

# Wanderer in the Landscape

Reflections on the relationship between art and the northern environment

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## The landscape of identity

I am an environmental artist and places affect me perhaps more than people do. I was born and have lived most of my life in Northern Finland. Being a Laplander is one of the stronger aspects of my identity. This identity is not static; I consider it a dynamic whole that is constantly being reconstructed and comprises many different identities.<sup>1</sup> Identities are located in symbolic time and space – in an “imaginary geography”. They always incorporate a feeling of home<sup>2</sup>, the landscape of the identity. It is precisely in the landscape that my art and my identity as a Laplander converge and form a leitmotif as it were for my most salient work as an artist.<sup>3</sup> I recognize myself in the

following text, where Tournier describes the bond between person and place at its strongest:

...individuals become attached to their place and merge with it; they associate their place with their image of themselves; they locate themselves there wholly, so that no one can touch the place without touching them<sup>4</sup>.

In physical [territorial] terms, the landscape of my identity is extensive indeed. It ranges from the forests and rivers of Lapland to its fells and the shores of the Arctic Ocean. I have worked in this area since the mid-1970s. Before starting my formal education as an artist, I made drawings and paintings. What interested me were the marks people left on the landscape: reindeer fences, lumberjacks' cabins, villages along a river, and fishery buildings on the Arctic Ocean. I could experience the narratives infused in these objects of my interest and feel how people had found their place amid nature, on this planet, and under this sky. In my eyes, the structures erected

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<sup>1</sup> Berger & Luckman 1994, 149-179. Berger and Luckman stress that both personal and collective identities are ongoing processes of definition and that the identity of an individual or group takes shape through interaction with the environment.

Pulkkinen 1998, 248. Pulkkinen emphasizes the constant construction of the postmodern conception of identity as well as the political nature of this process.

<sup>2</sup> Hall 1999, 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> Ronkainen 1999, 37. According to Ronkainen, some subjectivities, i.e., a subject position (identity), may become the

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leitmotif of a first person narrative – at least in certain discourses and situations.

<sup>4</sup> Tournier 1971, 60.

as part of the work-a-day world were manifestations of commercial history and of the material cultural heritage yet, at the same time, reflections of how people conceived of themselves as part of the universe. Later, at first after reading the work of Norberg-Schulz, I came upon the name for this esthetically and cultural-historically colored experience, a term familiar in the phenomenology of landscape and architecture, *genius loci*.<sup>5</sup> The concept later became familiar through environmental art as well<sup>6</sup>.

I received a western art education during modernism. This education dislodged my local identity, questioning its significance. At the time, art was seen as a universal phenomenon, with no real place for the voice of local people. Good art was locally "autistic" and independent of its surroundings. The basic tenets of modernism – the individuality of the artist, the autonomy of art and art's emanating from centers towards the periphery – now, in postmodern perspective, smack of colonialism. In art, modernization subjugated art even to the point where landscape art itself, as a tradition for depicting localness, became regarded as a sign of dilettantism. Only the dabbler could take an interest in landscape art. When I was a student, and later as well, I felt doubly marginalized vis-à-vis modernism: I had taken an interest not only in the Northern periphery but in landscape as well.

The way back to the northern landscape and its essential elements revealed itself to me during my travels in Europe. People's natural and everyday link to the landscape had been broken in the big cities and it was being sought from a new perspective. The exposition in Paris of the Italian *Arte Povera* movement

opened the way for me to return to the materials and traditional methods of my own environment. When I returned from my trip, the fish dams, hay ricks and woodpiles where I lived took on a new esthetic significance. I begin to think of the prospect of making the work, the methods and the skills which these objects embodied, and which I knew well, part of my art. The *MA space-time* exhibition, which illustrated the influence of the Zen view of nature on the arts in Japan, provided me with a new perspective on how I might work in the landscape. The experience of space and time in my activities in nature – fishing, hunting, picking berries and cutting firewood – found their counterparts in the meditative and holistic sensitivity to the landscape found in Zen art. The coordination of body and mind, the esthetics and existence of moving around in a landscape began to coalesce into artistic activity. It was only later that the examples of American and English environmental art reinforced and signposted "the way" which enabled me to approach my own environment as art. A common basis for doing and conceptualizing art began to take shape, and became a permanent facet of my existence.

Since finishing my formal education as an artist, in addition to doing art I have worked at the University, where I have focused on developing art education and teaching in that field. Today, we have rediscovered the bond between art and the environment in which it is realized and marginality now has a place of its own in discussions of art<sup>7</sup>. For me, the way my art addresses the North has become a method which I use to model and develop not only my art but also pedagogy dealing with the relation between art and the

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<sup>5</sup> Norberg-Schulz 1980, x

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Davies & Knipe 1984.

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<sup>7</sup> Lacy 1995, Gablik 1995, Efland & Stuhr 1998, Lippard 1995, 1997

environment<sup>8</sup>. The fact that I know the northern environment from within helps me to assess the impact my art has on the environment in which it is located and created. There are many issues connected with the art-environment relationship. First off, the relation between localness and being an artist always entails the dilemma of colonialism and emancipation<sup>9</sup>.

To start with, I must ask myself what makes me think I can offer something through my art that surpasses the local people's everyday experience and knowledge of a place; and how can I incorporate into my art my own life experience, conception of art and what I think is of value in art all without colonializing others, local people and places. A second question that must be asked is how I can give my art a form that will allow the environment and community to be a productive and constructive element of the artistic content of my work. A third concern is how I might guide future art educators to plan and realize emancipatory processes without colonializing the communities in which they will work. These questions are basic methodological and philosophical considerations in environmental and community art – choices about how art is done. These questions also underscore the relation of art to our cultural heritage and the values it embraces.

### **The ways of art and science**

Artists often find it difficult to talk about their works and the experiences associated with creating them. The creative process is an intense,

experience-directed and often confused one. Art involves a great deal of tacit knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Doing art does not require the same verbally articulated basis as academic research does. Researchers follow a particular path, which they define in theoretical terms and try to adhere to in hopes of reaching their goal. Artists fumble about and do not always know what their goal is; when they reach it, they cannot necessarily describe the path they took to get there. However, I can try understand my art by assuming the position of researcher and observing my work as a product of the culture to which I belong. I can also toy with different perspectives by treading the landscape, or no man's land, between art and science. This liminal space is very often the site where concepts and experiences exert complementary influences on each other, and this is what interests me most. This path leads one into the realm of phenomenology and to an attempt to understand phenomenal experiences, which the works I create and their sites are examples of. According to Arnold Berleant, a phenomenological description produces an effective and direct presentation: description of the environment requires the same sensitivity as the description of art, because it must depict the outward appearance of that landscape, the reactions and actions associated with it and, further, the meanings associated with these.<sup>11</sup>

### **Common filters for studying landscape and art**

The basis for my art and for my understanding of it is an intertextual weave comprising a discourse born of localness, alterity [differentness],

<sup>8</sup> See Hiltunen & Jokela 2001, Jokela 1996

<sup>9</sup> Koskela 1994, Koskela reflects on this same issue in her study of local communities from the perspective of cultural geography.

<sup>10</sup> Koivunen 2000, 75-93. Koivunen, citing Polanyi (1973), draws a distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> Berleant 1994, 159

marginality and otherness in the postmodern sense rather than an account of my art in theoretical terms or a practical description of my work. My perspective here differs from the conventional modernist examination of art. I endeavor to bring out appropriate was of interpreting art, for which I have sought models from outside the art world. Environmental aesthetics has prompted me to study phenomenal, culturally bound environmental experience<sup>12</sup>. My guide to the textuality of landscape and a multidimensional reading and interpretation of it has been the tradition of humanist geography<sup>13</sup>. Essential to the humanistic study of landscape is a search for beauty, which brings it close to art<sup>14</sup>. My approach has also been greatly influenced by Yi-Fu; Tuan's<sup>15</sup> topophilia, the feeling of belonging to a place, love for a place; and Edward Relph's<sup>16</sup> studies of place which look at the person-place bond [? place attachment], local identity and its converse, placelessness. Landscape and place are in fact often used as overlapping concepts, although place entails a stronger social aspect than landscape does<sup>17</sup>. I have also drawn on postmodern art research, including the works of Lucy Lippard<sup>18</sup> and Suzanne Lacy<sup>19</sup>, which, with the passing of modernism, have shifted interest to the relationship of individuals and communities to the environment, landscapes, places, localness and their own lifeworlds. Similarly, in their environmental and community art, Suzi Galik<sup>20</sup> and Irit Rogoff<sup>21</sup> offer new interpretations of the relationship to

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place, landscape and the activities - work and leisure - that take place in them.

### Intelligent embodiment

One of the principal challenges of postmodernism has been to question the long-standing convention of emphasizing the differential nature of the local people's everyday activities, such as their work, and esthetic experience. This widespread dualistic conception is captured well in the following quotation from Esa Sironen:

The subject of a landscape is not the farmer, just as the subject of water is not a fish swimming in it. To be such a subject, a person may not naively be part of nature but must comprehend him- or herself as standing opposite to nature, distinguished from it. Landscape is a relational concept. It requires mowing hay, cutting down trees, stopping one's mushroom picking, straightening one's back and putting oneself for only a moment beyond the confines of work and productivity – looking at things as a child, artist, philosopher.<sup>22</sup>

The background here is, of course, the assumption of Kantian esthetics that one inside a landscape cannot recognize his or her field of perception as a landscape including an esthetic aspect<sup>23</sup>. According to Kari Väyrynen, Kant sought to demonstrate the superiority of the human being's moral consciousness vis-à-vis his or her

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<sup>12</sup> Porteous 1996, Berleant 1997

<sup>13</sup> Raivo 1996, Karjalainen 1996, 1997, 1999

<sup>14</sup> Kontturi 1999, 158

<sup>15</sup> Tuan 1974

<sup>16</sup> Relph 1976

<sup>17</sup> Muir 1999, xxx

<sup>18</sup> Lippard, 1997

<sup>19</sup> Lacy 1995

<sup>20</sup> Gablik 1991

<sup>21</sup> Rogoff 2000

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<sup>22</sup> Sironen 1996, 121-122.

<sup>23</sup> Andrews 1999. Andrews contemplates the issue with reference to the ideas of Dens Cosgrove (1998).

sensuality and physical weakness.<sup>24</sup> Underlying this in turn is Cartesian dualism, which divides the world into reason and feeling and subject and object. It is precisely corporeality, in particular the relation between work and the esthetic, that underpins the new paradigm of art and environment that provides a direction for my art as well. In my work, I strive for experience that is not divided crudely into subject and object. Here, I follow Merleau-Ponty's existential-phenomenological assertions that embodiment in the environment is the elemental condition for all thought and that no thought can originate from pure consciousness without corporeal experience.<sup>25</sup>

The human being's corporal relationship to the environment has changed since the times when Descartes and Kant elaborated their philosophies. Inasmuch as physical work decreased dramatically, especially that involving control and conception of the environment, I have made an effort in my art to transform traditional working methods into methods for experiencing the environment and creating environmental and community art. The Kantian relation between acting in and esthetically experiencing the environment gets turned upside down here: what was previously referred to as work (routine activity that stifled creative thought and esthetic experience) now becomes stopping in the landscape (a physical experience which makes thought possible). Physical work in one's environment becomes a type of meditation in which the body opens pathways to sensations, to the environment's stream of consciousness and disengages for a moment our Cartesian brains with their dualist conceptions. This releases creative potential, engenders esthetic experience and restores the link between body and

mind in a way that leads to richer experience. Such esthetic thought can be seen as going back to the fundamental notion in Heideggerian phenomenology of "beginning thought from the beginning"<sup>26</sup>

## Lived landscape

When I work in the northern landscape, I feel that I am continuing the tradition of landscape painting. That is, as active subject I am not the ideal, free individual but a social being conditioned by culture.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the landscapes that form the starting point for landscape art, whether in their natural state or shaped by people, are always products of a culture and defined by it before they become themes for a work of art<sup>28</sup>. And this is true in my case, too. The way I conceive of the northern landscape is guided by two models simultaneously: the relationship to nature<sup>29</sup> that forms part of my northern identity and the tradition of pictorial art. However, I have gotten quite far away from landscape painting, the traditional means of depicting and imparting value to the association between environment and culture.<sup>30</sup> I do not place myself

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<sup>26</sup> Varto 1996, 125

<sup>27</sup> See Tarasti 1989, 59. Tarasti emphasizes that in making the subject the point of departure in landscape semiotics, we are forced to take into account the frame of reference formed by the surrounding community and culture.

<sup>28</sup> Andrews 1999, 1. Tarasti 1980, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Kontio 1999. According to Kontio, there is a special northern knowledge that lives in these unique circumstances: a particular relationship to nature, people, human existence, birth and death, belief and religion.

<sup>30</sup> Muir 1999, 256-268. Muir brings out the bidirectionality of the relation between landscape and landscape painting: the way in which the depiction of a landscape guides how we see and experience it but also how we come to value it.

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<sup>24</sup> Väyrynen 1996, 82

<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp. X-XI

before a landscape as a visual observer nor do I frame what I see; rather, I try to discover the landscape from within it, using all the senses that enable me to experience it. I try to work with the materials at the place and with the stimuli and content it offers. I do not call myself a landscape artist but, rather, an environmental artist.<sup>31</sup>

By invoking the concept “environment” I want to shift the focus from an external view of the landscape to its “flow,” which goes through me in the form of material, observations, experiences, meanings and values. The environment does not flow only in me but in the entire community in which I am working at a particular time. My observations and experiences of the environment are my own as an individual but I interpret and understand them as a member of the culture of which I am a part. In other words, I speak of a phenomenal environment and act in that environment in its culture-bound sense; it becomes difficult to distinguish the environment and the community from one another. The concept “North” defines both environment and community simultaneously. The North is a network of different places and the communities living and working in them. In this light, my environmental art can be seen as occasionally coming close to Suzanne Lacy’s “new genre public art”, in which public participation and commitment is the basis for and the objective of doing art. New genre public art is defined not only by its environment but also by its public. The focus is not merely the specific place or area in which the art is located but also

the esthetic expression of the values activated in the public.<sup>32</sup>

It is my hope that my works form part of the cultural practice in which landscapes and the values they incorporate are produced and renewed. My works reflect the conception of landscape in Lapland by being at once products and constituents of it. That I prefer the term “environmental art” to “landscape art” cannot be attributed solely to the fact that my art emphasizes community and ecological values but also to my interest in detaching my art from the tradition which, as the history of landscape art, has radiated as a colonializing phenomenon from the centers to the periphery of the art world. This is not a revolution on my part but a subtle shift of perspective or, rather, a shuttling between the mainstream (or “high art”) and local art culture – a moving about in the reality which I am constructing for myself and in which I construct my identity. As a product of a Western artistic education and a native of a northern village, I try to place myself midway between the two, where I look in two directions at the same time from a single point. I try to examine the North - my own phenomenal lifeworld - as an intertextual narrative; it is a narrative in which Western art and science are interwoven with the stories, meanings and truths of the local people.

### **Dimensions of the environment and making art**

Environment is in itself a multidimensional concept, and there is no unanimity on how it should be defined. When one works in the environment, one must nevertheless start with something concrete; as an artist one cannot engage in ontological

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<sup>31</sup> Andrews 1999, 22, 193. Andrews, who has done research on the history of Western landscape art, emphasizes the richness of the interaction between the artist and the environment vis-à-vis that between the artist and the landscape.

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<sup>32</sup> Lacy 1995, 19-20

reflection indefinitely. In picking up a snow shovel or video recorder, chainsaw or camera, I come into contact with different dimensions of the environment. Analysing the environment in terms of the levels of objective, emotional and textual meaning makes it possible to consciously take hold of it and examine its different dimensions. These open up different, albeit simultaneous perspectives, on the environment, the works of art being constructed in it, and the interpretation of these works.<sup>33</sup> My aim is to create a relation to the environment in my works that interacts with each level of the environment.

First, the objective environment and its visible landscape elements, such as rivers, forests, fells, the sea, the darkness of winter, light summer nights, determine the physical form [appearance] of the work I create, i.e., its material, scale and way of being. The objective environment also gives my works somewhat less visible dimensions, ones related to the flow of the environment: growing, withering, the melting of snow and freezing of water. Second, landscapes open up views into the emotions and the subjective level of the world of experience: work, free time, living, trekking. In addition to bringing my tools to the sites where I work, I take along my sensing, observing and feeling self. My phenomenal environment is always shaped by my world of experience: my emotions and personal history. On the third, or textual level, the cultural context of my works comes to light. The works become attached to issues and values that prevail between the local community, tourism, the

exploitation of nature, ecology and the interpretations of artistic institutions and the social activation of local communities.

On the textual level, the point of departure in my art with regard to the environment and the community is broadly reminiscent of the iconographic study of cultural landscapes, which looks at landscapes through the meanings and cultural messages they contain. Of particular interest in such research are meanings associated with the landscape and its elements that are shared by certain groups of people and the deeper cultural, historical and ideological factors underlying these meanings<sup>34</sup>. The discourse among the landscape itself, the artist interpreting it, the work of art, and the recipient who interprets the work is not stable or enduring. A landscape is not a static mental image but a mood that lives and changes along with the life history of the person experiencing it<sup>35</sup>. The landscape has also changed for me. My path has led from the gaze of a hunter and fisher to that of an artist. In my works, I often relive the processes of change that have affected the cultural heritage of the places where I work along with the change in my own personal relationship to the landscape. At a very early stage, art became a means for me to reconstruct my relationship to the environment as well as my relationship to northern communities.

### **Traditional images of the landscape in the North – constraint or opportunity?**

Tarasti points out that the reality of a landscape - as a culture or community

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<sup>33</sup> Karjalainen 1996, 8 and 1999. Karjalainen distinguishes three levels in a landscape: objective, subjective and representative. In his later work, he uses the terms mimetic, sensual and textual to refer to these same levels.

<sup>34</sup> Raivo, 1996, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Tani, 1995, 26. The cultural geographer Sirpa Tani has written about the concept of place but here her work is wholly applicable to landscapes as well.

conceives of it - can only be grasped if it is manifest as images of the landscape in the different texts of that culture.<sup>36</sup> It has been typical of both the pictorial arts and literature in Lapland that previous works have provided impetus and models for later descriptions of the region<sup>37</sup>. The collectivism of images of the landscape that art has created programs the way in which we look at the environment and also ideologies this perspective where the provincial "album" of Lapland is concerned.<sup>38</sup> It would merit a study in its own right to investigate whether the landscape album prevailing at any give time is a product of the general mentality of the times, an iconological movement drift of images or conscious ideological-political activity. How we understand the landscape in Lapland depends on whose descriptions and texts we are interpreting.<sup>39</sup> It is precisely the "who" here that has become the crucial question in discussions of the esthetic aspects of art and nature that have taken place in post-modern discussions of nature.<sup>40</sup>

Landscape art in Lapland has previously been studied as a peripheral and late reflection of the German Romantic tradition. In the 1950s and 1960s in particular, it was examined using an impressionism-tinged interpretative apparatus for outdoor realism. Landscape artists have been called depicters of lights and of the colors of water and air.<sup>41</sup> The discussion of landscape art in the modern era became quite generally fixated in fact on the perspectives offered by these two fundamentally very different conceptions of landscape and art. Nature with its grand "abstract"

phenomena – including lights, shadows, colors and rhythms – has to a certain extent remained an object of formal attention in art, in keeping with the traditions of impressionism and expressionism. In contrast, the meanings of the landscape, their regional, local and textual levels have not interested researchers in pictorial art, who have been preoccupied with universal modernism.

In addition, the discussion of landscape art in Finland has become trapped around the gilt concept of the national landscape. This universal Finnish model has then been applied in interpreting landscapes in Lapland, and the interest in landscapes in Lapland has been considered partly as a postwar phenomenon: Lapland was portrayed as something lost, a Finnish national "primeval landscape", associated with Karelia, on which the negative reaction to modernization could be projected<sup>42</sup>. In this context, attempts to understand the landscapes in Lapland proceeded via written art history, and the voice of the local population was not considered part of the interpretation of landscapes.

The prevalent mentality also detached the interpretation of art from its natural context and anchored it beyond where the local people could give it meaning. It is a way of thinking that has divorced nature from culture and relegated those living amid nature and conceptions associated with it into an insignificant margin. Where landscape is concerned, art and art research have adhered to the same utilitarian conception of nature that modernization has followed more generally. Porteous reminds us that when landscape lost its significance as an focus of interest in art, science and

<sup>36</sup> Tarasti 1980, 69

<sup>37</sup> Hautala-Hirvioja 1999, Lehtola 1997

<sup>38</sup> Häyrynen 2000, 38.

<sup>39</sup> See Jokela

<sup>40</sup> Shusterman 1997/2000, 21-55

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., Hautala-Hirvioja 1999, 156, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Häyrynen 2000, 43. Häyrynen seems Lapland as a new periphery which attracted attention after World War Two also for its raw materials and energy reserves.

philosophy, its bond to the romantic tradition was also severed, although it lived on in minds of average people<sup>43</sup>. However, an undercurrent of Romanticism plays a profound role in the conception of the North, particular in the area of tourism. A knowledge of the landscape album of the North and of the factors that have contributed to its creation is important to me. It is only against this historical background that I am able to assess the innovative quality of my art and what and whose "North" is speaking in my work at any given time.

### **The wanderer in the landscape**

The works of art I create form part of the northern landscape. Often, the snow, ice, hay or wood installations are located in places that can be termed edges, boundaries or extremes. The site can be a felltop, an outlying crag on the Arctic Ocean coast or a forested "middle of nowhere". In the tradition of landscape art, the North has had a place of its own in the sense suggested by Kant. "North" carries associations of loneliness, barrenness, wilderness, emptiness and extremity. The wilderness spreading out beyond the Lappish landscape that shimmers before us in our mind's eye - a creation of landscape art - represents the promise of a cleansing of the mind and soul, a chance to get closer to something which modern times and modernization threaten. Underlying this mindset is the concept of landscape cultivated in tradition of German Romanticism, which draws on Kant's philosophy. It is grounded in a theory of grandeur, which Carl Gustav Carus describes as follows:

"Before the grandeur of nature human beings become aware of their insignificance, but through this realization [in their

understanding this] rise above nature – or their own nature."<sup>44</sup>

This attitude of the wanderer, traveler or artist seeking a grand, sublime natural experience was adapted to Lapland particularly in the travel literature, as can be seen in the work of Kullervo Kemppainen:

Hurry and anxiety, those nightmarish companions of modern life, cannot extend their influence that far. Embraced in nature's grandeur, we experience our insignificance, see the triviality of our concerns. There, the mind is quickened, the body toughened and the soul cleansed.<sup>45</sup>

This view often sees the North in terms of the spiritual sublime of German Romanticism and as a divine wilderness or, in the American wilderness tradition, as a frontier that is the site of a heroic encounter between noble savage and pioneer. Closely associated with this perspective is the image of the North as a land of fells and scenic outlooks. Esa Sironen describes this general European development, whose origins go back to the 1700s: "Thus, rising to the mountaintop became a ritual of the new, modern world and a rite of passage which here in Finland, for historical reasons, took on the added facet of the gilt frame of the National Awakening."<sup>46</sup>

My works dealing with wandering may seem like a seeking out of barren extremes. They can be compared to the literature on Lapland in which, according to Lehtola, characters often act to relinquish security and set out for the unknown and extremes, where they

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<sup>44</sup> Eschenburg 1991, 73.

<sup>45</sup> Kemppainen 1960

<sup>46</sup> Sironen 1996, 124

<sup>43</sup> Porteous 1996, 73.

can test their manhood<sup>47</sup>. The theme of being on the road combines time and place into the state which is most characteristic of the literature on Lapland. The main characters work outdoors, are travelling somewhere, hunt and camp in the wilds, travel by night or by day, in winter or when there is no snow on the ground. Their dwellings are temporary shelters with the open world just beyond their doors. Being on the road and working in the landscape are not only movement in a physical space but also often in an abstract or psychological space as well. A journey and the route taken often acts as a spatial metaphor both in everyday speech and in art: life is often compared to a road and travel is referred to as a journey of the mind, not a mere physical move from one point to another.<sup>48</sup> Movement is felt to be important – it is the constant change of place that is crucial, not the destination. The journey to the physical sites where my works are located is an essential part of the process of creating the work, and perhaps something of the ontological manifestation of my art.

Landscape art emphasizes the information on the landscape that is conveyed by visual observation. However, in an environment, all the senses are involved and contact is made with the landscape through a feeling body. The role of the feeling body, the meditative aspect of the work, or moving around in the landscape invest my art with an aspect of pilgrimage. I notice that the signs of traveling, a pilgrimage of sorts, in my art are often interpreted as proof that I have been face to face with the natural esthetics (God). A work of art in a lonely location, on a barren shore or next to a wilderness trail seems to represent a symbol of silence and cleanliness but

also a Biblical landscape of rivalry and suffering.<sup>49</sup> To the casual observer, my works appear to be clear descendants of Kantian natural esthetics.

## Community landscapes

On the textual level of my works, the Kantian aesthetic paradigm in which the lonely romanticist artist and nature meet is turned on its head. The wilderness or the Arctic Ocean are not nature to the residents of those areas but places that are created and constructed by culture.<sup>50</sup> They are meeting points of the mind and language in which the culture of the region and the identity of its inhabitants find expression. Being alone in a landscape becomes communally understood in the world of experience of people in the North. The conception of work and other activity embraced in a landscape is shared and given meaning communally. Accordingly, my works, as things done by a one who is or travels alone in the landscape, are simultaneously and paradoxically communal as well. My art is not about the mercilessness of the wilds, a masculine occupation of the landscape but more about a social connection: a manner that reflects the communal discourse of a way of life in the landscape.

Often, creating a work of art is a process or project which I get the people in the area to commit themselves to. I strive for communication in my art, and one form of this is traditional work amid the landscape, not an external aesthetic appraisal of it. In this way, my art stimulates, transmits, and brings an

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<sup>47</sup> Lehtola 1997, 119.

<sup>48</sup> Saarinen 1999, 77-93. Jarkko Saarinen's works examine various wilderness discourses and their relation to the local populace.

awareness of the culture's own way of looking at the landscape and experiencing it. The art refines that which exists and does not import a model of esthetic experience from outside the community in the vein of "the center rushing in to rescue the periphery". My works often start with an analysis of the environment, where I survey the opportunities offered by the site I plan to work at. The point of departure here can be the sociocultural situation of the place. Frequently, I begin by exploring the cultural heritage and history of the place. What is most essential, however, is communication with the site, its history, the names of people and places, and the narratives of the people in the area. In other words, I build a foundation for my works by gathering an intertextual account of the place and the community. And the local community often takes an active interest in this process.

The northern landscape that forms the basis of my art is thus not void of cultural meanings; it is not the pristine nature. The landscape acquires its meaning through the social narratives and tales associated with people's fields of activity or the local history. I hope that my art sustains a meeting of the three levels of landscape experience mentioned earlier: nature in objective terms, a personal subjective world of experience, and communally produced textual meanings that are often veiled in everyday activities. In order to find these tacit meanings, I often transform the process of creating art into work physically done on site. The work puts me in touch with the feelings that the local community projects onto the site. It stimulates memories, which then prompt activity and encourage the recognition and construction of identity. Values also gain expression in activities that restore the link between the body and reason in the manner that Merleau-Ponty has suggested. The basis for my

works, their origin, lies in the movements of my body or of my colleagues and in the encounter with the environment, in that which binds our work concretely to the site and the landscape.

The intermediate level of my works is often the local community, which gives the works meaning by taking part in their creation and presenting their interpretations of the processes and the outcome. The interpretations voiced by local residents, men in particular, concur clearly with how esthetic experience is discussed generally. Esthetic terms of art are heard in everyday speech in the North. Esthetic experiences and preferences are not expressed directly; it is difficult or even culturally forbidden. Both subjective and textual esthetic experience, whether related to the landscape itself or works located in it, is almost always expressed obliquely, in descriptions of what is happening in the landscape: stories of fishing, hunting, reindeer herding, hay making trips, berry picking, forestry, etc. Esthetic experience of the landscape and of a work of art referring to it become represented and reproduced when people talk about and describe what they do amid nature. I feel that I have succeeded in my art if my works function as catalysts for and expressions of the existence of this communal discussion. What is happening, to cite Pauli Tapani Karjalainen, is

At the nexus of time and place what also materializes [emerges] is that which we call the ego – every person's unique being here and now."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Karjalainen 1997, 235.

At its best, art taps into and nurtures this process on the level of individuals as well as the community.

One additional value of my art in my view is that it often enables me to stimulate discussion on the environment and cultural heritage that would not otherwise take place. The sites of my works are forums where I often hear people and groups talking whose voices would not otherwise be heard. I have sought to create in my art a type of plow that turns the soil and unearths afresh textual elements of the local culture. This material serves as the basis for the re-constructing of and changes in the local identity. Tourism is a principal force constructing and transforming the conception of the North at present.<sup>52</sup> I do not want to deny the importance of tourism as mainstay of the economy and of people's well-being in Lapland. I believe that my art has something to offer in the genuine development of cultural tourism. Thus, the underlying inspiration for my art approaches pragmatic esthetics, one goal of which is to link art and esthetic experience to the practical and social needs of the community.<sup>53</sup> If one aspect of these needs is the Kantian natural esthetics that emphasizes innocence and the wanderer seeking the solitude of the wilderness, I would gladly allow him or her to walk in the northern wilderness of this imagination, where nature's grandeur will cleanse the mind.

The final phase of existence of my works is generally that created by the art community who have contact with the documents dealing with my works and

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<sup>52</sup> Saarinen 1999b, 81-92. Saarinen examines the impact of tourism on localness and regional identity in Lapland

<sup>53</sup> Shusterman 1997, 9-20. Shusterman defines the role and function of pragmatic esthetics in the Finnish and English preface to his book.

the representations of them that are realized in the art world. In this way, the totality of my works hopefully form a continuum in which there is a conceptual dialogue that is an extension of the bodily movements in the landscape and work in the local community: it contributes to constructing the conception of the environment, the public, and identity in Lapland. That which arises from the reworking of tradition, ultimately comes to survive on the terms set by the means of communication and technology of the dominant culture; however, in successfully finding its place in this global process, the margin may be emboldened. My art is by no means seeks to effect a return to the roots of traditions but, I hope, something more along the lines of Stuart Hall's insight that all new discourses in a culture always are located somewhere and always come from somewhere: "They come from some area, some history, some language, some cultural tradition; it is from these they gain their shape."<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

It seems that, like Western science, Western art has taken on an obsessive need for conquest. The creation of a work of art and doing research both entail constant surveying and taming], which always destroy something original. To the extent that we are able to convey through science or art something that we feel is valuable, there is also always something associated with the real lifeworld that remains beyond the scope of our representations. Does the North I love escape my grasp in the grip of art and science? Will the artistic or scientific representation of the North become impossible after all? Does the new and identifiable disappear as soon as it is attained? Perhaps that which escapes us

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<sup>54</sup> Hall 1992, 320

is precisely the intriguing secret of the unknown and indefinable – that which prompts artists and scientist to go out in search of new ways and territories.

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