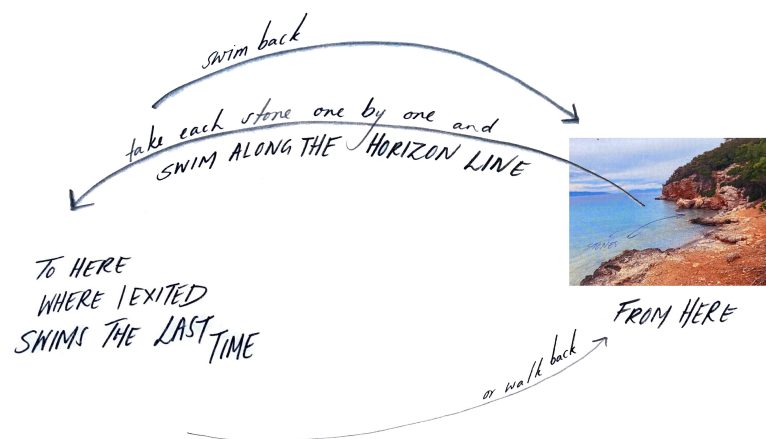


Moving Things Around

Returning: Stones to Agistri, Sticks to Mizarai

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Unrealised score for returning stones (Dragonera Beach, Agistri, Greece)

A note to the reader: This is an assembled text in two parts; where the recollection of returning stones to Agistri is juxtaposed with the experience of returning sticks to Mizarai. The contents are collaged together from diary entries, notes, adapted from speeches and stories and edited over the past months into the text you encounter now. The juxtaposition emerges through the process of editing the first half coinciding with the visit to Mizarai.

Throughout this text *collection* and *taken* are used in different ways; *collection* [noun] is used to describe the group of stones and *taken* [verb] as the opposite of return. I could have used collected as a verb; I could have also used borrowed. The act of returning transforms the act of taking into the act of borrowing, but at the time I took the stones my intention was not to return them.

Saturday (circa March 2023 to circa July 2025)

A few years ago, I returned a collection of stones to Dragonera Beach on the Greek island of Agistri. During a trip several years earlier, I had taken the stones each time I exited the water from a swim, with the intention of keeping them as a material resource to be used in future, unknown installations. These were stones I had felt compelled to collect at the time: stones I couldn't imagine leaving behind, stones I had barely looked at since. The case study of returning enables an experience of consciously being with a system and, through that, both recognising what that experience is as a dynamic entity, as well as opening space to step out of an experience to simultaneously document it. Documentation can be a secondary outcome of an experience that reflects it, and it is also a way of sharing a subjective experience with another.

For a long time, it's been a habit of mine to mull over memories, turning material over in my mind until a shift occurs, or after that point, where I feel the material could be transformed. I collect things such as sticks, stones, small objects and matches used to light my stove so that I can boil the kettle for a cup of tea. These collections, which I refer to as my archive, become the material make-up of my installations; they are material that I take, keep, and move around with as I move around. I was born in Whadjuk Noongar Boodja, now occupied as metropolitan Perth in Western Australia. For much of my adult life, I have practised at a distance—between where I was born and grew up and where I have been based—between Iceland, Estonia, and Lithuania. I am coming to realise how the disconnect between my installations and the landscapes they attempt to reflect, as well as the open, fragmented stories that they reference, exist in parallel to my lived experience.¹

A few years ago, I opened a conversation with myself about the idea that artworks could co-become in landscape, and thus situate (themselves) empathetically to the systems that they are presented in, systems that their being emerges from, systems they might maintain

¹ In my most recent series of works “*only certain somethings arrive*,” “*Ocean Breathing*” and “*other objects*,” I responded to encounters within the Paljassaare area of North Tallinn. Their development happened within the studio/home through the production of artefacts, generation of images through performative acts, reflection and note taking. So far, each project has been presented as installations and networks of artworks within exhibition contexts, away from Paljassaare. Thus, the final form of these projects highlights layers of disconnectedness from landscape and the ecological systems they attempt to reflect.



² This term was introduced to me by the article “Co-becoming Bawaka” by Country, B., Wright, S., Suchet-Pearson, S., Lloyd, K., Burarrwanga, L., Ganambarr, R., Ganambarr-Stubbs, M., Ganambarr, B., Maymuru, D. and Sweeney, J., published by *Progress in Human Geography*, in 2015.

connection to. Described with the term co-becoming;² I define this anecdotally through an observation:

When you lie on your back on a day without clouds and look up at the sky, you can see a gradient of blue, radiating out from the centre of the area you are looking at. Sometimes it is darker at the centre and sometimes it is lighter. One day, lying on the beach in the Northern Hemisphere, I noticed this gradient was the inverse of what I've seen in Australia. This is not the key takeaway from this anecdote. The takeaway is that in this moment it is possible to begin to understand that you are at the centre of this world, that it is round and that you are a part of this complex system. Yet despite this, in this single moment, there is just a colour field and a phenomenon of the system dissolving in on itself, into oneself, and oneself, in turn, dissolves into the system, all entities involved co-becoming.

Initially, I thought changing models of viewership from ideas of the viewer/reader/participant (where there is implication of an other) to models of experiencing art defined by notions of the shared might lead to some kind of co-becoming (though this is an exploration for later). Currently, I'm looking more at what might be implied and enabled by some kind of recalibration of production and presentation so that they are simultaneous to each other, and the present might imply and enable. Simply said, I would like my artworks to function as trends, as transient states of doing and of being.

The process of returning the stones is the first in a series of gestures that attempt to critique my old ways of doing and transform the material matter of the practice into new forms (lasting encounters).³ There is no imminent resolution in response to this.

I am still dwelling on the experience of returning stones to Agistri for a few reasons: I have multiple other collections of stones from

³ Nicolas Bourriaud describes form as “A coherent unit, a structure (independent entity of inner dependencies)” where “form can be defined as a lasting encounter” (Bourriaud 1998, 19). Artist Pierre Huyghe defines topology as: “refer[ing] to a process of translation. However when you translate something, you always lose something that was in the original. In a topological situation, by contrast, you lose nothing; it is a deformation of the same ... It's a way to translate an experience without representing it. The experience will be equivalent and still it will be different” (quoted in Bourriaud 2009, 135-136).

different beaches in Greece, sticks from different locations in Estonia and Lithuania, shells from Latvia and unfired clay pressed into the shapes of eggs from Pajassaare and a plan to return them.

The whole experience of taking the stones back to Dragonera Beach was pretty anticlimactic, without any ceremony. I sat squat on the shoreline and one by one, I pulled the stones from a snap-lock bag and placed them into the water. I held them in the water before I released them, hoping that I would feel them experiencing swimming once again, hoping that I would feel a shift in their materiality. I could feel the water, but the note I made for myself at the time stated that the stones felt the same as they had when I had held them in my hotel room the night before.

The only thing that marked this event, was a voice memo describing the experience that was sent to a friend, which in turn, created an audience for the piece (I don't remember who this voice memo was sent to, but I remember making the recording). After explaining what I was about to do, I read aloud a passage from Rachel Cusk's 2014 book *Outline*:

"Yet if people were silent about the things that happened to them, was something not being betrayed, even if only the version of themselves that had experienced them? It was never said of history, for instance, that it shouldn't be talked about; on the contrary, in terms of history, silence was forgetting, and it was the thing people feared most of all, when it was their own history that was at risk of being forgotten. And history, really, was invisible, though its monuments stood. The making of the monument was half of it, but the rest was interpretation. Yet there was something worse than forgetting, which was misrepresentation, bias, the selective presentation of events. The truth had to be represented: it could not be left to represent itself ..." (Cusk 2014, 246)

I ended the voice memo by saying that the absence of more of a plan was okay because the returning of the stones was not about me. However, the thought of what I could and couldn't have done differently has stuck with me. How could the exercise of returning the stones be aestheticised? How could it be held within another form that was relational to the experience itself? How could it be archived and documented? How could it exist in something other than a story?

returner (noun) = me
= stones

I the returner return[ed] the stones

even though I will go away
↓
and stones will stay

returner = me
= stones

I enable the return

the stones are the condition by
which the return is
→ motivated
→ catalyzed
→ manifest
→ **ENABLED**

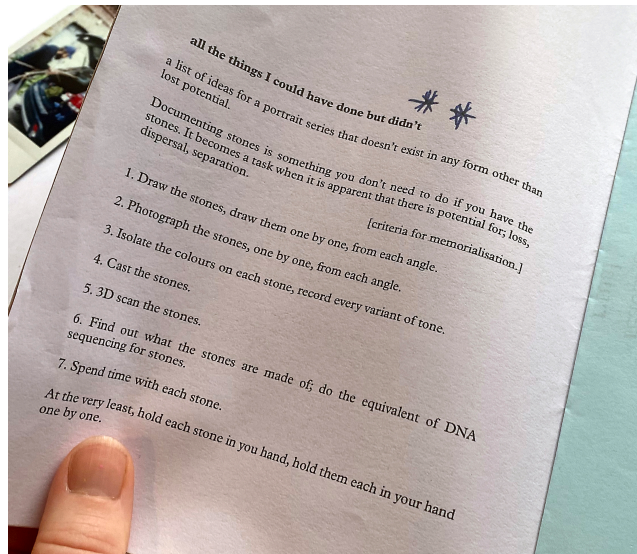
The stones being from there is what;
signals, signs, manifests the return.

Etymology of return

The previous night, I had sat down in my hotel and thought of all the things I could have done, but didn't. I was compiling a list of ideas for a portrait series that doesn't exist in any form other than lost potential. Documenting stones is something you don't need to do if you have the stones. It becomes a task when it is apparent that there

is potential for loss, dispersal, or separation, these being criteria for memorialisation.

This list of criteria, a basic first draft of ideas, includes:



Much of this article is adapted from an oral presentation I gave shortly after returning from Agistri, for this occasion I made a small edition of zines for the audience [my new colleagues at the Vilnius Academy of Arts' Doctoral School], this is the one given to Miki and returned to me to assist in the development of this speech into an article.

I could have made this list months earlier, in fact, years earlier, and done all these things, but I didn't. The production of [arbitrary(?)]⁴ documentation feels antithetical to the current aims of my practice.

⁴ In *The Exform* (2016), theorist Nicholas Bourriaud writes, "we inhabit an overfull world, living in archives ready to burst, among more and more perishable products, junk food and bottlenecks." He writes that our epoch is one of "squandered energy: nuclear waste that won't go away, hulking stockpiles of unused goods, and domino effects triggered by industrial emissions polluting the atmosphere and oceans" (11). He concludes, "the mass of art objects produced every year defies anyone and everyone's capacity for memorialisation and judgement," and it is yet to be seen how this will then develop and manifest into the future.

Tomorrow I will go to Mizarai⁵ to return some sticks that were taken for me shortly after the return of the Agistri stones. The sticks have been used for multiple purposes and featured in multiple exhibitions since they were borrowed. To say that I don't have a plan for this would hide the fact that during the drive from Vilnius to Mizarai, I will be thinking about the journey when I returned the stones to Agistri.⁶

Sunday (circa July 2025)

In late 2020, I collected a list of words and activities that I wanted to do, was doing and had done. I organised them into activities that could be described as roving or homing. Roving actions include visiting, collecting, orienting, and seeking. Of course, visiting this same place again doesn't make it home, it just makes it a place I've been to twice. Homing actions included revisiting, and also routine and navigating. Actions without categorisation within the logic of this moment included: sharing, acting, reacting, ritual, responding, the momentary, the temporal, the repeated/repeatable and the stable. The status of moving away or moving towards, and how the timeframe of these acts affects their categorisation, is also questionable.

⁵ I remember listening to American-Nigerian author Chinelo Okparanta speak at the Perth Writers Festival in 2017. Okparanta had been invited to speak about her 2015 novel *Under the Udala Tree*. Okparanta spoke about the process of developing the manuscript for publication: there were six drafts before the published version. Okparanta wrote each draft from start to finish without looking at the previous draft. I'm going to do this strategy, at least for the returns within the Baltic region, each return will be its own trip - things will happen in between. In a studio visit with Estonian Artist Taavi Suisalu, I was given the advice (in regard to another project I was thinking of) to go forward with the plan as it stands because something will emerge in the process of doing that will be unexpected.

⁶ Thinking about something while doing something else is a method I often employ. It's not unique to me, it was introduced to me in the first year of my bachelor studies by artist Shannon Lyons who recommended that we think-do-think-do / do-think-do-think. This methodology is more practice led than practice based. Thinking about something while doing something else somewhat differential to "thinking through making" and "making through thinking" (Ingold 2013, p. 18) and to David Lynch's description describing intuition as feeling thinking (see: David Lynch interview by Susie Pearl (2021) on YouTube, for excerpt see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DeLfS6CMns>) as an alternative to doing thinking. Thinking about something while doing something else is doing two things at once, creating juxtaposition and contrast that might lead to new realisations, shifts in perspective and/or a different trajectory of making.



If the returning of the stones enabled me to experience revisiting, my trip to Mizarai today was an experience of visiting: the sticks had been taken for me, and this was my first time seeing where they had come from. I left Vilnius around 10am with my colleague and friend; Adomas Žudys and the sticks. In the car, I read him my draft version of this text, recalling the return of the stones to Agistri. We speculated about burning the sticks. I wondered whether to bury them

—or do something else to speed up the composting process they would have undergone had they stayed in Mizarai.

Upon arrival, we sat by the decommissioned concrete swimming pool, half-filled by summer rains, and we read the quote from *Outlines* to each other. This was done in the attempt to make sense of it in relation to this experience, but we became preoccupied with the echo of our voices that kept bouncing back towards us. We tried to film the reading aloud to the pool and capture the reverb of our voices. We swapped the camera between us and eventually fumbled the recording. This made space for me to tell Adomas about the man I had met during the walk from my hotel by the port to Dragonera beach. The man had approached me, first opening a conversation in Greek and switching to English, when he had asked and found out where I was from. The man had been walking with a stick, like the ones I returned earlier today. He asked if I had been following the storm developing in Northern Queensland. With the stick, he drew on the sand the patterns of the wind that would emerge in response to the shift in the pressure systems. He explained how he had worked in shipping in the same region, and as he moved the stick around, creating arrows in a thin layer of the sand above the asphalt road, he told me how these winds would affect the ships and the people aboard them. I missed the moment to record him, I felt too shy to ask him to repeat himself for the camera and allowed this experience to remain for my eyes only. This memory was activated for the first time as a story retold to Adomas. He replied that each iterative trip is a way to remember the previous one.

A palimpsest emerges.

It's a different kind of accumulation that begins to emerge as the previous becomes plural. Each experience echoes into the next, shaping how each subsequent experience is planned, influencing how it might unfold and how I might react to it.



With the sticks at Mizarai, Lithuania.

In a clearing in the forest, I found a patch of grass that was less green than the grass surrounding it, as if a tree had previously been there casting a shadow and stopping the grass from seeing the sun. There was no other evidence of a tree having been there, I laid the sticks down in a way that they would highlight this feature in the land but not block the sun for the green grass. We took photos, and then I realised that by rearranging two sticks, I could form the outline of a fish—which is how I left them. Adomas made digital scans of both installations.

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