

## Research in Situ

*the ENCI area as a case study  
for researching transformative landscape processes*



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The tension between absence and presence in space was inherent to my position in the *Research in SITU* project, having joined the project two weeks later. Upon researching the ENCI area through embodied research methods, I discovered this tension to be intrinsic to the ENCI. Thus, the question of necessary human absence and presence and the implications thereof became the focal point of my ongoing research.

## Absence

At present, the quarry lays fallow- a gaping wound in the landscape. Amidst hills reminiscent of an excavation site, an ecosystem (re-)generates. Characterised by the tension between human (in-)responsibility for the quarry's creation and its ecosystem, the heterogenous community that formed around ENCI searches for the balance between human interference and absence. This quest for balance is most literally visible through the meters and meters of fences, determining where visitors may walk, stand, and which sensory perception of the landscape is permitted.

/ Excerpt of my Logbook /



Today I found a set of benches and tables at the ENCI. I (mis-)took them for an invitation to sit and feast my eyes upon the view. I sit and am faced with a fence, a vertical barrier blocking my vision field. This is not the first-time architecture has failed to cater to my body. Am I too short for the view?

## Longing for Presence

I now found myself increasingly longing for a tactile understanding of the quarry. During my first workshop at the ENCI, date, facilitators, we were asked to sketch our view on the quarry. I collected marl from the pathways winding their way alongside the fences. In an attempt to render my visual experience of the landscape tactile, I sketched the quarry with the marl that was damp from the rain. Using frottage, I documented the texture of the fences and layered them on my sketch.



*Marl and Algae on paper (A4)*

When contextualising these subjective experiences, it raises the question of the extent in which human presence and absence in landscapes and the ecosystem is required, perhaps necessary or (im-)possible. Moving forward, it became my goal to investigate the ENCI area as a case study towards these relationships of tension.

## Presence in the quarry

The external regulation of presence was broken, when our research group was allowed the gates that had been separating us from the former quarry. Led by palaeontologist John Jagt, we determined fossils whilst our paths were determined by yet again more fences. Amidst exploring the testimonies of long-gone-extinct species, I became increasingly aware of our sudden hyper-presence in the quarry. This inspired my speculation on the ultimate form of human absence. What will our species leave behind in a post-anthropocentric landscape? What is the testimony of our existence? Will it be fossils, our remainders similar to those of the Mosasaurus that was excavated at the ENCI quarry?

With this question, I stepped into my material research. I began collecting hands, imprints of human presence in clay. The choice of body part being hands lies in their role in creating the landscape that we today know as the ENCI area. The quarry's existence is rooted in human hands relentlessly and resourcefully excavating and exploiting the landscape for commercial profit. What struck me during this material research process was the moment I asked my grandmother to participate. Holding my grandmother's hand imprinted in clay, I was confronted with the fragility of human presence.

## Communicating to an Audience

The ENCI and the area surrounding it at the St. Pietersberg have a long-standing tradition of attracting visitors through locating their (hi-)stories at the intersection of fact and fiction. Joep Orbons, an archaeologist, and Joep Vossebeld, artist, curator, and storyteller, introduced us to multiple (hi-)stories during a lecture-walk that, located at the intersection of fact and fiction, have attracted engagement with the area for many years. Looking at the (hi-)stories surrounding the ENCI through this lens provided not only a deeper insight into the actual content the stories communicated, but also a layered discussion about the Zeitgeist of the stories' origin and transmission, that frames their narrative.



The intricacy of such (non-)fictitious stories inspired my research on how to position my work in this tradition, in order to communicate my research questions to an audience. Primarily, I strove to create a space, in which an audience can interact with subject matter in a way that it is rendered (emotionally) tangible. Timothy Morton, coined “prophet of the Anthropocene”, describes the urgency he sees for art to hold such spaces of reappraisal in his essay *All Art is Ecological* (...). According to Morton: “Mass extinction is so awful, so incomprehensible, so horrible – and at present its so invisible. We hardly know where to start, apart from either ignoring it or electrocuting ourselves about it.” (Morton, T., *All Art is Ecological*, p. 31) In response to this phenomenon, he suggests the element of absurdity and humour through which art can render urgent subject matter digestible for an audience, facilitating engagement and understanding.



*Marl and Algae on paper (A5)*

## RELICS

RELICS, a (fictional) start-up company.

In the tradition of consumable profit generation that the existence of the ENCI depends on, I offer an ultra-capitalistic response to the question: what do we leave behind? In the Anthropocene the human species has transcended to being one of the most influential factors on the ecosystem. When speculating on what we leave behind, is the answer (mere) fossils? Or do we leave behind RELICS, testimonies of God-like beings that we seem to have transcended into in the Anthropocene? Given our interconnectedness to other species and in light of recent events, it is evident that our infrastructures and our species are incredibly vulnerable and exposed to natural forces and the effects of the climate crisis. What is for sure however, is that the existence of the material we have created, specifically (micro-)plastic will surpass the human lifespan. Has in fact (micro-)plastic transcended to being the RELIC of the Anthropocene?

Relics is based on two fundamental ideas.

- (i) The ultimate goal of RELICS is offering an alternative space for dialogue and engagement with my research (and the questions I ask) through a sarcastic, absurd proposal at the intersection of fact and fiction.
- (ii) RELICS is speculative research on how to best preserve testimonies of human presence in the Anthropocene.

RELICS aligns with the notion of „YOUR story matters“ that feeds into the core beliefs of our hyper-individualistic and capitalistic society, in which the individual is placed above the collective. The complex interdependence of individual action and collective impact, (and vice versa as well as interchanged), is elementary component in discussing the climate crisis, its global consequences and its (moral) implications, such as intergenerational responsibility.

In the utmost consequence of this speculation, RELICS caters to the hyper-individualistic Zeitgeist by offering to preserve testimonies of customer's bodies as well as a series of my own body-parts. For maximal preservation, the body parts are encased in epoxy resin, a plastic-type material. Creating a (fictional) startup for capitalistic marketing and consumption plays into the catholic tradition of profiting of testimonies of God-like presence. In addition, RELICS touches upon the consumerist and capitalistic foundations that are ever apparent at the ENCI area.

By inviting an audience to shop at RELICS and either preserve their own existence or consume the already existing series, I attempt to open a dialogue about the ENCI as case study for researching the tension between necessary human presence and absence in (transformative) landscapes, and the implications thereof.

link to the website:

<https://helenalinnert.wixsite.com/shoprelics/category/all-products>





Excerpts of my LogBook

Imagining a post-anthropocentric landscape



*35mm film, printed on A3, layered with interwoven textiles*

Collecting patterns and textures at the ENCI















Material Research of the plastic glove as artificial border between my body and the material.

*290 surgical gloves mounted on jalousie structure.*





*My research and work presentation within our mini group- exhibition*



