

I wanna start by thinking about our bodies...

It's often the case, throughout a day, that our bodies are pressing up against the floor  
At the soles of the feet. If not the feet, then somewhere within the range of our bodies and their  
various potential extensions, we are leaning into, onto, up against... the floor.

And below the floor, eventually anyway,

is rock.

And in this rock that extends deep below the floor is

A void of space

A space that's been shaped by the weather

A cave, by definition, is always greater in depth than width

Which subterranean voids qualify as caves is determined by its spatial relationship to a human  
body

An opening of rock carved by the movements of erosion, lava, seawater, and glaciers,

An opening of rock

A delicate lace, woven by a score of collapse, slippage, and fissures.

Woven by chemical processes and bacterial life.

A cave becomes through fields of time much beyond the lifespan of your feet pressed against the  
floor.

A chamber for hiding

from war and weather.

A cave as a space for worship.

For hiding treasures

And holding the dead,

Subterranean voids with drawings on their walls as traces of memory.

Caves hold obscured histories.

There are subterranean dances of suspension, merging, and moving-through that unfold in these corridors and caverns,

These environmental architectures are active spaces of transing as it expands beyond human-centric frameworks.

Caves refute the fixation of transing as primarily located in gender at the site of the human body.

Transing always enacts more than human ways of living.

Always refutes binarian logics with an insistence on becoming without a fixed central destination.

Always refutes binaries through transings' potency to register simultaneous multiplicities.

Space is an active medium, a physical embodiment of action through time.

Land is fluxional and responsive.

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At the watery edges of islands and coastlines, there exists limestone pits in and under the ground, under the water.

Some are a meeting point  
for freshwater and saltwater.

When fresh and saline water interfaces  
in a sharp rate of change in salinity,  
a visible delineation occurs between the two liquids,  
This is called a halocline.

A strong distinction of difference.

A border-space, brackish in its blurry state of refraction.

Haloclines are border zones in water-filled limestone caves at the ocean shore.  
They can be an optical illusion of air space in caves.

A diver treads through a halocline.

The water layers are disturbed by the wake of their limbs.

Divers trade tips on how to move with stealth.

And it's like, - Do Not Disturb -

this breathtaking visual of liquid stratification.

*It seems so clear.*

Haloclines held by walls of limestone.

its porosity and dissolvability.

For hundreds of millions of years, water

drips

on limestone - shaping these caves, forming stalactites and stalagmites at the rate of one inch per one hundred years.

So I wanna go backwards in time.

Before that.

Crustaceans, clams, and coral *pull into themselves* calcium carbonate from the water that surrounds them to build their skeletal bones and shells.

And then, following their death, these bones and shells break down in a dance by waves, coming to rest on ocean-floor beds. They are pressed by the weight of the ocean's body. They mutate into limestone, one of the most common rocks on the planet:

limestone-

a trans-hydrous-biota-mineral-becoming that morphs over deep time, from water, to animal, to rock, holds in its body

an intricate lace

of memories of transing life through relationality.

Within a halocline border-zone between two watery worlds is a world entirely unto its own.

The high salinity and anaerobic conditions of haloclines are hostile environments by humans. The high salinity and anaerobic conditions of haloclines are conducive to optimal growth for some of the earliest life forms on this celestial sphere.

Such life forms known as extremophiles have been a fixation for microbiologists in recent decades.

Existential questions surface in their field: What is life?, they ask.

Extremophiles *thrive* in environments that are specifically challenging for the survival of carbon-reliant life forms, *all other known life*.

Extremophile translates to 'extreme' and 'lover'.

These *extreme lovers* have thrived through the evolutionary history of planet Earth, dating back more than forty million years, *flourishing* as one of the most abundant lifeforms known to humans.

In this moment, scientists are using DNA sequencing technologies with extremophiles to develop advancements with antibiotics and astrobiology.

extracting *methods of survivability*

for the fast-approaching future of climate change and outer-space travel.

These lives of extreme loving embody simultaneous ancience and futurity, tracing vast ranges of time within their becoming.

In the deep-time of limestone caves, where extremophiles thrive within watery halocline

border-zones,

a multitudinal scope of transing  
as an act of living  
can be felt...

can be heard.

Caves contain robust potencies of acoustic resonance.

When sound waves move through caves, the shape and size of the corridors is mainly responsible for the sound produced.

The porosity and structure of its surface also play roles in cave acoustics.

Limestone's porosity makes a cave soundproof,

The waves fill out the void of the cave.

Sound waves traverse fields of space four times faster in water than air.

Gradients of salinity impact the elasticity and density of water, also affecting the propagation of sound energy.

Lower frequencies of sound travel farther in saltwater, while higher frequencies convert more readily to heat and chemical energy.

The high-contrast of fresh and salt water in a halocline prevents mixing, causing an increased build up of salinity at the meeting edge, sound waves then reflect and refract at this border, as light does with a mirror.

Sound waves refracting and reflecting from the border-zone of a halocline do not constitute a going back or return of some kind, but rather participate in a weaving of past-future memory.

Past and future relationalities are not fixed, rather they are becoming *and* ancient in an open-ended reconfiguration

through intra-activity.

Memory, like limestone, is a sedimentary pattern of this intra-activity, all of its traces held as enfolded materialization.

In a case of erasure, those memory traces do still remain  
and it takes *effort* to make the ghostly entanglements felt.

—

I want to share with you an excerpt from a text written by an anonymous collective by the name of we-me, published in The Brooklyn Rail November 2021 issue:

*What does it mean to swallow your silence?*

*The swirling matters of voice-sound refracted. Sound waves hit the folds of a vibrating door toward the outside and then bounce back down into the bodily depths, being left unheard.*

*Voice is a wave-particle/transitory-material insistence on being.*

*When voice is cut (muted)*

*it refracts down into the underground,*

*dwelling in the subterrain of the body.*

*Waves mutating beyond language in the dank soil of the undergrammatical: a trans-becoming of pain and endurance, moaning in its voluptuous monstrosity.*

*The throat is the faultline through which voice trespasses, becoming an extension of the body.*

*Voice is always a production of trash ... Is always a libation (a touch). Is always an alchemical pouring out...*

*excess, overflow, offering, swallowed by the earth or flushed into the sewage, dumped into the ocean, where sediments of memory are imprinted. If memory is matter then it cannot be destroyed, but transformed.*

*“You are contaminated / with our ancestry / careful, you are contaminated, you are on indigenous land” Brisa Flow, Passado e Futuro Presentes, Free Abya Yala.*

*Past and future relationality are not inherently determinate, but rather becoming-ancient in an ongoing reconfiguration of enfolded contamination, within*

*and through histories of erasure.*

—

Like a cave, the human throat is a cavernous void space through which sound materializes.

A ring muscle shaped as a tube that runs from the back of the nose and down into the neck.

Positioned horizontally, the vocal cords are the fold-like vibratory component of the throat.

Like land, the vocal cords are fluxional and responsive.

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Voice has the ability to modulate dynamically. The socially rendered outcomes and implications of vocal sounding is complicated by diverse voice-ability and the circumstances through which voice occurs.

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The vertical tubular cave of the throat,  
the horizontal vocal chords within it  
are akin to  
the vertical limestone caves containing  
horizontal halocline borders.

The vocal cords separating the internal body and external environment and the halocline separating the dense salt water below from the fresh water above, both act as a vibrating door between two worlds; a kiss of true love, a trans-becoming in and unto itself. And just as extremophiles thrive in the blur of haloclines, there too in the sinkhole of the throat, microbial life abounds.

It can be speculated that there enfolds a rich entanglement of playful forces that escapes the confines of anthropocentric dichotomy that claim the ontological zones of human and non-human.

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Multiple possible

understandings of *silence*,

inexhaustibly so.

Acoustic, phenomenological, metaphysical, political, and performative versions abound.

Here, silence is considered in terms of its relationship to *listening* (or lack thereof) as a relational act that makes the silence so.

Stephen Feld proposes the term acoustemology and defines it as,

*“grounded in the basic assumption that life is shared with others-in-relation, with numerous sources of action that are variously human, nonhuman, living, nonliving, organic, or technological. This relationality is both a routine condition of dwelling and one that produces consciousness of modes of acoustic attending, of ways of listening for and resounding to presence.”*

The relationality of and social-political nuances by which *listening* and *silence* must be thought through. My friend Maria Fantinato thinks through listening and sound in ways that have inspired this writing.

She's clarified to me-

*Silence* is different from *absence of sound* whereby silence purports that sound is possible.

And absence of sound purports that sound is not or no longer possible.

If silence is a presencing of place and absence of sound is a devastation, how is listening practiced with respect to the ethical complexity of the unheard?

How can listening (in the broader understanding of embodied attending) extend to the *peripheries of “not belonging” within “nowhere else”* to expand inclusions of the incommensurable while refusing the hegemonic center?

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*The Little Mermaid* is a 1989 Disney animated feature film based on the 1837 fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. It follows the story of Ariel, a mermaid princess whose deepest desire is to become human. This unrelenting drive leads Ariel to make a deal with the octopus-like sea witch, Ursula, who grants her three days as a human in exchange for her voice which is held captive in a nautilus seashell. If Ariel shares a *true love's kiss* with the human Prince Eric, she will remain human forever. And if she fails, she will transform back into a mermaid and be owned by Ursula.

Anchored to the bedrock of Colonial-White-Supremacist-Cartesian-dualism, *The Little Mermaid* abounds with themes of violent oppression portrayed as normal social life. The paradigm this film situates itself within is the dominant lens of human thinking and mattering- a tunneled paradigm that refuses the multi-voice of intra-active trans-becoming-ancient.

Nonetheless, in the watery subterrain of this story lies another tale concerned with living, loving and surviving as trans. Ariel as a trans-species being and Ursula as a nonbinary femme sea witch negotiate their different struggles with the systems of power that aggressively deny their transing existences. At the enduring kiss of land and sea, these two biological trannies negotiate imminent challenges to survive insidious colonial violence upon their becomings, revealed by their use of and relationship to *voice*.

Ursula's character, based on the drag queen Divine, is a non-white gender-variant scratchy-throated voluptuous tentacled sorcerer hoarding "poor unfortunate souls" in her cave outside the reach of Protected Waters. By holding these souls captive, she claims power and retaliates against a world that refuses to value or accept her. Her drive for manipulation, enslavement and abuse is arguably rooted in the deep trauma of surviving as trans-becoming in a binary paradigm favoring white heteronormative ideals of colonial imperialist sociality.

In the throes of teenage urgency (an edge all of its own), Ariel's character, a young and kind pretty white princess who "has it all", is just breaching that sense of agency in the intra-action shaping her becoming, bringing an unwavering devotion and youthful optimism to her experience as a trans-species human.

Armed with youthful naivety, curiosity, and a massive crush on the human, Prince Eric, Ariel plans her physical transition to a human body on the powers of

*a true love's kiss.*

What is *true love* and can it recall itself in a kiss?  
How is true love defined and positioned in relation to decolonial love?  
When and where did the concept of “true love” begin?  
And how has it fossilized into the bedrock of hegemonic understanding of a life well-lived?  
Perhaps we can say...  
True love refuses disembodiment and detachment.  
True love is when the incommensurable intra-acts in solidarity.

*The Little Mermaid* imbues a kiss between a prince and a princess as “true love”, around which the male characters accomplish two tasks: one, rescue the white girl who's sole desire in life is to love and please these men and two, kill the evil villain who in this case, is an independent flamboyant queer fat racially ambiguous gender nonconforming femme witch.

In the musical number “Kiss the Girl”, Ariel's animal friends sing a calypso ballad encouraging Prince Eric to kiss Ariel before it's too late. In the second verse, Sebastian, King Triton's red Trinidadian crab servant who accompanies Ariel on land, sings softly into Eric's ear:

*Yes, you want her  
Look at her, you know you do  
Possible she wants you too  
There is one way to ask her  
It don't take a word  
Not a single word  
Go on and kiss the girl*

The lyrics position Ariel as an object/girl/child for the prince to have and that verbal consent for the intimate act of a kiss is not required. These lyrics and the scene itself frame the pillar of colonial heteropatriarchal order wherein the voices of the unheard are deemed valueless. In the global scope of sociality, and simply of life, this includes any language or mode of

utterance (human or non-human, spoken or otherwise communicated) that is not in English deriving from able white cis-men.

This portrayal of a “true love’s kiss” is in fact the driving subfloor of abounding horrific destruction and genocide.

At the same time, this scene and the lyrics of Sebastian’s ballad acknowledge that languages beyond this hegemonic anthropocentric paradigm do in fact exist! Sebastian’s lyrics claim desire and love live beyond the English language, beyond the borders of the written/spoken word through languages of embodied sounding and sensing.

In considering these two very different observations, the potential for manipulation becomes quite evident. Furthermore, the inescapability of this hegemonic order and the inevitable *broken-by-colonial-relations* conditions of being and becoming makes for *The Little Mermaid*’s true love’s kiss to be a location to bear witness to this at-large predicament.

A kiss, in its traditional sense, is a physical action of two bodies touching mouth-to-mouth as a gesture of desire and affection. This action conjoins two cenotes, creating a direct passageway between their tubular entrances to their underworlds.

A kiss potentiates *true love*, asin a multitudinal becoming of incommensurability in solidarity. This act is a physical refusal of disembodiment and detachment.

Despite all the erasures and oppressions embedded within this film, there is a thick theme of transing for both Ariel and Ursula. The protagonist in this coming-of-age story, Ariel risks transition to embody human form. Her experiences of embodied dissonance and familial-social tensions about her diversion from social norms foreground one early scene in which she sings “Part of Your World”, a song about having everything and yet wanting something more. She belts out, giving voice to her feelings in her underwater vertical cavern full of treasures from the human world she’s scavenged in the sea floor, admitting her deep desire to be in another world, to be of another body and finally to therefore be free, within what freedom means for her as a trans life. “Betchya on land, they understand,” she intones of a desire to be understood by and in

relationship with others.

Ariel approaches Ursula to remedy the unrelenting and painful circumstances of her bodily dysphoria. In the absence of her birth mother, Ursula assumes the role of queer trans mother, guiding Ariel into her own trans-becoming. She teaches Ariel that gender is a performance, elucidating the terms of gender normativity. She lays out that, in the performance of femininity, having a voice (ability to speak thoughts, opinions, and desires) is of no use, clarifying that body language is in fact the primary tool. Through a campy burlesque-style show of the feminine, the sea-witch teaches Ariel lessons on gender-based access, mobility, and voice, singing out:

*You'll have your looks, your pretty face.  
And don't underestimate the importance of body language, ha!  
The men up there don't like a lot of blabber  
They think a girl who gossips is a bore!  
Yet on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word*

The immersive fast paced song disorients Ariel, coercing her into a contract binding her to give up her voice for three days of passing as human. The song includes Ursula's incantation featuring the sea and throat:

*Beluga, Sevruga  
Come winds of the Caspian Sea  
Larynxes, glossitis  
Et Max Laryngitis  
La voh-ché to me*

The relational dynamic of Ursula and Ariel exemplifies the competition that undermines female and queer kinship, and potential for empowerment through solidarity in resistant modes of living- and loving-with. The isolation of nonconforming individuals generated within this paradigm has participated in the social mythology of racist, misogynist archetypes of witches and crones.

Ursula's character nods to the bitterness that can form over decades of surviving as a queer-femme nonbinary being in the "unprotected waters" of society,

while Ariel's youthful naïveté exhibits the power of dreaming trans utopia and forging a life that moves towards that dream in the conditions of class and race-based privilege. The dissonance between their experiences can be heard in each character's voice; Ursula—deep and scratchy; Ariel—sweet and angelic.

The queerness of Ursula's voice induced a year-long gender panic within the actual production of the film. Ultimately performed by Pat Carroll, it was initially proposed to Joan Collins, followed by Bea Arthur of *Golden Girls*, both of whom were entirely insulted by the role and its suggestion that their voices are deep and monstrous. This was followed by a string of six more attempts at casting the role before casting Pat Carroll, who had auditioned a year prior and whose dream was to perform the voice of a Disney character.

As exhibited in the film itself and its production, voice is a vibratory force of aliveness upon which oppressive social constructions of valued life play out and for which transing must shapeshift in order to survive these oppressive conditions. Voice itself (including its haunting absences), is traversing the cavernous throat whereby bodily transing disturbs the halocline-like illusionary distinctions held by brutal belief systems of separability.

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## **A Tale As Old As Time**

Violent discrimination against queers, femmes, and nonbinary humans has abound for what seems like “forever” within timescales of the human species participation on this planet. Silvia Federici argues that witch hunting became most prevalent at the start of the European transition from feudalism to capitalism, expanding with globalization as the dominant social-political-economic paradigm. In her writings on witch hunts, Federici investigates the relationship between witch-hunting and the contemporary process of land enclosures and privatization, taking this research to include the lives of queers, vagabonds, beggars, and any other nonconforming modes of living.

The finale of the film and its ultimate source of resolution is through the matricide of Ursula as Prince Eric commandeers his wrecked ship, impaling Ursula's body with its splintered bowsprit. Upon the witch's death, the underwater Kingdom is immediately restored to harmony, Eric realizes Ariel is his *real* true love, and her father King Triton consents to granting her

permanent transition to human form.

This ending affirms two deep-seated social tenets of colonial patriarchal white supremacy;

one, that witches, trannies, and the like are primarily responsible for social dysfunction and should be killed or exiled at all costs,

and two, that *true love* involves cis-men killing the almost always non-white villains, rescuing and attaining the white princess through marriage.

### **A gesture of recalling is a kiss of true love**

In Hil Malatino's book *Trans Care*, he shares, "How do we care for these traces of past lives that haunt us in ways that are loving, insofar as they offer a balm through providing evidence of past trans flourishing and joy, and terrifying, because they testify to the conditions of intensive violence that these subjects lived within and through? How do we care for these ghosts that take such care of us?"

Voice and storytelling are practices of recall.

The world *is* memory as enfolded matter.

It holds all traces of memory (past and future), *even memory that has been erased*.

And it matters which throats voice sounds

and which memories shape stories,

It matters what traces of memory world worlds.

The memories of extremophiles thriving over billions of years, of trans-wave-particle haloclines in a hazy eroticism of edging and refracting and of limestone in their multitudinal trans-becoming-ancient over spans of deep-time;

The stories arising as air enfolded through the throat in an undulating dance of sounding from the

bodily subterranean tunnels of those *unheard*;

The stories of the queer witches of the world;

***These are the traces recalled here.***

*May our ghosts continue trans-becoming in their decay or as ash, in peace and power with the trans-sediments of earth-matter. May the geomicrobial extreme lovers and subterranean streams caress their constitutions, carrying them over and into deep-time aliveness, may waves of sound and light refract and diffract in a dance with them. May a material transing enfold them in a vibratory kiss of true love.*