

SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITH PROXIMATE MESSMATES

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The research at hand experiments with the communication that occurs in the encounters and entanglements between human and more-than-human agencies. It builds on the emerging debates on qualitative methodologies informed by new materialism, which help us recognize how more-than-humans can communicate and participate in producing and sharing knowledge. The main purpose of this article is to introduce the approach of sensitive communication with human and more-than-human others in tourism settings. The article explores and tests sensitive reading as a way of conducting research on sensitive communication in proximate surroundings by presenting two empirical examples from Iceland and Sweden. The research is driven by curiosity about the different ways of communicating with and about mundane and ordinary places in the context of proximity tourism. The idea of proximity refers here to curious and caring relations toward our proximate surroundings, beings, and thoughts. This approach to proximity tourism reopens ideas of nearness and farness and offers an alternative approach to current quantitative macrolevel discussions and inquiries of the Anthropocene.

Key words: Communication; More-than-human; New materialism; Sensitive reading; Proximity tourism

Introduction

The COVID-19 situation has temporarily disrupted all kinds of growth within the tourism industry and has limited people's travel to their home regions. How society will recover remains to be seen, but the situation presents an opportunity to rethink and reflect on an alternative "normal" state of tourism practices (Gössling et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). It offers us as researchers

a chance to slow down and listen to the voices that commonly go unheard and to seek different ways of knowing and enacting tourism and research. Non-human voices, as Chakraborty (2020) points out, are often overlooked in tourism research, where methods "favour clear consensus and patterns" (p. 118). Hence, there is a need for methodological approaches that can open up new spaces for these voices to be heard (Chakraborty, 2020; Kramvig & Førde, 2020; Salmela & Valtonen, 2019).

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As tourism researchers Grimwood et al. (2019) stated, “We need new stories in tourism” (p. 2). In this article, we suggest that new stories are needed especially because we are witnessing an overwhelming human influence upon the Earth (e.g., Crutzen, 2002; Haraway, 2016). While the economic impacts of tourism have been celebrated by many, tourism is both threatened by climate change and contributing to the acceleration of environmental catastrophe (see Gössling et al., 2010; Gren & Huijibens, 2014, 2016; Scott et al., 2012, 2019). In this situation, we need concepts and methods that recognize the vibrant geosocial relations on which our lives depend (Pálsson & Swanson, 2016). We need new tools to acknowledge, for example, the multiple ways in which more-than-humans communicate, affecting and participating in the production and sharing of knowledge. Therefore, our purpose here is to explore and experiment with an approach of *sensitive communication* between humans and more-than-human others in tourism settings. We argue that this approach enables us to acknowledge and respond to a larger and more varied group of messmates (Haraway, 2008) than much of tourism research has hitherto recognized.

We understand sensitivity here, in its simplest form, as a way of relating with diversity and difference (Irni, 2016; Olsen et al., 2019; Viken et al., 2019). More specifically, we search for guidance on sensitive engagement and communication from the new materialist and feminist call for sensitivity toward *nuances, feelings, and power relations* (Irni, 2016). Our approach follows the example of Irni (2016), whose methodology of *sensitive reading* underlines the importance of avoiding dichotomies and categorizations when engaging with and communicating about difference. By doing this, we join the streams of tourism studies that search for theories, methods, and orientations that recognize, and are more sensitive to, nonhuman agencies (e.g., Benali & Ren, 2019; Chakraborty, 2020; Kramvig & Førde, 2020; Ren, 2011; Valtonen et al., 2020).

While tourism is often understood in terms of experiencing otherness away from home, we find it meaningful and timely to turn our focus to the tourism settings proximate to us. Although it is easier to recognize difference in new places, we wish to draw attention to the possibilities of engaging with and celebrating the supposedly mundane.

With this in mind, we have engaged with proximity tourism in settings that have challenged us to consider our ways of communicating with humans and more-than-humans, as well as our understanding of the interplay of nearness and farness. We have visited our own home environments—and those of others—with Irni’s components of sensitive reading as our travel companions. Emily lives in Sweden, Outi in Finland, and Gunnar in Iceland. As Nordic tourism researchers, we have recently grown accustomed to studying the Arctic hemisphere as a hotspot for international tourists. International tourism grew by 7% in Sweden in 2017 (Tillväxtverket, 2018), 22% in Finnish Lapland (House of Lapland, 2019), and 24% in Iceland (Ferðamálastofa, 2019). In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, tourism, usually described as one of the biggest industries in the world, is in tatters. Each country is estimating the extent to which domestic tourists could cover for great losses in international tourism revenues. The quantified measurements of international tourist arrivals are one way to relate tourism’s realities in these places and describe their dynamics as tourism destinations. However, this time we have aimed to change our way of relating to and communicating about these places and tourism with the help of an approach that calls for heightened sensitivity.

Before moving to our empirical settings, we take a closer look at Irni’s (2016) idea of sensitive reading and the wider framework of feminist new materialism to offer an overview of our idea of proximity in the tourism context. After that, we share two postcards from Iceland and Sweden as examples of sensitive communication with and about the places and more-than-human hosts we visit. By exploring a sensitive orientation toward our proximate messmates, as well as by practicing tourism and producing knowledge about it, we wish to contribute to tourism that enhances well-being among all of us.

Sensitive Communication With Human and More-Than-Humans

Eagerness in communicating with and about the “other” comes with its perils. The notions of “epistemic violence” and “epistemic ignorance” have been used to describe the phenomenon wherein otherness becomes reduced to sameness—not because

we want it to, but because our capability to listen to others is limited by our own prior assumptions, values, and motives. Postcolonial critiques especially warn us how a privileged position can make it difficult, if not impossible, to translate voices from the margin (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Höckert, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2017). There are always nuances that cannot be known or understood and feelings of discomfort that are worth exploring. Translating across difference always comes with the price of something getting lost along the way. This is even more so the case when drawing from new materialist theories, where the “other” is not limited to humans and communication cannot be traced along conventional methodological approaches.

On the basis of relational ontology, feminist new materialism has described the social as composed of and enacted by heterogeneous actors (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016). The present era of the Anthropocene further underlines that humans and more-than-humans are entangled together in multiple ways, coexisting, comingling, and collaborating in the making of realities (Latour, 2018). In her discussion on interspecies communication and cohabitation, Haraway (2008) spoke about these more-than-human others as “messmates,” pointing toward the multiple relations between humans and more-than-humans that have often gone unacknowledged in social science literature. The recognition of multiple relations deals with acknowledging the “impure histories, that which has not yet happened, and what yet is possible along the lines of differences and power asymmetries” (Åsberg, 2008, p. 267). As Haraway (2008, pp. 14–15) suggests, it is essential to acknowledge and respect how more-than-human others welcome us. In ethical relations, this welcome should never be taken for granted (Haraway, 2008; Höckert, 2018).

The aim of feminist new materialism is to undo the dichotomies between natural and cultural, discursive and material, theoretical and empirical, and human and more-than-human by examining the becoming of these diverse dimensions of the world in relation to each other (Leppänen & Tiainen, 2016, p. 28). Feminist new materialism’s practitioners are multidisciplinary and draw from various theoretical heritages. However, a focus on “matter,” meaning “a dynamic and shifting

entanglement of relations” (Barad, 2007, p. 224), is a key element in drawing scholars of feminist new materialism together (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, pp. 9–10; Rantala et al., 2020). Feminist new materialist approaches also consider situated knowing in new forms by acknowledging the liveliness of material, the more-than-human dimensions of the world, and the productiveness of relations (Leppänen & Tiainen, 2016, p. 36).

We have sought guidance from Irni’s (2016) writings, wherein she suggests an exercise that can help us to become more sensitive toward diversity. Irni’s article unravels contemporary debates on new materialism within transdisciplinary feminist research. She draws attention to the problematic ways in which these discussions focus on creating distinctions and divisions between different thinkers and lines of thought. More specifically, Irni (2016) lamented the chasm that has emerged between Karen Barad’s natural science-inspired new materialism and Judith Butler’s poststructuralist streams of thought, and how both sides seem to lack interest in understanding and communicating with each other (see also Hemmings, 2011). Instead of neglecting differences, Irni called for more nuanced and diverse academic discussions that are driven by curiosity about multiple interpretations. As an alternative to essentializing and dichotomizing ways of engaging with different ways of knowing, Irni presented a methodology called “sensitive reading”; that is, a way of reading where one becomes curious and open toward different *feelings*, *power relations*, and *nuances*.

With the notion of *reading*, Irni (2016) referred to researchers’ ways of communicating with and about others’ research when creating academic discussion (see also Pearce, 2004). We argue that it is possible to extend Irni’s argument to human and more-than-human relations. That is, the three overlapping dimensions of feelings, power relations, and nuances can enhance sensitive communication with and about human and more-than human others in tourism settings. This prospect means first slowing down to recognize different *feelings* that might rise up in encounters with our messmates and testing different ways of communicating these feelings. Irni (2016) presented sensitivity to our own and others’ feelings as a methodological challenge. She followed especially Ahmed’s (2004)

writings, where recognition of different emotion-abilities—such as frustration, awkwardness, and fear—enables us to recognize unequal power relations and injustice. Indeed, the second dimension of Irni's (2016) exercise encourages us to recognize and reflect upon the power relations in our research encounters and the ways in which we communicate about them (Pearce, 1997, 2004). This means asking, for instance, what kind of power relations are created by constructing differences? (Irni, 2016, p. 14). What kind of power relations can be undone by respecting differences? How can we open new spaces for other ways of being and knowing? (Grimwood et al., 2019; Höckert, 2018).

Finally, the exercise of sensitive reading celebrates different *nuances* that can inspire and challenge our preformed assumptions about the other. Searching for nuances hinders us from choosing sides or creating opposing either/or categories (Irni, 2016). Interestingly—and this is essential when we wish to engage in communication with and about our multiple messmates—focusing on nuances can help us to recognize that there are often more similarities among us than differences. Sensitive orientation to differences and diversity allows us, as Irni (2016, p. 14) suggested, to have ambivalent and constantly evolving relations with our “messy mates.”

Exploring Sensitive Communication in the Context of Proximity Tourism

Our exploration of sensitive communication with messmates is related to our aspiration to acknowledge the multiple ways in which more-than-humans can communicate and participate in producing and sharing knowledge, which we see as urgent in the era of environmental crisis and climate change. We posit that, in the current state of the Anthropocene, tourism researchers can no longer focus merely on the well-being of human hosts and guests, but are confronted with the task of caring for the Earth and more-than-human others (Gren & Huijbens, 2014).

Exploring sensitive communication helps us to describe and render meaningful the geosocial relations of tourism (Pálsson & Swanson, 2016)—that is, the multiple ways in which the lives and systems of the Earth are entwined and interdependent. This means that we seek to embrace the necessity and possibility of co-living with more-than-human

others, these multiple messmates, and to “stay with the trouble” the Anthropocene presents (Haraway, 2016; Ren & Jóhannesson, 2018). Sensitive communication in the Anthropocene implies the development of novel conceptualizations of human and more-than-human agencies—such as plants that have been missing from the tourism context (see Cohen & Fennell, 2019)—in ways that acknowledge their intertwined and interdependent nature instead of viewing agents as separate “entities.” There are recent tourism studies on, for example, the northern lights (Jóhannesson & Lund, 2017), handicrafts (Kugapi & Höckert, 2020), the common plantain (Stinson et al., 2020), and mosquitoes (Valtonen et al., 2020) that discuss the possibilities that emerge from the recognition of “the material interactions of human corporeality and the more-than-human world” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 2; see also Ulmer, 2017). This implies an extension of the scope of ethics so that it encompasses also the more-than-human world—air, soil, trees, rocks, and animals, for instance (Grimwood et al., 2018). These studies also encourage us to rethink nearness and farness. What has hitherto been classified as other to the social and thus distant from traditional concerns of social science about, for instance, tourism, is suddenly close and part of the same world. It is proximate.

Tourism is traditionally defined on the basis of nearness and farness, or through the interplay of the ordinary and extraordinary (Urry, 2002). Difference and otherness are often said to be the drivers of tourism (see, e.g., Viken & Müller, 2017). Proximity tourism challenges that image. It has been defined as a form of travel that takes place within one's “home” region (Jeuring & Díaz Soria, 2017) or “usual” settings (Díaz Soria & Llundés Coit, 2013). Proximity tourism thus challenges us to appreciate the mundane exceptionality of the supposedly ordinary (Díaz Soria & Llundés Coit, 2013; Jeuring & Díaz Soria, 2017; Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). While proximity tourism has often been seen as a way to supplement international tourism development and balance seasonal differences, our research has been fueled by concerns about the ways in which long-distance travel contributes to environmental catastrophe. Innovative and attractive forms of proximity tourism can offer a viable alternative to travel that burns fossil fuels.

The concept of proximity further allows us to rethink the spatial ordering of tourism practices. Rather than describing tourism as the movement of fixed forms in Euclidian space from point A to point B within a specific time frame, proximity opens up a topological space “of ordering and continuity of transformation in which past and present coexist” (Lury, 2013, p. 129). Movement is then better conceptualized as “the ordering of continuity” (Lury et al., 2012, p. 6) in a dynamic world inhabited by heterogeneous actors, both human and more-than human (Lund & Jóhannesson, 2014). Proximity thereby underlines connectivity in space and time. As Serres stated, time is not necessarily a linear road connecting the past to the present in a straightforward way (Serres & Latour, 1995). Our sense of time is an effect of our relations to things (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) and thus the temporalities of tourism are enacted through relational encounters that shape nearness and farness. Proximity is then a relational accomplishment.

Along these lines, we do not define proximity tourism merely based on “the traveled distance” from our permanent houses or apartments. The concept of proximity enables us to observe something from a distance, or to approach it and experience closeness or feelings of nearness in time and/or space. Traveling with proximity as a way of rethinking nearness and farness enables also different earthly creatures to be visited and lived with, whether they are far or proximate. Most people understand the ideas of “home” and the “usual” as something mundane that we tend to take for granted based on our relations to it. Sensitive communication assists in tracing connections with home and the usual by being sensitive to the nuances of different kinds of homes (Canavan, 2012). Moreover, as homes and usual places do not need to be limited to geographical locations, they can be understood in terms of physical, mental, geopolitical, theoretical, and disciplinary surroundings that we can revisit, reexplore, and reenact with curiosity and openness. This means that proximity tourism can become possible through movements on a very tiny scale (Höckert, 2019)—that is, by approaching the supposedly “known” in more sensitive ways. However, there is also the other side of the coin of proximity: we may travel long distances and experience proximity elsewhere. We thereby argue that proximity tourism is not necessarily a normative solution to

the problematic nature of long-haul tourism. The notion of proximity boils down to curious, caring and sensitive attitudes toward our proximate surroundings, beings, thoughts, and concepts.

We wish to offer an alternative approach to current quantitative macrolevel discussions and inquiries of the Anthropocene by engaging more closely with two little-acknowledged messmates of tourism: rocks and dandelions. Leaning on Irni’s (2016) ideas, we applied sensitive reading when engaging with rocks in Iceland and dandelions in Sweden. In early June 2019, Outi visited Gunnar in Iceland, and at the same time Emily conducted explorations in her backyard. In our travels, we paid attention to the nuances, feelings, and power relations among different kinds of earthly creatures. In addition, our field explorations built on the important advancements of ethnographic methodologies, which enabled us to grasp the tiny and oftentimes messy realities of everyday life, highlighting also how the sensing body is the primary tool of research as well as part of the studied phenomenon.

For the field explorations, Outi agreed to visit Gunnar to conduct some field work together. We had discussed prior to the trip some of our motivations, but the idea was to keep it open for whatever was to come. On a general level, Gunnar had offered to introduce some rocks to Outi at the Vatnsnes peninsula, which is located near the area he is from, in the north of Iceland. In addition, Gunnar invited a local tourism researcher to act as a our guide and Outi welcomed her friend from Lapland, Finland to participate, a friend who has accompanied her on many hiking and skiing trips over the years. As a result, the areas that the group was to visit were familiar and proximate to the Icelandic guides, whereas the way of traveling was familiar and proximate to Outi and her friend. Inspired by these explorations in Iceland, Emily decided to repeatedly visit her backyard and the dirt road close by, with Irni’s concept of sensitive reading in mind. Emily traveled rather slowly with heavy feet, as it was only few weeks before her baby’s due date. For her trips, she brought her soon-to-be-born baby, and a plan to inhale and enjoy the early summer greenness.

The fieldtrips began by writing out our field notes while trying to be as unprepared as possible. The only things we agreed upon were to include in our notes were general greetings from our travel

destination, presentations of our human and more-than-human travel company, field notes and observations from our trips, and the presentation of the souvenirs we brought home with us. Along the way, we decided to communicate about the trips through postcards (Figs. 1 and 2) (see also Veijola et al., 2019). Through these postcards, we wished to practice sensitive communication in a familiar tourism context—even though the stories were longer than normal for a postcard. The stories were written by describing and reflecting the nuances, feelings and power relations that occur in and shape our relations and entanglements with earthly creatures.

Communicating With Rocks and Dandelions

Dear Emily, We Send You Greetings from Iceland!

Outi: Gunnar has kindly offered to guide us around the Vatnsnes peninsula today, to show us

his mundane landscape and his rocks. When we leave Gunnar's home in Reykjavík, on our way out of the town, he shows us a place in the neighborhood where they have made the road narrower and curvier in order to avoid constructing it on top of certain rocks. He tells us that the elves had caused continuous problems at the construction site, making it clear that the road plan had to be revised. Gunnar's story about the rocks that were saved thanks to the elves appears to me as an act of pointing out the *nuances* in the landscape, and simultaneously as an act of "naming"—as an act of becoming, recognizing and taking ownership—something that Stinson et al. (2020) talked about in the context of Settler identity. As you will see, Emily, during our visit to Vatnsnes, folklore began to play an important role in communicating with and about messmates in our mundane landscapes. I had thought of the folklore related to elves as something exotic, something that is often communicated



Figure 1. First postcard, sent from Iceland (pictures by Outi & her friend).

to tourists, but to my surprise, during our visit the folklore came near to us, intertwining with the Icelandic rocks and the Finnish forests. The folklore enables us to recognize sameness in difference and difference in sameness.

Gunnar: You should also notice that the Hill of Elves is conveniently located close to the school; it fits perfectly, narrowing the road to slow down traffic and take care of the schoolchildren.

Outi: When we arrive to the first village at the Vatnsnes peninsula, a local woman accompanies us for lunch and tells us that she is not so sensitive as to see the elves. This comment strikes me, but I feel that it is not polite to ask about it—I am not sure how to situate myself within this topic of elves. It all feels awkward—exotic and mundane at the same time. I ask about this later in the car when we continue our trip. My friend tells Gunnar about *maahiset* (a type of elves that we have in Finland), and how we were once sleeping in a tent in a place where there were a lot of them and we had a terrible night. My friend's father asked us afterwards, how did you end up sleeping on their land? My body is filled with confused *feelings* that travel with me through the peninsula related to what actually has happened and what “has not yet happened and what yet is possible along the lines of differences and power asymmetries” (Åsberg, 2008, p. 267).

Gunnar: The local woman who has been working with my colleague in the area says that for this kind of landscape, you (as a tourist) need to bring something with you for the encounter to be meaningful and pleasurable. It needs to be knowledge or interests, as this region does not count as a “sublime landscape.” I have to say that I agree. For me, the barren vastness of the peninsula is mundane and reminds me of my childhood. This was a place that my parents went with us for a Sunday drive once in a while, and I can feel some nostalgic memories “murmuring” in my stomach.

Outi: During the tour through the peninsula, we also visit Hvítserkur, a 15-m-high eroded volcanic dyke, which is actually a petrified troll. Some years ago, the farmers in the area were concerned that it would fall into the ocean and decided to strengthen its “feet” with concrete.

Gunnar: Hvítserkur is, in a way, a perfect example of geosocial entanglements and how humans and more-than humans, rocks in this case, have

lived together on multiple levels through the centuries. Cultural narratives and folklore are solidified in the troll, Hvítserkur, and I find it somehow comforting to see the caring gesture of local people to strengthening its foundations with concrete. This would probably not count as the most nuanced method of conservation, but somehow it works.

Outi: We learn that, because of a lack of marked trails, tourists visiting the Hvítserkur disturb birds nesting next to it, as well as the seals. Our local guide tells about the seals and birds, about their rhythms, and about the rhythms of the sea. A big group of seals is lying in the sand across a narrow channel of water. We walk past them on our way to Hvítserkur. They do not seem to care too much about our presence but we notice that some keep a close eye on our movements. Gunnar and our local guide tell us about the few pieces of infrastructures that have been constructed here and about the discussions related to their construction. Controversial issues have surfaced in the area related to tourism policy and planning, involving the central authorities, municipalities, and private landowners. For example, if it is the local land owners who should take care of the area, how should they cover the expenses, since one can wander here freely—or whose role is it to be to care for the area? The *power relations* related to this specific attraction seem very complicated: there are the seals, the birds, the guides, and the scientist, the locals, the tourists—and then there are the trolls. These complicated relations bring the vast landscape close to my mundane forest landscape in Lapland: how we communicate ancient traditions to the tourists, along with newer traditions, such as the tradition of universal rights—those rights that allow you to wander freely, but also place upon you the responsibility to care through becoming proximate and sensing nuance.

Outi: From our visit, I bring to you, Emily, my admiration of cultural traditions and folklore, as well as my respect for how folklore can give voice and agency to the non-human world and help us to see our relations in different way.

Dear Outi & Gunnar, Many Greetings From This Magnificent Dandelion Jungle!

Over the past few days, I have been enjoying proximity tourism in this wild dandelion jungle



Figure 2. Second postcard, sent from Tärnaby in Sweden (pictures by Emily).

growing just in our backyard. Now, only few days away from our summer holidays (and my labor), these short trips feel like perfect, refreshing adventures. However, I have struggled to leave home all my prior assumptions about these flowers; that is, how dandelions are almost symbols of untidy gardens and disorganized lives. These are flowers whose cousins inhabit almost the entire globe, which make them mundane and proximate to most of us humans.

You would maybe first think that the dandelions are always here, as these untidy yellow guests. However, they emerge and communicate in very *nuanced* ways. It was only the other day that all these dandelions just jumped up from the ground, screaming cheerfully “surprise!” and “summer!”. Where everything had once been so green, their

sudden entrance painted the landscape in vibrant yellow. I cannot help but smile in the middle of this bright party filled with expressions of optimism and life. My daughter comes from school with a yellow nose, painted so with a juicy dandelion flower.

Today the white, cloudy flowers are taking over, turning the yard and roadsides into a lovely, peaceful dream. I take off my flip-flops and let my feet glide over the soft ground. Without shoes, I must slow down. My feet become sensitive to the different structures on the ground. My steps shake the mother-flowers, and their white baby-seeds fly into the air. I try to walk even more gently, worrying that the babies might not be ready to leave quite yet. While this moment is filled with *feelings* of gratitude and joy, it is also haunted by the

sorrow of knowing that the flowers are here for only a moment before they disappear. This time next year, if everything goes well, I will be walking and crawling here with our baby. For a little person, these flowers must appear to be gigantic, tickling cushions.

During my trips, some of the neighbors walk by, cursing the determined dandelions. Throwing salt at them, one says, could help to eliminate the flowers. I decide not to tell her that I am actually on holiday here, nor to show her my latest vacation pictures from this jungle. Instead, I turn the discussion into possible pragmatic uses of these flowers: salad, juice, and even coffee. And how the kids love to blow them! These talks with my human neighbors help to make the *power relations* in human–dandelion encounters visible. They make me wonder why we have accepted that some of these creatures need to be eliminated, as Valtonen et al. (2020) wrote about the discourse on “killing mosquitoes” in the Arctic. In a similar vein, people often talk about the best ways to attract mice into a trap. In these discussions, the focus is on the best ways to eliminate those beings, without any glimpse of doubt as to whether this is the right thing to do. It is almost as if the nonhuman nature is an enemy that we humans should tirelessly control or fight back against. As Irni (2016, p. 23) wrote, it is important to slow down when a critique toward something or someone appears unfair and unreasonable. I remove my shoes again; their thick soles give me a false feeling of power.

I have returned from these trips not only with tired feet, a rested mind, and stunning pictures, but also with enhanced feelings of care. These excursions have also made me think whether we need pragmatic, utilitarian, or aesthetic arguments to protect life. That is, why it is so difficult even to communicate about alternative ways of relating with these “things”? When and why have the nuances disappeared from these discussions? When did we become nearly obsessed with power and obligated to use it to eliminate some of the more-than-human others around us? From my trips, I bring with me motivation for a tiny revolution. I decide to start communicating alternative stories about dandelions by posting photos of them, speaking nicely about them when encountering my human neighbors, and painting their pictures with children. Indeed, in this

era of mass extinction, we need alternative ways of *reading* the places we visit.

Toward Next Trips

Our research article has built on emerging debates about qualitative methodologies informed by new materialism, which help us to acknowledge the multiple ways in which more-than-humans can communicate and participate in producing and sharing knowledge. We find Irni’s (2016) approach to sensitive reading fruitful, as it encourages us to communicate about plurality and produce alternative interpretations instead of aiming to “nail it” or tell a master narrative that excludes other possible versions. In practice, the idea of sensitive reading welcomes us to revisit our surroundings, beings, thoughts, and concepts with curious, caring, and sensitive attitudes. In our research on proximity tourism this means, for instance, reopening and messing around with the ideas of nearness and farness, testing their use in alternative ways and different field settings.

Experimenting with the ideas of farness and nearness enables us to experience proximity tourism and our surroundings as both mundane and sublime through the sharing of nuances, feelings and power relations entangled in the landscape—and in our explorations with our messmates. This shows us how moving in these surroundings is about “the ordering of continuity” (Lury et al., 2012, p. 6)—both in relation to time and space. For example, folklore can bring our histories and our physical places to life, from far away into the present—but it can also push them further away. It can show us something that is yet possible—possible because we recognize our differences and similarities, or because we are slowing down, which enables us to recognize unfairness and unreasonableness. Encounters with more-than-human others, like rocks, may evoke memories that relate to the place of visit and in a sense bring it alive. It may encourage to share stories and narratives that can also bring people and places closer together as in the case of elves and trolls in Iceland and Lapland.

The messiness of all our mates is something that cannot be organized or completely known. In this article, our aim has been to illustrate rocks and dandelions as great examples of messy mates

that cannot be organized (see also Jóhannesson, 2019)—they paint our noses, fly to neighbors' gardens, and intrude in our relationships. Furthermore, they make elves and trolls speak on their behalf. As for the outcome, we wonder: Should we next visit rocks and dandelions as hosts, and give them voices? How would that happen?

Kramvig and Førde (2020) discussed the importance of cultivating new methodological sensitivity. Giving a voice to more-than-human is also a question of methodological choices. This article has been one playful, and perhaps messy, experiment with the method of sensitive reading and the sensitive way of communication, with the aim of becoming sensitive toward diversity. As such it is a modest attempt to visit and describe geosocial relations of tourism in practice. Something that we see as important to developing further during our next trips and visits is not only recognizing feelings, power relations, and nuances, but also communicating about them in ways that shape the readers' relations with these messmates (see Vannini, 2015). The concept of the Anthropocene has often been criticized for promoting planetary visions, only working on global scales and geological time frames and glossing over local differences. The will to practice sensitive communication and shape readers' relations with messmates is a contribution to situating the Anthropocene, to give it a grounded connection and to bring forth those geosocial relations that often go unnoticed.

Acknowledgments

This article has received funding from the Envisioning Proximity Tourism with New Materialism project (Academy of Finland, No. 324493) and from the Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic project, ARCTISEN (Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme). We wish to thank the reviewers and the editors of the special issue for their insightful comments.

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