remains of these small marine organisms that emerged some 580 million years ago now dapple black shale rock. Greene's camera lingers on the immense cavernous landscapes, craggy edges and eroding waterfalls of the Dols Linn landscape in Scotland that reveals the graptolites' embalmed reality. Holdegger was speaking in the context of human-specific language, but having evolved quickly, rapidly morphing throughout a 100m-year timespan and populating the world's oceans, the graptolites shapeshifting somaeauts – now valuable biostratigraphic markers in time – can be read as a narrative, stretching Holdegger's promise through to seemingly infinite time. Narrated in speculative collective voice, the fossilised beings reach out from within their deep-time silent slumber: 'Billions of architects / we built micro-utopias / to live together in common corridors'. Having maintained a certain biological mystery, dancer Katye Coe collaborates in a bodily call and response, unhooking the clues they left behind. She speculates on the possibilities of how they once moved in the ocean; but more knowingly her body traces their movement since extinction, in slow motion over the millennia, from horizontal to vertical, returning to horizontality, the graptolites rendering time, her mortality unsteadying her; a collaborative dialogue across millennia of silences. Contemplating the transience of our species – our precarity more palpable now than ever before – Holdegger's timeless cycle of communicative regeneration here transcends the linguistic; silence acts as the reactivating and resurfacing communication to surpass inevitable demise. As Greene's graptolites profess, 'everything that solidifies will speak again'.

Five hundred metres into solid, stable bedrock on Finland's south-west coast lies Onkalo, one of the world's first deep geological nuclear-waste depositories. Once full, it will be sealed from the outside world; it must then be intact for 100,000 years, shielding those outside from its lethal contents. As the graptolites mark their era, one of the lasting markers of our existence will be the residue of our nuclear greed. Michael Madsen's 2010 documentary Into Eternity questions scientists, theologians and government representatives on their conflicting approaches to communicating the lethal danger at the site. A series of signs now mark the area: 'Nothing valued is here'; 'This place is best shunned and left uninhabited'. But the lifespan demanded of Onkalo – and the communication of its danger – is longer than any man-made structure has so far existed, and written language has only existed for 5,000 years. One hundred thousand years ago, Homo sapiens had not yet ventured out of Africa to populate Europe or the Americas, and in that time incalculable languages rose and fell into extinction. The best chance for future generations or species to avoid the danger of Onkalo, more consistent than any language, is to leave it unmarked, in silence, hidden from the perils of future curiosity.

In another of Allora & Calzadilla's works, The Great Silence, 2014, the camera turns to the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico, one of the world's largest single-aperture radio telescopes, capable of capturing the broadcast of radio waves sent by the universe. Seeking contact with extra-terrestrial life, Arecibo has broadcast messages out into space, aiming towards a cluster of stars over 25,000 light years away, the first in 1974: no reply has yet been returned. A few years later, during a conversation among physicists discussing the possibility of UFOs, Italian-American physicist Enrico Fermi exclaimed: 'But where is everybody?' There are hundreds of billions of stars in the Milky Way similar to the Sun, with a high probability of Earth-like planets and subsequently the conditions for intelligent life to develop; since many of these stars are billions of years older, it would seem to provide plenty of time for an extra-terrestrial civilisation to have visited Earth. With such probability of extra-terrestrial life, why is there no evidence of it? The Fermi Paradox has yet to be answered. Rather than gazing into the unfathomably silent celestial expanse, Allora & Calzadilla look back towards home to search for solace. The 300m-diameter dish site among the lush forests that provide a home for the last wild population of critically endangered Puerto Rican Amazon (Amazona vittata) parrots. Produced in collaboration with science-fiction author Ted Chiang, The Great Silence narrates the parrots' bewilderment at humanity's lack of dialogue with them, despite our spatial and cognitive proximity, as they face the imminent end of their kind and the disappearance of their language; humans, meanwhile, determinedly scan for signs of companionship in deep space. Rather than stranding us in a silent abyss, the Fermi Paradox is instead repositioned by the artists to examine the universal experience of silence as the irreducible matter that binds all relationships between the living and the non-living, human and animal, terrestrial and cosmic.

In his posthumously published essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', Walter Benjamin proposed the mute but omnipresent language of all things, animates and inanimate: a material community between everything, a cacophony of matter silently communicating its essence, content, existence and relationship to one another. When I first started thinking about this piece, the silence of a future lockdown was unfathomable. As the weeks and months of lockdown unfolded, in the rush to produce and consume more podcasts, online programmes, more content readily accessible from our computer screens, I find myself retreating from the noise. During isolation, Rotterdam-based artist Junghun Kim has taken on a new daily ritual: laying out on the floor a selection of objects, fruit, vegetables, plants and rocks found around his home. In this action, an ecosystem of interconnectedness is revealed. This daily ritual, one he describes as a geological meditation, shifts perceptions of these normally mundane and seemingly disparate objects to reveal an ecosystem of infinite relations between the universe's elements. As with the frenzied potential and collaborative agency in the silences between Myong Mi Kim's words, in Junghun Kim's modest case study of looking and listening, the objects become a cosmology, as significant as any other, from which to understand the overwhelming wholeness of universal existence. The Japanese concept of ma – which literally means 'interval'; 'space', 'in-betweeen', but also 'meaningful pause' – relates to all aspects of life: the space of intersubjectivity and the binding force between everything. The silence defined by ma - the silent matter between everything – is not absence, but a complete world in itself, full of active performance or, as Barad wrote, 'the infinite plenitude of openness'. As the universe expands to its fullest point, in order to spring backwards, inwards to nothingness, the infinite impermanence of silence is alive with possibilities, both dependent and independent from its past, yet binding individuals together with its agency. In our temporary quiet present, we continue our silent communication with the silent pulsiform turning of the Earth's matter: past, present and possible.

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