

OLHAVA AS SEEN FROM THE MAP OF VOLKHOV: LANGUAGE, PLACE, AND PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY IN ARTISTIC RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The starting point for my artistic research doctoral dissertation is to examine place through common names and how language is, through names, a part of a space. In the municipality of Ii (Finland), there is a village called Olhava. The town of Volkhov in Russia is also called Olhava in Finnish. For my research, I worked in the surroundings of Olhava (Ii, Finland) by using a map of Volkhov (Olhava, Russia), collecting data, and creating an installation based on these data. Nonsense theories and the psychogeography methods of International Situationists play a central role in this work.

INTRODUCTION

I have worked for a long time with different methods of printmaking, drawing, and writing while focusing on themes of place, perception, and language. My works are both installations and site-specific; the written works are often located in an urban space. In all of my work, there is always a question of language and the verbalisation of things, even if this does not appear directly in written words. I have usually approached the language in my mother tongue through the etymology of Finnish words. In etymological research, the original meaning of the word describes what the word is in a way that has often not been thought of. Words are adopted in daily use, used in a learned way, and their meaning may not be considered.

In my artistic research, I focus on language and place through the common names of places. As a starting point for this research, I took the name Olhava for the analysis. In the municipality of Ii (Finland), there is a village called Olhava. The name Olhava comes from the Karelian language and means a gully or a ravine, often with water at the bottom (Vahtola 1998: 18). The Olhava village is located along the Olhavajoki River. The town of Volkhov in Russia is also called Olhava in Finnish. The Volkhov River (Olhavanjoki in Finnish) runs through the town that is located some 120 km east

of St Petersburg. In the 9th and 12th centuries, Olhava was part of an important eastern trade route to Constantinople which connected the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. (Kirkinen 2002: 34). Why do these two places, which are geographically located far away from each other, have the same name?

According to Terhi Ainiola (2008: 88), a place gets a name when it is important for living, orienteering in the landscape, or other activities. Place names are also important from the time of the first maps, as location names are used to locate destinations and routes. The importance of names also increased in the 19th century, when a wider group of people

Olhava asema (Olhava train station) - Kirkko (Church): Hram Arhangelia Mihaila
Олхава асема - Киркко: Храм Архангела Михаила



Кявеле оикеалле радан виерерсея.
Кяянню лиевясти оикеалле.
Ятка радан виертя суораан.
Кяянню оикеалле радан юли.
Ятка неляннестя ристеюккестя оикеалле
я пиан васеммалле.
Киркко он пиан васеммалла пуопелла.

Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure Titles and information

Figure 1: One of the used maps and the route (in Finnish written in Cyrillic alphabets)

Figure 2: Detail of an installation

were able to travel outside their home environment (Iltaanen & Manni-Lindqvist 2019: 9). The cultural function of place names is often to transfer traditions and beliefs. The naming event is also an indication of the takeover of the site. Those who have moved to new places of residence have always carried place names with them to new countries of origin. The name can be the memory of the former place, as if the spirit of the place we knew before could be transferred by name to a new place. (Ainiala, Saarelma, & Sjöblom 2008: 15–20.)

Above all, however, names are a part of language and belong to a common linguistic heritage. People have given names to individuals and places for as long as natural language has existed (Ainiala, Saarelma, & Sjöblom 2008: 13–15.) In addition to researching the place, the work focuses on reflecting on the language and how it is part of the space through naming. I am also interested in the question of naming in the language more generally. The purpose of naming is to make some kind of understanding, to distinguish places, people, and things, and to study their etymology as one way of exploring the idea of originality.

When studying the etymology of place names, the origin of place names is investigated. The central starting point is the knowledge that all the traditional place names were originally in some way descriptive of the place (Ainiala 2008: 114). Is this question of origin, which, on the other hand, is the starting point for the whole work, its partial impossibility? The idea of origin in relation to repetition becomes a question of research through various methodical and theoretical practices. The idea of naming, recognition, and comprehensibility of a language as some kind of counterweight can be seen as a different practice of nonsense.

THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS

My research brings new knowledge to the art scene about the research of place and language through art, but it also participates in the discussion of printmaking theories. In recent years, Finland has had a lot of interesting writings and practices in the field of printmaking, and new publications of art graphics have also been published in recent years, in which printmaking is approached from both conceptual and materialistic themes. These approaches have been important to me throughout my artistic career. The book *Siirtämisen ja välittymisen taide* (The Art of Transfer and Transmission), edited by Päivikki Kallio (2017), examines how the question of tools and craftsmanship, which is usually associated with printmaking, could be the subject of theoretical examination. *Printed Matters: merkitysten kerroksia* (Layers of Meanings), edited by Annu Vertanen and Martta Heikkilä (2021), examines printmaking from the perspective of the meanings of the material and the medium. The field of printmaking has been accused of focusing too much on technique, but in these texts, the approach is to point out that the instrument matters, but the artist is not bound by anything other than his own purpose in his work.

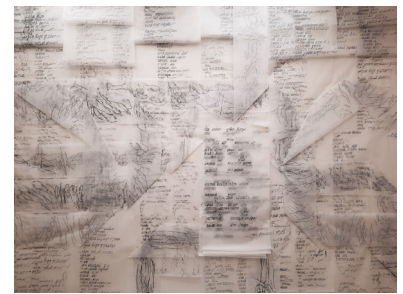


Figure 3

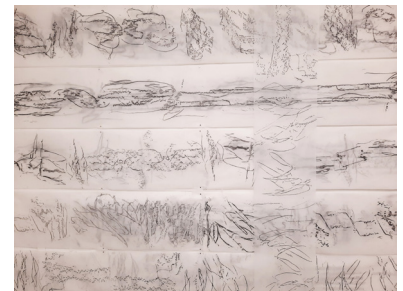


Figure 4

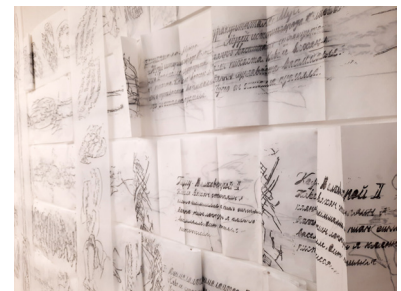


Figure 5

Figure 3: Detail of installation Olhava as seen from the map of Volkhov
 Figure 4: Detail of installation Olhava as seen from the map of Volkhov
 Figure 5: Detail of installation Olhava as seen from the map of Volkhov

In the field of literature, Sakari Katajamäki has researched nonsense. According to Katajamäki, nonsense does not mean that meanings are completely absent, but it has game-like features, rules that are broken or followed slavishly, and a balance between meanings and meaninglessness. Nonsense is associative, focusing, for example, on the pronunciation of words and not necessarily thinking about the meaning. Nonsense can be visual or linguistic. Nonsense is also associated with the game, as it is based on the rules according to which letters and words are placed in the text. There can also be an inversion of the sentences or words. (Katajamäki 2016: 91-113.)

Kai Mikkonen (2005) writes in his interdisciplinary *Kuva ja sana* (Image and Word) about the interaction between writing and image. According to Mikkonen, an image cannot be fully described by language, and linguistic expressions cannot be completely translated into images. The interaction of these elements requires its own concepts and expressions instead of language-describing grammars (Mikkonen 2005: 24). However, the translation of a language also involves a debate on the fundamental differences between languages, even though translation has been seen as impossible. In one language, things are expressed for which there are not even words in the other language or the matter is expressed differently in different languages (Paloposki 2004: 357-358).

The meaning of the images has been linked to linguistic communication, while the origin of writing has necessitated the existence of a visual representation. On the other hand, these character systems require the existence of spoken language. The creation of writing was crucial when the ideogram was translated into a phonogram. In this case, a correlation between sound and visual character was established. The expansion of writing skills again made it possible to connect further away, to interpret text, and to translate characters from one language to another. (Mikkonen 2005: 14).

This development of language and writing skills also interacts with the development and spreading of maps, which is a historical event requiring printing skills. The first printed maps appeared in Europe during the transition period between printing and handwriting. At that time, the maps were manufactured using two new methods, woodcut, and copper engraving techniques, in which the maps were engraved as mirror images on a wooden or copper sheet. This allowed the maps to be printed on several paper prints, so the printed maps reached the market much faster than handmade ones, as did books. Before printed maps, most European people had never seen any maps in their lives. Through their experience, people had come to know the terrain and landmarks of their homeland: rivers, mountains, valleys, and forests, as well as the distances and directions between them. Printing skills changed this situation very quickly (Nurminen 2015: 137-138).

Printed maps and alphabets are also associated with art forms that use old printing techniques in the tool. In her writing, Päivikki Kallio examines how the question of instruments, craftsmanship, or skill,

usually associated with printmaking, could be subjected to thinking and theoretical examination. In Kallio's experimental work, the idea has arisen that because printed art is gradually built in the process through various functions, it cannot be received and valued according to criteria created by direct expressions, but all work phases, such as the contribution of materials and machines to the creation of the whole process, must be taken into account. Instead of names such as printmaking, printing plate, and prints, Kallio uses the terms 'printed art', 'matrix', and 'trace' in contemporary art practices. These describe the whole process of printed art in which the devices are also involved. According to Kallio, there is a conceptual mindset at the heart of the process in which a number of different operators are also involved (Kallio 2017: 7-18).

DATA AND METHOD

As a method of observing places and acquiring data, I used the psychogeographical methods of International Situationists, such as using the wrong map. Situationists were an influential group in the 1960s who presented different methods for exploring a space, such as travelling through the German countryside using a map of London (Sederholm 1994: 106). Psychogeography refers to the study of conscious or unconscious effects that affect the emotions and behaviour of an individual in environments. A psycho-geologist studies and reports phenomena of environmental impact (Sederholm 1994: 79). International Situationists were interested in maps and their relationship to reality. One of their goals was to bring the experiences of the environment into the stories of the space. Maps usually depict the official side of the place, in which case, the map has practical significance, ignoring one aspect of the space. According to International Situationists, the power to represent places lies with the producers of the maps, so their goal was to misuse the maps already produced and make their own maps (Sederholm 1994: 106-107).

The first acquisition of the data took place in Olhava (Ii, Finland) in February 2020, when I worked at a residence in KulttuuriKauppila, focusing on researching the site and collecting the material. I used the map of Olhava in Russia when I was walking around Olhava in Ii. I chose and printed three different maps that I searched for on the internet because I wanted to test how a map affects travel and route selection. The maps were also marked with a slightly different way of targeting that I wanted to navigate to. With the wrong map, I was able to bring the places closer to each other, connect them, and find a new perspective on a place that I am already familiar with. I spent most of my childhood in Ii, as it is where my roots are from my mother's side, so I have a personal connection to the place.

I chose the locations of the routes by selecting the sights of Volkhov. In the city, objects located in specific geographical locations are repeated and have been put on a pedestal. With repetition, these objects, which are familiar to the public, form symbols that people use to build local identity. Special sites are also used to distinguish themselves from

other cities (Vallius 2019: 175). According to Marjo Nurminen (2015: 11), when we look at maps, we try to find our home region. We want to understand our own boundaries and unknown areas in relation to our own. In all the cultures that drew maps of the world, the aim was to present one's own residential area in the middle of the map and the foreign areas at the edges of the picture.

I selected sights from the Volkhov map that were marked on the maps. In some ways, I tried to find Volkhov spaces that have been marked as important places to see or find. I also tried to create my own marked sights in a place that, for the most part, is full of forests and countryside, Olhava in Ii. Those places were the church, museum, and train stations (Volhovstroi 1&2), and Staraya Ladoga. I also tried to find similarities between the places. Both of the Olhavas have a school, a power station, and a Volkhov River. I used these places as starting points for the routes and for navigating. I started exploring the places by navigating a starting point of the route, for example, Olhava's school or station, but after that, I took the map of Olhava in Russia and started navigating to the site, for example, the church. I interpreted the maps freely, ignoring the distances. I just looked on the map to make sure that, for example, now the road turns right, just as on a map or at a crossroads, you have to turn.

The length of the trips varied from a very short walk to a walk of about an hour. I did not feel that it was necessary to travel a very long distance in the research situation, but I was interested in where the map would take me: somewhere, to a place where I would not have gone without using the wrong map. I wanted to walk along the road all the time, as in the city, but I might have interpreted paths as routes. If there was snow on the ground and someone had walked on it, I interpreted it as a road. I did excursions on three days at different times of the day, using different lengths of distances and three different maps. I explored the place by following five different routes. I wrote down the routes as I walked and used frottage (a pencil rubbing technique) at the starting and end points to reproduce elements in the environment on the paper. The material also contains photographs and video footage of the place and the soundscape recorded.

The routes were: (Olhava) Train station – Church, Seurakuntatalo (Parish house) – Museum, School – Volhovstroi 2, Tuulivoimala (Power station) – Volhovstroi 1, (Olhava) Volkhov River – Staraya Ladoga.

EXHIBITION

As the first artistic part of my doctoral dissertation, I made an exhibition in which I worked on an installation based on data, which was performed in July 2021 at Galleria Huuto in Helsinki. The installation consisted of hundreds of rolls of paper on which I had rubbed traces from the carved woodblocks using a pencil. I carved various plates and repeated the patterns on the paper.

The traces of woodblocks consisted of the following things:
I used a pencil rubbing technique (frottage) at the start and end

points to reproduce elements in the environment on paper. I drew a reproduction of the crossroads of the starting and end points on the woodblock. I wrote the route directions on a block of wood. I wrote the instructions for the routes in Finnish, but using the Cyrillic alphabet. I also reproduced the maps that I used and connected them to in addition to the route descriptions. I named the things I saw in the places at the starting and end points of the routes. I wrote those names in both Finnish and Russian. I played with the alphabets, and I also wrote those words by changing the alphabet: Finnish words in the Cyrillic alphabet, Russian words in the Latin alphabet.

I folded some of these papers using the map folding technique. I also folded some of the papers according to the routes that I walked. By reproducing, rubbing, printing, drawing, and folding, I created an installation, a new place. The installation had several layers of paper on top of each other.

The exhibition specifically highlighted the problem of translation, on the one hand, in that it is possible to tell or translate one's own experience from the place into a literary or pictorial form. On the other hand, how is it possible to turn a particular place, for example, the village of Olhava near the River Ii, into a map, a conscious image distanced from experience?

Even though I have lived in Ii and I am familiar with Olhava, I have never lived in Olhava village. Furthermore, I have lived my entire adult life (for the past 20 years) in the Helsinki region. In other words, I have lived half of my life elsewhere, and due to the distance created by all these years, I examined the place from the perspective of a more or less outsider. However, my personal relationship with the area made me notice the connection between place names. When walking in Olhava, it felt as unfamiliar as Volkhov, a place I had never visited, and at the same time, I felt that something was very familiar and recognizable in a strange, distant way.

CONCLUSION

My work was supposed to continue in Volkhov, Russia, at first in March 2020, but COVID-19 prevented that. My plan was to explore the place and navigate it with the help of a map of Olhava. Furthermore, since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, my plans have changed again.

At the moment, Russia's Olhava seems like a distant place and everything related to Russia feels political, although when I started the research, I thought I would stay away from dealing with Russian politics, focusing only on historical and cultural links, and dealing with any issues only in a theoretical way. Nowadays, the situation may make it partly impossible even if this was not my purpose at the beginning. The Volkhov River counts in Novgorod, which is a significant place in the story of the origin of Russia. Now these historical, cultural, and partly storytelling links are contributing to the use of language and the reality in which the Russian

regime believes it can justify this senseless war. Nonsense is now a reality; borders and maps are even more political, and the idea of the originality of my thinking linked to transnational ideas through repetition seems even more important to research and discuss.

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IMAGE GALLERY

Olhava asema (Olhava train station) - Kirkko (Church): Hram Arhangela Mihaila
Олхава асема - Киркко: Храм Архангела Михаила



Кявеле оикеалле радан виересся.
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Ятка неляннестя ристеюкссестя оикеалле
я пиан васеммалле.
Киркко он пиан васеммалла пуолелла.



Figure 1: One of the used maps and the route (in Finnish written in Cyrillic alphabets)
Figure 2: Detail of an installation

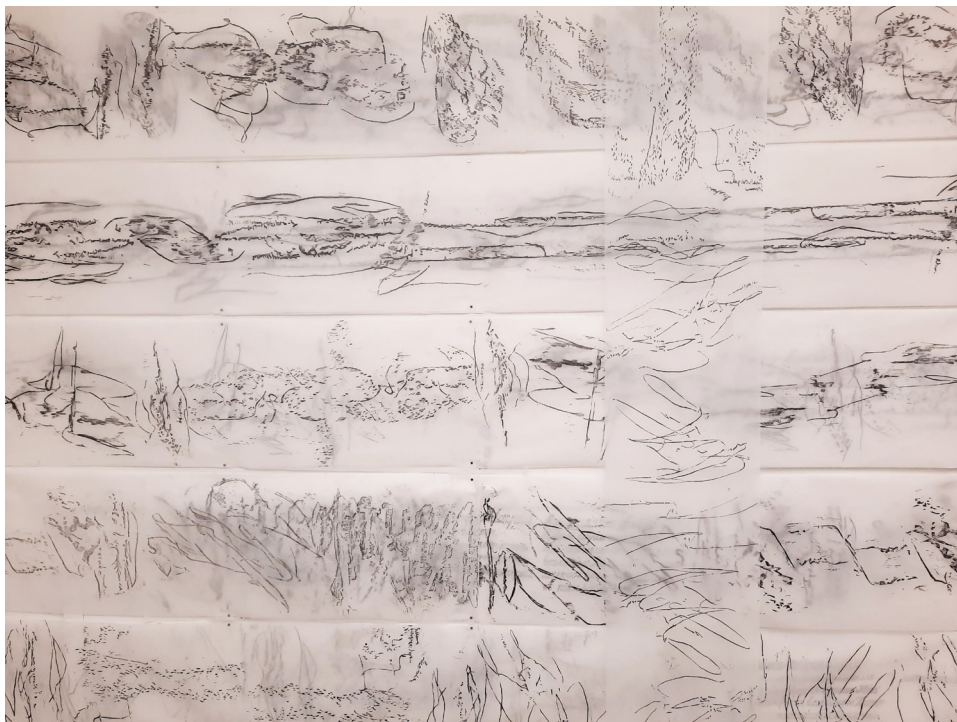
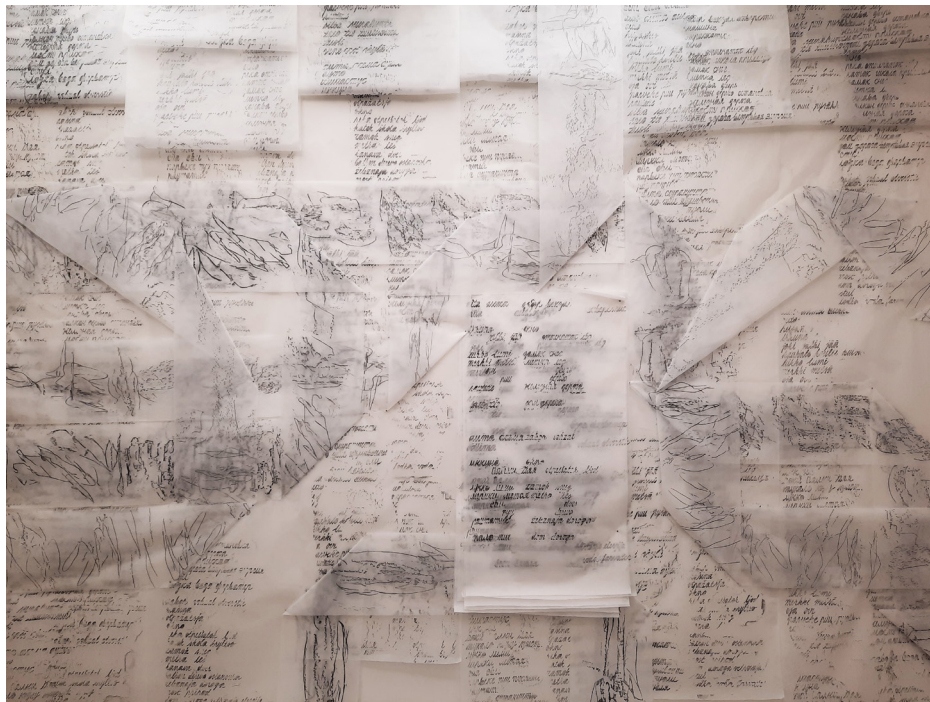


Figure 3: Detail of installation Ohava as seen from the map of Volkhov
Figure 4: Detail of installation Ohava as seen from the map of Volkhov

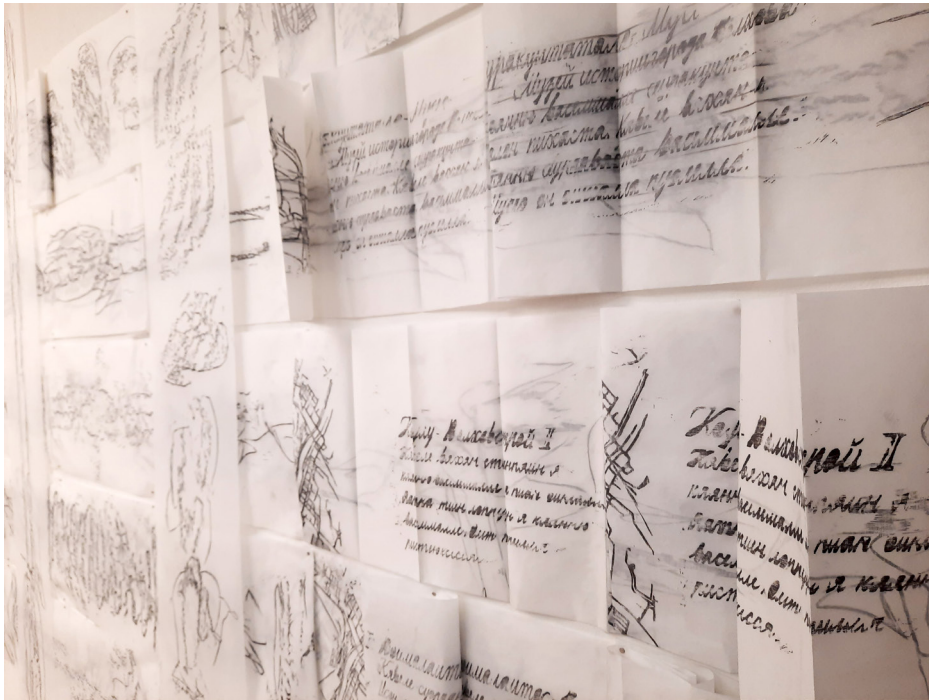


Figure 5: Detail of installation Olhava as seen from the map of Volkhov