

Understanding the relationship between rocks, rivers and humanity

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Because of their innumerable changing forms, both rocks and oceans are elements that have always seemed to excite and surprise the observer.

(Havran, p. 43, 2007)

At the outset of this project I sat by my hometown river, Ranelven, in Norway. While soaking up the fresh river air and observing the effervescent river water, my thoughts wandered to how much power - intense natural energy - the eternal flow of water carries, and how this affects and modifies everything in it: plants, animals, plankton and rocks. Big glaciers, small pebbles and everything in between have, by the force of life, been shaped, moulded and pushed against each other for an indefinitely long period and to be as they are now each a distinct shape and form.

During the field week in Finland I sat by Porttipahta, a dam on the Kitinen river. While sitting on the riverbank, I rubbed, scratched and stroked various rocks, reflecting on how rocks are not only shaped by natural forces such as the river's current, but also by human intervention. The rocks by the



Figure 1. Porttipahta, Kitinen, Finland.

Image: Parpala, 2024

Kitinen river were variously shaped: some of the stones had round edges while others were straight-edged. Typically rocks with jagged edges remain on the riverbank, whereas the rocks found in the water have been eroded and shaped by water, and are therefore rounder (Libal, 2017). Some of the rocks by the riverbank were not only jagged edged but made from a different type of material than the others. Through talking with a local guide, I learned



*Figure 2. Rocks made by both human and non-human hands.
Image: Ruud, 2024*

that these types of rocks most likely were put there by humans in the process of making Porttipahta. Tim Ingold (1993) emphasises the fact that both human and non-human activities take part in how the landscape looks today. The temporality of the landscape involves multiple overlapping time scales, which includes both earth formations – such as how the rivers shape the stones – and the urge for further human habitation, which in this case have resulted in the making of Porttipahta.

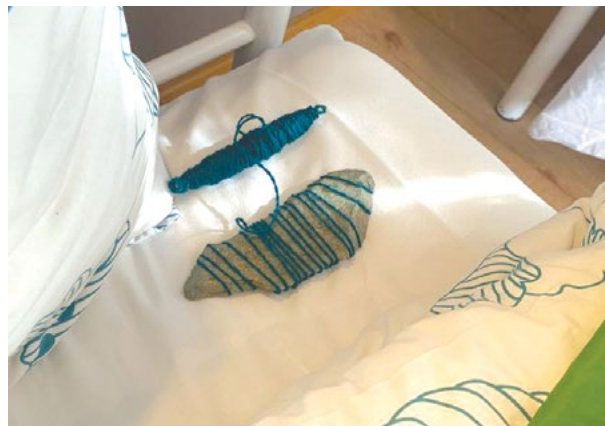
These temporalities have coexisted and interacted, continuously shaping the landscape. Through the temporality of the landscape the stones have been shaped, pushed, pulled, crushed and dragged against each other by both nature and humans. Though this is a natural ongoing process, this realisation made me want to take the stones out of the water and give them some time to rest in another kind of environment without anything or anybody shaping or forming it. Instead of the stones being formed by others, I wanted to respect its form and shape by using yarn. The process of working with –



Figure 3. Image: Parpala, 2024

and not against the stone started with gently wrapping yarn around it. By letting the yarn find an edge of the stone to naturally place itself I felt a deeper understanding of how both the power of the river and human intervention had affected and shaped it. The desire to show the stone some care by letting it just be, led me to weave carefully around them, honouring each stone's unique shape.

Figure 4. Image: Ruud, 2024



Instead of me shaping the stone, the stone shaped me through working with it.

The stones used in this project are from the Kiti-nen river, while the work performed with them was undertaken by me beside my local river, Ranelven. Ingold (1993) suggests that people experience the temporality of the landscape through their activities within it. By weaving onto the rock while being near the river, I became more aware of the unfolding and continuous changes in the landscape. Observing the streams and continuous wave-like flows of the river, the act of weaving made me feel more connected to nature. By dwelling in the landscape - and being aware of my surroundings, whilst having the purpose of showing nature my sense of care and a form of respect felt very intimate.

*The movement of weaving,
up and down, up and down,
over the yarn, under the yarn,
almost
like a wave*



While weaving has been described as “the craft of lacing fibers together to make a fabric or cloth” (Vocabulary, 2024), my goal was not to take the yarn off the rock and make a fabric out of it, but rather keep the yarn on the rock as a symbol of compassion and care. The colours used for the project – different shades of blue, green and grey - each reflects the colours of the river. In this way, I let the water, through its colours, be a part of my respect for the rocks. As Howard and Kendrick (2008, p. 64) note: «blue is the colour of our dreams, our mood and our soul.”

Whilst weaving onto the rocks, I came to the realisation that the feelings invested in the act of allowing the stones to simply be, without being shaped by external forces, also can be applied to how humans interact. Just as rocks are pushed, pulled, and shaped by forces around them, so too are people often influenced by external pressure, leading them in directions they may not have chosen themselves. The deep connection between human and nature, and the ways in which we mirror each other, became clearer through this reflection.

Figures 5 & 6. Images: Ruud, 2024





Figure 7 & 8. Images: Ruud, 2024



Concluding remarks

In engaging with these two rivers I have become more aware of how these sites are places of water energy and power, and also how humans have formatted the stones in the river into what they are today. This is a natural part of what Ingold (1993) presents as the temporality of the landscape. However, while non-human and human activities have continuously “worked against” the rocks, shaping them over time, my intention through this project has been to give the rocks a break – a moment of peace – free from further transformation. This project is in a way a tribute to the power of letting things be. A process to understand how we let nature influence us, shaping our understanding, without us always needing to shape it. By letting the rocks, for a brief moment, be how they are, embracing their form, a deeper un-

derstanding of how humans shape each other, both in positive and negative ways, appeared within me.

References

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