



DESTRUCTIVE CARE

Emotional engagements in mining narratives

by Anna Varfolomeeva

There is a growing awareness of the essential similarities between care and maintenance notions in more-than-human settings. Whereas the concept of care is increasingly extended towards non-living organisms, research on maintenance and repair still focuses mainly on technologies and infrastructures. This article extends the realm of maintenance theorizing towards humans' caretaking activities and discusses the concepts' parallels. It focuses on the case study of Veps ethnic minority in Karelia, Northwestern Russia. Since the 18th century, Veps have been extracting rare ornamental stones: gabbro-diabase and raspberry quartzite. The article demonstrates that Veps workers engage in close bodily and material interactions with the mining industry. Whereas many of them enter into affective relations with the stone, their attitudes towards their bodies and health become estranged and detached. The article introduces the concept of "destructive care" to analyze the process of the workers' growing alienation from their bodily needs. Through the Veps' example, the article demonstrates that the logics of care and maintenance become entangled in the realm of human – material co-existence.

Keywords: Care, maintenance, materiality, resource extraction, emotion

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Introduction

Ironically, this article was started in an isolated room of an infectious diseases hospital while being an "object of care" during the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. During that time, I witnessed how established understandings of care were getting modified under rapidly changing realities. Care is often viewed as a fluid and somewhat "slippery" concept (Martin et al., 2015). Yet, in the spring of 2020, acts of care often took the form of standardized protocols such as keeping a two-meter distance or washing hands for at least twenty seconds. These formalized rules may remind us of maintenance manuals designed to keep mechanisms functioning properly. As human beings, we also find ourselves in need of "user manuals" as an island of stability in an unknown social order.

This article analyzes parallels and juxtapositions between the treatment of bodies and materials in industrial contexts. Specifically, it argues that encompassing materials and industries in the notions of care may have negative consequences, such as workers' growing alienation from their bodily needs. The article focuses on the case study of Veps minority in Karelia, Northwestern Russia,¹ and their complex perceptions² of stoneworking.³ Since the 18th century, Veps brigades have been extracting rare decorative stones – gabbro-diabase and raspberry quartzite – used for ornamentation of well-known buildings and monuments in Russia and abroad. However, a real boost in mining in Veps villages began in the early Soviet period, when large state-owned quarries producing diabase and quartzite opened in the 1920s. The start of large-scale mining operations in Veps villages coincided with the development of the Soviet Union's massive industrialization plan. The industrialization plan's main goal was to turn the Soviet Union from a state importing industrial equipment to a state producing it. Rapid industrialization was considered one of the primary conditions for building a socialist society (Murav'eva, 2003). The development of the Soviet industry was closely tied up with a

distinctive "messianic ideology," promoting dedicated and self-sacrificing labor for the sake of a brighter future (Abramova, 2012, p. 58). Therefore, it is possible to speak of the Soviet "industrial discourse" as one of the state's national ideas (Rodina, 2017).⁴ This industrial discourse was actively promoted in Veps villages by the quarries' management, district administration, and local newspaper publications. The article argues that centralized ideas asserting the vital role of industry in Soviet life influenced the extension of the workers' caring relations towards the machines they engaged with and their production – the valuable stones.

In Veps stoneworkers' example, their world of care encompasses complex emotional attitudes of appreciation, pride, concern, and disappointment towards the local mining industry. Drawing upon the notion of affect as the process of mutual change undergone by human and non-human bodies through the process of interaction (O'Grady, 2018) or as "the motion of emotion" (Thien, 2005, p. 451), this article analyzes "affective entanglements" formed between stoneworkers and the mining industry. Simultaneously, while effective work gets prioritized over bodily needs and capacities, the self-care of mining workers is often overlooked: they take risks for the sake of productivity, neglect safety rules, and feel emotionally estranged from their bodies. This article suggests the notion of "destructive care" as an analytical framework stressing complex and often detrimental effects taking place when the notions of care encompass industries. As the concept of care is increasingly used referring to the world of technoscience (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015), the notion of "destructive care" is important for further conceptualizations of human – industry relations. This article, therefore, discusses broader understandings of care in industrial settings on two analytical levels. By focusing on Veps encompassing materials and machines as a part of their caring relations the article contributes to the academic literature on care and maintenance practices in the realm of industrial labor.

Bridging care and maintenance through emotional engagements

Care is a multi-dimensional and fluid concept (Mol, 2008; Martin et al., 2015; Hamington, 2004) that connects ethical dilemmas with practical orientation, most intimate encounters with attention to global problems (Ureta, 2016). Providing care is simultaneously

an instrumental process and an activity characterized by affective relations (Abel & Nelson, 1990). Therefore, care can be viewed as labor or practice, an affective condition, and an ethical principle (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). However, it is important to see

¹ Veps are a Finno-Ugrian ethnic minority primarily residing in three regions of Russia: Karelia, the Leningrad region, and the Vologda region. Since 2000, Veps have a status of an indigenous people of the Russian Federation. This article focuses on northern Veps residing in Karelia, as this group is characterized by their long-term involvement in stone extraction.

² This notion is used in the article in line with Tim Ingold's discussion on perception as the process of a person's immersion in the environment (Ingold, 2002). I view perception as the process of Veps stoneworkers' confluence with the landscape and industry.

³ The terms "stoneworking" and "stoneworker" are used as translations of the respective Vepsian words "kivirad" and "kiviradnik" and as terms encompassing several stages of engagement with stone: its extraction, cutting, shaping, polishing, and loading. In this article, I use "stoneworker" and "miner" as synonyms.

⁴ Alexei Yurchak (2006, p. 37) emphasizes the universality of the Soviet discourse in different parts of the state: "...these standardizations of everyday tools, references, and scenes were part of a larger standardization of discourse during the Soviet period... even when traveling to an unfamiliar city one would see the same familiar and predictable slogans with only occasional regional variations." Therefore, centralized decisions of the Soviet authorities were effectively promoted and enacted by regional administrations and enterprises, as in the case of Karelia.



acts of care as complex phenomena that are not necessarily associated with positive feelings and emotions, such as affection or attachment (Murphy, 2015). This "darker side" of care (Martin et al., 2015, p. 627) has been widely explored in recent academic studies focusing on practices of care disregarding and neglecting patients' wishes or needs (Biehl 2012), accompanied by anxiety and loss (Cubellis 2020), or causing suffering (Van Dooren, 2014).

Whether we discuss pleasant feelings or negative emotions accompanying care, it is viewed as an activity linked to specific emotional responses. On the contrary, maintenance and repair are often seen as distanced and estranged activities devoid of affection. Besides, maintenance is commonly viewed as a highly formalized action based on specific instructions such as user manuals. Mechanisms are expected to function predictably and to follow pre-designed guidelines: we refer to processes as "running like clockwork" when they follow initial plans and work smoothly. On the contrary, care is often associated with a fluidity of emotions, perceptions, and expectations: it "is not about knowing, but of questioning, opening, and attuning" (Atkinson-Graham et al., 2015, p. 746). The nature of emotional responses generates debate, as while being strongly connected to biological stimuli, they are concurrently social constructs influenced by power relations (Svašek, 2005). The invigoration and promotion of distinctive emotions could be viewed as a method of organizing and disciplining subjects (Schurr & Abdo, 2015). At the same time, emotions are corporeal practices that animate physical structures and constitute bodies (Martin-Moruno & Pichel, 2019). The emotional responses connecting Veps miners and the stone that they produce are strongly influenced by state power. However, they are also lived and performed practices of knowing the industry, engaging with it on a daily basis, and making sacrifices for it.

In this article, I focus on emotional responses and modes of engagement to differentiate between care and maintenance but simultaneously bring them closer in my analysis of Veps mining practices and imaginaries. In industrial contexts, care is traditionally associated with workers' well-being and safety, whereas maintenance refers to the smooth functioning of working equipment and increased productivity. Consequently, care is closely linked with positive or negative emotional attitudes (feeling safe or exposed to the dangers caused by industrial labor). In contrast, the invisible labor of maintenance is viewed as a mere necessity for the enterprise's functioning. Maintenance and repair are commonly conceptualized through their shared purpose to restore and mend social order (Henke, 1999; Graham & Thrift, 2007; Denis & Pontille, 2015). The function of managing breakdowns and practical orientation in combating vulnerability and decay (Graham & Thrift, 2007) become the central characteristics of both concepts. Astrid Schrader (2015, p. 668) distinguishes between two broad modes of caring: "caring for," which is primarily goal-oriented, and "caring about," focusing on affective relations and overcoming established limits and borders (such as those separating humans and

non-human animals). As it is traditionally imagined, maintenance is similar to "caring for" in its practical orientation, but it lacks the emotional response of "caring about."

However, the concepts of care and maintenance may be imagined through each other. As Jérôme Denis and David Pontille (2015; 2019) argue, while the acts of maintenance focus on restoring order and stability, they simultaneously involve close interactions between humans and materials, revealing the vulnerability and fragility of things. Both care and maintenance are embodied phenomena represented through the organization or discipline of bodies (Martin et al., 2015) or through the interaction between human bodies and materials (Henke, 1999). Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2011, p. 90) further correlates the concepts of care and maintenance, pointing out that caring about things in technoscience becomes an act of responsibility "for their becomings." Steven Jackson (2014) refers to repair as "the subtle acts of care by which... human value is preserved and extended," and Francisco Martínez (2017, p. 349) views repair practices as "ecologies of care." Therefore, it is possible to speak about human-object relations loaded with emotional responses: attention to vulnerability and decay, responsibility for the future of human creations, or satisfaction in restoring the broken social order.

Recent suggestions to think with care in science and technology studies (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) and "to take a more critical stance toward the politics of care in technoscience" (Murphy, 2015, p. 719) manifest further mutual interaction between the concepts of care and maintenance. Whereas the concept of care is increasingly applied to non-human agents (Bear, 2020; Beckett, 2020; Denis & Pontille, 2015; Martin et al., 2015; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015; Schrader, 2015; Ureta, 2014 & 2016; Viseu, 2015), maintenance and repair studies still focus primarily on technologies and infrastructures. This article aims to extend the realm of maintenance and repair to explore humans' bodily and material caretaking activities.

Focusing on the case study of Veps stoneworkers in Northwestern Russia, I demonstrate how direct engagement with materials and state-promoted attention to industrial productivity influence the notions of care and maintenance in mining narratives. Current and former mining workers refer to the mining industry with strong emotions of affection, pride, fear, anxiety, or disappointment. Bodies get sacrificed for the sake of industry when needed; they get damaged due to working with stone or becoming exposed to higher risk when productivity is at stake. By embracing industrial materials and machines as objects of caring relations, Veps mining workers, in many cases, become neglectful or inattentive towards their well-being.

Through mutual influence, the relations between humans and machines become more blurred and nuanced. When working closely with materials and industrial machines, it is possible to see

care and maintenance concepts as mutually constituting each other. By maintaining industries, humans, at the same time, secure their well-being as workers. Simultaneously, while taking care of their bodies, workers contribute to their labor and industry's perpetuation. The case of Veps stoneworkers demonstrates that

humans, materials, and industrial machines mutually influence each other. While humans produce and shape materials making them resources, they are simultaneously shaped by their labor, which influences their bodies, self-perception, and relations with the state.

Care and maintenance in Veps workers' narratives

This article is based on participant observation and interviews with current and former mining workers in Veps villages of Prionezhskii district in Karelia (Shoksha, Rybreka, and Kvartsitnyi villages, see Fig. 1) conducted in 2015 – 2018 as a part of my Doctoral dissertation fieldwork (Varfolomeeva, 2019).⁵ It primarily deals with extracts from the interviews devoted to the workers' past and present experiences of engaging with the mining industry. I use the notion of "personal narrative" as "a way

of using language... to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience" (Ochs & Capps, 2002, p. 2). Despite their focus on individual pathways, personal narratives are shaped by societal structures and relationships (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). They may therefore reflect collective identities, historical events, or state-promoted ideologies.

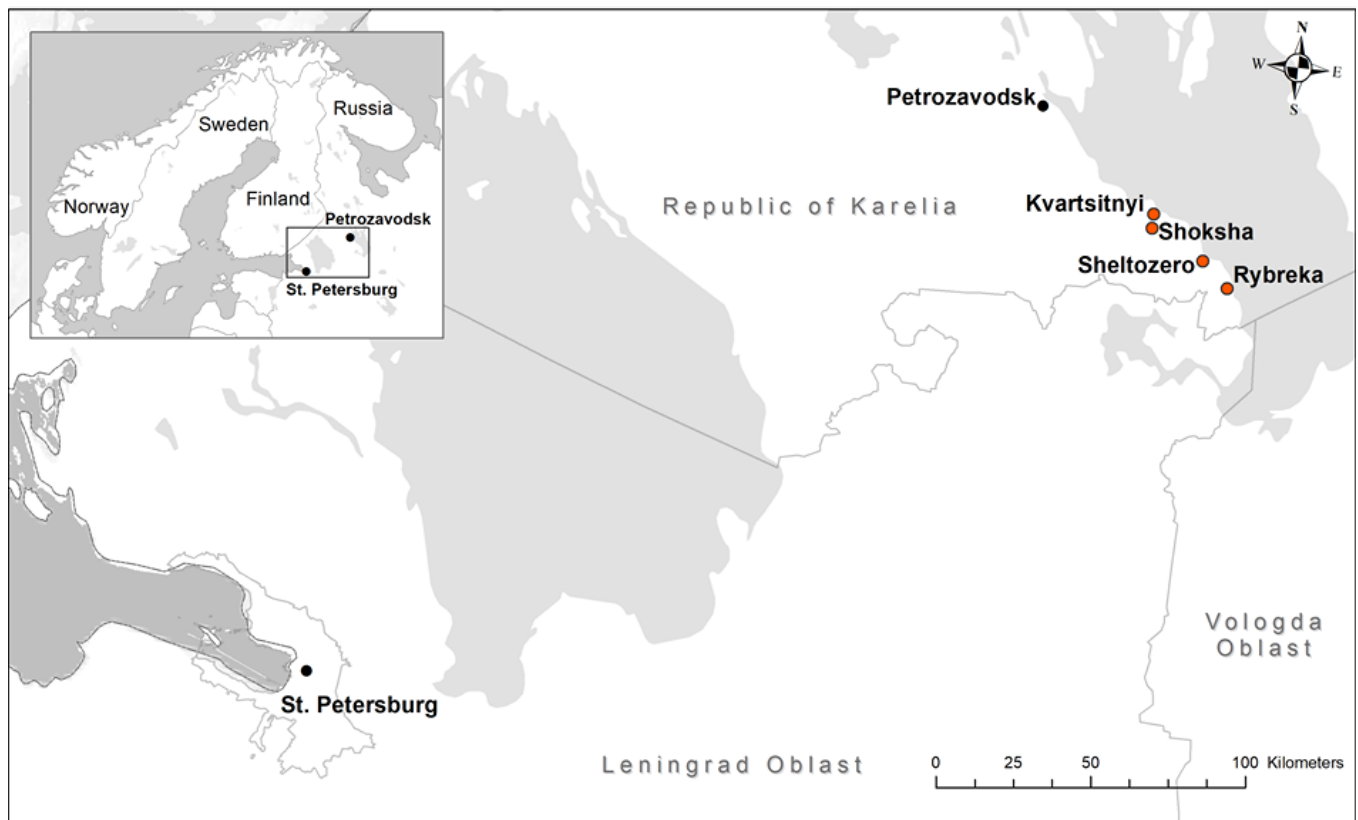


Fig. 1. Veps villages of Prionezhskii district of Karelia. Map: Anastasia Kvasha

Since the 18th – 19th centuries, Veps in Karelia have been managing the extraction of gabbro-diabase and raspberry

quartzite. Gabbro-diabase is a grey rock that gets a deep black color when polished. Raspberry quartzite is especially valued

⁵ The interviews were conducted in Russian: my Vepsian-speaking interviewees were bilingual, and though I understand Vepsian as well, they preferred to speak to me in Russian. In most cases, the interviews started with introductory questions on the informant's family history and background. After that, the conversation moved to several thematic areas including the informants' perceptions of work in the quarry in the past and present, views on present-day life in the village and on the currently operating mining companies, and ways of spending free time. In total, I conducted 66 interviews between 2015 and 2018. When referring to a specific interview in this text, I use K as a code for Karelia followed by the sequential number of the interview. To ensure the interviewees' anonymity, all names mentioned in the article are pseudonyms.

because of its vibrant crimson color and rarity: the only place from which it is extracted is the quarry near Shoksha village in Karelia. Both stones have been widely used for monument construction and building decoration. Their most famous destinations include the pavement and parts of Lenin's Mausoleum at the Red Square in Moscow and the decoration of Napoleon's sarcophagus in Paris (Strogalschikova, 2014).

In the Soviet period,⁶ diabase and quartzite were used not only for decorations but also for industrial purposes, for example, in

the production of glass. After the fall of the Soviet Union, due to financial difficulties of the 1990s, state mining enterprises were partly closed, partly sold to private owners. The quartzite extraction near Shoksha almost stopped (it is managed by a small-scale private enterprise with approximately twenty workers). Diabase extraction is maintained by several private companies of different sizes, mostly located near Rybreka village. Throughout the Soviet time and in the post-Soviet period, the mining quarries of diabase and quartzite remained the primary employment sources in Veps villages (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Mining worker at a diabase quarry in Rybreka. Photo: author (2016)

In Veps mining narratives, the stone is perceived with affection and pride, although its profound and, in many cases, the harmful influence of industry on human bodies is acknowledged. This section analyzes two interrelated themes appearing in the

interviews with Veps miners: extended caring practices, including mining materials and industry in general, as well as turning bodily care into emotionally detached maintenance.

Destructive care: bodies as industry engines

When speaking about stoneworking, my interviewees expressed, at times, polarized points of view. Whereas some of them would complain that they "feel suffocated" by the stone and the owners of the private mining quarries, others would praise the stone for "giving life to the villages" (Interview K20).⁷ Although seemingly

very different, both these expressions illustrate the vital role of the stone for Veps villages and the strong impact of mining quarries on the residents' well-being. Specific relations of care and maintenance are often formed by unequal power distributions in the community and may themselves become media for exercising

⁶ When speaking about the Soviet period represented in the interview narratives, I refer to the period from the early 1950s to the late 1980s when many of my interviewees were employed at the state-managed stone quarries.

⁷ All interview quotes are translated from Russian by the author.



power (Martin et al., 2015). We may ask who decides how and when to exercise care, who is included in caregiving or excluded from it, and how care gets entangled with control and limitation. Even positive implications of care "can work with and through the grain of hegemonic structures, rather than against them" (Murphy, 2015, p. 719).

The problem of unequal power disposition is highly relevant for sites that are largely shaped by governmental narratives such as state-managed stone quarries. In the case of Veps stoneworkers, the "industrial discourse" promoted by the Soviet state influenced affectionate and appreciative attitudes towards the mining industry, as well as emotionally detached visions and practices of bodily maintenance. When established discourses encourage overcoming bodily limits to reach better productivity, extended "caring about" the industry may result in limited self-care.

Taking risks for productivity

Starting from the early Soviet years, workers' productivity and labor importance remained a vital theme reinstated through the media, official speeches, or artistic works. One of the most famous Soviet songs, "March of the Enthusiasts" (1940), states, "...Our labor is an act of honor, a deed of valiance, and a heroic achievement." The example of Alexei Stakhanov, a miner from Donbass in Ukraine, who in September 1935 produced 102 tons of coal during his 6-hour shift, became the "New Man" symbol of the Soviet cultural landscape (Mariotti, 2017). The record set by Stakhanov initiated the movement of "Stakhanovites," aiming at increasing workers' productivity in different parts of the Soviet Union. The movement symbolized "selfless dedication to the building of socialism" (Feldman, 1989, p. 147) and workers' ability to increase their bodily capacities for higher results.

In Veps villages of Karelia, local attachments to the mining industry and the connections between Veps as the masters of stoneworking and the valuable resources were often remembered. The central office of the state mining enterprise *Onezhskoe rudoupravlenie* situated in Rybreka village featured a large map indicating all the destinations where diabase and quartzite went from Karelia (Kostin, 1977). Reports about Veps stone's destinations and interviews with the best workers who shared their pride over local stone were also often published by local newspapers of Prionezhskii district.⁸ Such reports were designed as motivational messages that would impact Veps miners and persuade them to achieve better results in their work. They stood in line with the general Soviet discourses of romanticized industrialization, promoting hard labor for the state's benefit (Schweitzer et al., 2017).

As a number of my interviewees were employed at mining quarries in the Soviet period, labor productivity is crucial for many of them.

Alongside extending the realm of care towards mining materials and machines, the workers experience a lack of self-care towards their bodies. For them, the concept of self-care loses its fluidity and its dependence on specific bodily needs and practices (Mol, 2008). Instead, it turns into a set of concrete formalized actions (for example, putting on gloves during stone loading or wearing a respirator when polishing stone). Even these formalized protective measures are, in many cases, neglected by workers, especially when they harm productivity.

As many residents of Veps villages have been involved in the mining industry for years, various ways of direct contact with the stone – including stone cutting and loading, polishing works, breathing stone dust, or listening to the instruments' noise – have left traces on their bodies. The traces of mining past may take the form of illnesses that people bear due to their labor. The most common illness which results from working with stone is silicosis – an occupational lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust (Interview K31). In most cases, silicosis development is a consequence of breathing rock dust while cutting or polishing stone. Silicosis was widespread at both diabase and quartzite quarries in the Soviet period. The knowledge about this disease was low at that time, and many workers did not use protective masks, goggles, or other equipment to prevent silicosis. The theme of silicosis is so common that the interviewees sometimes call it simply "the disease" (in Russian, *bolezn'*) (Interview K41) or, more emotionally, "this terrible disease" (Interview K6). The interviewees also mentioned other mining-related diseases, such as hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAV), which one may get due to intensive labor using stone-cutting machines.

As the interviewees remember, the quarries' management regularly distributed safety equipment – face masks and goggles protecting against stone dust, or gloves for stone loading. However, many interviewees refused to wear the protective gear available to them. One reason for this unwillingness to follow the rules was that silicosis dangers were not well communicated to miners until the 1980s (Interview K41). However, similar situations occur in contemporary quarries, as many workers refuse to wear respirators, even though the quarry administration provides them (Interview K49, K52). The workers of a diabase quarry in Rybreka explained that respirators were uncomfortable to wear and would make their work more difficult if worn daily. Even though the quarry's administration makes protective equipment available for workers, its wearing is not mandatory, and the possible consequences of working without the equipment are not strongly promoted. Therefore, most workers prefer not to use respirators, choosing easier working conditions over vaguely formulated possible health risks. Galina, a former mining worker, reflected on her experience in the Soviet state mining enterprise in Rybreka:

⁸ For example, the publication in the local newspaper *Kommunist Prionezh'a* (*The Communist of Prionezhskii District*) in 1967 features an interview with a local stoneworker who states, "When we are in Moscow, Leningrad, Petrozavodsk or other cities, we do not part with our Rybreka. We are proud to know that these cities' monuments are made with our own hands" (*Kommunist Prionezh'a*, November 4, 1967).



We were told to wear "muzzles" and glasses at work, but we wore them rarely. It was hard to work in them, you would sweat more, and the glasses would mist over, so we took them off (Interview K2).

In this quote, the informant is jokingly referring to the protective mask as a "muzzle," indicating that wearing protective equipment made mining workers subconsciously associate themselves with domesticated animals, therefore losing their subjectivities. Similarly, another former mining worker, Alena, refers to protective masks as "barnacles" and indicates that wearing such a mask would make her look like a horse. These metaphors, along with "muzzle" in the earlier quote, once again bear a reminiscence to animal labor:

"I was working (...) at stone loading and cutting. I was told: don't load so much; it is harmful. But I answered: it doesn't matter! So we would put these "barnacles" and gloves into our pockets and would load everything with bare hands!" (Interview K34).

Marx's famous differentiation between human and animal labor is conceptualized through the work's higher purpose: animals are seen as performing mechanical labor, while human work has a creative element (Marx, 1990). In this sense, through their unwillingness to wear protective equipment that would – in the miners' view – equal them with horses and dogs, Veps workers emphasize their right to maintain their labor's creative potential. While animals are traditionally viewed as working under human control, the workers establish their right to work independently and to act on their own terms. In this sense, the decision not to wear protective masks or gloves could also be viewed as exercising the workers' agency and taking control over their work.

At the same time, the narratives focusing on the workers' refusal to wear protective equipment demonstrate their lack of self-care. The bodies of stoneworkers are seen as mere vehicles for getting the necessary amount of work done, similarly to mining mechanisms. As protective equipment disturbs their labor and affects productivity, they decide to manage without protection (potentially damaging their health) to perform their duties efficiently. In this sense, the workers appear distanced from their bodily needs, from their tiredness or possible harm to their health. Simultaneously, when choosing productivity over self-care, they follow the industrial discourse asserted by the Soviet state.

Maintenance of workers' bodies

When discussing emotion-loaded maintenance relations between humans and objects, could we simultaneously envision a notion of care where its emotional constituent is hidden? When care is analyzed as "persistent tinkering in a world full of complex ambivalence" (Mol et al., 2010, p. 14), as the "mostly dismissed

labours of everyday maintenance of life" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 100), or as embracing "everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 40), the focus is on the routine, mundane, invisible elements of the concept. In this sense, care is viewed as a routine practice of mending fragmented social life elements, similarly to maintenance and repair. There are cases when self-care practices become represented in the form of "operation manuals," such as hand washing and greeting guidelines during the pandemic, or through drawing direct parallels between medical check-ups and mechanical inspection.⁹ In this section, I argue that when care gets extended to industries' realm, there is a risk of damaging self-care practices. In such cases, self-care and self-protection become a mere "caring for," serving the goal of increased productivity and endurance but lacking affectionate attitudes.

In the interviews with Veps stoneworkers, bodily care is often not viewed as valuable per se; it is deeply connected to the industry's well-being and higher productivity. When workers protect their bodies, they simultaneously contribute to the mining industry's continuation. Therefore, Veps miners' self-care is viewed as an emotionally estranged action, a set of concrete instructions to follow, and a prerequisite for keeping the industry functioning. In this sense, local visions of self-care become very similar to common understandings of maintenance activities discussed in this article's theoretical part. The bodily care and health consciousness of Veps workers lose their emotional and affective component, and the line between caring about bodies and maintaining equipment becomes vague.

In many cases, miners' perceptions of their work's impact on their health are characterized by a distanced and estranged attitude. Many of them talk readily about the negative consequences of stoneworking, the illnesses resulting from breathing stone dust or loading heavy diabase pieces. Nevertheless, they also stress that these illnesses are an unavoidable side effect of the work that had to be done. A common conclusion to such narratives is "well, we did what we needed to do" or "work is work, you know" (Interview K22). As the mining industry's vital role in the life cycles of Veps villages is widely acknowledged, its potential damaging impacts are often viewed as unavoidable side effects of a crucial task. As one of my interviewees, Larisa, stated, "You could hear explosions almost every day in the quarry, but they were not bothering me. This was their work, you know" (Interview K37). Although Larisa did not deny that the loud sounds of explosions could be disruptive for village residents, she believed that the diabase quarry's overall work was more important than potential discomfort.

Although self-care and self-attention remained rather marginal notions in most interviewees' narratives, there were examples

⁹ Christer Idhammar, Health care of humans and maintenance of equipment, is there a correlation? IDCON. Retrieved from: <https://www.idcon.com/resource-library/articles/culture-management/484-health-care-of-humans-and-maintenance-of-equipment.html> (Accessed March 12, 2020).



of Veps workers viewing self-care as a crucial element of their work. Zhanna, a former miner from Rybreka village, reflected that although it was cold in the quarry factory, she developed a set of protective measures for her feet. Before starting work, Zhanna would put on cotton socks, wool socks, soft felt shoes, and, finally, rubber shoes. This technique of multi-layering would keep her feet warm throughout the eight-hour work shift. After returning home from the quarry, Zhanna applied protective hand cream to help her arms recover. She believed that even though she was long retired, her health was better than that of her neighbors due to her attention to self-care. "People's health comes from their feet, you know," – Zhanna told me during the interview (Interview K30).

Zhanna's example demonstrates that some mining workers devoted time and energy to self-care and invented complex techniques to mitigate the harmful consequences of mining labor. However, such examples rarely appear in the interviews, as the discourses of labor productivity and overcoming one's bodily limits prevail in Veps mining narratives. Besides, even though the example of Zhanna focuses on self-care, it is enacted through a fixed set of specific actions. It is largely viewed as a part of the workers' "user manual" for keeping healthy despite the harsh working conditions. Zhanna's self-care allows her to perform her work duties better, and thus her attention towards her body is closely linked to her attachment to the mining industry. In other parts of the interview, she reflects on her willingness to sacrifice her comfort for the sake of industry. For example, she volunteered to do night shifts at the polishing section of the quarry, although officially, she could not be asked to work during the night since she had two kindergarten-age children (Interview K30). Nevertheless, when Zhanna felt that the quarry needed her effort, she was willing to work extra hours

or with extra zeal. Thereby, Zhanna's attention towards her body is closely connected to her labor motivation and performance.

Therefore, the vital importance of achieving better results, even if through self-sacrifice, is a common feature of many interviews. This recurrent narrative could be viewed as a legacy of the Soviet industrial discourse. Even though most of the younger miners were born after the Soviet Union's fall, they were brought up in the mining villages' labor-centered environment. The relations of care and maintenance among Veps stoneworkers bring forward discussions on power asymmetries. The practices or specific manifestations of expressing care and providing maintenance may be limited or strongly regulated (Martin et al., 2015). However, it is important to recognize the active role of materials when forming care and maintenance expressions in human-object relations. If we see the matter as "an active participant in the world's becoming" (Barad, 2003, p. 803), it is important to reflect on its role in shaping this process of becoming. Michel Foucault (1977, p. 172) mentions the profound influence of objects and materials on subjectivities when discussing the architectures of control: "stones can make people docile and knowable." Therefore, materials become an important part of power dispositions and may impact temporary shifts in power distribution.

The case study of Veps miners illustrates the mutual influences of humans and mining materials. It shows how close engagement with stoneworking influences miners' self-perception and agency. Many interviewees express pride in their bodies' strength and endurance and in being able to work hard despite the circumstances. In this sense, the lack of self-care and the treatment of one's body as a highly performing mechanism becomes a way of formation the workers' identity as skilled and capable masters or as creators of highly valued resources.

Creating chimeras: affective entanglements with stone

The previous sections of the article largely focused on the impact of state control and management on workers' relations with industry. However, local perceptions of diabase and quartzite were simultaneously shaped by close interactions between the workers and the stone they produced. Human – resource relations could be viewed as mutual co-creation. Unknown substances become resources through the human act of appropriation, which constitutes its symbolic "birth" (Ferry & Limbert, 2008). Concurrently, through the process of engaging with resources, miners' identities are formed and perpetuated. Natural resources produce new social configurations (Gilberthorpe, 2007; Richardson & Weszkalnys, 2014; Penfield & Montoya, 2020). They are not anymore seen as mere representations of social relations, but as actors in these relations (Marchant, 2018). As Andy Bruno (2018, p. 147) notes, "a rock can excite and destroy, facilitate and undermine, or create value and costs." Within these lines, mining sites in Karelia could be viewed as places filled with varied emotions and feelings, but also as venues promoting specific power relationships.

This section focuses on the notion of care "as a form of affective entanglement" (Ureta, 2014, p. 1534) and on "the embodied, affective relationship that people experience with material forms" (Knox 2017, p. 368). In mining narratives, the fragility and decay of materials are directly related to workers' vulnerabilities as professionals and as parts of mining dynasties. These interconnections between bodies and infrastructures demonstrate that the line between them is blurred at times and that they enter into a strong relation of co-dependency. As Donna Haraway famously states, "...we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway & Wolfe, 2016, p. 7). Nigel Thrift (2008, p. 10) similarly reflects on human bodies co-developing with the material world and creating "a constantly evolving distribution of different hybrids." In this sense, the relations between Veps workers and the resources they produce form a strong symbiosis when the destinies of humans and industries are intertwined, and their development or decay becomes a complex mutual experience.



Appreciating the local stone

Veps stoneworkers view diabase and quartzite extracted in Karelia through different layers of appreciation: as beautiful and rare objects, as the reason for relative financial stability in the villages, and as a result of the miners' hard labor. The value of diabase and quartzite is closely linked to local group identity. When Veps workers praise their stone, they simultaneously assert their own vital role as its creators and producers. In the interviews, they emphasize their labor's artistic elements, reminisce about their contribution to the local mining industry, or share important work achievements. In these narratives, mining materials and machines are not viewed simply as part of the work routine but are treated with strong emotional attachment. The importance of diabase and quartzite in Veps villages becomes a visual phenomenon, as stone pieces form part of the local landscape, sometimes being used as parts of fences, as house decorations, or for building paved roads in the yards (see Fig. 3, 4).



Fig. 3, 4. Pieces of diabase and quartzite used as decorations next to the houses in Rybreka and Shoksha villages. Photo: author (2016)

The local stones are valued as being produced by the miners' "own hands" similarly to the mineral specimen in Mexico analyzed by Elizabeth Ferry (2005). As diabase and quartzite have been used for many well-known buildings and monuments, the stoneworkers' labor connects them symbolically to the whole state and beyond. Sergei, a former mining worker, recalled how during his studies in Moscow, he proudly told other students when they visited the Red Square, "This is our stone!" (Interview K21). When being among fellow students from other regions of the Soviet Union, Sergei shared his knowledge of diabase and quartzite as a symbol of his

belonging to one of Moscow's focal points. By claiming the Red Square's stone as "our stone," Sergei reinforced the connection between Veps villages and well-known places in the country. The diabase and quartzite also served as signifiers of Sergei's status among his fellows as a descendant of a mining dynasty aiming to continue their work.

Another former miner, Viktor, remembered taking part in an excursion around Saint Petersburg when he saw raspberry quartzite as a part of St. Isaac's Cathedral's decoration and felt affection and pride. Viktor explained to me, "I can recognize this stone anywhere" (Interview K13), meaning that the years of working closely with quartzite resulted in his deep knowledge of the material. However, to his disappointment, the tour guide mentioned that the stone he recognized so well was sent to St. Petersburg from Finland. "That was a mistake. That was our Karelian stone," – Viktor said to me firmly, stressing the stone's origin as an important part of his narrative. Sergei's and Viktor's examples demonstrate that the workers' affective attitudes towards the stone they produce are inherently related to their self-realization feeling. If the stone is valued in different corners of the country, the workers are also valued as its producers. Diabase and quartzite also serve as a source of patriotic feelings towards Karelia: the stones' fame is simultaneously the fame of their home region.

Many informants relate their affection towards diabase and quartzite to their physical characteristics. Both stones were commonly used in the Soviet period for industrial needs or for building pavements, and therefore valued for their firmness and durability. On the other hand, they are also used in decorations and thus perceived as precious stones. This dual status is reflected in the interviews with locals who often mention the value of the stones as a material resource: "Our diabase is the hardest stone; it is even sent to nuclear power plants, that's how hard it is" (Interview K29). Mikhail, a former mining worker from Shoksha village, told me a story about an engineer from Kazakhstan traveling to Karelia by plane in the Soviet period to get the local stone, "otherwise, he said, our plant will stop working" (Interview K1). Many interviewees readily shared similar stories as a demonstration of diabase and quartzite's high value and demand. Such narratives reinforce their labor's meaning and strengthen their stoneworking identities.

The informants also recognize the stones' value as beautiful objects, especially in the case of quartzite due to its unusual color and glorious history "It is amazing, what a color it is. The color of ripe raspberry, over ripen berries... It is such a beautiful color." (Interview K24). Other interviewees emphasized the creative aspect of working with stone: "This is hard labor, but one feels like an artist when doing it" (Interview K13). As many Veps miners work very closely with the stone when cutting, shaping, and polishing it, this experience makes them associate their labor with creative artistic work. In this respect, diabase and quartzite are seen as realizations of creative force in line with the understanding of labor as "aesthetic activity" in Soviet culture (Dobrenko, 2007, p. 163).



Similarly, mining equipment is often discussed in the interviews with an emotional attachment and creative involvement. Zhanna (Interview K30) remembered how she learned to work with the stone polishing machine and came up with imaginative solutions to increase its efficiency. However, in the same story, she mentions, although in passing, that her hands were often in pain from lifting the polishing machine. Affective entanglements formed between workers and mining materials in many cases went alongside other, much darker feelings such as pain, worry, or disappointment.

Concern for the mining futures

The previous section largely focused on Veps stoneworkers' appreciative attitudes towards the local mining industry. However, these strong expressions of attachment are often accompanied by worries about the present and future situation of the diabase and quartzite quarries. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 2) points out, visions of care as "warm pleasant affection or a moralistic feel-good attitude" are often questioned and contested. This section builds on the relatedness between care and concern (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011), discussing the emotions of worrying, fear, or disappointment in Veps workers' mining narratives.

While expressing pride in the stones' firmness, durability, and famous destinations, many informants feel that private mining companies "waste their stone." The common complaint expressed in the interviews is that unknown quarry directors now manage diabase and quartzite. Most of the quarry owners are not from Karelia, and thus, according to the interviewees, they do not understand local needs. The residents are also worried that the stone is carried away from the region to unknown places. The present situation offers a radical contrast to the Soviet-time promotion of diabase and quartzite's well-known destinations. Veps miners' crucial role in producing rare and unique materials needed in different parts of the country is also questioned in the post-Soviet period. At the time of my fieldwork, both diabase and quartzite were not used for industrial purposes, and this situation influenced the miners' perceptions

of the industry. A local whom I met in Rybreka village noted, "they [private companies] just take the stone from us, and we are not needed anymore." Abandoned industries, closed plants, or decaying industrial settlements are often seen as a material actualization of the fall of the Soviet Union (Martínez, 2017). They could be viewed as disruptions of the established social order signifying that "no one cares" (Denis & Pontille, 2020, p. 5). In the interviews, the mining industry's decline is often symbolically connected with the overall state of rupture that the Veps villages experience in the post-Soviet period.

One of the most common destinations for Veps diabase and quartzite today is graveyard monuments, and this generates many black-humored jokes. One of my interviewees in Rybreka village stated with a mixed expression of mock and regret:

So, are you interested in my attitude towards the stone? You mean, are we proud of our stone? Of course, if you come to any cemetery and look around, you see... well, beautiful monuments [laughing]. And you know they are ours" (Interview K49).

This quote contrasts with my earlier references to workers' affection towards quartzite and diabase's physical qualities and fame. However, it also expresses a strong personal attitude towards the material. Both the workers' pride over the stone and their disappointment about it being "wasted" demonstrate that diabase and quartzite are not perceived simply as mining objects or as sources of economic stability. They are filled with deep emotional and symbolic meaning, and the fate of mining in Veps villages is closely connected with the fate of locals. High demand for the local stone simultaneously means a high appreciation for the workers' labor, skills, and expertise. On the contrary, loss of demand or "waste" of resources means a lack of acknowledgment towards the miners. Veps stoneworkers strongly identify with the stone they produce. Through close contact with mining materials, they have developed strong personal attitudes towards them. These attitudes ultimately influence their self-perception and their views on mining present and future.

Conclusion

When beginning this article, I referred to my experience of institutional care and power during the early days of the pandemic. As the text was developing, it offered additional parallels with contemporary discussions on corporeal control, risk and safety perceptions, and self-care. Such parallels signify that Veps stoneworkers' case could contribute to a wider analysis of care and maintenance in more-than-human settings. This article demonstrates that affective entanglements formed with industrial

materials and machines may influence estranged visions of workers' bodily needs. It also shows how care and maintenance practices can be shaped by the "toxic productivity" culture¹⁰ prioritizing work results over well-being. However, while being impacted by state discourses, Veps stoneworkers simultaneously shape and strengthen their connections with the mining industry. The article discusses the power of materials in forming the workers' agency and their sense of belonging.

¹⁰ The term "toxic productivity" implies direct associations between one's work results and the feeling of self-worth. The term was popularized in media in 2020 being seen as a side effect of the lockdown (see e.g. <https://www.economist.com/1843/2020/11/30/from-zumping-to-toxic-productivity-workplace-slang-for-the-pandemic>).



To analyze the interconnections between affective entanglements with industries and self-detachment from one's bodily needs, the article brings forward the notion of "destructive care." This notion encompasses the potentially harmful effects of caring attitudes in industrial settings. While Veps workers deeply care about the stone they produce, they realize that this care harms their bodies and life spans. Humans and materials enter into a complex relationship of simultaneous attachment and struggle. As state discourses promote self-sacrifice and going beyond one's limits, the miners often choose work results over bodily well-being. Although many interviewees mention stone-related diseases such as silicosis and HAV, they nevertheless believe in the necessity of self-sacrifice. By analyzing the case of Veps, the article contributes to the growing body of academic literature discussing the detrimental effects of caring relations. The notion of "destructive care" could also be viewed as an analytical framework for analyzing care and maintenance as intersecting and, at times, coinciding phenomena.

Contrary to Veps miners' detachment from their bodies, their attitudes towards diabase and quartzite are often highly emotional. For many workers, mining becomes part of the family heritage, a way of connecting with the landscape, and a channel for expressing their creative potential. However, as a side effect of chimeric symbiosis between the miners and industry, workers' bodies are seen as an industrial resource and as highly productive, although at times failing, mechanisms. As a result, self-care becomes a neglected concept. Many stoneworkers refuse to wear protective masks and goggles as they are uncomfortable and aggravate productivity. As the risks are vaguely defined and communicated, miners choose smooth work over potential health dangers. Even when self-care is practiced, it is often viewed as a set of specific actions necessary for reaching better work results.

When industrial maintenance becomes emotional, while self-care turns into a mechanical action devoid of meaning, the border between care and maintenance is especially fluid. Whereas care is largely analyzed in academic literature as a more-than-human practice, this article also discusses maintenance as a process focusing on human corporeality.

Care and maintenance practices of Veps are viewed in the article as agents of uneven power relations. Human – industry relations get shaped by the "romanticized industrialization" discourse. Soviet mining enterprises in Karelia functioned within the frameworks of "sacred labor" and the intrinsic value of productivity, and this legacy is still present in the stoneworkers' narratives. At the same time, following Tim Ingold's notion on humans and materials that "continuously and reciprocally bring one another into existence" (Ingold, 2006, p. 10), this article draws attention to the potentiality of materials. As Tiina Vaittinen (2015, p. 112) points out, care is "constrained by the structures," whereas it simultaneously "challenges and shapes them." Veps miners develop a strong self-identification with the mining materials they produce. By overcoming their bodily limits, they reinforce their deep connections with stone and their local industry knowledge.

Therefore, the lack of self-care in Veps stoneworking communities could be viewed as an effect of state power promoting self-sacrifice for the sake of industry. Nevertheless, it could also be analyzed through the prism of workers' agency and initiative. When forming affective entanglements with industry, Veps miners establish their identity as skillful producers of valuable resources. While the workers' ties with their bodies are destroyed, new bonds with non-human actors are created. The Veps' example contributes to the vision of care as a multimodal concept bridging losses and potentialities, ruptures and new becomings.

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