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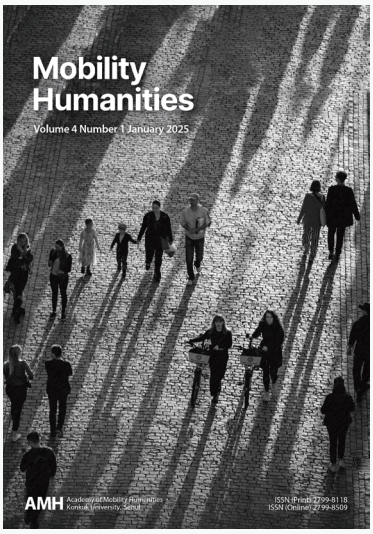

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SPECIAL ISSUE

The Mobilities and Aesthetics of Deep Time: An Anthro-apology from The Long Dead Stars

Claire Hind[a] **and Robert Wilsmore**[b]

Abstract

This paper discusses the artistic practice of electronic dance poets The Long Dead Stars in relation to walking-arts (human mobility) and the movement of rock (non-human mobility), contextualising an environmental agenda through a walking-arts inspired aesthetic that playfully but seriously attunes with earth materials. Exploring the significance of aesthetics, we ask "how might an artistic collaboration with rocks, with Earth, enable a non-othering, where rock and human are equal?" Through practices such as channelling, deep listening, ludicerious aesthetics, scanning and dithering, we consider how aesthetics can contribute to a successful human-rock partnership. As is right when trying to repair a broken relationship, in this case between the human and non-human, we start with an apology, an Anthro-apology, before exploring how aesthetic practice might move the relationship forward.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Anthro-apology, Deep Time, Dithering, Electronic Dance Poetry, Ludicerious, Object-Oriented Ontology, Walking-Arts

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An Anthro-apology

The Long Dead Stars would like to offer an Anthro-apology to the world. We are sorry; we knew what we were doing but we did it anyway. We were told that our house was on fire but we let it burn all the same. We partied at your expense. We lived for the day but now it is tomorrow. Tell us, what can we do? We were not listening then but we are listening now. But first, we need to know—"how" do we listen?

The Long Dead Stars

The Long Dead Stars write and produce electronic dance poetry (EDP). This music and poetry emerge from Claire Hind's walking-art where she practices channelling and deep-listening to the landscapes that she encounters whilst walking on the Yorkshire coast. As rambling rock flâneurs we take advantage of the freedom to wander that walking-art, and art in general, permits.

Our debut project, the album *Whitby Mudstone*, draws on a site of geological interest, the Yorkshire coast on the Northeast of England in the UK, an area of significant displacement due to rock mass movement. We are academics and artists: Dr Claire Hind, Professor of Contemporary Theatre at York St John University, and Dr Robert Wilsmore, former Head of the School of Arts at York St John University and now an independent scholar and composer. We perform EDP high on the Yorkshire moors for Dark Skies festivals, we release on digital platforms, we write academic papers. Because aesthetics, like rocks, is a real thing in the world, we consider art about rocks to be another sedimentary layer settling onto and into the rock itself, and we view our electronic dance poetry as both an object and as a scan of the coastline, as a sonar scan on a ship might return the topography of the seabed. We see social and cultural mobilities in the same manner as the movement of mountains and oceans. Describing the topographic contours of social life, Büscher and Urry presented "five interdependent 'mobilities' that produce social life organized across distance and which form (and re-form) its contours" which occur through types of "travel" that they categorised as "corporeal, physical, imaginative, virtual, communicative" (100-101), and we recognise in their call for further creative methods of investigation (Büscher et al.) the place that aesthetics plays in all five categories. Hence, we see our aesthetic as part of these mobilities, not just as comments about them. Poetry and music are part of the mobile object, as well as being emergent objects in themselves. As Timothy Morton, writing on the place of poetry in the *Hyperobject* that is global warming, says, "there is no reason why a poem can't be construed as a physical object in as rich a sense as you like. It's only counterintuitive if you think that entities come with two floors: basement mechanics and a pretty living room on

top" (119).

Our interest specifically understands and connects to the North Yorkshire landscape, through walking as a performance practice with the aim to mould the body with rock, wrap the body around boulders, on the beaches of Ravenscar up through to Boubly, and from this walking, wrapping, and listening comes words and music. It is not the "walking" of walking-art that is key but rather the encounters with the geology on the walk, highlighting our flawed perception of human as mobile and rock as static. Rocks, sedimentary shales, mudstones and sandstones deposited there 200 million years ago, are mixed with much newer deposits. On the beach near Boggle Hole, for example, is one such deposit that had travelled from Norway, approximately 11,000 years ago, during the last ice age. At the end of the bay, at Ravenscar, splitting rock types into two, is a peak fault named Peak Steel. It is a visible marker of seismic forces that evidence different Jurassic time periods. There are visible patterns between Lower Jurassic Sandstone that juxtaposes the Middle Jurassic Dogger. On the beach at low tide, at Stoupe Beck, there is a large Rhomb Porphyry rock that stands out as having a very different quality to other boulders. A rare rock type, Rhomb Porphyry is an igneous rock and is pink in colour, originating from the Oslo rift, a volcanic area in Norway.

Rock Hugging in the Scaurs

During the pandemic when we could not perform, or gather indoors, Claire developed the practice of walking for long periods of time as contemplation, to wrap her body around rock, to mould, mimic, and blend with the shape of the natural, temporal landscape. She was interested in how boulders, rocks, mountains, and peak faults have eroded over thousands or millions of years, and how they remind us of our brief passage of time on this planet.

Fig. 1. Claire Hind Moulding Body with Rock on the North Yorkshire Coast (Iona).

Claire walked to seek out extraordinary shapes; boulders left within scaurs cut deep from 70 million years of coastal erosion. Moulding the body with rock is an intimate, imaginative, meditative and playful experience. A form of deep play. Diane Ackerman, a writer on *Deep Play*, describes it as an "ecstatic form of play. In its thrall, all the play elements are visible but they're taken to intense and transcendent heights" (12).

In an attempt to comprehend geological time and our place in the universe, a collaboration with rock emerged, and the reflections upon this collaboration were reported to Rob Wilsmore, who translated Claire's practice of serious play in sonic terms. Together, rock in memory, rock in mind, they discussed the equality of things and the quality of objects. They talked through an Anthropocene lens and of the place of aesthetics in the relation of rocks to humans.

Hugging the Rhomb Porphyry one day, Claire began a practice of channelling rock, tuning her mind and body to understand the rock. Researcher in Noetics and the "interconnectedness of things," Helané Wahbeh notes that "Channeling is the process of revealing information and energy not limited by our conventional notions of space and time that can appear receptive or expressive." Artists often call upon the vocabulary of other practices: in this case, mediumship. Channelling works to heighten senses, opening up the possibilities of what we can see, hear, feel and know. To connect deeply with a boulder, one needs to channel it. Yet, rock may be hard to know. Feeling the rock's qualities, listening to it,

and understanding its place within the landscape as mobile, as something that is moving, is a form of openness. With her clairaudience (clear listening) to the rock, Claire attunes to how that rock rests as a shape, her understanding of the shape is now affected by the body pressing into it, the resonance of the object, its low frequency hum will change because of touch. The clairsentience (clear feeling) of the cold rock touching flesh and the reciprocity —the rock feels the body pressing into it. There is clairvoyance (a clear seeing) into the act of the embodiment, where the image of the act is visualised as an out of body experience, an aesthetic of Claire wrapped on a rock working in harmony with it. All these experiences inform her claircognizance (clear knowing) that this rock now knows her, not to mention the coincidence that the rock has travelled from her ancestral home, Norway, containing geological traces of a time before her ancestors had met Earth. These artistic processes are methodologies that migrate into a new medium of writing lyrics for electronic dance poetry. Just like the sedimentary layers revealed within an exposed rock face, an intermedial practice transcends into a multi-layered lyric practice that names the time period, describes the rock's formation, recalls the intimate moments of collaboration, and poses questions that become lyrics: "Are you ticklish? Can I tickle you? Will you tickle me?" (Hind).

Part of this channelling process considers the extraordinary passage of deep time that we are within, and such thoughts take Claire to a visualisation of being situated within a universe with the realisation that we are all living on a giant spherical rock, hurtling through space. *Deep play* explored within the frame of deep time within a form of deep listening, where Pauline Oliveros understands that "Sounds beyond the limits of the ear … gathered by other sensory systems of the body" (19) take into account a profound sense of otherness within incomprehensible time and space. American composer Oliveros, like John Cage before her, has been highly influential on how western artists have changed "how" audiences listen. We are no longer listening to the work of the composer, but to something much deeper and much older than our obsession with the author that has emerged only over the last thousand years; a period that is but the shift of a stone in glacial terms, and yet our self-centred vanity thinks it an eon.

What is more ticklish: limestone, chalk or granite? We may assume rock is a solid, static, object, but it is not; it is mobile. It may once have been fluid but became, or is "becoming," solid, and might best be described in terms of "fluid solidity." As Ingold and Simonetti write, "[c]ould solids retain something, in their very constitution, of the flux of which they were formed? Can the solid itself be intrinsically fluid, even as the fluid solidifies? Recall that it is precisely in the concept of duration that solidity and fluidity merge" (5). Ruing a deficit in western language, native American scientist Robin Wall-Kimmerer writes that, by the citizens of Potawatomi, "rocks are addressed as animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places" (55). In the west, it is art that steps in where science fails. Dylan Thomas's poetic "force" within the "green fuse" of the flower (13) is not a metaphor, it is the same life force in both flower and person. Even Einstein conceded that "the soul given to each of us is moved by the same living spirit that moves the universe" (Hermanns 94). But as a generalisation, our

science-dominated mindset has excused any attribution of sentience to rocks, rivers, and other natural elements, as that of religion making a poor job of understanding the world. Edirisinghe and Suchet-Pearson put it that "disregarding the sentience of rivers is a form of asserting dominance. By contrast, many Indigenous philosophies perceive rivers as deeply and intimately inter-related with humans. In Hindu religious practices, rivers are understood to be Devis or Goddesses who are alive. Thus, to assume that rivers lack sentience is to arrive at a conclusion based on a narrow worldview" (229). But we also acknowledge our westernness, we do not wish to appropriate indigenous philosophies but neither do we think it right to ignore them.

When the tide goes out in Robin Hood's bay, you can see evidence of a fault from 70 million years ago; movements from the earth forced up layers of rock, creating a raised dome shape. Gradually, due to natural erosion, the raised platform of exposed rock revealed patterns of ridges shaped in semi-circles uncovering hidden dips and scaurs; evidence of the varied rates of erosion over long periods of time. Mixed into the layers of geological history are the 160-million-year-old ammonites, and with them comes the "bashers," the folk that take out their hammer and crack open a rock to get a free souvenir. Indeed, there is much to worry about in this world to get overly bothered by a parent cajoling their child into finding a fossil by way of aggressive force, but there is something chillingly symbolic in witnessing a reckless act of hammering rock that brings other acts of destruction into view. If we think about our relationship to Earth, long term, and alter the language we use, thinking on the Planetary scale (rather than the global or the universal) as Dipesh Chakrabarty asks, by reminding ourselves that we are part of a deep time process and not the only objects that exist in a planetary process, we may be able to make space and time for the things yet to come, and care for the planet's future—long after we have passed. Alice Mah, researcher on toxic pollution and environmental justice, calls for just and sustainable transformations, and proposes in her research methodologies within the social science frame that we must see ourselves within the planetary, alternative socio-ecological futures, where planetary deep time thinking considers future generations and multispecies justice.

The Scanning

In considering an alternative approach to time and to future, we turn to John Ellis McTaggart, a philosopher who argued that time is unreal. This is of interest to us as EDP record producers because his argument for the unreality of time has similarities with the analogy of the needle on the record. Wherever the needle is at any one moment on the record is the present, the "now." For McTaggart, "the B-series" is a fixed order of events whilst "the A-series," a secondary ordering of events, "is imposed by designating some moment within the B-series as *the present moment*" (McDaniel), "A" is the needle on disc "B." We take inspiration from McTaggart rather than following his philosophy exactly so that we can develop our version of "the needle on the record" and "the scanning," as we

call it in our practice. We note similarities between McTaggart's A and B series with the opposite positions of the pre-Socratics, in particular where the famous analogy attributed to Heraclitus that "one never steps foot in the same river twice" is refuted by Parmenides' arguments that "change is impossible."

Had JME McTaggart (1866-1925) been an electronic dance poet rather than a philosopher, he might well have produced a 12-inch single because, like his dual pathway philosophy of time, the vinyl record has an A-side and a B-side on the same object, with the two song-objects either side of the plastic disc. For us, this time-disc has Heraclitus on side A and Parmenides on side B. Where Heraclitus sees constant change, Parmenides sees only stasis. On Side A, the needle on the record has played some of the song that is now past with the rest of the song still in the future. On Side B, "all" of the song exists already, set out in the lumps and bumps of the grooves; the needle only scans that which is already complete. Where the needle is, is the "now" (and "now" is what we call music). If our reality is where the needle is placed, then whoever moves the needle moves us. God is a DJ.

Parmenides' philosophy is written in "poetic" form; aesthetics and mobility (or rather the lack of mobility) are intertwined in his work. For Parmenides in *On Nature* the universe is unchanging, a solid "block" universe in which nothing can move. There is no room for anything to move into as "everything is full of what is [. . .] for what is, is in contact with what is" (Burnet 128). There cannot be nothing between things, for that would be a nothing that has magnitude, and that would be something. Count the space between stars and it seems that some are further away than others, but how can it be that there is more nothing between one star than another? Even if Parmenides' arguments seem naive to us, it is still the case that we do not know what most of that space is. Call matter dark or ghostly, translucent or bible-black, we are lost and adrift in a star-full, astronaut-suit white, star-ship-bobbing cosmic sea. Time doesn't pass—look, it just doesn't. B-sides, the underdogs of the record world, are often the most interesting, and that McTaggart, who was a philosophy lecturer at Cambridge University, should have concluded that time is unreal, shows the endurance of a tenseless time (no past, present or future to speak of). As Parmenides put forward: "One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that It is. In it are very many tokens that what is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now it is, all at once, a continuous one" (Burnet 129). Mobility (and hence time) is an illusion where his own being (Parmenides' own character in his poem), along with that of the Goddess Justice and the daughters of the sun, are somehow separate to the static block universe. In this immobile block we experience only slices, like an MRI scan that seems to move, flick-book style, through sliced images of the brain, so our lives are a scanning of the segments of this solid universe traversing what already exists all at once. What then of mobility in an immobile universe? If "future" is nothing more than something that already exists but is as yet unscanned by us, then we are faced with the disempowerment of an eternal or deterministic universe in which we can do nothing.

Following on from the Parliament of Things and Actor Network Theory of Bruno Latour

(see Latour, *Reassembling the Social*), Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, or OOO in its noumenal view of the universe, recognises that illusions are "also" within that universe, even if not necessarily as Real Objects, noting (in the context of a discussion on Husserlian phenomenology) that "some of the objects of experience simply do not exist, including hallucinations, dreams, and the non-existent objects of our most groundless anxieties" (*Object-Oriented Ontology* 155). However, Harman critiques scientific "theories of everything" as failing to account for these objects of experience (unicorns, fictional detectives) as "a successful string theory would not be able to tell us anything about Sherlock Holmes" (*Object-Oriented Ontology* 33) but "there is always a point at which sensual objects can become real, often through the mechanism of social acceptance" (Harman and Wier 57). We so readily think of objects as physical things, but this is not the case in OOO where "anything —including events and performances—can count as an object" (Harman, *Art + Objects* 2), just do not undermine it by reducing it down to its components or overmine it by reducing it upwards to its purpose.

Scans can be Magnetic Resonance Images, but they can also be sonic, as in ultrasonic scans. As artists in the sonic realm, we can move our sonic territory into both ultrasonic and subsonic territories with which to scan the universe, and we will have to do that to attune with both quantum time and deep time. A dubious leap, no doubt—a shot in the dark or a stab in the astronaut-suit white, pseudoscience or pure charlatanism perhaps, but we are artists. We can try, because generally the impact of artistic failure is not catastrophic. It is metaphorical heart surgery rather than literal heart surgery (we play with your heart but we do not cut it open with a knife), and we choose ludiceriousness as our approach on the grounds that the ludiceriousnessless of science is one of its faults as well as one of its strengths.

Deep Time and Jiggle Time

Given that we want to explore different time frames, and that the deep time of the Earth is within our scope then, as electronic dance poets, we must "go through a process of acclimatizing to much vaster tracts of time" (Morton, *All Art Is Ecological* 32) if we are to dance accordingly. On the computer software (aptly called Logic) we set the bpm, the "beats per minute." Generally, we have a range from 90 bpm up to 180 bpm, but dancing to deep time will need a click-track set to both quantum and planetary time scales. Dark ecologist Timothy Morton asks us to consider a "unit of beat" that both is and is not moving in the same instance:

> What happens when you take the smallest thinkable unit of beat? This is what scientists call a *phonon*. A phonon is a quantum of vibration, just as a photon is a quantum of light. When you pass a phonon through material sensitive enough to register its presence such as a metal tuning fork visible to the naked eye, you see the fork vibrating and not vibrating *at the same time*.

(*Hyperobjects* 116)

We want to tap into this quantum aesthetic so that we can dance and stand still in the same moment. Phonons, a component of the physics of jiggling, have a typical frequency range of 10THz to 30THz (Parlinski). Theoretical physicist David Tong writes: "In materials, atoms can jiggle, oscillating back and forth about their equilibrium position. The result of their collective effort is what we call sound waves or, at the quantum level, *phonons*" (103). In music we generally associate frequency with pitch rather than beat (pulse), which we measure in bpm rather than Hertz (although, of course, bpm is a measurement of frequency, how many times per minute, so we differentiate the terms for the sake of understanding). As a rough guide, we can calculate what bpm we might use if we shift a standard EDM beats per minute in relation to a standard pitch frequency. So, if 120 bpm is our dance standard and we take a bench-mark pitch frequency of say, for ease of calculation, 1kHz (a slightly sharp B5 or nearly two octaves above Middle C), then we need to scale this up by a factor of 10 Billion to get into the 10 Terahertz region, giving a bpm of 1.2 Trillion beats per minute. So, our jiggle-time electronic dance poetry will be around 1,200,000,000,000 bpm.

But we must also consider our deep time EDP if we are to dance to a geological time scale. Let us slow it right down, on a geological time frame of 4.5 billion years, to pulsate with the age of Earth. We will write a track lasting the Hadean age, we will keep it a straight "four to the floor" with one beat every million years, so over its 500 million-year span it will have 500 beats, that is 125 bars of 4/4. The formula for beats per minute is "bpm = 1min/beat duration," which in this case is 1 minute divided by 525,960,000,000 minutes (a million years in minutes), which equals 0.000000000001901bpm.

So, The Long Dead Stars bpm range is:

Deep Time edp	0.000000000001901 bpm
Relaxed edp	90 bpm
Standard edp	120 bpm
Drum n Bass edp	180 bpm
Jiggle Time edp	1,200,000,000,000 bpm

We may have difficulty putting some of our tracks on 12-inch vinyl.

Alan, Is That You?

From within the practice of deep listening and wrapping the body around a boulder, shifting weight to fit into its shape, thoughts come to mind. Deep listening is a process of turning on, not switching off, and the thoughts that come to the surface relate to the specificity of the site and the movement between human and non-human and the awareness of the

mobility of deep time. Thoughts turn into questions: Why are objects named Alan?

On the coastline where Claire hugs a boulder, a dinosaur fossil was recently discovered. The fossilised remains of a once living organism, an imprint in rock preserved within sediments, deposited beneath water as a Dinosaur, buried only to resurface, and through a deep time process of formation and erosion, it now finds itself as an object called Alan and on display at the Yorkshire Museum. Claire feels the loss of an object she did not know: "Alan is that you?" Once a huge creature, a sauropod, now cut out of the geological landscape, fixed in sandstone, and named after a man. The Long Dead Stars' lyrics are formed from this loss:

> Alan is that you?
> I could die in this world and become it,
> but you didn't want it, or warn me of it.
> Deep time where the love lies,
> where the love hides, in the love tide. (Hind)

Lyrics arrive in the form of a voice. It is something that is heard. It is something that speaks to Claire during and after her rock hugging experience. The voice of a boulder. The boulder and Claire converse as a channelling practice; intimacy between two vibrating objects, a cognisance. Rocks do vibrate, they hum with energy. Their resonance recorded and the different frequencies measured between sandstone and mudstone, between pebbles and mountain peaks, are apparent in science and can help scientists detect natural frequency. In fact, mountains are in motion; they sway gently from the seismic rhythms of the earth. This is happening right now. Mountains hum with energy, at very low frequency. We can't hear it, but it is there; the Earth has tone. Reflecting on moving mountains, Doreen Massey places these ever-mobile masses in their own on-going narrative "bearing in mind the movement of the rocks, both space and landscape could be imagined as provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished, stories" (46). The Long Dead Stars ponder on objects, resonating through us and our matter. Tiny little pebbles, embedded within the Rhomb Porphyry, evidence that they were once mountains as high as the Himalayas, now eroded to tiny bits of matter, small as a fingernail and whispering to Claire. Some of their shared thoughts are secrets, things that only Claire and the boulder know, such secrets end up forming part of the lyrics and Claire has a rule; there is always one line containing a secret in each song on the album Whitby Mudstone. Each one of these one-line secrets are open to interpretation, made manifest from being in cahoots with a rock.

When having an out of body experience on a Norwegian rock at Boggle Hole, Claire has a vision of herself hugging the boulder, and she can see this as an image from outer space. She is in the universe, looking down on herself, donning a green dress, wearing a petticoat, hiking boots and moulding her body into the rock. Yet everything is spinning, she witnesses the rate at which the earth spins and feels like she is being tickled by some kind of invisible force. Suddenly, back on the rock and spinning with it, a voice can be heard that become

the lyrics: "Stop calling matter dark, translucent is the word, it passes through my head and skin and is my lumpy love."

The voice speaks too quickly to fully comprehend, but Claire gauges something on the lines of real love existing within dark matter particles that travel through the universe, through the bodies of rock and dust, moving through other rocky planets and straight through the hearts of alien life forms, touching them with tenderness, tickling their senses before passing through our own planet, our hearts and rocks before flying through the Earth's crust and back out again.

Coincidentally, on the North Yorkshire coast, half a mile down under the rock cliffs at Boulby, scientists are searching for Dark Matter particles. The material that we cannot see or hear but know is there. "Dark matter is fundamental to everything in the universe, it anchors all structures together. Without dark matter, superclusters, galaxies, planets, humans, flea and bacilli would not exist" (McFarlane 57).

The underground tests in Boulby mine are aptly named "ghost hunting." Searching for ghosts is an interesting concept, but a question comes to mind: Why do we name the things we do not understand, after the dead? Language is a virus from outer space, recalls Claire to the boulder, quoting a line from a Laurie Anderson song. Chanda Prescot Weinstein, Assistant Professor in Physics and Astronomy at the University of New Hampshire, draws our attention to how science has been rife with racism and misogyny. In her book *The Disordered Cosmos*, she highlights that matter is not dark but translucent, it is invisible. She also discusses the acronyms WIMP (Weakly Interacting Massive Particle), and MACHO (Massive Astrophysical Compact Halo Object), that sit boldly in the Encyclopaedia of Astronomy and Astrophysics, as "two of the most popular DARK MATTER candidates. They represent two very different but reasonable possibilities of what the dominant component of the universe may be" (Griest).

Why name a particle relating to dark matter that is charmingly elusive, not to mention the most important invisible object in the Universe, as a WIMP? In fact, can't we do away with acronyms altogether, they ruin everything. Just because someone thought it was a clever acronym does not mean it is an apt name for an object of study for years to come. This WIMP, aka "ghost," is longing, in fact, "yearning", to be named in relation to its extraordinary unseen presence. Look, do listen, it passes through rock and flies through our human and non-human bodies, it can pierce any acronym! And, as it moves through space *en route* to the next rocky planet transmitting its translucent love (for free), remember, it has passed through aliens, in a different galaxy, it has empathised with unrequited love, understood unconditional love and ignited passion. This unseen particle, we argue, does not have wimp-like qualities, for what is a wimp anyway? Let's do away with derogatory words. "Particle physics, please sort out your vocabulary—matter deserves more kudos," says Claire to the Rhomb Porphyry. The Rhomb Porphyry retorts in a voice worthy to be spoken as the lyrics of a pop song; "matter heard her heartbeat, matter warmed her presence. Matter it

was, matter."

The Song-Rock Collider

As rocks make the coast object, so songs make the music object. For The Long Dead Stars the song, whelk-like, sticks to the rock, building layers on top of the rock that will give us something in addition to it. We level the rock and the song through an Object-Oriented Ontology and an Object-Oriented Anthropology to bring into existence an Object-Oriented Discography: Every song a rock formation of the Yorkshire coastline, every track a layer of sediment or stone.

Songs about rocks make them an object colliding with another object. Science does not seem bothered about how a song collides with a rock, and so The Long Dead Stars propose as a project the Song-Rock Collider. A new technology fit for the Anthropocene age, built from the shame of our Anthro-apology. It is a machine for listening to, and negotiating with, things. The Large Hadron Collider cost billions, but we believe we can build ours for much less. It will lie underground, circling the foundations of Latour's Parliament, where objects are represented in their own way, negotiating their own collective contracts. Massimiliano Simons, in his article subtitled "How to listen to quasi-objects," advocates for new technologies to negotiate with things on their terms, "the parliament of things itself can be understood as a technology of the Anthropocene, namely one not aimed to help us to fully control nature, but first and foremost help us to negotiate to remain part of a collective with as many possible quasi-objects taken into account" (13).

Our collider is a technology for listening to quasi-objects and has two modes of operation. The A-mode mobilises a negotiation to keep us alive for longer. The B-mode operates as a scanner, steering our way through the eternal block. We cannot be sure how the collision-mode (side A) and the scanning-mode (side B) work together, if indeed they do. It might be as Morton tweeted:

> I am listening to Coldplay and Stockhausen simultaneously.
> It's not that great.
> "I am listening to Coldplay"

Ludicerious Aesthetics

Music and poetry were never meant to give direct instruction, "sit down, stand up, move to the left," but in terms of a communication that is more complete they have an advantage over the literal. I can tell you that I feel happy and you will understand that I am happy,

but if I can make you "feel" happy then the reception is no longer one of representation but of being, of asignification. The literal wins in giving instructions, but aesthetics wins in the communication of being. So, we do not preach about the Anthropocene, as Morton wrote: "Yelling at people that we are making lifeforms go extinct isn't nice" (Morton, *All Art Is Ecological* 21). We learnt as children in school to "Show, don't tell." We can yell that we are dismantling the environmental infrastructure that allows us to live, but that will not make us feel the necessary panic to act because it "deletes the necessary strangeness" (*All Art Is Ecological* 21). We must add layers, refresh the metaphors. A schoolgirl told us to "act as if our house is on fire, because it is" (Thunberg 13). It had an impact, a little dimmed now, so we need to keep adding to the impact, increasing the sum.

So, how to respond to rocks through music and sound? There is a direct literal approach: place microphones on the rock, take data from the object, convert it directly into sound. Remove the human from the data set input, choose the medium to which the data can be applied and let the process produce the sound. But note here the word "choose." Choosing the medium reintroduces the human (the noise, the parasitic "third man" in Michel Serres' terms), the offer of listening to the rock to give it agency is annulled by our subsequent interference. It is but a pretence of listening, a listening that is what we think the Earth wants, when in fact it is us "human-splaining" to the Earth what it needs. In a train station I see an advert of a supermarket branded recycled plastic bag that reads "Every time you use it the planet says Thanks." Is this what our attempt to listen to the world is, imagining that we hear it say "thank you" every time we use a recycled bag? We are evidently not listening. Not in the way we need to listen. Next time I use a recycled bag "I" will say sorry rather than imagine the world saying "thank you." The bag is a listening machine, I hear differently now. What we need is a transparent way to negotiate a natural contract with the Earth and as part of the Earth's collective (Serres), hence the need for Latour's parliament, where these contracts can become policies.

So, we choose the ludicerious technology that is electronic dance poetry as our Earth listening device. As Jane Bennett writes, "I have also suggested that a playful, naive stance toward nonhuman things is a way for us to render more manifest a fugitive dimension of experience. In the moment of naivete, it becomes possible to discern a resemblance between one's interior thinghood (e.g., bones) and the object-entities exterior to one's body" (366).

The Long Dead Stars' track "Alan" is our scanning of a fossilised dinosaur whose bones are now rocks; they are external to our own bones, but we discern a resemblance. They are, in our EDP, like a memento mori in a Holbein painting, except this is not a personal awareness of death but the death of a species, even of all life. Our modus operandi when collaborating with things is ludicerious, being both playful (ludic) and sincere (serious) within the same timeframe. Sometimes separate, sometimes simultaneous, but both always occur within the project. I receive the rock in its sensual form that is layered by Claire's ludicerious manifestation of her experience with it, but it is still the rock. We must relieve ourselves

of the burden we place on the rock when we emphasise its hard materiality over its full sensual materiality that can include a poetic stratum. The rock is made of layers: some are sedimentary, some are poetry, some are music.

I'm Not Into Crab Sandwiches Either

The experience of writing lyrics that tell stories about a rocky environment is one thing. To write lyrics after the experience of embodiment, a practice of the body wrapping itself with a boulder, is another. Hidden gems: thoughts, questions, stories, ideas emerge from the practice itself, within a process of an evolving composition and from out of channelling. Channelling is akin to a process of erosion, and whilst many artists work with metaphor to understand and reflect upon an experience, it is the listening to the experience, tuning into the object, that unearths the imagination as a bona fide object. The burrowing down into consciousness, akin to the practice of Transcendental Meditation®, reveals the buried, the hidden, the other and even the mundane, and it surfaces a voice for electronic dance poetry. Let the rock speak. Let the fossils of burning charcoal holler. Let the evidence remain, beset as a dead creature within a subterranean landscape. But, let this skeletal imprint deep within *Whitby Mudstone* welcome conversation on the incomprehension of deep time and with a woman who is sincere with her practice, and who has a sense of humour: "Nice to meet you bottom living fauna, I'm not into crab sandwiches either, they cause acid reflux, make for idle times …"

This landscape, where the smelly bladder wrack forms dense beds on this rocky shore and where boulders, some of which are covered in this seaweed atop their frame, include one in particular that looks like Noel Gallagher (at some distance), is compellingly alluring. Yet the siltstone, sandstone, limestone and peak steel are treated as less important because we cannot really see their journey within a deep time frame, we cannot hear their resonance, and they are indeed, fragile. The fragility of life comes to mind in an embodied practice, and boldly speaking, humans are obsessed with death. In fact, what the landscape revealed to Claire as she lay with the peak steel, is that aside from her playful relationship with the boulder, thoughts of death are always present in her mind. Death is permanently wrapped up in this practice, like a sedimentary layer; it runs deep, beneath the surface of her mind. The question that often haunts her: What happens to us when we die? This quandary feels less troublesome when touching the rock with the body in an aestheticised embrace. For in this moment of deep connection, the very simple fact that we are made of the same matter as the long dead stars gives comfort and food for writing lyrics. Most of the atoms found within our bodies came from exploding supernovas, and the rocks on the beach contain those same atoms, too; therefore, we are more alike than we think. We are, in this vein, equal.

The Long Dead Stars do not write songs about rocks anywhere. The album *Whitby Mudstone* is focused upon this specific coastline taking in Sandsend, Whitby, Ravenscar,

because the environment reveals visible evidence of the deep time formation on that line. The song lyrics are constructed as glitched stanzas, and as free verse streams of consciousness, composed of light rhythms of repetitive patterns that mimic the sedimentary layers of the area's deep time process. Words are written as a weave of informational storytelling, where descriptions of the structure of earth materials (rock and astronomical objects), are delivered in a conversational tone on the experience of laying with rock. The voice shifts from first-person narrative to second, followed by casual asides delivered in third-person narrative as a humorous interruption to the lyrical flow. The rhythms, repetition, glitches and narrative form are dependent upon the poetics of the rock, the heart, the thought, the dead, and the space matter piercing through it all, disrupting the very notion that life—human and non-human—is transient.

We would like our music, as The Long Dead Stars, to ludiceriously make connections between deep time and our connection within a planetary universe. We want to be part of the "giddying," as Macfarlane puts it:

> Through the spectacles of geology, terra firma becomes terra mobilis, and we are forced to reconsider our beliefs of what is solid and what is not. Although we attribute to stone great power to hold back time, to refuse its claims (cairns, stone tablets, monuments, statuary), this is true only in relation to our own mutability. Looked at in the context of the bigger geological picture, rock is as vulnerable to change as any other substance. Above all, geology makes explicit challenges to our understanding of time. It giddies the sense of here-and-now. (5)

There is a danger that, in the giddying of the senses, there will be some that exploit this state of confusion. Good people giddy to awaken us to act on mass extinction, whereas the bad giddy to obfuscate the danger and dither to hide the damage so that they can continue as before.

We Must Stop Dithering

The rock, when hit hard by another rock, cracks; hit harder, it splinters; hit harder again and it smashes into pieces, into smaller rocks. The rock, when hit hard by steel, cracks; hit harder, it splinters; hit harder again and it smashes into pieces, into smaller rocks. The rock is not accused of disingenuity when creating the same effect, whether hit by steel or by rock. It smashes into pieces in the same way, regardless of what it is hit by. No one criticises it for doing that. The rock is just being its authentic self, doing what it does, rocking. So, when the rock hits me (Rob) vicariously through Claire's rock poetry, the impact causes an effect, and what smashes out the other side of the collision is dance music. Similarly, when an emotion hits me, what smashes out the other side is also dance music. Yet somewhere, I hear the voice of criticism that disapproves of the similarity of effect, of aesthetic, regardless of causation. "Hit by rock, hit by emotion, why manifest their impact in the same way?" The

voice continues: "Go to the rock, record it, let it speak for itself." The instruction sounds like it should be right; it asks for the authenticity of unmediated access to the rock, but that is not what is meant when Simons asks us to listen to the quasi-object, because it is too literal. It masks the "noise," which is ironic, as acousticians know very well that we use noise to mask unwanted voices. Where distortion caused by quantisation error in digital sampling creates "'unwanted" harmonics, we can add white noise to the system, in a process called "dithering," to make it magically disappear. The introduction of noise removes the unwanted voice and also goes undetected by us. Noise (or to make the metaphor blatantly clear—the human) is an insidious, unnoticed assassin. That, as Simons in his articulation of Serres makes clear, is what we have done to the world: introduce noise into the system and unvoice objects. We have introduced dither to the world to silence the voices we do not want to hear. Humans are ditherers, and that is not a good thing. We need to shout new slogans, raise new placards:

WE MUST STOP DITHERING!

STOP DITHERING NOW!

DOWN WITH DITHERING!

Poetry in Motion

The reader may have noticed that, as much as we have enjoyed toying with ludicerious neologisms and puns, we have avoided the obvious reversal of the Song-Rock Collider. It had not escaped our attention. But we are aware that the order is not reversible, it is asymmetrical in that the Rock-Song object is already a planet-sized heavyweight. Turned up to eleven and orbiting the sun at its own pace, it would weigh down the balance of our collider. Asymmetry has a key place in OOO thinking too; metaphors work because they are not reversible, and for influence, asymmetry is momentum. The Newtonian law of equal and opposite effect does not always hold, "I as a human can observe long-dead stars, which thereby have an effect on me even though I can't possibly affect them in turn" (Harman and Weir 58-59).

We are The Long Dead Stars. Rocks, remnants of long dead stars have impacted upon us; they have caused an effect, our art, and that is not outside of the total sum of the universe. Maybe the reason scientists cannot account for everything is because they have forgotten to include art in the equation.

In his concept of "situated composition" Sam Thulin explores the various ways that artists use mobile apps in the process of composition relating to place, mobility and situatedness, noting "as a concept, situated composition is not confined to describing a particular

engagement with technology and place. Instead, it is a lens or filter through which to approach any act of sound production and composition" (75). In our composition there are two apps, the second of which is the mobile phone app *WhatsApp* which is the e-parcel by which the poetry and tunes are stored and heard. The first "mobile app" is Claire herself, as it is her engagement with the rock object that becomes the recording of that moment.

Claire finds herself in her car at the temporary traffic lights near Menston, below Bingley Moor, contemplating what it means to be temporary, with road works ahead. She observes the object change from red to amber to green. Back to red. She is thinking of the walk down the steep 200ft cliff to the Peak Steel at Ravenscar. There is an earworm, she sings it to Rob on a *WhatsApp* voice note. She sends short voice objects, short audio recordings, which arrive in an e-parcel. Some are readings and some are short "ear worms" as Claire refers to them. Each one is in itself a complex mix of playful, simple melody, familiar in its pop orientation but with a much less familiar lyric that is alien to the pop world. Rob sifts the melodies from the e-parcels, choosing the ones that pop out, a process that songwriter and producer Lauren Christie calls "Butterfly collecting" (Wilsmore and Johnson). He makes some small tweaks so that they sit more comfortably in their new musical context, but tries to leave them in their purest form, the best pop is unencumbered by concerns for its own naivety, that assignation is the problem of the receiver not the artist. Pop choruses have short catchy tunes, just as our tracks do, but they do not tend to have lyrics such as "Fossas fossa bony parts, kink points in the main fold," normally pop "can't live without your love" and "wants you now, next, for good, forever or never again." But neither are we a field of our own; we are not so far in concept from Laurie Anderson's 1982 "O Superman," and our synth sounds and melodies often hark back to the 80s too. But the spoken word and music aesthetic tool thrives today; for Little Simz, Kae Tempest, Self Esteem, Sleaford Mods and countless others, this is a normal arts practice.

We said at the start that we were "rambling rock flâneurs," and if you have made it through to the end of this article with us then no doubt you will have experienced various responses along the way, be that wonder, elation and excitement, or boredom, exhaustion and disbelief. Our long ramble has been to observe and sense objects through various aesthetic operations in search for which modes might best enable us to listen to the Earth. We do not apologise for our rambling; our only apology is an Anthro-apology to the Earth for not listening in the first place.

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