

Listening to Rocks, Stones, Slits and Cracks

Dear Rubiane,

I have been pouring over the images of the Warren that you shared with me. I let myself zoom in and out. I felt moved by the rock—heart-like—that looks as though it has poured an iron rich blood on to the grey stones beneath. I got close to the layers of kelp, stone, sand, water, and waves of bright green sea grass. There is a stone filled with holes that could be a pelvis, grooves worn in the centre, and an absence where there could be a spine.

I crawl along a soft line in the sand. My breath traces the curves made by the waves. Sand is not sand, or not only, perhaps it's also the tiny fragments of the skeletons and homes of our 'earth being' ancestors. I wake in the night in a bed made of the bodies of trees, forged in the logics of plantations, sleeping wrapped in fabrics made of plants, flax, woven within artificially lit factories. I slip into a fever dream of mass movement, toxic histories, displacements that enshroud my body. My mind bends as I remember that I am typing on keys made from the fossil bones of dinosaurs. I remember that the glass on my computer screen was once scattered on the beach, on the ocean floor, or on the banks of Lake Poyang the largest freshwater lake and site of the most destructive sand mine in China. Now grains of sand that were once part of a constellation of forces that lay in the sun accompanies me as I write these words.

Sometimes I sit and stare at a pile of rocks I have on my shelf. I think about returning them. I would have to travel long distances. Some of them were found on a beach in Sicily, one on upside-down Djarra Country of the Victorian Goldfields, another is a fossil found in the Warren, a gift from a friend. Each retains an echo of where they once were. I think about the journeys they have taken under the pressures of industrialisation and late capitalism. Displacement of stones is part of the condition under and within which we live. We house ourselves in the displacement of stones, we cook meals in the displacement of stones, we bathe in the displacement of stones, our epistemes are forged in the displacement of stones.

What might listening to rocks, stones, slits and cracks, entail? What processes might we invent that respects the vital forces of rocks? Are stones and rocks hard to understand? Or are they 'singing' slowly at an energetic register that many of us are trained not to hear? Can magic, intuition, care and love be cultivated through listening to rocks, paying attention to stones and following the slits and cracks that might otherwise go unnoticed.

I wonder which daily rituals; you are inventing dear Rubiane that might allow us to resist these bio-ontological enclosures of life vs non-life [1]. An enclosure that decides what forces we can listen to and whose we might ignore. Life and non-life are part of the same processes of metamorphosis processes that constitute a living earth. Processes that are occurring at a many different scales to the ones that we can comprehend.

I wonder what is the affective-conceptual space that you are opening for us? What sounds, tastes, and feelings are informing the vibrant matter and materials that are part of your wider metabolism? How are the diagrams you are performing an analytics of relationality that asks questions about the perceptions of the world from a range of views, including more than human and non-living entities? In your diagrams I am reminded of metabolisms. Metabolic attention asks that we listen to the life forces that we encounter as interdependent entities that, as Vanessa Machado de Oliveira reminds us “operate in rhythms and cycles and that are constantly exchanging and processing energy and matter.” Metabolisms move in many directions at once as “nested living entities engaged in non-linear movement, in non-linear time.” [2] This metabolic attention is a way of being attuned to the planetary body that we all inhabit.

What senses might we develop for such encounters. Can eyes learn to listen? can our ears learn to taste? Can our fingers, see? noses watch? Because of course the mouth can touch. It touches everything, removes toxins, and permeates the wider metabolisms of bodies of thought and being. As a friend once said, the mouth is a technology of the earth and beneath us the land moving, slowly unseen and unheard.

Here, with our ears and mouths trained on the horizon we are remembering. Here its possible to concede that “to become different is to make the world different” [3].

I wish I could be there with you, though connected through metabolisms, we might come to understand that there is not so much distance between here and there.

Maddy

[1] Elizabeth Povinelli, 'Life/NonLife: A Response,' Somatosphere, <http://somatosphere.net/forumpost/life-nonlife-a-response/>

[2] Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanities Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2021), 215

[3] Elizabeth Povinelli, 'Life/NonLife: A Response,' Somatosphere, <http://somatosphere.net/forumpost/life-nonlife-a-response/>

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