

The Stone that Ran to Paris: Notes on waiting (and care)

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Abstract

The chapter tells a series of interlinked stories about a small, white stone that travelled from Kiruna to Paris in the winter of 2015. In so doing, it presents an open-ended analysis (or case study) of multiple, situated times that constellate around a concrete, specific material object—charting a range of times and temporal forms: from media time and biographical time to the timeframes of colonisation and resource extraction, geological time, deep time, the time of the stone's journey itself and its aftermath. Exploring these multiplicities of time through experiences (and affects) of hope, exhaustion, refusal, waiting and catastrophe, the text attempts to write them together in a way that does methodological justice to the cross-cutting, relational thickness of their entanglement. What happens in the "space" where geological and biological durations touch, recombining and coming to exist in the light of each other? What (new) temporal forms come into play? What might a small stone warming in your hand have to say about the Anthropocene?

Keywords: stone, care, attunement, duration, waiting, hope

1. Introduction

In the winter of 2015, on the occasion of the COP 21 climate talks in Paris, the Swedish national theatre Riksteatern organised an activist intervention entitled *Run for Your Life*.¹ The event took the form of a continuous, long-distance live-streamed relay race that ran, uninterrupted, from Kiruna in northern Sweden to Paris in France. Over the three weeks of the race, several thousand runners ran in an unbroken sequence, on foot, day and night, in segments that between them covered almost 4500 kilometres and passed through multiple European countries. The final runner was timed to arrive in Paris on November 30, just as the talks began. As they ran, each of the runners carried in their hand a small, round white stone that they passed from hand to hand, as a relay, at the end of each segment.

The following is a text about that small white stone, which was picked up on the shores of the Arctic Sea and travelled all the way to Paris—and beyond.² Like other contributions to this volume, it emerges from my participation in the Lifetimes research collective, a critical time studies group based at the University of Oslo, and the various topics and concerns we have been working through together since the project began. For me, these have included particularly the multiplicity of time, the materiality of temporal work, and an understanding of temporal forms as contingent achievements that require effort, resources, coordination and creativity to maintain.³ Reflecting this, the chapter presents

¹ Trailer for the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yx65zyFJFy0>

² Website for the event, now mostly inactive: <https://www.riksteatern.se/runforyourlife>

³ Jordheim & Ytreberg, "After supersynchronisation".

an analysis (or case study) of situated, multiple, embodied times as they constellate around one concrete, material entity—charting times and temporalities as they come into play and interact round the stone: from media time and biographical time to the timeframes of colonisation and resource extraction, geological time, deep time, the time of the race itself and its aftermath. Throughout, I treat the stone in the hand as something like a catalyst, a mobile site of recombination or *temporal contact zone* in which distinct temporalities (temporal rhythms, orders of time, time-scales) could be brought together and made available to each other, made to co-exist in the light of each other in ways they did not before. As a site of temporal assemblage, this space-that-was-also-a-gesture was transient—but also in its own ways durable, capable of transposition and re-assembly; it moved, possessing a life of its own beyond the immediate context of the race. In its simplest form, my argument here tries to trace the temporal movements and recombinations of that space, and of the stone-in-the-hand as a particular figure of time.

During my time with the Lifetimes collective I have also been thinking about affect, in its relation to time and practice, and the various ways in which so-called "deep time" may be encountered intimately, embedded in the situated weave of everyday objects and practices—and often, in affective registers that are richer, more interesting and generative than the literature of epochal vistas might prepare you for.⁴ Often as not, the smallness of small things turns out to be anything but—much like the smallness of that small white stone, which has haunted me for years, ever since I first saw it: passing from hand to hand, runner to runner in a manner that continues to occupy my imagination. On a theoretical and personal note therefore, the text is an attempt to clarify this (benign) preoccupation, to draw out the "lithic intimacy" of the stone and the gesture of holding it:⁵ a "minor gesture" perhaps, a small movement that connects the previously unconnected in ways that might yet (perhaps, hopefully) prove transformative.⁶

My interest in these matters—in the stone, the race, in the various temporalities they brought into play—situate themselves in the context of my own ongoing research on the Scandinavian "resource frontier"; particularly, my more recent work on resource extractivism and capitalist geologies.⁷ One thread in this work has involved interrogating the "ontological politics" of the line between life and non-life—between organic and inorganic, biology and geology—as this winds through the dominant resource imaginaries of the European north, and the various modes of colonial extraction and resource colonialism that these imaginaries predicate.⁸ In attempting to re-ground this inquiry in time studies, I have been inspired by a number of authors, from a range of disciplines—but perhaps most directly, by the work of Deborah Bird Rose and Michelle Bastian, on what they call "multispecies knots of ethical

⁴ Reinert, "Fossil".

⁵ I borrow the phrase "lithic intimacy" from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Stone*, where it marks an aspect of what Cohen calls "geophilia"—a human love for stones and earth. "Lithic intimacy runs slow and deep", he says (24).

⁶ "Minor gesture" is a term I take from Manning, *The Minor Gesture*: "the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation... from within the experience itself, activating a shift in tone, a difference in quality" (1).

⁷ Reinert, "Notes from a Projected Sacrifice Zone"; "The Midwife and the Poet"; "Emptiness".

⁸ Reinert, "About a Stone"; see also Povinelli, *Geontologies*.

time".⁹ Their use of the knot as a figure for thinking time as coexistence across difference helped me imagine the stone-in-the-hand as another such figure, as a gesture that bound distinct temporalities into relation—while also operating outside (and across) the ontological parameters of what Manuel DeLanda called the "organic chauvinism" of Western thought.¹⁰ Within the parameters of this chauvinism, the idea or proposition that inorganic materials may challenge you to respond well—to *live with* in ways that impose on you a genuine moral demand, beyond use value or exhaustibility—can be hard to conceptualise. Nonetheless, this is precisely what I think that small white stone does: issuing not just a challenge to *live with*, but also instructions for how to begin.

The next four sections of the essay sketch out four vignettes or moments in the race, in the trajectory of the stone and in mine along with it. These vignettes follow each other in loose sequence, linked to particular locations—but each is also a self-contained "plateau" of sorts, involving multiple temporal forms and experiences of time that may be diffuse, contradictory, overlapping or non-linear. As I go along, I use these vignettes to draw out and chart some of the temporal logics that are in play around the stone. I also use them as points of entry to a set of questions I am interested in more broadly: questions of attunement, of relational time and—for lack of a better word—the dimly discerned possibility of some shared, more-than-human temporality yet to come, which may or may not be implied (or modelled) in the practices I am trying to describe. What does it mean—what does it do, what does it *require*—to attune to the deep, inorganic temporalities of rock as they present themselves in the form of a small white stone, warming in your hand? The final section pulls together some of these threads, linking them back to the central questions that animate the collection: does it matter that time is multiple? Does it matter what that small white stone might tell you—about time, multiplicity, coexistence, other things—if you held it in your hand, for a while, in the Anthropocene?

2. "Kiruna" (Beginning)

It begins gently. In the snow, the figure of a woman comes down a mountain, holding a stone.¹¹ Words appear on the left-hand side of the screen and a voice, hers, begins to read them out—slowly, a little haltingly at first. Text on the screen tells us that her name is Jenni Laiti and that we are in Kiruna, in the far north of Sweden.¹² We are also in Sápmi, the traditional Sámi homeland that stretches across the north of Scandinavia and northwestern Russia;¹³ the Sámi name for Kiruna is Giron.¹⁴ The race to

⁹ Bird Rose, "Multispecies knots of ethical time"; Bastian, "Encountering Leatherback Turtles in Multispecies Knots of Time".

¹⁰ DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*. I pick DeLanda here because I like his turn of phrase; there are many (many) other thinkers who have circled this exteriority of the inorganic. Yusoff, "Geological Intimacies"; Povinelli, in *Geontologies*; my own earlier work, in "About a Stone".

¹¹ As of April 2022, the video is no longer available online. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZR6kGNM%5C.L>

¹² Jenni's twitter profile is here: <https://twitter.com/jennilaiti>.

¹³ See for example Valkonen et al, *The Sámi World*.

¹⁴ I thank Jenni Laiti for flagging, in an earlier draft of this text, that the geographical name "Kiruna" is itself a colonial inscription that should not be reproduced uncritically. Having introduced the context here, for the remainder of the text I will default to the Sámi name Giron.

Paris has begun, Jenni is the first runner. She wears a *gákti*, the traditional garb of the Sámi, the indigenous people of the region: to us, the viewers, she introduces herself as "an indigenous Sámi activist, mother, companion, traditionalist, protector, visionary and human being." Her voice continues to speak as her figure walks towards us; the camera keeps pace with her, retreating as she descends. As she walks, she passes people standing by the side of the road. One by one they join her, forming a procession and as they walk, they begin to sing—softly at first, gently beating their chests with closed fists. More and more people join in, and their song becomes discernible over Jenni's voice—like a hymn, rising in the background. The song is a *joik*, a traditional Sámi musical form.¹⁵ Like Jenni, many of the bystanders are wearing the traditional *gákti*: most likely they too are Sámi. "Take a stone in your hand" Jenni is saying, as her figure descends towards you, "and close your fist around it—until it starts to beat, live, speak and move." The line is from the famous Sámi poet, musician and artist Nils Aslak Valkeapää: *Áillohaš*, as he is known in northern Sámi.

Walking down the mountain, the singers of the procession beat their fists against their chests, gently, as if mimicking the rhythm of a heartbeat. The name of the mountain they descend is *Luossavárri*, or "salmon mountain" in northern Sámi. Nearby lies its neighbour *Gironvárri*, "grouse mountain". Between them, the two mountains preside over one of the largest iron deposits in the world—and at their foot, nestled next to the mine that mines the deposit, lies the northern mining city of Giron. For over a century, since it was founded in 1899, Giron has sat at the heart of the project of Swedish industrial modernity, corner stone to a grand (and lucrative) national narrative of steel, progress and wealth. The mine that the city was built to service was constructed, in its time, by the industrial colossus *Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag* (LKAB), the company that still manages the mine today. Estimates are that since operations began in 1898, the Giron mine has yielded almost a billion tonnes of ore—a vast mass of raw material, "resources", tunnelled out from under the mountain through an ever expanding, industrial honeycomb network of passages. Over time, the sheer extractive scale of this operation, the force and hunger of it have undermined (literally) the geological structure of the locality—reaching the point, around the turn of the century, where the town itself was beginning to subside, as the mine ate away the ground beneath it. Addressing the threat posed by this under-mining, a decision was made, in 2004, to physically move the entire city two kilometres east, out of the way, so the mine could continue operations.¹⁶ Valuable and historically significant houses were placed on flatbed trucks and rolled out to their new locations; most of the rest of the town was demolished and rebuilt.

Much has been written about Giron, and this process of reconstructive translocation in particular. In 2013, the Swedish filmmaker Liselotte Wajstedt released her elegiac memoir *Kiruna Rymdvägen* ("Kiruna: Space Road")—which documents her return to Giron as her hometown and her attempts to

¹⁵ The *joik* is called *Gulaballat Eatnamín*, and originated with the Sámi joiker and activist Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2LhBAi-Q8I>. The name of the *joik* translates from northern Sámi as "we speak Earth": <https://350.org/songs-from-the-sami-a-joik-for-the-climate/>. See also Aubinet, *The Craft of Yoiking*.

¹⁶ See for example here: <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/02/18/kiruna-moving-town-sweden-mining-climate-change/>. Ironically, the town was moved in the direction of the mine's growth—meaning that some time later, depending on the speed at which the mine grew, the same enormous operation would have to be undertaken again.

trace the eerie dislocations of this interval in which the town was no longer where it used to be, and not quite yet somewhere else.¹⁷ Through interviews, animations and walks through the city the documentary tells the story of a land eaten from below, physically hollowed by the relentless extractive process; a town on the edge of the pit, not even two centuries old but haunted, fearful, exhausted. Distant explosions bellow in the deep, startling the reindeer. Houses crack in the middle of the day. A sense of progressive uncanniness envelops the town, an inexorable decline into the pit. A road collapses; "we'll all find ourselves down there, at the bottom" one interviewee remarks, fatalistically. A father tells of his anxieties, entering the mine, his fear for his son who follows in his footsteps. The son is unconcerned, feels "safe" in the mine. One of the figures Wajstedt uses to describe the experience of time and life in this undermined state is a black hole: a sort of inescapable space, a horizon that traps you, a condition in which time itself seems to stand still.

In 2013, the same year Liselotte released her lyrical filmic memoir, I also met an anthropologist, Elisa López, who first told me about the translocation of Giron, how they were moving the entire city to make way for the expanding mine.¹⁸ Four years later, in the summer of 2017, I visited the city myself, drawn by her fieldwork stories of an entire city on the move, of houses rolling out on flatbed trucks, of whole neighbourhoods demolished to appease the growing, city-devouring hole. Coming off the train from Stockholm the city looked quiet, unremarkable in the bright daylight—but one detail remains with me still. At the tourist office, the clerk was handing out maps of the city. These were the kind of maps you will receive at the tourist office in any European city—two-sided representations of the city and its environs, circled by a ring of local businesses, restaurants, souvenir shops, gas stations, auto repair shops and so on. This map had one major difference, however. Somewhere to the east of the city, in a green and mostly empty part of the map, a series of ghostly circles inscribed sections of the future city, the city-to-be: streets, landmarks and neighbourhoods of a city yet to come, a still-imaginary topography, mapped out in walkable detail—like a promise, artefact of some subterranean pact between the city and the mine; an agreement binding them both to a future in which the trucks full of ore keep rolling out from under the mountain.

Whole houses moving out on flatbed trucks, a black hole, the map of an unbuilt city: indices, small figures of time in the sign of extraction—of time-spaces produced and dislocated in the inexorable advance of the mine; ghostly and uncertain, violent, haunted by the tremors of the wake. Coming down that same mountain in the snow now, gently beating their chests, the procession moves slowly, determinedly. The city is out of frame but the mountain lies under their feet, mute archive of the violences—some fast, some slow¹⁹—that have shaped the land here now for centuries: violences of dispossession, displacement, occupation, extraction, consumption. Exhaustion. "We cannot continue with the extractive mind-set of today," Jenni says, walking towards the camera, folding this manifold of violence—of nation, capital, race—into the slow, deliberate advance of the procession as their fists beat in a rhythm that seems intimate, even sacral. "We are the speakers of Earth" she says, voice

¹⁷ Video here: <https://vimeo.com/208900113>

¹⁸ López, *Transforming Kiruna*.

¹⁹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

cracking slightly. "We speak Earth, and it informs us how to live with her. Because of the thousands of years of symbiosis with Earth, we are still in dialogue with her." Slow and deliberate, fists beating against chests, the procession moves as if embodying an objection, a singing, wordless refusal consonant with Jenni's words: a public refutation—legible perhaps as a gesture of "temporal sovereignty,"²⁰ the rejection of an unacceptable present. The time of their advance sets itself against the time of the mine, of the corporation, of the colonial state, of climate change and of the quickening fires: against the terms of a present moment in which the planetary atmosphere thickens daily with ash and the seas rise, boiling their creatures in their own shells.²¹

In refusal, however, the procession also extends an invitation. "Take a stone in your hand," Jenni says, holding out the small white stone in her hand—to you. The gesture is an invitation, and a plea: what she asks you to undertake is something hopeful, intimate; a leap of faith. Eventually, she says, if you wait long enough, the stone will begin to "beat, live, move, speak". Is it that the stone will have quickened, to meet the rapid biological pulse of your time? Or is it your time that will have slowed, to the point where you can now discern the slow, seismic life of the stone? Either way, Jenni seems to say, some attunement will have occurred, some convergence such as to establish a shared time—a *syn-khronos*, a "together time"²²—in which the time of the rock and the time of (your) flesh come to stand in a new relation to each other; a time in which the aliveness of the stone becomes discernible to yours. The waiting that Jenni invites you to undertake is active, in that sense: oriented towards a future that it seeks to achieve; a kind of waiting-work to make subsequent relation possible, that might inaugurate the grounds for something novel, for a coexistence on different terms—even as nothing appears to be happening. Eventually, Jenni promises, in the recombinational interval of the gesture, while the small stone warmed in your hand, you *will have* learned: to respond, to be affected, to synchronise with this otherwise she presents you with—the otherwise of another temporal context, a mode of time given by the intersubjective relation; by dialogue, not as a possibility but as lived reality.

3. Tallinn (Duration)

Jenni's voice is one of many that created the assemblage of the race. For myself, I first came across *Run For Your Life* in November 2015, a few days before it started. At the time I was in Estonia, taking a break from fieldwork to teach an intensive on anthropogenic landscapes at Tallinn University, where I was working as a researcher. The race surfaced in my media feed right before teaching was set to start—and by sheer coincidence, it was scheduled to begin on the same day as the introductory session. This gave me an excellent opportunity to pipe the runners into the classroom live, in "real time", prompting a series of useful discussions about land, attachment, value, activism, justice and environmental change.

²⁰ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*.

²¹ "We run so that we may still have winter" Jenni says, in an interview before the race. <https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/jenni-laiti-startet-klimastafett-i-kiruna--loper-for-at-vi-fortsatt-skal-fa-ha-vinter-1.12644951>

²² Jordheim and Ytreberg, "After Supersynchronisation".

In the classroom, the runners lent directness and urgency to the issues we were working through; outside, alone in the wintery city, their figures began to haunt me. Between teaching sessions I would sit up nights in my hostel room, jet-lagged and sleepless, drinking instant coffee and watching the runners run, sometimes for hours at a time. Their presence began to expand beyond the feed: I started leaving them on as I read, as I took notes, made coffee in the hostel kitchen, walked out to the all-night supermarket in the old town, tried to sleep. In the periphery of my vision they flowed into each other, blurring into a sort of ghostly, sustained presence—a wave of movement that flowed whether or not I was watching, whether or not I was paying attention, whether or not I was awake.

In my jet-lagged, liminal state, uprooted and alone, I found this experience of time—as a continuity of presence—not just hopeful but comforting, even consoling. Whenever I tuned in there was *someone*: someone running through the snow, down the streets of small Swedish towns, through the Danish countryside, crossing German bridges and French villages... People, friends and family would stand by the roadside and cheer. Sometimes they joined in. Sometimes the runners carried spoons. Sometimes they were kids. Or couples. Or grandmothers. Some were dressed up as bananas. Others just ran as fast as they could, in complete silence. At all times, day and night, *someone* was there, running. A river of strangers, flowing through the days and the nights, one after the other, effecting together an experience of time as a kind of living mass: a continuous aliveness, operating in a mode of a togetherness that was also inseparable from the mediated simultaneity—the lived, collective, quotidian, immersive temporality—of the feed itself, as a globalised and continuous current, scrolling across a billion tiny glowing screens—with its many novelties, among which the specific solace provided by the experience that somewhere, out there, someone is awake with you. Alive.

Beyond this however, something in the experience of watching the runners also felt immediately recognisable—as if some other referent or experience were buried in it, just out of sight. I struggled for a long time with this sense of something hidden. What unlocked it finally, years later, was a flash of recollection. In April 2010, when news of the Deep Horizon oil spill first broke, I had been conducting fieldwork in a remote Arctic wetland.²³ Suddenly, from one day to the next, the spill was everywhere—broadcasting itself live, minute by minute, across every channel of my media feed. Night after night I would sit up in my small tent, horrified and unable to sleep, streaming in real time the grainy, churning vortex of toxic crude that billowed into the Gulf of Mexico from a borehole drilled into the sea bottom—millions and millions of gallons, ferociously, like a wound that would not stop bleeding. The spectacle of the rupture affected me viscerally, in a terrible way. For days on end I felt sick, as if something were pouring physically out of a hole in the middle of my chest—and yet, I could not stop watching; could not stop thinking about it, about that black, swirling liquid mass that gushed outwards and up, up into the lightless abyss of the ocean floor. The churn of the black gush was ceaseless: it flowed for weeks, day and night, pouring into the waters of the Gulf—whether or not I was there, whether or not I was watching. I could tune in or out and still it would be there, roiling, at the bottom of the sea, in my screen—billowing and relentless, fully indifferent to me, beyond any action I could possibly undertake. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months and the malign churn became a

²³ Reinert, "The Care of Migrants".

background, something quotidian and ongoing: something simultaneously chronic and acute, never more than a click away. In July, finally, BP capped the borehole: duration collapsed into event, became something that had ended.

The spill was hardly unique. Sensitised by the initial shock I began noticing other events like it, other instances of patterned time that "felt" similar: the torrent of radioactive water that gushes into the Pacific from the broken reactor at Fukushima; the backdrop of incinerating wildfires that recur with increasing ferocity, year after year, as the Earth heats; concentrations of atmospheric carbon at the Mauna Loa observatory, rising faster and faster, to unprecedented levels; more recently, since late 2019, the live data feeds of case numbers from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, updated across the world in real time, projected into multi-coloured dashboards. The timescapes of the Anthropocene overflow with instances: each of them a ghost in the curtains, a window forever opening onto a kind of catastrophic time that flows in the background like an underground river, unseen and relentless, always there for you to check in on. Each manifests the chronic duration of a catastrophe that unfolds in "real time", across the overwhelming, multi-modal globalised network architecture of the feed—with its strange, dislocated immediacies; its recombinations of intimacy and distance, permuted into stark snapshots of an ongoing, continuous, inescapable and escalating horror. Each reproduces that same experience of relentless, continuous, durational time that I would recognise years later, long after Deep Horizon, as I watched the runners from my hostel room in Tallinn.

The moment of recognition opens a line of analysis. Effectively, the temporal form of the race *was* that patterned temporality of the catastrophe unfolding, but with one crucial substitution. Here, the inexorable background process was not some flooding, churning blackness that poured into the clear waters of the gulf like arterial blood—but frail human bodies, working together day and night in the attempt to achieve an almost insurmountable objective; to bring the stone to Paris and through that, figuratively and literally, to stave off the catastrophe. What *Run For Your Life* did, using the all-too-familiar temporal forms of the catastrophic live-feed—its shapes, its rhythms and cadence, its all-too-established affects and affordances—was to effect something like a *mimetic subversion* of its temporality: reproducing its overly familiar charge by subverting it, installing at the heart of it a hopeful, collective human effort. Narrativising the anti-catastrophe in the language of the catastrophe, using what you might call a syntax of mediated catastrophic duration, the event made the structure of its particular temporality obvious, visible, apprehensible: available—for naming, for reflection, for critique. The morphology of the race refused the inevitability of the eternal, chronic, escalating catastrophe, even as it invoked it: appropriating its syntax even as it made that syntax legible, even as it subverted its givenness and made use of it.

There are several points to be made here. One is that the intervention of the race highlighted the already-givenness of certain kinds of synchronisation: how the subliminal intelligibility of the catastrophic live-feed reflects a certain collective familiarity, an involuntary conversance of the viewer with its temporal form. "Take a stone in your hand" Jenni says, as she comes down the mountain: re-synchronise, establish a (new) shared time. Another point here concerns the relationship between the chronic, unfolding, mediated temporality of the catastrophe and a certain formation of "deep time" that

anchors the politics of the stone. Not all live-feeds are catastrophic: the durational event may be benign, and genres such as “slow television” attest simply and directly to the absorbing capacity of a crackling fireplace, or of a long journey by sea.²⁴ Still, as a temporal device, the feed often sets up a relation between two specific times: that of a spectator, who may tune in or out, come or go—and another time, which is the time of an observed process that for the most passes indifferently, beyond, regardless. The disjunction between these two times also serves, in a sense, as one figure or metaphor for the experiential “shock” of encountering deep time. In the moment of confusion (occasioned here by the mimetic capture) you discover yourself attuned already to times and rhythms that you may not even be aware of, that lie under the skin until something comes along to defamiliarise them: times of the quotidian and your day, of life, of the familiar—and of extraction, of growth, of the state, of the catastrophe, of business-as-usual. Of eternity.

The third and final point, then, concerns the space of critique, the possibility of an otherwise that this disjunction opens up. This is where the stone sits, extended in Jenni’s hand as an invitation to reject alignments that were already-given, times you were synchronised to without knowing, or that had already synchronised you—and to forge instead an attunement to something else, to another time or the time of an Other: this time that she offers you in her hand, holding out the stone. What does it mean to accept her invitation: to allow yourself to be affected, to respond and become response-able, to enter into relation like this, opening yourself to the time of an unknown other in its radical and potentially vast, overwhelming alterity—allowing its time to restructure yours, to recalibrate you, even as it warms in your hand? The waiting Jenni asks you to undertake is a leap of faith: neither innocent nor (just) play.

4. Paris (Arrival)

Over the course of its three weeks, *Run for Your Life* staged itself as a public argument about time, urgency, citizenship: thousands of runners ran, in “real time”, each with their individual stories presented and narrated. Together, the 784 segments enacted a massive, distributed, transnational performance of collaborative time²⁵—a demonstration of a collective but distributed “ecological citizenship”²⁶ that modelled, in a concrete and apprehensible form, precisely the kind of cooperation that the planetary environmental crisis called for. Moving from hand to hand, linking the runners together, the small white stone framed the entire assemblage—the bodies, runners, stories, cameras, viewers—within the long, slow continuity of its own geological duration: passing from hand to hand as an index, or material image, of generational time; of time, of times, that exceeded and encompass any

²⁴ Thank you to Helge Jordheim for this observation on an earlier, more catastrophic version of the text. To cite one example, the first known (very much non-catastrophic) webcam was the Trojan Room coffee pot, a coffee pot set up to broadcast in (and then from) the computer laboratory at Cambridge University, in 1991: <https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/coffee/qsf/coffee.html>

²⁵ Berg, “Arts-based Practices for Collaborative Time”.

²⁶ Kaijser & Lövbrand, “Run for your Life: Embodied Environmental Story-telling and Citizenship on the Road to Paris”.

individual human timeframe. By its presence, the stone made the race into something more than just (yet) another call for action: in its presence the race became, I think, a kind of *hack*—an attempt to reengineer the temporal horizon of politics, to redefine the temporal scale that the question of climate action was permitted to stake out.²⁷ What happens when deep time of stone is allowed into the polity?

In the final segment of the race, in Paris, the stone is carried forward to the threshold of the chamber of talks and handed to Milan Loeak, a delegate from the Marshall Islands—who accepts it, reverently, and brings it with her into the chamber. One moment of formal closure in the trajectory of the stone: an endpoint, a moment of ritual seriousness which contains in itself also the promise of an indeterminate forward movement—for the stone, and for those who ran with it. As the Riksteatern website for the event still declares today, years later: "A thousand reasons to run / We will not end here."²⁸ Still: with its arrival in Paris, at the steps of the Le Bourget conference hall, a collective victory of sorts *had been* achieved, despite setbacks and complications.²⁹ In the end, the stone *had arrived*—and with it, its full manifold of hope, urgency, achievement, determination, reverence, the exhausted aftermath of effort. These human bodies, holding the stone so carefully, handing it over as their eyes follow its passage. Surely the stakes were clear? Surely now something would happen? Surely this was not all for nothing?

5. Zoom (Aftermath)

June 2021, five and a half years after the race and the talks that followed: in the digital flicker of my screen, at a frame-rate set by the selected playback quality, the first segment of the race loops silently. Jenni is coming down the mountain, again and again—like a prophet, carrying the white stone and a weight that seems larger than her human frame.³⁰ On the same screen she is also at home, in Sápmi, and I am in Copenhagen: both of us are on Zoom, and—after I contacted her on Instagram—Jenni has agreed to talk to me about *Run for Your Life*, about her involvement with the race and the stone, about what happened after the event. Parts of the story I have pieced together already, on my own; she is happy to fill in the rest. I learn that before the race, the stone was selected from a remote fjord by the Arctic Sea somewhere in Sápmi, about a day's walk from the nearest road. I also learn that from Paris, Milaň Loeak brought the stone with her back to the Marshall Islands.³¹ From there it travelled back to Europe in 2017, for COP 23 in Bonn, and from there out again to Aotearoa New Zealand, where it was held for a while in the custodianship of Te Ara Whatu, an indigenous environmental

²⁷ I am indebted here to fellow Lifetimer Ingrid Eskild for the observation that the hack is also the figure of an *intimate* knowledge—an intervention "from outside" that depends on (and works through) profound familiarity with its object. To hack something, first you get under its skin.

²⁸ See, again: <https://www.riksteatern.se/runforyourlife>

²⁹ See for example Bloch, here: <https://theecologist.org/2015/nov/28/cop21-actions-go-ahead-we-are-not-defending-nature-we-are-nature-defending-itself>.

³⁰ As of September 2021, the video is now unavailable. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZR6kGNM_L0

³¹ See this zine: https://issuu.com/jennilaiti/docs/dekolonialisttala_vearjjut_revolu, p34-35.

youth organisation.³² In 2019 the stone travelled back to Europe again, for COP 25, and from there onward to Kalaallit Nunaat, or Greenland, in the hand of the Inuit poet Aka Niviâna.³³ Now the stone rests there for a while, Jenni tells me: on a windowsill in Nuuk, overlooking the ice. At each of its locations the stone has been involved in events, from ritual consecrations to poetry performances, accreting relations in human time and a kind of biography—from the point where it was picked out in a remote fjord to where it rests now, on a windowsill in Kalaallit Nunaat.

The story Jenni narrates to me here is in the genre of the secret history: the pulse of a time that has passed hidden and unbeknownst, off the record. As the biography of the stone and its various accretions unfolds, it imposes (on me) a kind of retroactive transvaluation: an experience of time where you realise something has been going on all along and now that you know, it changes what you thought you knew.³⁴ There is a joy in Jenni's telling, in my surprise and obvious delight at learning about the secret trajectories of the stone—but there is also sadness; these are stories that issue from a place of depletion, of grieving hindsight. The grounds for this are simple: despite the torrent of rhetorical gestures and grand flourishes, *COP 21 was an abject failure*. Nothing of any substance has come of it. The "Paris agreement" brought about no transformation, no intervention or measure that rose to the terrible reality of the emergency. Emissions have continued to rise and they rise still, in their increasingly cataclysmic upward arc. An enormous weariness wells up here, a heartbroken exhaustion that fills the screen as Jenni talks about the aftermath of the race, about how she used to believe in solutions but no longer thinks they are possible, about what could have been, about indigenous comrades who burned out, who fell away from the climate struggle in disappointment—and the overarching sense that something important failed, irrecoverably and catastrophically. We talk about the failure of hope and what motivates action now, beyond the point where the possibility of a happy outcome can no longer be sustained. For many of those who harboured some expectation that genuine action might now occur, finally, the 2015 Conference of the Parties was—like others before it, and since—a moment of dashed hope, exhaustion, despair: a crushing, devastating failure. For many who still held out hope, Paris was the end of that hope. "We live in the apocalypse now," Jenni says. She seems tired, vulnerable.

"Take a stone in your hand" the younger Jenni is saying, as she loops her way down the mountain. What did it cost to create this moment in which you were invited to listen? Attunement goes both ways, it opens you up and it affects you, reorganises you, tunes you to the pulse and time and needs of an other—and there is danger in this, not just joy. Climate change is an exhausting attunement, heavy with the continuous reality of an unfolding devastation, of this accelerated geological catastrophe that compresses epochs of planetary time into the brief flash of a single lifespan, millennia into years. A single human body struggles to contain the weight of a death process that unfolds in this way:

³² Link here: <https://tearawhatu.org>.

³³ Instagram profile here: <https://www.instagram.com/akaniviaana/>. See also "Rise: From One Island to Another", her trans-hemispheric collaboration with Kathy Jetnil-Kijner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtT-hJBZIUy>

³⁴ Elsewhere I have written about the "retroactive shock"—a time experience that is structural identical to this but again, inverted: replacing the wound with the joyful revelation. Reinert, "The Midwife and the Poet".

attunement to the planetary is a practice of danger, an openness that can exhaust you, leave you broken, destroy you. And yet, what is the alternative? This is what Jenni presents you with, in that looping moment where she extends the small white stone in her hand, again and again: as an invitation to listen, to attune, to enter into relation with an other, vast and radical and unknown as that other may be—even as their time changes you; even as your hand warms them; even as they sit on a far-away windowsill, overlooking the ice, waiting to move again. Because Jenni and her people have been doing this work for a long time, for centuries, and they are exhausted.³⁵

6. Conclusion(s)

Let me wrap up. Throughout this text, my central contention has been that the stone in the hand functions as a material figure of time: an object, a gesture, an image that diagrams certain relations, rendering certain things thinkable in particular ways while effecting a whole range of temporal synchronisations—some of them more hidden than others. In trying to unpack some of these, and the temporal work that the stone did within its assemblage(s), I have laid them out here in the form of an exploratory argument. The argument is held together, in its twists and turns, by the figure of the stone—as it rests in the outstretched hand; as it comes down the mountain; as it passes from runner to runner; as it moves, as it is celebrated, filmed, written about... And finally as it comes to rest again, for a while, on a distant windowsill. Again and again the text circles that stone, returning to its presence and to the gesture in which it is (was) offered back then, up on the mountain: the entire text itself is perhaps best read as an attempt to respond—to begin to attend, "response-ably"—to the invitation in Jenni's gesture.

Here in closing, in another aftermath that is also the present-continuous of (this) writing, I am at my desk, reviewing one more time the footage from the race as I try to write this—watching the small, white stone skip from hand to hand, in a repeating series of small jumps that stitch together the days and nights of the race, again and again. The gentle, looping insistence of its arc is hypnotic, quietly moving. Runner after runner holds up the stone, poses with it, flashes a grin for the camera mid-stride before handing it over. The intimacy of their small, self-conscious expressions touches me: joyous, intent, focused, exhausted. I have long since lost track of how many times I have returned to these sequences—trying to figure what this has to say to me, what it is that I keep circling. The affects blur, recombine, bleed together into this diffuse, repeating, indefinite moment where I sit, staring at the screen, trying to assemble these scenes—these moments that orbit the small mass of the stone as it warms in the hand, waiting. Why has it taken me so long to write this? Perhaps, it occurs to me, the answer is simple: because I have been waiting; doing, all along, what Jenni asked me to do: to wait, with the stone in my hand—until the stone starts to live, move, speak. To breathe. If the stone offers a

³⁵ Six months later, having decided at long last to delete my Instagram account, I spot Jenni one last time, at a demonstration in a forest: one of the last images I see on the platform. She and many others are protesting the continuing incursions of British mining giant Beowulf onto traditional Sámi lands in Gállok, Sweden. Exhausted, but unbowed.

method, this may be it—and here, perhaps, is an outcome: the movement of the stone, its breath, in what you are reading.

One of the central questions we have posed ourselves, over the last few years of the Lifetimes project, is this: does it *matter* that time is multiple? If so, *how*? In a recent talk, philosopher Michelle Bastian coined the term "chronowashing" to describe a temporal tactic that deploys ideas like slow or deep time to construct an appearance of good faith or innocence, deflecting critique.³⁶ In sketching out the temporalities of the stone, I have tried to do something like the opposite of that: not to wash time but to muddy it, to thicken and complicate, to capture more of its textures—in an open-ended, multiplicative reading that expands the temporal logics, rendering their mechanisms and implications more thickly. Thick description is a narrative tactic that sets itself against simplification, abstraction, erasure. Used deliberately, it can substantiate—give flesh, lend substance, make visible. This is also where I am with the Lifetimes framework, I suppose, as an undertaking that began with a set of shared propositions and a commitment to thinking, together, the plurality of time in its sheer, cross-cutting abundance. "Time is multiple," we posited—and it is multiple in ways that defy domestication, that bleed across lines, silos and experience, defying theories and previous agreements: a generative abundance continuously challenges the language, the concepts, the figures and tropes by which it is to be thought. More and more, as the project progressed, I have found myself thinking that abundance through the particular figure of that small white stone, patiently warming in the hand.

The so-called Anthropocene is a disruption, a cognitive rupture, a confusion of scales. Earth changes are unfolding, accelerated and compacted into the span of a single human life—and the compression is jarring, violent, vertiginous. Nauseating. In its catastrophic valence, the Anthropocenic rupture possesses a broad, cataclysmic and monotonous immediacy, the monstrousness of a present that swallows past and future into the churn of an all-encompassing, planetary "Now": a strange, overwhelming present that is somehow also at the same time banal, diffuse, threaded into the quotidian in ways that make it obvious and hard to notice, unavailable to experience.³⁷ Against this, what does the stone offer? This, perhaps: a temporal gesture in which the elements come together but only for a while, touching and separating in unblurred relation—like a stone you pick up and hold in your hand for a while, before passing it on; a stone whose heartbeat you listen for, guided by the possibility of some future relation that might yet (perhaps) not be confusion, that might (yet) perhaps be neither catastrophic nor traumatic nor compacted but something else entirely, something that perhaps refracts itself in the event already, unhurriedly, threading through the footage and its aftermath in a hundred small ways—each in itself a moment of waiting, of uncertain suspension between a future that it tries to bring about and the one that it refuses.

"You don't destroy the things you love" Jenni says, coming down the mountain: naming, finally, this waiting that the stone calls for, this thing to which you are invited, that continues to motivate action beyond the end of hope. Does it matter—in the scorching and death, in the carnival of planetary

³⁶ Bastian, "Chrono-washing, or how not to re-story time for sustainability," talk at the STREAMS conference, Stockholm and online, August 4 2021. <https://www.meetstreams.com/streams-2021/>

³⁷ Swanson, "The Banality of the Anthropocene". <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-banality-of-the-anthropocene>

horrors that is the Anthropocene—that time is multiple? That every present functions in the light of all those other presents that are threaded through it: made and remade, remembered, enacted, invited, multiple as time itself and stitched through it in a hundred small glints—each of them waiting to be noticed and picked up, each of them a fragment, a seed, an arrested frame; a promise of something else, of an otherwise possible? Of course it does.

"Take a stone in your hand," Jenni says, "and listen."

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