

# Emerging with Rocks

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This living inquiry explores and documents the material-relational possibilities with natural rocks on a specific beach as a proactive participant in our encounter. I consider and take seriously the multimodal possibilities of the natural assemblages—ecological, cultural, political, and historical—as a means of cultivating a deep reciprocal relationship between myself and rock material. This inquiry is inspired by Stephanie Bunn (2011), Tim Ingold (2013), and Christopher Schulte (2018), as a way of critically engaging with multimodal ways of thinking with natural material and acknowledging beach rocks as a collaborative participant. Implementing a posthumanist framework, I begin to reconceptualize the normality of being with, engaging with, emerging with, and co-existing with natural material. Guided by Tim Ingold's (2013) concept of attention as a way of actively listening and being consciously aware during the present moment with materials, I embrace the intricate web of reciprocal relationships in the bioregion. This journey considers the ethical elements of coexisting with the complexity, particularities, unpredictability, and unlimited possibilities of natural elements and more-than-human materials that reside in this area, while exploring, learning, opening myself up to the gradual rhythms and intrigues that are often overlooked, taken-for-granted, and unnoticed.

*What does it mean to think with and correspond with place?*

*How might alternative ways of thinking with all agentic forces with(in) places be implemented?*

*What does it mean to think with, move with, and to be in correspondence with materials?*

*What does it mean to attend to and give our attention to the environment and materials around us?*



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## *Land Acknowledgement*

I'd like to commence my inquiry by acknowledging, respecting and honoring the environment where this material-relational co-compositional process occurred (Ingold, 2013). I was remotely situated on the Coast Salish peoples' unceded and ancestral territory of the *skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) nation, on which Secret Beach resides. In my shared experiences with the land and this place, I value the gestures, movements, relationalities, and inherent characteristics that are shared. It is critical for me to consciously appreciate the unexpected and unpredictability of the environment. I solicit everyone to navigate through this journey with compassion and empathy for the current Indigenous peoples who continue to express their unwavering dedication to this unceded territory.



# *The Processual Unfolding*

Growing up in the remote countryside and studying geography amplified my reverence for the ecological elements of my surroundings. Hiking, walking, and jogging the Coast Mountains Ranges over the years, encourages me to consider the material-relational notion and the multiplicity of working with natural materials. I become deeply invested in the possibilities.

*Why did I choose to work with rocks?*

The alluring colors, shapes, patterns, and textures of rocks can reveal a great deal about their origin and history of the location. Growing up, I relished in the pleasure of collecting, sorting, and comparing rocks. Rocks are malleable, versatile, accessible, and easily transportable. I am fascinated by the prospect of exploring, experiencing, and coexisting with rocks and attuning to how the material speaks to me. I ponder...

*What does it mean to think with, move with, correspondence with natural rocks?*

Rocks actively contribute to an immersive trajectory of our exchanges. Coexisting with rocks is an alternative way of interacting, being with and working with the material. Ingold (2013) outlines that the reciprocal relationship is generated by an infinite back and forth together as the material emerges into partnership with me. This enables rocks to flow with the environment's aesthetic and tactile interactions, which includes an innate connection that exists between the material and myself. Working with a material in this way facilitates me to "gradually develop a rhythm and feel for the material" (Ingold, 2013, p. 23). Secret Beach, tucked away in the geographic area of Gibsons, is the optimal place for my rock-emergence exploration.

Let us take a walk!





## Initial Wandering

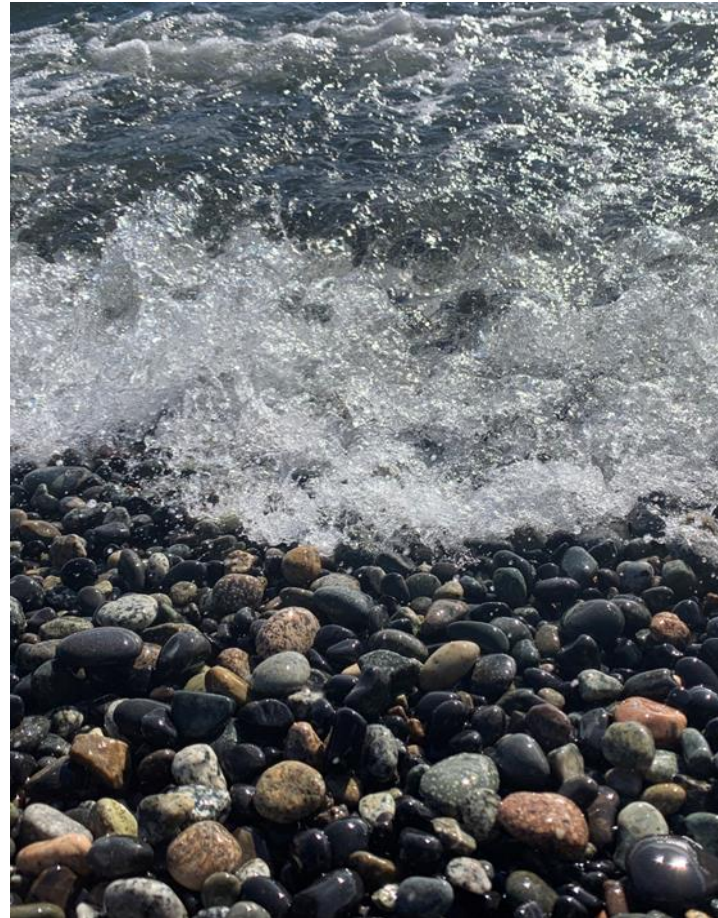
*What does it mean to attend to and give our attention to the environment and materials around us?*

As I eagerly proceed towards the descending steep and narrow stairway, an overwhelming urge to engage with nature envelops me. As I descend the staircase one step at a time, I deliberately grip, cling, and firmly hold the wooden railing for balance. I position my hand along the railing as I approach the beach access way steadily, gradually, and slowly being attentive to the slippery cement stairs with the debris of cedar needles on them. The gleaming, lustrous sunlight directs me to the shore, warms my extremities and puts a grin on my face. At the halfway point I pause a moment to listen to my surroundings, which includes tree branches clicking, clattering, and rattling in unison; oceanic waves lapping, gurgling, and splashing; sensations emanating from the shore; and the leaves fluttering, shuffling, and scattering on the ground. What a magnificent orchestra I am witnessing, as I continue “Listening as sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others [and our surroundings] integrated knowledge that holds the universe together” (Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 48). As I pay attention to my surroundings, the sounds of water from the beach beckon me to proceed in a slow, steady pace.

Tim Ingold (2013) indicates that attention is a way of actively listening and being consciously aware during the present moment with materials by embracing the range of possibilities and preserving receptive options that might present themselves as active participants during the process of engagement. In this listening moment, coexisting with the natural materials inspires a sense of inherent gratitude for my surroundings. Listening is an active verb which necessitates understanding and creates ambiguity, while being receptive to new alternatives. “It is a form of longing, and insofar as it is done responsively and responsibly with [materials]”, it encourages being aware of the infinite opportunities that material might impose (Ingold, 2013, p. 35).

## *Intriguing Ambiance*

*How does the ambiance of the environment compel us to engage with materials?*



As I stroll to the beach, one step in front of the other, I take in the splendor, tranquility, and harmony of the coastal elegance that surrounds me. The warmth of the sun circulates about me, as if to suggest, “Remove your jacket and stay awhile.” I proceed to remove my outer garments and position them on an old growth driftwood wedged securely in the rocks. Bubbling, gurgling, splashing, and splattering sounds emanate from the incoming oceanic saltwater tides. As I approach the water shoreline, I notice the glistening sunlight beaming on rocks as the frigid water cascades over the rocks. Several luminating shiny objects adorn my interest and piques me to investigate. I am pleasantly thrilled to encounter orange igneous granite rocks with coarse-grained quartz, mica, and feldspar embedded into the rock.

This intriguing experience solidifies that volcanic activity historically occurred in this area. As volcanic lava cools, this particular type of rock evolves and compels the material to surface as a volcanic mountain erodes. Squatting, bending and kneeling down I am eager at the prospect of retrieving, gathering, and salvaging these exquisite, alluring, and unique rocks. This dynamic interaction between the rocks, the sunlight, and the waves draws me deeply into understanding the variety of ways of interacting with rocks. Being present in the moment, I become consciously aware of the interconnectedness of nature (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). It motivates me to dedicate more attention to how rocks communicate with me.

## *Embracing Exploration*

I pause for a moment to examine, explore, and embrace the orange igneous granite rocks. Retrieving a few of the rocks for my baskets, I squat down on a log to embrace an intimate moment with this rock. The historical ecologies of this rock, as well as the connections that exist between the rock and this environment, fascinate me. How long has it been here? The sharp edges of the sides of the rock and the flat, smooth surface provoke more questions.

*How can one material speak more strongly to a person than another material?*

This particular igneous granite rock has historical evidence that a volcano eruption occurred in this bioregion in the past. I pause a moment to reflect on how the rock is exposed by erosion over time and how the sun shimmers on it as an indicator to capture my attention. The relationship between this type of rock and its environment intrigues me to engage with other rocks on the beach, so I can understand why this particular rock is unique. Observing the multiplicity of this rock and paying attention to the various dimensions that transform over time, I grasp a deeper understanding of the rock, but I have the desire to learn more. This invites the material and the environment to co-exist with me in generating new possibilities. This reminds us that “[materials] also provoke different ways of thinking as [humans] engage and work with them” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016, p.4). This particular rock takes on a life of its own, capturing my attention and evokes unique overtures, mysteries, and connections to a bygone era that entices closer observation.



## *The Fluidity of Nature*

Returning to the rocky landscape of the shore, I kneel to the ground, close my eyes, and extend my fingertips to interact with and explore the rocks in an experimental manner that is unconventional to me. I anticipate the rocks will speak to me differently, as we join forces and experience what emerges. As I move my fingers over the contours of the rocks, I'm curious about the nuances of our engagement and what may occur. Expressing excitement in the supportive possibilities, I relish every movement my fingertips perform while tracing the outlines of the rocks carefully, graciously, and with tenderness. The rocks' frigidity, sensitivity, and circularity respond to my touch. Suddenly I feel warmth on my fingers, as I slowly resume my inquiry with the rocks. I'm eager to locate the warm rock that sparked my attention, which leads me to move, shift, and gently manipulate my fingers slowly over the surface of the rocks. The warm rock presents itself, compelling me to open my eyes to get a glimpse of the volcanic lava rock with the imperfections, indentations, and circular fragments. This generates a serene, encouraging, and supportive atmosphere that assists me in gaining a deeper understanding of the intrinsic worth of this material. A continuous back and forth is developing-a reciprocating bond between this rock and myself. I wonder...

*Why is this rock warmer than the other rocks?*

Is it the sunlight that causes this rock to heat up faster than the other rocks on the beach, or does this rock hold heat longer? This prolonged and laborious approach of working with rocks encompasses a connection with rocks through an understanding of the material's complexities. This sensory experience, which is analogous to the concept of the flow of material, generates flexible stimulation. Touching, retaining, retrieving and gathering selective rocks that speak to me. I sort and categorize these rocks into baskets, like I did when I was growing up with my rock collection.





## ***Beyond Conversing***

*In what ways does an active exchange between material and individuals generate relational connections?*

As I retrieve the various rocks from the beach, one circular piece of white granite falls from my hand and tumbles along the surfaces of other rocks until it lands on the flat-surfaced, orange granite rock. I pause to observe the rocks interacting, both igneous granite rocks combined, both formed by volcanic lava cooling processes. Time is a transforming force that “prompts us to engage in the serious work of noticing” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, as cited in Schulte, 2018, p. 76). Noticing this rock inspires me to retrieve a black lava rock. I configure the lava rock on top of the white granite rock slowly, thoughtfully, and calmly. It takes numerous attempts to achieve; however, the rocks seem to embrace the prosperous aspects of being joined in unison once more.

All the volcanic elements join together, while the synergy of being with rocks responds with new and distinctive methods of communicating with me. This working together establishes a connection through the fluidity of exchanges that invites opportunities to emerge, unfold, and evolve. I’m reminded that “Materials live in the world in multiple ways. They can evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate meanings” (Kind, 2014, p. 1). Through our interaction, the rocks come to life and move with my gestures. It is an ongoing process that activates exchanges, while generating new possibilities of being with, working with, and coexisting with rocks. This approach strengthens the interrelated relationships with materials through collaboration that generate innovative ways of learning to emerge through the unforeseen connections of noticing or attending to (Ingold, 2013).

## *Imprints of our Experience*

As I reflect on this journey with rocks, I appreciate the collaboration process with rock material that was generated throughout this living inquiry. I recognizing that the rocks, the ocean, place, and myself all contributed to the nonverbal gestures, movements, engagement, and supportive qualities that strengthened the deep interconnectedness that was forged. The granite encounter amplified the experience and encouraged the guiding inquiry further. Rock dexterity is a delicate, time-consuming process involving adversity and persistence during the laborious encounter of working with and understanding rock movements. “The depth of this process requires time and satisfaction in bringing meaning to individuals” (Goldsworthy as cited in Riedelsheimer, 2001, 59:15). Laying the rocks required slowing down, being patient, and time to form a reciprocal relationship with material.

During this inquiry, each rock communicated with me differently; the size, shape, texture, and indentations outlined their involvement. Humans do not simply “do something to a material...we work with them” (Bunn, 2011, p. 22). Being receptive to the way rocks amplify our encounter was an important part of this inquiry. A captivating component of the process was reflecting on the morphogenetic process and how memories of collecting rocks in my childhood merged while working with and being with a material like rocks. I pause and ponder...

*How can I enliven the interconnectedness of my encounters, engagements and experiences with the rocks further?*



## *Recognition*

I would like to express my deepest heartfelt gratitude to my academic teacher, Haideh Hashemi Nouri, for her professional suggestions, thoughtful guidance, and generous feedback throughout this inquiry with rock material. Her insight and encouragement continually supported me to think more deeply about the importance of viewing materials in diverse ways. Her support prompted me to enliven the complexities, and multiplicities of place-based importance. Haideh's support in helping me understand the importance of valuing the viewpoints of natural materials beyond typical human perspectives is greatly appreciated.

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