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PERFORMING EMBODIMENT:  
IMPROVISATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE  
INTERSECTIONS OF ECOLOGY AND DISABILITY

BRONWYN PREECE

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Huddersfield

February 2019

## DECLARATION

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Portions of this thesis were disseminated in the form of a paper titled ‘*In Situ* (body as site): Improvising Ecological Disability’ at the American Society for Theater Research (ASTR) 2015 Conference in Portland, Oregon as part of the Performance and/of/in Ecology Working Group.

Portions of this thesis appear in the chapter ‘Environments, Ecologies and Climates of Crises: Engaging DisAbility Arts and Cultures as Creative Wilderness’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Arts, Culture and Media Studies* (2018).

*...I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Territories of the Tla'amin, shishalh, Qualicum and Straits Salish Peoples; the Ancestral Lands of the Pocomtuc; and the immemorialization of time, with which the Brigante tribe of the Celts, have impregnated stories and voices within the sites where I have had the opportunity to – during the course of this improvisatory PhD – simultaneously, be an honoured guest and host. These places and presences stand as living reminders of those 'who came before', those who may have vanished and those still present. I have been imbued with a furthered sense of deep respect, as I've undertaken explorations in these locales. With immense gratitude, my questions and understandings have been expanded, interweaving – and necessarily complicating – the ethical dimension of the place-meant (placement) of my every footfall...*

*I do not profess to have necessarily stepped according to practised protocols, however, what I hope to convey is a transparent orientation that finds myself continuously challenging (my own) perspectives, as I unfurl this expansive temporal engagement in co-creative entanglements and their significance on a local/global scale...*

## DEDICATION



*... for my parents,  
whose endless  
support  
and love  
hold no limits ...  
thank you  
for  
everything ...*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge that *Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into the Intersections of Ecology and Disability* was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am deeply grateful...



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

I would like to thank my supervisors, *Professor Franc Chamberlain* and *Dr. Hilary Elliott*, for their creative and academic guidance, challenge, support, and care from the beginning through to the completion of this project. Your open-minded receptivity to my out-of-the-box approaches – and your respective appreciation and engaged understandings of improvisation – has meant so much to me! Thank you. Thank you.

*Paddy O'Rourke* and *Similkameen O'Rourke*...no words, only immense gratitude...and appreciation for comments like '*Mum...next time: think booty shorts!*'

I extend my profound appreciation to site-selectors *Mark Young* and *Shelley Etkin*. You both outdid yourselves with the care you took to select sites and with the (sometimes unconventional) communications undertaken to relay the locations to 'audience' members. Your input provoked such 'site'ful arrest and artistic depth.

I wish to thank *all* of those who attended, participated, and/or responded to one or more of my improvisational performances. You selflessly provided endless inspiration and prompted ongoing and accumulatory moments of contemplation, reflection and questions for me as an artist and human being. Thank you.

*Jess Allen*...for the glamping, the moon walking, tree falling, tattooing and festival going, for being 'dropped in the ocean', for the collaborating and the commiserating...for your support and encouragement from the beginning...

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compassion and understanding! *Faren Wolfe*...for keeping the postal system alive with your wonderful letters endlessly received! *Lisa Woynarski* and *Moe Beitiks*...for 'planting' the worm of possibilities and the extended collaborations possible, transnationally! *Krista Dutton*...for the tinctures! *Anna Lundeen*...for hiking that trail with me not once, but twice! *Nicole Pead*...for the poetic alpine, cable-car, float plane and tidal navigating moments! *Jennifer Young* and *Dov Berger*...for all things kosher! *Anna Dodds* and *Axel Burger*...for being the best land partners possible in every way!

*Jay Hirabayashi* and *Barbara Bourget*...for the 'wrecking' and finding of my *butoh* body! *Diego Piñón*...for moments in caves and clay, dancing!

*Ruth Zaporah*...my teacher...your teachings have imbued my life with sweet richness and freshness...a fresh experiencing...a poetic and profound presence...with immense gratitude, love you!



## ABSTRACT

*Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into the Intersections of Ecology and Disability* is a practice-based doctoral study employing an extensive series of site-specific/sensitive improvisations to simultaneously engage with, challenge, problematize, confound, interject, overlap, expand, decolonize and/or *displace* understandings of embodiment as they relate to the imbrication of disability and ecology in the age of climate change. Premised on the belief that ‘improvisation’, ‘disability’ and ‘ecology’ are lenses that demand moment-to-moment responsiveness, adaptability, and collaborative engagement, the tiers of this thesis are teased out through a series of sixteen out/indoor *performances-into-poetic-performative writings* and ekphrastic responses in a variety of locations specifically chosen for the author in Canada, the USA and the UK.

The study examines the transdisciplinary implications of engaging (auto)ethnographically in the exploration of the intersections of Performance, Ecology and Disability Studies in/for our current age in relation to understanding and establishing ethical practices. It explores the experiential relationship between the experience of (per)forming an ‘ecological’ and ‘disabled’ identity.

The project engages a heuristic improvisational approach, generating through practice further questions. In particular, two pertinent areas of inquiry thus became foci within the study. The first examines whether the performance of ecological and disabled identities is dependent on the presence of the human. This is followed by whether we should consider ourselves performing notions of ‘ecological selves’ or are we, as ‘selves’ being performed by ecology and, concomitantly, are we performing and/or being performed by a self-disabling ecology? The exegesis is at once theoretical, conceptual, poetic, performative and ontologically artistic. Structural/cultural performance dualisms are contended with, none the least of which are: positionalities of audience/performer, (shared) documentation, subjectivity/objectivity, beginnings/endings and site-specificity/*trans*-location as they emerge through the improvisatory process. The study recognizes and values the humble, intimate nature of the unpretentious undertakings that were had. It addresses the reconciliation between engaging small acts as a way to actively engage with matters of global concern.

The interdisciplinary and intersectional study reveals an engagement with, and understanding of, ‘embodiment’ as an innate capacity of/for semi-permeable trans-corporeality: personally/globally.

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## THE PREMISE

### *Insight/Insite*

*Every disease is a work of art / if you play it rightly.*

~Gwyneth Lewis  
(2005, p.185)

My body is registered nationally in Canada as ‘permanently disabled’.

I have the rare genetic condition, Wilson’s Disease; the acute manifestations of which began to appear a decade ago. Wilson’s Disease simultaneously displays neurological, hepatological, gastroenterological and psychiatric manifestations, due to an inability to flush copper. Beginning at birth, the body retains all copper (sourced from water and food), accumulating to the point where the possessor of the mutated ATP7B gene displays an array of symptoms stemming from heavy metal poisoning. Though directly influenced by ‘environmental’ factors, this condition is not classified as an ‘environmental illness’ *per se*:

[i write as mutant. the New Oxford American English Dictionary thesaurus tells me i am A FREAK (OF NATURE) *uppercase and brackets in original*] :

]my hands shake . my body tremors . i cannot hold anything . my voice falters . i am barely audible . i am off-balance . i drool . my muscles are becoming dystonic . my eyes track in different directions . i have double vision . there is a (long) delay between forming thoughts and communicating them . i lose my train of thought . a lot . i forget words . i stutter and stammer . i am exhausted . i get flushed with bursts of hyperpigmentation . i develop osteoporosis . i am developing depression . severe anxiety . acute ocd . i develop intense phobias . i can’t remember things . i am incontinent . i bruise and bleed easily .

my face is frozen, i cannot smile . my toes and fingers are curling . i experience numbness . i am volatile . explosive . moody . sensitive . i am unpredictable . i choke easily . my food must be cut up in tiny pieces for me . my memory fails . changes are happening at differing rates: at times imperceptible to a 'self' who is continuously absorbing/integrating these overlapping and contingent modifications into new 'norms' – *i am so wholly unmyself/myself* – while at the same time these changes are glaringly shocking to the 'selves' who mediate the space of interaction with a body that gets addressed as i/mother/partner/daughter/friend/neighbour/stranger/student/local/politician/patient/ / / improviser / / /disabled: cpp#7-----2/...

my body stops and starts performing in complex shapeshifting articulations . relationships are tenuously fragile, tethered by an increasing accumulation of unknowns...[

Unbracketing the limitations of phenomenology – I am engaging a project that seeks, through cognitive/bodily means to understand and locate through performance and poetry a sense of (embodied) disjuncture. This feeling was erupting from the epistemological devastation of not being able to ratify – at the same rate – my own non-binary beliefs with my sense of shifting self. My tangible body seeming to be at odds with my tightly held operational concepts of working from within non-dualistic frameworks: I was not feeling as if I was embodying my beliefs. From this sense of fracture, dis-placement and dis-connection, a profound insight was had:

*If I truly believe that I am inextricably part of earth, then what is disability performing through my ecological body at this time; and what is an ecological self performing through disability?*

My experience was prompted by feelings of dis-ingenuity after my

attempt at a delineated ‘solo’ improvised show titled *one disclaimer...* (2007), during which I could not make sense/could not place/could not contextualize my shaking hands and voice within the performance. Through disclamation, I was trying to both – ironically and unsuccessfully – deny their presence. I felt that the few moments of performance synthesis that occurred were when I simply genuinely let my body shake – to express itself ‘naturally’ – with me giving it/myself my full attention. As Eugene T. Gendlin remarks, the:

past body functions in the present. ‘To function in’ means to be changed. Something changes when it functions in the formation of something else. We [see] this in the case of metaphor (1998, p.66).

I am embodying the change/changing metaphor: performing climates of improvisation.

### ***Metaphoric Perception***

*What does it mean for a metaphor to be apt? First, a metaphor must play some significant role in structuring one’s experience.*

~George Lakoff and Mark Johnson  
(1999, p.73)

My insight metaphorically problematized the boundaries of ‘self’ in concert with a wider frame. ‘However determinate one’s genetic inheritance, it must still, as it were, be woven into the present’ (Abram, 1997 p.50). *I had come to recognize my body as a vibrant metaphor for our diseased and disabled ecological condition.* David Abram suggests that this necessarily prompts a receptivity to the textures and shapes of the given present which transforms into ‘a spontaneous creativity in adjusting oneself (and one’s

inheritance) to those contours. It is this open activity, [...] by whichever animate organism necessarily orients itself to the world' (1997, p.50).

As an animate organism, the potential for interrogating my perception from – and through – performance, offered the opportunity to transform my perspicacity into a new improvisatory relationship. 'Performance' permits me the same negotiations and explorations, as it does for disabled artist Raimund Hoghe, who finds that performance offers him the opportunity to both confront and accept his body (Burt, 2005 referenced in Giddens, 2015 p.43). '[T]o give permission to the artist within your disabled body is an outrageous act of defiance', claims Bonnie Klein, co-founder of Vancouver's Society for Disability Arts and Culture (cited in Johnston, 2012 p.5). My improvisational 'defiance' would, in turn, reveal both convivial and contradictory outcomes. As Brandon Larson (2013) remarks, 'Not only is the choice of metaphor an ethical choice, it is also performative, which enlarges its significance even more' (p.141). He continues, suggesting 'that the metaphors we choose are not merely cognitive: they lead to actions in the world that have consequences' (p.141). I became curious about the material consequences of metaphorically entwining disability and ecology.

My moment of insightful arrest equally established a potentially inconsistent usage and/or double-edged metaphor: the valuing of disabled perspectives for what they might facilitate as means to engage practically with the climatic crisis, whilst equating the condition of crisis with disability. This critical juncture of these seemingly opposing vantage points/narratives in the paradox of ecological|disability provides the intersectional creative

crux of this study. The 2016 World Social Forum (n.p.) framed this tension as such:

One the one hand, there is a tendency for non-disabled environmental justice advocates to highlight the disabling impacts of resource extraction or contamination in ways that treat the tragedy of disabled bodies as self-evident. On the other, white, liberal disability rights frameworks oriented towards the celebration of the disabled body often prevent us from recognizing and organizing against disablement caused by environmentally unjust projects and models. How to move forward with these tensions in mind?

Moving forward necessarily demands an awareness of the interplay of the past as crucial in understanding our present, our future. David Fancy demands of the performance community, how we may continue ‘to develop theories and practices of performance that are informed by an understanding of participation that does not situate agency or cause solely within human bodies?’ (2011, p.62). This study situates itself within this experiential questioning.

Performance scholars Una Chaudhuri and Peggy Phelan, in their joint keynote address at the 2013 Performance Studies International Conference at Stanford University proclaimed that it is the power of the ‘now’ through which performance should address the world’s deeply vexed climatic predicaments (Stalpaert, 2015). Improvisational performance – a confluence of the past/future/present as the ‘now’ – seemed an apt method through which to approach and explore the intersection of my personal understanding within a larger critical frame, to situate my agency. I argue that improvisation inherently does, but equally must, intersect with larger issues. This document includes an expanded contextualization of the ethical approaches, ontological orientations and theoretical understandings that I necessarily engage to

navigate the possibilities (and risks) of site-specific improvisational performance: prompting the actual performances and the critical questions/challenges inherent in such an approach.

## INTRODUCTION

*Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into the Intersections of Ecology and Disability* is a practice-based doctoral study employing an extensive series of site-specific/sensitive improvisations to simultaneously engage with, challenge, problematize, confound, interject, overlap, expand, decolonize and/or *displace* understandings of embodiment as they relate to the imbrication of disability and ecology in the age of climate change. Premised on the belief that ‘improvisation’, ‘disability’ and ‘ecology’ are lenses that demand moment-to-moment responsiveness, adaptability, and collaborative engagement, the tiers of this thesis are teased out through a series of sixteen out/indoor *performances-into-poetic-performative writings* and ekphrastic responses in a variety of locations specifically chosen for me in Canada, the USA and the UK.<sup>1</sup>

As a woman of questions – a body interpreting emergent knowledges

– I began asking, and continue to ask:

- What are the transdisciplinary implications of engaging (auto)ethnographically in the exploration of the intersections of Performance, Ecology and Disability Studies in/for our current age in relation to understanding and establishing ethical practices?
- What is the experiential relationship between the experience of (per)forming an ‘ecological’ and ‘disabled’ identity?
- What can site-specific, improvised performance and poetry reveal about the role and agency disability currently has, and can play, in our climatic crises: implicitly and explicitly, metaphorically and as ‘material’ mitigator?

---

<sup>1</sup> This body of practice were conceived fully within the container of this doctoral project, rather than also existing in an independent public or professional context.

Simultaneously, holding these questions in mind, I am also engaging in forms of improvisation largely informed by Action Theater™<sup>2</sup> and *butoh*.<sup>3</sup> My improvisational approach(es) allow me to be fully present to what arises in the moment: in response to the context and unfurling content *in situ*. I am, therefore, further asking of the improvisation process:

- How does one both simultaneously honour the questions asked while not letting them mold, stifle or thwart what might be arising in the moment – *in situ* – and/or how does one consider what emerges (as linear or non-linear as the improvisatory journey might be) and tie it back to the original container?

An autoethnographic approach (detailed in Chapter Two), provided the heuristic to deepen and hone these questions. As a result, my practice generated two pertinent areas of inquiry, which thus became foci within the study:

- Is the performance of ecological and disabled identities dependent on the presence of the human?

- Are we performing notions of ‘ecological selves’<sup>4</sup> or are we, as ‘selves’ being performed by ecology?<sup>5</sup> And, concomitantly, are we performing and/or being performed by a self-disabling ecology?

These questions have facilitated an engagement with, and understanding of, ‘embodiment’ as an innate capacity of/for semi-permeable trans-corporeality: personally/globally.

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<sup>2</sup> Action Theater™ is a trademarked name in the United States. Legally, as a certified teacher, I must ascribe the ™ symbol to the first three uses of the name in a given document, but not thereafter.

<sup>3</sup> *Butoh* is italicized throughout the thesis, to indicate its use as a specialist non-English word.

<sup>4</sup> Term coined by philosopher Arne Naess.

<sup>5</sup> Of note: I had already been working with these questions for some time before Kershaw submitted his article ‘Performed by Ecologies: How *Homo Sapiens* Could Subvert Present-Day Futures’ (Vol.4 Pt.2, 2015) for inclusion in *Performing Ecos* a special edition of *Performing Ethos: An International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*: the journal issues I was concurrently co-editing during this doctoral process. I was delighted, although not surprised, by the resonant overlaps between our questions.

Performance Studies scholars Una Chaudhuri, Baz Kershaw, Wallace Heim, Theresa J. May, Wendy Arons; biologist Neil Evernden, General Systems theorist Joanna Macy, Feminist and History of Consciousness Philosopher Donna Haraway, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and climate activist Bill McKibben are among the many who have offered provocations to critically engage the arts to develop responses to the climate crises. I am responding by undertaking a performance/poetry/reciprocally reflexive feedback/writing process to urgently address the inherent perplexities of the overlapping and multiple issues at play.<sup>6</sup> Analogizing the body's experience of improvising with[in] ecological crisis, Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow (2015) contend that:

An ecology which accepts the energies of the as-yet-unknown, the unformulated, the possible, is also one which is willing to [...] replace the reified protection of the familiar with the possibility of being and doing different[ly]... (p.244).

In these times, Rebecca Caines and Ajay Heble (2015) underscore the current importance of 'the documentation and analysis of artistic and social improvisatory acts' (p.2), maintaining that improvisation is 'about the right to dream publicly' (p.2). Vida Midgelow asserts that improvisation, in our current global context, may embody 'subversive, even radical agendas' (2011, p.22). Perhaps, we may suggest that the subversive and radical agendas that have so-long been associated with improvisatory practices (see for example: Frost and Yarrow, 2015) continue today to hold relevant and renewed prescience. This doctoral project takes this as inspiration for actively catalyzing and performing [public] response[s].

---

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent example of writing being incorporated an inextricable limb in the improvisatory process, see: Midgelow (2013).

I consider my improvisational work an ethical evocation of a radical prescient and responsible reciprocity. Akin to what Henri Giroux (2004) articulates about the criticality of hope, my improvisational practice adopts a ‘creative means of expressing freedom, encountering difference, and exploring pluralist, contingent relations to the world [and] improvisation takes on the responsibility of performing that hope publicly’ (Fischlin, 2015 p.294). This doctoral project unapologetically engages hope as a critical vessel and active agent through which to contend with the dire possibility that in our current climatic crises, ‘We’re fucked’ (Scranton, 2016, p.17) and that the questions now at stake are ‘how soon and how badly’ (p.17).

These improvisations-cum-poems embrace the volatility of unknowns – even through possible chimera:

If you would be a poet, create works  
capable of answering the challenge  
of apocalyptic times...  
(Ferlinghetti, 2007 pp.3-4).

This experiential study ontologically extends, through practice, existing phenomenological frames (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, 1968; Abram, 1997, 2011; Brown and Toadvine, 2003); agential, vital and new materialist orientations (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2008) while implicitly examining the doctrine of (post)humanism through an enlivened aptitude towards trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2016a, 2016b, 2010a, 2010b; Tuana, 2008). It expands current definitions of embodiment as those articulated in Spatz (2015); Csordas (2015) and Ingold (1990). Structural/cultural performance dualisms are contended with, not the least of which are: positionalities of audience/performer, (shared) documentation, subjectivity/objectivity, beginnings/endings and site-specificity/*trans*-location as they emerge through

the improvisatory process (elaborated upon in Chapter Seven and Eight). The study embraces intersectionality, while it probes the poetic. It draws upon Clayton D. Drinko's (2013) neuroscientific research which examines brain response in relation to improvisation. My performance practice also encounters current definitions of materiality, empathy and relates these to an ethics of global responsibility.

The extended inquiry queries the colloquialisms of conquest; converts nouns to verbs; redefines terms; re-writes/morphs its own uses of the initiatory employment of ecology, disability and embodiment, to be immediately followed by their 'standardized' usage, which this study is obliquely arguing to eschew. 'The writing emphasizes the immediacy of experience; and intentionally rearranges our textual semiotics with insertions of - / ' ' ( ), purposeful capitalization (or lack thereof), ~~strike~~throughs, *italics* and/or dis-grammaticalizations of articles and pre-positions as a means of inserting etymological ?s through script. These written-mutations and metonyms might, at times, have the effect of creating diacritical disambulatory emphasis, appear inconsistent in application, tautological, labile or cause comprehensive delays: emulating to an extent the experience of having Wilson's Disease (the condition with which I am medically categorized)' (see: Preece, 2015 pp.160-161). The decisions surrounding particular usages of a bracket or parentheses, a vertical bar or a forward slash, *italics* or neologismical spellings, for example – may be dictated by an intuitive inkling, subtle nuance, overt exclamation *or* an overall aesthetic sensibility to how the writing falls on the page, particular poem or within the

greater chapter. (Im)Balance is key. Some of the character and glyph choices may imply a degree of ‘softness’. Others, a curt distinction.

The writing may [frustratingly] have the effect of disabling a sentence. This is an intentional and academic choice.

The thesis engages a written format that emulates the ‘disability’ through which the understandings came to be appreciated: presented in [fragmented] bursts and bits, a process of bricolage. My non-traditional writing may appear as ‘fractured’. The frequent usage of the en dash or short phrasings, for example, model in sentence structure, the tangential insertions or stresses which stylize my thinking. Married with the content, what this more appropriately conveys is the sense of layered holism made available through these/my perceptive abilities: fracture is thus, absorbed. The approach textually embodies a mode of transversal thinking, invoking Felix Guattari’s notion of ‘productive assemblages’ (2008).

### ***Structure: (Un)conventional***

This thesis is structured into multiple sections: delicately treading a tenuous balance between honouring the models and categories found in a traditional doctoral thesis, while not wanting to discredit the arguments I am putting forward. Therefore, the reader may feel at times that the sections and their sequencing are arbitrary and/or unerringly appropriate. As Estelle Barrett (2010) contends, the ‘interplay of ideas from disparate areas of knowledge in creative arts research creates conditions for the emergence of

new analogies, metaphors and models for understanding objects of enquiry’  
(p.7).

*The Premise* and *Introduction* preface ten chapters. Chapters One and Two serve in many ways as an extended introduction. They offer a firm grounding from which my process can be understood and lead into a more thorough investigation of the project’s key aspects. Documentation is interspersed throughout (with some elements appearing in accompanying appendices). The poems/photographs are integrated into the writing in temporal sequence, honouring the melding of the linear and the non-linear that this project embraces.

Inserted between several of the chapters, appears *the improvisational moment: presently*. This reoccurring – and always slightly renamed – section attempts to capture qualities of the sense I experience while performing improvisation. The hope is that this conveys, with transferable lucidity, the feeling from within the practice. This section aims to offer a *tone*, an ontological register from which to proceed into the more philosophical and theoretical chapters that follow. These insertions serve as a refreshing reminder of the performance practice supporting the theory.

*Chapter One: Foundational Tenets* grounds this study’s approach to research, elaborates on my perspectives on Reciprocity and Animism and my engagement as a human interlocutor with the more-than-human world. The role of the shaman as improvisatory performer/conduit between illness/disability, community and ecology is first introduced here, as a means to weave together many of threads of this thesis: theoretically and theatrically.

*Chapter Two: Methodology: Illustrated and Implicated* expatiates on the particulars of Improvisation, Performance Style Choices (informed by Action Theater™ and *butoh*: but being evocations of both/neither *in situ*), Site-Selection, Costuming, (Auto)Ethnography, Documentation and the Dual-Framing with Ekphrastic Responses. It deliberately includes examples of audience artistic response and expands on the different performance approaches taken between the eight improvisations during the first year, and the eight undertaken in the second.

Notably absent from this thesis is a stand-alone Literature Review. The relevant literature is discussed in each chapter, pertaining to the specific and emergent topics: a mix of scholarly and practice-based support and/or arguments to that which I am presenting. The chapters take pains not to assume any universalized understanding, on the part of the reader, of the terms or critical frameworks I am employing and/or challenging. I synthesize the definitions/orientations towards terms used with the relevant literature and reflective analysis in an effort to distill and present how the themes, concepts, ideas, philosophies, ontologies, epistemologies, axioms and rhetoric have collided and cohered through practice to form an original contribution to the processes of generating new, relational, inspired and ethical knowledges.

*Chapter Three: Grounding* begins to address Ecology, Disability, Embodiment and their respective overlaps, discussing whether the performance of ecological and disabled identities requires the presence of the human. Addressing the above leads into a discussion of trans-corporeality.

*Chapter Four: Orientations* examines how the foci of this study feature within and correlate with metaphor, neuroscientific findings, concepts

of site, place and space.

*Chapter Five* treats more deeply the Ecology/Disability »»»» ~~ecology/~~  
~~disability~~ overlaps whilst exploring notions of ‘who is performing’ vis-à-vis  
how I embodied these elements through my performances and poems.

At this point, readers might feel that much of the language and  
chapters used to frame the structure and basis of this study covered up until  
this point, are written as if on a literary precipice – giving the reader an  
extended build-up/grounding always with a sense of becoming, written baited  
with anticipation for the main event: the core of the improvisational  
performance practice. However, this sense of becoming, the endless  
introduction, is purposefully two-fold: it both entrenches the vast scope of  
this practised approach, whilst also linguistically capturing the essence of the  
act of improvisation: the unfurling, the becoming, is always an  
introduction...(even if mid-way, through the exegesis)...

*Chapter Six* moves away from this who/identity focus more into the  
*hows* of the representational space of the performances, poems, poesis and  
site-specific process.

*Chapter Seven* explores some of the more oblique or murky specifics  
which emerged through the improvisations, including negotiations with  
beginnings and endings, notions of inside and outside, humour and grief and  
levels of engagement.

*Chapter Eight* examines my interpretations of the audience/performer  
ekphrastic responses. In so doing, I will be responding to the question that if  
one was not in fact present in/at one of the performances what remains the  
point of access? Or, perhaps more importantly, what are the temporally-

transferable aspects of these happenings? I ask what is the resonant materiality of arguably ephemeral experiences in addressing notions of ecology and disability?

*Chapter Nine* examines some of the qualities of agency – the multi-sensory ontology – evoked through and by performer, performance and spectator ‘environments’ and the relevance of the practice and understandings within the local/global context. An examination of genre is prompted, examining its gleanings and process through political and activist frames. *What is the pertinent correlation and value of one woman in an intersection, on a doorstep, in a parking lot or in a studio – witnessed – in addressing the current climatic condition? What is the temperature of this practice? And where does ethical responsibility lie?*

*Chapter Ten* addresses our shared embodiments.

An *(In/Un)Conclusion* follows – a celebration of the impermanence of my ‘answers’ – serving as a platform for new beginnings, for more questions, rather than a decisive summation.

I invite the reader to recognize the subtleties, and implicit connections I am drawing between categories of experience. What may initially appear to be a tendency towards repetition, turns out not to be. Rather, I conjugate connections throughout. I may indeed posit something similar for an ecological concept, as I do for a poetic one; a corresponding observation about site-specificity, as I do for disability. These exclamations are not repetitions, rather expressions of similar resonances, of imbrications...a weave which folds back into itself through its weft the implicit threads

between theory, experience and understandings. Again, these are intentional and considered choices. It offers the text a rhythm, a music, which allows it to be read as a [connected] score.

### ***Practising Inquiry***

*Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into the Intersections of Ecology and Disability* is a Practice-based-Research PhD. It values creative praxis simultaneously as a mode of knowing, and as a method for producing new knowledges:

The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modeling and externalizing such knowledge while at the same time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes (Barrett, 2010 p.2).

I focus more on the critical contribution that is inspired by the practice, rather than on critically analyzing the performances themselves (their influences and sources, improvisation as mode/genre, for example). For this reason, this project can be appreciated as practice-based rather than practice-as-research. These terms – along with others, such as practice-led work – are never consistently applied by academia and may, at times, be used interchangeably (with regional, institutional and funding differences influencing the respective choice: lingering nuances of the bias towards the scientific-model being evidenced). Within this text, the emphasis is on showcasing, as Brad Haseman (2010) articulates, the primacy and efficacy of such engaged inquiry in ‘its capacity to forge new, hybrid or mutant research methods that are

specific to the object of enquiry’ (p.155). My specific ‘mutant’ methods, metaphoric insights, poetic performance orientations align with what Robin Nelson (2013) remarks of practice-as-research – however, his comments are germane to this inquiry – that it ‘typically affords substantial insights rather than coming to such definite conclusions as to constitute “answers”’ (p.3).

The exploration critiques as quickly as it celebrates; in so doing, it attempts to provoke as much as it strives to displace the privileging of product over process by intentionally placing performance documentation throughout this document (deliberately standing at a different, albeit congruent, angle with the text as a whole). It aims to embrace the vulnerability of interdisciplinarity: modeling a capacity for transvaluing complex stases. It asks, much as Susan Leigh Foster does, ‘How could the attempt to include the improvised alter the course of historical inquiry?’ (2003, p.6), whilst trying to ratify the challenge of capturing the qualities of spontaneity through the writing. The study becomes confronted, through the linearity of fixed text, with the dilemmas of trying to present imbricated ideas in a non-pejorative fashion. The writing and project aim, throughout, for a transparency that reflects (potential) or acknowledged biases, perspectives, and beliefs and how these inform my methodological ethics. The study remains accountable, necessitates complexity, defies essentialism and, in so doing, as Tami Spry so eloquently articulates, ‘is also in the service of simultaneously deconstructing what it might be putting together’ (2011, p.70).

This project explores five identified lacunae. The first, a lack of scholarship on the simultaneous social-ecological implications of improvisation. That being said, the area of critical improvisation studies is fast expanding, with exciting forays being explored as to its widespread (possible) applications and implications. Multiple relevant publications have been recently released or are forthcoming in the field. Frost and Yarrow (2015) address the ecological implications of improvisation, as do Middelw (2011), Sarco-Thomas (2010) and Reeve (2008). I maintain the ecological dimension is inextricable from the social, and vice versa. The following scholars contribute valuable insights into the emerging and overlapping conversations about the particular inextricability of the social dimension: Lewis and Piekut (2016), Caines and Heble (2015), De Spain (2014), Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz (2013), Drinko (2013), Peters (2009) Hallam and Ingold (2007), Belgrad (1998) and Smith and Dean (1997). This project contributes a particular perspective into the compelling conversations emerging.

The second lacuna, the marriage through performance, between ecology and disability (Deirdre Heddon and Petra Kuppers have made pioneering forays in this domain, albeit with different scopes ~~than my own~~). The third is the noted assumption of able-bodiedness/-mindedness in ‘environmental’ writings, and the lack of disabled voices present within such associated genres (Ray and Sibara, 2017; Kafer, 2013; Morton, 2007) and concomitantly, the lack of literature which features disabled views on climate change (Wolbring, 2014; Abbott and Porter, 2013). The fourth, as Philip Auslander remarks, is the rarity of ‘discussions of how a particular audience

perceived a particular performance at a particular time and place and what that performance meant to that audience' (2006, p.6). The scope of this project is comprehensive, necessarily requiring an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach.

The study continuously deliberately opens itself to being challenged, thus informing the unfurling movements/decisions of site/body/text, adapting processes responsively during its course. It argues for valuing improvisation as an important method of scholarly inquiry (Midgelow, 2012; Sarco-Thomas, 2010; De Spain, 2003); examines outlined criticisms of using ecology, disability and illness as metaphors (Chaudhuri, 1994; Sandahl and Auslander, 2008; Sandahl, 2001; Sontag, 1989, respectively); the ethical entanglements born from within a Western culture that has largely extracted a vocabulary-of-interweavement from the socially-felt lexicon; and the academic/artistic entanglement within paradox. My approach is evidently open to critique from many angles, not the least of which is the partaking in airplane travel to undertake this multi-modal study – that which Karl Hoyer has called the ironic academic 'travelling circus of climate change' (2010 cited in Spatz 2015, p.14). In Chapter Six, I take up this ethically murky aspect of my methodology in greater depth. I am treading the fine line between 'justification' and (not) making excuses.

What quickly became apparent through my doctoral performance process was that I was trying to develop a form of engaged improvisational performance (an awareness, rather than a model) without any examples of what I was trying to achieve. There was no one I was trying to emulate. I

had encountered no other practitioners who were specifically trying to approach site-specific performance with a similar set of inquisitives, in content or style. I had more models for that which I was aspiring *not* to do, rather than what I was discovering-while-doing in the crafting of what I was aspiring to do.

Baz Kershaw remarks, ‘performative events which use an ethically principled immersive participation, transforming audiences into participants, are most likely to lead to new ecological forms of performance’ (2000 cited in McAuley 2005, p.30). Kershaw’s comments can be simultaneously interpreted as remarking on the [potential] processes of theatre and implying that such ethics are synonymous with ecological principles. Though a broad statement, I appreciate the intended inference towards collaboration and collective-problem solving that seems to be at the root of his remark: his desire to embrace larger spheres of reference through performance. Discovering ‘new ecological forms of performance’ proved both challenging and exalting, compounding my sense of simultaneous isolation met with a deepening sense of connectivity through disease, disability and doctoral study.

This exploration dwells in the liveliness of emergent questions and processes. It does not seek to concretize findings, rather to present the unfurling understandings with the same fluidity with which they came to be understood. The active responses are thus interspersed throughout this document, rather than relegated to a section of conclusive findings. They are relatable to the given context, at this juncture. It is important to:

try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't

search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer (Rilke, 1993 p.50, emphasis in original).

This critical examination is a timely response to a noticing that the current predicaments of climate change are conjugating a ‘someday far in the future’ into the past tense for much of the human and ‘more-than-human world’ (Abram, 1997) at an alarmingly exponential rate. Innovatively, this doctoral undertaking appears to be positioned as the first, internationally, to bring together aspects of the fields of Disability Culture and Environmental Studies into the weave of Improvisational Performance Studies; interrogating the designation of the ‘Humanities’ under which these all fall. This project takes up with quiet, pronounced urgency, the ability of improvisation to engage with the immediacy of the present. As an enlivened temporal juncture containing both the past and performing the possibility of futures, performance stands as:

an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency ... Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience ... In this way performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play (Denzin, 2003 cited in Shaughnessy, 2012 p.25).

The critical questions/themes contended with in this study, enlivened through this improvisational prompting, are:

- How to relate and integrate ‘personal’ experience within a larger frame – demonstrating through practice so that it invokes a congruency that counters the potential charge of solipsistic narcissism;

- How to design a sharing process of engaging with and documenting performance with performer/audience, animating tenets of reciprocity, whilst simultaneously being catalyzed and fostered by one author;
- Unpacking usage, application and orientations with(in) a plethora of terms, none the least of which are: performance, ecology, disability and embodiment;
- How to demonstrate the ethical responsibilities of site-specific practices and the need for transparency, whilst trying to avoid didacticism – through establishing discursive opportunities – which encompass the more-than-human world;
- Investigating whether the ‘performance’ of ‘ecological’ and ‘disabled’ identities are dependent on the presence of the human;
- Exploring the relevance and role of the ‘shaman’ as improvisatory conduit with the more-than-human world;
- How to ensure that this exploration situates itself within the social/ecological improvisational lacuna, establishing it as a valuable method of inquiry;
- How to articulate the value of the ‘post’-performance poems as rigorous extensions of the performances themselves and simultaneous performances themselves (and as examples of reciprocity);
- Exploring poetic inquiry as a powerful method to further problematize notions of ephemerality vis-à-vis performance noting that ‘sometimes the documentation becomes the work’ (Smith and Dean, 1997 p.119);
- How to capture the liveliness of spontaneity in fixed and linear script – its segued and immediate relevance to the foci of inquiry;
- How to incorporate multiple registers of writing and response (ranging from my own to that of other’s) throughout this thesis;
- How to honour and highlight the qualities of my disability through the writing, reversing in turn, assumptions of able-bodied/mindedness in (environmental) and doctoral writings, working towards esteeming a ‘disabled presence’ within academia;

- How to honour these, and other questions, within the context of the improvisatory moment?

Ideas put forward embrace a hermeneutic, onto-axiological orientation – which emulates the tenets of flux espoused throughout – wherein the ‘significance of improvisation lies in its capacity for effecting an ongoing dialogue between the objective and phenomenal, and mirroring the relationship between theory and practice’ (Barrett, 2010 p.11). Such a process houses what André Bolt suggests of practice-based inquiry as a ‘double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time as practice is informed by theory’ (2010, p.29).

Whilst there exists an inextricable, symbiosis between the theory and practice presented here, it would be remiss of me not to point out the differences that equally exist between the process of my practice-as-performance-and-poetics and the process of studying and formulating theory around, through and from the creative process. Cultural theorist and philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, stresses the value of highlighting the practice components – as being contingent upon, and inextricable from – the theory that is produced around an artist’s oeuvre. He notes, however, that challenging the whole practice/theory divide is still the exception to the academic rule. Sloterdijk comments:

What if we observed artists in their efforts to become artists in the first place? We could then see every phenomenon on this field more or less from a side view and, alongside the familiar history of art as a history of completed works, we could obtain a history of the training that made it possible to do art [...] we could likewise trace the development of the practices and exercises that enabled [the] scholarship... (2012, p.20).

In my case I would say that every performance is part of the practice, while simultaneously, all the practice remains an unfurling performance.

That being said, keeping the active sense of the *practice* alive through these pages has been challenging. I have taken up the challenge assertively, multi-modally...and without handwringing. The prolific insertion of poetry, photographs, responses and written stylizations aim to address this desire/need to animate the experiencing. This exegesis also committedly serves to uphold the [perhaps] unseen elements of the practice – the theory, the study, the thought; to dismiss any potential perceived deceptions of simplicity. This thesis is layered, dense and complex. It is a practice of embodied, performed, poetic conceptual theory. Sharing the depth of this process is of equal importance as the improvisations themselves: an inextricable feedback loop, aimed to engender an appreciation for the scope of the undertakings. In so doing, the study also recognizes and values the humble, intimate nature of the unpretentious undertakings that were had. It addresses the reconciliation between engaging small acts as a way to actively engage with matters of global concern. My chosen approach emphasizes the resonant and prescient role that Performance Studies can play as a multi-disciplinary response mechanism to our current times.

This document approaches the analysis of the improvisations, arguably, very conceptually, very theoretically, albeit, grounded ontologically. This avenue may surprise the reader, who may have come to expect something different in a thesis which features ‘performing’, ‘embodiment’ and ‘improvisation’ in its title. That being said, the text also

analyzes the performances artistically, poetically, responsively, ekphrastically.

### ***Ekphrasis***

Ekphrasis is a central concept within this study – and very likely an unfamiliar term – which merits definition. The Greek word, traditionally referred to the vivid literal description of a work of visual art through poetic expression. The definition and application of the term has been adopted and adapted by arts practitioners of diverse modalities. Ekphrasis, within this doctoral study, refers to the (invited) process of responding to one art form (the improvisational performances) with another art form (not restricted to literal response). Further elaboration is found in Chapter Two, under *Dual-Framing: Ekphrastic Responses*. Of import is the recognition that the process of ekphrasis, within this study, serves to uphold and illustrate tenets of reciprocity – so strived for in my praxis – between audience/performer, human/more-than-human world, without privileging and establishing a hierarchy of forms. Any potential redundancy – by not just using the term artistic response – is removed by this critical stress. Ekphrasis-as-practice, as methodology, models the variety and inclusiveness possible in fostering a range of dialectics. Ekphrasis is one of the key means through which my practice arrives in this thesis.

‘Post-performance’ ekphrastic responses were solicited by those in participatory-attendance, through a variety of modalities (poems, drawings, paintings, short stories, dances, photography...). These refractions serve[d]

as reflexive tools, informing my deepening engagement with my (past/present/future) performances. This sense of dual-framing aligns itself with the phenomenological precepts of being at once seer/seen, witness/witnessed, performer/performed. Those present, including myself, are at all times, engaged in these processes the one for the other. In so doing, we were highlighting how it:

allows performer and spectator-as-performer alike to engage with the specificities of each other's experiences in ways they might not in the normal flow of daily life. This, for these artists, makes the risks involved in this sort of work [improvised public space performance] worthwhile. It is not a perfect, predictable process – but the challenges, and the failures, may teach performers, spectators-as-performers and society as much about possible futures as the successes (Hadley, 2014 p.106).

Reflections directly informed and challenged the process throughout, none the least of which was a decision to change aesthetic styles for the second year of improvisations (taken up in Chapter Two) – in an attempt to further interrogate the communicative capacities of body/site/performance.

My conceptually-leaning exegesis aims to relay the significance of these sixteen improvisatory events within multiple fields of thought/practice. Such an approach remains only 'one' of the many possibilities which exist as a means of entry into sharing the ideas – from the instigating moments through to what unfolded and continues to unfurl. If we take the improvisations as the [qualified] 'object' of inquiry, then this document stands as a testament to how the object [can] appear to disappear in its

multiplicity.<sup>8</sup> For there is no one way to write performance, to write improvisation (see: Chamberlain, 2016).

The simultaneous (de)construction of the Practice-, Performance-, and Poetics-*as-Reciprocity*search (I elaborate on my use of this term in *Foundational Tenets*, forthcoming in Chapter One), finds me here, *now*, offering a pastiche of moments – snippets – from each performance. I include these to offer a tangible taste – another vital register – from which the animate analysis of what transpired in the improvisations may be savoured. They also serve to augment to a degree, the ‘mystery’ of the moments that did and continue to unfurl:

*I call out for the Buddha...projecting my heralding voice down a remote forested road...almost instantly, we hear a distant truck rumble approaching...in it: a man. A man, neither I, nor any of the island attendees, has ever seen before. He stops. A brief exchange occurs. As he drives away, a shared comment passes through those gathered: ‘could that have been the Buddha, himself?’*

I am picked up by an audience member,  
spun around, and tossed into a snow bank.  
A ripple of shock and upset passes through the crowd...

*A man begins to cry when I ask aloud ‘Who owns art?’*

Our snowy, icy path is lit by headlight and lantern.  
A man with a walker forms part of our group.  
I invite everyone to ‘become each other’s wheels in the snow.’  
The shared, and slowed pace, invites linked arms and song...

*I try to uproot a small tree I mistake for being dead.  
I am aware the joke is on me...*

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<sup>8</sup> My orientations with notions of object and subjectivity are taken up in more detail in Chapter Two.

I find a broken broom.  
I become the witch I always was/am/could be...

*I hand the young boy in our group a beautiful stone I find in our travels...he keeps ahold of it for the duration of the time, and takes it home...*

I ask those of us gathered to raise our hands,  
if we are a colonizer.  
I raise mine...

*I turn around, the audience gasps.  
Both of my knees are profusely dripping blood  
(deep red against the white paint of my legs)...  
I had crawled for some time along a sharp, gravel road...*

I close the door I am expected to enter through.

*I wail guttural utterances.  
I have never made such sounds before...*

I remove the 'Welcome' doormat from the doorstep.  
I use it as both shield and flag.

*I put out my thumb. I hitchhike.  
An audience member retrieves his car and picks me up.*

I find myself positioned in a sunken grave  
on consecrated ground.  
I pick a daffodil growing there and 'smoke' it...

*Blindfolded,  
(faceless) cat calls are sent in my direction...*

On the seashore, I am offered a handful of seaweed...

## ***Embodied Theory***

I believe that live art (and thereby, liveness) does not necessitate being there in person to convey/grasp what did or is still transpiring (see discussion in Chapter Eight). What and how I present and address my work in the following pages, is undeniably, on a different register from the live events themselves.<sup>9</sup> Difference, inevitably does exist. I consider the difference between the concepts and the improvisations, the ideas and the performances: *embodied theory*. Embodiment (a concept) may not necessarily be tied to the experience of corporeal, seamless synthesis (see discussion in Chapter Three). Of paramount importance in this study is to evidence that the conceptual is not divorced from the body. This thesis is a body of text, housing various styles of approach. As will be evidenced, my body's experience of improvising the world is what negotiates the various 'different' registers of this *practised* terrain. The inextricable tension that exists in the embodied theories extends the experiencing and verbs the practice; resting in the potent space between one woman improvising *in situ*, and one woman expanding the frame of her situatedness.

In this sharing, there exists [a] permeability: presented as an open book (translatable to every 'foreign' language, as Rilke invites). The hope is that others may enter, engage and collaboratively live our way into unfurling animate answers... *now*.

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<sup>9</sup> The sixteen improvised performances are also purposefully referred to interchangeably (with no preference being given the one over the other) throughout this study as happenings, events and gatherings: these identifying monikers each seemingly imbuing these assemblages of people/place with a slightly different quality.

The study is presented as a critical bricolage: verbing my disability. As Robyn Stewart notes, bricolage ‘is hybrid praxis. [...] The bricoleur is positioned within the borderlands, crossing between time and place, personal practice and the practice of others’ (2010, p.128). The reflective assembling, the transversal testimonies, the inclusive sharing of process/product so valued in this undertaking thus translates herein into a purposeful amalgamation of sources – *all (non)expert* – personal, scholarly, and ‘witnessed refractions’. This document is replete with interspersed comments and citations, many quoted at length: ‘to help illuminate, explicate and problematize the multiplicity of meanings that resonate within and from these landscapes, to espouse their imbricated nature’ (Pearson, 2002 pp.81-82):

I am wondering, 'what do other people see?' [...] Bronwyn had her arms up over her head and slightly tilted. I found it curious that her arms synchronized with alder trees in the background. I wondered how Bronwyn did that, then realized that because of the angle, no one else in the audience was seeing what I was seeing. The coincidence of her arms being inline with the droop of the trees was something that only I could see, not the person to my left nor right. They would have seen her arms over her head and the trees at a different angle.

[...] By focusing our senses on all that we were drawn to observe, we feel more and our brains connect dots, fragments of information that would not otherwise be connected.  
[...] That really drove home for me the style of performance and the strength that Bronwyn brings to the theatre. You see her effort. You are drawn in. You observe and observe again, this time more intensely.

(R1, *Lasqueti 1*<sup>10</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Following each location credit, a number will be assigned to it, denoting which improvisation it was in said place, (these numbers will continue into the Year 2 series: i.e. the first of the Lasqueti Island events in the second year will be listed as: *Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016*, etc.). This facilitates possible cross-referencing on the part of the reader. A complete list of performances and their associated locations and dates is included as Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup> Performance responses from witnesses are demarked through the permeably open dotted frame throughout this text. I note the possibility that exists to skew my findings, by not including all of the responses received, and selecting those which best support given arguments or points. I have striven to present a balanced array of responses: those which could be viewed as more positive, as well as those that posed challenges or provocations.

The matter of intense and ongoing observation, accompanying the question of ‘what do other people see?’ alluded to by the above respondent is precisely what motivated me to solicit multiple responses to each event. Invitees and attendees (elaborated upon in Chapter Two) were briefed pre-performance (either in a circulated email or, in the case of *Earthdance*, a wall posting) that I was interested in soliciting ekphrastic responses. This may, or may not, have influenced how they chose to perceive the unfurling performance(s). Other audience members may have simply happened across the event, whereupon I tried, on most occasions (when contextually possible) to follow with my invitation of ekphrasism. On all occasions, I followed the performance with an accompanying email (or in-person) reminder and gentle request for response. Almost every attendee responded in some manner.

Audience-participants are credited in the text as *R1*, *R2*, and so on (the *R* being short-hand for *Respondent*), unless their identity somehow influences the understanding of their comments or where they specifically requested to have their comments attributed to them. It will be noted that most responses of a more, arguably, ‘artistic’ nature (poem, drawing, etc.) are credited by name. When presented with these refractions – occupying a different register than written comments – I simply asked the creator whether they would like to be named. The choice, however, to keep respondents largely anonymous, addresses many issues at once: not the least of which is an honouring of confidentiality.

This study has had to continuously ask of itself how effective employing these improvisatory and documentary methodologies are, or have

been, in establishing opportunities for facilitating expanded and ethical encounters – as they relate to understanding our current currency of complexities – akin to what Phelan (1993) espouses as the very potential for performance. And similarly, what Wallace Heim (2004) argues for, and demands of performance, to establish the grounds for a dialogical, co-created and potent ‘slow activism’. One attendee remarked, following an event, ‘I felt so invited’ (R2, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015); while another commented:

Your performance took me to places of complete devastation and hope and lightness. Wow...and it all felt safe. Thank you.  
(R3, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Every decision in this project reflects an entwining congruency, as ‘a *praxis* and an *ethos*: the staging of co-appearance, the staging which is co-appearing’ (Nancy, 2000 p.71, emphasis in original). In short, nothing operates independently of the other. This doctoral journey is dependently co-arising (Macy, 1991a).

The aim in and amongst all of these approaches is to establish a theoretical container where all of these ‘conceptual’ agents might meet in productive ways: situating how an improvisatory examination of the body’s role might translate into the sharing/dismissal of (and practised exploration of the value of) identity politics. The project simultaneously attempts to esteem the ‘disabled’ body/voice/mind within academia and the community-at-large. As Hilary Elliott remarks, the ‘rhythms, textures and dynamics of the moving body are statements, questions, exclamation marks’ (2007, n.p.). The

improvisatory interaction with a copula-based language and how that informs a performance-performativity continuum, questions through doing, how:

Naming oneself part of a larger group, a social movement or a subject position in modernity can help to focus energy, and to understand that solidarity can be found – precariously, in improvisation, always on the verge of collapse (Kuppers, 2011 p.109).

Identity/self-identification – and their relationships to notions of embodiment, disability and ecology – are perceived herein, as fluid, multiple, and complex, rather than as bound and singular concepts. There always exists the possibility of resonating with a variety of seemingly conflicting identifiers: my ‘own’ heritage speaks directly to this. Identity can involve the choice not to identify with what an ‘other’ might perceive as an affable or logical grouping. In addition, it can enable aligning with, in the capacity of an ally, when the ‘specifics’ of a named identity don’t fit. Identity can be the embodiment of paradox: simultaneously offering the potential for restrictive individualism and a platform for enlarged connectivity. *I* may become *i*.<sup>12</sup> Approached through performance, all of these aspects of identity/self-identification provide grounds for a discussion of performativity.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Identifying Identification: Performatively***

Performativity, as a term was first coined by J.L. Austin in the 1950s, in the domain of speech theory, suggesting that speech is a performance of ‘performed utterances’. The term was later morphed in the 1990s by Judith

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<sup>12</sup> Of note: ‘*I*’ has not always been capitalized in the English language. Significantly, capitalization emerged at the same time as capitalism – when Britain and the United States became world powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Weintraub, 2012 p.164).

<sup>13</sup> I wish to note that herein, self-identification is understood that it may, or may not, be the ‘property’ – or capacity – of humankind, alone.

Butler's framing that suggests gender, race and identity are performed through socially-conditioned interpretations of a body's gestures and behaviours.<sup>14</sup> I appreciate Frost and Yarrow's (2015) view of performativity, as the 'aptitude for renegotiating being and doing in the world' (p.xi). John Freeman emphasizes, however, that there still does not exist any 'authoritative distinctions' (p.161) between 'performance', 'performativity' and 'performative' (2015a). Derek Bailey remarks the same about theories of improvisation (1993 referenced in Peters, 2009 p.146). Even so, Disability, Performance, Feminist and Queer theorists have fervently taken up the terms. *Performativity-as-identity-exploration*, features in this study somewhere between the Austin and the Butler configurations. Language, herein, is understood as [embodied] corporeal movements. As will be more thoroughly detailed in Chapter Two and Three, my improvisations initially incorporated significant amounts of speech, equally appreciated as [a] movement of the/moving body.

Karen Barad (2008) poses the stupefying question as to whether all performances should be considered performative. She proposes a posthumanist approach to performativity which 'calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of "human" and "nonhuman," examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized' (2008, p.9). Performativity has been widely discussed within Performance Studies as a way to approach the deconstruction of 'human identity', but not, as Chamberlain, Lavery and Yarrow (2012) remark 'to deconstruct, from a biocentric position, separatist

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<sup>14</sup> For more see: Cavanaugh (2015).

and exceptionalist notions of “human nature” (p.6). This study has had to address – through performance and response – my relationships to my [disabled] ‘human nature’. My female and/or ‘mother nature’, have simultaneously, been probed. All of these considerations have been prompted by my own placement *in-* and-*as situ* (see discussions in Chapter Three and Four).

### ***Performance***

I employ the term *performance* much the same as Erving Goffman does: ‘all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [*sic*] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on his observers’ (1959, p.32). Placing explicit emphasis on the animate qualities of both the human and more-than-human world, and thereby the continuous presence of observation, I contend that performance is the permeable practice of interaction, always ongoing. Victor Turner suggests that, performance ‘is the explanation and explication of life itself’ (1986 cited in Denzin, 2014 p.vii). Mike Pearson claims, in his joint article with Julian Thomas, that performance is ‘always about norm and variability [...]’. And it involves qualitative improvisation and repetition without exactitude’ (1994, p.136). For many disabled people, the ‘notion that disability is a kind of performance is to people with disabilities not a theoretical abstraction, but lived experience’ (Sandahl and Auslander, 2008 p.2).

Everything we do contains elements of improvisation (in our daily

routines, structures and scripts). Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander write, 'Performance is a renegade term that describes bodies in a variety of contexts, from the overtly theatrical to the everyday' (2008, p.5). Without denigrating the potency and potentiality held within these terms – improvisation, performance and life become 'vitality' interchangeable, whilst still permitting distinguishability in life/art. Without distinction, performance and improvisation are ubiquitous forces, in this context, and could lead to critical dead-ends if kept within the paradoxical frame (Madison, 2005).

The paradox of performance (as all-encompassing) can be escaped by addressing the deeper significance aroused through crafting representational spaces. Performance spaces which draw our attention to the ongoing presence of performing agents – wherein, we begin to appreciate the need to:

bring some kind of order and clarification to [performance's] far-reaching uses and meanings. We must describe and decipher its multiple operations in order to comprehend it and recognize it, not simply for its own sake, but for what performance will teach us about our culture and ourselves (Madison, 2005 p.150).

The apprehension of performance being a process through which to observe 'our culture and ourselves' – as observing and implicated participants – quickly illuminates the improvisatory, self-immolating performance actions we do unto ourselves/earth. Kershaw refers to what he terms Western culture's 'performance compulsion' (2012) in which performances become displays of oppressive actions vis-à-vis our interactions with-in/'out' our world: the chiasmic clash of the improvisatory incurred by us, the anthropogenic 'paradoxical primate' (Kershaw, 2008 p.102). Kershaw maintains that distanced spectatorship (evidenced through traditional theatre

practices) engenders pathological attitudes of neglect directly attributable to our current climatic crisis. He notes too, that paradoxically, the ‘failures of humans in ecologically mis-performing on Earth might even become a source of hope’ (2012, p.11) if indeed performance processes become more interactive and ‘sufficiently responsive to the dynamic integration of global-local eco-systems’ (2012, p.8).

This study, does not therefore engage with either performance or improvisation with blinders on. Rather, it is akin to an ethical understanding of Turner’s conception of performance as the ability to enter a liminal state:

being betwixt and between structures or situations. [...] Relatively free of norms, guidelines, and requirements, liminality, for Turner, is the space of greatest invention, discovery, creativity, and reflection (Madison, 2005 p.158).

Concentrating on the ability of performance to possibly enliven sites for creative invention as means to effectively address the ‘compulsions’ of the Anthropocene, improvisation is thus employed ‘beyond its usefulness in a given day-to-day situation — in the fact that it still maintains a deep historical connection to cultures of oppression’ (Wallace, 2015 p.190) (See discussion in Chapter Five). This study takes up improvisational performance as an engaged process through which to explore the marginalization of ‘ecology’ and ‘disability’.

I perceive the climatic crisis as at once social, cultural, and ecologically environmental extending beyond the margins of global warming/cooling, beyond more than 400+ ppm of carbon in the atmosphere, melting glaciers, species extinction, the expropriation of Indigenous lands,

floods, radioactive fallout, pipelines, cancer, depression, droughts, coral bleaching, tar sands and toxic dumps, hermaphroditic fish, acidic oceans, genetically modified foods, deforestation, colony collapse, and monocultures; ghettoization, segregation, incarceration, warfare and terrorism; beyond the act of ‘clicktivism’, Kyoto, Copenhagen, Paris and Bonn, to the World Health Organization’s assessment that (depending on what one includes in calculations), the deaths of between hundreds of thousands ranging upwards to millions of people annually is currently attributable to this compounded crisis (2014). Raced, gendered and marginalized groups grapple with this number disproportionately within the once-Pangaea world.

Patrick Curry remarks that ‘it is factually uncontroversial among biologists that we now in the midst of the sixth great extinction in the Earth’s history’ (2011, p.16). I use the term Anthropocene interchangeably with climate change/crisis to refer to [the status of] our current age. I do so, aware that the usage of both terms has come under some critique, within sympathetic activist circles (see for example: Haraway, 2016; Malm, 2016). Anthropocenic perspectives – similarly to human-created climate change – are marred by their own entrapment between paradoxical frames. Andreas Malm surmises that:

*Climate change is denaturalised in one moment — relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities — only to be renaturalised in the next, when derived from an innate human trait. Not nature, but human nature — this is the Anthropocene displacement (2016, p.270, emphasis in original).*

While, Timothy Morton counters with the ‘“*Anthropocene*” is the first fully antianthropocentric concept’ (2016, p.24, emphasis in original). According

to ‘Columbia University’s Center for International Earth Science Information Network, there could be around 700 million climate refugees by 2050’ (Tseghay, 2014 n.p.): effectively marring the lines between actors and agency, anthropogeny and paradox, human nature and the nature of humans, qualifying as social/ecological acts of *displacement*.

Joan W. Scott perceptively remarks, ‘that experience is always an interpretation and always in need of interpretation’ (1992 cited in Heddon, 2008 p.27). I sought to test the applicability and agency of my metaphoric insight, maintaining that ‘experience’ is discursively (not necessarily linguistically) co-constructed within emerging contexts that encompass the more-than-human world.

Inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2000) notion of the ‘singular plural’, I re-awakened an improvisational artistic practice which had been subsumed by the ubiquity of performing the unknowns of day-to-day survival, where my life lay in the liminality of *pre-* and *post-* diagnosis. I did not, however, want to devalue the inextricable role of improvisation/performance in everyday life. Kent De Spain (1997) aptly remarks, in the improvisation of our daily lives ‘we use real-time creativity as a tool’ (p.33). I was keenly interested in exploring my questions in the representational performance space and ‘the power and clarity of a honed improvisational awareness, [as] a dynamic instrument of inquiry into the intricacies of human behavior and experience’ (De Spain, 1997 p.33).

In this improvisational ‘space’ I wanted to explore the relevance of disability/ecology-as-everyday-life-into-an-extended-definition-of-

performance-as-response-to-the-immediacies-of-a-contingent-present. This instinctually widened frame aimed to prevent ‘the work becoming esoteric – a private language – [by creating] an opening of attention to the world in which it takes place; the interlocking realms of personal and public experience’ (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1990 p.201).

The challenge thus became how to overcome any possible charge of solipsism or narcissism. Approaching this improvisational exploration autoethnographically – as opposed to autobiographically – would help diffuse the potential for such allegation. Wherein autobiography is ‘drawn from the moment of realization, liberation and externalization’, autoethnography differs in that the focus is on personal experience as catalysts in ‘a meaning-making endeavour to engage the broader social issues’ (Freeman 2015a, p.164). Resonating with both performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s declaration that ‘I only write or make art about myself when I am completely sure that the biographical paradigm intersects with larger and social cultural issues’ (2000, p.7), and Eva Hayward’s method of creating ‘critical enmeshment[s] rather than a personal account’ (2008 cited in Alaimo, 2016a p.186), I was motivated through a normative-non-normative body – *performing shaking and stuttering gestures* – to relate my insight into an enlarged scope. I began asking, much as Carrie Noland does, ‘How does embodying socialized gestures produce an experience of movement – its texture and velocity – that ends up altering the routine, the body that performs the routine, and eventually, perhaps, culture itself?’ (2009, p.2). Alison Kafer, suggests that ‘the experience of illness and disability presents alternative ways of understanding ourselves in relation to the environment,

understanding which can then generate new possibilities for intellectual connections and activist coalitions’ (2013, p.131). This practice and doctoral text present alternative ways of understanding.

### ***Intersecting/Improvising Mind***

The immediate effects of Wilson’s Disease have notably affected the prefrontal cortex, cerebellum and basal ganglia in my brain, consequently enabling an increased aptitude towards improvisatory, non-linear, non-censoring thinking (Drinko, 2013) and synaesthetic empathy (Lorincz pers. comm. 26<sup>th</sup> May 2015).<sup>15</sup> In *Theatrical Improvisation, Consciousness, and Cognition*, Drinko references neurologist Vilayanur Ramachandran, who posits ‘that many artists are synesthetes and have the ability to sense things more multi-dimensionally. This could be one factor in humankind’s ability to think metaphorically. He [Ramachandran] credits synesthesia as “cross modal interactions that could be a signature or marker for creativity”’ (2013, p.55). Andrea Olsen further conjoins these aspects of the brain’s cross-modal capacities, when she elaborates:

The cerebellum, working in conjunction with the basal ganglia, coordinates the whole, feeding back to every part of the cortex through the thalamus, the primary relay station for all sensory input. Anything that damages this web of connections, interrupts efficient motor functioning. [...] Just as with the landscape, as we move off familiar roadways, new dimensions unfold (Olsen, 2006 pp.71-72).

The metaphor of moving ‘off familiar roadways’, as the entanglement

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<sup>15</sup> I will note there exists the possibility to be accused of solipsism when not terming the effects of Wilson’s Disease in more general terms, to refer to a segment of the population. However, as the symptomatic displays of Wilson’s Disease vary so much person to person (for example, some experience liver problems with few, if any, neurological manifestations), I have chosen to frame this through the personal.

of self with landscape, certainly informed both site-selectors' decisions (further elaboration found in Chapter Two), my own movements within sites and myself-as-site. The fact that the chosen location for the first improvisation was a literal crossing of roadways – familiar to both the performer and audience – had symbolic significance. Spry observes that:

Since performative autoethnography is located in the intersections of lived experience and larger social issues, constructing meaning from these intersections often happens as if constructing a critical collage (2011 p.152).

Evoking the concept of crafting an entwined collage through non-linear integration, I share what I penned following the first improvisation (Lasqueti Island, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014).<sup>16</sup> My intention in presenting this poem here is to display how this reflexive methodology evidences what an invitation can in/evoke: the ability for the imbricated moment to hold the possibility to relate the local with the global.

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<sup>16</sup> Credits for photographs and artwork featured with all the poems are contained in Appendix B.

this is a case of no beginnings  
and lack of endings  
a questioning  
and a premise  
made tangible in  
the invitation...

*I write with an invitation....*

*I am going to be engaging in my first of a series  
of site-specific improvisations (forming part of my  
PhD) on Sunday, December 7 at 1 pm (the day  
after the Craft Fair). Rain, sun, snow or mud!*

*To fully embody the improvisational experience, I  
will be brought to the location of each  
improvisation without any previous knowledge of  
it (it is being selected for me). Therefore, if you  
do want to attend — please let me know — and I  
will give your contact to the liaison who will let  
you know the location of the outdoor site.  
So, please do let me know....*

*Thanks,  
Bronwyn*

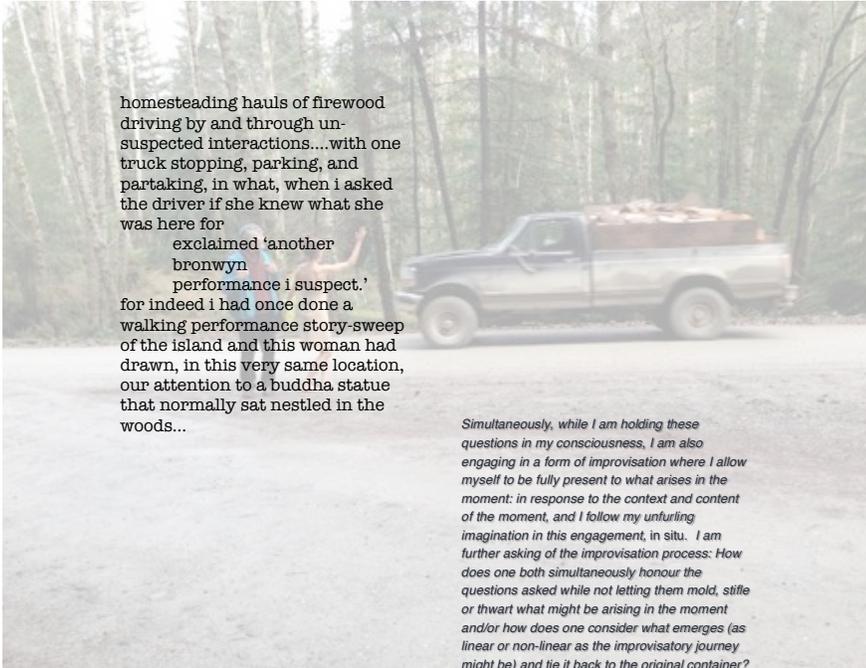
i have no idea where  
i am going. [none]. but

we are in this together.  
[metaphor is present]

i arrive,  
driven by my partner  
and daughter,  
to the crossroads.  
[more metaphor].

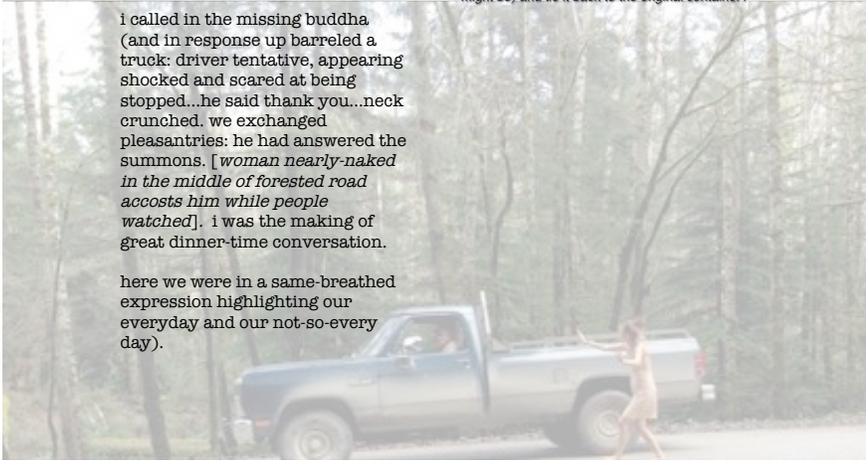
red tassled tuques, layers of fleece  
and wool, colourfully knitted  
mitts, gloves and gauntlets, a dog  
and welcoming smiles greet  
me/us/each other.

"are we here?"  
yes. "this intersection is between  
the south-end and north-end. It is  
our central park if this were  
manhattan, where the community  
hall is, between feral dogs and a  
curse, so I read in the news  
recently."



homesteading hauls of firewood  
driving by and through un-  
suspected interactions...with one  
truck stopping, parking, and  
partaking, in what, when i asked  
the driver if she knew what she  
was here for  
exclaimed 'another  
bronwyn  
performance i suspect.'  
for indeed i had once done a  
walking performance story-sweep  
of the island and this woman had  
drawn, in this very same location,  
our attention to a buddha statue  
that normally sat nestled in the  
woods...

*Simultaneously, while I am holding these  
questions in my consciousness, I am also  
engaging in a form of improvisation where I allow  
myself to be fully present to what arises in the  
moment: in response to the context and content  
of the moment, and I follow my unfurling  
imagination in this engagement, in situ. I am  
further asking of the improvisation process: How  
does one both simultaneously honour the  
questions asked while not letting them mold, stifle  
or thwart what might be arising in the moment  
and/or how does one consider what emerges (as  
linear or non-linear as the improvisatory journey  
might be) and tie it back to the original container?*



i called in the missing buddha  
(and in response up barreled a  
truck: driver tentative, appearing  
shocked and scared at being  
stopped...he said thank you...neck  
crunched. we exchanged  
pleasantries: he had answered the  
summons. [*woman nearly-naked  
in the middle of forested road  
accosts him while people  
watched*]. i was the making of  
great dinner-time conversation.

here we were in a same-breathed  
expression highlighting our  
everyday and our not-so-every  
day).



The idea captured in the ~~final~~ line 'and together we improvise[d]' conveys the reciprocal scope – the enlarged intention – of this exploration as a co-arising, participatory, sensorially-informed (Pink, 2009) study. Together, *in situ*, we perform[ed] the shifting dynamics.

At this point, I invite you to now watch the corresponding short,

edited video of performance excerpts from the first improvised performance (<https://vimeo.com/286633722>). Throughout the remainder of the thesis, following each performance poem, I insert the link to the associated performance video. It is my hope that by sign-posting these videos, at these given moments, that they may offer an accumulatory and deepening process for understanding, assimilating and analyzing the improvisations. These videos are to be appreciated in conjunction with the text, poems, photographs, and ekphrastic expressions included. They are all strands in the improvisatory weave.

### ***Documentation***

*[I]t is this space between documentation and disappearance, a space of fragmentations, which forms the site of our cultural knowledge and vision of performance.*

~Matthew Reason  
(2006, p.4)

*If performance neither disappears, nor fully resides in its documentations, then it seems appropriate to think of the continued cultural manifestation of performance as located somewhere in the space and time between. It is a space of extra-performance existence and non-existence [...] consisting of representations that contain something of the thing itself, but which are not the thing itself.*

~Matthew Reason  
(2006, p.232)

Hazel Smith and Roger Dean remark how the creation of ‘individual’ improvisations can counter the production of strictly ‘private’ languages by opening up the semiotic field through the creation of unique lexicons, grammar and stylizations of syntax (1997, p.37). This understanding is evidenced both within the moments of performance and the improvisations of

my everyday life with Wilson's Disease: encapsulated in my poetic performance scribings. I have particularly embraced the poiesis of the poetic narrative as a way to synthesize and process the process of performance with non-linear circuitousness. Valuing the poems as sites of inquiry themselves, they *transchronicle* (the) happening(s), offering up new sets of coordinates.

Rebecca Schneider (2005) remarks:

We find a slippage in genre boundaries together with a shifting of the site of art *onto performance understood as an artist's act*. Thus, these artists become agents or *actors* (the emphasis on the active) by deploying gestures that seem to resist (or undo or unbecome) the very media through which they emerge and, often, by or through which they are recorded. In this way, act-based art makes itself available to *become in different form*, to be retold (p.41, emphasis in original).

The varied documentation within this process and document are actively becoming through the uptake and genre-defying of 'difference'.

### **Poetic Inquiry**

With methodic ritual, following each improvisation, I wrote a poem, which could be categorized as 'found poetry', but this designation lacks the verbing of spontaneity, the rawness of fresh presence: the [performance] *finding* (Preece, 2015 p.159). Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay (2004) note that, 'Writing in the wake of moving (or watching another move) brings the living, sensuous world of the body into our language' (p.63), while Norman Denzin remarks that the inclusion of poetic ways of writing is a means of producing 'bodies of critically interpretive work that reflexively build on one another' (1997 cited in East, 2011 pp.110-111). The value of poetry as a method of inquiry has been notably pressed

into the service by many qualitative fields, by multiple scholars, none the least of which include Galvin and Prendergast (2015), Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima (2009), Madison (2005) and Brady (2005). Nancy notes:

Poetry is at ease with the difficult, the absolutely difficult. With ease, difficulty yields. This does not mean it can be brushed to one side. It means this is indeed poetry, presented for what it is, and that we are engaged within it. Suddenly, easily, we are in access, that is, in absolute difficulty, both 'elevated' and 'moving' (2006, p.4).

Cumulatively sixteen (ethno)poems were penned, which strove to cohesively assimilate the inferences that arose through the performing/ writing processes. These poems serve as critical composites from which congruency and tension have been found with the precursory theories underpinning this exploration. Contradictions have been highlighted, ratifications of disparate philosophies facilitated; the poems have steered me directly into domains of knowledge I never anticipated this study might venture towards, or never knew about in the first place. As an auto/ ethnographic-(performing)-poet, I have, as Turner suggests, gravitated towards 'liminal, existential spaces [...] that rearrange chronology into multiple and different forms and layers of meaningful experience' (1996 cited in Denzin, 2014 p.52). These liminal spaces, according to Turner, are imbued with a sense of reverence, of the sacred. The poems have served as textually reflexive, deductively problematizing, connect-the-dot composites. They are aesthetically performative (a performance of aesthetics) in their own right:

If you would be a poet, experiment  
with all manner of poetics, erotic  
broken grammars, ecstatic religions,  
heathen outpouring speaking in  
tongues, bombast public speech,  
automatic scribblings, surrealist sens-  
ings, streams of consciousness,

found sounds, rants and raves—  
(Ferlinghetti, 2007 pp.4-5).

After-texts, after turning itself inside out, writing turns again only to discover the pleasure and power of turning, of making not sense of meaning per se but making writing perform: Challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of 'textuality'; shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively (Pollock, 1998 p.75).

This dissertation is, as a whole, being presented equally as a performative text, a poem: a practice of poetic inquiry.

In addition, I tasked myself to draw a picture of each improvisation.<sup>17</sup> In so doing, I was challenging myself through a variety of media to offer up reflexive platforms. As the improvisations themselves operate within a state of alterity that temporally teases apart chronology and linearity, my own/others' responses emulate this very 'nature'. This transference of appreciation into a variety of modalities – and thereby, the syntheses facilitated by this bricolaging – made me reticent at first to employ video footage as a means of documenting the improvisatory happenings. In my experience, video can enlist a two-dimensionalizing that has the effect of flattening ground, as opposed to horizontalizing engaged relationships. As Curry contends, 'a flat screen, no matter what is shown *on* it, can never replace a three-dimensional and multisensory encounter in real time and place' (2011, p.168, emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Performance drawings included in Appendix C.

<sup>18</sup> I do note, that one could justifiably counter that television/video *does* precisely that: it replaces the three-dimensional encounter. What it doesn't/can't do is render it the 'same'.

Reason captured my initial hesitation, in part, with his observation: ‘the more faithful the video representation, and the less it adapts the performance for the new medium, the less watchable it becomes as an artefact in its own right’ (2006 cited in Nelson 2013, p.85). However, Reason fails to elaborate on what exactly he means by a ‘faithful’ representation (*faithful to what?*, one might ask), seeming to imply that a fixed camera angle, with uninterrupted recording might qualify. The contestable (and unattainable) ‘faithfulness’ was not my primary concern, rather the challenge of capturing the vitality of essence, the multi-dimensional qualities of engaged presences (arguably, these may be one in the same).

### Video

Filming live performance has a history of contentious debate within the performing arts. The main arguments revolve around its effectiveness in capturing the liveness of the event: ‘at once being both the saviour and the death of live performance’ (Reason, 2006 p.73), recognizing that ‘recordings convey little of the impact of the live event, little of the dynamism of the performance, the emotion, or the charged nature of the audience experience’ (p.90). In *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, Reason points towards de Marinis’ 1985 explorations of videoed performance documentation – with noted emphasis on the study’s title: ‘Faithful Betrayal’ (2006, p.24). Reason further notes Eugenio Barba’s comments ‘that theatrical performance resists time not by being frozen in a recording but by transforming itself and that such transformations are found in the memories of individual spectators’ (1990 cited in 2006, p.51).

Despite merited arguments that none of the modalities I am enlisting serve any better in mitigating the ephemerally(?)-animate within representation, I was initially resistant to including any filmed footage as a part of my reflexive process. My supervisors convinced me that an all-out rejection of having my performances videoed might be shortsighted on my part. I begrudgingly, agreed to this possibility. I was still holding fast to the idea that too-oft ‘hideous linear discourses’, as so described by Tim Etchells’s of Forced Entertainment (Reason, 2006 p.59) could not possibly capture the essence, texture, and feeling of the event itself. I proceeded through the first year of improvisations, faithfully attempting to have each event recorded whilst engaging little, if at all, with the footage. It was only in my laboured attempts to upload the footage for filing purposes, that I caught glimpses of the ironies and the realities of attempting to (non-professionally) film the rawness of *this* site-specificity: I was often out of the frame, or dwarfed by the magnitude, sound and scape of place. Admittedly, I initially felt a sense of self-assuring (read: anthropocentric) smugness feeling that this ‘proved’ the shortcomings of video in this context. However, this thought was necessarily dislodged with the acknowledgement of how very appropriate – or ‘faithful’ to my argument – such footage indeed was or could be. *In situ*, the audience’s attention was never solely on me. I was emphasizing engagement with the more-than-human world, with an expanded view of site, and so such footage captured aspects of the event that would have been lost had I always been kept in the frame. That being said, I had to ask, was this larger filmed frame capturing the vitality of the ‘liveness’?! Chamberlain remarked:

you aren't necessarily a 'centre' just one of many 'voices' available to the witnesses – the air and its humidity on their skin, for example, the scent of the trees. No, these aren't available through the video and your absence doesn't make them apparent – but a refusal to be the centre of attention in the video indicates a possibility of allowing more visibility/audibility to the non-human (pers. comm. 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017).

I credit, Matthew Nelson, a fellow artist at the *E|MERGE* residency in February 2016 for opening my eyes to the possibilities of video to capture, comment on, interpret and reflect upon my offerings...to speak through a medium of essence. Nelson worked with the video documentation that he took of my improvisations at *Earthdance* that year, rearranging, splicing and crafting an original, piece of work: a refraction which also stands as a provocation. A provocation that opens up the possibility to question the positioning of anthropocentrism as central focus/character within the documentation...what would the same 'performance' look like, if videoed with me being entirely absent, for instance? Either way, Nelson's approach seems to align with Phelan's remarks about performance, 'insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction' (1993, p.3) engendering 'a model for another representational economy' (p.3).

Nelson's 'representational economy' was akin to how Forced Entertainment chooses to best represent their performance work in film:

These representations, therefore, seek a way of speaking about the work that is more akin to the aesthetics of the original piece. Often this involves mixing genres, using anecdote and conflating or expanding ideas and times and events to subvert conventional chronologies. The recurring metaphors for such representations are familiar, as they speak of fragments, traces and remnants. Such interests, such motifs, seek to provide a discourse that matches the postmodern interests and style [...] which is similarly involved in revealing its own fragmentations, constructions and contradictions [...] attempt[ing] to create a record that

documents not the appearance of the event but instead represents something of the experience of the performance (Reason, 2006 p. 60).

Capturing ‘the experience of the performance’ through video has been approached by creating short, edited versions which aim to represent the same bricolaged, fragmented, and non-linear aesthetic of the project as a whole – a composite aggregate – splices rendering a fresh (w)hole through what is both simultaneously visible/invisible, included or left behind.<sup>19</sup>

The videos exist an attempt to tangibly record (dis)appearance as a the performing of lived and living experience.<sup>20</sup>

The critical challenge – how to ‘capture’/document while trying to minimize the distortion, alteration or reshaping of the improvisations – also guides the writing *through, as* and *with* performance. Performance is here conjugated as a poetics of engagement. Phelan suggests, ‘To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and therefore alter the event...’ (1993, p.148). Her statement recognizes the challenge of navigating the apparent fixity of text. However, she neglects to recognize that events are always in a state of alteration, flooded by the perspectives of those in co-performance. I suggest instead that performance *is* documentable. Documentation, however, does not prescribe or determine fixity. Performance is always in the process of

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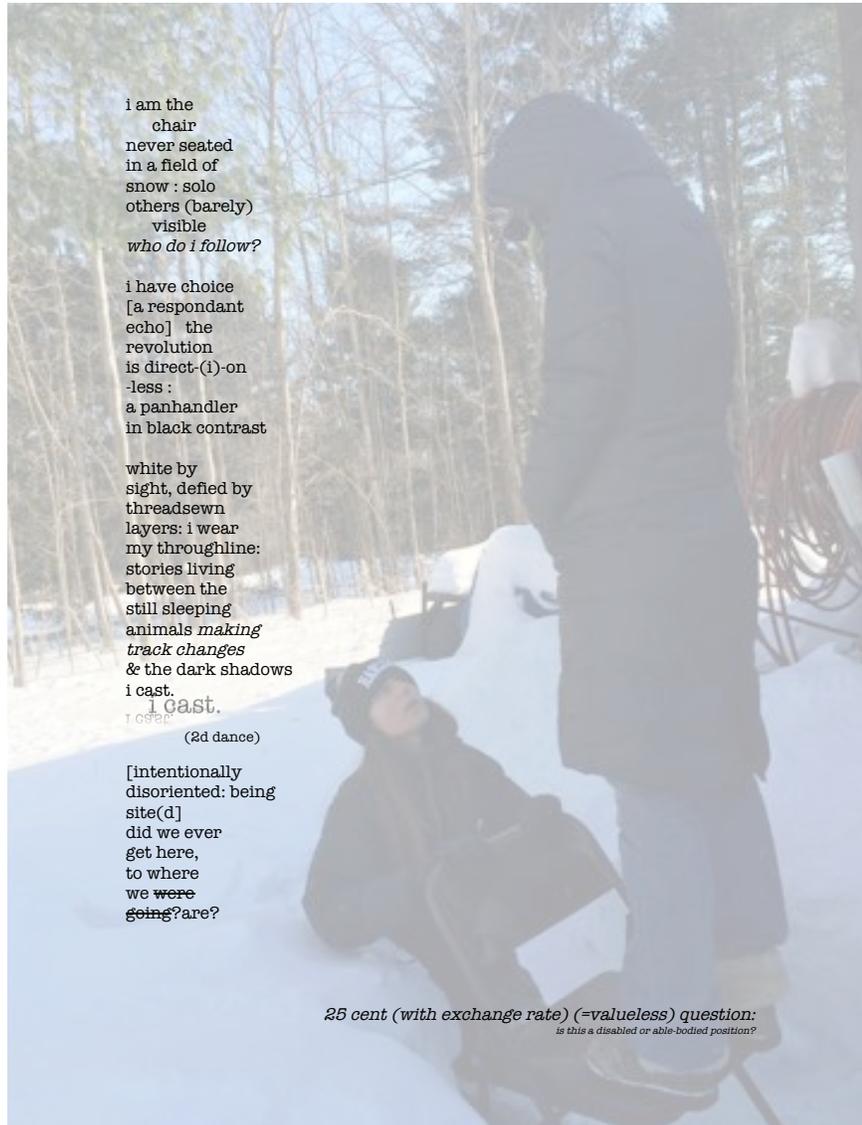
<sup>19</sup> The excerpted and edited videos were created by Matthew Nelson (for the four which he was in attendance) and the remaining twelve improvisations were edited by April Parchoma. I include a short interview with Parchoma in Appendix F about the process and her impressions of editing performance video for which she was not in attendance.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix E includes a list of all the links to the sixteen performance excerpt videos. In addition, a link to the uncut, full length video of the fourteenth performance in Huddersfield on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016 is included here (as both of my examiners were in attendance, making it a submission requirement).

documentation in/by an animate world. Rebecca Schneider highlights this under recognized process of refraction when she remarks:

The site of the event is in the witnessing, the re-telling/re-seeing, not in the ‘event’ itself; and yet the ‘event’ itself; becomes what is told in retelling. The mechanism of retelling is thus pitched toward eliciting a response which can stand as another generation of retelling, and function, in retelling, as yet another call. Thus the media undoes the media, resists the very mode of its manifestation, and pitches itself toward re-enactment in a variety of forms *always alternative* to the event itself (2005 p.43, emphasis in original).

By invoking the ‘*always alternative*’ whilst maintaining a perceptual form of ‘accuracy’, I share the ‘event’ of my second improvisation through the ‘event’ of my performance poem. The poem highlights how the location itself – in tandem with the site-ing of ourselves – created a dynamic challenge to concepts of ‘solo’ (*Earthdance 1*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015):



i am the  
chair  
never seated  
in a field of  
snow : solo  
others (barely)  
visible  
*who do i follow?*

i have choice  
[a resonant  
echo] the  
revolution  
is direct-(1)-on  
-less :  
a panhandler  
in black contrast

white by  
sight, defied by  
threadsewn  
layers: i wear  
my throughline:  
stories living  
between the  
still sleeping  
animals *making*  
*track changes*  
& the dark shadows  
i cast.

I cast.  
(2d dance)

[intentionally  
disoriented: being  
site(d)  
did we ever  
get here,  
to where  
we were  
going?are?

25 cent (with exchange rate) (=valueless) question:  
is this a disabled or able-bodied position?

(Please Now View: *Earthdance I Performance Excerpt Video:*  
<https://vimeo.com/286634603>)

### *the improvisational moment: presently*

‘The’ improvisational moment, as I experience ‘it’ is akin to an ontological ‘flow process’ which Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi describes as ‘the merging of action and awareness’ (2015, p.152) where a person ‘has no dualistic perspective: he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself’ (p.152). Zaporah refers to this as ‘awareing’. *Awareness, thus, does not become objectified.*

Many of the improvisational practitioners and scholars cited in this thesis speak at length – *to*, or *about* the zone, the presence, the attention or the mindfulness, employing some of the ‘familiar’ terms of association, conjured (and conjugated) through improvisation. However, there are fewer documented attempts to try to describe the *sensed experience* of these moments themselves; likely due to the collision of non-objectified experiencing within the moment – the dissolving of the primacy of the ‘I’ – with the rigidity of language.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps we sense that we betray the fullness of the process by even trying. *I/i* certainly do. And yet, at the mercy of perhaps the necessarily indefinable, I am held by the continuous invitation of [the] improvisation. In my insufficient attempts at articulation, I am affirmed *through this* process that improvisation is an art of descriptive indefinites. Sara Giddens (2015) offers perhaps one of the most resonant descriptors, when she refers to stillness as ‘not an absence [...] but a creation of space’ (p.23) ...

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<sup>21</sup> See De Spain (2003) for a discussion on the present moment in contact dance improvisation. For a focused examination of the present moment from a psychoanalytic and everyday perspective, see: Stern (2004).

What is the present? How can it be thought? What is presence? Ecological awareness forces us to think and feel at multiple scales, scales that disorient normative concepts such as 'present', 'life', 'human', 'nature', 'thing', 'thought', and 'logic' (Morton, 2016 p.159).

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER ONE: Foundational Tenets

### *Reciprocitysearch*

The approach of this doctoral exploration is as a ‘project of possibilities’<sup>22</sup> – as *Reciprocitysearch* – rather than research. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2004), Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that “‘research’” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (p.1), due to the abusive practices that have been undertaken in its name. Though, I acknowledge that my adapted neologism could be viewed solely as a tokenistic change, what remains of vital importance is conveying the understood ethics of reciprocal engagement which ground the undertaking of this site-sensitive study. Gay McAuley further reifies this orientation, by remarking: ‘In regard to a history of colonialism, “the placial turn” in theory and an appreciation of complexities of dwelling, occupancy and exclusion are significant in demonstrating the ethical responsibilities of site-specific practices’ (2006 cited in Pearson, 2010 p.10). This layered awareness is present throughout my work, and highlighted in this poem segment (19<sup>th</sup> March 2016), I wrote following a performance on consecrated English ground:

through zephyring  
skies (*colonial flags,*  
*security gates....and science*):  
underfoot :  
*they/we are here*  
in the graveyard of  
innocent picks, socialized  
destruction and *our*

---

<sup>22</sup> This statement is a riff off of Soyini Madison’s ‘performance of possibilities’ (2005).

cultural/religious  
practices

Another two, specific audience-participant responses spoke directly to this appreciation, made evident, within the performance, noting poetically:

body arching opening  
to the ground [...]  
remembers  
the innocence and innocents  
lost

*(Poem excerpt, R4, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)*

While she's kneeling on the earth she's asking  
Questions that make me feel my feelings.  
I remember that I am built of colonies, living on land that was  
colonized.  
And no one in this big story has ever asked for permission.

*(Poem excerpt, R5, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)*

As this study involves my engagement with global sites which each hold their own histories of colonization, occupancy and marginalized exclusion, I become further aware of how my own inherited lineages interact with these places as a living site of (a) herstory: a bloodlined amalgamation which includes the colonized/colonizer, the persecuted/persecutor, the settler/the diasporically re-settled in one body: further challenging notions of locality, Indigeneity<sup>23</sup> and appropriation. I must respond to my apprehension of my levels of both simultaneous privilege and *disadvantage* that I carry at all times, contextually ever shifting. Though I experience many of the challenges facing women and disabled people,<sup>24</sup> I simultaneously recognize that I have experienced a life largely endowed with being outwardly-viewed

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<sup>23</sup> The terms Indigenous and Indigeneity will be capitalized throughout this document as a mark of respect for the dismissive legacies of colonization.

<sup>24</sup> In this thesis, the term 'disabled people' will be used rather than 'people with disabilities'. Performance Artist Mary Duffy remarks, 'Describing ourselves as disabled people is a more unifying thing rather than tagging disabilities on afterwords and pretending we're just trying to be normal' (cited in Eisenhauer, 2007 pp.9-10).

as White, and my access to a university education has granted me extensive (and systemically entrenched) privileges which may both widen realms of exposure and/or blind me. Continuously, I mediate ‘the process of naming and claiming experiences in the world’ (Finney, 2014 p.xiv): my place-meant (placement) within a larger whole. I try to hold this awareness as transparently as possible, recognizing much as Thomas Nagel perceptively remarks, riffing off the title of his 1986 monograph, that no one has a ‘view from nowhere’. Nowhere is particular.

My ‘nowhere’ is a *now-here*: folding back into Abram’s earlier articulation of the need for ‘spontaneous creativity in adjusting oneself (and one’s inheritance) to those contours’. As I will later elaborate, in Chapter Four, my use of the term *site* becomes analogous with body: that of person/place (an understanding ascertained through this process). Pearson suggests that sites are ‘aggregations of narratives’ (1994, p.135). I agree, engaging with this remark, to infer bodied stories/voices/languages that may not only have been chronicled or celebrated, but also may have vanished, been suppressed and/or been imposed in/as location. My application of site-sensitive ethics attempts to extend non-divisively with the bodyscapes of Earth. This approach translates into the chosen and practised methodologies, directly orienting my understanding towards my complex placement within the climatic crises.

### ***Reciprocity***

I felt PART of a process of unsureness, part of a process of what-does-it-mean-to-be part, included, asked in, called upon, responsibility etc. etc. [...]  
this keeps an audience on its toes, as well as saying something

more in terms of what it means to be responding to...

*(R6, Earthdance 1, 20 February 2015)*

The notion of response begs for an expanded explication of how I verb notions of reciprocity with the human and more-than-human world. I locate this discussion before the Methodology section, to firmly underscore the pertinence of these concepts towards *all* the elements of inquiry that this study engages.

Abram (1997) posits that we ‘are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human’ (p.22) and that:

by affirming the canyons, the wind, the moon, and the forest as actors, as animate agents like ourselves, we simultaneously acknowledge their formative influence and their otherness (their wild indeterminacy, their existence not as fathomable objects but as inscrutable entities with whom we stand in a living relation (2001, p.25).

Ontologically, my relating with earth-as-others-as-myself, has always been one that I could term ‘temporally permeable animism’. As David Suzuki suggests, ‘[i]f we can see (as we once saw very well) that our conversation with the planet is reciprocal and mutually creative, then we cannot help but walk carefully in that field of meaning’ (1997, p.206). Barrett further elaborates on reciprocity as being the “‘intangible” form of cultural capital’ (2010, p.8). From the very youngest age, I have understood that I am deeply located within this world:

*At the age of five, I spontaneously announced to my parents that if I ever had a little girl, I would name her Similkameen. This, because of my experience of indivisibility with the river, the valley of the Similkameen – complete, unbifurcated immersion – flesh as water, rocks our bones:*

*synaesthetic skin. At such a young age, I struggled to convey within an objective English-speaking paradigm, this simultaneously overwhelming and completely 'natural' sense.<sup>25</sup> My creative solution was to attempt to align these feelings with a cultural equivalent that captured the same reverence, awe, wonder, fragility, movement, enchantment...mystery and magic. The birth of a child provided this analogy, the genesis of my employing metaphor.<sup>26</sup>*

I gave birth to Similkameen nineteen years after my extemporization. Metaphor occupied an agentic animism...and was named.

My engagement within these improvisations must negotiate as transparently as possible the human-centredness from which my vantage point informs my perceptions. Jane Bennett (2010) argues that this thus elicits a degree of healthy anthropomorphism necessary to address this understanding. Although, I am able to resonate and communicate on a variety of levels with the more-than-human world, I remain human in empathetic encounter with this dynamic animism. 'Interspecies improviser'

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<sup>25</sup>As Robin Wall Kimmerer remarks 'English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy' (2013, p.56). Similarly, Donna Haraway remarks 'Go outside English, and the wild multiplies' (2016, p.103). Comparable to my Similkameen River-experience, Kimmerer additionally remarks and evidences:

A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. [...] 'To be a bay' holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise — become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things (2013, p.55).

My appreciation of language as animate performer is engaged most evidently in the poems in this study, but underscores and has presented challenges balancing styles, semantics and semiotics with the meeting of worldviews and traditional and 'respectful' academic usage in this study.

<sup>26</sup> Similar versions of this story have appeared in Preece (2011) and Preece (2014).

David Rothenberg, positions listening as the first human requirement in fostering such a dialectic (2016, p.520). And while I agree, I am sensitive to the profound difference between listening and hearing. *This* was captured so accurately by one respondent when she observed:

A woodpecker decides to put in two cents  
Over and over, the beat of beak on tree answers back to the monologue  
It's marvelous, this interspecies communication,  
The invisible bird keeps drumming, the theatrical woman is poised,  
Listening closely, not understanding the message is about territory.  
*(Poem excerpt, R5, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)*

I am left to ponder where do attempts at reciprocity fall between 'listening closely' and 'not understanding'?

I come with an understanding that my perspectives might avail themselves to an 'uneven reciprocity' (Heim, 2012). Reciprocity, by definition, implies mutual benefit. However, as Barbara Hillyer points out (focusing on the context of social 'care'), 'relationships of reciprocity are not necessarily equal' (1993 cited in Wendell, 1996 p.150). How one measures the fair balance of benefit is subjective, contextual, and necessitates constant negotiation. This dialectic forms the ever-delicate dynamic of my conception of *reciprocity*search: the conundrum and crux of my practice.

There is a degree of irony in the above respondent's remark, given the pains taken within this study to be conscious of territories on a multitude of levels. At the same time, the interpretation validates my argument that reciprocal understandings are not bound by fixed definitions. They remain discursively malleable through a complex meshwork made of an ongoing

multiplicity of interpretations and viewpoints. Though acknowledged for ‘listening closely’, it was deemed by this one audience-participant (referencing their own accumulations of local experiences with the area, and integrating that with what was unfolding) that I had misinterpreted the intent of the bird. *Perhaps I had. Perhaps I had not.* There does not exist a delineated way to proceed or practice. Reciprocity, in this context, is appreciated as what the respondent described as ‘poised’ and intentional respect.

### ***Animism***

I engage with the other-than-human world as alive. Expressing sentience from within differing temporalities – variable and distinct. An animist approach invites the possibility for engaged resonances. *My heart beats a timing different than my feet, on the slope of a mountain crumbling, converting each other into/as niche.* Animism offers a parallax of perception, with the:

ability of the performing human to operate with tacit knowledges, with imaginative and intuitive regions, leads to an expectation that performance could open this to view. But this performing requires a refiguring of the human as a relational juncture (Heim, 2012 p.127).

Improvising as a ‘relational juncture’, I do not segregate biota from abiota, organic from non-organic, the trees from the forest, the ocean from the machines, the stone from mountain. In relation, I perceive them as animate.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In so saying, I am not purporting any lack of distinction between consumer products and the human and other-than-human world. Rather, I am wishing to stress that I perceive all of ‘products’ as animate

In this animate perception, I do not relate the abiotas as being non-living components of the living; rather, my sensually experiential understanding does not register a binary. Such an appreciation for life is affirmed by genetic scientist Suzuki, who revokes the labeling-through-*scientism* of rocks as inanimate: ‘Core samples from solid rock 4 kilometres beneath the Earth’s surface are filled with microorganisms. The rocks are alive!’ (1997, p.81). *At what point did the rock become dead matter?* Western orientations have supported a ‘hostility among scientists who, significantly, seem to feel that animism (the world and/or its parts, as alive) is still the Enemy’ (Curry, 2011 p.98). Curry argues the value of an animist re-enchantment of the world as a highly political act embracing the possibility of multiple positive outcomes (2011, p.145). Animism, does not suppress science. The science exists to support animist orientations.

‘Our spontaneous, pre-conceptual experience yields no evidence for a dualistic division between animate and “inanimate” phenomena, only for relative distinctions between diverse forms of animateness’ (Abram, 1997 p.90). Animism, has been used conventionally as ‘a system of belief that imputes life to inert objects. But [...] such imputation is more typical of people in western societies [...] than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has generally been applied’ (Ingold, 2011a p.63). Morton further remarks that such an understanding of animism ‘belongs to colonial-imperial concepts of first peoples cultures, so it’s not quite right’ (pers. comm. 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016). Rather, more appropriately, animism, as I am employing it here should be understood ‘not the result of an infusion of spirit into

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– which further support their noted inextricable impacts, for better or worse, within the human and more-than-human world.

substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation' (Ingold, 2011a p.68). Even more directly, I engage animism as being prior to any distinction between abiotic and biotic, between binaries of life, living and liveness. Animism, as I understand it, operates more on a continuum rather than on clear differentiations. Thus, engaging awareness of both my situatedness within an extended, temporal holism – the magnitude of which inspires and necessitates my desire to enact creative responses of the urgency of the Anthropogenic crisis. As Earth First! founder Dave Foreman, reminds us, 'Those machines, you know, they're made out of the Earth and therefore can speak to me and I can hear them because they're made out of the Earth itself' (1997 cited in Seed *et al.*, 2007 p.17).

How do I then transpose this appreciation to examining how we might extricate ourselves from the imminent dangers of climate change? I find a need to recognize that our 'material' relationships are junctures of different temporal lines/lives. Time becomes a vibrant and animate player in our awareness. The (heart)beat of the machine, of the Styrofoam, or the plutonium might be measured in very different rhythms than my own – but their impact and agency are very much alive, beating through cycles that negotiate survival. My appreciation then lends value to elements of Nancy Tuana's notions of 'viscous porosity' (2008) wherein human and more-than-humans interact across/as membranes 'of various types—skin and flesh, prejudgments and symbolic imaginaries, habits and embodiments' (pp.199-200). It resonates with Stacy Alaimo's ideas of trans-corporeality:

the ethical space of trans-corporeality is never an elsewhere but is always already here, in whatever compromised, ever-catalyzing form. A nearly unrecognizable sort of ethics emerges—one that demands that we inquire about all of the

substances that surround us, those for which we may be somewhat responsible, those that may harm us, those that may harm others, and those that we suspect we do not know enough about (2010a, p.18).

Animism and reciprocity must contend with the paradox that ‘Earth is able to produce and give birth to herself and at the same time destroy herself...’ (Grilikhes, 1997 p.61). Applying vital materialism’s tenet that the horizontalization of interactions ‘recasts the self in the light of its intrinsically polluted nature and in doing so recasts what counts as self interest’ (Bennett, 2010 p.116), improvisation and performance become a means of probing such questions. Drawing particular attention to site-based work, Heim (2012) is concerned with the chiasmus of the human and the other-than-human. She notes that the ‘heuristic value opens up considerations of how the human performs aesthetically in a life world that has processes and desires outwith and affected by the human’ (p.121).

### ***Human/More-than-Human Interlocutor***

The role of the *shaman*, in particular, is examined as a potential site of marrying these concepts and processes, as will the evocative space of the in-between. Though conscious of the dangers of (re)appropriating the title or falling into some new-age trope (both of which, arguably, I might be doing) – what remains pertinent to this study, is the corroboratory examination of the function of the shaman as a liminal, improvisatory performance interlocutor between humans and the more-than-human world. I am not professing to be a shaman; however, I note many correlations with the descriptions and experiences associated with traditional shamanism. The shaman is usually

initiated through illness, and occupying a space which today would be labeled as ‘disabled’. As Jay Griffiths (2006) remarks, shamans live ‘between metaphor and matter. [...] They live on the edge, between the village and the forest, in the twilight borders between worlds, between the living and the dead, between the songlines and the Pepsi bottle, between sickness and health’ (p.28). Frost and Yarrow (2015), Schechner (2013), Yarrow (2008) and Nachmanovitch (1990), among others acknowledge the relationship between the shamanistic spirit and improvisational performance:

...it doesn’t feel like I’m watching Bronwyn...something much more mythological... figments, appearance...  
(R7, *Earthdance 6*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

...spiritual trickster...  
(R8, *Earthdance 7*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016)

...it seems that Bronwyn erupted from the Earth. With her utterances it seems that she is neither human, animal, or plant, but a combination of all three. It is like we are a part of some ritual... long forgotten by modern society.  
(R9, *Earthdance 6*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

Improvisation [...] is a dynamic *principle* operating in many different spheres; an independent and transformative way of being, knowing and doing. Negotiation between different forms, structures and languages is a crucial hallmark of the improvisatory, indicating that it operates across familiar boundaries and the spaces ‘in between’... (Frost and Yarrow, 1990 p.77, emphasis in original).

Thus, developed the container for a study, stemming from one metaphoric ‘disclaimer’, to become an extended multi-year practice-based process of engaged, embodied creatively-critical inquiry.

It is my wish to try (while acknowledging the difficulty, if not impossibility) to embrace all of the players, voices, temporal alignments, storied facts and dialectal possibilities, taking up the challenge to perform and

write *into* a complex plurality. By holding this intention, I confound and compound the central questions of this doctoral thesis, adopting a *both/and* aptitude rather than an either/or...methodologically.

***the present moment: improvisationally***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER TWO:

### Methodology: *Illustrated and Implicated*

This doctoral project engaged a series of sixteen site-specific improvisations, over the course of a two-year period. Explorations employing inherently reflexive heuristic, hermeneutic (auto)ethnographic and poetic inquisitive lenses were made. These creative investigations held the appreciation remarked upon by Nelson (2013), that the practices and understandings are situated:

depending on where you enter, or pause to reflect upon findings, the insights will differ, but this is seen not as a weakness of the model, rather a recognition that knowing is processual and a matter of multiple perspectives (p.53).

This doctoral project employs intersectional and flexible methodologies which facilitate *knowing* as a complex verb.

### *Improvisation*

Improvisation (as animate juncture) remains consonant with the tenets of this study, being:

*relational*, in that it is continually attuned and responsive to the performance of others [...and] it is *temporal*, meaning that it cannot be collapsed into an instant, or even a series of instants, but embodies a certain duration. [And], improvisation is the *way we work*, not only in the ordinary conduct of our everyday lives, but also in our studied reflections on these lives... (Hallam and Ingold, 2007 p.1, emphasis in original).

Improvisation is ubiquitous with an ingrained evolutionary and day-to-day process. Ecologist and ethnobotanist Gary Nebhan refers to life on earth as ‘the Great Improvisation’ (cited in Lane, 2011 p.43); with contemporary

philosopher and ecotheorist Timothy Morton remarking ‘Improvisation introduces Darwinism into art’ (2010, p.108); and philosopher Gilles Deleuze suggesting, to improvise is ‘to join with the World’ (2004 cited in Ingold, 2011a p.84). Despite these assertions, improvisational musician Bailey points out, there ‘is no general or widely held theory of improvisation’ (1993 cited in Peters, 2009 p.146). Discussion of the whens, wheres and hows of its ‘specialization’ and its siting within extemporaneous frames, can become divisive. While a grand theory may be unattainable, I have found the following concise definitions for improvisation-*as-art* compelling, precisely because they highlight the artists’ attempts to refute duality:

improvisation involves the simultaneous conception and performance of a work of art (Smith and Dean, 1997 p.26)

and

where the process of artistic forming is inseparable from the process of the material to be formed (De Spain, 2014 p.121).

Both of these definitions also aspire to an ideal. This ideal is a state of creation which many artists, many improvisers, strive for endlessly – and may only attain fleetingly: forming the basis of their practice.

Improvisation, while often erroneously considered ephemeral (further discussed in Chapter Eight), is necessarily grounded in the material. These two definitions align with my view of improvisation as temporally-permeable-animism: agency in constant moments of becoming. Though, I run up against many definitions of ‘material’, ‘materiality’ and ‘matter’<sup>28</sup> — and generally steer away from employing these terms; I *do* find an affinity

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<sup>28</sup> As their usage often employs an emphasis on ‘thing-ness’, or an alignment with materialism-as-consumerism, which usually does not transcribe animate qualities to all of earth’s elements.

between De Spain's observation above, and Barad's (2008) lively definition below, to synchronize the conjoining (eco)logical threads:

matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming — not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity (p.139). [...] Material-discursive practices are specific iterative enactments — agential intra-actions — through which matter is differentially engaged and articulated (in the emergence of boundaries and meanings), reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities in the iterative dynamics of intra-activity that is agency (p.140).

Further, Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* summarizes Henri Bergson's view of materiality, offering a compelling explanation that:

'materiality' is a flow, and indivisible continuum of becomings whose protean elements are not only exquisitely imbricated *in* a flowing environment but also *are* the very flow. Extensive and intensive forms swirl around and become an open and living whole, a 'whole that is not given', as Bergson would say (2010, p.92, emphasis in original).

Improvisation is invoked in this doctoral project as a/the methodology of intra-activity, with an ethnographically, poetically inquisitive examination of its agency. Agency is explored through a co-performing conjugation of materiality: through and into *bodies* moving in context, in writing, in responses, in art. As Morton synthesizes, 'Improvisation is adaptation plus awareness' (2010, p.109). Awareness is neither determinate, nor singular.

Factoring into this perspicacity is the acknowledgment that, despite recent re-orientations – and the more recent, albeit reluctant, acceptance within academia – there has been 'a long-standing prejudice against improvisation' (Dean and Smith, 1997 p.5).<sup>29</sup> As both process and oeuvre, 'it' has been marginalized within Western cultures and its intrinsic, cultural

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<sup>29</sup> See also: Frost and Yarrow, 2015; Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz, 2013; Belgrad, 1998).

value denied. Frost and Yarrow suggest, that ‘its beginnings may be the beginning of theatre itself (Dionysiac rites, integrating community and environment)’ (2015, p.242). Considered a challenge to orthodoxy, relegated to ‘alternative’ status, improvisational methods came to be associated with ‘primal cultures’, associated with some of art/cultural practices that appeared to blur the spiritual and worldly (more-than-human) realms through ritual. Improvisatory segregation has a raced, socio-economic, political, religious, and eco-*un*-logical history (further touched upon in Chapter Five and Six). In its unruliness, improvisation-as-methodology also finds affinity with notions of disability. Through the understanding of marginalization, I argue the inherent value for delineating a representational space for improvisational performance to effectively ‘elevate’ it as a polyvocal intermediary – horizontalized, but not leveled, through performance, as performance. Working with improvisation, through a lens of pejorative debasement, offers further aptness from which to scrutinize the primacy of our current social/ecologic crisis.

Sixteen delineated improvisations took place over the course of a two-year period, eight in each academic year (2014/2015 and 2015/2016, respectively). I wished to explore and perform the questions of my embodiment of ecological (dis)ability in the three (most immediate) countries to which I am genetically tied, and hold citizenship in each. Each year consisted of two improvisations on the small, off-grid island of Lasqueti, British Columbia, Canada (with a population of approximately 375 people – where I lived, and called home for the better part of two decades); four around the rural grounds of *Earthdance Workshop, Residency and Retreat*

*Center* in Plainfield, Massachusetts, USA (where I partook, for two consecutive years, in the annual interdisciplinary artist residency, aptly titled *E|MERGE*); and two in the post-industrial town of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, UK (where my University and supervisors are located).

Examining the existing scholarship on improvisation, I could locate no accounts of improvisational performers (in theatre/dance) challenging the improvisatory by engaging in the not-knowing of *where* the performance would take place. If indeed I was testing out the applicability of improvisation, as having inherent properties *through* art/life as a means to approach an uncertain future – as a methodology *of and for* navigating unknowns – then I would be stifling my very inquiry if I were to enter such a space with much of the situational context known beforehand, lessening the level for potential improvisation. The sites for all improvisations were selected for me, without me knowing until the moment of performance where I/we would be.

### **Site Selection**

The purpose (and effect) of having someone else chose the location, beyond what I stated above, is the support it offered to embody and implicitly exemplify the underpinning tenets of this project. Not only did this help distribute agency and authorship, but it also became a vehicle through which the power dynamic between performer and audience could be/was changed. Audience members became privy to information in advance of the ‘performer’. This added dimensions of (secretive) excitement, intrigue and opportunities to examine notions of (the potential for varying levels of)

participatory engagement. The practice, again, as a result became continuously recentred: centring by decentring – through this invited process.

On Lasqueti Island, I solicited Mark Young as site-selector. Young is the owner and operator of *Leviathan Studio*, an internationally renowned centre for the study of Contact Improvisation. One of the local ‘experts’ in improvisation, Young equally negotiates a life with a degree of disability, due to a traumatic brain injury. At *Earthdance*, residency curator Shelley Etkin served as selector. Etkin is a dance improviser who explores notions of the ecological/cultural interface through her work. Though not self-identifying as disabled, she relates to notions invoked by ‘questions of access, embodiment, and what constitutes performance that is “able” to be expressed...’ (pers. comm. 20 August 2015). And in Huddersfield, my supervisory team made these decisions. Dr. Hilary Elliot made the two selections in the first year, and Professor Franc Chamberlain, the second.

There were certain factors I did know: the time and initial place of meeting/departure point.<sup>30</sup>

With respect to the Lasqueti Island improvisations, I drafted an invitation list (based on a series of factors, none the least of which was an island geography and low population where even the most ‘public’ of places might not be travelled through frequently). Though not wanting to privilege human respondents, reciprocal witnessing was forming an integral basis of the study. Pressing up upon existing modes of documenting performance, I wished to include a variety of self-identified artists working in a variety of

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<sup>30</sup> On Lasqueti Island, in all four cases, my home served as the point of departure, where from I was driven to Young’s chosen site (the location of which I was unaware of until the point of arrival).

modalities, within the collaboratively-witnessing group. Extending individual invitations seemed the most appropriate way to reconcile the aims of the study, within this context. Young would relay the information about the gathering place to invitees, through a combination of email, phone and in-person. Even so, there still remained unknown factors of who would turn up: invited by me, or those who would arrive through context. Chance and/or serendipity still retained an agentic purview, encapsulated by one woman's response:

I am grateful for the favour I did for someone in need, that delayed my drive home by enough time that I happened upon your happening.

(R20, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Unknown still was whether Young would choose specific sites with the intention that we remain, or whether he would gather people in one place, with the idea that we might travel together somewhere else. He did both.

Contextually different, the *Earthdance* improvisations took place in a venue with an international gathering of approximately thirty self-described artists, on a roughly one hundred-acre piece of snowy land. Participation was open to everyone at the residency, including staff members and those community members who came to attend/engage with the work of others. Improvisations were orchestrated in that a given time was announced for the 'performance', and on each of the occasions for the first year's four events, the same indoor meeting place served as the catalyzing place of departure, for the stochastic assemblies. As was soon appreciated, even though Etkin might have had an eventual end point in mind, on more than one occasion, the journey of getting 'there' was replaced by a meandering journey, replacing the there with the immediacy of *here*. The second year involved Etkin

experimenting with people placing themselves at a chosen location, and me being escorted to the site. The final *Earthdance* improvisation found a small convoy of cars all departing and arriving together to her chosen location.

In Huddersfield, my supervisors were responsible for inviting attendees. They organized those who gathered, having us meet in a chosen location, at a selected time. At one time, we walked to an abandoned parking lot; and on another, we were ushered into a taxi van, driven a disorienting and somewhat circumambulatory route, to be dropped off and left within this new set of coordinates; whilst the second year, this time led by Chamberlain, found me being blindfolded and ushered by hand-held guide to sites through the ‘unseen’...

The rationale behind doing sixteen improvisations was arrived at through a variety of considerations. Firstly, I wanted to test my hypotheses within multiple situations and contexts, balancing that desire with wanting to be able to effectively engage and respond with the processes of refraction that each would entail. I wanted to amass enough ‘data’ through which to ‘test’ my theories/form new ones; not forming ideas based on one or two delineated experiences (not neglecting that my improvisations through life are integrated within my nexus of understandings). I was conscious of having enough (and not too much) work to synthesize, distill and query so that my engagement with the processes/products would not be superficial within the purview of this thesis.

I gauged that it would be too much to ask of the small Lasqueti Island and Huddersfield (university)-performance-associated communities to engage

with more than two events per year.<sup>31</sup> The day-to-day demands respectively present in both communities – ranging from off-grid homesteading to academic responsibilities – warranted that any further invitations might tip the scales towards charges of narcissism. Respectful engagement meant that I would foster ample opportunities for involvement, while being guided by the sensitivities of context.

The *Earthdance* residencies presented a different scenario – a group of artists coming together with the expressed intent to engage in collaborating with others' work. This dynamic allowed for the prospect of engaging (artistic) multi-modal refractions to a greater extent. With the demands of the everyday set aside within the context of the residency, the opportunity to conduct more improvisations presented itself without it feeling like something *too* out-of-the-ordinary (*which it always is|n't*).

The audiences in the three geographic locations differed, however they all shared an affinity for the arts (on a broad spectrum). The geographic locations also varied markedly. The people reflected and created the sites just as much as the inverse. Each meeting was a reciprocal refraction of the moment: fresh and extemporaneous...and yet, intimate. Audiences averaged, over the whole, between 13-20 people per event. The largest gatherings of attendees were at *Earthdance*, the smallest in Huddersfield. Though not limited to *Earthdance*, the gatherings held at there also provided the most diverse audiences: with more representation from people self-identifying with an array of 'minority' groups. My relations to respondents ranged from knowing them well (Lasqueti Island) to this being our first meeting

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<sup>31</sup> In Huddersfield, my supervisors were equally in charge of inviting audience members, as I knew no one in the town or surrounding communities.

(*Earthdance* and Huddersfield). As I will again address in Chapter Ten's *Improvise Globally, Act Locally*, the intimate nature of these performances helped support safe spaces to foster dialectics to actively engage with matters of simultaneous local and global concern. They offered moments for quiet inspiration and considered contemplation... *collectively constructed*.

When I first engaged this methodology of distributed site-selection – with respect to selectors and countries – at the beginning of this doctoral process, I did so not knowing what may or may happen as a result. My intuition suggested that such a way to craft gatherings may yield potentialities yet unknown: *poetically performative opportunities which could implicitly explore matters of prescience*. As will be evidenced through the unfurling of this document/journey, my intuitive inclination and decisions proved to offer rich, exploratory and creative terrain. Approaching the sixteen improvisations in the ways I did, contributed to/created a generative symbiosis for this heuristic and hermeneutic study.

The series of improvisations were guided by rigour and ritual. Ritual is defined by Bronislaw Szerszynski as: 'repeated, rule-bound behaviour, referring to an ongoing tradition of otherwise invoking a reference point transcending the choosing and acting individual' (2009, p.54). The repeated pattern of eight sited performances per year, aimed to establish corroboratory reference points through which to interpret the experiential understandings. Concomitantly, the notion of such reference points 'transcending the choosing and acting individual' is partially addressed through the decision to have the sites for the improvisation selected for me.

In 'Ritual Theory and the Environment', Ronald L. Grimes states that theoretically speaking it is not obvious 'that one should speak of ritual, arts, and performance in the same breath, much less bring ritualistic, artistic, and performative sensibilities to bear on environmental problems' (2004, p.34). However, I am suggesting, much as Grimes does, that establishing a ritual series of focused performances may be an effective and creative approach to exploring our climatic crisis. Through improvisation, the notion of the specificity of sites – known and unknown – and the element of choice, as they relate here to the location of 'environmental problems' is being explored throughout.

### **Implicating Improvisation**

The employment of improvisation as a foundational methodology to aptly interrogate a plurality of meanings transcended the strict divisions between the personal and the public. It enabled 'direct' access into the very dynamic of negotiating unknowns, and examining our uncertainties about the future. As Daniel Fischlin reminds us, improvisation is a powerful tool when much is at stake:

*If* improvisation is a key way in which humans collectively adapt, communicate, and respond (both consonantly and dissonantly) with their environment; *if* it is a ubiquitous trans-cultural practice that points to an underlying quality of what it means to be human; *if* improvised discourses articulate ideas only to be found therein, testing the limits of our capacity to think new thoughts, to see beyond the constraints of current notions of freedom of expression; *then* there is a profound relationship to be recognized between improvised [...] discourses and other more expansive discourses in which other forms of human agency are at stake (2009 cited in Midgelow, 2012 p.3, emphasis in original).

Fischlin's observation syncopates the various threads of this study.

Improvisation, as undertaken in this exploration, holds the capacity not to 'if' our way into the dialogic territory of prescient and contentious issues; rather, to address the 'iffyness' through taking up the very qualities of 'not-knowing' as a deliberate practice of skillful means. As improviser, I know where I have been, where I have travelled, where I am. Threading these apprehensions together is what avails the next moment to be one of fresh presence: the future for the improvisation is synthesized as an expression of the now. But what that looks like is dependent on the accumulation of (my) acts up until that point. Context is immediate, fully contingent on a past, and arguably, dependent on a future. Through improvisation, I have been able to enter into the nature of a debatable future, by fully embodying an extemporaneous present:

I had no idea what might come next, what you might do next, what you might respond/attune to – and that unknowingness engaged, kept me on edge, alert, deeply focused.

*(R10, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

Conjoining site-specificity with improvisation and poetry, I found that I was able to model – through both immersion and juxtaposition – conditions, akin to what Frost and Yarrow point, as ones 'of integration with the environment or context. And consequently (simultaneously) express that context in the most appropriate shape, making it recognizable to others, "realizing" it as act' (2015, p.xv).

The realizing as act – *or, more appropriately, the collective realizing the potentiality that we all hold through our actions* – has, I would argue, been successfully taken up by my specific approach. In that the murky line between performance space and the everyday has been blurred from the get-

go. This has facilitated the performer/participants to transpose understandings between these registers of life living itself: performing ourselves playing, pondering, and producing possibilities...

Arne Naess suggests that 'spontaneous experience transcends personal, social and cultural specifications' (cited in Drengrson and Devall, 2008 p.194) and I would add to that, even our own expectations:

I liked how you invited and tuned in to the unexpected.  
(R11, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

I think the best improvisation transcends expectation – which is what happened with you...  
(R12, *Earthdance 7*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016)

Site-selector Etkin commented:

... what state is induced to an audience when they need to look for what they think they came for?  
(*Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

An exploration of the whats, whys, hows and whos of coming together provided the material-of-the-moment, the configurations-of-content-*through*-context. The improvisational container, positioned necessarily on the threshold of risk and responsibility, of awareness and action, invoked questions and situations collectively through doing. While at times uncomfortable, the *doing* tipped the scales endlessly in reciprocal dynamism between extremes:

disturbing in certain ways that could trigger people to think differently ...  
enjoyed it...  
on the edge of what is acceptable in our society...  
it was really raw...  
it was just down to the fuckin bones raw...  
that's what made it so good...  
but it was shocking....  
(R4, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Your improv takes me out of my comfort zone and I think that's a good thing. It's raw and strips you of any pretense of any normal holding pattern in our lives.

*(R13, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)*

...it seems like this was a lot about being made aware of my own discomfort, where I'm ok with it and where I'm not...interesting – thank you!

*(R11, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

My improvisatory moments were, undeniably, at times 'shocking' or 'disturbing'. This may be considered an integral (or unavoidable) aspect of improvisation, rather than a risk. I contend that the risk lies more in avoiding such situations. The urgency of our ecological (dis)abling prompts the necessity to examine the full gamut of our positionalities – respectfully, and as thoroughly as possible. Stifling dialogic exchange about the current risks posed by our Anthropocene, has aided and abetted our current situation. Improvisation – through the embodiment of this very rawness, through 'the edge of what is acceptable in our society' necessarily embraces our (in)human(e) conditions. And thus, it will invariably touch on things that people find shocking or disturbing:

Very evocative performance. Visceral, raw, and human. It reminded me how outwardly restrained I am in many of my inner feelings, and of how physically painful it could be to fully express those feelings. Thanks for the performance, the surprises, and the reminder that feelings are powerful!

*(R14, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

Improvisatory performance engendered the expression of, or related to the suppression of, feelings. In-the-moment, palpable and empathetic, my engagement with the methodology fostered conditions for which, *together*, opportunities were created to share in our understanding that:

the pain we feel for our world is a living testimony to our interconnectedness with it. If we deny this pain, we

become [...] deprived of life's flow and weakening the larger body in which we take being. But if we let it move through us, we affirm our belonging; our collective awareness increases (Macy, 1991b p.42).

Joanna Macy continues by stating that 'it takes practice to relearn this kind of resilience' (p.42). *Improvisation became (as it always was) the practice of resilience*. I conjoin these thoughts with Clayton D. Drinko's remarks that 'Improvisation is a way to train the brain to use drafts' (2013, p.106). In multiple and unique incarnations, over the course of the sixteen performances|poems, I contend that what transpired – was a drafting of our current situation-into-possible-futures. The process resolutely examined through non-direct, non-linear means what sharing in risk, agency and resilience means. Midgelow remarks:

in an increasingly commodity-obsessed global culture, driven by the requirements of the economy, production, and efficiency, the art of improvisation maintains its status as an alternative mode of performance—one that potentially realigns and reconnects subjectivities (2012, p.1).

The powerful feelings evoked by both performer and attendees, and the responses these elicited, is taken up further in this chapter, demonstrating how this served to 'potentially realign and reconnect' subjectivities.

### ***Performance Techniques***

My performance style has been largely influenced by two decades of training in Action Theater™ with master improviser Ruth Zaporah and my more recent study over the past many years of *butoh* with Jay Hirabashi and Barbara Bourget of Kokoro Dance and Diego Piñón of Butoh Ritual Mexicano. Both 'forms' focus on the symbiosis and immediacy of

internal/external stimuli as generators of artistic responses. Deborah

Middleton and Franc Chamberlain (2012) remark:

Performers, trained to integrate mental and physical capacities in the service of experiential and expressive activities, have cause to develop their own awareness of and reflection on, the processes unfolding in their minds and bodies as they work (p.102).

The mental/physical integration occurring during the site-specific improvisations conjure up a unique hybridity which defies an aesthetically-determinable or definable container; however, the manifestations resonate with the reciprocal, animate and engaged premises of both Action Theater and *butoh* within this study.

Each approach is summarized below – interspersed with the reasoned transitioning in delivery styles between the two – followed by remarks on their shared proclivities. I perform through both, evoking simultaneously: neither.

### *Action Theater™*

Action Theater is an improvisational, physical theatre training pioneered by American performer Ruth Zaporah. Pedagogically rigorous, the form's postmodern performance aesthetic charts the improviser's unfurling imagination through the sensorial specificities of the body: aesthetically characterized by the enacted crafting of vivid, fluid, contrasting body/landscapes, the improviser moves with deft clarity and articulation. Content is developed through disassembling, rearranging and playing with the formal components of time, space, shape and the dynamics of sound, movement and language. Performers engage continuously with their

experiencing of every shifting moment, translating their affective response into a congruent expression of ‘embodied presence’: a reciprocal unfurling finding ‘ourselves anew, not constrained by familiar patterns and conventions, not limited by who we thought we were. Instead, the voice of the universe becomes available to us’ (Zaporah, 1995a p.3).

Although a studio-based practice, Zaporah and practitioners of Action Theater recognize the transference of the practices into everyday life. Grounded in a Zen sensibility, Action Theater ‘addresses, over and over again, *how* we are who we are’ (Zaporah, 2006 p.1, emphasis in original). The cornerstones of Action Theater are embodiment and awareness, expressed through the unique coupling of content and form. Experientially informed, with a pronounced emphasis on the body-as-conduit-of-empathetic-experience and conveyor of meaning, Action Theater’s corporeal locus aligns with Merleau-Pontian phenomenological perspicuities. So too, does Action Theater resonate with theatre scholar Colette Conroy’s investigation of the ‘body as a paradigm – a conceptual framework – for the understanding of human relationships with the world’ (2010, p.7). The practice of Action Theater finds further corroboration with Tim Ingold’s observations, to improvise ‘is to follow the ways of the world, as they open up, rather than to recover a chain of connections, from an end point to a starting point, on a route already travelled’ (2011a, p.216).

Action Theater places equal emphasis on movement, language and sound/vocalizations, engaging the one as the others (i.e. language is perceived as movement, etc.), evidenced in one response I received:

...space and speech working and speaking to each other...  
(R6, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

So too, does Merleau-Ponty suggest that the ‘spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world’ (2002, p.214).

I am careful to note that my improvisatory style has been greatly informed by Action Theater, however, I am making no claims of performing ‘it’ *in situ*. By placing a greater emphasis on language – out of the studio, with me as *site* – I mutated Action Theater’s tenets of equilibrium. I favoured speech as a means to engage inter-activity and intra-activity (taking on a style akin to a responsive-stream-of-consciousness-story-sharing). My heavy use of speech, however – when examined through an Action Theater lens – often disabled, or arguably *disembodied*, my body’s potential crafting of contextually-congruent timing, shaping and dynamics. My language became a connective driver of ‘information’ – which would normally be viewed in Action Theater as not wholly embodied. As Zaporah often quips, ‘the body is all about *how* it happens’. My oratory skills ‘clearly’ evidence the multi-dimensionality of disability. My language performs (in) the space-between. On the one hand, on account of dysarthria, my speech can fade or bellow intermittently, can be disjointed, interspersed with pauses, be proclitic or slurred; and yet, I cannot ‘hear’ these differentiations. I hear my own voice, in the moment, as ‘normal’.<sup>32</sup> As such, I could equally argue that I acted very much within the purview of the practice of Action Theater – as performer, perceiving the reciprocal demands of the moments:

If the performer’s attention is on her experience, if her mind and body are in the same place, her inner and outer experience will match, and she will enter the field of

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<sup>32</sup> I know these qualities are present from the feedback and responses of others. When I watch video, and listen to audio recordings, of myself – at this secondary point – I can recognize and hear the difference in elocution and execution. My experience of my speech lies in the spaces between sound and voice, intention and interpretation.

universal expression. She will be relating to *the* experience, not *her* experience (Zaporah, 1995a p.182, emphasis in original).

Though my experience might, at times, be perceived as being dis-located – as the inner and outer experience may not ‘match’ – the ‘universal expression’ lies in the embodied experience of dis-abling dis/ability.

Action Theater’s orientation towards an always-enlivened frame of experience – ‘opening the lens up and falling into it’ (Zaporah, Workshop Notes, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016) – does not work within set scenarios and does not focus on developing characters:

‘Character’ produces stereotypes. It asks us to become somebody other than who we are. A somebody that can be described... Instead, we manifest a vast array of entities, parts of ourselves that are, up until then, hidden in our psyches (Zaporah, 1995a p.29).

These aspects of ‘ourselves’ are perhaps unnamable, but they are knowable. Action Theater depersonalizes content through practice, while making it all the while familiar. The elocutionary persona who emerged through me, in varying incarnations – during the first year’s improvisations – was an amalgamating channel, a *shamanic* funnel, a periphrastic dictionary of aspects of ‘myself’ writ large.

Malaika Sarco-Thomas claims, in her doctoral thesis *Twig Dances: Improvisation Performance as Ecological Practice* (2010), that ‘Action Theater can be used to more effectively articulate our capacities for responding in our encounters with the natural world’ (p.98). In Susan Morrow’s thesis, *Action Theater: Divine Play for the Stage* (2006), she cites Zaporah as referring to her students as ‘ecologically minded’, suggesting they

hold 'a personal ecology as well' (p.127). Zaporah continues, extrapolating that:

as we've destroyed the planet, we've also destroyed ourselves. It's all one thing. And so before we [...] can organically affect the planet, we need to know what our organ is [...] [my students] have a great desire to break the learning that our culture has put on them of how it is acceptable to behave and express oneself (p.127).

Simply put, Action Theater is the improvisation of interconnected presence.

Within the first-year of improvisations, I found particular potency in being able to deftly re-formulate words and language, weaving new meanings and phonetics:

language can follow feeling to the edge—to a scary, reciprocally dynamic situation that is the present. There, language's nonauthority can decompose our righteousness, our singleness, even as landscape continues to soothe us and draw us into collaboration with what is at hand, what just spoke, unfathomable, ephemeral. This is where language is alive and takes into account the live other. It may falter, slip into silence or gibberish, but it's sounding out the new cultural attention to a very old, complex relationship to habitat. These artists and poets show language engaging in shifting contexts and occurrences, bravely going forth not knowing where it's going to lead, but it meets the world (Newman and White, 2015 n.p.).

I found myself narratively webbing bodylandwordscapes harkening back to Smith and Dean's remarks on the extemporaneous creation of new lexicons through improvisation. Language served both as an animator of content, an engager of/with place – but it equally, served in some way to sever a connection to the specificities of articulating a congruency with body/site. 'Our sense of bodies develops in conjunction with language acquisition and is a source of metaphors for thought and meaning' (Shaughnessy, 2012 p.35). Language became a potent story-sharer. Ironically, and arguably though,

through my linguistic platform I may have also been objectifying ‘the landscape’. A bird call, broom or flag may have prompted a series of remarks – a mixture of literal and non-linear segues. And yet, these departure points may have arguably, affirmed them perceptually for some (at least initially) as a bird, broom or flag. And yet, here enters the dialogue – the invitation of identity and identification meeting with[in] performance: the *performativity*, as Barad suggests which examines ‘the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real’ (2008, p.121).

Zaporah perceptively remarked of the danger of language use (and simultaneously, the same trap when not using speech)<sup>33</sup> in (ecologically-oriented) site-specific performance: ‘only when the viewer views it does it become itself, does it become what we think it is’ (pers. comm. 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015). A tree does not know it is a tree, just as much as a bird does not engage with itself/world as seagull or eagle. Merleau-Ponty suggests, ‘The complex interchange we call language is rooted in the non-verbal exchange already going on between our flesh and the flesh of the world’ (referenced in Abram, 1997 p.90). Language was, opening up many channels of perceptivity, of connectivity – *it was performing embodied disability* – while simultaneously limiting other more subtle, gestural re-configurations to (in)form.

Gendlin remarks that language ‘is always implicit in human bodies, so that a present body-sense always leads to the formation of fresh phrases if you allow it’ (1998, p.34):

It really fascinated me how you played with words –  
and because English is not my mother tongue, I

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<sup>33</sup> Elaborated discussion follows in this chapter under the section: *Subject(ivity)/Object(ivity)*.

enjoyed how you took words and played with them and created new meanings....

(R15, *Earthdance 1*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

The creation of new meanings, through the (attempted) syncopation of speech with site, bucolic pathos and pointed humour, facilitated many insights for both myself, and others. As improviser, I jump into these gaps (within which I am already present) – *the pauses and stuttered articulations* – these spaces in-between, finding as Elizabeth Grosz suggests:

The space in between things is the space in which things are undone, the space to the side and around, which is the space of subversion and fraying, the edges of any identity's limits. In short, it is the space of the bounding and undoing of the identities which constitute it (2001 cited in Quick 2006, p.147).

This liminal space-between, this dehiscence, serves as a metaphor through which I tie the varying concepts together in this study. From here – *as between* – I engage with the multi-modal, non-censoring abilities made possible through the changes to my prefrontal cortex, in conjunction with the mirror-touch synaesthetic capacities facilitated through Wilson's Disease (see discussion in Chapter Four): offering a dynamic linguistic liaising with the more-than-human world.

That being said, I wanted to challenge myself further. Inspired by comments that addressed non-verbal portions of the performances, I wanted to test my ability as inquisitive performer to engage with the underlying questions prompting these improvisations, without *spoken* language:

The most powerful artistic moments were the silent ones.

(R18, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

I could appreciate your body improvising with your surroundings more than the questions you posed on an intellectual level. I could

connect more with watching and feeling the body responding than I did with the mind's meanderings and the questions posed.

(R19, *Lasqueti 2*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

What new understandings would I/others be able to access? How might my lack of speaking confuse, or render too oblique, the nature of the inquiry? How might it empower new discursive opportunities? How might this affect the shape of engagement with 'audience' and the subsequent responses? How would I:

exercise restraint that simplicity requires without crossing over into ostentatious austerity? How do you pay attention to all the necessary details without becoming excessively fussy? How do you achieve simplicity without inviting boredom? (Koren, 1994 p.72).

Leonard Koren responds, by describing the leaning of Japanese *wabi-sabi* – a cultural philosophy and aesthetic – whose orientations feature in *butoh*, to 'Pare down to the essence, but don't remove the poetry. Keep things clean and unencumbered, but don't sterilize' (1994, p.72). I felt sure that the lack of speaking would certainly add to my conscious desire to avoid didacticism and to further address performative approaches to objectification. And it did:

...the lesson was for us and the creation was ours  
(R8, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

and

...allowed us to make our own meaning *in situ*  
(R21, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

But my journey of exploration as performer, *in situ*, was not without my own running head-first into the performance-discovery of my own binaries (with ironic candor, binaries I was theoretically arguing against, but arguably embodying) – elaborated upon in Chapter Seven. Following my

first year of improvisations, I went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, granted the rare opportunity to work one-on-one with Zaporah for five days.<sup>34</sup> The focus of our time was examining how to work outdoors, without language, employing the sensibilities of Action Theater. Our time together, invariably became an interrogation of the very point of outdoor, ‘environmental performance’?

Zaporah remarked that for the personally experiential to become ‘performance’, necessarily:

the interaction puts a different kind of light on what it would be without. The interaction itself enhances or re-defines both the actor and the environment...that there’s something about the interaction that sheds a different light on both the actor and the environment... otherwise you don’t want to bother with it...and it has to be in perfect balance....  
If you can talk about it and describe it, it’s not working....  
I mean you could say, she went up there and she kneeled on that thing and she made sounds...but that’s not really saying what it is...that’s just giving its framework... (pers. comm. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015).<sup>35</sup>

When I watched Zaporah improvise, I found myself not trying to label the *whats* of what she was embodying. In response to my observation, she remarked:

No, because you recognize it...you can’t name it, you can’t describe it, but you recognize it within the natural realm of things...in other words, I’m not doing anything that’s not natural...it’s human...it’s not of the cultured realm of human, but it’s of the nature of being human... (pers. comm. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

To which I responded: ‘and that’s why it both fits and juxtaposes...that’s site-specific performance at its best. That’s the site-specific performance that I want to achieve...’

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<sup>34</sup> I acknowledge the financial support of the British Columbia Arts Council in supporting this opportunity. Undertaken ‘independent’ of my education, the gleanings influenced my subsequent artistic and academic work.

<sup>35</sup> Throughout the text, unbracketed ellipses in Zaporah’s passages from our personal communications, indicate pauses in conversation. Italics indicate stressed utterances. These passages have been transcribed from audio recordings.

My desire to extend my practice, led me with deep curiosity towards exploring the capacity of my expressive body-with-its-unique-vocabulary-as-conveyor of experience, *in 'silent' situ*. The decision, generated responses which included:

Your silence evoked the voice of the space  
(R1, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)

My/our attention was so very focused by your not speaking  
(R20, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Thank you for your silence. [...] A mesmerizing performance as we followed you into unknown territory...  
(R11, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Leaving language behind became my 'unknown territory'. As Ingold claims, improvisation 'is adaptation plus awareness' (2011a, p.109). I was not performing the known, I was sharing in the process of discovery: adapting changing awarenesses. The move to give up language, further availed *my* awareness of the binaries I had been dis/embodying while speaking. This folds into the understanding that if we maintain that life is encompassed 'in relations *between* one thing and another – between the animal and its environment or the being and its world – we are bound to have to begin with a separation' (Ingold, 2011a p.83, emphasis in original). I further address the obliqueness and the relevance of the binaries of subject/object, language/silence as they relate to this inquiry, and how they came to be understood through the improvisatory process in Chapter Seven.

Wishing to embody the potential for new aptitudes within my questions, I chose to approach this second year of improvisations with a style

different from, yet congruous with the first, influenced by the principles and aesthetics of *butoh*.

### **Butoh**

*Only when, despite having a normal, healthy body, you come to wish that you were disabled or had been born disabled, do you take your first step in butoh.*

~Tatsumi Hijikata  
(2000 cited in Kuppens, 2014c p.117)

I feel I have been performing *butoh* my whole life...only backwards.

*Butoh* emerged out of the ash of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. Its inception is credited to Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. A Japanese post-modern form of dance-theatre – directly responsive to the American World War II bombings and Western materialism – *butoh* is ‘a unique type of performed ecological knowledge’ (Fraleigh, 2006 p.327). Embodying both the social/environmental affects and effects of crisis, *butoh* straddles the corporeal continuum, melding the grotesque and beauty into a vital exposition of cultural *disability*. The form’s very ability to refract crisis, in all of its multiple conjugations, has lent it a propensity for widespread application and interpretation. Its currency holds strong today. I formally began training in *butoh* following the Fukushima triple-reactor meltdown – as a means to integrate and form an embodied response to a catastrophe so near to me, through coastal sea.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Radioactive material was soon showing up in the Pacific waters and on British Columbia’s coastal shores following the March 2011 disaster, and continue to this day be detected. See: Buesseler (2016).

The *butoh* body is noted for its slow, erratic movements and often near-naked, wholly white-covered appearance turning the dancer ‘into “everyone” and “no one” in particular’ (Fraleigh, 2010 p.86). The body is sustained neither:

through dualistic tensions between nothing and something, emptiness and substance, subject and object, or man and nature. The bodily experience of *butoh* is fluid and cyclic. It is more about identity in the making than final arrival (Fraleigh, 2010 p.47).

*Butoh* performances are largely non-verbal; at times wholly improvisational, more often it is a combination with portions of pre-scored choreography. However, *butoh* is always reciprocally responsive.

Fraleigh (2010) refers to *butoh* as a metamorphic and alchemic process, wherein performers:

consciously morph: from culture to culture and from birth to old age—transfiguring from male to female, from human to plant life, disappearing into ash, animals, bugs, and gods. Surprisingly, they transform without closure. Such nonlinearity might be confusing, but it can also call forth the present moment of awareness. In not needing to follow narrative logic, the mind is released into ‘the now’ of listening and seeing (p.45).

Seeking to morph the deep listening that was present in my first year of improvisations, with the resonant crisis-response formulations inherent with a *butoh*-approach, in my second-year improvisations I chose to alchemize *butoh* using copper and zinc as its base metal for interpretative and original formulations.

### *Action Theater™/Butoh*

Action Theater and *butoh* both arose through cultural

conglomerations actively refracting responses to the effects of war, far/near: Vietnam and World II, respectively. As a result, both have sensuously immersive foci, emphasize feeling and the inextricability of self/world/other, inside/outside. Approaching, through practice, a dissolution of binaries. Defying codification, both have Buddhist and shamanistic leanings. However, in neither case are students taught how to be shamans or Buddhists or is it even insinuated that this is/should be their goal. Nevertheless, one could argue that practitioners of each form embody the qualities associated with both.

Action Theater senior teacher and *butoh* practitioner, Cassie Tunick remarked:

Butoh and Action Theater aim in the same direction – to make the inside of experience, sensate living experience, visible. To inhabit essences of the world, the phenomenons of nature (of which humans are but one part), and reveal them in relational and unexpected ways, translated through our bodies and psyches. The degree of success in this realm can be endlessly argued over, strived for, reached for, failed, experienced, or not. Neither Butoh or Action Theater prescribe motion or feeling, but they both beckon us into the places of being that eclipse the mundane, the place of being fully embodied in a present moment (2009, n.p.).

Critically employing improvisation as a reciprocally discursive, ethnographic process of performance-poiesis in an animate polyphonic exploration of ecology/disability offers a methodological framework through which this doctoral inquiry can embody and respond with *immediacy*, to the urgency of the Anthropocene.

### **Style: In Situ**

Earlier, I wrote that ‘I perform through both [Action Theater and

*butoh*], evoking simultaneously: neither’. However, I must emphasize that it is my very training and embodiment of these (non-reductive) techniques which allowed me to birth the possibility of undertaking these sixteen improvisational events in the first place. The techniques offered the foundation – the method – from which the *in situ* stylizations were able to springboard from, offering soft malleable edges. Action Theater and *butoh* provided a congruent bridge to experientially embody ecology and disability, permitting the more developed frames of analysis held herein.

My training in Action Theater and *butoh* supported my ‘not knowing’ *where* the improvisations would take place, my ‘not knowing’ *what* would transpire during the course of each event, and to a certain degree, they even fostered the *how* of what did or did not transpire. These techniques influenced my way of proceeding – offering the soft contours to my improvisational map. This map was defined by permeable edges, offering soft limits to what may or may not happen, (invisible) borders that I was willing or not willing to cross. These understandings are not ones that I can necessarily articulate verbally, however, they became subtly embodied in all the interactions that unfurled...*touched by traces of technique...*

### ***Subject(ivity)/Object(ivity)***

Notions of subjectivity and objectivity are being addressed here – perhaps unusually – in my Methodology chapter, as my orientations within these frames forced me to confront whether I was potentially entrenching or possibly inadvertently perpetuating-through-improvisational-performance

that which I was ostensibly trying to argue against. I was pressed to examine the role I was possibly playing in either/both objectifying our environment versus adopting a subjectivity that if taken far can also perpetuate a chasm, akin to a Romantic idealism. The sentiments of Chaudhuri's 2015 *Performing Ethos* comment – that site-specific performance does not remove the possibility of perpetuating the nature/culture divide – were invoked for me when I was challenged by Zaporah in 2015. She observed that she felt I often was starting from a point of either subjectifying and/or objectifying elements of the given environment. At the time, the comment was shocking to me. She went on to suggest that it appeared to her that whenever I approached either a tree, or garbage can for example, that it inadvertently began and/or remained, very much, our cultured interpretation of a tree or a trash receptacle. She elaborated, by stating:

I'm the environment...that's not the environment...why is that environment different from this environment?  
Somehow [through what you, Bronwyn were/are doing] that environment becomes more *important* than this environment and I don't mean the emotional personality...I just mean the imaginal environment...I mean even seeing that as a tree is an act of imagination...the tree doesn't know it's a tree...  
(pers. comm. 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

Aligning with Zaporah's perspicacity, Abram considers imagination to be an attribute of the senses. He supposes that 'imagination is not a separate mental faculty (as we often assume) but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given' (1997, p.58). He maintains this ability is 'in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the invisible aspects of the sensible' (p.58).

Zaporah's and Abram's apprehension was *precisely* what I was trying to convey, to embody, to perform. And yet, here I was being called to account, informed that my experiencing-through-performance was possibly entrenching dichotomies of separation, or maybe perhaps more accurately, not availing potential for re-imagining these (culturally-specified, but not culturally-bound) relationships. Zaporah was quick to point out that this was her own interpretative understanding, and that others might relate to what I was doing vastly differently.

Over the last century, the critical Western frames through which subject(ivity) and object(ivity) have been analyzed most readily by Performance Studies scholars, have continued to broaden their embrace. Recently, moving from phenomenology, to agential realism and vital/new materialism and more recently through to object-oriented-philosophical frames;<sup>37</sup> all these lenses emphasize experientialism (see: Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 p.229-). I resonate most with the phenomenological frame, the least with the latter.<sup>38</sup> All of these orientations have worked progressively to displace the centrality of the human-with/as-world. None of these fields or theories, however, is independent of the other: there is much likeness and some dissimilarity.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This does disqualify other fields of study which also examine the subject/object relationship. These three, however, are most prevalent in the discourse that pertains to the areas of focus in this project

<sup>38</sup> As many scholars have since pointed out, the initial seminal phenomenological texts lack recognition of raced, gendered, ableist and economic factors as they mediate the experience of the body. The influence of Performance Studies, Feminist, Disability and Queer Studies, among others, have been pivotal in extending our current phenomenological relationships. That being understood, I still find much relevance within the work of Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>39</sup> I will attempt to offer a concise summation of the trajectory of these approaches, by including here a series of quotes that I deem to effectively capture succinctly – but by no means broadly – the scope of 'each'. The intent is to illustrate how my relating to notions of subjectivity and objectivity have equally been informed and challenged by these approaches.

*Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology:*

The idea of the subject, and that of the object as well, transforms into a cognitive adequation the relationship with the world and with ourselves that we have in the

In the spirit of this doctoral study, which aims to embrace a *both/and* aptitude towards the multi-tiered dimensionality of my/our perspectives, I find myself amalgamating three of the above theoretical approaches into a ‘return to the world of actual experience’ (Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology)- ‘*intra-acting*’ (Barad’s agential realism)- ‘*as earth*’ (Bennett’s vital materialism).

I further mix into this appreciation, an Eastern, Buddhist-informed approach<sup>40</sup> which has influenced Action Theater and from which *butoh* was born. An aspect of this orientation suggests that there is ‘not one, and not two’ (Morton, 2007 p.48), and which further prompts in me an ongoing exploration of the ‘we’. *Earth. Performing. Improvising.*

Zaporah and I were working together collaboratively – *improvising* – trying to tease out what we felt worked, and the pitfalls to be avoided. The

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perceptual faith. They do not clarify it; they utilize it tacitly, they draw out its consequences. And since the development of knowledge shows that these consequences are contradictory, it is to that relationship that we must necessarily return, in order to elucidate it (1945/1956, p.23).

The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history (p.66).

*Jane Bennett’s Vital Materialism:*

...seeks to transform the divide between speaking subjects and mute objects into a set of differential tendencies and variable capacities (2010, p.108).

[A] world of active subjects and passive objects begin to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between, human, viral, animal and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense... (p.108).

If environmentalists are selves who live on earth, vital materialists are selves who live as earth... (p.111).

*Graham Harman’s Object-Oriented-Philosophy:*

is a method of exploring *gaps* between objects and their components, objects and their appearances, objects and their relations, or objects and their qualities. A table is not the same thing as the quarks and electrons of which it is made. Nor is the table exhausted by its sum total of possible appearances to humans and other animals (2013, p.193, emphasis in original).

<sup>40</sup> By no means am I trying to reinforce a binary between Occident and Orient.

territory was fresh for both of us. At this point, I had a year of doctoral improvisations under my belt. It was the depth of my immersive process of reflection (aided by the ekphrastic refractions) – and the questions that the year birthed – that had led me to want to scrutinize the process more deeply with Zaporah. As Morton suggests, ‘Whether we think of nature as an environment, or as other beings (animals, plants, and so on), it keeps collapsing either into subjectivity or into objectivity’ (2007, p.41). He asserts that ‘It is very hard, perhaps impossible, to keep nature just where it appears—somewhere in between’ (p.41).

As we worked together, Zaporah began to suggest that working more in the elemental, archetypal realm seemed to be a way of potentially avoiding the delineating ‘dangers’ of site-specific performance. Morton remarks that the ‘Classical elements (fire, water, earth, air) were about the body as much as they were about the atmosphere’ (2007, p.41). Zaporah remarked that the goal of such an approach should be that ‘you’re actually creating a different kind of element into the natural environment that enlightens it all...’ (pers. comm. 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015). Her observation captures what I was/am striving for. *A woman barefoot in a slip, on city sidewalk is not your everyday occurrence. A woman, painted in white zinc, donning a metallic shimmer crawling along a gravel road acts precisely as ‘a different kind of element’ in this environment.* Zaporah’s emphasis on difference does not imply opposition. Rather, it speaks directly to the arguments I am putting forward about the valuable role of the disabled body in the ecological frame. Differentiation and variation are instrumental in fostering new understandings, to developing collaborative knowledges: however explicit or

implicit they may appear. Taking Zaporah's observations to heart, I engaged with them thoroughly as I began my second-year series:

...i see and then feel that bronwyn knows that the performance is all of it you are also outside you do not objectify the role of performer but blend it into the fool the clown the knower the baby and little sister grandmother archetypes also you're a tree...  
(R22, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

After you left, the observers were looking at each other. We were all standing with our mouths open. It was a privilege to observe the performance, to be brought to that place and have you enter it, observe you move through it and with it, interacting and contrasting...  
(R1, *Lasqueti 3*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)

My work strives to straddle the continuum of immersion available to us through our relative positionings. It invites the paradox of improvisation and performance into the improvisationally performative frame of the everyday. My work(ing) is not in a vacuum. It seeks out connection, while trying to be aware of the thresholds invoked through gathering collectively, through costuming, through articulating dissonance. All the while it explores the possibilities of 'imposition' that creating such performance spaces, such 'different elements' in the landscape of the everyday might evoke. *How might performing site-specifically simultaneously embrace and estrange these acts of embodiment?* Zaporah observes:

Because you're a sentient being and you're experiencing and you see the oddity of this woman walking down the street and these cars going by and she's doing whatever she is doing...as long as it's not to affect them...just another piece of the landscape and you see it as another piece of the landscape, you don't see it as 'Oh, there's a person in there, what are they going to think? What should I do?...maybe I should do it this way, so they can see I'm making art...you just don't want to go there...' (pers. comm. 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

My performances necessarily negotiated the extremes of affect and effect (without me being privy to the extent of the ramifications) as it interfaced with the unsuspecting passerby, the territory-reminding woodpecker, the drive-by trucks, the toads on the path... These negotiations resulted in me critically choosing to employ two very different approaches from the first year to the second.

If we take the improvisations as the qualified ‘object’ of inquiry<sup>41</sup> – as I stated earlier – then this document stands as a testament to how the object can disappear in its multiplicity. The object is dissolved by the host of subjects, and the subjectivity of perceptual refractions. ‘My’ performances happened, but were experienced differently by everyone. Subjectivity and objectivity are processes of plurality and intrachange. Objective distance becomes relative. How this relativity is negotiated is an intimate process of reciprocity, of this *reciprocity* search: always improvisational.

### ***Costume/ing(s)***

The first eight improvisations were conducted barefoot in a ‘flesh’-coloured slip.<sup>42</sup> Simultaneously problematizing the employment of the coloured designation vis-à-vis the frame of raced-marginalization, I was engaging the notion of a slip being that which is worn [in]visibly ‘in-between’. *Between skin and clothes, world and self*. I was intentionally

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<sup>41</sup> As per precedents of approaches in Performance Studies analysis.

<sup>42</sup> This costume was reluctantly modified – but deemed appropriate – with borrowed boots, and overcoat, in the significantly sub-zero weather of Massachusetts. A graph depicting the varying temperatures of each of the sixteen improvisations is featured in Appendix D.

playing with the notion of visibly wearing the terminology of the Flesh, as first employed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. ‘The Flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies or gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002 p.66).<sup>43</sup> Coupling the personal flesh with the skin of the world, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty engages the Flesh ‘as expression’ (1968, p.145). I was engaging in improvising the line of (in)visibility. Deciding that to perform entirely nude would raise issues that might stifle (through-ironic-metaphoric-directness) possibilities for engagement, I strove to realize:

The metaphor, if it is a good one, will draw out some of the characteristics of the phenomenon but will leave others obscure or invisible that might well be picked up still by other metaphors seeking still different characteristics [...] and you can’t get the whole phenomenon with one metaphor (States, 2006 p.7).

According to Fischlin (2015), improvisational performance ‘entails vulnerability’ (p.290). The costuming choices invoked, and added to, negotiating this ‘thresh/fleshhold’. Engaging vulnerability through improvisational negotiation, acted as ‘a responsibility to the self and other, [our] interdependent relations, and [a] commitment to engage in co-creative acts’ (p.290). Alaimo approaches trans-corporeality as a practice of ethics that ‘hails from a sense of fleshy vulnerability’ (2010b p.24). Maintaining that the predominant meaning of vulnerability ‘involves a recognition of human flesh as violable’ (p.24), Alaimo asserts that such an ethics ‘sets aside the fortification of the I in favor of the embrace of the multiple, the

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<sup>43</sup> Abram, Madison, Tuana and Haraway also actively use the terminology of the Flesh in their writings.

intertwined, the sensate' (p.24). By extension, I assert that trans-corporeal improvisations are acts of performed vulnerability:

Making yourself/*being* so very vulnerable is immensely brave, risky, generous. The improvisation offered up feelings often quashed, unexamined. It enabled feelings often quashed, unexamined. It left me with a host of questions, pensive, and deeply appreciative.

(R10, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Following the first year of improvisations, wanting to challenge and further test my own practice-within-a-thesis of sourcing an imbrication between ecology and disability – I opted to change both my costume and styles of delivery for the second series: from one with a strong penchant towards employing language to a 'silent' one; from *Flesh* to 'foiled copper'.

Again, cleaving to the notion of improvising (in)visibility – the in-between, the inside/outside – my second year of improvisations found me wearing a copper-coloured slip. On my skin-cum-*Flesh*/*Flesh*-cum-skin, I covered myself with white (a primarily zinc-based makeup): a simultaneous nod to a traditional *butoh* aesthetic<sup>44</sup> and the colour and make-up of the medication I take to balance the mineral antagonists that necessarily work as biological binaries within my body. *Butoh* master Yoko Ashikawa proposes to 'Start from the place of your handicap' (cited in Fraleigh, 2004 p.181). This inspiration inspired an exploratory transition towards the offerings of *butoh* within this study.

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<sup>44</sup> I have necessarily had to question whether my donning of the 'butoh whites' is an appropriate or justifiable [re]appropriation? There is no *butoh* authority, no codification, no licensing, nor transmission system – there really is no 'one' *butoh*. However, as I have been taught, there is a respect for what/who has come before-met-with a lively encouragement to further one's 'own' explorations and to defy cultural boundaries in so doing. That being said, as will be discussed later, the birth of *butoh* emerged partly in response to the Westernization of Japan...and I am not oblivious to how my engaging with aspects of the form may either support and/or undermine these original sentiments. I must qualify my remarks with the fact, that besides a two-hour session with a Japanese member of Dairakudakan, I have only worked with *butoh* instructors from North American and Mexico (all of whom have worked directly with the original Japanese masters). With great respect, I draw on what I've learned to date through my *butoh* experiences and hold an awareness of the fragile ground on which I move-in/as-white.

As a ‘white’ woman (both with|out make-up) – my costuming choices did evoke questions relating to my placement as female, as mother, and my understanding of ‘white privilege’ ...and my particular relationships to, through and as (a) site of Eco-Feminist principles and the relationship to the overlaps of Ecological Disability Studies and a Critical Race Theory frame (touched on more thoroughly in Chapter Three and Four). *I wore a slip for all sixteen performances. I wore boots for eight and half of them, and a long down coat for four. I wore underwear for only three.* Each costume offered up contextual provocations – threaded with very visual appreciation of the ‘required’ attention due to:

territories, to various ways all beings, human and non-human, populate and indeed co-produce the Earth through bodily, intra- and interspecific, historical, political, ritual, technical, economical and even mineral practices (Debaise *et al.*, 2015 p.174).

Costuming helped serve as an exploratory tool of my elemental embodiment.

### ***(Auto)Ethnography***

*Autoethnography is body and verse.  
It is self and other and one and many.  
It is ensemble, acapella, and accompaniment.  
Autoethnography is place and space and time.  
It is personal, political, and palpable.  
[...]  
It is critical, reflexive, performative, and often forgiving.  
It is string theories of pain and privilege  
forever woven into fabrics of power/lessness.  
[...]  
It is subaltern narrative revealing the understory of  
hegemonic systems.  
It is skeptical and restorative.  
It is an interpreted body of evidence.  
It is personally accountable.*

*It is wholly none of these, but fragments of each.*

*It is a performance of possibilities.*

~Tami Spry  
(2011, pp.15-16)

Prompted by the catalyst of personal experiences (considered always- and already shared-manifestations), the site-sensitive/specific 'solo' improviser engages a plurality open to interacting with these refractions of self by selves. Deirdre Heddon (2008) asserts that the 'politics of the personal is that the personal is *not* singularly about me' (p.161, emphasis in original), supporting my position that with the dense relational dynamism of planet Earth, 'solo' performance is in fact an impossibility within a world premised on ineluctable interactions. Improvisation 'radically interrogates traditional notions of subjectivity' (Smith and Dean, 1997 p.35) wherein the autoethnographic approach provides the closest 'fit' for an exploration which defies singularity.

Autoethnography is largely associated with the ethical appreciation of text-based materials that have been compiled through an integrative formulation – interrogating varying tiers of personal identity as they relate to the larger sphere. Emphasizing 'making writing perform' – allied with this approach – is located performative autoethnography. By inverting this primary tenet, I am, instead, creating a cyclical continuum, where performance-informs-writing-invokes-performance. Thus, I am creating an intratextual 'heteroglossia', to borrow Mikhael Bakhtin's concept, through which the representation of 'the artist' within the text is 'as a multiplicity of voices or selves representing different orientations and worldviews' (Belgrad, 1998 p.43).

The participatory axioms of autoethnography are particularly compelling. The methodology contains the ability to address the questions central to this improvisatory enquiry, as it is shaped to:

(1) purposefully comment on/critique cultural practices; (2) make contributions to existing research; (3) embrace vulnerability with purpose; and (4) create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response (Jones, Adama and Ellis, 2013 cited in Denzin, 2014 p.20).

Perceiving improvisation as generative and emergent – ‘the evolving movement of life’ (von Emmel, 2008 p.57) – the understanding of audience is extended to the more-than-human world. I aim to capture this appreciation, writing from within the epistemologically central ‘entanglements of copresence, from the rapture of communion, from the un/comfortable risk and intimacy of dialogue, from the vulnerable and liminal inbetweenness of self/other/context’ (Carr, 2014 p.106).

With respect to Bakhtin’s notion of representing different orientations, married with the earlier metaphoric invocation of ‘moving off of familiar roadways’ (Olsen, 2006); along with Jane Carr’s vulnerable liminality, improvisation-as-methodology is being pushed by having the choice of venue left to another.

### ***Dual Framing: Exphrastic Responses***

The lived/living experience, much as identity, is held as not being singular, bound or fixed – treated here more as an active *experiencing* – and therefore neither are its ongoing refractions and interpretations:

shifting from documenting ‘me’ to reconstituting an operative, possible ‘we’. The self that emerges from these

shifting perspectives is, then, a possibility rather than a fact, a figure of relation emerging from between lines of difference, moving inexorably ‘from her experience to mine, and mine to hers’, reconstituting each in turn (Pollock, 1998 p.87).

By the soliciting responses from those who attend each event, the participatory and shared premise of ethnography as a methodology is engaged. Carr points to Paul Crowther who explores how ‘in responding to an artwork, we become part of a shared ecology’ (2014, p.55). The vitally important practice aims towards building understandings of others’ values, despite the difficulties that arise ‘in sharing agreement with regard to experiences of art’ (p.55). Suzi Gablik similarly stresses the need for dynamically interactive art processes, through which ‘the vision of static autonomy is undermined (1991, p.51). Adding credence to these dually-framed events, Denzin remarks that they are both emancipatory and pedagogical. He adds that the postmodern audience is both ‘an interactive structure and an interpretive vehicle ... As existential collaborators they are co-constructed by the event [...] audience members are participants in a dialogic performance event’ (2003 cited in Shaughnessy, 2012 p.12):

the boundary between you as you and you as ‘performer’ – how is that defined? again, i really liked the parts where your movement and sound were [again, i’m having a hard time verbalizing it –] out of step with what i perceive as Bronwyn the human being – where your movements were unlike movements one sees in everyday life. like when you were on the ground, slowly pushing the post. where your body expressed the theme. i really like movement so maybe it’s a personal thing. i think i also felt more comfortable though when the boundary between artist/performer audience was more defined.

i loved the deep themes in your dialoguing, expressing.

[...]

beyond the themes that came up in your piece – colonization, ownership of names, boundaries of space – what is nature, inside, outside, identity – which i’m still thinking of – what sticks with

me most is still what's hardest to put into words – that i feel changed by ART. the courage, the intensity, the inspiration, the laying bare of the soul, i'm still so moved by it [your performance] and its energy has touched me. [...] since your piece, i've been guided by ART [...] not to get something or achieve something but simply to keep a connection and trust in something larger at play.

(R23, *Lasqueti 2*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Bree Hadley (2014) contends that intentionally opening an event to dual framing ‘draws spectators into a liminal space in which attempts to apply habitual, ready-made responses are deferred, delayed or thwarted’ (p.69). All of these attributes hold true. Encouraging non-traditional responses adds further dimension/challenge to the interpretation of shared liminality. The reciprocating engagement with ‘not-knowing’ (both audience/performer) on many levels becomes a very strong source of *felt* connection. The processes extemporize experience(s) from inside/outside arguably ephemeral representations. Simultaneously, they build (the) appropriate ethics demanded of the moment. As Hadley suggests:

Spectators can find their values, views and ways of being brought into question, but find it difficult to know how to respond, and find further debate, dialogue or discussion is required. [...] This is what creates the conditions of possibility for the questions that cannot be answered... (2014 p.69).

As mentioned earlier, my engagement within these improvisations must negotiate transparently the human-centredness from which my vantage point informs my perceptions. And yet, it is precisely my position, my site-ing as a human self – as a part of earth who has recently evolved into self-aware, conscious thinking (Seed, 1998 p.36) – that allows me to engage from this angle. I am acutely aware of the tenuousness of this dynamic, and the conundrums it raises:

balance is not  
a static position,  
but a constant  
negotiation,  
demonstration of faith,  
a hand-off, a sharing  
within a duet, with a tree  
*(Poem excerpt, Randy Reyes, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

On the one hand, I am cautious of personifying, appropriating, articulating or professing claims from within this capacity for intra-connection; simultaneously actively querying how as a human, I ethically interact/advocate on behalf of the non-human world. I must contend throughout with the appropriateness of Social Ecology's founder Murray Bookchin's comment that 'it is the responsibility of the most conscious life-form – humanity – to be the "voice" of mute nature' (1990 cited in Curry, 2011 p. 64). His remark I find highly problematic – if, like me, one recognizes a multitude of (non-human) voices – and yet, his comment also provokes, dependent on context, an arguably now-necessary human Anthropocenic responsibility.

**Performer/Audience/audience/performer**

... watching our reactions – at moments it was like who is the performer here? – are we as audience the performer activating the space somehow, or exploring the space, discovering the space or is she the performer?...it was so interesting...we were in this kind of performative mode and awareness of the space and silence and a container but at the same time watching and observing...  
*(R24, Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

Suzanne Lacy remarks that 'what exists in the space between artist and audience, [is] a relationship that may *itself* be the art work' (1994 cited in Shaughnessy, 2012 p.103, emphasis in original). Pregnant with the potential

for meaningful exchange (as well as its antithesis), the liminal space of the in-between is a fascinating place from which to contend with an identified lacuna within Performance Studies. Auslander maintains that ‘discussions of how a particular audience perceived a particular performance at a particular time and place and what that performance meant to that audience are rare (2006, p.6).<sup>48</sup> This project actively and non-traditionally, took up this rarity.<sup>49</sup>

Perception, here, is inferred by Auslander, to be something that happens after-the-fact: as a post-performance reflection. He does not appear to be referring to the space that Lacy speaks of – which can equally hold within it the unfurling dialectic between performer/audience. This dialectic operates as an active perceiving, as an active space for meaning making. There is an understanding that such an exchange may elicit/shape the happening *in situ*:

I really enjoyed the group engagement. It felt like everyone had a place. We collectively created a series of moments.  
(R25, *Earthdance 3*, 26 February 2015)

I deliberately sought out ekphrastic media, in addition to more traditional written commentary, to expand our noted culturally-limited performance-response mechanisms. What would happen not only to the space between audience and performer, but between the modes of response as well? How could or would ‘they’ interact to form an intentionally-fragmented whole, serving to underscore the intersectional nature of this

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<sup>48</sup> Though beyond the scope of this study, a prolonged examination is merited, provoked by Auslander’s observation of the need to further question the embedded privileging of access to both live performance and the subsequent culture of performance response that arguably has been mediated by a select few, in select styles: we have privileged the role of the ‘reviewer’ to be the valued currency of dissemination.

<sup>49</sup> Methodologically, I responded to this lacuna, with a congruent embrace of diversity: not by striving for one generalized rendered reading of audience-as-a-whole, but rather by viewing the ‘individual’ refractions as derived from a collective process of perspectives, meanings: mixed and responding.

project? How might such an approach aid in the exploration of notions of reciprocity?<sup>50</sup> Earlier, I cited Hadley's contention that opening an event to dual framing, 'draws spectators into a liminal space in which attempts to apply habitual, ready-made responses are deferred' (2014, p.69). Might a co-created, non-habitual, unplanned, liminal *pre-during, and post-* performance space be the very embodiment of an ekphrasis of ecology and (dis)ability identities? I argue that this is precisely what these gatherings performed. And this togetherness, was (and continues to be) documented with/through diverse plurality.

Auslander maintains that the relationship between a performance and its documentation can be perceived as ontological, when viewed as the performance preceding and instigating its documentation (2006, p.1). However, my improvisations problematized Auslander's apprehension of the ontological stance, especially when examined through an ecological frame. Through the contexts of ourselves already and always in relation to, what becomes of the documented ontology of the territorial woodpecker performing a response to us being there? Or the tire-tracks marking a stopping and steering around on a muddy road? As Nancy genuinely asks, 'At what point must ontology become...what? Become conversation? Become lyricism? ... The strict conceptual rigor of being-with exasperates the discourse of its concept...' (2000, p.34):

...so the thing that i most remember now is your energy, this very intimate, open, honesty, a sense of being-with that was very

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<sup>50</sup> The beginning and ending of responses are as proverbially murky as some of the sites/issues under consideration. Responses could be regarded as having begun with peoples' placement in relationship to each other and site (even before 'I' arrived); and the interactions happening as a result between the whole of the context; not, merely relegated to 'physical' post-ekphrasis. As was soon found out, some people chose to respond similarly through arguably 'ephemeral' means or one-time events: an example of which was a fielded dance response. However, this response, too, was recorded).

warm and unifying for everyone. it is your way, but comes out even more when you are in performance and holding the audience together as one. so there was this interesting sense of the porousness of performance, and feeling somehow complicit with you. like you knew which direction to walk but not necessarily where you were going and you were comfortable with that. i really enjoyed how you encouraged and wove in audience interaction.

(R26, *Earthdance 3*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

The solicitation of performance responses rests in the space between the [rhetorical?] exasperation of ‘ontologically being-with’ and trans-corporeality. Auslander, again, posits that perhaps ‘the authenticity of the performance document resides in its relationship to its beholder rather than to an ostensibly originary event: perhaps its authority is phenomenological rather than ontological’ (2006, p.9).

I suggest, rather, that these varied responses illuminate an exchange: a process of trans-corporeal ontology. This confluence reciprocally mediates what Reason acutely perceives, in conjunction with Lacy’s remark above, as ‘a space of fragmentations, which forms the site of our cultural knowledge and vision of performance’ (Reason, 2006 p.4). In the context of this study, the vision of performance is ‘one’ that vacillates between the seen and the unseen, between voicings and mutings, between territories and traipsings, whispers and wind, bones and branches...between representation and disappearance. This reflective documentation *being* the performance of ecology, of (dis)ability – perceived as humans, equally noted by the agentic animacy of the more-than-human world-always-in-relation-to. *The fading of tires tracks, the soil(ed) absorption of my dripping blood, the lasting pile of rubbish and dandelions, the sticks, stones, snail shells pocketed and re-located, the recycled (?) bottle...the painting, the poems, the scores...*

Again, we revisit for who and where does the performance (of ekphrasis) begin and end? Kershaw quips, ‘If the environment’s ecologies *actually* are performing us, how might we best respond to their varied influences? (2015, p.125, emphasis in original). Hadley contends:

Examining these chains of response – these chains of performances – can, though, provide insight into the way these encounters impact on individuals, groups of individuals, and the way these improvised reactions build or block new points of view emerging. It may, in other words, be precisely what is needed to shed new light on the features of risky, unpredictable performance practices in which performers and spectators alike engage their Other (2014, p.113).

The process of art and exchange became one of the many processes to relieve/highlight the equations of paradox. The answer, in this case, is not rhetorical, it is animatedly responsive at best:

...and all the people negotiating watching are also the performance or maybe most of the performance.  
(R22, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

Discussions on the nature of ephemerality often invoke a troubling bedfellow when it comes to documentation. This project took as a direct challenge the possibility of documenting the ‘ephemeral’, positioning it as an anthropocentric notion: contestable when the scope of performance documentation enlarges to include the agency of site/more-than-human world. As is taken up further in Chapter Nine, the animacy of environmental/contextual imbrications is also considered an active participant in the chronicling of what has, is, and may happen. *Performance traces were left. Habitats disturbed. Water drainage rivulets altered. The contents of garbage cans changed. Footfalls ingrained.* The question of value is how aware was I, and others, of our impacts of our gathering? How

were we choosing to interact *with* the processes of documenting *already* in process? Arguably, our very embodiment *in situ* could be viewed as an unfurling ekphrasis.

### *Ekphrastic Ecologies*

I premise, much as Amelia Jones does, that observing/participating in a live event itself is undeniably a different experience from reading a poem about the event, looking at photographs, drawings or any other type of response. However, I, and she, maintain that ‘neither has a privileged relationship to the historical “truth” of the performance’ (2007, p.12). Notions of truth are as contingent as are our respective perspectives, positionalities, and are as fluidly responsive and shifting as are cultural ethics. What is true for someone might not be for another. Truth is elusive, if not always interpreted and/or imagined:

Although I am respectful of the specificity of knowledges gained from participating in a live performance situation, I will argue here that this specificity should not be privileged over the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event (Jones, 1997, p.12).

Acknowledging that the documentary traces of the sixteen improvisational events are not the property, or making, of the human audience alone – with a nod to the phenomenological axiom, to return to the ‘things themselves’ – I wish to focus on sharing a further *selection* of some of the refractions that I received. These enlivened and embodied performance traces, are in addition to those that have been included with the poems:

- *Post-performance drawing by Janna Meiring, Earthdance 6, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016:*



- *Live-action drawing by Bob Bickford, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015:*



- *The following is a description and an image of a painting done by Cory Neale, which he videoed himself painting after the improvisation: alone, at night. He arrived at this process after first*

*trying to do live-action response painting. Neale recounts here the process which led him to create the image below:*

I felt the need to react to this improvisation in real time, as the medium I chose was improvisational, contemporaneously reactionary, in nature. This required set up and execution practicalities that were too complex, too little planning to be able to succeed. I followed the group to the location of performance and was set up. Within seconds, the plan, the expectation due to wind and the inability of the paper to lay. At one point, as the paper flapped in the wind, I held onto the whole roll, so it wouldn't fly away. I felt totally self conscious, as if the sound and my own addressing of this failure were distracting...The sense of frustration welled up inside of me. Distracting, and failing. The sound, that sound, it wouldn't stop. The sound of flapping in the breeze.

I made my way off site quickly to change and I felt a sense of shame and embarrassment. As if I was a performer myself and just had a show that went horribly wrong. The narrative that I write so meticulously fell apart at the end. I searched for a release, because I knew that this wasn't serving either purpose, my own process or that of the performer who opened her process to those around her. The question of *\*where\** performance begins and ends has correspondent set of inquiries...But also, the *\*who\**, when the performance is open to response, even in accompaniment. I thought further and looked for a tool to put my own experience in perspective.



*Of note, Neale has a disability. His own attempts to set up an outdoor painting set-up included him falling, due to his own restricted mobility issues. He commented:*

I see disability as a source of strength. It compels me to do the same with less resources. That has developed into a value system that has carried through in other parts of life, less is more, do more with less.

I see disability as a teaching tool. It teaches me empathy. Even if I know someone else's pain.... just a little... I feel I can relate.

I feel pride. I feel proud to be in the same room as other great, able-bodied... no not only able-bodied, but bodies that are closer to functional perfection than average, dancer, movement artist, risk-takers with the body. I may be disabled, but I belong in those places and spaces with those people. They need me, and I need them. We agree.

That's is why I am here [at the *E|MERGE* residency] these two weeks.

Neale also remarked:

...another benefit I draw from this experience is the learning process of how to do abstract improvisational watercolor painting in sub-freezing temperatures. One day..... One day closer. Actively engaging an improvisational response, to an improvisation, while really listening...

- *Post-performance painting by Monica Bell, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016:*



- *Post-performance poem by Paddy O'Rourke, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015:*

Hill Top  
Dancers nest  
Six foot  
Ram log  
Picked from ground  
Angular stones  
Natural lines  
Property value  
Plummets  
Ticks invade  
Changing climate  
Changing times  
Salal woman  
Takes us  
Journeys begin  
A veil so transparent  
What is real  
Oh so reality

- *Post-Performance Poem submitted as photographs by Lucy Smith, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015:*

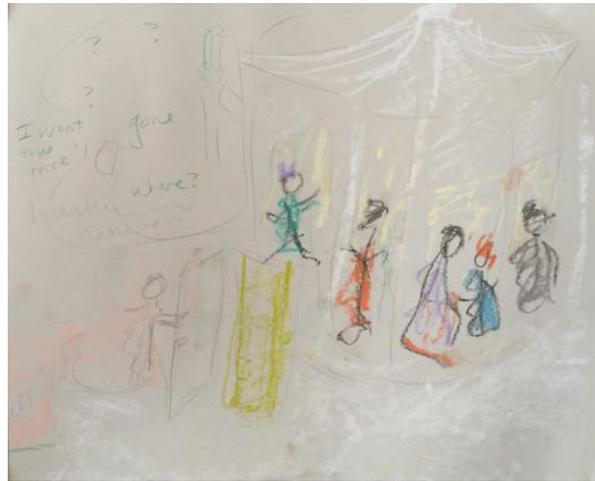


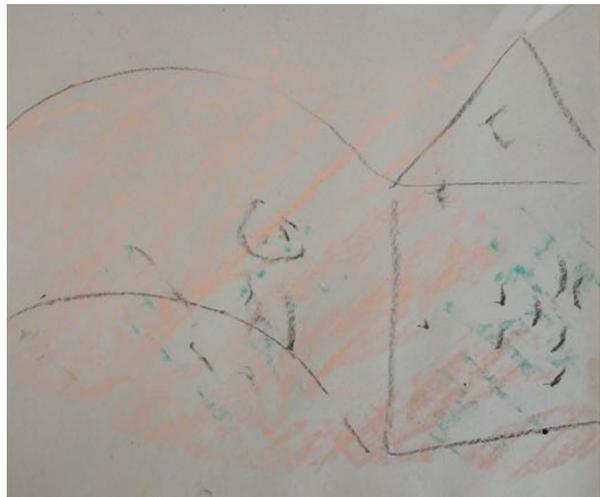
• During one event, one participant inserted a 'pop-up' art installation he had created, placing it in a location that he (correctly) anticipated would be re-visited during the course of the improvisation, due to the snow-banked trail network we were collectively navigating. Photograph by Aaron Jeffrey, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015:



• The following is a 'Process Drawing' sequence by Janna Meiring, during which she asked me to sit next to her while she drew out and spoke aloud her responses to the improvisation which had just occurred. Below is the transcription from the taped recording, and the series of six pastel images. Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016:

I was transfixed with this where? where? where did she go?...  
 there was this beautiful dissolving of this moment of  
 where...there was this hushed suspension...  
 I kept looking for copper? and I thought, she must be circling...  
 she must appear in a window or she must appear  
 somewhere...where is she? I want her to come back...is there  
 more? is it an end...? where is the end? and it evolved into a  
 beautiful congregation of moving bodies, standing bodies,  
 hushedness, some contact over here and some contact over  
 here...and then quietly we just filtered out down the quiet  
 hallway...I was looking through every window and every  
 doorway looking for you...hoping to catch a glimpse...hoping to  
 catch a glimpse somewhere until it faded...and within me during  
 this journey I felt a sense of curiosity and delight ...and I think  
 felt that in others: curiosity and openness ....  
 The energy of the offering transformed the space... there is this  
 aloneness of this traveling figure and this isolation between the  
 people and the solo figure most of time – in the window/out the  
 window – not disconnected but separated – but distanced and  
 then the moment you brought [a disabled man] in felt so touching  
 in that moment and there was this transition when we were  
 together in the space...this solo figure was together with us in the  
 space and then separate again and then disappeared...so I felt this  
 dance occurred in contact in relationship ....and aliveness...





• *Post-performance poem by Shelley Etkin, Earthdance 4, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015:*

fake nature  
simulated naturalism  
planted *unvIRONMENTALISM*  
as a shadow, a parallel, a critique, a reflection, a practice

accessibility? <—> responsibility?

tentative journeying  
the appropriate degrees of comfort  
the power of choice  
difficulty/ease?

all paths taken towards and away from an experience are  
moving towards and away from the experience  
and i do prefer the in-betweens  
totality of environment outstretching plains

distance/proximity to material(S)  
even if we pave the path (to love)  
some may choose not to take that  
balance of responsibility and false obligation to make things  
easy (don't wanna)

cleanliness  
godliness  
hotliness  
messiness  
haphazardness  
dangerous

the futility of cleaning!  
a commitment to cobwebs returning  
old friends

underneath all this things are NOT dead  
not dormant

(yes)

• *Post-performance poem by Alexa Owen, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016:*

Where I want to be most is in this skin.  
To be wrapped in the membrane of embryotic weeds

and curl back into myself, myself, myself.  
I want to wander around this space  
knowing that it's closed:  
that there's nowhere to be but here  
in the play of water,  
                    and wind,  
                                and waves and sky,

                                and ether.

I am the ground that holds it,  
with joyful effort.

The creature is strange and  
home in the strangeness.

Golden and dark, and hollow  
in the eyes in a way that lets us breathe.  
Can you feel it?  
Can you feel it in the slimy weeds  
strangling themselves in your hands?  
And with every breath  
Those slimy weeds inside  
Our chests expand to their fullness,  
Which is finite and holds everything  
We could ever need.

Golden and dark and hollow.

Where I want to be most is in this skin.

• *Live-action 'musical' score by Cory Neale, into which he incorporated elements of what I/others were saying/doing, in addition to his own thoughts provoked during the event. He explained to me that the 'end' is marked by his tears, explaining that he started to cry as I contextually-asked 'Who owns art?' and how the response that emerged from our being there together, as noted, is that we do, 'by being touched by each other...' Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015:*



the active taking up of what Jacques Rancière outlines as a need for ‘emancipated’ spectatorship. Audiences are considered active interpreters who, according to Rancière, blur ‘the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body’ (2015, p.19). Deirdre Heddon and Sally Mackey later compounded this thinking with an expanded and encompassing take on ‘environmentalism’: ‘in reality and practice, not a singular disposition but a plurality and range of positions...’ (2012, p.166). And, as Kershaw (2015) suggests, ‘acknowledging that humanity is performed by its surroundings has crucial implications for the stochastic, trial-and-error processes that create reflexive feedback systems’ (p.125).

Amalgamating emancipated spectatorship with emancipated environmentalism, I suggest that these ekphrastic processes serve(d) as (platforms for) *emancipated ecologies*...

***presently: the improvisational moment***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER THREE: GROUNDING

This chapter begins to address Ecology, Disability, Embodiment and their respective overlaps, discussing whether the performance of ecological and disabled identities requires the presence of the human. I contextualize my thinking within the scholarly dialogue that supports such views. Addressing the above leads into a discussion of trans-corporeality, upholding an underlying argument of this study that these ideas cannot not be completely siloed. The continued imbrication of concepts/practice is premised throughout, and linked back to the performance frame.

### *Ecology*

Ecology, is commonly understood as the study of the relationships between organisms to one another and to their environment or physical surroundings or ‘the science of the *living* environment’ (Odum, 1959 p.4, emphasis added). The term ecology was first coined by German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1869 (Odum, 1959 p.3). Now, it has been arguably appropriated to be synonymous with notions of interconnection: its basis, still one which, I argue, favours individuation. Often used interchangeably, ecology ‘has become vaguely synonymous with “environmentalism,” even though for decades it was used exclusively to refer to a formal scientific pursuit’ (Keller and Golley, 2000 p.3). Stemming from biology, the ecological lens – the science of studying living organisms – is engaged in examining systems by way of studying the ‘individual nature’ of living

animals and plants in interaction. Ecology, so defined and understood, bifurcates the animate and non-animate.

This performance project aims to challenge and expand the conventional understandings associated with the term ecology. My ‘ecological’ appreciation is vast and animate. Though I appreciate the employment of the word ‘relations’ as a property of ecology, this very premise seems to be negated in the individualizing of the organism.

Boundary-pushing scientist Suzuki, contends that:

At its heart, modern ecology is a continuation of the ancient human quest for a deeper understanding of the often invisible and web of *relationships* that connect living things to one another and to their surroundings (1992, p.53, emphasis in original).

Suzuki’s work refreshingly does incorporate both expanded understandings of animism and places emphasis on ‘relationships rather than separated objects’ (1997, p.198).<sup>51</sup> However, my reticence around ecological terminology is grounded in what Ingold observes about the dominant narrative, when he suggests:

An understanding of the unity of life in terms of genealogical relatedness is bought at the cost of cutting out every single organism from the relational matrix in which it lives and grows. In this understanding, life presents itself to our awareness not as the interlaced meshwork, [...] but rather as an immense scheme of classification (2011a, p.163).

The destructive ramifications of classification is addressed in part by Gendlin, who asserts that, ‘We need not think of nature as artificially constructed out of separate pieces, although it is useful (and dangerous) to construct and reconstruct them’ (1998, p.38). This paradox of the employment of Ecology-

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<sup>51</sup> Morton’s *Ecological Thought* (2010a) does much the same, only approached from another angle than Suzuki’s.

as-lens is perhaps best captured by J. Baird Callicott's comment, 'If it weren't for ecology we would not be aware that we have an "ecologic crisis"' (2005, p.1169).

Though I can find rapport with certain demands of the 'environmental movement' which is trying to address the 'ecological crisis', in addition to steering away from using 'ecology', I avoid, even more so, the words 'environment', 'wilderness' and/or 'nature'. 'In the wilderness myth, the body is pure, "solo," left to its own devices, and unmediated by any kind of aid' (Ray, 2009 p.40).<sup>52</sup> These terms seem to emphasize an 'Othering' by virtue of their employment often in conjunction with an 'out there' or distanced orientation, steeped in a complicated legacy of privileged White-Western Romanticism, Enlightenment, and more recent 'Conservation' protection efforts.<sup>53</sup> I carry an awareness – further appreciated through my experiencing of the improvisations and ekphrastic responses – that 'the meanings we attribute to the environment are grounded in history, race, gender, and culture' (Finney, 2014 p.3).

The question then begs to be asked, if I take issue with the term 'ecology', then how did it come to feature so prominently as an instigator for this study? At the time of my metaphoric insight – and still now – as an 'inadequate term', ~~ecology~~ invites a line through it. Culturally, appreciating

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<sup>52</sup> A point could be made that this is not the case with the usage of the term 're-wilding': a now-commonly referenced understanding, arguably, made famous – or mainstream – by George Monbiot (2014) among others in the UK (and Western Europe). In North America – where notions of wilderness and space, conjure up a different array of relationships – re-wilding, is a term that is not commonly used. Ironically, it was first coined by American Dave Foreman, and subsequently taken up by Michael Soulé and Reid Noss. However, I suggest, it remains site-specific. Arguably, it is an attempt to 'un-Other'.

<sup>53</sup> An extended discussion is beyond the allowable scope of this written component of the PhD, but see Morton (2007) and Evernden (1992) for perceptive elaborations. See Finney (2014) and Ray (2009) for an environmental-critical race framework relating to these points.

an ecological perspective, or self-identifying as an ecological self conjures up certain sets of references and by association a host of theories (from the Gaia Hypothesis and Systems Theory, to tree-hugging, placard-waving, granola-munching hippies...) and there exists a bit of 'me' in all of these. These associations fold into the ecological manifold, as it seems to be most commonly understood, with Dave Horton (2004) remarking, 'activists perform an identity which earns them distinctively green distinction' (p.64). He continues to say that the performances 'of green identity do not, of course, remain static over time' (p.74). The lack of staticity – the movement, the constant change – within ecological identifiers gives both impulse and grounding to my improvisational practice and performance approach.

There is a degree of navigating the continuum of *accessibility* with the usage of terms, in order not to delimit the potential for outreach/ understanding. 'Ecology'-as-notion, does feel more accessible – and resonant – when termed as openly as Gareth Somers' definition: 'Ecology is a matrix of encompassing and performative relations between all beings, perceptions, things, and landscapes' (2011, p.18). Though still marred by limiting linguistic dualisms, the very ability of improvisation to open up this tenuously volatile space of ecology for lexiconical extrapolations and termed inversions, is evidenced throughout 'my' poetic encounters:

i am seeking a  
new language,  
new words,  
new verbs,  
new lexicon  
a space beyond  
our names [colonized]

(*Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015*).

Ecology is the property of academia and the layperson, while simultaneously belonging to neither. I use the word sparingly, and instead attempt to embody alternatives through the dynamic of improvisational performance:

In a very real sense there can only be environment in a society that holds certain assumptions, and there can only be an environmental crisis in a society that believes in environment... The environment exists because it was made visible by the act of making it separate. It exists because we have excised it from the context of our lives (Evernden, 1985 cited in Langer, 1990 p.118).

I perceive the ‘environmental crisis’ and its nascent environmentalism as the manifestations of humans’ climatic crises with[in] themselves.

### ***Disability***

Disability conjures up many associations, but is probably unanimously best understood in Western culture to refer to a physical and/or mental condition that may limit or impact a person’s movements, cognition, senses or activities. This understanding contributes directly to the term’s volatility when it comes to being ‘used to describe individuals (or a people?) that are in a position of difference from a center’ (Kuppers, 2004 p.5). A strong case for putting disability *sous rature* can be made, as ability features within the word. Disability rather than ~~disability~~ can negate that those who befall under this designation, are often equipped with extra-‘ordinary’ proclivities in certain domains. Performance practitioner and activist, Kuppers notes that ‘Already, even this vague description is problematic: how the center is defined, how center and periphery interact, what fantasies they hold of one another, is different in different contexts’ (2004, p.5).

Tobin Siebers' remarks that those 'with a heightened sense of paradox may object that claiming disability as a positive identity merely turns disability into ability and so remains within its ideological horizon' (2013, p.281). He continues, stipulating that 'disability identity does not flounder on this paradox' and that what it effectively does is highlights the difficulty – while pointing out the need – to push beyond the limits of any ideological horizons. 'For thinking of disability as ability, we will see, changes the meaning and usage of ability (Siebers, 2013 p.281).<sup>54</sup> Such orientations push our common terminology *sous rature*. Bio-ethicist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's assertion, compliments this notion, when she observed that 'the disabled body exposes the illusion of autonomy, self-government, and self-determination that underpins the fantasy of absolute able-bodiedness' (1997 cited in Ray, 2009, p.40). The disabled body is ecologically essential, illustrative and implicated...performative and potentially pedagogical. Performance can help foster an understanding of the complexities of the meanings of disability and/or ~~disability~~, its meanings and current implications.

### ***Disability/Ecology***

The current context of disability is tantamount to its appreciation and application. Performance-makers and theorists are creating works inspired by ecological considerations, examining the (possible) expanded interpretations

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<sup>54</sup> Ability vis-à-vis Disability invokes discussions of Ableism, which has been defined as 'a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human' (Campbell, 2009 cited in Siebers, 2013 p.191).

and applications of disability in our current climatic crises (elaborated upon in the following subsection: *Performance/Performing/Performers of Ecological Disability*). Koppers asserts that disability ‘is one of the organizing principles of what we think it means to be human, and how a society organizes itself’ (Koppers, 2014c p.9). Her remark does not contradict Siebers’ observations above, as both, are mutually arguing for the simultaneous centrality of dis within ability. Phelan (2005) similarly remarks, ‘it is necessary to think of disability as both a natural condition in all human life and as a social interpretation’ (p.324). And the natural condition – and centrality of what it means to be human – is contingent on being of this world. Disability/~~disability~~, thereby, becomes a shared ecology. Bruce Henderson and Norm Ostrander (2010) remark:

it is not facile to assert that we are all involved in disability now, whether in our present state, in our relationship with the world around us, both personally and politically, or in our own futures (p.2).

Disability moves into the ecological register without much effort, or as Morton puts it ‘the ecological thought is also friendly to disability’ (2010a, p.85).

Harking back to my earlier comment, ‘i write as mutant’ – the thesaurus of the New Oxford American English Dictionary, clearly, and in uppercase, draws a connection between ecology and mutation when the thesaurus offers as synonym for mutant: FREAK (OF NATURE). The British version uses all lowercase, and drops the brackets. I do not consider all ~~disability~~ the ‘product’ of mutation, however, this is a term which relates to my personal relationship/entry point to exploring this arena of thought/practice/living. Mutation – however, is one of the genetic properties of many

(but not all) disabilities – and remains ‘a natural phenomenon, which even eugenicists admit is key to our survival as a species’ (Chemers cited in Koppers, 2014c p.141). One of the processes of mutation, for example, is known as ‘genetic polymorphism’ (Suzuki, 1997 p.132) and ‘is a fundamental characteristic of a vibrant, healthy species, a reflection of its successful evolutionary history and continued potential to adapt to unpredictable change (p.133).

The social interpretation of disability (to which I am both contributing and challenging), advocates through Disability Studies for an embracing of the disabled person into the social/built environment as a recognized necessary phenomenon on a continuum. By so doing, it dissolves to some extent the estranged and othering status so often attributed to disability, combatting ‘the social order of normalization that strives to rid the world of the irregular other’ (Fraleigh referencing Foucault, 2004 p.201). However, that being said, the ‘social model’ of disability (which differs from the ‘medical model’, wherein the emphasis is placed solely on the individual’s condition as being a stand-alone issue), is premised on an uncomfortable and paradoxical perpetuation of viewing the social environment as the sole ‘built environment’. Much as with ‘nature’, disability exists as a social creation (for more: see Kafer, 2013). So, ‘naturally’ a world in balance holds disability as part of, not separate from, its activities. Alaimo, citing Siebers, claims the ‘disabled body seems difficult for the theory of social construction to absorb: disability is at once its best example and a significant counterexample’ (2001 in 2010a p.7). Ato Quayson (2013) upholds this

observation, remarking that disability simultaneously oscillates between ‘a pure process of abstraction’ and ‘a set of material conditions’ (p.206).

Hadley further contends that ‘this paradoxical positioning of the disabled body is a personal, political and ethical issue not just for themselves, but for their spectators and for society at large’ (2014, p.7).

I am, therefore, now able to address what might have been understood earlier as a potential contradiction within my moment of insightful arrest, when I both equated the current condition of crisis to disability, while simultaneously appreciating disabled perspectives for what they might facilitate as means to engage practically with the socially-ecological climatic crisis (for more see: Wolbring, 2014; Abbott and Porter, 2013). I posit that a disabled world is in fact, one that has disrupted the balance, by paradoxically trying to institutionalize norms, on a sweeping scale (ranging from monocultures, to economic structures, to international patenting laws, to sanctioning ‘dominant narratives’).<sup>55</sup> Ironically, a disabled world is one that seeks to horizontalize through homogenization – the foe of both mutation and genetic polymorphism – thereby revoking the qualities of variability, inherently needed to ensure survival. Eli Clare accurately cautions, however, that it:

would be all too convenient and neat to suggest that without disability, humans recreate ourselves as a monoculture—a cornfield, wheat field, tree farm—lacking some fundamental biodiversity. Environmentalists have named biodiversity a central motivation for ecosystem restoration and a foundation for continued life on the planet. But to declare the absence of disability as synonymous with a monoculture disregards the multiplicity of cultures among humans. It glosses over the ways in which culture and

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<sup>55</sup> With the multiple spellings and applications of disability *sous rature* that have been applied, I here return to using disability in its conventional sense with its associative connotations.

nature have been set against each other in the white Western world... (2014, p.214).

Incorporating the above flag, Clare does declare, much as I do, that: ‘the bodies of both disabled/chronically ill people and restored [ecosystems] resist the impulse toward and the reality of monocultures (2014, p.215). Euro-American attitudes about nature, explains Patricia Limerick, are expressed largely in a ‘historical “model” that has “all the flexibility and variation of a conveyor belt; it gives very little room to variations in groups and individuals or in places or times”’ (2000 cited in Finney, 2014 p.56). Abram addresses how this perpetuates a cycle of normalization, which then feeds over-consumption as a means to compensate:

the mass-produced artifacts of civilization, from milk cartons to washing machines to computers, draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself *without variation*. To the sensing body these artifacts are, like all phenomena, animate and even alive, but their life is profoundly constrained by their specific ‘functions’ (1997, p.64, emphasis in original).

The effect and affect are the production of populations drawn into a dynamic of dulling their senses. The search for variety leads to taking up the material project in its more physical and substantive form. The dulled norm is countered through the acquisition of more things, new products, more stuff. These objects massage our relationships to temporal frames of use, life and decomposition. Phelan remarks that, ‘we are simultaneously alive to our death and deadened to aspects of our life’ (2005, p.324). Her apt observation edgily applies here. So, too, does Alaimo’s (2016a) persistent reminder that:

It is how objects are entangled—economically, politically, and substantially across bodies, ecosystems, and built environments—that matters, not how each object exists in isolation (p.187).

These accumulative acts could be termed as material dis-attachments.

Through them, I am/become, *more than ever*, attached to that carton of milk and the [dirty] laundry of our washing machines...

People with disabilities are actively positioned to advocate on behalf of variance, deviance and mutability<sup>56</sup> embodying the double-edged metaphoric tools which may simultaneously dismantle and rebuild the 'house' of the Master 'ecology'.<sup>57</sup> David Abbott and Sue Porter (2013) remark that the lived experienced of interdependency 'provides a neat bridge between the environmental and disability movements' (p.851). However, with this understanding, so too [can] come an uncomfortable bedfellow:

Constant reference to environmental causes of disability renders those who are disabled passive recipients of harm and implies their inability to be full participants in environmental justice work. It removes agency from those identified as disabled, especially when those working for disability rights are not part of the environmental justice conversation (Johnson, 2017 p.83).

From within this frame, Kuppers' (2016) comments hold true, more than ever, when she locates the current agency – and necessity – of disabled/disability activism:

Living in precarious times, this is the core feature of our [disability culture] activism: getting together, as best as we can, and acknowledging relationality, to each other, to land, acknowledging joy and sadness, connecting ourselves to a world of cultural production that needs our presence (n.p.).

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<sup>56</sup> This statement is made with the understanding that there still exists tension between the current discourses of disability culture[s] and environmental restoration. See Clare (2014) for more.

<sup>57</sup> Ecology: ORIGIN late 19th cent. (originally as *oecology*): from Greek *oikos* 'house' + -logy (Oxford English Dictionary, n.p.).

Advocating from/as a site of performance, through the tiered complexities of disability – engaged a fresh, subjective relationalism in audience responses:

what is the disempowering aspect of INability  
(to be withINability?)  
compared to the empowering aspect of DISability?  
*(Poem excerpt, R27, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

able, dis-abled,  
visibility, invisibility,  
dichotomies broken  
spoken so they're taken up by the universe,  
the choreography of  
a self-aware being  
is. already. in  
action.  
it's all ready  
happening  
all you need to do  
is believe and  
fill up w/ presence  
*(Poem excerpt, Randy Reyes, Earthdance 3, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

As for what the performance had to do with your disability I have no clue. Unless it is your disability that gives you the courage to put yourself out there like that. I think you are one of the bravest people I know.

I believe maybe many of us have some thing that disables us from completely participating in this life. [...] You are so beyond that and it is transforming to witness.

*(R13, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

it's good for me to know the history of your illness, but again I don't know if you need people to know that before...but for me, knowing that and seeing two performances so far and knowing a lot of improvisers, I can easily say that you are one of the most skilled improvisers I've met...part of it is whatever you're doing just keep doing that...you're amazing, you're really skilled, you're really sensitive, really fearless and that's obvious [...] I don't feel tension when you're performing, nothing feels off, you're just embodying who you are when you're doing your thing... you're very sensitive, very present to what's going on...

*(R28, Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

Embodying non-prescriptive, transformative catalysts addresses to the very core what I am seeking to do through performance, drawing together ‘essential connections between categories of experience we take to be fundamentally human’ (Phelan, 2005 p.324). This includes the ‘phenomenological experience of embodiment’ (2005, p.234) through which we may come to understand that:

it is possible to see ‘everything as performance’, and it is possible to see everyone as disabled, while also and at the same time recognizing that there are conceptual and perceptual frames that interpret specific events and specific bodies as extraordinary. [...] This fact has meant that we must see the world in a dialectical fashion: we are simultaneously alive to our death and deadened to aspects of our life. This duality means it is necessary to think of live art, especially performance, as both integral to, and separate from, daily life (Phelan, 2005 p.324).

The experience of disability, in my daily life, can make me feel, simultaneously separate from, and integral to, the (ecological) performance of my daily life.

### ***Performance/Performing/Performers of Ecological Disability***

*[B]ecause I am identified with Earth as well as being a human being, if I were to conceive of myself as anything, it would be as a go-between.*

~Rachel Rosenthal  
(1994-5 cited in Grilikhes, 1997 p.60)

Disabled artists, and their allies (who *may* be considered ~~disabled~~), are increasingly, more directly, taking up the ecological baton in their work. As a FREAK OF NATURE, I am reminded here, of the (not-so-distant) historical roots of much Western disability performance/visibility, that of the

infamous Freak or Side Shows: simultaneously culturally analogous to our dealings with Nature. As such, I had the honour to be asked to guest edit a special themed journal issue for the *Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts Quarterly* in 2017, titled *dis/sustain/ability*. The issue I curated featured the work of numerous international artists (all, but one, were performance practitioners and/or theorists; and over half, self-identifying as disabled) highlighting the diversity of practice and approach vis-à-vis the climate of potential sustainable change in this Anthropocenic chaos. I include here the responses from the artistic contributors, as well as my own, who were asked to define ‘dis/sustain/ability’ in 25 words or less. In the interest of keeping the performance thread alive in this thesis – conjoining it pertinently with a theoretical foundation, above and to follow – these responses serve as vibrant reminders and catalysts for connection: disability performance provocations:

**Jennifer [Fink]:**

You will never be out of the woods.  
You will never be the woods.  
You are the woods.

**Julie [Laffin]:**

At first I was crashing and burning—consumed by loss.  
Acceptance was arduous; I was being prepared to have all  
of my perceptions changed forever.

**Dee [Heddon]:**

Interdependency, vulnerability, co-habitation, across and  
between, you/i/we/me/us.

**Neil [Marcus]:**

We each use systems to make our worlds usable and  
thriving. The bright sun makes our lives work in so many  
ways. A good joke sheds light on life when we need  
laughter.

**Petra [Kuppers]:**

Continuing to be in flow, through the years, while living in  
an ableist society. Searching for connection, taking  
responsibility, engaging, widening the circle.

**Stephanie [Heit]:**

breathe inside fire or water or soil. make like a succulent, plump and adaptable. try on constraints then wiggle. notice movement – micro / macro.

**Bree [Hadley]:**

arranging human, physical, financial, and environmental resources in such a way that every being can live a meaningful, productive, and comfortable life now and into the future

**Susanna [Uchatius]:**

To separate these three words...though dis is not a word by a slash...makes them read as separate.

Dis is to negate, deem valueless...sustain is to lift up, support for all time and forever...ability is the skill, the life within that understands and knows how.

Together...dissustainability...though unrecognized or hidden, is the life within that knows and breaths within us all.

**Sandie [Yi]:**

‘Disability’ and ‘ability’ are not binary terms; making art about Crip/disability experiences is to sustain disability culture and the heritage of resistance and resilience.

**Ray [Jacobs]:**

It’s the long slow note made up of a feast of harmonics, always in flux, ever changing, transforming and subverting.

**Bronwyn (guest editor):**

... circles with edges, borders with welcome signs, awareness of networks, improvisation, interdependence, adaptation, vitality, necessity, inextricability, knitting/weaving/breathing-being...living in shared uniqueness/norming difference...verbing: ...

*(Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts Quarterly, Vol.18, 2017, p.7).*

If asked to compare my style of performance with that of another artist – even though Action Theater and *butoh* have largely informed mine – I feel it would be American performance artist Rachel Rosenthal.<sup>58</sup> Although stylistically very different, the recently deceased performer (1926-2015) most

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<sup>58</sup> I have only experienced Rosenthal’s work through her writings and filmed footage.

often worked solo, incorporated much improvisation and used her body as ecological metaphor (her breaking, osteoporosis-riddled bones compared to Pangaea and tectonic movements). She, like myself, performed as a conduit for/of connection.

The sense of performing for/as conduit for – or seeking – connection is implicitly and explicitly explored increasingly in the performance work of many disabled and/or ecological practitioners. The distinctions and overlaps between the disciplines – performance, ecology and disability – are increasingly blurring, despite what Arons and May (2012) address:

‘Performance’ and ‘ecology’ — do not easily or readily share space together, either materially or ontologically. This paradox explains in part why, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, ecology and environment are not only underrepresented and underthematized on the Western stage, but also undertheorized in theater and performance scholarship. Representing and thematizing the more-than-human world in performance with the tools we generally bring to bear on the task seems to require, by default, reinscribing that binary divide between culture and nature, given that performance itself is always already a cultural interpretation of and overlay onto the ‘natural’ world (p.1).

and, that which Sandahl and Auslander note:

Since disability studies is implicitly conceptualized as the study of a group of people (a very large group, since most of us are, or will be, disabled to one degree or another) and performance studies addresses a concept that transcends group identifications, the two fields are not based in similar epistemologies. As emerging interdisciplines, however, both have confronted problems of definition and distinction...’ (2008 p.7).

Ecological performance practitioners are confronting the same epistemological, if not ontological and philosophical, quagmires as the disciplinary efforts of disability and performance. I argue that both disability and ecology epistemologically transcend ‘group identifications’, and that

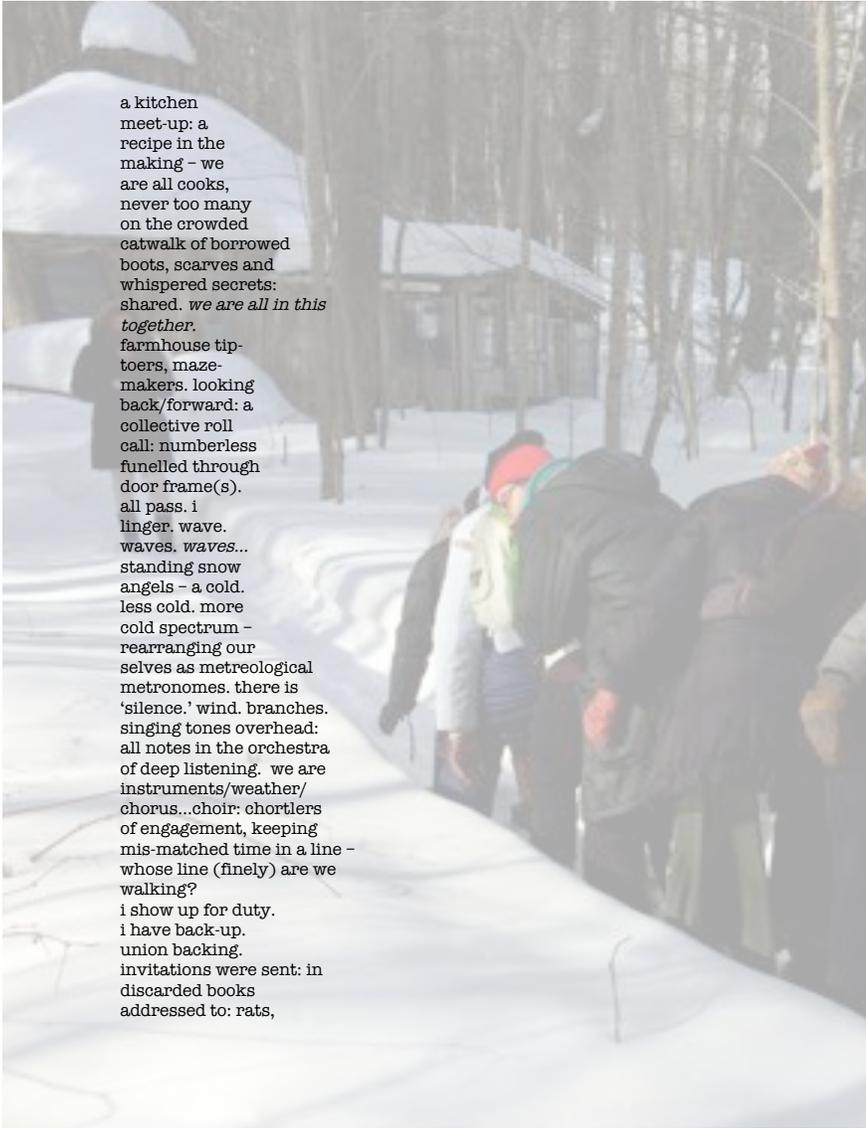
performance practices are serving to make these links transferable and the prescience of these understandings accessible.

In *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, editors Gabrielle Giannachi and Nigel Stewart, remark that it is in the interface between ecology and the arts:

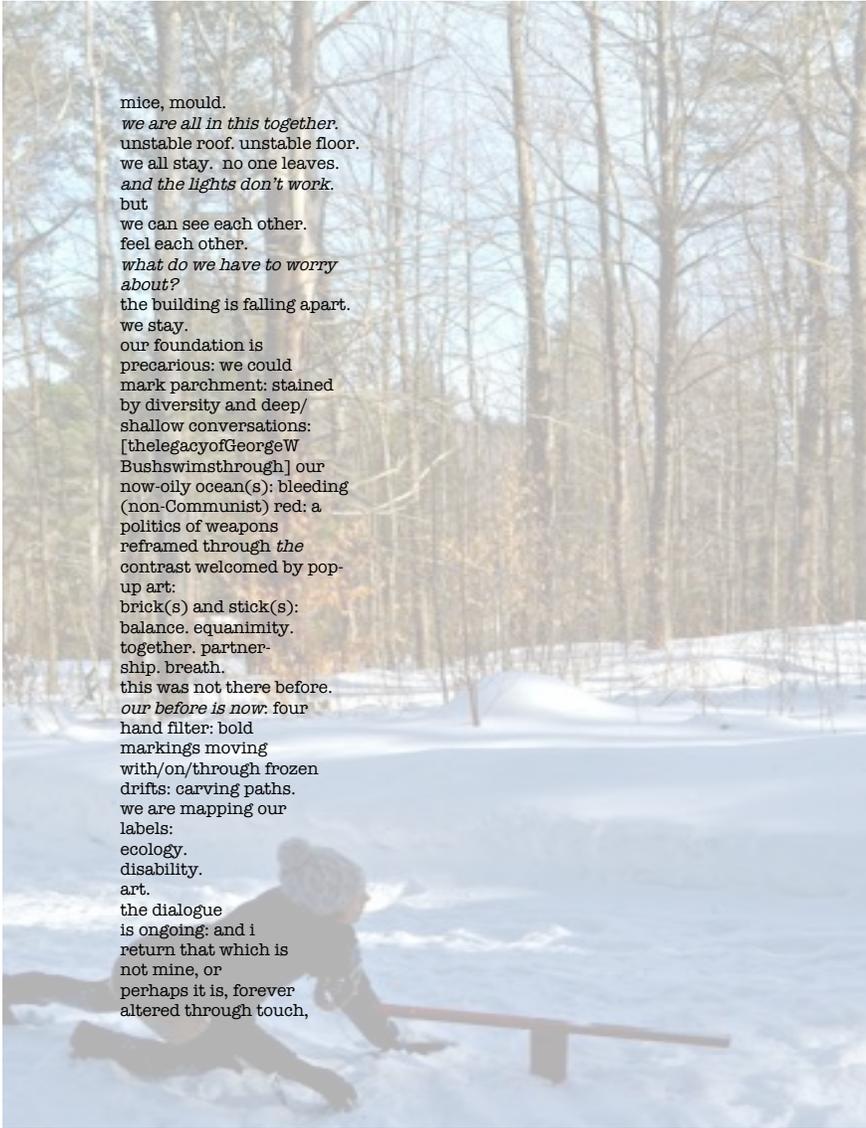
that some of the most aesthetically inspiring *and* politically challenging works are found because it is in an ecologically-oriented art that the very relationships between human beings and nature are being questioned, critiqued and even reinvented (2006, p.20, emphasis in original).

The reinvention, critique, and emerging questioning surrounding the examination of performance, ecology *and* disability together is gaining muster. I was, again, solicited to write a chapter for *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Arts, Culture and Media Studies* (2018) edited by Donna McDonald and Bree Hadley, illustrating how I am conjoining these areas together. Ahistorically, I argue, that these ‘disciplines’ have never been separate, and simultaneously have never existed: the improvisatory [shaman] embodying them in everyday and performative life.

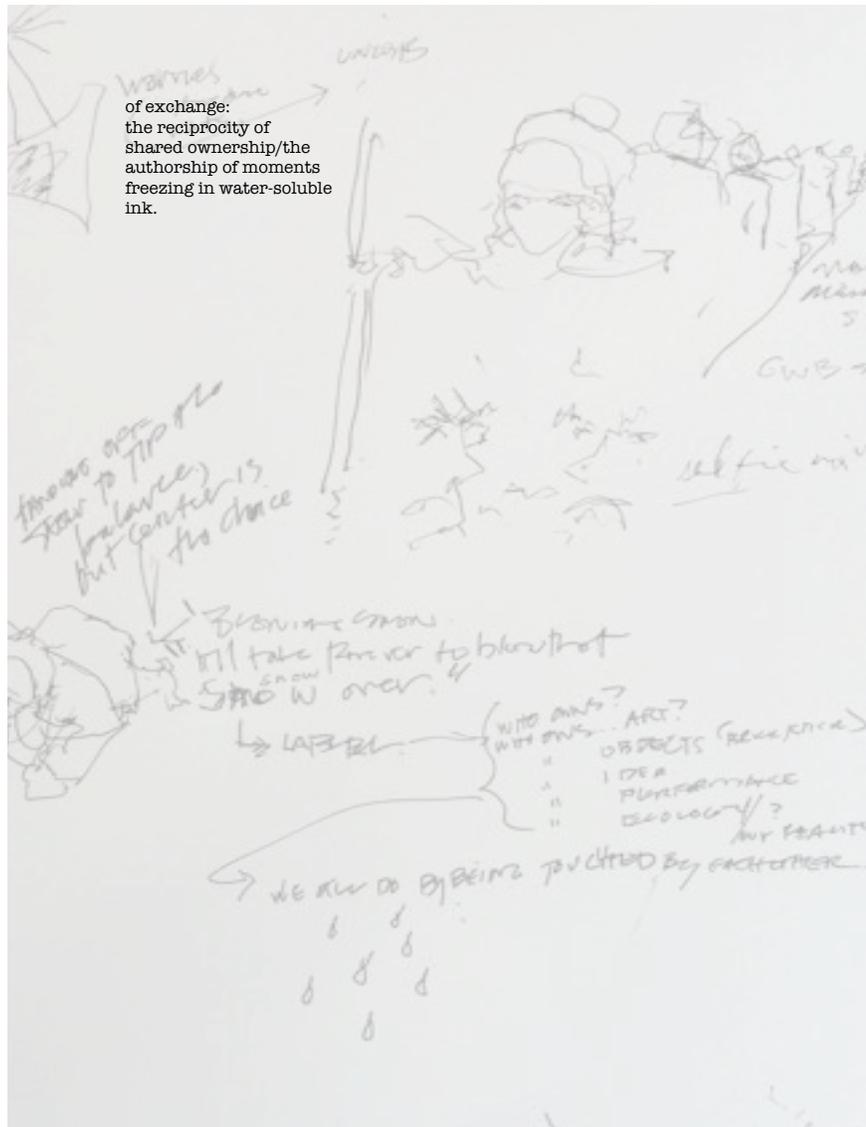
I share here the third poem I scribed (*Earthdance*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015). The poem speaks to the fact that ‘*we are all in this together*’ as we (re)map ‘our labels’: those of disability, ecology and art. As it elucidates, ‘the dialogue is ongoing’...



a kitchen  
meet-up: a  
recipe in the  
making - we  
are all cooks,  
never too many  
on the crowded  
catwalk of borrowed  
boots, scarves and  
whispered secrets:  
shared. *we are all in this  
together.*  
farmhouse tip-  
toers, maze-  
makers. looking  
back/forward: a  
collective roll  
call: numberless  
funnelled through  
door frame(s).  
all pass. i  
linger. wave.  
waves. *waves...*  
standing snow  
angels - a cold.  
less cold. more  
cold spectrum -  
rearranging our  
selves as metreological  
metronomes. there is  
'silence.' wind. branches.  
singing tones overhead:  
all notes in the orchestra  
of deep listening. we are  
instruments/weather/  
chorus...choir: chortlers  
of engagement, keeping  
mis-matched time in a line -  
whose line (finely) are we  
walking?  
i show up for duty.  
i have back-up.  
union backing.  
invitations were sent: in  
discarded books  
addressed to: rats,

A photograph of a person in winter clothing kneeling in a snowy forest. The person is leaning on a horizontal wooden beam. The background consists of many bare trees under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

mice, mould.  
*we are all in this together.*  
unstable roof. unstable floor.  
we all stay. no one leaves.  
*and the lights don't work.*  
but  
we can see each other.  
feel each other.  
*what do we have to worry  
about?*  
the building is falling apart.  
we stay.  
our foundation is  
precarious: we could  
mark parchment: stained  
by diversity and deep/  
shallow conversations:  
[the legacy of George W  
Bush swim through] our  
now-oily ocean(s): bleeding  
(non-Communist) red: a  
politics of weapons  
reframed through *the*  
contrast welcomed by pop-  
up art:  
brick(s) and stick(s):  
balance. equanimity.  
together. partner-  
ship. breath.  
this was not there before.  
*our before is now:* four  
hand filter: bold  
markings moving  
with/on/through frozen  
drifts: carving paths.  
we are mapping our  
labels:  
ecology.  
disability.  
art.  
the dialogue  
is ongoing: and i  
return that which is  
not mine, or  
perhaps it is, forever  
altered through touch,



(Please Now View: *Earthdance 2 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/286634978>)

## **Embodiment**

*Ask the question, notice the response, whole body the teacher.*

~Deborah Hay

(2006 cited in Sarco-Thomas, 2010 p.80)

I have come to appreciate embodiment as a process. As a verb. As

the unfolding of (my) experiencing. Embodiment is the verbing of my query ‘how does one simultaneously hold questions, while being completely responsive to the moment?’

Breaking down those boundaries in a moment [arrow] moment process and watching you ask questions with your whole being; for me was the most profound part of the experience/moments/performance. It seemed very Human.

(R29, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

I came to appreciate corporeally *figured* questioning, as embodiment.

Questioning as an active openness that houses boundless capacity for experiencing. Embodiment, as the capacity for trans-corporeal feeling.

My interpretation of ‘embodiment’ was challenged by Zaporah (13<sup>th</sup> November 2015) who retorted: ‘*the body asking questions?*’ Seated together on a bench, a conversational exchange ensued:

*BP*: ‘Asking questions’ is another way of me saying ‘remaining open to the world’, to being open to that experiencing...

*RZ*: Then why is *that* body? It’s mental...it’s mental being open to the world, the idea of being open...I mean as soon as we start talking...

*BP*: But how is the concept of the body not a mental one either?

*RZ*: Well, that true too...but the experiencing is not mental.

*BP*: For me, trying to find my own way of languaging it [embodiment]...was that experiencing is always an ongoing reflexive questioning.

*RZ*: I don’t think it’s reflective<sup>59</sup>...it’s just a knowing...as soon as I’m reflecting it becomes objectified.

*BP*: Okay...that’s true too... but a knowing sometimes is employed as being fixed...

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<sup>59</sup> Of note, I used the word ‘reflexive’, while Zaporah responded using the term ‘reflective’. One might suggest that the latter sounds contemplative and passive, whilst I was deliberately engaging a sense of activity.

RZ: Oh, I see...<sup>60</sup>

The conversation overlaps with some of the same considerations relating to how I've approached the analysis of this practice: where do we articulate our orientations into what is considered mental, conceptual, objectified; what qualifies embodied knowing and/or experiencing. The delineations are as specific or as ambiguous, as different or as similar as the very body who experiences and relates to them.

Prior to engaging with the explorations of this project, my associations with the term embodiment were more fixed or determined: 'where body functions as compartmentalized within autonomous zones and properly assigned functions' (Banes and Lepecki, 2007 p.5). These personal – if not wholly inaccurate – associations were likely derived from my initial forays into theatre training. In order to 'embody' a character, performers were taught to go to great lengths to both understand and harness their bodies in order to be able to control them. Embodiment, associatively, in this sense, became the property of skill, command and mastery. I perceived it purely as physical. Embodiment, appreciated as such – in such a limited frame – leaves little room for a body which begins to act in ways at first unfamiliar, at times feeling foreign. It leaves little room for a body engaged in a continuous catch-up game of understanding: [that of] *my* body. Embodiment means much more to me now, but from the purview of my initial understanding, my experience with the onset of Wilson's Disease was nothing short of what could be termed as, *disembodying*. This vicissitude posed a direct challenge

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<sup>60</sup> In an email exchange with Zaporah, a year-and-a-half later, reminiscing with her about our conversation, she clarified 'I meant knowing as a felt sense, explainable' (1<sup>st</sup> June 2017).

to my belief in non-duality. If I was to hold on to this concept of embodiment, then I was entrenching my/self in binaries. My concept of self/body was changing. The qualities of (dis)embodiment were drawing me closer to trying to make sense of my fluxing corporeality. *Disorienting* feelings, were claiming an orientation towards aligning with body in/as dynamism, in/as bodyscape. It *eventually* became clear, that chiasmic sensations were being perpetuated by my engaging with embodiment as being contingent on ableist ideals of physical prowess. My body was engaged in a (visual) process that was defying accepted ableist norms: *I shook. I drooled. I slurred.* I needed to find movement within descriptors in order to be able to come to understand what and how my em-body-MEANT. This was the process of engaging in questions.

Performance practitioner-scholar Ben Spatz, in his monograph *What a Body Can Do* (2015) defines ‘embodiment’ and ‘embodied practice’ as being that which includes all of the following:

thought, mind, brain, intellect, rationality, speech, and language. While ‘body’ or ‘bodily’ could be taken to mean only that which is *physical*, such as movement and gesture, I use ‘embodied’ to indicate a wider territory: everything that bodies can do (p.11, emphasis in original).

I appreciate Spatz’s holistic embrace, the ‘wider territory’, in his description of embodiment. It was this wider territory which I was originally lacking in my associations with the term. His definition, now, subsequently, prompts me to ask: Can embodiment equally mean everything that bodies can|not do, or once did, or may be able to do in the future, or can empathetically experience? I argue that indeed it can and does.

‘[E]mbodiment seen complexly [...] embraces what the body has become and

will become relative to the demands on it, whether environmental, representational, or corporeal' (Siebers, 2013 p.291). Similarly, conjoining [the inseparable] notions of trans-corporeality with embodiment, Alaimo remarks, for:

trans-corporeality to be an ethical mode of being, the material self must not be a finished, self-contained product of evolutionary genealogies but a site where the knowledges and practices of embodiment are undertaken as part of the world's becoming (2016a, p.127).

By enlarging the scope of embodiment to encompass a range of (potentially) shared knowabilities – *of trans-corporealities* – it elicits the implicit (potential/possible) responsibilities invoked by our hard-wired empathetic faculties.

Spatz's statement brings up the temporal situatedness of embodiment: as fluid verb and its degree of fixity as noun. It calls us into the immediacy of the kinesthetic capacities of mirror neuronal networks. It conjures up many interpretative extensions, including notions of 'phantom limb' experiences by amputees (see Merleau-Ponty, 2002). In the case of disability, it calls into play Siebers' remark that disability 'creates theories of embodiment more complex than the ideology of ability allows, and these many embodiments are each crucial to the understanding of humanity and its variations' (2013, p.279). It then prompts me, as Stanton Garner suggests, to ask whether we are able 'to accept', or I prefer to say *embody*, 'the ethical responsibilities that empathy entails' (2015, p.91). The subsequent question, bequeathed by such embodied thinking, surfaced in one of my performance poems:

*how do we define  
responsibility?*

*(Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)*

The ‘responsibility of our shared embodiments’ will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter Nine and Ten, questioning much as Bennett (2010) does, whether:

the ethical responsibility an individual human now resides in one’s response to the assemblages in which one finds oneself participating: Do I attempt to extricate myself from assemblages whose trajectory is likely to do harm? (p.37)

A trajectory of harm, or a trajectory of bodies’ negotiations between an ecological-made-technological world, is taken up ontologically by Spatz, when he asks: ‘It is even worth asking whether embodiment as a concept has developed precisely in response to and in order to cope with this disbalance?’ (2017a, p.267). Spatz is articulating, albeit differently, the [necessary] shift in our articulations/formations of embodiment; that which I perceive as a responsive engaged verbing of interconnection, of trans-corporeality.

This thesis equally finds resonance with other unbounded descriptions of embodiment, such as offered by Zaporah:

Embodiment is the condition that has to be there for this other magical thing to happen, which is just receptivity to the unknown, where the unknown is informing the action, not just the known (2013, n.p.).

and

Embodiment is the experiencing of the body – I-N-G – *experiencing* of the body – whether its kinetic, whether its vocal...experiencing the body, how the body is experiencing moment to moment impacts the content of every single moment... (pers. comm. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

Appreciating embodiment as *experiencing* with I-N-G, in the improvisational performance moment, this congruency is expressed as non-binary verbing. Wherein, for example – although subtle, but important – if crawling, my unbifurcated synthesis finds me ‘as crawl’ rather than feeling that ‘I am crawling’, because my improvisational moment is E-primed.<sup>61</sup> *Might the E stand for Embodiment?*, because:

at the subatomic level the interrelations and interactions between the parts of the whole are more fundamental than the parts themselves. There is motion but there are, ultimately, no moving objects; there is activity but there are no actors; there are no dancers, there is only the dance (Capra, 1983 p.92).

What might appear as an innocuous differentiation, holds relevance to how I orient myself within the improvisational moment with my own permeability and notions of sub- and objectivity (as discussed in Chapter Two), and the affect/effect of engaging in such styles of performance sharing. The content of every single moment, in my – and Zaporah’s – improvisational vocabulary contains *as present* the dynamism of empathetic exchange. In other words, a sensed experiencing of what bodies have the capacity of doing.

Improvisation, can be therefore considered a most suitable methodology through which to interrogate embodiment.

Noland in *Agency and Embodiment* (2009) adds further dimension to the processual emphasis I place on embodiment, drawing attention to the effects of culture on informing our corporeal synthesizing through our respective worldviews. She posits embodiment as ‘the process whereby

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<sup>61</sup> I note the irony here – or potential pointing towards irony – given that most of my poems begin with ‘i am’. The ‘i am’ of the poems is not (solely) personal – it is simultaneously a third-i/eye perspective – serving to literally express my ensual immersion and non-dualistic experiencing of self-within-and-as-world.

collective behaviors and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, and rendered individual and “lived” at the level of the body’ (p.9). Embodiment is thus, both a personal and collective experiencing. Much like the present moment – a space where the I [may] dissolve[s] into an intra/trans-corporeal awareness – [the] lived and perceived experience remains that of the experiencer. Gail Weiss’ approach resonates here, describing embodiment as intercorporeality. Resonating with Alaimo’s theories of trans-corporeality, Weiss stresses the importance of emphasizing ‘that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continuous interactions with other human and non-human bodies’ (1991, p.5). Embodiment becomes the testing of the tenets of our perspectives, the frameworks of views, the grips of our semantics and semiotics.

Thomas C. Csordas considers embodiment as an ‘indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world’ (1994 in 2015, p.50). He captures a similar sense of honouring the body’s unfurling involvement with world, as does Ingold:

I regard embodiment as a movement of incorporation rather than inscription, not a transcribing of form onto material but a movement wherein forms themselves are generated (1990 cited in Reeve, 2008 p.60).

The idea of embodiment being the generator of forms I interpret through Zaporah’s (2013) description, wherein form ‘is never what; form is always how’ (n.p.). Action Theater engages form as explorations into the relationships between the time, the space, the shape, the dynamics, the context. In so doing, the body becomes the very site *forming* the questions for the *experiencing*. The form is the vessel for actively sharing in

experience. With trans-corporeal animate affinity, bodies-as-site, conjoin with the specificity of site as location, wherein ‘sites *inform* the improvisations’ (Woods, 2013 p.54, emphasis in original). Morton (2010a) resonantly contends that ‘the *form* of the ecological thought is at least as important as its *content*. It’s not simply a matter of *what* you’re thinking about. It’s also a matter of *how* you think’ (p.4, emphasis in original). When elaborating on effective evocations of site-specific performance improvisations, Zaporah remarked: ‘I think it’s about form. It’s how you’re forming what you’re feeling’ (pers. comm. 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

Situating site-specific improvisations within a discursive reciprocity, one must then inverse the principle, asking – much as Heim (2012) provokes us to consider – whether the balance of exchange between site/person is equal or able to be gauged through the same temporal frame. ‘An attunement with a place may be transformative for the human; less certain is what it may do for the place. The reciprocity may be uneven’ (Heim, 2012 p.126).<sup>62</sup> Applying Doreen Massey’s (2005) assertion with Heim’s reminder that ‘embodiment is always instantiated, local, and specific’ (p.185) can serve as partial metric for our (tendency) to want to accord/relieve the application of an anthropocentric angle to the equation. Morton claims that:

‘Here’ is a mesh of entangled presences and absences, not a foundational, localist, antiglobal concept. ‘Here’ contains difference. Ambience points us to the here, now, with the artwork. And ambience opens up our ideas of space and place into radical questioning (2010a, p.104).

Our measures of balance might not always be even. The effects of our Anthropocenic actions are evidence of such. The body becomes the

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<sup>62</sup> As ‘attunement’ is featured in Heim’s sentence, one cannot quip in these times of global crisis, ‘if notions of reciprocity are present at all.’

calibrator of meaning, affects and effects. Site-specificity deters homogenization. The process of making site-specific work *may* further enable radical questioning. I preface that my work *must* engage opportunities for appreciating multiplicity and response.

Situating the process of embodiment-as-[trans-corporeal]-questions in movement lends further meaning to the decision to engage in improvisations in a variety of locations – multiple *heres*. This choice thereby extends the boundaries of the familiar, the known: effectively *displacing* them/me. Sarah Pink cites David Howes in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* that while ‘the paradigm of “embodiment” implies an integration of mind and body, the emergent paradigm of emplacement suggests the sensuous interrelationship of body—mind—environment’ (2005 in 2009, p.25). Pink continues by suggesting that, ‘the idea of emplacement supersedes that of embodiment’ and that ‘the experiencing, knowing and emplaced body is therefore central to the idea of a sensory ethnography. Ethnographic practice entails our multisensorial embodied engagement with others’ (pp.25-26). By virtue of this description, ‘environment’ and ‘embodiment’ are contingent paradigms involving necessary collaboration with ‘others’. Perhaps emplacement, here, becomes a more appropriate term for site-specific improvisation.

### ***Eco|Feminism***

Feminist frames are implicitly *sited* in my work. My choice to examine my relationships to my own performance of embodiment – as dislocating as they may be – most specifically through ecological and

disability frames, does not negate – but rather encompasses, and is supported by – feminist theory. The female body, performing, invokes questions of visibility, voice and voyeurism. Admittedly, it was never my desire to approach feminist principles head-on in my work, all the while acknowledging the impossibility of not doing so. Prompted initially by my intention to directly interrogate my relationships to notions of the ‘flesh’, I purposefully chose to be clothed, albeit minimally. In the first year, I wore a scant slip – mute in colour and style – potentially availing itself to sexualized interpretations as lingerie.<sup>63</sup> The second year’s outfit was bolder and brighter, white with metallic shine. My copper slip, unintentionally, was sewn a little too short and left me more exposed than I had intended. Though inadvertent, the *bare* invitation offered up by this ‘mistake’ created a welcome opportunity to explore further questions of (in)visibility. These were in addition to the questions already invoked for me with the wearing of a slip – which embodied the metaphor of the traditional layer between the seen and unseen. *In the representational space of performance* – demarked only by crowd and costume – *where and how does the line change my being woman-in-the-world?*

how far do we let her go  
how much perspective can we gain  
before we pass from With to Other  
was Other ever true?  
is With ever completely real?

Between Two Lines  
we are contained  
this wet sandy street

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<sup>63</sup> An examination of the word ‘mute’ is further taken up in Chapter Seven, prompted by Bookchin’s reference to a ‘mute nature’. Using this arguable adjective to describe the costume, holds even further relevance when considered through the implications of ‘muting’ and being ‘muted’ in an eco/dis/fem frame.

becomes our body vessel

*(Poem excerpt, Natasha M. Brooks-Sperduti,  
Earthdance 8, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I quickly recognized in the embodiment through site, costuming differences and event, the potential to marry concepts and discover analogous explorations of our estrangement with nature, environment, and wilderness; from ‘[m]othering’ nature/nurture to plinthing. How did my attire and placement feature to situate me with/against each evolving moment? How did the act of ‘performance’ either integrate or distance the potential for these understandings to be interrogated? The answers were never fixed.

Bronwyn’s bare feet padded over the beaten road and through the silted triangle between the roads where most cars don’t drive. [...] I was distracted by Bronwyn’s hard nipples (I’m such a teenage boy on some level) and had to work to focus on the performance. I guessed that clothing would get in the way of embodying the site and that her body needed to be witnessed as part of her explorations with her disability.

*(R5, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

...to contrast the location with white paint and copper slip, brought me more into awareness of the scene.

*(R1, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)*

Bronwyn’s outfit is a perfect reflection... The white paint represents snow, the brown dress mirrors the ground peaking through.

*(R9, Earthdance 6, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I didn’t really register consciously your ‘performer’s body’ – the costume, mask, white-body make-up – but it was a subliminal ‘given’; foregrounded by the schoolboys’ reaction. But I read this, I think, as a body-in-performance (consciously and courageously) rather than a ‘performing body’. It said things about what bodies do to us as we/they experience new dimensions/configurations we don’t necessarily understand; how we then explore/configure /live them (for better or worse).

*(R17, Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016)*

My costumed placement was not the terrain of exclusivity. Rather, I recognized, the extremes could hold the one in the other at (all) times. As my choices generated contextual questions relating to feminism, so too did the ‘white’ of year two, invite an examination of the overlaps between Critical Race Theory with Disability and Ecology Studies. The white was an intentional testament to my inner balancing of zinc with copper: made interpretatively visible, and a nod towards *butoh*’s traditional aesthetic. My use of ‘white’ could be challenged on grounds of (re)appropriating another culture’s particular performance markings, and/or as simultaneously highlighting exposing the ‘whiteness’ of privilege, and/or notions of estrangement from ‘nature’, and/or the homogenization of our culture and my relationships and awareness within these frames:

A ‘white wilderness’ is socially constructed and grounded in race, class, gender and cultural ideologies (DeLuca and Demo 2001). Whiteness, as a way of knowing, becomes *the* way of understanding our [American] environment, and representation and rhetoric, becomes part of our educational systems, our institution, and our personal beliefs (Sundberg 2002; DeLuca and Demo 2001; Smedley 1993) (Finney, 2014 p.3, emphasis in original).

I tried/try to hold these realities in consort with each other – however [un]comfortable they may be, availing my criticality and sensitivities to the contexts as they emerged...

### ***White (Mother) Nature***

The entrenched and contradictory Western practices of both ‘backgrounding’ and ‘pedestalling’ women and nature (Plumwood, 1993 referenced in Alaimo, 2010b p.22) have been explored in my performances:

hair stands  
erect  
alive  
on her arms  
a million  
tiny antenna  
for each cell

could there be  
More awake?  
More possessed?  
More alert?  
I see prey.

*(Poem excerpt, Natasha M. Brooks-Sperduti,  
Earthdance 8, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I am ekphrastically seen as prey...or possibly as preying (who is the 'I?'). I feel i am both. I am vulnerably strong. I am independently dependent. I am (was) in the improvisation, hitchhiking on a country road. 'Alone'. I was picked up by a single, White man in a car. I accepted the ride.<sup>64</sup> As Neil Smith has said:

Placing nature on a pedestal as ultimately uncontrollable merely renders 'her' a worthy opponent: romancing nature as foreplay. By being so aggressive, by threatening to control, nature is asking for it. Simultaneously woman and other, she is M/Other Nature... The Big Guy directs while M/Other Nature does the work... (cited in Lippard, 1997, p.12).

Morton remarks that 'putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman' (2007, p.5). He calls this an act of paradoxical 'sadistic admiration' (p.5).

Extending on what these two male scholars have noted, Lucy Lippard continues:

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<sup>64</sup> This improvisation 'ended' when one of the participants went and retrieved his car, responding to my thumbed-out request (which had found me hitchhiking for some time). I accepted the ride, knowing the driver as an audience/participant. There remains the unknown of how I – or the spectators – would have responded had another vehicle approached, 'unassociated' with our event, and offered me a ride...

In the last twenty years or so, the word ‘environment’ has replaced and demythologized a great part of what was once considered Mother Nature, but it allows us to maintain the separation: humans are the center, *surrounded* by everything else, reflecting the way Western culture has been built in opposition to nature (1997, p.12, emphasis in original).

Sites and slip *addressed* and identified ‘woman’ – identified me, performing – and/with/against/fore-and backgrounded by environment. Following my first improvisation in Huddersfield, one respondent remarked:

From the outset, the scant clothing encouraged a sense of concern for her vulnerability against a potentially harsh environment / climate. In the encounters with a passing audience, the select audience acted like bodyguards surrounding and securing Bronwyn, and this is something I certainly felt a sense of concern and protectiveness in those moments. This made the overall experience of the performance a humane / human one that sometimes extended into a connection between performer and environment, but often prioritized the performer over the environment.

*(R30, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

The inextricability of the ecological frame from the social cultured frame is evidenced in the above observation. The description of a ‘potentially harsh environment / climate’ encompassed both a reference to the temperatures of the day and their enmeshment and interplay with the underlying (yet unseen) ‘threat’ to women present in a working-class town. The comment, reminds me of Iris Marion Young’s pronouncement, that ‘women in sexist society are physically handicapped’ (1990 cited in Wendell, 1996 p.15). Aligning with the sentiments expressed by the above respondent, Alaimo remarks: ‘it is possible to imagine that the exposed flesh may embody an ethical recognition that arises from a sense of humans as inescapably woven into a trans-corporeal, material realm’ (2010b, p.19). She further marries all of the above concepts through her resonant ethics of trans-corporeality which ‘emphasizes

the imbrication of human bodies not only with each other, but with non-human creatures and physical landscapes' (2010, p.18). Alaimo underscores the importance of feminist performance theories which can offer 'a critique, subversion, or evasion of the dominant modes of representation and the gendered scenarios of visibility' (p.18).

It would be remiss of me not to take notice that the majority of academic voices supporting my arguments are those put forward by the Western, white, majority. In so stating, I am not devaluing the productive input of these voices (nor their variability), but it does slant what arguments gain dominance or are marginalized within the various fields of study. Dominant modes of representation and scenarios of visibility are not simply restricted to a homogenized, patriarchal hetero-normative narrative in relationship to our environment, but apply too to its now-systemic segregational practices. One such example is that while environmentalists [may] advocate 'the importance of pursuing social justice as an integral part of sustainable living, the significance of disablism, as a form of oppression, has not registered with them' (Imrie and Thomas, 2008 cited in Abbott and Porter, 2013 p.847).

The (eco)feminist frame similarly finds correlational sentiments with Critical Race Studies<sup>65</sup> as it contends with 'the bitterly divisive constructions of race and nature'. Paul Outka remarks:

This legacy – in which whites viewed black people as part of the natural world, and then proceeded to treat them with the same mixture of contempt, false reverence, and real exploitation that also marks American environmental history – (2008 cited in Finney, 2014 p. 38)

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<sup>65</sup> Although, race remains a contested category – it does still have strong implications within our cultural frameworks, reflected in access to education, work, and shelter. Critical Race Theory works at the intersections of critical theory, law, and power.

...and so too, this study finds correlations with ~~Post~~colonial studies.<sup>66</sup>

The particular study of North America's attempted genocidal-projects versus the Indigenous populations (albeit slightly different in both Canada and the United States) contends with the same paradox of eco-feminism: subjugation and plinthing. The constructs range from the celebrated 'eco-Indian' trope – 'a stereotype often employed to suggest a type of ecological nostalgia, which can also be considered as a reframing of colonial notions of "otherness"' (Woynarski, 2015a p.186) – to the cultural effacing practices asserted here in 'Environmentalism's Racist History' (2015):

In [Thoreau's] essay 'Walking' which gave environmentalists the slogan 'In wildness is the preservation of the world', Thoreau proposed that American greatness arose as 'the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural'. For both Muir [American conservationist, founder of the Sierra Club] and Thoreau, working, consuming, occupying, and admiring American nature was a way for a certain kind of white person to become symbolically native to the continent (Purdy, n.p.).

The eco-feminist, critical race and ~~post~~colonial frames, though not treated in depth in this study – inform the (current) histories in all three countries in which I performed. Canada, the United States and England, have all simultaneously occupied/adopted the designation of colonial power, while all have and currently still navigate the ghettoization of peoples/place.

This study strives to consider a trans-corporeal ethic not as a naïve suggestion or afforded luxury of the privileged, but as a transparent honouring of the current histories which make such a suggestion not a broad-

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<sup>66</sup> Please note I have always chafed up against the term 'postcolonial', as it unfortunately seems to imply that colonial practices are over. This is far from the case, and the very implications of past and current colonial practices form the basis of this area of inquiry.

sweeping idealistic statement, but an examination of the insidious vast global discrepancies which attest to the failure to practice such an ethic.

In my improvisations, I strove to hold an awareness of the polarities between theory and the living eco/social denigratory *disenfranchised* ‘realities’ of our present. The study questions the value of considering our global crises within such a frame. My improvisational identity operated with an understanding that ‘Anthropocentrism, environmental racism and sexism are tied to colonial assumptions grounded in a history of ecological subjugation’ (Woynarski, 2015b p.20).

### ***Human(e) Interpretations***

My critical and creative deconstruction of ‘my’ human identity is dependent on my ‘human nature’ (female/mother). It is through this locus that my perceptions – *my language, my labels, my performances* – inform my entwinement, my embodiment, within the larger sphere. My improvisations embodied in multiple different ways my very presence, my being *(t)here*. They held within and between them, an engagement with my/our felt senses of displacements. Adele H. Bealer (2012) remarks that:

Identifying the performative consequences of a variety of discursive paradigms, eco-performance theory might also discover opportunities for transgressive intervention in the gaps and spaces that open between performance as doing and performativity as social construction (p.5).

Rooted in a reciprocal discursivity, I contend therefore that as I approach the discussion of the relationship(s) between performing disabled

and ecological identities, any of my observations will remain human.<sup>67</sup> *Will remain as a White woman's*. It is with 'exceptional' privilege that I am able to explore my being-with-and-of-the-world, from this perspective.

My apprehension of my human perspective as a privilege equally does not automatically answer the questions: Is the performance of ecological and disabled identities dependent on the presence of the human? Are we performing notions of 'ecological selves' or are we, as selves being performed by ecology? And, further, are we performing and/or being performed by a self-disabling ecology? A renewed look at 'performance' is thus essential, to address the question of whether I perceive the more-than-human world as performing performers.

*The line is blurry.*

I could signal the 'flamboyant' courting rituals of birds, or the waggle dance of bees, as examples, which confound my human deciphering. With David Attenborough ringing in my head, these 'displays' appear to be performances-out-of-the-ordinary realm of the everyday – as something more specialized – particularly characterized and amplified by each individual animal. Such 'displays' appear through our human perceptions, to be an amplification of the everyday: and therefore arguably, performances. However, I argue that the bird's, or the bee's, behaviour is necessarily improvisatory. The animal is responding and accommodating the present

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<sup>67</sup> As will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four, the practice of Action Theater™ in particular, emphasizes keeping the experience human (while lessening the habitual human, thereby accessing our more 'animal' states...as these energies/flows/knowledges are encoded within us) – however, in so doing, the 'human' experience remains surprisingly knowable, however socially/culturally unnameable...

context of the moment. Their movements, as Chamberlain interprets, may ‘indicate an evolutionary continuity from insect behaviour to human dance – particularly in its non-literal aspect’ (Chamberlain, Lavery and Yarrow, 2012 p.23). The non-literal, and interrelated, evolutionary animal-human connection, finds Maxine Sheets-Johnstone asserting that, ‘Dance is older than man, in his bones as it were, in the form of an evolving empowering morphology and qualitative kinetics’ (2009, p.324). In such a case, I would argue that the qualitative *essence* (if not the term) of performance is present within the animals’ actions ...

This same bird or bee, *in situ*, is perhaps negotiating the disabling/disability factors that may influence the performance equation: such as deforestation or air pollution. The effects of the climate crisis have quite possibly forced the need for an exaggerated form of performance – an acceleration of the improvisatory – unto the more-than-human world: inextricably a co-performative paradigm.

In ‘Interspecies Improvisation’ (2016) sound improviser Rothenberg makes mention of the noted and *rapid* changes that have been occurring within the ‘songs’ of the South Pacific Humpback whale population. He credits this occurrence to several whales which ‘got lost’ (p.519). He does not question what might have prompted such directional differences, but rather focuses with marvel on how quickly the whales significantly adapted their own songs and affected the songs of those whales amongst whom they now found themselves. Though his angle of inquiry holds much merit, I do find it shocking, if not sadly ironic, that a practitioner of sonics would not have perhaps questioned if (human-made) sound may have forced the whales

off course. *Could the magnitude of underwater sonar or the dense swirling plastic gyres not be contributing factors to the disturbance of the whales echolocational abilities?* I suggest – much as Cornell University marine bioacoustics expert Christopher Clark asserts in ‘How Ocean Noise Pollution Wreaks Havoc on Marine Life’ (Schiffman, 2016 n.p.) – that such environmental factors well might have been.

Articles in *Current Biology* and *Nature*<sup>68</sup> report a desire for ‘novelty’, on the part of the Humpback whales, as the factor for their changing songs. ‘Cultural transmission’ and ‘cultural revolution’, feature respectively, in their titles. As much as this may be true, neither affords any ‘ecological’ speculation about the cultural dimension. Neither asks why the whales may have been off course, nor if/how we may have been implicated in rendering them so.<sup>69</sup> Though I acknowledge that this might have been beyond their purview, neither of these articles asks why the whales may have been off course, nor if/how we may have been implicated in rendering them so, a line of thinking I think should be considered. Their dis-(echo)-location was taken as a given, as if part of ‘normal’ anthropocentric parlance, with humans resuming their space, arguably, as distanced spectators. By highlighting this point, I admit, however, that I am tending towards two assumptions. The first being that I believe that ‘environmental’ factors influenced the whales behaviour. The second, being my willingness to accept, that in fact the whales were indeed, off-course. In conjunction with my first assumption, the latter may appear inadvertently to non-facetiously dismiss the possibility that

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<sup>68</sup> Article in *Current Biology* (2011) is by Garland *et al.* and *Nature* (2000) by Noad *et al.*

<sup>69</sup> Granted, I will acknowledge that this might not have been out of the purview of these articles; however, my point remains that such lines of thinking should be considered. Perhaps it should come as no surprise, given that the pieces were ‘situated’ in *Current Biology* and *Nature*...

the whales may have been travelling in different directions to meet representatives in order to consider different courses of action or they might have been meeting to check out whether sound and plastic pollution were common across the oceans. The potentiality for anthropocentric – if not, anthropomorphic – interpretations must continuously come into check. However, the gauge, as a human respondent is limited, at best.

### ***Inextricable Human Performers***

I cannot conceive of the performance of ‘ecology’ and ‘disability’ in the absence of the human because the human is inextricable from Earth. Through this interconnection, our human performances of ecology and disability are continuously informing and being informed by/effected and affected by the other-than-human world and so they cannot be conceived of apart. Paradoxically, my apprehension of ‘ecology’ as being a worldview, from which I cannot be made or am separate from, becomes objectified when I chose to name or discuss ‘it’. And yet, here I transfer the same qualities of invoking an *essence* bequeathed upon the more-than-human, to best understand my performance as human. Similarly, performing an ‘ecological self’ is contingent on being performed by ecology. Though I, human, might not be present in a plastic gyre in the Pacific, a piece of plastic that I used very well might be. In turn, the plastic gets consumed by an albatross, or becomes the leaching home of an ironically, adaptive hermit crab, which in turn, and thus, and then...:

One bottle cap—such a negligible bit of stuff to humans—  
may persist in killing birds and fish for hundreds  
(thousands?) of years. There is something uncanny about

ordinary human objects becoming the stuff of horror and destruction; these effects are magnified by the strange jumbling of scale in which a tiny bit of plastic can wreak havoc on the ecologies of the vast seas (Alaimo, 2016a p.130).

Thus, we all are engaging in ‘ecologically’ performing the simultaneity of being performed by a self-disabling ecology. The human does not necessarily have to be physically present in one site, to affect another. *On land. In sea.* Concurrently, the improvisations of the animate world, near and far, shape and inform me:

The potential for a revised responsiveness in one’s connections with distant voices and lands is possible, brought about by the assemblage of conversations in a space imbued with the aesthetic, and in which an ethical response is not pre-figured, but improvised and formed through those exchanges (Heim, 2006 p.208).

All at once we are embedded within a discussion of trans-corporeality.

Intriguing dimension is found by specifically approaching the above considerations through globe-spanning aesthetic practices. Improvised exchanges are metered and mattered through this oft-malignant web.

Alaimo’s remarks that:

Toxic bodies may provoke material, trans-corporeal ethics that turn from the disembodied values and ideals of bounded individuals toward an attention to situated, evolving practices that have far-reaching and often unforeseen consequences for multiple peoples, species, and ecologies (Alaimo, 2010a p.22).

We have produced our own toxins. We are metabolizing ourselves through our own productions and, according to Kershaw (2012), performance compulsions. We have created our own diseases: Multiple-Chemical

Sensitivity,<sup>70</sup> otherwise known as Environmental Illness, among others. As Morton remarks, industrial society has produced ‘asbestos, radioactivity, and dioxins, which have truly opened the body to its environment, albeit in the negative’ (2007, p.108). This observation stands alongside his comments about the ‘invention’ of the environment: ‘born at exactly the moment when it became a problem’ (2007, p.141). Gregory Bateson accurately observes that ‘Conscious man, as a changer of his environment, is now fully able to wreck himself and that environment—with the very best of conscious intentions’ (1972, p.446). Though proclaiming I aim for no distinction between organic and in-organic, it is with either acute awareness – *or contradictory reprieve* – that I choose to purchase those products *labeled* organic. So too, have I grown my own food: in soil and with water noted for their high copper content. Further taking up the notion of whether the human has to be present to be imbricated in a self-disabling ecology, Tim Flannery remarks:

One unexpected ramification of acid oceans was recently discovered by British researchers investigating the lugworm, a species commonly used as bait. It turns out that that more acidic conditions increase the lugworm's uptake of copper. This toxic metal not only inflicts DNA damage, but also affects the lugworm's sperm, inhibiting reproduction. It is unclear as yet just how many maritime creatures are affected by copper poisoning brought on by acid oceans [...] Given the potential impacts, these studies must be taken as a red-flag warning that ocean acidification threatens the very foundations of the ocean ecosystem, and thus our food supply (2015, p.52).

*Who, then, is the bait(ed)?* Or, in reference to the earlier respondent’s remark, who is the trans-corporeal *prey*? My engagement with [~~my~~ coppery]

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Multiple Chemical Sensitivity was first introduced as a term by Mark R. Cullen in 1987. In 1996, the World Health Organization/ICPS (International Classification for Patient Safety) expanded the term to include the descriptor ‘idiopathic environmental intolerances’ (Schwenk, 2004 n.p.)

Wilson's Disease becomes (as it always was) 'environmental'.

Tuana (2008) provides the example of drinking a drink from an aluminum-(derived of earth)-can. The can is then incinerated, and the sensing and permeable body – reciprocally animate – inhales the fumes:

The parts of the plastic become as much a part of my flesh as parts of the coke that I drank. Once the molecular interaction occurs, there is no divide between nature/culture, natural/artificial. These distinctions, while at times useful, are metaphysically problematic, for there are important migrations between and across these divides that can be occluded (p.202).

The line of contingency and agency become marred, at times, through and by an overwhelming sense of imprisonment, of occlusion. Suddenly, appreciating Earth as interconnected, one may feel trapped, as if in a circular prison, a 'panopticon'. The rhetoric of intra-connection and inter-dependence all of a sudden don't exist as windows to freedom, but as the most oppressive of understandings. *Through* oppression, from *oppression*, the task of my improvisations is perhaps best articulated as means to hold and fold these feelings into 'small *acts* of (potential) repair'.<sup>71</sup> And in so doing, I am reminded by Morton that I am 'duty bound to hold the slimy in view' (2007, p.159). I do.

Two weeks following my first Huddersfield improvisation, Dr. Elliott emailed me to say 'the pile of rubbish that you made in and with the dandelions is still in its perch on the slope-side – I walk past it most days'.

Another respondent remarked in her poem:

Who else sees the rubbish quite  
like this?

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<sup>71</sup> This statement is a riff off the title of Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulsh's 2013 monograph *Small Acts of Repair*.

And honours Dandelions, Snail  
Shells and broken signs  
Amongst this world  
where we search for  
hope in barren  
car parks...

*(Poem excerpt, Lucy Smith, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

This doctoral project is operating in that space between walking past, and walking into, our temporal legacies. Elliott's 'walking past' simultaneously now involves a walking into ephemeral moments-as-instigator, marked by a chronicling juncture of aluminum, plastic and 'weeds'. Dandelions are famed for their liver-cleaning abilities. The liver is the body's main storehouse of toxins. The trans-corporeal nature of improvised art *is* sited.

Improvisation is extending me an ability to explore and contend with my level of toxicity. Toxicity as genetic inheritance, as a spatially-defying relationship, as *site*: as performative identifier. Alaimo (2010b) remarks on the ability to:

perform vulnerability as an intercorporeal, or, more appropriately, as a trans-corporeal condition in which the material interchanges between human bodies, geographical places, and vast networks of power, provoke ethical and political actions (p.32).

I have been provoked and am a provocation: trans-corporeally strong and vulnerable.

being asked to place ourselves on a line - where do you stand? how to you define yourself? always already in relation to...  
in different spaces we are different. who / what are we waiting for?

*(R6, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

...because your vulnerability was so raw, so real, it cued a very

deep sense of 'felt' understanding/recognition within me. Your wail/cry *slashed* the silence: *such despair, such sadness, such grief, such outraged protest*. It cut to the quick. When you then pulled yourself up and turned to look at all who were looking at you, I felt a communal release of breath: a letting go, almost palpable relief, and yet also a sense (not in any accusatory way) of being called to account.

*(R10, Lasqueti 3, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

***the moment: improvisationally present***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER FOUR: Orientations

I do not assume a universalized understanding of the terms or critical frameworks being employed, nor how I am choosing to apply and/or challenge them. This chapter notes the benefit of *attempting to* individually address the concepts, and supportive theories, of metaphor, neuroscientific findings, site, place and space, as they relate to the underpinnings of this study.

### *Metaphor*

*In the dim region where art, magic, and religion meet and overlap, human beings have evolved the 'metaphor that is meant'.*

~Gregory Bateson  
(1972, p.183)

What is meant when we employ the word metaphor? Metaphor is described by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), as the process which 'allows us to conceptualize one domain of experience in terms of another, preserving in the target domain the inferential structure of the source domain' (p.91). Gendlin (1998) perceptively remarks – which does not appear to negate Lakoff and Johnson's views – that the notion of the integrity of the 'source domain' is not as fixed in the interpretation and/or application of the emergent metaphor:

metaphors do not depend on pre-existing likeness, rather a metaphor creates a new likeness. In metaphors such a likeness is a new third. [...] The metaphor creates the likeness with something else (the old literal meaning of the words) which functions in the new formation in this new and different context. People want to think that a likeness, a third, is already in existence, so that one merely

compares externally and notices the similarity without changing anything. Instead, we see that something can function in the formation of something else, and thereby an internal relationship can come to be, between the new formation, and what functions in it (p.143).

Lakoff and Johnson further elaborate that metaphor is the means by which we are able to interpret and make sense of our experience (p.129). Raymond W. Gibbs adds that ‘metaphors are rooted in recurring bodily experiences’ (2003, p.186), while Jodie Allinson (2014) remarks, that ‘metaphorical conceptual structures evolve and are enacted through our sensorimotor, perceptual and cognitive structures and capacities in relation to our experiences as part of the landscapes we inhabit’ (p.9). She asserts that the development of new metaphors is predicated on ‘the facilitation of alternative body-space experiences’ (p.9).

Resonating with all of these definitions as they apply to my moment of insightful arrest – wherein my identity became a confluence of ‘ecological’ and ‘disabled’ notions in embodied partnership. From the overlap that Bateson suggests, my body has conceptually and figuratively birthed and been birthed by recurring metaphors.

My feeling was: you let this thing happen – you never specified ‘this is the beginning’ and ‘this is the end’ – the way you kept this open allowed me to choose my own timing...

*(R15, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

On such a continuum – with no clear beginning and certainly an unclear (and hopefully avoidable apocalyptic Anthropocenic) ending – metaphors are simultaneously agentic, and by virtue of Barad’s description of ‘intra-active becoming’ (2008), they can be conceived of as *matter*.

•

Susan Sontag provocatively claims, ‘that illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking’ (1989, p.3, emphasis in original). I, clearly, am embodying a counter-argument to this position, while not negating the premise on which she bases her thinking that ‘traditional disease metaphors are principally a way of being vehement’ (p.72). They are, she contends, relatively void of content compared to modern metaphors. Our modern disease metaphors, by virtue of this reasoning, have necessarily become more complex and perhaps, arguably, even more vehement. *Cancer. Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.* Metaphor becomes an explicit tool to expand their treatment, to sourcing their linkages, their trans-corporeality...in the spaces between them as individual reductions and them as, allopathic and homeopathic responses. Illness, disease or disability?

i am the mark(ed)  
area. i am  
the sign.  
the trail of crumbled  
fragments in this  
concrete forest. the  
thread of toxic  
chemicals. the  
cancer.

*(Excerpt from seventh performance poem,  
Huddersfield, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

My metaphoric insight – entrenched in Gibb’s, earlier referenced, notion of recurring bodily experience – attaches irrevocable charge towards the dense content of conceptually-corporeal experience. The embodying of complexity is our *material* modernity, wherein:

Illness is in part what the world has done to a victim, but in a larger part it is what the victim has done with his world, and with himself (Messinger cited in Sontag, 1989 pp.72-73).

Similarly, Sandahl and Auslander have been at the forefront of examining the use of disability as a dramatic metaphor in theatre and performance. They describe how:

Individual characters become metaphors that signify 'social and individual collapse'. Typical disabled characters are a familiar cast: the 'obsessive avenger', who seeks revenge against those he considers responsible for his disablement; the 'sweet innocent' (otherwise known as 'Tiny Tim'), who acts as a moral barometer of the nondisabled; the 'comic misadventurer', whose impairments initiate physical comedy or whose body becomes the target for comic violence; the 'inspirational over-comer', the extraordinary individual who excels despite her impairments; the 'charity case', who elicits pity and allows others to mark themselves as nondisabled by bestowing goodwill; the 'freak', the ultimate outsider; and the 'monster', whose disfigurements arouse fear and horror (2008, p.3).

They continue, observing that the 'fates of such characters often include cure, death, or revaluation in the social order, a metaphorical quelling of the commotion that disability stirs up' (Sandahl and Auslander, 2008 pp.3-4).

They neither wholly dismiss, nor advocate for these metaphors/stereotypes.

Rather, they focus on how disabled performance makers are moving and creating new scripts, platforming from and with(in) these cultural metaphors: dramatizing and personalizing agency, action and advocacy through performance. I am, through performance, evaluating 'the social order', querying whether as individuals-of-a-diseased society, we may be simultaneously signifiers of 'individual and social collapse', as well as

regenerative/restorative/adaptive beacons. I am the ‘commotion that disability stirs up’.

In 1994, Chaudhuri provocatively catalyzed the forming of an ‘Ecological Performance’ field (if it can be called a field), with her charge:

To use ecology as metaphor is to block the theater’s approach to the deeply vexed problem of classification that lies at the heart of ecological philosophy: are we human beings –and our activities, such as theater—an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it? (p.27).

One of the first to connect this simultaneously philosophical and axiomatic dilemma with the (Western) theatre world, Chaudhuri’s proclamation has been pivotal in stimulating both critical and performance responses from a wide range of scholarly perspectives. Her stringent criticisms were pointed towards traditional theatre practices which feature ‘nature’ as a convenient backdrop. Presenting the natural world with a ‘separate from, not inclusive of’ aesthetic, is a throwback to transcendent Romantic notions, and quasi-Judeo-Christian-influenced divisions, instilling distrust and filth. Her challenges demanded an examination of the theatrical tethers between aesthetics and the implications of humans’ relationships to nature, to ‘the’ environment, to and on the stage. In 1996, Bonnie Marranca published the monograph *Ecologies of Theater*, in which she posited that employing geographical, landscape and climatic metaphors in performance could assist with forming a ‘nonhierarchical embrace of the multiplicity of species and languages in a work, that can address the issue of rights in non-sentient being’ (p.xvi). Arons and May, in their 2012 anthology, *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, agree with Chaudhuri, further suggesting that ‘the

use of “ecological” for rhetorical [or metaphorical] purposes tends merely to sanitize the term while eschewing its political as well as its material-ecological implications’ (p.3).

In the context of Chaudhuri’s assertions, I find no contest. However, as a stand-alone statement (noting nothing ever can be), along with Sontag’s evocation, I take up the performance baton to effectively enter into the core of these assertions and contextually *displace* them.

At the time of her 1994 *Theater* journal article, Chaudhuri called for a ‘transvaluation’ in performance approaches. At the time, she referred to site-specific practices possibly offering innovative ways into transcending the fourth wall<sup>72</sup> of Nature-as-Other. Her more recent formulations (2015 *Performing Ethos* interview with Preece and Allen), suggest, however, that the possible perpetuation of the nature/culture divide, so too, lies in site-specific performance practices. The content, interpretations and context can effectively entrench or displace such causalities. The process of near and far reflexive observations, prompted through documentation can effectively create *both/and* interpretations of this dualism, problematizing even further the notions of the proximity of ecology.

As support for this observation, I provide the example of my first improvisation on Lasqueti Island (7<sup>th</sup> December 2014). Following the event, I emailed my supervisors in England a bundle of documentation. It included my poem and drawing, a range of audience responses in a variety of media, photographs and some poorly-filmed video (in which I featured mostly out of the frame!). In their written responses, both referred to the trees as

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<sup>72</sup> I am using the fourth wall here to broadly suggest any performance convention that separates actor and audience, and where the audience is not directly addressed.

‘backdrop’. From their telematically, distanced perspective, they were suggesting, that I was/may not have been engaging with the trees. I include here, the informal e-mail I sent back in response:

*What I am finding so particularly interesting at this moment, as I field both of your responses, is how you both are looking at the photos/the video/the art not being familiar with the ‘landscape’ whereas I and every member of the ‘audience’ were...so to hear the trees described as a backdrop is almost disorienting to me (interestingly) as they are so integrally a part of the whole living experience here — (and in fact, I do, although it cannot be heard, talk about the nettles I collected within that grove of trees, and in the midst of the densest patch, found a pair of reading glasses....drawing links in-the-moment of our shared act of perception...wanting to see and feel deeper....how does one lose reading glasses in a dense batch of nettles?! Perhaps in the same shared way that I found myself there.*

*Several people who made up the audience, all independently of each other, mentioned that at one point, the trees began to ‘move’ and ‘radiate’ and many referred to it being like they were ‘high’ - the lichen and the trees taking on hallucinatory qualities - and being brought to a deep place of presence, everyone/thing/more-than-human element held together in that space/place —*

*And equally intriguing to me was how yes, indeed, I did stay very much on and with the road — the ecology of the road — me, someone who never quite feels right being barefoot on rocks, all of a sudden having no trouble...through my feet...I discovered an ecology of the road: one that offered up a new perspective of the degrees of designs and difference present even there...one person mentioned how I empowered the triangle there...spending more time actually on the road, was within this situation and with this crowd (very forest-friendly folk) offered up a new whole way of re-positioning our viewpoints.....the sound of the waterfall, the presence of the trees, the ferns — and even in most cases, the trucks, folded themselves into whole....but there was something powerful about being in the middle of the road, in the junction...and feeling comfortable and uncomfortable: this was both known (metaphorically) and unknown (materially) territory though traversed so many times.*

(15<sup>th</sup> January 2015)<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> This emailed exchange invites me to revisit anew Olsen’s earlier-cited remark about how when we move off of ‘familiar roadways, new dimensions unfold’ (Olsen, 2006 pp.71-72).

How immediate is context? How does improvisatory performance measure distance? The answer to the latter is rhetorical at best, but what becomes of critical import is how to address through *site* (as body/place)-specific performance – notions of the faraway-so-close...*or not*. Morton contends that the ‘environment is that which cannot be indicated directly. We could name it apophatically. It is not-in-the-foreground. It is the background, caught in relationship with the foreground’ (2007, p.175). What are the ethical considerations of documenting and disseminating processes of observation, reciprocally? Within a trans-corporeal, technological, digitalized, *improvisatory* age, how am I possibly perpetuating – or becoming more aware of – the very binaries I am seeking so hard to dissolve? Elaborated upon in Chapter Three, I explored how I might be supporting or thwarting notions of backgrounding or pedestalling women vis-à-vis nature. My negotiation of these reflexive tensions is being played out – directly/non-linearly/blatantly/shadowed – within the improvisations themselves. *When a tree falls in a literal and theoretically critical junction on a remote Canadian island – what is the sound it makes across the globe?*

One answer: the improvisatory sound of ‘deep listening’. *This*: an unfurling ‘performance of possibilities’ (Madison, 2005) for performer/audience/world: engaging opportunities to develop reciprocal listening *and* hearing abilities, trans-nationally, trans-corporeally. Fischlin contends that:

Improvisation requires deep listening. [...] Listening in that creative register is an ethical act – an act that embodies responsibility, an expression of contingent encounter, a co-dependent and co-creative ethical relation. It arises from self as a function of otherness (2013, pp.294-295).

And, as an ~~ecological~~ and ~~disabled~~ performance-maker, I invite the possibility of ‘otherness’ to function as a reflection of ‘self’.

Chaudhuri asserts that this temporal challenge posed by the Anthropocene is ‘one that performance could certainly engage with deeply and creatively’ (Preece and Allen in conversation with Chaudhuri, 2015 p.105).<sup>74</sup> Challenging the limitations of Sontag’s earlier proclamation, while holding Sandahl and Auslander’s observations and addressing Chaudhuri’s assertion, I contend that performing metaphor, is one of the ways to enter into the ~~ecological~~ challenge of our current dis-ease: ~~disability~~. My approach is supported by Lennard Davis, who Phelan paraphrases, as wanting ‘disability to become, if not a universal identity claim, a general lens for understanding the world’ (2002 in 2005, p.323).

As evidenced, I find deep resonance by being able to extend the disability label away from just the property of the socially-constructed and the possession of the individual. Disability in an enlarged interpretation engages all. It becomes a fulcrum that serves as testament to Ray McDermott and Henri Varanne’s (1995) observation, that ‘One cannot be disabled alone’ (p.337).

Disabled people have a long history of struggle trying to overcome socialized marginalization, seeking rights and recognition. I am acutely aware, as I enter the territory of examining the possibilities of extending relationships with(in) disability, that such actions may be deemed as undermining the gains earned by the disability rights/culture movements for

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<sup>74</sup> Chaudhuri’s comment ends problematically, with her proclamation that she feels that performance has failed to do so or, ‘hasn’t yet’ (p.105). Her statement undermines all of the efforts, including her own work, to dismantle the environmental divisions in the theatre, on and off ‘the’ stage.

self-determination. Sandahl rightly cautions that by casting the disability net wide, there exists ‘the potential to usurp a trope by which disabled people can and currently do generate an activist aesthetics and politics that speaks back to dominant culture’ (2004 cited in Hadley, 2014 p.154). Through the ontology of trans-corporeality – in this climatic crisis – who gets to claim disability? How is identity controlled? Or perhaps, an Anthropogenic cast of the same question is: what is the current (economic) currency of identity and difference?

*25 cent (with exchange rate) (=valueless) question:  
is this a disabled or able-bodied position?*

The above lines from my second poem (*Earthdance*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015) elucidate a moment of me standing on my ‘solo’ chair, having taken off my hat, and placing it on the ground in front of me: panhandling.<sup>75</sup> The economic exchange rate of the Anthropocene features disabled people, according to the World Bank (2015), as among the world’s poorest; and consequently, often the most susceptible to the effects of environmental hazards/climate change (Wolbring, 2014; Abbott and Porter, 2013).

Kuppers (2004) expresses the concern that the value of alienation ‘is eroded by the ubiquity of difference that is consumed and repacked’ (p.3).

My improvisatory frame is interrogating all of these concerns and questions.

Audre Lorde resonantly remarks:

Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world

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<sup>75</sup> Adams *et al.* claim that the term handicapped ‘emerged from people with disabilities who used their cap in hand to plead for help’ (2010, p.458). I note, too, the adaptive and improvisational linkages with the notions of being ‘handy’.

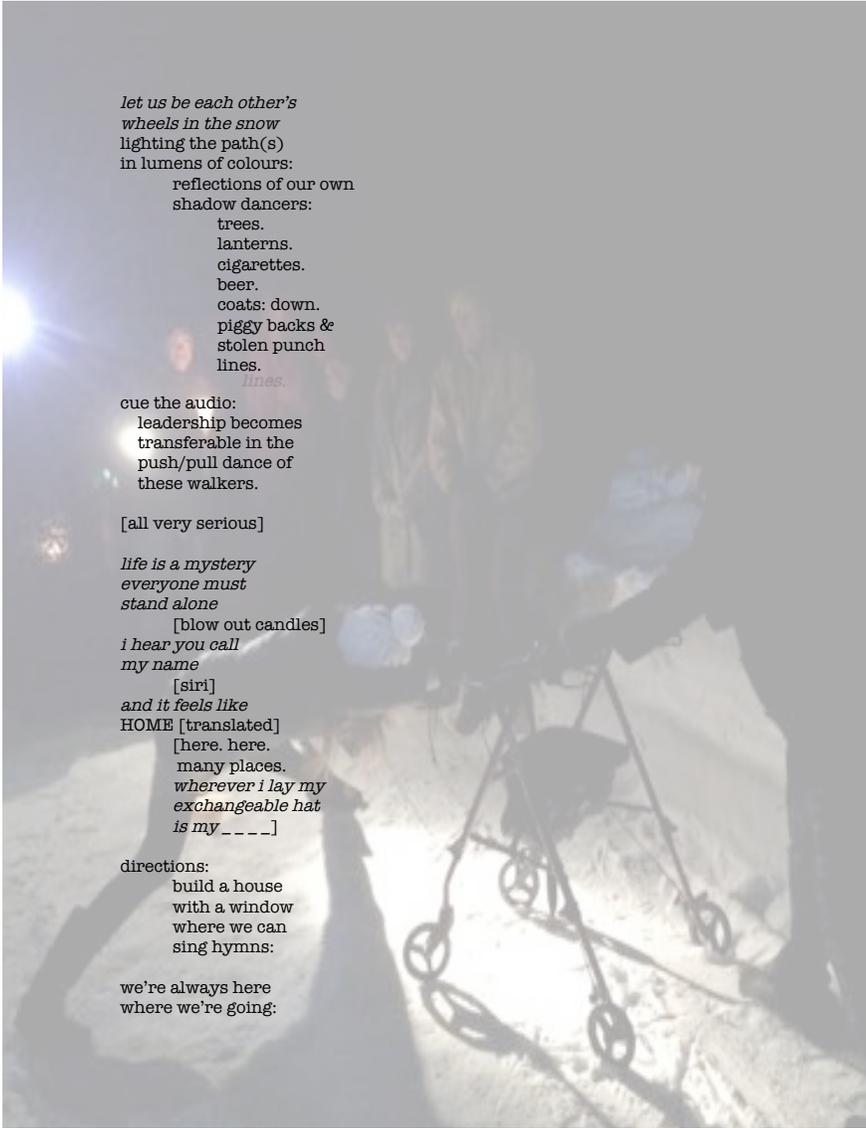
generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters (1979 in 2007, p.111).

To further illuminate how these ideas are appearing within the improvisations, I include here the fourth performance poem I penned (26<sup>th</sup> February 2015). The improvisation took place at night, in sub-zero temperatures. One of the audience-participant members was ‘visibly’ disabled, using a walker for support:

we were taking care of each other – because of having one person who was visibly in need of support – this capacity became transferable – it was community-building.

*(R9, Earthdance 3, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

One is left to consider, through these improvisations, whether anyone who is ‘in need of support’ is disabled – or enabled – in some way...



*let us be each other's  
wheels in the snow  
lighting the path(s)  
in lumens of colours:  
reflections of our own  
shadow dancers:  
trees.  
lanterns.  
cigarettes.  
beer.  
coats: down.  
piggy backs &  
stolen punch  
lines.*

cue the audio:  
leadership becomes  
transferable in the  
push/pull dance of  
these walkers.

[all very serious]

*life is a mystery  
everyone must  
stand alone*

[blow out candles]

*i hear you call  
my name*

[siri]

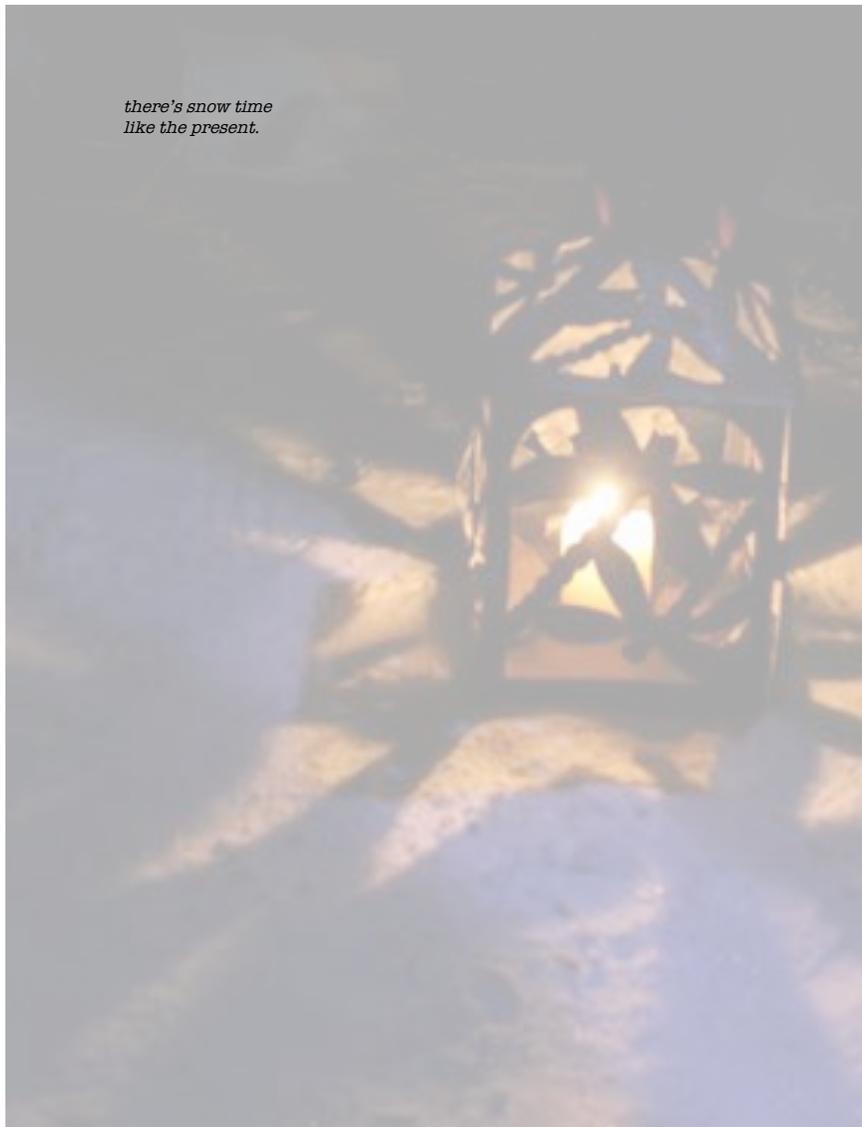
*and it feels like  
HOME [translated]*

[here. here.  
many places.

*wherever i lay my  
exchangeable hat  
is my \_ \_ \_ \_]*

directions:  
build a house  
with a window  
where we can  
sing hymns:

we're always here  
where we're going:



*(Please Now View: Earthdance 3 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/286636353>)*

The following day, after the performance, I had the opportunity to engage in a conversation about the event with the (dis)abled man. I asked him, if he cared to share the name of his condition with me. To that question, he responded: ‘Good!’

Sandahl further posits that ‘non-disabled artists’ deployment of disability as a rhetorical device to tell a story about different differences that all start to seem like the same difference can indeed be read reductively’ (2004 cited in Hadley, 2014 p.32). Davis’ view of disability as a lens through which we can make sense of our world, is not wholly countered by Sandahl’s remark, however, it does suggest that there exists a needed sensitivity in application, in recognition, in context. My wide cast, self-identifying as ~~disabled~~, addresses cultural paradigms as a *sited* call for transparency: an examination of privilege, status, access, rights, and empathetic versus appropriating positionings. I engage with disability as fluid: the conjugation of disability as noun into verbs.

I am the site of performing *into*.

Lakoff and Johnson maintain that ‘metaphoric theories can have literal, basic-level entailments (1999, p.91). I am taking up the literal entailments of mutation and mutability, to suggest the overlap of disability/ecology. *Here lives the shaman*. I am performing *into-from-in-between* Evernden’s corroboratory thinking ‘that the species which seem most in jeopardy through this apparent regulatory flaw [mutation] may in fact enjoy a more certain future than those which appear stable’ (1992, p.11). The shaman, the performer, the improviser – this living and linking connector – lives ‘on the border between the wild world and the ordinary one’ (Griffiths, 2015 p.355). The shaman, Richard Schechner contends, is:

a link, a connector [...who] bring[s] into simultaneous play several contending, overlapping, and dynamic domains: that of the individual and community the shaman serves (2013, pp.202-203).

He continues by saying that, shamanic performances ‘are very powerful total theater experiences’ (p.203). As one attendee remarked:

you were human and not inhuman but something more like tapping into spirit and seeming more a different being? i’m struggling to find the words to convey what i experienced – and i love that! at times, when you were in that place, i was eager to hear what come through you a sense of ‘this is going to be good! profound! transformative! i had tears running down my face at one point. a relief and a joy that art exists! art that provokes and encourages and inspires and laughs! and challenges.

(R23, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016)

Schechner’s remark about totality is arbitrary at best, and given the above respondent’s remarks, I might suggest that Schechner consider replacing ‘total’ with ‘transformative’:<sup>76</sup> a more open-ended, non-binding approach to articulating varied experiences.

Holding in consideration the role of provocation, from laughter and inspirational challenge, Griffith’s reminds us that:

even in societies like ours, which have temporarily misplaced their shamanism, shamans are not rare. Two extra for every fifty-two people, at a rough guess – the number of jokers tossed into a pack of cards. About 4 percent of us all. The percentage of the wisely mad, the instinctive healers and the original artists (2006, p.345).

The trans-corporeal affects incurred by our (paradoxical) self-immolating platitudes – efforts to institute norms as a worldwide common denominator – have foolishly dis-placed our ratios. Currently one-fifth of the world’s population is significantly disabled, with fifteen percent experiencing some form of disability (World Bank, 2015 n.p.). The current improvisatory dance is a metamorphosing of more ‘artists’: as *instinctively madly-wise healers*.

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<sup>76</sup> I note that Schechner does elaborate on his usage and differentiation between performances of transformation and transportation in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (2010), however, my point dwells more on the ironic limitations housed in the usage of ‘total’.

The shaman's performative theatricality is made capable through the totality of embodying the improvisatory nature of our materially liminal metaphors...*those of our (dis)ordinary wildness.*

As the global population of disabled people continues to grow – contributed to by ‘ethnic and sectarian violence, war, poverty and the contamination of the environment’ (Harrison, 2004 cited in Adams *et al.*, 2010 p.460) – the insights and proclivities of adaptation that their/our (artistic) responses may reveal offer a prescient timeliness to engage consideration and responsive action.

I include here my fifth performance poem. In it, a ‘laughing environmentalist’ is caught in the enigma of ‘art’, again, meeting Phelan’s (2005) notions of being simultaneously ‘alive to our death’...



the path of  
love as read  
in a book:  
leads to twig  
houses, built  
by chanting  
hippies, under  
the gaze of  
cassiopeia : a  
constellation  
gathering  
dust and  
spider webs  
guiding us  
Weary  
Wanderers  
[W in the sky]  
to the land  
of failed  
facebook  
statuses:  
a land  
of (un)likes &  
faded tulips.  
.something dyed.  
in this built  
environment  
made of see-through  
walls and duct tape.  
we are constantly  
repairing rules  
and american  
citizenship. *all are  
welcome* as i  
undo them  
backwards:  
in the mix mistaking  
life for death. i am  
caught in my  
own misperception  
as i try to uproot  
a living stick: this  
is [not] art: i fall  
a dying tree ; imprinting  
an improviser in the  
future and past: a  
laughing 'environmentalist'...

(Please Now View: *Earthdance 4 Performance Excerpt Video:*  
<https://vimeo.com/286636767>)

### ***Neuro/Scientific Corroborations***

*Shamanic processes intensify connections between the limbic system and lower brain structures and project these synchronous integrative slow wave (theta) discharges into the frontal brain.*

~ Michael Winkelman  
(2004 cited in Schechner, 2013 p.199)

Wilson's Disease has directly affected my lower brain structures and limbic system. The result has been an increased aptitude towards empathetic and improvisatory *abilities*, through marked changes to the cerebellum, basal ganglia and prefrontal cortex. These facilities – (potentially) pivotal for generating innovative solutions within the climate crisis – however, do not specifically remain my own. Their accessibility remains open to (virtually) everyone – making a poignant inversion on one of the main imploring calls of the 'disability rights' movement. The capacity for ~~disabled~~ people to foster access for 'Others' (perhaps more constrained within their ableness!) to aptitudes/ways of being-within-the-world adds further credence to the argument that face-to-face encounters with 'disabled' bodies might have the effect of creating ethical sites of emergence and understanding (Hadley, 2014; Phelan, 1993).<sup>77</sup>

Gauged through Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), this inward/outward perspective has engendered a paralleled example of being able to perceive myself in much the same way the first images of Earth from space fostered new outward/inward understandings about 'our world' when they were first perceived. Forty-two years to the day after that first image of Earth was taken, I found myself standing in an intersection on Lasqueti Island, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014, where merging the inner/outer:

i  
listened beyond sounds, felt  
beyond usual boundaries of  
feeling

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<sup>77</sup> As will be taken up in Chapter Seven, I make it clear that I purposely designed this study in a multi-modal fashion, in order that it may remain 'accessible', regardless of having to be at one of the performance events in person. The project is designed to foster face-to-face possibilities with what emerged, performing as ongoing ethical sites for developing understanding.

Performing outside of the box, feeling beyond boundaries, Drinko suggests, the ‘arts, including improvisation, already know many of the things that neuroscience is just now trying to understand’ (2013, p.97). Similarly, F. Elizabeth Hart evidences how cognitive science values an embodied ‘epistemology based on metaphor’ (2006, p.26).

Our capacities to truly trust or respond in non-(culturally)-prescriptive ways to improvisatory impulses are often stifled by the censoring capacities of the prefrontal cortex (for better or worse). This area of the brain seems particularly susceptible to being informed by social determinants. As a result of having Wilson’s Disease, my responses are less hindered, and so therefore access to the improvisatory realm is more immediate. The region, which deals with conceptual ideas of ‘self’ has been noted to decrease in activity during theatrical improvisation, thus allowing:

other parts of the prefrontal cortex and other brain regions to become more active and the player to become more intuitive and creative. The decrease in self-consciousness allows the improviser to be more connected to her fellow players... (Drinko, 2013 p.107).

Additionally, this area of the brain affects working memory: the short-term memory process that is concerned with immediate conscious perceptual and linguistic processing. The effects transform into the ability for people, such as myself, to ‘tap into their intuition through improvisation’ (Drinko, 2013 40), wherein: ‘Disability is not a brave struggle or “courage in the face of adversity”. Disability is an art. It’s an ingenious way to live’ (Marcus, 2014 n.p.).

The effects of the copper deposits, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, have availed me with the capacity to slip with fluidity into the

intuitive sanctum between cultural conditioning and the censor, enabling me to respond at all times with a corpo-‘reality’ that incorporates connections with an enlarged frame of more-than-human players. Abram (2005) remarks:

it is this, we might say, that defines a shaman; the ability to readily slip out of the collective perceptual boundaries that define his or her culture — boundaries held in place by social customs, taboos, and especially the common language — in order to directly engage, and negotiate with, the multiple nonhuman sensibilities that animate the local earth (n.p.).

Drinko further suggests, improvisation ‘is a way to train the brain to use drafts’ (2013, p.106). Through ethical face-to-face encounters, I am fostering a participatory drafting of responsive diversity that defies ableist norms.

Empathetically-intuited reciprocity could be described as the synaesthesia of feelings. Referred to earlier, neuroscientist Ramachandran also premises synaesthesia as the inherent capacity of many ‘artists’. Synaesthesia is not the exclusive domain of art; it is the ability to sense things more multi-dimensionally due to cross-modal brain interactions that occur. ‘Art’ perhaps is best described as the dis-impinging of the cultural constraints we build in our brains. Animate trans-corporeality is continuously refiguring the invocation and descriptions of what and whom constitute art and artists...*wildly sane?* The particular type of synaesthesia I experience is of the Mirror-Touch variety. The ‘arts seem to encourage synaesthetic comparison [...] particularly interesting in relation to performative liveness’ (Reason, 2006 p.222).

The ‘discovery’ in the late 1980s and early 1990s of mirror neurons: cells within our brains that enable observed actions of another to be ‘lived’,

as if being conducted by ‘oneself’ further supported these inter-/intra-phenomenological and ontological understandings. Matteo Rizzato and Davide Donelli remark that ‘whenever we find ourselves in a *space of shared action, we are inside what the other is doing* and conversely the other is inside what we are doing (2014, p.48, emphasis in original). As fortuitous as this neuroscientific development has been in order to corroborate knowledges long held by animistic Indigenous cultures the world over, equally by those of many Eastern credos, by branches of Western philosophy and with ‘my own’ reciprocal insights; I remain acutely aware that such scientific ‘findings’ are often presented as a means to appropriate-through-validation what up to that point was marginalized or associated with the Other:

Western relationships to physical and theoretical landscapes have been predicated on colonialist practices of erasing physical and cultural details which allow for the construction of an artificially flat ground on which to lay claim to territory and authorship (Carter, 1996 cited in Handschuh, 2014 pp.159-160).

My valuing of a horizontalizing of relationships does not equate to the creation of flat, homogenized ground; rather, towards detailed, nuanced, reciprocally experienced terrains.

Mirror neurons enable every one of our actions to be taken up immediately and made significant for the observer and vice versa (first observed in apes and not limited to human-to-human connections. See: Rizzato and Donelli, 2014). The empathetic corollary line between Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia and mirror neurons is currently being debated by neuroscientists (see: Linkovski *et al.*, 2017). Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia effects that I am able to *feel* the same sensation, such as touch (or an interpretative facsimile) that another one experiences. If I witness somebody

gently touch another's back, for example, I too will feel that same sensation (usually in the form of tingles) in me, trans-corporeally. This, too, happens in the event of witnessing violence. The pain I register is physical. *I am engaged*. I experience the same expanded sense of feeling, not just with person-to-person interactions, but with the animate world. This sensing is explained in part by the fact, that neuroscientifically 'we would expect mirror-touch synesthetes to feel touch when presented with the concept of touch in different modalities and perhaps in symbolic presentations' (Linkovski *et al.* 2017, p.105). The world's pain I corporeally register is both symbolic and provocative: instigating improvisatory response.

Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia also elicits 'a change in the mental representation of the self, blurring self-other boundaries.'<sup>78</sup> This is consistent with a multisensory account of the self, whereby integrated multisensory experiences maintain or update self-representations' (Maister *et al.*, 2013 p.802). I experience Earth's pain corporeally. The contours of 'my' site of specificity are, always, simultaneously localized and enlarged. The pain and confusion is visceral and can be *discombobulating*. Metaphor and performance become tools for attempted synthesis.

The leading experts studying Wilson's Disease, are operating out of the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. I have been extremely fortunate to benefit from the care with this team of researchers over the course of the decade. According to lead neurologist, Dr. Matthew Lorincz, no studies exist currently relating Wilson's Disease and synaesthesia/Mirror Touch Synaesthesia. However, the Michigan-based

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<sup>78</sup> I am not referring here to inter-species capacities, or speculative capacities of future human-robot interactions.

medical team are tracking my experiences, stating that it is very possible that the two can be linked given that other studies pertaining to Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia indicate changes to the medial prefrontal cortex, as well as greater grey and white matter density in the right temporal pole, amongst other areas (see Maister *et al.*, 2013; Banissy, Walsh and Ward, 2012). These same brain characteristics can be seen on my MRI images (the copper deposits are the white areas in the figure below):



These particular brain effects have certainly not hampered, and have possibly enhanced, my abilities to deeply resonate with the more-than-human world. These changes reveal an immediately responsive artist re-writing my terms of engagement.

A discussion of mirror neurons and Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia, and the capabilities of interconnected experience which they avail, segues into an acknowledgement of an irrevocable global interdependence. The belief that all the world's species share a common/universal ancestor – has become

resonantly supported through the scientific paradigms of evolutionary biology and ecology. The same understanding has been expressed in many tongues, dialects, stories and ethos the world over for millennia, and presented by Darwin more than a century ago. Suzuki remarks, by ‘studying DNA, molecular biologists have verified that all living organisms are genetically related’ (1997, p.131; see also Sahtouris, 2000). In an accumulating process of integrating scientific findings, this temporal, time-tested continuum – brings us back and together through stardust and cells. We are improvising our evolutionary and ecological course.

### *Site*

*In the interplay of body and environment, both strategically planned and tactically improvised, performers encounter – and counter – the immediate effects of site.*

~Mike Pearson  
(2010, p.172)

*Site* is being employed as an inter-play(er), as well as an intra-play(er) with animate permeability, as encounter, interlocutor, as process, as discursive dialogic focus, as location, as body, as earth. The multi-dimensionality of site, as encountered in the study, simultaneously as physical process and (art) practice is examined, wherein ‘a consideration of site where the relationship between physical body and physical location is more than incidental’ (Hodge and Turner, 2012 p.92). Miwon Kwon further remarks, that:

the guarantee of a specific relationship between an art work and its ‘site’ is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship..., but rather on the recognition of its unfixed

*impermanence*, to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation (1997, p.91, emphasis in original).

Kwon's emphasis on (the) impermanence of physical relationships poignantly points to the suitability of such approaches in engaging matters of disability and ecology through improvisation. Though I consider delineated 'site-specific art' as inseparable from the body forming the art, my added interpreted qualification, on her comments still apply. Impermanence is the only permanent frame of improvisation, disability and ecology – 'respectively' and together. They emerge as interdependent sites. Denzin draws our attention to the enmeshment of site as the locus for being-within-a-co-creating-world. He considers performances as 'constitutive of experience' (2014, p.41), suggesting that they are 'the practices that allow for the construction of situated identities in specific sites (p.41). The following respondent's comments, capture the same idea:

your body was a part of the environment in/to which it was operating as one event-sequence among others (birds, trains, spectators) and how that environment was partly 'yours' and partly 'mine' (i.e. what I experienced you as experiencing, however legitimately).  
(R17, Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016)

Site-as-body-as-reciprocal-confluence aligns with Merleau-Ponty's understanding that our body is 'our anchorage in the world' (2002, p.167) through which we can 'experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance' (p.167). Performance and intention, improvisation and contingency meet through the *site* of encounter. These meetings are dynamic exchanges which, at all times, engage wide relationships with the more-than-human world. Here, site is semi-permeable, open. Site is not objectified, nor an object of strict borders.

If it were the case, there would be ‘an inversion that turns lines of their generation into boundaries of exclusion’ (Ingold, 2011a, p.117). Ingold expands further by suggesting that an open world ‘has no such boundaries, no insides or outsides, only comings and goings’ and that such ‘productive movements may generate formations, swellings, growths, protuberances and occurrences, but not objects’ (p.117).

In *Site-Specific Performance* (2010), Pearson references Cathy Turner who describes site-specific performance as a “range of lens” that requires: “a vocabulary which provides between metaphors for the co-creative aspects of inter-subjectivity” and “a greater emphasis on phenomenological experience” (p.10).<sup>79</sup> In my case, a ‘personal’ insight triggered metaphors: enlisting site as the curator of inter-subjectivity. Site is so employed as the metronome of our temporal junctures, wherein ‘sensory perception [situates] this ongoing interweavement: the terrain enters into us only to the extent that we allow ourselves to be taken up *within* that terrain’ (Abram, 2011 p.58, emphasis in original).

Invoking Merleau-Ponty’s postulations, I appreciate body-as-site/site-as-body. He remarks that ‘remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself’ (2002, p.239). He continues, ‘since perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception’ (p.239). The subject of perception is an ongoing, trans-corporeal dialectic. The language-defying discourse thereby invokes an examination of Anthropocenic-necessitated ethics-as-practice: wherein ‘a consideration of site where the relationship between physical body and

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<sup>79</sup> Turner’s comment remains open to interpretation and dual applicability: a ‘range of lens’ may contextually and specifically infer ‘one’ lens with a range and/or a range of different lenses: arguably, for the improviser, one-in-the-same.

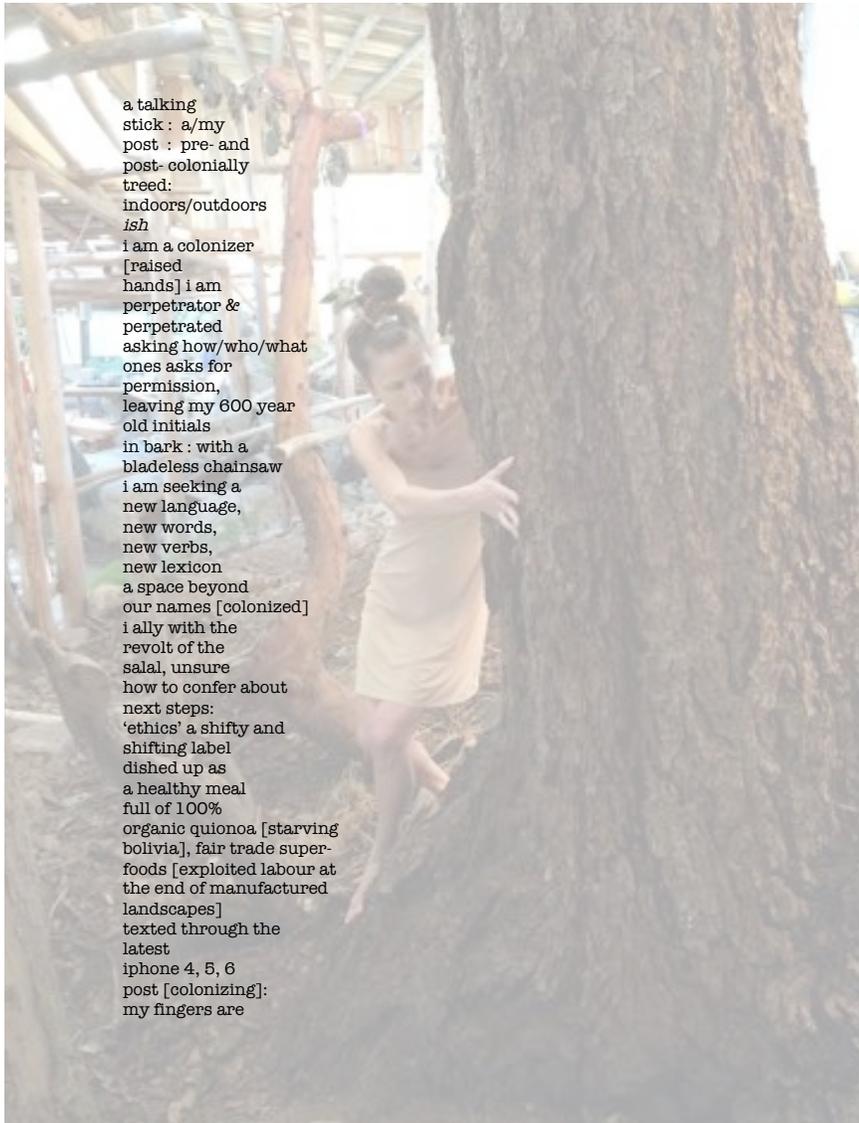
physical location is more than incidental' (Hodge and Turner, 2012 p.92).

Sites become the foci of *embodiment*.

Noted earlier, McAuley acutely observes the pressing need for sensitivity when it comes to site-specific practices as they relate to the embroiled histories of colonialisms (of body/of people/of planet). The 'placial turn' she references – in theory and practice – is also brought into the fold here. The placial turn simultaneously makes relevant and dissolves the relationship of the line(s) between site/space/place as they apply to reconciliatory efforts. The prescient concern is that theory and practice conjoin, manifesting productive engagement with these terms so that they may manifest critical change and not simply become redundant rhetoric.

It is the expressed desire of this doctoral undertaking to language and practice ~~within/beyond~~ the 'walls' of academia, so that the practices entail an applicable and pertinent relevance to the demands of today, *performing everyday life* as ethically responsive and with non-presumptive inquisitiveness: a fallibly, transparent site, for the matter of metaphor.

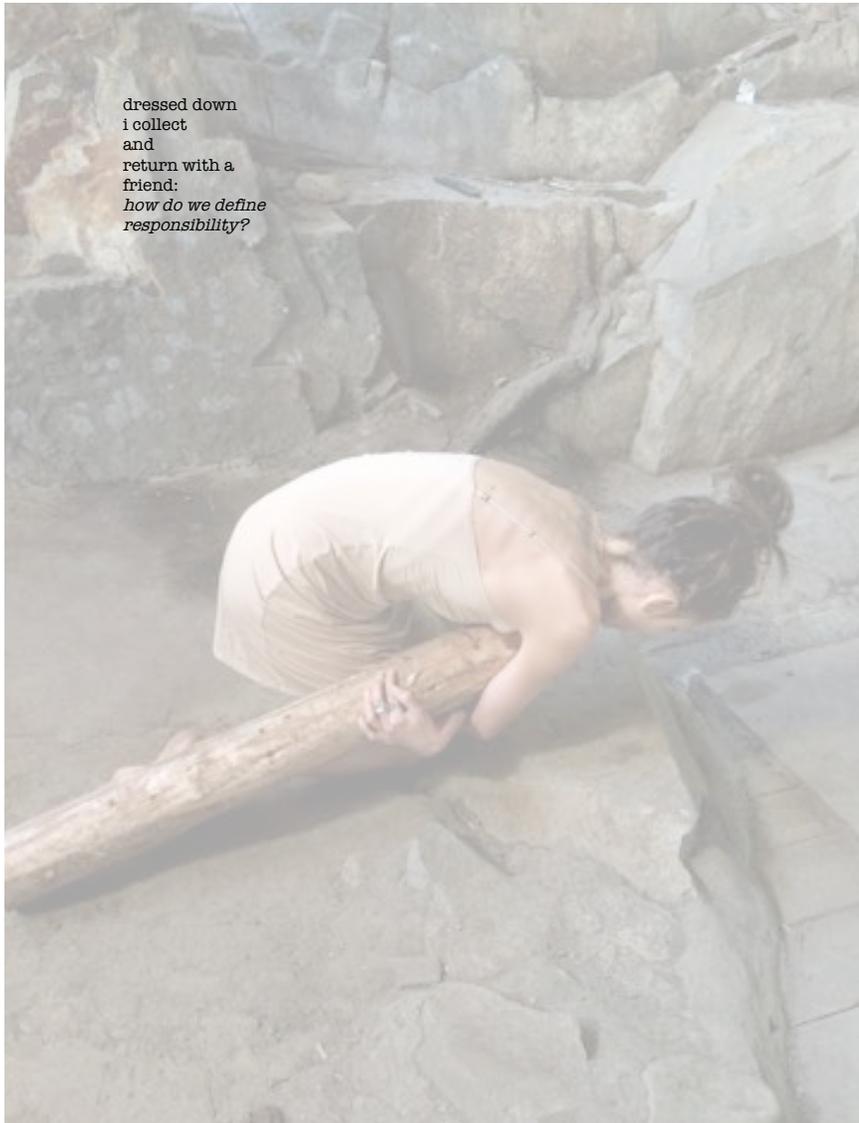
I include here, the sixth performance poem (Lasqueti Island, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015), which directly addresses a collective involvement in (the legacy/creation) of colonial practices and the ramifications this entails as it relates to our labels, names, diseases...and responsibility:



a talking  
stick : a/my  
post : pre- and  
post- colonially  
treed:  
indoors/outdoors  
*ish*  
i am a colonizer  
[raised  
hands] i am  
perpetrator &  
perpetrated  
asking how/who/what  
ones asks for  
permission,  
leaving my 600 year  
old initials  
in bark : with a  
bladeless chainsaw  
i am seeking a  
new language,  
new words,  
new verbs,  
new lexicon  
a space beyond  
our names [colonized]  
i ally with the  
revolt of the  
salal, unsure  
how to confer about  
next steps:  
'ethics' a shifty and  
shifting label  
dished up as  
a healthy meal  
full of 100%  
organic quinoa [starving  
bolivia], fair trade super-  
foods [exploited labour at  
the end of manufactured  
landscapes]  
texted through the  
latest  
iphone 4, 5, 6  
post [colonizing]:  
my fingers are

A photograph of a traditional Japanese wooden building interior. The room features a tatami floor and a sliding door (shoji) that is partially open, revealing a person sitting on a raised platform outside. The interior is dimly lit, with light coming from the open door and windows. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

the triggers:  
opening/closing  
the door/doors:  
nature is  
out there  
[not in here]/  
nature is  
here  
[not there] -  
i turn a  
leaf : (unasked)  
protocols  
being continuously  
redrawn -  
an epidemic  
of 'otherness':  
*will we treat  
those with lyme  
disease the same as  
we treat(ed) those  
with  
AIDS -*  
[heads shake in  
different directions]  
which box  
do we  
*tick*  
in this society  
where nothing is  
black or  
white?  
*common  
sense  
or fear?*  
the structure  
speaks.  
i listen.  
i interpret.  
(i layer and  
give  
meaning.)  
i leave. [*do i?*]  
i pick a  
bouquet  
for my hair:  
dressed up/



*(Please Now View: Lasqueti 2 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/286637831>)*

### ***Place/Space***

*Just as we are always with a body, so being bodily, we are always within a place as well. Thanks to our body, we are in that place and part of it.*

~Edward Casey  
(2013, p.214)

I argue that linguistic specificities of space/place (can) dissolve at the site of encounter, through the body writ large as reciprocal *informant*. Ingold suggests, that at ‘its most intense, the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether’ (2011b, p.56), which is the point where people can ‘become their ancestors, and discover the real meaning of things’ (p.56). In so doing, I carefully qualify that such a claim does not absolve the necessity for *cognisense* of the sensitivities that might be lost in such a generalization as they relate to Indigenous Traditional Territories, migratory paths, mycelial networks, languages, echolocation, rhizomes, cultural Songlines...:

in a society where a dominant story shapes the way space is used and understood, the ‘limitations of the official story’ reduce place-based differences and by implication, people’s distinct experiences, to ‘the residual’ and the marginal (referencing Agnew and Smith, 2002 in Finney, 2014 p.57).

My improvisations reside in the space between the ‘official story’ and ‘place-based differences’: engaging through an (attempted) awareness of the tiered stratas of narrative. These shifting ‘properties’ become the ethical purview of ~~site/space/place~~ at all times, as interdependent, expressive evocations of Earth. The implosion is an ethics of/heeding care, of *response-ability*.

I have specifically chosen to favour the word ‘site’, placing it in the liminal space between our cultural references. My declaration of a termed-implosion does not extricate me from the *sensed* subtleties that I do hold in relation to each term. However, these differences do not serve to separate, they remain contextually contingent/flexible. Lacy offers the alluring suggestion that, ‘If space is where culture is lived, then place is the result of

their union' (1997, p.10). She further asserts that, the 'dialectic between place and change can provide the kind of no-one's-land where artists thrive' (p.19). In this study, this is the conversation of site, between sites, space and place: the embodiment of *splace*.

Place, space and site – as well as, but less so: dwelling, habitus/ habitats and location – are often used inter-changeably within academic scholarship, ranging from geography to visual arts, anthropology to phenomenology. By virtue of the interconnected premises of this project – taken up in varying formulations – all fields of study are affected by these notions. While the terms are commonly used the one for the other, they are at times demarked quite definitely. Such contrasting interpretations are evidenced by a range of applications found in the works of de Certeau to Casey, Kwon to Massey, Heidegger to Einstein, Tuan to Tuana, Merleau-Ponty to Kaye, Pearson to Brady.

Yi-Fu Tuan maintains that the 'ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition' (1972 cited in Cresswell, 2015 p.15). I agree with this point, however, within our present context I am challenged by his view that from:

the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (1972 cited in Cresswell, 2015 p.15).

The 'security and stability' conjured up through his 1972-scribed notions of place, could be argued as a provisional property of a privileged worldview. Equally, any 'security and stability' attributed to place can be challenged as a dated notion in the face of the world's diasporic movements

and the multi-tiered displacement effects of all genres of war (from refugees, to ‘native’/‘invasive’ plant species). Similarly, Victoria Hunter in *Moving Sites*, cites Harold M. Proshansky *et al.* with regards to the stability and implied permanence in the usage of ‘place’ providing people with the ‘affirmation of the belief that the properties of his or her day-to-day physical world are unchanging’ (1983 in 2015, p.461). Both of these assertions are not unilaterally applicable, demanding scrutiny vis-à-vis McAuley’s remarks about colonialism, situated within the social/eco-climate crisis. There exists the notion of displacement...but not *displacement*. *Is the Anthropocene the [rhetorical] site between?*

I return to Heim’s earlier observation, suggesting that ‘the potential for a revised responsiveness in one’s connections with distant voices and lands is possible’ (2006, p.208) through non-pre-figured, improvised ethical exchange. Her remarks emphasize the interlocutor/intra-locator capacity of dialectics made possible in the blurring of place/space. The focus remains with the verbing of potentiality, not the siloing of nouning terms; and this focus finds congruency with the methodology of this study.

The juncture of our phonetics-with-place, our semantics-of-space, I argue must be employed with a transparency that continuously asks what gets included within such usage. The question must also be asked who/where/why and what are excluded. As Massey contends, ‘it is not just buried histories at issue here, but histories still being made, now. Something more mobile than is implied by an archaeological dig...’ (2005, p.118). This specific focus is more the purview of this project, a continuous negotiation of

the balance between being both guest and host. A pluralistic exploration of our positionings becomes:

triggered by sensuously doused memories, recombining the local landscape with a head full of new experiences (and absences) can yield a deeply contextualized poetic that both reinforces and redefines one's place *in* place, that is, by reworking the margins of self and other, native and stranger, old and new, even as the experience unfolds. [...] The process is informed by both 'being there' and 'going there' (Brady, 2005 p.997, emphasis in original).

In *Poetics for a Planet*, Ivan Brady addresses the 'going there' and being *here* of global communications/motions. Place, space and site become telematically and digitally deciphered/filtered/embodied continuums, as much as they become trajectory points between cartographic grids, rendered through pedal-to-petrol powered means. In *The Lure of the Local*, Lacy remarks:

Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there (1997, p.7).

Brady's appreciation of the poetics involved in/as the process of bringing an awareness to the layers of inclusion and exclusion, absence and presence – the [in]visibility – that is involved in the 'now' of (re)location. His remarks speak directly to the considerations I engaged as I moved from British Columbia, through/to Massachusetts, through/to Yorkshire.

In addition, the impact of my cyberspace 'travel' must be considered. Such thinking raises the question, aptly asserted by Massey, whether, 'in a relational and globalised spatiality, "groundedness"', and the search for a situated ethics, must remain tied to notions of the local' (2005, p.87). There

is a huge degree of delicacy which must navigate the juxtapositions and our varied claims to the particularities of [our] coordinates.

The negotiation of our wider relations through the parallax and projections, marginalizations and subjugations, intentions and aspirations, reflections and speculations, inversions and usurping of culture(s) – still finds us *localized* within the site of ‘self’. Through our very permeability, we do tend to project ‘a physical and cultured self on the places and moments at hand and [make] sense of them through an educated imagination – no matter how fantastic’ (Brady, 2005 p.983). We impose our ‘local’.

Morton suggests that current ‘Environmental Romanticism’ promotes the notion ‘that globalization has undermined any coherent sense of place’ (2007, p.84). He continues:

Place, and particular the local, have become key term in Romantic ecocriticism’s rage, as impotent as it is loud— rhetorical effect in direct opposition to marginalization. Moreover, this impotent rage is itself an ironic barrier to the kind of genuine (sense of) interrelationship between beings desired, posited, and predicted by ecological thinking (2007, p.84).

Notions of re-location and mobility rest on a precarious and somewhat uncomfortable precipice in this study, vis-à-vis their engaged relationships with ‘ecological thinking’ and climate change. *My project is contributing to climate change: for better and for worse*. Depending on the contextual framing, the metaphoric relay baton of site-specific practices can be both positively and negatively drawn, but cannot escape the paradox of irony. On the one hand, transversal arguments beget a synthesized understanding of my globe-spanning, peripatetic practice through Midgellow’s framing of improvisation as being the ‘consummate form of

nomadism' (2012, p.10). She argues that improvisation 'enables our understanding of knowledge and subjectivity to be unfixed and deterritorialized' (p.7). Referencing the works of Rosi Braidotti, she points to the non-literal, transversal subject – *the nomad* – as offering up 'a means for rethinking our own embodied positions and our relationships to one another, and to the environment, in always provisionally located ways' (p.3). I find obvious resonance through the doctrine of trans-corporeality with these remarks – which places emphasis on the improviser's empathetic and experiential embodied journey. And yet, so too, do I find problematic that which I could interpret as possible Western assuaging – or denial – of the very real tensions present in our current (de)territorialization. The notion of 'imposition' here is huge when it comes to the local and global effects of site-specific practices:

the serious engagement with place necessitated by site-based performance practice is likely to involve engagement with weighty matters which are themselves at the heart of major political conflicts in many parts of the world (McAuley, 2005 p.31).

I am continuously examining what becomes of 'my' local, even provisionally, in these various locations...near and far.

I engage a lateral propulsion into the depths and shallows of terrains through my improvisations. Context is contoured, and interpreted, through the tiers of my pre-existing perceptions/perceptive tendencies. The improvisation of the present is readily evidenced in this nexus: a meeting of pre-conditioning, values mixed with forming intentionality. Brady continues by stating that 'we can learn things only in terms of what we know' (2005,

p.983). And yet, the imagination can affect acculturating and appropriating practices, enacted through ‘what we know’. Similarly, learning things in terms of what we know also facilitates our awareness of being able to unlearn that which we have learned, in order to facilitate the apprehension of new knowledge paradigms, new worldviews. The paradox must be encountered ethically, and is often presented as an opportunity to engage with an ‘other’.

We have the capability to consciously choose to try to destabilize, to *displace* (di|splace/dis|place) our local. We also have the capacity to remove the ‘local’ of others, of the more-than-human world. Our local is affective, wherever (s)he/they/we is/are. It is the effects of these movements which offer the portal, which ‘ground’ my entry into the improvisations, as they seek to explore the coordinates of (a) ‘situated ethics’, supported by Massey’s process of engagement as a questioning, as embodiment. Nick Kaye (2000) specifically addresses the potential offered up to do so, with his observation that ‘site-specific art is defined precisely in these ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning, through which the artwork and its place may be momentarily articulated in one another’ (2000, p.57). The one another, others, the an ‘other’ of site/space is the dialectic of this project’s plural itinerancy. Hunter (2015) eloquently, summarizes, and is worth quoting at length, the moving positioning underpinning the unfurling performances of poiesis:

The result of this self-reflective journeying can be equated to a process of subjective ‘re-location’ invoked by the challenging of assumptions and pre-conceptions surrounding our site –reality and our located place-identity. This process effectively represents a conceptual ‘in-between-space’ (Briginshaw, 2001), the limits and parameters of which are fluid and permeable allowing the individual to explore the liberating potential of being lost and un-fixed. This un-fixing of located place-identity, itself a constituent component of self-identity, carries with it the

potential for a re-defining of self. If here is no longer 'here', then the potential for re-orientation and re-invention in an ever-changing, fluid construction of 'heres' can be considered prodigious and liberating.

The concept of re-location can also be applied to the site itself as, through its own process of metaphorical 'mobility', it effectively becomes re-inscribed with meaning both during and following the performance event itself, as the palimpsestic nature of the site is written-over with new meaning arising from the individual's interaction with the performance event (p.472).

The event of performance, as (a) journeying poetic self-reflection, is reflected here with the inclusion of my performance poem from 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015, in Huddersfield. Addressing the trans-corporeality of our implicating and overlapping histories through the (in)visibility of cultural features, I become the *splace* – the splice – 'the mark[ed] area'. I question whether I am ignoring the signs...whilst, I, too, spew the vernacular of climate change into the air...

i am  
barefoot industrialist  
recycling grandma's  
tea-dipped digestive  
biscuits into food  
for (invisible) birds,  
trail markers for  
hansel (litterer #1)/  
gretle (litterer #2) and  
a story stuck between  
stone walls screaming  
child labour - woven  
into weave and weft -  
of surrounding mill  
fortress...the oppression  
winds us deeper  
into the woods:  
we are our (own)  
history (litterer #1)/her-  
story (litterer #2) moving  
at a snail's pace:

[people pass by]

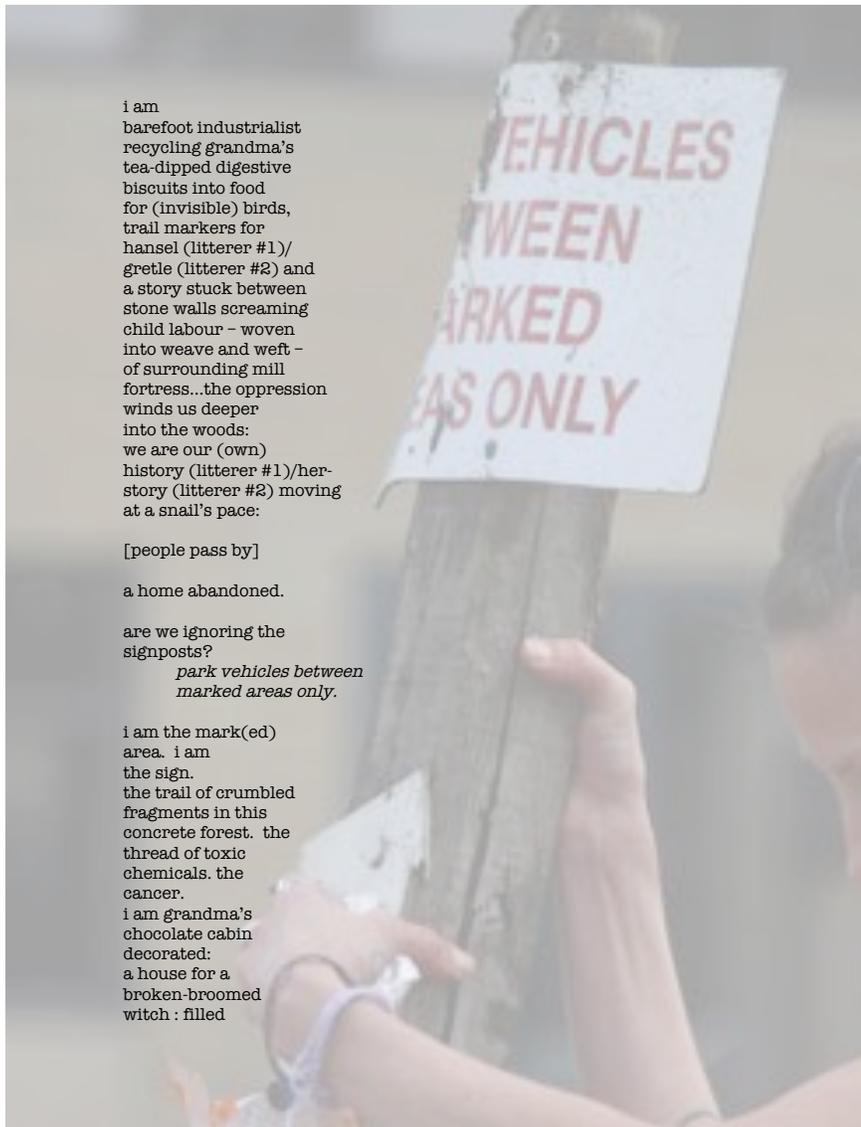
a home abandoned.

are we ignoring the  
signposts?

*park vehicles between  
marked areas only.*

i am the mark(ed)  
area. i am  
the sign.  
the trail of crumbled  
fragments in this  
concrete forest. the  
thread of toxic  
chemicals. the  
cancer.

i am grandma's  
chocolate cabin  
decorated:  
a house for a  
broken-broomed  
witch : filled





with tonics:  
puddle-powered brews  
of beer, lighters and  
candy wrappers  
growing  
dandelion tendrils  
shared through  
exchange:  
[can you recycle  
this for me?] a gift.  
the birds arrive.  
they sing from  
rowan-ash-(not)beech  
trees: summoning  
religious floods  
breathing climate  
change into the  
vernacular of air...  
their wings fly  
us into the role of  
faith  
[i return,  
pick up the  
pile of bottles  
gathered and  
head off  
forward/behind,  
arms full].

*(Please Now View: Huddersfield 1 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/286639004>)*

*[t]here*

Massey (2005) and Ingold (2011a) both offer effective arguments to perceive space and place as being dependent on the collaborative contingencies of individuals working co-existively. Massey, specifically, emphasizes fluid contextual trajectories, determined more by routes rather

than roots, of emergent relationships-as-process. She addresses the ‘now’ with a|historicality. She articulates beautifully the potentiality for moments of performance to manifest the imbrication of our ecological/social/personal and shared resonances and schisms. Morton perceptively remarks, that ‘*Place* is indeed a questioning, a “what happened here?”’<sup>80</sup> (2007, p.108, emphasis in original) wherein animism ‘thus turns out to have a lot in common with an ecology to come’ (p.108). This improvisatory performance process is the splacing of our chiasmic relationship. Tim Cresswell (2015) remarks:

Place provides a template for practice, an unstable stage for performance. Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways, where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways. Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than a priori label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice (pp.70-71).

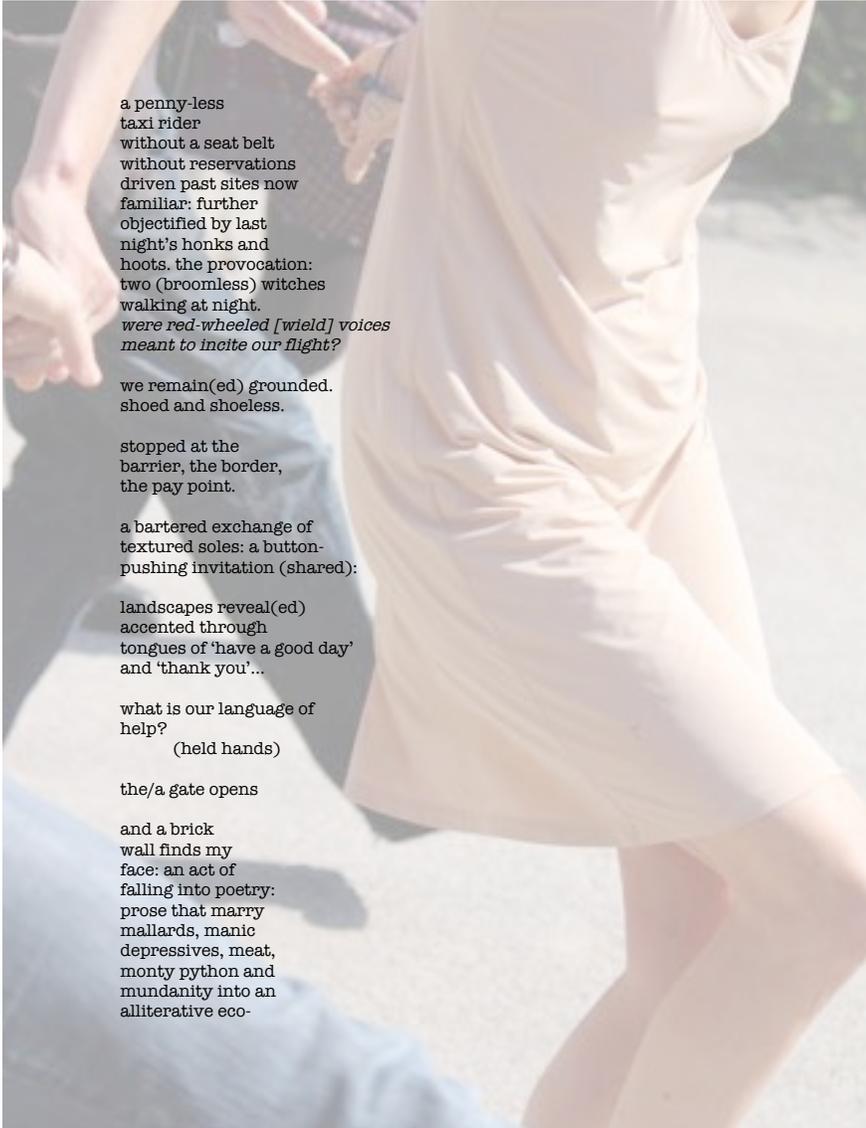
Engaging within these improvisations as a creatively, ethically-informed social practice, I have come to appreciate the unstable stage for exploring non-fixed and creative productions of identity.

I include here the eighth and ‘final’ performance poem conducted after the first year of performance events (Huddersfield, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015). Within it, borders are navigated, as we collectively wonder ‘what is the language of help?’ Morton (2007) remarks that ‘*Place is question*’ (p.178, emphasis in original).

We situate our answering through held hands.

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<sup>80</sup> So, too, this remains a question for space and site.



a penny-less  
taxi rider  
without a seat belt  
without reservations  
driven past sites now  
familiar: further  
objectified by last  
night's honks and  
hoots, the provocation:  
two (broomless) witches  
walking at night.  
*were red-wheeled [wield] voices  
meant to incite our flight?*

we remain(ed) grounded.  
shoed and shoeless.

stopped at the  
barrier, the border,  
the pay point.

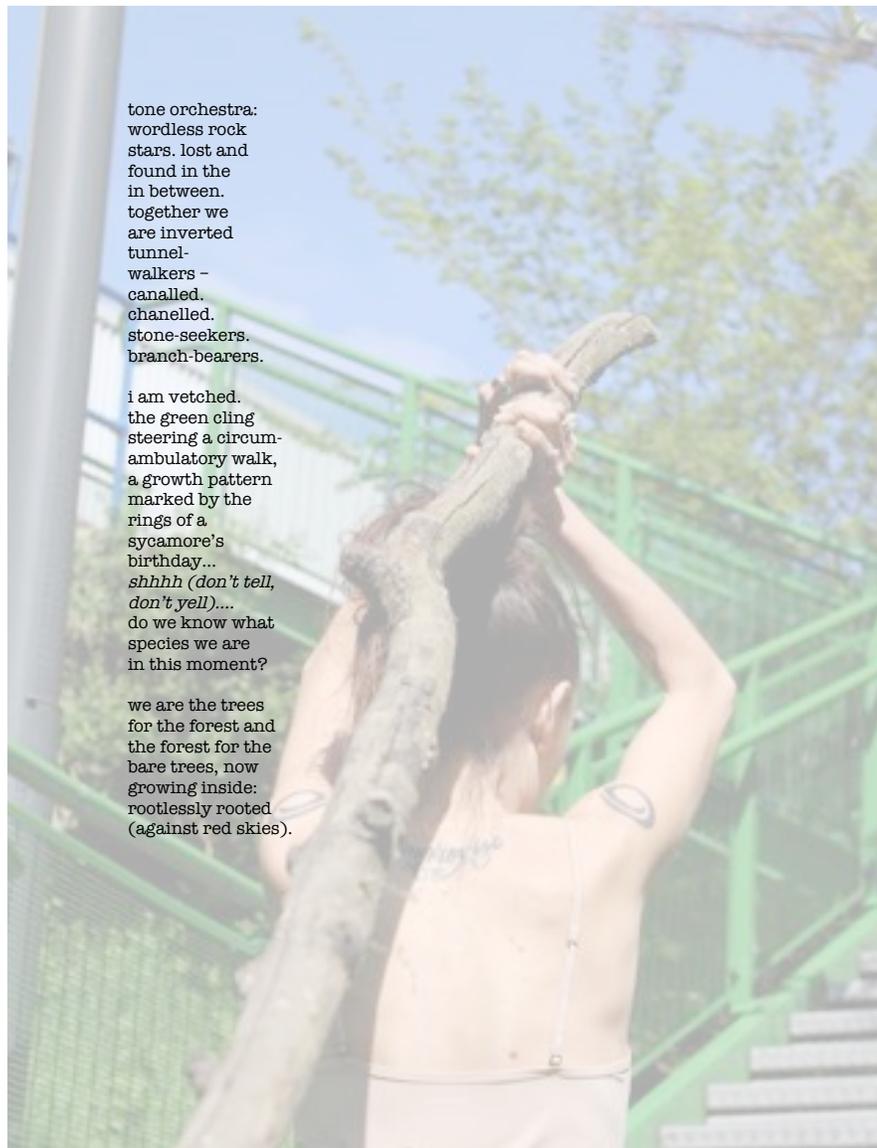
a bartered exchange of  
textured soles: a button-  
pushing invitation (shared):

landscapes reveal(ed)  
accented through  
tongues of 'have a good day'  
and 'thank you'...

what is our language of  
help?  
(held hands)

the/a gate opens

and a brick  
wall finds my  
face: an act of  
falling into poetry:  
prose that marry  
mallards, manic  
depressives, meat,  
monty python and  
mundanity into an  
alliterative eco-



tone orchestra.  
wordless rock  
stars. lost and  
found in the  
in between.  
together we  
are inverted  
tunnel-  
walkers -  
canalled.  
chanelled.  
stone-seekers.  
branch-bearers.

i am vetchd.  
the green cling  
steering a circum-  
ambulatory walk,  
a growth pattern  
marked by the  
rings of a  
sycamore's  
birthday...  
*shhhh (don't tell,  
don't yell)....*  
do we know what  
species we are  
in this moment?

we are the trees  
for the forest and  
the forest for the  
bare trees, now  
growing inside:  
rootlessly rooted  
(against red skies).

*(Please Now View: Huddersfield 2 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/286639267>)*

Ingold (2011a), in his approach to site and place offers the same description for 'both' – *non-essentialized and always in process* – and I find it resonates most profoundly with the scope of this project. His remarks support the suitability of the chosen improvisatory methodologies employed in this doctoral exploration. As such, they provide a stable platform for the

unstable opportunities offered up through performance. He suggests, that:

Place or site is a world of incessant movement and becoming, one that is never complete but continually under construction, woven from the countless lifelines of its manifold human and non-human constituents as they thread their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are comprehensively enmeshed (Ingold, 2011a p.142).

The constant movements of our comprehensive enmeshments have generated an underlying ethos for this improvisational project. This is possibly best captured in one of the refractive responses offered me:

Our time together transforms space into many different places  
I am charitable here  
I laugh here  
You took care of me here  
*(R31, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

Here, through the specificities of site, collaborative co-creations have emerged and transformed: curating opportunities for care.

***the present: (the) improvisational moment***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### Who is performing the What of Ecology/Disability (?)

I/You, me/other, ecology/disability all evoke questions of identity and ways of being in relationship with (the possibilities) of identification and disidentification.

The examination of my ethical relationships as they necessarily inform(ed) my [identified] placement, should be understood as being interwoven into the foundational core of this practice, of my improvisations, of my performances, of my poems. This is a still-ongoing process of deepening into the multiple and overlapping awarenesses necessary in each place I visited/stayed/performed/improvised. Some of these insights only made themselves known, or better understood, after the 'fact': triggered through the unfurling experience of each 'site'.

My performative identifiers are forever changing. They change through an improvisatory awareness of the sited discursivity between ~~ecological-disabled~~ citizenship underpinned by feminist dialogue. *My body is of earth. I perform and am performed by earth. I am simultaneously soil and soiled by and as earth: I am this* active and temporally extended (de)composition. In William Bryant Logan's *Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*, he remarks that, for decades, soil chemists have been trying to pin down exactly what humus is (which I consider here, as our *grounded* animate interlocutor), without success:

Radical disorder is the key to the functions of humus. At the molecular level, it may indeed be the most disordered material on earth. No two molecules of humus may be alike. Though no one has difficulty recognizing a humus molecule, it is quite likely unique, because it works upon

fractal principles. Simple geometries define any given part of it, but the modes for the combining of these shapes produce a vast array of different manifestations at different scales. For humus, similarity is rampant, but identity nonexistent (1995 cited by McCandless, 2016 n.p.).

Corroboratively digging this analogy into the ecology-disability frame, I am an animated, embodied intersection of this underpinning chemistry, wherein ‘intersectionality as a theory references the tendency of identities to construct one another reciprocally’ (Collins, 2003 cited in Siebers, 2013 p.292). *I am the uniqueness within similarity. I am the earth’s necessity and self-sustaining layer of support all-too-quickly being compromised.* As Donna Haraway remarks ‘...becoming human, becoming humus, becoming terran, has another shape—the side-winding, snaky shape of becoming-with’ (2016, p.119). I am the metaphor of our soil: ecologically disabled in the adaptive agency found by trying to navigate its/our simultaneous life-giving potential and overly resourced, dirty extraction. I am, once again, met by Phelan’s (2005) assertion that, ‘we are simultaneously alive to our death and deadened to aspects of our life’ (p.324). Through improvisation, I am able to negotiate my awareness of this paradoxical juncture: identity subsumed by the act of (performing a performative) presence. As Zaporah (1995a) states: ‘Expression is both the interpretation of experience and experience itself’ (p.13).

### ***Eco|(Fem)|Dis|Post|Crit***

At this point it is also worth remembering Chamberlain, Lavery and Yarrow’s remark that performativity has been widely discussed within

performance studies as a way to approach the deconstruction of ‘human identity’, but not ‘to deconstruct, from a biocentric position, separatist and exceptionalist notions of “human nature”’ (2012, p.6). Through performance and poetry, not only am I exploring my relationships to my [disabled] human nature; but, through practice my relationship to and within notions of my female and/or ‘mother nature’. One respondent captured the tension inherent in this dilemma, when they remarked:

...essentially, I can change my lens between acknowledging that I’m aware that you’re an attractive young woman in a slip and has the kind of bodyshape that is valued in our culture in terms of petite and thin versus not seeing that, and not considering any kind of sexual representation and just seeing you as a human being moving in space and I can switch between those two. [...] I still don’t know where that [internalization of dominant objectifying pathologies] is in your work and my response to it in the way that you’re choosing to dress...certain angles, when you bend over, there’s all that going on...do I look? do I pretend I’m not seeing that? is that something you want to be seen? or is it you saying this is just who I am and whatever you’re putting onto that is your own shit? [...] we oversexualize the female body and under sexualize disabled bodies. So, so far I don’t feel a clarity or a position on that from you, on those two pieces...which is fine...but it is something I am aware of...my intuition is that it could or will be more defined...maybe a loose end that isn’t resolved in you ... my experience is that you’re still in process with it and it’s not about the physical, more your relationship, it’s not about whether to wear a [slip] or not...I sense vulnerability in there for you....

*(R28, Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

My work implicitly avails and aligns itself with (eco)feminist principles, while simultaneously being susceptible to challenge and critique. And as the above (male) respondent remarked, through practice my work opened questions for others (and myself) to contend with. My particular decisions generated questions: costuming being one of the most tangibly accessible ways to enter the conversation. *Nearly naked.*

It is rare to witness a performance of this caliber here in Lasqueti, so THANK YOU. Thank you for making us squirm with your near-nudity...

*(R11, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

My near-nudity, my exposure, was my ‘profound engagement with a vulnerable self’ (Roloff, 1973 cited in Pelias, 2014 p.7). They were, as he suggests, acts ‘of being nakedly human, publicly’ (p.7).

As a female, improvising – arguably, strong in her vulnerability – ‘there is another predator out there: exhilarating sensual identification with landforms and processes is countered by social fear and oppression’ (Lippard, 1997 p.17). Further, due to a mutation in one of my genes, I (self-) identify as a disabled woman. I am corollary thesaurus-ized as a FREAK OF NATURE; thus, opening a critical lens through which I can examine notions of estrangement of both disability and environment. Sarah Jaquette Ray remarks of a systemically embedded view she calls the ‘disability-equals-alienation-from-nature-trope’ (2009, p.50). As a woman, I *do* experience ‘sensual identification with landforms’.<sup>81</sup> Through my very experience of reflections through these landforms, I am better able to relate to my ‘own’ body – through my disabling senses of distance/proximity. These reflections always have to contend with perspective and access, and through a disability frame are often constructed through a polarizing discussion which focuses either on ‘ignoring the limitations of the body or triumphing over them’ (Kafer, 2013 p.142). It is through discussions of access (not limited solely to the physical, gendered or raced, but also financial and the ‘sacred’) that areas such as mountain tops, steep cliffs, and ‘remote extremes’ associated with

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<sup>81</sup> I am not suggesting that men cannot experience the same affinity – in fact, my inclusive argument does not posit a binary between male/female connectivity with/as Earth.

our constructions of a Western conquerable-wilderness, evoke the ability to understand our cultural concepts of nature as being largely built by and for the able-bodied. Thus, what is rendered is an assumed inaccessibility on the part of the non-normative body. Kafer (2013) asks, ‘How might we read disability into these formations?’ (p.130). This prompts the question, ‘How have compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness shaped not only the environments of our lives—both buildings and parks—but our very understandings of the environment itself?’ (p.130).

My changing range of movement (concomitantly physical and financial) has rendered, at times, certain areas more accessible than others. This is a fluctuation shared between all of humanity. The question that this then sparks – which does not restrict itself to a rhetorical framework, but certainly applies to the specifics of this study – is enlivening my/ourselves within each context, to trying to understand: *Who* governs access?

The lands I performed on/with/to/at in British Columbia and Massachusetts both form part of the Ancestral Territories of the Tla’amin, shishalh, Qualicum and Straits Salish Peoples, and the Pocomtuc, respectively. Due to colonization, there is no current habitation by these Peoples either on Lasqueti Island/*Xwe’etay* or in Plainfield/*(Indigenous name lost/unknown)*. On neighbouring islands and land around Lasqueti, members of these respective Nations still do exist. Many live on ‘reserves’. They face ongoing and multiple struggles, in the wake of government-acknowledged genocidal attempts, to keep their culture alive, from falling mute. *Living reminders permeate the island’s lands and shores: vibrant animations of the ‘aggregations of narratives’ (Pearson) of these sites.*

The original Pocumtuc, with a history marked by colonial warfare and the subsequent movements this necessitated, largely lost their specific Tribal identity, intermarrying with surrounding Indigenous groups.<sup>82</sup> Their history is much harder to trace. With painful irony, I was conducting my search from a place called '*Earthdance*'. No one at the centre could tell me who the original inhabitants of the area were. It took me days of searching to locate the Pocumtuc – 'finding' on [www.firstnationseeker.ca](http://www.firstnationseeker.ca) that they were already gone. Their language: extinct. *Muted*. With all due respect to *Earthdance* (of which I have much) and its patrons; I was asking these questions at a centre which attracts a clientele – at the very real risk of stereotyping – which tends in the 'drum and dreamcatcher' direction of predominantly-settler-ancestored 'awareness'. *Earthdance* even boasts its own sweatlodge.

On the one hand, we are dealing here with cultural (in)appropriation, and the other, arguable signifiers (to some) that denote a willingness to enter into more profound reciprocal engagements. They both, simultaneously exasperate the 'other' and critically engage the 'eco-Indian' trope. Lisa Woynarski, citing Birgit Däwes and Marc Maufort, claims that 'the images of the eco-Indian or eco-Aboriginal – effectively revived towards the end of the twentieth century – have been powerful instruments of dispossession and displacement' (2014 in 2015a, p.187). The very acts of dispossession and displacement of the Indigenous Peoples of North America, included but were not limited to, the implementation of segregational reserves and reservations, which continue to this day. In the great majority of cases, the lands chosen

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<sup>82</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying, terms used in Canada and the United States often differ as do the structures of the Nations/Tribes (because national borders do not correspond with original Territories), so no accurate generalization is possible.

for these forced re-settlements emulated the attitudes of the now-dominant narratives towards these Peoples: ecologically stripped and abused.<sup>83</sup>

In Yorkshire, the once-upon-a-time of the Celtic Brigante Tribe holds narratives of invasions and displacements, of which neighbouring tribes and the Romans played a part. Overlooking Huddersfield, whispers of their past echo in and from the folds of Castle Hill. From beneath a tower commemorating Queen Victoria, lie the dips and crevices of a once large, landed settlement.

What becomes of utmost importance, when applying any/all of these theoretical frames, is understanding that a ‘narrative is constructed about the environment that is deemed at once authentic and universal and that denies the complexity of experiences that nondominant groups have encountered historically’ (Finney, 2014 p.10). Earlier, I referred to my first year’s ‘Flesh’ costume choice as being ‘mute’. The choice, embedded in its threads, the site for fruitful discourse around our dominant and/or subsumed narratives. *Again, how did my (dis)placement and costume choices feature to situate me with/against this awareness?*

Ecology, Disability, Feminism, Postcolonialism and Critical Race Theory as categories each assume an inter-sectional character. All speak through a process of marginalization, of subjugation – of *muting* – identifying how this ‘voice’ can lead to positive forms of empowerment. All, equally, are founded on uncomfortable paradoxes:

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<sup>83</sup> It is with pained reluctance that I must acknowledge that this document cannot possibly convey the extent of the overlaps prompted/touched on by this study. And not to be found guilty of relegating this mention to a less-than-equivalent status than any other, it should be noted here that the feminist frame through/as ecology and disability, can assert herself here with the reminder that Massachusetts, too was the home of North America’s most notorious ‘witch hunts’...

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. [...] I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices (Lorde, 1979 in 2007 p.112).

Improvisation, in its associative resonance, becomes an ethical choice: a politically personal/personally political tool for change:

...you are gutsy, in the zone, feisty, and dealing with multiple layers of relating to sound, environment, people, inner sensations, ideas, spatial and visual dynamics and socio-political and spiritual and physical issues. [...] There is an edge...  
(R31, *Earthdance 1*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

I include here, the first poem from my second year of improvisations, from the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 on Lasqueti Island. *My costume (had) change[d]*. I was always aware that all of my choices held the potential to inadvertently offend and/or trigger people in a diversity of ways (positively/negatively). *This: they did. This: I/i did.*



i am the  
thorned  
vine in the  
distance --  
an intersection  
of zinc (white :  
muddied) /  
copper (bloodied :  
worn) : [oxidizing  
green]  
crawling  
heavy breaths  
*knee to stone*  
*body to bark*  
*barks to bones*  
closing an open  
gate  
"i am not part of  
this performance"  
*rather*  
i am amongst  
you : watching  
ourselves :  
junctioned  
leaving anguished  
cries  
hinged on  
the (a) re-  
opening :  
drawing drips  
of (my)  
red windowed -  
heart :  
*in dust.*

(Please Now View: *Lasqueti 4 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/286639806>)

The process, of encountering through improvisation the vastness of our past and potential storyscapes, draws me to Lorde's remark, when she invites us to: 'touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears' (1979 in 2007, p.112).

*My face wore and wears the markings of whiteness.* As Caroline Finney (2014) observes, ‘Along with environmental organizations, environmental participation appears to have a primarily “white face”’ (p.26). In popular culture representation, not only is the ‘face’ of environmental participation predominantly white, it is usually the property of the able-bodied, and depending on the particular thrust of focus, often male. Particularly, as it explicitly pertained to my improvisations at *Earthdance*,<sup>84</sup> my ‘whiteness’ demanded an awareness of the narratives of a past-brought-into-the-currency of the present. What began to surface amongst this collection of artists was a very palpable awareness of a ‘legacy of oppression and violence against black people in forests and green places’ (Finney, 2014 p.20) while paradoxically such places are also associated with providing sites of (possible) refuge from domination.

The insidious thread between all of these identifying frames, is that they each study how people were (?) relegated to a less-than-human status, and one of the justifications for doing so was to conjoin them with ‘nature’.

### ***Eco(Dis)-Logical***

*The self is as comprehensive as the totality of our identifications. Or, more succinctly: Our Self is that with which we identify. The question then reads: How do we widen identifications?*

~Arne Naess  
(1984 cited in Sarco-Thomas, 2010 p.371)

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<sup>84</sup> My whiteness was interpretable through Critical Race Theory frames in both Huddersfield and Lasqueti Island as well; the one an extremely multi-ethnic/racial town and the latter, predominantly occupied with residents of Euro-descent.

My identifications have been elasticized by this experiential doctoral undertaking. *Simply put; however, anything but simple.* It has added some and also rendered previous identifiers obsolete. Morton (2007) remarks of the aporia we find ourselves in, if we strive to establish a radically alternative politics and philosophy to an entrenched Cartesian view of Self (p.175). My deviations – my mutations – have created performance/poetry neologisms: politically personal, embodying an attempt to deconstruct the paradoxes of identity. My study has problematized, re-problematized and further problematized. *It has solved nothing.* I have solved nothing. The project *has* fostered critical considerations and (artistic) response.

I have been forced to explore my wanting to dismiss an identification with the term ecology, by enacting certain societal gestures/behaviours to be perceived (to a certain degree) as embodying an ‘ecological’ ethic. Through improvisation, I am trying to straddle this very performative binary: a collision of worldviews and semiotics. Within this, I am enjoying the maneuverability of the term disability: wherein the remaking of (dis)abilities necessarily becomes multiple. Disability, by proxy takes up the ecological (and feminist) project of interconnection leaving me with an understanding that none of the labels are strictly my own:

disability citizenship and aesthetics can model a form of being in space and in relation that aligns with many ecological thoughts, but can foreground access and its diversity, questioning notions of the pristine and too-carefully-guarded boundaries (of all kinds), of virgin land and heroic forays (Kuppers, 2007 p.31).

Deep Ecologist and Buddhist scholar Macy, in her extensive study of General Systems Theory as corroboratory with the Buddhist appreciation of a

dependently co-arising world, offers process descriptors which can be understood as the intra-permeability of disability-within-ecology:

When perturbations in the environment persist and produce a continual mismatching between input and encoded norms, the system either becomes dysfunctional or hits on new behaviors which are adaptive to the new conditions. These are then stabilized at a new level of negative feedback. In the process the system has altered its norms and complexified its structure for greater adaptability. The novelty-producing feedback is called 'deviation-amplifying'; the movement is toward differentiation and more improbable steady states (1991a, p.76).

Clearly articulated, an ecosystem is based on continually adapting to change, to difference – the process of which is not assimilation or sublimation, but rather displacing the possibility of fixed 'norms' – thus, deviance becomes the mechanism towards establishing 'improbable' balance. In this case, I am equating 'deviance' with the properties of the body, to be interpreted as reason to value the insights emanating from such perspectives. Though Macy does not directly reference disability, her remarks corroborate with the premise which supports the denial/suppression of the natural integration of disability is what ironically creates a 'disabled planet' (understood as being one that aims to achieve homogenization, thus invoking the term's usage in more conventional sense). Dis-Ability and ~~disability~~ are thus, complexifying and improvisatory agents, wherein:

self-organization into greater complexity represents a movement away from structural stability. As the system becomes internally more highly organized and externally inter-related with more factors, it becomes less stable and less predictable. At the same time and the same token, by virtue of increasing the variety of its responses, it becomes more adaptable (Macy, 1991a p.85).

and

A wild population of any species consists always of individuals whose genetic constitution varies widely. In other words, potentiality and readiness for change is already built into the survival unit (Bateson 1972, p.451).

In this sense, through the provocatively-adaptable improvisatory frame, Henderson and Ostrander (2010) argue that disability studies exist always as a form of performance studies (see also Koppers, 2014c; Hadley, 2014; Sandahl and Auslander, 2008). Similarly, Kershaw (2008) and Marranca (1996) argue that, so too, is the study of ecology one of performance.

### ***Improvising [the] Who***

*What I am as an artist is a channel through which a whole host of factors actively can mix together, creating a performance, creating a community, creating change. I do not see the performance as my own.*

~Frank Moore  
(2011, p.21)

Through the mindfulness of the improvisations, I became acutely aware of a ‘persona’ (for lack of a better word) who emerged through each improvisation. Entering into that liminal zone – murkily traipsing betwixt and between the blurry beginning and endings of these (per)forming happenings – this ‘performing self’ emerged, begging the question: *Who is performing?*

‘In performance’, Phelan (1993) remarks, ‘the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of “presence.” But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else—’ (p.150).

She-who-is-I/i-who-is/(morphs into)-other/Other came to be understood by me, as the liminal equator: an affected cultural ‘colour’ commentator straddling the performance performativity ‘identity’ indicator/disqualifier. As Siebers remarks, ‘Minority identities acquire the ability to make epistemological claims about the society in which they hold liminal positions, owing precisely to their liminality’ (2013, p.284). In my assertion of certain universalizing principles in an ecologically-disabled frame, my resonance with Siebers’ ‘minority’ remark can simultaneously find both dissonance, and agreement. I must also qualify that my minority identification is within a larger identification of ‘privilege’: a complexifying agent of my site-specificity. This understanding was realized through the multi-modal accumulative practices of the improvisations (*-into-poetry-into-drawings-into...*) themselves, fostering criticality as an active principle.

There is that quality or feeling in me when you appear that’s like ‘who are you?’ [...] and there could be different words, but the shamanic entrance...

(R12, *Earthdance 7*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016)

The performatively performative space of the shaman again materializes through the liminally representational event of the performances, both felt and repeatedly remarked upon.<sup>85</sup>

There was a dance between worlds, and also frailty and different levels of ability and lucidity and that that is also included in the picture...in the picture of life...and it is not necessarily something we look at or talk about or want to be comfortable with and I felt that your engagement in that with your staying longer and staying longer and staying longer with that wasn’t just a transition spot and it was a very palpable part of the experience...

(R33, *Earthdance 6*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

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<sup>85</sup> Other terms that re-appeared on several occasions in respondents’ remarks akin to the shamanic references were those of ‘witch’, ‘spirit’ and ‘trickster’ – the latter being a particular North American reference born of Indigenous mythology which references the animal-human interface.

...there was a supernatural overlay on the performance that was fascinating.

*(R30, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

...both human and other-worldly...

*(R21, Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I include here, the tenth poem I scribed at *Earthdance*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016, which captures the ‘superstition of panoptical vision’...’sharing the invitation of threshold crossing(s)’...



i am the  
optional  
[not option-all]  
entrance :  
the inside/  
outside umbrella  
opener - a  
superstition  
of panoptical  
vision - [ex-  
changed] scrutinized  
in the surround :  
see-through  
double-  
glazed membranes :  
evaporating  
a removable  
drape (of)  
counter-clockwise  
movements:  
unbalanced, off-centre  
barring one's  
'own' door/  
sharing the  
invitation of  
threshold  
crossing(s) :  
screaming through  
screen / screening  
[the possibility of]  
screams :  
holding the  
hand(s) that  
aids,  
booted i  
assist in  
removing shoes :  
hang up my  
'own' curtain [call] :  
disappearing  
through the crack  
of unlocked,  
swinging  
hinges

*(Please Now View: Earthdance 5 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/286640197>)*

The '*Who*' who is performing is also she, [Bronwyn Preece] – ME! – who deals in very real terms with the effects and affects of Wilson's Disease – in/out/through the 'performance' frame(s). Spry suggests that sometimes:

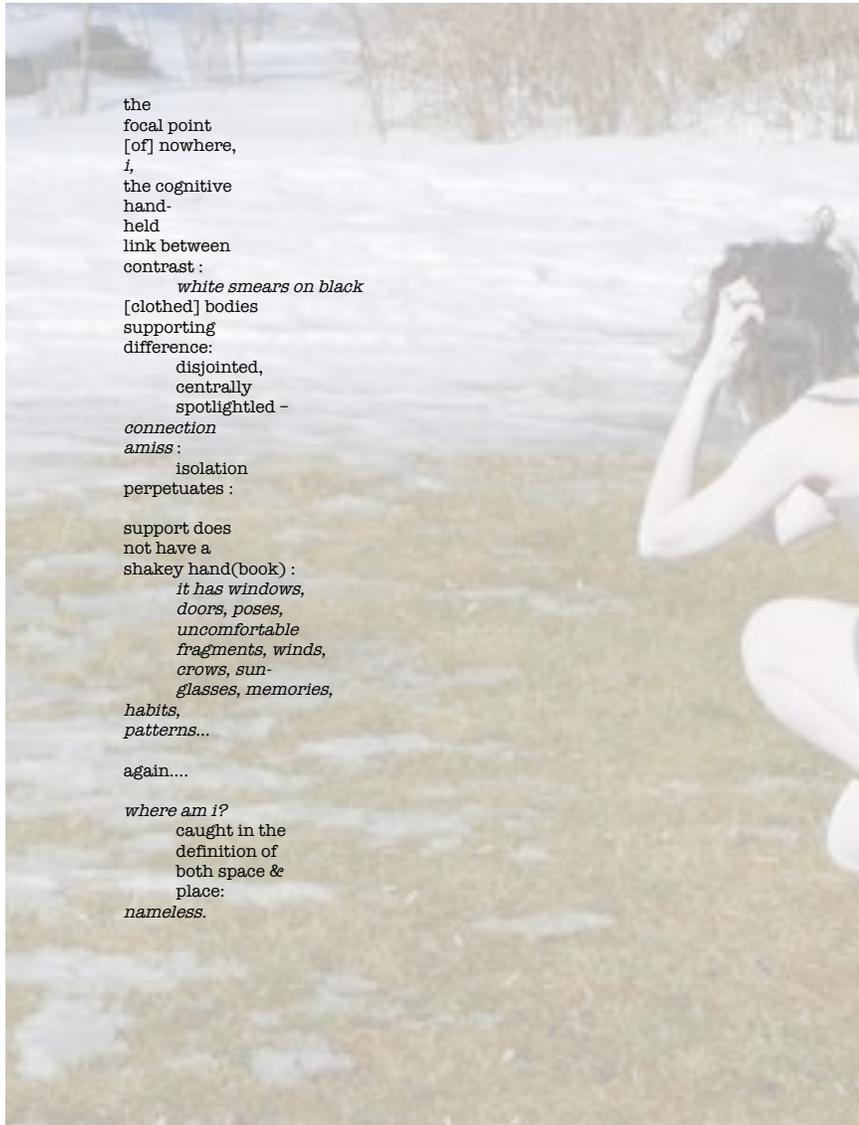
it is in the knowledge that we live experience directly, but study it performatively that we find ways to live in the fragments of language and bodies that lie about the stages of interactions with others in contexts (2007, p.345).

I move from poetically 'disappearing through the crack' to the following poem, where therein, I experience one of the many paradoxes of disability. Often, even when being 'supported' or 'centrally highlighted' by others, notions of isolation may in turn emerge or become evident. 'Carrie Sandahl has previously demonstrated the critical role that solo performances have played in engaging audiences in disability identity politics and collective re-imagining of stigmatized understandings of disability experience' (Johnston, 2012 p.43). Sited/sighted between building and trees, the eleventh improvisation invoked Griffith's earlier observation of shamans who live 'between metaphor and matter [...] between the village and the forest, in the twilight borders between worlds [...] between sickness and health' (2006, p.28):

There was something so raw and otherworldly that was coming from your body...it was almost like keening (a form of grieving) ...there was something in your stance...there was a lot of shaking going on and a dialogue between the shaking...it was quite powerful...we were close to you, we were in proximity...to have you so present in the same was really powerful...

*(R33, Earthdance 6, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

As will be evidenced in the eleventh poem (20<sup>th</sup> February 2016) my identifiers, still appear to be 'nameless':



(Please Now View: *Earthdance 6 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/286729564>)

### ***(A)symptomatic***

Moments where symptoms/feelings are more acute arrive, at times, unannounced, triggered by the confluence of context. My body found resonance through the improvisations to explore the range of some of the more extreme e/affects – from more pronounced shaking to a one-time all-

consuming panic attack in my twelfth improvisation. In such a heightened state, my acuity to directly experience the depth of my metaphoric insight was not stifled. Rather, I was privy to a depth-through-performative-immersion to the immediacy of *experiencing* resonance with local/ (personal)/global issues:

Both the ‘what’ that is known and the ‘who’ that is the knower are elusive. Neither can be fixed or pinpointed as static, self-existent entities. Shifting and dancing out of reach as we seek to grasp them, they suggest that there is not knower or known so much as ‘just knowing’ (Macy, 1991b p.76).

*My anxiety was/is not mine alone.* Morton (2016) claims, ‘Anxiety is *elemental*’ (p.78, emphasis in original). And yet my experiencing – ‘my performance’ – was not palpably read by ‘others’ as that of a panic attack. *In one sense, I did not share it.* In another, I was [the] sharing:

We become aware of ourselves in relation to our experience. Clearly, we are not our experience. We’re the consciousness that witnesses this process. We’re not our feelings. Feelings, emotions and thoughts pass through us. [...] The awareness that our every action is a construct of some constellation of influences can be devastating at first. We don’t know what’s ours, and what’s been handed down to us. We don’t know who we are. Eventually, this understanding frees us (Zaporah, 1995a p.18).

The freeing of this understanding served as a corporeal-catalyst. This creative springboard engaged directly with the trans-corporeal: the ‘shared welcome’<sup>86</sup> of our contagious contaminations...

Alaimo remarks that, ‘Performing material bodies as ethical terrains [...], as interconnected with the wider physical landscape – offers

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<sup>86</sup> A reference to the literal ‘Welcome’ mat that was employed during the improvisation: made of petroleum/carbon-based black rubber. The welcome mat became a stratified and multi-dimensional metaphor throughout the performance.

possibilities for post-human ethics' (2010b, pp.32-33). Her comment re-engages the challenge of how to document, or trans-scribe, the threads between my performance event(s) and the capacity to engender trans-corporeal ethical terrains:

The 'unique' body of the artist in the body artwork only has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist's body and name. Thus, this body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on an authorial context of 'signature' but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body. When understood in its full open-endedness, live performance makes this contingency, the intersubjectivity of the interpretive exchange, highly pronounced [...] since the body's actions can be interfered with and realigned according to spectatorial bodies/subjects [...]; documents of the body-in-performance are just as clearly contingent... (Jones, 1997 p.14).

Addressing the challenge above, I share with you here the twelfth poem (*Earthdance*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016), so presented with an ekphrastic interpretive drawing and two photographs. The poem shares the revelation of a moment of simultaneity/synchronicity transpiring during the performance. As I was performing, through the 'ethical terrain' of anxiety (but not 'performance anxiety'), the *transtechnologic* universe was relaying messages to me through my computer's inbox. The sender:  
[www.diseasemaps.org](http://www.diseasemaps.org).



To truly explore our own identifications as being human, we open ourselves to our imbricated and inextricable nature simultaneously with the human and more-than-human world: improvising through this awareness.<sup>87</sup> *This i truly experienced.*

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<sup>87</sup> / ecologically-(dis)abling / disabling-(eco)logic /

***moment(ary) improvisation: presently***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## **CHAPTER SIX:** **Howing: Representing the Representational**

Transitioning from the *who* into the *how*, this chapter strives to take a closer look at the ‘representational space’ of the performances and poems, highlighting some of the major points, gleanings and transitions that emerged throughout the process. The chapter will examine how these particularities were supported and/or challenged by improvisatory, site-specific means in relationship to the questions underpinning this inquiry.

Due to the breadth of topics evoked through my practice, I am taking pains to touch on as many pertinent aspects as possible. I examine elements that either supported the process initially, or emerged during this exploration – without tipping the scales towards superficiality on all accounts, or extreme pedantry on the other. In so doing, I am trying to flesh out each area with enough dimensionality so that the scope of thought is conveyed, whilst admitting that there is far more that could be said. As this study celebrates the panoply of compounded overlaps, I feel strongly that failing to include mention of any of the following (or previous) topics/dimensions would ultimately betray the complexity inherent in the project. Simultaneously, I am struggling to avoid repetition of points previously made when revisiting core methodological approaches. The necessary cycling back and through, addresses the amalgamating composite of the stratas of this study – each with the intention of interjecting something fresh into this unfurling.

The crafting of this particular chapter has also been challenged by the sequential demands of linear script meeting with the tiered understandings/intentions that often emerged in a more imbricated sense. The following

writing feels at times like I am creating a *literal* basket – a holding container – a balance of weaves, where the design is being intertwined with a diagonal twist. The attempt is to examine the basket (the *hows*) in its parts – wherein each and every part touches on aspects of the other: where dividing lines become frayed in the (welcome) overlap. As Guattari suggests, we require ‘new ecological practices’ (2008, p.33) that will have ‘to articulate themselves on these many tangled and heterogeneous fronts, their objective being to processually activate isolated and repressed singularities that are just turning in circles’ (p.33). This chapter stands as ecological praxis. It is simultaneously fluid, whilst replete with spliced meanderings. It is analogous to – and therefore representational of the ‘performance’ of the (dis)abling experience of having Wilson’s Disease.

### ***Performance Splace***

*Splace* |splās|  
verb

[to perform] between sites, space and place: the embodiment of site; *informal*

I wonder about the ways of understanding whether it was your performance or our performance, or whether it ought to just be the performance.

(R34, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

...you created an energy field

(R8, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016).

Attempting to examine the ‘representational space’ of the sixteen improvisations, I am met instantly with the welcome blurriness that I invoked

with how these moments were instantiated. I was intentionally choosing to hold an awareness between the extraordinarizing of creating focused moments of engagement within the performance of the intrinsically everyday. In so doing, I found Zaporah's comment particularly astute, that form 'is never what; form is always how' (2013, n.p.). Form *informs* (as congruent vehicle for) the experiencing and the sharing of the moment-to-moment experience of the improviser as an active verb. Zaporah suggests, 'It's how you're forming what you're feeling' that make the cornerstones of performance, noting that if there is 'no communication, no exchange, it's not a performance' (pers. comm. 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015). I was further prompted by Shannon Jackson's (2011) question in *Social Works: Performing Art*,

*Supporting Publics:*

What if, for instance, the formal parameters of the form include the audience relation, casting such inter-subjective exchange, not as the extraneous context that surrounds it, but as the material of performance itself? What if performance challenges strict divisions about where the art ends and the rest of the world begins? (p.15)

I had the strange feeling that the performance was still going on. I knew the show was over [...] and yet it didn't feel like anything had changed. You were still improvising, now with words instead of gestures, presenting yourself as yourself instead of as a performance. But what's the difference? Art is improvisation, life is improvisation, there is no separation between the two. This was a good illustration of that.

(R35, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Through 'performance', we [audience/performer(s)] were dialectically dissolving/re-creating the 'strict divisions' of our performances, our daily improvisations: forming the material contexts invited by the moment.

***Poiesis: The Poetry of Performance Poems Performing***

*Poetry itself is tied to the context of the immediate and the immanent, to the processes of 'being there' and sensual saturation, and to the art of the possible and not necessarily the actual, in or out of what might seem to be an obvious historical or mythological context.*

~Ivan Brady  
(2005, p.991)

Brady's remark makes me consider – just as my poetic/improvisational practice was and has been doing – what if the historical contexts are not obvious? *Obvious to whom?* How is 'the obvious' qualified vis-à-vis the perpetuation of dominant narratives? What – and *how* – are my responsibilities as a visitor/local, 'being there', to avail myself to the plethora of narratives? Narratives that are at once, muted and present? I grapple with my understanding of how my very placement, my writing might be either perpetuating or undermining these junctures. I am provoked into a simultaneous mode of questioning and answering, examining the role that my poetry does/can have, questioning what position its inclusion holds within this doctoral text, in synthesizing (my) perceptions.

The poems – a purposeful engagement with these questions – facilitate the sharing of one woman's *in situ* performance understandings. They are testimonies of transparency, with (my) own situational blinders revealed through the language. The poems are ostensibly personal|political. I take up the writing of these poems, much as Kafer incites us to ask, how through disability, ecological interactions can be spelled out in terms other than an ignoring or overcoming the body (cultural) narrative? She remarks, 'I am motivated by a desire to write myself back into nature even as I unpack

the binary of nature and self, nature and human' (2013 p.142). This, the human nature of ~~disability~~.

My hope is that the words speak through the specificity of site (body/land), conveying an immediacy of interpretation relevant to the moment, regardless of the need to have been there. As performances themselves, the poems simultaneously become points of stylized access for both myself after-the-fact, and for those (humans) who were not in fact present in/at one of the performances:<sup>88</sup>

It may well be that our sense of the presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving the document itself *as a performance* that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience (Auslander, 2006 p.9, emphasis in original).

The poems intentionally take up the aesthetic and performance of bricolage, taken up by the whole of this project. They offer the possibility of being interpreted in conjunction with the video iterations, my drawings and ekphrastic refractions: fragmented representations contesting the 'ephemerality' and (im)possibility of documenting these meetings. The poems also exist on their own, as 'independent' iterations: as scores for interpretation and (possible) future performance, further invoking possibilities of cyclical ekphrasis.<sup>89</sup>

The poems were written as an active (*act of*) sharing, of remembering – becoming part of the ongoing canon of non-linear his/herstories: recorded:

mark a grave

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<sup>88</sup> This is further taken up in Chapter Seven.

<sup>89</sup> I am conceiving of the possibility of creating an improvisational performance space in which the poems and photographs feature as projections to interact and engage with.

with the twigs of  
forgotten  
his-&-her stories

(Huddersfield 3, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016)

The poems were recorded in a (written) world where many voices are not present (for a host of reasons) – in some cases acting literally as a grave marker for the vanished. Simultaneously, I am conscious, much as Jones (1997) states, that ‘it is hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them’ (p.12). These poems avail themselves as future retrospective markers of perspective. They thereby, address ‘the immediate and the immanent’ (Brady, 2005) conveying the possibilities made available *to one, together*, through the process of sensually saturated deep listening and hearing. Corroboratively, Andrew C. Sparkes *et al.* consider poetic representations to offer up powerful forms of analysis, providing ‘the researcher/reader/listener with a different lens through which to view the same scenery, and thereby understand data, and themselves, in different and more complex ways’ (2003 cited in Prendergast *et al.*, 2009 p.xxviii). These poems add another dimension to the performances, whilst the performances represent an intimate, quiet, yet complex poiesis.

The poems are inherently a practice of attempting to embody an (auto)ethnographic ethical practice, and occupy this position within this study. *They are a poetics of embodiment negotiating content and context.* The poiesis: the improvisatory process, myself a *site* for asking-through-doing, through meaning-making. They are intimately an extension of the non-scripted improvisations, wherein they become mnemonic and metonymic limbs of the *in situ* revelations:

as an embodied activity, it can touch both the cognitive and the sensory in the reader and the listener. Therefore, poetic representations can touch us where we live, in our bodies. This gives it more of a chance than realist tales to vicariously experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation (Sparkes *et al.*, 2003 cited in Prendergast *et al.*, 2009 p.xxviii).

They become the language of my *contextual* trans-corporeal embodiment: wherein embodiment means everything that bodies (writ large) can do, but as well, what bodies may have done and might be able to do, or empathetically comprehend. 'The projection of synaesthetic experiences between reader and writer is possible because of the shared bodily experience of the world: the relationship is intersubjective' (Reason, 2006 p.224). As Stanley Bunshaw remarks, the reader 'cannot help but read into the words images in his own body' (1970 cited in Reason, 2006 p.224). The poems become another means of translating experience – themselves performing – *body-through-body*: the body of text becoming an expression of the 'diaspora of dialogic engagement between disparate moments and movements of meaning' (Spry, 2006 p.342). Meaning moves and displaces the obvious. As Griffiths perceptively notes, the land 'is sown with the seeds of verbs' (2006, p.204), and verbs are the moving chroniclers of our time. The poems are a verbing of (my) *in situ* improvisational understandings: qualitative data collators in this *reciprocity*search.

Abram imputes the possibility of text to simultaneously distance ourselves from the more-than-human world, arguing the effect of the introduction of the written, non-hieroglyphic alphabet aided with this sense of disconnect, shifting the experience of human reflection to a more insular refraction (1997). But he, like I, delight in the possibility offered by taking



fagots. The curious question then becomes when did this understanding transpire (and, or if, for whom)? In the performance or in the written semantic play – or in the space between the ‘two’? The performative poetic in this case simultaneously embodied, a unique space for being ‘literal allies’ and allies through our disposable litter. *The poems are the performance writing ‘it’self*. Offering this layer of performance interpretation, on behalf of the ‘performer’ offers the languaging body/bodies to linger now in a multiplicity of forms – thereby, enlarging the frame of interpretative contexts. Jones asserts that ‘it is precisely the relationship of these bodies/subjects to documentation (or, more specifically, to representation)’ (2007, p.12) which conjoin them to the to the dislocation ‘of the fantasy of the fixed, normative, centered modernist subject and thus most dramatically provides a radical challenge to the masculinism, racism, colonialism, and hetero-sexism built into this fantasy’ (p.12).

In so scribing the events, do I risk affecting an outcome, or dictate an understanding, outcome or effect? Should the documentation be left solely to those in attendance? I argue for the value of the poems as performances themselves, performing a continuation... Though by no means my intention, an argument could justly be made that my poetry fixes to a certain degree the reach of the performances. But, I counter that such a stance holds little muster in our daily improvisations as I actively take up Rancière’s understanding that:

The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators (2009, p.27).

My poems became active narrations and translations, active subjects/objects in a world of translators and narrators.

*I semanticized silence, I languaged locutions. I compiled curiosities, I inked imagination. I penned possibilities. I palimpsested the personal. I drafted disability: I wrote/write Wilson's Disease as a wherewithal(l) with world.* The poetic process enabled a nuanced congealing through reflection. The poems allowed me to 'distance' myself through an immersive practice: extrapolating my perspectives on what unfolded. Conjoining words-as-action, as unfoldings, as processes-of-emergence, enabled further reference points to emerge through the poem: as if new cartographic markings on the (intentionally troubled) maps of these improvisations... The poems became another tier in the process of *making sense* of the intertextual performance space.

The poems place themselves directly into the discourse of documenting the representation and disappearance of performance. In a chapter focusing on the *hows* vis-à-vis the poetic inclusion, rather than trying to write about the process of how I wrote each poem (which, ironically, is beyond words),<sup>90</sup> I wish instead to make the case for *how* the poems provide valuable means for the writer/reader to simultaneously enter the process from the perspective of the performer, whilst also engaging in *the act* of a performer reflecting upon the unfolding. In doing so, I acknowledge of course Reason's point that:

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<sup>90</sup> Or as Ferlinghetti quips: 'A poet should never discuss the craft of poetry or the process of creating it' (2007, p.18).

with all representations, the methods and interests of the presentation also begin to constitute a distinct identity of its subject. That is, in the choices of *what* to record, in the manner of *how* to record and indeed in what *can* be recorded, the act of representation defies its subject (2006, pp.3-4, emphasis in original).

Further, each poem I penned is included herein not as words ‘alone’. Rather, each is under/overlaid with photographic images taken during/or drawn afterwards<sup>91</sup> by respondents. The representational forms of these poems both embody and trouble a poiesis of reciprocity. They defy and redefine in multiplicity: the ‘subject’. Inter-textuality and inter-subjectivity become ‘a basis starting and end point of relational aesthetics’ (Bourriard, 2002 p.44). However, it was ‘I’ who chose which images to include and how to relate them to the poem/ performance. This layered dynamic offers up a fresh methodology for performance documentation.<sup>92</sup> It engages a spontaneous simultaneity, embodying at the same time tenets of both perceiver/perceived, viewer/ viewed, performer/performed, writer/written...writer-of-performance/ performed-by-writing. As Laurel Richardson asserts:

If a goal of ethnography is to retell ‘lived experience’, to make another world accessible to the reader, then I submit that the...poem, and particularly a series of...poems...comes closer to achieving that goal than do other forms of ethnographic writing (1994 cited in Butler-Kisber and Stewart, 2009 p.4).

The sixteen improvisations wrote sixteen poems: a poiesis of living experience, a ‘series’ on *in situ* engagements with availability. Throughout

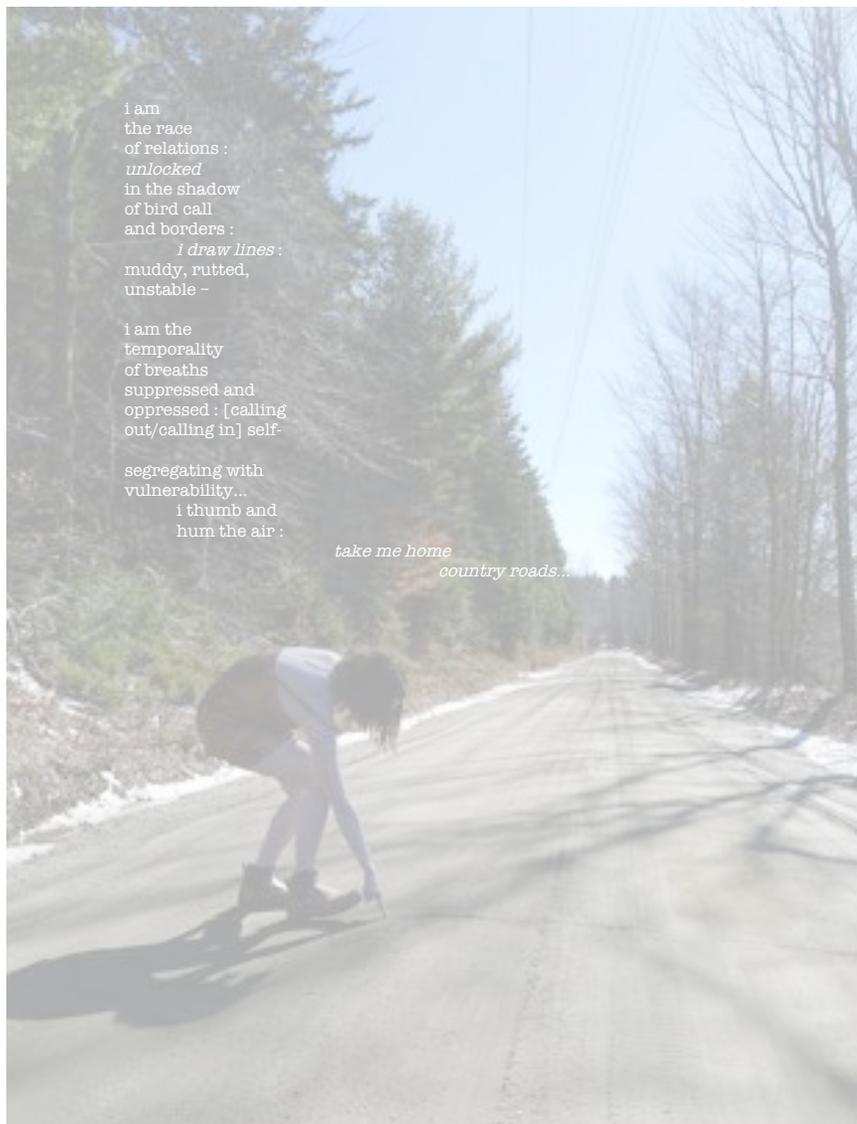
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<sup>91</sup> One exception is the third poem, from *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – which includes a ‘performance score’ by Cory Neale which was noted in ‘real’-time, as the performance unfolded. All other drawn images were submitted shortly after the ‘fact’.

<sup>92</sup> Prendergast (2013) is the only other practitioner/scholar I have come across who uses poetic inquiry to reflect from within on performance unfoldings.

the poems contended with my very situatedness: my improvisations, the  
currency of situation...

I share with you here, the thirteenth poem (*Earthdance*, 27<sup>th</sup>  
February 2016), deliberately written-in-white...



(Please Now View: *Earthdance 8 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/286730061>)

‘Take me home’ segues seamlessly into a discussion of the relationship of a moving site-specific practice within this process...

### ***Site-as-Specificity: Moving***

*I am a moving site.* I am animated by living bloodlines that course through my veins, engaging a global cartographic testimony of (dis)placements which I embody in the present: the Jewish Diaspora, the forced marching of the Cherokee Nation on the Trail of Tears, the movements of the Irish migrants, among others. I am first generation Canadian. My mother made the cross-Atlantic journeying from Britain, as a child. My father is a self-termed ‘refugee-from-violence’: an American who left the United States in response to the racial segregation practices and Vietnam War efforts, ongoing in the country. My body is an improvisatory map – *a specific improvisational practice* – wherein there is ‘a radical refiguration of intersubjective exchange in which a nomadic ethics is lived within the form itself’ (Migelow, 2012 p.9). I inherited a ‘natural’ affinity to explore and perform the questions of my embodiment of an ecological (dis)ability in the three (most immediate) countries to which I am genetically tied. I again invoke Abram’s earlier observation that our genetic inheritance (however ‘determinant’) can enable an ‘open activity, this dynamic blend of receptivity and creativity by whichever animate organism necessarily orients itself to the world’ (1997, p.50). *I am site as body, as place, as space, as improvisation, as performance, as self. I am site as a specific practice of art:*

I read body art performances as enacting the dispersed,  
multiplied, specific subjectivities of the late capitalist,

postcolonial, post-modern era: subjectivities that are  
acknowledged to exist always in relation to the world...  
(Jones, 1997 p.12).

I am equally a *site of privilege*. This enables me to now choose to travel, and by decree of my birth, allows me access to and from many countries to which others are not. I am aware of the danger of being accused of reinscribing colonial 'explorer-like' attitudes by taking up this privilege, and acknowledge that many of the initial journeys were prompted by deeply-seeded, innate curiosities. I am choosing to travel with these awarenesses, in the space between forced migrations and *dis*-locations... *socially-ecological*.

McAuley contends that site-based performance 'is certainly a move in the direction of ecological responsiveness' (2005, p.29). Although I can agree with her comment, I must return to the paradoxical-if-not-hypocritical position I am taking, by choosing to engage in discussions of our *disabling* climatic crises while wracking up a large carbon air-print. By using the website carbonfootprint.com, I calculated my estimated airplane travel for the two years of improvisations at 3.6 metric cubic tonnes of carbon. If I then add on another visit to England, to fulfill residency requirements of the PhD, and another trip to undertake my VIVA, my output is just over six metric tonnes. If I add up vehicle, ferry and train travel to that tally, I am likely nearing a seven metric tonne emission impact. Is the (potential impact) of the global dissemination of my improvisational/poetic practice findings, quantifiable as a means of offsetting some of the impact? I opted to undertake this study, so am arguing-in-the-hypothetical. I am hopeful that the insights might 'justify'<sup>93</sup> the means: accepting my role as simultaneous

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<sup>93</sup> For every trip I undertook, as part of this doctoral process, I took pains to coordinate multiple activities with each journey, specifically to reduce my carbon impact. For example, but not limited to, I

‘master’ and ‘tool’ as I try to dismantle the current house of our *dis*-ecology.

Intimately conjoined and constitutive with the practice of poetics, I have found, much as Jen Harvie suggests, that, site-specific performance ‘can be especially powerful as a vehicle for remembering and forming a community’ (2005 cited in Pearson, 2010 p.9). As part of the same citation, she remarks that location can serve as a ‘mnemonic trigger’ potentially ‘helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meanings of those times’. One creative non-fiction ekphrastic response remarked:

She started asking the big questions that she had alluded to in her introduction. What were we doing? Where were we? What was happening?

Part of me wanted to be flippant, to throw out some funny comment but I couldn’t think of one. This sort of reverential hush happened. No one spoke. Bronwyn did not fill in the space that expanded out from her questions. Suddenly I could really hear the stream pulsing, foaming, rushing from the previous days rain. The air was heady and alive, so West Coasty I could see fine moisture hanging in the air. The ferns around the waterfall were quivering, dark green and lush.

The patch of forest on the other side of Main Road where lots of us have picked oyster mushrooms and nettles, where the alders grow out of swampy land, fixing nitrogen and eventually hosting spore parties, where the moss is thick and spongy and electrically green, where I pass by without a second glance on my way to False Town, became a special place. Because I had stopped to look. Because we had all stopped to look.

I looked up to the bare branches of the alders silhouetted against the sky and felt it all.

Yeah, something cool happened there on the side of the road. It could have been an intellectual wank but it became a still moment in time that was mysterious. I didn’t even want to answer those questions of what were we doing there. A strange little spell had been cast and that was neat enough [...] and had grounded me at a spot on a road I travel often.

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conjoined my annual visit my Wilson’s Disease specialists with these journeys. By that same token, I have opted within the academic frame to refrain from traveling to many conferences, on the basis that I cannot justify the impact of the flight to present a short paper (noting that each conference set-up is different, and some support more inclusive and immersive learning environments). I have made persuasive arguments within several leading organizations, leading to me and others being able to present by Skype or other means, in lieu of being there in person. This inevitably, has its merits and drawbacks, too.

(Creative non-fiction short-story excerpt, Jenny Vester,  
Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

The above remarks invite engagement with notions of something being ‘neat enough’. The neat enough of this particular case, aroused in the respondent, a newly-visceral experience of space, of place, of perspective that I deem actually did integrate ‘the questions I was asking’ and they were answered in her noticing. I would argue that this site-specific performance embodied aspects of the contingencies of climate change. Through doing, through being together, it was this specificity, that permitted entry into the sited/cited discursive realm. Susan Haedicke (2012) suggests that as:

the familiar space morphs into a strange place, the public space recedes as a specific geographic location and instead acts as a tool to highlight the immediate urgency of climate change. Physical site expands into the discursive realm. And, in fact, the more integral the actual public space is to the performance event, the more the discursive site wedges itself into the body of the spectator, as the experiential shock of being in a transformed familiar place reveals previously unimagined possibilities (p.104).

Employing site-specific means – wherein site, as experienced, ‘can be at once a destabilization and reclamation’ (Hodge and Turner, 2012 p.92) – this work successfully challenged dominant performance and narrative paradigms. It was in the particulars that the *form* – the *howing* – permitted such exploratory expressions. I agree with improvisational musician Stephen Nachmanovitch who contends that: ‘Structure ignites spontaneity’ and ‘Limits yield intensity’ (1990, p.84).

I was enabled to experience the terrain differently by following your trajectories. [...] I was aware of tactile and visual dimensions of the environment to a greater extent than I would have been if I had been just standing there or walking across that space by myself. I was *arrested*. My focus was both opened up and narrowed down.

(R17, Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016)

It compelled us to look with attention, look with wide peripheral as well as narrowed, focused concentration. I didn't want to miss anything.

(R1, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)

Earlier, I had cited another comment by the above *Respondent 17*, when they offered: 'the environment was partly "yours" and partly "mine"'. This observation finds congruency with Turner's remark about site-specific performance that, 'it makes the shifting relationships between "me" and "not-me" a field of deliberate enquiry' (2004, p.382).

This doctoral study purposefully took up this field of deliberate inquiry. Through site-specificity the possibility of availing ourselves to the limitations imposed on, or restricting, a trans-corporeal understanding and ethic was found. Poetically improvising into the not-me/me, the improvisation created a dialectic between agency and implication.

***improvisational present: the moment***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am~~ the concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER SEVEN: (Non)Specifics

### *Beginnings/Endings (?)*

My feeling was: you let this thing happen – you never specified ‘this is the beginning’ and ‘this is the end’  
(R15, *Earthdance 1*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

I really enjoyed the way this performance tailed off more in some way - what is an ending? Again, like the first performance, I feel like a lot of this strength is in not knowing where we stand somehow, going between risk and responsibility and a river taking us on a journey - choice choice choice...  
(R6, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

The pertinent question of ‘where do we stand’ in relation to ‘choice, choice, choice’ raised in the above refraction, attentively addresses the metaphoric tension highlighted through my chosen approach of *how* to performatively embody climate change. The ambiguity of how to proceed positively and ethically, when met face-on with hard-lined, doom-inducing ‘facts’, is arguably the modern conundrum of awareness. I wanted to embrace the soft edges of these movements: between ‘concrete data’ and daily routine, emulating them through improvised performance in the extraordinarying of our everyday.

The demarcation of the beginnings and endings of these shared moments became the property of the intentionally liminal. The liminal being the proprietor of a yet still unnameable/nameless set of contextual, reciprocal (per)formed [everyday] circumstances...the *hows* of:

your?/ our? the? event? performance?  
(R23, *Lasqueti 2*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

A happening, an event, many things at one time. I love watching

people together responding responding re-acting pre-attending to...  
Thank you for your perception attention to, attending to...  
(R6, *Earthdance 3*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

Globally, we appear to be treading a volatile edge. However, through the art of living-improvisation(ally) we soon discover that there are no (firm) markers<sup>94</sup> for these descriptive identifiers.

I may have: *slipped off my coat, removed by boots, started to follow, began to lead, appeared, stepped out of the car, fastened/undone a blindfold, changed the tempo of my movements, altered the pitch of my voice...* the ‘transitional’ signals, the instigating moments noting different registers of performance/event/happening were contextually different each and every time, the set-up changing depending on circumstance:

Shelley [the site selector] set the stage, by breaking the rules going through the house with our shoes on. It feels kind of naughty. Bronwyn continues to change the rules by letting the audience proceed before her. We blindly follow Shelley, but Bronwyn takes control of the audience by simply pausing. It is profound how much just taking time to pause can really change the atmosphere, intensions, and expectations. Bronwyn then runs to the front of the line. Again changing our POV. Underscoring the fact that no matter if you are in front of the audience or behind the audience you can still hold the attention of the audience.  
(R9, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

Instinctively we followed her around the outside and into the interior of the room finally, She exited [...] we were left there for an extended period of time before we realized she was gone and the piece ‘ended’. It was a stunningly masterful turn and control of audience flow.  
(R36, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

My back was turned [...] when she slipped out of her big black winter jacket and her boots and began to tiptoe across the road.  
(R5, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

<sup>94</sup> One might point to registered declines or increases in sea levels, temperatures, rain fall, etc. as ‘markers’ – but even with these, perspective casts an uneven shadow on where the relative meaning of such figures translate into contextually ‘identified’ impacts.

The four Lasqueti Island improvisations found me being driven from home, arriving by car to the four unknown sites. It was the decision of the driver, in each case, where and how to park in relation to the configuration of people/place: inevitably influencing my/our subsequent movements.

For the first ever improvisation, I stepped out of the car, coat and boots on and asked, ‘*Are we here?*’, inferring that I was not going to presume that this was the chosen site. It was clear that ‘it’ was *here*. I addressed and welcomed the crowd, who had arranged themselves in an orderly line, alongside the edge of the road of the intersection. They stood side-by-side, like a wall...facing south, the direction from which they knew I would be arriving. Here, in the middle of an off-grid forested island, in an intersection of gravel roads: the anticipated formalities of a ‘presentational’ space and/or the stand-aside role of the traditional spectator were already being modeled. Here, a cultural inscription was being embodied by this motley crew of colourful people who by their very lifestyle choice were living, arguably, counter-culturally. From this line, a question was posed: ‘Are we allowed to interact?’ to which I replied that ‘there are no rules’... I removed my coat and boots and *slipped* into the middle of the intersection. Subsequently reconfiguring the relationship with the audience to more of interactive-spectator, weaving in and out of ‘their’ line, prompting one person to remark:

In a sense improvisation is undifferentiated from the every day simple actions of being alive and in another way it feels quite segregated, cordoned off. To make this differentiation defined I feel it needs some boundaries. [...] All part of the acausal matrix we inhabit.

(R35, *Lasqueti I*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Throughout each subsequent improvisation what truly was at play was the differentiation of – intentional implosion of – boundaries. These co-created on-the-spot discoveries led to moments from the sometimes uncomfortable through to the truly exciting:

...so we set out and I felt something fizzing, potential, maybe - an about-to-becomeness, an aliveness - that we were implicated in, drawn into.

*(R6, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

Excited, a bus journey where? ...uncertain, intrigued, nervous...

*(R40, Huddersfield 2, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

I haven't talked to anyone else about that but that's what I see – and the other day when you came back in there was a sense of that – like oh! we've put on our shoes and now we've taken them off and you came back down the stairs it was like 'oh it's not over' and it wasn't like – it wasn't the same feeling of in a concert when a song will seem like it's over and people will clap and then it starts again and people are like oh! – it definitely wasn't that – that embarrassed feeling – it was more like: she's returned. she's not gone. there almost wasn't time for that embarrassment and self-disappointment of oh we screwed up as an audience member it was just like: what's happening now?

*(R12, Earthdance 7, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016)*

The murkiness of beginnings and new endings was directly linked to the questions underpinning this study. Comments continually affirmed the apprehension of the layered significance of this metaphor through the various readings invited by each performance. These improvisations were inviting readings of relatability, of relationship[s]. Throughout, the embodiment of hazy beginnings and endings held Anthropocenic corollary relevance, raising questions of an ecologically-disabling nature:

... these are all intrinsically ecological questions for me [what-does-it-mean-to-be part, included, asked in, called upon, responsibility, etc.], and they began from the very beginning of this performance, both through content and delivery.

*(R6, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

The *Earthdance* improvisations created their own sets of unique situational extrapolations towards endings and beginnings. In the first year, everyone – myself, included – would meet at a given time in the main building’s kitchen (a mixture of both daytime and night times were chosen). Site-selector Etkin welcomed us each time, urging us to don warmer clothes. *Did the performance begin with our coming together? With the chit-chat as assembling pre-cursor? Or in the ways in which we cloaked ourselves?* Etkin would then begin to lead us in a given direction (in each case her route would take us outdoors) with a given location in mind, but not spoken aloud. In this transitional portion, as the group assembled and moved, I would place myself in continual reconfiguring positions amongst them/us. From the very get-go negotiations were being made – who to follow? Etkin? Me? You? The person in front or next to me? Where did following begin and leading end? Quite quickly, there became an understood sharing of agency and participatory co-creation:

i am taking the cue off of you  
line up  
cue  
we're in this together  
we're all out here  
we're all wondering  
*(Poem excerpt, R27, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

I love the pathway and the journey and the moving nature of the performances; I love the event, the suspense in expectations and involvement. We are all in this together.  
*(R6, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

There were undeniable focal points – with me remaining the hub of the peripherally widened *theatron* – however, each person had impact. Our movements helped highlight ‘the others, creating a collective energy that in

turn fosters individual expression' (Belgrad, 2016 p.290). This was continually reaffirmed and registered:

...yet the I's remain through audiences speaking up speaking out, you can take this in your stride, of course, but it highlights even more your particular kind of generosity in taking centre stage - you own space and speech but with a space for others to speak also - facilitate-performing

(R6, *Earthdance 3*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

We are totally captivated by the controlled chaos of the situation. There is give and take of audience and performer.

(R9, *Earthdance 2*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

The available give and take of notions of audience and performer(s), were supported by the give and take between beginnings and endings.

Throughout the first year of *Earthdance* improvisations, an intriguing processual question developed (with highly metaphoric overtones/ underpinnings). By approaching the performance gatherings in such a way, it began to be asked: 'did we get to where we were going?' In the creatively nebulous zone of following/leading, agency and initiative, Etkin's intended destination was not always reached. Instead, a co-created journey would weave itself through an unfurling set of prompts...*the passage to 'there' was already 'here'*: collectively shared. Edward Casey (2013) acknowledges Alfred North Whitehead's influence, when he claims the body is 'the arena in which the here and the there conjoin inextricably' (pp.214-215) wherein the body 'is unique in bringing together here and there in a manner that resists the allure of simple location [..., wherein] the "there" *ingresses* into the "here," and vice versa' (p.215, emphasis in original). As much as I advocate for such dissolution between self and environment – I caution, that such acts/states/apprehensions must be conjoined with particular sensitivities

to site: which must include a temporally-extended, location-specific deep listening. The process might be anything, but simple.

Improvisational dancers Tufnell and Crickmay invite dancers to ‘journey without a map’ (1990, p.111). I acknowledge their invitation is, here, contextually removed. However, I still run-up abrasively against their directive with respect to the larger ramifications of engaging in a globe-spanning performance practice. Even though, through the improvisations I undertook, a pinpointed destination might not have been attained – and one might rightfully argue that indeed I was not working with a map – the embodiment of adaptability still encompassed a recognition of the cartographic histories (to the best of my knowledge) of what my/our relevant [mapped] positioning *here* may have meant: for performer, for audience. *The very map of privilege that allowed me to be who, where and why I was, and how. The very map of experienced marginality which informs ‘my’ who, where, why and how.* These were my performance-spatial-coordinates: demanding acknowledgment within the representational space (and beyond). This (attempted) awareness was shared with the group to varying degrees, while steering clear of didactic imposition. Our very boundary-defying trans-corporeality, I feel demands this much of us/me. That being said, I recognize that performing with and as site – through the representational frame – offers many potential elements for response. Paul Couillard (2006) points to the complex and delicate challenges offered up by the varied social, political, cultural histories and values of sites in forming our perceptions. He remarks that, we ‘read and respond to spaces according to our relative positions: gender, race, class and a host of other factors’ (p.34).

‘Ultimately’, he asserts, ‘we respond as our selves’ (p.34). ‘No one can guarantee that others, with different relationships to the site, will perceive our responses as either appropriate or sensitive (p.34).

When using language, provocations were offered up as questions rather than statements. Michel de Certeau’s aphorism: ‘what the map cuts up, the story cuts across’ (1984, p.129) holds true here. Even when non-lingual, the act of mapping – *embodying site* – still held an openness to the (invisible) map that holds the ‘aggregations of narratives’ (Pearson) and the ‘placial turns’ (McAuley). These awarenesses were held in *now* time: acknowledging those that have, or do, relate[d] to this place in different terms:

[Bronwyn] went through what I saw as a series of gestures which elicited centuries of victimhood that people have engendered world wide.

*(Sheila Harrington, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

The woman is making us think about boundaries, about Earth abuse, about meaning...

*(R5, Lasqueti 2, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015)*

Recognizing that the representational performance space was itself embodying the themes so directly relevant to the global picture – and how this was not amiss of those participating – further affirmed the poignancy of what a ‘local’ gathering can do to better understand our relationship to a larger whole.

The notion and usage of ‘local’ remains open to challenge throughout. The layers of identification are pressed upon through our multiply sited and placial alignments. The gatherings of people – in British Columbia, Massachusetts and Yorkshire – assembled for these performance

events, offered up a panoply of lineages, politics and histories of settlement/travel, brought together in one place (nevertheless, one has to concurrently ask: who was missing?). Some might have identified as a ‘local’, others as a ‘visitor’, others perhaps as ‘resident’, ‘guest’ or ‘settler’. However, it is the awareness of what the ethical dimension of this space-between these identifiers becomes that is of vital importance to addressing our larger (or potential) understanding of [ecological] displacement. *Our personal meeting in the provinces of our parochialisms.*

Returning here to the way that the *Earthdance* improvisations were begun/ended, Etkin chose a different tact for the second year. The four improvisations of 2016 found me getting dressed in private, and then at a given time one person would come and lead me to the chosen location. As was quickly evidenced with the first site, ‘expectation’ was confronted and subverted, even with this approach. When I was first led to a particular site, it was anticipated that I would walk through the door that had been opened for me...*I did not.* Rather, I closed the door, and looked/performed through its glass from the outside...

bronwyn knows that you don't do the thing that is asked but of course always do the thing that is asked. soft subversions.  
(R22, *Earthdance 5*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

For the fourth improvisation at *Earthdance* in that second year (the thirteenth in the collective sixteen) I requested that the location of the improvisation be held off the *Earthdance* site. This request was a respectful nod to the sensitivities that were unfolding within the *E|MERGE* artistic residency surrounding examinations of race relations. Performing in/as white became contextually provocative. I deemed the best way I could support

what was surfacing as a tense and divisive exploration of race relationships, was to re-locate the improvisation in response to the sensitivities of the context. A small convoy of cars, made their way through this delicately shared climate of change.

In Huddersfield, the first year's improvisations found us (a small group of University Theatre and Performance Studies affiliated folk, including my two supervisors) convening at a given time in the lobby of the Drama building. On the first instance, Elliott led us out the doors, steering us in the direction of her chosen (unspoken) location. Similarly, to what had transpired at *Earthdance*, the journey to/from there became the *here...* with the group arriving eventually where Elliott non-prescriptively was leading us/me. On the second occasion, when the doors of the Drama building opened, there outside was waiting a taxi-bus. We all entered. *I was barefoot. Penniless.*<sup>95</sup> The pre-arranged taxi took a somewhat circumambulatory route through roads I was unfamiliar with, in a town I had just arrived in days before. The taxi was a one-way ride. The effect of this both materially and metaphorically conjoined the themes under focus in this study: the adaptive, co-creative, and interdependent resourcefulness required of our ecological site-ing and the threshold of what we may perceive as dis- or enabling acts. The roles of performer and audience were successfully blurred: we needed to work together as a group to get back to where we came from, albeit changed.

The second-year improvisations, locations this time selected by Chamberlain, found me being blindfolded and walked to two distinctively

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<sup>95</sup> In this context, arguable, 'handicaps'.

different sites. *Again, when did the performance begin?* With the donning or removal of the blindfold? With the unseen, yet heard call-outs from teenage boys and passersby? And what were the other layers that I necessarily had to become aware of – to see – through blindness? Lynette Hunter, in *Performance, Politics and Activism*, draws attention to theorists who propose different arguments and metaphors for blindness. These range from Phelan's idea (drawing on Lacan) of being able to 'rebuild through blindness a potential for subjectivity and identity that is not visibly representable' (2013, p.8) to other meditations, such as those offered by Patrick Anderson, 'on the political potential in blindness for performative ways of knowing and apprehending that depend on incoherence and incompleteness, and disrupt moves toward assimilation' (p.8). Both of these contentions find resonance within this study. The latter takes on a particularly interesting tone when considered in relation to the tiered sensitivities these improvisations were exploring. My costume choices were enabling a degree of recognition of our past and present racial histories. *I was 'blinded' and 'painted white'*. Specifically referring to colour-blind casting, Hunter's comment remains germane here, when she states that 'blindness performs the way that, sighted or not, we cannot see our own self and are radically interconnected with what we cannot see' (2013, p.8). Though I acknowledge that Hunter is focusing on sight, in the context of these improvisations, our experiencing was not restricted to vision alone. I, therefore, am choosing to extend her observation, by replacing the 'cannot' with a 'may not [initially]'. The new statement, more aptly claims: we may not [initially] be able to see/experience our own self and our radical interconnectedness with all that we cannot see:

past, present and future. These (in)visibles create performative terrains:

i am (a) terrained  
topography (*geopsychology?*):

[...]

*the blurry edge*  
[ever present]  
*might not be visible*

(*Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016*)

Aptly relevant here, without beginning or ending, circling back, are Ingold's earlier cited remarks. He suggests that an open world 'has no such boundaries, no insides or outsides, only comings and goings' (2011a, p.117).

Taking up this notion of comings and goings, within the focal site-specificity of the (in)visibly terrained, I followed up with Elliott about the modern midden of litter and dandelions, a year-and-a-half after the original sighted. After several weeks of consciously noticing it, wherein 'the immediate area around the rubbish still murmured and bubbled with your improvisation' she remarked that, 'At some point it dropped back into the *invisible landscape*' (pers. comm. 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016, emphasis added). My question prompted her to set out 'along my daily route with the express intention of re-seeing...' (2016).

The space between our sensing, prompting and responding was perceptively remarked upon by Etkin, who commented on of the co-creative features of the improvisations:

all decisions are available for mutation  
all decisions provide every other option  
it's the agency to follow anyone  
any path  
any body  
that makes for improvisation

(*Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015*)

## ***Bewildering: Inside/Outside***

*Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside of myself.*

~Maurice Merleau-Ponty  
(2002, p.474)<sup>96</sup>

Exploring the rigidity of our cultural relationships to notions of inside/outside, and how these assert themselves – relative to our own bodies, our homes, neighbourhoods, our national borders, and a greater sense of ecological ‘availability’ – was implicitly woven within my improvisatory performance frames. Availability is used here to refer to the too-oft perceived conception of the environment being other than here, other than ourselves: as outside. By so doing, we deny, for example, ‘that a significant part of our body weight is made up of creatures like bacteria that live in our cells’ (Allinson, 2014, p.8). *Our sense of wilderness is at stake.* The placement of which can be a bewildering process:

Given the ways in which organisms and ecosystems are woven into each other, how are we to refer to ourselves? When I say ‘me’, am I really referring to a whole community of organisms of which ‘me’ is the collective title?’ (Danvers, 2009 cited in Allinson, 2014 p.8).

Bewilderment is appreciated as a process of recognition of our innate wildness, rather than a disorienting sense of confusion on a continuum of psychological ‘madness’.<sup>97</sup> It becomes the capacity to understand our

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<sup>96</sup> I earlier cited Ingold’s remark that an open world has ‘no insides or outsides, only comings and goings’ (2011a, p.117). I believe Merleau-Ponty’s and Ingold’s observations do not contradict each other. Rather, I feel they both are articulating much the same, albeit through different linguistic means.

<sup>97</sup> I use the term ‘madness’ here not as a dismissive attribute, noting the particular efforts of mad-empowerment initiatives within the disability rights movement, nor to denigrate its usage as a valid identifier. Rather, I use it here so that it may not be read as a *disqualifying* attribute, one deserving of segregation from society: but viewed instead as an innate capacity to understand our relationships with the world. As Griffiths suggests, these be-wildering capacities are often attributed to the shaman or the fool:

the one through whom the wild word is spoken, so even at [Royal] court there is one free to speak from the wild side. But because he is ‘mad’ he is often ignored. Because his truths are ludic, they are often not taken seriously. Yet the mask of madness protects his license, for he is a beyonder of the psyche, and

imbricated and inextricable association with ourselves/each other/earth: in every context. Bewilderment is not the property of the rural or the urban, the privileged or the marginalized: rather our differing contextual apprehensions help illuminate our sense of connection or lack thereof. Our role today may be to reclaim, to empower our culturally prescribed definition of bewildering as the process of being perplexed or confused (often associated with ‘disability’) into acts which harness our exploration of relationships of what *be-wilder-ing* means to us today.

‘Wildness is insatiable for life; neither truly knows itself without the other’ (Griffiths, 2006 p.85). The insideout of our wilderness is animate. Our own sense of attunement with notions of wilderness – of our own wildness – have been replaced by senses of ‘domestication’ (along with domination, subjugation, and marginalization). These tenuous relationships, analogous to our notions of inside and outside, occupy paradoxical positions in that they can represent simultaneously a space to be avoided, feared, cleaned or cleared, while on the other hand, they can be spaces revered or romantized. In this they occupy positions similar to many aspects under focus in this study: namely disabled, female, raced and ecological bodies.

We are living in a world where borders divide countries. A world in which we may sweep our homes clear of spider webs, only to ‘import’ bouquets of flowers; where we may try to placate the attempts of creatures to

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precisely because his words can be dismissed, he is free to say them (2006, p.345).

When using this term, I am aware equally of the validity of finding means to express our genuine madness about the current state of the world – and our uncertainty about the freedom we may or may not have to say so. This rage harkens back to Morton’s comment cited earlier about the impotent feelings that can be brought forth by such sentiments. The harnessing of these feelings of impotent madness is one of the agents of change through which these performances engaged in a dialectic of active possibility, bewildering the process: creating micro-climates of change.

cross the threshold of our dwellings with offerings of food on doorsteps; where National Parks may have steep user fees; and where our bodies are often forgotten to be recognized as being inextricable in this dance of (collapsing/creating) boundaries. Site-selector Etkin remarked of the performances that they enabled us to:

...defy the ins and out  
reflect ourselves inside out.

(*Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016*)

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard intimately relates outside and inside, reminding us that they are ‘always ready to be reversed’ (2014, p.233).

...space to listen to life around us, inside is, but also the creative making – this blurry line liminal line between receiving and responding making itself known to be throughout.

(*R6, Earthdance 2, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015*)

Person and place  
Identity in relationship to appearance  
Inner versus outer identities  
Collision of inner/outer worlds

(*R37, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015*)

I argue that our relationships to notions of environment, wilderness, inside and outside are always available – they are the very body/bodies we inhabit. Concurrent with Heim’s earlier observation about embodiment: similarly, our relationships to wilderness and in|outside are ‘always instantiated, local, and specific’ (2012, p.185). Many of the site-selections availed themselves (more readily) to jumping into this chasm. *This was so with the old growth tree surrounded by a human-made studio; or in a structure made of twigs, where I could move ‘through’ walls; or when maneuvering to either sides of windows: exiting and entering buildings.* This

‘permeability’ reminds me of site-specific, performance artist Julie Laffin’s work, who after developing ‘Environmental Illness’ had to negotiate the very thresholds of the outside coming in, and her inming with the outside, as toxic engagement with world.<sup>98</sup>

What becomes key is how implicitly – at times explicitly – exploring these contested dualisms is directly pertinent to the context of this study, to understanding the interface of disability and ecology. And might this, in our current culture, possibly require of us a touch of anthropomorphism to assuage romantic idealism? Bennett (2010) remarks, ‘If a green materialism requires of us a more refined sensitivity to the outside-that-is-inside-too, then maybe a bit of anthropomorphizing will prove valuable’ (p.120). *Might ‘a bit’ of transparent, inevitable anthropomorphism be a strategy for negotiating a semi-permeable trans-corporeality... the inside-that-is-outside-too?* For able-ing our sense of global enmeshment? I would argue that it can be. The decisions in how to document this work have certainly provoked these considerations. Invariably it becomes somewhat unavoidable through our perspective-base as humans, because even earnest attempts, as Bennett suggests, in ‘works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above a nonhuman “environment”’ (2010, p.120).

How does an implicit examination of the outside/inside/outside-inside\outside\inside continuum thus transfer to the relationship of ‘others’ (human and more-than-human) within the performances? To our relationships with climate change? The answer, on my end – even with the

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<sup>98</sup> See: Bottoms and Laffin (2012).

fielded responses – is speculative at best, entirely subjective at the least. I include here, an extended excerpt from a poetic response received, which arguably, addresses the trans-corporeality of these lines:

What I know before I see  
influence of reception  
copper and zinc  
shimmering and white

Your glitter  
your shine  
made the world around you  
glitter  
and shine  
made me realize what is inside of us  
is outside of us  
we are the same  
no change

But then there were these people  
watching  
people dressed in a way  
that hides their belonging  
they belong  
to something else  
this witnessing mob  
taking in this perfect  
confluence  
of nature in nature  
watching your  
freedom  
holding space  
for your experience  
generating  
attention

[...]  
I've taken your place  
your experience  
making me realize I am you  
I think I know what you are  
what you feel  
who you are  
what you do  
given the space  
given the presence  
given the challenge

(Poem excerpt, Deborah Black,  
*Earthdance 6, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016*)

The conceptual lines embodied through my improvisations, were arguably more directly present when I was using language. As an engaged story-sharer, I was connecting such explorations through more literal, if not non-linear means. However, it was in silence that some of the most viscerally experiential, moments were felt (and addressed in refractions). They evoked an attuned astuteness to the subtleties at play, that I was playing with others:

...really enjoyed your responses...you were aware of sounds, the politics of sensitivity, an awareness of in/out...  
(R21, *Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016*)

If my performances were able to offer opportunities - as they seem to have genuinely done – for reciprocal ways to acknowledge senses of being perplexed or confused about our level of participation/implication within the current climatic crisis – and platforms from which to prompt thinking/doing; then, I cannot help but think these ‘acts’ served to foster, for the better, *climate of change*: inside and out.

Subtly, non-didactically and tacitly, I was attempting to invoke through performance a space where an examination of our insides and outsides related (in|directly) to the way we perceive our temporal placement, our ability to be agents of change. *Agents of change for better or for worse*. I was attempting to create space for the examination of the delineations we choose to abide by or absolve, however micro- or macrocosmically we engage our lens of contextually-based awareness. I was taking up the task, through many avenues – from not knowing where I was going, to the

audience/performer dynamic, to the contextual insights – of exploring what it meant to truly be *bewildered*. In so doing, I was discovering that this is one of the most grounding apprehensions of self-with-world, of presence that one can experience.

I could argue that the contested line could be purely the property of superfluous theory – and I would agree that yes, this line of inquiry can potentially become redundant, subverting its applicability and relevance to the prescience of our times. However, what I have discovered, and feel is worth sharing, is my perception that our orientations around notions of inside/outside are tantamount to our ability to avail ourselves – or, at least, myself – to a sense of empathetic, experientially-felt interconnection: however, beautiful or painful this may be in a given moment. As Callicott points out:

any distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ or ‘self’ and ‘other’ is strictly relative and never ultimate, except as a modernist fantasy: ‘[I]t is impossible to find a clear demarcation between oneself and one’s environment... The world is, indeed, one’s extended body’ (1989 cited in Curry, 2011 p.96).

Inside/Outside become an ethical blurring, which remain throughout: contingently culturally-relative-and-specific.

I was really fascinated by the timing and the questions related to the beginning and ending – and it made me think about how many beginnings and endings there are in what we do in performance... This leads me to another question: what is the performance? And this leads me to the thought that ‘what is the performance?’ is a subjective answer...

*(R15, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

## ***Levels of Engagement***

*Art is a state of encounter.*

~Nicolas Bourriard,  
(2002 p.18)

The tether of our relationships – with those we know, those we meet, and those we may never encounter – rests in a fluxing dynamic continually negotiated through our cultural abstractions and perspective parameters.

The series of sixteen improvisations consciously engaged with the ‘everyday’ by exploring (at times uncomfortably) our perceptions through the representational space of performance. Charlotte Canning asks, where ‘do the limits of performance and everyday life intersect?’ (2013 cited in Spatz, 2015 p.172). In this practice, the delineations were ambiguous at best, ambivalent at least.

As stated earlier, at the beginning of the very first improvisation I was asked: ‘Can we interact?’ to which I responded, ‘There are no rules...’ But, of course, there are ‘rules’. We embody social rules that surface, often times unconsciously, in our day-to-day behaviour. As Fiona Wilkie remarks, the ‘meeting of performance with place, and the meeting of the spectator with both performance and place, involves a process of negotiation between the complexities of overlapping sets of rules’ (2002a, p.256). Engaging in the blurriness of life/art and the participatory roles of performer and audience were never met with any formalized concretization. *I was asked questions. I asked questions. I led. I followed. I was lifted up, spun around and thrown into a snow bank. I picked up rocks, snail shells and branches and offered them to others. I held out my hands to be held. Doors were both opened and closed for and by me.* Respondents positions were also relative to me in that

I may have known them well, or not at all; may have been related to them, have had financial dealings with them, or have been an unknown passerby. On several occasions, people commented on feeling as if they wanted to join in – but didn't – opting to curb their impulses to do so:

In your performance, there were many moments where I struggled to navigate my impulses to both join in and to stay still – I wanted to follow you!!! [...] Then you were walking, running down the road and I wanted to follow you and I wondered about what might happen if I were to give in. And then, later, as you cried out, hanging from the teapot gate and still, we stood, I again felt drawn to connect. I felt ashamed for not coming over to embrace and comfort you, and I also knew with clarity and confidence that I was not supposed to join in. I was not supposed to interact by stepping forward in that way.

*(R34, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

I had the urge to take the curtain Bronwyn was carrying and drape it over her shoulders because it was dangerously cold out. For some reason, I did not.

*(R36, Earthdance 6, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I wanted to give you a hug.

*(R38, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

These remarks I found intriguing. I followed up with those who shared them by asking what it was that I may have been doing – or not doing – to invite such responses; or, were they imposing culturally-and traditional-performance sanctioned censors? I share two of the replies received, because both expose the complex imbrication of 'localized' responses that stream through our perceptions:

My sense of clarity that I ought not to interact during the performance came from at least two levels of intuition. Primarily, a gathering titled a 'performance' in the society in which I was raised is structured such that it includes a pre-determined 'performer' and a receptive 'audience'. As I had not previously been prompted to expect that this performance would deviate from these constructs, I resisted any urge to engage in the performance in a way that would separate me from others I perceived as 'audience' members. I sensed that if I chose to

interact with you (Bronwyn), I may upset other attendees by confusing their sense of rightful authority and engagement in that context. In addition, I did not want to be guilty of ‘stealing the show’ by stepping in to interact with you. [...] Audience members risk getting in trouble for jumping on stage, distracting the performer and ruining the show for everyone else. Even in some incredibly evocative musical performances, in our society dancing or clapping one's hands is not always normative or seemingly acceptable.

Secondly, and somewhat vulnerably, I admit that my sense of ‘should not’ was amplified by my position as a newcomer to Lasqueti Island. I was weary of stepping into action and upsetting other attendees' expectations of the performance because as a newcomer on this island I am still meeting more established community members and figuring out the social structure and culture of this community. I was weary of sticking out and perhaps hurting chances for future work or collaborative relationships with attendees. Ironically, as I type this I realize that within that crowd, choosing to step forward and participate may have actually endeared me to others present. This line of thought reminds me that at a previous event on the island where I saw a mother struggle to restrain her three small children from walking around during a solstice ceremony at the community hall, I witnessed an older woman commenting to one of her contemporaries about how embarrassing it must be for the mother. Perhaps this helped me form a sense that while Lasqueti is somewhat interested in participatory, expressive cultural experiments that deviate from the western European norm, it is still an island where the proper audience member waits before taking initiative to participate.

*(R34, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

I wanted to give a hug because I was thinking, ‘that probably hurts and she is probably cold. Maybe other pain she feels that other people don't understand leads her to physical injury. Maybe it helps distract from the pain or helps evoke much needed care from others.

*(R38, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

My awareness of the many threads we were holding in such a *splace* of gathering allowed me to recognize moreover, much as Zaporah mentions above, the very ‘oddity’ of what I was doing. Zaporah remarks that my intention, as improviser, should not be to affect the passerby. She suggests the appearance of a car, person, animal to affect my relationship with the

immediate context, but not to cross any ‘outward’ thresholds from within this ‘oddy’. She advises to allow only the improvisational space to be affected.

Zaporah’s remarks, it must be noted, are spoken from within frames that approach performance – even if in a public location – more as a stand-alone space. The space is open, available and mutable to the givens of context (and our imaginal interfacing with these prompts) so that they may be shared; however, the practice of Action Theater does not include forthright audience or passerby interaction.<sup>99</sup> My interests extend beyond these confines, and my questions have been deepened through/into my performance manifestations. I am seeking to find whether and when the many principles of the form allow for levels of broader interaction. I did not want to carry a fourth wall<sup>100</sup> into my work. That being said, in dismantling this wall, I did not want my work to become threatening or be perceived as acts of imposition towards others: human or the other-than-human world.

*Interjections, yes. Foistings, no.*

As the performance modes shifted, the relationship to the performance also shifted so that this role as spectator was unstable and, at times, unclear. In the more intimate sequences the role was fairly straightforward. When the performance expanded to the passersby or more distant spectators, it became something other, as we became part of the performance being encountered by the unsuspecting spectators. Two observations on this: first, it fostered a sense of complicity with the performance, but it was unclear and uncontrollable whether this complicity was with the more strident environmental points or the creative, subversive

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<sup>99</sup> That being said, the space conjured up when in the improvisational ‘zone’ often leads to what could be termed a *transpersonal* space – where even if not directly interacting, audience and performer(s) – there is a sharing, a channeling, a crossover of content that happens. Zaporah (1997) has remarked this upon many occasions (1997); as have other improvisers. It speaks directly to what Frost and Yarrow and Schechner addressed earlier in what they term as the more shamanic capabilities/possibilities of improvisational performance: with or without direct interaction.

<sup>100</sup> Again, I am using the fourth wall here to broadly suggest any performance convention that separates actor and audience, and where the audience is not directly addressed.

performance act taking place. Second, it also heightened a sense of protection for Bronwyn.

*(R30, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

The murky line of the Other and our processes of othering were of critical interest to me in these gatherings. By opting not to interact, or simply not acknowledge, a passing, slowing or stopping car, a person or animal – from this space of ‘difference’ – could I possibly be entrenching a denial of this ‘oddity’ (much as I had once done when trying to perform ‘normally’ without acknowledging my shaking hands and faltering voice)? Was I, thereby, emulating an unhealthy binary between spaces of perceived difference? Or, on the other hand, by choosing not to directly engage the other, how might my sharing of my experiencing avail itself to being experienced in possibly, a less ‘affecting’ way, but none-the-less, effective on some level? As with many of the questions derived through this exploration, the answers remain fluid and unfixed. So too, do they were/are conditional and contextual – very much because our interactive layers and registers are equally, not made up of clear delineations: our permeability shared through the air we breathe.

The first year of improvisations found me engaging – arguably, affecting others. *I stopped cars. I waved. I asked someone on the sidewalk to recycle a plastic bottle for me, because, in conversation, it had been established that as a local, he knew where such a receptacle was, whereas, I did not.* What becomes of issue here is how the space of performance – ‘difference’ demarked by costume and crowd – either gives or removes such permission to engage the other. How contextually-determinant may this, may or may not be? In my ‘everyday’ life, I would not normally hesitate to

approach someone on the street I didn't know to ask for directions or information. Culturally this is generally permissible. Even though I might never know how approaching this person might affect their day/life. I am reminded here of the 1980 film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The premise of the fictional comedy finds the lives of an African Ju'/Hoansi bushmen tribe turned upside down when a mysterious Coca-Cola bottle<sup>101</sup> – a foreign object – drops from a passing plane. The result unleashes a series of events, completely re-inventing their everyday. Therefore, when doing something out-of-the-ordinary-through-which-I-am-trying-to-explore-our-collective-ordinary (read: possible apathy), how might approaching someone on the street (whilst being barefoot, and surrounded/followed/preceded by a crowd) somehow contravene cultural lines which then somehow 'implicates' this person into something 'other' than the norm? I explore further in Chapter Nine, how in the age of climate change, we define being implicated.

I was highly cognizant of the delicacies present, especially when 'a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination [and] we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social imagining' (Jackson, 2011 p.14). The spaces held within these improvisations, thus become an active questioning of our levels of conformity. Each performance was implicitly underpinned by an exploration of possible actions that we could take, to defy or open up with each other, through difference in new and creative ways. The acknowledgement of the vast network of our trans-corporeal (*dis|abling*) embeddedness (seen and unseen, spoken and unspoken) within the

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<sup>101</sup> In this context, this comment reinvoles Griffith's (2006) earlier statements to do with situating the shaman between the Pepsi bottle and the songlines....

Anthropocene was a non-didactic focus. The improvisations held strong the possibility that they may inspire new climates of change: which might, necessarily, be affective spaces.

She also engaged and acknowledged the passersby, and created strong visual moments for the more distant spectators.  
*(R30, Huddersfield 1, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

Three separate colleagues asked what I was doing later that day, as we were being watched from various windows that overlooked the ‘car park’ ... all found it interesting, intriguing and a welcome if unusual sight in their normal working days.  
*(R40, Huddersfield 2, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015)*

I love it when unsuspecting passersby get sucked into a vortex.  
*(R5, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

In my second year of improvisations, I opted not to engage ‘as outwardly’ with those ‘unsuspecting passersby[s]’. I was inspired to see how this might change the sense of dynamics, while still enabling access to the event’s unfolding. In so doing, I was still mindful of modeling subtle acknowledgements of my awareness of being a copper-glittery woman-in-white to those who may transverse our ‘shared’ scene. All too quickly, with the contextual givens – these delineations became tested. The engagement incited catcalls from teenage boys, caused cars to stop, and attracted people to follow/join. In one particular instance – in fact, the first of the second year series – led to a ‘meeting’ with a man, who when walking down a ‘normally’ empty Lasqueti Island gravel road, turned the corner to see me standing there in the middle of it. Respondents remarked the following:

Also enjoyed the way you responded to the man walking towards you on the road, who then sidetracked into the bushes to avoid being ‘part of the performance’. I appreciated the way his presence was acknowledged, but with care not to impose a ‘role’ on him.

(R10, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

Please – another time, if you see \_\_\_\_\_ coming down the road, just ignore him, leave him be. I felt so bad for him, he so clearly did not want to be seen.

(R11, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

My acknowledgement of his presence was not (in)direct. I remained where I was – I did not flee or advance – but attempted to respect his trajectory as best I could, through my/our *dissimilar* frame. We were at least one hundred metres from the assembled audience-participants (who had opted not to follow me down the road). He quickly sidestepped into the forest, uttering out loud, ‘I’m not part of this performance!’ *Was he or wasn’t he?* He clearly was not an intentional part of the performance (neither was the woodpecker or the dog in another), but invariably he and other factors were contextually-sited incidental ones. His and my moments met the refracted interpretation of said encounter, supporting an appreciation for Couillard’s earlier cited observation that, we ‘read and respond to spaces according to our relative positions’ and that ‘No one can guarantee that others, with different relationships to the site, will perceive our responses as either appropriate or sensitive’ (2006, p.34).

### ***Humour/Grief***

*The refusal to feel takes a heavy toll. Not only is there an impoverishment of our emotional and sensory life—flowers are dimmer and less fragrant, our loves less ecstatic—but this psychic numbing also impedes our capacity to process and respond to information. The energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting*

*the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies.*

~Joanna Macy  
(1991b, p.15-16)

The use of humour was an explicitly political tool...and was explicated/embodied through the circuitous destination-less route of the performance.

*(R6, Earthdance 1, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

The imagination needed for fresh visions and discoveries, suggested by Macy above, is interdependent and inextricable from the embodiment of an ecological disability frame. Performance, and particularly improvisation, has enabled an evocative process for in-the-moment transparency: a/as site for feeling. A/as site for imagination...cycling through humour and grief:

Stones, sticks, waves of anger  
crash around this church  
as you sink into the earth  
and move the air  
like water

spaces open  
sounds appear  
world pull into focus  
stretching with breath  
flowers, buildings, grass, walls  
dancing together —  
sticks for standing  
firm, fragile  
like us all —  
when will we break?

*(Poem excerpt, Lucy Smith, Huddersfield 3, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016)*

There is a fine line between comedy and tragedy. Laughter can often be a body's response to fear or pain, much as expressing one's grief for the world can be a vehicle for transformative action.<sup>102</sup> I took up my awareness

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<sup>102</sup> Though beyond the purview of this study, yet intimately connected, I wish to mention my time spent studying with General Systems theorist and Buddhist scholar Dr. Joanna Macy. Her work and inspiration have been instrumental in informing my approach through the negotiations with/as climate change for more than fifteen years. Macy has pioneered a method known as *The Work that*

of the range of possibilities offered up through expression, exploring the tenuousness of these relationships: my synaesthetic body as conduit of *in situ* experiencing:

... crawling along the road toward the gates of purgatory, or was it the gates of society... where she [Bronwyn] took on the role of the hapless victim. She pulled them shut... She pressed herself against its hard surface, and went through what I saw as a series of gestures which elicited centuries of victimhood that people have engendered world wide. The throwing of the pebbles, with intent, but lack of force, was another symbol of the pathetic nature of this crime of humanity. Then, she pushed open the gates, and the mood changed again. [...]  
[A car] stops, and she touches the back of it, drawing out in the dust, a heart. This changed the energy again, with a light heart forged in dust.

*(Sheila Harrington, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

I want to acknowledge that my first year of improvisations more readily engaged laughter through language, whereas my second year dipped more accessibly into sounded silences of sorrow. Neither was exclusive of the other and this manifested through a series of different registers in each performance. However, I do want to make note of how the first year's approach availed itself more readily to accessing ironic paradoxes through speech, whereas the second lent itself more easily to exploring a sensed and sounded pain for/of the Earth. Through the variety of refractions received, I hesitate when I suggest that the former possibly tipped the non-bifurcated scales towards opportuning more explicit understandings, whilst the latter facilitated more metaphoric decipherings. These thresholds remain, however, highly contestable, for me and others. We engaged in perceptual

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*Reconnects*, which aims to help people acknowledge, rather than suppress their feelings of *bewilderment*, pain, and grief in ordering to facilitate and mobilize, rather than stagnate – or *disable* – them, into positive change.

processes that examined how we can ‘act from the sensory information available at the moment, rather than react from habit and outdated association, enhancing our ability to respond—our responsibility (Olsen, 2006 p.55, emphasis in original). Olsen further remarks that:

Perception is also personally selective, affected by genes, family values, previous experience, and the current state of alertness (2006, p.56). [...] Some psychologists consider that as much as 90 percent of what we perceive ‘out there’ is actually ‘in here’. [...] Often it is a seldom noticed aspect of ourselves, projected into the environment. [...] [P]rojection also occurs on a cultural level, where ‘other’ is constructed as a threat. Projecting our own unexplored nature outward poses ‘difference’ as an excuse for violence, war and environmental destruction (p.59).

The levels of perception and projection throughout the performances – either languaged, sounded, felt and/or intuited – co-created by performer, audience and context, all held Anthropocenic relevance. All sixteen improvisations resided in the space between my not being able to hear particular inflections of my ‘own’ voice and my guttural soundings. As one respondent remarked, they ‘*slashed the silence*’ (R10, *Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016*); Having taken up both approaches in their more extreme interpretations, I am relishing the depths that both fostered through performing the performative. Performance permitted an exploration of our projections and perceptions, engaging the imagination to ‘rub up against the senses’, as Zaporah (1995a, p.261) states.

We redefine the world in the process:

I realized it didn't need to be attached to a specific story. [...] You walking off and suffering while tearing pieces [of seaweed] off spoke to me of the difficulty of letting go. And at the end, when you finally let the last piece go, there was a sense of relief, but also emptiness. And then you picked up a bunch more seaweed, as though to fill the void; like our culture that fears silence.

(R41, *Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016*)

Through *noisy silence*, it is perhaps an apt time to revisit Bookchin's earlier cited provocation that 'it is the responsibility of the most conscious life-form – humanity – to be the "voice" of mute nature' (1990 cited in Curry, 2011 p. 64). Bookchin's notion of muteness is problematic and dismissive. It denies, as stated, an animate soundingscape. A soundscape whose changes map ourselves-writ large (listening, hopefully, as we so do) to the voices, sounds and tongues that reside(d) in the recesses of earth. The voices that strengthen and emerge, those that fall away or have been suppressed (from machines to beetles, people to plants) and the awareness of the intimately reciprocal 'nature' of such fluctuations. *Undeniably, however, we mute and have been muted.* This is the LOUD cry of a (self)disabling ecology. Abram, so eloquently draws our attention to this fluxing symbiotic relationship:

For when we no longer hear the voices of warbler and wren, our own speaking can no longer be nourished by their cadences. As the splashing speech of the rivers is silenced by more and more dams, as we drive more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own languages become increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance (1997, p.86).

Therefore, *if* I interpret Bookchin's words with an anthropocentric understanding – through which, they were uttered – then I can concur with his statement. However, I can only do so, *providing that* the 'consciousness' he speaks of stems from an awareness and acknowledgement that humanity have done this to ourselves; and, further that there is no 'othering' going on in the process of his exclamation. I am reluctant to accord his *equivocal* statement such affordances, grieving the very humour of the lack of 'earthly resonance' in his words. Post-colonial theorist Iain Chambers remarks:

In the dispersal of a single History, whose omniscient word legislates the world, I begin to hear composite voices crossing and disturbing the path and patterns of the once seemingly ineluctable onrush of 'progress'. In the movement from concentrated sight to dispersed sound, from the 'neutral' gaze to the interference of hearing, from the discriminating eye to the incidental ear, I abandon a fixed (ad)vantage for a mobile and exposed politics of listening—for a 'truth' that is always becoming (1996 cited in Kochhar-Lindgren 2006, p.426).

Though well intended, sadly I feel that Bookchin's comment does not resist divisive and deeply-seeded power structures, and somehow adopts in so doing an imposing, colonial-like, attitude.

The muting of and muted – *as opposed to 'mute'* – more-than-human world is intimately conjoined with the systematic and systemic practices of muting voices/people into exploited and marginalized categories.

***the moment: presently improvisational***

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER EIGHT: The Refractions

*Performance occasions reinterpretation.*

~Mike Pearson  
(2010, p.27)

*[The spectator] will be shown a strange, unusual spectacle, a mystery whose meaning he must seek out. He will thus be compelled to exchange the position of passive spectator for that of scientific investigator or experimenter, who observes phenomena and searches for their causes. Alternatively, he will be offered an exemplary dilemma, similar to those facing human beings engaged in decisions about how to act. In this way, he will be led to hone his own sense of the evaluation of reasons, of their discussion and of the choice that arrives at a decision.*

~Jacques Rancière  
(2009, p.4)

This chapter focuses on the occasioning of opportunities ‘through unusual spectacle’ to engage with choices around the exemplary dilemmas of our day. It focuses on the processes between sharing and troubling the performer(s)/audience(s) dynamics embodied throughout this study. In an attempt to categorically uncategorize the sharing of understandings, specific focus will be placed on the role that soliciting [lasting?] performance responses played in the study. I question [my] role(s) vis-à-vis engaging with them, and the role that such an approach can offer to the debate of documenting live performance works. In so doing, I will be responding to the question that if one was not in fact present in/at one of the performances what remains the point of access? Or, perhaps more importantly, what are the temporally-transferable aspects of these happenings? Or, what is the resonant materiality of arguably ephemeral experiences in addressing notions of ecology and disability?

## *Interpreting Interpretations*

*Ethnographic analysis is never straightforward – whether or not it concerns the senses. It involves making connections between, on the one hand, complex phenomenological realities and the specificities of other people’s ways of understanding these, and, on the other hand, scholarly categories and debates.*

~ Sarah Pink  
(2009, p.128)



Two (comparative) images from the first Lasqueti improvisation,  
7<sup>th</sup> December 2014:  
Top: by Tony Seaman,  
Bottom: Bronwyn Preece

The ‘complex phenomenological realities’ evidenced through the documenting/performing of responses (my own included) displace any firm lines between the auto- and the ethnographic. As evidenced in the two drawings above, both feature the perspective from what might be termed the audience’s or a larger ‘whole’. My taking up of this position *draws* parallels to what Zaporah claims is necessary for skillful improvisers to hold, what she

terms, ‘the three-I’s’ at all times: personal/partner/world (pers. comm. 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015). It could also be treated as being incongruent or *out-of-place* with my corporeal stress. The comparative positionings of these two responses – just as much as the contradictory refractions received – lend themselves to be scrutinized, as Pink suggests above, through a variety of ‘scholarly categories and debates’. Noland remarks that, ‘In the eyes of the phenomenologist, ethnography’s task is to provide a full account of a participant’s experience through recourse to the observer’s own experience’ (2009, p.44). How could ‘I’ possibly provide a full account of the experience of another? I simply cannot, *even* through the discourse of trans-corporeality, supported by the neuroscientific capacities of mirror neuron networks. I can however, be present to resonances, to *empathetic intrigue*. I can give my full attention to possibilities of inspired ‘recourse’ through engagement with others: reflections of our sharing of selves. Rather than teasing apart each individual submission, I have opted to follow Sontag’s advice, that the focus of art commentary should be on showing ‘*how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means*’ (2001, pp.13-14, emphasis in original). That being said, I *was* and *am* most interested in understanding ‘*what it means*’ – not by dissecting each piece at length, but rather by engaging in an accumulating meaning-making process which examines them in relation to a larger, unfurling pastiche. I appreciate these ekphrasations as ‘aggregations of sites’.

I find Butler’s notion of ‘reexperiencing’ particularly interesting when applied to my engagement with these refractions. Noland taps Butler’s ideas to suggest that to re-experience a set of meanings ‘entails recognizing, once

again, the meanings that a particular action is conveying to others' (2009, p.191). I posit that these (ekphrastic) reflections allow me to re-experience the work by, again citing Noland, 'recognizing the meaning the act is conveying to others' wherein such an awareness 'affords in turn the possibility of a critical distance from the practice' (2009, p.191). Whilst the fielded responses offer a perspective distancing, they also create moments of affinity through simulacra. Through the process of re-experiencing these performances anew, I become 'alert to the distinction between meaning-making for others and being a material support for that meaning, or, more precisely, being a material *and animate* support for that meaning' (Noland, 2009 p.191, emphasis in original).

Complicating this mix is how the process of soliciting refractions aids me with the cognitive processes of 'rerepresentation' mediated by Wilson's Disease. Rerepresentation is the ability of the brain to form feelings and emotions – fashioned out of the original sensations of the receptors (Fogel, 2009). This function works in tandem with the prefrontal cortex to 'hold something in mind' [...] while the person thinks about it. This capacity is known as 'working memory'. It is an ability, whose immediacy is functionally delayed through the process of Wilson's Disease. The responses and ekphrasis aid in the space between the event and 'my' memories of it. Conjoining neuroscientific appreciations of rerepresentation with Phelan's reexperiencing enables the refractions to further compound my understanding in identifying the complexities of performing ecology and disability as ~~identities~~.

where do you go to get perspective? and how do you know  
when you've found it?

*(Poem excerpt, R27, Earthdance 8, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I fielded an extensive number of responses – with the majority of people choosing words as their medium of communication. Impressions furthered the dialectic of possibilities offered up by such occasions, with repeated reference to my performing being brave, open, vulnerable, and raw. As a result of being able to witness and engage in this experience, many people came to share very personal anecdotes with me: the performance and response spaces availing themselves to empathetic and sensitive exchange. As much as the refractions were born out of a collective space, many treaded an intimate line: inspiring a sharing with me that felt, to some degree, ‘private’.<sup>103</sup> Time and time again, the reflections engendered within them a sense of safety to share, to permissively feel. Even if responding from being provoked into uncomfortable places, there was often an expressed, positive desire to keep engaging with me – an affirmation of some of the ‘impacts’ these moments were inspiring. The active solicitation of reflections provided a space for ongoing processing – mitigating, in turn, some of the potential ‘risks’ evoked through such performance methods. The responses existed as mutually transferable support for audience|performance|performer. They featured a sense of full-circling within experiencing. My exploration was instigated through a personal prompt-taken-public, and in turn a public-witnessing was prompting the personal, recognizing and reciprocalizing connection.

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<sup>103</sup> I reiterate that my choice to keep respondents largely anonymous helped honour confidentiality.

The diversity of responses also highlighted the prism of perspectives, evidencing our human capacity for interpretive difference: experience being relative and embodied. The following example perhaps showcases this best, and also speaks to the nature of our ‘centred’ readings of the more-than-human world, and the instability of our anthropocentric (?) embrace:

Also about the dog – [...] It seemed to me you were taunting a helpless prisoner. But [the dog’s owner] wasn’t bothered, so maybe it’s just my thing.  
(R11, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

I felt myself smiling all through the duet with the barking dogs. I loved the expressiveness of your playful, physicality and pacing as you punctuated the down beats of the dog-in-the-car’s gradually softening barks.  
(R10, *Lasqueti 3*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)

To be said to be ‘barking up the wrong tree’ idiomatically implies placing mistaken emphasis in a specific context. These responses further call my attention to the sensitivities of the *sites of our specificities*, and the power of performance to reveal and negotiate these varied understandings.

Site-specific performance art cannot be considered as stand-alone. The performances and processes of response took up the temporality of what I will term, the ‘saturation of influence’ – both my own and that of others. The invitation of, let alone the process of ekphrasis, was promoting thinking that was and would ‘continue to have effect beyond the event’, acting as ‘slow contagion[s]’ (Heim, 2004 p.2). One respondent, many months later, shared this with me:

...it’s an experience I hadn’t had before reflecting on your movement performance with a poem. What I noticed was that I really sank into the experience of your performance in a deeper way as I was reflecting on it – more so than when I was

just watching. I felt like I had time to let the performance sink in, sit with it, and then allow myself a focused creative space to allow my experience of the performance to flow, and to really touch me.

*(Alexa Owen, pers. comm. 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016)*

This same respondent chose to read her poem aloud at the annual Lasqueti Island Arts Festival. ‘It is the liberation of the artwork from the cramped intentionality of the singular artist that ensures the continuing presence of the origin in the unfolding of the work’ (Peters, 2009 p.60). As a result, I heard from many that through ‘another’ they were allowed a unique perspective into ‘my’ work: an accessible and welcome means of understanding better what I was exploring/grappling with.

Balancing the tension between proximity and distance, here and there, who and how – I decided that the best way to expose the inter-relational nature/international currency value of the responses was through sharing their specificities within *this* larger frame, *this* thesis. As a result, I decided that I would honour the accumulating nature of the responses, choosing not to share them amongst the other attendees/respondents of each particular gathering, following an event – but rather waiting to see how they wove together (or not) through this [documented] *oikos*...Auslander’s lacuna.

I share with you here, my fourteenth poem (Huddersfield, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016) wherein I drop ‘our blossoms’ as potent [performance] markers of what has passed (past), and offer them as indicators to help in forming our responses, negotiated through ‘our deadening dreams’ of what may come...

I am compelled to think of these reflective mechanisms as blossoms we are co-creating and collectively dropping. Serving as open-ended, pluralistic performative acts – honouring the present, by reflecting on the past (performances). In turn, they fostered the creation of transferable skills through which we can cultivate active means to respond creatively to the demands of the climatic crises. This, of course, is a mutual process of transforming reflections of ourselves...



i am  
folded-blindly  
*softly molded*  
into cement,  
stone, curbed  
directions (not  
directives) and  
*textured*  
descriptions : [*hand-held*]

*supporting the unseen* :  
wind on skin :  
*supported by the seen* :

*This is Divine Intervention* :

the steeped insertion of  
representation :

*uncomfortable*

Institution :

cold, unmoving,  
unrepentant

against (*yes! against*) a  
moving blue-grey and  
rites-of-a-budding-  
spring : who sing (from  
the ground

up) : a *grassroots*  
tonal,  
guttural wall:

[*translatable as*] : an anti-  
war (*hammered*) protest:

*where have all the  
flowers gone?*

through zephyring  
skies (*colonial flags,*  
*security gates....and science*):

underfoot :

*they/we are here*  
in the graveyard of  
innocent picks, socialized  
destruction and *our*  
cultural/religious



(Please Now View: *Huddersfield 3 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/286730752>)

By inviting a variety of ekphrasis (however partial it remains), 'that which lies *just beneath the/our/my surface*' are 'perceivers [who] stand on an equal footing when the performance that exists between them has a life beyond the present' (Hilevaara, 2012 cited in Giddens, 2015 p.103).

## ***Supporting the Unseen/Supported by the Seen***

For me I felt the movement of time. You looking up and down  
the road and me standing in one place to witness its passing....  
(R13, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Taking up Katja Hilevaara's understanding of performance's potential for 'life beyond the present', I locate the value in the variety of response methods to offer up a composite – not *dissimilar* to the event itself. This practice actively facilitates multiple access points to actively engaging with 'watching time passing'.

Phelan's asserted reservations about the differences between performance and representations of that performance, in which she contends that there can exist a disavowing of the 'Other' by trying to achieve verisimilitude in methodology (1993, p.3) are actively addressed through the documenting of this project. In addition to actively seeking a non-homogenizing approach to the 'representation' (in which I am paradoxically, caught by not trying to 'author' it myself); it would remain a painful oversight if a study focusing on disability and ecology did not take up notions of accessibility and privilege with regards to facilitating and prompting *ongoing* understandings gleaned from these performances, whether the responder was physically present or not.

These performances had to – and continue to have to – contend on many different levels with being sites of simultaneous privilege and marginality, and with their layers of (potential) accessibility. My fostering of ecologies of ekphrasis through embracing public practice methodologies, was a deliberate attempt to try to extend the junctures of these meetings – and their reach. The intentional set-up of this practice finds affinity with Jones'

contention that the issues raised in the absence of not being there, 'are largely logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic' (1997, p.11). I recognize I risk being accused of contradicting myself, as I earlier supported the idea that face-to-face encounters with 'disabled' bodies might have the effect of creating ethical sites of emergence and understanding. That being true, the 'public' and ekphrastic nature of my performances were designed in such a way as to eschew exclusivity. I do not consider it necessary for a person to have been there for them to be able to grasp what was contextually grappled with. As Hadley (2014) affirms:

the live, concrete encounter with corporeally specific Others may not be the only way to create the conditions of possibility for this dialogue between different ideas, discourses and ideologies, but, no matter the medium, something of this complexity is required (pp.31-32).

The ekphrastic ecologies perform this complexity. The reverberations of Owen's sharing of her poem with the larger community, for example, allowed for a wide(r) interfacing.

How do these sixteen site-specific improvisations become acts supported by the seen, supporting the unseen? I offer up a series of poems, videos, and a panoply of responses as means to engage with these performances. The improvisations never prescribed their specific unfurlings. Neither was the conglomerating of narratives (written or otherwise), pre-scripted. They are shared here with the intention for further focused dissemination beyond what has already naturally happened. They are offered to enable a reverberating through, what Heim calls, 'the conversational drift' (2004, p.2), non-prescriptively, so they may continue an improvised dialectic.

Questions of the *who* and the *how* render the processes and ecologies of ekphrasis at once ontological, phenomenological, but also epistemologically intersubjective:

the audience for the work may know a great deal or practically nothing at all about who the performer is, why she is performing, and what, consequently, she ‘intends’ this performance to mean. Either way, the audience may have a deep grasp of the historical, political, social, and personal contexts for a particular performance. While the viewer of a live performance may seem to have certain advantages in understanding such a context, on a certain level she may find it more difficult to comprehend the histories/narratives/ processes she is experiencing until later... (Jones, 1997 p.12).

The same applies for the performer – and the poems and ekphrastic relationship offer a temporal dimensionality that simultaneously reifies the contingency of the present, while offering up new ways of [improvisationally] mapping *being* [t]here: opening a new chronology of application and interpretation.

### ***Ontological Paradox***

*Performance's only life is in the present. [...]  
Performance's being...becomes itself through  
disappearance.*

~Peggy Phelan  
(1993, p.146)

Phelan contends that performance is already a ‘representation of representations’. Arguably, it can be in cases of scripted work. However, in the case of my improvised, contextually-active responses, I argue that the evocations of shared presence defy this categorization. Through my embrace of ekphrasis, I am challenging her provocation that performance ‘cannot be

saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance' (1993, p.146). As has been established, I take performance to be a constant trans-corporeal thread of a global shared existence. Simultaneously, I valorize the co-creation of focused representational performance space. My expanded embrace of performance allows me to still view the after-marks, the responses – *the representations* – as performances: they effect and affect movements and interactions, considerations and discussions. They do not, as Phelan suggests, betray and lessen the promise of performance's own ontology (1993, p.146). With supportive resonance, Schneider (2012) asserts that:

the bodily, read through genealogies of impact and ricochet, is arguably always interactive. This body, given to performance, is here engaged with disappearance chiasmically – not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive [...] In this sense performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive re-appearance (p.143).

I contend that representation does not *necessarily* equate with disappearance (albeit we can point to countless examples where viewpoints have been denied). From a social/eco-justice advocacy point of view, representation of marginalized voices is an issue through which performance can enliven a space for advocacy. I can concur then with Phelan, if I suggest that the legacies of our performances of disappearance may in fact be evidenced through live performance: animating our temporal situatedness, reacquainting ourselves with our own mutings. During and subsequently, the [*in situ*] performance responses become animate performers/performances themselves. The refractions reach 'especially high levels of intersubjective awareness through the directed gaze and collective concentration of the

audience and because of the heightened tension of the performance space’ (Reason, 2006 p.217). This is well illustrated by the responses that follow:

R24: ...the performance of everybody finding the right spot... [looking from the outside, through the building] I could see people through the opposite window...I could see \_\_\_\_\_ turn and I thought she must be there...at that point I was observing the performance of the audience and it was amazing for me because I could only imagine what was going to happen or what was happening...

R42: I was just watching other people’s reactions to you...I couldn’t see you...I could tell that you were coming...but I thought I’d stay here and watch other people’s reactions...

R43: I enjoyed watching the shifting back and forth  
(*Conversation, Earthdance 5, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016*)

This ‘shifting back and forth’ taken up through representation and disappearance was contended with throughout these improvisations. One respondent resonantly and appreciatively remarked, following a series of *Earthdance* performances ‘you disappear at the end...’ (R12, *Earthdance 5/6/7, February 2016*): Reason asserts, ‘If disappearance evokes a radical ontology then it also seems to speak of oblivion, forgetfulness and death’ (2006, p.23). These improvisations held fast in their/my awareness the ontological possibility of [a] ‘disappearing’ Earth: of our performing ourselves as, into and through (dis)abling ecologies...<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> And as Reason cautions, ‘ontological arguments do not cope well with internal contradictions and the maintaining of paradox’ (2006, p.25). Perhaps, rather, these ontological arguments can become the basis for understanding and performing Anthropocenic resilience.

*improvisation: moments of presence*

*...this improvisational space holds time; exists as registers of availability; i am full of receptivity. Saturated. I am conduit, channel for deep listening in surround sound. Vessel of expanding tethers: thick air. My thinking is ~~my~~ heartbeat, ~~my~~ breaths: ~~i am the~~ concept of non-concept. i [am] sense. i sense. sensing sense. ~~My~~ thoughts are neither question nor answer. ~~I am~~ space-full...*

## CHAPTER NINE: Active(ly) [Dis]Abling Environments

In this chapter I examine some of the qualities of agency: the multi-sensory ontology evoked through and by performer, performance, spectators, environments. The relevance of the practice and understandings spawned within the local/global context are explored; prompting an examination of genre. I examine my practice's gleanings and processes through political and activist frames, addressing the question: *where do – or does a collective – ethical responsibility lie?*

### *Acting (as) Environments*

*'[B]e on the lookout for the reflexivities of paradox' as we develop models of performance that 'might dissolve the boundaries between performer and spectator to produce participants in ecologically responsive action which recognizes and embraces the agency of environments'.*

~Baz Kershaw  
(2007 cited in Haedicke, 2012 p. 114)

Kershaw takes up where Phelan and Reason left off, campaigning for a recognition of animacy in and of ourselves surrounded. This recognition is expressed in the comment below:

...you paused pretty much in front of me, when you were walking towards where we'd come from, you paused and then you continued, and something made me take my hood down and I just became more aware of the sounds around me...

*(R12, Earthdance 8, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

The active blurring of spectator and performer *with* and *as* environment, *as* and *with* performance boundaries, became a reciprocally noted and a critical hallmark of my improvisations. *Sites were agentic, birthing new forms of*

*contextually-relative generative agents*. These were co-created conditions, alive-ned through our being [t]here (not necessarily dependent on it, but paradoxically inextricably unavoidable):

...you really became part of the environment. I spent some time after you left taking in the surroundings. We live in an amazing world and I saw from your performance that we are not separate from it but we are a part of it.

*(R13, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)*

I was just...being, and interestingly enough not even much so focused on the performance but in the group of people, being out on the country road that I hadn't been out on before and looking at the blue of the sky, and the melting snow and hearing the birds that are just starting to come back and vocalize and you respond to them, or what I was making the connection of you responding to them...so that whole experience was never congealed into a nice narrative with something to say about it... [...]I was really much more interested in keeping the 360° awareness of the space and viewing the space....

*(R44, Earthdance 8, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016)*

I am grateful to have been invited to just 'be', with that eclectic group of folks, smelling the air, listening to the sounds, taking in the beauty and presence of that 'place'. To just stop for awhile, watching you be right in that moment.

*(R45, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

Watching 'me' in that moment finds an awareing 'flow process'.

Improvisation, necessarily, becomes an ethical verbing.

At the beginning of this thesis I asked how to honour and hold the questions of inquiry into and within the improvisatory moment. This is a question of presence-as-embodiment. As I fold into the dimension and register of the performance splace, I am not repeating the questions over and over in my head as I am 'in the moment'. Yes, I am aware that it is these questions that have arrived me in this location, at this juncture at this time. My embodied and improvised answering – and analysis – is a continual

practice of presence, wherein ‘the moment’ holds tentacles of awareness: past, present, future. In ‘Improvisation and Times-Consciousness’, Gary Peters (2016) astutely wonders, what if that ‘being “in the moment” turns out to be something more complex or something other than absolute self-presence it is commonly assumed to be: *that* is the question’ (p.441, emphasis in original). This study argues that it does, that it *must*. For me the improvisatory moment may be a [conceptually] clear one, but it is densely saturated.

I hold the complexity of awareness – of presence, of ‘being in the moment’ – simultaneously in/outside the performance space. ‘Outside’ of the representational space negotiates ‘inside’ a corollary process of questioning – (read: active trans-corporeal embodiment). As has been evidenced, the registers are different between the everyday and the performance persona-ed space that I embody; while at the same time they both retain aspects of relative and accessible semblance.

My daily improvisations through my ‘consciousness of the times’ finds me asking: *Am I doing enough? How do I act?* ‘Inside’ the performance space – the practice – the operatives of my body are not ‘conceptually thinking and acting out the questions’, whilst they very much are embodied in my presence. The improvisatory space alchemizes the questions into a direct, responsive moment-to-moment awareing. These ethical conundrums emerge through my ekphrastic flow: actively examining my own choices within agency and agentic mediums. Caines and Heble (2015) suggest that:

improvisation has much to teach us about listening – *really* listening – to what’s going on around us, much to tell us

about responsibility and hope, and how we can adapt to change, and how we might [...] choose to create a shared future (pp.2-3, emphasis in original).

Still, I am not immune to wondering if improvising hope and responsibility is enough to counter the ‘fact’ that: ‘humanity’s current ecological footprint already exceeds the Earth’s long-term carrying capacity by as much as 40 per cent’ (Curry, 2011 p.225). This figure is only mounting. Is ‘my agency’ – my actions, my language, my spliced phrasings<sup>105</sup> – artistically waving a whimsical wand over *animate* life or death stakes? The question returns us to how I ‘value’ the performances.

I value them in their quiet intimacy to have effects beyond the present, but on a small scale. ‘For whilst, yes, improvisation lives in a perpetual present, memories – the [performances], people places that have been – reappear – bidden and unbidden – for improvisation is a consummate palimpsest’ (Middelow, 2011 p.18). Holding this awareness, I am making no postulations to suggest that the range of ripple effects might be any greater than curling up someone’s cheeks with a new place-based memory or inviting someone into the asking of a new [climatically] contingent and contextual question.

My questions are inspired by the ‘realities’ of our day. They touch and fuel my synaesthetic core, occasionally, to the point of complete disablement, wherein my ‘flow’ is paralyzed. These moments of (self)*disabling* doubt emerge from/are measured against a society that regularly marginalizes the value of the artistic voice. A society that suppresses ecology. One that subjugates disability. To pretend that these feelings do not arise would be

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<sup>105</sup> With ironic candor, my spliced phrasings are underlined in *green*, by a computer program automatically designed to detect the lack of subject-object construction.

dishonest. In ‘fact’, they were agents in my initial moment of metaphoric, insightful arrest. However, these same sentiments can be vanquished through the very process of improvisatory exchange. The reciprocity of practised response foster the support of one-another’s experience of our own perceptions and perceptive, vulnerable fallibility *in situ*. These become place markers and makers for change:

At first the location seemed ecologically barren, a road, but half way through the performance the trees seemed huge and vibrating. I did not know there was a river running through there. I will definitely look upon that location differently forever.  
(R1, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Abram remarks, much as the respondent above does, that the ‘singular magic of a place is evident from what happens there, from what befalls oneself or others when in its vicinity’ (1997, p.182). This singularity is not the property of one, but the panoptical experience of many: human and other-than-human.

Another respondent, in a similar vein, mentioned:

Our shared moment at that time that place (another crossroad of a sort) felt singular, rare.  
(R39, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Abram continues, by saying ‘To tell of such events is implicitly to tell of the particular power of that site, and indeed to participate in its expressive potency’ (1997, p.182). The agency of environments: the expressive potency of place: the ekphrasis of ecologies: *performing possibilities*. Such agency is one of the implicit impacts of these improvisations.

I can’t imagine passing by that intersection without some memory of your performance.  
(R46, *Lasqueti 4*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)

As much as such a comment serves to reinforce the specialty of the performance moments, I do not claim ownership of them. Even though

catalyzed by one – and so therefore, still garnering the nod of credit – the terrain voiced its own capacities for co-creativity. *This*, the act of site-ing. *This*, the capacity for agency. However, as performative acts, there was no dependency on a human audience. Multiple I's (eyes) traversed and formed the space: participants, in this active imagining. These elements were not separate from, but intrinsic to, evocations of the tangibly and precariously sensuous surrounds. As Heim (2012) suggests:

If a wider sphere within the relational field of life – a place – can learn, it may be that, as with the organism, learning involves variations in composure in response to a problem, or to a random occurrence, or to waves of alteration within and around that transient formation humans call place (p.120).

Place is [a] site performing the learning of transience. *Climate changing. Changing climate.* The transient site(self) simultaneously, a place for performing variation through the randomness of occurrence:

...the extended discussion/metaphor of home was really lovely, and wheels, as applied to the body/disability as well as place and the journey of self. it worked really nicely with the fact that we were sort of following you out to somewhere, unsure of where we were going.

(R26, *Earthdance 3*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

Place, above, features through the 'wheels of a walker'; place, below, is evoked through a gift of seaweed...*both* 'moving' moments:

I loved the exchange of bladder wrack – that you accepted my offering and ran with it. I know it to be a magical, healing plant, something that really connects me to this place.

(R11, *Lasqueti 4*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016)

The healing plant permitted literal 'waves of alteration' to flood a sunseting shoreline made up of conglomerate rock, aptly responding as a changing and weathering climate...

## *Abling (Dis)environments*

**this place is IN the process of DIScomposition (read: active ecological process)**

*(Poem excerpt, bold in original,  
R27, Earthdance 2, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)*

Rancière posits that ‘the spectator must be roused from the stupefaction of spectators enthralled by appearances and won over by the empathy that makes them identify with the character on stage’ (2009, p.4). In the case of these improvisations, the stage was a widened field encompassing many characters (including context), which served to rupture stupefaction. The performance offered opportunities to explore identities and identifications. The word ‘ethics’, Nicholas Ridout reminds us, ‘derives from the Greek *ethos*’ (2009, p.9). Ethos means character.

Of the human responses received, many more framed or addressed their responses through an ecological frame, rather than through disability. This is completely understandable, given that for many this was likely the first time they had ever considered conjoining notions of disability with ecology, or better yet to view the landscape of disability as one that did not necessarily have to invoke a terrain of pity, sympathy, awkwardness, fear, denial or avoidance. *Through disability*, ‘the character’ provoked a process of consideration that is captured beautifully here, by two respondents:

Trying to firm them [my impressions] isn't so easy.

*(R13, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

...in some ways I am really not sure how to respond...

*(R39, Lasqueti 1, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)*

Many respondents, through their own self-identification as able-bodied/minded did however respond to notions of disability through this

lens, offering valid and perspicuous insight.<sup>106</sup> It must be noted, that the character of the improvisations also invited examinations (implicitly and explicitly) of the nature of our appropriations, rendering some perhaps more conscious of respectfully not wanting to address what they were only now, first considering for the first time. These improvisations could be as Hadley (2014) describes:

work which makes disability more broadly relatable may aid in drawing spectators' attention to the way they – like disabled people – are unconscious, unwitting or unwilling performers in the daily social drama of disability, albeit in different roles (p. 151).

Tracing the 'character of ethics' through Western history, we find a similar trajectory as in the considerations above. Ethics was at first the property of the individual – *How shall I act?* – all about oneself. The individual grip gradually lessened transforming into its more recent formulations wherein ethical considerations might, as Ridout (2009) suggests, include everyone but ourselves. These improvisations tread that space between the different 'roles' – negotiating the impact of the individual in a cluster of 'i's asking *How do we act?*

...yes, what I experienced [in the improvisation] was a kind of transposition of 'thinking' into an alternation of 'play' and 'pause': which made me think of Sollers' question: 'où sommes nous en dehors d'où nous sommes?' ('where are we when we are not where we are?'). What 'I' am, as Beckett exemplifies in *Not I*, is NOT - or rather not only - what can be captured as the defined or explicated or historical 'self', but rather it (might, or could) be the impetus to something that fractures that (bourgeois/liberal/post-renaissance) construction of 'the individual' - which is conceived as a 'separate' entity, divorced from/superior to its 'environment'; and therefore proposes perhaps an alternative, co-extensive with its hesitancy of being, its tentative but by no means certain ([d]evolutionary) steps.

*(R17, Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016)*

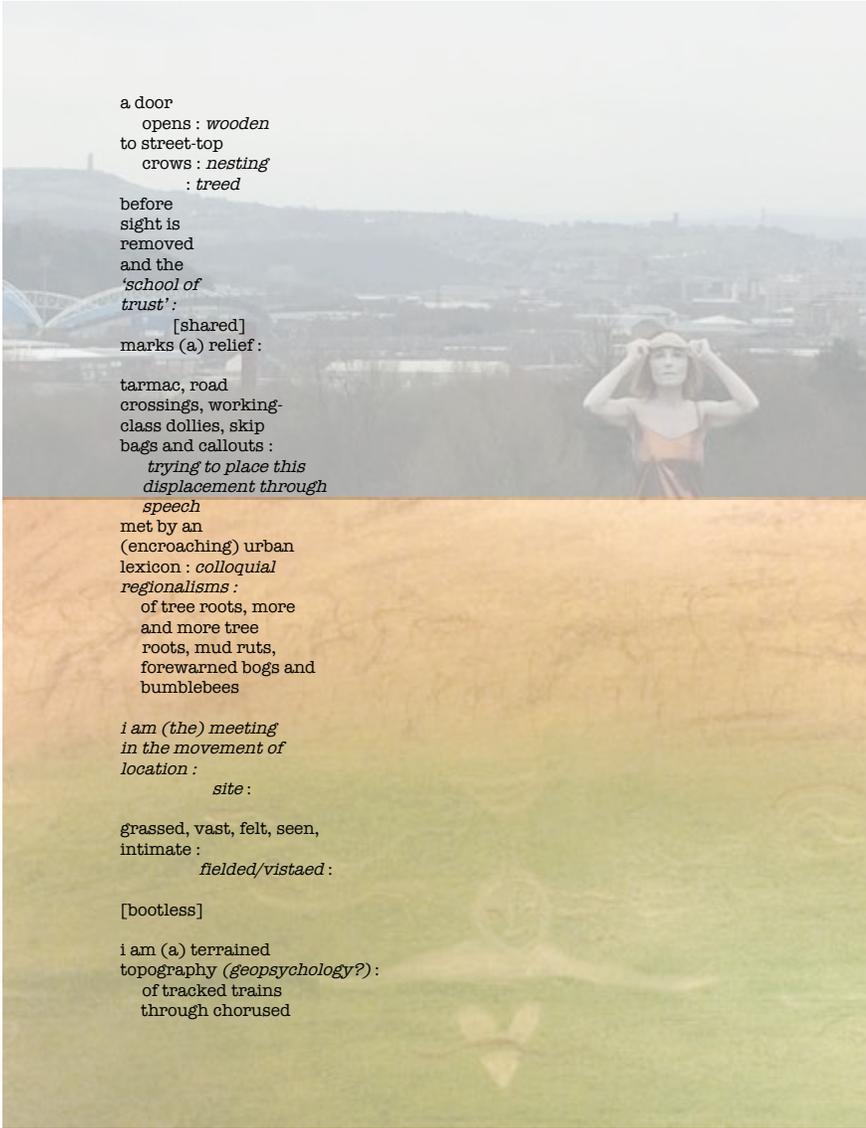
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<sup>106</sup> Respondents were never asked to self-identify during this process.

The very public nature of my performances – of my performing *through* disability (the degree of which was varying perceptible to ‘others’) – elicited, in turn, much privacy: developing zones for intimate *disclosure*. On several occasions, audience members became active participants through the embrace of empathetic refraction: fostering within them perhaps newly found abilities to relate to, or reveal, their own ‘disabilities’:

I decided that I was not going to let my disability keep me from giving you this, my humble feedback.  
(R13, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

I include here, the fifteenth poem (Huddersfield, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016) ‘trying to place this displacement’ which many of us collectively, albeit differently, feel:



a door  
opens : *wooden*  
to street-top  
crows : *nesting*  
: *treed*

before  
sight is  
removed  
and the  
'school of  
trust':

[shared]  
marks (a) relief :

tarmac, road  
crossings, working-  
class dollies, skip  
bags and callouts :  
*trying to place this  
displacement through  
speech*

met by an  
(encroaching) urban  
lexicon : *colloquial  
regionalisms* :  
of tree roots, more  
and more tree  
roots, mud ruts,  
forewarned bogs and  
bumblebees

*i am (the) meeting  
in the movement of  
location :*

*site :*

grassed, vast, felt, seen,  
intimate :  
*fielded/vistaed :*

[bootless]

i am (a) terrained  
topography (*geopsychology?*):  
of tracked trains  
through chorused



*(Please Now View: Huddersfield 4 Performance Excerpt Video:  
<https://vimeo.com/287499710>)*

My 'vision of (in)stability' continued to prompt responses, which from those resonating with varying aspects of disability and/or impairment ranged from inspiration to envy:

I think partly, I felt jealous, not of the audience thing, but of just feeling ok to move however your body wanted to in the moment. I love dance, and movement and wish I had the

confidence to move and express my body more freely. Or just move full stop [...]  
I was thinking about when you were starting and being cautious, and alert and exposed [...] And how when I can't walk but am on the pavement or in train stations etc. and how that state of exposure and fear isn't pleasant, but it does give something back to you. Like increased awareness, and openness to kindness of strangers, and just hearing bird song. And a feeling of nothing to lose. Got sod all dignity left anyway, which is almost a powerful feeling.[..]  
Partly weirded out a bit by the strangeness. But also I admired your courage to do it anyway. [...]  
Mainly, thank you for sharing that experience.  
(R47, Huddersfield 4, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016)

Alan Read reflects that the work of theatre is now ‘a place where audience members experience “affects of adjustment” between immunization from interaction – the emancipated spectator – and community’ (2013 cited in Hunter, 2013 p.7). My improvisation affected/were affected by the wider *theatron*, animatedly emancipated.

### ***Politically Active***

Hunter advocates for performance that ‘places the individual within a collaboration so that the two sustain each other through responsibility to difference rather than identity alone’ (2013, p.5). She stresses further ‘its articulations focus on the body/mind media as articulating forms of knowledge that contribute radically alternative perspectives to public discourse’ (p.5). This, she considers to be political performance. This, I contend, to be one of the primary foundations of these improvisations, and so by virtue of this description, yes, these improvisations are political. Continued ekphrasis and response becomes a politics.

Thanks so much for involving me. It was an honour.  
(*RI, Lasqueti 4, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016*)

Awake, thinking, thinking...  
About Bronwyn's performance, a theatrical, artistic sequence of movements and its impacts on my own thinking and feeling. [...]  
My own responses were chaotic. [...]  
this was an interaction with place – which surprisingly kept me awake for a while contemplating its place in the world we call 'theatre'. [...]  
I left disturbed, moved, entertained, frustrated and now here in the middle of the night – inspired by her courage, her wit, her presence.  
(*Sheila Harrington, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016*)

'[M]utual spectatorship raises the ethical stakes in theatre in a way that is not quite possible anywhere else', claims Ridout (2009, p.15). He continues, stating that aesthetic experience 'becomes the condition of possibility for a particular kind of ethical relationship. The ethical relationship becomes, in its turn, the ground upon which political action might be attempted' (p.66).

As 'disturbing, moving, entertaining, frustrating, courageous, witty and present' as the attempts I make may be, they are rooted in the ambit of intersectional discourse. The very essence of such a dialectic demands reading, performing, responding and writing between and around the lines. Doing so much (so little?), and by virtue of Hunter's description above, within the context of contemporary society, my improvisations and poems may be considered radical.

An examination is warranted as to whether 'political theatre' is held to be a euphemism for 'activist theatre' and/or 'radical theatre' and when further conjoined with 'ecological theatre' are they naturally assumed to be, by proxy, *ethical*?<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Though an extended discussion of political, activist and radical theatre practices is beyond the scope of this text...*this text could be considered precisely that.*

Dr. Jess Allen and myself tackled this inference in our joint editorial for *Performing Ecos* a special edition of *Performing Ethos: An International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance* (2015, Vol. 4 Pt.2 and Vol. 5 Pt. 1 & 2). We addressed the ‘misguided but not uncommon assumption that it is inherently “ethical” to make or discuss art that is about “the environment”, that is sited outdoors “in nature”, that makes clichéd use of creaturely imagery or nostalgic references to Indigenous cultures’ (p.4 and p.90, respectively). In fact, much that is done in the name of environmental art, site-specific or ecological performance, can serve to re-entrench bifurcated binaries through the varying methods of approaching these performances of perception.<sup>108</sup> Chaudhuri speaks to this directly. Zaporah suggested that that might be what I was inadvertently performing. But again, we must question this measuring, asking by who, with whom, and how? As in ‘my’ case, I can both counter and assume such charges. And, if deemed so (by who, with whom, how...and *why?*), are these pieces rendered less ‘effective’ when gauged against the intention of seeking to inspire agency in our ability to remedially respond to climate chaos?<sup>109</sup> And does this necessarily render them unethical? No. Of course not. But inevitably, *possibly*....

The ethics imbued in, and evoked by, the collectivity of our current performances, extract a new form of prescience with which to gauge ourselves ontologically. Disappearance and representation, here again, are weighted with apposite prescient relevance.

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<sup>108</sup> I am hesitant to give concrete examples, not wanting to finger-point at performances/projects that were very likely trying to genuinely approach and address the dire situation of various aspects of climate crises in a way that they felt was proactive.

<sup>109</sup> I am not suggesting that all performances which may fall under the above categories are intentionally addressing climate change.

I am not so much interested, on the one hand, in where my practice falls within the confines of performance and theatre taxonomies, in its wide embrace of interdisciplinarity. With or without the label(s), it does not change my orientations within the practice. However, I must note, that such designations afforded to the work of others has invariably influenced the approaches I've taken. On the other hand, I cannot but sense subtleties, affinities and resistances with certain of these denominations. I recognize that such classifications might either attract or dissuade people in their attendance, acceptance and/or subsequent dissemination of work 'within circles'. *We live in a Google world of keywords*. I do not want to delimit the audience to the strictly 'converted'. I have had to balance wanting to articulate intention and scope as broadly and openly as possible, while simultaneously asserting the practice's precision and focus. I am cognizant of the advocacy potential held within, furthered by the yet untapped in this work (suggested earlier by Kafer, 2013). I want this work to move/language through various sectors and strata of academia/communities. At times these are one and the same, but often not. I am aware of the simultaneous hurdles and open gates presented through these undertakings, perceived varyingly as art/academic/performance/poetic/improvisational, as *theatrically politically activist(?)*...

I am reminded here, of how, with some degree of naivety, I inserted *the* infamous Margaret Mead quote into an undergraduate Theatre for Development paper of mine. Her remark suggests never doubting that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, for as she states,

‘indeed, it is the only thing that ever has’.<sup>110</sup> I was abashedly caught in my own idealistic near-sightedness, when the instructor remarked: ‘for better or for worse’. So much is true. And, this was showcased so beautifully through (the performances of) the now-eponymous Occupy Wall Street ‘99%/1%’ rallying cry.

An awareness, of our double-edges is necessary – especially, when examined through a radical, political and activist performance frame. As the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation sought to examine in their 2015 colloquium, ‘Improvisation, Collective Action, and the Arts of Activism’, we must contend with the ‘implications of neoliberalism’s valorization of spontaneous orders and risk-taking for counterhegemonic movements that look to improvisatory performance practices (and their attendant ethical sensibilities)’ (n.p.). Quite simply, these improvisations were and *are* counterhegemonic, whilst simultaneously they operate within the understanding that we are the human hegemony (in socially-ecological stratifications).

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that during the Occupy Movement (2011), my attending placard read: **100%**.

At one time, revolution has been suggested and it was incorporated into the piece in an exciting and in an unusual

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<sup>110</sup> There is much debate as to how to properly cite this quote, and its exact origin. The quote was trademarked, held by Margaret Mead’s granddaughter, up until 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016 (see: <https://trademarks.justia.com/766/00/never-doubt-that-a-small-group-of-thoughtful-committed-citizens-can-change-the-76600230.html>).

way.<sup>111</sup>

(R9, *Earthdance 1*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015)

I have deliberately attempted to steer clear of some of the extreme interventionist strategies, opprobrium, pugnacity, censure or flamboyance negatively associated with political theatre and/or activist performance. *I have (humbly attempted to) perform and be poiesized through the local and the global, with intimacy. With 'quiet' immediacy.* At the risk of reasserting/undermining the incontrovertibly implicit understandings evidenced, let alone the readership, it still might warrant saying: *there exists no one radical activist body politic.* I contend that all theatre/performance is inherently political, but not necessarily radical or activist; and whilst it is inextricably ecological, it is not necessarily 'environmental'. All performance/theatre is unavoidably environmental, though not radically activist, and yet is a performative politic of contextual ecologies.

### ***Performance eARTh***

Performance Art (self-)distinguishes from 'theatre', in that 'the performer *is* the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative' (Goldberg, 2011 p.8, emphasis in original). However, what may distinguish my work from traditional versions of performance art, is its effort towards a non-narcissistic focus...embodying

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<sup>111</sup> In a discussion around political theatre, one might think that this respondent's remark could provoke a nod towards Augusto Boal, and his *Theatre of the Oppressed* movement, wherein he posits, the 'theater itself is not revolutionary: it is a rehearsal for the revolution' (1979, p.122). However, as has been evidenced, the sites of/as performance, were approached, wherein agency was equally appreciated in the present; just as much as they stood as performative platforms for 'revolutionary' futures...

character-cum-ethics-cum-character. Performance Art, often used interchangeably with Live Art, is an applied performance strategy for engagement:

situated on a continuum in which place, the body and human activity are interconnected; what distinguishes one practice from the other is the nature and function of the artefact and the relationship between performer and spectator (Shaughnessy, 2012 pp.102-103).

The relationship between performer and spectator has been approached in this practice as ‘an ecocentric ethics [that] at its best is pluralist and pragmatic, post-secular in an animist way’ (Curry, 2011 p.268). And yet, as I underscore the value of reciprocity within these frames, I also recognize that I have catalyzed the explorations: ‘responsibly’ fostering them with two degrees in Applied Theatre and a host of other community-engaged performance and activist work under my belt. I come with a toolkit (unseen?). I also come humbly, both as part of a process of creating and prepared to facilitate the unexpected. I come, as myself (performing|performed by)...

Catherine Graham contentiously raised an interesting point in her keynote ‘Activist Performance in/and Canada’ (2012) when she remarked that she feels artistic skill ‘is crucial to making these projects of exposing exclusion work’ (n.p.). She elaborates and notes:

This has not always been a popular point of view, as many activists who want to use art to increase participation fear that putting an emphasis on artistic skill will create another set of exclusions. [...] I want to be clear on what I am saying here. I do not believe that specialized artistic training is a requirement for participating in public life. What I do believe is that, to increase participation in public life, we often need to be able to refocus attention and that this is what art and artists ultimately specialize in: focusing attention on the things we are socially conditioned not to see (n.p.).

What we may be socially unconditioned to see are the ethical dimensions of our actions; and so, I posit, in the vein of inclusivity, artistic [ableist] skill must include a transparent and ongoing questioning of these considerations within every ‘work’. *With my shaky voice, my trembling hands...* my artistic ‘skill’ (perceived through ableist norms) is open for critique, and yet I feel ‘prepared’ artistically to meet the challenges of the day... and, in so doing, I do focus, become a focus, and refocus attention(s)... *This my disability.*

Freeman synthesizes the main points in Denzin’s *Interpretive Autoethnography*, evocatively capturing that ‘autoethnographic performance should unsettle, criticise and challenge taken-for-granted, repressed meanings; invite moral and ethical dialogue at the same time as it reflexively clarifies its own moral positions’ (2007 in 2015a, p.162). He continues, relaying that it should engender resistance, ‘demonstrate kindness; show instead of tell; exhibit interpretive sufficiency and representational adequacy that is authentic; and present political, functional, collective and committed viewpoints’ (p.162). Thereby, ethics [of (auto)ethnography] are the property of the invisible necessarily needing to be evidenced through visible means.

In the *Performing Ecos* themed issues of *Performing Ethos* (2015), I spearheaded the inclusion of a ‘Centrespread’ which featured the ‘independent’ answering by all thirteen contributors and three guest editors (myself, Jess Allen and Stephen Bottoms) in 100 words or less, of the question: ‘What is YOUR ethic of performance and/as ecology?’ Below I include a sampling of those responses. All, but Chaudhuri’s, are excerpted:

*Kershaw*: This question's formulation raises critical theoretical problems, as it could imply that somehow a person can have something like possession of performance as such. Otherwise how could one claim some 'ethic' that is relevant to it? Also the 'and/as' binary is complex in suggesting that whatever relates performance to ecology per se could be determined by humans, perhaps to especially significant degrees. [...] So my eco-performance 'ethic' is coupled to the shortest paradoxes in English, by proposing 'less is more' (Vol.4 Pt.2, p.135).

*Bottoms*: Perform your environment, and let your environment perform you (Vol.4 Pt.2, p.138).

*Chaudhuri*: Include everything (Vol.4 Pt.2, p.138).

My response, found me acknowledging 'that even with all of my most well-intentioned efforts ... at some point [I] might in the end be "proven" to be wrong or to have unintentionally caused harm' (Vol.4 Pt.2, p.138).

I published the above, understanding that we all unavoidably cause harm, to varying degrees. The question is how little harm we can cause in our lifetimes and what we can do to help reduce it in the future.

### ***Response-Ability***

One of the principal/principle dilemmas of the present may not be so much – as Bennett (2010) deftly underscored when quoted earlier – finding ways of extricating ourselves from complex political/social/economic (and potentially harmful) assemblages, but rather to negotiate how we can act responsibly from within them. *My name is on a land-title. I live on unceded Traditional Indigenous Territory. I pay and receive money from a government that funds war efforts. I wear clothes that say, 'Made in China'. I plant seeds such as Russian kale. I consume food that doesn't grow here. I*

*'bank' online. I use fossil fuels.* It feels not so much that I am living a 'life in the margins' – but more, a life as a series of footnotes (with a perfunctory nod to the 'carbon footprint') and optimistically not as endnotes.<sup>112</sup> *We are anathematic oxymorons.* Or, more concisely, to borrow from Scranton (2015): *We are, simply, fucking morons!*

The tethered and tenuous vicissitudes of our current ethical mire are what Hunter encapsulates as the simultaneity of 'mutually exclusive presents (present-times) suggesting that we can be inside neoliberal structures at the same time as outside them, inside the ideological simultaneous with being alongside in the situated' (2013, p.9).

Herein, *again*, we site ourselves as the 'paradoxical primate' (Kershaw, 2008).

### ***Improvise Globally, Act Locally***

*What is the pertinent correlation of one woman 'slipping' into an intersection, a taxi, an ocean's shore, on a doorstep, a parking lot, an opening/closing gate or in a windowed studio – witnessed – in addressing the current climatic condition? What is the corollary temperature of this practice within the global locale?*

Improviser Keith Johnstone, in what I assume was meant more observationally than provocatively, remarked: 'The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no

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<sup>112</sup> *I co-own land as a cooperative, with seven diverse families, holding shared senses of stewardship. I have tried to learn as much as I can about the local Indigenous presence (no longer present), and have traveled and met with, and was openly received by Tla'amin Elders and the Tla'amin Cultural Committee. I served two consecutive three-year terms in local government, under a 'green mandate': the youngest woman ever elected to the post, being 24 at the time. I engage in alternative forms of economy, which include barter and trade. I try to buy clothing made in 'sweat-shop-free' environments and wear second-hand clothing. I save seeds. I buy organic and fair-trade. I belong to a credit union. I lived off-grid.*

attention to the future' (1979 cited in Peters, 2016 p.444). *As* improviser, I bemoan this statement. There is a vast difference between working in the realms of unknowns and paying no attention. Not paying attention to the future, in art and life, denies simultaneously the past and the present – in so doing, dishonouring the safely-guarded improvisational 'moment'. I want to stress, though I am not implying that Johnstone is inferring such, that improvisation is not the practice of ignorance. Or, at least, not mine.

And so, I ask the above epigraphed questions genuinely. Cognizant that they may appear to be seeking out some quantifiable measure of impact or laudable claims, strong calculable and cross-referenceable indicators of the *effect of improvisation*, of 'my' sixteen improvisations. The justification of the arts and their merit within the Western Intellectual and Scientific traditions is anything but a new conversation – and beyond the purview of this study to entertain at length – but surely necessary to acknowledge as it influences the 'reading' of these series of events. The *qualitatively quantifiable* questioning was/is ongoing, and the gleanings from the engagements have been shared throughout.

Not devaluing the gifts of science or reason, I invoke Lorde's 1979 perspicuity, in that the best way to counter-act the febrility of our planet might not be through fire, might not be by using the same tools as the master narratives. Still, I recognize this study shares methodologies with many neoliberal agendas that adopt some of the pillars of improvisation-as-practice, of performance. This overlapping of methodologies becomes a useful signifier in that the dilemmas are simultaneously oppositional and shared between ~~us~~/~~them~~.

What becomes of pertinent value as I evaluate this practice, woven through the lenses is my consciousness around notions of relativity, and how that transposes to the areas with/wherein I was/am working. As Susan Wendell so accurately points out, in the context of disability, what is ‘normal ability in urban Western Canada is neither normal nor adequate ability in rural Kenya’ (1996, p.14). I am requisitely attentive to some of the more commonly shared denominators – whilst not diminishing the differences – offered between the locations, and respective audiences, in Canada, the USA, and England. Arguably these locations share greater contextual similarities, than had the project encompassed Asian, African, South Pacific, Atlantic, Antarctic, South American and even European sites. I signal this not as an omission of the practice, but rather, as an invitation to further interrogate the questions held, and emerging through, this project within ever-increasingly larger frames. One I wish to take up.

And yet, it is the very localized ‘framing’ of this work – the intimacy of shared encounters – between the seven, twelve, nineteen, or twenty-eight of us, with and as site(s) – and the relevance these gatherings hold in relation to the global, that is of interest. The macrocosm does not exist without the microcosm, and neither does a population without individuals. Even amongst the imbalance of over-population and extinctions, recognizing the semi-permeable individual, and the agency available to ‘one’ does not insist on an ethic of individualism, nor monism. Neither, through a trans-corporeal lens, does an ascription to pluralism suggest that our situatedness be disregarded. As Christian de Quincey opines, ‘Every worldview espouses some deep truth —and is in error only if it claims possession of the whole truth’ (2002,

p.215). We view the world, from and as ourselves – always in relation to and with. This understanding, invests an interest in *siting* the impact of the local, however different it/we might by to (an)others. My placement holds value, not from an ego-centric, but rather an eco-centric perspective. *As does yours. And theirs.* Truth is elusive, and only poly-viable when approached as *concepts* (plural). Concepts actively considered in relation to that which contrasts the ability to be a fixed, and solo doctrine. This negotiation *is* the space, created *in situ* and refractively. I contend this is the most fruitful way to address the ‘impacts’ of these improvisations, these worldviews. It allows for the engaged consideration of:

wherever the circle of human compassion *ends*, it always *begins* with the local...[and] it is these formative, local, social and ecological attachments that provide the basis for sympathetic solidarity with others (Eckersely, 2006 cited in Curry, 2011 p.163, emphasis in original).

These sixteen gatherings served as engaged encounters through which we could explore our current and potential sympathetic and empathetic solidarity – between humans and other-than-humans – through embodied nuance. Sentimentalism was averted through an emphasis on sensing, of feeling through terrains possibly unexplored, or availed to be experienced anew.

Tempered with my own ‘regulative principle of realism’ (de Quincey, 2002 p.217) – my ‘real’ being as fluid as the worldviews and truths that qualify its existence – what I was trying to foster was far from some utopian ideal. By being real-time surrogates of our planetary pitfalls, our coming together *confirmed* the improvisational space as an ‘arena of social interaction and accountability’ (Watterman, 2015 p.59) positioning it ‘as a

site of dialogism-in-action, where we bring our personal histories and values into contact with others in a spirit of openness to change' (p.59).

Time and time again, as captured in the poems and reflections, this 'spirit' was present, locally available and translatable, discernible and tangible, recognizable – but not necessarily nameable. The spirits making up these local conglomerations acted as vibrant embodiments of a shared experiential space, which proffered understandings, akin to what Lakoff and Johnson suggest in *Metaphors We Live By*, as providing 'a richer perspective on some of the most important areas of experience in our lives: interpersonal communication and mutual understanding, self-understanding, ritual, aesthetic experience [and] politics' (1980, p.230).

Stretched me in some way.

(R13, *Lasqueti 1*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

Through intimate encounters, the everyday was *displaced*, our not-  
noticing gently subverted through shared opportunities for pause and  
contemplative, participatory encounter. Perceptions meshed into deepened  
senses of connection. The extent of our relationships was experienced anew.  
Our responsibilities were gently probed, renewed and/or reinvented through  
refraction. Dis-/Able-bodied agency was reconceptualized and affirmed.  
Dissonances and binaries were exposed, as cultural exclusions were  
examined inclusively. New understandings were born and new bonds  
formed. One-in-the-same, the specifics of our improvisatory context and  
their contingency and implication, their pertinence and place in/on a global  
scale were repeatedly remarked of and felt, *trans-corporeally*.

∴ [T]he experience...profoundly modeled a connectedness possible ∴

for all of us. [...] The improvisation offered up feelings often quashed, unexamined. It enabled feelings often quashed, unexamined. It left me with a host of questions, pensive, and deeply appreciative.

*(R10, Lasqueti 3, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016)*

Possibly the greatest impact.

This doctoral thesis inverted the maxim, ‘improvising globally while acting locally’, in so doing, it explored how performance might illuminate the conditions of Earth, and Earth illuminate performance...

**CHAPTER TEN:**  
**Shared Ethical Embodiments**

...within...

## (In/Un)CONCLUSION

*Why improvisation?  
Precisely because improvisation is the act  
and art of unknowns....*

Writing up two years of practice – a process seeking to correlate sensed intuitions with theoretical and improvised syntaxed frames – has been nothing short of a visceral insiding/outing. I have interpreted the new and the startling, through the old and familiar, and the familiarly old through the startlingly new. I have argued myself into corners, and then folded us (myself and corners) together into spheres. I have been trapped by my own metaphors, at times finding the process of extrication labourious, as I tried to counter potential contradictions. I have routinely forgotten what I wanted to say, what I wanted to write. I have been challenged by how to balance a lack of working memory with forming a coherent document. I have, again, routinely forgotten what I have read, wanted to say, what I wanted to write. I have sought ways to embrace the *disability* through which I compose my thoughts, conjoin theories, test hypotheses – wishing to honour the methods offered me through Wilson’s Disease, in the writing. *A disjointed or metonymic splicing*, imbued with variations of repetition (surely infuriating at times for the reader; ostensibly so for the embodied practitioner). I became overtly aware, in so doing, of the delicate balance between respecting the formal, academic parameters within which I am executing this exploration while simultaneously trying not to undermine the very principles I am advocating for, potentially self-effacing through ‘norms’. I was challenged by how one advocates for a valorization – whilst simultaneously not undermining the potential (in)congruency – of the disabled voice within

academia. Through seeking equilibrium within this written document, I recognized the desire for such a balance to be a microcosm of the larger project.

*Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into Ecology and Disability* has been the most difficult, stimulating, infuriating, provocative, challenging and rewarding project I have ever undertaken.

I have hesitated to make rigid, fixed declarations, though I premise my approach on ‘firm’ foundations, which in turn evidences original evocations and understandings. I did not *and* do not want to reinvokethe colonial practice of staking a claim, to territorialize, to own an aspect of ‘newly discovered’ knowledge; however, I do present my work as an original contribution emerging from a shared process of knowledge creation.

I have traipsed delicately on this line – trying to ascribe to the performance axiom of ‘show don’t tell’, wanting this practice/process of exegesis to implicitly evoke the foundational tenets this project embodied and exposed. I wish for these performances, poems and document to be considered more of a sharing, not a reductionist deduction on my part that asserts some ownership on this domain of (shared) knowledges.

‘The act of critical writing about performance is thus itself constructed as an ethical response to the work, part of the “reciprocal and unending cycle of call and response...”’ (Ridout, 2009 p.63), embodying transversally ongoing performance responses to the inextricability of my own/Earth’s call....

I humbly recognize the innovation and originality of this project, and the understandings from it that helped form, and aid in the formation of new transdisciplinary perspectives for the ‘respective’ fields. I do not deny my unique positioning which has facilitated what may well be the first triadic consideration of the linkages between previously ‘un-related’ scholarly domains, Disability, Improvisational Performance and Ecology. I found inspiration in the works of many, but no mentors whose work paralleled my own. In its freshness, the project’s ‘grounding’ and ‘mapping’ is emancipatory. The performances have served to stimulate unique conversations – have triggered reciprocal understandings that have been documented, that have elicited actions as a result. These understanding and actions lead towards enacting concrete ethical, (dis)able-bodied collaborative solutions on the part of audience/performer, which can/is in turn effect(ing) local/global change...for the better.

I have not been operating solo. And I have not been confined to the Humanities. The multi-dimensional practice I share and document is a ‘calling in’<sup>113</sup> of ourselves, as humanity, as academia, as communities-at-large, and as all of our incurring overlaps. Through attempting to avail ourselves of the tiers of imbrication and implication, I am opening doors for understanding our (dis)placements and for continued meaning making...

I wish to avoid having the recapitulation of the affects and effects of this project become pejoratively repetitive and redundant. To become rhetoric. I suggest that my exploration of my theses through poetic

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<sup>113</sup> See: Trần (2013).

improvisations attests to the passionate agency permitted by these adaptable methodologies to respond with immediacy and availability of my prescient questions. To the demands of the day, *everyday*.

What I have shared herein is an approach that emphasizes the imbrication of performance, art and life. *Can it be considered a rubric for site-specific improvisation? A cautionary codification for climate changing performance? A platform for participatory poiesis? A system for an ekphrasis of ethics? A template for a transparent, trans-corporeal theatre of ecological/disability advocacy?* Both yes and no. *Performing Embodiment: Improvisational Investigations into the Intersections of Ecology and Disability* documents a process of immersion, infusion and inspiration... through the sustained invitation of gentle provocations.

This doctoral exploration challenges Performance, Ecology and Disability Studies by evidencing the important and expansive value that can be offered to each of these fields by engaging Critical Improvisation lenses. It stresses the need to transparently and carefully craft our inquiries intersectionally, with particular emphasis on plurality and multivocality. It challenges these fields, and others, to examine categorizations, the limits of representations, and the ethics of inclusion. I implore the environmental and ecological sectors to embrace animism. My work offers support to those in Disability Studies who seek to meet academia with the dynamic challenges and richness of idiosyncrasies. My experience with this study leaves me confident in encouraging those involved in performance and improvisation to

further explore the possibilities for audience and participatory engagement.  
I invite, each, to inter-change.

The project does not assume duplicability. It does however invite 'others' to explore the supportive principles and approaches within the situated context of 'their' local. It invites an animate awareness, adaptability, responsiveness and reciprocity *in global situ*. It invites improvisation.

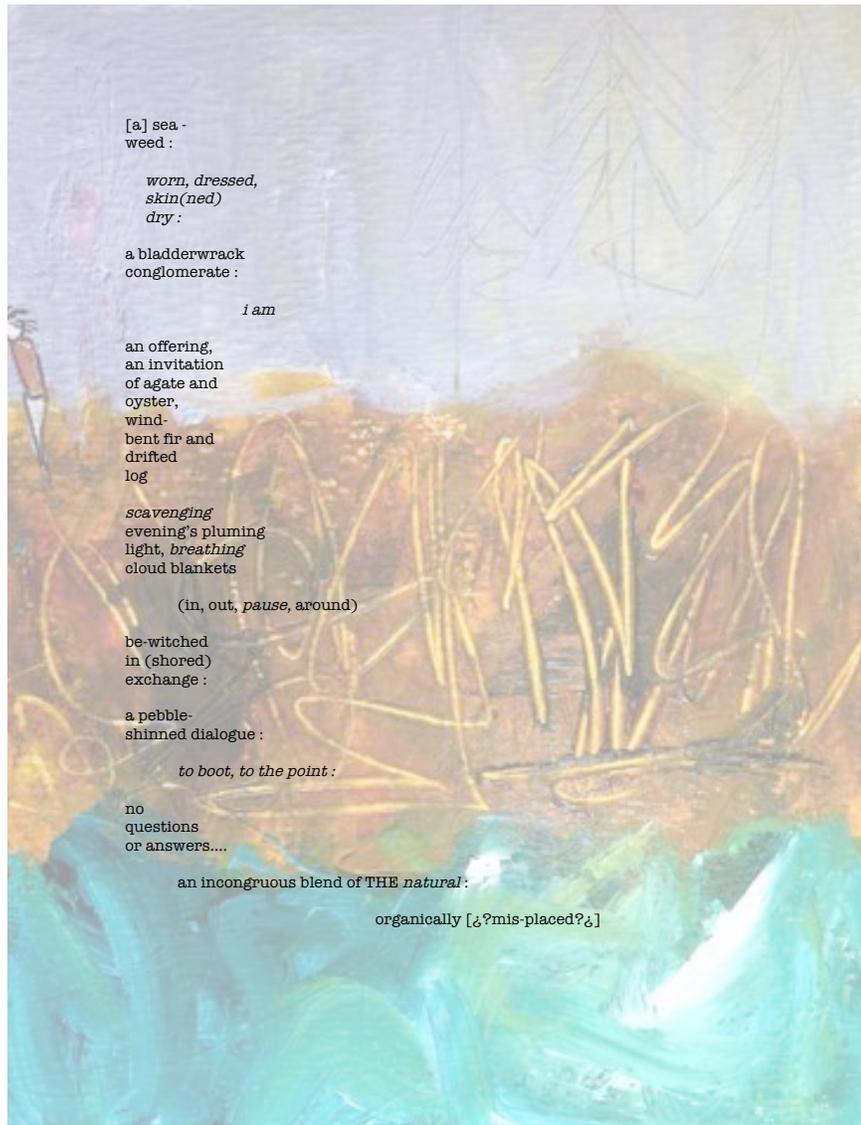
It is not by sending his awareness out beyond the natural world that the shaman makes contact with the purveyors of life and health, nor by journeying into his personal psyche; rather, it is by propelling his awareness laterally outward into the depths of the landscape at once both sensuous and psychological, the living dream that we share with the soaring hawk, the spider, and the stone silently sprouting lichens on its coarse surface (Abram, 1997 p.10).

It is not by sending their awareness out beyond the natural world that the *performer/spectator* makes contact with the purveyors of life and health... it is by propelling *our* awareness laterally outward into the depths of the landscape: the living dream that we share with a host of identities: *ecologies of varying abilities*. It is our navigating of these relationships of recognition and reconciliation which permit an animate reciprocity to be reappropriated within cultures of crisis. This: the improvisatory value of performing the performative, and recognizing the performances of being performed. This: the measure of our contextual distance.

*This, my experiential relationship between the experience of (per)forming an 'ecological' and 'disabled' identity.*

Inspired by 'one disclaimer...', I slipped into a shared animate being:  
the flesh of the improvisational world...

From the unceded, Traditional Lands of the island of *Xwe'etay*, I offer  
you my 'final' poem (28<sup>th</sup> May 2016):



(Please Now View: *Lasqueti 4 Performance Excerpt Video*:  
<https://vimeo.com/287502422>)

Through temporally-permeable animism, my porosity of viscosity, I have asked many questions. Many, if not most, are still unanswerable; yet they remain open for exploration. Continued consideration. *Linguistically. Sensorially. Kin-aesthetically. Synaesthetically. Theoretically. Practically.* Intentionally, 'presently' contingent. An invitation.

I think one of the greatest parts about your performances is the ending is unclear...\*

this is a case of no  
beginnings  
    and lack of endings  
a questioning  
    and a premise  
made tangible in  
the invitation...

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### *List of Performances*

- 1 – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014: *Lasqueti 1*
- 2 – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 1*
- 3 – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 2*
- 4 – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 3*
- 5 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 4*
- 6 – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015: *Lasqueti 2*
- 7 – 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015: *Huddersfield 1*
- 8 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015: *Huddersfield 2*
- 9 – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016: *Lasqueti 3*
- 10 – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 5*
- 11 – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 6*
- 12 – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 7*
- 13 – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 8*
- 14 – 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016: *Huddersfield 3*
- 15 – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016: *Huddersfield 4*
- 16 – 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016: *Lasqueti 4*

## APPENDIX B

### ***Poem Photograph/Art Credits, listed in order of appearance in each poem:***

Poem 1: *Similkameen O'Rourke, Tony Seaman*

Poem 2: *Latasha Wright*

Poem 3: *Utam Moses, Aaron Jeffrey, Cory Neale*

Poem 4: *Unknown (camera was collectively passed around), Helen Goodrum*

Poem 5: *CJ Holm*

Poem 6: *Similkameen O'Rourke*

Poem 7: *Franc Chamberlain*

Poem 8: *Franc Chamberlain*

Poem 9: *Similkameen O'Rourke, Valeria de Rege (painting)*

Poem 10: *Aurore Biré*

Poem 11: *Bruce Hooke*

Poem 12: *Janna Meiring (drawing), Greggor Krammer*

Poem 13: *Bruce Hooke*

Poem 14: *Lucy Smith*

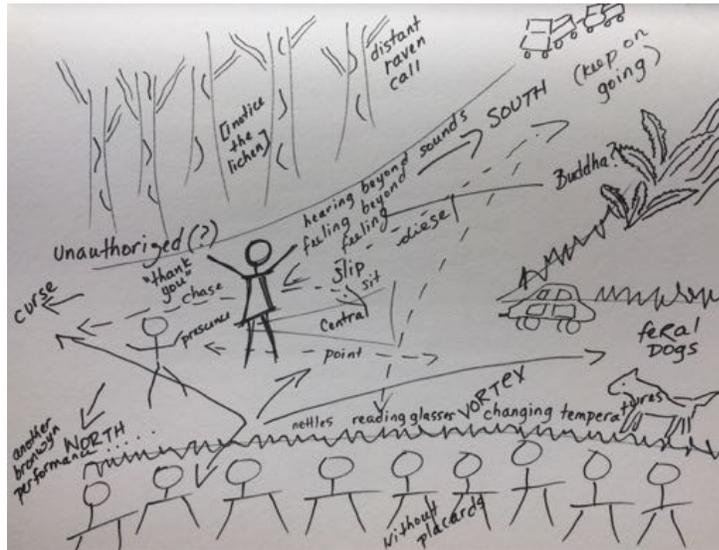
Poem 15: *Lucy Smith (photographs and drawing)*

Poem 16: *Valeria de Rege*

## APPENDIX C

### Post-Performance Drawings:

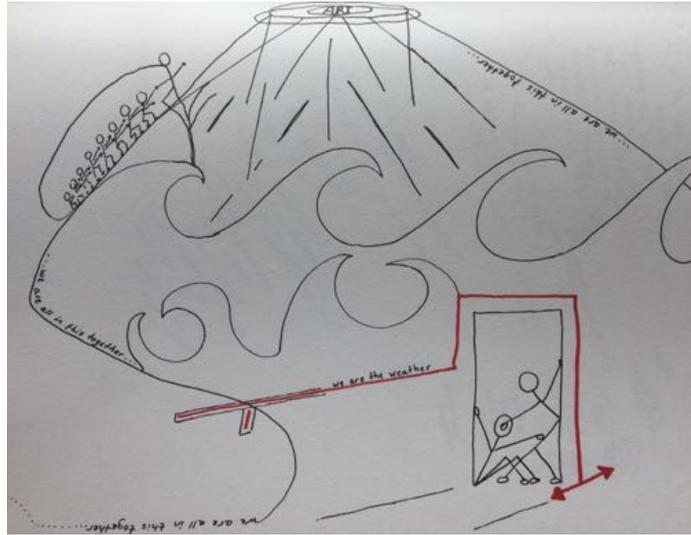
1- Lasqueti, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014



2- Earthdance, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015



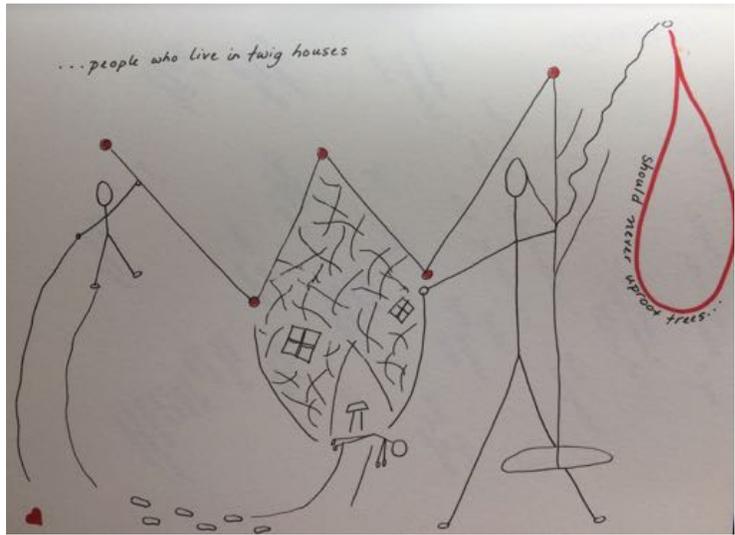
3- Earthdance, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015



4- Earthdance, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015



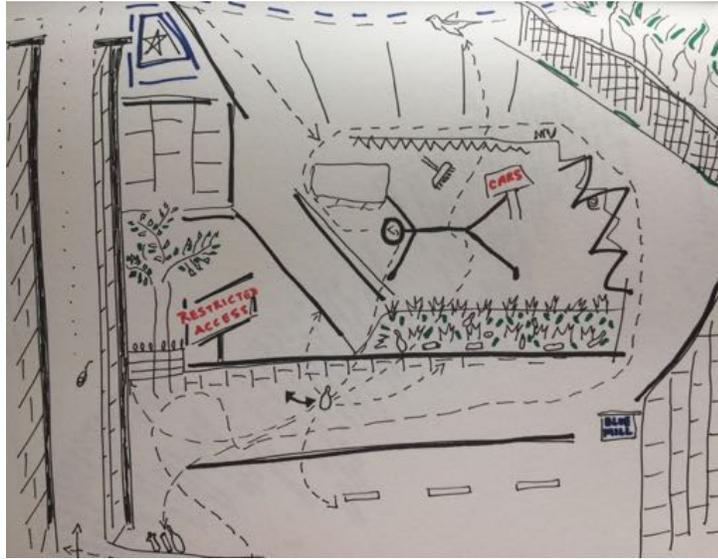
5- Earthdance, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015



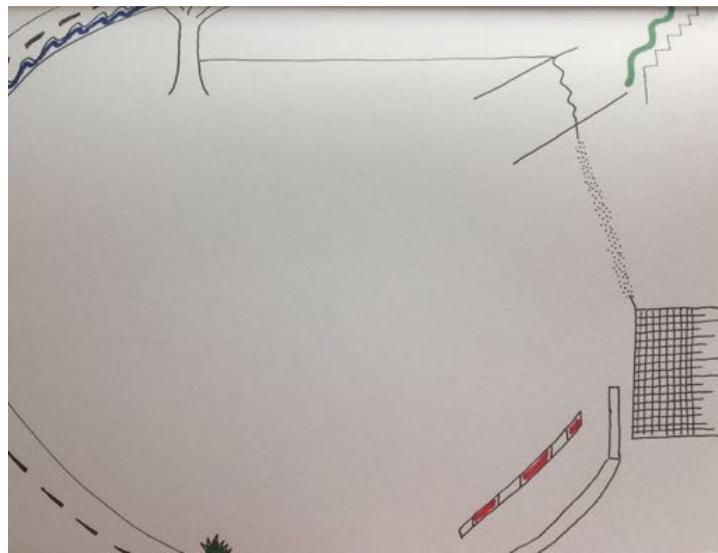
6- Lasqueti, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016



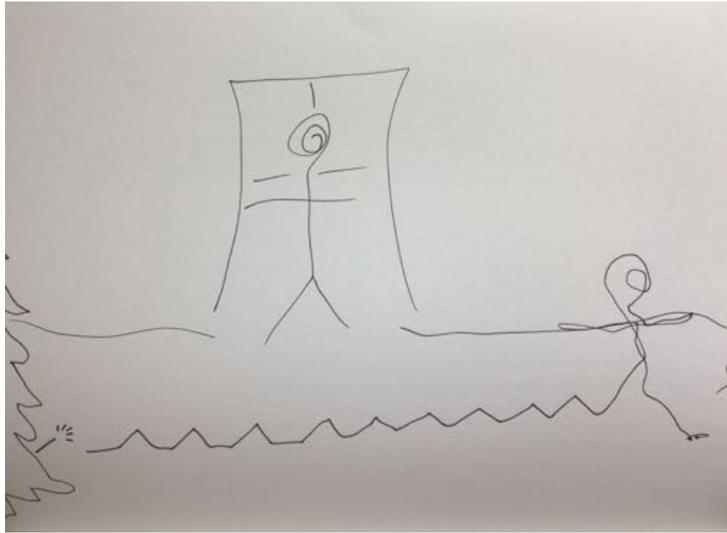
7- Huddersfield, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015



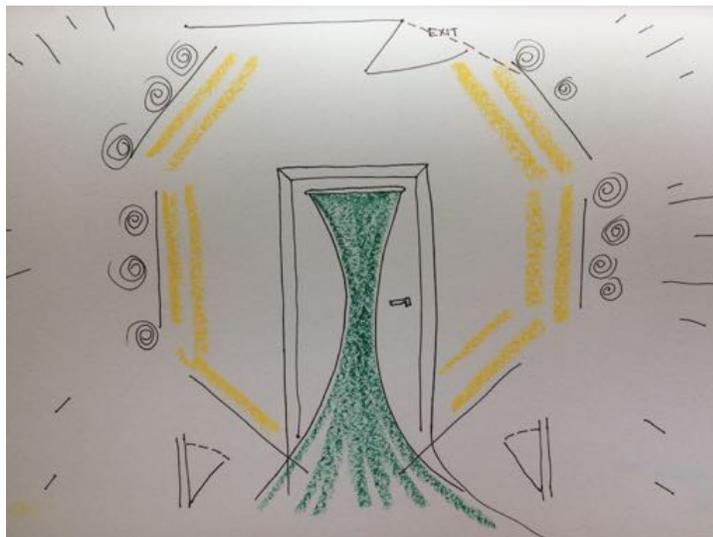
8- Huddersfield, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015



9- Lasqueti, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016



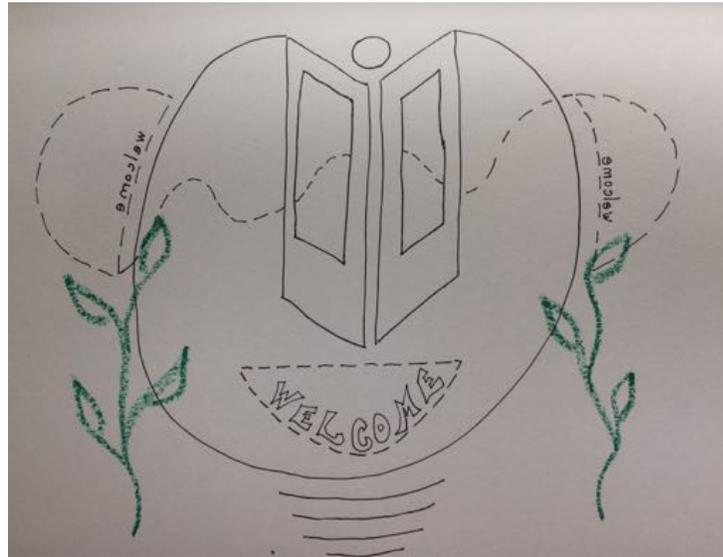
10- Earthdance, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016



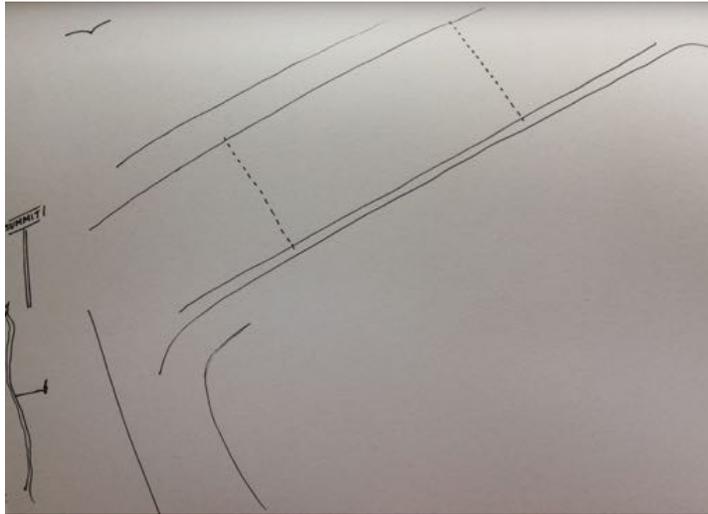
11- Earthdance, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016



12- Earthdance, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016



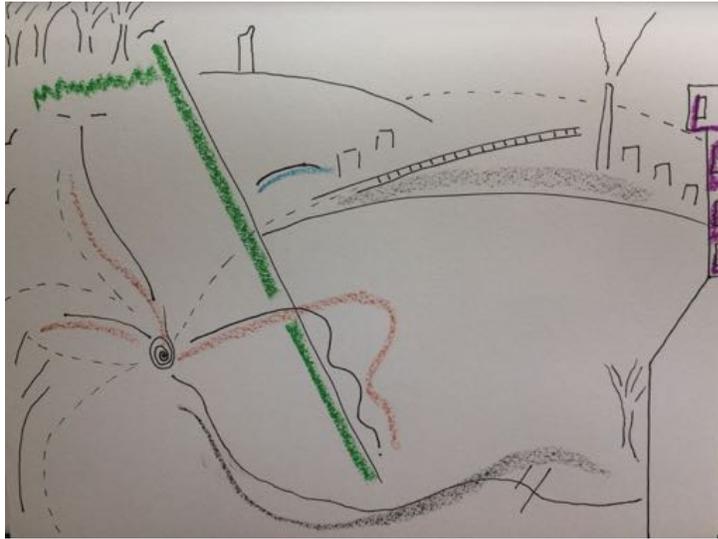
13- Earthdance, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016



14- Huddersfield, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016



15- Huddersfield, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016

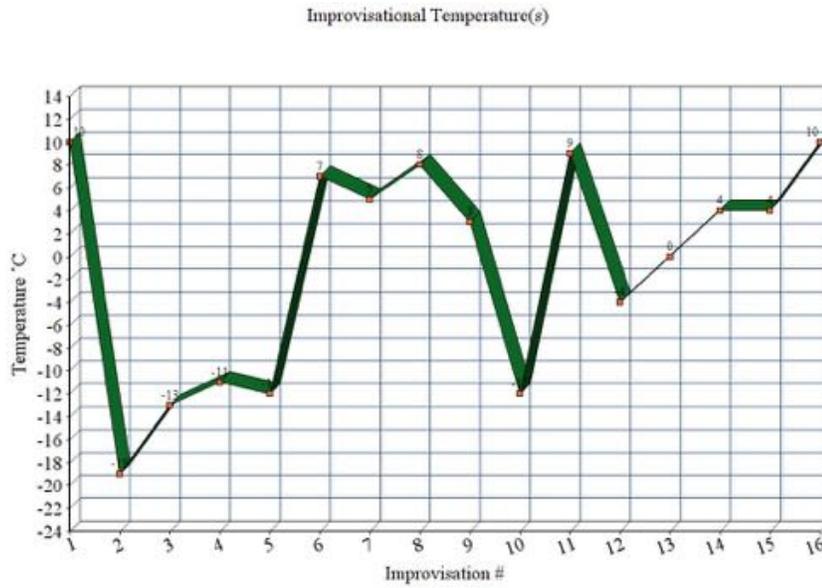


16- Lasqueti, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016



## APPENDIX D

### *Improvisation Weather Graph*



*(Figure made using [www.charttool.com](http://www.charttool.com))*

## APPENDIX E

### *Performance Video Links (edited, excerpted versions):*

- 1 – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2014: *Lasqueti 1*: <https://vimeo.com/286633722>
- 2 – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 1*: <https://vimeo.com/286634603>
- 3 – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 2*: <https://vimeo.com/286634978>
- 4 – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 3*: <https://vimeo.com/286636353>
- 5 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015: *Earthdance 4*: <https://vimeo.com/286636767>
- 6 – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015: *Lasqueti 2*: <https://vimeo.com/286637831>
- 7 – 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015: *Huddersfield 1*: <https://vimeo.com/286639004>
- 8 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015: *Huddersfield 2*: <https://vimeo.com/286639267>
- 9 – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016: *Lasqueti 3*: <https://vimeo.com/286639806>
- 10 – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 5*: <https://vimeo.com/286640197>
- 11 – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 6*: <https://vimeo.com/286729564>
- 12 – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 7*: <https://vimeo.com/286729925>
- 13 – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2016: *Earthdance 8*: <https://vimeo.com/286730061>
- 14 – 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016: *Huddersfield 3*: <https://vimeo.com/286730752>
- 15 – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016: *Huddersfield 4*: <https://vimeo.com/287499710>
- 16 – 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016: *Lasqueti 4*: <https://vimeo.com/287502422>

- Full length, unedited video of fourteenth improvisation: *Huddersfield 3*: <https://vimeo.com/287538322>

## APPENDIX F

### *Interview with Video Editor April Parchoma*

**1) What was it like to edit footage for performances you were not in attendance for?** *With that, I'll note that for each performance, I did provide you with suggested segments that you may choose to use...how did these suggestions impact your editorial process and decisions?*

The footage was like a performance for me, with fresh eyes, never having seen it before. What I like about not having been there is that I wasn't trying to recapture an experience, but rather work with the materials to convey the essence of the available experience.

**2) Being that you only engaged with these performances through filmed clips – as both editor and viewer, what do you think is gained, if anything, or lost by being able to interact with a live performance ‘only’ in the videoed – and then subsequently edited – form?**

The wonderful opportunity film presents is framing, as well as the opportunity to tinker with the visual experience of the viewer. So, the viewer of film is limited by the choices of the camera person, the camera audio, and the editor. The time one spends on each of these particular performances is greatly reduced, so perhaps they also indicate a different level of investment for the viewer. Further, the viewer is often alone, and often can view content from wherever it pleases one to do so.

As a viewer of the footage, I really enjoyed being able to return to the content and begin to see continuities, narratives or aesthetically pleasing elements. It was nice as an editor to also be able to hone in on moments and eliminate footage that wasn't necessary. In certain cases this was too difficult

and I needed help in order to make those decisions; however, as the process progressed I became much better at chopping the footage.

Seeing the performances live is the opportunity of presence, of creating one's own frames, of choosing to be open again and again, and applying critical thought in real time. More time is invested as one must bring their physical bodies to kinetically plug into the moment, with other people who may or may not be strangers. Then time and space is governed by the performer, one cannot push pause and return at one's leisure, and then one must bring one's body back home at some point.

In having to relocate to Saskatoon for a great portion of this year, and be removed from my theatre community in Vancouver, this project gave me the opportunity to stay connected to performance, and the value of and courage involved in improvised performance. This work speaks to the eco-feminist-spiritual-human part of me, and so the heart connection and appreciation of this work was also present in me throughout the process.

What is a bit strange about the editing process is that as the editor I am selecting what will be seen. This is in part due to being practical with time, but also speaks to the enormous trust that you, Bronwyn, have placed in me, and I take that level of trust very seriously. So I worked hard to reciprocate that trust and I hope the service I provided serves you well.

### **3) Can you describe your editing process?**

What I was looking for was a narrative - in texture, shape and if available, verbal.

How I went about delivering this changed, but the general format went like this:

1. Review footage
2. Review footage with notes, using notes as a general guideline provided to have a good idea as to what was important to you. Write my suggested revisions in brackets beside the times provided.
3. Take a break (not necessarily from editing but definitely switch projects for a while)
4. Return to the footage with fresh eyes and begin selecting segments, sometimes using the guidelines, sometimes and often not.
5. Reduce selected footage to five minutes or less (I got better at this as the project progressed)
6. Finalize project (35-40 minute rendering process)
7. Share project (convert to Mp4, 2-8 min)
8. Place project on the drive (add footage to Google Drive, 5-10 min)
9. Perform edits if needed
10. Re-finalize, re-share, re-place on the drive (45-60 minutes)

#### **4) Anything else you'd like to add...**

[...] I chose simple, intuitive options and did not get fancy with the editing. I do favour the simpler style for these projects because the beauty is in the work, and the work speaks for itself and thus does not require elaborate editing. I often used filters to offset poor film quality. At times, the quality

was a bit infuriating - there was so much beauty in these performances and it was often apparent that the camera person was not totally capable of seizing the moment. This was not true in all cases, but certainly in some. I would love to capture a performance on film to see if I can do better with the same technology, especially after this immersive experience.

Your performances are, in my view, quite valuable, and totally necessary. I look forward to making it a priority to attend more than one in the future.

*In Gratitude,  
Bronwyn Preece*

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\* Final quotation in (In/Un)CONCLUSION: *R12, Earthdance, Feb., 2016.*