

# RED SANDSTONE

Caroline Loewen

# The Stone Archive

Does looking at human history through the lens of geologic time affect how we view our own histories?

How would our perspective change if we were to view stones, minerals, and quarries as an archive of human and non-human experience?

What stories can be told through stones?



Listening to the stone

Would the sound of stones, had we ears to hear it, be a cacophony of noise? Pounding, raucous noises of a world forgotten and ignored. Screaming at us to remember where we come from. Imploring us to recall that we too are nature.

Or would it be a melodic tune? The gentle susurrations of the wind and the water on the stone's surface, a gentle reminder of the perpetual geologic processes that formed this land. The same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. That nothing really ever changes, the landscape is as indifferent to us now as then, though it's a gentle indifference, like that of a flame to a moth. The moth desperately seeking that which has no capacity to care, an utterly one-sided story. The flame carrying on, unaffected.

Would we hear the plaintive cries of lifeforms long gone, revealing dimensions beyond our comprehension, mixed with the sonorous cry of deep time? Would we feel it in our bones? Is the sound of stones a melancholic sound? Filled with lamentation for the thousand daily dying, dead, and reawakened.

Or would the sound of the stone set us to laughing? How else can nearly eternal beings cope with their fate? Having seen everything from the glory of mountains being built to the horror of mass

extinctions, would the stone be comedic? Giggling at the absurdity of its own existence, contagious, until the whole world is howling.

Would it be a love song? A joyful noise exalting the world and all that is within it. Reminding us that life itself is good and worthy of celebration.

Whatever the sound of stones, it would be a wonderful, astonishing noise.

Oh, that we had ears to hear it.



The Archive

*Archive: noun ~ 1. Materials created or received by a person, family, or organisation, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator. ~ 2. The division within an organisation responsible for maintaining the organisation's records of enduring value. ~ 3. An organisation that collects the records of individuals, families, or other organisations.*

Much like a paper archive holds records of human history, stone can act as an archive of Earth's ancient geologic history, a repository of the past. Stones, like archives, carry information about their history and identity. Both often incorrectly perceived as dead, inanimate, and passive, the lithic, like the archive, are anything but. Archives are alive and active, as Jean-Pierre Wallot describes in *Building a Living Memory for The History of Our Present*:

‘History is not the dead ashes of persons and events gone by, the simple search of reasoned acts on the map of time. It is a living tissue, an evolving adventure that has led us to where we are now and is still driving us further [... archivists are] working for tomorrow, to ensure the ‘continuity of the memory’ of our people’.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, each grain of sand laid down, each pebble formed and smoothed by the wind and water, each stratum built up over time is a testament to and memory of the history of that past and present process. The stone functions as a living ancestor, both the creator and created of the archive, it exists in both the past and the present. It is actively building an archive of stories.

As Jan Zalasiewicz describes in his book *The Planet in a Pebble*: