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matter of time

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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abstract

matter of time sets out to examine the temporal and physical conditions of prospective mining sites in Finland and Aotearoa New Zealand to question natural resource use in the context of contemporary landscapes and changing ecologies. Photographic records of the two sites map out microcosms of natural matter in its temporal and physical state of flux, suggesting an intimacy that is not grounded in the traditional representations of a landscape.

Photography and its position in contemporary image culture is investigated in this exegesis through physicality and materiality of the photo object. While seeking analogies between the physical environment and its photographic presence, *matter of time* attempts to challenge the cultural construct that a landscape photograph constitutes through challenging the surface of a photographic print. The objects and installation methodologies continue to question the finality of a photograph and the conditions of its physical presence in installation space by presenting a site that suggests impermanence and navigation through a terrain with multiple trajectories.

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Relic of Memory, Seamus Heaney (1969)

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preface

The sound of gravel mutes as the land begins to slope. Sun is at its highest, bleaching everything it hits in the hollow: the sand, the pond, the sediment. Heat dries the blood dripping from a horsefly bite under my eye. A lonely reindeer with a tracker latched around her shedding neck sees me and heads in closer to claim her space in the slight breeze. For a moment it smells like urine and sulfur.

I have never been here before and I have never been far. The site is right by river Kitka which runs to a lake bearing the same name. On that lake sits Cape Airisniemi, where my father was born and where my grandfather still lives. My family home is twenty minutes away. I move along, trying not to make the reindeer uneasy. Long strips of rock have been neatly sliced off or drilled out: the crevasses are surrounded by traces of mechanics and markings of locations. Rusting pipes poke out of puddles, hoses circulate towards the bottom of the pond. I am walking on scratches that could prepare the cavity.

Juomasuo swamp area in Kuusamo, Northern Finland, became widely known as a prospective mining site around 2010, when an Australian mining company acquired a permit to mine, established originally, in 1990. Over the past eight years this mining permit has been in the hands of three different companies (owned internationally and nationally) with an interest in gold, cobalt, copper and other fine metals found here. The mining project, although welcomed by some, has met with strong resistance from local people, organisations and the Kuusamo city government. The region is known for its national parks and far-reaching bodies of water. To build an opencast mine in the midst of it all is seen as potentially harmful for local industries like tourism, forestry, farming and reindeer herding. Beyond economic arguments, the mine poses a threat to the area's ecology: runoff and dust from the mine could end up in the surrounding rivers and lakes, potentially even in the ground water.

I have examined cuts and bruises like these before but always with the privilege of physical distance easing the impact. As T.J. Demos states in his essay *DECOLONIZING NATURE: MAKING THE WORLD MATTER*, intensifying resource depletion and environmental degradation has resulted in a situation where humans are “more than ever conscious of the disastrous effects of that scientific and technological age of post-Enlightenment Western modernity, now increasingly global in its reach” (Demos 14). For Demos this situation stems from our desire to control the material world that we are a part of. I am aware that the camera hanging from my neck is very likely powered by the same minerals that would eventually be extracted from this very location. I think of another site I visited three months earlier, on the other side of the world.

...

Clouds drag by like sacks of rain along the plateau. In the muted light there are just two colours: the colour of shrub and the colour of dirt. The road falls out of sight, down the mountain by the radio tower. For a few minutes the light bursts out: marine sediments, a decaying piece of wood, a stream running below the road all emerge from the two-tone, gleaming. As I head back through the suburbs before dark, a faint smell of coal fire seeps into the car.

Early this year I found an article about Te Kuha, a prospective coal mine on the Denniston plateau in Westport, Aotearoa. Parts of the Te Kuha mining permit allow access to conservation land and to a water conservation reserve. This concession is considered alarming by some local groups and national organisations – as with the Finnish open cast mine proposed above, others within the community would have welcomed the job opportunities stemming from the project. In June, after court appeals were made, the New Zealand government declined the final permission to mine on the conservation land, and the mining company is yet to announce what happens next. Coal mining has a long tradition on the West Coast of the South Island which is the site of several historic mining towns like Denniston and Granity, and mines like Stockton that

are currently operating. Against this backdrop of economic drivers and the cultural history of the area, the government act of declining parts of the mining permit indicate a very different direction for the area.

I came to Aotearoa New Zealand for a visit that has now stretched out to five years. At the beginning the country was a fantasy that I consumed like any tourist does, most often with my camera. As my stay lengthens, I slowly begin to comprehend the land through a more complex set of geographic, historic and socio-political structures. My research on the prospective mining of this site at Denniston in the South Island has been critical to the development of this project and has resulted in the completion of test work that allowed me to extend this photographic body of work and to consider the potential of it containing spatial elements. I will discuss both sites throughout this text.¹

Rather than polarising concepts like transience and fixity, ephemerality and perenniality, the objects and installation methodologies in *matter of time* represent a spectrum between the opposing ends of this site-specific debate: the finality of a photograph and conditions of its physical presence are brought to a negotiation with materials and structures that suggest a volatile process taking place in the installation space itself. The site made through this installation longs for the site in the world.

¹ Photographs from the Te Kuha mining site are not presented as part of *matter of time*. This is a choice based on the durational aspects of my visit to the site: I did not have the same level of engagement, the same embodied experience of the site in Westport as I did with the site in my Finnish hometown. Therefore the two sites would not have been in balance in the final body of work, and the site in Westport would not have had the depth of representation it deserves.



Figure 1. *wood, Denniston Plateau. 2018, image by author.*

1. in anticipation

The site in my Finnish hometown and the site at Denniston in the West Coast region exist in vastly varying temporalities: seasonal cycles, local histories and brief encounters with visitors. Intersecting with these processes, there is another layer of temporality that is relevant here: as if literally set on hold via their respective processes of consent, there is a sense of anticipation that overshadows these two prospective mining sites at the opposite ends of the earth.

Doreen Massey's *for space* considers how we have conceived of and could further develop our understanding of the construction of place through time and space. Throughout her text Massey argues that places are "spatio-temporal events" (Massey 130) with multiple trajectories thrown together to be negotiated and constantly reconfigured. According to Massey place in the Western world is often constructed through the experience of situating and grounding oneself in the " 'the natural world' ": place is regarded as a holistic location. By using migratory species and geographical elements from her local environment as examples, Massey challenges the idea of a stable, unchanging environment that will remain the same until we enter it again (Massey 130-138). Photographs often validate this idea of place as unchanging by introducing a brief spatio-temporal event from a chosen point of view, capturing a measured period of reflected light in a fixed and finite manner.

Multiple intersecting temporalities, fantasies and fears are projected onto these sites. The deep geological time measured via the earth's crust can be seen to collide with the capitalist project of excavation and extraction: a mine's operational duration is determined by the amount and quality of material extracted and intensity of labour needed for this task. Often, in reporting and engagement with public, especially in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the mining company concerned posits its plan to bring the site back to a 'natural state' after the mining activities have concluded. This creates an intended cyclical

trajectory of resetting the clock: it suggests the utopic impulse of remaking *what was there before* and rewards a kind of nostalgia for this concept of the 'natural' state of the site. The sites in this research also engage with a further temporality: as mentioned above they have both been in the process of *becoming* mines for several years. This sets them into a liminal space where intense physical and temporal change, and perceived return to origin are both fantasised about, suspended in time and yet to be achieved. It is this extended liminal space of projection and intended reversal that allows for several trajectories to exist at once.

Similarly to Massey, Timothy Morton sees place as a very Western concept. Morton writes that place especially paralyses an ecological approach because it makes us see ecology as something bound to earth, bound to location: it must feel homely and be thought of in terms of the here and now (Morton 27). Place is problematic because it suggests a limit to the experience of belonging. It privileges our experience of intimacy and uniqueness but allows us no broader perspective. Morton calls for a more progressive ecology that would be spacious and global, dislocated in every way (Morton 27). According to him "the ecological thought spreads out in both space and time, but thinking big doesn't contradict being intimate" (Morton 100). To Morton ecology is not about being able to relate to nature but about being able to experience intimacy with other beings regardless of their ambiguity.

Abandoning the idea of place results in one all-encompassing trajectory, an ongoing and limitless spatio-temporal event, but it also brings up a set of problems. The ecological aspects of a place are often tightly woven into the social and political projects surrounding it: this is especially prevalent in locations of material extraction. Place has a specific social and political context and can therefore enable a hierarchy of mastery and exploitation of people and resources but, on the contrary, it is often the specific ecological, social or cultural aspects of a place that can save it from ecologically damaging development, as in the case of the mining site I have engaged with at Denniston Plateau. Morton's

idea of expanding ecological thinking beyond relating to what we understand is radical because it dismantles the specificity of a location, which can at times be the most potent argument for salvaging and or saving a specific ecology. I would argue that what we need is a way of relating the specificity of a place to other places in the world: to be able to form a terrain which connects a multiplicity of places.

2. the paradoxical object

Rebecca Solnit writes that photography engages with the world and subject matter in a different way from any other art form and therefore has more responsibility to negotiate its representational methodologies (59). The difference to other art forms and the responsibility that Solnit refers to, relates to photography's indexical nature: it seems to present us a slice of the real, of something that once existed in the world in some form. To Solnit photography's significance in representing contemporary landscapes rests in its ability to document and function as evidence of places under threat (59). This sense of threat evoked by landscape photographs seems to ground itself in "now-ness" (Feuerhelm 2017), the immediacy enabled by - and expected from - image-making technologies and online media outlets. Susan Sontag writes in *On Photography*, first published in 1977, that "today everything exists to end in a photograph" (24). This statement has only become more relevant as contemporary image culture develops and transforms. Photography and ecological thinking seem to currently share the same anxiety over adhering to this now-ness: the expectation of immediacy and urgency paralyses our responses to both because now-ness is cycled through the layers of communication technology and hence derives from a disestablished past and is without a conclusion in the future. In a culture where photographs constitute experiences in the world, we seem to have already lived through what we have seen in those images.

Sontag continues to critically examine photograph's temporality and connection to the world throughout her texts. She states that photographs are artifacts that appeal to us because of their perceived status as found objects that derive directly from the world: they are magical because they are of the real (69). Furthermore, Sontag writes that photographs are often approached with specific sentimentality: "photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at the time past" (71). The temporal disconnection

photographs have in relation to their subject matter makes them not only sentimental but also paradoxical objects: they adhere to a reality of the past and therefore seem to fail us with their promise of this reality in the present.

Discussing several of Sontag's ideas, Susie Linfield writes in her essay *A Little History of Photography Criticism; Or, Why Do Photography Critics Hate Photography?* that photography was a modern invention ridden with anxiety and conflict from its inception (55). To Linfield talking about uncertainties of modernity is similar to talking about uncertainties of photography: "photography is a proxy for modern life and its discontents, which may explain some of the high expectations, bitter disappointments, and pure vitriol it has engendered" (55). The expectations and dismays projected onto photography correlate with the expectations and dismays we have about the world.

Linfield seems to agree with Sontag on the direct emotional connection to the world that photographs evoke. Linfield states that we should not look at photographs to find reasons or solutions for disasters and conflicts:

They – we – turn to photographs for other things: for a glimpse of what cruelty, or strangeness, or beauty, or agony, or love, or disease, or natural wonder, or artistic creation, or depraved violence, looks like. And we turn to photographs to discover what our intuitive reactions to such otherness – and to such others – might be. (61)

There is a valid sense of generalisation in the approach to images described by Linfield, especially in relation to the historical and political context of the photographic content. I would argue that while the expanded context is crucial to the narrative the photograph or a series of photographs adheres to, it is not always our primary way to enter a photograph, or any situation for that matter: we bring our biographical and cultural background to the viewing experience and therefore are seeking a point of relation on a personal level. Photography that operates on a general level of collective cultural understanding, and is able to

evoke a personal response, has the power to accommodate a multiplicity of relations while still adhering to its specific narrative and context.

Rebecca Solnit praises the formal shifts in landscape photography towards installation and performance, and even more importantly, towards photograph as a sample: isolating a small part of nature without the contextualisation of landscape, scenery, views or distances (Solnit 59). By this Solnit means mainly close-up photographs of natural matter. Contemporary photography has seen a number of practitioners working in this vein: printed images celebrating the materiality of matter become artwork in which the materiality of the photographic print becomes the meaning of the work, often combined with other materials or objects within the same work. American artist Letha Wilson is one of these practitioners. Wilson combines printed photographs of specific sites and landscapes with often architectural structures or materials to discuss the connection between natural and manmade (Fig. 2). In Wilson's works the photograph becomes matter as any other and is treated in the same way: cuts and folds, immersion into substances and puncturing the image surface with other objects suggests that the photograph and the landscape both have a life after the photographic moment has passed.

Figure 2. Wilson, Letha. *Utah Maine Concrete Slab*. 2013.

Within practices like Wilson's, the sense of a site is no longer transcribed through the conventional photographic representation of a landscape but constructed through photographic prints. This way of making and using images has the potential to create a disconnection between the image and the site it derives from: with a concise and non-specific reference point that does not evoke a sense of place in the viewer, the photograph could claim its origin to be anywhere. Things like landscape, scenery and view ground us in time and place: they make us meet the photograph and its subject within specific constraints that are relatable. This argument of generality could be connected to another one of Sontag's notions on photography and its ethical potency:

But moral feelings are embedded in history, whose personae are concrete, whose situations are always specific. Thus, almost opposite rules hold true for the use of the photograph to awaken desire and to awaken conscience. The images that mobilize conscience are always linked to a given historical situation. The more general they are, the less likely they are to be effective.
(17)

Most of the photographs I have taken in the past year in Finland and in Aotearoa New Zealand can be seen to operate within Solnit's idea of using photography as a means of collecting samples – and against Sontag's idea of ineffective generality (Fig. 3-4). The gaze in my photographs is often directed towards the ground, un-systematically surveying the land's surface and its alterations through the traces, markings and objects that are placed on it. I began photographing the sites in this way because to me a landscape photograph in its traditional form of introducing us to a scenery or a view, is made for what I would call a 'cultural gaze' that is projected onto the land. It is made for us to be able to see ourselves in a landscape, to imagine how it would feel to let our eyes wonder across it, to visually consume it. Images like this function as a cultural construct, feeding into a generic desire, a longing for a return to nature. This approach seems to enable an ideological separation from the land by aestheticising our relationship with it. Further, this separation seems to exclude the, often rough and sensorial, intimacy we would experience in a landscape or at a particular site.



Figure 3. *untitled, Denniston Plateau. 2018, image by author.*



Figure 4. *untitled, Juomasuo.* 2018, image by the author.

Using images from my trip to the Te Kuha mining site and the surrounding areas in Westport and the Denniston Plateau, I made a test work called *Seam* which was presented as part of a critique earlier this year (Fig. 5-8). *Seam* included five large photographic prints, two tv-screens showing moving image works and a string suspended with screws, floating slightly above the ground, following the outlines of the prospective mining site. Photographs used in the installation can be understood as microcosmic records of the ecological and historical aspects of this site which exists on conservation land, and is in close proximity with historical mining sites of the area. Placed on the floor, the prints and tv screens forced the audience to become aware of their use of the space when moving around the room to view the works.

The spatial elements of *Seam* were successful in making the audience navigate within the installation space in respect to the prints and other elements, referencing navigation through a terrain similar to how I might have experienced it. To return to Linfield, she concludes her essay by claiming that today's adherence to irony and emotional distance, especially in our ability to manipulate images through digital technologies, makes us distance ourselves from photographs (63). According to Linfield this results in an increasing inability to respond to photographs and make connections through them (63). Encountering photographs in a way that makes the viewer aware of their physicality through an embodied and spatial experience has potential to evoke a new way of connecting with the photographs and their subject matter.



Figure 5. *Seam installation view 1*. 2018, image by author.



Figure 6. *Seam installation detail 1*. 2018, image by author.

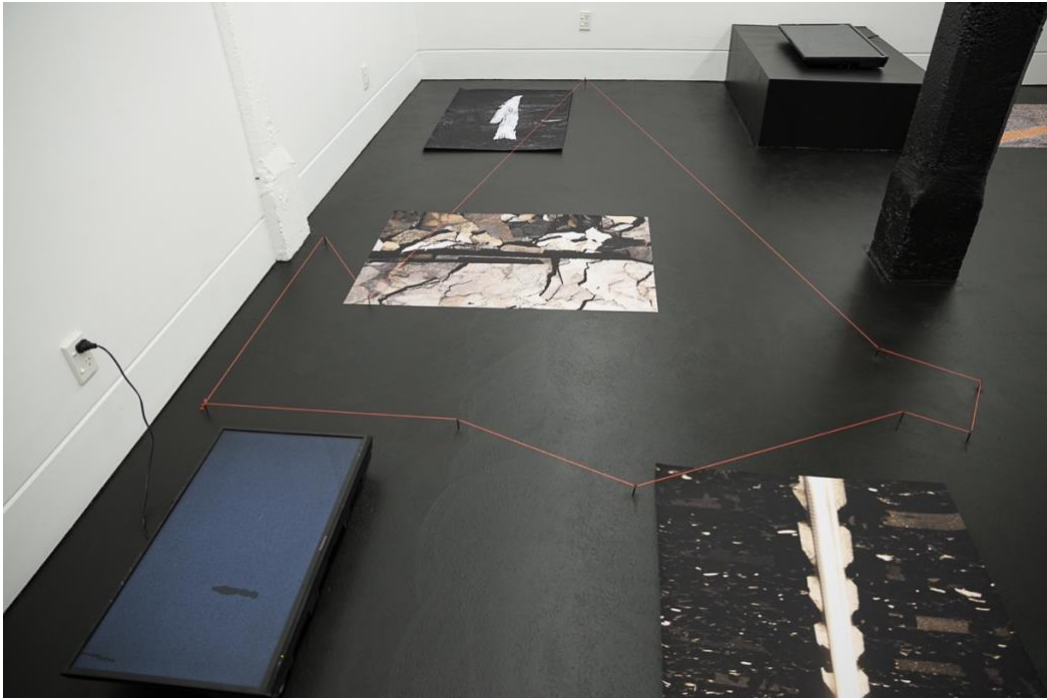


Figure 7. *Seam installation view 2.* 2018, image by author.



Figure 8. *Seam installation detail 2.* 2018, image by author.

3. language and matter

“When a rock rolls over or floats on water, and when a feather sinks, the world will come to an end.”

Finnish proverb

A group of designers and engineers with a keen interest in biotechnology are looking into genetically modifying chicken DNA in a way that would result in making chickens with pink bones. Because of the vast global consumption of chicken meat, the pink bones could be used as a way of identifying the geographic age of the *Anthropocene* from the layers of the earth’s crust in the future. This project alludes to the Western obsession with what happens to the world in the future and what trace we leave behind. We now predict the effects of human impact on the planet, prepare for potential threatening scenarios and estimate the points of no return resulting from our actions.

When The Rock Rolls Over was initiated through an investigation of the human impact of and human adaptation to environmental change. *When The Rock Rolls Over* (Fig.9) is a video sequence combining moving and still imagery, named after a Finnish proverb predicting the end of the world, quoted in the beginning of this chapter. The video operates like a slide show with each image appearing for a few seconds and then cutting directly to the next, while emanating the illuminated cold tones of yellow, pink and green from the screen. *When The Rock Rolls Over* was the first of my works to address the sense of anticipation and apathy caused by information that sets us between deadlines and demands when it comes to the environment. We are placed in a temporal space where time is running out, or it could be argued, has already done so. More than ever, we see the future through what we have done to the past and our remaining relics have become something that could be called ‘hyperobjects’ (see Morton 2013): carbon dioxide, plastic, (soon pink) chicken bones and polluted water. Perversely, consumption means accumulation, and this extends to the information we encounter: to gain information is to gain capital, no matter if we

utilise it or not. Today information is built on fluid, constantly regenerating structures, that we often only manage to respond to by merely gathering, placing and replacing.



Figure 9. *When The Rock Rolls Over.* 2018, image by author.

Jason W. Moore argues that capitalism does not act upon time and space but instead actively produces them (Moore 108). In his essay *The Rise of Cheap Nature*, Moore weaves together the nuanced lineage of events that preceded what we collectively understand as environmental change. Referring to the concept of Anthropocene, he starts to unravel the connections between “human-initiated environment-making” and its connection to inequality; how work is valued and whose lives matter. He describes this as the preface for a capitalistic project of ‘cheap nature’ of natural materials and labour (Moore 2016). Rather than a fixed set of human and non-human beings, cheap nature could be understood as a strategy of placing value on any beings as they enter the capitalistic realm. In *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, a book co-written by Moore and Raj Patel, the authors continue to define the concept of *Cheap Nature* through what they describe as the *Nature-Society* divide.

According to Moore and Patel we separate the world and issues emerging in it into social and natural: mass unemployment and consumer culture are social problems, biodiversity and resource depletion are ecological problems (47). The world is not only seen through the *Nature-Society* divide but also made and organised through language: this operates as a “real abstraction” (Moore & Patel 47) that both describes and constructs the world, often to the benefit of the powerful. “Nature is not a thing but a way of organising – and cheapening – life. It is only through real abstractions – cultural, political and economical – all at once that nature’s activity becomes a set of things” (Moore & Patel 47).

Moore and Patel see nature as being cheapened through systems of exchange and profit that serve the capitalist project. To them, cheap does not only mean low cost: it is a violent strategy that enables capitalism to transfer relationships of life-making into cycles of production and consumption for the smallest amount of compensation possible (Moore & Patel 22). In arguments against the prospective cobalt and gold mine in my Finnish hometown for instance, processes of cheap nature are not only something that people oppose, they are also part of the discourse of condemning the mining project and protesting against it. In most public expressions against the mining project, locals, social groups and politicians constantly bring up the negative impact mining would have on local economy, especially within the tourism industry. These expressions show that argument for the preservation of clean nature is also largely a capitalist project of valuing the land because of the economic benefits that can be gained from it.

Grounded in the *Nature-Society* divide, our current geological period, the Anthropocene, has been called the era of man and is characterised by permanent human impact on the planet. Anthropocene grounds itself in the *Nature-Society* divide. By binding other forms of life to political and economic systems, we have created an ever-growing set of what are seen as ecological problems that increasingly extend to – and as a result challenge the separation from - the social realm for example in the form of climate refugees. Several

academics have criticised the idea of Anthropocene for its human-centric and generalising approach. Irmgard Emmelhainz writes that Anthropocene is problematic because it places humans at the end of their own destiny, which limits the chance for alternative approaches of organizing, and reimagining, the world (Emmelhainz 138). T.J. Demos writes that Anthropocene “suggests—falsely—that we’re all agents of climate change, sharing equally in its causes and effects” (Demos 2015, *Against the Anthropocene*, par. 2) and that “anthropos distracts attention from the economic class that has long benefitted from the economic system responsible for catastrophic environmental change” (Demos 2015, *Against the Anthropocene*, par. 6). Bruno Latour also makes a point that instead of seeing humans as a unified agent with equal responsibility in the current developments, we should be talking about peoples as a multiplicity (Latour 2017, Fourth Lecture).

Australian artist Nicholas Mangan’s project *A World Undone* (2012) is a slow-motion video recording of fine particles of zircon crystals (the oldest material known on Earth) falling through air against a dark background (Fig. 10). In an interview with Max Andrews and Mariana Cánepa Luna, Mangan explains “the idea was to try to situate what we might call technological, or filmic, time within geological time through the means of the camera and the rock material” (Andrews & Cánepa Luna 65). The material enters a new form of temporality. Ana Teixeira Pinto writes in her essay titled *Alien Economies* that in Mangan’s work Anthropocene is not a contest between human and nature, but rather “the brutal process through which all things, however remote, are torn from their surroundings and brought into the marketplace (Teixeira Pinto 148). This way of thinking relates directly to Moore and Patel’s arguments above on cheap nature, through natural materials being transformed to take the form of consumable objects that can then be exchanged for money.

Figure 10. Mangan, Nicholas. *A World Undone*. 2012, installation view, IMA – Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2016, image by Carl Warner.

I would argue that the intersecting technological and geological temporalities of *A World Undone* not only reveal the human and non-human aspects of duration but also sequence them together to suggest a set of connections. This set of connections could be understood in relation to Timothy Morton's concept of *mesh*. According to Morton, mesh can be used to describe the interconnectedness of human and non-human beings, breaking the ideological barrier created by Nature (Morton 99). Mesh brings together social, psychic and scientific domains without attempting to draw lines between background and foreground or to set up an established reference point (Morton 28). The way Nicholas Mangan interacts with natural material also creates a space where social and natural domains are not set in hierarchy but rather in an ongoing dialogue with each other, with Mangan's artwork being another extension of this dialogue.

As argued earlier my photographs attempt to articulate an intimate record of ecologically challenged sites. In *Seam* and in *matter of time* I map microcosms of natural materials – coal, cobalt, gold and other minerals – in a state of prospective physical and temporal flux. The materials found at these sites have already become inculcated in the language of capitalist life identified and earmarked for making as an imagined set of desired things and saleable commodities. The geological duration of matter is about to be contested by an intensified temporal cycle of production, yet the matter is still largely bound to the ground, enclosed in what can be understood as its natural and elemental form. The photographs included in *matter of time* reveal the marks and traces of exploration into the geological layers of the ground: this brief encounter inspired by material discovery, intersects with the geological time of the earth.

To Carter Mull photographs, in the same way as objects and experiences, negotiate the inevitability of commoditisation within the current state of capitalism (75). Needless to say, photographic technologies have enabled a digital archive of images that continues to expand in time and be bought and sold as commodities. According to Mull, the presence of construction and the act of making photographs that are both depictive and concrete seems to offer a way to respond to the challenges of relating to photographs in the ever-expanding, digital image world.

Mull expands on the constructed image and artists working in this field in the following quote:

The sense of materiality in contemporary photography usually occurs in front of the lens, within the formal structure of a work or within the printing and presentational modes. On the one hand, this interest in process and the material construction of a photograph could be seen as an assertion of fact within the making of an image. On the other hand, the interest in materiality could be thought of as an outgrowth and continuation of the concept of constructed image. (Mull 75)

Devoted Speculations, a group of three works I made in 2017, embodies notions of image as a consumable object that can be remade and reconstructed by physically altering the image surface (Fig. 11-13). In *Devoted Speculations* the picturesque representation of land becomes contested through form, scale and space along with the inclusion of other materials, making the printed image into the object of the work.

In To Another Body, named after a verse in James Dickey's poem *Inside the River* (Dickey 1960), and one of the works in the series, juxtaposes a pristine view with a physical element of the environment, casting doubt on the photograph's representation of reality. Taken at the Kaiwharawhara stream in September 2017, the photograph does not suggest the poor condition of the stream due to pollution. I could have photographed the stream's fold where all the rubbish was gathering but chose to photograph it running through the bush, with streaks of sun falling in. By collecting water from the stream and then forcing part of the print into a fish tank filled with the water, the photographic matter and matter extracted from the site were put into dialogue. Being exposed to the water, the print would have eventually dissolved, manoeuvring on the border of presence and representation and challenging the temporal relation of the photograph and the site. Quite didactic in nature, the work represents an initial step towards addressing contemporary and local ecological issues and the measurements of human impact.

Caught could be placed at the other end of the same spectrum in my practice. It was broadly influenced by Jaques Benveniste's theory of water memory (Ball 2004) and concerns over local developments like seabed mining in the Taranaki region and overfishing and contamination of seafood and water around New Zealand and elsewhere. The work relates to water as a resource that is exploited, but also to the mediated truths that are promulgated about these issues. These concepts were communicated through the document-like form of the object, the fragmentation of the painted newspaper collaged together with a photograph of

sea water and the glossy, commercial surface finish of the object, tangled in a plastic net. The hanging structure of *In To Another Body* and *Caught* was made of rough, unfinished pine with screws and brackets left clearly visible. I wanted the simple execution to make viewing the photographs a spatial experience and to refer to photography as a construction, as a front for socio-political conversations. By displaying the works like this, the presence of the printed photograph still acknowledges the frame but is no longer constrained by it.

Simulating Horizons is a physical play on perception, questioning the conventions of landscape painting and photography and the representation of experience. The concept of Western landscape grounds itself in the horizontal which represents the forward-moving Western expansion (Lippard 24). This metaphor of the horizon as an ever-expanding site of human desire (over non-human) is contested in *Simulating Horizons* through the folds and creases of the printed image. The work also attempts to criticise the role of landscape photographs as consumable ready-mades established in the cultural gaze. Altering the surface of the image scatters the point of view and the folds make alternative structures and perspectives for viewing. The front of the photographic print as a way of relating to the image, becomes challenged and is opened for interpretation. The body of work in *Devoted Speculations* was a set of mediations on a way of making work within the liminal space between subject and photo object. It opened ways for me to consider materials, scale, space and events beyond the flat and contiguous photographic surface.



Figure 11. *Simulating Horizons, installation view.* 2017, image by author.



Figure 12. *Devoted Speculations, installation view 1.* 2017, image by author.



Figure 13. *Devoted Speculations, installation view 2.* 2017, image by author.

4. out in the world

Rebecca Solnit writes that the Western landscape tradition has grounded itself in the unaltered past of the earth. As a result, according to Solnit, the Western tradition operates within “the classic pastoral mode”, idealising the rural with a sense of nostalgia and longing, inscribing it as the lost paradise. This is directly reflected in the attitudes of some conservation movements, and in Western concepts that connect indigenous people with the past because of their relationship with the land. Solnit acknowledges that this longing for the rural has been shadowed by the avant-garde narrative of forward-heading progress that “postulates linear rather than cyclical time” (49). She continues on to argue that with the rise of diverse voices, humanity no longer appears to be heading in a single direction (Solnit 49). This means that the past has become the future and linear time bent into a circle: the search for harmony with organic forms of life has made landscape a possibility and a necessity for survival, instead of being only a place for nostalgia (Solnit 51). According to Solnit, within art this has meant that works about environmental destruction question future conditions and objectives.

In photography the linear, forward-heading progress and its impact on land has been conventionally examined through engagement with industrial and human-altered landscapes. This approach started gaining popularity in the 1970’s through the New Objectivity movement. Pioneered by German couple Hilla and Bernd Becher, the movement influenced current photographic practitioners such as Andreas Gursky, whose large-scale photographic work continues to deal with aspects of the industrial sublime. There is also a growing number of photographic artists that engage with current implications of human-made environmental change within a more intimate arena. To make her photographic series *Lake Mountain*, German-born, Australian-based photographer Katrin Koenning has been revisiting a popular winter destination outside Melbourne since 2010, after large bushfires damaged the area (Fig. 14). Koenning writes that “*Lake Mountain* is a long-term study of a scarred and transitioning Australian

landscape”, placed in the wider context of global warming and extreme weather conditions (Koenning 2010-2018). *Lake Mountain* is a series of tonally muted images of land, sometimes with human traces, in snow-covered surroundings. The photographs hint to a location of leisure through objects like plastic sleds and lean-tos but do not offer distant vistas for the gaze. The close proximity to land is relevant to Koenning’s practice: she is not interested in showing the scars that exist in the landscape but rather the, often mundane, exchange of encounters that we can have with sites that are and could potentially be further damaged.



Figure 14. Koenning, Katrin. *Lake Mountain*. 2010-2018.

Liz Wells writes that in the 1980’s and 1990’s female photographers tended to focus on the human relationship with place rather than scenes excluding human interaction. She suggests that women’s images of natural form were made in close proximity, implying a sensory and bodily experience rather than a reinforcement made by gazing into the distant sublime. Koenning, although working in the 21st century, leans towards this approach. Wells continues to argue that even today the lack of female photographers known in the landscape genre is often cultural: being in the landscape is physically demanding because of

long distances and often heavy equipment but it is also a lonely process that comes with a risk of being injured. I would argue that there are an increasing number of female photographers who do not see these factors as limitations: one of them is Dutch photographer Awoiska van der Molen, whose practice involves traversing in nature for several weeks on her own and without any human contact.

On female approaches to Western landscape aesthetics, Wells writes:

We are all influenced by Western aesthetics; notions of the pleasing picture are hegemonically sedimented. Photographers have to consciously adjust or refuse pre-existing aesthetic modes if the traditional landscape pictorial is to be critiqued. Being a woman operating within visual terms within which patriarchal attitudes have been formative renders this complex. A number of female photographers have engaged with questions of the female gaze; in effect, gender has been implicated in the interrogation of aesthetics. (190-191)

Wells states that gender is relevant in defining individual perceptions of land, but it is also influenced by biographical, social and regional conditions. In relation to this statement and the photographs taken in Finland and included in *matter of time*, it seems relevant to briefly discuss my relationship to land as a female within the Scandinavian context. Access to land, in Finland, meaning the ability to pass through areas and to do outdoor activities, is protected by *jokamiehenoikeudet* (*everyman's right*) law, which is enforced in Finland, Norway and Sweden. This is a set of rights and responsibilities that relates to engaging with the land: people are allowed to walk, cycle, ski, camp and collect food from public and private land as long as private houses and yards are left alone and no damage is done to wildlife and trees, and no rubbish is left behind. Ideologically, everyman's right has shaped my relationship with the land from a very early age. I spent my childhood and early adulthood in Northern Finland, where everyday experience is deeply connected to the seasonal cycle and its impact on the land.

To be a woman alone in nature was not unusual nor seen as a risk – at least not any more than being a man alone in nature. Winter months with long periods of snowfall and darkness and a brief summer with never-fading light affect the collective psyche and interaction with the land, even in the context of a modern Western society. Growing up during the recession in the 1990's meant that families relied on private land for food and land in general for leisure because it was affordable. I would argue that this has resulted in an ideology of living with the land as much as living on it.

Liz Wells has also written about Nordic approaches to landscape photography and painting in *Land Matters*. Referring to Gertrud Sandqvist's notions on Nordic consciousness as a desire to translate the external landscape into an inner landscape, Wells summarises "it would seem that land is so integrated within Scandinavian consciousness that there is no clear subject-object relation" (Wells 221). Followed by detailed examples of Nordic photographers' approaches to their local surroundings, Wells' statement seems accurate. Nordic mentality is bound to the land and therefore often seems inseparable from the representations of it. Communicated through the landscape photographs, this mentality has for a long time adhered to the fetish of escape, but is being constantly redefined through the contemporary ecological conditions of the land. This can for instance be seen in Finnish photographer Jaakko Kahilaniemi's series *100 Hectares of Understanding* (Fig. 15) where he examines his personal ownership over a piece of land and human interference with natural cycles (Kahilaniemi 2018).

Figure 15. Kahilaniemi, Jaakko. *100 Hectares of Understanding*.

In addition to being used by landscape photographers, photography has been and continues to be a critical element in the work of several land artists: the camera operates as a witness for the artists' interventions with sites that can at times exist in remote areas, or for scenes that are performed or constructed solely for the camera to record and cease to exist after the photograph has been made. Aotearoa New Zealand artist Pauline Rhodes' practice involves using the camera in this way: her outdoor installations are always momentary (Fig. 16). Christina Barton describes Rhodes' use of the camera in her book *Ground/Work: The Art of Pauline Rhodes* as an act of removing the body and its activities from the constructed scene to make the artist experience the objects placed within the land from a viewpoint of an outsider, as a reconstructed scene (16).

Barton continues her description:

Once the view is framed and the camera activated, the separation of the object from its maker is complete. Open space becomes closed, active body becomes disembodied eye, self becomes other, and present-ness is replaced by an act of re-re-presentation as the context shifts from being in place to seeing from outside. (16)

Rhodes' approach of using the camera as a device to distance herself is refreshing: it is as if she erases her own authorship, often perceived as precious within photographic practices, as the site in the world is translated into a site residing in a photographic object. I would argue that within my practice the photograph operates in a reversed mode: I make and collect photographs from the site without representing any traces of my presence in the images themselves. I then re-introduce my presence through the de-construction and re-construction of the physical photographic print and its installation. I intend to question the nature of the photograph as a contained entity and its closed-ness: my representation becomes present through my, and eventually the viewers', interaction with the photo objects in a space.

Barton writes that the interplay between open and closed, shifting and static, extended and concentrated space is one key element in Rhodes' work - the other is temporality (16). According to Barton temporality exists in the artist's process of refusing to consider her sculptural interior works as completed objects – but it is also the subject of her art (16). “Rhodes does not make art to stay the passage of time, indeed the ephemerality of her work would suggest a deferral to it” (Barton 19). It seems as though Rhodes is creating her own temporality to sync with and make sense of the earth's temporalities. In my work the personal temporality traces earth's temporality through the re-construction of the photographs: the site in the world and the site created expand towards each other in time.

Figure 16. Rhodes, Pauline. *Sea Pool*. 1992.

According to Barton, Rhodes does not adhere to the perceived unity between nature and the feminine that was often present in the work of 1970's female artists working with nature-related themes (24). Instead, her practice can be located within the tradition of female artists who engage with materials and specific sites through seemingly unstructured installation modes to challenge the control of masculine gaze: "their work challenges traditional visual depictions, where the world is objectified and the consciousness separated from its material base, thus justifying the human subject's domination of the environment and exploitation of its resources" (Barton 24). Barton argues that Rhodes' ways of operating within the land constitutes the feminine in her practice: Rhodes does not leave any permanent trace, and she engages with materials, objects and sites in an ongoing manner (25). According to Barton, this approach relates closely to feminist theories around ecology by enforcing a continuous and respectful relationship between humans and nature (25). Within my practice the structured, masculine gaze has been challenged for instance by interfering with the print surface of the traditional landscape photograph (*Simulating Horizons, In To Another Body* and *Caught*), by embodying photographs in installation approaches that force the audience to negotiate the space alongside the photographs (*Seam*) and by examining the temporal and spatial aspects of photography, and the photograph as a material (*matter of time*).

5. in the event of an object

Fascination for the ways in which scenes are set and the ways in which narratives are crafted for the camera and the eye, has made me focus on two photographic artists throughout my master's degree: Noemie Goudal and Boyd Webb. French artist Noemie Goudal combines installation and photography by constructing images within images. Her means are simple: prints mounted on cardboard attached with string and hung up on a site are recorded with a camera (Fig. 17). Goudal explains in an interview with Nora Uitterlinden that she wants the viewer to see the construction: to her sharing the imperfection of the installation with the viewer is like sharing a secret that will make the viewer stay with the photograph for longer (Uitterlinden 2016). Goudal often combines several images together digitally before placing the final one in the landscape: to her this creates layers of time within a single image, elongating the moment photographed and making a place that can be revisited (Uitterlinden 2016). Goudal spins histories into myths, introducing complexity and multiple realities to a place.

Boyd Webb is a New Zealand-born artist living in the United Kingdom who operates in a very different realm of the performed and photographed compared to Goudal. Webb's photographs are playful, theatrical and cinematic questionnaires of the relationship between humanity and nature. In his images, bodies are often frozen in mid-movement, tangled up in manmade lifeforms, which seems to suggest that the relationship between human and non-human beings is constantly in flux, balancing between chaos and order. In their own ways, Noemie Goudal and Boyd Webb stage and perform a scene established solely for the camera apparatus to record; the moment captured becomes more relevant than the events preceding or succeeding it. The final photograph is more witness, less part of the performance.

Figure 17. Goudal, Noemie. *Creus*. 2012, from *Haven Her Body Was*.

Hito Steyerl writes in her article *A Thing Like You and Me* that because the subject of a photograph is not fixed in time, we do not identify with the subject or its representation but rather participate in the materiality of the image with the subject photographed - the image is an object that merges our senses with matter (Steyerl 2010). Steyerl bases her argument for “siding with the object” (Steyerl 2010) on the notion that even if emancipatory practice has always been about an object needing to become a subject (because subjects have history, agency and a certain level of control) being a subject is also problematic because of the power relations it is subjected to. Steyerl suggests that instead of seeing images as something tormented by representation, misrepresentation and presupposed authenticity we should turn to their material aspects for the truth. “This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates” (Steyerl 2010). According to Steyerl becoming a thing is not solely an optimistic project: things are bruised by their past and these bruises become interpreted and voiced through further violence. “To

affirm the thing also means participating in its collision with history” (Steyerl 2010). Images, analog or digital, do not reside outside of this collision: they carry traces of technology, editing, manipulation and material transfers (Steyerl 2010). In a similar way to Doreen Massey’s concept of place examined in chapter 2, image as a thing becomes a site of multiple social and political trajectories at once and therefore, when we participate in the image, we participate in its history and agency, its bruises and desires.

Steyerl’s definition of images as things relates to ideas established in *object-oriented ontology*. In his book *Alien Phenomenology*, Ian Bogost describes object-oriented ontology as a philosophical study of existence that places objects at the centre of being and suggests that things do not exist for humans: they exist equally with us (6). Bogost writes that in comparison to the philosophic approach, within cultural theory, object-oriented ontology is seen as closely connected to some arguments against anthropocentrism eg. post-humanism (7). Using environmental concerns as an example Bogost argues that where post-humanism still affords humanity as a status that natural beings should be elevated to, object-oriented ontology denies that human interaction with objects is the only form of interaction objects engage in during their existence (8-9). Some of the writers examining the current state of ecology, for example Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour, ground their arguments for relating to other beings in object-oriented ontology.

In her essay *Images Do Not Show* Irmgard Emmelhainz writes that anthropocentrism has led to images that constitute knowledge based on perception and gain value from being seen: seeing has become “a kind of groundless, accelerated tautological vision derived from constant passive observation” (135). Using recent sci-fi films and Google Earth imagery as examples, Emmelhainz argues that we are being visually immersed in experiences with new sensations that cause us to lose a place to ground our vision to, and this visual groundlessness extends into the political, social and environmental. As a result, Emmelhainz calls for a way of making images that

ground vision and return a sense of criticality to the act of viewing (137). I would argue that Hito Steyerl's concept of relating to an image as a thing has potential for reintroducing Emmelhainz's idea of a critical way of viewing: acknowledging the material existence of a photograph would demand vision to be placed in the concrete presence of it rather than a rendering of visual data.

David Cunningham has critically examined Hito Steyerl's approach of siding with the object and its implications for the photographic image's relationship with reality. In his blog entry for *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, Cunningham writes that the need to withdraw from representation to the material truth of the image does not dismantle the image's relationship with reality but instead shifts perspective to the image as the reality that we participate in through its material presence (Cunningham 2016). Cunningham argues that Steyerl's examples of the image as a thing carrying forces and bruises refers to its indexical qualities: image is a thing of material configuration and communication rather than being the same thing that it is an image of (Cunningham 2016). Therefore, according to Cunningham, the forces and bruises are embodied in an image only through *both* the material *and* indexical qualities of it. Cunningham concludes his discussion on Steyerl's text by writing that if a thing is expected to speak for itself and to us, in the context of documentary photography this could potentially mean that image becomes a translator between the language of things and language of humans: the image constitutes a matter of presence instead of presentation (Cunningham 2016).

matter of time (Fig. 18-23), the final body of work, was initiated by my personal connection to, and concern over what happens to a place and to a local ecology when being transformed by industrial processes of material excavation and extraction. My physical presence or a trace of interaction with the site is not directly presented to, nor recorded by the camera. The site is not examined within the context of surrounding local sites that could have biographical value: the nostalgia of locality is not embedded in visual cues that we understand as a result of belonging to a specific culture or a social system. Instead, belonging

happens through intimacy experienced with a site, a land area and its contested surface, which is navigated in close proximity through the images made. Without offering the visual safety of a horizon, the four close-up photographs of the ground in *matter of time* ask the viewer to relate to the specificity and generality of the photograph at once: they operate as microcosms of exploration and prospective extraction and as such resonate with macrocosmic cycles of matter in the world.

To dissect and to rearrange the photographic surface seems to be another violent act within the medium, like bruising the already bruised. Here the cut and the distortion between two parts of the print act as a way of challenging the photographic frame as an entity, and the image as an end point, referring instead to the ongoing theme of questioning the cultural object that a photograph constitutes (in contrast to the two photographic prints presented on the wall). To participate in the photographs is to participate in the disconnect between the photographs, their subjects and the real. Referring to the excavation and extraction of the site, my distortion of the photographic surface reminds the viewer of the physical conditions of the photograph's origin. Linear forms extend from the content of the photographs to the cut, the physical treatment of the printed images, and the structures intersecting with the prints. This emphasis on the dispersed yet interwoven linearity can be seen as a critique on the temporal aspects of Western engagement with the land, especially in the context of extracting natural materials for short-term gain. It also refers to the multiple trajectories that a site or a place consists of: these are the indexical narratives of the photo objects.

The wooden structures holding and elevating the photographs seem volatile and informal. They extend beyond the prints and refuse a highly manufactured finish, carrying a sense of labour and making with the hand. They create a terrain within the installation space and make the viewer become aware of their body in relation to the objects. The non-fixity of the structures can also be seen as a reminder of the fragility of the land and human involvement in it. The four

photographs within the wooden structures are printed onto aluminium, another mineral extracted from the earth. The surface of the aluminium can be seen through the prints and is visible on the other side of them. The visibility of the plain aluminium surface operates as an acknowledgement of the photograph as a thing and emphasises its materiality by literally laying the earth's elements onto each other. Using aluminium is a rather obvious reference to the act of mining that the content of the photographs predicts, but it also brings the disparity of resource use to the fore: replacement of one material to change systems of production usually means exploitation of another one. In Western society nature continues to be cheap, it just becomes a utility in alternative ways.

The linear forms carried through the images, objects and installation and the potent presence of material in the photographs draws connections to Robert Smithson's *Provisional Theory of Non-Sites*, first published in 1979. In this theory Smithson defines "*The Non-Site*" as a three-dimensional, abstract picture that represents the actual site (Smithson 2001). "To understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three-dimensional picture which doesn't look like a picture" (Smithson 2001). According to Smithson, between the actual and the Non-Site exists a space of metaphoric significance. The created site has a potential to extend our understanding of, or re-imagine, the site in the world.

What does this extended understanding of the actual and the Non-Site mean for *matter of time*? Are these objects a monument of anticipation and potential mourning? Do they suggest an ongoing shift between balance and chaos that continues to exist in nature even without human involvement? When we participate in this three-dimensional picture, we participate in the act of land bearing witness to human actions. The picture continues to be drawn: the process of engaging extends through the layers of matter, structures and temporal presences.



Figure 18. *untitled.* 2018, image by author.



Figure 19. *untitled*. 2018, image by author.



Figure 20. *untitled.* 2018, image by author.

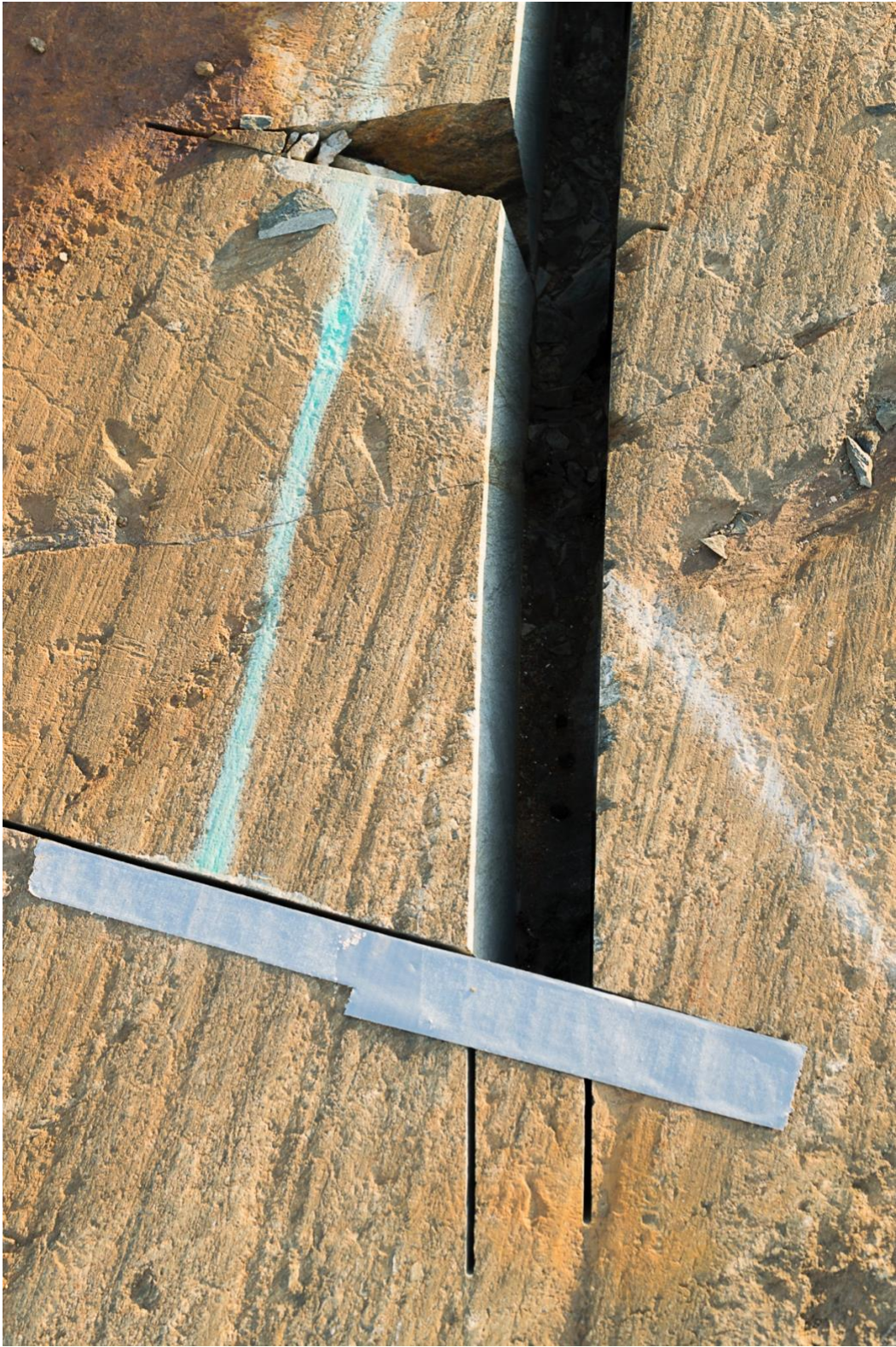


Figure 21. *untitled.* 2018, image by author.



Figure 22. *glow*. 2018, image by author.



Figure 23. *pine*. 2018, image by author.

time and surface

To traverse through a site means to become aware of a surface: its forms, elevations, outgrowths and cavities. It is a negotiation between several bodies of things, a constant translation between the language of matter and movement.

I began this research by examining two prospective mines, one in Finland and one in Aotearoa New Zealand. I was drawn to these land areas because of the specific temporality that seemed to be casted on them: geological, historical and cultural temporalities of the two sites were intersected with a sense of anticipation, as if the sites were suspended in time, shifting between the return to the origin and the brief and intense process of excavation and extraction.

To photograph a site under potential ecological threat seems already late in today's contemporary image culture which relies on the immediacy of an image: we now live through what we see. By erasing the horizon, the guideline for cultural gaze that longs for a landscape, and by intimately recording the earth's surface and the human traces on it, I have attempted to argue for a way of seeing that is not dislocated but brings us visually in close proximity with the natural matter, before the place itself.

Focusing on the potential of the photograph as an object, this research has tested the printed image surface to question the established ways of viewing photographs, and the temporal states that they seem to adhere to. In some of the works the photograph has become a spatial element that sets limits for navigation within the installation space. *matter of time* combines these mentioned elements by challenging the photographic frame as an entity and by bringing materials to the fore both through the image and the image object. The structures supporting the prints suggest impermanence in time and space, creating an echo between the site in the world and the site made.

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Figure 4. *untitled, Juomasuo*. 2018, image by the author.

Figure 5. *Seam installation view 1*. 2018, image by author.

Figure 6. *Seam installation detail 1*. 2018, image by author.

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