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Envisioning Tourism and Proximity after the Anthropocene

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Received: 24 March 2020; Accepted: 4 May 2020; Published: 12 May 2020



Abstract: The current Earthly crisis demands new imaginings, conceptualisations and practices of tourism. This paper develops a post-anthropocentric approach to envisioning the possibilities of the ‘proximate’ in tourism settings. The existing generic definitions of proximity tourism refer to a form of tourism that emphasises local destinations, short distances and lower-carbon modes of transport, as well as the mundane exceptionality of the ordinary. We conceptualise proximity tourism with feminist new materialist literature, which accords agency to the ongoing common worlding of all matter—including but not limited to humans—rather than to separate individual agents. More specifically, our research explores the idea of proximity by drawing closer to the geo—to the Earth—through geological walks in the Pyhä National Park in Finnish Lapland. We analyse these walks with the notions of rhythmicity, vitality and care—ideas constructed from the theoretical heritage guiding our study. By doing this, we explore the potential of proximity tourism in ways that intertwine non-living and living matter, science stories, history, local communities and tourism. The outcome of this analysis, we propose, composes one possible narrative of tourism after the Anthropocene.

Keywords: proximity tourism; Anthropocene; more-than-human; new materialism

1. Introduction

A great part of the academic debate surrounding the Anthropocene and tourism has focused on climate change. Much of the research on the topic has been dedicated to quantitative studies that predict a substantial acceleration of international tourism on macro levels [1,2]. Tourism researchers Stefan Gössling, C. Michael Hall and David Scott, for example, place a focus on the limitations of technological advancement in compensating for the emissions caused by the rapid growth of tourism, the difficulties of demanding responses to climate change from broader tourist populations, the limited progress towards decarbonisation in tourism and the lack of consensus among tourism leaders on how to contribute to the mitigation of environmental impact [3–6]. Moreover, it has been pointed out that developing countries, which could benefit the most from the contributions of tourism, are also the most vulnerable to climate change, creating a vicious cycle of growing tourism, emissions and vulnerability [7]. As argued by other scholars, the current discourse on sustainability does not provide adequate tools for addressing and solving the profound earthly crisis [8,9] or making change within the tourism sector [2,10]. This is because the associated concepts and practices, such as green growth, still rely on business-oriented thinking driven by the imperative of growth, are human-centric in their scope and perpetuate the nature–culture divide. Therefore, a more radical change in imagining, conceptualising and practising tourism is needed.

In the paper at hand, we propose proximity tourism—and one particular form, geotourism [11–13]—as a possible source of hope for surviving the earthly crisis. Proximity tourism emphasises local destinations, short distances and lower-carbon modes of transportation [14,15]. In a situation where carbon emissions need to be cut down radically, it offers a new way of understanding and orienting oneself towards tourism. In the existing literature, proximity tourism has been approached through questions of attractiveness [16], cultural and physical distance [17], walkability [18] and transportation and accessibility [19]. In the Nordic context, much attention has also been paid to local tourism in second homes [20]. Moreover, Steven Hollenhorst, Susan Houge-Mackenzie and David Ostergren [14] introduce the term locavism, which refers to bioregional tourism that takes place close to home, shifting attention away from distant, exotic places to one's own backyard and favouring slow travel on the ground. The authors argue that “a key element in the shift from tourism to locavism may lie in the realisation that a simple connection to one's human and ecological community is equally valuable and rewarding as distant tourism experiences” [14] (p. 314).

We approach proximity tourism with an example of geotourism, which is, at its best, grounded in sustainable, responsible educational choices and practices, placing a strong emphasis on geoethics and geoconservation [11,13,21]. Thus, our empirical example of proximity tourism—the geo walk—connects our paper with existing research on geotourism. Geotourism—tourism with a geological purpose [11] and the aim to promote awareness of geoheritage [13,22]—connects with Hollenhorst et al. [14]'s community-oriented notions of locavism by identifying the value of human and nonhuman local communities in tourism practice. Geotourism also holds educational potential, motivating people to understand the connections between geological processes and current environmental issues, such as climate change and threats to nature's biodiversity [13] (pp. 4–5). Altogether, geotourism bridges the nature–culture divide and enhance awareness of geoethics [13,23]. Peppoloni and colleagues [23] (p. 31) remind us that *geo* refers to '*gaia*', meaning 'Earth' (Greek), or 'home, the dwelling place', '*ga*', based on its Sumerian base. Thus, we treat human interactions with the *geo*, including geotourism practices, as essentially ways of encountering-with [24] and becoming-with the Earth [25]. To become-with the Earth invites us not only to observe from distance, but to dwell—to return *home*. Geological walks are a way to come back and become attuned to our shared histories with and from the Earth.

Continuing down the path opened by the aforementioned seminal research on proximity tourism, we see a need to further deepen its theoretical premises. Our main concern is that the current body of work relies mainly on anthropocentric accounts of travelling close. It pays heightened attention to humans' motivations to practice, or not to practice, proximity tourism, and to the accessibility of proximity tourism destinations. In their study, Hollenhorst et al. [14] link proximity to connection with one's human and ecological community, while Inma Díaz Soria and Joan Carles Llurdés Coit [26] connect it to the appreciation of the mundane exceptionality of the supposedly ordinary—which, we might add, includes the exceptionality of proximate nature and its histories. Proximity could also mean something other than being physically close [26]. Inspired by these unfinished stories of 'proximity', our contribution lies in its exploration of different ways of thinking, doing and researching proximity beyond, but in relation to, the Anthropocene.

In order to experience and understand proximity beyond the mere human community, we apply post-anthropocentric theorising and employ feminist new materialist concepts [27–29]. We understand post-anthropocentric theorising as a feminist undertaking directed towards overcoming species boundaries and violent hierarchies among earthly inhabitants. In Donna Haraway's words [28], it is about crafting kin-stories with multiple Others. This necessitates the decentring of humans as 'masters of the Earth', and instead cherishes the entanglement of all life [27,30] in the past, present and future [31]. Engaging with and becoming responsive to the temporalities, histories and togetherness of all life coincides with 'a return to the Earth' that sets the ground for geotourism. For far too long, the Earth has been considered “too earthy to be worthy of serious attention”, being beneath us and not above, in the sky, enabling humankind to look into the heavens and stars [32] (p. 70).

By embracing this earthiness, we consider geotourism as having the innate potential to fuel post-anthropocentric theorising, allowing the conceptualising of tourism beyond the Anthropocene. To drive this change, we employ three theoretical concepts inspired by feminist new materialist heritage—rhythmicity [33], vitality [34] and care [29]—that connect us to Earthly stories and allow us to analyse our empirical example, the geo walk. Methodologically, we lean on the walking-with method [35], which likewise draws from feminist new materialist theory and pays particular attention to the ways in which walkers, as embodied and emplaced within a specific setting, walk with multiple others [36]. Based on this framework, our attention in this paper is placed on the situated, down-to-earth perspective of practising proximity tourism while walking with, and on, the famous and unique geologic formations of our empirical site, the Pyhä National Park in the Finnish Lapland, for which guided geo walks are organized annually during the autumn season.

With these three concepts and our empirical example, we set out to illustrate how we can learn about the complex processes of life constantly taking place proximate to us through our touristic experiences. We explore the ways we can sensitise ourselves both to the new stories that are being born every moment and to the new histories that are being created. Thus, our task is to go beyond the Anthropocene in theorising proximity tourism.

2. Theoretical Orientation: Post-Anthropocentric Theorising

“Nature can no longer be imagined as a pliable resource for industrial production or social construction. Nature is agentic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world”. [37] (pp. 4–5)

Post-anthropocentric theorising can be traced back to an origin in feminism(s) as an emancipatory theory and philosophy [38] (p. 17). We will first briefly introduce the feminist legacy guiding our paper, after which we will point out the key tenets of feminist new materialism that characterise our post-anthropocentric theorising. These rest on the three concepts guiding our theoretical work, introduced in detail in dialogue with our empirical example of geo walks.

It has been made evident that feminist approaches “have the potential to mount a radical challenge to humanist academic discourses and practices surrounding sustainability, social responsibility and justice” [38] (p. 167, referring to Plumwood, 1993). The possibilities and alternatives provided by feminist theories to thought about the Anthropocene are varied, as exemplified by the valuable contributions of influential feminist scholars in the book *Anthropocene Feminism* [39]. Grusin notes that the concept of the Anthropocene has been present in feminism and queer theory for decades: It is “a genealogy that is largely ignored, or, worse, erased, by the masculine authority of an institutional scientific discourse that now seeks to name our current historical moment the Anthropocene” [39] (p. viii). We argue that the need for new, more complex and sensitive conceptualisations of the Anthropocene suggested by feminist scholars, together with imaginaries of what happens after the Anthropocene, are tightly connected to the study and practice of tourism, as well as to explorations of the role of the post-anthropocentric tourist. Feminist theories disrupt and complicate generic notions of what counts as ‘sustainable’, ‘ethical’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, thus rejecting normative accounts of ‘sustainable tourism’ that are unavoidably built upon unequal power relations when envisioned from anthropocentric standpoints.

Within feminist theories, feminist new materialism forms the particular inspiration for our study of proximity. In recent decades, feminist new materialism has become a popular approach in various disciplines, ranging from the social sciences, arts, cultural and media studies, science and technology to contemporary philosophy [40] (p. 297). Deconstructing the material/discursive dichotomy “that retains both elements without privileging either” [37] (p. 6), feminist new materialism’s practitioners are multidisciplinary and draw from various theoretical heritages, as an interest in matter is not bounded to any academic or scientific discipline [37] (pp. 9–10). However, a focus on ‘matter’, meaning “a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations” [30] (p. 224), is a key element in drawing scholars of feminist new materialism together. In their view, matter is simultaneously a

verb and a noun: Matter is mattering, an ongoing movement “between nature and culture, the animated and automated, bodies and environments” [41]. As such, its character is “fundamentally multiple, self-organising, dynamic and inventive” [41], fuelling material feminism’s demand for “profound—even startling—reconceptualisations of nature” [37] (p. 5).

Mattering, as an ongoing process ‘in-between’, holds in itself another central tenet of feminist new materialism: Entanglement. Karen Barad notes how we “lack an independent, self-contained existence” [30] (p. ix), an idea that forms the basis for post-anthropocentric theorising. Anna Tsing beautifully describes the meaning of entanglement: “. . . rather than limit our analyses to one creature at a time (including humans), or even one relationship, if we want to know what makes places liveable, we should be studying polyphonic assemblages, gatherings of ways of being” [42] (p. 157). In the field of geology, Marcia Bjornerud relates to Tsing’s thoughts of polyphony when referring to “our extended family of living organisms”, and to the utmost necessity of recognising our place in time in relation to this extended family [43] (pp. 16–17). Geology’s acknowledgement of ‘deep time’—a timescale that points to the Earth’s multi-billion-year history, escaping human comprehension—communicates with the philosophy of mattering. However, as Frodeman [32] (p. 71) notes, there has been a wide neglect of the concept of geologic time within human sciences, pointing to its undiscovered potential. For post-anthropocentric theorising, deep, more-than-human timescales, mattering and entanglement provide ways to undo dichotomies between nature and culture, the discursive and material, the theoretical and empirical and the human and non-human by examining the becoming of these diverse dimensions of the world in relation to each other [44] (p. 28). In this relationality, situatedness becomes important: By acknowledging the liveliness of the material and non-human dimensions of the world, and the productiveness of relations with and among them, feminist new materialist approaches take into account situated knowing in new forms [44] (p. 36).

With this feminist and new materialist legacy, we propose that envisioning ecologically attentive ways of knowing, doing and theorising tourism, with a focus on the ‘proximate’, is made possible by post-anthropocentric theorising. Fundamentally, such theorising moves beyond human centrism. It requires us to ‘notice’, meaning that “We need to know the histories humans have made in these places and the histories of nonhuman participants” [42] (p. 160). Post-anthropocentric theorising encourages curiosity towards life beyond, and entangled with, humans. The re-discovery of such curiosity and a related sense of wonder is also considered essential to the development of modern geotourism [13] (p. 8).

Post-anthropocentric theorising is thus a posthumanist project, at the heart of which lies the questioning of the centrality of human power [38] (p. 168). When learning about the complex processes of life that constantly take place outside the everyday lives of humans—the new stories born every moment, the new histories created—it seems outlandish to consider the stories of humans to be the most important or interesting. Yet, as Tsing notes, “. . . we are not used to reading stories without human heroes”, as human centrism holds tightly to “dreams of progress” [42] (p. 155). This fixation on human protagonists is communicated also in Bjornerud’s [43] account on timeliness. Bjornerud points out that we so often lack “a sense of temporal proportion—the durations of the great chapters in Earth’s history, the rates of change during previous intervals of environmental instability, the intrinsic timescales of ‘natural capital’ like groundwater systems” (p. 7). A disinterest towards natural history that characterizes a considerable portion of humans [43] (p. 7) makes post-anthropocentric theorising ever more important. Not being used to something, or lacking an interest in something, does not mean that we cannot learn or become interested. We argue that to take on this task, to go beyond the Anthropocene in theory and practice, is a crucial question of ‘response-ability’. Posthuman theorising requires that we become response-able to those we meet and have met [28,45] (p. 130)—and, to add, also to those we have never had a chance to physically encounter, but of whom we can hear stories about—forming a moral obligation to them [46] (p. 16). Through this response-ability, post-anthropocentric theorising becomes material, fleshy, proximate and embedded in situated knowings and histories, instead of

something abstract and distant. It is grounded in matter that matters and holds agency “in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing ‘intra-activity’” [27] (p. 803).

With this focus and emphasis on matter, we have chosen three concepts that guide us in our post-anthropocentric theorising of proximity and proximity tourism. Each of these three concepts—rhythmicity, vitality and care—highlights matter(ing), entanglement, relationality, historicity and situatedness in its own particular way, and as such provides potential analytical approaches to exploring proximity. The selection of these analytical concepts has a story of its own. This story weaves together feminist new materialist theoretical heritage and the very history of our research group. The concepts allow us to analyse, understand and structure proximity and geotourism in ways that have not existed until this day in the field of tourism research. The concepts work thus both as philosophical guidelines and as practical anchors, encouraging us to pause and listen. They also challenge us in understanding the tourism experience under scrutiny: Rocks and stones, which are generally considered inanimate, gain new life when approached, for example, through the concept of vitality. This challenges us to widen our understanding of what vitality genuinely means and how vitality becomes organised temporally and collectively.

Rhythmicity allows us to highlight how more-than-human co-living is conditioned by a range of cosmic and technological rhythms [47]; proximity tourism assumes a different, slower rhythm than does mass tourism [48–50], while *geo*, as a basis for geotourism, brings us back to “our deep roots and permanent entanglement with Earth’s history” [43] (p. 16). Rhythmicity makes us think about our place in time, and geology helps us, following Bjornerud, to ‘fathom’ deep time, which is “arguably geology’s single greatest contribution to humanity” [43] (p. 16). Post-anthropocentric theorising also entails an understanding according to which non-humans are attributed with *vitality* and agency [31,37,46,51]. This draws attention to the self-organising vitality of all living systems and helps, as Rosi Braidotti [34] suggests, to disrupt the prevailing hierarchy between earthly beings, providing a way to decentre the human. The notion of *care*, in turn, directs us to consider the ethical relation between human and non-human agents. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa [29] aptly notes: “Care is a human trouble, but this does not make of care a human-only matter” (p. 2), directing us to notice multiple forms of caring relations. These relations are not conceived through normative moralistic visions of care, understood rather as always open and situated [46,52,53].

3. Method

In our discussion of these three core theoretical concepts, we lean on the walking-with method [35,54] and apply it to an example of a geo walk, arranged in the Pyhä-Luosto National Park in the Finnish Lapland. The national park constitutes a mundane surrounding for our research group, as the national park is situated approximately 150 kilometres from our hometown. We usually visit the park for personal and work-related day trips, staying at the university’s base, which is situated at the border of the national park, when we organise research seminars and field courses at the park. Therefore, the park forms for us a fruitful surrounding to explore different ways of thinking, doing and researching proximity. Here, we have chosen to concentrate on the example of the geo walk because it enables us to become attuned to our shared histories with and from the Earth, as we discussed in the introduction.

When producing empirical materials related to the geo walk, we have proceeded in line with the core ideas of the walking-with method. Walking-with is movement-with—movement that invites rhythmic, temporal and affective dimensions into our social-scientific inquiry; that is, dimensions related to our core concepts. Thus, the method enables us to highlight sensuous and rhythmic interrelations [55] (p. 183) and ways of becoming attentive to the ordinariness of our surroundings while walking [35] (p. 20). Central to our methodological approach is the practice of sensitising, thinking-with and being open to the ways that more-than-human entanglements manifest in the particular context in which the geo walk takes place [56,57].

In practice, two of the authors participated in a geo walk in in September 2019. The walk was organised by the local visitor centre and was guided by an experienced geologist. It began with a one-hour lecture explaining the geological history of the area and then proceeded through the park for some eight kilometres, following the trails. The authors walked with the other participants, chatted with them and with the guide, made observations, ate snacks and took photographs. They touched rocks and stones, letting their bodies be affected by them, and felt the slippery wooden duckboards or rocky trails under their boots. While driving back home, they shared their experiences, and they wrote out a research diary the following day. They also linked their own embodied and emplaced experiences with emerging geo-social literature [58,59] that considers the various ways the geologic and social intertwine.

In what follows, we use the empirical insights gained during the walk to reflect on and illustrate what proximity tourism after the Anthropocene could mean and how it could offer a way to respond to the current growth-oriented paradigm underlying tourism. We analyse the geo walk through the notions of rhythmicity, vitality and care, and in the analytical sections that follow, we start with a narrative from the geo walk and follow it with theoretical reflection, in which we entwine new materialist literature with our empirical insights.

4. Rhythmicity

4.1. Empirical Insights

We were sitting in the auditorium of the Naava visitor centre of Pyhä-Luosto National Park with some 20 other people, participating in the geologic walk. We had arrived a bit late, as we were in a hurry again. We took a breath to calm our bodies down and focused on listening to Peter, an experienced geologist, talk about the geological history of the region and the Earth. It soon became clear that our human species, which has enjoyed a very short existence on the geological timeline, does not play much of a role at the geological scale. A good reminder to us, habituated to think of history as human history. Peter's figures and diagrams threw us into deep time: Millions and billions of years run in front of our eyes as geological processes, episodes, epochs, eras, travelling lithospheric plates, ice ages and more followed each other. The rhythms of deep time and the busy, minute-based schedules of our everyday lives entangled and clashed in our bodies. We felt a bit troubled, if not amused; our habituated rhythms were suddenly disrupted.

During the lecture, we gradually began to grasp what had happened before the 35 km long range of hills and fells took the forms that we now know and experience. The fells are the remains of ancient mountains that eroded and shrunk via geological processes over about two billion years, contributing to the appearance of various rock types and the formation of gorges in the park. During the late ice age—not so long ago by geological standards—the region was covered by three kilometres of ice. That is hard to even imagine. The border of the retreating glacier reached Pyhätunturi Fell around 10,000 years ago, and the melting glacier formed the crust, soil, rocks and fells of the park. The ancient rhythms and movements of various earthly matter started to become more tangible to us.

Today, the park attracts an increasing number of domestic and international travellers. The flow of travellers follows the rhythms defined by institutional arrangements (e.g., vacation periods) and the seasons (e.g., winter seasons and seasonal weather conditions). These rhythms play a part in building and changing the shapes and forms of the fells: The movements of walkers and skiers may change the places of rocks and widen the trails, shifting the landscape. Then again, the very same seasonal and weather-based issues that control the rhythms of the travellers likewise shape the geological landscape. The arctic rhythm of winter and summer seasons with its alteration of snow, cold, sun, melting snow and water erodes the fells continuously. The permafrost, for instance, lifts some rocks up and breaks others down. This process is just so slow that it is hard to notice. It is no wonder, therefore, that it is so common to consider rocks as stable and still. Yet, as Elisabeth Povinelli reminds us, “we think something is enduring because we can't see or don't experience the constant wobbling” [60] (p. 182).

The rhythms of geological forces are different from those of humans; still, they entangle in this very geo walk.

After the lecture, we went to walk in the park. Peter's talk made the landscape's geological processes seem alive. We could image the way the melting ice, waterfalls and ancient glacial river broke their way through the mountains, billions of years old, eroding them into the low, round fells—how the volume of the flowing water transferred rocks, shaping their figures, making tremendous noise on their way. The park turned into a place full of events, noise and movement. Simultaneously, our bodies felt still and peaceful. We were attuned to the rhythms of the rocks: Their seemingly still rhythm made us stop and feel the stillness. Now, each time we walk at the bottom of the Isokuru gorge, surrounded by massive amounts of rock, we stop to admire the view and sense the atmosphere. Such an experience may also change the very basic rhythm of human life, that of breathing. 'Breath-taking' is more than an expression.

The walk also sensitised us to noticing different types of rocks. There are not only rocks, but particular rocks. In geological terms, we distinguished quartzite and conglomerate, for instance, and the way the shapes of the rocks tell their story: Round rocks have been rolling longer through the ancient rivers. We also learned to read the story of the lichen on top of the rocks. A rock full of lichen has stayed in the same place for centuries, while a 'clean' rock has been 'recently' moved from somewhere. Perhaps the most significant rocks we saw on our walk were those displaying well-preserved ripple marks—a memento of the waves of a sea situated in the park some 1.3 million years ago. They lured us to touch them. We let our fingers slip over the smooth ripples, feeling the rhythm of ancient waves. We touched the past, and the past touched us. We also sensitised ourselves to seeing and admiring rocks that somehow appeared fun, beautiful or remarkable to us due to their particular shape or size. One looked like a seal, another like a monster.

Finally, the quality and quantity of rocks also gave rhythm to the very practice of walking—the pace and tempo of our walking changed in accordance with the rocks on the ground. Duckboards provided a relatively stable ground for walkers, while rocky stones were difficult, especially for those of us habituated to walking on paved streets. Rocks are uneven; their surfaces may be slippery. Rocks may slow down our walking, or invite us to stop, to stay on the ground, to feel it, either standing or sitting. Walking, in this sense, is walking with the rhythm of rocks.

4.2. Theoretical Reflections

In previous new materialist studies, the entangled nature of human and more-than-human rhythms is brought up, for example, in Olivia Davies' and Kathleen Riach's [33] study on bee-work. They observe that, for hobbyists, bee-work is like a 'multispecies choreography', where the work is in tune with the locations and movements of the bees. They also note that in large-scale apicultures, the inspection process is hurried, disrupting the fluid movement, which illustrates the human-centred, industrial development of bee-work. This contradictory nature of cosmic and capitalist rhythms is analysed especially by Henri Lefebvre [47], who develops a rhythm analytical approach together with his wife Catherine Régulier. This approach, the 'rhythm analysis' method, invites us to attune ourselves towards the situated and embodied nature of rhythms.

Rhythm analysis takes rhythm and the dynamics between time and space as its starting point [61]. The approach concentrates on the interferences between cyclical and linear time [47]. In rhythm analysis, cyclical time refers to the natural and cosmic rhythms to which humans have been exposed from the beginning of time through to the development of modern civilisation. In modernity, their repetition continues, but instead of natural rhythms, the repetition is based on technology, work and production, which constitute linear repetition [62] (p. 87); [63] (p. 6). Hence, linear repetition may resemble a cyclical rhythm, but it can never become an actual rhythm [47]. The rhythm analytic approach enables attentiveness to specific aspects of rhythms, such as the multiplicity and uniqueness of particular rhythms, how rhythms unite with one another in everydayness, how they are discordant and how harmony is formed by the innumerable rhythms present in the body [47] (p. 16); [64] (p. 150).

Attuning ourselves to the rhythms of the rocks during the geo walk allowed us to slow down. Slowing down can be seen as a counteraction to hectic everyday life and capitalist rhythms (as well as growth-orientation)—however, it can also be considered an act of allowing our bodies to perceive the interfaces of diverse rhythms in and around us. Thus, slowing down enables us to perceive the nuances of more-than-human agency, and it makes visible how diverse agencies are entangled in our proximate surroundings. Attuning ourselves to the rhythms of rocks also sensitises us to noticing different types of rocks and the different levels of history that are materialised in the landscape. It allows us likewise to become proximate with the particulars surrounding us and to learn the history and present of these particulars. This may also make us strive for common futures. Attuning ourselves to the rhythms of rocks can, for example, help us to perceive how arctic rhythms are materialised in particular rocks, making us strive to better understand the dynamics causing the rhythms and how our own actions impact and entangle with these rhythms, creating new histories. Rhythms lead us to a sense of timefulness [43]—a poly-temporal worldview—including “a feeling for distances and proximities in the geography of deep time” (p. 17). Bjornerud [43] considers this poly-temporal worldview vital to creating a more sustainable future in the era of the Anthropocene. Geo walks provide one opportunity to understand and become sensitive to poly-temporality and timefulness. This focus on rhythms and temporalities can also invite surprising, even reversed, notions of the rhythmic entanglement of rocks and humans; described by Bjornerud in her prologue on timefulness on the Svalbard islands in the Norwegian arctic, the remains of human history on the islands, human-made artefacts, seem to her older and shabbier than the ancient mountains, which are robust and vital [43] (p. 5). Acknowledging this rhythmic interplay is essential when our aim is to reach out for accounted, situated knowings that acknowledge the relationalities of the more-than-human world.

5. Vitality

5.1. Empirical Insights

While walking in the national park, we were compelled to wonder at, and experience, the vitality of the rocks. We, and many others, commonly consider rocks to be stable, inert and passive matters—as reflected in commonplace sayings such as ‘rock solid’. Yet, Peter’s talk about geological processes concretised what we have been learning while familiarising ourselves with the geo-social literature. Rocks are vital, ‘lively’; they evolve, change and move. This liveliness often goes unnoticed in the expansive timeline of geology, as we discussed earlier. While walking, the theoretical idea of the vitality of materiality thus became lively to us. We understood that rocks are lively also in the sense that they are agentic, acting on and with us, agency emerging as the effect of configurations of human and nonhuman forces. Rocks and stones shaped and framed our doings, guiding how and where to walk, where to put our feet while taking steps. Rocks and stones are also agentic in the sense that they have the power to attract visitors, as Pyhä-Luosto National Park exemplifies so well. Last year (2019), 169,700 visitors came to the park (<https://www.metsa.fi/kayntimaarat>). The world is full of similar examples—the Grand Canyon, for instance, provides a case in point.

While walking behind the group of participants, one of us started talking about the inspiring question raised by anthropologist Hughes Raffles [65]: What can a rock do? A short reflection on our own experiences rendered visible the fact that rocks and stones can do a lot. For example, they can heal, as in the case of stone therapy. In other words, rocks affect. The very nature of the body means that it is continuously affecting and affected by other bodies—including non-human bodies, since “organic and inorganic bodies all are affective”, as Bennett [66] (p. xii) reminds us. When relating to the rocks, a body’s agentic capacity may be changed—strengthened, impressed, effectuating perhaps a change of mood. We experienced this change while walking with the rocks; they (and our entire surroundings) made us relax, as they have done so many times before. We felt, indeed, livelier, more vital.

We continued wondering how the very vitality of this particular region we were visiting is largely dependent on these rocks. The fells and rocks, and the preceding geological processes, make touristic

activities possible in the first place. The livelihood of the region has rocky roots, so to speak. As a result, we can now go to a restaurant for dinner, ski on the tracks or go downhill skiing, climb with a professional guide, and so on. Many local people derive their living from the rocks, indirectly or directly, like those working in the nearby Lampivaara amethyst mine. Besides providing livelihood for humans, these rocks and stones enable many different types of lichens to live and provide nests for snakes, insects and some birds. Going further, all of life, and all earthlings, are entirely dependent on rocks, stones and minerals. This dependency includes our affluent way of life: Even the mobile phone with which we take photos while walking consists of some thirty minerals. This might open up a space for considering rocks and stones with appreciation and care. As Bennett notes: “The ethical task at hand is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perpetually open to it” [66] (p. 14). The walk cultivated our abilities to discern the vitality of rocks and to become open to it, making us see surroundings that were familiar to us in a new light.

5.2. Theoretical Reflections

In new materialist literature, the notion of vitality draws attention to the self-organising vitality of all living systems [34]. This shift entails blurring the boundaries among what we in the era of the Anthropocene might consider living, semi-living and non-living [46] (p. 112–113). Braidotti [34] suggests that the concept of vitalist materialism constitutes “the core of a posthuman sensibility that aims at overcoming” (p. 55–56). Her idea of vitality draws inspiration from Baruch Spinoza’s notion of a monistic universe, which puts in question dualistic oppositions between matter and humans, nature and culture. Spinoza’s monistic worldview aims at creating non-dialectical understandings of materialism itself, and it has enabled further definitions of matter as vital and self-organising. It is these monistic premises of the Spinozist legacy that Braidotti uses as a building block for a posthuman theory that escapes anthropocentrism. In Braidotti’s thinking, monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism are connected as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity [34] (p. 57).

Braidotti’s vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life that has been traditionally reserved for the human and the wider scope of non-human life, also known as *zoe*. Braidotti [34] (p. 60) calls attention to the non-human, dynamic, transversal and vital force of life that reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. For her, this life, this *zoe*, is an inhuman force that stretches beyond life. Indeed, Braidotti does not settle for a drastic restructuring of human relations with animals, but suggests that the post-anthropocentric shift requires a planetary, *zoe*- and geo-centred perspective—that is, a reconfiguring of our relationship to the complex habitat we used to call ‘nature’. By complex habitat, Braidotti [34] (p. 81) refers to the ‘milieu’ of human and non-human inhabitants of this particular planet. Within Spinoza’s monistic framework, this concept means that we are all part of ‘nature’ [67]. Hence, Braidotti [34] (p. 82) encourages us to envision a geo-centred subject as a transversal entity, an enlarged sense of community, encompassing humans, animals and the earth as a whole. This task requires questioning the hierarchical idea of human exceptionalism and letting go of the need to dominate and control nature. It requires recognising *zoe* and vitality in places, beings and things that we have overlooked in the past.

In a similar vein, Mick Smith engages with rocks as the earth’s continental drifters that constitute the thin lithospheric crust that keeps travelling across the planet, on which all of us earthlings are entirely dependent [31] (p. 165). While our current global economy is busy carving its effect into this crust [31], tourism in the post-Anthropocene would mean travelling and living with the rocks. Perhaps it would mean being in transition, like mountains that “grow and move, flow and shrink and perish—eroded by water and ice, exploding in volcanic ecstasies, melting and slipping back into the torrid heat of the Earth’s mantle” [31] (p. 165)? Transition, Bjornerud [43] notes, is something that future geologists are taught to understand as the essence of rocks from the early stages of their education: “Rocks are not nouns but verbs—visible evidence of processes: A volcanic eruption, the accretion of a coral reef, the growth of a mountain belt. Everywhere one looks, rocks bear witness to

events that unfolded over long stretches of time” [43] (p. 8). Smith [31] (p. 166) suggests that being proximate with geological remnants, like rocks and fossils, enables us to recall something from the past back into life in the present. That is, it lets past lives matter by ‘breathing new life’ into them.

6. Care

6.1. Empirical Insights

Our walk took place in a national park managed by Metsähallitus, a state-owned enterprise whose task is to take care of and protect the various earthly creatures inhabiting the park. While walking, we therefore saw several noticeboards that advised us how to move, where to move and what is and is not allowed to be done in the park. There were, for instance, boards that told us that it is forbidden to go to some places during certain periods of time to protect rare flora, and others that told us that making a fire and camping is allowed only in marked places.

Besides these instructions, the material arrangements of the park articulate care. The duckboards, for example, prevented us from harming the fragile nature of the national park; at the same time, they mediated the encounter between our bodies and the rocks. For instance, while walking at the bottom of Isokuru gorge, we stepped on stable wooden planks instead of on the floating stones. The stable planks felt safer under our feet, which were used to walking on asphalt or indoors [68]. As the wooden planks are wide at some parts of the trail, they also enable disabled bodies to visit the park, as well as families with small children in strollers. Different groups of people are thus taken care of. This includes animal companions as well, dogs in particular. We saw many dogs during our walk, and one of the participants let us know that the wooden planks are comfortable for dogs’ paws, whereas those made of metal are not—even though they would last longer than wooden ones. We therefore started to wonder whether humans were caring for humans, or for human companions, by covering the difficult parts of the paths to make them more easily accessible for visitors. Is it the human that aims to minimise the erosion of the rocks and to maintain the wellbeing of the rocks, or are the wooden planks caring for the visitors?

Besides institutionalised care in the form of protection, guidelines and prohibitions, we noticed other forms of care—and disruptions of care—while walking through the trail. In particular, we paid attention to the human-made piles of stones that stood next to trails. At first glance, the habit of making a pile of some three to five stones seems rather ‘innocent’, or even cute; yet, on second thought, it is a violent act. It speaks to the human desire to leave a trace of his or her visit. It also tells us about ignorance of the rules of the park, and of the consequences of the act on the biodiversity surrounding the rocks. The lichen on the surface of a stone takes hundreds of years to grow, and the stone may afford shelter for several tiny creatures. Then, all of a sudden, a human hand moves it away—presumably without any ethical thought. The customer manager of the park that we had met earlier told us that she developed a habit of deconstructing the piles while trekking in the park. “Should we do the same?” we think. The habit of making piles of stones is relatively common among trekkers, and at some fells and mountains, they are important guides, helping trekkers to avoid getting lost. However, here, they have no such function. On the contrary, as the local newspaper *Lapin Kansa* writes on June 6, 2019: “The piling of stones compares to littering”.

During the winter season, the rocks are protected under the snow, we discuss while driving back home; or are they? We know that some like to do back-country skiing in the gorge—even though it is forbidden. The avalanches that skiing may bring about might cause the movement of rocks and thereby change the living conditions of the unique mosses and flowers growing there. So many seem to care merely for the human experience, leaving other creatures and beings unnoticed, we both silently think. At almost the same time, the inspiring quote from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa [29] comes to our minds: “Care is a human trouble, but this does not make of care a human-only matter” (p. 2). Caring relations with earthly creatures matter.

6.2. Theoretical Reflections

Care pushes us to think-with. Care—who am I walking with? Care—whose path am I crossing? Care—whose presence can I sense, and whose can I not? This response-ability cannot be chosen—we become response-able [28]. The question is, how do we act, not merely react, thereafter? Care cannot be described as something normative and easily explained: It is always open and situated [46,52,53]. Puig de la Bellacasa notes how “(c)ertainly any notion that care is a warm pleasant affection or a moralistic feel-good attitude is complicated by feminist research and theories about care” [52] (p. 2). What does this mean? Care is open: There are always different viewpoints and elements of care that conflict with one another. Care is situated: There is no universal ‘answer’ to questions of care, and sometimes care means different things in the same places [52] (p. 1). Moreover, care is ethics. Care is entanglement. Care is more than human. Care is matter. What then do we accomplish with thinking about, and with, care?

For Puig de la Bellacasa, care is significant “for thinking and living in more-than-human worlds” [52] (p. 1). For her, care is speculative ethics (p. 69). Care invites us to acknowledge, and be curious about, our more-than-human world. Living in a more-than-human world means we are, day after day, minute after minute, in the midst of ethically charged encounters, entanglements and clashes with others. Moreover, our relations with others do not only ‘involve care’; “care is relational per se”: “Caring and relating share ontological resonance” (p. 69). These encounters are care-laden, as “[c]are is omnipresent, even through the effects of its absence” (p. 1). Puig de la Bellacasa notes that “for interdependent beings in more-than-human entanglements, there has to be some form of care going on somewhere in the substrate of their world for living to be possible” (p. 5; see also p. 70). Care is unavoidably, ontologically more than human by nature.

Moreover, feminist philosophy leads us to consider care—always rooted in ethics—as a prerequisite for life in a messy, complex compost of more-than-human relationalities [28,42,52]. Our first consideration of care, relevant for our study, points to the caring aspect of care—the actual, practical acting of/with care. Following Haraway [28], care is about taking responsibility and facing our response-ability with/in our world. Caring—not only in the maternal sense—is becoming response-able with the creatures we encounter [28]. Care is taking responsibility for our actions and encounters with others. Even more so, it demands action, ‘maintenance work’, to make affectivity. As ‘part of situations of care’, becoming caring—as an active verb, becoming response-able—is thus more than a moral intention: To ‘care about’, instead of ‘caring for’ [52,69] (p. 5).

Institutionalised care as part of the geo walk experience is one form of the ‘maintenance work’ of care, taking the form of materialised protection, guidelines and prohibitions in the national park. It is the active practising of care. This, however, does not suggest caring ought to be considered an obligation, which would de-naturalise its existence [52] (p. 70). This principle applies even when the maintenance of nature parks is mediated by law and regulations. There is no regulation that obliges one to deconstruct the tourist-made piles of stones in national parks. This form of practising response-ability is situated and non-normative. It happens through the embodied engagement of the member of the staff of the nature park with the more-than-human community inhabiting the nature parks. It is a caring relation that encompasses respect, attentiveness and more-than-human solidarity.

Post-anthropocentric understanding of care thus includes a realisation that care is not a human-only matter, even when it is ‘human trouble’ [29] (p. 2). A recognition of humans as (only one) part of more-than-human assemblages and thus constitutive only through others allows us to notice multiple forms of caring relations. Caring takes place in various forms, spaces, histories and stories on the more-than-human planet. Trees care for each other, as do bears, birds, butterflies and worms. Humans are part of this caring worlding process: Humans can take care of worms, too. Bees take care of humans while pollenating plants and making the world a liveable place. Not all caring processes are identifiable or rationalisable. However, they make up an ongoing common worlding built upon relationality [28].

Lastly, caring points to proximity and distance. What does it mean to care in close proximity with others? What does it mean to care from a distance? Caring for, as a less mutual and entangled realm of

caring than that of becoming response-able with, invites the possibility of caring from a distance. This possibly does not make caring worth any less—but it is different. Proximity invites a different kind of understanding of care. Care comes close: To the encounter, to the intimate, to the everyday. It pushes one to take responsibility. Proximity demands taking action—when proximate, things cannot be put aside, or at least not as easily. Proximity might also demand a slowing down in response-ability, as it did for the authors taking part in geo-walks. Caring with the proximate denies any quick answers or solutions.

7. Conclusions

In his writing on posthumanist tourism, Smith [31] emphasizes the importance of being proximate with non-human others. He uses the example of human encounters with fossils, suggesting that keeping a fossil on one's palm can "help to re-envision links between traces of the past being(s), intensities of present experiences, and future oriented ecological concerns regarding the Anthropocene" [31] (p. 167). According to Smith, these kinds of encounters can offer exemplary openings into our entanglements with the past, present and future in a way that can change our understanding fundamentally. In line with Smith, our aim in this paper has been to illustrate how we can learn about the complex processes of life constantly taking place proximate to us through touristic experiences. We have explored how we can sensitise ourselves both to the new stories that are being born every moment and to the new histories that are being created. We have deliberated how these moments of learning can be identified in a geotourism that intertwines non-living and living matter, science, histories, local communities and tourism. Our task has been to go beyond the Anthropocene in theorising proximity tourism, bearing in mind that posthuman theorising requires becoming response-able with those we meet. As a tool to reach beyond the Anthropocene, we have applied post-anthropocentric theory, and especially the feminist new materialist approach. With this approach, our focus has been on the liveliness of material, the situatedness of knowing and the productiveness of caring relations. Furthermore, we have chosen three concepts that carry new materialist heritage—rhythmicity, vitality and care—to discuss and illustrate potential analytical approaches to proximity tourism. Envisioning tourism in the post-Anthropocene requires both a conceptual creativity and a linguistic clarity that can create new collective imaginaries [34]. Hence, in our discussion of our three concepts, we have used the example of a geo walk in the Finnish Lapland to visualise the imaginaries we refer to. The empirical example of the geo walk has enabled us to experience glimpses of Braidotti's idea of geo-centred, monist subjectivity that encompasses humans, non-humans and the earth as the whole [34] (p. 58).

Our empirical example has highlighted how the concept of rhythmicity makes visible the ways that the past, present and future become alive and entangled in our proximate surroundings. The concept also enables us to see how the rhythms of production and technology intertwine with cosmic rhythms [47], urging us to move beyond a romantic idea of proximity tourism—beyond the idea of proximity tourism as some kind of pure connection with the more-than-human, separate from capitalist and growth-oriented rhythms. Instead, rhythmicity pushes us towards a conceptualisation of proximity in tourism as an entangled and situated way of slowing down in our surroundings and as an opportunity to learn about the particulars of our surroundings—particulars where the various rhythms and agencies intersect and intertwine. Slowing down, attuning, and learning can evoke care instead of resistance and avoidance.

Our idea of proximity tourism also resists the traditions depriving vitality from matter and reducing it to a mere substrate for human re-creation [46]. It calls for the recognition of human participation in a shared, vital materiality [66] (p. 14). As Bennett [66] further argues, "if we continue to see the things as passive objects, it encourages (and legitimises) us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations. If rocks are only considered as 'resources' or 'threats' to humans (e.g., in earthquakes), then thinking with rocks as vital extends our ethical and political response" [54] (p. 851).

Furthermore, reading the geo walk through the concept of care has invited us to see care as more than a human matter [52]. Care is grounded in ethics and ethico-politics and is present in post-anthropocentric tourism narratives and practices, such as the geo walk. On the geo walk, care manifests, to begin with, in the institutionalised practices of nature parks—practical acts of becoming response-able [28]—as active processes of caring. Moreover, and most importantly, institutionalised practices of care entangle with other more-than-human caring relations, including those that take place without human influence. The concept of care has also invited us to consider proximity as a push to become response-able with the more-than-human planet we inhabit together with multiple others.

Martin Gren [24] asks how the modern human condition, and the moderns' understanding of tourism, inevitably changes when we encounter "the Earth of the Anthropocene". While we have proposed proximity tourism as a vision of tourism after the Anthropocene, it can simultaneously be seen as a way of enhancing the common chances of surviving through the Anthropocene. In sum, we do not propose that proximity tourism should be considered a particular, distinct form of tourism. Instead, proximity tourism ought to be acknowledged as a sensitive way to orient ourselves within our everyday surroundings. Such an orientation considers different temporalities, entangled and vital materiality and the different manifestations of care in a more-than-human world. We thereby suggest that proximity tourism should not be developed in opposition to global mass tourism and capitalistic ideals of growth. Rather, the potential of proximity tourism lies in its dynamic and polymorphous, open-ended nature, making it possible for ideas of proximity to become part of other, existing forms of tourism and tourism discourses. Importantly, proximity tourism—equipped with a conceptualisation of proximity that goes beyond the Anthropocene—has the potential to transform the habituated ways of thinking about and practising tourism from within. It fosters the recognition of our inevitable relatedness with the more-than-human world, and this sensitising, we propose, might provide one possible way of practising tourism.

Moreover, a return to the geo—the Earth—can teach us a considerable amount about proximity. Geotourism is one way to rediscover a sense of wonder at the proximate [13], not least by way of intertwining non-living and living matter, science stories, history, local communities and tourism. Rocks and landscapes start to gain new life—vitality—through stories that can be both scientific and mythical. Cultural associations of the geo bring the geological timespan—deep time—closer to humans grasped by an urban, technologised lifestyle [70]. To return to the geo is to turn to a home that is intensely *ours*, in a more-than-human sense—and thus, it plays a critical role in the imagining of tourism after the Anthropocene.

Author Contributions: All the authors have equally contributed to the development of the core idea and argument of the paper, as well as the theoretical framing. O.R. managed the writing process, and contributed particularly to the positioning of the study, to the development of 'rhythmicity' and to the conclusion section. T.S. was responsible for designing and writing the theoretical section. A.V. was responsible for analysing the empirical materials and writing the empirical vignettes. T.S. also actively participated in writing the section on 'care', while E.H. took responsibility for 'vitality'. They also contributed to drawing the conclusions. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Academy of Finland, grant number 324493.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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