

Chapter Eight

On Finding Ways of Being: Kinesthetic Empathy in Dance and Ecology

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October 1st, 2010 —It is 8 a.m. and a fine, cool mist is gathering into cold drops that saturate Brooklyn and Manhattan. The clouds are low, condensing the sky close to the earth, and I am walking along 58th Street West toward the Hudson River, mentally preparing myself to be wet for the next three hours. The Hudson River Greenway just North of the sanitation building at 59th Street is a sculpted terrain of concrete, gravel, grass, trees and Astroturf that divides NY Highway 9A from the waters of the Hudson. It is here, at a concrete ramp ending in rotting wood and water looking out to the skeletal remains of a historic pier and beyond to New Jersey, that the process begins.

This may be the first time I've stopped to take in the land of Manhattan.

Jennifer introduces herself, Maggie, Chris and Kate to the small group of us who have come for this interactive presentation of SIP (Sustained Immersive Process) /Watershed. In a low whisper while holding solid eye contact she explains that they have been working together for a number of weeks and have developed some ways of investigating and engaging with the environment. She pauses between thoughts, sinking in... that they are going to share their process with us... and that we are welcome to participate to whatever extent we feel comfortable. If we become too wet or cold there are some dry places below the highway where we can gather.

The following are six scores, or sets of instructions, which were given throughout the morning to engage us in their Sustained Immersive Process:

1. A grounding of the feet, a *There is a familiarity, a sense of centering of the breath, a circular willingness in my body and desire motion of the arms, movement for physical release. I am inspired by Qigong; arriving here circulating my arms toward my in this body, in this space, core as we stand witness to the connecting breath to body to movement of the gray waters in*

ground to landscape.

front of us and the expanse of silvery gray sky stretching out from side to side.

2. Forming partners and taking turns leading and following. Holding hands the leader chooses a place of interest and goes there, the follower takes the opportunity to explore how one might orient themselves along the journey to this chosen place, to their own body, to their partner, to sight, sound, smell, touch, to imagination, to scale, to temperature, shifting perceptual focus as a way to find new orientations in space. Upon arriving at the chosen location the partners switch roles and repeat; follower becomes leader and chooses the next destination.

Chris is lightly grasping my hand as we move at a slow pace through the gray landscape. I feel a different sense of time, something slower or wider, and a willingness to release to curiosity. Water shoots down gray green drain pipes as big around as my head, a series of multiples stretching out in great lines to my front and back, circulating water off the highway above our heads.

3. Gather and watch the water. Seven minutes. Find a partner. One person begins moving in response to watching the Hudson River. The other witnesses and then responds to the response to water. Continue repeating responding to response three times.

Jennifer's hands cut playful and erratic movements along and through the negative space of the shrubs lining the walk inspiring me to take off at a quick gait down the hill and around the willow tree, wet branches whipping me in the face. I come to a halt that lands me on the ground. Laying on my back, hands upward to the gray sky, arched upper back and neck head reaching for the earth, fingers and arms stretched overhead, fingers pointing downward to distinct blades of grass framed within blue (gray?) sky and willow tree.

4. Find a place on the horizon as far away as you can see. Trace a line from this point on the horizon to where you now stand, as if your gaze is a pencil or record needle. Do this three times with three different points.
- There is a difficulty of holding imaginary lines in actual space and an attention to intricacy that creates distance and space and scale between me and one thing and the next. A meditation; we're creating a container for fine-tuned attention that allows us to hold the action of drawing an imaginary line while witnessing the mind wandering, rambling away and back again to the presence of what the eyes can see. I am left with thoughts of scale and perspective; a centering of self in relationship to a vast intangible whole.*
5. Find a partner. Person one watches the water. Person two repeats the line-tracing exercise while physically tracing the bones of their partner's body with their hands. Switch roles and repeat.
- Feeling the juxtaposition between projected line and solid bone, the exacting massage of fingertips through muscle. Working my eyes along the particularities of cityscape and then moving water that is so hard to hold with a focused and constant gaze.*
6. Walk through the environment. As you are walking, listen. Find a sound that is far away, live with this sound, become accustomed to it. Find a sound that is closest to you, live with this sound, become accustomed to it. Find a sound that is in the middle, live with this sound, become accustomed to it. If a louder sound comes along and covers the sound you chose let it
- It's difficult to hear anything over the rush of highway to the right. Suddenly, I realize the rush of wind shaking the plastic poncho against my cheeks and the splatter of rain close to my ears and eyes.*

cover it and try to listen to it
through the louder sound.

The first time I spoke with Jennifer Monson, dancer/choreographer and founder of iLAND (Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance), about her creative process, we were ascending a steep hill in New York City, away from the Hudson River inland toward 12th avenue. It was raining and we had just spent the morning together with five or six others along the banks of the Hudson, immersed in an interdisciplinary investigation she and her collaborators are calling SIP (Sustained Immersive Process)/Watershed. I asked Jennifer about how she experiences her work in relationship to ecological issues. Amidst the rain soaking our clothes, punctuated by pauses for thought, she used the word "empathy." It was this word and its sentiments that have stayed with me as I've grown to know Jennifer. That day she spoke of a desire to have an empathetic exchange with her environment, that her embodied practice leads her to question notions of power in how we approach each other and our surroundings. These are important issues to consider in the face of climate change and the pressing need for ecological sustainability. To think in terms of a relationship *with* the environment as opposed to *to* the environment begs us to listen more and be in touch with our surroundings.

iLAND is a dance research organization that fosters cross-disciplinary investigation of the ecology of New York City. The organization's ethos is grounded in Monson's many years of improvisational dancing outdoors and a firm belief in the power of kinesthetic awareness to influence other fields of research. Focusing on kinesthetic awareness and impact demands a reorganization of the senses, which calls into question how we as humans tend to navigate, understand and inhabit an environment. I have become involved with iLAND over course of 2010 and the work cultivated through this organization has inspired me to think of my own process of improvisational dance and environmental action in terms of ecological empathy. In my practice-based research I've begun to track the experience of my body in relationship to my surroundings and to unpack what trainings and practices I've acquired and developed that encourage me to lean towards an empathetic exchange with my environment. This

has led me to question the role of embodied experience in our understanding of and response to environmental issues, particularly in light of cultures of capitalism and consumerism that often disregard impacts on bodies and land due to profit-driven initiatives. The work of iLAND counters this tendency by cultivating embodied experience that grows out of and into the interconnected systems of which we are a part.

What follows here are documents and ruminations on the kinesthetic relations between body and place. The writing moves between theoretical analysis and poetic documentation, culled from my engagement with iLAND and the public presentation of SIP/Watershed, as well as by my own solo movement investigations that are inspired by my recent move from rural Massachusetts to New York City. My research is an investigation of the built environment through a rural- and dance-trained body. It is a project of proximity, a performative and analytical process to invest in the possibility of forming an empathetic exchange between body and place, an exchange that could subsequently lead to a reorganization of how we value each other and the environment. I am writing as a practitioner and observer, balancing the task of filtering conversations, research and experience through movement and words.

It's so different here. New York City. A place of endless connections, networking, socializing, career building, dream making.

And disconnection.

At home in the hill towns of Western Massachusetts I am reminded of the quiet. And what six miles into town feels like on a bike. The gradual receding of the countryside to clustered homes, college campus, city hall. Six miles to school here in New York City is a stream of one concrete eco-system interrupted by the water under the Williamsburg Bridge. I privilege the "natural" eco-system of home and its green spaces. "Natural" in quotation marks because there too we have reconstructed land from forest turned farmland turned strip mall intercepted by conservation lands and old growth trees. But I privilege this reconstruction of land; it feels smaller and more expansive in its simplicity. I feel more distant from the urban landscape than a part of it and yet the intellectual-cultural-technological huuuummmmm of urban space stirs me.

Something expansive in its own right;

but closed, too—and other.

In *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, dance writer and anthropologist Susan Foster engages in a close tracking of the evolving cultural meanings of the terms kinesthesia and empathy. She explains empathy as the sensory experience felt in the body invoked by encountering another, be that “other” inert, active, human or otherwise; and kinesthesia as the awareness of bodily orientation in space. Kinesthetic empathy thus implies an awareness of how our bodies sense and respond in overt and minute ways to the world around us. Vernon Lee suggests that the capacity for an empathetic experience originates “in one’s own awareness of the kinesthetic responsiveness to the object”; that we must feel the world with our bodies before we can empathize with it (Qtd in Foster 155). Kinesthetic empathy, then, can be thought of as a dialogue between that which is within and without; as an attunement to the body’s capacity to register sensory shifts in relation to the multiplicities that constitute an environment.

Recent research in neurobiology suggests that empathy is integral to how we construct meaning; in other words, it is linked to knowledge production, and is a form of orienting self to world (Foster 178; Gallese 171). Susan Foster’s work illustrates how dance practice, in particular, cultivates kinesthetic empathy by making one aware of bodily interactions in time and space. This work, held in tandem with Jennifer Monson’s dance research and those practices proposed and supported by iLAND, leads me to consider how kinesthetic empathy might produce new ways of knowing the spaces and bodies that we inhabit. This process of meeting the world and self through kinesthesia is one of proximity rather than distanced, objective observation and is subject to the particular body through which the information is channeled. How, then, does dance, and more specifically dancing outdoors, train a body or audience to approach the world with empathy? Does the cycling of data through a kinesthetically attuned body invoke alternative ways of being in the world? Perhaps the cycling of the environment through the body heightens our awareness of the reciprocity inherent in our relationships with other people and our surroundings.

**ABANDONED LOT:
Movements at the corner of Kent and 6th
Brooklyn NY
October 31st 2010**

I don't trust this dirt; I trust these weeds.

Riding my bike over the Williamsburg Bridge each day I pass by a vacant lot far below with deep rivets cut in the earth and gravel piled high covered in scraggly green. Large steel beams frame half the lot overhead, just begging for a swing to be hung surreptitiously in the night. I can imagine swinging out high over the weedy rubble and dream of building a little off-the-grid shack nestled into the hollow of the bygone building.

Yesterday I went in search of this lot and found it cordoned off by plywood strewn with graffiti, prohibiting entrance to this dreamy space of possibility. I pressed onward to other streets in hopes of a weedy encounter. A little later I found it through a gap in razor and barbed wire tangle on 6th Street. Slipping through with a couple of snags through blue wool and green canvas I stepped into a sunny open space left in the wake of some previous structure. Lined by buildings on two sides and streets on the other, I am protected from ground-floor view by a metal wall that rises high overhead.

Abandoned lots. Lots of abandon. Move with abandon; reckless abandon. Abandon self. Let go. Of what would I let go? A practice of holding. A delineation of holding the things worth holding. Nestling into an unsettled place.

Take stock: to take in the land. Do wild spaces dictate wild movements? Becoming wild. Becoming animal (Deleuze and Guattari 335). Becoming human. To make this space resonate through experience and attention to micro perceptions. Becoming place. If anywhere in New York City is wild this is close to it. Unplanted and unplanned.

After burning there is re-growth. After upheaval there is re-growth. After building and demolition there is gravel and toxins and re-growth. The weeds are the land pushing through.

I do not trust this dirt. I trust these weeds.

A tree stands in the corner of the lot growing around metal I-beams of an industrial gate disfiguring both itself and the beam, twisting it

mercilessly and gorging a deep scar in itself as it envelops the rusting metal. Climbing through the brambles and trash I perch myself on the gate and find contact with the tree. Shoulder to branch, cheek to bark, hand to twig, spine to trunk, wedging myself into the tangle of metal and alive wood. Round yellowing seedpods hang like fruit around my head, some sprung open and passed (dead) like tiny mouths still clinging. I feel protected here, in and amongst the arrow-shaped leaves, looking out across the open weedy expanse, beyond to tagged walls and cityscape, holding leaves and metal and seeds and gravel and bark and buildings.

Two tasks/scores. Task one: Delineating a thing to hold: a perception score. A dance of the eyes. Holding a stick and remaining focused on a metal beam five feet away. The stick becomes transparent and I can see the beam through the stick. The stick splits. Becomes two. Holding each in perfect focus without joining the two. Soft brown, speckled with dark spots, slightly raised, which I can feel where the bark meets my skin. Holding two sticks and one rusted yellow beam. Switch. Blend the sticks and the beam becomes two. The softened focus is a doubling of the world. An overlap. Holding focus sharp and soft in the same moment. Holding two kinds of focus in two different spaces.

Experiencing the tentative line of holding multiple realities in a singular observation.

Task two: finding this tentative line in movement. Running through space. Body in motion switches between two modes of focus: one of play and observation, and one of thinking and audience. Self watching and imaginary other watching, creating an articulation that is bound to a preoccupation with ideas of successful communication, impact and impression. *A split between concept and movement*, between self as mover and witness. Holding both simultaneously. Playful investigation moves toward trying toward thinking toward performance. Toward dance? The awareness of moving and the choice making, the desire to let go of preconception and exterior watching, to move the body as the body wants to move, as the land wants the body to move. Charting a trajectory from perception to movement to placement, to awareness to thinking, to choice making, to communication. When does this sense-perception-turned-movement turn into dance?

In "Movement's Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance," Susan Foster draws a lineage of the study of kinesthetic perception. In the late nineteenth-century kinesthesia was identified as a kind of "sixth sense" connected to the awareness of one's existence to space and time. This definition was refined and articulated as researchers learned more about how this "sixth sense" is connected to the musculature and proprioceptors of the body that process the intake of sensory experience and articulate the expression of movement, from something as unconscious as breathing to the self-aware gestures of dance (47). "Kinesthetic empathy," "inner mimicry" or "metakinesis" became known as terms that refer to the imaginary sense of movement felt when observing someone (or something) in motion. Kinesthesia is now understood as the sensorial awareness of movements and their orientation.

In the 1930's American dance critic John Martin wrote about kinesthetic empathy in relation to the emotional transmission of modern dance as exemplified by the work of Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. To quote John Martin at length:

Since we respond muscularly to the strains in architectural masses and the attitudes of rocks, it is plain to be seen that we will respond even more vigorously to the action of a body exactly like our own. We shall cease to be mere spectators and become participants in the movement that is presented to us, and though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs, we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature. (53)

Recently, neuroscientists have connected this sense of "dancing synthetically" to the presence of mirror neurons, which "resonate" in similar ways regardless of whether we see an action or perform it ourselves (Rizzolatti 253). We feel the movement that we see around us as if we ourselves were moving. Regardless of whether we are aware of this process it is always happening, the movement of the world is replayed through our muscles and brains in minute ways. In other words, when we witness an action we are effectively rehearsing the possibility of fully embodying it as a way to connect with and understand our surroundings. Gallese speaks about this process as creating a shared body-state in which observer and observed are linked in an inter-subjective relationship (771). Our orientation to the world, indeed our very sense of self and reality, are deeply informed by a constant neural

and physical response to our surroundings whereby our body/minds actually repeat, or mirror, the world around us. *We perform the world in minute neural-muscular gestures.*

In the context of this project I am particularly interested in our kinesthetic response to the environment. If our neurons fire appropriately upon seeing a turn or leap or fall, what is firing upon living in a city, forest or field? Might we find ourselves in an inter-subjective state with our environment? Some would argue, as is evident in many of the experiments recorded in *The Secret Life of Plants*, by Peter Tompkins and Chris Bird, that the transference of feeling or sense from one object or being to another is not a purely human experience.¹ These experiments suggest that we are part of a network of kinesthetic response in which all things are informed by each other. Animate or otherwise, in motion or stillness; we are in a constant state of re-orientation, sensing and feeling our environment as if it were ourselves.

What are we sensing in our bodies as we witness shots in the chest, or scars in the land? How are these experiences being tracked, traced and archived by our bodies?

Mirror neuron theory gives scientific credibility to experiences that I think are very familiar to improvisational dancers. There are many improvisational techniques that teach you to pay close attention to your surroundings, its form and movements, how it impacts your body and what choices to make from within a constantly shifting landscape and (subject) position. An example of this is the practice of Authentic Movement, a contemplative improvisational dance technique which engages people in two different roles, that of mover and that of witness. The mover closes their eyes and moves in whatever way they wish. The witness remains still and monitors the sensations that arise while witnessing the other. The witness is often described as creating a container for the practice; their act of attention holds space for the movement of someone else while taking note of their own body's response. Each role in Authentic Movement requires an attention to what is arising from within, the mover witnessing self, the witness regarding mover, each in a state of non-judgment, seeing what is and letting things arise and pass. They are bound in a reciprocal engagement in which their movements define each other. I grew up dancing this witness from within and witness from without.

What is it to witness this earth?

This space?

This place?

This city?

What container are we creating in order to witness and respond to our actions?

Practices such as Authentic Movement have informed Monson's work and this is evident when I spend time with SIP/Watershed. I see it in the ways in which they give spaciousness to their investigations, listen to each other, dig deep into internal kinesthetic response, and reflect on findings as a catalyst for continued exploration. They are consistently observing their own experience within the container of a shared practice. These practices build relationships between self, site and other that resonate for me beyond the explicit space of dance. They infuse the way I inhabit my body, my environment, and my relationships with a kinesthetic awareness and attentiveness.

I am not of this place. I come from a rural place.

Through the displacement of my body—which is trained in techniques of contact improvisation, climbing trees, yoga, catching bugs, tuning scores, hitchhiking, body-mind centering, buying local, laying in grass, conceptual performance art, riding bicycles and authentic movement²—I become aware of the tension and juxtaposition between built and natural space. I become aware of the strangeness of land reclamation, box stores, parking lots and parks. I also become aware of a general sense of displacement. The displacement of people by colonialism, capitalism and environmental force, the displacement of land from under our feet by corporations and agri-business resulting in a place-less-ness that is pervasive and deep.³ With this displacement also comes a lack of orientation, and so it seems to invoke a shoring up of those things I think I know so that I can relocate my body-self-sense in this foreign land. Dance practice, and in particular improvisational and site-specific practice, provides a framework with which I can be present to the passing sensation and constant re-orientation to body to thought to place to land. Dance has intention, a survey of possibilities and a contextual reorientation that *leans toward the possibility of an empathetic exchange*. Through training and attention I grow aware of my body pressing into this possibility. As I find meaning in movement and space for consideration I also encounter the demand to reckon with the implications of my actions and the recognition that I have the capacity to shift perspective and direction.

**SIP/Watershed:
164th St. on the Hudson River
Manhattan, NY
October 8th, 2010**

You cannot take 164th Street all the way to the Hudson. You must access the river further South or North and travel a path between railroad tracks and the water. Near where 164th would intersect with the Hudson, the land is a long wide green expanse along the steep rocky edge of Manhattan.

Was it always like this, or carved away for rail and recreation?

Here the river is wide and even, flowing toward the city to the left and upstream, lined with rocky outcroppings aglow with autumn colors. These kinds of landscapes, with their northeast waters, wood and rock, are familiar to me. We meet in the shadow of the George Washington Bridge at a discharge site for combined sewage overflow during rainy weather. There is a sign cautioning to beware of toxins released in the advent of a storm. Following a similar pattern of warm-up to the first day we ground our feet and find our breath.

It's gray but not raining.

Standing here and taking in the landscape there is always more than appears or is perceived. What embodied and environmental cues are edited out in the process of understanding? Is this how we understand the terrain; through mapping and flattening it out to make way for transportation?

We hold hands and lead each other to points of interest.

Editing to create order, not the natural order of growth and decay cycling back onto itself, but the clean precise order of grass mown, leaves raked, pavement mended and shrubs clipped.

I fit my hipbone into the hollow of the shore and think about how water edits stone.

Departments of recreation, sanitation, environmental protection.

We rearranged objects and bodies in relationship to each other and sound.

An ordered body.

We played the landscape.

An ordered landscape.

We made sounds and drawings, diagrams that mapped the soundscape.

What order are we to follow with our bodies in this place?

Drawing sound, drawing out sound, sounding drawing, diagrams of sound and space.

Does SIP embody and engender a new order?

We spoke in whispers, treading the line of intelligibility between sound and speech.

The embodied research practice proposed by my experience with iLAND engages a cross-disciplinary approach to dialogue with the environment. The tools brought forth in sound, architecture and dance infuse and inform the process, creating a relational network of sound, space and movement. This form of research imagines a way to approach a conversation between humans and built and natural environments by turning toward the environment through the body. iLAND proposes a space where boundaries are blurred between disciplines. Dichotomies such as performer/audience and expert/novice are diffused into a shared space of exploration, expression and meaning-making. Rather than define each collaborator or audience member within specific roles, everyone becomes involved on multiple and shifting levels. The exploration is not conclusive or didactic but instead proposes a deep attentiveness and interrogation of a kinesthetic response to internal and external composition. The site is equally regarded in this process as it influences the form of research and data collection used by the various disciplines represented. This exchange between environment and dancer, and dancer and audience, completes a kind of kinesthetic empathetic feedback loop from the environment to the body to another body and back to the environment. SIP may not completely break-down socially prescribed ways of being, but it does practice it by following a more fluid engagement of inquiry and reciprocity. This challenges presumptions of defining the world based on notions of truth or fact by calling attention to the nuanced textures of lived experience.

In *The Lie of the Land*, Paul Carter proposes that 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 beautifully uses the metaphor of poetry, whose meandering trajectory folds along the details of the terrain, as a contrast to the linear and cutting marks of colonial navigation. For Carter, poetry allows for a sympathetic trespass and expression of experience, which I feel is akin to my nuanced time passed within this Sustained Immersive Process. After my first day participating in SIP/Watershed at the Hudson, memories and experiences became linked to the minute details witnessed in the space opened by sustained kinesthetic engagement. What was once only a park between highway and waterway becomes a container for a multiplicity of happenings and investigations. I begin to know the space in another way. Carter argues that forming a detailed relationship to people and place counters the totalizing narrative of the State⁴. I believe that kinesthetic investigations are one way to form narratives counter to mainstream capitalist and colonial ideologies. By aligning oneself *with* the environment and others, we perform a reorientation toward a more ecological way of being.

How are our understandings of power and subjectivities changed if, instead of being defined by a single call and response of one human to another, we instead turn toward the soil, a river, or a storm?⁵ Understanding our identities as constituted by both human *and* environmental relations thus requires that we give credence to the landscapes we inhabit. The ways in which we manipulate, use and respond to our habitats affects the kinesthetic relay that defines our experience and understanding of ourselves. It would seem, then, that an increasingly resource-depleted, paved, privatized and war-stricken world would reproduce a particular kind of subject; and in the face of this, it becomes important to interrogate our notions of self and other and the response mechanisms that these positions reproduce.

In *Relationscapes* Erin Manning speaks about proprioceptive awareness in terms of feeling ecologically, stating that “we feel the world ecologically before we know exactly what it is” (73). In other words, our ability to recognize or name the world is pre-empted by sensory perception, which raises questions for me about our ability to listen, or feel, without jumping to hard and fast conclusions about ourselves or the world around us. She also notes that “proprioception provides us with

clues that precede our cognitive understanding of where we are going,” which suggests that our body begins to process, respond and perhaps understand before our mind can conceptualize a socially constituted meaning, or a politically correct response (14). Our bodies, we now understand, are hardwired to the world, inextricably linked to our intake of and impact on our surroundings. This, then, is a pre-linguistic impulse, which relates to the questions of subjectivity above in that it proposes the possibility of articulating (through movement) an ecological state of being that functions within cycles of reciprocity and constantly evolving patterns of exchange. Dance has the potential to cultivate this state of being by teaching one to hone into the details of kinesthetic response. It proposes a context for the articulation of movement and composition (read: subject position) that allows for, indeed necessitates, awareness of mutually responsive and constitutive flows of action not only between bodies but also within the context of a given space.

Felix Guattari addresses similar notions of ecological states of being in *The Three Ecologies* in which he outlines what he calls an “*ecosophy*”: an articulation of the ethico-political arenas of “environment, social relations and human subjectivity” through the lens of ecology (28). His call to recognize the depth and breadth with which all things are interconnected (not as a singular unity but as a system that consists of a multiplicity of interacting forces) demands a deep interrogation and response to political and environmental issues, both individually and collectively. Guattari argues: “Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists. Ecology in this sense questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue as it has for the past decade” (52). An ecosophical analysis compliments the neural and physical aspects of kinesthetic empathy discussed thus far by presenting an ethical imperative bound to the notion of an ecological subject. This suggests that through becoming aware of oneself as an ecological subject one must confront the ways that hierarchical and capitalist systems are incogruous with the relational depth and breadth of human (or non-human) experience.

Through my engagement with iLAND I have often spoken with Jennifer about her process, and have been impressed by the sincerity with which she is questioning the notion of “a small nature-loving minority” that is often attributed to environmentalists searching for a practice that is able to grasp, or at least move, in relation to this depth of interaction.

The collaborative experience of SIP/Watershed engages with an expanded concept of ecology, one in which the body is implicated within the systems it is investigating. It is important to note that while dance and kinesthetic empathy offer a lens through which to think, feel and move ecologically, these practices in and of themselves do not inherently lead toward an interrogation of, or response to the issues Guatarri presents. The collaborative experience of SIP/Watershed thus becomes an ecosophical practice insofar as it is utilizing these practices to inform an expanded concept of ecology and our experience of it.

The concern for how we respond to “capitalistic power formations” and “sweeping progress” is echoed by Foster in *Choreographing Empathy* when she raises the question of how new technologies such as cell phones and the internet are mediating our kinesthetic capacity; that is, our ability to orient our bodies in space. She notes the disorientation created when speaking on a cell phone in public and the rapidity with which we are fed sensory information (making less time to pause) as two examples of how our kinesthesia is being compromised (or at least changed) in an increasingly technologized world. If attunement to our surroundings is fundamental to our capacity to experience empathy and empathy is a correlate to understanding the self and other, then we may be at risk of a greater sense of disorientation (Gallese 775). In light of these reflections it seems important that we find ways to reorient, read and respond to our surroundings.

I was sitting outside of FAO Schwartz next to the glass cube of the Apple Store, on Fifth Avenue, and was approached by a security guard and told I could not sit on the floor. This was striking to me.

Floor.

I was outside and I was welcome to be in the chairs provided, but not on the floor.

I was outside. On a floor.

Silvery concrete and glass stretching out on all sides. Interrupted by fashionistas connected to iPads and iPhones. More like a roof. For below me was the largest Apple Store in the world. On the roof of a subterranean Apple Store; on the floor of the city. Where sidewalk becomes the property of private corporations hidden underground.

My small-town environmental training is made particularly apparent in light of the realities of city life. It's easier to feel as though everyone in the United States has a general sense of environmental awareness and action when living in a town where trash, recycling and compost are proudly carted away by The Pedal People Collectiv⁶ and cloth shopping bags are made by and for the community to substitute for paper or plastic at the local grocery store, not to mention the pervasive "buy local" campaigns,⁷ Community Supported Agriculture⁸ and farmer's markets. It is these trainings that partially constitute the lens through which I am able to read my body and environment. It is with these predispositions that I find myself in the city.

**APPLE:
Movements at the Apple Store Plaza, 5th Avenue
Manhattan, NY
November 13th, 2010**

I'm nervous here, I'm afraid to move. I can't move.

I have a deep desire to find a similar release and investigation in this space. What use are these tools (scores, ways of being) if they cannot be used within this system too?

Be courageous. Move.

Heart is rapid.

Gaze is at middle gray and safe. Survey the possibilities.

Learn the rules through breaking them.

Remember motion. Orientation.

The score of this space is delineated, maintained and enforced.

I can feel the corporation.

The fountain elegantly redistributes water into frothy white columns that mirror the pillars which frame one side of the plaza. *So many bodies.* Guards appropriately attired in black suits with clear plastic wires protruding from their ears, coiling down their necks and into their collars. Shoppers toting bags, cameras and children form a line awaiting

entry to the subterranean Apple Store. I find purchase in the slightly rounded edge of the stairs that mediate plaza to sidewalk. A slow quiet teeter begins as the concrete splits the length of my foot, folding minute bones and muscles around the architecture to assure balance in a metered walk along this public private edge.

Holding innerscape and outerscape, private space and public space.

My private experience in their privatized public space.

Am I holding my own private revolution? Is this world-making?

Here is my place: an intimate space between bodies, unbeknownst to the crowd, unbeknownst to passersby, unbeknownst to the guards, cultivated through hyper awareness, attention to kinesthetic response and proximity, existing within and between.

In a crowd, I am so close. We are so close.

Gray on gray on white on black on gray on silver on clear on white on gray on silver punctuated by the vibrant Google blue of ties and t-shirts. Imported melting snow forms dirty slush heaps that frame the curb, ushering in the shopping season. I hold eye contact with a couple who sits some distance away.

Are they conversing about me?

I am moving backwards, attempting to sense a spaciousness around my back, attempting to feel (see) with my spine. Bodies are in every direction with a density accumulating at my left as people pause to enter or snap pictures. My heightened attention makes everything feel hyper visible: the space between people, the weave of cloth, a conversation, the temperature. I'm aware of the guard's eyes but do not know who else is witness to these actions. To my actions. The invisibility of the crowd mixes with the hyper visibility attained through kinesthesia. Being keyed in to a shift or gesture or brush or pass or glance.

I feel invisible and possible.

Who is allowed, forced, denied, privileged, access to their own disappearance?

I'm on my knees now and with arched back, face to sky, bodies and buildings soar above me.

Static concrete and frenetic bodies. The scale collapses between bodies and buildings. Bodies become moving buildings. Buildings become static bodies. Soaring (towering) up ahead.

My white rural dance body, clad in blue jeans, slouched on corporate steps. A playful inching wiggle of torso (ass) leads to the soft thump down one, two, three, stairs, slick clean gray stairs, landing on the rough

sidewalk, legs spread wide in front of me. In a world where we mask and bind and build and shave and wax to plug in, strip down, smooth out and shut up, all categorized, all containment, all the time, where does my excessive fury-feeling body/self fit in?

Animal body. Body sense. Animal sense.

Embracing breasts with whiskers; receptors; feeling receptors made for sensory experience.

Sometimes I feel a greater kinship with the tomato plants on my windowsill and their fuzzy stems than with the women on these streets.

Ecologically Identified

I am given names. I give myself names. I am naming. *Hippie, anti-capitalist, idealist, unrealistic, tree hugger, witch, childish, fairy, anarchist, artist, weirdo, crunchy, scrub, dirty, hairy, dirt ball, ragamuffin, irresponsible, pacifist, leftist, radical, naive, granola, hipster, privileged, white, mooch, back-to-the-lander, beatnik, bohemian, queer, freak, deviant, dropout, fringe, free, creative, resilient, unconventional, anti-consumerist, environmentalist, eco-feminist, pagan.* I am attempting to build a relational practice predicated on the interstices of biology, perception and cultural identity.

Self-consciously,

ecologically

forming.

Since moving to the city I've needed to reconcile the small local actions that transform one town against the enormity of consumption and waste made apparent in an urban environment. I find myself questioning the value and impact of small-scale actions in the shadow of a nation that propagates environmental disregard and destruction. In Northampton, Massachusetts our waste may be conscientiously sorted and whisked away without fossil fuels (until it leaves the city limits), but in New York City there is no hiding the plastic to-go containers offered at every turn and mountains of waste on barges and city corners transported to some unknown destination. *In the countryside you can at least pretend that things are sustainable.* Having been groomed in the (mostly white)

hippie-land of Western Massachusetts and educated in the tradition of self-conscious leftist activism of rural New England, I am keenly aware that my body is written with innumerable practices that hold innumerable pitfalls and blind spots. However, I also hold that in my body (and in all bodies) there is a kind of truth that we must listen to; that when we hone our attention to that of micro-perceptions and ecosystems, something is revealed with which we must reckon.

Toward what elements of our environment are we trained to pay attention and how can we learn to feel and understand the subtle impulses that our body is constantly receiving and performing?

John Martin assumed the emotional state of the dancer is effectively transmitted to the audience purely through their physicality, thus allowing the audience to experience the same emotional state simply through witnessing the dancers' movements. Susan Foster refutes the universality assumed in Martin's thesis by situating the spectator on a spectrum of capacity for sensory feeling and interpretation that is predicated on a set of social formations and trainings that enable someone to have an approximate read on the experience of the other ("Kinesthetic Empathies" 247). Neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese makes note of this as well when he cites an individual's "idiosyncratic past experiences, capacities and mental attitudes" as having an impact on one's empathetic capability in a given situation (774). These theories of kinesthetic empathy presume that while we may always be sensing the world on a neural or physical level, our capacity to discern and read these impulses as a site for interconnection are reliant on additional factors. These factors are in part based on our familiarity with a given experience, site or body and our ability, or patience, to hone into the attendant neural, physical and social cues.

Foster, by way of M. le Chavalier de Jaucourt, posits that the experience of kinesthetic empathy is not one of exact representation, but instead is one that produces a "heightened sense of attentiveness" (274). Rather than leading toward an explicit form of understanding or communication, I believe it this heightened sense of attentiveness that can help to reorganize how we value our relationships to each other and our surroundings. I find it difficult, particularly in an urban environment, to remain attentive to my body and environment; yet practices such as SIP suggest ways in which we might give time and space for a closer, more nuanced and sustained examination of how we interact with the world around us. Tapping into kinesthetic empathy, then, can train the

body to pay attention to physical response regardless of our ability to immediately name or give meaning to these sensations. Before understanding comes listening, and time spent.

The time I have spent with Jennifer, Chris, Maggie and Kate in their investigation of SIP/Watershed has infused my own process with new considerations: Orientation, Scale, Perception, and Filter. These are entry points into the landscape. Into an experience *with* the landscape. Landscape entry points to ready the mind and body for an exchange with space. With place. With built things and natural things, moving things and static things. An empathetic embodied response: "I move to move with you to move with them to move you moving me" (Manning 25).

SIP. Sustained Immersive Process. To sip; to take in small portions of information. To let things soak in, sip. To mull things over. To give time. To commit to a sustained practice. To a sustainable practice. To pause between. To be open and ready. To let in. To give in... to release.

John Martin says an empathetic response is possible when one holds an awareness of self to a degree that allows for holding an other simultaneously. The landscape entry points of this Sustained Immersive Practice were held loosely, reconfigured and repeated at the Newtown Creek Nature Walk in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

SIP/Watershed at Newton Creek Nature Walk October 7th 2010

*They tell me we use 1.3 billion gallons a day
They tell me it processes 310 million gallons a day
They tell me they transport 2.24 million gallons a day*

When I heard we were going to meet at Newtown Creek Nature Walk I thought I would be going somewhere green near the water, to some winding thing along marshy edges, or to a smooth clear running stream along stones. There would be birds and wooden planked walkways that

meander along and dead-end in platforms with benches for pausing and taking things in. "They have this in Queens?" I thought, "How great!"

They do not have this in Queens.

The Nature Walk begins on a set of stairs that lead up to a concrete walkway. There is no water in sight. The walk has high walls that grow and arc like the edges of a ship with portholes through which you can catch rounded auditory and visual vignettes of the other side. Gravel pits and cisterns amongst networks of pale green pipes, yellow trucks and pink paint on gray concrete. A loud speaker calls. An office building towers. A truck beeps. The sun is hot and the air is cold.

We repeated score number two of the first day, pairs leading and following through the walkway, taking turns to experiment with orienting our attention to where we have been, where we are, what might be. We stopped to notice the wood grain embedded in the concrete walls, drops of water accumulated on metal and glass, the resonant quality of the metal tubes opening out to another aural realm. Turning at the juncture in the path, the only direction is left; sloping down a long corridor at the end of which we find designed trees, circular benches and...water. "Designed to evoke the rich, continually evolving environmental, industrial and cultural histories surrounding Newtown Creek" (DEP). This feels like an office park.

I remember the cranes at Newtown Creek

I remember cranes.

Great green muscle (metal) arms

steady and smooth

swinging out its rusted animal talon

a flick of the wrist

grasping at our waste (like carrion)

what a waste (what a task)

Here a car. A whole purple shining car.

Green arm and rusted hand

clenching maroon car then red car then white car then

beyond disrepair (despair)

beyond demolition derby

Now seeing the pile grow; neatly stacked

Here's a clack

one dropping with a soft sound buried in the other sounds

*If a louder sound comes along and covers the sound you chose
let it cover it and try to listen to it through the louder sound.*

here

a deep green one

We stood there for a long time. Watching these arms swinging out and back, we had arrived at the end, or *an* end, looking out from a concrete platform with benches (to pause and "take things in"), standing by the rail separating us from the water's edge, out into this deep moving channel, out to these piles growing bigger from another pile bigger still. Where are these barges going? What is this churning? Every piece in that color-coded pile of rust was once new and of use and before that constructed and before that extracted and before that of the earth. So much, too much, so what? If we lost sense of our bodysenseplaceorientationimpact would we just disappear? Disrepair? Despair? I don't know what to do. So SIP suggests we move.

Dancing the "I don't know."

Practices such as SIP orient us to people and place through kinesthesia. What happens when we encounter a mass of refuse made in the wake of non-attention? So many things move forward without consideration for what it left behind. Here we are making room to reflect on where we have been, where we are, what might be. Paul Carter says, in all relevance:

The tracker who tracks his prey also makes tracks, and this sympathetic identification, this mark of vulnerability, is also a sign of power. It may be that the dionysiac crowd grows self-destructive precisely because it ignores this. Making the mistake of imagining its tracks trackless wastes, it ends up hunting itself to a sacrificial death. (*Repressed Spaces*, 188)

It is this sympathetic identification of our own tracks that take witness to the systems in which we move. To re-encounter what was left in the wake; recognizing what is ours, what emanates is picked up and cycles

back; or to spend time in the intelligibility of space and scale between one thing and the next.

The day at Newtown Creek had its own set of scores to take in and respond to the phenomena of water:

We watched the water: *Watch water. We watch water. And all else.*

You find a space to rest on these long wide stairs leading into the water. I trace your body weight as it compresses into the stairs, mapping a shape with my finger of your contact with the land. My body tracing your body tracing the land.

Watch. Watch water. We watch water and all else.

Record needle pencil gaze, tracing distance to nearness to self along buildings and billboards and highways and waterways. Pin pointing self to hear to here to hear to here and now. Tracing bones and muscle tissue and light and difference to approximate distance.

Watch. Watch water. We watch water and all else.

More Scores: endless scores, made to approach and reflect and move, ones that grow out and into ways of being. Drawing and diagramming: now for the watching all else, the taking in of the group of duets and diagramming (drawing) on paper whipped up by cold wind and held down in the heat of the sun. We're making documentation on paper of *what passes what is and what might be*. The im/possibility of catching movement with a pen. *Traces*. What gets left behind. *Outlines*. What we leave in our wake. *What is outside, pushed to the edges*. This orientation through drawing and diagramming is temporal as well as spatial. We're grasping at this residue (*like carrion*) on paper.

Tracking (Mapping): Water In Water Out

At 40 degrees 44 minutes 10.3194 seconds North and 73 degrees 56 minutes 48.5952 seconds West, between shrubs on the edge of a concrete walk, below young neatly labeled trees, on a warm day, looking out across a channel of water to the towering eight egg-shaped waste processors, with a concrete wall to my back stretching high over my crouched body, my pee streams into the mulch at my feet. Piss flowing toward my foot, accumulating faster than the earth can absorb. Jamaica

Kincaid says that “domestic space is any space in which any one might feel comfortable expelling any bodily fluid” (23). Here I spit. Here I pee. Here I sweat. Here I cry. Here I come. Here I bleed.

40 degrees 42 minutes 41.7132 seconds North 73 degrees 58 minutes 2.8956 seconds West pee mixes with dirt to muddy brown amongst pebbles in the abandoned lot. In this (now familiar) weedy lot I find myself contemplating the possibility to be in a space without destruction. To be in a space without destroying. To be aware of what I leave in my wake.

In the wake; to wake up the soil; to wake up the body; to wake.

Wake *noun*

1: the track left by a moving body (as a ship) in a fluid (as water); broadly: a track or path left

2: aftermath— in the wake of

1: close behind and in the same path of travel <missionaries arrived in the wake of conquistadors and soldiers >

2: as a result of: as a consequence of <power vacuums left in the wake of the second world war >

3: a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died, sometimes accompanied by ritual observances including eating and drinking. (Merriam-Webster)

40 degrees 34 minutes 37.6566 seconds North and 73 degrees 53 minutes 42.6042 seconds West the pee disappears into tall grass. Moving away, quickly away. Perched on the eroding shore of Dead Horse Bay. A bit of relocated land that covers (holds) and seeps (reveals) so much past waste now turned treasures. Pissing on past waste and present treasures. Will tomorrow love today's trash?

In Closing

What actions and movements create place in a way that is not invasive but invests?

Investigate. Territory. Domestic. Home. Habitat.

to feel and know
the spaces and bodies
we inhabit

Finding a place that is relational.

A place of reciprocity, which recognizes a connection at some
unknown depth.

A place that we are constantly creating and becoming.

A place where there is room to move.

In the midst of global climate change we cannot rely solely on technological advances and appropriate consumer choices to provide sustainable solutions. I propose that the cultivation of attention to kinesthetic response (and consequently empathy) produces new subjectivities that rely more on a sense of connectedness than on the separation that seems to be perpetuated by present day neo-liberal economics and technology; a separation that has proven destructive to both human and environmental rights and well being. Practices must be enacted that produce cultural shifts which realign our relationship with the environment. Particularly in the United States, it is time that we own up to our bodies and this Earth, that we shift our weight to the other foot.

This project has been an articulation of a search for an empathetic relationship with my environment, one that is registered by and through the body. I have used kinesthesia as a way to ground myself in a city and perform an empathetic act of place-making. I think of this as a dance, as a kinesthetic exchange between body and place that demands acknowledgment of the inextricable ties between our actions and the world. Neuroscience provides a lens to think of this dance as a honing in on the neural-muscular system with which we are constantly surveying, learning, revising and rehearsing. Indeed, finding sustainable solutions to ecological issues requires that we implicate our own bodies in the cycle of change. Honing into kinesthetic response necessarily shifts our attention to function *within* ecological cycles. This cannot be fleeting. It must be sustained, translated to state of being. SIP and other forms of improvisational dance enact a sustained process that has the potential to resonate beyond the boundaries of a given collaboration, site, or public presentation, to replay in peoples' bodies and minds, rehearsing and performing a new way of knowing the spaces and bodies that we inhabit.

Notes

1. *The Secret Life of Plants* is a collection of records from science experiments that track the bio-feedback of plants in response to various human interactions on and around them using a polygraph machine.
2. Tuning Scores is a practice for ensemble-based improvisation developed by dancer/choreographer Lisa Nelson. Body-Mind Centering is a practice developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, that integrates anatomical, physiological, psychophysical and developmental principles.
3. See *The Lure of the Local*, by Lucy Lippard, for a conversation about the delocalization of the United States and how this affects our experience of place and identity.
4. For a further investigation of Carter's approach to place-making see Material Thinking: <http://www.materialthinking.com.au/>
5. In *The Work of Dance*, Mark Franko reads John Martin's analysis of metakinesis alongside Louis Althusser's theory of interpollation to point to the ways in which our sensory experience is implicit in the visceral experience of subject formation (59). As these theories point to how our subjectivities are constructed through inter-human relations I would also like to consider how our identities are formed through relations with our environment.
6. The Pedal People Collective is a worker cooperative based in Northampton, Massachusetts, that provides bicycle powered waste removal for the city and private residents.
7. Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) launched a highly successful buy local campaign in 1999 that is recognized regionally and nationally and continues to influence the local agricultural movement the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts (see <http://www.buylocal.org>).
8. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system that mediates the economic risk of small scale farming by selling seasonal farm shares to local members who then receive weekly produce, meat or dairy.

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