

ECO SOMA

## **ART AFTER NATURE**

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*Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters*

Petra Kuppers

*Art and Posthumanism: Essays, Encounters, Conversations*

Cary Wolfe

Art  
after  
Nature

# ECO SOMA

PAIN AND JOY  
IN SPECULATIVE  
PERFORMANCE  
ENCOUNTERS

Petra Kupperts



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These chapters emerge from my travels as a disability culture activist: I choreographed a Salamander performance with Spinn, a physically integrated dance company in Sweden; spent time workshoping with A Different Light, a theater company in Aotearoa/New Zealand (comprising people deemed to have cognitive differences); worked as a consultant to the Victorian government in Australia to set up focus groups with disabled artists; and connected with Japanese Butoh artists in Berlin to choreograph at the Holocaust Memorial. In my travels, I have met and learned from so many; I have learned different ways of being with the land—with histories and futures, in community—in respect and humility. In my career as a touring artist, I have also seen the impact of ever-expanding travel economies. So this book also charts my growing embedment in and gratitude to more local, sustainable contacts, connecting with disabled and nondisabled artists in my hometown of Ypsilanti, in nearby Ann Arbor and Detroit, and in cities a train ride away like Chicago, Toronto, and other nearby Canadian cities.

I am grateful for performance, experimental dance, creative somatics, eco-poetics, and all practitioners and artists who push what our forms can be. I am also grateful to my fellow writers who are always exploring new modes of gliding between the art forms. I am writing these comments during Covid times, where it has become clear how deeply needed our practices are. I have a skin thirst for feeling others, bodily, in dancerly grace and weight sharing. I know that this resonates for so many in our multiple communities.

My thanks goes, as always, to the supportive international wayfarers who perform with me in the *Olimpias*, our disability culture performance research collective. And I am so grateful to the people who come to play, dance, and breathe at Turtle Disco, a somatic writing studio. This is the local instantiation of my art practice, cofounded in 2017 in our living room, with dancer and poet Stephanie Heit.

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Symposium in 2020. Parts of the fourth chapter were initially a keynote speech for *Broken Puppet: A Symposium on Puppetry and Disability Performance*, Bath Spa, United Kingdom, in April 2018. In between, I explored the material in many conferences, symposia, community sharings, often with participatory elements, being nourished and nourishing in turn. I particularly valued the engagement at the 2019 Performance Studies international (PSi) in Calgary; a speculative performance workshop I was invited to lead at the 2019 National Women's Studies Association annual conference in San Francisco; a flocking score and talk at the American Dance Festival/Hollins College Dance MFA with Thomas DeFrantz, and a talk and postconference workshop at the 2019 American Society for Literature and the Arts.

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I am delighted that this book can go out into the world as an open-access text and that my collaborators, play partners, and communities can access my words about our shared experiences without having to pay (digital divides notwithstanding, of course). I am grateful to the University of Michigan and the TOME collaboration of the Association of American Universities, the Association of University Presses, and the Association of Research Libraries for making this possible.

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# Introducing Eco Soma

What is “eco soma”? I approach this phrase as a mash-up, an encounter zone all by itself: there is “ecosomatics,” a term somewhere between exclusion and inclusion, with undertones of neoliberal self-care, of White settler appropriation of Indigenous practices, a bit New Agey, a bit old ritual. And there is “eco soma:” a two step, a longer phrase, a stumble, the hesitation marks left in. The break holds hope and promise. I propose “eco soma” as a method for working with somatics in performance: both in the production and the reception of somatic-flavored work.

This book collects my experiences of embodied performance witnessing. It attempts to figure out those special moments when time shifts, or new sensations emerge, in the middle of involved witnessing, in the encounter zones between self and environment and on specific lands.

Eco soma sensing connects with materials, objects, and sites that one’s moving body meets. I find that sometimes my moving self, in dancery openness, can sense more or differently than when I am immobile, even though (or maybe because) my disabled movement is painful. Eco soma sensing is interested in the kind of gaps and opportunities that open up when phenomenological awareness of being in the world encounters uncomfortable spaces. That discomfort opens up, for instance, when your cuddly blanket is made of water-threatening plastics whose tiny fibers might clog a fish’s digestive system. Your own stomach contracts at the thought, even while you hold on to differences between your own gut and a fish’s sensing. My play here with I/you/we pronouns is a deliberate invitation—not to overidentify but to wonder. This being-with and alongside elements and nonhuman others is central to my query (particularly in chapter 3, where disabled people go swimming together and hang out as/with salamanders).

In an eco soma inquiry, my own self is never “unmarked” or the quiet center of the phenomenological self: I am part of both a human and a nonhuman

ecology, and I am part of a set of historically and culturally grown relations. All of this brings embeddedness and entanglement. In my case, my self is marked as White, a citizen of the perpetrator nation Germany, a disabled wheelchair/scooter user, a settler on Anishinaabe territory, a consumer in a Global North economy, a cis woman, queer, an artist and an academic, in pain, and in joy. All of these markers complicatedly arise to my being in the world: they shape my sensations and my fantasies.

My personal lineage for this work emerges from disability culture, queer phenomenology, ecopoetics, experimental anthropology, psychogeography, affect theory, and from long immersion in somatic movement modalities and performance practices. As you will see, each practitioner whose work I engage with in these chapters calls on their ancestors in different ways and creates their own lineage: academic, artistic, spiritual, or other. I honor multiple ways of coming into one's self, and hence I use the term *bodymindspirit* at multiple points. See how it resonates with you.

The first one of these lineages I cited above is probably the one least written about: disability culture. I am encultured as disabled—left out, not thought about, discarded—and, on a regular basis in my case, sitting at the bottom of the steps. And I also co-create disability culture: reaching toward resilience from an unstable position, trying to not be lonely in my singular and painful form of embodiment, okay with being the odd one out and being jubilant when I am not. My particular somatic way of being in the world encompasses these things: in pain, unstable when on my feet, out of the “talk sphere” when sitting in my wheelchair at belt level and with the party happening above me, unable to get into most dance studios, experimental performance venues, private homes, etc., and being mistaken for other wheelchair users on a regular basis. All these sensations and experiences shape and characterize my perspective in this book.

Other disabled people have different markers of their exclusion and their sites of joy, as have others with different cultural lineages whose forms of embodiment and enmindment have been denigrated, often with deadly results, by the dominant forces that shape the way people encounter each other, live, and interact.

My citable (i.e., archive-explorable) lineage for my cultural form includes disabled people who speak about disability culture (or adjacent concepts), such as psychologist Carol Gill, the British dance group Candoco, performance artist Neil Marcus, theater artist Mat Fraser, playwright Kaitie O'Reilly, theater



and disability theorist Carrie Sandahl, choreographers Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Gerda König, and Manri Kim, choreographer and dramaturg Raimund Hoghe, disability studies scholars Steven Brown, Tobin Siebers, and Eliza Chandler, Sins Invalid co-founders Patricia Berne and Leroy Moore, AXIS dance company's Judith Smith, performance artist Frank Moore, artist Syrus Marcus Ware, dance artist Perel, Two-Spirit poet Qwo-Li Driskill, disability justice organizer Mia Mingus, and activist Anne McDonald. My archive also includes writers and visionaries I never met who were disabled but wrote or created in relation to the "cultural" part of disability in complex terms, such as Antonin Artaud, Martín Ramírez, Audre Lorde, and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (who did not embrace the label "disability" but wrote eloquently about theorizing in pain and from a bed). It gives me such pleasure to write even this short list of names, to cite a lineage and a peer world when so few disabled people have come to voice, expression, public performance, or print. Most of us have to construct our lineage in a shallow time slice, as we can't easily find each other. The nondisabled world does not often offer me "disability culture(s)" as something to learn and know about. And, as part of this, disability culture(s) are diminished by insufficient contact between different cultural formations.<sup>1</sup>

An important connection point in my repertoire-based, embodied, private lineage is my Tante (great-aunt) Lisa, who had cerebral palsy and was a farm-worker for most of her life, with no access to a love life, to sexual expression with others, or to education. She was the one who first taught me about living well in pain, about ways of thinking creatively about the erotic, and who strongly supported my path away from my small German village toward the education denied to her. I was so lucky to sit side-by-side with her under trees, both of us chucking peas or peeling the potatoes she grew. I still can feel the sensations: dappled sunshine through the trees, a bowl on my knees, and the nutritious plants heavy and moist in my hands.

My task in this book is to unsettle myself, embrace my unstable way of being in the world and in academia, and prepare and offer nourishment, a place to be, breathe, and sense into connections. I offer my pain and joy to others who experience their cultural location with ambivalence and with stumbling. Fantasies of otherworlds are part of this, trying to find different gravities, different atmospheres. I can think about disability culture being a "pie in the sky": an American formulation that emerges from a workers' song written in 1911 by Swedish-American labor activist and songwriter Joe Hill, which he wrote as a parody of

the Salvation Army hymn “In the Sweet By-and-By.” Pointing to an “elsewhere” for one’s reward is a powerful hegemonic mechanism of control. In 2007 I wrote about disability and crip culture being “a moon on the horizon, an accessible castle in the air” (2007b)—a European fantasy image, the fairytale castle out of reach, with its own heritage of feudalism and Disney dreams, mashed up with ramps, soft pillows, and talking elevators. Speculative dreams of happiness and communality are never easy, pure, or unadulterated, as performance studies writers like Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz have shown.

Whether “disability culture(s)” are a thing or not is hard to decide, but my painful bones long for it, just as so many others look for cultural identification as a home, a place of certainty, of belonging. In this book, I show what it can be like to witness performances from the embodied and fantasized position of a disability culture observer. Disability culture becomes a felt and enacted process, not a thing.

Above I wrote of stumbling as a way to think about being uncertainly identified and identifying. Somatic experiences are central to my theorizing. I am usually the only visibly disabled person in most academic settings that are not specifically about disability (studies) (and certainly in most dance studios), and I often think I can feel eyes on my skin. When I get up and move on my feet, anything can unbalance me. I fear being pushed over, afraid that I am too heavy to fall gracefully and without injury. Years of Contact Improvisation have taught me skills for falling, but a lifetime of pain reasserts its emotional and somatic marks. But I also love my instability, to be in ocean waves, on uneven forest ground, or among moving people, for short periods. So I aim to get myself into encounter zones where I feel difference close up, skin to skin, where a lack of balance is an aesthetic strategy. In the pauses, when I rest after a few minutes of dancing, I have enough time to contemplate the implications and to witness the world, as even more years of Authentic Movement and Contemplative Dance Practices have taught me. I listen inside, honed by my experiences with Continuum Movement and BodyMindCentering, and I watch around me, using my performance anthropology training and Laban Movement Analysis skills to look for what is communicated in nonverbal ways by the wider field I am in: human worlds, more-than-human/nonhuman worlds and their movements, geology and elements with different temporal markers.

Identifications and lineages come with baggage, and this book explores mul-

tiple zones where what I/you/we bring to an encounter extends beyond our individual skin sack—and yet remains available to our senses. Colonial histories have proven that it is much too easy to shut one's self off from these eco soma encounter zones, to either other the other completely into property, or to subsume the other in one's identificatory fantasies (i.e., "They are just like me.")—something I write about in the fourth chapter as I follow Saidiya Hartman's critique of empathy into engagements with video dances and speculative time signatures.

But the point of this book is to stay open in the physical encounter zone, in the physical meeting of human/nonhuman/world: to enter as an artful cultural practitioner/theorist into un/comfortable contact and to seek out somatic sensations in environmental art practices. Where do you feel yourself become unstable? How do you consciously call upon, think, or fantasize about your roots? What are the limits of security and clarity in your lineage? How do you respond to the moments when your own identification is unclear, doubtful, or painful?

When thinking about lineages and the disruptions of colonial, racist, and eugenic violences becomes too hard, how do you find a momentary balance, a resting place for yourself and for others (a central question of chapter 1, with its focus on somatics and participatory performances)?

How can you consciously unsettle and resettle yourself and think about the implications of the land you are on and the histories that brought you here (the core of chapter 2, which looks at Indigenous/settler collaborations and mediations)? I invite you to take these questions into your reading of this book.

### **Isolation Somatics: Zoom Worlds**

In the middle of writing this book, the somatic performance scene shifted, aligning itself with a new environmental world and a new attitude toward fellow humans. The year 2020 marked the start of the global coronavirus pandemic. Performance and embodiment practitioners found themselves shifting ground in viral times. In this book, I think about somatics, embodiment, environment, and contact zones; these are my lenses on this pandemic time. Thus, in this preface, I write about Zoom worlds, with the openness of an explorer in new territory.

In April 2020, novelist Arundhati Roy wrote in the *Financial Times* about the coronavirus in India:

It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (2020)

Much of 2020 feels like a portal, indeed: the pandemic and its global effects bringing supply chains into focus; an ongoing economic collapse and the breaching of environmental protections; and the global uprisings against police violence and the turn toward Black Lives Matter even by White people who a few short years ago bristled at the words—hopefully making a revolution and reparations possible. The international environmental movement keeps reminding newspaper audiences of the “portal” moment of these times: the last moments to reverse or mitigate climate collapse and the rearrangement of the human world.

In a much less cited moment in the same article, Roy speaks about online somatics. She critiques as narcissistic Indian prime minister Narendra Modi’s decision to “share his yoga nidra videos, in which a morphed, animated Modi with a dream body demonstrates yoga asanas to help people deal with the stress of self-isolation” (Roy 2020). As the high point of her irony, she asks for a different dream-asana:

Perhaps one of the asanas could be a request-asana in which Modi requests the French prime minister to allow us to renege on the very troublesome Rafale fighter jet deal and use that €7.8bn for desperately needed emergency measures to support a few million hungry people. (Roy 2020)

This, then, is the public perspective on somatics in a nutshell: a highly complicated place between narcissism, indulgence, fantasy, and nourishment; between effectiveness and doing too little; and between wealthy self-delusion and public suffering. Somatic practice, even yoga in India (though particularly in an India under the sway of a Hindu nationalist agenda), seems inadequate, meaningless, and ungrounded.

In moments of such tension and overwhelm, caught between a rock and a hard place, I move. This book charts moments when others do the same: move fast or slow, shift gears, shift worlds, shift sensations, to get to portals of “otherwise,” to “walk [or roll] lightly, to imagine another world” (Roy 2020).

Part of my regular practice is drifting, *dérive*, spending more time than “normal” exploring space, checking in with my body and my environment.<sup>2</sup> As mobility is physically painful for me, I naturally pay extra attention to where I am and how gravity works on me.

Let’s enter. In today’s drifting, I amble around my study, a common disability performance practice even in nonviral times: pain and mobility difficulties often constrict my range. I, like many disabled people, have learned to think of mundane and enclosed spaces as environments, not just the lofty wild sites of much environmental writing. Most of my wilderness explorations with fellow disabled people are on the edge of car parks, on streets within reach of my car door, or in my yard. So today I caress the edges of my home space with fingers and eyes: a midwestern U.S. family home in Ypsilanti, Michigan, with its pine cladding and quarry tiles, while outside the windows can be found the freshly greening white pine trees in the yard. I drift over to a painting on a table easel next to my writing space, and I look at a little diver, a tiny detail in a much larger painting (Plate 1). It’s the first painting I have completed since the isolation started, and it holds many traces of dreams and desires—not least my urgent and frustrated physical need to be weightless in the warm water therapy pool, a refuge for my aching body. But the little diver is also my somanaut,<sup>3</sup> an emblem of the social isolation practice my wife Stephanie Heit and I have been in since I fell ill on March 3, 2020, before Covid-19 testing became widely available in the United States.

I have been using the isolation of these last months, when I wasn’t coughing and/or very worried, to participate in somatic sessions brought to me via Zoom. I have managed to reconnect with many old comrades from my personal dance history this way, and I have leaned into practices that have been part of my embodied world for two decades or more. I cite these practices as they also chart some of my movement lineages: I enjoyed Continuum Movement with Teri Carter; BodyMindCentering with Olive Bieringa, Martha Eddy, and in lectures with founder Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen; Somatic Experiencing with Daniel Bear Davis; Speaking in Tongues sessions with mayfield brooks; Feldenkrais with Mary Armentrout; Skinner Releasing with Julie Mayo and Yvonne Meier; Qi Gong with Laurel Atwell; Salsa Somatica with Amelia Uzategui Bonilla and Juan Urbina; moving/drawing/writing sessions at the American Dance Festival with Jesse Zaritt; languaging dance with Ishmael Houston-Jones; Resilience Motions with Zavé Martohardjono; and more.

In my drifting, I am drawn to a particular embodiment/Zoom moment that happened on my purple plastic-derived carpet in front of the acrylic diver painting. On May Day 2020, Beltane, or Worker's Day, I lay down on this carpet to participate in a Queer Embodiment session, organized by the LGBT Health and Wellbeing of Scotland network and facilitated by Tracy Veck, a disabled, queer, White, Scotland-based artist who has led similar sessions out of the Center for Contemporary Art in Glasgow. Let's dive in here.

Tracy (she/her), our facilitator, is hosted by Benn (he/him), from the Scottish LGBT Health and Wellbeing network. I arrive to the Zoom meeting, and Benn welcomes me. Then he helps me figure out how to change my name on my iPhone (which is different from the protocols of the laptop). I offer my usual handle: *full name, (she/her)*, which has become the queer/trans-aware convention for many of us in the (at that point only two) months of daily Zooms. There are about ten people in this session: half use this convention, while the other half do not. Maybe this gives some clues to the fact that I am no longer in an academic or artistic environment but in a more diverse and differently queer scene. Visually to me, participants come from mixed racialized backgrounds, and some are visibly disabled.

I greet the few people I know in private chat messages. There is both personal intimacy from these earlier connections and also impersonal intimacies: we are all present because we align around the theme of "queer," so being here is the equivalent of the little queer nod we'd usually give each other in public.

I can see people's bedrooms and living rooms. They can see my study. Dogs and cats walk past the camera, both in my own space and in the spaces in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and England.

Tracy leads us with kindness and spaciousness. First, we breathe. We arrive. *Meditate where you are, move or do not move, feel what's right for you:* kind words to hear in isolation time, no *shoulds*, no judgment. *Leave your camera on, turn it off*—whatever works best. She breathes acceptance and support through the screen, and I can see many of us fall into our back-bodies, fall (at least in my case) into delicious trust and openness.

For the next hour, I relax my face and my jaw. I let my hand touch my other hand gently, exploratorily, with all senses engaged, on the edges of skin-sense of self and other. I hug myself and acknowledge that this might be a weighty and emotional gesture for some of us. I rub and give care to my belly in this trauma-informed care session.

Every few minutes the group extends this exploration by going disco. I get to groove to glam-rock music, like the Scissor Sisters tune “I Don’t Feel Like Dancing When the Old Joanna Plays” (with “Joanna” signifying a cockney rhyme to “piano”). The band Scissor Sisters emerged from queer NYC nightlife, and the name references a lesbian sexual practice. The song lyrics we dance to signify something of the push-pull of queer desire, the awkward caught-ness that also speaks to isolated lives in the pandemic crisis: “Don’t feel like dancin’, dancin’/ Rather be home with no one if I can’t get down with you.” The music twitches into danceability. This upbeat tempo contrasts deliciously with Tracy’s calming delivery and her focus on small muscle releases. We can dance it out. I can see people dance in their living room, their seat, their bed. They can see my study and my nest, a purple sheepskin laid out on my purple carpet. As the movement grows, I take my phone into Turtle Disco, the empty front living room that Stephanie and I use as a community movement studio. I boogie down. There is no judgment; disquiet and disconnect shake out of my bones, at least for a second. Something releases in me: both the intense self-scrutiny of Zoom and intense self-consciousness. Heart rate up, breath out.

As part of the Queer Embodiments session, Tracy asks us to explore our space, using the music as a way to see our home environment with new rhythms. The music is 1940s jazz nightclub music. Later on, in the discussion, one of the participants talks about how the dust bunnies around her room took on a different charge with her changed perspective of her space: now, as she misses dancing in a queer club, the dust accumulations feel appropriate, reminding her of a shabby, comfy home away from home. In these little moments, fantasy and spatial exploration combine to animate new opportunities, merging memory and what-is-available into speculative realms of how to live in a pandemic. The moment feels communal to me: *we can do this*.

Tracy’s invitations to find new rhythms and intimacies with our household and its objects echo Sara Ahmed’s queer objects. Ahmed writes about how a space makes “certain things, not others, available” to us (2006, 14). In this quiet practice of Tracy Veck’s, the living room transforms into the club, with little transitional animacies guiding the way. The space makes things available; dance makes things available. Our orientations can offer us new perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Turning ourselves away from the everyday directional lines of our rooms, some of us go upside down, or lie on the floor—and there might be a dust bunny. What we each do with it—what kind of orientation we might activate, stress, or derail

from—is here artfully up for grabs, or for cruising. This is a dance, not the everyday aliveness that might orient some of us toward a dustpan. By turning away from this dustpan’s call, some of us might even experience a turn away from the line of the family Ahmed discusses: the call, hail, or order of patriarchal arrangements. By doing something different, feeling differently, I get a glimpse of moments that offer little queer openings into the nonmundane: vibrations.

My language repertoire feels/sees/senses space between words: eco soma. Eco soma enters when world, environment, and embodiment/self find some open space in reflection: new openings for pain, toward joy.

### Eco Soma Writing

I’ve just read a section of Fernando Pessoa’s *Book of Disquiet* during a collaborative art practice in viral times. The excerpt is part of a writing prompt by the NYC-based feminist poetry collective Belladonna. In this passage, queer elder Pessoa is a writer at his desk adding mundane business figures into his ledger. Something happens at that writing desk: for a moment, Pessoa sees the lines he filled out as a palimpsest, as something built on older erasures. Pessoa, the Portuguese colonial cis male figure, sees it as a lineage of all kinds of explorers:

Smiling to myself I remember that life, which contains these pages with fabric types, prices and sales, blank spaces, letters and ruled lines, also includes the great navigators, the great saints, and the poets of every age, not one of whom enters the books—a vast progeny banished from those who determine the world’s worth. ([1982] 2017:5)

When I read this passage with an eye alert to how the world parses, and who has “worth” in multiple ways, the passage reverberates well beyond what Pessoa might have foreseen. Our words and worlds have histories, and the “great navigators” echo with colonial violence, even as Pessoa tries to point to men of exploration, saints, and poetry as the shimmering call beyond the mundane into the space of fantasy. One man’s freedom of movement is another man’s domination.

I am interested here in moments of seeing more than one thing and touching in non-touch. There’s the not-quite-coinciding of writing practice and longing: what enters the book is not just what is in the book. Power relations shape (ecological) fantasy, as any auto-ethnographer knows. My painterly/swimmerly



imagination of the gravity-free diver, my somanaut, has other layers, too: ocean degradation, tourism and its costs, and plastics productions but also the psychic lure of the abyss. That's one of the spaces of eco soma, the shadow side of ecosomatics, the pause around "knowing." Eco soma sits less immediate in my ear than words that include "somatics": it slows the speed of consumption and reception. I conceive of this as an eco-poetic move to notice and imagine.

To get back to my Glasgow group: queer and trans people of all kinds have a long nonbio heritage of seeing things levitate and vibrate. Queer and trans people can and need to see things beyond what is there, to imagine otherwise. Pessoa is part of that lineage. Queer aesthetics overlay the mundane with the club, sometimes inside ourselves and sometimes outside, proud and loud. Some of us have to live life in disquiet. *We can do this*: survive in difference. Many minoritarian groups born in identity-formations can find these new intimacies and then talk about them to the little glowing Zoom square.

In the Scottish session the alternate orientation to the (eco-queer-crip) dust bunny quickly becomes a talking point, a shared narrative, a shared laughter, and an affective nugget of connection.

And now, in my writing here on this disquiet *dérive*, it becomes an argument around orientation and autoethnographic writing and eco soma ways of being speculative. Little sparks, opened up through taking time and creating new rhythms, sensitize me to looking and being in familiar spaces and finding escape vectors. I come back to the somanaut: inside, outside, fantasy, reality, and dust bunnies as animate furry creatures. The little diver in my painting explores a new world, combining disquiet in habitus, inner sense, and world integration. Vibrating.

### **Note about Image Descriptions**

In keeping with contemporary disability culture practices, I offer descriptions for each of my images and plates. In doing so, I had to make many decisions, the same ones that people face who audio-describe art or films. After trying out different approaches, I decided that unless I specifically know the self-identification of performers, I do not give racial or gender markers in my image descriptions. This still feels complicated to me, but it emerges from the fact that my images come from different national frameworks that have different social justice framing for racialization (i.e., the process by which people are caught

in or utilize “racial” frames). “Race” is not a visible or biological thing. Gender does not fit into binary frameworks. I do acknowledge that it is fruitful to undo assumptions of Whiteness or binary gender as norm.

Racial and gender markers around performances are part of the chapters. The performers have read my writing and have approved the way I describe them, or they suggested other terms that I then adopted. In the plate section, where images are divorced from the text, I have asked people in solo images for their preferred self-description.

## CHAPTER 1

# Social Somatics

## TENTACULAR METHODS ON THE HORIZON

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

—*Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*

Horizons are shared because they coexist in enmeshment with one another. This does not mean, however, that they are equal; one of the most helpful things about the concept of a horizon is its ability to describe a world characterized by asymmetrical power relations and the differential distribution of bodily vulnerability that is a consequence of that power of asymmetry.

—*Gayle Salamon, The Life and Death of Latisha King:  
A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia*

September 2019. I am outside a performance installation by LA-based dance artist taisha paggett, who is in residency at Light Box in Detroit. She is trial-running components of an upcoming collaborative dance-centered installation project, “School for the Movement of the Technicolo(u)r People,” Gallery TPW in Toronto, 2019.<sup>1</sup>

Around me in the cracked concrete parking lot are around ten other dancers. Weeds shoot up between us, wild strands of September green pushing all the cracks. Connections open up everywhere for me: here are many people I have danced with for years in the region’s community dance venues.<sup>2</sup> I am the only one who uses a mobility device (my scooter), but from personal disclosures I know that the circle contains multiple disabled people: next to me is a queer White HIV+ cis man, a bipolar dancer is on the other side, and there are others. I know that many of us enjoy the energy of communal movement and

the challenge of using performance energies to world-changing ends. We are always up for experiments.

My main focus in this chapter is how community performances instantiate new nonmonocultural perspectives in the here and now. My method is informed by tendrils and tentacles and entanglement, somewhere on the continuum of participant-observer and creator. Feminist science scholar Donna Haraway writes about one of her “demon familiars,” opening her second chapter in *Staying with the Trouble* with a spider, an “eight-legged tentacular arachnid”:

I remember that *tentacle* comes from the Latin *tentaculum*, meaning “feeler,” and *tentare*, meaning “to feel” and “to try”; and I know that my leggy spider has many-armed allies. Myriad tentacles will be needed to tell the story of the Chthulucene. (2016, 31)<sup>3</sup>

In this study of feeling performance and trying for new futures I am using a phenomenological perspective to knit entanglements of self and world at the site of the horizon—the horizon Salamon describes in the epigraph: a site of enmeshment but with divisional aspects, with traces of unequal bodily vulnerability, water and air mixing, land and history mixing, bodies on land, in air, on and under the water: shared world horizons with different epigenetic memories. A phenomenological perspective is one where my sensing/feeling self is the curious seat of consciousness that sends out her senses (or tentacles) to know the world around her. By orienting toward the environment, a self assembles, and an “I” emerges, in relation.

The horizon is a meeting place where lived and felt bodies and lived and felt (more-than-human) social lifeworlds touch. And these horizons are contested and evolving sites, as the self’s knowledges shift and change.

With this, the study falls squarely into the original terrain of “ecology” understood as the study of the relationships between organisms and how they relate to their environment or physical surroundings—“the science of the living environment” (Odum 1959, 4). In this chapter, the monster trails around us. Each chapter unfolds its skins-touching-across-otherness in different ways: you’ll find Indigenous mermaids in the next chapter, a different kind of apocalypse of watery death/life imaginations in the third, and inorganic and organic hybrid creatures in the last chapter.

Let’s enter paggett’s environment.

You and I might be uncomfortable at times in this performance space or in this book. In this Detroit performance, I am a White dancer entering a Black-centered space. Some of you might be nondisabled, entering a particular crip space of pain and mobility issues through my writerly perspective.<sup>4</sup> Racialized, cis or trans, with different class backgrounds: we all bear and witness different experiences, none of them totalizing or representative. Let's get spun into paggett's dancery web as I spin mine by using performance engagement as my introductory format. Let's dive into these eco soma method webs.

We, the community participants who responded to the social media advertising for the evening, assemble outdoors until paggett is ready for us. We are a mixed-race but predominantly White group. We are led into the cavernous dim space of the Light Box. A spacious dance floor extends beneath our feet to two brown hands in prayer pose on a large glittery cutout high above the far wall, a memory from when this performance place was a Baptist church.

We are given instructions. There are stations, with flowers blossoming like shrines to our embodied copresence, the occasion of being-with. Each station invites us to do certain things. Every five minutes, we are to change stations. How we engage is up to us. All of us are experienced somatic and improvisation artists, and there is no hesitation.

The world-building I am tracking in *Eco Soma* engages with the longings of fantasy and make-believe. My argument throughout this book hinges on the fact that many people, well beyond "art world" crowds, enjoy and even relish being active audiences (of performances, video work, and creative writing experiments) and are willing to engage bodily in complex sets of questions. I love to feel our world-building, and I invite you to come with me, working within your own comfort zones. Hesitation is okay, and stumbling feels like an appropriate way of being in a complex world. Find your own rhythm.

This is what I read before entering the Detroit workshop contract. paggett writes:

I've been thinking a lot about gravity. The gravity of the blood (to paraphrase [somatic practitioner and BodyMindCentering founder] Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen) but also the gravity of being a racialized body (which we all are) . . . The gravity of this violent political moment but also the gravity of getting lost in the groove of a favorite song . . . The gravity of weight exchange in a contact dance but also the gravity of grieving . . . The gravity

of a delicious breath but also the gravity of having to navigate uncertain and unfamiliar terrains. (Light Box Publicity, August 2019)

Gravity. The first thing I see near me as I enter the space is a big blackboard. On it, chalk writing invites us to share the names of people we mourn, people who have passed from us and who we want to honor. The name Stanley Love is on the chalkboard: an experimental New York downtown choreographer who passed just before this workshop. Before I do much else in the space, I write down a second name: Reid Davis. Davis was a White queer theater maker from California; a longtime heart-attack survivor; a bear; and a hug giver who also left us this past summer. I remember when he would just “come with me,” gladly accepting invitations to fantastical community performance actions centered on disabled queer lives, finding new ways of being together.

Next to the blackboard is a microphone, unplugged. A sign invites us to “echo the name” into the room. I imagine many of us hear “#sayhername” in the under-swing<sup>5</sup> and think about race and gender. Indeed, later in the evening, many other names on the board are women’s names. In one of my five-minute engagements, I chant all the names that have been assembled on the board and read some of the names through the flowers that half-obscure them: more than names, they are handwritten swirls, hearts, lines, assemblages that make a sound on my tongue, tentacles and roots that reach into the past and into the future, lineages that twirl around the bodies moving in the circle. There’s beauty and playfulness. And there is a sense of unease: I can’t tell the racialized association of the names on here, and the associations of the hashtag format make me acutely aware of the Black-exclusionary nature of many White somatic spaces.

The entry into this space is under the sign of (queer/embodied) lineage, under the weight of death and the celebration of life, moving into the future by braiding our past(s) and shifting White supremacy’s present. By implicating me as a participant to write, speak, sing, and mourn, I become part of embodied connections. I hold the cool microphone in my warm hand, an awareness of my unamplified voice twining with dancers and light in the large space. These tentacles need no electricity. I am also aware that so many names never get spoken in this environment and that my ability to project my voice into space is an effect of my particular comportment training and my particular understanding of the social rules pertaining to me. To #sayhername, for instance, has consequences. Black trans subjects, in particular, are vulnerable, and to

Speak her name is defiance and can be met with deadly force. I am aware of these horizons as I hold the names in a queer-framed, Black-framed<sup>6</sup> world into which my queer White body is explicitly invited, framed through ritual, given rules for being.

My work engages art practices in contested public sites, and I am particularly intrigued by performances where the very nature of the contestation can be shrouded, unclear, or inaccessible to people entering them with privilege, be that racialized, gendered, settler colonialist, ableist, classist, speciesist, or other privilege (people with relatively less privilege usually experience this sense of inaccessibility, that critical distance, much more often). I try to feel my way into moments of discomfort, to the monsters of exclusionary and racist pasts and presents all raising their heads and chewing on potential connections. I track what happens when time and space shift, when spin and encounters happen, when pleasure becomes a gateway to new openings, and when immediacy and distance merge. I am guided by a Cthulhu monster stretching tentacles over natureculture horizons, touching weird things, “interlacing trails” (Haraway 31). Monsters: racist metaphors, and yet also embodied performed sources of power. The scent of flowers invites me into other-being, co-being, as I touch the silky smoothness of a petal. Am I a monster to this flower?

Soon after entering, I am in a big circle, my scooter whooshing through space, twirling and matching trajectories with paggett, my White arms sailing out as her Black arms intersect. We glide, float, shift weight, mirror each other: her slim agile body, my heavy form, circles and breath. The connection is immediate and joyful, and I catch glimpses of her smile as we bring our pas de deux to an end.

There is an intersubjective charge in the room. Later, in the talking part of the evening, paggett tells me that she also marked that moment of our circular dance. She noted the soothing note of my machine, my scooter, which allows me to zoom smooth in ways no bipedal rhythm can. Phenomenological inquiry here is not just a focus on this narrating “I,” delineating how the layered rich world appears to her, but also full of ethical challenges to frame “soma” with “eco soma”: self-sensation with bodied world and not just the world of those who seem similar to the witnessing self. Scooter rhythm intertwines with the sounds of the music on the soundtracks, with the pads of naked feet on the dance floor.

Every five minutes, change.

Music changes. Sometimes, there's silence. Sometimes, there are Black spirituals, moaning the blues and sadness and Jesus into that space, rousing the hairs on my neck, moving all dancers into repetition, exhortation, full body up and downs, bouncing, swinging movements. At one point, we are listening to Malcolm X on a scratchy recording talk about his visit to Africa, about the Black man rising and the dignity of the Muslim brothers.

Read-out texts float in, and the tentacular takes on a different shade, making present bodies aware of embodiment histories and power relations. paggett reads from Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2019), a manifesto about White supremacy and the invention of geology. The book focuses on racialized concepts that condemn non-White bodies to chattel, to matter, and to commerce and exploitation.

I find other books in the space, and we hear excerpts over the course of the night: the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance's *Field Guide to iLANDing*, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods's *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, the program for Canadian BLM activist and trans/crip performance artist Syrus Marcus Ware, and Rodney Diverlus's *burn, burned* ("In a fictitious future, after decades of race wars, a cadre of revolutionaries struggle to pick up the pieces," read the program notes).

The texts sink into movement: the trance state of moving communally in space allows for a different reception situation than distanced reading. What is the difference in hearing these sentences below read out in a performance while one's skin and muscles are activated, outward reaching, or while assembling a linear argument in one's readerly mind?

Racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert. Extractable matter must be both passive (awaiting extraction and possessing of properties) and able to be activated through the mastery of white men. Historically, both slaves and gold have to be material and epistemically made through the recognition and extraction of their inhuman properties. (Yussuf 2019, 14, read by paggett in the performance)

Human and metal, entwined, both in labor extraction from dark mines but also in the discourse fields of recognition: these are the associations of "ivory teeth" and "ebony skin": racialized markers that align certain humans with extractive capitalist values. Later, one dancer puts golden trousers and a golden



blouse—obtained from a prop box of clothes for dress-up—over her dancer’s leggings and shirt. Combined with this book passage, the 1970s ABBA-influenced images of Dancing Queens spin in my European head and touch monstrous capitalism: human/gold mining operations. This is the danger of reference fields: of listening to a song with a different ear. Listening and feeling, dis/comfort opens up new tentacles of thought for me.

The sense of clash, of racialized geographical location, surrounds us in the Light Box, in Detroit, on a street not far from the initial stones thrown as part of the 1967 Detroit Protests (usually called “riots” in White-framed history books). One of my codancers and collaborators, disabled performance artist Marc Arthur, shared with me some of his process writing after our visit:

Whenever I’m in Detroit I feel like I’ve arrived from a place of privilege. I’m thinking of the histories of migration there, and the ongoing racism and segregation. They echo and reverberate throughout the performance space not only as we conjure with taisha’s voice and research questions. They feel particularly embodied. The history of the city enters my experience. I found myself spinning a lot, and jumping a lot. It was hard for me to sit still in a space that was, at times, deeply meditative. (personal communication, 2019)

Marc jumps and expends energy. He lets the energy of discomfort at a racialized situation find expression in his White body. Sensitized to the scene and its geographical location, he incorporates the spinning energies that mark so much of Detroit’s history and translates them with his muscles. Sitting on my scooter, I feel the vibrations created by jumping dancers around me.

I remember a show I had seen earlier that year, a performance engagement with a subterranean Afrofuturist Detroit network, poet jessica Care moore’s *Salt City: A Techno Choreopoem*, developed at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. Spinning in the Light Box, I feel for the tunnels under Detroit, the connective webs beneath the city that were links between the historical speakeasies, allowing patrons to vanish when the police came knocking. I try to smell/taste the ionized air in the salt-mine tunnels that channel throughout the city, and that create the setting for Care moore’s show: tentacles of subterranean habitation, vibrating the surface.

Tentacles and monsters, in all their forms, are central to *Eco Soma*. There are not many horror-worlds untouched by exclusion. Social justice storytelling seeks to be aware of how others are constructed. Monsters that shift alignment

between self and other, and that exceed narrative certainties are the eco soma monsters that intrigue me. I use “eco soma” to refer to felt things that come close and create emotional response, poetic in-betweens, listening for new sounds, creating new pathways. With eco soma, I refer to creative flights of connection that combine bodily, emotional, and imaginative responses. I invite you to see what happens in your own reading practice as you offer openings to yourself as you read the in-between. I offer these terms, eco and soma, not as a coinage or a territory move but as two words in search of connection, with a space between and around them, in spin with one another and producing layered pearlescent illuminations fueled by breath.

In my evening’s activated reading practice, a golden shirt suddenly twitches into a monstrous moment of racialized pasts that inform presents and might inform futures if the world does not change the rules of its capitalist extractive biopolitical games. Pretty soon in this chapter you will hopefully make yourself comfortable with crisp cannibals. This is the heart of this study’s politics: how artmakers use diverse bodies, minds, and words to build future-leaning speculative worlds together, in art-based practice, on unstable and nonsolid ground in the context of biodiversity challenges, climate catastrophe, and environmental change. Performance and dance are central to my argument, both as objects of analysis and as ways of being. Tentacular engagement feels most powerfully enacted when skins meet, when the dispersed sensitivity of my body’s surfaces come up against other living beings, human and other-than-human, in the context of curiosity and in the dis/comfort of being with otherness.

As this book will investigate later, empathy has been a fraught pathway of calling for shared humanity. Racialization technologies have successfully dis-aligned White skin sensation from Black and Brown skin sensation. The “commonsense” understanding of one entity as alive and human and another as inert and nonhuman is already imbricated into politically charged structures of understanding the earth. To think of body/earth/material entanglement also means to think through and beyond any easy understanding of “the body” and “embodiment,” to go beyond a meaning that aligns with liberal understandings of a White independent colonial self. As feminist literary critic and theorist Hortense Spillers reminds me, “Before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh’ . . . if we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard” (Spillers 1987, 67).

To hear words like these while moving and alert to embodiment sets up non-empathetic riffs of dissonance, a Black jazz of unclarity, and dislocated echoes of how ways of being can be parceled, divided, and categorized.

Eco soma is a site of slowly dawning merger: modes of embodiment and modes of extraction economies rasp against one another in creative engagement. My body/body conditions. Monster tentacles. White/supremacy/monstrosity. In the Light Box, I hear textual snippets that remind me of Black precarity, of danger in public space. Stories of Hurricane Katrina and the disposability of Black homes. I measure the distance between my arm arc's freedom and who might not be allowed to engage with abandonment in shared space.

There's gravity all around us in these two hours of open exploration, whether my own limbs sink and rise, whether I witness other movers, or whether I take up another invitation station: "rest," lie down by myself or with another participant on a comfortable futon and watch the video displayed on the ceiling above us. My body experiences pain now, and I am glad to find this station and take up its invitation. I stay connected to my body, though, and feel it shifting into the contours of this particular futon.<sup>7</sup> I see the movers around me, echoing their movements in my own sense of embodiment, even at rest.

In the video projected onto the ceiling, I see a group of Black dancers move with each other, a black cloth wrapped around them like fascia, the connective tissue sheet that wraps everybody's innards. The sheet here is external, a piece of fabric, and it reminds me both of a shroud and a swaddling blanket. Resting, witnessing, I get to muse about culture and color, about what I see with my German-European eyes, and what others might see. The dancers give weight to each other through the cloth, in counterbalance, shifting each other while keeping one another safe (see Plate 2).

At another point in the video, I see the dancers in their weight sharing but with a third person holding a black shiny surface up to them: they can watch each other in a Black mirror. I read a metaphor for a Black space, a Black perspective, being seen. Together, the threesome travels across an arid landscape, a park with large gashes of exposed earth, always in motion, always reflecting and in relation. The terrain is challenging. The earth heaves. I am led to think about landscaping and which bodies toil in soil—and about toxic sites and environmental racisms' sedimentation of toxins in communities. The movement continues. The group in the room is learning ways to move together.

This book's experiment leans. It leans into, against, away, over, with, onto.



Figure 1. Two dancers move behind a rectangle they hold with muscular arms in front of them, shielding themselves. They move through a landscape of broken-down curbs and construction debris. The image consists of two video projections angled above one another. Part of workshop sharing of *School for the Movement of the Technicolo(u)r People* installation, Light Box (2019). Photograph courtesy of taisha paggett.

Again, the valence field of the word touches many shores: from “leaning onto” as a crutch, a support, a friend, to “leaning in” as an upward striving mobility that sees contemporary feminism as rapacious neoliberal energy. There is no purity in this eco soma work. No body is untouched by violences of colonial, racialized, gendered, linguistic, and corporeal punishment. And yet, the words “body/bodies,” “embodiment,” and “somatic,” lend themselves to futurities thinking of self-care and communal as well as personal happiness.

Eco soma attention as a lived experience registers discomfort and violence even in the absence of explanation and fully realized cogitative process. You know when something’s off, and you know it in your bones. Eco soma methods pay attention to these energies of somatic articulation and strive to offer tools for registering them. Eco soma methods also offer solace, ways of connecting ourselves to the living energies of land, animals, caretakers, and fellow humans as wayfarers on our journey.<sup>8</sup>

Around me in the Light Box, movers are releasing into and pushing up against

gravity. I take weight. I share weight. I hear gorgeously sung songs of Jesus wishing to take the load off my back and feel the tentacles of the seduction—and the price.

In an earlier intervention, a poem for dancers, taisha paggett wrote:

stay fearless and momentous. Stay  
 unwieldy and excretory. stay oceanic. Keep  
 letting this piece drag on. stay humble.  
 because we were born with resistance in our spines.  
 stay chained to that fence, that tree, that railway  
 track, one another. stay over the rainbow, kaleidoscopic. (2012)

Durational labor can train us to “stay with the trouble,” to use Haraway’s resonant phrase. The participant dancers in the space take responsibility to be in relation to one another, to fill the space with our bodies, and to come into contact. Racialization, and what it might mean for White and Black people to enter a Black-framed space, has been central to my own White experience. Memories of Black Lives Matter activists’ choreographic actions are at the core of my engagement with the self-and-other-and-world-care instructions offered at each of paggett’s stations.

And there are other dimensions to my participation. I try to stay receptive to the multivalence of touch as violence, as tenderness, as invitation, as shifting border states, as queerings on the edge. I remind myself that there are multiple traces of Black embodiment in this space, not just precarity, but also joy, fulfillment, and care for our earth. Queer Black foremother Audre Lorde writes:

We tend to think of the erotic as an easy, tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way. (1978, 54)

Many artmakers, Black, White, of color, disabled, nondisabled, have touched in with Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” essay and have come away enchanted, energized, challenged.<sup>9</sup> The text offers a battery, a tune-up, an affirmation: there are forces inside us oriented toward living. In a world that tells Black, Brown, queer, trans, and disabled lives (all in different ways) that their lives are not worth living—toward death, in the depth of a mine—I attend to the somatic pull of Lorde’s work and words.

Different tentacles, different life forces: eros moves in the Light Box, living

as fullness and energetic touch. In the gravity of multiple histories, mournings, and celebrations, there are horizons, dense border zones and their energies. This is a somatic performance exploration. It offers agency to its participants. The scene will only come alive when enacted. The performance is participatory, not just in the execution of particular instructions but also in an unforced succession of moments of decision making. The actions we engage in are open to the public but not spectacular and “for others.”<sup>10</sup>

The fellow queer White disabled dancers I came and left with talk about it all afterward, sitting down over a delicious Lebanese feast a few minutes away in Dearborn. We are clear: this kind of performance action is a thinking/moving/being in joy, a meditative space we approach like an embodied poem *and* a critical act, a place where we grow and learn together. We, with our different articulations of Whiteness, were welcomed into and learned some initial rules of a particular Black-framed performance space, with questions and uncertainties remaining.

My particular perspective in this book is informed by my disabled status. My ways into places, to places, and through places are shaped by my physical being and by social and cultural forces of exclusion that offer different pathways to different people.<sup>11</sup> The performances I witness and participate in through these pages are all marked by many different markers of exclusion and inclusion, performing destabilization.

That, then, is the world of eco soma actions: tentative creeping engagement, not just by crips but by many who find themselves unable to stride outward, forward—pushing harder and getting somewhere. Many of us get nowhere fast: disabled, economically disadvantaged, educationally challenged, in poverty, racialized into monsters, outside gendered binaries, or without resources. This study charts modes of resilience and joy in performance experiments. I am not only looking for agencyful and direct movements in the face of challenges but also for sliding downward, over, and around those challenges, in the hesitant paths that many of us take to be with one another.<sup>12</sup>

With this orientation, this study always travels in very specific paths. There are no recipes here for how to lead community arts projects that provide civic uplift. There are no success stories of widespread transformation. The political and the personal touch but do not become one another; they stay halted, a bit cripky, creepy, speculative.

Instead this book deals with the pleasures of the immediate and the minor.

Most art projects here are invitations in public realms but without fanfare, (with a few exceptions) outside the context of “high art.” I theorize moments of offering support and being offered support. My perspective is not (only) a distanced critical evaluation but also a phenomenological thickening, a being-inside, seduced and hence partial, full of longing. This book charts forms of theorizing that emerge from contact and attention, a fostering of poetic, mildly sarcastic, playful and joyful sensibilities, aware that our horizons are co-constructed but not level.

This is a project of hope.

## Somatics

Let’s revisit one of the foundations of much performance practice: an attention to the embodied engagement that shapes how people appear in public. I track the zones between self and other in an outdoor Australian dance theater performance by people with cognitive differences; in a biomimetic participatory performance in Oakland, California; in the form of a video creating its own rhythms and soundspaces; and in movement, biopolitics, and my German memory, emerging among an art installation of living plants. In each section, my eco soma audience address changes.

As a somatic explorer, I enter three-dimensionally into an encounter. As a phenomenographer, I listen in layers. In my eco soma method, I align my own sensing with openness about being otherwise, moments of other-knowledge. I try to tune myself to that sensitivity. Explore with me the potential of focusing on this dynamic as a different way of understanding political arguments in the public sphere, concepts of access and (bio)diversity, unclear trails toward futurities.

To do so, become aware of your bodymind<sup>13</sup> as you are reading this—surely an unusual request in academic writing but one that respects the particular eco soma research trajectory I am sharing. My argument is not only articulated in the words but hopefully is also encoded in the rhythms of the chapter, in the sound of words, and in the juxtapositions between themes and media. But how do you become aware of your bodymind?

For now, breathe. Become aware of the feel of this book’s paper, or the feeling of the keyboard beneath your fingertips. Feel your eyes: use some eye exercises, looking to the side, up, and then down. Focus on something away from

the screen or page then direct your eyes back. Adjust how you sit; feel gravity flowing through you, anchoring you as you give your attention to the argument developing in these words and to their sound and their rhythm.

The study of “the somatic” has different contours in the discipline of dance studies, one of the disciplines we’ll be engaging in the journey of this book.<sup>14</sup> Somatics offered a way out of the anti-intellectual accusations that embroiled dance studies and still shape its psychological stance. “What a body knows”—this might seem like an obvious statement to many people who have undergone any kind of conscious bodily training.<sup>15</sup> But for a while, calling upon “body knowledge” was taboo, something that signaled inadequate socialization in critical theory. Over the past twenty years or so, these issues have slowly been laid to rest from two different directions.

The first direction comes from dance’s engagement with White and European critical theory. Dance studies discovered critical theory’s already-existing critical bodily and sensorial heritage. Particular moments in this reencounter centered on a rethinking of Walter Benjamin and early twentieth-century work on the city and the flâneur and on Michel de Certeau’s corrective to Michel Foucault (1984), explicating the workings of power on the level of daily habitus. Both of these theorists go walking in the city and find different ways of addressing power relations and modes of resistance in everyday movement. Also part of this toolbox for thinking about movement and dynamics as central to politics, consciousness, and relation, is Deleuzoguattarian work in its vitalist lineage and its exploration of energetic shifts.<sup>16</sup>

A second (and deeply related) line of connection emerged from rethinking the work of anthropologists like Marcel Mauss (1935) and Thomas Csordas (1993), as well as phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1947] (2007) and Simone de Beauvoir [1949].<sup>17</sup> Eventually, once dance studies began to address its White-lens problem, other phenomenologists entered the dance studies canon: Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* (orig. 1952, trans. 1967) and Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, which I have already discussed in the passage about Fernando Pessoa’s desk in the preface (2006). This rethinking helped rehabilitate an intense and specific thick description of bodily sensation and allowed for connections between these sensations and the coming to personhood, subjectivity, identity, the social, and power.

Outside of critical theory, the study of somatics, developing out of training in embodiment, slowly transformed the dance world itself and influenced



writing on movement and bodily experience. Don Hanlon Johnson (1995) and Martha Eddy (2009, 2017) chart many influences and practitioners in the field (covering European practitioners from Rudolf Laban, Marion Rosen, and Ida Rolf to White U.S. practitioners like Anna Halprin, Joan Skinner, and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen). Many of these anti-industrialist, pro-personal-empowerment movement practices shaped Thomas Hanna's 1970s naming of the field as "somatics."

Johnson, an important voice in this establishment of the field, sums up his perspective on the deficit in European Enlightenment and its Greek roots. He holds against the widespread sense of somatics as purely personal transformation, uncoupled from politics and social change (and, though he does not explicitly state this, something for rich people).<sup>18</sup>

Medicine, education, psychology, and government were each put into separate conceptual silos, masking the fact that they are inextricably interlinked in how they affect us. Our founding political thinkers tragically failed to take into account the fact that people who have not learned how to successfully attune to each other, especially to those in other *demes* [neighborhoods in different city states] in the midst of intense differences, cannot successfully collaborate in the enormous project of creating an intricate and just set of democratic structures. (2018, 7)

In pursuing this line connecting somatics—attunement, co-feeling, sensing, bodily sensibility—and political development, Johnson cites Wilhelm Reich's anti-fascist analyses and Mohandas Gandhi's embrace of *ahimsa*—nonviolence—as models to think bodily and political transformation together (and Johnson acknowledges the deep flaws of each of these individuals).<sup>19</sup> He writes about the set of somatic pioneers that emerged as part of European modernism, many touched by the violence of wars and the Holocaust, such that "they saw their methods of touch, sensing, breathing, feeling, and moving not only, or even primarily, as aimed at personal well-being, but as methods for reshaping the institutions of a sick social order" (2018, 18).

In his 2018 collection, Johnson acknowledges that even though this political impetus was part of the conception of somatics, the field didn't fully open itself up to honor and acknowledge non-White and Indigenous writers, thinkers, movers, and knowledge carriers—or anyone who explicitly grounded their somatic approaches in forms of embodiment historically deemed marginal (fat,

queer, disabled, trans, etc.). So Johnson attempts to recast the established canon explicitly in a more just and worldwide frame, in keeping with the field's emerging acknowledgment of colonial and decolonial moves in the academy and the studio.<sup>20</sup>

When I read Martha Eddy's work on somatic pedagogy (Eddy 2009) with my performance studies students, what resonates most clearly with them is the argument that somatic education is a pathway to taking responsibility for oneself, in the absence of hard truths and in experimentation and playful process. And my classes also usually acknowledge that the written word alone, before our experiences of actually engaging in exercise work and observing each other breathe, is only part of our exploration. This is not knowledge to be gained only from reading *about* somatics but knowledge that becomes available when embodiment *becomes* a form of reading practice and informs attention to sounds and signs, a visceral close reading. The circle is complete when moving/reading come really close, like when paggett reads Yusoff to us while we move.

Eco soma: much somatic research has tended to stay within the boundary of one's own skin sack. In this study, artists reach artfully outward. The "eco" here keeps pushing on that skin sack, extending beyond the fingertips, reaching out toward others, and registering the physical/psychical dis/comfort waves that happen in that energetic field. Those "othered" by dominant groups never had the luxury of only thinking of their own skin sack, though. In 1980, Iris Marion Young had to think about how patriarchy impacted the trajectory of her swinging arm in "Throwing Like a Girl." In 1993, at a conference on "Rage against the Disciplines," Susan Stryker performed a monologue about transgender rage and queer fury at the edges where embodied experiences of transgender people meet a world steeped in binary gender violence. The resulting essay was published in *GLQ* and is still now, in 2021, one of the most read essays of the journal. Stryker posits allegiance with the monster created by Victor Frankenstein and reclaims the monstrosity label even as she writes eloquently about what it feels like to live within persistent pathologization:

Like the monster, the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor. Rage colors me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart. It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival. (1994, 244)

Stryker theorizes how this rage fuels “the hard work of constituting ourselves on our own terms, against the natural order” (1994, 252). This is an empowering and moving call to use affect, physicality, and fantastical monstrosity to disrupt conceptions of the natural: a somatic, embodied push against the divisions that subtend power relations anchored in “natural” relations and “right” bodies.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural somatics practitioner Resmaa Menakem thinks about the effects of living in an anti-Black world on one’s own body schema: “The Black child gets infused with these ideas about what’s human and beautiful between the ages of three and five. It is in the structure of our society, of the media, of religion, of economics. It affects our circulatory system, our musculoskeletal system, our nervous system” (2019). Work on the level of somatics, of embodiment, needs to happen for change to have an effect, and that labor is a challenge and an offer to both benefactors of and those oppressed by White supremacy. When not addressed, violence continues, as Menakem writes about police culture and “us” versus “them” thinking: “When intergenerational trauma lives and breathes in the bodies of both ‘us’ and ‘them,’ almost any encounter can lead to tragedy” (2017, e-book).

I hope for new forms of living through the kind of creative practices I am discussing in *Eco Soma*, practices where consciousness of embodiment and of cultural formation intersect. Embodied labors of attention on the limits of self and world, a phenomenology that incorporates imagination with tentative reaching toward intersubjectivity and otherness: that is one of my working definitions of the eco soma field.

### **Somatics in the Community Studio**

Somatics are the foundation for much that cultural workers and community dancers do in their everyday work life. If you are a performance artist working with communities, you most likely engage in one of four things in your daily or weekly sessions: (1) you use somatic work to calm, focus, and develop bodyminds; (2) you invite the experience of joy and ease; (3) you listen to and tell (body)stories; and (4) you shape what you build on in these ways through dramaturgical choices.

Somatic work is foundational. You can listen better if you breathe in peace and have space in yourself for both you and others. You can tell your story or move your body with more ease if you have a provisional or momentary sense

of stability in yourself. You need to have some sense of ownership in order to be free with yourself. You need some point of anchorage to speak from—and maybe you conceptualize that as your diaphragm, the land you stand on, or your connection to ancestry. Expression emerges from somatics, which is why, to me, somatics and the honoring of breath, space, and embodiment are so vital to a political aesthetics of access.

A lot of my initial experimentation with somatic practices emerged from my early work in community performance in the 1990s. I was working with mental health system survivors in Wales, and I thought that my training in Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal would guide me well. I was also studying for my Certificate in Community Dance from the British Laban Guild (and eventually obtained it as one of the first wheelchair users to get any kind of official dance qualification). My plans included dramatic sketches, creating embodied tableaux and dance choirs about power dynamics in mental health settings and the workings of stigma. But when I started my sessions, I quickly found that the basic foundation for expressive work was not a given. For our warm-up, my participants joined me in centering ourselves, standing upright, and then swaying back and forth and from side to side. This is a common exercise in theatrical and dancerly work: a grounding, sensing one's self in space (try it: stand up for a bit. Sway. Find your center. Then read on).

In my sessions, my collaborators fell over. They had to step out to catch themselves as they toppled over. I was mystified: I could never quite get to the later levels, to what I deemed to be the actual work, as stability was not a given. It took me a while to work it out: my collaborators had an impaired ownership of their own body. Most of them had been institutionalized against their will at some point in their lives. Many had been homeless and moved from space to space. Some had been imprisoned. Many had depot medication inserted under their skin, leaching chemicals into their bloodstream—injectable long-release medication designed to cut noncompliance.

In order to do political work, we breathed. We all breathe in toxic worlds, some more toxic than others according to our level of privilege. In these Welsh sessions, we used somatic methods to take back and improvise around our damaged bodyminds, invaded, incarcerated, beaten, and medicated.<sup>22</sup> This work is the basis of my understanding of the politics of somatics: make more space for more bodies, damaged and invaded; share breath in public; enlarge which

bodyminds get to take up space in our shared world; find ways to anchor; and acknowledge older anchoring methods.

What it means to be human is so much more than having a voice in the sense of being able to put forward a rational, discourse-driven, individual, self-dependent agenda. I cite philosopher Erin Manning, who approaches issues of how bodies know and how they become politically active. She does so through a somatic lens:

The body senses in layers, in textures, in rhythms and juxtapositions that defy strict organization into a semiotic system. (Manning 2007, xiv)

In this statement Manning might not think specifically about disability aesthetics, but I do: Sensing in layers, textures, and rhythms—not in the units that linguistic discourse offers us—is to me the core experience of moving with fellow disabled people. Dispersed centers, interdependence, multiple sites of engagement, nonverbal concentration, a free long, open refreshing breath, joy at the site of encounter: these are moments that blossom in the performances I discuss in these pages. In the next section of this chapter, I show how a perspective on eco soma presence in a theatrical framework can shift the stakes of what political actions can be.

### **Sensing in Public: Rollercoaster Theatre**

The first tracks for my eco soma project were laid a good while ago in 2006, when I witnessed the Melbourne, Australia, performance of *GAWK*, by Rollercoaster Theatre.<sup>23</sup> I began to understand the work as a form of social somatic, with my particular interest in the way disabled people show up embodied in social space and upset productively how space and embodiment can be configured.<sup>24</sup> I approach this particular show with an attention to what performance scholar Shannon Jackson (2011) calls the “support structures” of participatory art: the kind of training, architectures, and durational interventions that make the labor of touch experiential. I am engaging with this show in the context of its wider production of disability culture labor and, in particular, its educational framework. Rollercoaster Theatre is a group formed out of graduates of the Certificate in Live Production, Theatre and Events (Ignition Theater Training). This course is a vocational theater training course for people with a broad range

of disabilities and learning needs, and the majority of students in this course have developmental or cognitive differences.

The *GAWK* performance took place on Federation Square, a postmodern, deconstructed, architecturally kinky, weird civic center site in Melbourne. It is a place designed for commotion and mixing, and many performances take place there and insert artful behaviors into the habits of the city.

On this site Rollercoaster Theatre set up three high scaffolds for a promenade performance event, and they also used the square's existing giant animatronic screen to show a video they had created. On the scaffolds sat the performers, far removed from the crowd (see Plate 3). There was no performance text. Instead, the performers engaged in routines, like stretching hands out, shielding their eyes, or other repetitive actions. The colorful video blinked phrases ("I feel so left out." "I love you." "Don't touch." "Come over here.") interspersed with drawings of stick figures (some people with arrows shot through) and combinations of text and graphics, like an "I" followed by two staring eyes.

Naomi Chainey, general manager of Grit Media, an Australia-based disability media content provider, wrote a review of the show:

The imagery was stark with six over-lit performers shrouded in white sheets and heavily coiffed costumes lined up across the stage. Movement was minimal—the occasional reveals of large open eyes painted on the performer's palms which "stared" at the crowd making up the majority of the actual performance—the figures effectively dehumanized, as the piece delved viscerally into the issues of perception. Through use of repetition, sound bites, music, animation and photography (effectively displayed on the overhead screen) the piece portrayed an intense loneliness that gradually built to a crescendo as the performance went on. Voices crying "stop looking at me!" and "can anybody see me?" were, I thought, particularly powerful, as was the repeated image of the eye painted on the hand. (2008)

Watching this particular performance and focusing on the performers high up on the scaffolds, I felt like a key was turning inside myself. I had written much about deconstructive approaches in disability performance, but here I was faced with a show that didn't quite feel capturable with the tools of this particular lineage of contemporary ironic distancing. As a disabled critic, I could try to capture this performance in a number of critical theoretical frames. I could talk about how the group inverts the flâneur, turning the gaze around and highlight-



Figure 2. Two GAWK performers on a tall platform on Federation Square, Melbourne, both wearing strange headdresses, one of which looks like a beehive. A giant LED screen flashes “I love you.” The audience includes bipedals and a wheelchair user. Rollercoaster Theatre, 2008. Photograph by the author.

ing their own status as objects of the gaze, or how the actors become starees.<sup>25</sup> I could analyze how these starees use sophisticated techniques to deflect or deal with being the object of stares. There were many ways in which the performers shielded themselves. The choices were really interesting and diverse: some made themselves less human, others donned paraphernalia of authority, yet others cushioned themselves. They wore fat suits, beehives, organic or plant matter, bishop’s miters, huge hair, and even cheese wedges. All was armor. All was white, reflecting rays back out.

I thought of the Australian desert, the camouflage of living things, staying





Figure 3. Close-up of the *GAWK* performers, holding their hands in front of their eyes, palms out with eyes painted on them: alien creatures with strange senses, beneath hats that look like a cross between a cheese wedge and a beehive, and a bush hat made of newspaper. Behind them, the LED screen shows a hand-drawn image of a staring creature. Rollercoaster Theatre, 2008. Photograph by the author.

hydrated, and shielding oneself from the sun. I thought of zinc sunblocks for European settlers, trying to make Australian lands habitable to White people. I could make quite a lot of that. I could offer citations and readings that would develop this analysis of the show as a political statement about the public sphere, either around disability inclusion or about human environmental or environmental human impact.

But neither *flâneur*/public sphere imaginings nor a focus on loneliness or Australian environmental discourses quite grasps my experience that day in



Melbourne. “The body senses in layers”: My main experience was not involved with a measured assessment of the political aesthetic strategies employed by the group. Instead, my experience was one of particulate impressions, of multiple attentions gliding over my body, including sadness and thoughts of flanerism but also including the feeling of the palm of my hand, the desire to paint, and thoughts on costumes and hiding among plants, evading the metal surfaces of the square. I felt quite directly the sadness of reaching out and being denied, of what it might feel like to be excluded and not being seen—not being seen as human. But watching the show, I kept rescuing myself by focusing on how much fun it must have been to construct this or that costume and how much time and attention was involved in putting on makeup or on creating the images on the hands. I observed the performers and their intense focus high above the world, being looked at—but this time inviting the look, basking in it.

### **The Intensity of Process Play**

The education framework for this performance is the Ignition Course, a radically accessible form of theater training that can cater to students who cannot read or communicate through spoken language. It uses interesting ways to train its students. For instance, they “introduce important Australian plays by using images and videos to create their historical and geographical contexts and by workshopping segments of the plays themselves” (Hutchinson 2005, 14).

I imagine Rollercoaster Theatre built on these ways of presenting knowledge by slipping into roles, tasting history and theory through embodied doing. What I saw that day in Melbourne reminded me of that process, playing bits of various pieces and roles: I can easily imagine that the performers chose a particular costume because of a sensual affinity with a particular hairdo, for instance.

The local paper saw things in a similar way, as they report that “Stanley, of Seddon, thought he looked quite sexy in his costume and he was not intimidated at the thought of sitting high on a platform” (O’Doherty 2008). They asked Stanley for his opinion on his role, and printed it without reference to his particular impairment<sup>26</sup> or by making it inspirational.

I found out that the idea of the eyes on the hands came from a *Doctor Who* episode. Again, I can imagine that in their rehearsal space, at the Footscray Senior Citizens Centre in Melbourne, Rollercoaster Theatre slipped into *Doctor*

*Who* characters, got fully into painting eyes on their hands, and played all out at seeing through their hands: playing with touch and sensation, feeling hot and cold on their skin—all these somatic exercises that are part of a cultural worker’s vocabulary.

At this point, I draw a parallel with Anna Hickey-Moody, an Australian researcher who codirected a show for Restless Dance, a dance company of people with developmental disabilities. She writes in an intriguing way about a particular moment in her show: a man lighting a candle. She uses a Deleuzian framework of affect to address the intensities involved in the repeated lighting of the candle as an embodied act of wishing:

His embodied memory of the way that the “candle lighting” happens is an extension of his personal style. Weeks of working . . . have cultivated the corporeal affect of “the wish” and have instilled a method for lighting the candles in his blood, flesh and bones. (Hickey-Moody 2009)

Not irony and analysis, but intensity and specificity embodied in blood, flesh, and bone through style: that seems to me at stake here, in the *GAWK* performance, too. As a witnessing critic, I shift vocabulary, as Anna Hickey-Moody does: “The question is no longer about ability and disability but is about sense, affect and relation” (Hickey-Moody 2009). All performers had styled a persona for themselves, high up on the scaffold.

### **Moth Dreams**

Messages fragment and shift kaleidoscopically. To use a unifying perspective like the flâneur or the single message “It’s sad to be excluded” feels too restrictive and normate.<sup>27</sup> A focus on somatic practices can help me to understand a different time and space flow, one less concerned with the semiotics of political agendas and instead with the pulsing of life: even life denied life by many eugenic techniques and technologies that lead to so many disabled people, in particular people with Down syndrome, being killed before birth. I have to work within hope, cruising utopia (to cite Jose Muñoz’s resonant phrase): desirously finding openings for pleasure and connection. This is reparative criticism, a “privilege of unknowing,” to cite Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) call to engage in critical practices that move in tension with paranoid criticism and which

seek new environments of sensation for the objects [critics] study by displacing critical attachments once forced by correction, rejection, and anger with those crafted by affection, gratitude, solidarity, and love. (Wiegman 2014, 7)

If I witness in a somatically flavored way, paying attention to the textures, rhythms, and echoes in my bodymind, I can bodysurf on this Australian show (and Stanley's "sexy" floats with me) and in the realm of counterpublics. My desirous reading tries to be aware, sensitive to, *and* ameliorative of the public images of disability, to imagine, with Sedgwick, a place where "the reader has the room to realize that the future may be different from the present" (2003, 146). Michael Warner writes:

Counterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably entails distortion. Mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy. (2002, 63)

How can I use eco soma methods to refigure the damaged, stigmatized identities of disabled people toward a new public, one that is aware of the processes of damage and can be open, elastic, and plastic enough to widen our sense of who can come to voice, presence, joy, "feeling sexy," or agency in public?

In reading my way through the performance and its critical embedment, the spoken and unspoken, the known and the unknown, I want to open up the concepts of "distortion" and "damage" and place here instead Gerard Vizenor's (Anishinnabe) concept of "survance" in the context of racialized eco-catastrophe. Survance, he writes, with a poet's unclear clarity, "is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry" (1999, vii). He later elucidates this "story" concept by placing it firmly in the realm of narrative and artmaking: "The nature of survance creates a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihility, and victimry" (2009, 1).

This narrative resistance to absence works well in this disability story from one of his literary works. Vizenor writes in his novel *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1990) about a pilgrimage in a postapocalyptic, postindustrial, post-fossil fuel United States, a band of trickster characters traveling along

the Mississippi River. One memorable scene presents a surreal encounter with “cripples” and shows the survival techniques they use to live—imaginative self-imaging enables public presence and vitality.

I quote from literary theorist Joseph Coulombe writing on Vizenor—and I leave the language of my co-conspirators here in place. Sometimes, in order to move forward, I need to be open to language patterns beyond my own, and that might, today, include “deformed” or “handicapped.”

When they [the heroes of the book] come across a large group of physically deformed people, some of whom lost their faces or legs due to industrial toxins, the pilgrims [and the readers] receive a lesson in the use of the imagination to combat debilitating situations. Some of the “cripples” dress as moths, some wear special masks; all envision their lives as whole, so each is whole in his or her own way. They cope creatively with their handicaps: “Their incomplete bodies lived whole through phantoms and *tchibai* dreams” (Vizenor 1990, 145). (Coulombe 2011, 82–83)

There are many books in which literary cripples become the heartfelt center and the carriers of life lessons to be learned. Vizenor’s work is not that flat. His cripples end up devouring one of the pilgrims, pulling her limb from limb in an orgiastic ceremony. These *tchibai* dream creatures are more Bakhtinian carnivalesques than plucky survivors. They are excessive, transgressive, voracious: they swallow absence and enlarge themselves into shimmering new wholes. In this universe of postcolonial Indigenous collage, movement, engagement, even eating (and being eaten) is life.<sup>28</sup>

By taking my critical field here not just from queer and Brown performance studies but also from Native American literary imaginaries, I can enlarge the field of co-conspirators, and I can look for the moths: those of us who find ways of entering imaginatively into the public sphere, armored with play against the stares and the stories.

In the case of the Melbourne performance, some of what I witnessed relates to what Jose Muñoz has called disidentificatory moves (1999). “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” (31): disidentificatory moves emerge from ambivalence and from some kind of identification with (gender, racialized or other) stereotypes, consciously critiqued, in an ironic/longing play. This kind of self-knowledge and irony might well be part of what I am seeing on the city square. But Vizenor’s emphasis on dreams gives me

a different purchase for thinking through the political agency of people with cognitive differences. Styling moth dreams, gossamer desires, weaving images out of what finds a hold in one's bodymind.

### **Flocking Attention: Dandelion Dancetheater**

My next performance site is in Oakland, California, a traditionally less affluent neighbor to San Francisco. It takes place in front of the Oakland City Hall, at the center of political decision making, where at that very moment heavy budget cuts eviscerated the welfare net of U.S. social policy. White queer dance maker Eric Kupers of the multiracial and body-positive company Dandelion Dancetheater directed *WonderSlow* here one sunny day in summer 2011.<sup>29</sup> In a place of civic shaping, this performance offered a well-known technique from environmentally aware dance repertoire: flocking.<sup>30</sup>

At the center of the amphitheater on the Frank Ogawa Plaza,<sup>31</sup> performers from multiple racialized groups engaged in daylong flocking. Flocking is a biomimicry technique, often used in dance contexts, and associated with eco-dance choreographers like Jennifer Monson. Monson writes about her work, and I cite her here at length as one of the core practitioners in my lineage:

In the navigational dance project BIRD BRAIN the dance process was informed and created by navigating along the migrational journeys of animals. . . . This process has been rich and complex starting from a deep investigation of the senses and navigating the bodies systems—(Gray Whale Migration); to creating dances within and of particular places (Osprey Migration) to investigating the energetics of flocking and adaptive systems (Ducks and Geese Migration) to creating interactive systems within the container of a theatrical setting as well as pointing to the relationship of the theater's building to its environment (Flight of Mind). I started this project feeling bereft—that wilderness as I understood it no longer existed in the world (or soon wouldn't). My understanding of wilderness has evolved into something intertwined within our own consciousness and interaction with the environment. Wilderness or wildness is a state of dynamic adaptability constantly that surrounds us whether in the massive effect of Hurricane Katrina, of the micro affect of endangered butterflies returning to the Twin Cities Ammunitions Plant or the emergent



Figure 4. *Wonderslow* performance on the Frank Ogawa Plaza, Dandelion Dancetheater, 2011. This overview shot shows inlaid abstract patterns reminiscent of the Oakland oak in the stones of the plaza, with freely windblown white umbrellas, and groups of people: a number of people in white flocking on the amphitheater stage, kneeling and raising their arms together, a group of people sitting, standing, and likely chatting outside the doors of City Hall, and a smaller group centered by a wheelchair user, feet and white leggings resting on the steps of the plaza. Wheelchair ramps are visible at the edges of the shot, below trees. Screenshot from *Wonderslow* video.

systems designed through game theory and virtual reality. The usefulness of the term “nature” has become complicated for me as I struggle with the dialectic of nature/not nature. What is not nature? Wilderness becomes a more amenable concept for me in that it alludes to something untamable, unknowable and challenging, and it is a very human concept. Wilderness as a concept seems central to human evolution. Dancing is a powerful medium for addressing our “nature” and is one of the places I experience wildness. (Artist statement, ILand, 2014)

Monson’s wildness, the experiential heart of untamable, unknowable behavior, lies also at the heart of many love affairs with things somatic: with the edge spaces where life touches life, leans in and on, expands not just consciousness

but also muscle control and energetic state beyond the skin of one individual human. Here, in Oakland, I touch into this energetic field of biomimetic non-human fantasy.

“Flocking” is an approximation of bird behavior meaning that there is no continuous leader but that the flock orients itself to whichever bird is out front and follows it until the orientation shifts again. To be in the flock means to enter a group meditative state. My writing here offers my witnessing, a verbal expression of my holistic experience of this meditative state, getting from “hastily walking through the city” time to “watch the grass grow” time (there was literally an installation of a video camera trained on the grass, and a monitor, a cheeky tech translation of “meditation”).

I put on some white clothes (from a chest made available for public use) and wheel my wheelchair into the middle of the stage in front of the Oakland Civic Center and in full view of the politicians’ entry doors. This is not far from the spreading branches of Oakland’s iconic tree, the Jack London Oak: a giant coast live oak that lives on this Ohlone land and is depicted on Oakland’s city flag (you can catch a glimpse of this tree seven minutes into the video).<sup>32</sup> I align myself with the person already on the stage, a Latina woman also using a powerchair: Cristina Carrasquillo, a Puerto Rican dance artist (see Plate 4). I am so delighted; it is rare that I get to dance with someone else who uses a powerchair.

I also remember thinking how far my embodiment was from the pigeons that normally make their rounds here on this site. That day, two powerchair users pecked and hunted for some kind of sustenance in the civic round.

When I enter a flocking score my world’s horizon changes. Attention hones itself down to an edge. On that stage, my perception broadens and tightens at the same time as my limbs enter a zone of multiplied attention, responding to the fine small movements the front dancer transmits through her back, her arm resting on her powerchair joystick and her head swaying. Bodily translation becomes meditation. My focus is not on translating her movements into my different body but on feeling myself entering into the energy lines that emerge from her limbs and torso. The sun is shining down. It is warm and getting hotter. My blood rises to the surface of my bare limbs, slathered in sunscreen. I move; my movements are not determined by my core but by the fine sun lines that weave in the flock.

Others enter: one bipedal dancer and then another one. As the frontal orientation changes, I at times find myself the leader, and there is a minute shift as the

golden lines change tension and I swing myself into the movements that come most deliciously to me: arm sways, rounded limbs extending into space, my sitting body stretching. Movements from core to extremity, spirals around my spine. Cat stretches and circles. There is no desire to stay at the front, though: the spirals naturally draw me into a different frontality. I move sideways, and another dancer takes over the flock. There are moments of tuning in: waiting watchfully with eyes all over my body to respond to the smallest twitch of the body in front. There is the relaxation as the front dancer moves into a familiar gesture, allowing me to swing freely with the gravity that extends between the earth and my movement memory of opening and closing, advancing, retreating, sways and contractions. I dance for a long time, caught in the pause of attention. Time flows around me.

Then I go my way, home, to everyday life.

I returned in the evening, ready to immerse myself again in the flow of *WonderSlow*, the meditative flocking procedures that enlarge my skin, shoot out lines of connection, and anchor me so beautifully different in the *en passant* flow of a workday in the center of Oakland.

In the evening, though, my experience was different. The sun had moved: no longer was my body suffused by the strong heat nor my vision attenuated by the golden glare. What felt like molasses and lounging in my limbs had become the crispness of Bay Area evenings: a touch of cold in the air, my muscles on the edge of contraction, tensing back against the wind. I dressed warmer, and reentered the amphitheater, joining a whole crowd flocking together.

This evening flocking was much quicker and demanded a different attention from me. Instead of joining another chair user, I was now the only chair user in a flock of bipedals (although some were visibly disabled bipedals). The mechanics of the dance had changed through this: the flock turned quickly, and a lot of step work with traveling patterns made it impossible for me to pick up the fine lines of energy, of losing myself in the attention to another's body translating itself into my own movement. I was always a step behind: if I extended my arms and joined the upper body wave that moved through the flock, I could not control my joystick and retreat the five steps the bipedals took, becoming a static obstacle in their migratory path. If I followed with my joystick the weft of feet moving forward, sideways and back, my body felt left out and unintrigued, longing for the stretching arcs and whole-body engagements.

I left the stage, and joined other wheelchair users at the bottom of the plaza,



the lower level, and there we watched the flock for an hour or two: feet up on stone, a fulcrum of movement rather than the radiating arms of it. Again, my attention shifted and, in crisp adaptability style, I left behind any frustration and my longing for the sun-drenched languor of liminal control the afternoon's flocking had afforded me.

Instead, I entered a new phase of audiencing, of being woven into the giant dial that *WonderSlow* became, transforming again. There was a space for me here, too, even if not, at that moment, as part of the flocking crowd. I now was a still point at the center of a radial action, and I could find peace and joy in that, too. Around the edges of the plaza, dancers moved very slowly, engaging in a walking meditation that had them beat a quiet gong every few steps, circum-ambulating the plaza in an hour-long duration.

I took in many more details: freewheeling white umbrellas that wafted with the cooling winds across the plaza; a ballet of natural forces just as delicate as the energy lines I had so reveled in just hours before when I was being moved/moving myself. The tick of metronomes, multiple rhythm stations set up all over the plaza's steps. The oak, standing impassively by, in a much slower plant time.

Breath. Movement. Wind. Passersby. The blank windows of City Hall. Time ticking. The patterns on the Plaza. People. Pigeons. Wigs. Order and Multiplicity.

In my witnessing words here, time has slowed to a pace where I can feel my attention broadening, where there is space for words to appear as I remember the intensities of "being there." This is to me a somatics of audiencing, invited by dance performance modes that stress not only duration but also meaningful participation. Joseph Beuys speaks of the social sculpture, a conceptual idea I love to use to approach these participatory slow unfoldings:

Let's talk of a system that transforms all the social organisms into a work of art, in which the entire process of work is included . . . something in which the principle of production and consumption takes on a form of quality.

(reprinted in Bishop 2006, 104)

Art practice can help transform toward a gaze and a broader sensorium that becomes aesthetic and that encompasses City Hall as much as the Puerto Rican dancer in her powerchair, in her majestic, smooth, turning circle. The way the city unfolds around us, in Oakland as it did in Melbourne and Detroit, shifts as my attention is honed and revisioned. "I" produce and "I" consume, artfully, changing gears, finding space in the density of the city. The everyday of the

flâneur, the city dweller, the politician, the shopper, the homeless person, the person in the mass, the person experiencing herself in singularity, the pigeons, the clouds above: all these everydays can hinge and pivot when challenged at the level of somatic engagement. They create a horizon: a shared sociality with unequally distributed power. In the meditative time frame, this horizon can come to consciousness and rise into focus through the layer of background embodiment. These everydays can change when you end up experiencing yourself as a small but complete whole (to use Vizenor's phrase), or as a pocket of wildness (to use Monson's). These projects invite this axial pivot, the social sculpture, the unfolding of aesthetic spacetime, to offer a new perspective on plant and human time, on shared humanity in public, on asymmetrical horizons, on a trajectory toward repairing damaged publics. They invite the interconnectedness of things as living works of art, as cultural productions open to improvisatory interventions.

### Memorials of Life

We visited Berlin invited by a group of Butoh artists  
 who were interested in disability  
 We thought about doing an action at the Holocaust Memorial  
 I felt the tension of all war and the inhuman acts of war  
 I am Jewish  
 My partner is German  
 This black stone row after row  
 Gives me no peace  
 I don't comprehend it  
 I am speechless  
 We needed a new sculpture  
 A memorial of life  
 An accessible place of commemoration and assembly  
 A practice of peace  
 May I touch you?  
 May I touch you?  
 Thank you for coming.  
 Thank you being here.  
 Go through the gate

Please lie down, if you are comfortable with this  
 And place your head on this person's belly, the soft part  
 Go to the left  
 Breathe  
 Relax  
 Give your weight to the person beneath you  
 Feel the small movements of life  
 Listen to the sounds our bodies make  
 See what emerges  
 You go to the right  
 May I touch you?  
 May I touch you?  
 Feel the wave of breath running through this braid of humanity.  
 May I touch you?  
 Remember. (read by Neil Marcus and Petra Kuppers, transcript of  
 video poem, 2011)

In this section, I offer a meditation on eco soma as a performance method.

The Olimpias, the performance research collective I lead,<sup>33</sup> ran the *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* many times on three different continents. Neil Marcus, a disabled Jewish performance artist who lost family members to the Nazi killers, and I, a disabled German performance artist, co-created the movement score and ran each of these sessions. We had been invited to Berlin by resident Butoh artists, and together we visited the famous *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* constructed by Peter Eisenman. With us stood Marcus's brother, a Jewish man who lives in Berlin. The initial idea had been to create an action at the site of the memorial, but the massive size of the memorial and the depth of mourning and grief led us away from this. We paid our respects, sitting in our wheelchairs, silent in front of a vast field of gray concrete stelae or blocks. We couldn't enter bodily, couldn't drive our wheelchairs into the mourning field. We explained in a slide in the video we created: "We acknowledge the lawsuits brought by the disabled people of Germany who sued for disability access to the memorial and lost."<sup>34</sup> The somatic experience of uneven ground and narrowing passages had been designed as a metaphor: bipedal people experience unsettled walking, a stumbling gait, when they move through the four acres of the Eisenman memorial.<sup>35</sup> What does it mean to have



Figure 5. Setup of *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin*, The Olimpias, 2011. Two wheelchair users, Neil Marcus and Petra Kuppers, are setting the score for the participatory performance, in front of a projection of the actual Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. Photograph courtesy of an Olimpias participant.

a particular form of embodiment become an emblem for the memory of state terror—in particular a terror machine that also killed many disabled people?<sup>36</sup> In our installation, away from the fixity of these blocks, we speculated about other ways of commemorating state-sanctioned murder. We wanted to look toward the nonexclusionary presents and futures we could build out of our different human specificities, in touch with memories of atrocity and genocide. So, instead of entering the concrete of the Holocaust memorial, we created an intimate and fleeting architecture of bodies: a memorial of life, a practice of peace, a fantastical assemblage, a human braid.

We ran *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* with Holocaust survivors, with disability culture activists whose different bodyminds meant we had dogs in the braid with us, with transgender activists, and with people with cognitive differences. We ran this in Canberra with Australian Aboriginal activists, with people from the Butoh archive in Tokyo, with Jewish rabbis, and at a queer performance festival in Sweden.

Since the action is participatory, and since it is hard to share what it is like before one does it, it was ethically impossible to assume informed consent to video or photograph. So no documentation exists of most of these events. The only event we recorded took place as part of a three-day *Somatics, Movement, and Writing Symposium* (University of Michigan, 2011). All participants had perused a reading pack before assembling, had engaged with the ethical issues at the heart of the action in multiple ways, and had given permission to be filmed.

Some of the creative argument in this next section relies on slowing down, on temporal shifts, on a quietness that holds space for things to emerge, on the sensorial effects of the tonal qualities of voices: one halted by spastic speech difference, one with a German accent—and on the strange rhythms of (wheelchair) machine clicks.

I encourage you to switch modalities now, and watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=no-ZohJxWZE>.

As you watch the video take note of how you feel. Chart whether your breathing changes and if your body posture shifts in the transition from looking at a screen or a page of a book to the more laid-back reception many of us associate with TV watching. Listen to the sounds of the studio mediated in the video. What is the effect of all of this on you? What connections and disconnections do you experience in different media, in documentation?

Let's look at this performance in detail. All participants/audiences know the title before they come to this participatory action. *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin*—a weighty and long title—sets up its own contract with the audience. It was important to Neil and me to give a trigger warning through the title and then to leave a lot of space, taking care not to fill the experience with too much particular historical content.

All positions, apart from the “facilitator” position (me) and “the judge” (Neil Marcus), are sourced in a few short minutes from attending audience members as we get going: two people to be *the gate* “clearing people before they go forward” (that is the only instruction we give them, and they make their own choices about what “clearing” means) and one person to be Neil's assistant, helping him to stand if he chooses.

People come up to Neil through a long line and through a gate created by two participants. “Clearing”: some participants create pat-downs, quite physical, checking for knives or guns. Others choose more energetic healing movements, as if touching auras. Once a person is cleared, Neil invites them to go either left or right. I receive the people he releases. I ask them: “May I touch you?” Then I invite them to lie down. I ask the participants around them if they are okay with someone touching them. If everybody agrees, I invite the participant to lay their head on someone else's belly—a braiding action familiar from the history of participatory art. Many people use wheelchairs or regular chairs while being braided in. We explore together how we can create touch with the next person in the braid. Belly to head is the most common, but we also have back to back with participants sitting, a hand on an elbow of someone in a power wheelchair, a head leaning on a shoulder: whatever works, in comfort and in contact. If someone does not wish to engage in physical touch, I invite them to find a good position for themselves, and engage in energetic touch, instead.

Beyond human (and sometimes nonhuman, service-animal) bodies, the only space shaping is the projection of two photos of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe on some flat surface in the studio or community hall where we are meeting (these are the two memorial photos at the beginning and end of the video: blocks of concrete undulating across a vast space). We also have a few chairs available, alternatives for people who cannot or do not wish to be on the ground or can't stand in a line.

During the performance, all spatial delineations happen through the chang-



Figure 6. People in a braid on the floor of a dance studio, heads on each other's bellies in stillness and breathing. *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin*, The Olimpias, 2011. Photograph by the author.

ing geometries of the moving bodies and the lines they make as they begin to overlap and assemble. We offer minimal verbal introduction: we just run the score and see what people take from it and what content they bring to their movement experiences. This is an eco soma method approach as a performance: somatically grounded yet deeply in touch with the limits of what is beyond one's own skin, with the histories and presents of inclusion and exclusion, sorting and naming. The horizon vibrates, and everybody's experience seems to spread, entering into pasts, presents, and futures.

A sharing circle, often long and elaborate, followed each performance (not part of the videopoem nor recorded anywhere). In the sharing circle, people spoke, danced, or sang about what memories came up, what emerged from ages and experiences of empire, colonialism, eugenics and division, atrocity and



healing, the ambivalence and joy of being touched, appreciation for the multiple layers of consent queries, and the pleasure of breath. Participants shared personal memories, cultural memories, somatic experiences, dreams, trance images, and intellectual engagements. Some participants saw ghosts. Some saw stacks of dead Jewish people in the concentration camp. Some fell asleep lulled by the rhythm of communal breath. Some wondered about issues of permission and obedience, saw the tension between the simple structure and the care of the judge's gaze and my voice with its query "May I touch you?" I have decided not to write down the stories that have been told in the sharing circle. You, watching this videopoem in the flow of what you are reading here, will have your own response and enough imagination to trace echoes of the lyrical and expressive material people shared afterward.

There are multiple ways in which one can express the energies that occur in somatic events like these. I discuss four of them, as each offers different perspectives on *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin*—Foucauldian biopolitics, necropolitics via Mbembé, Deleuzoguattarian machines, and (in the next section) Haraway's staying with the trouble. At moments in these readings, I will offer eco soma method interventions: ways of slipping between intellectual engagement, sensation, site, and poetic fantasies.

Biopower is, according to Foucault, a development on from sovereignty, from kings decreeing death on individuals. In biopower realms, humans have a technology of power over the population. "It is continuous, scientific, and it is the power to make live and to let die . . . [it is] the power of regulation" (2003, 240–41). This regulating power is the power of modernity, "rationally," "scientifically" creating categories like race or disability. This is the science of eugenicists and Nazis, setting up categories of living beings and engaging in racism as a way of eliminating certain parts of society and of controlling populations. This lineage of argumentation reads all the way to the geology/racialization arguments in the opening of this chapter.

In our performance action, this sorting was something many participants commented on: the chilling effect of being judged, or being sorted into two sides, without a clear sense of what the judgment entails. Being adjudicated and weighed, quantified, made fungible, interchangeable, not seen—this is a deep-lodged fear that grabs many racialized and/or medicalized people.<sup>37</sup> There is great risk in enacting this in a social somatic, and Neil Marcus and I are aware of the emotional labor we demand of our participants. My soothing pat-



ter throughout is offered as a way to help people through the experience and to make sure they are not stranded or alone in their enactment, activated by the judging action and the images of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe looming over it all.

At the same time, I experience my kind invitation and Neil's charming smile and gentle touch with his spastic hand as quite a challenge: people accept our invitation without pause, without intervening, without pushback. I had not expected that. In some of our final sharing circles, sometimes participants just stayed in the comfort and calmness of the experience, the utopic feel. When I brought up the implications of the action's title, and the fact that people had said yes and gave permission to be put into lines, judged, and then laid down into the braid without question, I encountered energies of rupture—the discharge at the moment when one sees oneself not wholly within one's own control. I stopped making this comment, as it undermined the contract of care we set up (unspoken) in the performance experiment, but I bet the vibration of “what did I lend myself to” was still felt by some participants. Foucauldian biopower is the system, and we feed the system through participation.

I do not want to let this part of the performance discussion sound as if we had set a trap for participants. The tension between seduction and agency was something we had expected to be more at the forefront of people's experience, and it was for many. I do find it important to take you, as my reader, to this point. Let's stay with this a bit more, before exploring other facets of what people have brought to the performance.

Foucault developed his work on biopower through the example of scientific racism and the emerging need for political entities to find ways to control societies in industrialization modes and within population explosions. Individual executions, the sovereign right to kill, were no longer an effective means of ensuring sovereignty and power balances—so larger-scale differentiations came into play, and racism became a state function.

Achille Mbembé takes up Foucauldian biopower discussions of racism and moves the discussion from Nazi death camps as ultimate expressions of this form of population control to colonial occupation. He writes that

colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. (2003, 25)

In two of our *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* performances, this imbrication of population regulation and spatial regulation came most urgently to the forefront: when we enacted the score at the Australian National University in Canberra, the capital of Australia, and when we had Indian and Pakistani people in the circle talking about the arbitrary colonial division of their homeland and the effects of the border on their families. Again, without directly citing what people said in our circle, these divisions of land and people as a result of colonial rule were painfully but also fruitfully brought into the sharing circle and offered new perspectives and solidarities.

The disability experience is one of these modernist divisions and an example of biopower and necropolitics in action, articulating this regulatory dividing action with a somatic sense of oneself, including experiences of pain or fatigue and other bodily states. In this performance circle, initiated by disability culture activists, the intersectional nature of disability, colonial experience, animacies, flora/fauna/human ordering, racialization, and gender divisions might, for a moment, for a breath, become somatically experiential—in shared breath and in the moments when I listen to how a particular somatic experience echoes with particular divisional categories.<sup>38</sup>

And in the shared breath, and the reliance on each other's bodies as cushions, as living pillows, as a moving shifting braid, people enacted and narrated connections: I saw relaxed poses, strangers holding hands with one another, heard about the cathartic aspects of being in the braid, the Holocaust imagery winding in an eco soma fashion through the dis/comfort of being so close. We spent time together, breathing, and co-creating a dream world of a future for all. Twice, we had (service) dogs in the braid, tuning into the energy and happily co-snoozing with their humans (at least for a while).

Different from some of my public participatory actions, I did not ask for snippets of free writing from audiences. This particular performance was deeply somatic, and writing felt too removed, too analytical, too organizing. But for you, reader, this likely creates some problems—and hopefully fruitful problems. My ethical withholding in not recording or citing what people said puts strong emphasis on my role as witness and also as the person controlling the discourse surrounding the performance. There are so few pieces of “documenting” detritus that can shore up my narrative or challenge my view.<sup>39</sup>

My eco soma method writing here has its own audience effects: it invites new narrative conventions as I address my own power both in cocreating the

performance and in controlling its narrative. How do you, as reader of these words, reflect on issues of truth status, power, control, and narrative, on the limits of what can be co-felt?

Thinking about these connections, about elements working together in new and surprising ways, leads me to a third perspective: a Deleuzoguattarian focus on machines, on disparate elements integrating into new meaning making, and on horizons meeting and tilting. The next chapter in this book will engage more directly with this multivoicing and decentering, in an Indigenous/settler framework, and in contact with land and bodies. For my purposes here, I offer the following meditation as a way of thinking about eco soma methods of sensing within performance witnessing:

Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. . . . (N)ot every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 7)

This is Deleuzoguattarian writing, writing from a poetic world, a “lingo.” I often find it useful to remind people that it is okay to not fully grasp the meanings of Deleuzoguattarian writing but to see what becomes activated in themselves as they read. What words grab you, what images emerge as you read about the tree, the root, the lines drawn in the paragraph above?

In this more associative mode, my material below discusses rhizomatic meaning making, semiotic/somatic chains of connection that cannot be traced to origins but that connect archives, practices, and meaning. Machines are nexuses where things grind against one another, their connections becoming haptic, tactile, audible, visible, and sensate. To me, disability is one of these machine principles, as is race and gender: categories born in modernist divisionary practices, deeply interrelated but not reducible to one another, with effects that vibrate outward and create new meanings and life patterns.

In the performance circle, I experience the scene as a machine articulating colonial practice, somatic experience, and storytelling into and against one another—and new meanings emerge. I had not thought about Pakistan and

India when Neil and I designed the score, but the connections became “obvious” in the machine of the circle, as people narrated the particular eco that surrounded their soma, the histories and divisions that have marked their lives, and that they held while lying in co-humanity.

Running the *Journey* in an Australian theater, Neil and I did not yet know to think about Australian Aboriginal experience of division and enclosure, land rights and death, police brutality, and prison vans. Once we heard the stories, the machine knitted a new whole between disability and Indigeneity, a whole for a moment and a hole in the meaning making that tries to separate us into identities.

In another performance, Butoh archivists from Tokyo spoke about the tsunami dead floating on the waves and about how lying on one another, breathing, ghosted their somatic experience. Memorial, earth time, ocean time, and human time coalesced to become a machine. They witnessed themselves as connected, and water, fish, and organic material in the process became part of the breath wave.

“May I touch you?” repeats on multiple levels throughout this participatory performance, and through my writing here. People have their own experiences from different life realities, from different enmeshments, but they find themselves on a shared horizon, in a field of breaths, in the valleys and hills of bodies.

In the next section, please join me as Neil and I take the *Journey* performance into a non-White-owned space, a space dedicated to a diaspora, remembering colonial violence.

### **Moluks Historisch Museum: Moving with the Clove**

As a last lens in this section, I offer a final memory jewel, a crip performance relic. We enacted the *Journal to the Holocaust Memorial* score in the Moluks Historisch Museum, the Molukken/Spice Island museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands (the museum has since shut its doors, one of many austerity victims). Donna Haraway shades and twists Deleuzoguattarian thought of machines and rhizomes into natureculture thinking. She transgresses categories in order to defamiliarize and open up new connectivities:

My purpose is to make “kin” mean something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy. The gently defamiliarizing move might seem

for a while to be just a mistake, but then (with luck) appear as correct all along. Kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans. (2015, 161)

In her work, she brings narratives of flora and fauna specificity into contact with human social justice thought and ecological time with human time: I can try to “make kin” through various ways of knowing and through sensing/feeling and research: suddenly, something I hadn’t thought of before as having animacy, having life, is a lively thing I can interact with.<sup>40</sup> In the Moluks Museum, a similar move happens in the sensory universe of its space: making kin, being in contact, on a complicated horizon of colonial and crip relations, with a clove, the aromatic flower bud of a tree.<sup>41</sup> How does reciprocity enter into this relation, though? Can this become something other than extractive? How can I exercise my imagination to see ways in which our work with the clove benefits the clove (to take up Potawatomi ethnobotanist Robin Wall Kimmerer’s challenge to imagine “beneficial relations” [2015, 6])? The performance could offer a form of composting to the plant remnants, an exchange of sweat and breath humidity that might assist the plant material’s journey through time. Or else, all our engagement with the smell of clove could assist in wider cultivation of the plant, assuring markets and distribution patterns. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes, “Making worlds is not limited to humans” (2015, 22) and my human imagination is limited—plants make their own stories and journeys. I offer the very moment where you/I/we begin to think about a nonhuman-centered benefit as an eco soma speculative act of engagement.

The museum is also a community center, a place of assembly for the Spice Island inhabitants who were removed by Dutch colonial forces in the 1950s. Kin, spread out on a rhizome of postcolonial transplantation and removal. These Spice Islanders, themselves of hybrid origin, of New Guinea, had fought Indonesian forces side by side with the Dutch colonizers in the Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army), hoping to win a free state for themselves. When the Indonesians took over the island chain, these Moluccans were threatened and painted as collaborators with the Dutch. So, in a move to “clean up” their colonial violence, the Dutch brought twelve thousand Molukkan soldiers and their families to the Netherlands. Nowadays, the center list recognizes about forty-five thousand descendants in the Molukkan diaspora.

For many of these descendants, given Indonesian politics, few links to the homeland remain. For them and others, the museum offers a narrative of how Dutch colonialism and Indonesian struggles chafed against one another, as well as a clear sensory memory relic: the smell of cloves. The Spice Islands were on the Dutch radar, as well as other colonial forces, because of their riches: their spices, a much sought-after commodity in early colonial raiding. And when one walks into the main exhibition room of the center, large vats of cloves welcome the visitors.

Guards advised us that we could each take a clove: we were welcome to take the nail-shaped spice as a memento of the Molukkan struggle and diasporic experience. With the permission of the center, as part of our *Journey to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* score, we handed out the little spices as worry stones, kinesthetic objects, and memory relics to be held and warmed in one's palm, releasing the cloves' scent.

As participants felt their bodies breathing in the weft wave of lifting and falling chests and bellies, they clasped the cloves in their hands like little islands of warmth and scent. While they were waiting in the line to be let through the gate, and while they were lying in the braid, people could smell the cloves from time to time for the duration of the action. And they could take the plant remnant home, whatever "home" meant for them. The action's participants came from many spaces in the world. How we received the clove against the warm surfaces of our skin, as exotic or homemaking, *heimlich* or *unheimlich*, as food or as object, as familiar spice or signpost of otherness, mapped a world for us.

As a cultural critic, I could create a rhizome of clove, charting its many connections and semiotic webs. I could write about scent, the nail-like shape, colonial travels and economies, use in environmentally acceptable reef fishing methods,<sup>42</sup> and so on. But for my purposes here, in this eco soma flow, I am "staying with the trouble" to cite Haraway again, with the intention of calling out the edgy human/power/natureculture associations instead: I think about these plants as *objet a*, that is, desire objects in psychoanalytic transference of energies; as exchange objects in colonial wars, boundary objects in allocating racialized labels; transitional objects in medicine, in particular biomedicine's other, herbal/alternative medicine; and as fetishized mementos of performance actions.

In that mélange of associations I think of lineages of plants as convivial,

close to my skin, my aching bones, my pain receptors, yet also grounded in European extractive colonial journeys: both of these experiences are baked into my bones. Plants can be soothing healing entities, near personified, on the edge of speculative fantasy familiars. In many traditional and Indigenous herbal medicine practices, you speak with the spirit of the plant, honor them, and ask for relief. Cloves are painkillers in many different Western and non-Western medical contexts. Whatever was going on for people in the *Journey* braid, the clove had its own powers to ground and soothe. The power relations stay part of my reception. Each small clove, each dried flower bud, stuck in, blossomed again, and lodged little tentacles to dislocated homes, global travels, the realities of colonial wars, and the long duration of plants.

Painkillers and pain: to work with the clove stays with the trouble of biopolitics, with the horizon of separation and its ills, with greed and its results, and with resilience: the ability of the Spice Islanders to make a kinship home on the cool, flat waterlands of the Dutch.

### **Social Practice: Memory**

In this last part of the chapter, after these discussions of “soma” in multiple forms, humans in their (bio)political/post/colonial diversity, and humans on the horizon of other-touch, I keep expanding the circle. I can extend my discussion of somatic interventions into moving bodies again to a wider sense of life: first by linking my autobiography as a somatic, embodied subject of a perpetrator nation to wider historical moments of German Nazi politics and then on toward plant life and the durations of nonhumans.

To me, visiting Germany means entering a fraught and complex emotional terrain. I am German, and I enrolled at the University of Cologne, the first high-school finisher in my local family net.<sup>43</sup> It was during this time that I first became a wheelchair user—my lifelong disability expressed itself in such a way that bipedal movement became impossible. This particular personal history meant that not only the history of exclusion but also the structural positioning of different bodies were always clearly experiential to me: in order to get to the dance seminar, I had to climb to the top floor of the theater, dance, and film studies building, often on my butt, stemming myself up on my hands step by step (enact this: lay this book aside. Stem yourself up from what you are sitting on right now. Note the effort. Count your stairs).<sup>44</sup> This university was not for

bodies like mine. Eventually, at age twenty-four, I moved to the United Kingdom and then, ten years later, to the United States. Along the way, I found disability culture and civil rights legislation that made my career possible and my form of embodiment conceivable in performance studies.

Growing up as a young, energetic, disabled subject, bodies in flux were never far from my mind when I thought about disability and Germany: to me it was so clear that my parents' generation of congenitally disabled people had been exterminated by the Nazis. That was the generation that had wrought much social change in other countries, in the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere. Growing up on the Niederrhein, I could see *Kriegsversehrte*, war veterans, in my own home and all around me but not many older people with congenital differences. Many of these, like so many others—Jews, Roma, Sinti, gay people—had been exterminated by the Nazis, seen as *lebensunwertes Leben*: lives not worth living.

Eugenics still hangs like a shroud over my vision of Germany: here, contemporary social hygienic methods around disability usually seem to focus on health care and abortion, not on ramps and access. So when I travel to Germany, I still often feel excluded: few contemporary dance spaces in Berlin allow me access, university theater seminar spaces are still often inaccessible, and fellowships cannot accommodate my wheelchair needs.

Events like the Berlin Biennale are still quite inaccessible, housed in courtyards full of cobblestones, and the Biennale's emphasis on "social practice" art does not seem to include thinking about smoothing the path on the ground. This is a choice, a choice enacted, a movement made—invite one more artist rather than buy some concrete and create a ramp. These are choices. This is only *one* historical way for a modern nation and a reborn city to come into being. This way of shaping space is not a given, not natural, and not necessary. In some ways, in my "structure of feeling" (to cite Raymond Williams) at home, and in the architectural structures of public life, this Germany does not seem to be too interested in disability as part of the horizon space of human biodiversity.

There are of course many disabled artists in Germany, and it is important not to make them invisible.<sup>45</sup> But why are there still all these barriers in public life in such a rich country? Why is my experience of German open shared space still so unpleasant? This is the question I bump up against, literally, when I wheel myself over the cobblestones of German streets.



So how can I use eco soma methods to link movement actions to national imaginings (not in semantic categories but in theories specifically focused on movement and sensing) and to new futures? Hardt and Negri's writing about the multitude allows me to link energetics, movement, and capital relations together. Their work is part of what informed the dramaturgy of political movements like Occupy Wall Street and other newer forms of finding resistances. In their discussion of postmodernist labor practices they state:

(One) face of immaterial labor is the affective labor of human contact and interaction. . . . This labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. (2000, 292, 293)

"A feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion": much of the language used here can easily glide into the registers of dance and theater studies. The language echoes attempts to see performance as an effective method of community cultural development or health intervention. This is the language many dance artists use when we try to speak about effects of performing in the community and how this might potentially be measured and made productive. How can one measure the affective? How can it be harnessed? What is dance and theater's place within biopower? This is a place of research for many contemporary community dance artists, people working in an area of dancerly production. This is dance with and for everybody, every body, an area of thriving dance practice that sits in between the interstices of folk dance and concert dance and that has at least one of its origins in Germany: in *Ausdruckstanz*, in the sense that all bodies can be expressive and that this expression is something worth attending to.

One of the Austro-German origins of this work is dance theorist and somatic artist Rudolf von Laban's ways of thinking through the connections between vitalism, a universal energetics, and movement. Without following the ins and outs of Laban's work and his reception in Germany, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere,<sup>46</sup> a personal excursion in this chapter allows me to connect to Laban issues when I think about postmodernist production, biopower, the post-Fordist/Taylorist factory,<sup>47</sup> community cultural development, and dance with changing bodies:

*After my Abitur, or high school diploma, I worked in my home town in a car factory which delivered parts for Ford. For a short seven months, I was a union*

worker, and my union card and pay-in book are still in my office drawer. One of my workstations, one on which I spend many months, is still deeply engrained in my bones—and the work flow I learned there in my bones and tissues was my embodied reminder of what I was taught later, when I studied for my Laban dance certificate.

I stretch out a hand to the left, and grasp the edge of a thick plastic sheet, nearly as tall as I am. I tug, and my second hand moves over to nudge the thickly undulating slightly sticky sheet along, smoothing it, making sure no wrinkles appear. Moving my whole back, I maneuver the sheet over the metal apparatus in front of me. My right hand reaches up and pulls down the top part of the metal machine. Its jaws clasp onto the smooth sheet. My right hand moves sideways, and hits a round red button, a half-sphere, that yields to my push and initiates a vacuum sequence. The metal machine in front of me hisses and vibrates, and the sheet is heated, pulled by evacuated air, pressed into the familiar half-moon shape of a Ford dashboard. The process takes about two minutes—and then the top releases, and I can push it upward. The dashboard is warm and smells of heated plastic. I grasp a sharp knife, and quickly yet carefully circle the giant sheet, freeing the newly formed instrument cradle from the flapping remnants. Tugging at the sides, the dashboard releases, and I shift my back again, my core engaged, as I haul the large plastic mass upright, and thread it onto the waiting structure to my right—a rail, onto which assemble the dashboards, each the size and shape of large sides of beef, nestling into one another, their warmth slowly fading. Having completed this task, I turn again to the left, ready to reach out my hand for the next plastic sheet.

In between this process, I have a few seconds to myself, as the plastic warps under the vacuum press. Slightly to my left, near the edge of the big machine, lies a small yellow book, a Reclam edition—a familiar sight to all Germans, the highly economic *Universal-Bibliothek* (“universal library”), classics either in or translated into German. One month, it was Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (at that point, I was still studying for my Philosophy final school exam), another month, it was Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (here, I was on my own, reading for pleasure), and yet another, my first encounter with Melville’s *Moby Dick*, finding the list-chapters particularly suited to the rhythm of my work. In the seconds the machine affords me, I read a page and a half, unflinching. When the hissing stops, I return the book to the metal shelf, and get ready to haul—my mind engaged in the page I just

*read, my meditation on political theory, whaling towns, and monsters in perfect harmony with the demands of this effort.*

*Much later, I learn how Rudolf von Laban's followers adapted his work to help factories create efficient movement structures, one that would allow workers to counteract the negative effects of repetitive strains. I do not know if Laban's principles were part of the training of whoever designed that machine on which I saw my 18th birthday. But this furtive book consumption, and the rhythms of reading it engendered in me, are still part of my repertoire of literary behavior. I found both comfort and meditative dance in my engagement with the machine that enabled my studies: it provided the money to allow me to pay for my first year of university, and it offered me time to think.<sup>48</sup>*

Then, I lived in the compass of the factory—one of my performance/social sculpture actions, WEFT, started from the sound of my grandfather's wooden leg on the concrete floor of the fabric factory where he was a night watchman. Now I live in Ypsilanti, Michigan, an ex-auto factory town, with its memories of union jobs, and narratives of workers' hope. It was also at one point the Michigan city with the largest Black demographic, and it played a significant role in the underground railroad, part of Black escape routes to Canada. How can rhythms of escape become resonant to eco soma methods of seeing one's movement freedom in relation to constraints, unclear horizons of sociality, and the alienation *and* comfort of the factory?

During Laban's time in the United Kingdom, in the Second World War, movement analysis was useful in both workers' education and in ameliorating the Fordist industrial factory: his system, developed alongside an engineer, allowed workers to compensate muscularly, through styles of enacting a particular movement for the highly regimented movements that the machine/human interface demanded. At the same time, this introduced workers into a new disciplinary machine, one of calisthenics for keeping the body in peak condition. This is one of the more constraining histories of somatics and its alignment with neoliberal self-perfection.

This seesaw of ambivalent political engagement carries through the history of community dance. In some perspectives, the work of expressionist dance builds upon (positively connoted) local specificity, deep myth work, and the articulation of home narratives—all values that allowed it to be appropriated by (negatively connoted) fascist narratives of *Blut* and *Boden* (blood and soil).

How does this nexus of disciplining the body as a factory addendum in nation-building jibe with the expressive affective potential of community dance, the pleasure, joy, passion of moving together, of creating images and narratives in dance, and of creating embodied poetry in the here-and-now in contact with environment and community?

Hardt and Negri's political analysis of post-post-Marxist practices of the multitude can be helpful in articulating that nebulous realm of "creative resistance" that many of us in performance studies and applied theater studies keep coming back to. They offer space specifically in thinking through creative resistance within complexity, for they allow us to also think about the disciplinarity of that creativity and the way that creativity fuels a postmodern economy.

Creating movement patterns in relation to one another is one of the formal elements of Laban's community dance practice, which has at its core the creation of choreographic patterns of varying energies, levels, and speeds, articulated against one another to allow for tension and development. Once immersed in these ways of thinking about movement, participants quite quickly tune into the expressive potential of everyday movement. In dance movement workshops, participants can quickly create patterns of echo and opposition with many different stimuli (think back to the opening of this chapter: arms gliding in mirror and counterpoint).

Remember my action instruction earlier on, stemming oneself up steps, lifting oneself by one's arms, embodying the movement signature of awkward stair navigation? Maybe doing this now you can access the sense of marble under your butt, the hardness of the surface, and the slickness of wet rain traces trampled in by bipedals now covering your mucky hands. You can feel the exposure of your backbody as you move up and then backward. Maybe there's an emotional signature to the direct and sudden explosions of gravitational force downward as you push yourself up the next step or even to the more sustaining practice it eventually gives way to, yielding into the step to rise up less abruptly but more in tune with my body's patterns as I accommodate my environment. This is a bodily reading of biopower: not biopower's force to decide on which bodies are toward death and which toward life but biopower's sorting function at the level of physical engagement with built environments. Some bodies are not welcome here.

These resonant physical moments are also the political horizon of this way of working in community. Together, in a performance workshop, I/you/we

can find the moments when a particular bodily experience echoes memories, analysis, and social commentary. This “I/you/we” functions as a different kind of *Stolpersteine* (German for “stumbling stones”), a little rest/resistance in the smooth flow of writing. The encompassing “we” would be an invisible marker, but so much of this is about being aware that there are multiple perspectives on things and experiences. Together, I/you/we can create countersomatics, movements that revalue oppressive experiences. Articulating biopower means becoming aware of who is seen as human, what is seen as meaningful, and what else might enter the frame when I/you/we open up to alternative ways of seeing the world and our bodyminds.

### **Social Practice: Plants**

To close, let’s go and visit an exhibit, eco soma style, with an attention to how it feels, embodied/enminded, un/comfortably at times, to be there. The exhibit was on the top floor of the KW, the Institute for Contemporary Art, part of the 2012 Berlin Biennale. I walked up there with my cane and sat on the steps, remembering much of the bodily habitus of my German days. Biopolitics and the shape of the artful body were much on my mind. Up on the top floor a dark space awaited me, lit by an array of bright lights over rows and rows of seedlings. This was “Berlin Birkenau” by Polish artist Łukasz Surowiec, a project that had brought 320 seedlings from the environs of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp to Berlin. These young seedlings were handed out to participants who then entered into a contract of care and agreed to nourish them. Here was the site of a practice of peace, an interspecies collaboration, a politics of care, of ongoing activity and energetic exchange, and of immaterial/material labor.

When I visited shortly before the end of the Biennale, many seedlings were dead. Something about the space looked like a garden center, a greenhouse. Polish and other immigrants often provide the cheap backbreaking labor of tending rows of plants in Europe, planting and harvesting salads, carrots, flowers. The birch seedlings were only one part of a living transnational transit, historical and contemporary, around labor, factories, death, and life. Historical roots and empire narratives of migrating workers wove connections in my witnessing.

I am writing about these trees in the context of a book that points toward speculative forms—monsters, tentacular connections, clove fantasies, and moth



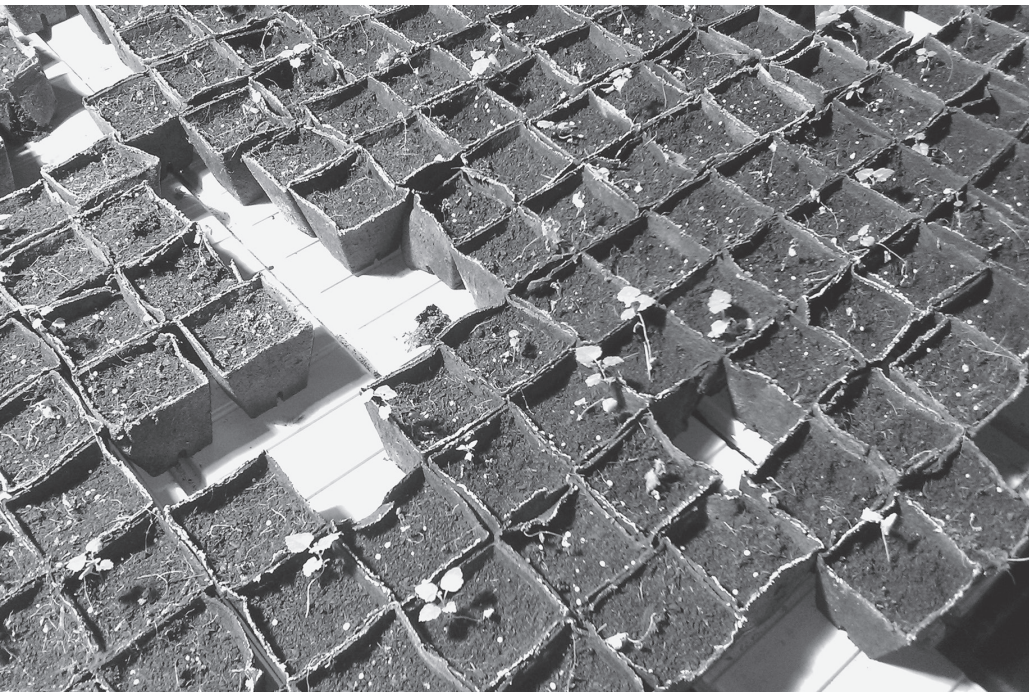


Figure 7. Overhead shot of birch seedlings in decomposing pots full of earth. Some seedlings have already perished, and some are doing fine. The earth in the pots looks quite dry. Some pots have already been taken out, and likely home, by audience members. Installation “Berlin-Birkenau” by Łukasz Surowiec, Berlin Biennale 2012. Photograph by the author.

humans. Thus, I also see my visit in Berlin’s exhibit space, and the little birch trees in another context, more akin to Marx’s use of the speculative when he writes that “capital is dead labour, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (1887, 163). Aimee Bahng writes about the multiple meanings of “the speculative,” grounded in capitalism and (financial) risk management as much as in imagination, hope, and queer futurities. She writes, “When speculative futures run wild, excavation, historicization, and haunting become increasingly important modes of contingency to slow the storm of progress” (2018, 17). Bahng’s context are transnational networks of care and undercommons, communities of color imagining against rapacious capitalism. In this Berlin exhibit, German/Polish

histories, presents and futures align along migrant axes, and haunting atrocity shadows the brown and green liveliness.

Birch trees: traditionally, in my culture, the trees of youth, of pagan rites, of fertility. But Birch is also in the name of Birkenau concentration camp (Birch = Birke). I tried to stand for a little while on wobbly legs, tried to be with the plants and to find something that would reach across the energetics of species—I have often used Deleuzeoguattarian ideas of rhizome and plant vitalism to work with community groups in botanical gardens. But in this exhibition space, the weight of history seemed too much to bear, too hard a pull on me seeking plant connection and living flow. Witnessing this in Berlin did make it easy to wonder cynically about what revolutions might look like. About the space of gestures. And if gestures are empty or full of revolutionary potential, or both. Outside the Biennale, sunshine and rain were happening at the same time, and I found myself asking whether these little baby plants wouldn't do better outdoors than in the dark exhibition space.

In the performance actions I shared in these pages, I use eco soma methods to show how audiences become participants on the move, implicated in social patterns while somatically engaged. They are invited to feel-think-be particular styles of temporal puzzles, to become social sculptures, or to think about the fullness and emptiness of gestures.

Leaving that cobblestone courtyard in Berlin, I wondered about the future of nonhuman others under human regimes: I wondered if some of these seedlings would grow up into bonsai, little cripple trees, appreciated for their twisted beauties, old survivors living gracefully and marked by violences reaching into their roots. Would the birches mingle with other trees and plants—old live oaks in California, clove trees in the Maluku Islands? Could diversity as a value intersect with the clean aesthetic of a German exhibition hall? Maybe the failure to thrive in conditions of uniformity is also a somatic protest.

In his anthropology of thinking forests in the Amazon River region, Eduardo Kohn wonders:

The world beyond the human is not a meaningless one made meaningful by humans. Rather, mean-ings—means-ends relations, strivings, purposes, telos, intentions, functions and significance—emerge in a world of living thoughts beyond the human in ways that are not fully exhausted by our all-too-human attempts to define and control these. More precisely, the forests

around Ávila [a Quichua-speaking Runa village in Ecuador] are animate. That is, these forests house other emergent loci of mean-ings, ones that do not necessarily revolve around, or originate from, humans. (2013, 72)

What are the mean-ings/mean-ends of the exhibit hall and its alternating scarcity and density of light and water *to the trees*? Is there a communicative web deep in the shallow soil of the exhibit hall, this recently popularized tree/mushroom web communication that has influenced much Shinrin-yoku/“forest bathing” thinking?<sup>49</sup> What do birches make of human-blood-and-calcium-rich soil? What kinds of “we” do trees know, and what are unequal horizons of self/social world in root terms?

In this book, I try to fly with these thoughts. But my concentration breaks, and I fall back into my soma sack, utilitarian, human goal oriented, pleasure seeking, exhausted. So I make the trees into extractable material, like gold and diamonds, when I ask what kind of living benches could be made out of what kind of sustainable growing wood, to support all dancers, all breathing beings, to actively work toward a world that lets all people be people? The real question would be: what world would let all human dancers, and more-than-them, other-than-humans, live together in their intersecting trails?

There were many holes in the Berlin exhibit: absences, maybe portals, transport sites to other futures. Many plants had been taken home, and some might be thriving as I type these words. People took them: audiences. Active audiences who felt okay with the challenge to look after a living metaphor, with offering some space in their own lives, people who got engaged by the little plant’s lively otherness.

There is much hope in that.



## CHAPTER 2

# Edges of Water and Land

INDIGENOUS—  
SETTLER  
ECO SOMA  
COLLABORATIONS

Gizhaabowemin ezhi-zhaabwiiyang  
odaminowinan ozhitooyang, mazinitooyang  
aanikenootawangwaa dewe'iganag gaye zhiishiigwanag  
mino-mgondaaganewaad mino-anishinaabeyang.

We accompany our survival  
with games creating, arranging  
translating for drums and rattles  
to animate the sound of being good beings.

—Margaret Noodin, from the poem “Gimanaajitoomin Nibi/  
We Honor Water,” 2020

The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation. It is  
unforgetting. It is mattering.

—Angie Morrill, *Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Collective*, 2016

In this chapter, I am continuing my exploration of embodied artful explorations that foreground diverse frameworks in contact with one another, and I use somatic sensation as the core aesthetic drive. Now, however, the invitations come via digital media and no longer predominantly from the skin-to-skin or shared sun-and-air contacts that characterized the previous chapter. Work at the site of injury is central to this chapter, and so I focus on healing practices that emerge from collaborations between Indigenous frameworks, Western arts methods, and the land itself.

To position myself apropos colonial reckonings: my sensibilities emerged out of German environmental arts thinking with its lineages of poets and

revolutionaries, Joseph Beuys's mysticism, and Nazism's engagement with land discourse. My sensibilities were honed during a decade living in Wales, collaborating with Welsh language activists and poets centered in anticolonial thought. This was followed by a formative experience working in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as the inaugural Caroline Plummer Fellow in Community Dance. During that time I worked in a hospice, with predominately Pākehā (European settler) elders, some of whom had fought Germans, and a Māori group of artists/healers who used traditional methods to reintegrate people who had engaged in violent crimes. I also spent significant time in Australia, given how close my interests in community performance aligned with the concept of "community cultural development," an Australian arts funding category. During a number of residencies I learned much from Aboriginal leaders as well as White community arts practitioners, including that there were limits to being a curious ethnographic traveler.<sup>1</sup> I quickly learned not to write about Indigenous work per se. I was invited to listen.

Now I live in Michigan. I seek out and appreciate Anishinaabe contemporary creative forms. I took two semesters of Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibwe language, at the University of Michigan with Anishinaabe elders Howard Kimewon and Alphonse Pitawanakwat. Anishinaabe poet and linguist Margaret Noodin, whose recent book is the bilingual *Gijigijigaaneshi Gikendaan* (2020), helped me understand something of the connections between language and land, grammar, and being-in-the-world. I learned, for instance, about the importance of verb forms over nouns—of being-with, being-in-process, being-alive-together. Noodin, and other writers like Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinaabe), show me ways to think about permeable selves and processes in the natural world.

My painful embodiment means that I engage in delicious tracking of earth and water; understanding the implications of this leads me to the traditional and current caretakers of the land. Many of my Indigenous collaborators are skilled in forms of pain and trauma management. I continue to try to listen actively for the ethical demands on me as I move and dance on land that has histories, and that demands acknowledgment of relation, reparation, and return. This is the unstable and unsettled position I write from.

In all the practices I discuss in this chapter, intercultural perceptions and evaluations of land are the connectors of the healing work, and I track how land and the concept of "love" emerge together. Let's begin by placing ourselves.

What are the histories of the land on which you are now reading these words? What people caretook and caretake this land?

I wrote most of this within the purview of the Three Fires Confederacy. Matthew Siegfried is a local historian who leads a number of walks along the streets of my hometown of Ypsilanti. These walks focus on the Black and Indigenous histories of our small Rust Belt town. He tells me that my home is on the land of the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi) and was once a Wyandot village. He describes how historical records indicate that smallpox, a disease introduced by European colonizers, devastated local Potawatomi villages in 1752 and the Wyandot village in 1787. In that period, these nations were all aligned with the French against the English and participated in the French and Indian War. Later, the Potawatomi were central locally in Chief Pontiac's War (1763), against the Detroit fort, a center of slaveholding Whites (at first mainly Indigenous and then later Black slaves were present in the fort; for this early history of Detroit, see Miles 2017). In a 2014 interview, Siegfried describes how some of the Potawatomi of the Huron River, forcibly removed in 1840–41, escaped and later returned to Michigan.

Using a different method of elucidating the region's history, Margaret Noodin writes about a burial mound in Detroit along the river: "Potawatomi historian Michael Zimmerman has told us of the leader who lived in this place, Ininiwizh. It matters that he lived in the late 1700s as the settlers began shifting the earth to create walls and divide cultures, and that in 1771 he left this place, this river and these waters. It matters that his name means milkweed, the sole food of monarch caterpillars" (Noodin and Kuppers 2021).

Anishinaabemowin, the language of Margaret Noodin's poem in the chapter epigraph, is one of the sounds familiar to this land. In order to write about my location, I consulted with Indigenous and White historians, as "maps" are complex things, and I try to listen to many stories of this land without getting too pinned down. Territory does not necessarily mean settling, and transit—mobility, making tracks—can be temporary tactics of alignment rather than land-grabbing strategies. In the epitaph, I cited "unforgetting" and "mattering," the terms used by Angie Morrill (Klamath), Eve Tuck (Unangaḡ), and the Super Futures Haunt Collective as ways to hold against dispossession. They are both processes. Consulting, researching, and being aware of and learning over time what I don't know are central to this chapter's ecosomatic approach: like the opening Anishnaabemowin poem's energy, it's an "-ing" chapter, a doing. And for

me, as a settler, that means “unsettling”: engaging postapocalyptic thinking by acknowledging Indigenous apocalypses, undermining my own stability, listening to beyond what I know, pulling the rug out from under myself, asking more questions about this ground, and opening my sensorium to more languages and voices.

### **Crowded Writing**

Over the years, a lot of my own theoretical framework evolved from and with Deleuzoguattarian thought: the complex web of ideas and concepts that stem from the collaboration between French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and radical psychotherapist Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari coauthored texts and used far-ranging and often challenging thought constructs and examples to map new connections and energetic relations: lines of flight and bodies without organs. Chapter 1 introduced rhizomatic structures and trees that organized things in ways that were too linear. I remember reading this duo in the 1980s, sitting in cafés after university lectures in Germany, slowly finding my way into the dense texts, and already being provoked by the specific and ever more elaborate examples they wove into their particular weft. Their writings mentioned non-White others as examples, as metaphors, in line of flights that did not end well. I had not met any nomads or actual Hopi yet, but I was fairly certain that their mention was a particular assemblage of exoticisms—lives viewed from afar. Anthropological ethics was, for better or worse, not the point of what I understood to be trickster texts.

Here are the two most important sentences in Deleuze and Guattari’s book for my argument on eco soma methods, on co-creation in somatic/ecological thickness: “The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd” (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 3).

I am a community performance artist, someone who identifies as and works with what Erving Goffman calls “stigmatized” people: those who often find themselves in a complex relationship with the values and words applied to them by others. These are disabled people, people deemed disposable and debilitated in neoliberal worlds, and people who have to be careful about how they present themselves. My artwork and theoretical labor are not about telling one’s story straight or about witnessing injury; my engagement with politics of recognition was and is complicated and involves the poetics of being recognized as a

complex, interdependent participant in public life. It was and continues to be fun to weave the strands of identity and voice through the striated nets and tools of Deleuzoguattarian protocol.

In this chapter, I am interested in unrecognizable performance/writing/mark-making practices among arty, tricky crowds with different names: names for themselves, named by others, violent naming, and secret names. I am writing about cross-cultural artful collaborations between Indigenous people and settler people, working together “each . . . several, [so] there was already quite a crowd.” My use of the word “settler” is rhetorically marked: I use the word frame Indigenous/settler (and the continuum denoted by the frame) not to mark essential identities but to dislocate “art practice as usual” into a more defamiliarized terrain. The practices I write about are crowded by histories of colonial violence and encounter and by much longer durations of survivance and life. I am an outsider to Indigenous practice, and there are protocols of how to write about Indigenous work, and it would take careful consultation with artists and elders to ensure that lines of communication are sanctioned and appropriate, not appropriative.<sup>2</sup> I do not write about Indigenous practices, instead I address here edge spaces, collaborations, encounters. Many of the practices I am writing about in this chapter come to me secondhand (and I mark that in the text), and hence I try to be careful not to speculate about Indigenous meanings. All these practices occur in contested places where traditions have woven specific protocols and forms of engagement and where contemporary artists are working with these living and revitalized archives.

One of the core nexuses of discussion in this area is the value of taxonomy,<sup>3</sup> given the highly local and site-specific nature of most work. Gilbert and Lo (2002) provide an introduction to the ways that the cross-cultural performance moment has figured in multiple ways in settler-dominated performance criticism. I am not rehearsing these concepts here, as I am trying, insofar as it is possible at this moment in the settler-dominated archive, to entangle with Indigenous theorizing. I am interested in the theorization that happens in the sited moment of a particular performance’s life, with the traces that this sitedness leaves in its electronic circulation.

Within this kind of discussion framework on cross-cultural performance labor, different perspectives come to the fore: no longer taxonomy and abstraction but issues of protocol, responsibility, and the piercing of the settler heritage of art/life dichotomy.

The performances I write about in this chapter are also mainly distributed on the globe-spanning connective tissue of the internet—and much of my performance witnessing throughout this chapter is through mediation, cameras, voiceovers, publicity texts, audience remarks in reviews, or write-ups in annual reports. This is now an eco soma method with touch at a distance—but still in touch with imagination, with rhythm and song, and in the embodied deliciousness of writing, reading, and witnessing from afar.

In my field, community performance, one of the main problems used to be disconnect. Your group works on one side of the hill. My group works on the other. This arrangement makes it really hard to make connections, engage in professional development, and watch one another's shows. Eventually, at professional meetings or conferences, other community artists and I would exchange CDs and later DVDs of our work, bartered and gifted like the precious jewels that they are: missives from elsewhere, evidence of art life in many different locations. These art witnesses travel outside the networks of most Western-oriented professional art practices with their ways of recognizing excellence and also outside traditionally framed land-based art practices with their own established values. Few critics operated within these community arts, and those who did often came out of (and sometimes imported value schemes from) high-art practices.

Over the last decades, some of this has changed: YouTube, Vimeo, TikTok, webpages, and endless reservoirs of data assembly have transformed the connectivity of people who work in locally engaged, site- or community-specific art practices.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I am consciously engaging with witnessing and entangling from afar. My eco soma method here is a convivial style, a style of co-living, of openness, which includes gratefully taking up invitations by Indigenous friends to learn languages, and to see things differently from what I learned to see in European graduate school. This chapter meanders as a methodological intervention, and it locates me as an author in a living relationship to what I encounter. I hope that you, as an active reader, can bring your own situated knowledge to what is textually evidenced or archived here: witnessing from afar, each of us acknowledging our own perspective and its histories while engaging respectfully with the art evidence we find.

None of the three art practices described here are univocal, even if one has the name of a single artist attached. Place, space, and histories complicate locations. The short opening video from Three Fires Confederacy land, Ann Arbor,

Michigan, hosts women from different Native lands in a performance workshop. The second art object stretches from Ojibwe lands to Venice, Italy—Ojibwe artist Rebecca Belmore's video installation at the Venice Biennial's Canada Pavilion. The third example speaks about the ongoing Ghost Nets Project, a large-scale and multiyear community arts/cultural development project from Australia, with practices that stretch across the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Torres Strait.

Making my way through this particular reference field, I quickly run up against the limits of my personal histories of take-up of Deleuzoguattarian "affect and states of enchantment" (Byrd 2011, 17)—most of my previous publications are deeply steeped in desire machines and rhizomes, and this book swims in this pool, too. As Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) points out, "As a philosophical sign, the Indian is the transit, the field through which presignifying polyvocality is re/introduced into the signifying regime" (2011, 19), as one of so many becoming-Others—a charge that is also familiar from, for instance, feminist critiques of Deleuzoguattarian perspectives. Byrd writes that in these philosophical discussions "the Indian is a ghost in the system, an errant or virus that disrupts the virtual flows by stopping them, redirecting them, or revealing them to be what they are and will have been all along: colonialist" (2011, 19). In the writing of my chapter, I need to listen to the moments when free flows across territory align too neatly with imperialist grasping and deterritorialization of those to whom these lands are not abstract.<sup>5</sup> My writing needs to be attentive to where thought apparatuses trying to escape linearity also echo of dispossession. Byrd offers (alter)native poststructuralities, such as "south-eastern cosmologies of the Chickasaw and Choctaw [who] imagine worlds with relational spirals and a center that does not so much hold as stretches" (2011, 20). These are moments when "the Indian" becomes something else than a trace or a mechanism in European thought structures—when Indigenous thought becomes the theorizing center.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, with these acts of attention, I enter unfamiliar, already occupied, co-habited terrain. As I do so, I can find many wayfarers for my journey as a disability studies and performance studies researcher in matters eco soma: many concepts like relationality, intersubjectivity, and ethical relations to unknowability, all with much currency in my home disciplines, also greet me as established ways of thinking about knowledge production in Indigenous-led research.

Before I get too comfortable, though, Byrd offers a challenge: "As Derrida

and Deleuze are evoked within affect theories, the ‘Indian’ and ‘tattooed savages’ remain as traces. Any assemblage that arises from such horizons becomes a colonialist one” (2011, 21). I am a disability culture traveler and a settler, and my history is part of my life on the lands I travel on. Colonialism’s histories and futures are indeed part of the package, but I can, with Byrd and others, look to Indigenous theorizing and artifying to engage alter(native) speaking to move toward a writing that recognizes but does not attempt to contain (encircle, de-land, remove) “a crowd.” Therefore, my reference field here consciously pushes into Indigenous knowledge creation and uses a citational politics of centering Indigenous researchers. My intention here is not to territorialize me as a new authority who has the privilege to read widely, but to honor and elevate those that have given me new ways of thinking.

### **Rivering: Native Women Language Keepers**

Anishinaabe poet and linguist Margaret Noodin wrote these sentences for a coauthored essay we wrote about our work together:

To begin, in order to locate ourselves, we remember—mikwendan, which in the Anishinaabe language (Anishinaabemowin) literally means “to find consciousness in our thoughts.” We are only two of the members of Miskwaasining Nagamojig (The Swamp Singers), a women’s drum group who sings all songs in the Anishinaabe language and centres an Anishinaabe space and ways of being and healing. We are thinking of healing people and places through the steady beat of songs on skins, moving from studio space to sacred mounds, from land to water and all the physical and intellectual spaces in between. (Noodin and Koppers 2021)

To begin differently, let’s start with video jewels from our habitation in a studio, at a symposium Margaret Noodin and I co-organized in Michigan in 2012. This video, *Native Women Language Keepers: Madweziibing—Music Rivering* (dirs. Noodin and Koppers, Ann Arbor: The Olympics, 2013), can be found on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKHtaHYQ5CQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKHtaHYQ5CQ).

I invite you to watch the video,<sup>7</sup> and to track what you are receiving: what you are focusing on, what sounds you hear, what is familiar, and what is not. Noodin wrote about what *we* are thinking—what are *your* thoughts as you see, hear, and feel the echo of the drum?



These are multivocal beginnings, knowing in difference.

Native Women Language Keepers was a weeklong exploration of Native women's practices as language teachers, activists, and artists, with many stories of women as keepers of water and full of the sounds of multiple languages.

In the video documentation we created, the symposium fellows are introducing each other, respectfully citing Māori *mihimihi* (a formal introduction) to center global Indigeneity and Indigenous ways of knowing *and* doing in a community that did not share any one cultural form. The video features the symposium fellows who were engaged in Anishinaabemowin/Ojibwe and Niimipuu/Nez Perce language revitalization through the arts. There are short dramatic scenes with material by Heid Erdrich, Howard Kimewon, Alanis King, and Margaret Noodin. There is drumming and singing by the Miskwaasining Nagamojig (Swamp singers), an Ann Arbor-based hand-drum group that Noodin founded and that I participated in. We shared honor songs in front of projected paintings by Daphne Odjig (see Plate 5). The performances in the Madweziibing video evoke sensory locatedness on edges, by rivers.

When we were working to find a title for our video, Noodin offered translations for Madweziibing ("music rivering") as a verb, shifting the noun into action. The title holds echoes of Anishinaabemowin linguistic specificity, importing into English an active verb form of description layered over a noun-based static identity.

We are "rivering" in the video, knitting ourselves into childhood land and public history while acknowledging different forms of locatedness. Here are moments in the video where we all speak about our associations with water.

If you say "water place" I think first of lakes, I think of Chinimaging and those great lakes. But I also think of what we now call the Mississippi, the michi ziibing, that river that goes through the state for us from Minnesota, that is a big part of who we are.

And even our nation in the US what is east of that waterline and what is west of that water line is a big part of the history of where native people were, and how the United States defined the people and where they moved them to. (Margaret Noodin, transcript from video)

My river is the Rhine. So I come from a community where every waterway has a nixe, has a mermaid or a merman, every waterway has something living in it and something moving in it. And I remember growing up that each

River and each little tiny Flüsschen, we would call them in German, each of those would be inhabited by dancing women. . . . [L]ots of my choreography comes out of living alongside rivers or alongside oceans. (Petra Koppers, transcript from video)<sup>8</sup>

Other women, participants in the gathering, enter the watershed and dance into the space of remembering healing places. Ojibwe playwright Marcie Rendon<sup>9</sup> recalls:

Before I knew language, the sounds that I knew was the sound of the Red River, for it was literally probably as far away from where we lived as those pillows, and then the cottonwoods. The leaves of the cottonwoods, there is a certain sound that they make, that is like home to me.

And then the other river would be the very beginning of the Mississippi. My grandfather was a logger up around in northern Itasca, up in the Jack Pines. For me it's that water and those trees that I hear. One of the first things that I tried to do in theatre was to get a musician that could actually make the sound of the cottonwood trees. Because that's the sound that is so important to me. (Marcie Rendon, transcript from video)

Water flows through our biographies and into our movement: in one sequence, women hold hands as they create alphabetic representations by tensing their bodies and arcing into form. There is muscular flow here, blood pumping as the arms swing wide overhead, poet and video artist Heid Erdrich's (Ojibwe)<sup>10</sup> and Margaret Noodin's voices flowing over the movers.

Nd'ozhibii'iganankemi, enya, nd'enendamobiigemi.

(We make letters, yes, we write our thoughts,)

Nd'maamwiikidowinankemi.

(We make words to say together.)

...

Nd'chimookaniishinaabeigiigemi.

(We write AmerAnishinaabe)

(Heid Erdrich and Margaret Noodin, transcript from video)

The alphabet is not an Ojibwe invention, it is imposed but can be wielded; it can become a form to hold, and it can enter a flow on its own energetic trajectory.

These forms flow out of the constraints of European form and into the rivers that bind all of us by the water, taking responsibility for moving into a future together.

Nimiipu language teacher Angel Sobbota<sup>11</sup> describes what our sharing of space does for us as a group:

And so, right now we are speaking of place, the place of river and mountains. River is for us is *piik'un* and mountains is *méexòsem*. When I am listening to everybody speak about their river and their mountains, I have no idea where you are talking about. But what I do know, and this is going to be the same for me when I describe where I am from, . . . what I do know is that there's wisdom that sits in these places, there's wisdom in these places, there is power in these places. (Angel Sobbota, transcript from video)

We begin and end with the drum, singing together—and if you follow the footnote link, you can sing alongside, lend your breath and your heartbeat to revitalization.

Shkaakaamikwe *g'gikenmaanaa*  
 Mother Earth we know her  
*G'gikenmaagonaan pii nagamoyaang*  
 She knows us when we sing

(transcript from video)<sup>12</sup>

Presence emerges in the vibrations of sound that always go well beyond what is audible and that vibrate our human membranes in conjunction with the skin of other animals, the sinews of deer, and the wood of the frame. Vibrations travel.

In my ear is Avery Gordon's formulation of ghosts as "dense sites," and I remember the opening, layering, breathing action of drumming as I know it: density gets unpacked, opened out, and pain comes to consciousness. When you beat a drum, your bones are nourished; you can feel the beat running right down into your feet and up to the crown of your head. It is calming to drum. And it can also be too much sensation—different sensoria respond differently, and there are drums in many sizes and levels of loudness. Given my own location in disability culture, I think of forms of stimming: small drumbeats of fingers against a thigh, or on the back of one's other hand: neurodiverse patterns that can help someone to stay grounded, define edges, and acknowledge one's self.



Figure 8. Madweziibing/Music Rivering (2013) video still, showing an image by Daphne Odjig (Potawatomi/Odawa), an influential Canadian First Nations painter in the Woodland style. The image shows a woman with a drum and a flying encircling creature above and around her. Next to the image is the text of the Mother Earth song in Anishinaabemowin and English, an invitation to sing along. Image courtesy of Daphne Odjig.

Drumming can create alternative rhythms that override our nervous sensoria and realign us anew: fluffed, aired, beaten, stretching density out into a field of sound.

Density, social life, a conviviality of not knowing but co-living: many people find connections in the heart and circle of the drum. In the Madweziibing video, Ojibwe painter Daphne Odjig's famous painting of a woman/spirit/drum becomes animated, as our editor JaiJai Noire synchronizes the image with the rhythm of the drums. Odjig, born in 1919 and a member of the Woodland School, is recognized as being responsible for revitalizing legends and finding wisdom relevant to contemporary practices. Her voice becomes a part of the conversation as the swirling embodiment of people dancing bulges into the video space.

In our shared essay, Margaret Noodin writes about heart/drum/land/energy/life connections:

At the centre of so many of the activities of the Swamp Singers is a drum; small, hand-made, hand-held and warmed often by the friction of palms to ensure the tone is strong. The word for drum (*dewegan*), like the word for town (*odena*), connects to the notion of a heart (*ode*) an epicentre of water cycling through bodies. However, more than a physical system of chambers, veins and arteries, the concept of the drum and the heart centres on the beats, which are synonymous with energy. Just as the heart depends on a steady impulse to continue, so does a song. The impulse, when examined, is the same that drives all life; a biologic ability to transfer matter into energy. A heartbeat and a drumbeat both signify the continuity of connected systems, liquids and air, earth and fire, a river of time. (2021)

Noodin's heart continuity aligns with performance theorist Diana Taylor, in her discussion of memory, archive, and the repertoire, who uses the image of the heart as a way of thinking about the inevitability and uncontrollable nature of memory emerging in life: "Memory, like a heart, beats beyond our capacity to control it" (2003, 82).

These organic connections between the blood pulse, the drumbeat, the heart, energy, and the memories embedded in territory push through me as I think about different art traditions in confluence. I witness them in liquid flow with one another, streaming the dense sites of ghosting, allowing for a mixing of air, a breath at the site of stifling memory. There's a worrying like water around a rock, the rock of the inhumanities and the pain, injustices, and genocidal violence of colonialism. And there is a people's drumming, singing survivance.<sup>13</sup>

Resonating with old songs and older waters seems a way to read this performance respectfully, to see the coming together of different people in ways that respect site, land, and language. But my theorizing must understand itself to be a syncope, a singularity, respecting and weaving back into the breath of the drum and respectful of the moments where there is no beat. Choctaw historian Devon Mihesuah writes the following:

While non-Indian historians and some Indians have made careers out of speaking for tribes and interpreting culture besides the one to which they belong, many Indians will not write about tribes other than their own, even if they have insights into those cultures. When it comes to speculating on Others' motivation and world-views, many Indians are simply uncomfortable and won't do it. (1998, 12)

I live in a global net that allows me to hear of exciting projects at conferences, find traces online, and joyously connect with fellow art practitioners who work to reshape the public sphere. Living collectively, practicing *minobimaadizi* (the good life) in an artful world is the horizon of my own desire as a practitioner and a teacher alongside my collaborators and friends.

But any documentation only witnesses some of the meanings the artists encode in their work. Living well within all that, connecting readers and viewers to new experiences without an illusion of grasped knowledge, offers its own particular cross-cultural jazz.

Before this chapter slides too far into a postidentitarian new age, it is important to hold on to the politics of recognition that I try to activate in these pages. I am responding here to Monica Mookherjee's discussion of alternative approaches to recognition, an approach she terms "affective citizenship."

[This] approach follows those who recognize that cultural identity can be conceived as a language or a framework in which the negotiation of meanings takes place. . . . Though the porous character of cultural languages means that they might be difficult to identify in practice, recognition should begin with their equal consideration. (2005, 36)

In the context of this particular performance piece, this means recognizing that the drumming, singing, different Indigenous and settler protocols like Māori *mihimihi*, or the conventions of a European-derived black-box theater are *all* languages at play. They are all cultural expressions, discourse fields that will be more or less recognizable to members of different communities and people with different affective citizenships. I asked you earlier to chart your own response to the video, its colors, the pulsing painting, energies, the sounds, the languages, and the stories. Tribal members will respond differently from people who predominantly identify as settlers, or from those who have the privilege to never think about how they identify on this continuum. And affective communication is at play within and beyond the more traditional discourses supported by academia: historic reclamation and truth seeking, the marking of atrocity, rights and treaties. As Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Collective write, "Settler colonial societies are haunted by the host of gone peoples—they pulse at the center" (2016, 7). How to translate that pulse, that beat, is part of the affective charge to performance scholars writing in the edge spaces.

I mark the site of eco soma affective encounters: something happened, and Noodin and I recorded it and made it available to a larger public than the one witnessing in the flesh. But without anthropological labor on audiences and their particular witnessing, it is hard to make claims about how different people experience the (mythopoetic) phenomenological encounter in the shared space of Native and settler aesthetics. The electronic media universe has its own audiencing procedure, and many of the practices I am focusing on seem particularly aligned with mediation and with secondary audiencing. As I continue, you will see particular rhetorics at play in the cultural producers' display choices. Within Indigenous studies, some of these themes are addressed through the frame of transnational indigeneity. Jessica Horton, in her work on the piece I am moving to now, speaks about how contemporary videoed works by roving artists "provoked a debate about how to conceptualize Indigenous places—and the role of place more generally—amid global conditions of transit and flux" (Horton, 2012: 15).<sup>14</sup> How can you/I/we experience work created in the compass of a particular land in a different site? What happens in electronic travels, in the absence of corporeal presence, and how can I use eco soma methods to track experiences that unsettle me?

### Sheets of Water

After this display of evoked sitedness, I am moving to a very different practice: a veiled watery display of affective belonging to a specific earth and water. I am engaging Ojibwe artist Rebecca Belmore's iconic *Fountain*, created and displayed for predominantly non-(Turtle Island) Indigenous audiences as part of the Venice Biennial, where she was the first First Nation artist to represent the colonial nation of Canada.<sup>15</sup> Her presentation choices come from a particular decolonizing framework as she "seeks to envision Indigenous presence on a global scale by centering Anishinaabe culture as a decolonizing lens for her work" (McGlennen 2013).

This example will allow me to work through Monica Mookherjee's argument on affective citizenship in a postcolonial world by focusing on the politics of recognition and the impact of different reference fields on one another. In the work I am surveying, different cultural categories clash—not just a monolithic settler and Indigenous discourse. There are many different perspectives on what each of these categories are, their historical complexities, their inner

differences, how the term “citizen” functions in different sites and histories, and the continuum of fluid practices each of these categories document.

As Mookherjee makes clear, success in this context depends on being touched, and changed, on “reciprocal transformation” (2005, 39). If discourses remain static and within their historical bounds, there is little room to move forward. This is at stake in particular in art practices, with their long histories of the exploitations of Others, including Indigenous Others as machines to do interesting work with but without engaging in the critiques these imported Others offer to dominant White supremacist perceptions. In the past, the validity of others’ critiques was safely shuttled into categories such as “past history,” “vanishing,” and “pathology” to avoid “reciprocal transformation.”

The particular installation I focus on is a fountain: it is a video literally projected on water. I witness at a distance—I have never been to Venice, a place that didn’t seem open to wheelchair users. But I became fascinated with Belmore’s piece, observing the posthappening life of a major art piece that has gained critical reception throughout the world. Belmore had embedded the video of the installation on her own website, so I could access the visuals if not the particular living watery screen. With the demise of Adobe Flash Player, the video is no longer available on her site, but you can search for “Fountain” by Rebecca Belmore and find traces on the internet. I encourage you to watch it now: find the video and see how you, in your particular location, and in your particular constellation on the Indigenous/settler/other continuum, respond to the elemental images of water, fire, land, and a woman’s presence.

The installation has had many write-ups in the international press, and that is the main evidentiary field for my analysis here.

In the video, Rebecca Belmore performs, and her collaborator, settler Canadian Noam Gonick, is the video maker. On this living screen, we see a woman standing near and then wading into an ocean (off Iona Beach on the Musqueam First Nation land). The camera shows us a wide, storm cloud–drenched vista of a gray ocean—and one can barely make out a sewage pipe running down the beach. A jet flies overhead, disrupting the soothing monotone of the waves.

Belmore stands in the water, struggling with a heavy pail she’s dragging out to the beach. She throws the bucket at the camera/water screen/audience, and red liquid runs across the water screen.

For me, in these sequences, many different paradigms of old European im-



ages of “strangeness” coalesce: trauma and woundedness, earth discourse, and conceptions of Indigeneity, distraught femininity and water, foreignness (of an Ojibwe woman in Italy), transformation of water into something else, and alchemy (early in the video, logs on the beach burst into spontaneous flames). I can also easily see these images in the context of Anishinaabe/Ojibwe recovery from colonial land degradation and colonial violence. Lawrence Gross (Anishinaabe) speaks about “post-apocalypse stress syndrome:” “the Anishinaabe have seen the end of our world, which has created tremendous social stresses” (2002, 437).

My reading of the secondary literature on the installation has alerted me to Indigenous readings only slightly familiar to me (and often very intriguing) about creatures in the water—but I had to cut the rest of my sentence here to ensure I do not engage in inappropriate and appropriative speculative interpretative labor.<sup>16</sup>

In surveying how this work is received, and how the work itself manipulates these fraught discourses, I can trace something akin to impact. But, like Horton, I need to step carefully before “the signifiers in Belmore’s work threaten to float free of specific referents and enter a kind of postmodern landscape of interpretive play” (2012, 15). And yet, the work is in Venice, and postmodern landscapes of interpretive play are what sites like the Biennial are about. Questions of authenticities become currency for an art market eager for storied underwater panthers.<sup>17</sup> Belmore’s oeuvre throughout shows her masterful awareness of navigation: the seduction of Native imagery in their violence, the grounding in Indigenous knowledges, which are themselves complex in a family history that is disrupted by colonial pressure on cultural continuity, the manipulation of an art market that easily can sell both authenticity and trauma.

Thus, in order to find my way through the assemblage of interpretive appropriations, I need grounding. My method traces its way through a number of the published discussions of *Fountain*, engaging in a discourse analysis informed by a leaning into Ojibwe intellectual history, centering on an Indigenous perspective and its own (dis)engagement with settler thought.

In his writings on Native engagement with visual technologies, Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor writes about how “the native” is absented at the site of representation. He calls for less ethnography and more active creative acts of presence. Vizenor reaches for an active Native engagement with visual arts as a site of connection beyond objecthood and victim imagery:

Analogy is an active, aesthetic, creative connection in the visual arts, and in the sense of natives, analogy is a desire to achieve a human union in visual images, rather than a cultural separation in language. (2004, 182)

Vizenor's push toward connection is complemented by Cree research methodologist Shawn Wilson, who asserts that Indigenous research methodologies are based on the

fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of Creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is in relationship with all of Creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. . . . hence you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research. (2001, 176–77)

Questions about impact, connection, and reciprocal change can find evidence on many levels. In looking at Belmore's work through a lens of aliveness and connection, as a complex engagement with trauma and apocalypse, I push for reciprocal change, opening my settler reading practices to Indigenous survivance in Indigenous images.

This might be nice for me but not necessarily helpful to Indigenous people and the land. But what might be helpful is that I can open avenues of somatic thought here, in my eco soma way, and honor Indigenous engagements with living in climate, genocide, and (language) extinction catastrophe. *Eco Soma* will read differently to people who use somatic exercise to ground themselves, or to people whose ancestors used trance methods to engage with land, lineage, or spirits. A reading for people's survivance needs to be supplemented with recognition of an Indigenous right to land management that does not relent and does not see an industrial degraded land as dead, done, and gone. Embodied theorizing, like embodied art practice, stands in relation to the beach, to the trees and logs, and to the roar of the jet in the sky. How the weight of globalization rests on the land—the effect of the lines of traffic across the globe to get to Venice and other nodes like it—these are the connecting lines in Belmore's *Fountain* that come into focus for me when I follow Vizenor and Wilson, and when, with Anishinaabe researcher Kathleen Absolon (Minogiiizhigokwe), I am aware of the relational nature of our knowledge gathering:

Having conversations meant travelling over the land to meet people in spaces that we both agreed upon. Searching for Indigenous scholars to converse with led to the bluest of blue blueberry patches. (Absolon 2011, 33)

For everybody who wants to enjoy blueberries with others, it's good to pay attention to many different perspectives and privilege voices in ethical relationships with what settler English calls "resources." I/you/we must pay attention to the effects of extraction economies on the lands that host our meetings and consciously engage in ongoing, relational, and convivial ways of being.

This brings me back to the drumming discussion, of hearts and Noodin's description of life energy. Diana Taylor's heart/memory alliance echoes across Indigenous/First Nations art traditions and Western contemporary art contexts, as this review of Belmore's piece makes clear:

*Fountain* deals with elementals of essences: fire + water = blood. The time is both now, in the industrialized landscapes of North America, and in another zone, a time of creation, myth and prophecy. . . . Water turns to blood. As befits our times we do not know whether this is a metaphor for creation or an apocalyptic vision. (Bailey and Watson 2005, 11)

In this review, undecidability becomes a motor: this is not a write-up of a shockingly horrific blood drenching, the kind of image complex around women's blood that one might traditionally associate with White settler-style aesthetics. Undecided between creation and apocalypse, I could see other avenues, including ways of thinking that do not see the apocalypse as the end. In the first collection of Indigenous science fiction, editor Grace L. Dillon reads into the postapocalyptic:

All forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of biskaabiiyang, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of "returning to ourselves," which involves how personally one is affected by colonialization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. (2012, 10)

There is an opening here, in these undecidabilities, in these agencyful actions by an Anishinaabe kwe in the water, and I choose to read it in terms of relations, connections, and reciprocal impact. As art practice, the emotional and

tonal valency of installations like *Fountain* is open—otherwise, it would be an illustration, a tableau, a teaching. Instead, the piece retains mystery and depth as an Ojibwe story and rejects flat interpretation in the ongoing flow of the watery screen. In that undecidability, half-disclosed Ojibwe images and half-remembered (for Western reviewers) Old World narratives of alchemy can intertwine and shape forms of thinking about the future, adapting to change while grounded in respective ancestral traditions of land honoring.

I am intrigued by the differences and continuities between cultural archives of trauma and life. And I am also intrigued by how few references focus their particular discussion of *Fountain* on the actual substrate of the representations they analyze: the watery screen.

Water carrying, in Ojibwe cultural contexts, is often represented as a position of honor for women, and caring for the water as part of women's work.<sup>18</sup> In writing this, it is also important to note that in many Indigenous practices, Western limits around who might take a position as “woman” do not necessarily apply—gender fluidity and an openness beyond binary gender are part of much contemporary activism aimed at revitalizing traditions that preceded colonial missionary influence.<sup>19</sup> In 2011 and 2013 Indigenous women led by Ojibwe elder Sharon Day carried a copper-lined pail of water all the way down the Mississippi (the *Michi-zibing*).<sup>20</sup> This practice started in 2002, initiated by Josephine Mandamin, an Ojibwe woman from Manitoulin Island, often referred to as *nokomis*, or “grandmother.” The Water Walkers write about their path in the following way:

The Water Walkers will draw attention to the peril the river faces due to pollution. The Mississippi River is the second most polluted river in the United States. Toxic chemicals from municipalities, farms and corporations are taking their toll on the river. By the time a drop of water reaches the “dead zones” near the mouth of the river, the water is nearly depleted of oxygen. We can stop this and the walkers intend to educate people along the way as to what they can do.

“We want the walk to be a prayer,” Day says. “Every step we take we will be praying for and thinking of the water. The water has given us life and now, we will support the water.” (from Facebook site description)

Memory at the site of water is an important theme in *Fountain*. The installation, on a falling sheet of water, has strong site-specific reverberations in Venice, a

city struggling with its watery nature, pollution, drought, management, and vitality. In its watery, slippery substrate can be found the “foreignness” of a Canadian landscape and the strangeness of a Turtle Island artist who engages effectively with the (to Turtle Island/U.S./Canadian eyes, “foreignness” of) Venetian concerns. There is a meeting there, a meeting that highlights attunement to environmental issues as potential Indigenous values at the home site of a major colonial power, the old island state of Venice, a nation that fell from the height of its maritime power after protracted battles with the Ottoman Empire and the devastation of the Black Death. That is a lot going on and a lot for a sentence to carry: deep histories, all with multiple layers. Eco soma methods help me to feel echoes of all that, grounded in my own location, and also feel that I can’t know more than glimpses of some of these stories. I am improvising in the in-between.

A reviewer quoted on Belmore’s website writes:

Belmore seeks to shatter long-held myths embedded in our common history in order that her Fountain can become a symbolic oasis in the arid environment of colonial relations. Great fountains help to memorialize people and places, and memory is important to Belmore. (Martin 2005)

I am taking my cue from this review and its use of the word “oasis” to speak to a piece that is profoundly unsettling—where, as Belmore herself puts it, “In the video, the artist and the viewer stand on either side of a sheet of blood, and we see each other through it.” There is something grounding about the long shot of the water, sky, and ocean closely aligned, the horizontal line shimmering, shimmering on the water running in Venice, which is a city of water. The woman, dressed in somber dark tones, looks away from the viewer: she is a dark shape in the ever-moving small waves of the bay, light and shadow in liquid flow.

Later, the bucket empties towards the camera, swung by a woman’s muscular arm. Liquid washes toward the viewer in a great dark assault, roiling out of the round cavern like a living beast.

Pause, reader. Reread the last sentence. Track its discursive field. In this sentence, I clasped together “beast,” “dark assault,” and “woman.” This colonial image combination showed up unconsciously in my imagination. It wasn’t me who found this image combination in my sentence, it was a friend, a woman of color, friend enough to point it out to me. There is no woke purity, no short-circuiting of historical baggage, no erasure of my own background. Eco soma

methods here mean listening, reading, collaborating, and redoing. In my eco soma investigation, I continue to hold myself accountable for my imagination, and I try to listen to all the associations . . . and so I leave this first sentence, and its learning curve, in this text. Here is a second sentence:

Liquid washes toward the viewer in a great living wave, an Indigenous woman's power ushering it toward us.

The public archive of feeling surrounding historical and ongoing colonial assault—shame, accusation, despair and, for people predominately identifying as settlers, guilt and a different repertoire of shame—tenses and coils with the elemental power of place evocation, with the power of muscles and flow.

Margot Francis reads *Fountain's* power through this archive of affect: she traces anthropologist Michael Taussig's "public secret" of colonialism through the negative effect of defacement (1999), and she sees Belmore as "disfigured by the performance" (Francis 2012, 165). Remembering Vizenor's play with ethnographic languages and survivance stories, and the tracing through hearts and energy, through postapocalypse life, I look for strength there, an anchoring in labor and water. The transformation of water into blood into red water into light on water seems too multivalent to be read wholly as defacement and abjection.

To me, the connection between Native Women Language Keepers and *Fountain*—one a week-long performance encounter, the other a high-art object at the Venice Biennial, site-specific and site dislocating—is the engagement with archives and places, with practices held in suspension like the blood in the bucket, striking us with their kinetic force when released in a complex shared public space. Emotions, both positive and stressful, release. Waters stream together, convivial, evoking different sources of aliveness. The two art practices productively upset stereotypes of where Indigenous people are supposed to reside and how European-derived settlers should think about their relation to occupying land. These complexly woven pieces enact a braiding of civics that can acknowledge flow, time, protocol, recovery, ways of engaging the apocalypse, and the fact that not all is known about the other.

### Relations and Ghost Nets

Reciprocal change affecting land and water and our thoughts about this: this is a theme in another project of affective citizenship, an artwork created as part of the Ghost Nets Australia project. This one takes place in very different

terrain, far away from the settler metropolis. Like Venice, this terrain is also linked with extraction economies as part of global flows, and these linkages with extraction—in this case, fishing practices—are exactly what sets these art practices in motion. I am taking you now via videos and photos to Aurukun, Far North Queensland; Mornington Island, in the Gulf of Carpentaria; and Moa Island, one of the Torres Strait Islands.

I am interested in exploring further how different citizenship issues inform each other through aesthetics that come from different places. As a structure to think through, I am pointing toward “social flesh,” a particular formulation of cross-sensory mutuality I take from Christine Beasley and Carol Bacchi, researchers at the University of Adelaide in Australia, a rich site for eco soma methods. They write against a place in which social policy assumes a neat division between bodies to be acted upon and bodies that act. And they position a

fleshly, social intersubjectivity as a new grounding for considering the meaning of citizen. We coin the term “social flesh” to capture a vision of interacting, material, embodied subjects. (2012, 330)

Theoretical “coining,” with all its economic undertones, makes me think back to Hortense Spillers’s theorization of flesh as a term that foregrounds violence against captured Black bodies, and the struggle against erasure (1987).

In keeping with my book’s politics of mingling discourses, this somatic, an embodied relation and fleshly intertwining within dis/avowed power relations, is at the heart of Aboriginal Australian conceptions of “caring for country.” Here is U.S.-born Australian-based anthropologist Deborah Rose’s much-cited definition of country:

Country is multi-dimensional—it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, air . . . People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. (1996, 7)

A somatic relationship to land. Stay with me as I digress to talk about love, and land love, which are central themes in Western eco-poetic/eco-arts thought. There are complexities when evoking caring for country in a settler environment. In her discussion of “love” as a constituent feature of the multicultural

nation-state, Sara Ahmed speaks about the stickiness of love and about the investment in the act of loving as a foundational commonality:

Love becomes crucial to the promise of cohesion within multiculturalism; it becomes the “shared characteristic” required to keep the nation together. . . . It is “love” that the multicultural nation idealises as its object: it loves love. (2003)

This formulation gains interesting traction when thought of alongside the “caring for country” Aboriginal framework of belonging. Affect offers a grounding for solidarity and community in the absence of identification (given the diversity of the state). Can nationhood also mean an investment of non-Aboriginal subjects in the care for country, entering into nonpersonal and reciprocal communion with one’s place of settlement, as a responsibility rather than a feeling? To parse, with respect, the different kinds of emotional investments into what settler philosophies might call the abstraction “love” but might not be felt as abstraction in an Indigenous framework: this is the labor required of intercultural labors of love within cultural studies.

White settlers tend to find the abstract idea of the “caring for country” part of Aboriginal life easy to get along with. Displaying love and caretaking are indeed familiar emotional complexes, if differently expressed, in settler thought. The caretaking might preclude extraction management of land (and flesh/bodies), and that creates tension with the acquisitive frame of settler national management and extraction economies. But somehow, “caring for country” feels right to many settlers. So right, in fact, that overidentification is often part of community arts frameworks: “going native” but only in a highly circumscribed and safe frame.

From Aboriginal perspectives, settlers’ abstraction of love for country (i.e., disrespect for the land itself while speaking to an abstract entity called “country”) often provides a space for ironically raised eyebrows and acts as a significant barrier to communication.

Levels of abstraction and framings of love are some of the issues at work in cross-cultural dialogues.<sup>21</sup> Agreeing on what terms might mean is a significant part of coming into actual dialogue to ensure cohabitation in recognition.

But let’s get into material practice for a bit. Come and go braiding with me. One of the precious shimmery DVDs I received from Settler/Aboriginal community cultural development practices in Australia includes material from the



Ghost Net project, which centers on traditional basketry skills. In the material I will introduce now, these traditional skills intermingle visually with White settler imagery on the northern Australian coast and the adjacent Torres Strait Islands.

Below is an image from the Ghost Net Art Project website, part of the visual evidence of the success of the project. This creature hangs above the Cairns exhibition space and above a young person in clothes and gear that echoes the mermaid's colors—probably made of similar indestructible plastics. The mermaid is made of ghost nets found in the Aurukun community. Ghost nets are nondegradable fishing lines left to drift in the sea where they entangle sea creatures and pollute the fragile liminal space of the beach in many oceanic communities.

Is this mermaid an Aboriginal or a European form? She is very different from the sculptural baskets or other work I associate with displays of craft from communities in this region. What do you see? How would you describe this image? I am trying to find ways to loosen my method from a close textual analysis bound to my own Euro-/Anglocentric imagination, to reach yet again from my skin sack toward others.

I offered this image to a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous performance scholars at the *In the Balance: Indigeneity, Globalization and Performance* conference (London, October 2013). Instead of giving a paper representation of an authoritative view of the Ghost Net Art Project, I asked the conference attendees to describe the image I projected in one sentence, and we went around the crowded room. This method emerges from disability culture, my own cultural source, where audio description allows multisensory access to visual forms. It also emerges from my eco soma research: situated knowledges, living, breathing, and open to the imagination. What surfaced at the conference was a multivocal reception with many different ideas, ranging from Indigenous mermaids to tourist attractions. I did not record the conversation: it was its own performance, a secondary witnessing that spoke as much to the image as to who was in the room and their sense of what it meant to discuss Indigenous performance practices in London, England.

The image of the shark emerged in tandem with the mermaid comments in that London room: sharks, a common find in abandoned nets, turn and turn until their oxygen runs out. The fin, so dangerous in some contexts, is here a reminder of fragility, endangerment, and the fact that shark fins are a worldwide

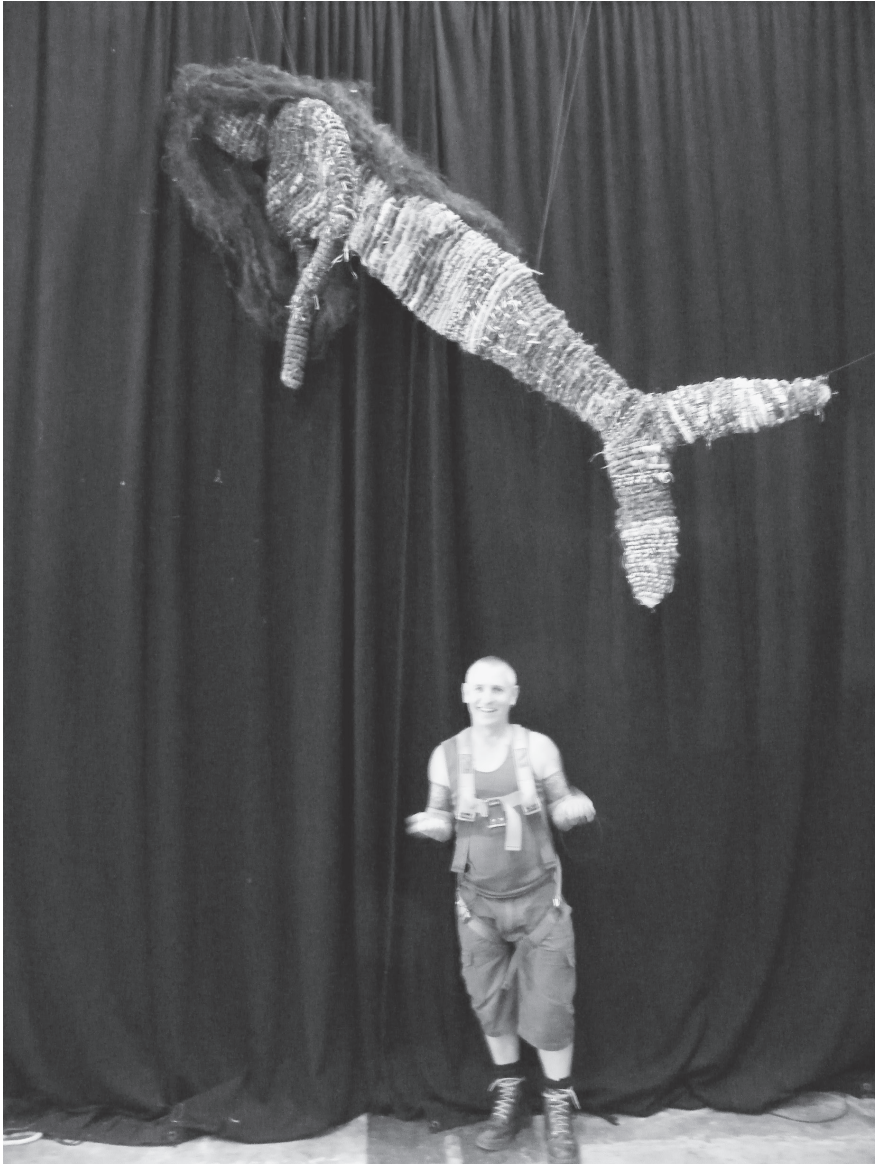


Figure 9. A ghost-net creature made from colorful plastic materials hangs above a young person at the first Cairns Indigenous Art Fair in 2009. Photograph courtesy of Gina Allain, one of the Ghost Net Art Project facilitators, with thanks to Sue Ryan.

delicacy. “Finning” is the practice of cutting off the fins of sharks in which the de-finned, mutilated sharks are thrown back overboard to sink to the sea floor and die. Social flesh—think of nets cutting into human and nonhuman skins, trees growing around embedded objects, whales with hooks stuck in their skin. As I spin these stories, in eco soma fashion, I touch life/death, pain, and joy.

The shark, the Western ideal woman figure, the fragile liminal figure of the mermaid: many images collide in this multicolored reclamation. This is the remedial side of economic overfishing and ecological devastation: a multi-agency, multisited project to find something “useful” to do with the detritus that strangles Native lands. Whose wounds are healed here?

In the Torres Strait Islander context, Aboriginal people are not curiosities. But to the international art tourist, the connections press on me: Indigenous people and fake mermaids have shared space in freakshow exhibits in the past. The Indigenous/mermaid has often been cast as the illusive other, with its titillating offer of free sexuality and its dangerous draw into the depths (of the jungle or the sea). My personal sense of social flesh here is one of different women’s positionalities in modernity, of animal and human skins cut for profit, food, and (in some Aboriginal contexts) for claiming someone as human.

The dangerous and deadly material threatening the island’s ecotope is reshaped by human intervention into something (some)one can live with. Imagine the trash gyre in the Pacific Ocean and remember the fascination it holds for many artists and thinkers. Edgar Allan Poe’s swirling abyss mingles with denatured colorful plastic bits, a cleanish watered mélange of color and material that was long associated with wealth and social abundance. Despite its proven deadliness to fish and other marine life, there is also something oddly attractive about the swirling plastic color. Think about the glass-pebble beaches all over California that are now endangered tourist haunts. Trash becomes treasure. Debris, as long as it is inorganic and “clean,” can become revalued, rewoven, and endlessly integrated into human-to-human exchange, like the stories of cargo cults and cola bottles falling from the sky.

There is a story of resilience here but also potentially a cautionary one of redirected energy—from land claims and fishing rights, treaties on water use—toward calming measures of domestication and accommodation. As Goenpul researcher Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, “Beaches remain important places within Indigenous coastal peoples’ territories, although the silence about our

ownership is deafening” (2011, 57). Let me not get too comfortable on someone else’s trash-strewn beach.

The backbone of the Ghost Net Art Project is to create financial support for Islander communities—to contribute to health by creating new income streams and saleable items to feed into tourist economies. Its dominant feature is not artmaking or community creation: it is economic development on the terms of settler society’s success. Sue Ryan, the cultural development worker who initiated the project, states that

in 2008 I was asked to do a scoping study to establish if there may be interest in communities to use ghost net material in creative ways. The idea of the scoping study was to see if it was viable for people to create craft, art or functional items from net which could be sold to help artists and communities financially. It was also hoped that this would create interest from the communities to gather the nets themselves to help reduce the number of ghost nets, thus cleaning up the coastline and creating sustainable small business enterprises in remote communities. (2010)

Mixed art, mixed use, mixed culture: all embody the creative principle at work in these artful expressions of strength and community arts, of caring for country, and of fitting in, all skirting the knife edges of neoliberalism.<sup>22</sup>

### **Sharks and Patience**

I have been following the multiple media outputs of the Ghost Net Art Project for a few years now. It is a big project, with multiple funders and outputs, lots of artworks in exhibits, videos, songs, and performances.<sup>23</sup> In my last collaborative art discussion, I focus on a part of the project that utilizes narrative, sound, and performance to inch closer to an enmeshment of the social flesh and to a sense of reciprocally changed narratives of different communities’ values and metaphors.<sup>24</sup> Again, I encourage you to view it—and to see my discussion of it not as some kind of masterful reading of what is there to excavate or catalogue but as a conversation, an ecosomatically grounded, felt, and moved engagement that understands the real distance between me here at the screen and the reality there, on the island, within multiple layers of distance, mis/reading, and distant touch.

A 2010 community performance work on the island of Moa, part of the



Figure 10. A shadow puppet image from *The Young Man and the Ghost Net* (2012), showing a silhouette of a motorboat under a sickle moon above a floating net. Beneath the image, some in soft focus, are hands holding the sticks that animate the boat and the small human figure within it. Along the edges, sea creatures, weeds, and starfish complete the scene.

Torres Strait Islands archipelago, involved sixty-five musicians, singers, and puppeteers of all ages, sharing stories about one of the Torres Strait Islands, the nets left by trawlers (mainly from Southeast Asia), and settler-dominated environmental and community cultural development directives from Australia. It is an affecting story about a resourceful young man from the island community of Moa. He's out fishing, finding a ghost net, returning the next day to gather it, saving a shark, acting responsibly toward his island ecology, and gifting the net as useful material to his father and uncles.

This story highlights the networks and engagements that subtend the island community and toward which the young man displays strong civic values of responsibility and respect. It is definitely a teachable story—but according to whose conventions?

The art forms used to tell that story are hybrid: shadow puppetry as a form is mainly associated with Southeast Asian forms, part of the neighboring cultures, and the basket weaving that is another part of the project has strong

Indigenous roots but also recognition value in White settler societies, with their weavers guilds.

If the Belmore installation pushes against European-framed thoughts on blood and horror toward something more lifegiving, the story of the shark here has similar multiple meanings, echoing differently, it seems, in different communities. The island story shifts around these story nets surrounding sharks and asks its viewers, both in the village and in cyberspace, to step up to our responsibilities as readers, critics, and consumers.

The visuals accompanying the puppetry show also speak to this different value system: a papier-mâché shark draped in netting parades around the dark common grounds and is held up by participants.

This is an honored presence, a power of the sea, not (just) a creature to be feared. The village of St. Pauls celebrates the project, and there is no sense of “primitive villagers”: the kids parading past wave lustily at the camera and at us, the viewers, clearly aware of what is going on. Electric lights provide the illumination for the shadow show. Fishing boats have outboard motors. No one needs saving, but they save themselves and the lives of creatures they are involved with. Or maybe that is the story the video puts into global circulation.

Whatever the narrative, this is a performance in touch with the local world, responsive to place, woven into a social flesh: an eco soma that is both local and global. The boy who narrates the video makes clear that the performance’s hero knows that the trawler that abandoned its net in the storm is engaged in “catching fish to sell in cities in other countries.” The ghost nets are objects of circulation caught in the slipstream of global market traffic—and I can weave these ghosts right back into Aimee Bahng’s work on financial speculation and on hauntings that clog the spokes of rapacious progress and unsettle its totalizing narratives.

In the network of this chapter, the ghost nets work as connecting machines, undoing senses of separation between the Aboriginal and the settler, the local and the global, the consumer, and everybody suffering under an extraction-based economy. This “undoing” is uneven: it is unclear how “the Aboriginal” (as a category) gains from the extractive and circulatory logic of the market, with its trash production, surpluses, and assorted detritus. Weighed down by all kinds of nets, how much do people value this particular invitation to “clean up” detritus that is not of their making and that circulates in tourist galleries outside their immediate life worlds?





Figure 11. A second screen capture from *The Young Man and the Ghost Net* (2012) shows a group of people on the island of Moa parading around town with a papier-mâché shark, lit up and luminous, with elders sitting on white plastic chairs and looking on.

From watching the video, it is evident that a celebration could be gained here, a site of positive pooling energy, the circle around the fire, and a role model for young members of the island community who might otherwise leave home in these neoliberal settler-dominated times.

Or maybe what is gained is just a cup of tea, the somatics of sitting together: sipping, partaking, creating.

Let's think about some more images from far away/close by, reflecting on where we sit. In *Creative Livelihoods* (Arts in Health Initiative 2011), a video created at a different Ghost Nets site (Morningson Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, part of Queensland), an Indigenous elder makes clear her perspective on what is gained by participating.<sup>25</sup> She speaks about the value of the older women coming together, telling stories, and sitting with youngsters who are acquiring the language. To her, the language is of the utmost importance, and the environmental narrative is dealt with in terms of family issues: one of her sons is a warden who dredges the ghost nets away from the beaches. He gets paid to do so, having a secure job in this particular economical net.

There is no overt sentiment about the turtles or sharks caught in the nets but rather a strong sense of continuity in the engagement with young people—in some ways, the stitching of the baskets seems incidental (and one of the young men interviewed for this video even has to ask his friend what they are doing—“weaving baskets”—ah, yes).

Romanticism about handicraft and traditional skills needs to balance itself carefully: these are relatively quick projects (in the *Creative Livelihood* project video, some of the Aboriginal women speak about coming to this particular island for two weekends) that “teach them” caretaking, hopefully in tune with traditional values. But getting fed, hanging out, and finding company might be more immediate goals than mythical storifying or providing narrative closure for settler programs that measure outcomes.

Immediate and long-range goals and how to attain these might have different lengths of patience and persistence in Islander and settler thinking about time, as Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata makes clear in his review of Frances Calvert’s *Cracks in the Masks*, a 1997 film about Torres Strait Islanders reclaiming objects lodged in settler museums:

Torres Strait Islanders are used to long and patient negotiations with others, and this film is part of a process that will go on until these objects are returned to the home of those who made them. The collective dignity of Torres Strait Islanders is expressed by Bani in the closing scene of the film. When at the British Museum of Mankind he touches an object of his ancestors and is reminded “please don’t touch,” he raises his hand and says “Sorry, sorry.” But this politeness belies the tenacity and patience of Islanders when they feel and know what is just and fair. (2001, 611)

Nakata’s example reminds me that I cannot assume that I know what is going on when I look at the filmic representations of the interactions between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal collaborators, as there might be very different ways of expressing satisfaction, annoyance, or disagreement.

The point here is not to (only) point to governmental paternalism or Indigenous resistance but to look at the works that emerge from these Ghost Net events and find traces of multivoicing. When I try to see different perspectives at the same time, taking time to sort through my felt sensations, I notice at least five anchor points: (1) settler fantasies and assuaging of guilt *together*



with (2) material presence of Indigenous weaving, (3) instances of survivance in language preservation, (4) intergenerational contact, *and* (5) water/land reclamation. Remember the opening of this essay? Here, the video speaks with more than one voice, each being multivocal, offering convivial styles of encounter and comingling. In this multiplicity, I see an acknowledgment of self-determination in complexity.

Local engagement with the detritus of fishing for international sushi lunches might hold agential activity. “Caring for country,” then, operates as an oppositional act. That act, in turn, can be fed back into the machines of settler bureaucracy, “doing good” by providing creative outlets for economic activity (i.e., assimilating Aboriginality toward settler economies and objet d’art for a consumer market). But the circle continues: these activities can themselves, in turn, become important goals for the community elders who try to move toward microbusinesses.

In the context of kinship ties with water country, any collaboration of political value here emerges from the relational forces that work on the actants in this giant web of connections: humans and nonhumans, animated and (Western-style) inanimate, economic, and environmental circulations at local and global levels. Artful collaboration around caring for country needs to take into account the specifics of weaving but also the land and sea country management systems that have been in place for thousands of years. All systems are interconnected. Only a systemic view of integrating settler communities into much older management relations seems likely to win approval and buy-in. An Arnhem man submitted this statement in connection with another water management issue and, although unrelated to the Ghost Nets Art Project, its humor makes it stand well as the last word on this particular collaborative venture with its partial willingnesses:

Our management arrangements for the sea are at least as complex as yours; but at least most adult Yolngu understand how their own system works.

And our system has worked for us for thousands of years. We think this is due to our relationship to the sea. In our law Manbuynga and Rulyapa, we are all related as kin to the sea. We thus use the sea and have access in accordance with our law which derives from these kinship ties (Manbuynga and Rulyapa are two main currents in the sea). (Ginytjirrang Mala 1994, quoted in Rose 1996, 13)

## Closing

Multiple locations and projects distributed on global nets. Liminal sites on the edges of water, rivers and seas, projected through internet oceans. Given the specifics of these sites, my convivial eco soma style of openings looks to waves rather than rocks and to movement rather than certainty. With this, I am echoing Birripi descendant and theater teacher Lisa-Mare Syron, who writes about cross-cultural performance in Australian Aboriginal/settler contexts: “It is necessary to dissolve oppositional locations of engagement to allow for the possibility of multiple sites of contact that shift between experiences, in an approach that is in a constant process of motion and illumination” (2008, 81).

This chapter did not engage with cross-cultural performance meanings “on the ground,” for instance, in the Ghost Net workshops themselves. I did not share what happened in our week in the Native Women Language Keepers workshops. I also could not speak to what on-site audiences took away from the Venice actions. Instead of covering over what I do not know or do not feel I have permission to share, I am using the medium of video to keep difference in play. But I trust that I made some waves here, moved things about, showed how internationalized traces of these local actions refigure agency within the settler/Indigenous continuum. These works all try to live artfully in the post-apocalypse, in collaboration and in connection with Aboriginal self-determination claims. These art projects allow for the presence of voices in recognition *as voices*, even if the content is shrouded in artful behavior, with different bits hidden for different audiences.

My strategy does not require “the Indigenous” to become recognizable as a figure of death or to display her wounds for trauma-addicted others. Instead, I am pointing here to embodied reading strategies for collaborative projects that require *response-ability*,<sup>26</sup> a shared sonorous and circulatory moment of relational living in the flow of history. This vision of history can unsettle the current moment, and allow all of us to understand current settler/Indigenous relations as just one point in time.

Recognition is complicated: the histories of who does what to what kind of knowledge make it hard to see these collaborations as occurring on an equal playing field, open to similar mechanisms of decoding. The different rhythms interact in different beat patterns. In the moments of eco soma expansions

I tracked in this chapter, I was interested in moments of decentering, in the silences between the drumbeats, in unsettled readings of relation. Here is what I continue to learn in the collaborations I track and engage in, and which I hope to nourish as they nourish me in turn: there is animation and motion on the edges of water and land.



## CHAPTER 3

# Un/Bounding

## WRITING WATER WORLDS

The bodies of both disabled/chronically ill people and restored [ecosystems] resist the impulse toward and the reality of monocultures.

—*Eli Clare, Brilliant Imperfection*

All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you.

—*Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower*

This chapter centers on performances and creative writing projects in open engagement with their environment, in immersion and in contact—opening the body to new watery influences. After the previous two chapters, on participatory performance and video work, respectively, this chapter moves from performance toward writing practices. It charts ways of thinking/feeling with eco soma methods through alignments of bodies, environment, and trace. Part one of this chapter moves to three different sites where I highlight writing and water performances with different kinds of audiences. In the second half of the chapter, I combine participatory approaches and eco-poetics to focus on the Salamander project, where disabled people go swimming together. Throughout this chapter, vulnerable bodies embrace vulnerability, deny both victim and hero positions, and instead learn to live with influence, porosity, in what chronically ill literary scholar Catherine Fairfield calls “perilous ongoingness.”<sup>1</sup>

Influence: there are no human bodies that thrive independently, and our bodymindspirits shape themselves in multiple ways in dialogue with biopolitical ordering. As Aurora Levins Morales writes:

There is no neutral body from which our bodies deviate. Society has written deep into each strand of tissue of every living person on earth. What it writes into the heart muscles of five star generals is distinct from what it

writes into the pancreatic tissue and intestinal tracts of Black single mothers in Detroit, of Mexicana migrants in Fresno, but no body stands outside the consequences of injustice and inequality. (2012, 82)

Many contemporary perspectives on disability's presence in our world relate human diversity to the speculations of capitalism, ecological change, war, the rupture of disaster, and the different temporality of slow violence.<sup>2</sup> Asthma becomes linked to changes in public health and exposure. Attention differences are rhetorically clasped to new communication practices (such as the internet), and chemical sensitivities link to polluted environments. Metabolic changes like diabetes get rhetorically linked to postcolonial food production.

Industrial aggressions and war actions like those at Bhopal, Fukushima, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, Palestine, and the deployment of chemical weapons in the Vietnam and Iraq wars have created new ways of being in the world, for both newborns and people who lived or fought in these regions. Radiation and land mines create uninhabitable areas and maimed bodymindspirits.

When disabled people feature in climate and environmental crisis reports they usually do so in tragic positions. This is due to lack of access to evacuation measures during disasters, the negative impact of environmental changes on health, and low prioritization of disabled lives during rescue efforts.<sup>3</sup> In the disaster narratives around these sites, people with mental and bodily differences usually feature as victims and rarely as survivors or as people learning to live in new ways.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, disabled people and their co-conspirators remediate shared spaces in a field of interdependency, and reclaim vulnerability as a site of community, creativity, and openness. As disabled people, we live engaged with our world, whatever our world is, and we find an equilibrium with our sensoria, pain thresholds, cognitive differences, neurodiversities, and mobility challenges. We live with change. Artists touch lively and deadly water together in the name of art and press their boundaries. We experience the edge spaces of eco and soma, self and/in/as world: humans in nonhuman environments connecting to the biochemical milieu we are part of, realigning words like "wildness" or "animal" as we dive into places that stress our hormonal system and get our adrenaline going. And we do so in multiplicity and with longing for new futures.

I align my interest with the queer-of-color critique of Joshua Chambers-Letson, who writes in *After the Party* about Assata Shakur and Nina Simone:

Though ephemeral, when this sense of freedom is generated across the body through performance, the body becomes aware that the rest of the time something's missing, something better than this is possible, and that something must be done. (2018, 7)

Performances can lift us into the freedom space as time and space shift. In the second half of this chapter, a large group of people literally go and suspend themselves together in water. Chambers-Letson writes in Jose Muñoz's wake, who himself offered the term "minoritarian subjects" in performance studies as "formations of identity [as] 'identities in difference.'" For Chambers-Letson:

the minoritarian describes a place of (often uncomfortable) gathering, a cover, an umbrella, expanse, or refuge under and in which subjects marked by racial, sexual, gender, class, and national minority might choose to come together in tactical struggle, both because of what we share (often domination in some form by the major, or dominant culture), and because of what makes us different. (2018, 15, 16)

As usual in the enumeration of minoritarian difference, the crip stays at either the bottom or top of the stairs and can't get into the club or go to the party. But we are around, even if we get tired too early, can't be around alcohol, or get overwhelmed. So, I link the crip to this party imagining: we do come together, engage in juicy disability cultural labor, and experience moments of access intimacy: disability justice activist Mia Mingus's phrase that speaks to the pleasures of being with people who get you in access terms, and who get what you need to be comfortable and accommodated, physically, spiritually, etc.: to be *with*.<sup>5</sup>

In these pages, some of the comings-together remain unspectacular care events, and some are party memories. In any case, sometimes we send beautiful photos back into the wider social world. To set us up, first let's go to the park and then to the theater. Afterward we'll curl up with poetry.

### Writing in Parks

breerant is a multidisciplinary Detroit artist who uses the pronouns she/they/slim, and identifies as a nonbinary woman. They also work as a member of *Visions of the Evolution*, a multidimensional literary, performative, and healing-based project with a focus on healing as artistic practice in Indigenous African

ontologies and across Afrodiasporic frameworks (cherise morris, project website, 2019). I encountered gant's work in the 250-acre Eliza Howell Park, the fourth-largest park in Detroit, as part of Brown on Green, a culture series that focused on Black female bodies' relationship to Detroit's green spaces.<sup>6</sup> The series shifts the terrain of eco-arts firmly into non-White territory, both challenging and supplementing an ecological tradition that has been shaped by Whiteness and where the exclusion of Black and Brown people was fundamental to the early tenets of environmentalism. Dorceta Taylor writes about environmental racism's curtailment of Black access to natural space:

For much of their history conservationists and preservationists either ascribed to or promoted discriminatory policies or remained blind [sic] to them. These actions made it challenging for people of color and the working class to engage in environmental activities on an equal footing with the white middle class or to collaborate with them. (2016, 382)

Events like Brown on Green in Detroit's parks assert Black outdoor activities as civic, public, creative, and agentic, not delinquent or curtailed. Black stakeholders in public park space are makers and users of spatial practices. As Katherine McKittrick makes clear:

Black women's histories, lives, and spaces must be understood as enmeshing with traditional geographic arrangements in order to identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and to expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination. (2006, xiv)

As in many other instances in this book, I want to mark my own position as a researcher/participant in social arrangements, and I once again read these lines on Black women's geography as an embodied subject caught in different webs of power relations.

As a White disabled person, my enmeshment with the medical complex is intense, and I am writing these lines (and transcribed the above quote by McKittrick) in the Results Pending wait area of St. Joseph Hospital in Ypsilanti. Just after I wrote down the quote, I was called to my next procedure: a CT scan. I lay down on the bench that goes into the donut hole and felt the X-ray dye enter my body through the IV in my arm. The dye shifted my temperature and created a strangely metallic taste/sense in my nose and mouth. I looked up, and above me was a park. A light panel above the machine, the area patients look



at when undergoing the procedure, is a lightbox, illuminating a calming scene: rhododendrons in bloom, pathways winding between the ordered beds, and two people walking in the middle distance. White elderly people. Or White Elders? Using a description that connotes power and expertise feels like a reading out of step with dominant White relations to older people, and, with my blood shifting sensations, I notice the difference between the two thought patterns.

Having just been sensitized by McKittrick's writing to racialized differentials in the construction and maintenance of space, and being alienated from my own bodily sensorium by the influx of dye, I was in touch with a spatial alienation that is not mine, and cannot be mine, as a biopolitical subject classified as White. About a quarter of the patients I pass on my way to and from the Results Pending room are Black. I try to imagine what a Black medical subject lying here would feel, how relative calmness and relative distress might play out for them (and I am guarding myself against following that particular fantasy in my writing: the sentence about what I imagine is not here and shouldn't ethically be here).

gant's performance, *Otherlogue (III)*, was described in this way on social media as part of the show's advertising: "Explor(es) the relationship between ritual and mental health for Black womenfolk, in both public and private spaces."<sup>7</sup>

In the park in Detroit, gant's performance piece opened the night. Audiences had assembled: some were on the provided plastic folding chairs, and some (like me) sat in comfy camping chairs brought from home. The row of chairs faced a mowed strip of land, and beyond the mowed area, the grass stood tall, swaying in the evening wind that slowly came up. Large trees framed the vista for us, and the roar of the nearby motorway was audible along with cricket chirps.

Soon, another sound entered the scene: gant, dressed in flowing earth-colored robes, emerged from behind a tree carrying translucent glass jars to a small cupboard set up in the middle of the staging area. Their hands held multiple glasses at a time, so the effort of walking on the uneven grassy ground jostled their hands, and the jars clanked against one another. gant deposited the jars on the altar, and then went to get more. They made this walk many times: from the tree to the altar, laden with glass jars of all sizes, and then back again emptyhanded. Later on in this durational piece, gant held jars in the gathered folds of their garment, and the glass sounds grew louder. At times, the energy of gant's body moving on the ground created enough momentum to cause a loud clashing of glass on glass, worrying me as an audience member with visions of



Figure 12. bree gant, in a brown dress and a colorful headdress decorated with long feathers, and two co-performers, Miryam Johnson and Nahimana Aponi, in orange leotards with leopard neckline decorations, concentrate on filling a large number of vessels with water on a mowed strip of parkland. The vessels stand on a water altar and on the earth. *Otherlogue (III)*, at Brown on Green Festival, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Cheryl Willard.

broken glass and their bare feet on the ground. Every time gant moved away from the altar, they moved the scarf over their shoulders, swirling the air.

Eventually, gant emerged with big containers of water (see Plate 6). Now, two women assisted gant, also carrying water containers. gant and the two companions (who would soon move on to dance their own piece) filled water into the empty jars. Here, the piece ended.

Witnessing these actions unfold over time, many stories and sensation fragments washed over me. That's the power of durational labor, of repetition: the imagination can open up in these temporal loops (remember the repetitive factory motions in chapter 1). The phenomenology of witnessing durational labor is different from the audiencing labor of seeing a realist theater or cinema performance, where narrative momentum draws me into worlds.

In my writing practice, I dive into my fieldnote fragments, some scribbled hastily and near illegibly into my notebook after the performance.

Where do I hear glass tinkling in public parks? I think about homelessness and alcohol struggles (and in one of the instantiations of gant's work, a Hennessy bottle is part of the piece).<sup>8</sup> In the Q&A that followed the event, gant mentioned alcoholism in their family. Let's think through this moment in further detail. gant's piece is entitled *Otherlogues (III)*, and the connections between self and other in dialogues and questioning emerge in my autoethnographic witnessing.

From a phenomenological art perspective, exciting moments happen when actions come to consciousness, enter above the threshold of sensation that normally keeps somatic experience in the background. Many phenomenologists articulate this borderline through reference to pain: humans become aware of their inner somatic worlds when pain raises sensations above the invisible/unthought smooth working of one's embodied self. Only when my knees scream at me do I think of them as "knees," as a "them." Part of my own narrative labor as a painful subject is to create narrative webs that allow me to find a place for this pain. Thus, my own sensorium makes me think of medical imaging machines showing me crystal webs around my joints. In my eco soma imagination of the beautiful/horrific sharp crystal edges in their glittering joint caves, I find some aesthetic release, even if my pain does not go away. But these images of sharp edges work differently for me here, sitting comfortably in the humid summer air and watching glass and grass.

Actions that suddenly rise above (my White, middle-class) normality: in the tinkling of the glasses, I do not (only) hear my familiar back-deck windchimes. I think of alcohol bottles. I think of cut feet, of broken glass ground into back alleys, and of the danger of broken glass in public green spaces. This precarity that leaps into my mind is unequally distributed onto Black and Brown bodies in this neighboring city. Let's think about the likelihood of finding broken glass, sharp edges, and needles in the parks of the cities that I visit regularly. First, there is Ann Arbor, the home of my employer, the University of Michigan, a wealthy, White-dominated city with civic money for park maintenance. Then there is the smaller city of Ypsilanti, where I live, and a place some (White) Ann Arbor people steadfastly refuse to visit as it is deemed dangerous, an attribution rooted in racist images and investment, housing redlining, the decline of the automotive industry, and other Rust Belt pain patterns that have impacted

different racialized groups in different ways. Lastly, there is this big city forty minutes to the east, iconic Detroit, with its heavy pall of racialized precarity and roaring activism. Many Detroit eco-activists point to the failure of White imagination when it comes to seeing Detroit as something else than a ruined city. I have to confront my own racialized internalizations and carceral imagination in the moment that “broken glass” becomes my first narrative layer of witnessing gant’s work.

Where there is danger, there is also power. I see gant’s stride, the thud of their naked feet on the earth. The skill with which gant carries so many glasses at once, one finger in each, clasped together. The carefulness with which gant sets the glasses down. The way they uses the fabric of their dress to swaddle and carry the jars. The ritual action that is unfolding holds strength and attention, an assuredness that speaks of repetition and purpose. In gant’s performance, actions and their repetition sacralize and ritualize their altar and their environment. Behavior shifts spaces.

Then the materiality of the jars themselves focuses my gaze anew. The slow accumulation of jars allows me to see through the glass to the careful mowing of the site, strips of grassland made easily accessible for local children’s activities and for people to walk on. Right behind gant’s performance, the grasses rear high, and cicadas are buzzing louder and louder as the evening progresses. The city of Detroit stopped mowing this and other parks in 2009, adding to the ruin narrative of the bankrupt city. To see this area mowed and made accessible speaks of rejuvenation, reclamation, and a denial of abjection. In the governance of the “natural” and the relative attention paid to these spaces, Detroit narratives of civic neglect play themselves out and offer arguments in their own right. From mowed grass to rubbish dumping sites (and the sharp edges of glass and metal), the presence of coyotes, foxes, herons, and horned owls: all these elements have played a part in the wrangling about ownership and maintenance of this park.

The tending of the altar and the deliberate tending of this grassy strip and its invitation to naked feet come to my consciousness as I witness and weave a new pattern with my precarity imagination.

Then comes the moment that gant pours the water into the jars, and the whole scene changes on this tilting action. Later, in the Q&A, gant speaks about water and women’s healing rituals. But in this moment of the pour, the ritual

blossoms into my consciousness. I think of libations, of pouring water on the ground to remember, and a historical dimension of Black survivance crests in my thoughts. Water runs lively into the jars and creates new horizon lines inside the translucent objects.

As not only a White but also a European-born subject, I immediately connect the image and sound of water poured into jars with old rituals in my own lineages: scrying, looking at water in vessels to divine alternative realities in the past, present, and future. But I am aware that I am outside my own located ritual imagination here and that labor is required of me to be in respectful presence. So, my eco soma phenomenological stance is one of sensing, wondering, reaching beyond what is familiar and what rises to consciousness.

Teaching performance in intercultural environments has allowed me to witness this ritual immediacy in different cultural contexts. My witnessing self thinks of Yoruba practices and water, of the Orisha Oshun (a powerful water goddess), of cleansing ritual baths, and of meditating with a glass of water and then drinking it.<sup>9</sup> I know that I know too little to feel these connections in my bones. That thought itself is a marker of phenomenological performance witnessing: opening to the unknown and recognizing its presence. My web of references and connections needs to be loose and have holes/wholes to acknowledge agencies beyond my own. *Otherlogues*. This performance does not allow me to rest in my ignorance of the power that unfolds before me. The actions pull me to acknowledge power's presence.

Pouring water into jars. Here is another narrative likely open to any inhabitant of Michigan in 2019: the Flint water crisis, and the spectacular presence of plastic water bottles in media coverage of the slow-motion disaster of civic neglect and precarious Black bodies.<sup>10</sup> In one image of gant's interdisciplinary oeuvre, published as a diptych "on vessels" in the Ypsilanti-based *Bathhouse Journal* at Eastern Michigan University in 2017, gant is lying in a bathtub, with jars of water all around them on every flat surface of the basin and tub rim (see Plate 6).<sup>11</sup> gant's head is turned to the side, and their expression is unreadable. They could be sleeping, immersed in self-care rituals; or they could be dead, a suicide in a bathtub, the latter image just as familiar for women in bathtubs. The jars here could be holding tears, the accumulation of excretions associated with depression<sup>12</sup>—an association not easily available in the live performance with its lively movement. This kind of association is more in keeping with the

life/death status of the photograph and its current liminal status in between art object, crime scene witness, and social media entity.

Which bodies had to learn how to take showers and baths with bottled water? Which bodies toted bottles full of water around the city and had to figure out how to carry the heavy load, deciding whether plastic or glass were the best water containers? These wider Michigan narratives, which also include water shut-offs in Detroit, point to the relative health status and biopolitical location of racialized bodies in our shared environment.

This durational piece with its open invitation to witness jars, glass, mowed grass and tall grasses, naked feet and flowing garments, emerges from bareness. There is the openness of space and the mating sounds of dragonflies that spin all around us, performers and witnesses alike. The grassy field is alive. And there is precarity: glass being carried, precious objects and dangerous material breaking, injury.

One last avenue of *Otherlogues* inquiry I wish to touch on here emerges from a novelist's plea for an opening of the imagination and casts bareness in a different light. In 2016 the Indian novelist Amitav Gosh wrote *The Great Derangement*. In this book, Gosh took the novel form to task for its failure to engage climate change. Gosh explored how the very form of the novel and its bourgeois origins are anathema to the kind of agencies and time scales that pertain to the Anthropocene. Novels, given this individualist capitalist origin story, use time spans more aligned with one (or a few) individual lifetime(s) rather than epochal movements, and forms of realism and relatability demand adherence to "ordinary" human lives and their immediate agents. Gosh uses a perfect crip metaphor, deranged lunacy, to discuss rapacious politics and neglect in addressing changing environmental conditions and their human causes. And in reviewing Gosh's work, Alexandre Leskanich, in the pages of the *LSE Review of Books*, calls on yet another crip metaphor, blindness, now via Bohemian-Australian poet Rilke, to understand what is going on:

This admirable book is the latest testament to the limits of contemporary thought and language, to the frustration of human cognitive power over a world we thought we knew. Deranged indeed, but also incrementally dispossessed, we have become the disinherited of Rainer Maria Rilke's remark, finding that "each blind lurch of the world leaves its disinherited, to whom no longer the past nor yet the future belong." (2017)

Both “crazy” and “blind” here function as fulcrums to understand the inadequacies of analytic and critical engagement, somewhere in the middle between human and nonhuman (earth) agents.

In the Q&A to their show, gant explained that they had not previously performed *Otherlogues* outdoors and that the terrain as well as the ethics of such an action required thoughtfulness. On the uneven ground of the park’s grass, clarities shifted, and the appeal of water rituals points to displacements historical and future. Many have (and many will) lose homes and ownership, bus routes and streetlights, and urban and rural infrastructures; and any environmental pressure will be felt unequally depending on the relative biopolitical location of people. The “crazy”—those who are homeless, dislocated, alcoholic, depressed—will see their ranks swelled by the newly dispossessed. Climate migrancy is already a topic in many parts of the world. “Disability” will take on new meaning in sites where the privileging patterns of current medical and insurance industrial complex provisions break down—something that came forcefully to the front in the Covid-19 pandemic and exposed racialized inequity. So, this is one last aspect of gant’s show I take with me: the stripping bare of humanity, the precarity of the need to secure water: and within that, the mutability and adaptability of healing ritual, bare feet on the land, and the new futures the ritual opens toward.

### Writing in the Theater

Amitav Gosh’s argument about the inability to imagine climate catastrophe plays out in a very different way, and in a much more bourgeois environment, at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre. Here, neoliberal choice-driven worlds are riven by water, putting pressure on lives and narratives.

And as I am writing these lines now, I am digesting today’s news, at the end of May 2019, that seven small children in an elementary school in Oklahoma drowned in the basement of their school while a tornado devastated their region.

I am writing this with awareness of the ongoing slow violence of poisoned water in many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. I am writing this in awareness of the saltwater drownings of refugees across the Mediterranean Sea. I also think about Ebo Landing, and African people just landing on St. Simons, a Gullah island off North Carolina, turning around as they came off the ship. They walked into the waters to drown themselves, denying the



labor of their bodies to the slavers. Waters. Wakes. Christina Sharpe attends to echoes of the slave ship's wake, trailing the ship and rippling ever onward in contemporary race relations, a physical/metaphorical movement:

In the wake, the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to the regulation of Black people in North American streets and neighborhoods, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, to the brutal colonial reimaginings of the slave ship and the ark; to the reappearances of the slave ship in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, and the school. (2016, 21)

To attend to wake work is to stay present to slavery's grammar and its continued unfolding.<sup>13</sup> Old sins and bodies on the line.

All this is with me as I stop writing for a while; I leave the theater foyer and my writing spot and enter the auditorium of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre. The play begins. In front of me, two women, one White, one Black, are engaged in sun salutations—modified for older bodies (according to the play's text, sixty-five and sixty-seven). They reach up, then down. They move into plank pose, then into cobra, and then downward dog. A long breath marks each action.

These laboring women are actors, part of Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*. Lucy Kirkwood is a British playwright, and *The Children* was a Tony Award nominee in 2018, after successful runs in London (Royal Court Theatre), New York City, Melbourne, Toronto, and Chicago (at the Steppenwolf Theatre, where I saw it in 2019).

This scene, the sun salutations, comes at the end of *The Children*, as the experienced Hazel draws in the beginner Rose, pulling her into the poses with her breath. In the background, Robin, Hazel's husband (who is also Rose's ex-lover), cleans up literal shit. The "house is foul" as Hazel says, shit flowing from the composting toilet, a leakage that heralds the final turn of the play.

As the two women do yoga and the man brooms, the ever-present sound of the sea swells, repeating, becoming threatening. The sound recalls for the audience the narrative from early on that set the play in motion: a tidal wave swamped a nearby nuclear reactor; the reactor failed, and this part of the world (or maybe this world) started its journey toward the end. That is the background of *The Children*, a very Fukushima-like story, transposed to the British coast.

In the scene, the noise builds to a crescendo, and now the three figures on



stage are bathed in the light of the bottom of the green-blue sea. The stage lights create the effect of the sun reflecting downward, a Walt Disney sea bottom from which three souls stare out at the audience.

Church bells ring from the stage speakers, and I remember British stories of bells from villages that fell into the sea long ago, when the ground first became unstable and churches and houses fell from the cliff's edge. That sound comes to me as a link to many world sites under climate catastrophe: villages drowned for aqueducts and dammed rivers.

But let us stay with the yoga a bit more. Bodily messes, and somatic holding-against chaos are persistent themes throughout *The Children*. The yoga somatics are the realm of one of the protagonists, the upper-middle-class hardbody White woman Hazel with a blond, perky ponytail, mother of four *and* nuclear scientist. She and her husband, Robin, live in a farmhouse twenty miles from the exclusion zone, the death zone that is now contaminated.

The audience hears a lot about cows, returning ghosts that stand as a kind of Schrödinger's cat over the play, a hovering in-between. Miraculously, they were alive when Robin checked on them after the first catastrophe, after the wave destroyed the reactor. But as the play develops, Robin admits that the cows were actually dead and that Robin has been going out every day to dig graves for them. While engaged in this concrete earthy action, he was being slowly poisoned by the fallout from the runaway reactor.

With this mourning action, Robin enacts a slow-motion death wish in this poisoned world. He asks his wife to think about the machines they are becoming—machines that aim to live to over a hundred, perfect and functioning, but dying of boredom. He wants to have the chance to actually die, to acknowledge mortality. He is ready to herald his ex-lover's call to duty. For the call to duty is also a call down memory lane and a call to party. Before the shit comes running across the stage (literalized in a flood of water gushing out and over the stage's lip), the three were dancing, reliving an old party at a colleague's house. Hazel, as befits her yoga mistress persona, was the one who invented the dance then, too: so now she is the one who remembers it, twitching and gyrating in familiar 1980s grooving, assured, sure-footed, sexy bottom twitching, having fun even as it contradicts her words. Her body speaks. Rose and Robin join in, pick up their steps and pace from her, and everybody is having a ball.

Bodily movements bring them together, marking the high points in a drama

of speech and memory. Bodies are there, and they are disavowed. But they come back in all their materiality, like the decaying huge cow carcasses off stage. Bodies leak. Hazel gets a nose bleed. Rose, who lost two breasts and her beautiful Afro to cancer, pulls off her wig. Hazel accuses Robin of not having liked his children “when they leaked,” but now it is Hazel who wants to control the aging bodies that are falling apart. Robin needs Viagra to get a hard-on, and Rose takes birth control pills at sixty-five in order to squash her libido.

Sexiness is everywhere, and plenty of chemistry circulates between all three of the stage’s actors. The repressed will return, just like the cows. Shit, semen, and blood mix with the ocean water.

And the overflow is everywhere—the yoga and the dance are familiar and hence infectious. I see audience members’ shoes twitching all along my row.

“Do it for the children” is an abstract concept throughout the play, just like Gosh argues. Even for Hazel and Robin who have biological children, the children are abstract—they are elsewhere, at the end of a phone, but not in the immediate physical reality. When Robin wishes to become part of the last band of retirees, old nuclear workers coming back to the damaged reactor to act as saviors, it seems less about “the children,” either bio or general, than about relevance: something to do, something to recapture, about lost or blunted intensities.

I am still trying to figure out whether I think the play is ageist—but I don’t think it is. All three characters do lead full lives, and their momentary desperations, infidelities, or missteps are just curveballs in what is basically a happy existence. These are not Godot’s waiting people, miserable and disconnected. All three have anchors, deeply shaken by aging and cancerous bodies, by calcified rituals, or by lust, but on the whole they are stable enough. The world, instead, is unstable. And with that, the notion of choice, of what to do and who should do it, might be taken away in one deep roar of the sea.

*The Children* plays out in front of theater audiences who see, for once, an actual kind of mirror. The night I saw the play, at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, the main bulk of the audience was “the usual”: relatively affluent middle-class people, likely exactly in that sixty-to-seventy-year-old bracket, mostly White, some Black. These demographics very much aligned with the categories of the actors.

They are the retirees, and this was a play about them, and about the choices—loss of choices, past choices, and future choices—they likely made. Here are some of the choices the play presents to its characters: career versus family,

or both; one partner, or many, with potentially no old-age safety net; jobs that contributed to the global mess we are in; choices about whether to use a compost toilet or recycle; whether to hold on to the computer and email or not; and flying around the globe, or settling in a smaller cottage after the loss of the big family home. All these choices come back to physical actions, to the monitoring of one's physical functions (like shitting, or drinking noncontaminated water), to the ritual of yoga or the fleeting need for embraces. What can be controlled, and how can one respond to radical, frightening change in the course of a single evening?

The watery immersion here is a call to rethink, redo, refeel, reevaluate old patterns of hormonal flow and sensual engagement just outside the circle of conventional morality. And the beautiful glimmering blue-green light is a release, too, from the repetition of sun salutations. After the party, after death, after one way of life is gone, what happens?

In *The Children*, eco soma speaks about power and control, about loosening bounds and borders, about decay and flesh, and about the shared patterns humans enact, perform, and repeat to hold ourselves together.

Between gant's water ritual and *The Children*, I am writing about different kinds of eco soma sensings and different kinds of memory acts. Water's relationship to lineage versus catastrophe is on the line and falls into different registers. I am watching water as material reality, as metaphor, as history maker in different ways, in my deckchair in the park or in the tight velvet of a theater seat. Racialization, disability, and gender mark the moments in different ways, creating eddies and whirlpools. Let's visit with a third performance moment, one that combines the power of storytelling and words with the force of gesture and compression.

### Dirty River Girl

Choices about where to live and what jobs to take are not an option for many. To offer a different perspective, outside affluence, here is another performance intervention in a much more activist-framed performance.

*Dirty River Girl* was performed as part of California's disability-centered social justice performance group Sins Invalid's 2009 show and printed as a poem in the collection *Body Map* (2015).<sup>14</sup> In this performance/poem, Toronto-based artist and nonbinary femme Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha speaks of an

underground river of queer-of-color youth with bodies that are “all just too sensitive.” *Dirty River Girl* makes connections between abuse, trauma, and disability. This lived disability experience is central to many contemporary activists who see the uneven medical recognition of malaises in White Western biomedicine (i.e., “You’re too sensitive” as a doctor’s answer to a medical complaint). Activists look to underrecognized injuries and bodily effects that undercut vitality and are often linked to intersectional violences of racialization and forced underclass living.

In this book I have already visited a range of sites that connect somatic discourse, being-in-bodies, with historical trauma, including (in the previous chapter) the Nibi Walkers, Ojibway women who walk the rivers.

In the *Dirty River Girl* performance, Piepzna-Samarasinha stands in a shaft of light, her/their body clad in a pink/rose nightie, an abundance of curls flowing richly over her/their shoulders. Piepzna-Samarasinha uses “she and they pronouns, alternating” (personal communication, February 2021), and I am reflecting this delicious linguistic mobility in my description. Their hands are at her center, the solar plexus, clasping her hands at their belly. As she speaks, she raises their arms from her side to form a wide *T* and then brings them back together again, holding, shrouding, giving support to herself, centered in the body’s middle. They speak of “an underground river that whispers /abuse survivors are the ones who get the weird disease.” The experience of trauma is linked to the water bursting: “Our bodies’ walls cave in on the stories they hold that are too much / swell our banks in a flash flood.”

In the next section of their performance, she makes a connection between the tiredness of the poem’s “I,” “like a Victorian wasting disease” and the Blackstone River in Worcester, Massachusetts, their initial home (and here I switch from the poetic convention of distance between author and poetic “I” to the performance’s elision of this distance). The river is personified, a fragile presence in the land. Sensuality, touch knowledge, and sexuality are deeply connected, as land entities, human entities, and their border zones infiltrate and influence one another:

Entombed in cement, she slowly filled up with poison from all those dyes, all that cement, all those computer chips rinsed with acid. She flowed under the city, and we never saw her sweet hips or her cum rushing green and willowy through our beautiful

rust-belt-empty lot paradise. All we knew was she was fucked up and hidden, locked up someplace where no one would touch her. (video transcript)

That motive “no one would touch her” occurs multiple times throughout this poem/performance and others in the show and has been a leitmotif in Sins Invalid’s performances in general: the loneliness of disabled people, seen as nonsexual, who are now stepping into the limelight and claiming their beauty, their sensuous selves.

Much of the somatic work in the field of social justice labor focuses on this reclamation process: developing a body-center, a fully inhabited and loved self that then can step out into the world. History and herstory mix, as Resmaa Menakem explains in his cultural somatics online course, where he engages with intergenerational trauma and disturbing flashbacks that are not part of one’s personal biography:

You may have flashbacks of some type of trauma that are not necessarily personal. Many times, we may think we are defective, something is wrong with us or we are crazy as the images seem out of context for our own personal experiences. In that case, you may be dealing with historical trauma. If something is hysterical it is usually historical.<sup>15</sup>

I am intrigued by this reclaiming of “hysteria” discourse, with its heritage in White psychiatric discourse as “woman-out-of-control.” Here, the “out-of-control-ness” of the association remains, but it is now aligned with physical boundary–breaching understandings of memory and affect. From its use as a put down of “irrational” women, the term shifts into the terrain of counter-somatics. The personal of memory, the bounded skin sack, becomes porous to all kinds of water, to memories that come from elsewhere and need reintegration, acknowledgment, to allow one to reunite oneself and to allow power to flow through one’s bodymindspirit in ways beneficial to life.

Piepzna-Samarasinha moves on: “In 1983, my mother could recite the thirty-three cancer-causing/compounds in Worcester water.” The world is toxic, and Piepzna-Samarasinha refuses to make a distinction between herself and the world in which they grew up. They resolutely claim kinship and coherence with the river of her childhood, destinies entwined; to grow as a person, the land and water need liberation, too. This is the radical demand and politics at the

heart of this somatic work: a somatic that extends beyond one's self envelope (or skin sack), one that demands a form of personhood and well-being for land and human (and nonhuman) others.

She gets to a point where the entities of the Brown girl and the river intersect: "What would it take for a river that polluted/to be loved?" River and girl move but without fully flowing into an anthropomorphic *mélange*. The river keeps its own space, its own stanza, and so does the girl. They touch, instead, skin to skin.

What does it take, they ask, opening up the question to a "you" for the first time. "For my body/for your body/to come back from being swept away?" Implication and infiltration are not just reserved for toxic processes but also for healing ones: for reclaiming, for opening oneself toward trust, (including, in the last lines of her performance) the trust of letting herself go into orgasm, an affirmation of surrender to pleasure and unboundedness.

This move, from self to world, is one that many Indigenous activists also focus on. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, in March 2017, the Māori tribe Whanganui Iwi succeeded in having the Whanganui River, the tribe's *tupuna* (ancestor), awarded the same legal rights as a person by the New Zealand government. The law uses a Māori truth: "Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au" (I am the river, and the river is me).

Soon after, the Indian government granted the Ganges and Yamuna rivers legal personhood status. Many places now have mixtures of postcolonial, settler/Indigenous rights frameworks for nonhuman entities (O'Donnell and Talbot-Jones, 2018). Water laps at old structures. Water asserts its agency.

For Piepzna-Samarasinha and others who reclaim their space, the avenue toward that open trust in the world and in one's self is through the experience of sexuality and the joy of self-pleasure. This, in turn, sensualizes the river and acknowledges its agency, its being active in the world.

Reanimation, reclamation, listening to elemental agency. There's a precarity in mirroring human social justice onto the all-encompassing movements of water and avenging rivers, but it feels great to align with these powers breaking through colonial and settler concrete. That's the power of speculative work: storytelling practices to change the story. Eco soma methods here offer entwinement discourses, "living with," assaulted immune defenses and welcoming embraces.

### Toward Open Writing at the Site of Sensation

In keeping with eco soma pushes against boundaries and into extensions between bodies, sites, and histories, arguments run through this book in complex and intersected ways. I do not pull up all the strands presented but leave trailing threads for you, the reader, to pick up and run with. Academic writing means writing in a field, engaging in citational practice, and weaving. Community work goes against some of the core assumptions of traditional academia, like individual authority, distancing independence, and concepts of mastering.<sup>16</sup> Yet community writing can also fulfill many of academic writing's functions, as interferences and connections can come to the fore in unusual ways. In the next part of this chapter, I do not wish to make my collaborators and community participants into case studies by dissecting their work. Disabled people are too often the object of stares, diagnostic gazes, and analyses. By offering a section of open writing as a methodological intervention into conventional academic discourse, I try to deflect those gazes and to channel their energy into other paths. With this particular method, this part of my chapter shifts into cultural studies methodologies and away from modes that privilege close analysis as their main mode of generating knowledge. As an eco soma reader of this work, you are invited to feel your own shifts in perspective: what touches you, as glass, as water, as river, as toxic element, as beneficial salve?

Given this awareness of traditional power relations around disability, this writing works in an open pool of power and its deployment, its invisible pulls and effects, trying to think of humans not as pristine biologic entities but as creatures spun into nets of historic injustice and its ongoing effects. In *The Transmission of Affect*, feminist philosopher Teresa Brennan offers alternatives to an insistence on individual sovereignty, a view of tightly closed borders and pristine spaces of self-containment. Affect transmits and plays on the openings of bodies. Humans (and nonhumans) live among hormone whiffs, touch and substance alignments between sweat glands and nasal passages, the spray of words layering like a veil on someone else's skin. "We are not self-contained in our energies," Brennan writes (2004, 6).

Environmentalist Paul Shepard, positing ecology as a way of understanding relationality, wrote that the epidermis of the skin is "ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration" (1969, 2). This echoes with disability studies scholar Mel Chen's perspectives

on permeability, holding against boundedness, using their own embodiment as an experiment to “deemphasize the borders of the immune system and its concomitant attachments” (2012, 196–7), in a form of “toxic sensorium” (2012, 196). In a resonant image in their study, Chen collapses on their couch at the end of a toxic day, and experiences the couch as a lively site, as a place of intimacy and snuggles, support, and sensuality. Queer complex attachments come into the image, too—exhausted, Chen has only a grunt for their homecoming girlfriend and instead snuggles up with the couch. “The couch and I are inter-absorbent, interporous, and not only because the couch is made of mammalian skin” (2012, 203). It all gets a bit complicated, just like the issue of love in the previous chapter—here are moments of relation, of use, of being-with, all gnarled up: “What body am I now in the arms of? Have I performed the inexcusable: Have I treated my girlfriend like my couch? Or have I treated my couch like her, which fares only slightly better in the moral equations?” (2012, 202).

These attentions to permeability and influence inspire eco soma approaches: attentions that find artful openings and juicy hesitations in the interplay between skin and skin, skin and surface, eco-world-in-self and soma-self-in-world, care and use, flesh and discourse.

Arguments that stress transmission over boundaries, interpenetration over shells, offer an intervention into how humans conceive of individuals and how humans are affected by others, by the environment, and by nonclosed systems. Words conglomerate within people; they fill me up and color my perception. Words shape and are shaped by the emotional valence with which people make sense of the world. Hence, words are not superseded by hormonal stuff, and the bio contact is not more real than the cultural stuff. Words and hormones, imagination and physiology, work in tandem. They make me permeable.

I dive down into the abyss of my bodily skin sack’s outer reaches. Water rushes in and makes experiential the space between us. There’s me, in water as these words come up like air bubbles, and I try to store them till I get to dry land to scribble; and there’s you, likely reading on land. Water rushes in and cuts off the air that so invisibly sustains you and me. Water rushes in, gravities shift, and eddies stroke my limbs. I am intrigued by the way we can align biologic and linguistic influences, narrative lines, and sentence structures.

This playful engagement drives our eco-poetic inquiry, too, on the edges of science and art. In the collaborative art experiment I am moving to now, we are *not* using artistic methods to elucidate and make experiential scientific data. I



am also shifting pronouns from time to time: moving from the “I” I carefully maintained through most of this book so far to a focus on a “we.” This does not mean that I believe that everybody who participated in the Salamander project would sign off on everything I claim here. But I do want to signal that this is an experience born in community, in collaboration, and that many of the insights I am writing about emerge from the storytelling and chat that accompanied the project events.

We offer alternative ways of understanding relationality. Eco soma: real effects, in real time, in real alignment between living entities. Eco soma: drawing upon the web of sustaining effects that shape how we think of being individual, social, connected, desirous, and responsible. We are conglomerations with islands of stability, self-aware bounded things who receive what there is to be received from a particular angle or a particular web or sieve. To me, this poetics of sedimented instabilities, changed and rearranged through contact, is an eco soma framework.

I write in an engagement with the poetics of myth and our own postcolonial terraforming, aware of the histories and presents of settler-Indigenous engagements. In the *Eco Language Reader*, Brenda Iijima asks, “How can poetry engage with a global ecosystem under duress? . . . In what ways do vectors of geography, race, gender, class and culture intersect with the development of individual or collective ecopoetic projects?” (2010, i). The Olimpias disability culture collective responds by going swimming.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Salamander Project: Disability Culture**

In May 2013, a small group of disabled artists in the San Francisco Bay Area began going swimming together as an art project.<sup>18</sup> Initially, Neil Marcus, a spastic performance artist and poet, needed to exercise more to loosen his stiffening limbs, and he knew that the neoliberal dictates of repetitive docile exercise as self-improvement just did not work for him. What did work for him, though, was performing for a camera and an audience.

Working out what needed to be done, Neil bought a small underwater camera and invited his collaborators to come with him and take photos of him underwater. At the time, I was his main collaborator, and I led the Olimpias, a disability culture artist collective. Soon after starting, we decided that this project had a lot of juice and created a meaningful experience for many people.



Figure 13. Before the water session of a Salamander workshop in Dallas, Texas, on a hotel rooftop. People prepare swimmers for the water by reciting Salamander writings, caressing their limbs (with permission), and preparing towels to receive them after the water part. Performance at the American Society for Theatre Research Conference, Dallas, Texas, 2013. Photograph courtesy of the author.

So we created a conceptual frame that included but went beyond self-care and called the project “Salamander,” as many of us had strong mythical associations with artful water play and with the myth valency of creatures like salamanders.<sup>19</sup>

The salamander is a real-life animal, of course, and in our real and local life it works in ecological frameworks as a marker: the presence or absence of salamanders can help mark the toxic load of environments (Davic and Hartwell 2004). But the salamander is also a mythical creature and a border creature, one of the original alchemical animals. In alchemy, the salamander is linked to the elements; it connects water and fire and stands as a marker of transformation.<sup>20</sup>

As our project progressed, we gathered more and more border creatures, shared childhood stories, and remembered myths. Through this we garnered new myths and new stories to help us focus on what was going on around and within us. We experienced, we created, we were active and happy, at least for moments, among ourselves: a very different image of disability in environmental practice than usually presented in literature and social discourse.

As disabled people, many of us are cut off from the mechanisms of work. We often can't be economically active, and that makes many feel devalued and worthless in a culture that is focused on labor. These value assignments run deep, aligned with internalized ableism. We are ecosystems under duress, and the treatment of disabled people and elders often offers insights into a particular human ecology and its organizational structures and values. Neoliberal policies seem intent on erasing human diversity, as more and more people experience the snipping away of the welfare safety net. In California, with In-Home Supportive Services and other programs under constant pressure to let people slip through the cracks, many of us find ourselves under assault, required to conform to narrow prescriptions of what being human means.

Floating together in the water, we have had many conversations about this. The shift in gravity allowed for an opening to talk about pressures and sorrows.

Literary critic Lynn Keller sums up how many see the history of nature writing as a genre. The critique is quite stinging. There are many examples of nature writing that shift outside these boundaries; but, even so, this description resonated with many of us paddling in the pool. Keller writes:

Nature writing as it has developed from traditions of the pastoral contributes valuably to readers' appreciation of the given world and can instill reverence or respect that prompts a desire to preserve the earth's resources, yet this genre may play a relatively minor role in the conversation around sustainability. Received ideas of nature codified in such writing tend, as many have noted, to position nature as something apart from the human, making it difficult to conceptualize ways for large populations to live appropriately in and with nature. The elegiac or nostalgic cast of much nature writing is likely to be of little use to clearheaded envisioning of an attainable, sustainable future. (2012, 581)

For many of us in the pools, rivers, and oceans of Salamander project workshops, nature is not pristine. We can see the trash of nonreverence all around

us, whether we dive under the Mediterranean or frolic among kayakers in Lake Michigan. Occasionally, I have led Salamander sessions in these idealized sites of “purity”—for instance, deep in the Australian bush, or in the Shoalhaven River with the threat of bull sharks very much alive around us. Most Salamanders, though, were in much more “human-shaped” sites: thermal baths in Germany and Sweden, under bridges in Stockholm, in a public bath in Aotearoa/New Zealand, on Barcelona’s busy public beaches.<sup>21</sup> All the visits had to do with “attainable, sustainable” lives toward crip futures: most days, we walked and wheeled from these sites to disabled people’s apartments in these respective cities or sites. Or we went to the one wheelchair-accessible restaurant and broke bread together. An offer of economic care access was part of each of these gatherings. My professorial pay allowed me to offer financial support to anyone who didn’t have money for a meal, an entry fee, or a bathing suit. We found out about our respective lives, locations, and support structures. But supplementing this, when we were under, at the heart of our engagement, there was unknowability, boundary zones, and death/life underwater.

Keller writes from a perspective as a critic of experimental poetry, and she sees value in a fostering of aesthetic diversity:

I believe the demanding projects that must be undertaken by a literature toward sustainability will require the literary and imaginative equivalent of biodiversity: different contributions will come from a variety of generic, formal, structural, rhetorical, and thematic approaches, many of them deliberately resisting inherited conventions, and from varied critical and social perspectives. Independently and in interaction with one another, the diverse species in this literary ecology may open up our perceptions and with them our understanding of our options. (Keller 2012, 582)

The Salamander project offers a perspective on how this interdependent, complex, multigenre poetic work may operate on the ground or rather in flotation among many different bodyminds.

I want to sharpen the discussion, too, for I also believe that an emphasis on diversity requires actual contact, collaboration, and outreach; it should be orchestrated not only at the level of editorial or curatorial policy in the assemblage of materials, art, or performances. It needs to also be felt at the level of the street, of bringing people not usually in contact with one another into consciousness of the contact that we always already bear. This is pervasive contact

at the level of sedimented affect: how we understand ourselves to be bounded as well as the ways imaginative writing and art undo and loosen those boundaries.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs identifies as a “Queer Black Troublemaker and Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all sentient beings” (2021). She models a way of engaging new methods at the site of environment/embodiment in a way that speaks directly to inter/active audiencing procedures. She writes in her foreword to the *M Archive*: “Consider this text an experiment, an index, an oracle, an archive. Let this text be alive as you are alive” (2018, xii).<sup>22</sup> And in her readings from her text, she uses her poetic collection as an oracle or divination tool. I was a participant at such an event, a salon talk with Gumbs and a shared meal, part of choreographer Jennifer Harge’s FLY/DROWN event series at the Detroit Artists Market in 2019. The breezy image in the bathtub I discussed earlier was part of the visual art exhibit of this event. During that evening, and as a part of a performance workshop that had us move and connect with each other, Gumbs invited her audience to ask a question that was meaningful to us together with a number. We were asked to have a stake and to be connected—such a rare way of going about poetry/fiction readings. In the session I participated in, many of us asked a question, and Gumbs took her book, opened it at the number given, and read a passage in response. And then she and the audience member discussed the impact of that phrase, avenues of potential fit. This was not just a stylish feature but a real invitation to connection. This kind of connective web—artmaking with something at stake, writing as a memory of being together—is also at the heart of my wishes for projects like Salamander.

Out there, in public, disability is preferably unseen, politely ignored, a head turner (away). Given the near-instinctive (adult) pull away from disabled people, the politics of Salamander are homeopathic and inoculatory, offering what might be painful so that the pain might lessen over time. Our project needs to be public because the public finds disability abhorrent. So we insert ourselves, if we can (and as much as we can), with a difference, modeling our own grace and hope, our careful and loving play with each other.

In public water sports, bounds are visible, experiential, and under duress, as many writers have noted (including Walt Whitman, who hangs out with the bathers). Literary theorist and poet Michael Davidson begins his study *Concerto for the Left Hand* in his public pool. He comments on the ungainly yet beautiful addenda and movement patterns on display in the pool: there are people of



Figure 14. After a 2014 Salamander workshop in a pool in Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand, with members of the Different Light Theatre Company, a company of people deemed to have cognitive differences. The company actors float one of their own among them. Photograph by the author.

different ages with varied health statuses and all with different perspectives on whether or not they officially identify themselves with the disability rights movement. These people swim together, lurching about with flippers, goggles, and sun hats (2008, xiv).

In the Salamander project, we make the everyday diversity of the pool into a political field. We acknowledge exclusions and histories, including the racial histories of U.S. swimming pools, segregation, uneven access to swimming opportunities, and lack of nongendered changing rooms. We consciously insert disability into the pool's framework. Suddenly, we see many disabled people and their friends in the water. Some have extraordinary bodies; some move in unusual ways. Some are White, and some are of color. Others are marked by various forms of transition. Our being in this world, not just incidentally but en masse, inserts a visibility of biodiversity. We are not just the outcome of catastrophe, the embodiment of environmental assaults, or ciphers of victimhood. We are here and we play, aligning ourselves with our worlds. We are holding



each other, at least for a short while, but with reverberations that go beyond. These can be care webs, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's term for mutual aid-oriented collective actions that can "shift our ideas of access and care . . . from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that's maybe even deeply joyful" (2018, 33).

We open ourselves up to other worlds, to the speculative. In the water, for some of us, things clear up. Magic happens. Visual artist Calida Garcia Rawles writes about her time in water and the inspiration for her well-known paintings of Black people floating deliciously and alive in water:

I found that I felt emotionally lighter after leaving the pool, no matter what issues I was working out before I jumped into the water. This led me to begin using water as a visual language . . . a way to heal and address difficult and divisive issues. When I am in the water and I see the light glistening off of it in certain ways . . . it just looks so magical. The way the body appears to break, splinter, and flow in moving water appears other-worldly to me. (2020)

Otherworldly: this is my experience of our Salamanders, too. A healing magic, in touch with exclusions and denials, with violence and pain, but also a place of power, joy, and reset, outside the bounds of the usual. In touch, in water, we change. Floating, I remember some of my personal movement influences, like Japanese-born choreographer/dancers Eiko and Koma, who are students of Butoh elder Kazuo Ohno. I hear their calm voices, and I found their words again as I researched this passage. The two of them write in their "Delicious Movement" manifesto: "1. Move to rest, sleep, and dream. 2. Move to pass time, bloom, and linger. 3. Move to taste and share. 4. Move to forget and remember" (Eiko and Koma, n.d.). As I twist around myself in the water, I dream and bloom, my painful bodymindspirit inviting movement patterns of other creatures to move me, to share, to forget, to remember.

And writing this down, re-experiencing watery serpentine curvings, I also remember Qwo-Li Driskill, who writes a letter to another ancestor, Chicana activist and philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa described a psychic state of stillness named after the monster/goddess *Coatlícue* in rich language, as a stasis where the conscious mind rests to process change: "a rupture in our everyday world," "a consuming internal whirlwind," "a thousand slithering serpent hairs" (Anzaldúa 2007, 68, 69). Driskill sees strong connections between

this animated power of stillness, of rest, of abeyance, and disability: “People with disabilities . . . may be able to more easily access the *Coatlicue* state . . . because our bodyminds require and experience constant crossings between consciousness. Crip bodies and crip consciousness are part of a larger ‘healing of the wound.’” (2012, 90). The *Coatlicue* is not part of my personal cultural background, and I do not wish to write too much about a concept that has a rich history and engagement in Chicana and Latina thought. But this serpentine abeyance, a power of stillness as a place to process transition, is often with me as I twirl in the water, underwater, as I give the weight of my painful joints to a new gravity, as I rest with others, in mutual care, by the side of the pool.

At the pool, lifeguards tend to tense for a while as we collect our wheelchairs and walkers (and strollers for children). Some of us stiffly enter the pool, an effect that might be partly due to psych meds, autistic embodiment, pain, or other neurodiversity effects. Assuring people that we are safe, both to ourselves and to them, is part of the performance display of Salamander. *Here be dragons*.

Disability theorist Tobin Siebers offers a framework that allows us to rethink these connections between aesthetics and the environment. He writes:

Works of art called ugly ignite public furor. Unaesthetic designs or dilapidated buildings are viewed as eyesores. Deformed bodies appear as public nuisances. Not only do these phenomena confront the public with images of the disabled body, they expose the fact that the public’s idea of health is itself based on unconscious operations designed to defend against the pain of disability. (2003, 215–16)

So if disability is preferably unseen because it reminds people of projected and repressed pain, let’s offer an alternative. Let’s play, splash, push the boundary a bit. Let’s press the horror button, too, in the scary liminal place of the chlorine soup (and its hints of contagion). Our engagement with public aesthetics happens in public poetics—out there, in the shared social world.

I conceive of eco-poetic work as going beyond the page, of blowing up from the two-dimensional capture of data on white paper toward engaging audiences in an embodied poetics. If the point is to change the world, do we not need to place our eco-poetic adventures in public view? If interdependency and collaboration are at stake, do we not need to invite others, not yet part of our project, to witness and to shift standpoints incrementally? What is activism for aesthetic politics, and how can it find audiences?





Figure 15. A group of people in a pool, in a cipher, engaging in water drumming, which is part of a ritual of care and celebration in a Salamander performance at the UBC Aquatic Center, Canadian Association for Theatre Research at Congress 2019. Photograph courtesy of Sharon Engbrecht.

Critic Jonathan Skinner points to this impetus to go beyond the page in his expanded sense of ecopoetics: “Landscape artists who write . . . make a compelling case for the extension of writing by other means—as if their landscapes, gardens, and earth works were poems without books, written in the elements and in living matter, merely extended or refracted onto the page of the essay” (2011, 260). In the Salamander, we are writing essays with water, without heavy lifting and earth shifting. This is a collaborative poetics of invitation, one that acknowledges with Siebers that there is always already an aesthetic in space, one that can be tweaked and made conscious through a gentle and seductive play with difference.<sup>23</sup>

Our Salamander work has many different invitations, opening outward, inviting engagement. Taking a photo in the pool is such a framing device: a poetic

gesture that frames a moment as something set apart from the flow of diving underwater. Many Salamander photos come about when strangers are drawn into our circle. They see the camera, see what we are up to, find out what we are doing, and want to be part of it. Chatting about underwater camera technology can be an opening into poetic play. Many give permission for us to take their photos. And there they are in the photos, dripping wet, skin to skin with Olimpias people. Everyone is laughing, blowing out air, the bubbles mixing. All are breathless together in the euphoria that comes with depleted oxygen.

As the Salamander project continues, we go well beyond cameras in pools. We hover, swim, engage in horseplay, and dive in rivers, oceans, and lakes. In all these places, “disability” is an issue, a highly visible unusual presence, not one structured into the aesthetics of the human-nature interface. Our natures are beyond the imagination of “nature.” Queer crip feminist Alison Kafer pulls the rug out from under any theorizing that somehow sees “natural spaces” as “natural” and disabled people as “naturally” outside of them. Here she describes how the human activity of camping mirrors dominant social arrangements:

Disability studies could benefit from the work of environmental scholars and theorists who describe how “social arrangements” have been mapped onto “natural environments.” Many campgrounds in the United States, for example, have been designed to resemble suburban neighborhoods, with single campgrounds for each family, clearly demarcated private and public spaces, and layouts built for cars. Each individual campsite faces onto the road or common area so that rangers (and other campers) can easily monitor others’ behaviors. Such spacing likely discourages, or at least pushes into the cover of darkness, outwardly queer acts and practices. (2013, 130)

In the Salamander project, we foreground alternative erotics, social arrangements, and disability culture ways of doing things. The way that “access” has been inscribed into “nature spaces” has specific assumptions about who is doing what in what way. In one pool, lifeguards were troubled because we were not adhering to the lane swimming that was the “normal” mode of working in that particular water. We pointed out that most of us just can’t swim a whole lane, only bits of one, and that we were careful not to inconvenience linear swimmers. But our nodular conglomeration at the edges was just too aesthetically disruptive, and we were (not unkindly) asked to leave.

On the plus side, going into “nature” does not necessarily mean trekking

for miles out into a place where no other humans are (and where a sprained ankle would mean a helicopter rescue). Our “naturalness” might be five feet off the path, helping each other over an uncut curb to touch a tree and sing to it. Others, bystanders who also can’t do the whole trekking thing, can observe us from the picnic areas and join us in our near-edge spaces.

Alison Kafer uses a different Olimpias project to point to our emphasis on nearness rather than distance. She picks up on some core themes of Olimpias’s explorations and sharpens the lens: the joys of academic interdependence. For example:

Crippling this terrain, then, entails a more collaborative approach to nature. Koppers depicts human-nonhuman nature interactions not in terms of solo ascents or individual feats of achievement, but in terms of community action and ritual. (2013, 143)

Kafer moves then to quote an earlier Olimpias project write-up of mine, a long sentence that readers who made it this far into *Eco Soma* will recognize in its German accumulation of sensation:

We create our own rhythms and rock ourselves into the world of nature, lose ourselves in a moment of sharing: hummed songs in the round, shared breath, leanings, rocks against wood, leaves falling gentle against skin, bodies braced against others gently lowering toes into waves, touch of bark against finger, cheek, from warm hand to cold snow and back again. (2007, 22, 23)

Unpacking this sentence, Kafer continues:

In this resolutely embodied description, the human and nonhuman are brought into direct contact, connecting the fallen leaf to the tree, or the breath to the wind. What entices me about this description is that it acknowledges loss or inability—she goes on to describe the borders of parking lots and the edges of pathways as the featured terrain, not cliff tops and crevices—and suggests alternative ways of interacting with the worlds around us. Rather than conquering or overcoming nature, Koppers and her comrades describe caressing it, gazing upon it, breathing with it. (2013, 143, 144)

Olimpias participants change over time, and while some of the people in our loose collective have been with us for more than a decade, others come in for

just one project. Thus, our aesthetic politics changes, and the temperature of our writings changes. The Salamander project, while retaining many traces of the embodied writing Kafer comments on, offers a slightly different lens, with the caress and the awareness of boundaries and resistance in balance with one another.

### **The Salamander Project: Open Pool Writings**

The salamander and the natural mediation of amphibians . . . could be an unpretentious signature of the earth, the trace between land, water, and our stories. Consider the stories and memories of salamanders as the natural traces of survivance.

—Gerald Vizenor, “The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders”

In this section, I share a range of Salamander writings, all emerging out of freewrites and ekphrastic work on the photos of our project. Some people wrote after swimming with us; some wrote in response to the images we post in the world pool of Facebook. Ekphrasis is central to our disability culture politics: acknowledging different sensory experiences in a poetics of translation across forms is a cultural convention providing access for blind and visually impaired people, people with different cognitive processes, and others. When we, in our *Olimpias* workshops, engage in freewrites about an image or an experience and share the diversity of responses, we can clearly understand that there are many different ways of being in the world, responding to stimuli, engaging with thought.

The writings below were shared on the Salamander listserv or on Facebook. Many of the themes developed in the first part of this section return in these writings, unfolded and deepened. In different forms, you will find water and flesh as connective media; thoughts on the pain of disability and the violence it engenders in public; meditations on inclusion, exclusion, and change; the mythic status of disability and its lean into stories; public performances as politics; connection and wildness; and ways of perceiving ourselves and our relation to the world differently. Presenting these themes in this way, through an assemblage of voices (or, to use Gumbs’s phrase, an oracle) is an enactment of biodiversity: many styles and choices, different distances to and within language frames. Édouard Glissant’s (1990/2006) resonant engagement of the “right to opacity” reminds me that poetry, freewriting, and open-field forms are part of a tactic, a material condition of hyper/in/visibility for nondominant groups. There are

many ways to sing and shroud how disabled bodyminds engage in our worlds. See what lines, images, or stories resonate for you—and flip over to the color insert, too, and look at the five color plates of Salamanders under the waters: trace them, describe them, celebrate them, and extend the care web into aesthetic joy.

**Sharon Siskin, Berkeley-based visual artist, Ecoart Matters teacher  
at Laney College**

Light, Shadow  
 Water, Body  
 Liquid, Solid  
 Flowing, Stasis  
 Roaring, Silence  
 Moving, Stillness  
 Let's float together  
 You and I in the egg of  
 This world, protected,  
 Within from the reality of what they/  
 We have done to our nest.

**Andy Jackson, poet, Australia**

Squint into this, I would have  
 said to myself, knowing the key  
 ingredients and their venom.  
 A public swimming pool.  
 A camera. This body. I don't need  
 to spell it out. Prose says it's all there,  
 always fizzing in the marrow.  
 The enjambment between us proves  
 everything blue, all water. This  
     is a series of dances  
 we invent as we go, each  
     the length of a full breath.  
 One body passes over me, another  
     winds around my torso, sinuous,  
     amphibious, tender, muscular,  
 substantial. Deep animal

play, human mind turned  
 against itself and for the new human,  
 submerged in the way we move  
     together fluidly, or bump  
 against bone with apologies and  
     laughter, then dive down again  
 into the depths where thresholds  
 blur and the future  
     opens like lungs . . .  
 Clouds move in as I climb out  
 and become singular again,  
 rubbing the towel against my body,  
 but leaving a few drops behind.  
 I know two things—  
 it's too cold to stay here all day  
     and the world is thirsty for water.

### **Petra Kuppers**

Who can feel comfortable in a bathing suit, in a swimming pool, in what is considered a healthful space in our shared culture? These are questions that come into focus as Salamander gets underway, and our workshops proliferate. Barriers emerge: the chlorine in many public pools is a barrier to our chemically injured participants. For many Black children, learning how to swim is an act of defiance of White norms, something beset with historic and contemporary racial tension. Gender images are also an issue for many people in pool settings. Some Olimpias collaborators who identify as trans, either pre-, post- or non-transitioning, are uncomfortable with sharing themselves in public pools, acknowledging the danger of binary “male”/“female” changing areas.

The slides between experiences of hate, shame, and reclamation are complex, and with each email or conversation in these first weeks of Salamander, I feel again and again the power of disclosure, exposure, the toxicity of the public sphere, the sadness of feeling excluded. The privilege of fitting in, or of having assembled enough cultural capital to own one's visible difference as a place of pride, comes sharply into focus for me as I see and read of people being attracted by and yet unable(d) to join us.

I am writing this a day after I was spat on, in public, by a drunken woman on a public bus. She was upset before we entered the bus. As the bus waited around for the bus driver to strap us in, to “secure” us according to his regulations, she got more and more enraged, mumbled “bitch” at me, and paced in agitation. When she left the bus, she spat at me, and her spit on my skin and hair smelled of booze. I am a half-time city dweller, full-time public transport user, and though used to abuse and bus drama, the intensity of hate pierced my composure.

“Bitch”: I am a large woman, articulate, owning my space. I signal complexly: my skin color, carriage, and German Welsh accent speak of privilege; my wheelchair (strapped in place, unable to move when someone spits on me) makes me vulnerable and easy prey. My femininity is hidden for many by the bulk of my person—in public, many people call me “sir.” Classed and gendered in complex ways, girth hides my pendulous breasts.

In the water, I am a salamander: I am mobile in ways I cannot be out of the water. Nothing straps me down, and I have the privilege of movement, sidewinder, undulating, rolling in the pleasure of my round strong limbs. In the water, pressure deforms. But even though this is a place of safety for my aching limbs, this is not a place free of the constraints of normativity: race, class, gender, and disability very much inform who has access to my place of freedom. Many people we have swum with so far in Salamander haven’t been in pools for a long time—this is an opening, a tentative step, often hard-won, and we shall understand it to be such. To see ourselves in the pool is a political action in its own right. So we shall swim together this summer, trying to be attentive to who is not in the circle with us, not able to float, deliciously, tenderly regarded.

**Neil Marcus, artist, Bay Area**

it is hard to get to the pool. I mean . . . it has been over the years.

but lately it’s been easier. it’s art. it’s performance. it’s . . . Showtime. . . .

water has always been my comfort. I fall into i.e. jump into it . . . totally.

it’s the only place. I can . . . fall. my body be itself. just who I am. me

Spastic . . . falling.

turning, twisting, writhing. it’s o.k. water. in water face down. holding

breath like an alligator/log. first thrashing as Tarzan gets me in his

grip. I thrash in resistance grappling with him. then I am subdued . . .  
 appearing lifeless. though not lifeless at all.  
 this leads me to theater. the stage. the fourth wall.  
 I feel also very at home in this world.  
 the fourth wall, to me is like . . . as I am . . . in water  
 another element is the audience. in the pool it is the camera. I know this  
 lens. I can work with it. it is capturing new images.  
 I am egged on. I know what I have to 'say' is important.  
 'ACTOR' is such a charged word. I guess it means being seen  
 and knowing how to relate to oneself onstage in front of an  
 audience. STAGES are magic places.

**Chia-Yi Seetoo, dance artist, Shanghai**

Not so much afraid of water now. Perhaps it's the warm weather, I actually wanted to swim. Not athletic swimming. Just to have fun. Both your bodies are warm. Soft, buoyant, tender, floating in the water. Tried to dive without goggles on. Then tried to open my eyes. Then tried to stay under water longer. Came up with ways to wave my limbs around, snake my torso. Neil can stay under water for so long. Amazing. I kept floating back up. What great fun to just float in a warm but not too hot late afternoon in Berkeley. For a moment we all became like kids. Just a moment of playfulness, being together, beyond words. Dance under water. Work with the buoyancy. Not about defying gravity, nor embracing gravity. Not about erecting or jumping higher, nor 'sinking' or 'releasing' into the floor, as we might say, when working to inverse a certain upheld aesthetic expectation—of dancing on the ground, dancing on the plane. But water! We are really dancing with it. We are all cuddled and surrounded by the water. We are working in another way. The water lifts our limbs and we succumb to this tender choreography. A tender adventure.

**Nor 'Ain Muhamad Nor, student in earth and environmental sciences,  
 University of Michigan**

Did i see you flinch as i danced through the water?  
 The clear blue body embracing every crevice of my skin from the bridge of  
 my nose to the folds of my elbows  
 i am touched, like i have never been touched before. My lover was never like that.



As i move my body with the water it's like  
 a dance routine, those graceful leaves of fire and gold  
 they don't stand a chance, not even on windy nights. My bones no longer  
 tremble like they always do, the veins in my arms no longer battle like  
 soldiers, at war.

i am not afraid of myself anymore.

The Sun is gentle with me. It caresses me through  
 the silence the way mothers caress their sleeping babies  
 on hospital beds, i am illuminated and rebirthed as the air that keeps me  
 afloat escapes my lungs as fast as you turn away.

I do not listen to dogs who parade their dirty bones, so do not tell me that  
 i can't do this.

The distance between the surface of the  
 water and the tips of my fingers spreads as i let  
 my body sink into peace. Dark locks of hair liberating upwards, denying the  
 existence of gravity.

I am the astronaut, yearning for soft landing,

i am the ripples, moving my surrounding,

I am water, fluid and enchanting.

Finally.

i am at the bottom, and my heart beats, slow. Here in the dark where light  
 cannot reach me, and noise cannot come for me, i become my own. The  
 water guards me

from the poisons of the norm, i am free. Let me stay here forever.

Let me breathe.

Let me breathe.

**Jasmine Pawlicki, Anishinaabe, singer, drum group leader, and  
 powwow dancer**

Because the Nibaanabeg and the Nibaanabekwewag live in another realm  
 hidden from our sight in the deep, dark waters, they are feared and rarely  
 mentioned. However, they are beings who share characteristics with us,  
 and they wish for the same recognition as those who dwell on land. Over  
 time, the Anishinaabeg began to forget to offer asemaa (tobacco) to the  
 manidoug (spirits/mysteries) who live underwater. In dibaajimowinan  
 (stories), the Nibaanabekwewag are temptresses, drawing unsuspecting

men down through four spiritual realms into the final realm of death. However, it is not out of malice that the Nibaanabekwewag draw these men to their world, but from a desire for these men to understand the underwater manidougs' need for asemaa and recognition from those in the land of the living.

### **Petra Kuppers**

Salamander falls into the fairy tales. My grandmother walked with me the stations of the cross, strewn across miles of farmland and woods. Near one of these stations was a small wood with a lake and a ruined boat. This, my grandmother told me, was Sleeping Beauty's castle. I believed this, and I still remember the ruined castle, one of many in the German countryside. Weeds wound through the stones, and the lake was calm, full of water roses. I bet a salamander or two made their home in it, too. Black and gold. In the dark green. Water I do not wish to swim in, scum on my arms and legs, the green sludge accumulating under my breasts. Fertile creatures, half soil, half water, plant animals, clinging to me. I am hugged by these sticky German waters, by the Michigan lakes in their own placid greenness, the sign of overfertilization, the mark of terraforming upon them.

If I were to find the salamander, he might speak of survivance in a colonized land, of habitat loss and of shrinking gene pools. But he is here, a web search assures me: farmers and urban dwellers have not yet succeeded in excavating each dark nook, the crevasses are still hidden, there is still a dark fetid smell of fecundity and of weeds wrapping themselves over stones and breaking their backs.

### **Denise Leto, poet, Bay Area**

The last salamander I saw in San Diego was not at the body of water I was speaking of when walking in the water there and here with the sense of mom in both places now that she is gone. It was not in the ocean. It was not in the uncanny valley. It was in the mountains. It was black with red spots. Or maybe I'm making up that it was black with red spots because I want to be inside the myth of all things wet. Landed, I think of all things wet. In the ocean, you don't think of wet/dry, hot/cold, alive/dead . . . you think of ocean. I think of not just the sentient being, "a salamander" but just the word too. Salamander. They show up in my poems. I'm not sure why.

It doesn't matter. There they are. I am now in a circle of salamanders. We write and write. They do not look like us. I am grateful that demarcations of wet/dry, land/water, beginning/end do not matter. They are both things at once as are we.

Later I dream: of a phosphorescent salamander singing.

Later still I dream: my friend who is dying sits cross-legged on the floor with a blanket wrapped around her but then the blanket is not a blanket it is an octopus.

I dream these in the same night. The family Salamandridae surround. They have something to do with writing in the near-amphibious rain.

### **Susan Nordmark, Bay Area writer**

Denise and I exchanged gazes, questions. We were otters, diving and twirling below the surface, bodies agile and lithe. The familiar unfamiliarity of each person new to another, her specific features, how her body and brain respond. How she is, is not like me. How I am, am not like her. How we have fish skin, seaweed hair, bright eyes, limbs, porpoise lungs.

It had been glorious. The next day my shoulders were hard and strong, happy I had pulled water. But gut, brain, lymph nodes cried with pain. Don't punish with chemical-infused pool water, they said. I had to think. Do I want to swim and take an immunosuppressive, blood-vessel-damaging drug afterward? No. A brain-swirling drug? Will they even work? No. Do I want goggles that vacuum-suck? Not if they crush my skull like a vise. Will all this be enough, is there an enough? Was this experiment valuable? Do I grieve? I grieve the loss of water.

### **Denise Leto, from *Lake as Body***

The salamander, black with red spots  
 climbed into her mouth with its pods,  
 its sticky pods and it pulled  
 at her lips: replenished, stricken.  
 Losing the larger frame of sound  
 she was unable to speak, her voice  
 seized in grainy rivulets, lesser dams.  
 The salamander swam beneath her tongue  
 it was gorgeous and frightened

or frightening—she wasn't certain.  
 It kept being a world in there  
 so she wouldn't swallow its slick  
 skin hiding in glottal stops.  
 It didn't pretend to be her primal self.  
 It didn't pretend to be anything  
 other than its own body.

**Chris Smit, director of DisArt, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

I am terrified by water . . . But I wasn't once. As a child I loved the water, I loved swimming with my father, I loved the floating and the use of my legs which during the day were not used because they were tucked into my  
     wheelchair.

In 1989, surgeons cut open my back and put in a Harrington rod . . .  
 Connected it to my spine. The rod took away my love for the water . . .  
     Simply  
 made me sink.

I haven't been in the water for swimming reasons in over two decades.  
 But the smiles, the bubbles, the movement that I see here in the  
     Salamander  
 images . . . They call to that child who used to love swimming. They awaken  
 a sort of mystery that I have not felt in many years . . . Can I find some sort of  
 rhythm in the water again? Can I pursue movement in a new way?

**Stephanie Heit, poet/dancer, Michigan**

We came here as a group and met up with some others who drove separately. There are limited spots in the parking area, but we are lucky and get the equivalent of the crib spot (there are no official ones) with close access to the short pathway to the small beach. This is our lake. Petra, Gwynneth, Beth, V, and another queer couple. Along with the growing number of people who connect with this 23-acre refuge of deep spring fed water with squishy life at the edges: cat tails, lily pads, minnows, frogs, pickerel fish, and the occasional water snake. It gets deep quickly. Sometimes we bring little rafts to take turns resting on while we hang out and tread water in the middle. We chat in a drifting way as our bodies move and are moved

by water. Our voices interrupted by the prehistoric sandhill crane call as a pair flap across the lake causing a caesura in conversation and movement. This is the above time. I dip below. Under there is water silence. A slur of sound that changes shapes, viscous and comforting. My brain slows a bit from my hypomanic mind, prickly as thoughts chafe against one another in quick succession (a common occurrence for my bipolar being in the summer season). The finite nature of my held breath brings my awareness into focus. I tune into my endpoints—fingers, toes, head, tail, and sense them lengthening beyond my skin in energetic shafts through the water. I'm able to rest as I share my weight with the lake and imagine my nervous system, that often feels raw, now lubricated and insulated by this lake. It is a relief to speak in cellular exchange, contact, gentle strokes especially as antidote to my current hypomanic language cascades. I know the others are still close by, and at one point, Petra and the camera witness me. Yet I experience this underwater space as private, solo, and at times, a dissolve of edges, blur of water bodies.

**Xavier Duacastilla Soler, disability activist, Barcelona**

Ser Salamandra, ese es la cuestión.

Bajo el agua todo se transforma.

En el agua el cuerpo recibe impulsos de vida, otra movilidad, otra manera de danzar la vida.

Being Salamander, that is the question.

Underwater everything changes.

In water the body receives life impulses, another mobility, another way of life dancing.<sup>24</sup>

**Petra Koppers**

*Salamander Swim off Barceloneta, Spain*

The water is turbid: this is near the surf, the most unstable part of the ocean for bipedals. This is near the danger zone for me, where I can't walk. I am watching Erik struggling into the water, watch Brook standing by, observing him but not helping needlessly: she knows what to do and when not to interfere, when help is unwarranted. But a Spanish man coming by does not know that: he shouts at her, chews her out for "leaving Erik alone."

Erik continues on this crawl into the water, and eventually, he is through the roughest surf, and I can extend my hand to him. We cradle each other in a mutual embrace. Brook joins us, and she holds Erik, too. We are connected, and drifting. For a while, there are short gasps and stiffness. This is not our natural medium. Then, it's becoming more peaceful. We turn away from the busy beach and toward the calm, quiet horizon.

Waves roll in, and lift us. We let them, eventually, as we do not fight any more. Lift, roil. Breathe. Skin to skin. We all have bared our chests: here, on the Barcelona city beach, lots of women of all ages are topless. We see few explicitly gender-queer people, though: between us, we have scars, tattoos, blue hair and other adornments that seem a bit unusual on this beach, but it's fine. Apart from the one guy, no one else hassles us.

The disability scene is fantastic: there is a station for disabled beach goers, and five buff beach guards hang out there and help disabled people. It seems quite the hook-up and hang-out place: in the time we are there, I see a bunch of gloriously naked people with unusual bodies, glistening with oil, boobs to the sky, with entourage, engaged in playful banter with a mixed-gender crowd. One of the crips, a guy with strong arms and no legs, can speak some English, and is helpful to us. This is pretty near heaven.

The guards lend me crutches with big plastic cups at the bottom, so I can easily get down the ramp that leads into the waves, and they keep my powerchair safe while I bob around in the sea. Later, they get Yulia and Erik off the sand with the big yellow crip beach mobile, cheerfully lifting disabled bodies, offering to hose us down, and to tie Yulia's shoes.

Cheers and laughter, warm skin pressing into mine in the gentle waters, an embrace of more than two, tender breasts leaning into another's soft tissue. I can see Erik's lips turn blue, eventually, and the color reminds us that no, this caress is not a homeground, there is danger here. We have to leave. We shout to one of the helpers on the beach, and he comes and helps us get out, get past the surf again.

The sea sucks at me one last time, clasps my feet and tries to hold me back, and I could let myself fall backward, backward, downward, so easily, to give myself to this gravity, to rest in this pressure so delicious to my tissues, to relieve the pain. But it's time to go. Crip time, in rhythm.

## Eco Soma Writing

When I think of Olimpias's moments of grace, what comes to me are small-time bubbles, crip time (which you will read much more about in the final chapter of this book), blossoming out of time's usual flow toward new futures. These grace notes are rarely in performance but are moments like this, suspended in the memory amber of writing: for example, a fellow Salamander swimmer and longtime Olimpias participant Katherine Mancuso, meeting me in another niche of the Bay Area's disability culture ecology, an AXIS dance company dance jam. I find myself moving with Katherine, and we embrace into contact weight sharing.

I do not know about Katherine's day, and we do not use words. But we sink onto each other's shoulders, a long-held embrace, a fleeting kiss to each other on the neck. Slowly, we glide over skin, our arms retreating over warm flesh. We find another hold, another point of sharing weight, of counterbalance. We offer anchor points to each other: at one point, my arms are outstretched, and Katherine's hands are hanging off mine; her body rocks in place beneath our hands, safely anchored between our palms and the ground below, teetering back and forth.

The shape we make feels like an egg in space, limbs tucked in, a rocking. A place of possibility and virtuality, emergence and transformation. There is little dynamic work here; this is not a riveting performance when watched with the judging instruments of audiencing. But it is a delicious place to be in: bones in secure contact, muscles warmly aligning, skins cool and soft against one another. I remember Chen's couch as I write these words: here are places we find support, sites that leach and influence, different kinds of skin, different kinds of livelinesses.

From here, Katherine and I can each make little starts into movements that might or might not be unfamiliar. We can also rest and prepare for what lies ahead, for the moment when we step out of this time bubble. These are the sites I wish to move from and toward: smooth space, deterritorialized zones, stimulating globes to reassemble and self-stimulate toward recognition and emergent new territorializations.

Nonhuman others appear in these pages—and whether they appear as metaphors or as experience remains an open-field question. How does it feel to be disabled and deemed nonhuman and expendable at many different historical

junctions? In the open writing, I shared my experience of being spat upon, and many experiences like this structure the lives of people whose voices, bodies, or minds are deemed other. Drawing upon the textual fields of salamanders or eggs offers new textual riches to a human biodiversity that has been painted into a medical corner. The scope of our politics is shaped by the social field that we have access to, and the lift over the uncut curb can be a step into unknown territory.

In Western nature writing, “nature” has so often stood for “nonhuman,” an other to be penetrated, conquered, awed by, or saved. In this ecopoetics project, the methods of textual creation and critical reflection focus on connectivity and interdependence, on multiple voices in vibrational touch with one another. Eco soma methods are here methods of multivoicing, of listening to the silences between voices and to the different textures and genres with which humans and nonhumans come to expression. “We are not self-contained in our energies”: we open up in a field of connection, into a watery realm in which any wave we make can be more consciously felt by others. The waters of pools, lakes, rivers, or seas help us understand what interdependence and connectivity can mean and how we affect and are affected by each other and the world. Who can swim in chlorinated water? What is the toxic load of this river? Where do plastic bags swirl in the surf? What is safe, for whom, in what contexts? The words that emerge, like this writing, can extend the reach of our ecopoetics, local specificity, and nonlocal readerly practice interweaving with each other, touching in the nonspace between words and skins.

In conclusion, I wish to offer three reasons for the creative-writing emphasis of this performance-visual-writing project and for its inclusion in a book on eco soma methods. How do eco soma methods mix and congeal with writing as art practice? The first reason brings me back to Lynn Keller’s perspective on the value of experimental writing in sustainability discourses and to the interdependent webbing that emerges when multiple genres and forms come into contact. Writing, performance, witnessing, extension: these are all moments of deterritorialization, each pointing in turn to a wider field, to meeting on horizons. Each clasps other sensations to itself, always in need of supplementation in a field that always remains open.

The second reason for writing also relates to sustainability and to material practices of making art. Writing can touch, and touch can change. So much of my attention lies within the moment when energy/sensation/intuition/feeling



reaches beyond one's own skin sack toward something other. The project writings and the photos interspersed throughout might offer this emergent quality for a reader, allowing them a way into a very specific/cognitive experience. A few of the texts will glide away without any mark being made. Other ones might well lodge themselves in a readerly hollow. What has remained with you, reading the pattern of texts above? Did you dream yourself into water, and if so, what emotional currency floated with you? The time of reading itself is a gift, an engagement offer, as is the time it takes to write these and the courage to publicly post them to the Salamander LISTSERV or our Facebook site.

The parameters of the Salamander project are easy to grasp: visit with each other, go swimming, dive under, use an underwater camera to take photos, tweak the colors a bit with Photoshop, enjoy your deformed beauty in alternative gravities, and write about your experiences if you want to. But even though the setup is easy, many won't engage in the work. Engaging physically in art practice is hard, and displaying oneself in a culture that fears, avoids, and hates disability is even harder. The Olimpias collective provides safety in numbers and shared experiences, fortifying against a harsh and dominant world. Writing functions as an extension, a pushing forward of our politics and our diverse perspectives, sounds, voices, and stories. We can share ourselves beyond the local.<sup>25</sup>

I am writing a first draft of this chapter in summer 2019, and the latest Salamander work is a video, in line with the discussions in chapter 2: a way for a local, site-specific project to travel and to do so without the same kind of pressure that air travel would exert both on my disabled body and on our wider ecosystem. In 2018 I received a commission to mount a Salamander exhibit as part of an international disability culture exhibit in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Gwynneth VanLaven, a disabled photographer and videographer who had also swum in our Salamanders, assembled a nine-minute video loop of still images and snippets of our writings.<sup>26</sup>

In 2019 I led a large group of theater scholars in a keynote workshop for the Canadian Theatre Studies Association in the blue water of the University of British Columbia's new Aquatic Center. Inviting us to do this offered a break with the sense of "normal" relative locations for scholarly and performance-based knowledge creation in "business-as-usual" White settler-framed conferences. The Salamander workshop for disabled and nondisabled participants tried to respectfully acknowledge Indigenous activists at that conference, artists who shared the long history of water/land protocols and actions in the region.



Figure 16. A number of people in sunny dress sit and lie on a lichen-encrusted rock, by the Swedish North Sea on an island with a hot-water pool. Two empty wheelchairs are behind the prone figures. The island is usually only open to disabled people, and for this Salamander promenade performance, audiences were invited to drift around the island to various stations at which Danskompaniet Spinn performed small dances before people who brought bathing suits joined us in the hot-water pool for a water performance. Lilla Amundöns Handikappbad, 2016, part of my artist-in-residence visit at Dansbyrån through the Konstnärnsnämndens Internationella Dansresidensprogram in Gothenburg. Photograph by the author.

Other people have asked me for permission to run their own Salamander sessions: go for it. Our little score has traveled far and wide. It has connected many crip-focused communities. This practice isn't copyrighted or "owned" as an art object. Go swimming, or go socialize in other ways that are accessible and safe for you (and I am revising this chapter during the Covid pandemic in 2020, aware of the physical costs and pain that results from losing access to

my warm-water therapy pool). See what intimacy edge spaces create; see how you can play with risk and hate, with love and challenge. Try to pay attention to what rituals, protocols, orderings, and understandings undergird the medium you are immersing yourself in.

In and out of the water, the project travels on via art world waves as well as more liquid formats, and the triad of writing, experiencing, and mediation fuel the circuit.

And this brings me to the third reason for writing's presence in the project, back to a more intimate moment. When I cannot lead a wet Salamander workshop, we do dry ones, and these contain freewriting or spontaneous audio description in response to the images that emerge from the project. Really seeing others (either in visual practice or through the audio ekphrastic translations),<sup>27</sup> sensing them embedded in their environment, describing them and the different waters that surround them, listening to description, witnessing the differences with which we apprehend our world, writing again: these practices allow us to vicariously experience watery suspension and the life-death membrane that we touch when we witness people deformed by water, outside, in elemental engagement. We see each other in the matrix of our world—in the water, in the light, and not as individual skin sacks—we float. I believe that this practice can offer conspiratorial support to Mia Mingus's call for new kinds of disability activism: "I want us to tap into the transformative powers of disability, instead of only gaining access to the current system. . . . We don't simply want to join the ranks of the privileged, we want to challenge and dismantle these ranks and question why some people are consistently at the bottom" (2017, online talk). What is in the water, what is in the air, what presses on the land, on our bones, in our blood? Who is "our" and "we" here? What old stories and new toxic sites, or what inhumanities and countering myths become active when people watch and describe others in magic water realms? There is interaction, a way in which your memory of water, whatever it means to you, becomes activated by the images we share: a call and response, an eco soma widening, opening, listening.

As you read in the second chapter, audio description is a disability culture method of sharing artwork, and in disability culture circles many people recognize that this practice has a lot of creative potential. The act of describing slows down viewing, allowing us to rest with a visual image and to see what happens with it when we take time. When we engage in audio description in the round, everybody one by one adding a line to the description of an image, we look

closely at images of the world and acknowledge the differences in the room with us as well as the differences around us in the world: differences in sensory access but also differences in cognitive processing, differences in memories and stories, differences in how we all process our world. And there are differences over time: the effect of humans on nonhuman spaces; the growth of trees; the impact of terraforming on environments; and the changing color, feel, and translucency of different waters in different seasons.

Below is an example of how the act of image description can shift perspectives on seeing and knowing. It is a meditation by Beth Currans, a women's and gender studies professor at Eastern Michigan University, who also swam and dove into the waters with us. Currans writes about the way that descriptions of the unclear, unbounded underwater images can activate thoughts on how we categorize and how we communicate. Currans wrote this on the Salamander LISTSERV, where participants posted observations, freewrites, and descriptions of circulating images:

Two people underwater, one marked as male by his beard, one ungendered by the water's visual distortion. Bubbles glisten in the background and create bluish, blurry spots between their faces and the camera/viewer. Reflections from the sun tattoo his arm as it reaches behind him, separating their faces. Their faces are hard to access. Facial expressions are unclear. Eye contact not possible. The visual distortion means I can't "know" them.

The distortion means that the water, the sun, the bubbles are as essential to the image as their faces. Such is life. Context always affects how we see. Barriers of various sorts partially block our vision, literally and figurative. Our expectations shape what we see. Our own vantage brings some elements to the forefront, while others become peripheral.

Even when we pull back to see as much as we can, we must still make decisions. To focus on the bubbles in the background, or our own obsessions that shape how we see? To explore the barriers that prevent us from fully seeing their faces? To focus on how the sunlight emphasizes his arm, the play of light, the bubbles?

Viewing and analyzing is a dance, a poetic movement among the different facets of an image or idea. Deep focus on a detail provides one type of knowledge; focusing on barriers to our view provides another. A macro-view provides an overview, but the details get lost. Tracking personal re-

sponses allows access to affective registers. Sometimes the need to find out more is overpowering: who are these people and why are they under water? What do the seemingly serene looks on their faces mean to them? Who are they? Other times, focusing on the play of light and bubbles allows a different register of engagement, something playful, watery, warm. (Currans, Salamander LISTSERV, cited with permission)

Community writing, audio description, and ekphrastic freewrites all engage Lynn Keller's vision of a diverse field, in real contact, engaged in a project of hope, and also engage Gumbs's vision of a new literary practice that combines contact with divination, a casting into (hopeful) futures. These particular writing processes might help us shift the cultural pain of disability toward understanding how we all, disabled or not, approach being surrounded and supported, being in an environment and being the environment. Eco soma methods allow us to make sense of these sensations. Amassed writing at the site of sensation allows for shifts, for re-feeling one's own affect toward water, words, and images. We can glimpse that things might be otherwise and that our relations to other bodies and to our shared environment might not be stable. This is what I take from bree gant's water healing rituals, *The Children's* catastrophe, and the *Dirty River Girl* and its somatic experiencing: things change. Science fiction, fantasy, and horror scenarios that surround us are also rehearsal sites for changing grounds. This, to me, is the basis of eco soma methods: undoing certainty, undoing boundaries, shifting into permeability.

Eco soma work imagines new possibilities on the horizon. Alexis Pauline Gumbs ends her "Archive of Ocean" section with the following passage, which also leans into Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. I wish to respectfully cite it as the outro to my chapter and as a release, an assurance, and a promise that calls wayfarer and ancestors into the stream of our labor toward honoring all our survival:

Here the water is not waiting to waste you. here the sun is not stripping your skin. this is the dark water of renewal. offering only one message: begin.  
(2018, 131)



# Crip Time, Rhythms, and Slow Rays

SPECULATIVE  
EMBODIMENT

The rhythm of in/visibility is cut time: phantasmatic interruptions and fascinations. Stories are propelled by this formation of inhabitable temporal breaks; they are driven by the time they inhabit, violently reproducing, iconizing, improvising themselves.

—*Fred Moten, In the Break*

I, we, need to imagine crip futures because disabled people are continually being written out of the future, rendered as the sign of the future no one wants. This erasure is not mere metaphor. Disabled people—particularly those with developmental and psychiatric impairments, those who are poor, gender-deviant, and/or people of color, those who need atypical forms of assistance to survive—have faced sterilization, segregation, and institutionalization; denial of equitable education, health care and social services; violence and abuse; and the withholding of the rights of citizenship. Too many of these practices continue, and each of them has greatly limited, and often literally shortened, the futures of disabled people. It is my loss, our loss, not to take care of, embrace, and desire all of us. We must begin to anticipate presents and to imagine futures that include all of us. We must explore disability in time.

—*Alison Kafer, Feminist Queer Crip*

This chapter delves into another wrinkle of eco soma, of our embodiment's experience in contact and in relation, in connection with others and in environments. The previous chapters invited you to coexperience, in my writing and in your reading, somatic echoes of being-with, of sensing ourselves in edge zones where otherness and self meet on edgy horizons. Fantasy is a core component of these encounters: the desires and fears we (however the multiple I's in this "we" are positioned) have of one another and of our world translate directly into the somatic experience.

You have already been together with me at the bottom of our breaths, under pressure deep in the water, dreaming of salamander touch. In this chapter, I push the fantastical even further outward, into speculative embodiment, space travel, escape trajectories, and plant humans. I discuss Black Lives Matter's activist street poetics, with a focus on breathing, and on life and death in a White supremacist world. But let's start on the ground, in the studio.

### **Into Fantasy: Expressive Objects in Turtle Disco**

Puppetry worlds allow embodied artists to reach beyond their own skin sacks, beyond the limits of their human bodies, and beyond the limits of our given and experienced environment. During the time I spent writing this book, this concern, moving beyond skin limits, became very vivid to me in my own practice, and so I will spend some time exploring an eco soma of object/puppetry theater.

Once a week, a number of local artists meet in Turtle Disco, my home in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in a repurposed living room that faces the street. It is a somatic writing studio I co-create with my wife and creative partner, Stephanie Heit, a dancer and writer. She and I both identify as disabled: I am a wheelchair user; Stephanie is bipolar and lives with brain injury. Most of the people who come to Turtle Disco likewise identify as disabled and as queer. Our Turtle Disco practice is purposefully local. For me it is the pendant of my ongoing and long-standing wider international practice. As I am thinking about sustainability in terms of my own art/life practice, my aging, and in terms of global travel, Turtle Disco and its local web follows the impetus given by feminist science writer Donna Haraway, who already appeared in this book in chapter 1. In the last chapter of her influential book *Staying with the Trouble*, she discusses communal storytelling as a tool for imagining new futures. She focuses on a person in a commune, Camille, a fictional entity of the Children of the Compost, a collaborative web of speculative narratives. Camille is genetically bonded to monarch butterflies in an effort to save them from extinction, and readers follow five generations of Camilles and their changing physicalities and adaptive embedments.

Camille came into being at a moment of an unexpected but powerful, interlaced, planetwide eruption of numerous communities of a few hundred people each, who felt moved to migrate to ruined places and work with



human and nonhuman partners to heal these places, building networks, pathways, nodes, and webs of and for a newly habitable world. (2016, 137)

Turtle Disco sees itself in this (future) lineage: local, sustainable, aware of the histories of extraction, exclusion, and colonial violence in our place; with neighbors coming together, engaging in art/life practice to sustain ourselves as a chosen web. In our practices, Turtle Disco rehearses for Haraway's small cooperatives, small communities, healing and recharging caves. Turtle Disco imagines itself as health/care/performance/practice to hold ourselves, non-human others, and the world to new forms of cohabitation.<sup>1</sup>

In one of our practices, object theater work and shared animacy, honoring life and story everywhere, becomes very resonant. In this chapter, I use this example to move (or, as you will see, creep) my eco soma argument into the speculative mode and into genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

My own disability manifests itself primarily through chronic pain. In one of our weekly sessions, "Contemplative Dance and Writing," led by Stephanie, individual movement and meditation are followed by an Open Space segment. In this segment of the practice, people can either choose to participate and engage each other or to witness from the side. I often wish to participate but find my limbs frozen by pain. To get off my cushion station and move into the circle can be too hard. Even though Stephanie and I have installed a grab bar on the wall near my nesting spot, I sometimes cannot easily rise up. So, one practice I engage in is draping a soft, fluffy blanket (that is part of my nesting station) over me. Then I animate it like a puppet. I creep and slide slowly into the middle of the room, unable to see where I am going, but slowly and in keeping with my pain rhythm: a pink plush monster puppet, a blob, an amoeba, unconcerned with high kicks or wide reaches but rippling with sensitive edges and fringes, sliding and pooling across the wood floor.

As you read this, feel your sensations. What are you sitting on? What is it made of? How did it come to this place? What is your relation to it—and how are you defining "relation" here? What stories does the material tell you when you use your own sensitive fringes, your fingertips (maybe your lips) to touch it? How does it feel to contort your own body into new configurations, to create new relations with what is familiar to you? Enjoy the stretch. Remember this information as you move forward—still sitting on and with cohabitant objects.

Eventually, in Turtle Disco, my blanketed body encounters something:

maybe someone is reaching out to me, or there's a foot in my trajectory. At this point, the blanket/my body become a unit. The new assemblage *becomes* puppet: nonfacial, sensing in tactile ways, with readable and relatable emotions and narratives. We retreat, and we foray. A play of rhythm might happen, with a flap of the blanket chiming with moving fingers, or a segment of cloth mirroring the movement of other dancers in the space. Everybody in the space is creator and audience alike, entering into these hybrid fantasy worlds as they wish to.

In my reading of what is going on, we, the people in the room, play like children. We are able to animate everything around us—and we also play like adults, able to connect our imagination with strata of knowledges we have of the objects we use as somatic extensions. Shells hold memories of summer holidays that become entwined with newer knowledges of the environmental costs of air travel. “Made in China” wind-up toys bop rhythmical on the wooden floor, but as we finger them, labor conditions, plastic pollution, and supply lines enter the dance, too.<sup>2</sup> There's a tiny plastic whale I play with, touching its round surfaces. And while I hold the little whale in my hand, we spontaneously make sounds in the studio, chirping and humming in call and response, slowing and booming. Soon, my improvising bodymind weaves into the dance the effects of sonar and seismic blasting on whale life and on whale pods.

This kind of entangled object theater stands in complex relation to the authenticity of the performing human body, the energetics of presence that an actor brings to a performance environment. This is often a topic of discussion when disabled theater makers begin to explore how to bring their impairments into the (visual) conversation: how their disability can shape aesthetics. As Emma Fisher found out in her interviews with disabled puppeteers, when they created puppets that spoke to their own embodiment:

many puppets were animal/human hybrids, including a fish and a caterpillar, each with a human face. These puppets seemed to be truer representations of how we viewed ourselves than had we chosen to use figurative puppets designed to mimic our human bodies. (2017, 364–65)

Nonrealist representations that take flight from recognizable human figures and bodily configurations can allow for deep expressive potential. Instead of mimicry, we find other ways of creating relationality and of infusing objects with emotions and interactivity. This is another facet of eco soma imagination



Figure 17. A close-up of participants in Turtle Disco play. Small plastic figures of dragons climb a pink-socked foot. Two arms with tattoos of landscapes and seedlings help the dragons climb. Photograph by the author, 2019.

at play: an extending of one's skin envelope into expressive collaboration with materials, enacting and literalizing the poetics of new materialist perspectives on material's agency. In my manipulation of the blanket, for instance, the blanket also speaks back to me. I am aware of its materiality: an oil-based process creates the fluffy, soft, and easily washable fleece blankets we are using, and I am aware of the fiber shedding that accompanies these materials and contaminates

our waterways.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, when I am under it, deep into performance trance, I imagine the tiny marine creatures that died long ago, and I feel the pressure of the earth before transforming into oil, buried under strata of rock and sand.<sup>4</sup>

In the Turtle Disco sessions, other objects become animate, too. In our dances, we involve small figurines that inhabit Turtle Disco's window ledges: wind-up toys from around the world, leaf skeletons from the garden, and tiny plastic sharks and dragons. One by one, depending on mood and session, these become part of the dance, amplifying or initiating movement from crippled, painful bodyminds. The objects can carry a lot: if someone is not feeling up to eye contact, or is very tired, or wants to act out some angry scene without endangering the rest of the living actants, these objects help us.

In these research practices in Turtle Disco, becoming with other, becoming fictional, and becoming (to link again back to Emma Fisher's practice) a disabled caterpillar are all avenues for self-expression and modes of connectivity. Time, space, and bodies shift under pressure in many different ways.

In this chapter, I investigate the use of fantastical genre narratives in a range of forms: a shadow puppet theater around mental health; a Butoh performance film about plant/human cohabitation; a poetry segment about rays, biomatter, and language; and connections between Black Lives Matter's social media labor and a dance video focused on Antoine Hunter.

### **Nonrealist Embodiment: Playing Monsters**

Let's dive even further into surrealism and into minor-key strangeness. In this section, I put fictionalized and yet still somatically available bodies into genre play. I am visiting with a small community-based theater—a boxed space complete with velvet mini-curtains, props flying in on sticks, and other elements of traditional European puppetry shows.

On the first Friday of each month, my small home city of Ypsilanti, Michigan, shares community music, gallery exhibits, and shows in the downtown area. In July 2017, one of these shows was part of a run of *True Stories of 1 in 4*, a partnership between a local small experimental puppet theater—the Dreamland Theater—and the Full Circle Community Center, a downtown Ypsilanti drop-in center for people living with mental illness. The title of the show pointed to the incidence of mental health difference in the general population, and the evening used various storytelling techniques to access stories of people with

significant mental health differences. For this show, interviewers for the project had visited Full Circle and interviewed people there to reshape their participant narratives as puppet sketches.

As part of my preparations for this writing, I also visited this drop-in center, which is operated by Washtenaw County and open to all who identify with mental health issues, whether with a case worker or not (in the U.S. context, this is an important marker, as it involves issues of insurance coverage and disability benefit—some drop-in centers are only open to people with a case worker).

When I arrived, the person who opened the door for me was an elder Black man who clearly had taken on the role of greeter. He offered me friendly entry into the community center proper: there was a long corridor, various rooms (some with art material stashed away in boxes, some with games), including one TV room. I was there on a cool morning, and few community members were about. Most were men, mainly elderly, and they seemed to be in the middle of a comfortable mid-morning snooze. The ones awake, as well as two women, greeted me happily and chatted with me about the offerings and, in general terms, about the collaboration with the puppeteers—one of many local art groups and wellness groups that comes by and offers their services.

I left with only a superficial sense of it all, as I didn't feel it would be ethical to disturb people too much to find out more, drill down about working processes, or just hang out like a barely embedded anthropologist. But I also got a friendly vibe and a sense of how the interviewers likely went about their project.

The puppeteer organizers described their project's intention as raising awareness of a community that is often ostracized due to social stigma. I was interested to see how storytelling and the different temporalities and affect structures of mental health difference would leave traces in the modes of delivery, in the way a narrative gets told.

The performance that night in the Dreamland Theater had a large audience. I had come with a group of friends: gender and disability scholars from local universities as well as local disability artists, many of whom have lived experiences of mental health difference. Many of us expected what I would call the most common experience of community theater: self-witnessing, fairly linear stories of challenge and survival. Instead, what we experienced that night thoughtfully engaged the multiplicity of storytelling and created other possibilities for the telling of disabled lives, shifting environments and humanity into newly scaled patterns and into new animacies.

The third piece of the evening, “The Language of Time,” was the most surreal and experimental one, mixing the puppeteer’s aesthetic of Cthulhu-like monsters with a crip time narrative of nonlinear sensory immediacy. Those two complexes warrant unwrapping: Cthulhu and crip time.

Cthulhu is a cosmic monster created by U.S. writer H. P. Lovecraft and first appeared in the short story “The Call of Cthulhu,” published in the American pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in 1928. He is part of a strange cosmology, usually referred to as Mythos, in which ancient alien gods bring interdimensional madness to Earth: humans are strangely drawn to this way out of human worlds but go mad when they open up portals for Cthulhu.

Ever since Lovecraft first wrote about this entity, other authors and artists have taken up Mythos figures—something about this particular flavor of speculative nonhuman otherness has proven remarkably seductive over the years, even though Lovecraft and many of his American Gothic stories are overtly racist and sexist. But Lovecraft’s fear of otherness is so baroque and intense that many people of color, women, and others who have experienced marginalization pick up figures of the Mythos and play with them: they are ripe for reclamation (and also out of copyright).<sup>5</sup>

Even those who do not read much speculative fiction might, for instance, be familiar with the storylines of Guillermo del Toro in films like *Hellboy* and *Pacific Rim*, all founded in Lovecraftian Mythos. Richard Stanley’s *Color out of Space* (2019) is a direct adaptation of one of Lovecraft’s short stories and features the transformation of a rural locale into voracious and yet seductively beautiful animal-plant-alien hybrids.

In Lovecraftian worlds, madness is not redemptive, nor does it offer new insights into the here and now: the cosmic madness is not some romantic “madness as seer” thing. And yet, Cthulhu madness is a form of escape, a response to the sudden opening of confining reality toward something else.<sup>6</sup> In Mythos stories, readers find dimensions that are overwhelming, fever or drug dreams, grandiose and colorful, swirling and moving at interstellar speed.

Crip time, on the other hand, is a phenomenon originating from disability culture.<sup>7</sup> It emerged as a term in line with many other nonmodernist, nondominant forms of temporality.

In the crip time lineage I cite when tracking down a print origin, I source the term to Anne McDonald, a nonspeaking disabled woman who used facilitated communication (a communication board) to get out of a nursing home, eventu-



ally earn a degree, and become a leading part of the Australian disability culture scene. She writes about crip time (and I cite her at length here, as she is often condemned to shorthand in the citational politics of academic literature—and the very act of coming to the page is something to be honored):

I live by a different time to you.

I do not refer to the usual differences in the way we all experience time. We all know that time speeds by when you have nothing to do; time hangs heavy when you think you could have something to do if people re-ordered their timetables. So tempting is the long sleep in, so wearing the long afternoon left unattended. The time my caregivers spend loitering is negligible, the time I spend waiting is interminable. One's perception of time is dependent on one's dependency.

But my time is different from yours in a more important way. Imagine a world twenty times slower than this—a world where cars travelled at three miles an hour, lifesavers took an hour to chew, a glass of water half an hour to drink. Pissing would take quarter of an hour, lovemaking longer than it does now (which might be a good thing).

I live life in slow motion. The world I live in is one where my thoughts are as quick as anyone's, my movements are weak and erratic, and my talk is slower than a snail in quicksand. I have cerebral palsy, I can't walk or talk, I use an alphabet board, and I communicate at the rate of 450 words an hour compared to your 150 words in a minute—twenty times as slow. A slow world would be my heaven. I am forced to live in your world, a fast hard one. If slow rays flew from me I would be able to live in this world. I need to speed up, or you need to slow down.<sup>8</sup>

This is a science fiction story all of its own and an affecting one: “Imagine a world . . .” I imagine that those of you who have never read her work before might gulp or have some other visceral response to this description of a life world. McDonald's words offer those of us not in her time signature a glimpse of a different world. She uses science fiction imagery to imagine shifting her environment to fit her embodiment: eco soma “slow rays.” She might shift our world, beam us like a crip Doctor Who into new time-space continuums. “Slow rays” do not really sound like “permission.” Instead, they offer narrative possibilities of violent transformation. Science fiction movies rarely use rays in a consent-based environment. Rays also speak to radiation, creepingly slow

transformations at the level of nuclei, transforming and (potentially) destroying tissues from within.

I appreciate this agency fantasy image complex hidden in her quote, this metaphor-rich press on the passivity and caught-ness that is very much her fate in a fast-paced world.

Crip time has become a generative principle for many who think about nonnormative temporalities, to the point where the term has taken off from its grounding in a particular woman's disabled specificity toward much more generalized theorizations. I shift the concept back to McDonald's "slip into this world" invitation, toward embodiment and enmindment, the specific and non-general ways of being that disabled people bring to the world.

I invite you to think about your own locatedness again, this time your locatedness *in time*: What kinds of different temporalities can you name? Which ones are you familiar with? Do they offer overt or covert critiques to power relations?

Let's go back to the Dreamland Theater. So how did Cthulhu's otherworld and crip time's immersive potential operate together in this puppet show? I never met the woman whose narrative was shared here, but community members described her as someone with traumatic brain injury, telling a dense story of ant poison, falling down stairs, potential parental abuse, exclusionary experiences at school, and frightening encounters with doctors.

The only spoken words of the puppet sequence are: "You can read and write, why can't you do math?," spoken as a teacher monster looms over four pupils at a school desk. Doctors' offices and other institutional settings complete the scenarios. Throughout the wordless show, animal/human/monsters appear on the backlit screen, shift in scale as they move farther away from the light, then loom and vanish.

Who are monsters? Who are helpers? At one point, the heroine, a small figure with flowing hair and multiple eyes, and an ant take up about equal space on the screen. A bottle labeled ant poison hovers threateningly over both of them. Environment and self-experience shift in relation to one another.

Halfway through the puppet show, a dragon/snake appears, its intentions unclear, but large, detailed, beautiful, with cut-outs and intricate framing: a rest for the eye rather than a narrative motor. In another moment, the heroine is lost in a puzzle-piece forest, something that to members of disability culture



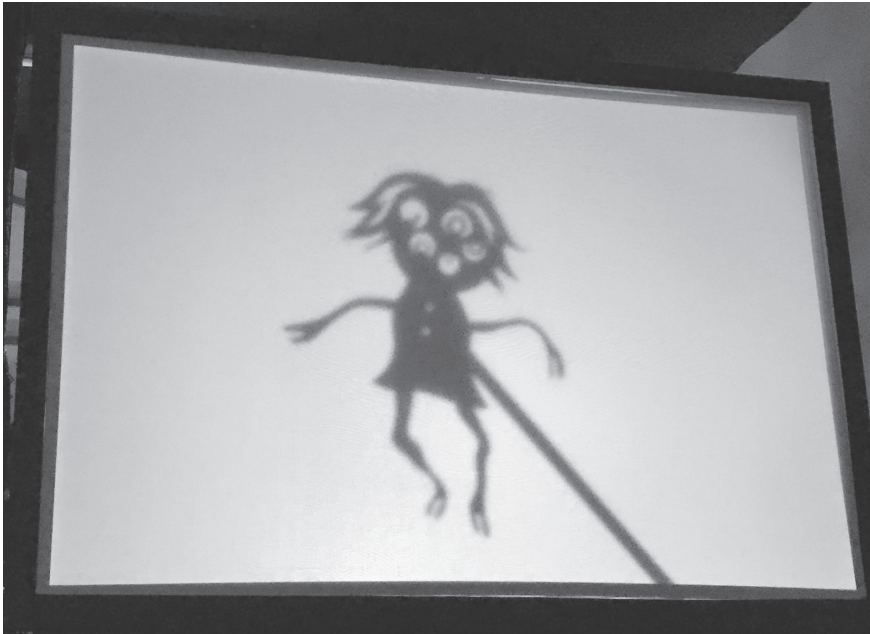


Figure 18. A shadow puppet of a small figure with feminine clothing, multiple eyes, wild hair, bifurcated hands and feet, held on a stick behind a puppet theater screen. I call her the Little Cthulhu Girl. *True Stories of 1 in 4* performance, Dreamland Theater, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 2017. Photograph by the author.

worlds might read like a comment on Autism Speaks iconography of missing puzzle pieces, which see autistics as damaged, with missing pieces (a rhetorical move disability culture activists condemn as hate speech): the figure is caught in normative puzzle worlds, without a fit, imprisoned, immobile.

Pigs with translucent ears/potential wings accompany the emergence of Cthulhu: a big-headed creature with multiple eyes and octopus tentacles, quite recognizable to genre fans of Lovecraftian bends. The monster holds a big hammer and threatens the heroine figure, who runs, following the pigs, across the screen. But escape is at hand. The pigs and the heroine run into a flying saucer spaceship and take off. As the spaceship gets smaller (closer to the light), a new figure appears: a stylized earth. Soon, the image shifts again, and the earth becomes an Escher-like tapestry of ant forms, circling us back to the beginning of the narrative.

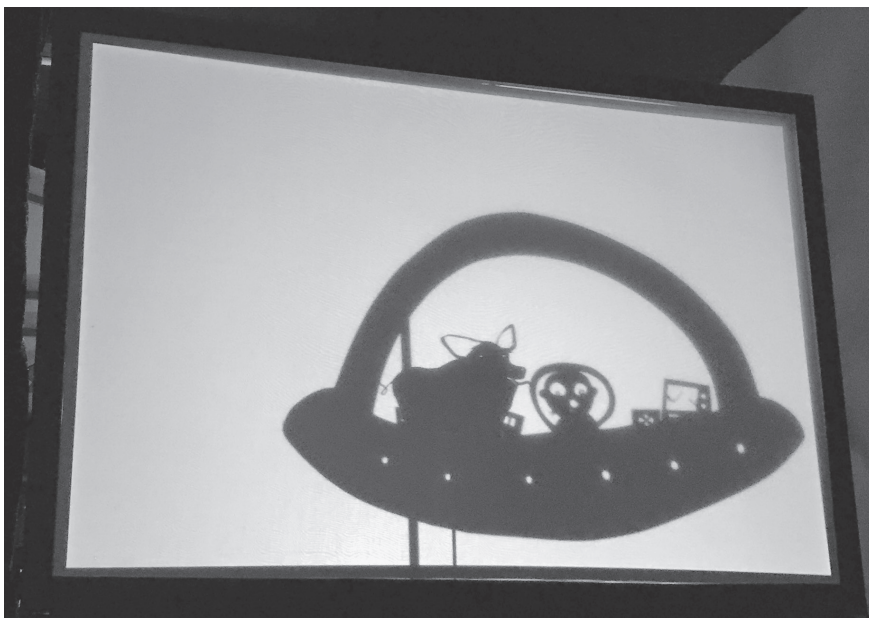


Figure 19. Two shadow puppets: one a (previously flying) pig, now safely inside the second puppet, a starship with a small humanoid figure in an astronaut helmet. The two are shipmates now and can safely escape. *True Stories of 1 in 4* performance, Dreamland Theater, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 2017. Photograph by the author.

Patrick Elkins, the puppeteer, described to me his experiences working with the woman's narrative—how he first heard the interview about her life and how he was captivated by the sense of time developed in the narrative outside of “normal” time frames.

He didn't use the expression “crip time,” but when I offered it, he found the concept a fitting one: traumatic brain injury and mental health difference as a different form of living in time, telling stories, sharing circles and lines. He also told me that he met the drop-in center user later again after working on her story and that she had seen his adaptation of her story and enjoyed the silhouette narration.

Puppet work is magic work: it transforms this world into forms of abstraction. Objects take on their own power, and a materialist presence spins on in its own storytelling power. When I watched “The Language of Time,” I did not



Figure 20. Puppet constructor Patrick Elkins, a White man with a long beard and a cap, smiles as he shows a puppet—with long tentacles, multiple eyes, and a fanged laughing mouth—holding a hammer on the stage action side of the projection screen. *True Stories of 1 in 4* performance, Dreamland Theater, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 2017. Photograph by the author.

see a woman's authentic experience, narrated in realist terms and conventional temporal pacing and then transformed more or less faithfully into shadow puppets before being received by me with my mind full of Cthulhu and crip time. To employ this method of engaging the performance piece, I would have had to invite this woman to tell her story of injury and poisoning again. I know from personal experience that many disabled people find this a burden, a ballast, a retraumatizing, even if they feel themselves forced internally to tell it all again and again. So instead I use a writerly imagination's tools as methodological interventions grounded in disability culture ethics.

Things threw shadows, and objects took on life: their own vibrant matter but also the projections they reflected back. Papers cut intricately into shape interacted with light and set off associations. Neurons fired. Coherences emerged, nexuses of meaning, an escape narrative, a trajectory away from the certainties of this world. There might be starships. There might be pig helpers. There might be stars.

There are disabled people in (the) future(s). There are disabled people in space.<sup>9</sup> This is the delicious narrative I choose to take away from this show and from this particular engagement of puppetry with disability. Cthulhu is up for crip reclamation. In the weft spun in the Dreamland Theater as well as my own Turtle Disco engagements with nonrealist embodiment and enmindment, disability becomes a motor. Disability culture ways of telling stories shift across bodyminds toward objects and toward audiences, pushing, pulling, and ultimately shifting disability's signficatory field. In these eco soma encounters, relations between worlds, time, and bodyminds shift and open up: art sends out rays.

I want to trace the slowness of this offering as a way into sense-sharing at work in other contemporary speculative texts also concerned with centering socially denigrated forms of embodiment by opening up new agencies in leaky, contagiously swinging temporalities.

Let's track how artists use fantasies of slowness and nonhuman time to open into new worlds and into sensoria that are deliberately marked as nonordinary, whether through bodily difference, drug use, environmental change, housed/unhoused status, or animal/human crossings (or all of the above). The examples I discuss in the next sections are a fifteen-minute dance film created by White disabled dance artists from Portland, Oregon; a sci-fi poetic sequence by Korean American poet Sueyuen Juliette Lee; and a discussion of Afrofuturist aesthetics, Black Lives Matter, and a dance video set in the streets of San Francisco with Deaf African American dancer Antoine Hunter. In these texts, engagement bends into somatic configuration, and communication happens at the level of strata, matter infiltrating bodyminds in temporal shifts.

### **Waking the Green Sound: Interdependencies**

*Waking the Green Sound: A Dancefilm for the Trees* was created in 2016 by Wobbly Dance Company, a company led by Yulia Arakelyan and Erik Ferguson in Portland, Oregon.<sup>10</sup> The film was developed with other Butoh artists (i.e.,

artists engaged in a Japanese-initiated international movement vocabulary of transformation). Butoh is a transnational movement originating in the World War II period and the devastation of Hiroshima. Its intense physical exertion and exteriorizations of affect have become a projection surface for many critics interested in the political power of human performance intensity.<sup>11</sup>

The film begins as the camera peers into a private world, beginning with an overhead perspective on straw hats, moving to reveal laced, gloved hands holding a yellow tea pot, resting on three sets of knees, which are in turn kneeling on a leaf-strewn ground. I am at some kind of (mad) hatter tea party, fueled by the ingestion of plants.<sup>12</sup>

A sideview close-up shows three pale creatures (Yulia Arakelyan, Erik Ferguson, and guest dancer Grant Miller), all with unusual limb configurations and ways of moving, carefully wrapped in lace and flowery cotton (see Plate 13). Two of the figures connote maleness, one femaleness, although all wear feminine-coded clothing and makeup that feel like costumes or masks (breast scars later on in the movie vibrate any binaries into trans-territory).<sup>13</sup> Their deliberate, dancerly movement vocabulary consists of hand twitches, yawns, eye contacts, necks flaring out to take in air.

The effort of breathing is visible. Breathing and its hindrances were some of the core issues that shaped the film's emergence. Dancer and Wobbly Dance codirector Erik Ferguson narrates how physical shape, the precarious effort of breathing, opened up a path to explore dance video. For the company, shifting from live performance to video was a move into more accessible territory, after a residency where the dancers were faced with dancerly conditions that stretched the "limits of breathing and certain aspects of our physicality. After that, Yulia was looking for a way to control the time duration, and for the freedom to go back and refine things without dangerous physical exertion" (Campbell 2015).

Video can offer this freedom, a space to breathe. It allows these dancers to be physically safe and to open outward, playing on the limits of outside and inside in gorgeous outdoor scenes. The camera shows the breathing action in this video, a physiological and autonomic action that flares cobralike around Yulia Arakelyan's neck.

That is one of the benefits of screen dance for performers. But what about audiences, and witnesses of screen dance? Arakelyan's breath gathers additional signifiers in the slowness of its unfolding. There is the intertextual play that is



Figure 21. In this video still, three heads with shorn hair in white crumbly makeup, mouths open, breathe or scream, full of intensity and need. A nose ring, teeth, cave mouths lined in pink. *Waking the Green Sound*, 2015.

part of watching popular culture on screens: slow deep breaths often signify deep emotional content in movies.

In dance studies, the term “kinesthetic empathy” has currency: the way that audiences can feel an “alike-ness” with moving others that can lead to physiological and/or emotional attunement. That argument, based on the grounds of physiological sameness, falls down for me as soon as I think about racist, ableist, misogynist, classist, or transphobic references in film and live performance: it’s always been much too easy to discard empathy for bigotry.<sup>14</sup> Still, dance studies’ desire-line toward otherness swings in my witnessing of Arakelyan’s breathing. Different fields touch, linked in the somatic act of taking breath, making breath’s commonly unconscious presence experiential. This is an eco soma moment for me: the ambivalent swing/distance that dance film offers to me as a moving, feeling viewer, caught by rhythm but on the other side of a screen, eyes lost in a two-dimensional representation.

The slow mesmerizing work of the video does not heal crip precarity.<sup>15</sup> But



the connections between technological intervention, plants, and the surfaces and interiors of bodies align in a new configuration in a form of interdependent healing ritual, “to learn practical healing rather than wholeness, and stitch together improbable collaborations” (Haraway 2016, 136).

To rephrase, this is an eco soma intervention, a shifting of gears into other realms—and I am not using the term “mesmerizing” innocently, either. Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) was a German physician who created a system of hypnotic induction that became a forerunner of the use of hypnosis in Western medicine. The word “mesmerizing” links back to this medical practice of tapping into “animal magnetism,” manipulating a spiritual fluid circulating inside and around a patient, something akin to the balance of humors in humoral theory. In more common usage today, “mesmerizing” refers to something holding us in its spell. That’s the use Edgar Allan Poe made of Mesmer when he wrote the story, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (published in England first under the title “Mesmerism in Articulo Mortis”). In this story, a patient gets hypnotically suspended at the moment of death from tuberculosis. In the days and months that follow, the patient does not decay but lives nonbreathing, vibrating between life and death, until the spell is released (and an ultraquick and gory decomposition into liquidity affirms that the actual moment of death was a long time ago). Before the hypnotic release, the narrator manages to coax comprehensible language out of the living corpse: a communication months after death.

Lived time is an issue in Poe’s story: temporalities of physiological and psychological processes get rearranged in horror mode rather than in crip time. There is no horror in *Waking the Green Sound*, and I see more that has to do with Haraway’s practical healing than with boundary transgressions between life and death. But the mesmerizing aspects are there: leaves and hands shiver, creating the small, repeated movements (or sounds) often associated with hypnosis. Breathwork, plant medicine, hypnosis: these are all methods of reaching altered states, shifting us out of this world to find new imaginations (see Plate 14).

The other image complex that colors my reception of *Waking the Green Sound* is the concept of soma, not (as it has been so far in my book) in the meaning of somatics, but in an earlier and more hidden lineage: “soma,” the drink of the gods, a hallucinogenic beverage made from plants. Soon, in the video, the gloves come off. Dancers’ hands are partially paralyzed and drape over the table

that links the three figures. The careful reveal leads to connection: hands finding one another and unusual finger alignments and ratios intertwining over the sound of gongs and bells. We're watching a ceremony, a ritual.

The three make tea, interdependently, ritualistically, and with joy. Three pairs of hands work together to stuff leaves and flowers into the big yellow tea pot. Eventually, the camera travels into the pot and cuts to a field of leaves. In it lie the three dancers, shaved heads and girded bodies covered in dried white clay. The surreal tea party shifts into hallucinatory territory as the small, white figures clench and open, laugh and shiver. Temporal accelerations and surprise cuts undermine a sense of embodied, co-breathing realism and highlight the surreal qualities of these plant/human figures who appear with flower lips, plants at the limits of ingestion, at the threshold.

Soma was such a threshold drink, a psychoactive substance described in the "Indo-Ayran" (a complicated term I will come back to later) Rigveda, emerging out of the oral transmission of Vedic culture. According to Frits Staal, professor of philosophy and South/Southeast Asian studies, and frequent commentator on Vedic rituals from the West, "soma" referred to the godhead, the plant from which the drink was made, and the drink itself; and the ingestion of soma seemed to offer linkages to all three of these entities (2001): god, plant, fluid. The status and uses of the magical drink "soma" have been discussed extensively among Vedic scholars and in the English literature on texts such as the Bhagavad Gita. My library research on the topic brought me down many ethnobotanical paths, including discussions of which ficus trees give their seeds for the drink (Kashikar 1986); whether it was millet, Eleusine coracana, ragi, or the brilliant red fly-agaric mushroom, also linked to Siberian shamanism (in the influential *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, Wasson 1968); and what the status of the word "milk" is in the context of soma. Soma reading leads me to longevity research, altered-state research, as well as deep into the exegesis of texts of religious ritual. Every time I have given a talk on *Eco Soma*, someone in the audience approaches me afterward and asks about the hallucinogenic, life-giving mythical drink: there's still quite a subculture out there, and the term "soma" links us bodymindspirit explorers.

The hippie story of cross-cultural imbibing is central to many lineages of performance. For instance, French performance visionary "Papa" Antonin Artaud is a touchstone for many performance artists like me. He lived through excru-



ciating asylum experiences and yet was also a free, privileged, grant-sponsored European traveler to Mexico. While in Mexico, Artaud withdrew from heroin, certainly a terrible experience. However, he got to know peyote and participated in Tarahumara rituals, setting the stage for many future performance-art travelers, searching for and finding art in psychoactive ritual.

But the story of soma, when tracked through the archive, also leads down another route into a deep maelstrom of cross-cultural violence. In an essay published in 1920 in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, E. B. Havell, Julius Eggeling, and Max Mueller discuss the soma plant as it appears in descriptions of Vedic rituals (Havell 1920).

Mueller's name is probably the most famous here. This German-born but British-based "orientalist" offered the first coinage of the term "Aryan race" in the English language in 1861 (Lectures on the Science of Language). French aristocrat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau used the word in his efforts to legitimize racism: he saw the "Aryan race" as superior.<sup>16</sup> Mueller, in turn, strongly protested the conflation of the sciences of language and of "man" in resonant images: "It would be as wrong to speak of Aryan blood as of dolichocephalic grammar" ([1888] 2004, 120). And yet, the "science" of skull measuring, which gave us terms like "dolichocephalic" (long skulled) deeply influenced theories of intelligence, culture making, and language acquisition; racism's intertwined heritages and co-constitution with disability, sex, class, and gender move into view again.<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, as I flip forward in time, and stay with the exploration of soma ritual, I come across people like Chintaman Ganesh Kashikar (1986, on soma drink and the ruling classes), another eminent researcher of Vedic ritual and traditional Pandit who taught in Pune and who also edited a Rigveda edition (called the Poona edition) that improved on the one edited by (again) Max Mueller: indications that the orientalist and colonial frameworks of who gets to construct knowledges begin to show holes (Bahulkar and Bahulkar 2003).

Time to breathe. Soma (the drink) and breathing are closely linked in the scholarly discussion of Vedic ritual:

The effects of some psychoactive substances appear to be similar to those of breathing in chant and recitation, including silent varieties that developed into meditation in the Upanishads and Buddhism, not to mention Yoga.



Figure 22. Production photo, a figure (Yulia Arakelyan) in a forest, half-submerged or emerging out of vegetation. Photograph courtesy of Kamala Kingsley, *Waking the Green Sound*, 2015.

The inhaling and exhaling that accompanies the giant opera or breathing exercise of a Soma ritual is one of the features that helps explain how a psychoactive substance can become a ritual. (Staal 1988, 2001, 754)

It is easy to see how *Waking the Green Sound* relates to this image complex: breath, ingestion, psychoactive substances, painkillers—but as I spin this list, I am getting further and further away from the actual film, I am caught in my own phenomenological horizon space that can be dominated by the presence of pain and by the joy of not being in pain. But there is more to come back to in the film itself.

The film is full of nonrealist, nonconsensus time cuts as examples of crip time, of alternative temporal patterning. There are the slowed-down meditative movements often associated with Butoh, as well as the sped-up movements so

often associated with drug dreams, all within a soundtrack that samples the *whoosh* of the ventilator, binding breath back into rhythm.

In the dance/dream, the clay-covered figures begin to peel, their skin now visually akin to the trees they wind around. Again, my pain body reads these images in the context of pain, and I think of aspirin, a substance found in tree bark familiar as a healing plant to many peoples across the globe.

Small and only partially controlled feet and hands shift against bark as I see one of the figures up in a tree. Leaves, bark, lichen, clay, skin: the boundaries become unclear. I am in the realm of Donna Haraway's a-kin, tech-humannatureculture, biomergering with the slow-moving camera and the waves of cuts.<sup>18</sup>

This dance video is a form of hypnosis, offering a view of crip time's difference that asks for attention and the consciousness of breath, the nongiven-ness of grasping toes and fingers. Toward death and toward life, Butoh's precarity is in the weight of its heightened sensory experience, made experiential in the temporality of this slow unfolding. Breath is visible, flaring, staccato in the rhythm of the film's cut.

The sun goes down on one performer, and alights on another one, shivering in the aspen-shake of sun leaves on her face, a sped-up camera jittering us into an awareness of duration. She uncovers an old turtle shell, and climbs into it, merging her body into another species' remnant.

Here is another aspect of *Waking the Green Sound* that offers a shared cultural/phenomenological horizon space: human/animal/plant hybrids as sources of horror material. The aesthetic of the *Green Sound* never lets the images slide into horror, but the image-complexes certainly have currency in horror movies: people whose movements are slowed or sped up (think *Ringu*, or, in the English version, *The Ring*), animal-humans (think *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, an archetypal horror movie involving disability and body modification), plant-humans (think *The Body Snatchers* and its multiple remakes, or *The Girl with All the Gifts*<sup>19</sup>), trans as a bodily concept (think *Silence of the Lambs*), and, of course, people with physical or psychiatric disabilities (this basically encompasses the entire history of Western horror movies, from the ambivalently fun *Freaks* via *Psycho* to any baddie in a wheelchair ever).

In the film, three small humanoids with turtle shells on their backs crawl toward a magic door, a golden portal, held close by the bone-whiteness of an antler. Inside, incense burns, its smoke filling the air; music drones; everything



Figure 23. In this video still, one of the dancers sits with a turtle shell on her head, golden cloth wrapped around her, on her red plush throne amid lights and organic materials that remind me of mushrooms, in a templelike setting. See *Waking the Green Sound* (2015).

touches and adheres in tropes of transgression; there is embodied infusion everywhere. Cloths wrap white limbs, and gold paint enhances the dancers' small articulation of life. Small arm movements, breathing patterns, and movements that seem to speak to inner journeys all hide behind closed eyes and tattooed skin.

A cut to a different scene: the tea party becomes raucous, drinks spill, flower heads are thrown. Ecstatic sensations flow through flailing limbs. There is laughter. There are screams. And there are the half-closed or wide-open eyes of bliss. Something circulates in the blood and light, in the tea and the leaves, in the dried lichen and the painted skin, in lung pearls in gas exchange. Humans and plants dance amid permeable membranes.

I find myself hoping that the hosting plants in the forest environment had as much fun as this dancer trio. There is tenderness in the shooting: no trees

look like they were harmed in making the video, although some plant leaves have been shredded for tea steeping. So I asked, and I received this answer, full of crip love and tenderness, mutual caretaking, interdependency, and intimacy. The shooting location was on Cowlitz peoples' territory, and

was the backyard of the wobbly house, our house, and that was the magic of it, to get as close as we could, as intimate as we could, with the nature that was very near. Those 100 year old fruit trees are on our property, the temple was our shed repainted and laid with an altar for that scene. Chain link fence was disguised with miles of amaranth stalks collected and contributed by friends and late summer leaves covered the tatami mats we lay on. (personal communication, July 2020)

Three disabled dancers, in ground-level locomotion without chairs, their unusual bodies' and limbs' sensuous surfaces in touch with other living things, enjoy the high of dance and plant touch, supported by their friend network. Sampled and layered sound (by Sweetmeat) and sensuous camera work (by Ian Lucero) enhance the somatic immediacy of the movement and ask me to think about the trans/mit/ability of videodance: its power to shift me, to touch me in the absence of easy physical alignment. I have physically danced with two of these three dancers, we have swum together in a Salamander ritual in the Mediterranean sea, our bodies rolling across each other in dance studios, limb to limb. I have smelled their presence, and they have smelled mine. Watching them in these delicious colors, in costumes controlled and aligned with the camera's gaze, makes me remember our shared sweaty embodiment in a dance studio, in a contact jam, in supportive salt water.

As someone with chronic pain, I recognize the draw toward bringing (animate) things close, to live in close-up, to find touch and energetic transfusion in one's immediate environment. A lot of my own work emerges from close-ups, from seeing things very near to me. On days where it isn't easy to go out, these close things become my environment, my scenic boulders, rivers, and mountains. Think about the Introduction's dust bunnies beneath the sofa, a feather escaped from a down jacket, or a spiderweb in the corner of a window. In my street, I look for moss, sit by it, and move with it.<sup>20</sup> Seeing my world with new eyes, in new perspectives, lying on the floor or pavement, tracking my sensations with words, opening into speculative encounters with heightened entities:



these are all ways in which pain and pleasure find openings and release. I write here as someone who vibrates in sympathy, in disability culture ways, and in access intimacy, with Wobbly Dance's approach to their home forest ritual.

Video acts as a memory machine, but it also offers momentary points of approach before denying similarity, enacting narratives that do not speak of familiarity but insist on difference, on what is not known. My body neither looks nor moves this way, my neck does not flare this way when I breathe, but there is a base structure that translates across the screen, when I watch, and when I co-breathe, for fifteen minutes, halting my day's speed to be seduced by color, shape, and moving form.

The interplay of drugs, diffusion, and substances offer a quasi-ecstatic field here, a softness of release. Disabled dancers, usually so constrained by medical realities and by projections of helplessness that need to be protested against through super-crip competence, may loosen the bounds of control. They can perform with abandon, at least in the carefully controlled environment of a video shoot.

But as a disabled person living with an awareness of my social surroundings, I can't just release myself to the fantasy. This fantasy still remains anchored in the complexities of drug release, racialization, and drug criminalization: who has access to legal drugs and who does not; what is at stake in having drugs, prison pipelines and supply chains, opioid crises; and the denial of painkillers to people whose lives are unthinkable without them. At different moments, in different ways, speculative embodiment snaps in and out of focus and inserts precarity and suffering into any sense of White abandon. There is something impossible here. Suffering swings in my reception of this strange, guarded dream.

Suffering and mourning: this is a nexus of thought in much eco-arts work. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), an influential popular ethnobotanist, aligns with equally influential White writer, Joanna Macy, when the former argues that:

until we can grieve for our planet, we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health. But it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again. Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. (2013, 327)

In *Waking the Green Sound*, hands are in the earth. Wounds and scars are on display. Necks flare, struggling for breath. The trees in the film do not show their wounds, but most viewers will be familiar with the dried-up husks of trees where the water table has receded too much, or with the changes in habitat, insect-load, and tree illnesses that are affecting more and more tree stands.

But in my writing about the film here, other wound-complexes also align. I think of historical wounds of war and genocide, where human histories pressure any readings of trees and human in alignment. The Nazis were expert at mining cultural mythology for a new philosophy of earth/human engagement, articulated via the old German oak, via “Indo-Aryan” claims of Sanskrit ancestry for White Germanic racial purity and via rituals in forests. So when I write about these images on the video screen with so much love, and even when I engage myself in tree dancing, my skin in touch with bark and leaf, these other histories of my lineage shiver through me. The dancers in *Waking the Green Sound* might well have been gassed by Nazis, for crip and queer reasons, had they been born at that time (a different place might not have saved them: a birth in the United States might have also led to death within the eugenics movement, “the American Science”). Empathy and identification draw fragile alliances. Their contours change quickly: who is in, and who is out, can shift over the course of a few years. Phenomenologically, I am never “just body,” never without the entwinement of eco soma engagement with the world as a cultural, historical, material, and spiritual entity.

### **Sun Rhythms: Poetry’s Embodiment**

From the grounded embrace of botanical slowness, let’s move to a slow vision of stars, in the moment of going nova, an ultimate abandon. In this section, I explore another meaning of rays, of connecting devices that touch one surface to another through energy transmission, in reading. This loops a bit further out from my eco soma argument so far. I have negotiated non-copresence through videodance, which has its own histories of kinetic embodiment discussions. Now, in this example of literary non-copresence, only fragmented words remain; but, as I hope to show, the eco soma witnessing practice can work on this complex horizon, too.

In a different kind of speculative mode between planets and suns, Korean

American poet Sueyeun Juliette Lee engages light as a mode of emphatic engagement, a transfusion of human words and stellar time, articulated through the decay procedures with which sunspot eruptions operate on language. In the development of the poetry sequence “Solar Maximum” (2015) the somatic, the experience of embodiment, is the substrate to meaning, the base from which impact is measured. Here in Figure 24 is a double spread from *Solar Maximum*.

Look over this page, the last one from the long poem: let your eyes travel, track your eye movements—the subtle play of muscles deep inside your eye sockets—feel the jumps. What does witnessing the blank spaces feel like?

Rhythmicity and its syncopation, weakening strong beats and offering weaker ones to come to the fore in new alignments, are at the heart of much Afrofuturist musical work.<sup>21</sup> These temporal shifts of syncopathic openings, of matter burned out, away, holes in wholes, a contagion of rhythm and influence, are at work in Lee’s oeuvre. The formal experimentation holds a lineage with works like M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (2008), which uses textual procedures to witness the death of African slaves thrown off ships in the middle passage. Philip repurposes legal language, the eighteenth-century British legal case examining the slave-trading ship holder’s culpabilities, and explodes it, fragments it, radiates it to smear across history. Water dilutes into its component parts, syllables, and letters, left behind on a white field. Philip illuminates racial atrocity in the past, contaminating the present, making nonpoetic texts speak differently in difficult articulation. Philip refuses to use the language of oppression to speak to the White market: she decomposes it instead, pointing out holes.

Holes are the connection I am drawing here, recycling material to thin it, to let it shine through to other eras and other imaginations, like some of the slow play in Turtle Disco or Lovecraftian flights. Lee uses palimpsests for her purposes, engaging with burned-away records. Lee casts into the future and witnesses the effect of light on human bodies, mashing scientific texts into their constituent parts. These texts become marks, akin to the shadow a hand throws on a wall (in one of the photos woven through the text, an image from the Egyptian Western Desert). There are exploded source texts from radiation cancer treatments, material from NASA publications, and information from the Cryonics Institute.

The poet’s long poem “Solar Maximum” (the title sequence in *Solar Maximum* [2015]) combines visuals and found text, both scientific and mythological, with a more narratively oriented voice.<sup>22</sup> It begins in narrative time,



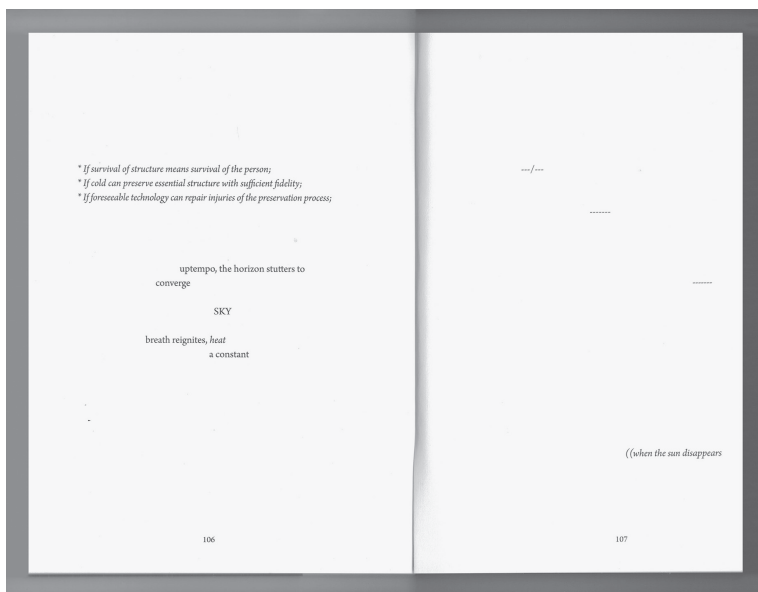
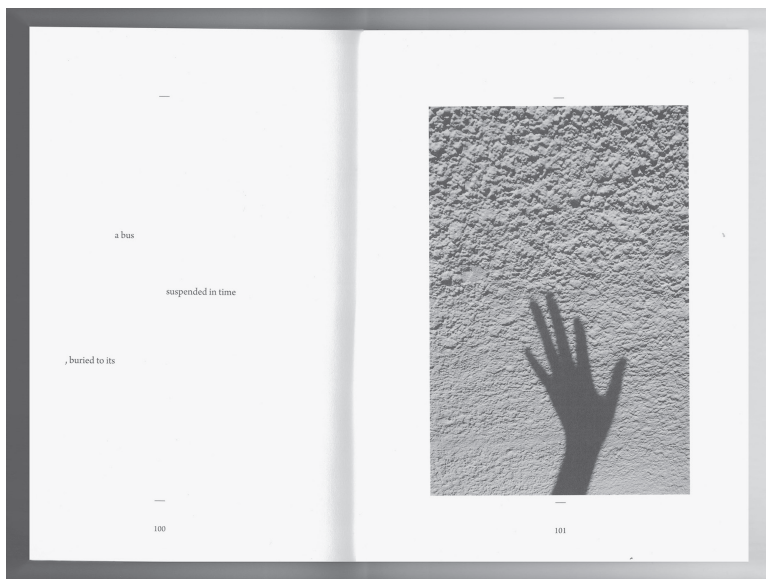


Figure 24. Sueyeun Juliette Lee, *Solar Maximum*, 2015. Hand double spread (100–101, 106–107). Fragments of writing strewn across the pages, highlighting absences. An image of a hand—it looks to me like a shadow, but the poet’s notes identify the hand as “Painting of hands, Foggini-Mesticawi Cave, Glif Kebir, Western Desert, Egypt,” Roland Unger, March 11, 2011.

with a stable “I” that charts causes and effects in temporal order, in a sentence arranged in a prose poem. This block of prose content speaks to infiltration and precarity: “My skin crawls at odd hours of the day, a residual effect of my recent / radiation therapies, how they inadvertently synched me to coronal/flares” (73).

The reader finds out that the sun eruptions cause scar responses in the subject’s skin. The light conditions are not easily discernable and do not align with human perceptions of brightness or cloudy sky: “One can’t choose the mood / that gathers, the body’s response” (73). Unpredictability is part of the pattern emerging in this endtime poem, in which personal dissolution and dystopic radiation death of the planet align with mythological texts of Gilgamesh and a sheltering raven, who offers solace: “When she rests / she stretches out her wings, and the entire earth cools beneath her subtle / breeze” (79). Light affects memory and creates photographs, the screens that humans populate with dead ones, loved ones, near ones. When light eviscerates matter, holes appear in memory, skin, and cancer cells. Atom bombs explode. Sunlight sears. Nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, the inexorable nonanthropocentric actions of the distant sun: hybridity bleeds into a story that sits between U.S. and Asian relations, between individual cancerous bodies and the hygiene of “nations.” Cause and effect become unclear, and the narrating subject can engage in narrative magic tricks and tell us of endless money and papers and phantom glass shards falling from her shaking hands, all while bankers use “iridium-plated bones” to forecast the stock market (97). Eventually, repeatedly, “the entire world condenses into a magma skitter” (91) and language appears holey on the page, white space infiltrating sentences and lopping off endings. “The body quenches into ore” (105): reading this, I am back at the extraction narratives, the golden shirt, in the first chapter, back at the senses of unequal distribution of risk, mining work, but also at the site of the apocalypse, of heat death. The preciousness of sensation sears off the poem’s surfaces, glittering shards that make unclear location, radiating origin and lanced destiny. The poem calls to Shamash, an Akkadian solar deity, with exhortations of protection, with the desire for sheltering narrative and temporal abeyance.

Throughout the poetic sequence, humans and elements bind together, establish co-living/dying, in penetration, proliferation, holiness, and holes. Disassociation and noninfluence are as present as their other. One of the images strewn through the sequence is a close-up of brain tissue, of capillaries, that supply brain tissue with nutrients. “Tight seals in their walls keep blood toxins—and

many beneficial drugs—out of the brain.”<sup>23</sup> In all this, bodies are shining things and are shone upon; they are connecting mechanisms in a world that heats and/or cools toward disconnect: “body = filament/body = a wick, halted” (75).

To read *Solar Maximum* and its interplay of narrative, repurposed scientific language, images, and exhortations connects the act of reading to many other speculative and fabulist universes. Genre reading is contaminated reading, full of leaky borders and proliferating similarities. Reading along, I can see the connections to so many of the lowbrow adventure science thrillers I enjoy and the study of which was a central part of my feminist critical training.<sup>24</sup> One of these novels, *Deep Fathom* (2001), White U.S. author James Rollins’s rollicking story of the sunken continent Atlantis, also twists around light, sunspots, and light’s material ability to bore holes, explode the world, and twist time. The story centers on an unknown element at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, complete with a tense description of presidential war-mongering and atomic war with China (which weirdly turns out to be an alternative history narrative, reset into the historical sequence of uneasy contemporary peace through a mysterious light- and time-bending crystal pillar).

I read *Deep Fathom* and *Solar Maximum* simultaneously, by chance, and was struck by the thematic similarities and the different aesthetic strategies at work. There are clear similarities: both works lean into global space, adventure, and experimental narratives with different aims and effects, centering Western science and yet opening up avenues for non-Western knowledges to impact and shift the monolithic nature of colonial knowledge patterns. Gendered patterns arise, too: Rollins’s work features a strong White Canadian woman heroine sidekicked by a Chinese woman scientist with a good sense of humor; yet the undisputable hero is a White American ex-Navy SEAL, a man of hard body and mind. Lee’s book is a world of “she,” with female others encountered and addressed.

Science fiction poetry is not a well-known subgenre of experimental writing.<sup>25</sup> But Lee sees her work in the heritage of the speculative, of science fiction. She writes in the notes to her collection:

This collection represents my efforts to sketch out a speculative poetics—one that explores the various moods of imagined (future) spaces and their implications for human emotional and psychological being. Despite writing “towards” these imagined futures, my aim is hardly predictive,

but reflective. I hope to invite us to meditate more intelligently upon our present—its circumstances, relations, and structures—and envision whether we desire to continue along our current trajectories.<sup>26</sup>

The effect is of slowing, halting meditations, in tension with the forward-leaning nature of futurity writing, with its temporality of the “what now” that characterizes much dystopic and adventure fiction. In *Solar Maximum*, the core image is the permeability of skin/page/tissue, the slow burn-away of material to offer the lace-effect of palimpsest-like memory holes.

Like other genre work, *Solar Maximum* invites the penetration of my reading self by other scenes, stories, and images from beyond the book’s pages. From the flash shadows of Pompeii to Gilgamesh’s pilgrimage to the sun, from stories of cancer radiation to the deaths of Hiroshima, from *Zong!* to genre texts about solar flares: sun/star/fire/violence/death are central to these holes in pasts and futures. Permeability here is a language function, an attention to the medium and matter of light as a communicative substance as well as an illuminator. The poem’s politics link with Wobbly Dance’s engagement with touch by nonhuman elements through the opening of language description to a literal enactment of searing erasure. In the decay of sentences, the reader witnesses the materiality of the invisible/occluded environmental forces and of the fragility of human life. Lee’s poem invites halting. It invites you to take the words into your mouth, let your eyes skitter over the gaps, and feel the slowing earth rotation: “uptempo, the horizon stutters to/converge” (106).

In the section that follows, we will follow this trail of life’s fragility, its violence, and of the agencies that keep people anchored.

### **Black Lives Matter: Protesting Death, Living Breath**

Sending rays out to influence dominant others to see and feel their human co-inhabitants of this earth is hard, but it is a mechanism that is used again and again, as artists strain against the odds. At one end of somatic coherence building is the performance heritage of building empathy by performing the ultimate time shift: death. Positioning one’s self in the place of a dead other is a core act of performance work—and yet, as an interracial sign acknowledging White supremacy, this way of witnessing another is fraught with complexity.

African American theorist Saidiya Hartman, in a discussion of a White abo-

litionist's usurpation of a Black body's suffering, shows how empathy "fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead." She points out the problems of moves that "require that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible" (Hartman 1997, 19, 20). Response-ability fails again and again when communication and communion are disrupted by White supremacy (i.e., when the White body usurps even the position of victim in order to be able to translate a connection to suffering). Shaped by categorizing systems, humans fail to recognize co-humans.

This kind of misrecognition of shared humanity is at work in a contemporary U.S. political environment, which is once again openly saturated by hate and violence against people of color. The ongoing assaults on Black people, in particular young Black men, Black trans women, and Black disabled people, are pervasive. They are far from isolated incidences, or citable as the U.S. race legacy, "in the past." George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin in summer 2013 became the flashpoint for the ongoing U.S. protests and for the emergence of Black Lives Matter as a performative activist organization. I am using "performative" here in a different sense from the way it emerged in the resurgence and deepening of anti-Black police violence in 2020: rather than using the term to mean "fake" or "hollow," I focus on the generative potential of performance, as transmissive or as touch.

These 2020 protests followed the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Dion Johnson, Dreasjon Reed, Atatiana Jefferson—seven names out of a long list of Black people killed by police. Read them out loud. Feel into yourself as you read these names, and listen to the echoes inside yourself. Name the sensations that rise up as you pay your respect to the dead.<sup>27</sup>

Black Lives Matter is a protest organization initiated by three queer Black women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. In 2013 Garza wrote a Facebook post titled "A Love Note to Black People" in which she said: "Our Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter." This note became the rallying cry for international actions against the devaluing of Black lives. Black Lives Matter initially were focused on image- and performance-based interactions. They relied on the power of (social) media to engage in their activist labor. Social media are deeply entwined with liberal and capitalist frameworks, something that for

a time earned Black Lives Matter critiques in the wider Black liberation community. Yet, they successfully galvanized and channeled a critical engagement with the precarity of Black lives under White supremacy.<sup>28</sup>

The intertwining of rays and lives, (social) media, the influence between screens and streets, and matters of life and death will guide me through the remainder of this chapter. In serious play on an eco soma method of change: how do I/you/we think about bodily stepping toward otherness, becoming implicated, without just “placing the self in (the other’s) stead” (Hartman 1997)?

Multiple authors in the ever-expanding critical engagement with affect theory have noted the use of affect as infiltration rather than a motor for identification (see, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari 1987, Goldie 2000, Brennan 2004, Ahmed 2010). In these pages I track this form of contagious touch through the interaction of screen- and street-based activism. The two are different kinds of performance tactics, but both are designed to elicit the impersonal and automatic forms of reactions (*not* identifications) associated with affect transmission. Energy gets amassed. Things, stories, feelings roll. Magnetic swings draw eyes to the screen or make one feel something in one’s chest. Interactions between the affective contagious regimes of social media and the physical acts of movement are at the heart of this section, where people take up gestures by dead others, an eco soma practicing of chosen lineage. These gestures become artful eco soma political actions toward future life on shared horizons but without collapsing other into self.

### **Performance, Witness, Hands Up: Michael Brown**

It was late November 2014, the day after a Missouri Grand Jury made the decision not to indict the police officer who shot teenager Michael Brown in August of that year in Ferguson, Missouri. The day after the verdict, protests erupted in Ferguson, Boston, Chicago, and New York, and the boy’s father, Michael Brown Sr., asked protesters for nonviolence and for a moment of silence for his son.

I worked with my University of Michigan undergraduate “Space and Site” class in one of many sites around campus, exploring freewrites and performance actions. That day, we situated ourselves in a Catholic church, and many of us came to this site shaken and disturbed by the polarized disclosure of racist precarity in the United States, a coming to consciousness (for those of us not already there, protected by White privilege from experiencing a racist world).

In the church, chosen before the national events overtook us, we were on the edges of public and private space, with shushed instructions, undisturbed writing space, occasional worshippers sitting in the penumbra of our actions, and the ethical challenge to us to respect the sacred site *and* come to expression.

On this day, in the aftermath of the news and the ongoing social media reaction, we created Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed sculptures in front of the altar, witnessing where we were at after the previous night's news. Some among us, mainly students of color, created sculptures of fear and pain, sharing with White students how dangerous the world felt to them. At one point, a student held another in a form of pieta, a mother cradling her slain child. Others used hand gestures with extended fingers to symbolize guns—a move that some in the group then commented on, linking the easy availability of gun symbols to the ubiquity of guns in the country. At another point, students protected one another with bodies extended outward like battle shields.

In our sculpture work, we used text, moving from silence to sound, quietly reciting Audre Lorde's "Power," a poem commemorating ten-year-old Clifford Glover's murder in 1973. The poem narrates the child's murder and offers images of the policeman who "stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood/ and a voice said 'Die you little motherfucker.'" The poem takes us to the trial, where the policeman says, "I didn't notice the size nor nothing else/only the color" (Lorde 1975).

We used our bodies to contaminate ourselves with violence, to touch and be touched by others, to invite something of a mother's pain, a policeman's fear of Blackness, or a child's last breath. We did not exactly "act out" being these people but instead we invited incursion, a point of engagement and interpenetration without full identification. The work felt dangerous, at times appropriative, but the students and I had an open discussion of what we might want to do to mark this historical moment, and upon group agreement we went with it (but acknowledged the dangers of pain glorification and appropriation). The day demanded a loosening of boundaries between students and teachers, between personal experience and what we read, heard, or viewed out there, between one's personal biography and the wider operations of White supremacy.

A performance studies essay by Anusha Kedhar fueled our preparations that day. Many performance scholars used this widely circulated essay to center Black voices in commentary on the public scene. This blog post came out in October 2014, as a much-cited emergency write-up in the blogosphere, offering

talking points in the immediate aftermath of Black people being killed. Kedhar offered an analysis of the well-known “hands up, don’t shoot” gestural sign of protest around the world. The gesture and the words accompanying it were used in the aftermath of the Michael Brown killing by protesters approaching armed police with their hands up repeating these words. In many protests around the United States and beyond, this physical/verbal sign became a signature of a particular moment in race relations. At one point, the Black liberation activist Reverend Al Sharpton described the sign in this way, encouraging protesters:

If you’re angry, throw your arms up. If you want justice, throw your arms up. Because that’s the sign Michael was using. He had a surrender sign. That’s the sign you have to deal with. Use the sign he last showed. We want answers why that last sign was not respected. (Pearce 2014)

Kedhar writes about the “hands-up” gesture’s failure to be respected, to communicate across state and citizen, officer and subject, citing literature professor and blogger Keguro Macharia:

Michael Brown’s death “indexes the failure of this bodily vernacular when performed by a black body, a killable body . . . Blackness becomes the break in this global bodily vernacular, the error that makes this bodily action illegible, the disposability that renders the gesture irrelevant. [It is read as] always already threatening, even when that movement says, ‘I surrender.’” In short, blackness is what lays bare the limits of this kinesthetic sign, what turns this universal gesture of submission into a gesture of guilt, criminality, and culpability. (2014)

The code cracks under the weight of the alternative recognition system called racism: under racism, a fairly familiar human gesture, hands up and palms out, no threat, becomes illegible, as the recognition of this system is just about Blackness equated with threat. The bracketing off into the [nonhuman] inserts an illegibility into the communication machine.

Kedhar offers a range of other reading strategies of the choreographic, embodied sign of “hands-up.” One of those is informed by performance scholar André Lepecki’s analysis of choreopolitics. Kedhar writes:

If police formations and blockades in Ferguson are choreopolicing strategies of an increasingly militarized police force, the “hands up don’t shoot”



gesture has become a choreopolitical tactic of defiance. Demonstrators walk toward police officers with their hands up, challenging the police officers to shoot, daring them to respond, to reckon with the officers' culpability, to remind them of their culpability. (2014)

This reading relies on recognition, on an understanding by the police that protestors share humanity with them and that the state ordinances and rules are imposed on a situation in which humans meet, in the flesh-space, now-space, of urban geography. The gesture suspends the rules of engagement that govern a particular location or time, and the gesture's slow and deliberate enactment tries to make safe this push against sanctioned space arrangements. The "slow" and "deliberate" are core points here: the fastness of everyday actions, in singularity, do not work (and that fastness, ordinary speed, guided Brown's killer). But the group choreography, drawing attention to its nonnatural, deliberate state, holds a different message: it slows the flow of business as usual.

This sense of out-of-time-ness, the starkness of a Black or Brown person slipping into a different time/space moment and using this as a fulcrum to effect recognition, is also at work in a much-shared photograph. It is one of many images that have come to symbolize the power of the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement deeply embedded in the image politics and affective contagious regimes of social media. Sharing, liking, forwarding, meme-ing the image—all these social media mechanisms draw power to and into the image, roil it in energy. In the photograph, a Black woman dressed in a gorgeous dress stands in the flow of police ranks in Baton Rouge, in July 2016, during the protests following the death of Alton Sterling, a thirty-seven-year-old Black man who was selling CDs outside of a convenience store. The photo and its resulting memes are easily discoverable via search engines, and I encourage readers to go looking.

Social media identified the woman as Ieshia Evans. Search for her name on the internet: her image has become more visible than her name, and the act of searching for her can be an acknowledgment of her action. The photograph is by Jonathan Bachman, a New Orleans freelance photographer on assignment for Reuters that night. In the coverage surrounding this photo, which has since gone global as a meme, one Facebook user describes the woman in this way:

Look at her posture. She is balanced, powerful, upright and well-grounded with both feet firmly planted on the earth. Look at the line made from the

crown of her head to the heels of her feet. She is only protected by the force of her own personal power. (Jami West, cited in Bogart 2016)

This reads like an embodied (maybe even dancerly) description, informed by a Black aesthetics of groundedness, earth connection, strength, and nobility. The “natural royalty” swing of the (otherwise purely descriptive) “crown of her head” aligns well with womanist images of Black women’s power.<sup>29</sup> The other feature of the photo is the backward swing of the heavily armored police officers, two figures dressed in black who seem to sway backward in front of this upright, straight figure. It looks like she might have issued some kind of sound blast, a magic *wham*, to repel these figures, whose lines are broken by angular knees and elbows. She seems to float in her own temporality, her dress billowing both forth and back, not in the slipstream of the same movement as the two soldiers.

As a cultural theorist trained in the ways that media images can create endless snakes of images linking to images linking to images, I can help to push against deadliness and make connections between African American citizens confronting a state apparatus that condemns them to death with hopeful imagery from Afrofuturist repertoires.<sup>30</sup>

In particular, this image echoes for me the literary description of the arriving alien in Nigerian American writer Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* (2014). *Lagoon* is a novel set in Lagos, Nigeria, where it charts the effects of alien arrival on a sea witch as well as a local woman and her circle. The alien is a shape-shifter, fragmenting into nano-tubes of black material under the microscope, then erecting herself as a stunning woman. Humans who are drawn to the alien have special abilities. The rhetorical power to stop and sway masses is one of them: a famous music star narrates a soundwave moment, his ability to generate transforming waves of temporal displacement. The kind of effect that can repel soldiers in full armor and upend them in the street—the kind of effect so many commentators read into Evans’s image.

Incongruous kinetic energies fuel this photograph. It is memorable not just for the strength and beauty of the woman in her diaphanous dress facing two police officers as the advance guard of a whole line of black-garbed storm-trooper soldiers. The image captures deliberation, a defiance of the speed of postmodern racial escalation. Ieshia Evans did get arrested and was eventually released. She was, and is, in real danger as a Black woman engaging in public protest in the street. But Evans made conscious choices about how to face

danger, including her posture, location, and dress, choices that spoke to the heightened nature of an occasion that demanded recognition of the escalation of racial tension and supremacist governance.

I make a choice to understand this political gesture in the street as a gendered and powerful act of Afrofuturist activity, emerging from the poise and dress choices Evans made, which align with Kimberly Nichelle Brown's argument that "contemporary African American female writing is a product of choice, of agency, rather than solely a reaction to victimization" (2010, 64).

Afrofuturist Nalo Hopkinson defines Afrofuturist science fiction as "literatures that explore the fact that we are tool-makers and users, and are always changing our environments" (Nelson 2002, 98; interview). In the time-slice offered by Bachman's photo, we see Ieshia Evans explore everyday tools (of dress, habitus, and spatial orientation) to comment on the need for change and to drop our armors and arms, even in the midst of precarious living. In the choreopolitics of this image, "Black women and girls are in the present and can and do signify (on) the future" (Morris 2012, 162). And then their expressions of agency can become a different kind of visual/literary/cultural bodymind politics, one that flows across the globe.

### **Breathing Street Rhythms: Eric and Erica Garner**

In July 2014, Eric Garner was put in a chokehold by NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo because he was suspected of selling unlicensed cigarettes. In a video shot by a bystander, Garner repeated "I can't breathe" eleven times while lying face down on the city sidewalk before falling unconscious and dying.<sup>31</sup> This killing initiated large-scale antipolice protests in many U.S. cities. Garner is reported to have had asthma. "I can't breathe" became part of the repertoire of antipolice violence protests nationwide and of the emerging Black Lives Matter movement. Performance actions in classrooms and in the streets commemorated Garner's struggle to breathe as he lay endangered in common urban space. Images of these actions were posted online and circled the globe, exploiting social media's capacity for wide and rapid contact and reproduction. Garner died. Life and death enter complexly into the international cultural machines: protests galvanized many people, fostering new movements. (Usually White-owned) image machines circled into action, living and breathing with the powers unleashed by Black death. In the streets, shared through social media, and in

our classrooms, many performance actions commemorated Garner's struggle to breathe—actions and images that were shared worldwide and that inspired moments of enactment. Protesters nationwide taped their mouths shut and wrote "I can't breathe" on the tape—an action that disabled activists have commented on as complicated to enact and, at times, endangering to protesters.

Breath is central to many considerations of access in protest movements—see for instance this widely cited blog post by disabled blogger *Geeky Gimp* (a collective of writers led by Erin Hawley), which offers pointers for how to make social justice protest actions more accessible (and note how prescient the comment is in light of the police aggression against protesters during the Covid-19 crisis): "While we strive for safety at all events, protests can pose health risks for disabled people. Tear gas or pepper spray can lead to breathing problems" (*Crip the Resistance* 2017).

This issue of disabled access to protest actions came to a deeply sad point in the December 2017 death of Eric Garner's daughter, racial justice activist Erica Garner. She died of a heart attack brought on by an asthma attack. Some media outlets connected her death to her tireless work in protests and on the street, the stress she lived under as a result of systemic racism and the physical stress of protest actions.

For the years between her father's death and her own, at twenty-seven, Erica Garner lay down in the street, outside the store, on the spot where her father was killed, in the performance form of the "die-in." The action was a form of private mourning, coded into and through the performative politics that have become associated with contemporary antiracist actions, themselves linked with deep histories of embodied political gestures. She spoke in an interview about these actions and about her relationship to public responses:

Since her father's July 17 death, Erica Garner has held twice-a-week "die ins" on the Bay St. sidewalk in Tompkinsville.

"I feel the love and energy from around the world, but on Staten Island it's been emotionless," the 24-year-old told the *Daily News* after Thursday's regular demonstration in front of a beauty supply store where cops confronted her father.

"I felt his spirit when I was walking down to the spot," she said. "I've been doing this every Tuesday and Thursday since my father's death. I do

it without cameras there. I do it with cameras there, and I'm going to keep doing it." (Friedman, Parascandola, and Hutchinson 2014)

As she said, some of these actions happened without cameras, many with them. Private mourning rituals intersected with public actions, activating audiences like my students in the "Space and Site" class. In the field of social media, some audiences responded, co-felt, enacted, embraced the recognizability and reliability of her bodily actions; others were unmoved, even hostile (and I refrain from citing some of the hateful responses to Erica Garner's death, which link racialization and disability discourses in utterly predictable and painful ways).

### *Make Me Wanna Holler*

My last discussion foregrounds breath as artful living as a human on the street. Antoine Hunter, who identifies as an African, Indigenous, Deaf, Disabled, Two-Spirit dancer, moves on the streets of San Francisco in *Make Me Wanna Holler* (2017), a four-minute video dance directed by Erica Eng and choreographed by Dawn James. The publicity material of the video sums up its subject matter in this way: "'Make Me Wanna Holler' poetically depicts the daily struggles and frustrations that challenge a homeless man living on the streets of San Francisco. Starring the deaf dancer/performer Antoine Hunter" (Eng 2017). Watch it here: <https://vimeo.com/205247231>.

How does the city appear to you? How do you feel as you watch the city rhythms and Hunter's observations of his environment? How does the sound of the transportation system affect you? How does the music move you? How does it feel to watch the watchers? What happens in your bodymindspirit when the lyrics swell up, when Hunter bursts into his first backbend?

In the video, Tyler McPherson's camera moves along with Hunter on his day in the city—from arriving via subway to descending again into the underground in evening light. The first shot is inside a BART car, and the bars of the light fixtures whoosh rhythmically across the screen, alongside the sound of BART rails. Audio/movement cues merge throughout the video, potentially pointing to Hunter's Deaf way of communicating and witnessing the world. In the next shot, Hunter moves from a dark silhouette in the glass reflection to a direct shot, lingering on his face and his mobile eyes, calmly taking in the world around him, with a hint of a smile inside the black beard. Soon, he gets up.



Figure 25. In this video still, a dancer descends into a subway station, his arm swing witnessed by a young woman with a headscarf. Behind him, an elder also descends. *Make Me Wanna Holler* (United States, 2018), directed by Erica Eng, choreographed by Dawn James and Antoine Hunter, performed by Antoine Hunter.

A Black woman and an Asian woman look at him, offering a non-White-centric perspective on public life.

Visual rhythms abound throughout the video: the pattern of the escalator versus the still stairs, people walking fast against Hunter's slow tempo, the visual patterns of skyscrapers and neoclassical facades against the grid of power-lines overhead. Soon, the music starts, and beats syncopate against the visual rhythms. Hunter keeps looking around himself, observing a hectic world that moves at a faster pace than his own speed. At one point, he lies down in the street, in the position familiar to many homeless people—head on his folded hands and coat, a soda cup in front of him to collect money. He looks at the camera, which is at ground level with him. Does the camera placement alleviate a sense of distance, of voyeurism?

The dominant feature of the film is temporality, and the difference in time signature between Hunter and the rest of heaving San Francisco. He is controlled in the way a dancer can be both quiet and radiating with energy. When he explodes into wide, spiral movement, Hunter's expressive face speaks of



Figure 26. In this video still, a dancer lies on the pavement, tucked against the walls of a building. In front of him is a paper soda cup. *Make Me Wanna Holler* (2018).

frustration. And at one point, his arms are spread wide, and his hands gesture toward his chest in what I read as a “this is me” gesture.

Shared humanity is at stake, across slowed movements, different rhythms, against Marvin Gaye’s “Inner City Blues.” The context of the song is exploitation: the visual rhythms speak to finance, commerce, inhuman temporalities of rushing and narrowing (see Plate 15). “Rockets, moon shots, spend it on the have-not’s / Money, we make it, before we see it, you take it / Oh, make you want to holler . . . No, no baby, this ain’t living.”

In the context of my eco soma thoughts, I see this dance video as a rhythmic exhortation to slow down, spend time, breathe, see co-humans, as well as other living creatures, like a flock of pigeons that take flight against Hunter’s movement arc. I read the movie from the perspective of a racialized disability critique, a notion of Deaf Gain (Bauman and Murray 2014),<sup>32</sup> of adding what is missing, what is lost, and what needs to be excavated beneath the monetized cityscape.

This dance video is a form of hypnosis, offering a view of crip time’s difference that asks for attention and the consciousness of breath. I read it in relation



to the particular temporalities that emerge out of disabled embodiment and enmindment: somatic differences that leave traces in political struggles, aesthetic products, and forms of organizing. Crip time can also refer to the temporalities of hallucinatory drugs, to what happens when you take narcotic pain killers. Time jumps. The world shivers. Altered states are a way out, a star flight.<sup>33</sup> I think of expansion, of unboundedness, the opposite of carceral urban logics that constrain movement. I think of cameras in urban landscapes that move with humans, celebrating their presence, rather than policing and quantifying them.

Somatic dis/coherence appears in connection with crip time in Anne McDonald's words. I cite again her words about slow rays, about fantasies of how to influence a world so that she could fully be in it: "I am forced to live in your world, a fast hard one. If slow rays flew from me I would be able to live in this world" (McDonald n.d.). "If slow rays flew from me"—if she could touch the world with energy, if she could influence a fellow nervous system, if she could align, transmit, entrain others. Slow rays—something of this is what a dancer does. That's what music can do, of course: influence through rhythm, a temporality that transmits itself through bodily sensation, rays, and vectors of influence. Humans entrain themselves through rhythm, taking on someone else's pulses.

In *Make Me Wanna Holler*, a shivering of time happens in the waiting time, in the out-of-flow time, in the meditation on the purpose of the city's antlike activity. The temporal signature of a dancer allows for time-outs, for observation, and for developing an articulation of one's own expressive modalities—the wide swing of arms and legs in arcs against the linearity of the city. Fred Moten writes about Duke Ellington's swing, about not answering to any one category, of surplus and rhythm:

Where's swing come from? What drive? My People: the rhythm of this performance, a resistance to the question that is erotic. Yet he was black, he did have and was in a band, inside the band that invaginatively envelops him, his comping marking that rhythmic disruption that animates swing, out of which swing emerges, before meaning. (2003, 27)

Rockets and moon shots, animated by swinging arms: Hunter's aliveness is not contained in any one trajectory, either, in his dance video, in the production framework of shots selected, honed, caressed.



Crip time is not just about slowing rays; it is also about altering temporal perceptions, creating a caesura in rhythmic patterns, inserting a difference, a wing's stroke, with a new beat.

Breath is rhythm, repetition, an openness to somatic influence, and a connectedness to the world. Social media imagery and video material can influence these rhythms and alert audiences to aliveness (even as it can also reinforce fungibility and toward-death-ness in the endless circulation of gasping dying humans). Rhythmicity and its syncopation, weakening strong beats, and offering weaker ones to come to the fore in new alignments are central to theoretical framings that seek ways forward (and outward) for Black people living within White supremacy. Rhythm and its contagious quality, in the form of attention to lived temporalities, have also become central to the ongoing articulations of crip time in disability studies. Crip futures align with Afrofuturist heritages through an emphasis on being around, on being alive in the future, and not being biopoliticked to death. Aimee Meredith Cox writes the following in her ethnographic work with a young Black women's dance group in Detroit:

They worked through and beyond the space of empathy to do the shape-shifting political work of creating spaces to challenge [their limited and conditional citizenship] and imagine more life-affirming possibilities. (2015, 232)

Moving out from reference fields of deathliness toward life needs to be central to an ethics of interracial criticism. There are futures here to be shaped by Black girls, racialized people, and Deaf people—not just felt in other bodies.

In this last section of chapter 4, I investigated performance responses to killings of Black people and Black precarity. They reached their participants and audiences in class inside a church, on the street, and through social media. I witnessed performances that relied on slowed rhythms, the labor of breath, and the out-of-time-ness of homelessness. These actions intertwine with the escape trajectories and alien alivenesses with which I opened the chapter: eco soma imaginations that see new futures in crip time, with pain, sadness, anger, and joy, in layered sensings, in holes, in wholes.

All these actions vibrate: fields-in-touch that transmit aliveness into the future, the next beat, the next breath. My hope is that your body and mine are on the line here, too, in an eco soma assemblage: history, narrative, pain, inclusion and exclusion, theorized at the level of skin and breath.



# Coda

## ORACLES

On the first page of her book *Black Shoals*, which interrogates the potential for Black and Indigenous healing, Tiffany King writes that

each form of violence has its own way of contaminating, haunting, touching, caressing, and whispering to the other. Their force is particular yet like liquid, as they can spill and seep into the spaces that we carve out as bound off and untouched by the other.

Slavery and genocide linger in places we do not expect and cannot yet see or define. Their touch can arrive in an illness, a “not feeling right,” or not wanting to rest your feet on the ground. Their presence can feel like not being able to fully expand your lungs. (2019, x)

I am citing King’s words here as I write the final words in this book, honoring theorists, thinkers, and feelers working in fields that I am not trying to corral. Definitions are tricky things: they own a territory, and that move of ownership—territorializing, corralling—defines a White academy in multiple lived metaphors. In eco soma style, I return to the mechanism I have moved to many times in this book: how do you feel as you read? How do King’s powerful words stimulate your physical curiosity, a new physical habitation, a way of moving with ideas, without usurping a Black body’s space with your own (whatever your racialized identification is)? How do you acknowledge suffering but also feeling well, by self, by others, witnessed in what you read, see, or feel in the street or in a book? What resources does honoring provide, or protocols of not seeing one’s self as alone, or staying in the comfortable/uncomfortable space of one’s own skin? My organizing principle has been to look for connections and for physical/speculative desires to navigate and engage dis/comfort.

Here is a passage from *M Archive*, by Alexis Pauline Gumbs. It’s a speculative text, in a lineage from M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005) an “ancestrally co-written text,” a text that “works to create textual possibilities

for inquiry beyond individual scholarly authority” (ix). Gumbs writes her co-text as a “speculative documentary . . . written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse” (xi). In the third chapter I told of how I encountered Gumbs’s work off the page and how she kept her commitment to co-creation in a beautiful way by using her book as a divination practice. Here is what I found in its pages as I searched for a way to end *Eco Soma*:

When she said the mud mothers she meant that energy close to the core of the earth where the planet felt more alive, soft, hot, and in production. if you could look close enough (or listen carefully enough, the critical geologists would have corrected), you could see the churning planet making herself brown. if you were to choreograph a dance about it (which, i agree, would be an excellent idea) you would need to have everybody cover themselves in mud and then make motions like pushing, like freeing wrists, but lead with the belly [ . . . ] and they would eventually get closer and closer together until you felt that you were watching one being, growing together curving home and pressing pressing to solid but still always breathing. (23)

I am glad to go with Gumbs’s guidance, to delve into the modes of deep time, sensuous bodies, bodies-other-than-human, in motion, touching, pressing.

In her opening pages, Zakihiyah Iman Jackson writes about “an unruly sense of being/knowing/feeling existence, one that necessarily disrupts the foundations of the current hegemonic mode of “the human”” (2). She grounds her investigation by thinking about the anti-Black use of Black bodies as material for metaphor, as fungible, interchangeable: the “discursive-material plasticity of black(ened) flesh” (19), in a lineage that links back and deepens the biopower discussion of chapter 1. In my own eco soma investigations in this book, I tried to locate bodily, in movement, in energetic exchange, on the horizon (the words just keep accumulating) the in-between spaces. Those are the spaces that push against denied humanity, and they do so not by affirming bounded, autonomous, isolated selves but by curiosity at its limits. Come with me to one last brief encounter, which I approach with the divinatory energies of the *M Archive*, with an attention to what presses, agencyful, “growing toward curving home.”<sup>1</sup>

In January 2020, just before the pandemic altered performance making throughout the world, I co-created a disability culture performance workshop

with a group of anthropologists who were interested to move and think about disability in intersectionality. We visited with the Museum of Archeology Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples, in London, Ontario, Canada. For our visit, we set up an Alternative Knowledge walk-through, a performance structure I use often for museum, gallery, or archive visits. Here is how one of the participants, Amala Poli, described the experience:

The local Museum of Ontario Archaeology was the site of our first group activity on the third and final day of the workshop. I chose this activity, the Alternative Knowledges tour for discussion here, as the museum experience is often guided by the written plaques next to artifacts, demanding our attentions, structuring knowledge and consumption of the various kinds of stimuli within the museum. Guided by Petra Kupperts' gentle suggestions, individual participants meandered into different corners of the archaeological museum, choosing artifacts to present them to the other participants. This exercise disrupted the conventional expectations of the museum space, as each of us created a two-part process. We first presented our chosen object or image in its historical context to honor it in its own right, and then added a creative element that speculatively guided the rest of the individuals through a new and imaginative experience of the chosen artifact. . . . it gave us occasion to co-exist in a space of respectful attention and care, listening and absorbing each others' creative and imaginative energies together. (Poli 2020)

In the museum the history of archeology lay exposed around us in its own sedimentary layers. There was the diorama of Indigenous life, but there were also contemporary perspectives on respectful, protocol-aware engagement with First Nations and with land. History unfolded from unquestioned White supremacy and colonialism to more nuanced approaches, even if not freed from the frame of the White academy.

In my station, I stood in front of a glass screen, not touching (and writing this, I think of the heat of the *M Archive* passage, sand melting into glass). Behind the glass was a small mammoth plastic creature with impossibly red lips at the end of a long trunk. Next to it lay excavated fossilized mammoth teeth, signs of "I have been here": creature/rock/body/mineral (Plate 16). I spent time looking, being, being lost, opening. I sensed what would come through in

speculative modes of eco soma attention. Then, the group came round to my station. I didn't know what would happen; I hadn't planned it out. I just trusted my improvisatory skills, and I also trusted that something would offer itself to me if I asked gently enough, if I pressed into the earth, right there. We went on a dream journey. Inviting them with my voice, I had everybody drop into this particular location, thousands of years ago.

I cannot fully remember what I spoke about in that dream meditation: I am altered when I do these things.<sup>2</sup> Since so much of my memory is sensory, image and sensation flashes, I offer it in a complex pronoun, not claiming anything for the group, but also inviting you in. This remains:

*At one point, you/I/us are sitting on the ground. There is sparse grass below, sandy soil beneath that. A gentle breeze. Alone, but the community is not far. The sky is wide. Something comes up from behind, massive, but not threatening, awe inspiring, but not violent. There is a musky smell. You/I/us feel the heft of its being in the trembling earth beneath. There is no threat. It lays its long snout on you/me/us: the shoulder, a weight, air flow and humidity on cheek. It kisses you/me/us. Warm breath blow. Then it withdraws, a question mark as much as a benediction.*

Eventually, I return to our consensus world, on the floor, in the museum, in front of the glass cabinet, in the circle of our group. And here is that little plastic mammoth now, asking me about anthropomorphism, about who does what to whom, about pedagogies that are open to what is on the limit, about embodied joyful journeys that can't be remembered. Unruly senses. Land yielding with a gift to a quiet request. People breathing in meditation, yielding even as none of us in our multiracial community can really trust one another in a world of White supremacy, eugenic impulses, and colonial injustice. We brought a lot of our pathways to this meeting, where we came from, our people, our land. Now, we were on *this* land.

We/you/I breathe, fill lungs together, center well-being in community, in risk. We/you/I (in a museum, or sitting with a book) breathe with the dust and memory that Tiffany King reminds me of: "Slavery and genocide linger in places we do not expect and cannot yet see or define" (2019, x).

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes about a visual artist that "for South Africans such as [Ezrom] Legae, those depicted in his work are no longer simply human, as they are transformed by the taking on of the physical and psychical

potential of animals” (2020, 32). Here, in the museum with the mammoth, in a soft/hot churning planet, our group is in a practice that channels and does not resolve. The practice asks each of us to press and yield into horizon space, to find our boundaries, and to see what our imaginations make of a touch of deep time, of old land, of bio/mineral/elemental encounter.

I am also holding on to King’s later comment, and I task myself to not get too hopeful or carried away. She tasks her book to

arrest settler colonialism’s tendency to resuscitate older liberal humanist modes of thought to create new poststructural and postmodern forms of violent humanisms that feed off Indigenous genocide and Black social death. (2019, 12)

Let’s not get romantic in the violence of the anthropological museum, even as we explore new kin. Stay at the limit. And yet here we are, yielding to a queer interspecies kiss.

In the last chapter, shadow and light, the blanket’s opening, the tree’s bark, the pigeon’s flight all led to vitalities that were unruly, disturbed categorization while trying to evade becoming malleable material for production. Here, in this coda, I moved from the last chapter’s discussion of my individual pain in touch with different plastics to a different little plastic figure, behind glass, next to stone teeth, soft and pink and hard and calcified and imprisoned, all at once. How does one fill one’s lungs, watch someone else fill their lungs, and be aware of the histories in the act? How can I be aware and alive to the airy material with its trace of clove odor (chapter 1)? To the beating heart and its connection to sound (chapter 2)? To the permeability of the skin to liquid toxins, verbal toxins, and creative healing structures (chapter 3)? To the speculative embodiment of spaceships to zoom out of normality, to plant-human time, to dove wings (chapter 4)?

These are eco soma questions for me, and I am glad to be engaging them with you, in company, in unruly and defiant breaths.





## NOTES

### Introducing Eco Soma

1. In this book, I embrace a citational politics of foregrounding expressions that teach me about perspectives outside the (somewhat) consolidated field of disability studies, and I try to reach beyond White academic canons. Also if I have engaged with particular writers in my earlier books, I am less likely to cite them here.

2. The term *dérive* emerges from the Situationist International, and it is a surrealist technique of de-/refamiliarizing oneself with one's environment. There is much more to be said about psychogeography, *dérive*, the Situationists, and disability culture experiencing and writing. For some resources on this, in relation to my community performance practice, see Kupperts 2018 and Heit and Kupperts 2019.

3. This term has a long history in somatic practice. I encountered it first in Teri Carter's Continuum/Experiential Anatomy/BodyMindCentering sessions, where we used it to describe our "dives" into the human anatomy: getting into contact with blood cells or organ membranes. It also has roots back to Pilates teacher Gil Hedley and his Integral Anatomy "expeditions of the human form." British-based dance researcher and practitioner Becca Weber uses the term "Somanaut Dance" as the umbrella for her choreographic and somatic practices. I am citing all these lineages and uses in order to mark how terms travel and how concepts with resonance shift and turn. I also feel an affinity with another "-naut" out of eco-poetic usage: Orchid Tierney's "petronaut," as she engages in "oily writing" in petrochemical contexts (2019).

4. These moments of new orientations and relations are a delicious reminder of Sarah Ensor's reading of Samuel Delany's cruising movements in his novel *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. She writes about a passage that contains loitering, lingering, waiting, and sitting as phrases, and she claims that "beyond the fact that all of the actions here are banal, daily, and casual, the verbs themselves are exclusively intransitive; rather than tending directly toward an object that exerts a kind of magnetic pull, they are open-ended, wandering, and persisting indefinitely. The resulting grammar (on the page and of somatic experience) is distinctly non-telic, both insofar as the culmination of these concatenated phrases is simply an acknowledgment of their collective nonspecificity, and insofar as the protraction endemic to their present progressive verbs precludes any sense of immediate utility or identifiable end. It is this capacity for—and predication on—forms of dilation and delay, precisely the way in which "contact" can be understood not as the vector-like relationship between subject and object but rather as the medial dimension in which such relation becomes possible—that makes it, for Delany, such a powerful concept and embodied practice alike" (Ensor 2018, 7). She locates a looser relationality, a lingering, and shapes it into a queer form of environmental practice. With this, she offers a powerful way of

employing literary analysis to think about the meanings behind how people orient to space, others, and the world.

### 1. Social Somatics

1. The school is described by paggett in the following terms: “The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People is a roaming, large-scale installation and performance platform conceived of by Los Angeles–based artist taisha paggett. This project, which takes the form of a dance school, is shaped by the question, ‘what is a Black dance curriculum today?’ The installations themselves, developed in collaboration with artists Ashley Hunt and Kim Zumpfe, serve as temporary dance schools, and performance spaces. The core of the School for the Movement of the Technicolor People is the dance company WXPT (we are the paper, we are the trees), a temporary, experimental community of queer people of color and allies, dancers and non-dancers alike. WXPT was created by paggett in early 2015 to expand upon the language and methods of modern and contemporary dance practices, to shift the ways dancers of color are positioned within the contemporary field, and to explore questions of queer desire, responsibility, migration, and historical materials that inhabit our cultural imagination. The collaborators involved in the school change with each city it takes place in” (paggett website, accessed September 2019).

2. This includes monthly ecstatic dance meetings, contact jams, a DanceAbility workshop hosted in collaboration with the newly evolving Disability Power Detroit organization, and more. This isn’t to say that “disability” is a legible category at this workshop: as far as I can see, I am the only one marked by my mobility device and hence clearly legible as disabled (as well as the only fat person in the room). What I mark here is my own perspective, the particular register through which I see the world, and align my dance companions into categories that are resonant for me. I see the world in crip-desirous ways. But as my witnessing of the scene will show as it unfolds, disabling frameworks enter this particular Light Box evening in multiple ways.

In this endnote, I am already using a range of frameworks around “disability,” and I want to guide readers who wish to find out more about different ways of thinking around concepts like “crip,” “disability justice,” “feminist-of-color disability methods,” and more, as well as tensions between identity-based and representational approaches to disability and analyses that track connections between “ableism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalist violence, particularly as they assign value or lack thereof to certain bodyminds” (Kim and Schalk, 37–38) to the transformational resources of Jina Kim and Sami Schalk’s overview essay (2020) and the foundational work of Nirmala Erevelles (2011), Mia Mingus (2017), or *Sins Invalid* (2016, 2019). In these works, “disability” shifts from an identity someone holds, which might or might not be visible, to an analytic grounded in the uneven distribution of resources and the historic and contemporary reverberations of violence.

3. Haraway uses the word “Cthulucene” but shifted an “h” to denote some freedom from the monster named by racist writer Lovecraft: “Cthulhu (note spelling), luxuriat-

ing in the science fiction of H.P. Lovecraft, plays no role for me, although it/he did play a role for Gustave Hormiga, the scientist who named my spider demon familiar. . . . I take the liberty of rescuing my spider from Lovecraft for other stories” (2016, 173). Both Lovecraft and Haraway have linked the different spellings they use to the concept “chthonic” (classical Greek “of the earth”). I am not as allergic to Lovecraftian monster worlds as feminist science scholar Donna Haraway seems to be—but then, I am a creative writer as well as a performance artist and well aware of the many writers of color, queer writers, women writers, and others who shape their worlds in the Lovecraftian mythos universes, recognizing that the racist, misogynist granddaddy seems to have left a lot of desire lines dangling. Some of these Lovecraftian reinventions include Victor LaValle’s *Ballad of Black Tom*, a reinvention of one of Lovecraft’s most racist tales, “The Terror of Red Hook,” or Dan Gildark’s film *Cthulhu*, a queer Innsmouth scenario. I am going to discuss Cthulhu further in the last chapter of this book. For now: it’s a multi-tentacled monster.

4. As a disability culture activist, I use terms like “disabled people” or “people with disabilities,” two widely accepted variations. I also use “crip,” a more recent term of reclamation, with complicatedly different lives in activist and academic worlds. “Disability” allows one access to legal rights language, “crip” leans much further into in-group lingo, into queer tactics, outside of respectability politics. For a rich opening discussion of the term, see Sandahl (2003). We all come to our knowledge practices in different ways, and asking someone how they wish to be referred to is always the best approach when trying to figure out shifting language practices. Here, in this chapter, I mainly use “crip” to connote the contemporary arts and performance field.

5. #Sayhername is a social media movement to draw attention to and hold memorial space for Black female victims of police brutality and anti-Black violence in general. The movement founded itself on lack of attention given to gender in the analysis of anti-Black violence. One of the supporters is the theorist who coined the term “intersectionality” in the 1980s, and she uses a participatory framework, an embodied marker, to show what she is talking about: “Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw has a trick. She asks everyone to stand up until they hear an unfamiliar name. She then reads the names of unarmed black men and boys whose deaths ignited the Black Lives Matter movement; names such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin. Her audience are informed and interested in civil rights so “virtually no one will sit down,” Crenshaw says approvingly. “Then I say the names of Natasha McKenna, Tanisha Anderson, Michelle Cusseaux, Aura Rosser, Maya Hall. By the time I get to the third name, almost everyone has sat down. By the fifth, the only people standing are those working on our campaign” (Khaleeli 2016).

In the same *Guardian* interview, Crenshaw also makes a powerful link to another facet of intersectional precarity: disability. “However, unless the way women are killed is taken into account, says Crenshaw, we can’t “broaden our understanding of vulnerability to state violence and what do we need to do about it.” There are many cases, for instance, where women are killed by police who arrive as first responders to emergency

calls for mental health crises. “Disability—emotional, physical and mental—is one of the biggest risk factors for being killed by the police, but it is relatively suppressed in the conversation about police violence” (Khaleeli 2016).

6. After sharing my writing with taisha paggett, she graciously gave me consent to share and publish about her practice. She asked me to capitalize “Black” as a racial signifier. Journalism professor Lori L. Tharps pointed out in her op-ed “The Case for Black with a Capital B” in the *New York Times* (2014), “Ironically, The Associated Press also decrees that the proper names of ‘nationalities, peoples, races, tribes’ should be capitalized. What are Black people, then?” Given this logic, I capitalize Black and White here. When the issue is skin color, I leave the signifier lowercase. The very act of contemplating this is instructive and culturally significant in its own right. After writing this footnote, in July 2020, even the *New York Times* switched their rules, and they are now capitalizing Black but keeping “white” lowercase (as two editors argue, “There is less of a sense that ‘white’ describes a shared culture and history.” Hmm. In the *Atlantic*, Kwame Anthony Appiah has argued for capitalizing both, arguing that neither present a “fully formed and stable social category” (2020).

7. I met my future wife at the naming ceremony of this particular performance space, and this particular futon used to be in my office at the University of Michigan before I donated it to Light Box during one of my moves. I slept many times on this futon, during a time when I was effectively homeless: a misunderstanding with a landlord meant that my apartment was rented out after a return from the summer, and, something so familiar to people who use wheelchairs and usually completely invisible to nonchair users, there were no wheelchair-accessible apartments to be had in Ann Arbor for that particular semester. So for a few months, I dogged security guards, made friends with janitors, found out about late-night cafés in the city center, and showered at the local YMCA.

8. The ecosomatic as a content field has already a good number of entries, as artists and theorists look around for tools for living in the changing world of the Anthropocene. Foundational entries include David Abram’s work (1996) and many other writers in ecopsychology, ethnography, and beyond. My ecosomatic wayfarers here include literary disability studies scholar Matthew Cella, who writes, “This deep entanglement—the dialectic of embodiment and emplacement—is the central subject of this essay as this dialectic forms the basis for what I call the ecosomatic paradigm. The ecosomatic paradigm assumes contiguity between the mind-body and its social and natural environments; thus, under this scheme, the work of negotiating a ‘habitable body’ and ‘habitable world’ go hand in hand” (2013, 574–75). Cella uses this perspective to engage with novels by Cormac McCarthy and Linda Hogan, as well as the interpenetration of disability and emplacement within them. Other writers in this lineage include disabled dancer and somatic practitioner Bronwyn Preece, who writes about her work as “earthBODYment, an eco-somatic approach to exploring connections between mind, body, and earth” (2015, 2021).

For a more multivocal engagement with ecosomatics, see also the ecosomatics

issue of the Center for Sustainable Practices quarterly I edited, with contributions by Aimee Meredith Cox, Brownyn Preece, Megan Milks, Edgar Fabián Frías, and Rania Lee Khalil (2021). There are also many theater and performance books that engage the ecology/performance seam, and I do not specifically play with this rich and deep history in this book, although I do see it in the lineage of what Theresa May calls “eco-dramatury,” which is a “theatre praxis that centers ecological relations between nature and culture, human and non-human, individual and community” (2021, 4).

9. There are a number of contemporary texts that speak to notions of well-being and self- and other care in political and social justice terms, from Naomi Ortiz (2018), who reminds her readers about being rooted, about ancestral support, and Grandmother Moon’s light, to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s engagement with disability justice and care webs (2018), to adrienne maree brown, who cites Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, and Toni Cade Bambara specifically as part of her lineage in *Pleasure Activism* (2019).

10. The “participatory” here draws on multiple strands of art practice, and very uneven engagement with this tradition in art criticism. In 2006 Claire Bishop found it necessary to coin the term “social turn” for a set of art practices in contemporary art: participatory work, often outside museums, but usually still with a strong connection to the art market, often in system critique modes. Against the fact of this coinage stands (or creeps, or leans, or shuffles, whatever minoritarian habitus metaphor can work) the long history of community art, socially engaged art, and art for social change by multiple communities, often from people who are part of these communities, often aimed at political change and with concrete social aims. Coinages happened all along: in 1991, Suzanne Lacy used the term “New Genre Public Art” to refer to work that was not (straight) sculptural but in public places. Bishop engages the terrain in biting critique, for instance, in her evaluation of strands of 1970s British Community Art: “By avoiding questions of artistic criteria, the community arts movement unwittingly perpetuated the impression that it was full of good intentions and compassion, but ultimately not talented enough to be of broader interest.” My book, as all my work in the past, mainly engages with work that also seems to have slipped out from under that particular “broader interest”: minor practices, as much concerned with witty survival, cohabitation, and shaping new futures together than with the approving nod of art-world critics.

11. Eco cripp: as disability activists and theorists like Alison Kafer (2013) and Sarah Jaquette Ray (2013, Ray and Sibara, 2017), Eli Clare (1998, 2014), and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2015, 2018) have shown, the environmental movement and the disability movement have been at odds with one another for a while (and the same is true for desired connections between eco-justice and racial justice movements). The hearty healthy eco-warrior and the fragile crippy creep are not easily mapped onto one another. But that has rarely hindered disabled people, with all their baggage of cultural stereotyping, to go out and touch a tree, sing to a flower, or find completion and contemplation in the aliveness of natural and unnatural worlds.

12. And with this particular orientation, resilience, creativity, engagement in the face

of precarity, my argument diverges significantly from Lauren Berlant's. Berlant engages with weak resistance, an exhausted practical engagement with life and pressure. Berlant critiques notions of sovereignty, and they are interested in sites where agency becomes complex, as in "spreading out activities like sex or eating, oriented toward pleasure or self-abeyance, that do not occupy time, decision, or consequentiality in anything like the registers of autonomous self-assertion" (757). Using people of size's eating habits as one of their examples, Berlant ends their argument on weak agency: "[The essay] argues that in the scene of slow death, a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment" (2007, 759). Berlant's register of intentionality is very different from mine. I work in community settings and joyfully participate in communal "low" art of all kinds. I meet plenty of folks who are self-aware, critical, bowed by the racist, misogynist, ableist, classist, homophobic, transphobic systems that surround them. Some live with little hope, but they do not seem to see or move their large bodies as living metaphors for slow death. In the registers of affect theory, I am more in line with José Muñoz's cruising utopia and its investment in an Ernst Blochian hope: with melancholy, even with depression, but not without love.

13. A term with much currency in art and dance practice, somatics, and therapeutic communities that acknowledge the interconnectedness of body and mind. See, for instance, *The Emergence of Somatic Psychology and Bodymind Therapy* (Barratt 2010), which creates a lineage that encompasses Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Frantz Fanon, Paolo Freire, and others. I am indebted to the graduate work of Angela Schöpke Gonzalez (2021, unpublished) for a historical investigation of the term's citational history. She pointed me to John Money, writing about the term in 1956, in the context of challenging Descartes's body/mind split. More recently, the term has also been taken up in disability studies but often without keeping the older lineage attached: always a complexity with disciplinary coinages. The connection between self-experience and sociocultural frame stay central to this understanding: disability studies scholar Margaret Price shifts the discussion of bodymind to not only refer to the interrelation between processes but to also refer to "a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience" (Price 2015, 271).

14. Parts of this chapter have been performed and danced in many environments, always inviting audiences to move along with me—in particular, flocking as I am reading the relevant sections. These performance/lectures were part of various performance actions in the California Bay Area and beyond from 2009 onward, including the American Dance Festival/Hollins MFA in Durham, North Carolina, and a keynote for the International Federation for Theatre Studies in Osaka, 2011.

15. Readers steeped in European critical theory will recognize this as a Spinozan phrase, based on his famous statement that "we do not know what a body can do." Benedict de Spinoza is a seventeenth-century philosopher whose work stands in op-

position to the distinction between mind and body (i.e., what is known as the Cartesian split). He writes, “Nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the mind. . . . The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body . . . and nothing else. (See Spinoza’s *Ethics* as quoted in Curley 1994, 123).

16. Particularly influential to many dance practitioners is *A Thousand Plateaus* ([1980] 2004), see, for instance, Lepecki and Jenn 2009. I use dancerly methods when I discuss ATP with dance graduates: we read the first three pages, and I invite the students to underline and then cut out phrases that interest them. They then dance with these phrases and watch the others with their own phrases. We weave a web. Eventually, we get back to the text itself and discuss how our “movement analysis” shifted our understanding. Lightbulbs go on. Suddenly, some of this makes more sense and is closer to our particular skins. Grounded, and open to layers, memory, process, distributed loci of movement in our body: dancing brings out eco soma nuance, and new reading insights can happen.

17. One of the most prominent scholars of phenomenology in/as dance studies is Sondra Fraleigh. For a sustained engagement with ecological issues and dance phenomenology, see her edited collection *Back to the Dance Itself* (2018).

18. This issue, the economics of somatics, are particularly pronounced in the United States, where funding for somatic approaches as part of a social contract does not exist, and most healing modalities outside biomedicine are not easily covered by insurance (see also Eddy 2016, 236–37). My own training in Laban, Continuum, BodyMindCentering, and other approaches first happened in Europe, where pathways to employment and integration in institutional approaches to healing were at the time more easily imaginable. I had the privilege to encounter Laban movement in school, and my father took me to cheap public Autogenic Training sessions in my early teens: a modality of autonomic nervous system training that still underlies many of my approaches to altered-state somatics and dream journeying.

19. For an in-depth account of Gandhi critiques, see for instance Lahiri’s (2020) chapter on the issue of “imperfect solidarities.”

20. Part of this edition is somatic practitioner and autistic Nick Walker, who uses a somatic lens to engage autistic culture. Walker writes about the somatics of stimming and discusses issues like “eye-contact” as a cultural entity, differently weighted in the White and Black environments she grew up in. She writes movingly about the effect of medical intervention in stimming practices: “locking the beauty of our autistic dance away under layers of chronic tension warps our embodiment” (2018, 100). Walker finds her eventual preferred somatic modality when she reads about Aikido in Samuel Delany’s novel *Babel 17*—touching in with the speculative, world-bending imagination that also drives *Eco Soma*.

21. This axis, of the natural/unnatural, also fuels Doran George’s analysis of the oppressive nature of their dance training at the Dutch European Dance Center: “My effeminate movement and pronounced assibiliation of words containing ‘s’ sounds seemed not to be culturally neutral because they challenged prevailing beliefs about natural



gender” (2020, 3). Their education “stratified bodies as being more or less authentically connected with nature, and although I (and others) questioned the pedagogy’s premise of neutrality, it was difficult to challenge because it was bolstered by generally accepted scientific metaphors” (2020, 3).

22. I describe this communal learning and adjustment process in more detail in Kuppers (2003)—and for the last twenty years I have been using this initial exercise, centering ourselves, as an example of disability culture knowledge production in action.

23. My particular location in the networks of community performance allowed me to find out about this show, and I honor the many connections that made this possible: I was in Australia to collaborate with Australian dance movement therapy researcher and ethnographer Kim Dunphy, then working as an arts administrator. Kim passed away in the last months of finalizing this *Eco Soma* book project, and our final goodbyes were in Covid times, electronically. She had invited me to be a researcher for the Community Creative Development Bureau of Victoria, leading focus groups with stakeholders in disability arts across the state in order to inform new funding initiatives. Vale Kim, one of the many people whose generosity and vision helped weave the interdependent web that subtends *Eco Soma*.

24. I have seen the term “social somatic” increasingly used since, in particular among cultural body workers in the Bay Area, my part-time home for a time. Eddy locates a line of use of the term with Alexander teacher, Hakomi practitioner, and elder Carol Swan (2016, 234). Citational lines and language ownership are complicated by the need for market differentiation, websites are undated, and the academic/practitioner/artist interfaces make for a bewildering terrain of influence and caretaking. Most important, though, we are all on the journey of making movement more accessible, more capacious, and sourced from more roots.

25. “Staree” is a highly useful term coined by disability theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson to denote the agency of those who are always being looked at (2005, 7).

26. In the British social model of disability, accepted to an extent in Australia as well, “impairment” refers to a particular condition, “disability” to the social effects of that condition.

27. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson introduced the term “normate” to disability studies, and it’s a great term to undermine and defamiliarize the everyday “normal.” The term refers to the “corporeal incarnation of culture’s collective, unmarked, normative characteristics” (1996, 8).

28. These crip cannibals set up another association for me, less carnivalesque, more sobering in its reminder of racist politics and their effects on shared social lives: the reference field of “welfare queens,” racist images of Black women supposedly accumulating children to drain social security nets, “disabling” (i.e., draining) the financial resources of the body politic (see also Kim and Schalk 2020, 44).

29. The show had multiple components in a wide-open community ritual. You can sit back and be led through the multiple stations by Eric Kuppers himself, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFBi5aaJpN4>.



30. This technique, “flocking,” was described in one of the books taisha paggett had ready for us in her Light Box workshop in 2019: these little coincidences, energetic link-ages, make for momentary crossings and solidarities.

31. Frank H. Ogawa, after whom this plaza is named, was a civil rights leader, confined in a U.S. internment camp in Utah during World War II, and the first Japanese American on the Oakland City Council, where he served for twenty-eight years.

32. This same tree also appears in the opening pages of Jenny Odell’s *How to Do Nothing* (2019), a popular artist’s self-help book that urges people to pay attention and traces the history of this call in European philosophy and contemporary art. Trees continue to be pivot points, axes for human worlds.

33. The Olimpias is an artists’ collective, founded in 1996 in Wales during work with mental health–system survivors, with artistic director Petra Kuppers. Associates come from around the world, with a current U.S. center. We create collaborative, research-focused environments open to people with physical, emotional, sensory, and cognitive differences and their co-conspirators. In these environments, we can explore pride and pain, attention, and the transformative power of touch. The Olimpias is disability-led, and nondisabled co-conspirators are always welcome. Many of the Olimpias’s performance research working methods are collected in Kuppers (2014). In this artist’s statement language, I replaced the term that’s been there for a long time, “ally,” with “co-conspirator,” in keeping with calls to action, to future-oriented thinking, transformation, speculative life-making centered on Black Lives Matter protest. I acknowledge Black writers and activists like Alicia Garza, cofounder of the BLM movement, as the carriers of this language and knowledge, and I remain conflicted about the politics of using the term for a White-dominated crip-led group. Right now, this is where I am landing . . . and any discomfort will spur me on to reinvent and shift as my own growing understanding develops. This is, after all, a book about movement. This is also a book about being-with: one of the lineages of the “co-conspirators” formulation comes to me from anthropologist Tim Choy (2016) and his call for a conspiracy of breathers: an aspirational politics in which people become aware of *con-spiring*, that is to breathe together and join forces to fight toxic atmospheres.

34. Things shift over time. Here is how the memorial has addressed this collapse of disabled embodiment and the imagination of instability. It found a way to move (somewhat) beyond the initial inaccessibility: “Special passages for wheelchair users and people with walking disabilities are marked by the Field of Stelae”: <https://www.berlin.de/en/attractions-and-sights/3560249-3104052-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe.en.html>, accessed June 2021. See also Dekel (2013, 11) on the disability alterations.

35. This relation between stability and instability has also entered the critical discourse around the monument: historian Mark Godfrey writes that the memorial “replaced the firmness and fixity of the German ground with a fictitious, unpredictable, newly invented topography . . . one that is other than stable” (2007, 246).

36. For more information on disabled lives in the Holocaust and the uses of the metaphor

of stumbling, see Kenny Fries's *Stumbling over History: Disability and the Holocaust* (forthcoming). Throughout Germany, stumbling stones—small brass markers—have become a marker of historic memories of atrocity: blocks set into the pavement in front of European and Russian houses witness the deportation and killing of people from those homes during the Holocaust. I remember seeing these blocks first when I went to the University of Cologne: in 1992, artist Gunter Demnig began creating these brass markers as part of an initiative commemorating Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust. In February 2019, the *Guardian* reported that “the 70,000th *Stolperstein* was laid for Willy Zimmerer, a German man with learning disabilities murdered at Hadamar psychiatric hospital outside of Frankfurt.” The same *Guardian* article also reports criticism of the project: “For me, stumbling over a piece of metal in the ground is anything but dignified,” writes Holocaust survivor Charlotte Knobloch, head of the Jewish community in Munich and Bavaria.

37. I had to stop myself from writing “like cattle”: that enmeshment of animal discourses and particularly Black fungibility appears on my writing fingertips too easily. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes, “Critical black studies must challenge animalization on at least two fronts: animalizing discourse that is directed primarily at people of African descent, and animalizing discourse that reproduces the abject abstraction of ‘the animal’ more generally because such an abstraction is not an empirical reality but a metaphysical technology of bio/necropolitics applied to life arbitrarily (2020, 15). “Humanity” is a complex field of allocation and judgment, and to use animal metaphors here would elide the violence of dividing lines, the same categorizing instinct that has authorized racialized violence.

38. In this way of both experiencing and utilizing somatic sensations toward destabilizing knowledge, I am activating a different embodied/critical pathway from Doran George, whose work on particular lineages of somatics identifies the field in its connection to a Western and European concept of the natural. George writes, “Explanations that configure the significance of the body as beyond culture, such as proffered by Somatics, forfeit an understanding of how social forces are embodied through dance” (2020, 9). In contradistinction, my understanding and use of somatics as part of my eco soma methods specifically embraces this activation of felt and moved reflection.

39. To really know “something” of what went on, performance studies people could try to track down and ask participants at the Performance Studies international Conference/Festival in Utrecht (2011), or others who took part in our circle. This would involve a different methodology from my single-voiced narrative here: interviews, or maybe focus groups (to help jog people’s memory). But would these interviews elicit the somatic thickening of experience that I felt in the room? Would there be words for our sensations in memory’s translation?

40. This moment links me to geographer Max Liboiron (*Métis/Michif*), who first thought about plastics as unchosen kin and then offered a deep rethink after being challenged by Indigenous thinkers around the use of “making kin” as a practice of White possessiveness. Researchers should and can change our minds and track who is

holding us accountable: seeing this thought process laid out in Liboiron's work helps me track my own changing thoughts (Liboiron 2021, 110, citing Goenpul tribal member and professor of Indigenous studies Aileen Moreton-Robinson 2015 and Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd 2016).

41. This way of thinking about the materiality, specificity, and journeys of particular plants, minerals, or "hyperobjects," to cite Tim Morton's (2013, 1) phrase about "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" like Styrofoam or plutonium, is grounded in new materialist work by writers like anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and her attention to the multidimensional webs of matsutake mushrooms (2015), or Tiffany King's (2019) writing on porosity and the indigo-stained hands of Nana Peazant in Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust*, engaging anew Clyde Woods's "blues epistemology" (1998).

42. Australian researcher Ashley Frisch and colleagues write that "clove oil solution (10% clove oil, 90% ethanol) is an anaesthetic that is widely used to catch demersal fish on coral reefs." A 2007 study in the *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology* found that "(1) limited amounts of clove oil solution are unlikely to harm this coral, and (2) clove oil solution may represent an 'eco-friendly' alternative to cyanide for use in the live reef-fish trade." There is a whole spate of similar articles in marine ecology journals, tracking the relative resilience of corals and the toxicity of the anaesthetic over years of discussion. This is strange reading material for a performance studies scholar, and I am leaving this one trace of my short moment of being led by the clove in this text as a mark of interspecies process.

43. For my dance readers: I was part of Germany's first Tanz Theatre seminar, led by Hedwig Mueller, a heady time. Not incidentally, a different version of this section has previously appeared with Germany/Japan-based editors Nanako Nakajima and Gabriele Brandstetter's collection on dance and aging (2017).

44. In her moving phenomenology of Latisha King's execution and the resulting court case, Gayle Salamon writes about Maeve Fox, the assistant district attorney prosecuting the White supremacist murder of young trans biracial Latisha King. She writes about Fox enacting a chin flick, a "proverbial f-you" that shows how young Latisha "is through some remarkable alchemy able to transform the transphobic scorn directed her way into something powerful and profound, a sense of confidence and security held at a bodily level" (2018, 85). My stem-up invitation, uttered for many years in different talks, does not have the vibratory charge of allowing us to see a murder victim's power. But I employ it in a similar strategy: to see strength instead of pity and to feel one's muscles rather than the harshness of concrete stair exclusion. Also, with this stemming invitation, I am employing a somatic technique that is close to a disability simulation—but you will not "know me" by stemming yourself up a bit, or even by trailing around a campus for an afternoon in a wheelchair. I embrace the creative potential of these seductive simulation scenarios: they are fun ways to break up long talks or reading sessions and are a great alternative to sitting in a classroom. Social practice artist Carmen Papalia is a master of this kind of seductive play with simulation: he leads

people in long lines across traffic lanes, feeling his way with his stick (for instance, in his participatory actions *Long Time No See* and the *Blind Field Shuttle Walking Tour*).

45. Elsewhere, I engaged with the work of Raimund Hoghe, longtime dramaturg to Pina Bausch, who has offered a strong body of work on German history, Nazi politics, the disciplining of bodies, and queer longing (Kuppers 2015). See also Johnson (2013); or the work of Gerda Koenig, a Cologne-based wheelchair-using choreographer who has created work that mobilizes her own nude body as a fulcrum of desire and beauty (Kuppers 2006, 2017). In 2018, the Sophiensaele in Berlin began to host foreign disabled dance artists as choreographers, working with the local population, with U.S. gender-queer crip artist Perel as their first guest.

46. See, for instance, Lilian Karina and Marion Kant's *Tanz unter dem Hakenkreuz* (Dance under the swastika) (1996), for one of the many accounts of Laban's work in relation to the Nazis and the point at which he fled after first collaborating on big dance spectacles.

47. Fordism and Taylorism are systems of mass production linked to Henry Ford's auto empire and to a particular form of "scientific management" of workers' bodies: machine-link cogs interlocking on assembly lines.

48. This section is adapted from my essay "Occupy the WEFT: Choreographing Factory Affect and Community Performance."

49. Shinrin-yoku/forest bathing emerges from Japanese preventative health medicine in the 1980s. Tomohide Akiyama, director general of the Japanese Agency of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Japan, coined "shinrin-yoku" in the early 1980s, and both Japanese and South Korean researchers have created bodies of work on the health benefits of walking in forests. The concept arrived in the English-speaking world mainly through Quing Li (2018), an immunologist and teacher at the Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, Japan.

In the United States, the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs has developed, and many community centers now offer "forest bathing" as a "class," decoupling associations of rambling from everyday practices and coupling them with professional expertise. The mycelium network and intertree communications have been popularized in a book by Peter Wohlleben (2015, English trans. 2016), who started his career as a German forester before becoming a survival guide and a caretaker of the forest in his local German community. The book's reception is an intriguing case study: a petition denouncing the "oversimplifications and emotional explanations" launched in August 2018, and found 4,516 supporters as of July 2020 (OpenPetition: Even in the Forest It's Facts We Want Not Fairytales, 2018).

## 2. Edges of Water and Land

1. I have some Western ethnographic training, as social anthropology was part of my degree program at the University of Cologne. But when I was getting ready for my fieldwork—working with disabled people on Indonesian islands, examining their mobility strategies in water/land environments—the NGO who set up these connections

barred me from going because I was a wheelchair user myself. I did not fit the normative idea of an anthropologist, so that was that. Throughout my career, the sense of who “my people” are keeps shifting and twisting, but my interest in how fellow disabled people create rich artful lives is central to my curiosity, practice, and scholarship.

2. Also note that my naming practice shifts throughout: I use various words, in keeping with dominant Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native uses on respective lands. These protocols change, and I would urge anybody writing to consult with elders and Indigenous scholars of the particular land.

3. A short literature review might be necessary to historicize and locate cross-cultural engagement in performance. In the categories for cross-cultural theatrical practice developed by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert (2002), the practices I am looking at would fall into different categories, made complex by the fact that none of them fall solely within a straightforward dramatic mode: the first one emerges from syncretic postcolonial practice within a nation-state framework, the second seems closest to intercultural practice in an international setting (as developed by Bharucha 2000), and the third from Multicultural (capital *M*) community performance (i.e., from a state, Australia, that practices a top-down integrationist arts policy for community cultural development. The first two, in particular, challenge Western dramatic modes in the way Christopher Balme analyzes them in his discussion of cross-cultural drama (1999). My work is influenced by these taxonomical efforts in relation to cross-cultural theater.

4. This move into the “virtual age” is not without complex issues for many Indigenous people, and for people who find themselves affected by digital divides, and by the racialized frames of the Internet. See for instance *Natives on the Net* (2006), a collection by Kyra Landzelius, Lisa Nakamura’s engagement with racialization and representation on/with/in relation to the net (2007), and Grant and Hendriks’s collection on Indigenous people and mobile technologies (2016).

5. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang write, “Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter”—grasping theoretical concepts and capturing performances within them is not a method that fosters decolonializing processes (2012, 3).

6. For a rich history of Indigenous and Black critiques of Deleuzoguattarian thought and its deathliness, see King 2017. King also has a footnote in her text, an aside, but one that offers an important perspective on practices of reading, affect in the classroom, and the need to think about the uses of theory as a tool. I cite the footnote here in full, as it pertains strongly to the placement of theoretical thought apropos one’s ethical deepening: “I would also like to acknowledge the often unnoticed (or noticed and perhaps resented) methods that students, particularly women of color, use in the classroom to refuse the tacit acceptance of violence embedded within the tradition of White critical theory. For example, White male students in my graduate feminist theories class often perform a kind of exuberance and joy when the course finally gets to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. Conversely, many women of color in the class feel a sense of dread. Rather than explain this dread as a response to the difficulty and rigor of the text, I am apt to believe that on an affective level, the resistance to their work

could stem from the way death stalks the work. Whether my resistant students know or understand it or not, I imagine that somewhere in the gut they might be wondering, ‘Why must I become attached to something that murders?’ Further, many of my women and queer-of-color students astutely ask how this is useful. This question considers the tenor in which Deleuze wrote and hoped that people would hear and receive his work. In 1972, in a discussion with Foucault, Deleuze urged that theory is ‘always local and related to a limited field.’ Theories are particular things that emerge from specific milieus and circumstances. Further, Deleuze argues that ‘a theory is like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who ceases then to be a theoretician), the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don’t revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others.’ (See Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, ‘Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze’ [1972], <http://libcom.org/library/intellectuals-power-a-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze>.) This is rigorous and worthwhile work that is rarely performed. It often requires that one first ask the question: how is this relevant and helpful to me? Most of the time answering this question will require additional reading that includes biographies of the theorist as well as other kinds of supplemental reading” (King 2017, 184).

7. One note about images in this chapter: as I want to ensure that people whose work I write about can read the material, and since the latter half of this chapter focuses on collaborations in Queensland, Australia, I made the decision to not have recognizable images of humans in this chapter, in line with Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander protocols around visual representations of (potentially deceased) humans. One video still of the Anishinaabe singers is in the separate color section, but all other images here are of abstract art, shadow puppets, and crowd scenes that make individual identification impossible. This is in line with the protocol adopted by the Australian Broadcasting Association: “Journalists and documentary makers should be aware that images and voices of long-deceased persons—for example, in archival footage and photographs—may cause distress to Indigenous people” (NITV 2017). As always, it’s best to consult with particular Indigenous groups, of course, and not to assume the validity of blanket statements, particularly ones created in the uneven power environment of White/Indigenous collaboration space. As National Indigenous Television Channel Manager Tanya Denning-Orman explains: “Even though we have cultural protocol guidelines we must also remember that every community has their own set of cultural protocols that need to be respected and the best approach is to liaise directly with Indigenous communities members as culture protocols may differ from year to year” (NITV 2017).

8. The video was carefully approved by all participants, and by Anishinaabe elders who were also present for the events. Some of these layers of permission and protocol were unusual to me, a non-Indigenous artist and researcher, and I gratefully learned from my Indigenous collaborator Margaret Noodin to allow for the time and space necessary to ensure appropriate relations.

9. Marcie Rendon (Anishinaabe) is a theater maker and writer-activist who supports and encourages other writers to write in Ojibwe. Among her projects are a writing residency she facilitated on the White Earth reservation as part of a three-phase Project Hoop Residency to create theater projects at a community level.

10. Heid E. Erdrich is Ojibwe enrolled at Turtle Mountain, and the author of eight books of poetry and prose, and an interdisciplinary artist. She has created poemeos (poem films and videos) in collaboration with Elizabeth Day, Jonathan Thunder, and Trevino Brings Plenty.

11. Angel Sobotta (Nez Perce) is a language teacher in the tribal Head Start program, local schools, and at the Lewis-Clark State College in Idaho. She is also a theater maker with the Lapwai Afterschool Programs, teaching language by adapting legends and directing the youth, including “Niimiipuum Titwaatit—The People’s Stories,” which was an antibullying project (2012).

12. You can sing this song with us, too. Here is the link to the Ojibwe.net, a resource for Anishinaabemowin language revitalization, where you can find the words and the song. See Miskwaasining Nagamojig (April 2) (Shkaakamikwe: Mother Earth, 2016), <http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/shkaakaamikwe-mother-earth/>. I used to be a bit wary about whether it would be respectful to do this, me as a settler inviting others to sing an Indigenous song, but my collaborators have assured me that this is (one part of) the purpose of the site. When teaching the works in this chapter, I have since used the link to joyfully invite a group of people to participate in an Anishinaabemowin song, as a respectful, alive, and thriving practice.

13. It’s important to remember that *survivance* cannot be the only concept with which to grasp Indigenous practice in performance studies—there are many nuances of expression, as Stó:lō Researcher Dylan Robinson points out when he addresses Idle No More gatherings as displays of anger as well as cultural survival (2017).

14. See, for instance, Huhndorf 2009 and Forte 2009; see also concepts of “visual sovereignty,” following Rickard 1995.

15. More information about this artwork can be found on Rebecca Belmore’s website: <http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/exhibit/Fountain.html> (Belmore 2005).

16. When I stop my writing self here from fabulation, from (certain kinds of) speculation, from writing down what I vaguely heard, I am doing so with the awareness that the concept of “research” has complicated values in decolonially aligned practices. “Evidence” would not help, or even deep footnoting citing informants: the barrier here is that I have not been given explicit permission, since I didn’t ask for it, as I am not in established relation. I am following Aotearoan Indigenous decolonizing scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s call for thoughtful action: “Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination” (2012, 218–19). Many White scholars are recognizing these ethical demands on not just telling stories as if they are ours to share; see, for instance, anthropologist Natasha Myers, who writes in an incantation that is part of her project *Rooting into the Planthroposcene*: “Refuse to discipline or deride local and Indigenous



cosmologies. Push back on every contortion or erasure or reduction of their knowledge that seeks to make such practices legible or commensurable or rational to science. Do not appropriate Indigenous knowledges, but do the work to make yourself receptive and responsive so that you can take these knowledges seriously” (2020).

17. Water panthers: it feels seductive to me to dive in here, but in my readings about Anishinaabe artists, I see their power mentioned but rarely explained in depth—different from the oft-told and written story of muskrat diving down and grasping the grains of sand that will make up Turtle Island. So here, in this chapter, I also leave them as a mention, a story that is not mine to tell. For a reference and a weaving into a different water story, see Anishinaabe writer Kimberly Blaeser (2020).

18. For a reading of a range of Indigenous feminist water protest actions, see Choctaw theater researcher Bethany Hughes’s work. She writes that the performances she engages “make clear that Indigenous feminist protest is not positioned against something, but rather for something: for the water; for the future; for each other” (2020).

19. In 1990, the term Two-Spirit emerged as a pan-Indian and Indigenous-specific term at an Indigenous lesbian and gay gathering in Winnipeg, Ontario, Canada. Two-Spirit activists as water protectors are aware of their importance in moving beyond binary norms. Standing Rock was a protest camp that stood against the North Dakota Access Pipeline, initially called into being in April 2016 by elder LaDonna Brave Bull Allard. Candi Brings Plenty, an enrolled citizen of Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe, advocated for the presence of Two-Spirit people, and a Two-Spirit camp was established. Trudie Jackson writes on the queer and trans people of color blog *ColorBloq* about the importance of the Two-Spirit camp as part of the wider Indigenous-led protest: “The presence of the Two-Spirit camp was crucial, since their presence was important as Water Protectors, Water Carriers, and Leading in Prayers. There was a fluidity of sexuality and gender represented at the Two-Spirit camp which challenged the binary that only cisgender heterosexuals were public in their protests and injustices and especially in support of Native Nations like the Standing Rock Sioux. The Two-Spirit camp challenged the gender norms by representing multiple genders at the NoDAPL camps, thereby also refusing to accept patriarchal domination of what the oil pipeline represents. The Two-Spirit camp showed once again that Native peoples do acknowledge multiple genders among them and accept them as part of their communities.” The acceptance is not automatic: not all elders and communities accept Two-Spirit perspectives (which is not the same as not accepting tribally specific nonbinary gender identities and sexual practices). Language practices are part of this revitalization of nonbinary gender and sexuality frameworks, and here, tribal specificity is central. In a 2016 interview, a Two-Spirit organizer and media arts justice facilitator with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, Fallon Andy (Anishinaabe) speaks to Anishinaabemowin language and gendering: “Today my grandma just calls me ‘noozhis,’ which means ‘grandkid,’ or by my nation name, which is ‘Waasegiizhigook,’ meaning ‘the light that shines through the clouds.’ She really takes out all the gendered stuff for me, which I really like.” This gesture represents a slight



shift in human consciousness, Andy says, as well as signaling a returning to the Anishinaabemowin way of seeing people for who they are as spiritual beings (2016).

20. Day (2008) identifies publicly as lesbian and also acknowledges the more recently emerging term Two-Spirit.

21. “Love” is caught in so many normative frames, regulated and used as a tool of colonialization. On how settler sexuality, land, blood quantum discussions, love economies, and relationality go together, see Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate/Dakota)’s blog *The Critical Polyamorist*.

22. Neoliberalism: in the context of these community arts projects, an economic creation that flattens difference and shifts attention away from the structural workings of racism and from the effects of extractive settler colonialism (Ahmed 2012; Mohanty 2013).

23. For many resources from the project, see the wider project website: <https://www.ghostnets.com.au>.

24. This video is on YouTube, “The Young Man and the Ghost Net” Moa Island Torres Strait. GhostNets Australia (Ricki Gunn and Corey Austin, Queensland: Ghostnets Australia, 2011), at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnN3t-5nf3g>.

25. This video is part of a DVD, *Creative Livelihoods*, released by the Art in Health Initiative and the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, Queensland (Art in Health Initiative 2011).

26. In my particular lineage as a community performance maker, I trace this term to Brazilian theater maker and activist Augusto Boal (1995).

### 3. Un/Bounding

1. Fairfield writes about her own experience of chronicity and more-than-human influence by meditating on the Greenland shark (2019), and engages the term “perilous ongoingness” in her PhD thesis (2021).

2. Slow violence, as discussed by Nixon 2011, is a force with a long history, one that treats people and their land and location as disposable, making them bear the brunt of incremental destructive global capitalism: a long-term emergency. Instead of viewing environmentalism as a political struggle among rich Global North actors, Nixon argues that there is a long history of people of color and actors in the Global South working to resist degradation but that these struggles are often invisibilized. This is one of the friction points between postcolonial and environmental studies.

3. For more insight into this frightening rise of contemporary eugenics in emergency management, see Barry Levy and Jonathan Patz 2015, 312–13; David Abbott and Sue Porter on disabled vulnerability 2013, 843–44, or multiple discussions of triage and lives worth having a ventilator in the Covid-19 crisis.

4. For a rare counterexample, see Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People*, and Jina Kim’s discussion of this work through a crip-of-color critique (2014).

5. Mia Mingus writes: “Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete

strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met. . . . Access intimacy is also the intimacy I feel with many other disabled and sick people who have an automatic understanding of access needs out of our shared similar lived experience of the many different ways ableism manifests in our lives. Together, we share a kind of access intimacy that is ground-level, with no need for explanations. Instantly, we can hold the weight, emotion, logistics, isolation, trauma, fear, anxiety and pain of access. I don't have to justify and we are able to start from a place of steel vulnerability" (2011, blog entry). This formulation resonated with many in disabled and chronically ill communities: this resonance went deep quickly, and much contemporary disability arts writing cites this beautiful concept.

6. In my writing of this piece of autoethnographic performance witnessing of site/performance, my influences included Kathy Westwater's performance work at Fresh Kills, Jennifer Scappettone's work on copper mining (2020), Cecil Giscombe's work on site and racialization (2020), Judith Hamera's engagement with political economic history in Detroit (2017), and Sally Ann Ness's ethnographic work in Yosemite National Park (2016), not to mention engagements with Deidre (Dee) Heddon, Angela Ellsworth, Pauline Oliveros, and more. In more diffuse, not easily citable ways, I also want to honor other lineages, from my European heritage: Dadaists, feminist surrealists, artists using language to create/track/excite the borders of life and death, people interested in edge experiences and trance states.

7. The origin of the piece was a commission for the Detroit Public Library, for the *Show Me Your Selves* exhibit.

8. See entry on Blanc Modern Africa blog, <http://www.blancmodernafrica.com/travel-journal/2019/7/detroit-art-week>.

9. My first teacher for this was Yeye (mother) Luisah Teish and her book *Jambalaya* (1988).

10. In *Flint*, a documentary theater piece by José Casas, dramatizing the voices of adversely affected Flint residents and University of Michigan students with ties to the city, an arch made of thousands of discarded plastic water bottles makes up the proscenium of the show.

11. The image can be found at <http://www.bhjjournal.net/breegant/>, accessed November 2020.

12. I am very careful not to ascribe a single meaning here or assign gant a particular identity. I take my cue here from Therí Alyce Pickens's writing on Blackness and madness. She writes about the character Shoni in Octavia Butler's novel *The Fledgling*, elegantly weaving Merleau-Pontian, Deleuzian, and Agambian language into her writerly engagement: "I am hesitant to ascribe to Shoni's Black madness an agentive quality. . . . Black madness remains a provocation. Even as it forms the locus of the invagination of their history and the fold of their future, it both allows for agency and forecloses it. Black madness remains a wrinkle in the linear progression of history and time before its opposition to their dominant ideology. As a result, it cannot have anything but a

vexed agency, nor can it create itself outside the confines of a bare life” (2019, 48–49). In this reading practice, Black madness questions the very notion of progression: the past and present are mired in racist ideology to the extent that “solutions” are not possible without redress. The past needs to be rethought and renegotiated to become a seedbed for futures. Without that labor, Black mad characters remain unclear, on the edges of narrative, unsettling futurities. Pickens writes about a science fiction novel here, but her thoughts resonate deeply with my understanding of Black disability’s political presence in White-dominated space and, of course, with calls for postslavery reparations: the break and the injustice need to be acknowledged *and* repaired. Black Lives Matter activist Syrus Marcus Ware identifies as Black, mad, and trans, and his Antarctica installation at the 2019 Toronto Biennial is a site for thinking/feeling liberation in the future: the complexities of building a healing future in the grip of old stories (for text from his installation, see Ware 2020).

13. Also resonating with me here is Tiffany King’s work on *The Black Shoals*, a book I read after I wrote this chapter. King writes about shoals as not water/not land, as in-between sites, and the Ibo/Ebo landing emerges from the ocean of time again: “The sandbars could also present another opportunity to kill the ship’s crew, seize the vessel, and head back to the sea in the other direction. Or, as in Paule Marshall’s retelling of the story of Ibo Landing, the shoal could have been the place that the Ibo decided they would turn around and walk past the boat back home.” The shoal is “a small uncovered spot of sand, coral, or rock where one must quickly gather, lose oneself, or proceed in a manner and fashion not yet known” (9). The shoal as a site of meeting, of decision, of shifting grounds, as a writerly site of “being with”: I want to call on this way of thinking horizons and meeting sites: writerly labor at the site of injustice, grounded in land/water and in circulations.

14. The video from the Sins Invalid performance can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkSG5NKRALs>, accessed November 2020. Sins Invalid is a disability justice performance project that centers people of color, queers, and nonbinary and trans people with disabilities. For an overview of the project, its focus on disability justice approaches, and its grounding in the power and resilience of the disabled community, see Shayda Kafai (2021).

15. Trauma Basics (video), minute 3, accessed September 2019. The videos can be accessed through this free registration portal: <https://culturalsomaticsuniversity.thinkific.com/courses/cultural-somatics-free-5-session-ecourse>.

16. For a rich engagement with the contradictions and complexities that arise between the political and aesthetic objects of community engagement and participatory action research on the one hand and the demands of “audit culture” and peer review on the other, see Michelle Stewart, Rebecca Caines, and Andrea Kotlar-Livingston (2020).

17. And getting real with water has been part of my performance studies friendship circle for a while, too: for instance, my collaborator and colleague Anita Gonzalez publishes about her experiences on cruises working as a destination lecturer for Royal Caribbean and Celebrity cruise lines, providing information about Caribbean history

and culture (2014) and about her maritime research into African American maritime performance acts and their water journeys (2018).

18. There are beautiful lineages for disabled people's artful enjoyment of watery space—German artist Gerda Koenig, DIN A 13 dancer/choreographer, floated in a swimming pool lit by multicolored lights in *Colors of Longing* (2000; see Kupperts 2003). British artist Sue Austin created an underwater wheelchair as part of a science/art/engineering exploration in 2013. When I give Salamander talks in recent years, I also widen this lineage acknowledgment to highlight other art projects and their embedment in water as hopeful/complex sites of embodiment. In particular, I cite and show Calida Garcia Rawles's 2019–20 images of Black bodies underwater, illustrations used both for Ta-Nehisi Coates's novel *The Water Dancer*, and Jesmyn Ward's essay "On Witness and Repair: A Personal Tragedy Followed by Pandemic," about losing her husband to Covid and about the ongoing revolution, Black Lives Matter, and witnessing.

19. The Salamander project provided creative nourishment for many people and many publications. For earlier, briefer engagements with this material, see Kupperts 2014 and 2018c. A related essay, an offshoot of the project, was "Public Intimacies: Water Work in Play," hosted by Petra Kupperts, with V. K. Preston, Pam Block, and Kirsty Johnston (2018d).

20. Salamanders appear in literary culture, too, as creatures in slipstream or magical realism settings as transformative, liminal beings. For salamanders in the fantastical literature and moments of Aztec culture, see Paula M. Bruno (2005); and for salamanders as a site of Jewish and Yiddish culture, see Szeintuch, Tourgeman, and Zigdon 2005.

21. As you can see from this list, I was able to travel far and wide, supported by academic/artistic/community performance/disability performance networks. I am an artist-scholar, one of only a handful of international jet-setting disabled artists invited to give talks and run workshops worldwide—a moment I am marking, in its environmental and privilege stakes, balanced with the only recent surge in interest and funding for disabled artists. Some White Global North artists like myself, from these first waves, now sense an invitation to step back or step aside. I try to make sure that other disabled people have access to these kinds of resources. Part of my activism now is to program disability culture events in ways that engage the work and demands of disability justice activists (see Sins Invalid 2019) so that we are hearing from a wider field, for all our good: against monocultures.

22. I am citing in *Eco Soma* Gumbs's *M Archive*, but in the context of this chapter, I also want to point to her book *Undrowned* (2020), which came out during the last weeks of my copyediting process. Gumbs's book does powerful work at the site of water, memory, and more-than-human kin. She also takes to water to find life and breath in racial gendered ableist capitalism. "I am saying that those who survived in the underbellies of boats, under each other under unbreathable circumstances are the undrowned, and their breathing is not separate from the drowning of their kin and fellow captives, their breathing is not separate from the breathing of the ocean, their breathing is not separate from the sharp exhale of hunted whales, their kindred also. Their breathing

did not make them individual survivors. It made a context.” (2–3). In her book, Gumbs looks toward whales as mentors for living in vulnerability, collaboration, and adaptation, shifting her language through contexts, finding watery connective tissues through time and toward futures, aligned with adrienne maree brown’s influential *Emergent Strategy* in finding supportive, life-giving ways of living across harm, listening onward.

23. Here I move away from a politics of enumerating and analyzing how “the figure of the disabled body is the quintessential symbol of humanity’s alienation from nature” (Sarah Jaquette Ray, 2013, 6). In her study, Ray engages in depth a foundational text for ecodeisability studies: Eli Clare 1999.

24. Translation by Xavier Duacastilla Soler.

25. There are also many other circulations of the Salamander project. In this footnote, I wish to highlight one that places the Salamander in an occupational therapy teaching setting at Stony Brook University. In 2014 Pam Block invited me to visit with her occupational therapy students and run a Salamander workshop with them. In an essay on the use of arts-based disability culture practices, Block and her colleague Pam Karp cite these student writings about what they took away from floating with each other and me in their university pool. They invited the Salamander project “to our campus to challenge ingrained assumptions about society and placing the students in the uncomfortable position of facing their own culturally manufactured biases about the juxtaposition of their roles as healthcare professionals and people with disabilities became a valuable lesson to us as educators. We learned that providing culturally artistic experiences outside of the traditional classroom and clinic offered our students a unique and engaging opportunity to examine with a greater perspective what it means to live life to the fullest, not only for their potential collaborations in future therapeutic partnerships, but for themselves as well. The evidence of our students’ burgeoning occupational consciousness is revealed in their self-reflections. Rich (Farrell) remarked, ‘Being able to understand and accept those around you is a concept we can relate directly to working with those who have a disability.’ Jessica (Hammer) provided insight through self-reflection. ‘While in the water, I experienced support from my partner as well as from the individuals outside of the water. This showed how there can be interdependence and interconnectedness from the disabled and able-bodied population.’ Lauren’s (Jacklitsch) self-reflection highlighted her developing occupational consciousness when she remarked, ‘We need to form a partnership with our clients to attain the greatest results rather than exerting authority over our clients.’ The Salamander workshop experience provided us, as educators, an avenue for further student development in a manner that differs from traditional teaching models” (Block and Karp 2020). I appreciate the new openings and thought-fields that shimmer out from our Salamander experiences and image remnants.

26. If visual modalities work for you, the silent gallery video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYARFPN9dZU>. You can also use this video to create your own access exercise, setting up a communal audio description workshop.

27. There is rich work done on audio description as an aesthetic practice in its own

right: sensorial ekphrastic engagement across forms beyond some kind of “transparent” access provision. For instance, see Georgina Kleege and Scott Wallin (2015).

#### 4. Crip Time, Rhythms, and Slow Rays

1. The name “Turtle Disco” links crip time signatures of slowness *and* speed, dance and joy, and Turtle Island, a reference to North America in use since the 1970s, based on a number of Indigenous creation stories.

2. Again, the process of engaging material brings me in direct contact with my layers of reading, the world material in my brain, the archive of eye movement and kindle, or moistened fingertip: I remember where I was when I read Mel Chen’s *Animacies*, the chapter on lead toxicity, the penetrating matter in relation to children’s toys and racist discourse fields, and the way Chen writes about their own journey in toxic embodiment.

3. And thinking of these small invisible fibers links me back to Max Liboiron (Métis/Michif) and my footnote in the first chapter, about their thoughts on plastics as unchosen kin, and then their undoing of that metaphor when addressing challenges by Indigenous researchers.

4. This is a process I have investigated and tried to make communally experiential in my own eco soma work: see my discussion of *Burning*, an engagement with toxicity and heavy metals, as a community performance project (Kuppers 2014).

5. There is so much material on Lovecraftian reclamation and reinvention by writers from nondominant groups that I teach a course on it at the University of Michigan: “Dark Fantasy,” a critical/creative class where we read authors like Victor LaValle, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Bryan Thao Worra, and T. Kingfisher. We learn from their genre-based, recombinant craft to write our own stories (for some more on these recombinant active reader pleasures, see Kuppers 2020). But this is not the same as normalizing Lovecraft, or rehabilitating him and other racist and misogynist authors. And the wider fantasy world is shifting, as the 2014 protest against the World Fantasy Award statuette of Lovecraft shows: after protests initiated by Nnedi Okorafor and a petition led by Daniel José Older, the organization dropped the Lovecraft statuette (“the Howard”) and is now handing out awards designed by Vincent Villafranca.

6. Swedish literary scholar Van Leavenworth writes about the storyworld of Lovecraft (i.e., the unifying elements of the Mythos stories). These elements are denarrativized, which means they do not rely on a shared and ongoing story or character set (different from, for instance, the Batman or Tolkien universes). Instead, Leavenworth characterizes the unifying elements in this way: “In the Lovecraft storyworld, recurring scenarios feature human characters in realistic settings who discover coexisting cosmic realities and the unspeakably scary beings that inhabit them. These realities appear to rupture natural laws and cannot be conceived of by human minds, and so the encounters produce terror, eternal unease, and/or mental instability in the protagonists” (2014, 332). Leavenworth explores loss of control in later Lovecraftian storyworld entries, tracing experimental narratives, video games, and interactive fictions that enact anxiety and rehearse it in ways that point toward complicated narrative pleasures.

7. Anne McDonald wrote before the concept was picked up by disability studies as an academic and artistic phenomenon. For different discussions of the term, see Eli Clare's influential engagements in creative nonfiction (2014). Also see Kafer 2013; Samuels 2017; Kuppers 2008, 2014; and McRuer 2018.

8. See McDonald, n.d. In informal conversations I have had over the years with activists in Australia it emerged that the mid-1980s was the likely origin point. Here is the first traceable publication data for this Anne McDonald center website page, found via Google's index feature: it shows that the site was first indexed on August 17, 2005: <https://www.annemcdonaldcentre.org.au/crip-time>.

9. There are many writers and researchers who believe this and work actively as culture producers to highlight our star stories. See Allan 2013, Allan and Al-Ayed 2016, Schalk 2018, and also as part of my own creative writing practice (Kuppers 2018a, 2018b).

10. The video's trailer is available at <http://www.wakingthegreensound.com/>.

11. An interest in disability's difference is a well-recognized category of the form. See Kochhar-Lindgren 2006, which discusses Butoh as a form aligned with third ear transnational performance practices. Or see Kurihara 2000, on one of Butoh's early founders, Tatsumi Hijikata, and how disability shaped his dancerly choices.

12. I am leaving the "mad" in "mad hatter" in this text but with brackets. I embrace the tenets of mad studies, with its suspicion of the easy traffic in madness tropes and its foregrounding of the expressions of people affected directly by mental health difference and its policing. The company creating this mad hatter party (which is explicitly named as such in their publicity materials) is well aware of the bodily and psychical pain of mental health survivorhood, and the term is consciously used by them and by me.

13. Speaking about trans shape-shifting temporalities is complex, and allocating gendered pronouns creates interesting tensions. This particular formulation, designed to both signal the presence of trans, and yet without grounding this in an individual dancer, was vetted by the company.

14. Empathy is complicated. Here is a potted footnote version of some of the concept's strands. "Empathy" as a term originates as the German "Einfuehlung" with philosopher Robert Vischer (1873). His work describes the mechanisms by which viewers project themselves into objects they see. Literary theory has its own history of engagement with these terms, too, and critics like (out lesbian) essayist Vernon Lee described empathetic movement, bodily feelings infiltrating reading practices, in her *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913). Her collaborator and lover Clementina (Kit) Anstruther-Thomson describes the effects of Greek vase form in its engagement with viewer's embodied experience: bodies affect knowledge, we see and understand through our bodily forms and its histories (*Art and Man: Essays and Fragments*, 1924). The history of engagement with affect, prelinguistic feeling states, etc., have shaped an important segment of theoretical engagement in the 1990s and early 2000s (see, for instance, Massumi's work on autonomic affective reactions). In a different lineage from the proto-queer crossings of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, the "feeling" aspect to aesthetics, how some bodies make other bodies feel, shapes Tobin Siebers's *Disability*



*Aesthetics* (2010). In dance studies, the term “kinesthetic empathy” has currency through two main strands of substantive engagement: one that emerges from critical theory, and one that addresses actual audience studies, linking people watching dance up to sensors. Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster emphasizes how the new concept of empathy took over from (narrative) sympathy: “‘Empathy’ was neologized, not to express a new capacity for fellow-feeling, but to register a changing experience of physicality that, in turn, influenced how one felt another’s feeling. . . . Instead of casting one’s self into the position of the other, it became necessary to project one’s three-dimensional structure into the energy and action of the other.” (129). Her engagement of empathy’s potential challenges easy utopian understandings of dance critic John Martin’s original coinage of the term “kinesthetic empathy.” She asks: “Empathy is now entwined with the apparatuses, increasingly digitalized, that hurtle images of bodies from one side of the world to the other. In the fleetingness of these images, are we able adequately to exercise empathetic capacities?” (169). In the second strand of dance criticism’s interest in empathy, mirror neuron research features prominently, such as neurological evidence for emotional resonance and sympathy felt while watching movement. Other studies use qualitative methods to find out why and how audiences see dance (Reason and Reynolds, 2010). But even though I do not pursue kinesthetic empathy as an argument line in my book, I want to honor intriguing work done under its label: see, for instance, Rosely Conz and Stephany Slaughter’s use of a screen dance project to think about interventions in anti-immigration narratives with young people in mid-Michigan (2021).

15. This crip precarity has shifted much more into the foreground at this moment in 2020, as I am revising this manuscript in the Covid-19 age. Many users of oxygen tanks and ventilators are particularly vulnerable to the virus—and also vulnerable to eugenic exploitation, with threats of their ventilators being taken away and given to more “viable” subjects.

16. In the context of a contemporary U.S. publication, it is important to note that the “race” construct used by him distinguished “Aryans” from “Alpine” and “Mediterranean” races (i.e., using racial distinctions that are no longer dominant in contemporary U.S. racism and its hate theories).

17. For a primer on the issue of neuroqueer and its roots in multiple discourse fields from queer aversion therapy to antiautistic hate speech, see Yergeau 2018.

18. The entwinement of tree and limb feels tentacular, enacts the metaphors through which Donna Haraway unfolds her *Chthulucene* (2016). Making kin, her core request for intersectional interdisciplinary work, involves the literal future-leaning touches of “mixtery” (a term borrowed from African American engagements with hybridity) and the kind of formal experimentations in science writing that lean into science fiction: character, generations/epic storytelling, world building.

19. Stefanie K. Dunning fruitfully engages this film and its Black fungal-human girl child protagonist in relation to Afro-pessimism: the old colonial order, civil life, must burn and only out of this, out of abolition, new life adaptations can emerge. She reads



the film (not the novel on which it is based) through the lens of anticolonial activist and surrealist Suzanne Césaire's writings on Black diasporic life in Martinique, on plant-humans, on a different order from machine life, and on a liberation that is not dependent on assimilation: "Afro-pessimism's turn toward abolition is a call to 'plant-life'" (2021, 147).

20. Hanging out with moss: this was a delicious movement ritual/moss-protocol for social justice led by andrea haenggi and moss in Brooklyn, as an Environmental Performance Agency summer school in 2020, during the Covid shutdown. We participants from all over the world introduced ourselves and one another to our neighborhood moss, all asynchronously, guided by Robin Wall Kimmerer's research (2003).

21. I offer my evidence in the form of a performance studies engagement with music, rhythm, and their political effects. In a review of a performance at a Parisian fashion/musical event, watching step dancers, Morris uses their personal embodiment, their sense of being in different rhythms, as a key to the experience's rupture: "I keep feeling an exhilarating friction, the uniformity and unison of the choreography and the dancers' spatial formations somehow just barely containing the unevenness of the beats that these bodies tap and hammer out across the runway and their flesh" (112). Methodologically, Morris consciously refers to their critical acuity as a political act in the times of Black Lives Matter: "I offer a close descriptive reading of Rick Owens's S/S 2014 collaboration with LeeAnét Noble and Team Vicious, theorize the performativity of fashion as a mechanism for producing what does and does not matter, and ultimately ask how both this performance and our attention to it might participate in the mattering of Black lives. It is a response to an unjust world in which all of us are responsible and none are fully innocent." The critic's attention and the rhythms of our gaze and writing partake in the politics of our public sphere. This understanding of a wider field of political rhythm, the push and pull of what matters, also swings under my strategies in this chapter, working on less recognized and alternative works.

22. The intertextuality of Lee's work marks it beyond this collection. Brian Reed writes about Lee's long poem sequence, "Korea," and explains how it uses this multivocal strategy "to dramatize her struggle, as a diasporic writer, to make her own place in the world both using and abusing the global flows of information that characterize the contemporary digital media ecology" (2015; electronic resource).

23. From unpaginated endnotes.

24. In the lineage of, for instance, Janice Radway, and her work on why women read romance novels; Megan Sweeney, on the way imprisoned women engage reading group books; Rebecca Wanzo, who shows how Black graphic novelists engage cultural stereotypes grounded in White supremacy through their use of caricature; or Sami Schalk, who charts how Black writers use the science fiction genre to reimagine new worlds.

25. Although there is a strong field of science fiction and fantasy poetry out there—but not easily intersected and named in the experimental realm. Lee's prior publication sites for the poems and sequences collected in *Solar Maximum* speak more to the circulation

of feminist experimental poetics than fan culture and cons. One of her production notes mentions a common interest in speculative ideas about aberrant futures in her feminist poetic circles (for other contemporary experimental approaches to sci-fi poetry, see Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* and its engagement with hybrid future language practices, uneven exchange in imaginary lingua franca, or Vidhu Aggarwal's *The Trouble with Humpadori*, which quotes Spock from *Star Trek*'s "Trouble with Tribbles" episode to approach its central "performing cosmic deformity").

26. From unpaginated endnotes.

27. Reciting the names, using living breath to honor the dead, has become an important ritual for many activists, including Kimberlé Crenshaw and her @sayhername campaign, bringing visibility to Black murdered women. Sadly, I sat in circles reading the names of the Latinx queer dead of the Pulse tragedy in Orlando, Florida, in 2016; I took part in poetry readings where we spoke out loud the name of Black trans women murdered, honoring their own names. And I also remember the deep sorrow that coursed among disability activists internationally that same year when the names of nineteen disabled victims of a stabbing murder in Japan were not released, as many families were reluctant to make the names public due to stigma. Names have power.

28. For some of these critiques, see for instance a 2017 engagement with a #BankBlack campaign, where Black Lives Matter activists engaged with a Black-owned bank: "There are many ways to show you are down with the Movement without participating in its commodification. In response to the #BankBlack movement, an anti-capitalist solution would be to begin creating not-for-profit people-owned credit unions. While this is still operating under the umbrella of American capitalism, it is an anti-capitalist effort which divests from major banks which historically have been an enemy to the Black community" (Simons 2017). See also this critique, as the Cincinnati chapter of Black Lives Matter untethered themselves from the national organization in 2018, acknowledging the historical moment and impact of Black Lives Matter while distancing themselves from what it had become: "We originally took the name, inspired by a rising movement for Black liberation, manifested through spontaneous actions breaking out after the killings of Mike Brown, Jr., and Trayvon Martin. People chanted 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot!' and 'Black Lives Matter.' This was before any serious national structure and unified platform existed . . . But we can no longer use or identify with the name Black Lives Matter—a rally cry that still has meaning, even if perverted by those pushing it as a brand. The depth and scope of betrayal of struggles against police brutality and the families fighting for their loved ones is too great. The continuous shift towards electoral and liberal Democratic Party politics and away from revolutionary ideas is too great" (Black Lives Matter Cincinnati 2018).

29. A term coined in the late 1980s by Clenora Hudson-Weems as a way of describing a Black feminism developed by women of African descent.

30. The term "Afrofuturism" was initially coined by Mark Dery in interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose in 1994: "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of

twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called ‘Afro-futurism.’” (180). Important artists in this tradition include Sun Ra, Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, and many more. Kodwo Eshun posits that “Afrofuturism may be characterized as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic project and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken” (2003, 301), and Susana M. Morris posits that “Afrofuturism insists that Blacks fundamentally are the future, and that Afrodiasporic cultural practices are vital to imagining the continuance of human society” (2012, 153).

31. “I can’t breathe.” One man’s dying words became a slogan for public protests, and then, horrifically, became more dying words again and again. These are also the words that George Floyd, in 2020, repeated nearly thirty times while a police officer knelt on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Other Black people also spoke this phrase as their last one, as they were put into strangleholds by police. I hope that by the time this book comes out, the 2020 revolutionary actions will be helping to reshape community caretaking in the United States and that the deep, long, and ongoing racial injustice in the United States is being addressed systemically.

32. “Deaf Gain is defined as a reframing of ‘Deaf’ as a form of sensory and cognitive diversity that has the potential to contribute to the greater good of humanity” (2014, 4).

33. Drugs have been one of the dividing issues of U.S. social relations. The overrepresentation of Black people in prison is linked with White supremacist systems of racial control through carceral logics. Michelle Alexander analyzes how the criminal justice system and the “War on Drugs” target Black men, in particular, in a new Jim Crow era (2010). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 introduced more severe punishment for distribution of crack (associated with Black users) than powder cocaine (a drug more commonly associated with White use). As a result of civil penalties associated with convictions, such as a lack of access to public housing, many Black men drop out of systems of civil/civic discourse. White supremacy pushes them out of a vision of shared humanity and mutual responsibility. That push out of systems is visible in the streets of San Francisco. Given all this, much is at stake in even mentioning “drugs” in the context of moving bodies of Black men, and I need to be responsible in not pushing my argument too far.

## Coda

1. This ritual-based approach is also nourished by a week-long residency with Patrisse Khan-Cullors, at Goddard College’s low-residency MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts, one of the places I teach. Patrisse guided us in altar building and held space for a ceremony of memory in which we each received thanks for remembering our ancestors. This kind of ceremonial activism and ritual of collective care informs the wider politics of Black Lives Matter, as Khan-Cullors and asha bandele write in *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (2018).

2. Being altered, tranced, or open into other spiritual dimensions is an aspect of somatic inquiry and of multiple performance methods. The conjunction of magic and somatics is not unusual, even in strictly Western frameworks. There are connections between the Cold War ESP technologies like remote viewing and the history of somatic institutional embedment: for instance, the links between Michael Murphy, founder of the Esalen Institute, and the CIA. Ed Hawkins writes that “Murphy was an adviser for the Jedi warrior training programme at West Point Military Academy in New York. Code-named Project Jedi, soldiers in the programme were taught invisibility, seeing into the future and extraordinary intuition, like knowing how many chairs were in a room before walking in—but also stopping the hearts of animals” (2019). For more on the encounter zones of somatics and spirituality, see the collection by Williamson, Batson, Whatley, and Weber (2014), in which multiple somatic practitioners try to capture the numinous. In this book, capturing something like “magic” within language is hard for many writers—Ray Schwartz sums up the elements that get him to call in words like “magic” and “sorcery”: “The depth of sensation, the unearthing of images and memories, the emotional connections, the altered states of consciousness, the involuntary movements that sometimes arise from somatic exploration—all of these can seem like sorcery” (2014, 313).

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**Petra Koppers** is a community performance artist and disability culture activist. She is professor of English and women's and gender studies at the University of Michigan and serves on the faculty of the MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts at Goddard College. Her books include *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art* (Minnesota, 2006); *Theatre and Disability, Community Performance: An Introduction*; and *Studying Disability Arts and Culture: An Introduction*.