

a sounding (0)

I wake up to an unusually clear and sunny morning, and gaze at the slither of endless bright blue in the gap between the window frame and the hanging fabric. It's cold, 7 Celsius outside, and 14 indoors, and so I reach out for whatever layers appear in my tired field of vision. Not external - appearance or fashion of any kind, but the internal, the warmth, is on my mind, and it only takes a few seconds to layer up.

When arriving in a place humans call home, or in my case its best proxy, and unpacking the clothes from the trip, what is this sense that overcomes me when I put on my wool jumper I wore to sleep and at breakfast that has collected in its fibres the scents and molecules, and the mild seawater humidity of that place?

As a group we had come to the conclusion that humans can't yet breathe deep underwater, but I hold this piece of warmth close, and inhale the watery place once more, before it mixes with the usual, local immediacies of the everyday, and 'to do' lists, and the damp cold.

What does culturing the deep mean? in the context of being in this particular place - Porto, Matosinhos beach and town, in November 2023. I write out these details in commitment to specificity that Max Liboiron calls for; 'place-based knowledge comes really out of a place' (1), they write in *Pollution is Colonialism*. Not knowing a place specifically has consequences. And so I do my best to do this with my bodymind, as in my writing.

The first time I meet this beach is at night, and it's cold - so cold that by the time I have walked from the water's flowing, rumbling edges back to the pile of crates on which I precariously perch to wipe my feet of hundreds of thousands of minuscule shells, stones, and bits of glass adopted back to nature, I can't feel my feet at all.

Being here feels like an embodied dissonance: being with and at the water's edge out of choice while for many the water means a loss and a rupture; being safe at a time when for many this is only beginning of a loss of life - it is the end of November 2023, and Gaza is enduring a hellfire, once again; being when there is no other choice to be made; being when 'a stilling of all life is underway' (2).

I often think about how many beyond-human beings have to rebuild their homes from scratch year on year. Their homes have to be just so. There is a specificity which they cannot afford to miss or abandon for their lives depend on it. We humans are almost never particular with our homes: a small furniture imperfection, or a decorative error does not usually endanger our very existence in the same way a lack of a home altogether would.

For many, humans and others alike, the water, the sea means a loss, sudden and violent, of a home and that place they called theirs - their Land, or their Sea, or both - they run from the Sea (3). Flooding and washing away of lives and livelihoods caused by human design is especially devastating to witness from the relative safety of a safehouse.

My thoughts often travel to those places most at danger of flooding and erasure by the rising sea levels as just one of the symptoms of climate catastrophe the affected communities had little to do with. The surprise I felt when seeing Malaysian houses built on stilts that were neither on land nor on water, that were in themselves an ecotone (4), rolls in: a merging of the sea and the land where I was only a brief visitor, an intrusive guest, and whose those murky waters rocked me back and forth with the tide, and that brief encounter with a sea snake leaving a lasting imprint on the impressionable mind of a young child.

I dragged a bag of shells and coral skeleton I had collected on those shores back home with me - my prized treasure the weight of which I am still trying to undo today. The elevation permitted by the stilts accounts for the tides, it was explained to me. In theory, this was easy to understand, but I struggled to grasp what it might feel like to have a daily possibility of your home being flooded.

In the cramped former Soviet social housing apartment I grew up in a flood meant an altercation with the neighbours, and unsightly stains on the ceiling; much of the time the cause was not the scatty neighbour but a leaking pipe, or one that burst from sudden freezing temperatures under a lack of maintenance - but who would dare to speak blame?

There was that one time when our rental flat flooded almost entirely when you forgot to turn off the tap (5), and the old radio and vinyl player combo drowned and was never repaired or replaced, then went out of fashion before too long; we kept both the main body and speakers in the hope that someday they might emit voices again.

And then there was that one time me and granddad put together a make-shift dinner table sitting at knee height for a new year's celebration by placing together those silent speaker and covering with the usual, dated and comforting, celebratory table cloth, a leftover from the era of extreme scarcity. I permit myself a moment of softness diluted with regret, and that feeling I do not have a word for yet, that which is pain but warmth at the same time; longing, saudade.

Which of our beyond-human remote companions might be feeling this same thing right this moment?

The same silent speakers made an appearance in my graduate work, at the dawn of my naive attempts to speak the unspeakable, with the unspoken, for those silenced, and that which we don't dare say out loud; is it enough to attempt to speak nearby? (6)

The mind dulled by medication feels frustrated and frustrating - where is this bright clarity I am so fond of? one that writes the right words, thinks the impossible things into materialising? it is here; it is transient; it is my childhood memories; my new experiences; the old friendships; the new invisible contracts we made with this place and each other, to be continued, with hope for a living deep sea, some day.

I am a sounding, I suddenly begin to speak out loud while quenching my fibro body's need for being a water body; a sounding, someone pronounced during our two days together; a

sounding, I thought to myself, while emitting sounds during the plyvocal manifesto performance for a sea without mining; a sounding, present but wishing to remain off camera; I am a sounding signalling the arrival of my ancestors' voice on the wings of the seagull cutting across the sky a few meters above my head.

'Close your eyes - no, really, close them' (7) prompts a fellow sounding. Thinking to the depth of thousands of meters, I do close my eyes, and picture a place where darkness is a home, a place where minutiae of beings scramble and hustle at sea floor pace - their own, not ours; a place where light so necessary for our human knowing of the world can mean danger of being exposed, perhaps even pain for the seafloor inhabitants; a place the writer beautifully named Ocean (8) writes as one of safety from the traumas of war carried through generations, the body going into the form of hiding in an immediate response to that which careless others call a celebration; in darkness where to close one's eye does not mean a turning away but an activation, an attuning to our embodied ways of knowing.

Having been away from the computer screen for only a few days, my fibro fingers have become yet more unaccustomed to typing, and it takes a me while to get these lines down on digital paper. As this piece draws towards its close, I wonder if this shifting away from being technologically dependent is not the very necessity that needs to happen for us humans to think away from ourselves and towards becoming better accustomed to that into which we were born - the fluid, runny, watery, not geometrical, forms of what we have named Nature (9), our linguistic inefficiency in tow?

The sand, glistening with microplastics under the near-full moon is right here, at my touch, and whom and when do I touch when I touch this sand? (10). I collect some - a small amount, to take back with me, a gesture I will spend many years undoing.

A child who was always impossibly slow at speed reading who has metamorphosed into a hypersensitive grown being, I wonder whether this body of mine would be much better at being herself at sea depths, where time is slow, noise is still relatively little, and the water is always all around, always salty, embracing the stream of liquid we humans call tears?

When things broke, we fixed them instead of replacing. Sharing a space, together, gently pushing each other in ways seen and unseen, into new thoughtful directions, new depths, new ways to expand in each other's presence, overcoming difference - are these not the ways in which a deep sea for allkind might be possible still? The Earth is burning, we run to the Sea (11).

To stay with the other's thoughts even when it may not be what you wanted to hear; to extend kindness in times when you least expect the same in return; to be softness; to be water, that which can take anything in wrapping herself around you as she shapes and rounds the sharper sides of you; to not play into the pervasive hand of constructed binaries; to be enabling; to be shimmering; to be present; to be radiant; to be otherwise; to be.

I wake up to the sensation of sea moving in me, my breath synchronised to the rhythm of Iberian waves I entered only briefly. Sea, when did you enter me?

(0) I retrospectively learn of the work of Dr. Julian Henriques and his “use of the verb ‘sounding’ in relation to ‘collective and [...] socially integrated production process[es]’ (2011, 168-9)” as referenced in the paper *Polyvocal Potential: Sounding collectivity in experimental audio* by Matilda Jones presented at the London Conference in Critical Thought, June 2024. Topic to be researched further.

(1) Max Liboiron: *Pollution is Colonialism*. The Humanities at Stony Brook University. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-HWxQ8G1HM>. At 23:04 onwards, they say: ‘Indigenous people are not the same / There’s certain things I know about bogs: there are bogs where I come from, and there are bogs here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and they are not the same bogs, and my dogs nearly drowned in a bog here because I was using the wrong lessons from the wrong bogs’. / ‘You have to start in a place’. see also: Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021), Duke University Press.

(2) Olga F. Koroleva, ‘weaving / on ‘giving the sea salt rock’, commissioned by Sarah Blissett for the CSPAQ 43: Intertidal Encounters, 2024, pp. 52-57, accessible at: <https://sustainablepractice.org/publication/quarterly-43-intertidal-encounters-2>

(3) a rephrasing of the lyrics to *Sinnersman* by Nina Simone. The original reads:

‘So I run to the river
It was bleedin', I run to the sea
It was bleedin', I run to the sea
It was bleedin', all on that day?
So I run to the river
It was boilin', I run to the sea
It was boilin', I run to the sea
It was boilin', all on that day’

(4) Astrida Neimanis, *Becoming a body of water, Undutiful Daughters*. *New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 93. An ecotone describes an area where two or more distinct environments meet, such as a tidal zone, making for a significantly more biodiverse area.

(5) In the early post-Soviet period, and most likely previously - though having been born in '87, I can only speak to my experience - there was no tap water running in the tap during the daytime. To make up for this, people collected tap water and stored it in buckets and pots for household use, also showered and did their dishes in the window of time, often only an hour or so at night, when the water did run - most of the time this water ran rusty, and it took a while for clear water to begin to come through. Sometimes it never showed and all water related work had to be postponed. Drinking water had to be collected from the spring, in our case - we were lucky, from a dedicated source in the part across the road. The return walk takes around an hour, and the spring is still used today.

(6) Nancy N. Chen, To Speak Nearby. A conversation with Trinh T. Min-Ha in *Visual Anthology Review*, Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 1992, pp. 82-91. Trinh T. Min-Ha refers to her filmmaking approach as 'speaking nearby', as opposed to 'speaking for' the vulnerable subject / protagonist.

(7) Polyphonic Seabed Authority Choir performance by Chris Harris, Sigrún Perla Gísladóttir, Aurora Ribeiro, Andrea Inocêncio, Lily Mccraith, Georgia Wells, Julia Jung, and Olga F. Koroleva, 25 November 2023.

(8) Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, London: Penguin Random House (2019), pp. 19-21.

(9) in philosophical / theory terms, this can be understood as 'organic life' as opposed to 'nonorganic life' as posited by art historian Wilhelm Worringer as a "characterisation of the notion of line in Gothic Art "as the only perceptible expression of the non-living or the absolute"" as outlined here by Alan Broadman: <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/n/nonorganic-life.html>, cited further in Astrida Neimanis, *Becoming a body of water* (as above) from Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987).

(10) Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press (2008), p. 3 onwards.

(11) As in 3, reference to *Sinnerman* lyrics, and a nod to the possible ways of human evolution towards the Ocean.