Excuse Me I Am Expanding

Butoh Dance as an Embodied Method for Experiencing and Expressing
Ecological Selfhoods

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A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

at the

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

&

University of St Andrews

23rd August 2024

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I, Paul Michael Henry, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD includes

- A portfolio of three new film works, 21 journal entries, and one new audio work
- A commentary of approximately 40,000 words in length
- An appendix of approximately 2,700 words in length
- Three analysis coding spreadsheets

and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

I was admitted as a research student at the University of St Andrews and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in September 2019.

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Funding

Figure 1: Wardrop, J (2017) *Shrimp Dance photoshoot.*

Abstract

This project explores how embodied practice can generate and express experiences of ecological selfhood – the felt sense of being a porous entity which extends indefinitely beyond the skin. Through practice as research, Butoh dance (a twentieth century form originating in Japan) is adapted to interrogate the possibilities for a dancer to intentionally expand their selfhood, and to express this experience directly to others through non-representational performance. The wider contexts are the Anthropocene and the dominant neoliberal capitalist view of selfhood as properly being individualist, skin-bound, and competitive. This research outlines how such individualism is implicated in driving ecological crisis through aggregate behavioural effects, underscoring the need for alternative understandings of selfhood. The project is situated within the fields of Butoh studies, ecological performance, ecological performance discourse, and ecosomatics.

The psychosomatic techniques necessary to expand selfhood are researched through studio practice and documented through journalling. An accessible audio guide is also presented to introduce the newcomer to such work. The use of these techniques as the basis for performance works is explored through a documented stage performance from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and two dance films shot in Japan, Italy, Ireland, and Scotland. The resulting contribution, Playing with the Cut, is a method of altering the boundary between self and not-self through dance; a radial selfhood which expands and contracts contextually. The method is shown to facilitate experiences of ecological selfhood on the part of the dancer, and the generation of performance material for general audiences in which Playing with the Cut is at the core of the creation process. This project presents a distinctive contribution to reconfiguring selfhood as an essential component of humanity's response to ecological and climate crisis.

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Practice Works and Appendices

Excuse Me I am Expanding is a practice as research project, and this text is presented in tandem with my Practice Works and four appendices. The Practice Works comprise a selection from my studio journals, video documentation of a stage performance, two dance films, and an audio meditation. All Practice Works can be downloaded at **this hyperlink**, and appendices at **this one**. I will prompt you throughout the thesis using **bold, underlined text** when you should divert to one of these before returning here.

You should ideally save everything on your hard drive to avoid quality and buffering issues during playback, but I appreciate that you may be on the move or switching between devices. I have therefore given hyperlinks in the list below to alternative YouTube and PDF versions. Prompts to visit a Practice Work or appendix are also hyperlinked to these online versions, and I will hyperlink general mentions of each work throughout for ease of retrieval (in **bold**, though without the underline). To make overall navigation of the project easier, you can click the caret symbol (^) at the bottom left of any page within this text to return to the Contents page, which in turn links to all chapter headings.

List of Practice Works

* Practice Journals ·· **(PDF)**
* *With Your Eyes Closed* ····························· **(YouTube)**
* *Shrimp Dance* ··· **(YouTube)**
* *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* ················ **(YouTube)**
* *Excuse Me I am Expanding* ······················· **(YouTube)**

List of Appendices

* Appendices A-C – Analysis Coding ··············· **(PDF)**
* Appendix D – Butoh - Context and Positionality ········· **(PDF)**

Video and audio material is best accessed through good headphones and a large screen (no phones please).

Speaking of which: **you should now play _With Your Eyes Closed_** before continuing. This short audio work (duration: 7m 12s) offers an initial exposure to the somatic territory I have been exploring in this project. I advise playing it somewhere where you do not feel awkward closing your eyes and letting your body respond how it wants to. I also advise approaching it as a guided meditation (do not seek to assess it critically at this stage). We will be on firmer ground if we have a shared experience of somatic expansion at the outset. See you when you get back.

Figure 2: Henry, P. M. (2023) _Excuse Me I am Expanding (Kyoto Bamboo Forest)._

When the pelvis is felt as a fertile garden, a source of the plants growing up and down to become the rest of the body (legs and feet as roots below the ground), and the face is encouraged to be nothing (I do not have a face), *then the face that appears is a natural, guileless result of blossoming from the pelvic garden. This is some weird, beautiful shit. From where is the pelvic garden nourished and fertilised? From the world. Giving love to the world is a returning because the love came from the world... I am a nothing infused with love, from which my garden grows to give love back.* **This is an ecological selfhood.**

Practice Journal, Entry Nineteen

Introduction: Spillage

You are me. It sounds strange; an affront to something. You are me and all the water you drink, the waste you shit, your fish progenitors, and the sun burning bright to see itself (you).. As me, as the sun, you are an offence to the cardinal conceit of neoliberal consumerism: the individual. You radiate beyond your skin through entanglement, insulting independence. You can write this sentence only because of everyone – your caregivers, the trees that keep you breathing, the beasts and plants who died for your sins (oil and gas). If you feel these are not part of you it's because you think you are defined by the perimeter of your skin. The contingency of that thought is the subject of your PhD.

You begin as required, with a research question: how can an embodied practice generate and express experiences of ecological selfhood, defined as the felt sense of being a porous entity which extends indefinitely beyond the skin? You've been having such experiences through dance for many years now and clarifying how they're produced might offer valuable tools for navigation of an Anthropocene in which skin-bound individualism is the dominant social paradigm. In your **professional practice**, the ecologically entangled self has become a core theme: it permeates the performances you've offered on stages throughout Europe, the United States, and Japan. It also lies at the heart of **UNFIX**, the first ecological performance festival in Scotland (and a model exported to New York, Tokyo, and Bologna). You founded it in 2015 on the conviction that no better task can be set for artists than conjuring communal means of realising the lesson of the Anthropocene: we are not separate.

You research through embodiment because you've found that though ecological selfhood can be pointed to with words it must ultimately be felt in the body.. You create a portfolio of **Practice Works** as the primary demonstration of what you're doing, and a text (this one) offering a discursive portal to the portfolio. The interplay between text and portfolio gives rise to the method of accessing ecological selfhood and expressing it in performance which is your contribution.

You call your method Playing with the Cut. It's a way of surrendering your skin-bound self to an oneiric realm which doesn't recognise it. Its mode of operation is embodied-imaginal,

meaning it acts through images carried in the body and makes you dance. And it modifies the cut between you and not-you, which makes it difficult to write about and analyse since the tools of analysis generally presuppose a researcher separable from the research object (the opposite of what you're trying to do). The subject-object dichotomy also makes research itself difficult, since the researcher's gaze is at odds with the ecological self-immersion you're exploring. Your method hinges on self-emptying and devotion, which you can't do while a part of you lingers on the outside to observe.

You worry about instrumentalising your dance form, an explicitly anti-capitalist and originally Japanese innovation called Butoh. It gave you permission to expand beyond your skin and the means to do so in a way you hadn't experienced since childhood, and you want to share this gift without betraying it by turning it into a knowledge-product. You learned it outside of formal institutions, in studios and rivers and forests throughout Europe and Japan, from teachers who've worked for decades with little contact with the academy. As me, your face is Irish, your bones 44 years old. Your personal heritage around colonialism and the gatekeeping and destruction of knowledge is complex, and you're researching at a conservatoire where the first face greeting you each day is the Queen Mother's. You wonder what your grandad Eamon would make of this. Your enthusiasm for the project is bound up with the joyful, bear-hugging emotionality inherent in feeling somatically interconnected (I am you! Separation is over!) – but you realise appropriation, erasure, and the politics of knowledge will be something of a counter-theme as you proceed.

You settle on a methodology: private studio sessions where you adapt Butoh method towards generation of ecological selfhood experiences, phenomenological journalling as a method of capturing data from the sessions, and performance as the expression of your research object. The studio sessions are conducted through a technique you call researching-by-definitely-not-researching. This means banishing analysis and all thoughts of research whilst dancing, capturing data only afterwards through your journals. This technique side-steps the intrusion of the researcher's gaze during practice, and subsequent journalling gives you data to analyse. You make three films to explore how your techniques can be communicated through performance, and an audio meditation inviting your audience directly into the somatic territory in question.
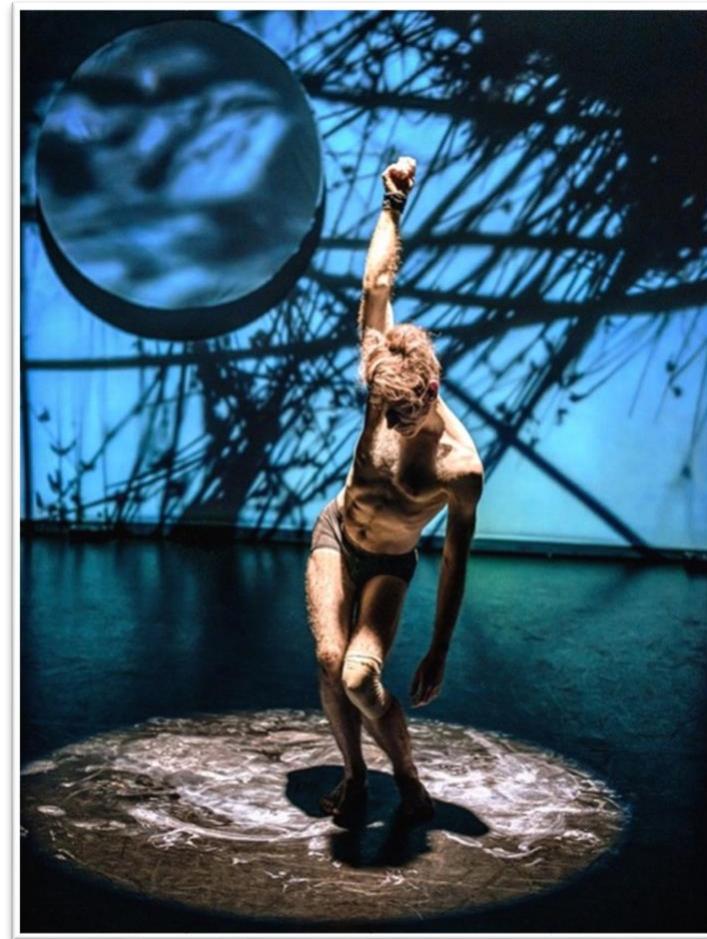
Figure 3: Hartley, B. (2017) *Shrimp Dance.*

The first film is documentation of a performance of *Shrimp Dance* (fig. 3), a dance theatre work springing from marine biology findings about the effects of human anti-depressant consumption on crustaceans. You choose this theme because it speaks to two salient facets of ecological selfhood. Firstly, the anti-depressants reach the ocean through sewage, problematising the omission of excretion in the term consumer (the archetype of human selfhood in late capitalist ideology). Scatology is one way to burst the bubble of consumerism. Secondly, the anti-depressants are a response to human feelings. Their measurable effects on the distant behaviour of shrimp falsifies the dualism between mind and matter which supports human estrangement from nature and embodiment. If enough people get sad enough, shrimp start swimming weird. This phenomenon undercuts neoliberal framing of mental illness as a personal (skin-bound) problem, reframing depression as a form of interpersonal and interspecies connection. You want to show that researching through embodied imagination doesn't mean engaging in make-believe but rather accessing ontological and material truths around interdependence and embeddedness.

Your second film is called *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* (fig. 4). It's a meditation on mass extinction made on a residency in Italy, using your own mortality to consider what it means to live as an anthropod in a time of anthropogenic ecocide. Can your personal birth and death blend your selfhood with that of the nonhuman victims of ecological crisis? Through the opportunities afforded by video manipulation you're able to literalise some of the invisible shifts you experience in dancing through this theme.
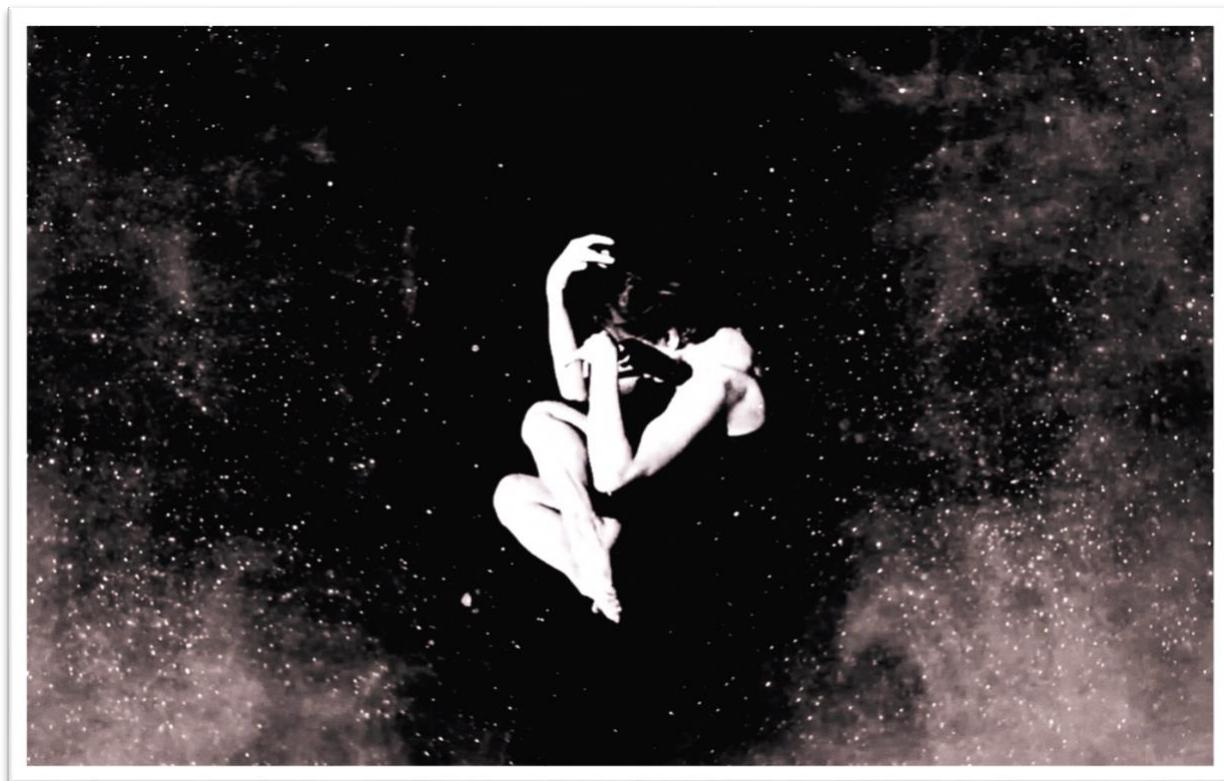
Figure 4: Henry, P. M. (2022) My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off.

You begin your last film, *Excuse Me I am Expanding* (fig. 5), by shooting in Japan with the intention of making a final demonstration of your method to round off the PhD. You do well but are unwell, dislocated and adrift on the other side of the world. This exposes a relative lacuna in your research so far: difference, and the paradox that ecological selfhood opens you to identification with everything but doesn't extinguish your someoneness. You've been so busy undermining individualism you forgot your own specific vulnerabilities. Feeling unconfined by the skin brings intimacy with other life forms and a realisation of interdependence, but the status of the skin is ambiguous: it can be transcended to reveal your

involvement with all things, but it also designates a portion of the cosmos that has been specially placed under your care for mysterious reasons.

You finish the film by exploring this paradox, probing your personal roots in Ireland and Scotland, and searching for stability whilst navigating diagnoses of complex trauma and neurodiversity. This experience lends nuance to your research findings, leading you away from a binary of individual/ecological selfhood towards a weird spectrum of concentrically expanding selves which inform each other. Your practice becomes more playful, experimentally inhabiting selves of varying sizes and qualities. In this way it proffers access to a pliable selfhood, capable of identification with the biosphere and of bringing this experience back inwards when the circumstances of your skin-bound life require it. As Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield has it: 'The paradox is that while we need to remember our connection with all of life, we also have to remember our zip code' (Koontz, no date).
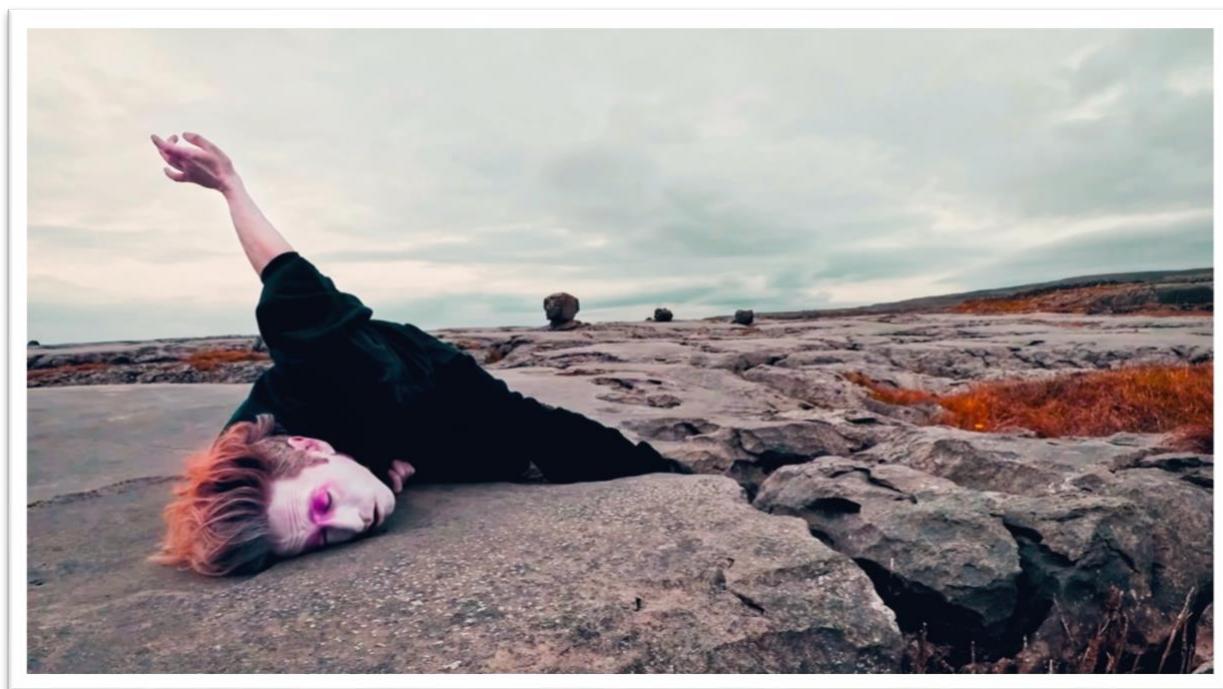
Figure 5: Henry, P. M. (2023) *Excuse Me I am Expanding.*

There's an absurdist humour in this identity-play which offsets the doom-strewn context of your project. It prompts you to begin this text in the second person, switching places with your reader since expanded selfhood collapses the separation between entities (meaning your examiners are assessing a part of themselves). This is a craven attempt to erode the membrane

between examiner and examined – you imagine a shy giggle of complicity when you meet at the viva, a recognition that you're all still babies really, winging it through the cosmos. But membrane transcendence is what your PhD is exploring so you're also being sincere, and it feels methodologically appropriate to toy with discursive boundaries as well as fleshy ones. Your research logic urges that the skin separating institutional high style from the rest of society shouldn't be exempt from transgression. Your examiners are only you in another form, and your shared predicament is frighteningly obvious now that the world seems to be ending. The Anthropocene is everyone's context. You think about the bushfires, wars, missed emissions targets, viral epidemics, and immigration debates defining your PhD years. You pass the Queen mum's photo hanging outside the toilets. Ecological selfhood: that means you're her in some sense too.

The knowledge gaps your project addresses emerge when you stake out relevant research fields: Butoh studies, ecological performance, ecological performance discourse, and ecosomatics. *Ankoku Butō*, an earlier label for Butoh, emerged in the Japanese countercultures of the sixties and the name means something like *dance of utter darkness*. Its principal architect, Hijikata Tatsumi, was responding to his own cultural heritage as well as the arrival of Western forms like ballet and German expressionist dance, the imposition of American culture and capitalism, and the Japanese experience of World War two (Viala and Masson-Sékiné, 1988, pp. 11-17). His effort was to create a dance method which freed the body from cultural conditioning, emphasising surrealist metamorphoses of the dancer through surrender to the darkness within the body (a notion which at this stage we can equate, tentatively, to an embodied unconscious).

Though not focussed on ecological crisis, Hijikata's darkness included ancestral, evolutionary, and cosmic content, advocating erasure of the boundary between human and non-human (Centonze, 2018, p. 16). You're not the only researcher to grasp its relevance in the Anthropocene (Candelario, 2019 and 2023). The gap you're addressing is the specifics of how Butoh can be adapted to repair the rent between humans' separatist self-image and the ecologically embedded and interdependent reality in which this image floats. Playing with the Cut offers a rigorously researched model for how Butoh-derived tools can shift selfhood from atomisation to entanglement in light of the Anthropocene.

Ecological performance discourse is the water you've been swimming in since you started

locating your project amongst the theories and concepts ecologically-minded practice researchers use to frame what they're doing. New materialism is particularly prevalent, along with the resonant theory of posthumanism. You try to frame your practice through these lenses, but it doesn't seem to work and the reasons for this form another gap you can address.

The first reason is that the theories are part of a material turn, and what's turning is academic discourse (which you haven't really been involved in until now). You've been immersed in Butoh, Buddhism, indigenous philosophies, and the remaining scraps of your own ancestral worldviews pre-colonisation. New materialism focusses on 'the western dualism that renders matter, nature, and bodies as inert, abject, and inanimate' (Alaimo, 2020, p. 187), seeking to reanimate these things through terms like vibrant materiality and material-discursive intra-action. Posthumanism works at transcending the Eurocentric ideal of the humanist subject, coded as white, male, rational, and somehow disembodied. It's provocative writing but includes scant mention of the cultures who've revered the non-human as vibrant for thousands of years, with even a modern dance form like Butoh preceding the new theories by decades. It feels unethical to align yourself with a newly vivifying discourse when your sources weren't involved in any deadening in the first place.

Your second reason for departing from these theories is a homogeneity they exhibit through using agency as a core concept for discerning vitality in the things around us. Your practice doesn't focus on this but on devotion from the side of the practitioner, so you're proposing a gap left since there are alternatives to agency in delineating non-human vitality. The third is terminological: your embodied practice resists the complexity of current discourse, and you employ simpler words like love, resonance, emptiness, and metamorphosis in lieu of the expected neologisms. New materialist terms function well in theoretical work, but you propose that embodied research might be wary of adopting them since they tend to favour the discursive in their theories of material-discursive production, forsaking the body's responses and eliding the billions of years before discourse was born. Embodied memory is older than language and won't submit to material-discursivity. You find allies in alternative ontologies proposing terms like mixture and immersion as grounds for ecological description, and animist perspectives that evoke more emotion and embodiment in addressing what's beyond the skin.

The final reason is the academy's bias towards scriptocentrism in general. Your stance is that discourse only goes so far – a key reason why you started dancing – and you recruit the

distinction made in the field of general semantics (Korzybski, 1948, p. 498) between map (language) and territory (extra-discursive reality) to insist on dance not as a preparation for writing, but a realm that language cannot comprehensively access or fully encapsulate.

Ecosomatics is a more frictionless container for your contribution. This field is still cohering, with the term first used by Rebecca Enghauser in 2007 (Fraleigh and Riley, 2024, p. 5). As the name suggests, its concern is reconnecting mind with body (soma), and body with its supporting environment (eco/oikos), which is a good description of your practice. Your gaps here are less contentious.

Firstly, your focus on selfhood emphasises bidirectionality, looking outwards from the body to the world but also turning the gaze back on itself to encourage changes in the self; this generally goes unaddressed in ecosomatics. Secondly, Playing with the Cut is less linear than other models of ecosomatic practice, recognising factors that are outwith the ego's control and a need to stay flexible in navigating the unpredictability of embodied-imaginal unfolding. Thirdly, where other ecosomatic models tend to describe practice as a mode of thinking, your Butoh training leads you to something of a hard-line stance: no-thinking, the act of cogitation and discursive mentation singled out as a barrier to immersion in your method. Lastly, the presentation of your project through videos of your dancing fills a gap in ecosomatics, which is mostly disseminated through textual abstraction. Though your journalling does likewise to convey the internal experience of the performer, your concern with the loss of embodiment when dance is described in writing leads you to foreground performance as essential in communicating somatic practice.

In your first chapter you outline the context of your project in more detail. The macro-crises comprising the Anthropocene are summarised, as well as the conceptions of individualist selfhood and instrumental nature which facilitate them via the dominant neoliberal ideology. You outline research which resists these conceptions: findings from biology, deep ecology, new materialism, posthumanism. You introduce concepts from non-Western traditions which align with your practice (animisms, Buddhism) and individual writers offering a conceptual basis which supports your method: Emmanuelle Coccia, James Hillman, Astrida Neimanis, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Martin Buber. You consider embodied practice-based approaches to the same issues by artists such as Sonja Bäumel and Niya B, and researchers in the emergent field of ecosomatics, opening onto the possibilities afforded by extra-textual research.

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Chapter two lays out your methodology, firstly through a taxonomy of key terms. This is followed by an overview of your practice method, adapted from Butoh dance, and its relevance to ecological perception. Your second method, journalling, is introduced through discussion of phenomenology and the revised application of it proposed by philosopher Shigenori Nagatomo which you use in capturing your practice sessions. You then explain your rationale for and approach towards your third method, performance, and your choice of grounded theory as a mode of analysis of the data gathered. This methodology protects practice from the researcher's gaze, allows data gathering from your dancer's phenomenological perspective, and records performances on film so that recurring strategies used to communicate ecological selfhood in performance can be discerned.

In chapter three you introduce your Practice Works and the order in which you'd like your audience to encounter them. Your journals trace your phenomenological experience in the studio: elaborate journeys of somatic transformation which shift your basic apprehension of selfhood, or the type of entity you seem to be. The performances show examples of how this process can be applied in making stage and screen work on a variety of themes: the ecological ramifications of mental illness, the spectre of the sixth mass extinction, and the paradox of opening to ecological selfhood whilst taking care of yourself as an individual.

The Practice Works are analysed in chapter four through grounded theory, exposing the essential elements of your practice. Through this, your overall contribution of Playing with the Cut emerges. The unifying aspect is not the imaginal or choreographical content of a studio session or performance, but your willingness to relinquish skin-bound individualism and dance whole-heartedly through the ecological self-transformations which result. Your contribution is your method of doing so – a flexible collection of tools for managing a dancer's receptivity and modes of relating to embodied-imaginal phenomena which arrive from outwith the cut between me and not-me, drawing them into realms of ecological selfhood.

Chapter five explicates your contribution in detail and considers it in the context of Butoh studies, ecological performance, ecological performance discourse, and ecosomatics. The gaps your project fills are different in each, variously extending and challenging current narratives. Given your theme, you also give space to reflection on authorship, cross-cultural dialogue, and the criteria which validate academic research.

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Your conclusion explains your intended audience and considers the limits of your project – chiefly the COVID pandemic which disrupted your original plans, ironically by demonstrating human ecological interdependence through viral transmission. You describe the possibilities for extending your enquiries in future research, and close with an autobiographical summation of how you ended up in the Anthropocene, trying to reshape yourself through dance.

By the end you hope to have convinced that part of yourself which is your audience of the value of your contribution. It won't force down emissions or change the priorities of world leaders, but the Anthropocene is in part an aggregate result of individualist selfhoods consuming and competing as they've been taught, so shifting the values and boundaries of these selfhoods seems key to evolving an adaptive and compassionate response to what has already been unleashed around the planet. We are in uncharted territory as a species, facing survival threats whose outcome greatly depends upon our collective capacity for ecologically sane conduct – on whether we know how to act in the interests of our own flourishing, as well as that of the biosphere and all who inhabit it.

SOFTEN YOUR FOREHEAD

FLEX YOUR TOES

BREATHE – YOUR'E DOING FINE

Chapter One: Animism/Deadenism

We begin improbably, in a dead world. Western reduction of the non-human to a state of mechanical matter is often traced to René Descartes, whose seventeenth-century cleft between (human) soul and material justified a view of animals as unconscious automata which he could vivisect with impunity in the pursuit of knowledge (Descartes, 2006 [1637], pp. 46-48, and 1997, p. 81). For several centuries Cartesian dualism ran alongside industrialisation and colonialism, legitimising conquest and exploitation of lands, wildlife, and communities beyond the pale of patriarchal reason. Despite advances in animal and human rights, and despite attempts at a green capitalism which acknowledges environmental damage, this view remains dominant today and owes its tenacity to roots deeper than Descartes.

Ecophilosopher David Abram writes that 'According to the central current of the Western philosophical tradition, from its source in ancient Athens up until the present moment, human beings alone are possessed of an incorporeal intellect, a "rational soul" or mind which … sets us radically apart from, or above, all other forms of life' (Abram, 1997, p. 38). This philosophy persists in the neoliberalism currently governing industrialised nations and globalised capitalist socio-economics. Social scientists Jeanne M. Bogert et al. write that the Dominant Social Paradigm or DSP of industrialised, neoliberal societies maintains the dualism between nature and culture, positing the former as something 'distinct from human life, not … something humanity depends on for survival or … something that has inherent intrinsic value' (Bogert et al., 2022, p. 9).

This DSP outdoes Cartesian dualism in presenting nature as not just soulless but limitless: 'the neoliberal economic system is based on an ever-growing economy and adopts the "infinite planet" model, which assumes that economic growth can continue infinitely with disregard for the environmental consequences' (Bogert et al., 2022, p. 5). Though expounded as a model for human life and welfare, the dependence of the DSP on a conception of natural resource extraction means that 'neoliberalism is also an *environmental* project' (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, p. 277).

Neoliberal *deadenism* (my own term, posited in contrast to the animisms explored below) is

something of an awkward fit with the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch in which human impact on the biosphere and Earth processes has become a main driver for ecological shifts including climate change (Waters et al., 2016). The Anthropocene describes a world of flows, limits, and interdependence. The term was first proposed in the year 2000 (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000), and though yet to be formalised by geologists, there is widespread consensus that human activity has now left its mark on the geological record. Debate hinges on which date should be enshrined as the beginning of the Anthropocene – common candidates include the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the use of nuclear weapons – rather than on whether it exists (Subcommission on Quaternary Statigraphy, 2024). Anthropogenic climate change specifically is beyond doubt (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018), and the IPCC consensus is viewed by many authors as an understatement of the problem's scale (Lovelock, 2009; Bendell, 2018).

Beyond climate change, 'the average rate of vertebrate species loss over the last century is up to 100 times higher than the background rate' (Ceballos et al., 2015, p. 1), part of a species collapse known as the sixth mass extinction. The Anthropocene has entered popular discourse as a catch-all for the impacts of human activity on geology, climate, ecosystems, and non-human species. Descartes' brand of deadenism might survive these shifts since they show nature only as a feedback system, not necessarily an ensouled one. Cartesian dualism is founded on the claim that humans, uniquely, have an immaterial 'rational soul' (Descartes, 2006 [1637], p. 39) – a difficult dogma to falsify through physical analyses. But neoliberal infinite-growth ideology is a material claim which is clearly exposed by Anthropocene data as nonsensical.

What of the humans living on the infinite, dead planet? They assume selfhoods inflected by the DSP in which they are embedded. I define selfhood in this project as a being's felt understanding of their own life: its needs and limits, identity and solidarities (or lack thereof) – the type of entity one feels oneself to be. Neoliberalism shapes selfhood 'in the image of homo-economicus, the ideal, entrepreneurial, self-made individual' (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, p. 276). Sociologists Kathleen Lynch and Manolis Kalaitzake trace a history of individualism in European society through Christian thought and liberal thinking. Where liberalism 'de-emphasized relationality and accommodated a dualistic ethics of care/carelessness between private and public life that enabled self-responsibilized individualism to develop' (2018, p. 9), these authors characterise neoliberalism as an

intensification of liberalist thought through free-market logic (p. 14). Self-perception is now moulded by atomistic market relationships promoting social connections rooted in competitiveness and risk-reward calculations, resulting in a strategic mistrust of others. This is accompanied by endemic and rising inequality and an inhibition of solidarity (Lynch and Kalaitzake, 2018, pp. 10-12). The resulting paradigm is of an *individual* human, striving amidst an othered nature and in competition with its peers.

This constitution of atomised individuals is compounded by consumerism proper: the production of artificial needs and hitching of authentic ones to consumer products (Kanner and Gomes, 1995, p. 83). Individuals consume more than they need to and believe the concomitant of consumption (excretion) has an abstract *away* to which it can be thrown.. Consumer selfhood is spurred on by the saturation of advertising in contemporary life, with psychologists arguing that this process produces a narcissistic or 'all-consuming self' (Kanner and Gomes, 1995, pp. 80-81). Neoliberal consumer selfhood is the apotheosis of what Buddhist teacher Tara Brach calls 'the space suit self' (Brach, 2012): defined by the skin, braced against attack, avaricious and grabby. The space suit *needs stuff* to sustain it, driving both overconsumption and the disjunct between the imperative to address ecological crises and the individual consumer paradigm most empowered to do so.

Expanding Selfhoods

Elements of the above description feel redundant, describing a neoliberalist world with which many of us are claustrophobically familiar. My social media feeds are awash with sardonic memes about staying alive by producing for a capitalism which may end up killing us. Greenwashing and more sincere attempts to address ecological crisis now occupy a significant position in the cultural and political landscape, but their lack of challenge to the infinite growth model means they merely add uneasy cognitive dissonance to the dominant paradigm rather than upending it. And whilst radical revision of our values and economic practices can be freely argued for by journalists (Monbiot, 2024), enacting it feels like a political impossibility. Neoliberal governments, advertisers, and corporations do not promote alternatives to consumer selfhood, though as we shall see, they are plentiful.

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We might begin with research findings in biology. 'A Symbiotic view of life: we have never been individuals' (Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, 2012) makes a compelling case that traditional biological grounds for identifying individual animals, including humans, have been debunked. They illustrate this via recent research into symbionts and the deeply interleaved reliances between organisms and the bacteria and microorganisms which they host. In the case of humans, there are estimates that '90% of the cells that make up our bodies are bacterial' (p. 327). The authors conclude that we are not individuals by physiological, genetic, evolutionary, or developmental criteria, and that such findings 'leads us into directions that transcend the self/nonself, subject/object dichotomies that have characterized Western thought' (p. 326). Applied Ecologist Tom Oliver offers a scientifically grounded argument for a 'Copernican-like revolution of human identity' (2020, p. 4), motivated by expanding knowledge of our interdependence and the urgent need for behavioural shifts in the Anthropocene. He gives striking examples of our physical involvement with the rest of the cosmos, including evidence that 'over half of the atoms in our bodies have travelled from far off parts of the universe [via] 'intergallactic winds' (p. 22). Oliver's thesis is that the figure of the human individual is an adaptive fiction which served species survival in earlier stages of evolution but is now catastrophically out of date: 'the idea that we are independent, discrete entities is a falsehood created by evolution and exaggerated by our modern culture' (Oliver, 2020, p. 136).

Biologist Lynn Margulis' research led to the proposal of the term 'holobiont', a more accurate descriptor than individual for living entities (Guerrero, Margulis, and Berlanga, 2012). A holobiont is a *notionally* discrete ecological unit comprised of a host and all other species living in and around it. It is 'dynamic and context-dependent' (Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, 2012, p. 333), fluid, and capable of change. This is a picture of a being quite tenuously individual, discrete from some angles and entangled from others. It is an ecological being, immersed with the world and thoroughly interdependent. A selfhood based in this lightly held individuality would be truer to the facts than atomised individualism.

I begin with scientific results to emphasise that ecological revision of ontology is not a matter of philosophical or ethical preference only, but a question of whether the individualist DSP accords with any credible notion of objective reality. Where biology is falsifying individualism, neoliberalism idealises and promotes it uncritically.

Western ecophilosophical paradigms critiquing individualism and taking interdependence seriously include deep ecology, established by Arne Naess in the 1970s. Naess contrasted 'shallow ecology', or instrumentalist efforts aimed solely at controlling pollution and resource depletion in the interests of the wealthiest societies, with 'deep ecology'. His principles for the latter include 'rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the *relational, total-field image*. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations' (1973, p. 95). This closely mirrors Margulis' holobionts. Naess also stressed 'biospherical egalitarianism', or a non-anthropocentric valuing of all forms of life, 'principles of diversity and of symbiosis', and an 'anti-class posture' – now more commonly known as concern for climate equity (pp. 96-97). This is in marked contrast to green capitalism, that is, neoliberalism-friendly climate change initiatives by (often polluting) corporations such as Shell. These frequently happen in collaboration with what Naomi Klein calls 'Big Green' (prominent environmental groups), resulting in market-based solutions which are 'the least burdensome, and often directly beneficial, to the largest greenhouse gas emitters on the planet' (Klein, 2014, p. 195). Green capitalism advocates 'have tried to gloss over the clashes between market logic and ecological limits', indulging in what Klein terms 'magical thinking' (pp. 93-206). Deep ecology prioritises ontological revision and clear values instead, pursuing ecological harmony and ethical desirability over profit and markets. This stance also characterises the other perspectives to follow.

Where deep ecology has fallen out of favour in academic discourse, posthumanism and new materialism occupy a central position and are the philosophical underpinnings for much contemporary ecological performance research (as I will illustrate in chapter five). In academic art practice – meaning the making of art through research which is accompanied by critical writing connecting it to academic discourse – they are successors to earlier inroads made into importing ecocritical thought from the study of literature to performance research. This earlier work led to the coinage of 'ecodramaturgy' by Theresa J. May and the growth of attempts to promote ecological thinking in the field of performance (Arons and May, eds., 2012, p. 4). Such research is a key context for my project since I will be positing my own performance practice as generative of ecological realisations throughout this text.

Posthumanism, exemplified by writers such as Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles, is surveyed in Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013) and coheres around an assertion that our historical moment cannot be supported or addressed by the ideals of humanism and the

humanist subject, defined as 'the Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian "community of reasonable beings", or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on' (p. 1). Braidotti argues that 'central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference as pejoration' (p. 15). For the posthumanist, difference and relationality become positively charged values instead. Braidotti posits the posthumanist as 'a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable' (p. 49). The titular hypothesis is essentially that traditional humanism must be transcended because its pretence of universality was in fact code for (some) white European males and perhaps select others; consequently, rupturing the hierarchical binary of human/non-human enables a revision in which the oppressed and othered within and beyond humanity become visible and valuable through consideration of relationality and interdependence.

New materialism shares some common concerns with posthumanism: both begin from a monistic ontology (influenced by Spinoza) and thus oppose Cartesian dualism from the start. They also share a foregrounding of ethics and a desire to give voice to the oppressed and transcend anthropocentrism. Writers associated with this field include Karen Barad, Manuel DeLanda and Stacy Alaimo, and new materialism is distinct in its emphasis on materiality and the agency of other-than-human entities. This extends to the agency of what might more commonly be thought of as networks or systems, characterised by Timothy Morton as 'hyperobjects' (2013). His examples include climate change itself, plastics, and global capitalism, each of which are omnipresent yet diffuse, often hidden to the senses, and difficult to relate to. His naming of such phenomena as objects brings them into relief as actors endowed with the capacity to effect change (though perhaps hyperverbs would have better suited the process nature of ecological inquiry).

Vital materialism, a strand of new materialism chiefly associated with Jane Bennett, strives likewise to articulate material agency over a broad domain (animals and plants, inert materials like metals, and diffuse events like weather or blackouts). Bennett explores the potential to elevate non-human matter to the status of intelligent and lively. She uses philosopher Bruno Latour's term *actant* (Latour, 1988, p. 84) to describe entities in their power to do things and cleaves to a notion of their capability to produce effects as a marker of vitality (Bennett, 2010, p. viii). Her motive is to counter the image of dead and instrumentalised matter, and to combat 'human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption' (p. ix).

Bennett's work also incorporates feminist perspectives and a concern for difference and structural inequality.

Articulations of non-human agency and the interconnected nature of life have many precursors, most obviously in Indigenous worldviews. Here, I will echo Canadian Métis scholar Jennifer Markides' acknowledgement that 'using the word "Indigenous" as a standalone term is problematic' (2020, p. 160), suggesting a homogenous Indigeneity rather than diverse peoples with distinct cultures. Nonetheless, Indigenous views may be pragmatically grouped together in this discussion since they offer a common counterpoint to the neoliberal DSP and the Western philosophy which gave birth to it: 'The Western/Eurocentric, fragmented and jagged worldviews do not align with an Indigenous epistemology that sees the *self-in-relation* to all other beings' (p. 161). A self-in-relation is not an individual in the sense of skin-bound self-sufficiency, but rather owes reciprocal debts to the life around it. Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer clarifies this orientation through Indigenous extension of kinship to non-human beings:

> In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as it. That would be a profound act of disrespect… So it is that in Potawatomi [an Anishinaabe language] and most other indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family.
>
> Kimmerer, 2013, p. 55

Markides further distinguishes Indigenous cosmologies from the DSP by contrasting their divergent origin stories. Where the Christian conception of a hierarchical creation with humans installed above everything except God enabled Descartes' view of human exceptionalism, Markides cites Thomas King's narration of the Native American story in which 'a curious pregnant woman falls from the sky and lands on an Earth that is covered in water. The swimming and flying animals work together to save the woman … In the story of the *Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, the Earth is co-created by the animals and the humans' (Markides, 2020, p. 159). With such a notion at the bedrock of one's culture, it becomes intuitive to view non-human beings as relatives, and to recognise both their vitality and our interdependence with them.

Animism(s) can be difficult to comprehend from a Western standpoint and have sometimes been approached as superstitions. The term was coined by anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871 and posited in contrast to Christian dualist metaphysics, with animist cultures derided as the product of primitive and childlike ignorance (Howell, 2014, p. 103). The Western dualist dogma from which anthropology grew impeded any deeper consideration of animisms' veracity or purpose. Indigenous researcher Leroy Little Bear explains the animist orientation – through his preferred terms of Aboriginal, rather than Indigenous, philosophy – as follows:

> Existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance … There is no animate/inanimate dichotomy … Consequently, Aboriginal languages allow for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English. If everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations.
>
> Little Bear, 2000, pp. 77-78

The hinge of historical anthropological incomprehension of animism is the culture/nature binary permeating the history of sociology, which Sabrina Tonutti locates in the work of anthropologist Franz Boas and his follower Alfred Kroeber, who hardened it into an ontological separation of the cultural and the biological (2011, p. 189), with the cultural belonging only to humans. An objective view on animist practices in anthropology must therefore involve a reckoning with the discipline's own roots in the mechanistic biases of Western culture: what is animism and who is studying it? Little Bear writes that anthropologists 'have done a fairly decent job of describing [Aboriginal] customs themselves, but they have failed miserably in finding and interpreting the meanings behind the customs … [which are] to maintain the relationships that hold creation together' (2000, p. 81). In my view Eurocentric mechanistic philosophy itself can, ironically, be characterised as superstitious, being supernaturally oriented in striving to locate the human soul outside of and above nature – a stance which the Anthropocene suggests is doing a poor job of maintaining relationships between humanity and the world.

Tonutti illustrates the contingency of the culture/nature split by way of the Jivaro Achuar population from the Amazon which 'considers the majority of animals and plants as "persons" who live in their own societies and make contact with humans according to specific social and behavioural rules' (p.194). She also cites the Malaysian Chewongs who do not believe in either a categorical or ontological separation between humans and other beings, since 'plants, animals and spirits are all characterised by consciousness, have a language, rationality, intellect, and moral codes' (p. 194). As prelude to my argument in chapter five, I would like to highlight that animist cultures need not revivify the world in the manner of new materialism since they did not put it on trial for its liveliness in the first place. Efforts to revitalise the non-human are only necessary in cultures which have killed it. My coining of the term deadenism for Cartesian worldviews seeks to bring this into relief.

Though not typically characterised as animist, Buddhism allows for a similar kinship with non-human beings and a radical contrast with neoliberal individualism in positing the individual self as an illusion, credulity to which is at the root of all suffering. The individual is akin to an existential etiquette necessary for communication between and navigation amongst seemingly separate human and non-human entities, with the paradox of the small self (skin-bound) and liberated self (limitless) expressed as two coincident truths. Conventional truth corresponds to the superficial separation between individual and environment, and ultimate truth refers to the deeper ecological reality in which this mere appearance plays out (McGuire, 2015, p. 39). Zen monk Shunryu Suzuki expresses this as the difference between 'small mind' (the skin-bound self) and 'big mind' or 'the mind that is everything' (Suzuki and Dixon, 2011, p. 43).

The Buddhist doctrines of emptiness and interdependence dictate that no individual self exists inherently, meaning it is empty of intrinsic or discrete existence, being rather an aggregate appearance comprised of interdependent causes and conditions. The self is thus *dividual* and made of non-self flows, and the absence of this word despite its antonym in modern English dictionaries may indicate just how foreign this concept is in the West. Ignorance of emptiness and interdependence tends towards an over-reification of the skin boundary. Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh proposes that 'the verb "to be" can be misleading, because we cannot be by ourselves, alone. "To be" is always to "inter-be". We do not exist independently. We inter-are' (Hanh, 2017). Hanh's *interbeing* will be part of my vocabulary in subsequent chapters.

Holding Water

The perspectives outlined above frame the general topic of selfhood and its culturally contingent formation. Biology, deep ecology, posthumanism, new materialism, Indigenous philosophies, and Buddhism relativise the neoliberal individualist paradigm through contrasting conceptions of what it is to be an entity or *me*, and unlike the neoliberal model they each acknowledge ecological interdependence and are thus less dissonant with unfurling ecological crises. I will here add five further writers because their ideas, woven together with aspects of the outlooks above, will form an ontological model which can coherently underpin my method of Playing with the Cut. The method emerges in chapter four through analysis of my Practice Works and their adaptation of Butoh (introduced in chapter two). Since Butoh is pre-eminently a dance form and not an explicit worldview, I will employ the ideas in this chapter to articulate and situate the ontology I see as implicit within it: the type of world a Butoh dancer dances in, the ways in which Butoh method makes selfhood expansion possible, and the value of these in traversing the Anthropocene.

Firstly, philosopher Emmanuelle Coccia's *The Life of Plants* (2019) proposes an ontology built from the study and contemplation of plants in which *immersion* and *mixture* are the first principles of being: mutual interpenetration of being with being, being with environment, environment with environment. The beings immersed in the cosmos mix mutually but without losing difference and distinction – this to the point where it ceases to make sense to speak of the environment:

> The notions of environment and ambient world should be rejected: the living being is an environment for the world in the same way in which the remaining things of the world are the environment of the living individual. Influence always goes in both directions.
>
> Coccia, 2019, p. 98

In a world characterised by immersion, action becomes inextricable from *metamorphosis* (a key term in Butoh dance). To affect the world is to be changed by it, to allow the world to affect oneself through mixture and reciprocal interpenetration. Coccia's paradigm for this is the plant, but of course it also includes the human. His theory addresses the habitual emphasis

seen in the subject-verb-object structure of English on fixed and definite objects at the expense of flux:

> The world for an immersed being – the world in immersion – does not, properly speaking, contain real objects. Everything in it is fluid, everything in it is in motion, with, against, or in the subject. It is, properly speaking, a universe without things.
>
> Coccia, 2019, p. 32

In this connection, Kimmerer notes that 'only 30 percent of English words are verbs, but in Potawatomi that proportion is 70 percent' (2013, p. 53). The Western propensity to thingify is linguistically entrenched, making Coccia's work all the more valuable in explicitly rejecting dissection of the world into reified objects. A universe without things also recalls Buddhist emptiness and interdependence, concepts which have been key to my thought throughout this project. The principles of immersion and metamorphosis will define my method's ontology in later chapters, cohering around the proposition that to dance means *to be changed*.

Feminist philosopher Astrida Neimanis speaks to this situation by using water as a pivot to discuss ecology, climate justice, and the cultural construction of water, a substance normally assumed to be a mere fact of life (Neimanis, 2017). Her research unsettles the borders between subjects and the objects they define themselves against by stressing liquidity and perforation:

> To rethink embodiment as watery stirs up considerable trouble for dominant Western and humanist understandings of embodiment, where bodies are figured as discrete and coherent individual subjects … As bodies of water we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation.
>
> Neimanis, 2017, p. 2

Like Coccia, Neimanis sees our entanglement not as something with which we as individuals must reckon, but something which undoes our individuality as traditionally conceived:

> An 'ontologic' of amniotics [is] a mode of embodiment that highlights water as that which both connects us and differentiates us. This ontological proposition joins other feminist and posthuman interventions in challenging the idea that

ontology first and foremost interpellates sovereign, self-sufficient beings.

Neimanis, 2017, p. 111

Water is an evocative medium for grasping the notion of immersion, and 'rupture and renegotiation' of the boundaries of selfhood forms the crux of this project. Neimanis' argument dovetails with Coccia, with her phenomenological bent and focus on human subjectivity bringing us closer to experiential considerations of what it means to negotiate selfhood in a fluidly entangled world.

Concomitant with fluctuations of selfhood is the need to rethink otherhood (defined most simply as *whatever I am not),* and here I will align firstly with Kimmerer's perspective, taken as emblematic of Indigenous personification of beings (human and non-human): 'Indigenous ways of understanding recognize the personhood of all beings as equally important, not in a hierarchy but a circle' (2013, p. 385). Note that personification is here anthropomorphic only if the prior assumption is made that humans are the only real people, a Cartesian position I am not taking. People are beings with whom we can have personal relations, and in my method of Playing with the Cut this includes everything (everyone) I encounter, so Kimmerer's orientation allies with it.

A second perspective on otherhood is offered by philosopher Martin Buber's distinction between two modalities of being: I-It and I-Thou (1958). Where I-It indicates an orientation through which other beings are seen primarily as objects of use and manipulation, I-Thou is a relational mode of *meeting* wherein others are seen as numinous, part of divine creation, and in effect portals to God. The *eternal I-Thou* is a human's proper address to God, whom Buber locates not outside of the world but immanent within it. Buber maintains that both modalities are necessary, with I-It being inevitable in managing our affairs throughout human life. But the more present the I-Thou modality is to a person, the more they are capable of relation. Sacred dimensions are present in Indigenous philosophy too, but I include Buber because his explicit recognition of I-Thou as a mode of encountering the infinite in the particular concurs with Butoh method.

Lastly, I owe my method's title of Playing with the Cut to psychologist James Hillman. His perspective on ecopsychology begins from the Western paradigms in which I am conducting

this project and clarifies my research object:

> There is only one core issue for all psychology. Where is the 'me'? Where does the 'me' begin? Where does the 'me' stop? Where does the 'other' begin?
>
> For most of its history, psychology took for granted an intentional subject … Psychology located this 'me' within human persons defined by their physical skin and their immediate behaviour … The familiar term that covered this entire philosophical system was 'ego' …
>
> [But] since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like – to the deep oceans and distant stars …
>
> The most radical deconstruction of subjectivity … today would be re-placing the subject back into the world, or re-placing the subject altogether with the world.
>
> Hillman, 1995, pp. xvii-xxi

Ecological selfhood is my own phrase and I include the suffix -hood to suggest embodying and somehow holding the self as ecological, and living from within this. The difference between ecological and individual selfhoods is located in the *cut* between me and not-me, which Hillman presents as a matter of cultural choice. Interestingly, his use of the word cut matches that of Karen Barad's later work in extrapolating from quantum physics to theorise a similar 'agential cut' whose demarcation resolves the indeterminacy of phenomena to produce 'relata' from 'relations' (Barad, 2007, pp. 139-140). Playing with the Cut is my method of experimenting with this process of boundary marking, based in the Butoh techniques presented in chapter two.

Somatic Amnesia

Our embodiment is the most obvious way in which our existence is ecological. Discarnate concepts and language structures give us freedom to leave our bodies, to visit Jupiter simply by thinking about it. But they also leave us vulnerable to hypnosis and confusion, thingifying fluid processes and working with currencies (monetary and otherwise) which may have no tether to material reality. Alternatively, they can enable powerful abstractions whose rippling

effects on that reality have not been thought through: nuclear weapons, plastics, fossil fuel use.

Our bodies hitch us faithfully, when we remember them, to the ecological truths of change and interdependence through breath, diet, excretion, gravity, and sensual perception. But written into Cartesian dualism is a divorce of the thought *I* from the reality *body* – Descartes did not posit a dualism between his skin-bound circumstance and existence outside it, but between his disembodied rational soul, existing nowhere, and everything else including his body. A return to ecological sanity therefore involves reclaiming situated embodiment, a process which ecosomatic researcher Christine Bellerose calls 'depatterning somatic amnesia' (2021, p. iii). I will close this chapter with examples of embodied ecological art practice. Though the immediate context of my work is Butoh dance, I want to contextualise Butoh itself by considering other practitioners currently working through embodiment.

Performance centred on the body holds great potential to counter-act dualism through its insistence on corporeal presence over abstraction, and many contemporary artists use this medium to foreground the ecological. Bio-artist Sonja Bäumel's performance installations *Expanded Self*, *Expanded Self II*, and *Fifty Percent Human* see her create living sculptures from her own skin microbes in a giant petri dish filled with agar. These are snapshots of Bäumel's entangled biological being at the moment of their impression, but also autonomous life forms evolving over weeks into strange biological sculptures – pieces of the artist which she would have called *me* when still part of her body, now confronting her as animate other. Her personal experience of visiting the installations prompted her to reflect, echoing Margulis' holobionts, that humans are like 'a semi-continuous spectrum of interactive bacterial nations' (Bäumel, 2015).

Transfeminist performance artist Niya B approaches ecological embodiment differently, evoking inter-species kinship through affect, empathy and eros in *Collective Lover* (Niya B, 2019). Influenced by the eco-sexuality of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, Niya grew a gender-neutral family of aloe vera transplanted from the offsets of a single plant. The initial outcome was an installation in which audience members were invited to adopt a member of this plant family, exploring living alongside it as a family member or lover. Later performances saw Niya dancing amongst the aloe vera, becoming increasingly sensuous before breaking the leaves and gently smearing sap on the bodies of audience members one by one, holding eye contact. Where Bäumel subverts skin-bound individualism by palpably extending her body

beyond the skin, Niya B destabilises anthropocentric notions of care by extending familial relations across species.

Precursors to this kind of work include Ana Mendieta's earth-body works, in which she used the presence and absence of her body to connect with landscape and cosmos (Mendieta, 2024), and Anna Halprin's Native-American influenced *Planetary Dance*, a community ritual harnessing the embodied group power of individual intentions towards world peace (Planetary dance, 2014). Numerous contemporary artists such as Zoe Scoglio (Scoglio, no date) and Dougie Strang (Strang, no date) continue their own investigations of embodiment as a means of realising ecological interconnection. My project's emphasis on selfhood seeks to make explicit what I see as a sometimes latent concern in the work of many such artists: striving to undo and then refashion the basis upon which humans posit their identity, and through this to enact a fundamental revision of the human condition.

In addition to these individual performance practices, the nascent field of ecosomatics is of particular relevance to my project because, though Butoh dance predates it, ecosomatic performance might be considered the larger container in which much Butoh operates. Ecosomatic practices vary widely but cohere through the common approach of reconnecting mind with the subtle lived experience of body (soma), internally and externally, and reconnecting body itself to its home environment (eco/oikos).

For Jennifer Beauvais (2012) this prompts an extrapolation of Object Relations theory in psychoanalysis, with the notion of secure or insecure attachments to caregivers extended to our bonding with our own bodies and outwards to our environment, resulting in a model of ecological therapy. Others, such as Brittany Laidlaw and Tanja Beer, align their practices with Indigenous worldviews which see 'nature' as 'a communion of subjects with their own agency and capacity for relational autonomy' (2018, p. 284), defining ecosomatics as 'the process of sensing the inner body as the gateway to sensing and connecting with the greater Earth body' (p. 286). Brittany Tolbert views her bodily movement practice as 'a way of knowing Earth' (2022, p. i), and Sandra Reeve argues for somatic practice as essential in transforming human behaviour since 'changes in the body take practice and operate on a different time scale from theoretical changes' (2012, p. 5).

I will consider ecosomatic approaches further in chapter five, but for now will bluntly propose

my own rationale for embodied research: Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* is never translated as *I dance therefore I am*, and for good reason. Embodied exploration, intrinsically relational and ecological, is the enemy of deadenism and leverages our lived experiences of interconnection towards the realisation that there is no such thing as discrete or isolated human interiority. How we perceive ourselves is entangled with what we think is not ourselves. Embodied research into this entanglement forms the core of my project: a performance-based inquiry into the felt experience of interbeing, whose name right now is ecological crisis.

Chapter Two: Embodied Imagination

Given the potential for linguistic confusion in discussing ecological selfhood – where subject/object boundaries wobble along with cultural norms and positionality – my methodology begins by defining my terms clearly. Some of these have both popular and specialist understandings as well as divergent uses by different writers. Others are either my own coinage or extant terms whose connotations I am embellishing since some of what I want to say falls between the cracks of existing terminology. To avoid misunderstandings and set the scene for my Practice Works, the following paragraphs give the meanings I intend in this project.

Selfhood indicates the felt understanding of one's own being – the sort of entity I feel and conceive myself to be. Related to this is **ego**, in Hillman's sense of an intentional subject which is by (Western) cultural default 'defined by their physical skin and immediate behaviour' (Hillman, 1995, p. xvii). These are similar notions, but where selfhood is a general apprehension of the conditions of being a self, I use ego to indicate more specifically the volume and limits of that self: that which is inside the ego is me, that which is not is not-me. As seen in chapter one, there are multiple ways of regarding **otherhood** (the status accorded to other beings), from the consumer's instrumentalising gaze to the animist's mode of encountering, or I-Thou in Buber's philosophy (1958). **Cut** describes the process of marking this boundary between self and other.

Ecological means the conditions of interdependence and interbeing, cognisance of which reveals life as intrinsically relational. **Interdependence** itself means that entities do not exist discretely but through inherent processes of exchange with one another. Interdependence is an empirical proposition, generalisable from specific processes: oxygenation, ingestion, excretion, and so on. We do not need a full account of these to establish that entities arise and persist not through their independent power alone but by interrelation with others.

Interbeing comes from zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2017), and I find useful connotations in it which he may or may not have intended. These indicate an ontological proposition more far-

reaching than interdependence, which feels restricted to the interrelations we might discover empirically. I use interbeing as an extrapolation from such interrelations: if all things are in exchange (at varying degrees of separation), then existence presents as a package deal – humans, animals, plants, and stars all happen together. The same conclusion can be reached by consideration of the big bang: if the cosmos is the leading edge of a process of becoming which traces back to a unitary source, then all things imply all others since we form the sum of what the big bang did next. Furthermore, where interdependence refers only to processes, interbeing can also be understood by imagining a snapshot of the cosmos in total detail which shows everyone together, no entity left out, no one siloed in a private universe. We (humans, plants, black holes) necessitate and co-define each other.

I use **emptying** (and variations such as **self-emptying)** as well as **emptiness.** My use of the latter should be distinguished since it stems from Buddhism whereas the former comes from Butoh. As seen in chapter two, Butoh posits the adoption of an empty bodymind as foundational to the form. This means surrendering self-concepts and internal monologues, making space for the possibility of dancerly transformation and a *being moved* by images rather than moving from the quotidian sense of volition. **Emptying** and **self-emptying** refer to this process. Within Buddhism, **Emptiness** (Pāli: suññatā, Sanskrit: śūnyatā)

> refers to the fundamental Buddhist teaching that… phenomena do not exist in isolation
> of each other, and by logical default they are empty of an independent and inherently
> existing self… However, for the same reasons that phenomena are empty of an intrinsic
> self, they also are "full" of everything else that exists.
>
> (Shonin, et al., 2015, pp.159-160).

In employing Buddhist **Emptiness** here, I am emphasising its ecological import (roughly synonymous with interdependence). Shonin et al.'s recognition that this Emptiness is paradoxically synonymous with fullness shows a strong parallel with Butoh's stance that the empty bodymind implicitly contains everything and can metamorphose into other potentialities through dance. The two uses do, however, come from distinct traditions, with Buddhism aiming for enlightenment and Butoh for performative, and less codified, results.

Somatic refers here to bodily experience, though I do not mean the body as distinct from the mind as in some definitions (Colman, 2015), since I propose no such duality. **Embodiment** is

a mode of awareness in which soma is consciously and at least semi-continuously present. Use of these two terms promotes physical experience (or experience in which the physical is not forgotten) as a crucial facet of my research. Another way of saying this is researcher Ben Spatz's contention that embodied research is 'research which prioritises embodiment' (2017, p. 2). They offer this by way of contrast to research in which the body is involved (i.e. all research), but in which it is 'treated instrumentally, as if it were transparent' (p. 4). This project aligns with Spatz's definition of embodied research and also adds a phenomenologist's primary emphasis on embodiment as subjectively experienced rather than objectively studied.

Bodymind is the holistic term I use for the human entity, inclusive of soma, intellect, emotion, and imagination. Putting body before mind gestures towards compensation for the cultural dominance of thought. For clarity's sake I will mainly leave spirit and soul as latent considerations; though these are involved for me personally in considering selfhood and dancing, my argument does not stand or fall according to concern for a spiritual dimension (and my methods neither prove nor disprove one).

Thinking and **imagination** warrant clear definition. **Thinking** refers here to abstraction, which itself means planning, conceptualising, and inner activity characterised by sign systems or discourse. Thinking is experiential but gives the experience *of thinking,* not the direct experience what thinking may be signifying. **Imagination** is distinct from thinking, and decoupled from the pejorative sense of *it's all in your imagination/head,* and from daydreaming about situations unrelated to immediate embodiment. Imagination is conceived instead as a creative faculty distributed throughout the bodymind and beyond, experienced somatically, and entwined with but exceeding interoception/exteroception in that it is transformative as well as receptive. While imagination and thought may interact, they are discriminable modalities.

From the standpoint of my practice, imaginative engagement is going on all the time (consciously or not) and includes the positing of cuts between self and other. The neoliberal ideal of skin-bound individualism is a collectively and hierarchically enforced imaginative project which mandates a particular cut and which, as seen in chapter one, is not given by biology or the cosmos but continually constructed. **Dance**, in this project, is an embodied-imaginal activity which can intervene in this construction by exploring alternative cuts in a somatic rather than thought-focussed way. **Performance**, meanwhile, is dance in communication: the expression to others of the experiential realm a dancer is accessing.

My key terms conclude with **immersion** and **mixture**, the basis of my ontological framework after Coccia (see chapter one). These are posited as first principles of being and articulate how any entity – lungfish, ecosystem, mountain, laptop – is both immersed in a world comprised of all other entities, and in turn forms part of the world in which any other entity is immersed. Mixture deepens this co-immersion by lessening entities' discreteness: for example, the point in a meal's journey from world to gullet to digestion at which it becomes part of me is hazy, just as the water cycling from ocean to cloud to bloodstream and back suggests that I am ontologically mixed with all of these. Immersion, mixture, interdependence, and interbeing unsettle the culturally normative boundary of the ego as being marked by the skin barrier, clarifying why Hillman calls this cut 'arbitrary' (1995, p. xix) and pointing to the possibility of alternative cuts.

With my terms clarified, it is worth revisiting my research question: how can an embodied practice generate and express experiences of ecological selfhood? In my introduction I defined ecological selfhood as the felt sense of being a porous entity which extends indefinitely beyond the skin. We can now add a complementary definition: ecological selfhood is an embodied experience of existing by means of interdependence and interbeing. Some such experiences relate clearly to transcendence of the skin barrier, where others inhere more in recognition that my being implies and is mixed with all others. Where this distinction is not crucial, I will alternate between interdependence and interbeing since both point towards the ecological. And due to the many variations of it captured in my Practice Works, I will sometimes refer to ecological selfhoods in the plural.

So how can embodied practice generate ecological selfhoods? The answer I am working towards is by *playing with the cut* –experimenting with the contents of the ego by surrendering the cut which marks its boundary, and refashioning selfhood through exposure to ecological experience. Surrendering the cut tends to mean the ego becomes larger: an entirely ecological selfhood would in a sense recognise no other, for everything becomes me or, isomorphically, I become everything. This project explores varying points along the spectrum running from atomised individual to entirely ecological selfhoods. The exploration is conducted via the unpredictable experiences afforded by dancing as ego-surrender, or dancing as surrender of the cut. The reasons for this unpredictability are threaded throughout the following chapters, and the specifics of my overall process will be detailed and analysed in chapter four (alongside an

emerging answer to how ecological selfhood can be expressed through performance).

My methods for researching are my adaptation of Butoh dance (providing tools for embodied ego-surrender and for relating to the experiences this enables), journalling (my first method of data gathering), and performance (the practice of embodied-imaginal expression of selfhood expansion). My performances are based in dance but also use music, text, dramaturgy, visual art, and video editing, though these are generally employed as communicative supports for dance. The existence of the performances on film enables further data, and filming serves too as a means of dissemination of the project (without which this text would be insufficient and even misleading, as I will argue in chapters four and five). The issue of research conventions or what I am calling *the researcher's gaze* will arise frequently, and my methodology seeks to address it by respecting its necessity whilst preventing it from interfering with the actual practice of selfhood expansion. The following sections outline each of these methods in more detail and consider the question of analysis.

Butoh, Emptying, and Devotion

Ankoku Butō (Dance of Utter Darkness, more commonly referred to as Butoh) originated in Japan in the mid-twentieth century. Its main instigator was Tatsumi Hijikata, an Akita-born dancer trained in Western forms such as German expressionist, ballet, and jazz dance, and by European avant-garde literature and theatre, particularly the work of Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet (Baird, 2012). Butoh grew from his idiosyncratic interactions with these and indigenous Japanese art forms including Kabuki and Noh theatre in the context of post-war Japan and experiences of national defeat, nuclear horror, counter-cultural experimentation, and American military and cultural impositions. The other major figure in Butoh is Kazuo Ohno, an older dancer whose deep impression on Hijikata led to several collaborations. Ohno and his son Yoshito (my teacher) contributed an overtly spiritual orientation; oral histories sometimes propose Hijikata as the 'dark side' of Butoh and the Ohnos the 'light', and a somewhat hagiographical early account in English calls Hijikata the 'architect' and Ohno senior the 'soul' of the form (Viala and Masson-Sékiné, 1988).

Butoh has since been adopted by several generations of dancers and become increasingly globalised through international performances by Japanese artists and the emergence of non-Japanese practitioners (of whom I am one). As a modern form indebted to European and American culture, Butoh is not entirely indigenous to Japan, meaning questions of appropriation by the non-Japanese are not straightforward. I am however comfortable with my status as an Irish-Scottish *Butohist*, having clarified which aspects of the form are not authentically accessible to me through archival study, soul-searching, and conversation with my teachers – principally Yoshito, who as a dancer in the inaugural public Butoh performance was more qualified to comment than anyone except Hijikata and Kazuo (both of whom died before I first visited Japan). Further consideration of my positionality as non-Japanese, and of sensitivities around reframing Butoh for new contexts, can be found in **Appendix D**.

My project centres on Butoh's contemporary value in responding to the Anthropocene, so I will focus here on my reasons for adapting the form as an ecological research tool for exploring selfhood. This is something of an exercise in reverse engineering since I have been training in and performing this dance for the last fifteen years, and its import in the Anthropocene crept up on me gradually as my experience of it deepened against a backdrop of ecological crisis. I

have never been sure if dancing intensified my ecological concerns or simply provided me with a way to work with them. My presentation of Butoh method and philosophy in what follows stems more from my teachers' oral instructions than from publications, but I will cite references where possible.

Hijikata posited Butoh as a rebellion of the body against societal conditioning rather than as an ecological dance form, and this project is a re-purposing of it by emphasising and extending aspects of the original method that I see as ecological in orientation. I am not alone in seeing Butoh as ecologically engaged: my teacher Atsushi Takenouchi's practice, for example, is overt in seeking to reconnect dancers with nature and the wider cosmos (Takenouchi and Frank, 2021), though I did not meet him until I was already working on my own articulation of the same issues. Hijikata declared that Butoh 'is about an expansion of the concept of a human being … rooted in the discovery of the possibility that the human body may metamorphose into anything from animals and plants, to inanimate objects' (Mikami, 2016, p. 73). The sense in which this is true is embodied-imaginal, and the ontology implicitly employed by Butoh assumes the possibility of experiences of becoming almost anything.

The Butoh bodymind is posited as containing and fluidly exchanging with the ongoing activity of the cosmos, sometimes justified through its evolutionary history, though explanations also recall Coccia's philosophy of immersion and mixture (2019). Butoh accepts the surreal, the irrational, and the emergence of hidden (dark) phenomena directly in the body. It requires suspension of assumptions about the limits of access available for humans to other forms of existence, characterised as the adoption of an empty body. The empty bodymind (my preferred term since it averts any body/mind duality) issues from a quietened and sensitised presence achieved through both physical training and a voluntary act of surrender into not knowing the boundaries of self or the limits of experience.

The value of this suspension resonates with that of the *beginner's mind* of Zen Buddhism: 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few' (Suzuki and Dixon, 2011, p.1). It can also be read as an instance of the phenomenological epochē (Lewis and Staehler, 2010, p. 15), where daily knowledge of our situation and habits is suspended. In the context of selfhood, emptying points directly into mystery – into not knowing who or what one is, in order to have experiences unavailable to the person who has ossified their identity and extent. As my journals and their consideration in chapters four and five show, searching

for the basis of oneself through embodied imagination often leads to realisations that can easily be termed ecological, standing in stark contrast to Cartesian discarnate conceptualising.

The empty bodymind is receptive to images or qualia which, through their intensity, produce movement (*images* does not imply a visual bias and should be read as multi-sensory apprehensions which can include atmosphere and mood). Though the images can be suggested by a teacher or choreographer, many Butoh dancers adhere rather to a process of spontaneous image generation in which the images simply appear, rushing into the vacuum left by emptying. This is generally the procedure followed in my practice in this project. In common with the animistic, deep ecological, and new materialist perspectives considered in chapter one, Butoh extends life and vibrancy to what is commonly thought of as inanimate as well as to the non-human in terms of animals or plants. Metamorphic exchange with stones, water, household objects, and weather is available. There is a suspension not just of normative ego cuts but of the very notion of being human. Butoh is not ironic in essence, with the dancer's metamorphosis hinging on their guileless abdication of daily selfhood to make space for alterity.

The ecological import of this practice involves perceiving the bodymind and the world anew, though it would be inaccurate to suggest that all previous learning is suspended. With my knowledge of evolution and biochemistry operative, I might be met with the surprise of my *teeth:* a mineral concoction absorbed from the Earth via my diet, linking me to the circulation of all matter and dissolving the separation between self and environment (this example from my journals is considered in chapter four). The distinction between thinking and embodied-imagination becomes crucial here. While I may hold knowledge of ecological circulation in the back of my mind, the active process is not thinking but somatically dreaming into the phenomenon of my teeth-as-everything, weirdly and holistically through dance.

It is thus not entirely true that thinking is renounced whilst dancing since it is an integral aspect of human functioning. When I stress no-thinking in later chapters, my intention is to frame thinking as one modality amongst the many we exhibit, and to emphasise that it is not an uncomplicatedly useful one in embodied ecological research. Thinking can form an enabling background process for dancing but must be held in check due to its cultural dominance and tendency to abstract from immediate embodiment and deal in binaries and linearity, which in turn tends to disrupt the flow of embodied-imaginal inquiry. There is a thought-based

underpinning to my practice in terms of the ontology of immersion, knowledge of ecological flows, and a Buddhistic logic of interdependence and porosity, but it is not in control of active practice. The unpredictability mentioned above stems from this quieting of thought so that dancing is an experience of acquiescence to images the thinking ego does not agentially produce. The images determine what will occur.

The aesthetic and bodymind effect that can be had on witnesses of Butoh performance might most easily be ascribed to kinaesthetic empathy, a phenomenon around which there is a growing field of research and in which the proposed mirror neuron system in the human brain leads us to internally simulate the movements and behaviours of others as a way to intuit their experience and have a version of it ourselves (Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 35). A ready example of this is found in the experience of jumping out of one's seat during a horror film: the impact does not inhere in language or narrative, but in a near-immediate resonance with the character on screen, a feeling of what it must be like for them by feeling it ourselves.

Whether or not the mechanism of mirror neurons is in fact the trigger, a phenomenological approach can simply recognise the mysterious resonance between one being and another engendered by attendance to their presence and state. In my experience and that of most critics and reviewers, this resonance is where the value of Butoh performances, from an audience perspective, is to be found. But there is something oblique about Butoh as perceived from outside: taking the example above, if my teeth were an element in a stage choreography I would not seek to mime or explain this to an audience but simply to metamorphose, leaving their interpretation of my state open. The horror film analogy breaks down here since the cause of a film character's fright is generally evident, whereas a Butoh dancer's responses may be more mysterious. In this sense Butoh is non-expository and makes no appeal to the rationality of its audience. It communicates instead through **resonance**, as will be explored below.

I have taken to describing Butoh as a practice of **radical empathy***,* using empathy in the sense of 'projecting oneself onto the object of contemplation' (Reynolds and Reason, 2012, p. 19). Though this implies an individualist model, it is a good enough starting point for how the neoliberally-educated subject might seek to cross the divide between me and not-me. I append the word radical to stress the embodied, totalising nature of the engagement: metamorphosis in Butoh requires participation of the entire bodymind and is weakened by circumspection and (rational or emotional) withholding. In illustration of the power this holistic approach wields,

I witnessed in Tokyo the participation of a noted Butoh scholar in their first actual Butoh class. Despite years of theoretical engagement with the form they burst into tears, whispering 'I had no idea it was like this'. Writing about what Hijikata was up to is markedly different than resonating with it or trying it for yourself. Embodied-imaginal engagement shifts the whole self rather than segmented portions of it such as the critical faculty I am calling the researcher's gaze.

Butoh plays with time (including memories both personal and ancestral) and space (including macro experiences such as being tugged-at by stars and black holes). More locally, exercises involve feeling beyond the skin boundary – for example feeling branches and flowers sprouting from the body so that I might be moving with reference to a blossom attached to my crown but projected more than a metre outside of it. My adaptation in this project is to emphasise such aspects and lean into metamorphoses productive of experiences of interbeing. The features above illuminate my rationale in making Butoh the cornerstone of my methodology. Its stance of radical empathy and opening of selfhood to a widening cut, coupled with an inherent concern for embodied imagination over sedentary cogitation, makes it a uniquely appropriate method for exploring ecological selfhood.

Capturing the Invisible

With Butoh as my practice basis for nurturing ecological selfhood, the remainder of my methodology concerns methods of expressing it and capturing it for analysis. As noted in chapter one, even Buddhist philosophy (particularly explicit in its negation of individualism) recognises the inevitability of a *conventional reality* in which beings are separate and appear to have invisible insides distinct from their observable outsides – the conventional cut between subject and object. If I have an experience of ecological selfhood, it is not gifted to you due to our fundamental interbeing (if I feel I am you it does not follow that you feel you are me). There are still insides and outsides to be considered, and my methodology must account for both my phenomenological experience of dancing and the ways it can be captured and expressed outwardly.

My initial plan for researching the inner aspect was to conduct group workshops with structured

feedback to study how my method operates transpersonally across different nervous systems, but by the time I had ethical clearance for this the world was in lockdown due to the COVID pandemic. My revised approach is to capture my inner experience through journalling and my outward performance expression through film (below). My choice of journalling over other methods is explained in chapter three, but here I will argue for the phenomenological way I go about it.

Phenomenology, developed initially by Edmund Husserl (2008 [1900/1901]), aims toward a method of describing how phenomena arise in our experience. The focus is 'not on *what* appears, but on *how* it appears' (Lewis and Staehle., 2010, p. 1), and the *how* does not mean a material explanation of what causes appearances (for example mirror neurons in the brain), but rather a depiction of the way events show up in consciousness. My choice to journal in this manner is influenced by its validation in related research (for example Snow, 2002, and Fraleigh, 2010) and by consideration of the internal*,* experiential locus of the research object in my own consciousness.

Fundamental to phenomenology is the *epochē* or bracketing of what Husserl called the everyday 'natural attitude' in phenomenological enquiry (Husserl, 1983 [1913], pp. 51-53, 57-60). This translates as a suspension of prior beliefs and assumptions about the world in favour of an unfiltered depiction of its presentation to consciousness. Such suspension marries well with Butoh's self-emptying and offers a descriptive orientation towards practice which can accommodate changes in selfhood and subject-object boundaries. Or rather, it almost does. The basic phenomenological question is *how do things appear in consciousness?*, but I am adding a crucial second question which traditional phenomenology largely ignores: *who do they appear to?*

This approach is influenced by writers such as Francisco J. Varela (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993) and Shigenori Nagatomo (1992). Both authors emphasise a blind spot in phenomenology as practised by Husserl and to a lesser extent Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. This is their assumption of a static transcendental self – a who – to whom the phenomena appear which is abstracted from the world and looking in upon it from a no-place. Both Varela and Shigenori critique the ethnocentricism of classical phenomenology as beginning from a model of self which is excised from ecological embeddedness and is in effect Descartes' *cogito,* stressing 'the pragmatic, embodied context of human experience, but in a purely theoretical

way' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993, p. 19). An example from Merleau-Ponty: 'In order that my window may impose upon me a point of view of the church, it is necessary in the first place that my body should impose upon me one of the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 104). Here the self is assumed to be separate from and prior to the body, which imposes upon it. This abstracted self is unreachable, immune to fundamental revision.

Nagatomo's *Attunement through the Body* provides a convincing redress to phenomenologies born of implicit Cartesian dualism and assuming an abstracted self which is impervious to transformation. Re-reading Husserl and Merleau-Ponty through Japanese philosophers Yuasa Yasuo, Ichikawa Hiroshi, and medieval Zen master Dōgen, Nagatomo stresses the transformative capacity of selfhood via self-cultivation in meditation (Nagatomo, 1992, p. xxi-xxii). He also offers a particularly useful distinction, for my project, between 'subject-body' and 'object-body', where the original Japanese term for subject *(shutai)* carries the assumption that the subject is incarnate (Nagatomo, 1992, p. 5). I ally with Nagatomo because he posits that the subject-body need not stop at the skin, unlocking a concept which can articulate enlarged perceptions of selfhood. Where the object-body has definite dimensions and limits and is in effect the external body you can see and touch, the subject-body is found to be more ambiguous, emanating to a hazy horizon (or perhaps no horizon at all). This felt phenomenon clarifies the possibility of making the cut beyond the skin and is presented in my Practice Work ***With Your Eyes Closed***.

Nagatomo's subject-body seems to me almost identical to the one which metamorphoses in Butoh method, capable of felt states of interpenetration between body and environment. Through it, outside becomes less outside and inside less *only* inside. In this mode, objects, environment, and the body itself begin to seem less other, and a sense of immersed selfhood becomes achievable. Like Nagatomo's phenomenology, Butoh does not begin from the humanist subject or disembodied cogito, but it must reckon with these and distinguish itself from them since they are the foundations of the social conditioning which most of us experienced growing up, and which surrounds us still.

I begin from Nagatomo's viewpoint, situated within an immersed world (after Coccia), when journalling: changing phenomena appear to a malleable and embodied self, and the two are immersed in each other. Neimanis' ontology of amniotics (chapter one) pertains here too, where bodies 'leak and seethe … vulnerable to rupture and negotiation' (2017, p. 2), though I

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will reframe this as *capable of rupture and renegotiation* to neutralise any negative connotation – selfhood expansion being an aim rather than a risk in this project. When referring to my phenomenological approach hereafter, it is in this revised sense wherein, firstly, there is no assumption of a static transcendental self which apprehends phenomena, and secondly, the who to whom phenomena appear is embodied, though not necessarily bound by the skin.

A further aspect of my approach to both dancing and journalling regards otherhood or phenomena not immediately experienced as part of my who. I default to the assumption that whatever appears to consciousness may deserve the name person – recalling Buber's I-Thou mode of encounter rather than I-It, and Kimmerer's articulation of Indigenous generosity in dignifying all beings as people (chapter one). It is difficult to radically empathise with a phenomenon if you assume that you are a *person* and it is not. My journalling seeks instead to mirror my practice in extending subjecthood towards images, beings, and objects, which are regarded as part of my larger self or as entities/people with whom I can have personal relations of solidarity and exchange.

Expressing through Resonance

My method of researching the outer, expressive aspects of my practice is the one implicit in Butoh qua dance form: performance. I must acknowledge up front a limit in my project in that I could not extend my analysis to qualitative research into audience experiences – this was impossible during the pandemic and even without this circumstance it might have been beyond the scope of what I was able to achieve due to time constraints. My methodology is thus bounded by research into the forms of expression I developed to communicate ecological selfhood; that is, into the performances themselves rather than how they were received. This project is an outgrowth of my established performance practice which incorporates years of feedback from audience members and critics. This gives me a well-founded confidence in the communicative impact performances such as those in my Practice Works have on others, but it is not evidenced in the data I am offering here. Where my journals capture how embodied practice can generate ecological selfhood experiences, the performances show how these can be expressed.

Performance on film provides a way for me to analyse the common approaches and tropes I use when the solitary process shown in the journals is geared towards communication for an audience. These approaches follow the same embodied-imaginative dream logic as that process and seek to extend the states I experience outwards to audiences through the **resonance** referred to above as standard in Butoh performance. Resonance is somewhat under-theorised here because it is, to me, fundamentally mysterious, referring to the prompting of phenomenological experiences in audiences when witnessing Butoh (which I know as an audience member and as a performer observing audience responses and receiving feedback). I do not proceed rationally when choreographing, and do not seek an objective view on what I am doing, so film affords me the possibility of adopting the researcher's gaze after the fact in order to analyse my work for patterns and recurring strategies.

Additionally, I regard the performance-films as key to presentation of my research. My terminology above sets out a distinction between thinking, writing, and reading on one hand, and embodied-imaginal experience and expression on the other. My methodological rationale for practice not only in research but its presentation is that I see my practice as untranslatable into text. Its discussion in these pages is not a translation but a contextualisation and abstracted analysis which would amount to anecdote without more direct evidence of my dancing. I will explore my concerns about mistaking abstraction for that from which it is abstracted more fully in chapters four and five.

The performances in my Practice Works are of two types. *Shrimp Dance* is a video document of a piece intended for live audiences, and the expressive and dramaturgical choices made were tailored to the people in front of me during its performance at Dance Base during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2022. The film was shot by cinematographers working discreetly in conditions not designed for the camera – lighting was lower than optimal for lens capture, and the black box stage location selected for festival attendance rather than thematic aptness. The other two pieces, *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* and *Excuse Me I am Expanding*, are instead video works: locations, dramaturgy, music, and editing were designed for encounter on screen, making the results more immediate and impactful when viewed this way than those of *Shrimp Dance*. My project went in this direction of necessity since it was unclear if the pandemic would allow further live performances, but this forced me to innovate and I was eventually glad of the chance to explore what video dance offers in compensation for its loss of live presence: multiple sites including remote spots to which it would be difficult to bring an

audience, manipulation of time and perspective, and experimentation with colouring and other effects to render visible something of the surreal quality often encountered in embodied-imaginal practice.

Considered together, these three pieces illustrate the essential aspects of my method in performance. *Shrimp Dance* reads as documentation and the viewer may feel at something of a remove from what was a live encounter between performers and audience; on the other hand, the documentation is of a rigorously constructed work of whose successful dance-communication I am confident following the feedback I received over its two-week run. *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* and *Excuse Me I am Expanding* are more experimental in the sense that they were created with the collaboration and advice of only a handful of others (film makers, musicians, and my supervisors) and completed in solitude in front of a computer. My trust in them as exemplars of my method derives mainly from such collaboration and my wider experience of what communicates best when I perform for audiences. But they have the advantage of being created for the medium in which you will encounter them, and their production quality is higher than *Shrimp Dance* such that I can screen them in the future to disseminate my project.

Furthermore, the pieces collectively illustrate a key utility of my method in performance: not the expression of a single experience called *ecological selfhood*, but an orientation towards diverse topics and phenomena in which openings to ecological selfhood(s) form the core creative procedure (this will be considered further in chapter four and my conclusion). Each work presents a distinct angle of approach by working through a specific theme. **Shrimp Dance** explores the links between human mental illness, medication, water and sewage cycles, and impacts on marine life to encourage a feeling of interbeing between humans and across species. **My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off** considers mass extinction and trans-species solidarity through mortality, a common predicament for all life forms. **Excuse Me I am Expanding** is an expression of the major paradox of ecological selfhood – the coincidence of conventional and ultimate truth (in Buddhist terms), or the weirdness attendant to recognition that interbeing yokes all entities together but does not dissolve the differentiation of each one's experience, or their responsibility to the relatively skin-bound self that they alone inhabit.

Mindful Abstraction

My introduction mentioned a secondary research question for my project: how can the generation of ecological selfhood through embodied practice be researched without the trappings of research themselves becoming a hindrance? As will be seen in chapter three, this question emerged as I began situating my existing Butoh practice within a research paradigm and found that framing my dancing this way, even if only with the thought *I am researching for my PhD now*, impeded my ability to empty my bodymind and engage in practice holistically. Practice in this mode seems intrinsically at odds with what I am calling the researcher's gaze – nominally that of a discrete and often impartial subject regarding the research object. Adopting this gaze is the hallmark of some research but proves a deadly enemy of the practice of rendering the cut between me and not-me amenable to ecological expansion since it calls for a partitioning of myself into researcher and research object.

Though work has been done to address this problem in consciousness studies (for example Varela and Shear, 1999), I did not find a precedent fully amenable to my project. Varela's notion of first-person methodologies has informed my approach, but the methodology I use here is perhaps unusually stark in its separation of practice from data gathering through a procedure I am calling *researching-by-definitely-not-researching* (detailed in chapter three). Most research in consciousness studies also assumes that first-person experience will ultimately be expressed to others through verbal accounts, whereas my methodology considers expression via resonance – dance in performance for others – to be essential (I argue for this in chapter four).

My practice procedure does not involve intellectual knowledge acquisition by a non-participating aspect of myself (held apart in order to consider practice from outside). I seek instead to jettison this concern and treat practice as autotelic. The rescue of analysable data is achieved through journalling after the fact and making video documents of performances. One reason video performance is privileged over writing alone is that it depicts phenomenological experience as it happens rather than giving an after the fact description. Another is that it escapes the flattening of multi-dimensional somatic experience into words about it. Clarifying these specifics enables me to use a bespoke procedure which allows practice to be

unencumbered whilst still providing modes of capture and dissemination.

I analyse the amassed data using Grounded theory, which advocates for 'developing theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). The basic process entails coding for salient features of the data by using a nested hierarchy comprised of open codes (the highest resolution and most precise features), axial codes (which group open codes under a heading which connects them), and selective codes (the most generalised headings which group the axial codes themselves). Throughout my analysis I use the above colour coding to facilitate cross-referencing of my coding spreadsheets (**Appendices A-C**) with this text.

I should note that I adapt the principles of grounded theory to my needs, since one of its core principles is 'simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5), and as emphasised above, concurrent practice and analysis proves an impediment to my practice. I therefore separate the two activities temporally, though there is some interaction between them in that reviews of my journal entries exert influence on subsequent sessions.
I find grounded theory to be useful but incomplete for my purposes, and in chapter four I augment it in order to capture experiential aspects of the Practice Works which tend to disappear under the lens of grounded analysis.

My core methods – Butoh-derived practice, journalling, performance, and grounded theory analysis – are underpinned by the terminology and ontological principles I have laid out towards a coherent methodology for approaching what is a highly self-reflexive and subjective terrain: the shifting boundaries and qualities of selfhood.

TRY LOOKING AT SPACE

INSTEAD OF THROUGH IT

Chapter Three: Practice Works – Accessing Ecological Selfhood

My **Practice Works** consist of the introductory audio meditation *With Your Eyes Closed*, my **Practice Journals**, and the three performance works *Shrimp Dance, My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off*, and *Excuse Me I am Expanding*. My grounded theory analysis spreadsheets for each of these can be found in **Appendices A-C**. The audio meditation offers a gentle exposure to the domain of somatic ecological selfhood so that listeners can appreciate something of it first-hand before considering the more complex manifestations of my process displayed in the journals and performances. The journals describe my embodied-imaginal dance practice, aimed at inducing shifts in self-apprehension – experimental abandonings of my skin-bound ego. The performances comprise three exploratory expressions of the sorts of states this practice produces; they are centred in dance but recruit theatrical and videographic tools (dramaturgy, music, lighting, video projection, text, video manipulation and editing) to enhance and contextualise the states in question.

My aim has not been to show one way to replicate and express a particular experience, but to establish a method which engenders manifold ecological realisations of selfhood and, concomitantly, otherhood. This plurality is a natural consequence of the fact that my practice results are not egoically controlled, but rather gifted to the ego once self-emptying is engaged. This seems appropriate since my experiences of ecological selfhood relate to appreciation of extra-egoical phenomena as integral to my being not through controlling them, but through the opposite approach of surrender – allowing what is normally considered not-me to dance my body. Surrender is fundamental to Butoh in general since the images which move the bodymind (see chapter two) present as autonomous, and relations with them are achieved by means of **devotion**: not asking them to behave or change but adapting oneself to accommodate them. Devotion will be considered further in chapter four. Surrender introduces inherent unpredictability to what will be experienced. Abdication of control is one way in which my method counterposes narratives of mastery and conquest within the human exceptionalism of the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

This last point opens onto the question of agency, which will form part of my evaluation in

chapter five. When I speak of my method of Playing with the Cut as one leading to an expanded selfhood, I do not mean an individualist, unitarily agential selfhood which covers more territory than the neoliberal skin-bound paradigm. Ecologically enlarged selfhood is different in kind: an immersed and entangled self-apprehension which conceives of agency more as the collective interactions of an ensemble with which the individual will(s) collaborate – giving and taking fluidly with the rest, not through dominance but interdependent co-constitution. Again, this makes results unpredictable, joyfully so since dancing is experienced as an opening of the self into belonging to the larger ecological dance of the cosmos. This is what the private sessions captured in my journals seek to achieve, and what my performances seek to express.

With Your Eyes Closed

(2020. Duration: 7m 12s)

This piece, which you should **already have heard** (click the hyperlink if not), is intended to bridge the experiential gap between me as researcher and you as receiver of my research. My hope is that by listening entirely subjectively – as you might to a guided meditation – you will have found a gentle opening into somatic ecological selfhood. The basic result I aim for is precisely the phenomenon of Nagatomo's 'subject-body' discussed in chapter two (Nagatomo, 1992, p. 9). That is, the perception of a radial body that extends beyond the skin boundary indefinitely. In asking you to engage with this piece first, my desire is for you to experience from your own side a simple version of the somatic realm explored through the rest of my Practice Works, rendering them more directly – as opposed to conceptually or analytically – intelligible. I encourage you to look at the pieces to follow with the felt sense of this experience held in your bodymind.

Journal Entries

(2019-2022)

I conducted thirty-three private studio sessions throughout autumn 2019 until summer 2022. These form my core research into how embodied practice can generate in me experiences of ecological selfhood. They generally comprise a warm-up and silent meditation followed by

improvised dance practice, with or without music. Repeated iterations of Butoh-derived dance strategies allow me to hone the most reliable tools and to identify and remove unhelpful factors (see chapter four).

I initially thought video documentation would be the appropriate mode of data capture and tried this for the first fifteen sessions. But the camera did not reproduce my phenomenological experience, displaying no more than a hint of the internal process I was engaged in. Additionally, its presence imposed a division in my consciousness through the knowledge that what I was doing would be judged and analysed afterwards. I needed permission to be boring, ugly, aesthetically clumsy, and inept in the sessions lest notions of expertise or impressing others fortified the ego cut between my bodymind and the world around it.

Concerns about monitoring my practice proved to be a hurdle even once I stopped filming and pursued the less intrusive method of journalling (which I had also been doing since the first session). Self-reflexiveness is often presented as a desirable component of practice as research, with Carole Gray and Julian Malins writing that 'most researchers would concur that preliminary evaluation and analysis take place in parallel with data generation/collection and are iterative, reflexive activities' (2004, p. 130). But in this project delineations between practice, analysis, and evaluation were interventions in the process, and generally obstructive ones since they impeded self-emptying and metamorphosis by keeping dualisms in place.

I found self-emptying to be intractably at odds with formal research and any reminder of my (neoliberally inflected) social self as an institutional researcher with outcomes to achieve and a stipend to earn. My eventual solution to the problem of researching a process which does not want to be researched was to compartmentalise myself temporally: my researcher self was banished from practice sessions and reinstated only afterwards through reflective journalling (and occasionally sketching, as in fig. 6 below). I had to repeatedly make the conscious decision to forget about my PhD and its journalling when dancing, since otherwise I found myself scanning practice for insights to write up (i.e. abstracting a part of myself from what was happening in real time). Though there was some element of preliminary evaluation in as much as I learned from each session and applied the more promising strategies to the next one, a strange loop of *researching-by-definitely-not-researching* was ever-present.
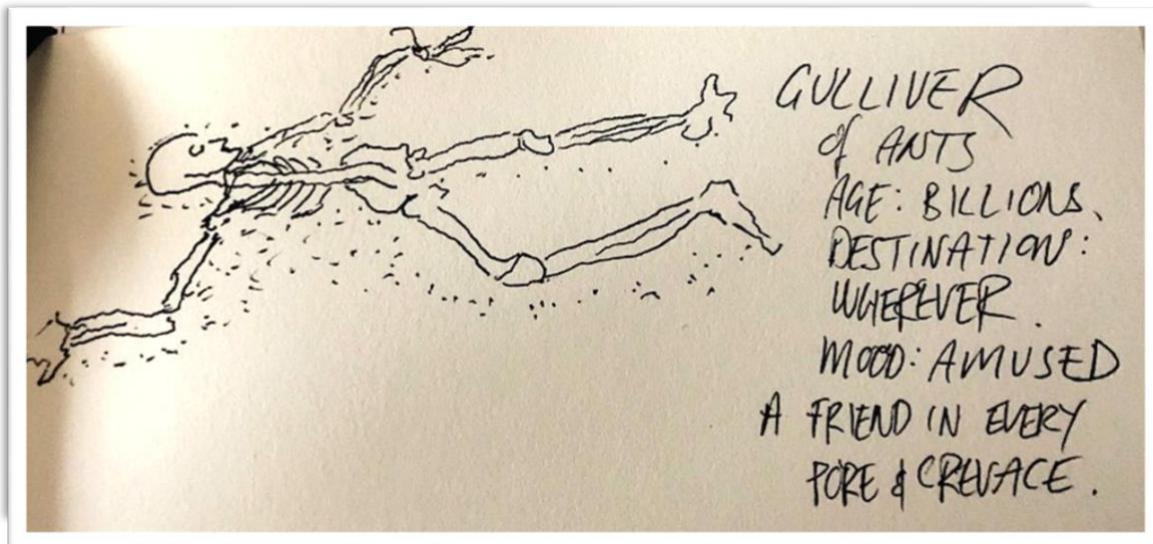
Figure 6: Henry, P. M. (2020) *Self-Portrait, Journal Entry Three.*

The tenacity of this issue is mainly due to the conflict between ecological selfhood and the researcher/research object paradigm, but may also owe something to my choice of Butoh as a foundation for my practice. Hijikata was explicit in his aversion to the use of dance for purposes of commodification:

> To a production-oriented society, the aimless use of the body, which I call dance, is a deadly enemy which must be taboo … [Butoh] flaunts its aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society. In this sense my dance, based on human self-activation, … can naturally be a protest against the 'alienation of labor' in capitalist society.

> (Hijikata, 2000, pp. 44-45)

In as much as I am being faithful to my training, it is questionable whether I should be attempting to produce knowledge for institutions through my practice at all. A pure Butoh would be entirely autotelic, producing nothing beyond the activity itself, though this is also the hardline stance that renders the form ungraspable and risks consigning it to archives of the 1960s-80s (roughly Hijikata's period of activity), rather than continuing it as a vital practice offering strategies for today. This has been a central tension throughout my project.

I have selected twenty-one representative **Practice Journal** entries which illustrate both the

ecological selfhood experiences I accessed and the conflictual process of phenomenological narration of sessions during whose enactment I did my utmost to forget their purpose. Entries one to ten are somewhat messy but I include them because they contain some of the most fruitful episodes and also illuminate the methodological challenges I had to navigate. I tried various gambits along the way, such as in *Stone and Ants* (**entry three**) and *A Bear in Chains* (**entry four**) where I highlighted in yellow instances of intrusion by my researcher-self and their anxieties and plans, in an effort to distinguish these from deeper shifts towards ecological selfhood.

Entries eleven to twenty-one were written by means of a template modelled after Claire Petitmengin's phenomenological interview method for researchers studying subjective experience (2007). I found her framework valuable in clarifying both the aim of my journalling and the pitfalls to be avoided. Petitmengin stresses aspects such as maintaining the present tense, sticking with the concrete details of what occurred rather than digressing into theorising, and striving for what she calls the 'evocation state' (Petitmengin, 2007, p. 245). This is a recalling of experience as if it is happening now, as far as possible from within the same embodied and affective state in which it originally occurred. Intended as a model for second-person interviews, I adapted it for self-interviewing after the fact, leaving a space of around one hour after studio sessions before writing them up by plunging myself back into my remembered practice states (I found that playing the same music on headphones is an effective trigger for this). I settled on the following template headings:

* **Framing** – noting down the context of the session, my state in beginning it, the duration, any music used, any initial plans I had, and prompts from my dance teachers or other inspirations I employed.

* **What?** – a present tense depiction of what happened, without consideration of what it means.

* **How?** – the approaches and techniques I used in conducting the session, and the manner in which phenomena arose.

* **Who?** – the type of entity I felt myself to be throughout the session.

* **And afterwards?** – Notes on the after-effects and echoes of the session as I re-inserted myself into the world outside the studio.

This template had the benefit of giving a pre-composed framework which my practice self merely had to fill in without disrupting accurate recall of the session experience. I am including examples of both styles of journalling – the earlier experimental and the latter formalised version – because they provide different (and differently imperfect) shades of access to the practice I was engaged in. These twenty-one entries will be my source material for analysing the inner, first-person aspects of my practice in chapter four.

<u>Please now look at the Practice Journals in detail</u>.

Performance Works

My process for developing the three performance works was largely an organic outgrowth of the process shown in my private studio sessions, created by employing the same strategies of emptying and devoting to images. There were many additional concerns though, most obviously the intention to craft something that communicates to others. Concerns around aesthetic impact, intelligibility, and projection in the sense of performing in an outward-facing manner for reception by audience or camera lens were pertinent, whereas they were purposefully removed in the private sessions.

I applied my practice to themes which I researched beforehand (such as the links between human mental health and the welfare of marine life), teasing them out through the dream-logic of my dance practice. I think of this as putting my core process to work in service of specific expressions, and the range of supporting tools and media I chose were guided by how far they clarified and exposed the images arising through dance. Such thematic applications stem from the preparatory experience which inspired my doctorate. Though theoretically I could have removed them in favour of simply expressing the fact of ecological selfhood expansion, my art making has always involved having material to work with. And besides, the value I am positing in ecological selfhood includes the gaze it brings to bear upon the world (discussed in chapter four). As described below, I did in fact experiment with having no theme in *Excuse Me I am Expanding,* but found themes imposing themselves regardless.

The issue of the researcher's gaze was no less present here than in my private sessions, and it

would be dishonest to pretend that I was creating under the continual conscious direction of my doctoral research question. Butoh and my Playing with the Cut operate by a different and almost opposite dynamic, recalling the ancient Greek notion of art as being produced by devotion to the Muses rather than as an act of will by the ego. The opening move is emptying, and the sustaining engine is devotion, as will be seen in my analysis in the next chapter. These stances will be key to my answer to how somatic practice can generate experiences of ecological selfhood, and they necessitate the ego's submission to embodied-imagination, which in my experience will not be dictated to by a research question. So here too, in exploring how performance can express ecological selfhood, I find that temporal separation of my researcher and practitioner selves is essential.

Shrimp Dance

(2022. Duration 47m 06s)

Figure 7*:* Sinead, A. (2022) *Shrimp Dance.*

This performance was inspired by Professor Alex Ford's research with crustaceans (Guler and Ford, 2010). His studies of shrimp exposed to anti-depressants show that increased levels of fluoxetine, the active ingredient in Prozac, cause them to alter their behaviour. Where their evolutionary adaptation is to stay safe in shadowy waters, increases in fluoxetine prompt a tendency to swim upwards into the light, often to be eaten by seagulls. The volume of medication traversing the sewers makes for a measurable phenomenon – traces of cumulative distress which discredit the notion of depression as an individual malady and point towards a societal problem. I see Ford's work as a tracking of sadness at scale, articulating a trans-species process: spindly marine people transmuting human depression into motion, upwards through the currents. *Shrimp Dance* arose from this poetic reading of his research (with Ford's blessing).

^

I premiered the piece with my collaborators (musician Jer Reid and video artist Jamie Wardrop) for Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival at Platform in Glasgow in 2017. We subsequently performed it at punk rock gigs and theatre venues in Glasgow, and in Frankfurt just before the COVID pandemic shut down international travel. As restrictions lifted in 2022 we were able to present a mature version at Edinburgh Festival Fringe over a two-week run at Dance Base, with appropriate support from Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities and Creative Scotland to allow us to stage and document the piece for my doctorate. The version offered here was filmed on 12ᵗʰ August 2022.

Shrimp Dance is a black box theatre piece with a semi-improvisational structure negotiated between me, Jer, and Jamie. We base things loosely around three overlapping worlds: the ocean, employed literally and as a figure for the unconscious of humanity; the shore, demarcated by the seating bank (with the audience as a figure for human society); and the machine, evoked through projections, sound and choreography, where individuals persevere amid the dictates of consumer selfhood and the technological and informational saturations of late capitalism. The piece is surrealist in approach, dreaming into a-rational zones and emotional spaces whilst using Ford's work as a material tether to our main theme: tracing the links between individual mental health, wider human society, and their correlates with the health of other species and the planet. The division into three worlds is slightly over-schematic in describing what is a fluid and intuitive creation, but it gives a coherent reading of how *Shrimp Dance* is constructed in terms of my research into ecological selfhood.

Since this portfolio piece is most representative of my performance work (with the latter films being inflected by the pandemic conditions in which they were created), I will describe its development in detail. The idea for *Shrimp Dance* predates and partially prompted my doctorate, going through different iterations between 2013 and its presentation here. I read about Alex's work on the BBC website and it struck me as profound not only in its status as science but in the political and ecological extrapolations I discerned. I secured his blessing to make a piece based on the experiments and began writing free verse poetry about their implications regarding interdependence, human social facades and the emotional turmoil beneath their surface, and the solidarity I found in this material proof that so many of us are

struggling. I then started studio sessions: emptying myself and seeking to let the shrimp, the oceans, the sadness and the yearning underlying it fill my body through whichever images unfolded. I also started making music using ocean samples and the *Shipping Forecast* theme which connects me to my dad's love of listening to it late at night (and thus to my own emotional life and biography). This interplay between writing, dancing, and music is representative of my overall artistic process, with each feeding the other until something which feels like the scenes of a performance emerges.

Over the work's gestation period, rather obvious material phenomena such as the tides and the moon became rich symbols to be mined in order to blur distinctions between ecology as a purely material issue and a more ecopsychological sense encompassing selfhood and the emotional and psychic flows accompanying human existence. The moon becomes a repository for unacknowledged human needs, the ocean a messenger to humanity on the shore. I gave an initial solo performance based in these elements in Exeter in 2014, filled with references to my own odyssey through the maze of prescribed medications – a quasi-confessional performance which I came to feel did a disservice to the scale factor of Ford's findings.

I then sought to develop the piece further as a duo with Butoh dancer Yumino Seki in studio sessions in Hastings, erasing information about my personal stake in favour of an expansive view on collective human suffering and its ecological correlates. We made experiments such as literalistic dancing of the side effects listed on a Prozac leaflet (spasming, electric shocks), but overall the process of oneiric imagery arising through the empty Butoh body remained the driver. I kept writing and composing music, refining dramaturgy, and questioning whether any of my poetry should make it into the piece or if it was just preparatory musing (as is often the case). This continued back in Glasgow, where *Shrimp Dance* as I am presenting it here evolved in collaboration with Jer and Jamie.

In the final version not much is explicit about who I might be as a person, but traces in the choreography and my emotional engagement hopefully contribute to a piece that has been authentically lived even as it reaches beyond the personal. And events in my own life are tacitly represented – for example my trip to visit a friend in Cullen in the North of Scotland during a period of depression. I went walking to the shore at dusk and lay down on the rocks, feeling the weight of my sorrow as a flock of gulls circled above me, providing a perfect stereo image which I recorded on my phone and inserted in the scene at **24m 15s** in the submitted video.

Shrimp Dance employs transformations of scale: Professor Ford kindly sent me the shrimp themselves, less than a centimetre long, and these are displayed in vials next to similarly sized, half-moon shaped antidepressants on a plinth at the theatre entrance (figures 8 and 9). The use of concrete objects like these, coupled with more hidden biographical material such as the seagulls, is typical of my process: material and socially-charged phenomena are brought in contact with my personal circumstances, and these percolate through my life and interact obliquely with the core studio sessions from which dance emerges (in conversation with music composition and writing). The final creation phases generally involve dramaturgy, lighting design, costume, and venue logistics. In the case of *Shrimp Dance* there was also the collaborative interplay of discussing the issues of the piece with Jer and Jamie, and collectively establishing the final musical and visual identity of the work.

Jamie's visuals shift from watery depths and lunar landscapes to a live-projected microscope trained on leaves and moss (fig. 10) as well as his own tongue and nasal hair, blown up to cinema sized proportions. Jer's sound design moves from hydrophone recordings of tiny shrimp movements to distant seagulls, cavernous drones, and sudden silences where my live breath and gasping as I dance are amplified through contrast. My body amongst these warpings of scale is decontextualised, my dancing happening in an every-no-place, between ocean and shore, individual daydream and consumer nexus.

The main driver behind our choices is the desire to use Ford's shrimp research as a fulcrum against which to shift depression from an individual problem to a societal and ecological one, and a phenomenon of connection rather than separation. The emotional waste of consumer neoliberalism (hidden despair) gathers in the oceans, returning to us in the choreography of shrimp. Behind this recontextualisation of one medical condition from individualised to systemic-ecological is the more general process of Playing with the Cut: transcending identification with the skin barrier to reframe selfhood as collective and entangled. *Shrimp Dance* is then the first exemplar to be analysed in chapter four of how ecological selfhood can be expressed.
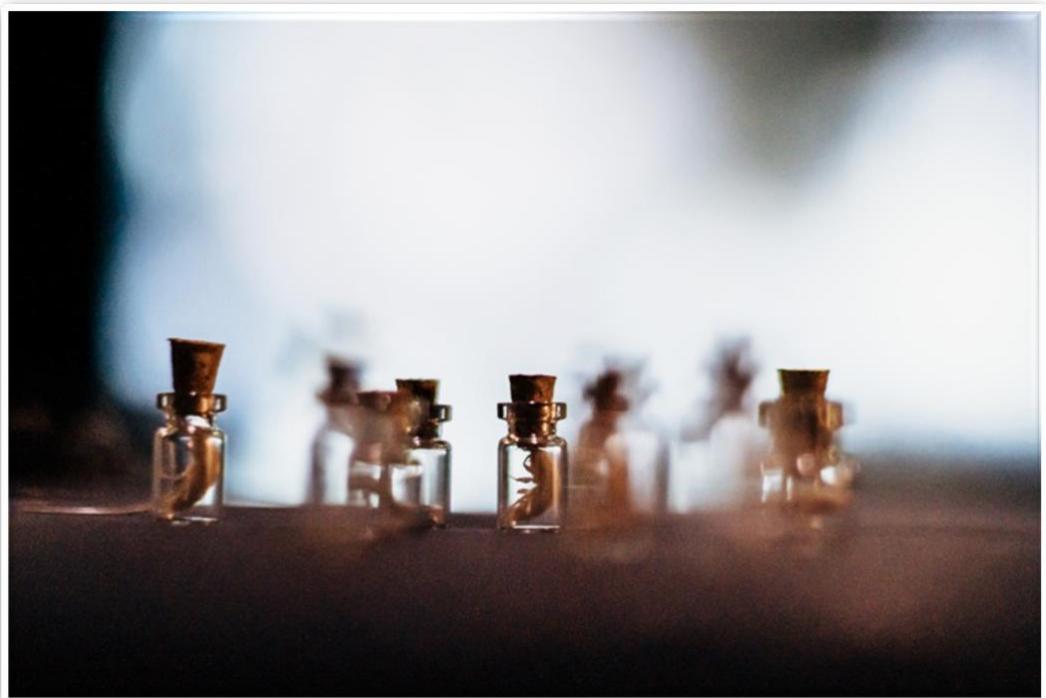
Figure 8: Hartley, B. (2017) *Shrimp & Antidepressant Vials.*
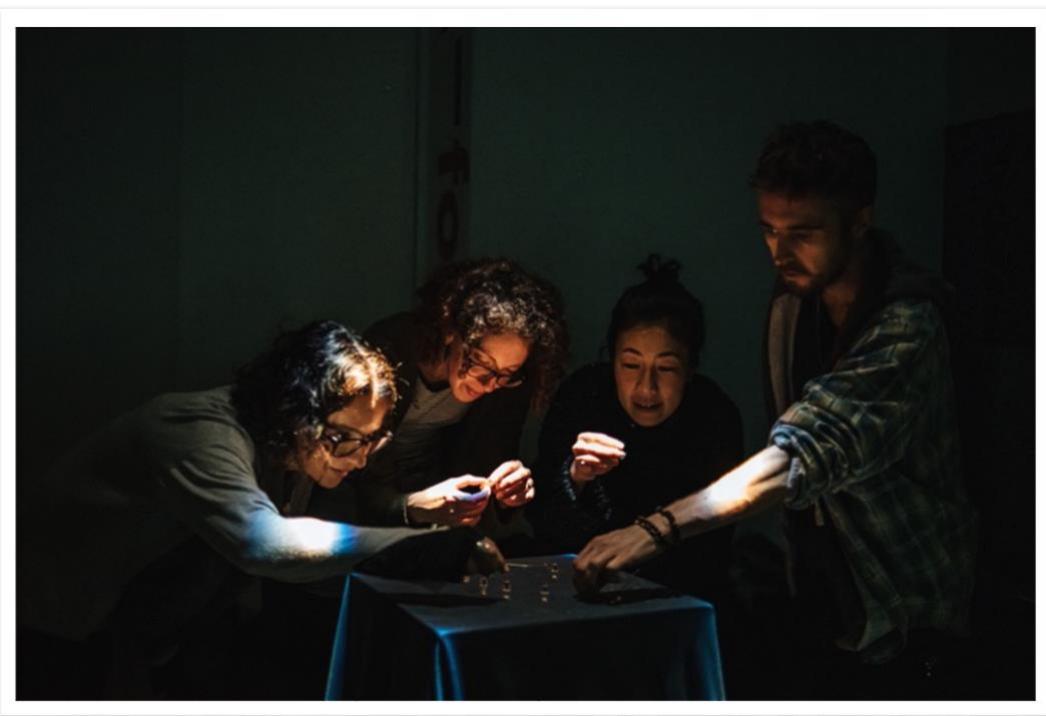
Figure 9: Hartley, B. (2017) *Audience at the Plinth.*
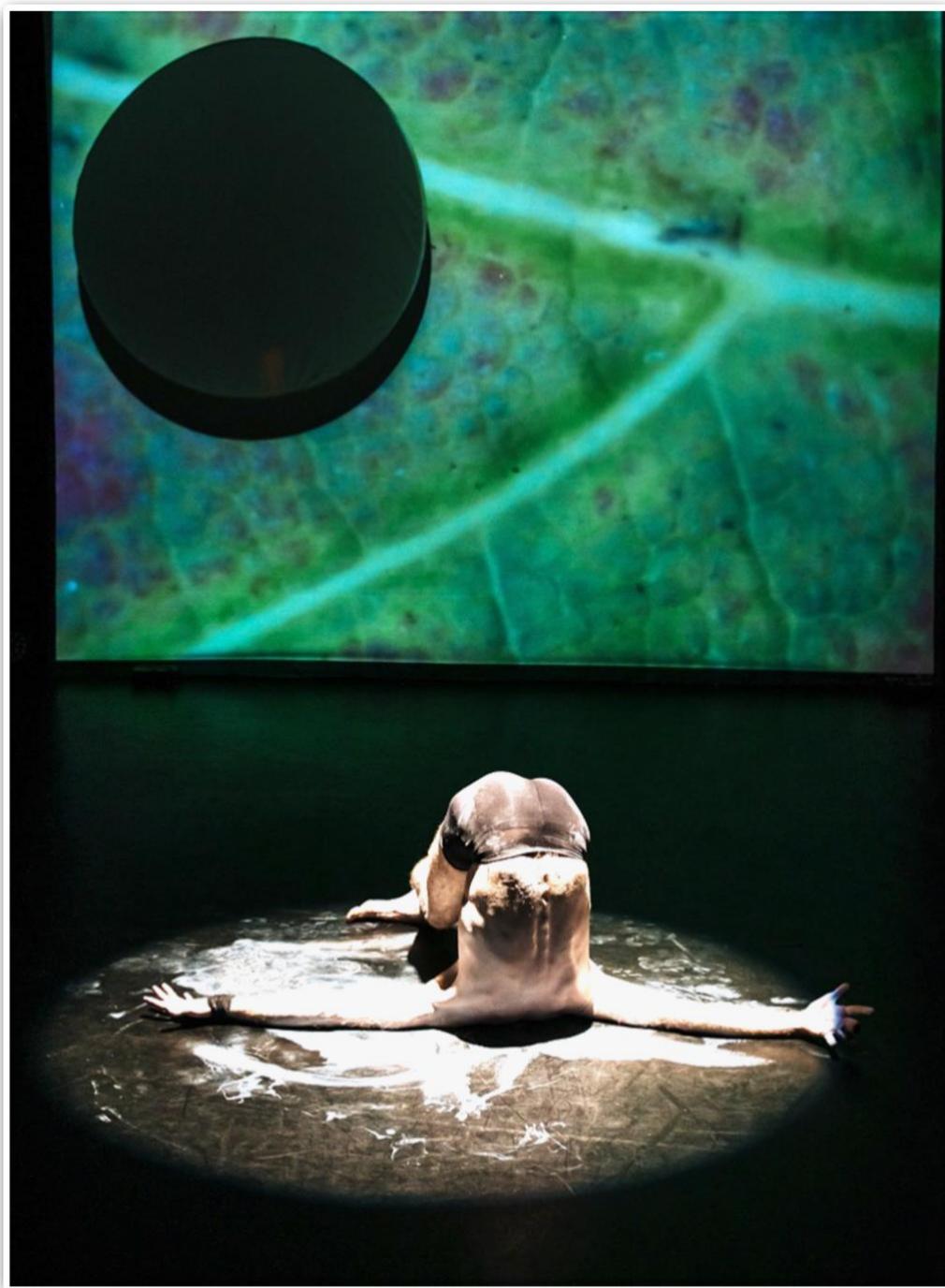
Figure 10: Hartley, B. (2017) *Live Microscope.*

<u>Please watch *Shrimp Dance* before continuing</u>.

My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off

(2022. Duration 27m 57s)
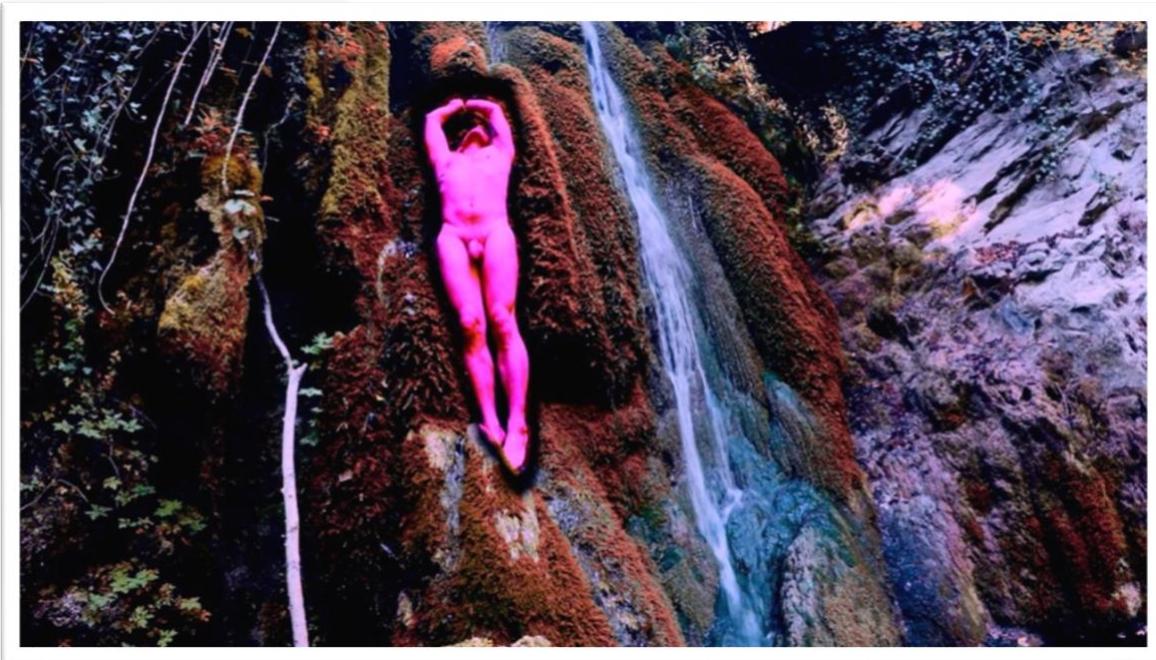
Figure 11: Henry, P. M (2022) *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off.*

This piece sprang from a commission by Art.Earth (in association with Falmouth University), to whose *Borrowed Time* symposium I was invited as a keynote performer. Though originally scheduled as a live stage performance in Devon in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic meant the event was moved to November 2021, by which point I was on an Artist in Residence programme in Bologna and elected to deliver a film instead. It was largely shot on location in Italy, though it also incorporates green screen experiments I had done at home at the height of lockdown in 2020 (fig. 12), and archive footage of a stage performance in Bristol in 2018 (fig. 13). The green screen scenes were done shortly after the start of my PhD, when the pandemic put everything into free-fall and a project geared towards connection and entanglement was plunged into its seeming opposite: solitary research done in social isolation.

The theme of the *Borrowed Time* symposium was extinction, ecological collapse and our stake in these as mortal beings. *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* is my response to it, begun during a period when the ramifications of human behaviour on the earth, other species, and each other was most abstract – I was living alone in a Glasgow tenement flat, with little visible connection

to others besides the birds outside and the occasional exhausted bee I tried to revive on my windowsill. The scenes shot when I made it to Italy documented my first chance to see new landscapes and collaborate with others in more than a year.
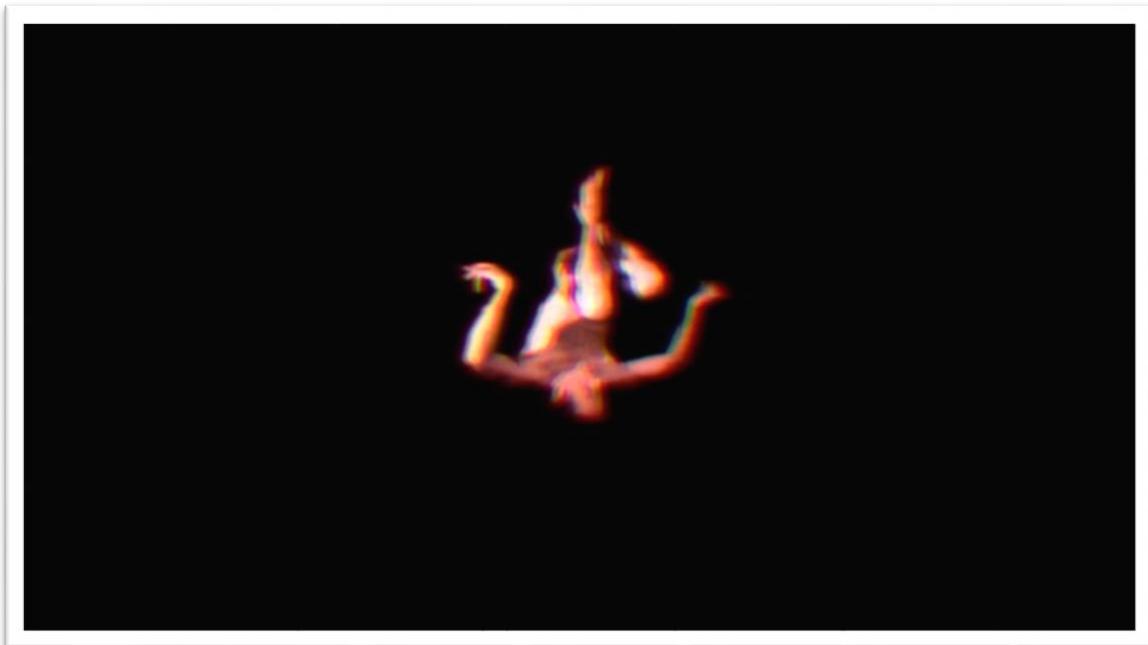
Figure 12: Henry, P. M. (2022) *Green Screen Experiment*
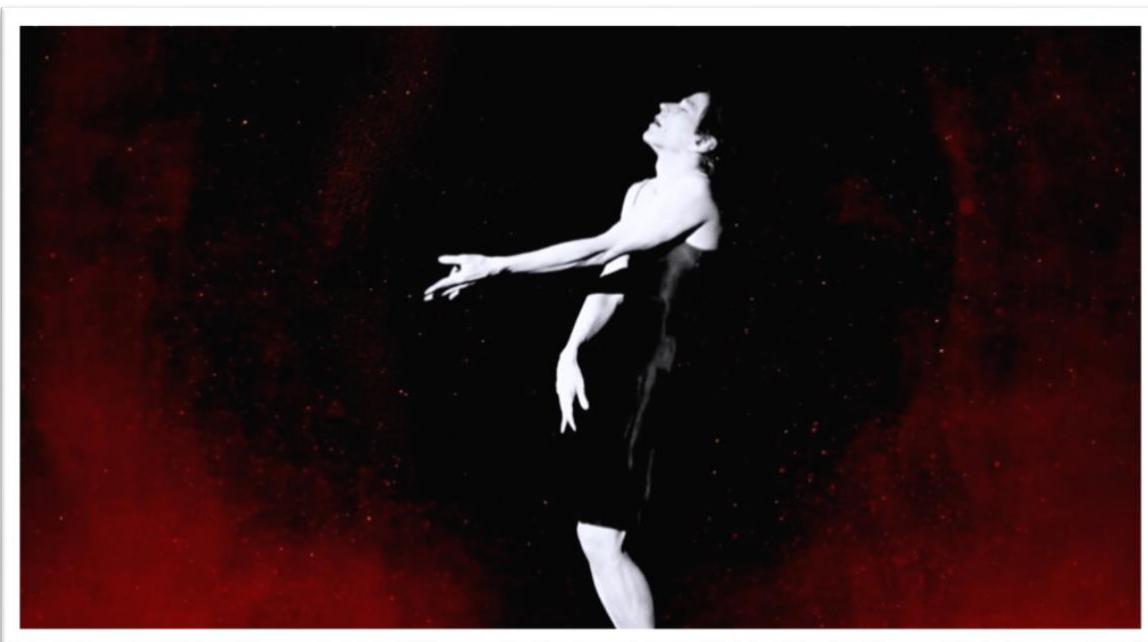
Figure 13: Henry, P. M. (2022) *Bristol Archive Footage*

Where *Shrimp Dance* aims to link the self with the world by opening the bodymind through material spillages of medication and fluids, *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* takes an opposite approach: mass extinctions and climatic disruption (already outwith the skin-bound self to the extent that they can seem abstract) are collapsed inwards into the bodymind of an individual human. Concrete experiences of death occur for us through the loss of friends and family, perhaps a windowsill bee, and the struggle to relate to our own deaths. In order to render distant extinctions palpable, I risked solipsism by making the performance all about me, my death, my paralysis in the face of climate crisis, and the irruption into my dreams of the spectre of the Anthropocene – *wet green death of millions of eyes closing*, as the film has it. It opens with one of the earliest photos of my childhood (fig. 14), accompanied by a cassette recording from 1982 of my father asking me to sing. This explodes into shards falling through a void, linking individual life with the cosmic whole, and is followed by a meditation on the mystery of being implicated in both of these scales in a time of ecological collapse.
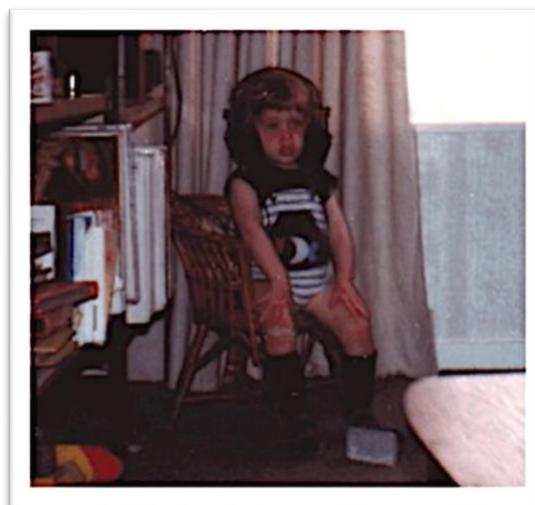
Figure 14: Henry, J. (1983*) Childhood Photo.*

As with *Shrimp Dance*, the film deals in surrealism, leviathans turning in their sleep and dismembered body parts chasing one another through the void. Such images derive from my core practice as presented in my journals, and are extrapolated and embellished as I shape them for performance. One consolation of being forced into making films throughout the pandemic is that they allow a more visible manifestation of these scenarios through editing, video effects (fig. 15), music, and voiceovers. I sought to leverage these tactics in compensation for the loss of live presence found in stage performance. Where *Shrimp Dance* offers immediate bodily

presence to its audience, this work and *Excuse Me I am Expanding* give more scope for the reframing and recontextualising of the body which I will call **orienting** in chapter four.
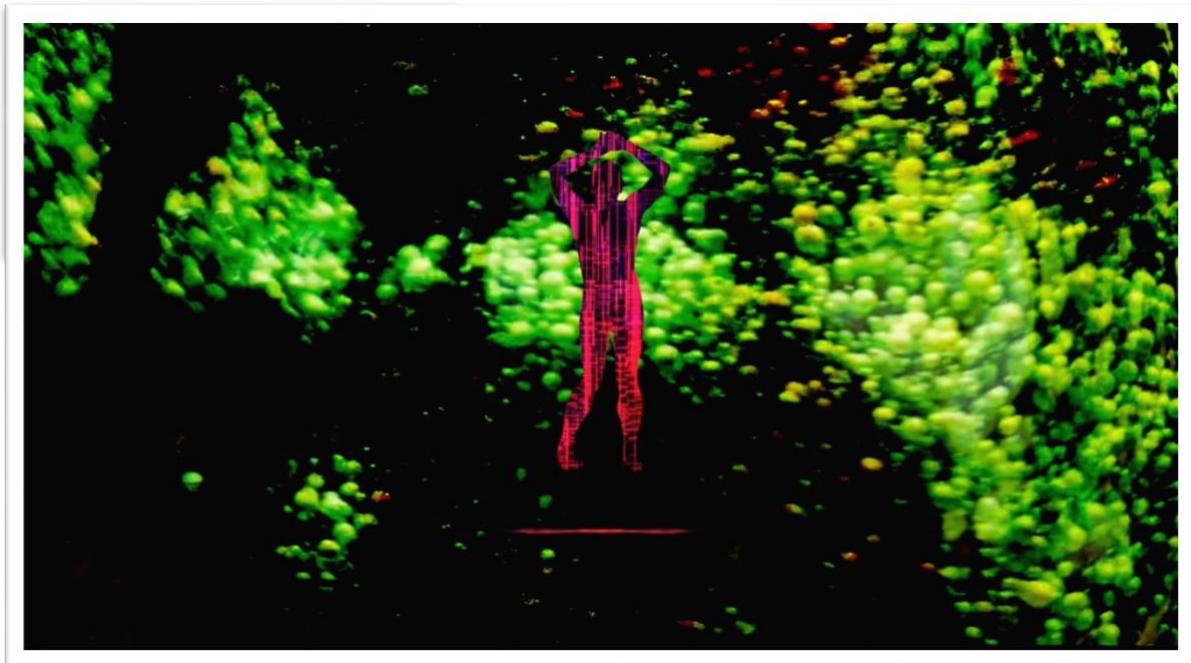
Figure 15: Henry, P. M. (2022*) Video Effects.*

The performance comprises five main episodes whose aesthetics resemble those of music videos and video art rather than narrative cinema or documentary. The episodes are intended to accrete and build in the mind of the viewer, not in order to advance an argument or tell a story, but to generate and sustain a mood: the complex and ambiguous embodied experience of living with a mortal human body, as a member of a species whose impact we now know is catastrophically out-sized and deleterious to other species and earth systems.

Please watch *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off* before continuing.

Excuse Me I am Expanding

(2022. Duration 34m 18s)

Figure 16: Alexandru-Popa, C. (2023) *Excuse Me I am Expanding (Buchanan Castle).*

I began this piece with no social or political theme in mind, thinking to isolate my research question and show how ecological selfhoods can be expressed without their application to specific issues. I found however that themes of identity and cultural difference inserted themselves inexorably since they formed my context – I was in Japan on a Visiting Doctoral Researcher placement at Keio University. I realised as I proceeded that, ecological selfhood being intrinsically relational, there is little use in making art which simply states *I am an ecological self now* without showing what that means in interdependence with my geographical and cultural surroundings.

I filmed many of the scenes alone, using a 360° digital camera purchased in Japan. This allowed me to document my dancing and daily existence there, from time-lapse footage of cycling in busy districts to dancing in the treetops outside Kyoto (fig. 17) and in secluded bamboo forests behind Fushimi Inari shrine (fig. 2). I also had assistance from Japanese film maker Shuta Shimmyo in capturing a live performance at Rakudoan Theatre in Tokyo and outdoor dancing in a cemetery in front of Ushiku Daibutsu, the tallest Buddha statue in Japan (fig. 18). Shuta is

a Butoh producer and old friend who has on several occasions suggested filming in culturally charged locations such as Ushiku Daibutsu and the Aokigahara or 'suicide' forest near Mount Fuji; without his prompting I would not have dared for fear of being seen to be insensitive.
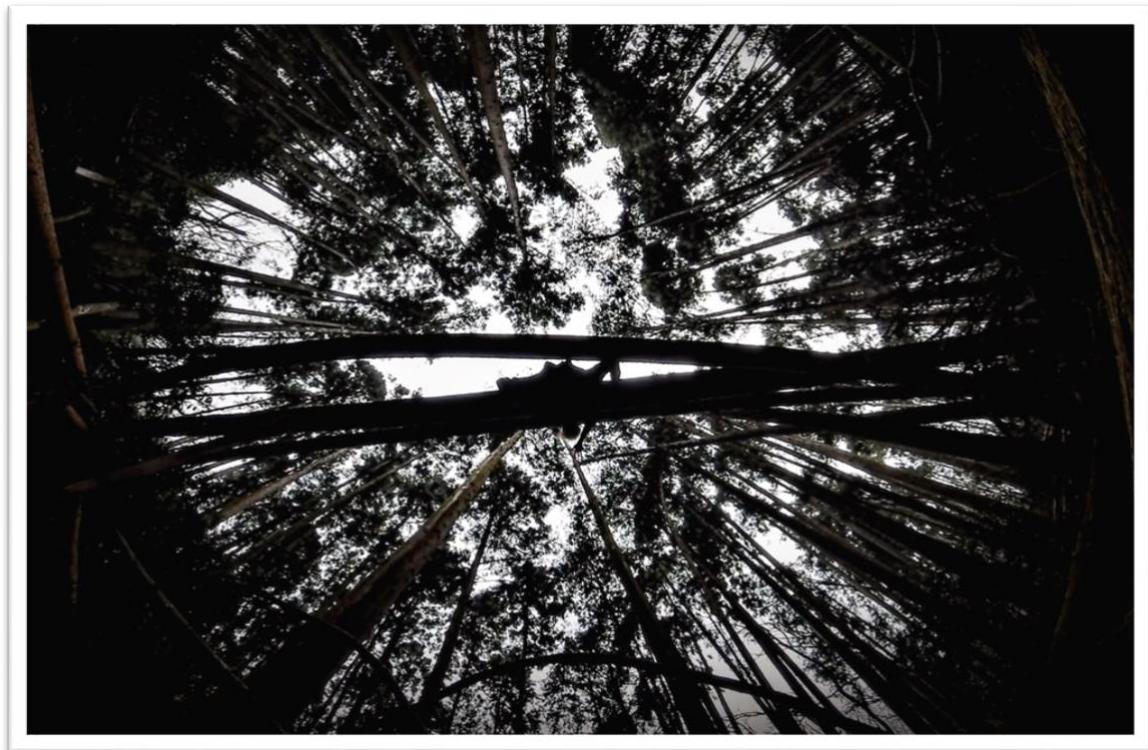
Figure 17: Henry, P. M (2023) *Kyoto Treetops.*

Figure 18: Shimmyo, S. (2023) *Ushiku Daibutsu.*

Though happy with the results of filming in Japan, I was perturbed at making a performance solely from them. My aim in this project is to show a method of expanding selfhood into ecological coherence and a less dissonant orientation towards our immersion with all things, implying a felt sense of ecological sanity. But in truth I was deeply unwell in Japan, and after my return to Glasgow spent many months recovering (during which I received diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and autistic traits). I thought I could see this in the footage: a being in crisis, seeking to connect but carrying a bearing of loneliness and dissociation.

My thoughts returned to the idea mentioned in chapter one of a 'conventional truth' coincident with 'ultimate truth' in Buddhism (McGuire, 2015, p. 39). If ultimate truth relates to ecological interdependence and an expanding cut between me and not-me, conventional truth articulates the largely skin-bound specificity of being *someone*, with a personal history, genealogy, and psychology. My method aims to generate experiences of ecological truth but would miss the mark if it did not accommodate the need for a healthy conventional self whose needs and wounds must be respected (I consider this issue further in chapter four). This realisation changed the trajectory of the performance and entailed further shooting.

I grew up near Glasgow but my heritage is largely Irish, and my main experiences of belonging in childhood happened in my mother's hometown of Bray, County Wicklow. During lockdown I had finally applied for my Irish passport, and my Irishness (and concomitant lack of true belonging in Scotland) had been on my mind. I went back *home*, filming further scenes and recording music with my cousin Eoin, letting him guide things as he situated me in abandoned mines and peat bogs, plying me with stories of our family and their involvement in these landscapes with the struggle to gain independence from the British. I also filmed amongst the bizarre geology of the Burren in County Clare (fig. 19). I wore the same white makeup and kimono shirt I had in Japan, a reminder that going home was not so simple for me – I did not grow up in Ireland, and my rootlessness was no doubt a factor in propelling me out of my primary culture to find a practice I could resonate with in Japan. In Ireland, I was in search of a centre around which my hybrid cultural and psychological experiences could gather.

Something still felt missing, however: an atmosphere of weightless suspension between worlds which has been continual in my life, and which I believe also defines living in a neoliberal society (though in my case it may be compounded by my neurodivergence). I often feel adrift

between the neoliberal consumerism around me and the terrifying and incompatible signs of ecological over-reach on the other. This clash exposes the individualist dream as not working at a species-level, but does not empower a new way to live in the Anthropocene.
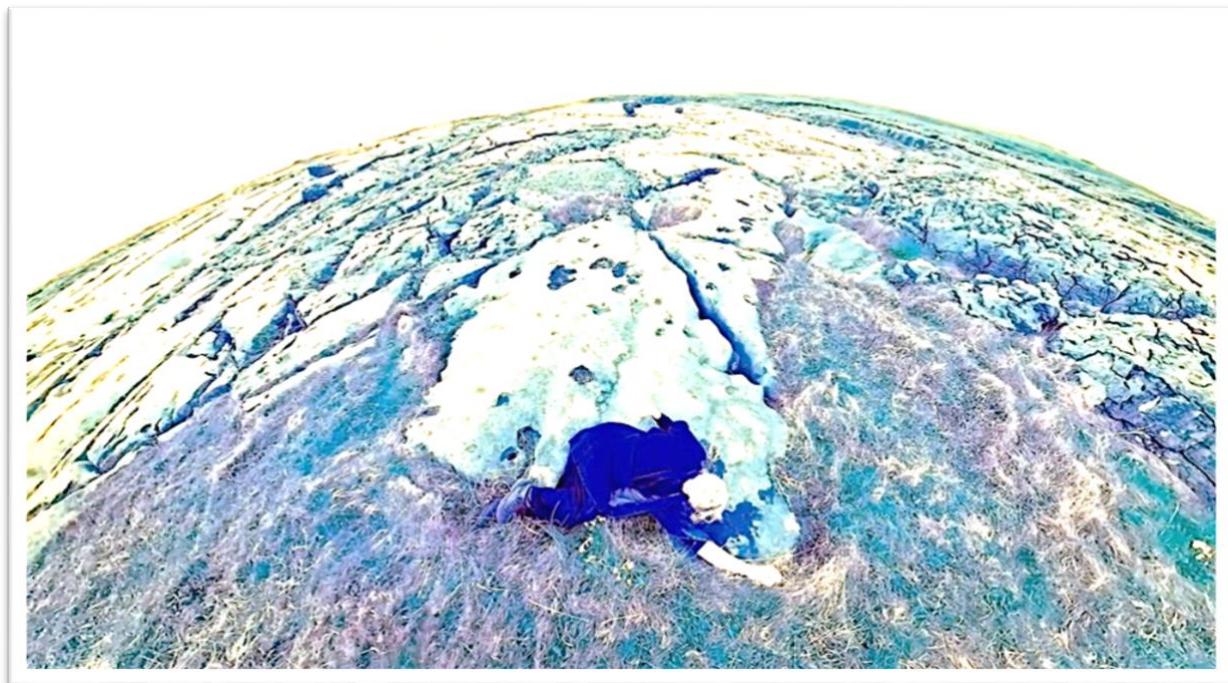
Figure 19: Edmond, M. (2023) *The Burren.*

To try to capture this feeling I went to Buchanan Castle in Stirlingshire with film maker Christian Alexandru-Popa (fig. 16). The castle was requisitioned as a field hospital during the Second World War (treating Rudolf Hess after his bizarre crash landing nearby), and abandoned shortly afterwards. It seemed like a place which could evoke both human folly and nature's response. We filmed amongst the crumbling and decay of the buildings and the great trees sprouting through the ruins. I wore the same red gown I had bought in an Italian market for *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off*, another gesture towards the tangled life experiences I was trying to navigate.

The same feeling of ambivalence and dislocation guided the subsequent editing process. The performance cuts continuously between Japan, Ireland, and Scotland, backwards and forwards in time, supported and subverted by a soundtrack morphing between noise, Japanese and Irish traditional music, and an improvised post-rock track recorded with my cousins in Bray. My editing decisions are intended to express the feeling of being out of joint and in too many places

at once, partly by highlighting performance choices I was unaware of during the filming process. The performance in Tokyo (shot first) saw me dancing Butoh whilst singing old Irish folk song *She Moved Through the Fair*. I knew most of the Japanese audience would not understand the words, and wanted to emphasise my foreignness since I was performing prior to my teacher Seisaku and did not want to play the losing game of trying to blend in with venerable Japanese Butoh artists. The cultural disarray of being an Irish-Scottish Butoh dancer in Japan continued to the kimono-clad scenes in the Irish countryside, and the ghostly dislocation among the ruins in Scotland.

This sense of being embedded in multiple cultures but belonging to none of them forms one thread of continuity in the final performance. Another is the attempt to 'dig where I stand', as Scottish ecological writer Alastair McIntosh has it (McIntosh, 2004, p. 3); to embody my specificity, scrambled inheritance, trauma, and uncertainty, and to seek to expand anyway. I feel I achieved this, but not without significant health risks. This factor will be part of my method of Playing with the Cut in chapter four. An alternative title for the performance was *Holding Water,* after Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* (2017) – the immersed predicament of opening to fluid ecological interdependence whilst keeping body and soul together.

Please watch *Excuse Me I am Expanding* before continuing.

My Practice Works thus approach the question of embodied generation and expression of ecological selfhood through three main strategies. *With Your Eyes Closed* seeks to dissolve the duality between myself as researcher and my audience as receiver of my research by offering a guided somatic experience which points towards the phenomenological realm I am studying. My Practice Journals record my solitary progress in the studio and the inner shifts in selfhood my practice engenders. And the performances show the modes of expression I evolved to express such shifts. The next chapter discloses my analysis of the Practice Works and the emerging method of Playing with the Cut which undergirds them.

Chapter Four: The Researcher's Gaze

This chapter is an act of abstraction, not of translation. In my introduction I referred to the school of general semantics founded by Alfred Korzybski, in which 'consciousness of abstracting' is something of a mantra (1948, p. 498). This is a key concern for me, often popularised as cognisance that the 'map is not the territory' (Read, 1975, pp. 246-247). It promotes ongoing recognition that modelling or mapping real world phenomena through language and symbols produces exactly that: a model/map which is distinct from what it depicts and is all but certain to be reductive, leaving much of the life and pluri-dimensional scope of practice behind. This realisation may account for the tears of the academic mentioned in chapter two when they tried dancing rather than writing about Butoh.

My analysis seeks to organise and consider my practice results. It is particularly useful in considering my Practice Journals since they are the only traces of inner events which I deliberately kept safe from the researcher's gaze at the time. But consciousness of abstracting urges caution that the journals themselves are already a map, one step removed from what happened and only forming as full an account as I could produce with words. Analysis of them introduces a second layer of abstraction, and a second chance to lose information.

As noted in chapter two, I use grounded theory to code the most salient features of my Practice Works – concretely this means reading, listening to, and watching the pieces numerous times whilst noting the properties that seem structurally or functionally important in them, and grouping them into coherent codes. This enables is a topographical view of my practice from which the key features which nurture access to ecological selfhood and its expression become visible. But I will adapt these results as appropriate to my more intimate experiences of practice since these hold more depth of information.

The Cambridge Dictionary lists as one meaning of analysis 'the act of examining a substance, especially by separating it into its parts, in order to discover what it is or contains' (Cambridge University Press, 2021). This is redolent of Descartes' vivisection of animals (Descartes, 2006 [1637], pp. 46-48), which no doubt uncovered knowledge about organ and nerve functions, but

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at the expense of the animals – destroying his objects of enquiry and, ethics aside, rendering their lives unresearchable. The current chapter required no murder to produce, but it is still a dissection which slices fluidly interdependent processes (or perhaps one complex process) into discrete categories.

This framing is important since engendering ecological selfhood inheres in a contrary activity: collapsing categories, resisting fixed identities, and rejoining separations. The imposition of separative categories on living reality is after all a special talent of the Cartesian and neoliberal ontologies I am striving to counter. Descartes' animals would not have come back to life had he kept on slicing.

What follows elevates my thesis, hopefully, to the status of outcome-producing. I see it as a way to prepare my audience for re-immersion in practice, which is the start and end point of my project – through engagement with my performances, their own dance exploration, or their ongoing relations with embodiment. My intention is for **With Your Eyes Closed** to have offered a direct apprehension of selfhood expansion which you can use to track the distinction between territory and map: that was an experience, and these are words on a page.

*Please refer to **Appendices A-C** for full enumeration of the coding considered below. The spreadsheets are time-stamped where they refer to a video or audio document, and the colour categories used there are retained in this text for ease of reference:* red *for selective codes,* green *for axial codes, and* blue *for open codes.*

The Subject-Body

With Your Eyes Closed aims to invoke for the listener the phenomenon of the radial subject-body (Nagatomo, 1992, p. 5). Grounded theory analysis of it illustrates the abstraction issue just discussed, and by extension uncovers a preliminary answer to how embodied practice can generate ecological selfhood. My coding (**Appendix A**) comprises a list of the most prominent features: compositional choices such as intimate speech, introspective language, and musical drone/phasing. It reads like a fairly typical qualitative description of the data offered. When performing the coding I experienced myself as a bounded subject, implicitly separate from my research object and cut off from immersion in it. I could appreciate the tactics used, and how

they might operate in interaction with a listener.

But the value of the piece, which inheres in the self-apprehension to be had by dropping analysis or conceptualising (no-thinking) and devoting to somatic experience, was in my experience nowhere to be found. When I listen to it instead in the intended mode of empty embodiment, my subject-body surfaces easily in my consciousness. You can explore this distinction by **listening to it twice**, once with the receptivity employed in guided meditation, and again with your critical hat on. The act of parsing seems to cause the meaning of the work to disappear.

I consider this to be a finding in itself: the tension between the modes of analysis, in which the thinking self maintains distance in order to codify what it perceives, and embodied immersion, in which it surrenders through the body into interdependence with the world or the work being presented. If the piece has performed its job (and you yours by approaching it somatically rather than critically), you will perhaps have reached some understanding of this through an experience of bleeding beyond the perimeter of your skin in a way that defies demarcation.

With Your Eyes Closed thus performs twin functions: it offers a direct entry to the research area for my audience, and highlights the issue of the researcher's gaze. The work illuminates the analysis rather than vice versa, since the actual experience of expanding selfhood vanishes under the spotlight of analytical scrutiny. When I speak of embodied-imaginal dimensions being lost in translation to text, this is what I mean.

My first analytical insight inheres then in the failure of grounded theory to access the core of the piece: a verification that the empty bodymind, fundamental to Butoh dance, seems to be a prerequisite for experiencing ecological selfhood (revealed in this case by the radial subject-body's implication of the self in the world beyond the skin). Analysis specifically blocks access to the living experience on offer since the self/other cut is enacted, and made intransigent, by the researcher/research object paradigm. An empty bodymind and devotion to embodied expansion are key steps here as in my other Practice Works, and will form the foundation of my method by the end of the chapter.

The work discussed below is more complex and amenable to investigation by analysis. Nonetheless, it springs from the same opening gestures of emptying and devotion, with which

categorical abstraction is at odds, and holds itself aloof from analysis to some extent. Slippage between this text and what it refers to reverses the arrow between practice and analysis, revealing analysis as one way in which ecological selfhood will likely *not* be experienced or adequately shared. This is my reason for stressing no-thinking in practice and its reception. Research communication here entails a continual appeal to consciousness of abstraction (map vs. territory), and to holistic bodymind engagement over subject-object dualism.

Getting Weirder

My **Practice Journals** report my immersion in more complex, baroque forays into the experiential domain introduced through *With Your Eyes Closed*. Where my films explore how to express realisation of ecological selfhoods, the journals focus on how to generate and sustain them in the first place. The entries depict the strategies I use in seeking to do so, and the results obtained in the form of phenomenological experiences of bodymind and environment. Grounded theory analysis is much more fruitful here since it identifies recurring correspondences between orientations and tools adopted on my part, and their effects in nurturing or inhibiting experiences of an expanding cut. The names of all codes are my own descriptors.

Four selective code groupings present themselves (**Appendix B**). Essentials of practice directly addresses the question of how a somatic practice can adapt Butoh methods to encourage realisations of ecological selfhood – the tactics used, as well as the types of phenomena which typically arise and how they can be worked with. Enablers of practice indicates supporting aids to practice when it falters, and the strategies necessary to protect it from intrusion by unhelpful influences. Inhibitors of practice designates factors which also impaired my studio sessions but which I concluded had no remedial strategies other than to accept them as variables and indicators that I do not practice in isolation from the circumstances of my life. Lastly, effects of practice does not directly address my research questions, but I include it because it looks at how encouraging ecological selfhood within practice bleeds into my life outside the studio, and how particular studio sessions resonate across time. Whilst outside the strict scope of the project, it is valuable as an exploration of the wider merit of such practice.

The axial codes falling under essentials of practice are: stance of openness, core phenomena arising, and ways of relating to phenomena. These three phases are loosely chronological, though in a given practice session they will bleed into one another and recur cyclically. Stance of openness is the basic orientation through which practice is entered and maintained – it can be contrasted with scepticism, guardedness, or certitude. Its open codes are emptying and devotion. In emptying there is a voluntary, embodied bracketing of daily knowledge about the self with its limits and quiddity, as well as a cessation of thinking and theorising. Paradoxically, this bracketing is really an opening: what are excluded are normal categorisations such as *I am a human person, with a body **this** size and a dividing line **here** between my insides and my outsides*. In their place I put a sustained commitment to openness, bidirectionally – that is, my insides spill out into the environment, and the environment is invited inside. This is described in the journals as **disappearing**, **vanishing**, **becoming no one**, and giving rise to a **sense of humming soma exhibiting as presence**.

Devotion describes a tuning of my intention towards practice and the phenomena arising in it. In place of discursive thought, which is breathed out through emptying (literally imagining thoughts being exhaled can be helpful), my intention is simply to fall in love with what is arising, giving myself to it unwaveringly. It feels like being faithful to the phenomena on their own terms, and doing this functions to sustain and enhance practice. Emptying and devotion are the key orientations already identified as enabling the subject-body experience in listening to ***With Your Eyes Closed***. They sound simple but require autodidactic experimentation – I find myself learning and relearning them over the years as my thinking mind creeps in in new ways. They can be clarified by asking *am I forming sentences or judgements in my mind?* and *am I manipulating phenomena or petitioning them with love?* Ultimately they hinge upon dropping thought.

Core phenomena arising describes the results of the first phase: the spontaneous percepts appearing in embodied consciousness. These are what is devoted to, and they are the reason I wrote in chapter three that my practice is not egoically controlled (since the core phenomena themselves are, experientially, in charge). They can be split into the open codes imaging, analogising and multiplicity. Imaging is, as discussed in chapter two, a core Butoh technique of allowing qualia to arise spontaneously in experience, and letting them influence the body. These qualia are frequently surreal, often ecological and evolutionary in nature, and tend to effect a change in the sort of entity I feel myself to be.

Analogising and multiplicity are really flavours of imaging. Analogising crops up frequently, perhaps due to the explicitly ecological research question framing my practice sessions, and consists of parallels drawn between my body and the other stuff of 'nature':

> I felt the life of my teeth, calcium and mineral evolved to their form just like stones and rocks. They were there just because life grew them … My hand brushed my cheek and I felt how my stubble had grown of its own accord, exactly like grass from the soil.
>
> (**Entry One**)

Multiplicity denotes a pluralising of the bodymind. I often hold multiple selves, bodies and spacetime scales in relationship, and these nurture, delegate, and submit to each other (synchronically and diachronically). I am avoiding reference to a fragmentation of self because experientially it feels more like enlargement through complexity and relationship:

> I put my own hand on my cheek, a mothering gesture bringing emotion, relief but also the urge to cry… Soft hands come from all around me, pushing my body lovingly into new shapes. Hands arise from inside the body too.
>
> (**Entry Ten**)

> There is the researcher … concerned about getting it right ... There is the technical dancer, mindful of training … There is the being, the one who vanishes into the dancing … permeated by moonlight and leaves … I reach a synthesis of some kind, lit up and dancing with moon-blood … a mixture of moonlightdancer and functional human, ready for the world outside.
>
> (**Entry Fifteen**)

The third phase is ways of relating to phenomena. I identify four orientations adopted towards my relations with the images/qualia arising: merging, resonating, expansion, and metamorphosis. Merging entails intentionally collapsing the distinction between observer and image. This is mutually exclusive of the researcher's gaze, leveraging devotion in order to fall fully into the dance, with no remainder of self left to observe from outside. Resonating happens when I relate to phenomena animistically and in, I think, Buber's sense of I-Thou (Buber and

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Smith, 1958). Images and materials are dignified as persons. Difference is maintained, but still with no remainder in that my whole self is given over to resonation:

> I see through the square window green plants rising: they are speaking to me greenly, saying *up* and *down* and *grow* … I do not become the plants exactly; I resonate with them and exchange energy … Briefly I resonate more with the red brick, sandstone redding my body deep inside.
>
> (**Entry Nineteen**)

Expansion refers to specific cases of emptying wherein I consider the world around me as happening inside my body, my body as enlarging to encompass the world, or a mixture of the two.

Metamorphosis describes the overall change undergone by someone practising these techniques, and is a staple descriptor in Butoh (Fraleigh, 2010). Its emergence as an open code within ways of relating to phenomena points up the limits of coding once more. Metamorphosis might have been an axial code subsuming much of what I have written above, just as devotion (stance of openness) could come under ways of relating to phenomena. Appropriately for an ecological practice, the codes flow into and immerse one another, and their hierarchical grouping in the spreadsheets is somewhat misleading. Perhaps this sheds light on why the researcher's gaze is inappropriate for the moment of actual practice in which everything must intermingle freely – recall Coccia's notion of immersion in which there is no *outside* from which to research (2019, p. 32).

At any rate, metamorphosis describes feeling deeply transformed into another being, material or surreal. Viewed as a unique category, it is perhaps the end of a spectrum running resonating-merging-metamorphosis, where resonating keeps me distinct from phenomena, merging blends me with them, and metamorphosis seems to leave *me* behind entirely such that I become someone else:

> I sprouted tentacles myself. Became Cthulhu. Tentacles out from my foot souls [sic], under my arms, my hair a Medusa nest of squid growth waving … My face became strong, sexual, lascivious.
>
> (**Entry Five**)

> Rain falls on my crown. Gradually I am drenched. I feel my torso and upwards

detach from my legs…. My legs are those of a Japanese ghost (I have no feet).

(**Entry Fifteen**)

Enablers of practice subsumes the axial codes expertise, creating a vessel, and supporting aids. Expertise acknowledges the physical and emotional training I have undergone in Butoh and performance, producing embodied knowledge of gravity, muscle, fluid, flexibility, and balance. It also includes familiarity and a sense of safety in encountering the strange and sometimes drastic transformations prompted by image-work. My journals show an increase in enthusiasm as practice uncovers weird shifts in my selfhood rather than unease or fright. This seems to be borne of gradual exposure and its attendant reassurance that it is safe to explore such experiences.

Creating a vessel breaks down into circumscribing, aimlessness, impartiality, simplicity, and respecting body energies. These strategies create boundaries marking which types of phenomena and orientation belong within practice. There is, once more, a paradox in that the boundaries are used to keep out influences which would restrict openness – boundaries to ward off boundaries. Circumscribing means creating a private space with protected time parameters, the goal being to consciously drop socialised behavioural restrictions for the duration of practice. Aimlessness refers to ongoing recognition that discovery happens when there is no goal in mind, and that the clamping effect of thoughts such as *I am researching* (e.g. **entry three**), *I am choreographing,* or *I am being productive* are deleterious and tend to fix a selfhood – researcher, artist, good boy – based in individual striving rather than interbeing.

Impartiality maintains a non-judgemental stance towards what is arising; allowing newness, ugliness, deadness, and uncertainties to exist without shaping them towards aesthetic or emotional preference. Simplicity means using clear anchors to return to when the thinking mind gets busy despite my intentions. An example from **entry five**: 'My only prompt was to empty my body, wait, and use the mantra "Please come and dance my body. I love you"'. Respecting body energies refers to a choice I sometimes encounter between prefabricated ideas (a map) I thought to explore in the session, and my body's unfolding experience (the territory). I choose the latter whenever possible.

Supporting aids describes resources I make use of beyond the core activities of maintaining

openness and devoting to spontaneously arising images. They comprise stimulus (an inspiring **image or prompt**), spirit guides (phrases from my Butoh teachers or **others** whose articulation of ecological selfhood gave me encouragement), music, physical materials, and synchronicity.

Regarding this last code: I find throughout my sessions that surprising confluences between my embodied imagination and the world *outside* it – in the form of environmental and musical happy accidents – spring up and give a sense of confirmation to my openings into ecological selfhood:

> The forgotten stone appeared to my vision and somehow I knew that this was the ending of the dance. As I bent to pick it up the Basinski track faded right on cue (1 hour and 3 minutes).
>
> (**Entry Three**)

These are experienced as meaningful interactions between or within a blurring me-not-me, suggesting that when I open myself to what is beyond the skin boundary, what is beyond also opens itself to me. I am content to take pragmatic encouragement from such occurrences without ascribing a rational cause to them. Synchronicities have arisen consistently throughout my performance career as well as in solitary practice.

Inhibitors of practice gathers open codes which I accept as variables of practice: isolation and capacity. Isolation denotes a lack of connection to others and life in general, something to be expected during solitary research and exacerbated by the lockdowns of the COVID pandemic during which I conducted the sessions. Capacity refers to my physical energy reserves and mental health (which fluctuated across the period of research). An isolated, distraught, or numb self simply has a harder task in opening to ecological selfhood, and a more entrenched separation to bleed beyond. I will stress inhibitors in my model since they point to risks in Playing with the Cut which were not serious in these sessions but became actively concerning when filming *Excuse Me I am Expanding* (see chapter three).

Effects of practice codes for the reverberations of these sessions outside of formal practice and includes running themes, permeation, and soft re-entry. Running themes are practice contents which resonate beyond a single session, humming in the background of my life such that I want

to re-employ them (e.g. the discovery of a garden blooming in my pelvis in entries **seventeen** and **eighteen**). Permeation denotes more general discoveries of practice bleeding into my daily life. Examples include **entry sixteen** where the strategy of resonating used in the studio re-emerges as I walk through a park, resonating with trees, discarded cans and other humans; and the *chain of breathing* from **entry eight** which continues in my awareness as I encounter other humans and animals in the streets, feeling kinship through a secret pact of lung pulsation.

Soft re-entry is a specific strategy I adopted for this research project. When teaching Butoh I spend time at the end guiding participants back into a sense of normality and socially expected individualism, in deference to their destination out on the street where the expanded sense of self they have encountered might leave them vulnerable. But in these sessions I risk myself in not demarcating the end of practice, walking back into the world in an altered or ecologised state to explore how this selfhood can encounter atomised society. My ability to do so relates to expertise and training, and I do not include it in my model since it might be dangerous for others.

Though I cannot assess the long-term effects of practice on my selfhood within the scope of this project, I can at least see in my journals striking changes in my perception of self and other in the hours immediately after practice. These, I would argue, exhibit a selfhood which is ecological, immersed, and interconnected:

> I walked very slowly through the streets afterwards, feeling I had dropped out of the social race. At the same time I was able to feel that the Life in my body is the same life in other humans around me, and in objects. We are the same; we are what life is doing. Just respect and be with.
>
> (**Entry One**)

> The feeling of never needing to speak again. The world is so full and I am suspended within it, an empty vessel through which energy winds are conducted (or self-conducting). I am very *NOW*. Nothing matters and everything is open and glistening.
>
> (**Entry Twenty-One**)

Performing Ecological Selfhoods

My performances research the expression of embodied ecological realisations as generated through the process captured in my journals. The inclusion of three works illustrates what I see a particular merit of my method in contributing to the performance arena: embodied selfhood expansion as a modality or gaze through which a range of concerns can be explored. As noted in chapter three, ecological selfhood as a gaze was written into my project from the start due to my existing performance practice. Though the implications of this are fuel for future research, I have here tentatively established this gaze as necessary by attempting to remove what my selfhood(s) are *looking at* in ***Excuse Me I am Expanding*** and finding nothing left to work with. The emergent themes of genealogy and cultural displacement announced themselves because ecological selfhood seems to always operate in relation to something.

Each performance navigates through particular themes, with the results inflected by my aesthetic preferences and the media in which I am skilled. Other artists would make different choices and begin from differing inspirations, meaning that my offerings are examples of – rather than limiting prescriptions for – performance centred in ecological selfhood research. I initially coded each work separately, but in seeking a coherent answer to how ecological selfhoods can be expressed, I ultimately found it best to amalgamate all open codes and re-analyse them together. This coding allowed my overall strategies to be discerned, and can be viewed in **Appendix C** (the first mention of each open code below is also hyperlinked to a time-stamped example on YouTube).

The coding process uncovered a range of strategies towards dance, aesthetics, and dramaturgy which are held in common by *Shrimp Dance* (a stage performance), *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off,* and *Excuse Me I am Expanding* (both film works). These strategies detail a method of expression which relies on the Butoh-indebted generative process researched through my journals. This generative process is the crucible which produces choreography and improvisation, and mutually inspires the non-dance elements of the performances (which I will collectively refer to as dramaturgy but include the use of music, video projection, video editing, and the like).

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Three selective codes emerged to encapsulate the six axial codes (and one hundred and twenty-four open codes) gathered from the films: dance, orienting, and situating. Dance refers to the performing bodymind. The chief distinguishing feature here is an approach to dance which is presentational rather than re-presentational. Dance is given as a mode of exhibiting embodied-imaginal states and relations, not as symbolic, expository, or reliant on a pre-existing language the audience must interpret – recalling the advice often given to novelists: *show, don't tell*.

As discussed in chapter two, this presentational stance is central to Butoh and its faith in the capacity of audiences to resonate with what they witness through their own embodiment; a direct transmission from a performer's bodymind to the bodyminds of audience members, rather than the use of dance to convey something other than itself. Butoh aims at being and becoming rather than miming or explaining. This bypassing of external referents is at the root of my wider dance practice, perhaps explaining my concern with the risk of departing into abstractions about it in this text (since there is very little *about* in my dancing).

The axial codes of which dance is comprised are revealing, somatic & affective states, and relations & immersion. Revealing is perhaps the most readily apparent, referring to exposure of different possibilities of the human form by foregrounding functional systems, material structures, and dynamics: **mechanism**, **fluidity**, **extrusion**, **incapacitation**, **exposure**, **nudity**, **vocalising**, **flattening** (fig. 20). This code also includes the subversion of implicit norms of physical agency by relocating the sources of movement intention away from the face/brain (**displacement**) and revealing manifold simultaneous sources (**multiplicity**).
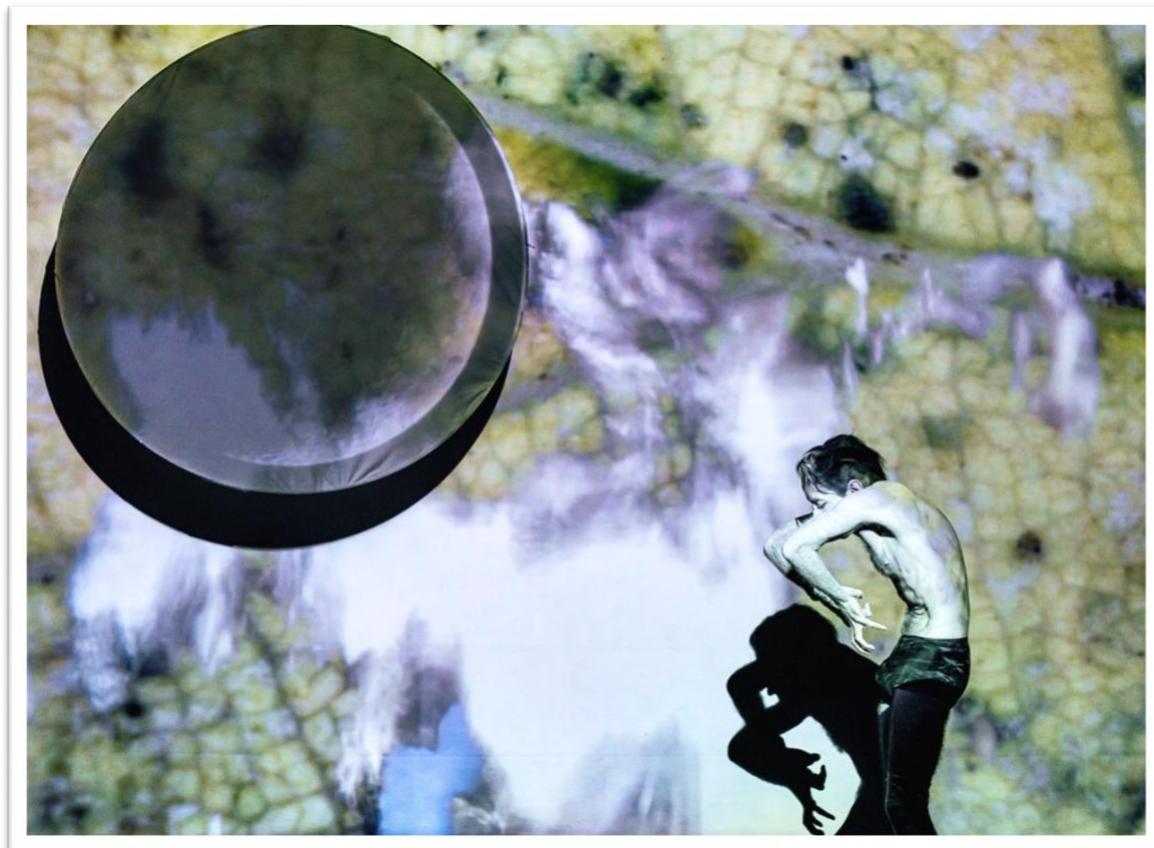
Figure 20: Hartley, B. (2017): *Flattening.*

Such motifs express a pluri-dimensional body motivated by a shifting, often non-unitary self. They are not figurative in the sense of my trying to communicate something semiotically, but are simply the presentation of realities I experience while dancing. These realities emerge from a bodymind encountering surprising ways to experience itself in an open-ended revision of its own constitution. If there was a semiotic message expressible in words, it might be something like: *we are not what we think we are*.

Somatic & affective states designates the feeling tones of selfhood, or the embodied emotional content experienced whilst revealing, relating and immersing. As with most other codes there is something approximate and a little false about isolating aspects from the overall performance since everything is given as an interwoven whole. Nonetheless, this axial code plausibly groups open codes which pinpoint a range of liberated states experienced when the individualist cut is successfully transcended: **somatic ecstasy**, **unknowing**, and **astonishment**. These accompany beleaguered or overwhelmed states – **exhaustion**, **crisis**, **fragmentation**, **lostness**, **bewilderment** (fig. 21). There are also more decisive emotional attitudes (**eruption**,

regression, **assertion**, **internality**), and binary oppositions (**helplessness/control**).
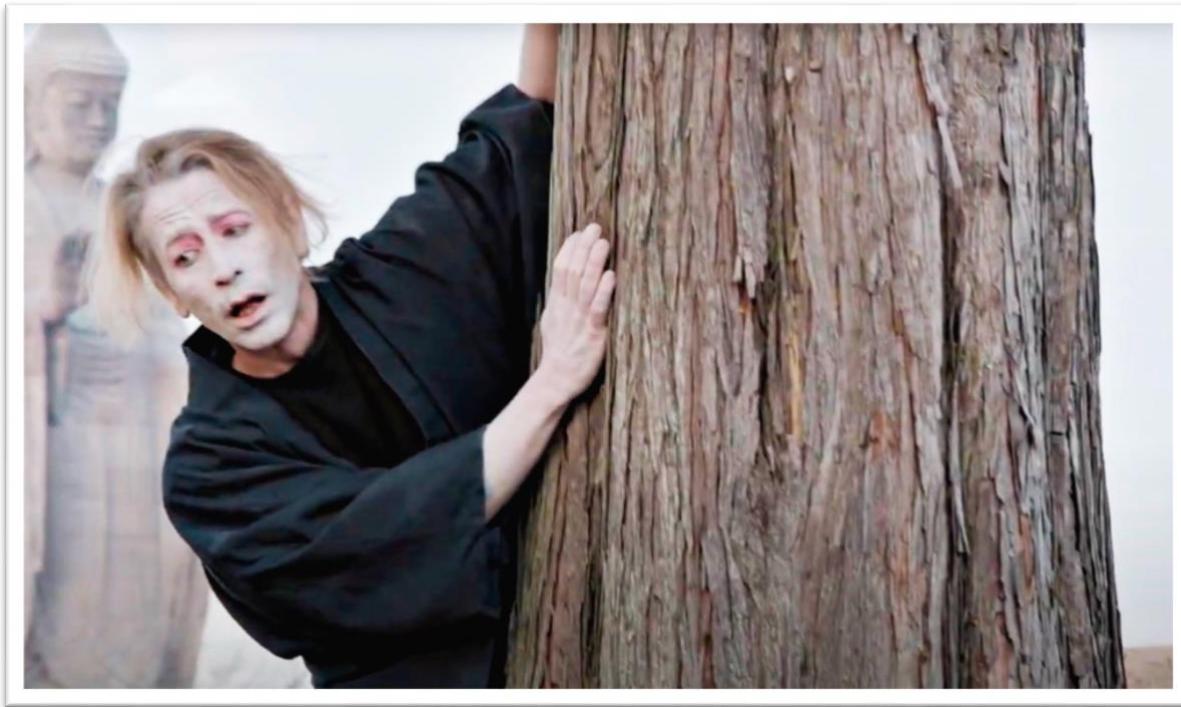
Figure 21: Shimmyo, S. (2023) *Bewilderment.*

This list is drawn from viewing of the films but is also reflective of the states I experienced in private studio sessions, indicating an achieved expression of the internal territory being researched. The more uneasy states sometimes relate to difficulties in transcending individualism and the pain of being trapped within it, but should not be read entirely as such since the normative connotations of physical-emotional conditions do not always ring true to internal experience in this work. I have encountered many instances of ecstatic exhaustion, fascinating lostness, revelatory fragmentation, and the like in researching my method. An element of the phenomenological *epochē* (bracketing of normal assumptions) is worth retaining as a viewer since what looks like a bad time may in fact be a happy breakthrough or the release of a repression. Here, if obliged to attribute a semiotic message to the work, I would offer something like: *you are watching a shell cracking open, sometimes messily*.

Relations & immersion gathers the codes indicating the type of world I am dancing in, and my modes of relating to, as, and in that world. This is expressed through posture and body language, gesture, facial expression, and interaction. The twenty-two axial codes here include **encountering**, **boundary crossing**, **vertical/horizontal**, **exploring** (fig. 22), and

resistance/separation, which show different types of relating by a demarcated self towards others (others can include humans, the landscape, or a more amorphous sense of the dancer addressing the world, space, or life in general). There are also codes such as **conjuring**, **gaze**, and **the invisible**, in which dancing indicates a non-normative engagement with reality outside the skin (for example, navigating space as a charged medium rather than a mere absence of solid objects). A third loose grouping includes **collapse**, **immersion**, **merging**, **acquiescence**, **dreaming in the womb**, and **communion** (fig. 23), where the bodymind surrenders individuality to become part of the surrounding world (or reveals to itself and the viewer how it is already an enfolded part of it).

Figure 22: Henry, P. M. (2023) *Exploring*.

Figure 23: Henry, P. M. (2023) *Communion.*

Particularly interesting for me is **not-two**, seen in the final sequence of *Excuse Me I am Expanding* (28m 04s-33m 08s). Here I see the bodymind striking a balance between individual and ecological selfhoods, dancing in a zone of exchange between someone-ness and embodied personal history on one hand, and expanding ecological entanglement with visible and invisible materials, forces, and beings on the other. There is still a human responsiveness and emotionality displayed, but in unpredictable harmony with the metamorphosing world the dancer is in and of. Curiously, both of the other works culminate in bodymind states which are quieter and steadier, but otherwise not dissimilar.

My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off concludes with me walking slowly along a ridge against the skyline and past a lonely tree (20m 38s-26m 25s). My body is firmly embedded within a world but remains distinct. The deliberateness of each footstep keeps the bodymind rooted in the earth (this is echoed by the tree's groundedness). The accompanying poem speaks of disappearing and impermanence, contributing to an impression of trembling, contingent individuation rather than ontological individualism. For me this expresses a tentative nondualism (not-two), the dancer not identical to the world but immersed in it and not caught in delusions of fundamental separateness.

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Shrimp Dance ends with a sequence I call *Broken Rainbow Buddha* (42m 25s-45 50s). Here my bodymind is calmly determined, holding a posture depicted in many traditional Buddha statues, surrounded by frenetic rainbow colours and droning cymbals, advancing towards the audience. Coming to rest in a circle of light – designed to strobe rapidly, though this was technically impossible in the Edinburgh performances – I seem (slightly absurdly) to be on the verge of being taken up by a spaceship to a realm beyond human individuality. But nothing happens and the piece ends with me poised and trembling between the hyper-coloured mystery of ecological overspill and the social reality of the audience at whom I am gazing (fig. 24).
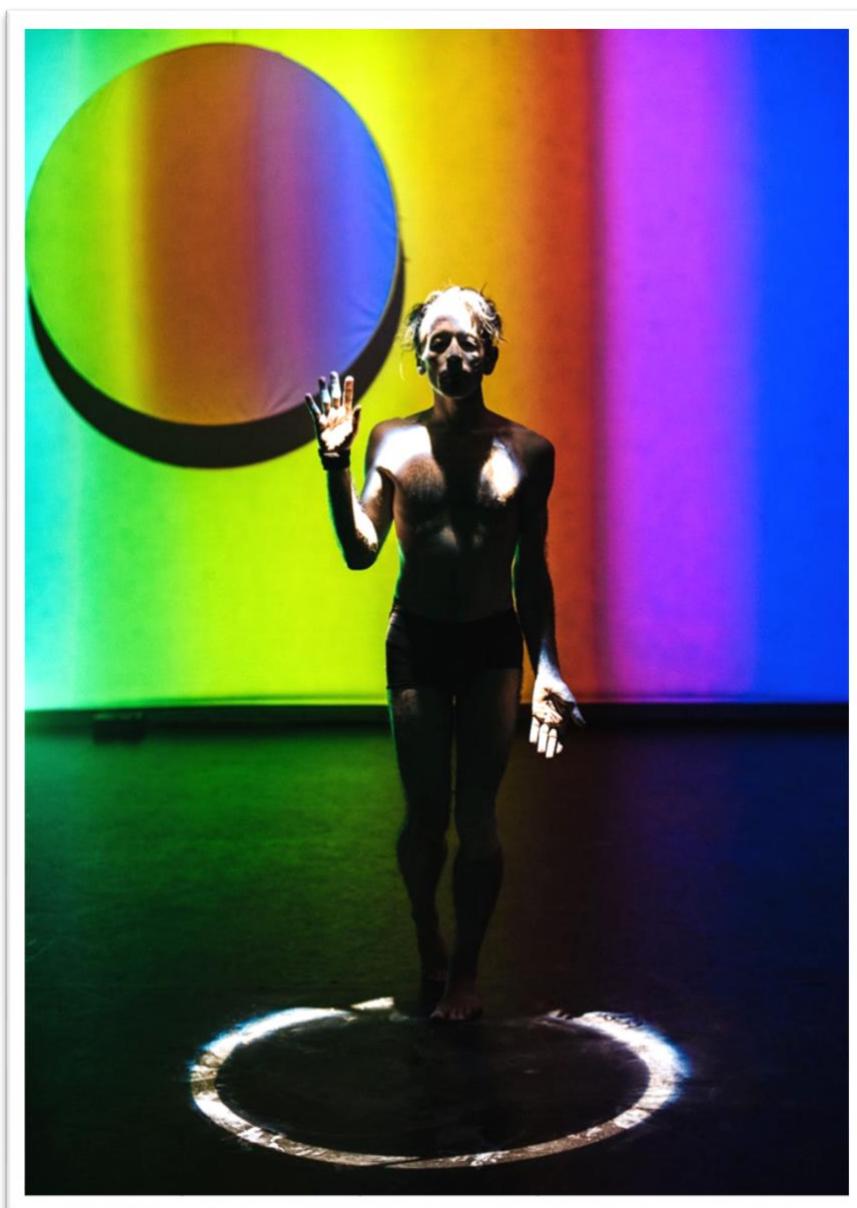
Figure 24: Hartley, B. (2017) *Broken Rainbow Buddha.*

To state the obvious: I am not a Buddha, and this expression of neoliberally impaired not-two-ness hovers between individual predicament and harmonious interbeing. This is representative of the selfhoods unlocked by my method. *Broken Rainbow Buddha* is not intended ironically, but does carry the double resonance of a being partly transcending individualism, and partly showing through brokenness just how far contemporary society is from enabling such transcendence. For me personally, this tainted nondualism is so far a temporary state accessed through dancing and meditation, but nonetheless one which softens the rigidity of individualism I experience elsewhere in daily life. The semiotic message I might wrestle from relations & immersion is that it demonstrates Hillman's notion of the arbitrariness of the self/other cut in action – it shows me *playing with the cut*.

My experience is that neoliberal individualism as a creed loses credibility when vibrant states of interbeing are regularly experienced. The highest ambition of my performances would be to impart such states to audiences. This sounds lofty and I do not claim resounding success. But I at least know in my bones that the mode of encountering through which I interact with strangers in the audience at the end of *Shrimp Dance* (40m 00s) is more undefended and intimate than anything I experience within the neoliberal social paradigm. Such I-Thou-ness is sadly not evidenced in my spreadsheet (a tool not noted for its embodied relationality), documented only through memory of the softness and recognition in strangers' eyes each time I perform the piece. I am increasingly attuned to its possibility in other areas of life, and these performances aim to prompt similar openness to expanding and entangled selfhoods in audiences.

My remaining selective codes are orienting and situating. They contain seventy-five open codes, but my analysis of them will be brief because they are essentially a panoply of techniques for achieving two main ends: enhancement/complication of the readability of the dance codes above, and connection of the dance content to materials, discourses, themes, and the audience themselves. They fall into the areas of dramaturgy, music, lighting, visuals, location, text/spoken words, cinematography, and editing. These techniques make the inner world of the dancer easier to discern, enrich its context, and aid the direct embodied communication at the centre of the works. They are auxiliary in that I have performed in the manner considered above with no textual, musical or visual support (and have seen many dancers do likewise), but they are also reflective of Butoh's dance theatre origins and my own

inclinations when dancing on stage or, especially, on screen. I see them not as compensating for the obscurity of embodied communication but as contextually supporting its transmission.

Orienting refers to establishing and transforming audience perspectives on space, time, phenomenal intensity, and the edges of things (or where entities start and stop). The axial code perspective & focussing covers stage and screen techniques like **warping perspective**, body **doubling**, **isolation** of objects, and **micro-macro** scale transformations. Time denotes analogous temporal techniques such as **time layering** and **inversion**, **fast cuts**, and non-metrical sonic tropes like **drone** and **sustained tones** which undermine the slicing of time into units. Superimposition is the use of **juxtaposition** and **collage** of material elements as well as **cultural** and **modal** layerings. Information density is variation in the amount of compositional elements presented at any one time, from **sensory overload** to **void** and **human absence**. Finally, disruption & surreality designates corruptions in the transmission of naturalistic presentation such as digital **filtering** and **glitching**, colour **saturation**, **costume**, and **absurd** predicaments into which the body is thrown (fig. 25). These techniques all serve to (re)frame the body, unsettle conventional readings of sensory information, and assist the expression of the worlds I am dancing in.

Figure 25: Henry, P. M. (2022) *Absurdity*

Situating is a variety of techniques for thematically, discursively, and geographically placing the dancing bodymind. The axial code contextualising refers to dramatic **exposition**, and the introduction through words, visuals, and sound of **frames of reference**, **intertextuality**, **autobiography**, and subjects such as **death** (fig. 26) or **Buddhism**. Environment means locations and textures: **wilderness/urban/busyness/ruins**, **decay/crumbling**, and materials like **water** and **mud**. The last axial codes are subverting discourses and witnesses. The former is comprised of **discourse transgression** and **the Devil's part** (breaching the etiquette of neoliberal sociality and adopting morally questionable attitudes for, essentially, shock value), and the latter of the interjection of human and non-human perspectives other than the performer's own (such as **the moon's aversion** to human conduct). Such elements carry the main responsibility of connecting ecological selfhood as gaze to the themes and issues each film explores.

Figure 26: Murphy, E. *(2023) Death.*

The techniques found in orienting and situating surround and enhance the central techniques found in dance: the expression of ecological selfhoods through a non-representational employment of dance as generated through the process articulated in my journal analysis. Where that process gives intricate specifics in answering how ecological selfhood can be

generated through embodied practice, the question of how it can be expressed can in the end be answered in extremely simple terms: show it to people. Granted, showing encompasses the wide range of dance facets above and their enhancement by a host of tools and techniques which assist communication of the subtleties and thematic contexts of particular expressions. But my wider performance career repeatedly affirms to me that audiences do not necessarily need complex explanations or theories about what my dancing is, and nor do participants in my workshops in order to access their own ecological embodiment. Their bodyminds resonate with it directly, with relatively little prompting.

The analysis above considers approximations abstracted from my Practice Works and should not be regarded as dispensing with practice as though it is preliminary to communication through words. Comparison of my actual portfolio with the analysis above hopefully makes this clear – the portfolio benefits greatly from the analysis, which makes it doctoral-research worthy, but could meaningfully survive without it. The reverse is not true, and proud as I am of my words, I hope they will never obscure what they point to. The method I will articulate next draws on both practice and analysis but is designed to help disseminate something for people to *witness and do and feel,* in the many-splendoured and entangling vibrancy of embodied experience.

CECI N'EST PAS UN CORPS

Playing with the Cut

The preceding analysis is my main basis for the diagrammatic articulation of the method of Playing with the Cut presented below. Fig. 27 outlines my answer to how embodied practice can generate experiences of ecological selfhood. Fig. 28 shows a template for how such experiences can be expressed. Fig. 29 gives a reduction and adaptation of these which shows the core elements in one graphic.

A last reminder about map and territory: the figures below show orientations and strategies which must be put to *embodied use* as either practitioner or audience (or both) in order to become meaningful.
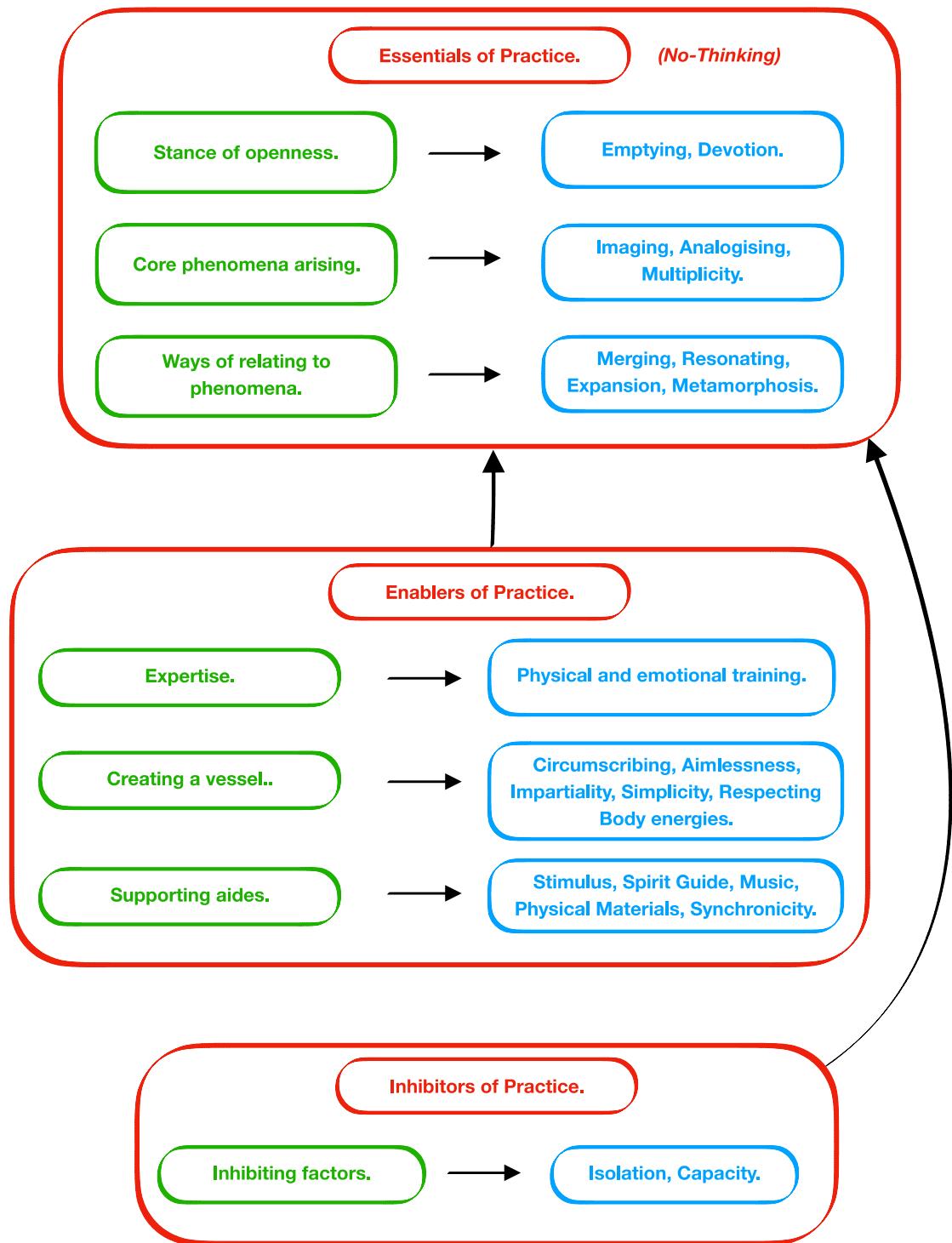
Figure 27: Henry, P. M. (2024) *Generating Ecological Selfhoods.*

Dance. *(Show, don't tell)*

Revealing.	→	The body as pluri-dimensional, Intention as shifting and non-unitary *(as appropriate).*
Somatic and affective states.	→	Showing feeling-tones of selfhood (the emotional aspects of expanding).
Relations & immersion.	→	Dancing the relations between self and world.

Orienting.

| Space and time. | → | Perspective and focussing, Time manipulations. |
| Density and disruption. | → | Superimposition, Information density, Disruptions and surreality. |

Situating.

| Contextualising. | → | Thematic exposition, Introduction of cultural and intertextual contexts. |
| Environment. | → | Mis en scène: Wildness, Human artefacts, Materials, Geographies. |

Figure 28: Henry, P. M. (2024) *Expressing Ecological Selfhoods.*

Stance of openness (fig. 27), with its open codes emptying and devotion, forms the basis of the whole practice. It initiates the possibility of a shift in selfhood, and provides an anchor to return to at all stages. Ways of relating to phenomena (merging, resonating, expansion, metamorphosis) describes the main ways to proceed once emptying and devotion have made way for images and qualia to arise and be engaged with. Creating a vessel (circumscribing, aimlessness, impartiality, simplicity, respecting body energies) is in effect an enabler for emptying and devotion. Its open codes are psychological attitudes, so while circumscribing may mean physical and temporal boundaries as in my studio sessions, it could also mean the mental posture adopted when practicing in wilderness or in public spaces. Inhibitors warns of the limiting factors of isolation and capacity, which give pragmatic limits to the method in any one session according to the wellbeing of the practitioner. The remaining codes are more contingent – for example, analogising and multiplicity arose for me but may not for others. Expertise pertains to the deepening facility to engage the method a practitioner will gain as they train their body and emotions over time.

In Fig. 28 I have condensed the open codes as there were too many to include in a digestible diagram. Relations and immersion is summarised as dancing the relations between self and world. This is accompanied by the global reminder *show, don't tell*. These are the core features enabling expression of ecological selfhoods in performance. They stipulate presentation over semiotic or mimetic performance, and a focus on exhibiting the ambiguous and shifting cut between the performer's self and everything else before (and including) an audience. Where many of the other codes will likely be involved in doing so, this will depend on the situation and specifics of a performance – as mentioned, this method can be used without the trappings of costume, lighting, music, and so on. The selective codes orienting and situating could also be incorporated using different axial codes than those in my portfolio pieces. It is in this sense that I have framed my performances as examples rather than prescriptions for performing ecological selfhoods.

Playing with the Cut is thus very flexible due to the idiosyncrasies of particular practitioners and sessions, and also to my apprehensions about *vivisection,* which prevent my regarding the codes as absolute – I would prefer that practitioners stay open to adapting the codes according to their experience. The core tenets are emptying, devotion, no-thinking, a ritualised attitude of circumscription, a focus on relations and a shifting cut, and an emphasis on showing rather than explaining.

Fig. 29 below shows a reduction promoting these key elements and includes both the generation and expression of ecological selfhoods. Where figs. 27 and 28 sprang directly from my spreadsheets and retain their dry, administrative style, I have aestheticised fig. 29 and re-worded the codes as advice for the practitioner in language I feel would inspire me in practice as a dancer. I am not prescribing a warm-up or preparation process as the method might be employed within a variety of practices, but the following indicates preparatory strategies I have found helpful:

Spend around thirty minutes warming up. This can include stretching, releasing tension, and generating warmth by shaking or jogging. If you have a meditation practice, around twenty minutes of this may be beneficial. Throughout the warm-up and the practice itself, try to drop down into the body, releasing and exhaling thoughts about what is happening since these tend to form obstacles to immersion – no-thinking! You can return to embodied imagination by using imagery which dispels your thoughts. For example, see them transforming into butterflies made of light which emanate from your body and fly up towards the sky, leaving your empty, vibrating body to engage in the practice.

A useful strategy for emptying is to imagine hundreds of delicate, multi-coloured fish swimming through the space, tasking yourself with not disturbing them through your movements or thoughts. The empty bodymind is the vessel for Playing with the Cut. An empty bodymind is free to fill with images by which it is moved to dance. The goal is to be absorbed completely in the process, so do not worry about analysing your experience (it is better reflected upon afterwards).
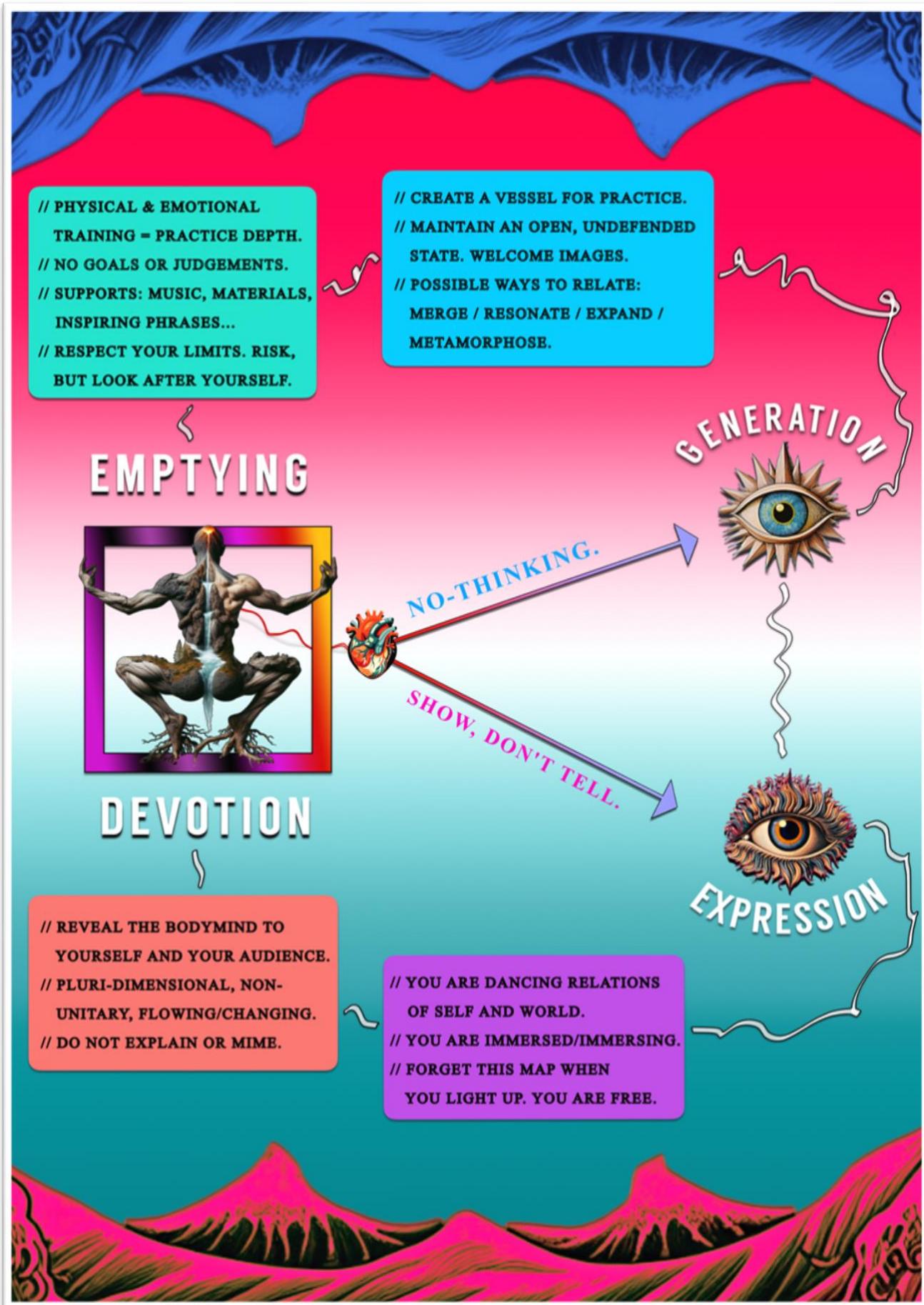
Figure 29: Henry, P. M. (2024) Playing with the Cut.

The practitioner would do best to study the method between sessions, but during actual practice to be spontaneous (no-thinking), following the images with their embodied imagination and referring to the map above only when needed to sustain or revivify practice. If embodied self-transformation is evident there is no need to think about the method. In other words: no vivisecting when things are going well, or privileging the map over the territory of embodied experience.

The method is, in this sense, an array of remedies for faltering practice, used to get things back on track. It is intentionally empty of explicit content – which images arise and how, and the specific process of relating to them, being unique to each session. In the next chapter I will evaluate Playing with the Cut in relation to my original research question, and in the context of the fields to which it contributes.

BLINK THREE TIMES PLEASE

(NOW TOUCH SOMETHING COLD)

Chapter Five: Is Embodied Experience Discursive?

Playing with the Cut is my answer to my initial research question: how can an embodied practice generate and express experiences of ecological selfhood? As I will discuss below, it contributes knowledge to Butoh studies, ecological performance, ecological performance discourse, and ecosomatics. My method alters the boundary between me and not-me, and produces performance works which express these alterations. Fig. 27 in the previous chapter summarises the generation of ecological selfhoods, and fig. 28 deals with their expression. Both are condensed to their essentials in fig. 29: emptying, devotion, circumscription, ways of relating to the core phenomena produced, and a non-representational performance mode based in embodied resonance which emphasises the performer's shifting cut through their relations to and immersion in the world.

My secondary research question is: how can such a practice be researched without the trappings of research becoming a hindrance? Much work has been done on the problems of documenting ephemeral performances (for example Phelan 2005, pp. 146-166), and on the relations between unmediated and mediated performance (Auslander (2023, pp. 10-68). My own approach, tailored to the specifics of my practice and the context of producing institutional research, has been my technique of researching-by-definitely-not-researching – capturing data by banishing the researcher's gaze during generative practice, journalling phenomenologically afterwards, and then intentionally adopting the researcher's gaze in examining the journals (or reviewing film footage in the case of performance expressions). It is also being answered continuously in this thesis by employing consciousness of abstracting, or awareness of the difference between map and territory, to clarify what theory does and does not encapsulate, and what is left behind in the transition from embodiment to writing. I have sought to convey what writing cannot through my performances and the meditational offering ***With Your Eyes Closed***.

These inquiries were initially prompted by my existing dance practice, grounded in Butoh, through which I have had countless experiences of an ecologising shift in my sense of self, and of the viability of anchoring performances for others in such shifts. In my years of developing this practice I was aware of the way it spoke to the mounting concern with ecological crisis in

the world around me, and of the possibility that it could contribute knowledge of alternative ways to experience selfhood which undermine neoliberal individualism. My effort in this project has been to extract from my practice a clear method of transcending the feeling of being an atomised consumer in conflict with nature and opening, experimentally, into ecological selfhood.

Through the resulting method, selfhood expands and metamorphoses in ways which may be termed ecological in that they implicate the self in the world beyond the skin boundary – *I* becomes variously inclusive of, or entangled with, phenomena beyond the individualist cut. The stance of openness, hinging on emptying and devotion, lays the groundwork for self-transformation by suspending thought and habitual assumptions of who I am and where I stop. It also enacts an erasure of conceptual labelling, of my body as my body, of space as space – all at once I do not know what these are, and am therefore able to discover them anew, and differently. And it places my volitional faculties in a position of surrender, willingly offering my being to be moved and changed by arising core phenomena. Self-transformation is then expressed through resonance, a direct, embodied presentation of ecological selfhoods which eschews mimesis and representation.

Playing with the Cut has been shown to be adaptable to a wide range of sub-themes beyond generic ecological selfhood. The simplicity of *With Your Eyes Closed* becomes more intricate and entangled as the area of exploration widens to multi-species concerns and mental health (*Shrimp Dance)*, personal relations to mortality and mass extinction (*My Whole Face sort of Fell Off),* and the paradox of expanding ecologically whilst retaining specificity as a situated someone (*Excuse Me I am Expanding)*. Still, the basic apprehension that selfhood can be modulated beyond the skin barrier and shaped by ecological realisation remains the guiding thread throughout.

Non-dance art forms and discourses have been employed partly to support the dance content in my performances, and partly in recognition of the dominant logocentric and cinematic tropes contemporary audiences expect (thus broadening the accessibility of the work to those who may have no experience in engaging with performance through embodied resonance alone). I have also used them where they are simply better than dance at achieving particular ends. Guiding questions for my practice are *what is the best medium for this particular expression?, what does this medium do that others do not?,* and a third question of recurring significance in

a research paradigm: *what is this medium unable to do?* This last has arisen mainly in regard to the poverty of textual translations of embodied work.

My project posits embodied-imaginal practice (dance) as pre-eminent in generating and expressing ecological selfhoods, but it is patently ill-equipped to achieve certain other aims. The most incisive medium for communication is often words, and what can best be expressed through them should be. This is seen in exposition, referring to the textual projections at the start of *Shrimp Dance* which inform the audience of Professor Ford's experiments, and in my later spoken monologues about antidepressant use and its poetic connotations. Likewise, childhood *(My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off)* deals with specific experiences that would be only vaguely recounted through dance, so they are narrated through spoken words instead. And I am using words now, albeit with a stubborn insistence that they are, perforce, an abstracted commentary on practice. Here I am in disagreement with writers on practice as research such as Melissa Trimingham who mandate that practitioners 'translate' their work into text (Trimingham, 2002, p. 54), an act I regard as impossible when the work is somatically based. Ultimately my view is that crucial information is lost in both dancing a text and textifying a dance.

The reader may question the inclusion of fantastical material arising through the method given my argument that it forms a useful tool in light of the concrete emergencies of ecological crisis. Journal **entry four** sees me becoming a chimera and feeling lava in my veins, and in **entry five** my heart is eaten by a shark before I give birth to, and am birthed by, my double. One might ask how this cultivates a selfhood aligning with the real-world material flows whose derangement by human activity comprises the Anthropocene. Playing with the Cut does not distinguish between such fanciful phenomena and the (materially real) mineral commonalties of teeth and stones considered in **entry one**. My justification for this centres on the primacy of the embodied imagination, the medium through which selfhood transformation occurs. Embodied imagination is reified through permissiveness – as seen in chapter two, this means that the ego surrenders to images which arrive, experientially, from beyond it, in the manner of inspiration from a Muse. The ego's job is to accept what comes and devote to it, nurturing a capacity to transcend the conventional perception of self as independent, skin-bound, and *human*.

Playing with the Cut is therefore an a-rational (not anti-rational) method offering experiences

of expansion beyond the existing ego cut of the practitioner, and though it can accept and put to work material-world prompts, the basic process is free and empty of judgements about core phenomena. No-thinking.

Darkness Dancing

Butoh studies is the first field to which my project contributes. Butoh developed outside of academic discourses – initially in the margins of Japanese culture through the avant-garde experiments of Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, and hitherto disseminated and embellished globally by several generations of dancers training in non-institutional workshop and performance settings (Viala and Masson-Sékiné, 1988; Baird and Candelario, 2019). But by now there is a wide corpus of literature about it in English which I am calling Butoh studies.

The field encompasses chronicles of the form's development (Baird, 2012; Baird and Candelario, 2019; Viala and Masson-Sékiné, 1988), translated source materials written by Hijikata and Ohno (Nanako, 2000; Ohno and Ohno, 2004), records of the *Butoh Fu* or choreography used in Hijikata's performances (Hijikata, 2015), and first-hand accounts of training and performance by his pupils (Mikami, 2016, Waguri, no date). There is also research into Butoh as a mode of metamorphosis (Fraleigh, 2010), and as training for ecological consciousness and environmental relations (Candelario, 2019 and 2023). The latter two are focussed on theorising what Butoh dance might offer to a shifting of the dancer's state and to ecological attunement, with narrative depictions of performances witnessed by the authors, and discussion of statements by Hijikata, Butoh artists, and dance critics.

My addition to this growing body of research is an iterative interrogation of the particulars of Butoh through my own practice, with a sharp focus on the ecologically expanding selfhood of the dancer. The result is an explicit method which adapts Butoh to explore shifting selfhood in the context of the Anthropocene. This amounts to a more complete study of the *hows* of ecological self-expansion through Butoh than has been published elsewhere.

As discussed in chapter two, my excavation of the possibilities for ecological selfhood modulation through Butoh techniques is selective in as much as Hijikata's concern was with a total liberation of the bodymind from unconscious habits, conventions, and indoctrinations via

a 'Rebellion of the Body' (Baird and Candelario, 2019, p. 4). As such, he was not responding explicitly to ecological crisis. Hijikata's work aimed towards a radical, surrealistic metamorphosis of his dancers (mainly for the purpose of innovation in stage performance), and a somatic emancipation from the cultural mores surrounding him in mid-twentieth century Japan – both regarding his Japanese heritage and the arrival of Western art forms and American capitalism (Viala and Masson-Sékiné, 1988, pp. 10-17).

Metamorphosis and transformation are perhaps the most common nouns employed to describe the shifts Hijikata's Butoh prompts in its performers, and the intricacies of its method for doing so are well articulated by the likes of Kayo Mikami (2016) and Takashi Morishita (2015). But as researchers such as Rosemary Candelario recognise, Butoh can be repurposed in the Anthropocene to 'double as training for developing an alternative relationship between humans and their environment' by leveraging its concern with 'transformation of the dancing body into something else' (Candelario, 2019, pp. 11-13). Playing with the Cut deepens this exploration of the contemporary value of Butoh by foregrounding the notions of selfhood and the cut made between me and not-me.

Metamorphosis and transformation in themselves do not imply ecological concern in that they might refer only to the freedom of a dancer to transform from one type of atomised being into another. By emphasising the size and qualities of the cut, and selfhood's inevitable opening to ecological connection once it strays beyond the skin, I am contributing an adapted method which specifically addresses the problem of neoliberal individualism – showing how it can be undone at the level of selfhood by experiencing interdependence and interbeing (as defined in chapter two) through metamorphosis. This expands a skin-bound selfhood into one which is immersed and involved with the world beyond – that is, an ecological selfhood fundamentally different in kind from an atomised one.

My method therefore clarifies the capacities of Butoh to act as a crucial mode of practice and experience in the Anthropocene, both for the solitary practitioner and for artists seeking to generate ecologically concerned performances. It also peels my project away from strict concern with the boundaries of Butoh or adherence to Hijikata and Ohno's lineage. As noted above, preservation of Butoh's original methods and historical place is being done by others; my research advocates rather for the potential of Butoh-derived practice to contribute to personal and cultural navigation of the Anthropocene. This places my contribution to Butoh

studies closest to Candelario's claim that Butoh can be 'a kind of ecological methodology' (2023), adding the framework of the cut to give precision to its enabling of an 'alternative relationship between humans and their environment' (Candelario, 2019, p. 11). Playing with the Cut offers a clear method emphasising not only Butoh's capacity to shift our relations to our environment, but its enabling of a fundamental shift in selfhood – of who and what we perceive ourselves to be.

Ecological Performance and Material-Discursivities

The next areas to which my method contributes are ecological performance and ecological performance discourse. I am making the unwieldy distinction between these two fields because the first refers to the practice of artists making ecologically concerned performance work, and the second isolates the philosophy used by theorists and some of the artists themselves to frame this work. In the case of theory-driven artists, such philosophy also inspires and/or limits the performances they are able to produce in the first place. As I will argue, there has recently been a homogeneity to ecological performance discourse which I find troubling, and Playing with the Cut offers a philosophical orientation which can contribute to diversification of both the discourse and the practice produced under its influence.

Beginning with ecological performance itself: I briefly surveyed this field in chapter two by giving examples of artists whose body-centred work explores ecology: Sonja Bäumel, Niya B, Ana Mendieta, Anna Halprin, Zoe Scoglio, and Dougie Strang. This is a thumbnail sketch since ecological crisis is a zeitgeist to which countless artists are applying themselves (as I have found through curating hundreds of them as artistic director of ecological performance festival **UNFIX**). Playing with the Cut contributes to this area a distinct goal for ecological performance as well as a method for achieving it: the cultivation of experiences of ecological selfhood and a mode of performing-through-resonance which can communicate these experiences to audiences. My method also details how non-somatically focussed art forms (music, video, text, and dramaturgy) can enhance this communication by contextualising the performing bodymind in relation to themes and discourses, and orienting an audience's perception of it in time and space. I am unsure whether the method can be transferred outright to such forms and adapted by artists who do not make body-focussed performance, but if so they will still have to train somatically in Playing with the Cut first since it inheres in directly

embodied, non-representational exploration. The method can certainly be employed by live and performance artists, contemporary dancers, and of course Butoh dancers themselves.

In turning towards ecological performance discourse I will put practice before theory: to reiterate, Butoh did not arise within academia, and it should not be assumed that current discourses provide an appropriate theoretical framework for it. Hijikata's stance was that Butoh 'was not a philosophy but that "someday it might be"' (Fraleigh, 2010, p. 63). I respect his implication that it is first and foremost an embodied practice, and any theoretical framework must cohere with practice rather than being imposed upon it. A lack of fit between my Butoh-inspired method and current ecological performance discourse will indicate a gap in the discourse which my project addresses by providing 'new' knowledge about how ecological performance can be theorised (my use of scare quotes around the word 'new' prefigures part of my argument).

A starting point here is offered by the hazy philosophical positions implicit within Butoh since these carry over to my own method. My sources for the concepts below are largely oral instructions my teachers offered within the context of practice between the years of 2009 and 2023 – principally Yoshito Ohno, Seisaku, Yukio Waguri, Kayo Mikami, Yumiko Yoshioka, Imre Thormann, Moe Yamamoto, Masaki Iwana, and Atsushi Takenouchi. Texts which support them include Mikami (2016), Fraleigh (2010) and Ohno and Ohno (2004).

As discussed in chapter three, Butoh method most often begins by positing an empty bodymind. In illustration of this, Yoshito Ohno told me that his reason for painting himself white before performing was to 'erase Yoshito', becoming a blank canvas which can transform. This comes under emptying in my model. A second consideration is rationality and thought. Teachers are known to chant *no thinking* during workshops, and emptying includes dispensing with sign systems and commentary. Rather than engaging core phenomena through thought, the dancer addresses them emotionally via devotion. As noted in chapter four, devotion involves the sense of being faithful to core phenomena (images). My teacher Seisaku referred to this simply as 'falling in love' with them, and Butoh dancer Gyohei Zaitsu spoke to me of image relations as functioning like human relations: give your partner your full attention or they will sense disinterest and leave.

Thirdly, Butoh assumes that each body has access to the whole cosmos (sometimes explained

by dint of evolution); exercises may involve recapitulating the emergence of life from the oceans or listening to the stars with whom we are entangled. Butoh as a dance of *darkness* implies discovery of that which is hidden – repressed by social conditioning and personality structure, or simply lying beyond what is normally considered possible. This is the darkness of the world but also of the self, uncovered by surrender of the individual will and a quietening of personal agency (emptying), and somatic in that it presents as embodied imagery, devotion to which compels movement.

Lastly, while none of my teachers use the word *animism*, it has always been clear to me that Butoh operates by assuming relationship with an animate and possibly panpsychic world. Hijikata's statement that his method 'enucleates the psychology of inanimate objects' (Centonze, 2018, p. 16) suggests as much, as does this anecdote:

> Once on the sly I put the kitchen dipper in the middle of a field. I did it because I felt sorry for the dipper, stuck in the sunless kitchen, and wanted to show it the world outside.

> (Hijikata, 2000, p. 75)

Playing with the Cut retains these Butoh precepts and also proposes a labile selfhood which can incorporate its ecological ground through dancing – a notion not emphasised in my training, perhaps because my teachers simply took it for granted. Each of these concerns must survive the location of my method within ecological performance discourse if it is to remain accurate.

Ecological performance discourse has been shaped by the incursion of ecocritical approaches into performance research, as seen in chapter one. Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May's *Readings in Performance and Ecology* frames the imperative of ecological performance as 'a reconceptualization of the nature and purpose of mimesis' which requires 'finding ways to represent the more-than-human world on stage that do not ineradicably "other" nature' (Arons and May eds, 2012, p. 2). The ecocritical/literary roots of such discourse may explain the assumption that *mimesis* and *representation* are what performance aims for, but both Butoh and my method centre instead on metamorphosis and non-representational dance. Mimesis, 'the act of representing or imitating reality in art' (Cambridge University Press, 2021), is from my standpoint a telling rather than a showing, and this difference suggests from the outset that

Playing with the Cut will enter the debate at an awkward angle.

The rise of posthumanism and new materialism within ecological performance discourse is a more recent development. These theories, exemplars of a mooted material or ontological turn, were urged upon me by academic advisors in preparing my doctoral proposal. They also sprang up frequently in conversation with supervisors and other researchers within English speaking academia (at my UK institutions and during international online conferences), and predominated in my keyword searches for ecological theory and practice. There are book-length considerations of new materialism and the arts (Bolt and Barrett, eds., 2012), leading journal *The Drama Review* devoted a whole issue to 'New Materialism and Performance' (Schneider, ed., 2015), and explorations of this topic appear frequently in other journals (Bayley, 2020; Choat, 2020; Kramer, 2012; D'Amato, 2021, Guay, Larrue, and Nolette, 2022) as well as in doctoral theses (Lucie, 2020; Ravisankar, 2019; Hopfinger, 2017). The case is similar regarding posthumanism, with books (Stalpaert, C., Baarle, K. and van Karreman, L. eds., 2021), book chapters (Gomoll, 2020), and journal articles (Brisini and Simmons, 2016; Remshardt, 2009) researching how this theory can inform ecological performance practice. I found no similar publications on alternatives such as deep ecology.

Posthumanism and new materialism therefore predominate in current ecological performance discourse, and they have seemed almost ubiquitous during my period of research. My method's fit with this discourse is thus best judged by how well it aligns with them (and with their critiques). I will treat them somewhat in aggregate because despite the diversity of approaches within and between them, 'one of the most distinctive characteristics of the new materialist ontologies [is] their avowed posthumanism' (Coole and Frost, 2021, p. 20), and there are broad macro-concerns common to both, though with different emphases.

The stress in new materialism is on envisioning matter and nonhuman beings as lively and agentic (agential and agentic are interchangeably used adjectives by new materialist authors), and in positing a material-discursive process of becoming within a monistic ontology. Material and discourse shape each other mutually, and humans are no longer to be at the centre of this process but embedded within a relational milieu of 'agential intra-action' (Barad, 2007, p. 139). Posthumanism shares in this monistic philosophy and rejection of a duality between matter and culture, emphasising transcendence of the Eurocentric ideal of the human as white, male (though oddly disembodied), and a rational master over other forms of life. Instead, the

posthuman subject is defined as relational, embodied, and constituted through multiplicity and difference (Braidotti, 2013, p. 50).

My project is clearly within the streams of new materialism and posthumanism in as much as my method is geared towards an embodied (material) reassessment of the boundaries of the human, respect for the liveliness of nonhuman entities, and the making visible of interdependence and relationality as ontological truths in a moment when neoliberal notions of individualism and infinite growth – and attendant issues of colonialism and anthropocentrism – are being exposed as both oppressive and productive of ecological crises (Coole and Frost, 2021, p. 18). However, my reading of these theories as an artist indebted to Butoh, a practising Buddhist of some decades, and a free-roaming reader into animism, indigeneity, and diverse spiritual and ecological paradigms, is that their claim of newness hinges on a largely unacknowledged bracketing of everything beyond Western academic discourse.

Apprehension of nonhuman entities and matter as lively and interdependent with the human, and of centres of agency other than the human, can credibly be called new only within the frameworks of capitalist extractivism and colonialism – and perhaps the self-referential progression of the academic humanities, in which pressure to announce a new discovery leads to turns such as the linguistic one which the material now seeks to transcend. New materialism makes for strange reading when approached from outside these discourses, whether from a non-Western framework via Butoh or Buddhism, or a Western one with a longer memory: my own default position would likely have been animist had my Irish ancestors not encountered Christianity and the British Empire (Green, 1986, p. 167).

Numerous scholars speaking either from or in support of indigenous perspectives agree with me. Some of them are allied with the theories themselves: Stacy Alaimo, writing in a chapter on new materialism within a book on posthumanism, notes that 'the central problematic that new materialism seeks to counter, that of the western dualism that renders matter, nature, and bodies as inert, abject, and inanimate, is unrecognizable within indigenous cosmologies' (Alaimo, 2020, p.187). Brendan Hokowhitu more baldly finds the nomenclature of 'the emperor's "new" materialisms' to be 'offensive' from an indigenous vantage point, and a recapitulation of the Western doctrine of discovery (Hokowhitu, 2021, p. 172).

Zoe Todd writes of waiting in vain during a talk by Bruno Latour for him to

credit Indigenous thinkers for their millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and all relations, and with climates and atmospheres as important points of organization and action… It never came'.

(Todd, 2016, pp. 6-7)

In a similar way, I read Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* in disappointed expectation of an acknowledgement of how her theory of agential intra-action recapitulates via physics the 2500-year-old precedent of Buddhism's doctrines of emptiness and co-dependent arising (Barad, 2007). Elsewhere, Virginie Magnat cites Rosiek and Snyder's challenge to non-indigenous scholars 'to recognize and address the "Columbus problem," namely, the claim to have discovered new materialism and posthumanism' (Magnat, 2022, p. 28).

Such writers share my qualms about theories purporting breakthroughs in ecologically conscious liberation from Eurocentric humanism, but speaking only from within it and failing to credit other cultures (and their own forgotten ones) for pipping them to the post centuries earlier. This is arguably a discursive re-enactment of the colonialism they seek to dismantle. It is not my place to force these arguments – they are already being made by indigenous scholars such as Hokowhitu above – and I recognise the capacities of new materialism and posthumanism for analysis of specific issues around gender, technology, ecology, and capitalism. But I support criticism of their framing. My concern springs partly from my Irish ethnicity and cross-cultural interests, and it is heightened by Playing with the Cut's derivation from Butoh, a form which articulated many of the insights of new materialism and posthumanism decades before their arrival.

I extend this wariness to my own project, arguing here in the standard institutional mode for the originality of my contribution whilst also contesting my need to do so in such terms. My PhD depends upon me saying I am making an original contribution to knowledge, implying narratives of discovery and progress which are not innocent bystanders to colonialism and ecological crisis. Leroy Little Bear's Aboriginal critique of Eurocentric values promoting linearity and measurement identifies a preference for 'bigger, higher, newer, or faster' as part of an overall indictment of colonial aggression (2000, p. 82). This prompts a question worthy of expansion at another time: is newness definitely the right criterion for research value?

These reservations notwithstanding, how does my project speak to new materialism and posthumanism? The writings of Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and other exemplars of the material/ontological are far-reaching, ecologically analysing everything from blackouts to cross-species relations and the internet. When qualified, as they occasionally are, as '*renewed* materialisms' necessary because 'unprecedented things are currently being done with and to matter, nature, life, production, and reproduction' (Coole and Frost, 2021, p. 4), they offer insights which escape the charge of cultural erasure because they deal with phenomena which themselves are undoubtedly new. But I find them oddly homogenous in a way which I have not seen questioned, and which I will argue my method highlights by operating differently.

A default procedure in extending life and significance to the nonhuman in current discourse is to enquire into agency – Barad's agential realism (Kleinman, 2012), Latour's actants (2005), Bennett's use of Latour in seeing vibrant materiality as replete with sources of 'agentic capacity' (Bennett, 2010, p. 9). There is a logical rationale for this if the goal is to counter the hegemonic powers of Western colonialism and capitalism, which are nothing if not agentic. The task becomes one of articulating agency in other sources. But in my method, agency does not form a focus and may even be a distraction. Playing with the Cut inheres in emptying and devotion to the resulting core phenomena, in much the same way as you might fall in love and find yourself merging and resonating with the being of your beloved. The beloved may be nonhuman, inert, amorphous, fantastical. But there is no question being asked of it. If there was, it would be closer to Kimmerer's summation of the indigenous address 'Who are you?' (2013, p. 42) than the new materialist *What can you do?,* with its faint echoes of ableism in locating value in the power to perform.

Where agency is more relevant to Playing with the Cut is in its abdication on the part of the practitioner, whose willingness to be moved by sources outwith the ego forms the core of practice. These sources are appreciated as invitations to transform selfhood and realise its ecological overspill beyond the skin, appreciated simply because they appear, bearing information about the entanglement, mystery, and aching beauty of embodied existence. One incursion of my project into performance ecological discourse then is to posit the desirability of researching human access to more emotive and, for me, sacred experiences than the analysis of agency.

From the standpoint of my grounding in Butoh, my neurodivergent lived experience, and even my teenage Marxism, I am unsure of what sort of ethics a theory of the ability-to-do aims towards. I understand the intention to empower the marginalised, but not how proof of agency can underpin values – unless we are saying that the marker of value is power (the currency of colonialism and patriarchy themselves). My hope is that we can learn to appreciate other ways of being simply because they exist and we are their relations.

A second point of departure my project takes concerns my terminological choices: for example, using Coccia's evocation of *immersion* and *mixture* (2019, p. 32) as an ontological pivot over the more commonly used *assemblage.* Coccia is clear that

> for there to be immersion, subject and environment have to actively penetrate each other; otherwise one would speak simply of juxtaposition or contiguity between two bodies touching at their extremities.

> (2019, p. 37)

This is a neat fit with Butoh's notion of bodies' holographic access to the wider cosmos and coheres with the type of world I find myself in when dancing. In contrast, assemblage very much implies separate bodies touching at their extremities – both in English and through its derivation from the French *agencement*, meaning an arrangement or layout (Nail, 2017, p. 22). I am aware of treating the term literally, and that those more invested in post-Deleuzian theory might challenge me – for example with Barad's quasi-Buddhist statement that phenomena are 'relations without preexisting relata' (2007, p. 139), meaning there are no separate bodies prior to the assemblage. But this is precisely my point: assemblage sounds wrong until annotated in depth and has unhelpful connotations in demotic vocabulary (being redolent of the assembly line or assembling furniture).

Sculpting the wrong words into the right ones at length seems to me exclusionary and mystifying – I am trying not to use the word jargon. Immersion and mixture immediately sound like what they mean. This matters in research where embodiment is foregrounded, and where words are used to reunite soma and discarnate intellect. That is, demotic intelligibility and immediate connotations are critical when research hinges on abandonment of abstract languaging in favour of plunging into embodied experience. Words should trigger and reflect such experience with minimal mediation by theory. Further, if bodies are co-constructed with

and inscribed by discourse, we might be careful about inscribing them only with intellectualised verbiage.

My offering to current discourse here is to suggest the methodological benefits of euphony and simplicity of language in addressing materials through embodied practice, since theoretical discursions sap available attention for engagement in somatic experience. My bodymind can easily dance into the following statements: *I am immersed in an animate world. I am merging with this chair. I am mixed with everything. I am dissolving into love.* It might also dance into this one, but not without a hernia: *my task is to discern temporary assemblages of lively matter cohering through agential intra-action.*

My aversion to fiddly terminology has a second rationale besides its unfriendliness to embodiment: accessibility. Almost every sentence I have written in this section, and certainly those in the works above, would be met with incredulity by my working-class parents. Though there is of course value in specialised language when it is necessary in articulating difficult concepts, I think much current ecological performance discourse jargonises in a manner that has little utility other than restricting its dissemination. This seems unwise when the topic of debate (the end of the world) needs to be addressed by everyone.

My last intervention in ecological performance discourse is related to the above, and it concerns scriptocentrism (even logocentrism, since orality is not foregrounded in dance). New materialists such as Haraway and Barad theorise a 'material-discursive' process (Alaimo, 2020, pp. 178-180), partly in reaction to an overemphasis on language-only during the previous linguistic turn; this is intended to 'give materiality its due' (Coole and Frost, 2021, p. 7). This orientation enables all kinds of analyses of the co-creation of our world through discourse-and-power in mutual exchange with agentic material. But for my purposes it risks accomplishing the exact opposite of its aims, that is, reinstalling alphabetic language as the medium and arbiter of material experience – a super-charged linguistic turn. Materiality is here given its due overwhelmingly through convoluted writing, privileging the discursive in material-discursive.

The danger is co-option of materials by discourse, encouraging a trance in which you can write about materiality and believe you are working directly with materials rather than sitting at a desk (an activity involving materials but not the ones you are writing about). The neologising complexity of current discourse can make this pitfall less obvious. But simpler tropes such as

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'writing with' rather than 'writing about' contain a similar risk. I would prefer 'writing to' as a textual gesture of inclusivity towards materials who are not themselves involved in our discourse. If we were really collaborating with them we would not be using human script.

I am proposing a downside of dismantling dualisms too easily, which is obliviousness of the power differentials at play. Writing is the default in humanities research and was the driver of the linguistic turn which is supposedly being redressed by the material turn (actual materials were not very agentic in either turn). Gone unrecognised, this bias leaves scholars poorly equipped to give materiality its due.

Dwight Conquergood writes in this connection that

> the almost total domination of textualism in the academy makes it difficult to rethink performance in non-Eurocentric ways… What are the costs of dematerializing texts as textuality, and disembodying performance as performativity, and then making these abstractions interchangeable concepts? … Because knowledge in the West is scriptocentric, we need to recuperate from performance some oppositional force, some resistance to the textual fundamentalism of the academy.
>
> (Magnat, 2022, p. 27)

This concern is part of my rationale for insisting upon both no-thinking in my method, and consciousness of abstracting (map versus territory) in theorising about practice results. Text is already an abstraction from embodied experience, and analysis of it introduces another layer of separation; unavoidable perhaps, but consciousness of abstracting means we are at least cognisant of the procedure.

Material and embodiment are the conditions in which discourse happens, and they exceed it. A material-discursive framework for thinking with (to?) the material world is therefore self-limited to the aspects of it which plausibly are brought into being through material and discourse together. It cannot account for many aspects of post-discursive life – I do not eat discursively – or for any of what came before it (by post-discursive I mean *since the advent of discourse).* The interplay between stuff and language has no bearing on the formation of the universe or the emergence of complex life, entailing the irony that material-discursive philosophy is inherently anthropocentric unless discourse is defined so broadly that it may as well mean any form of activity.

Writing about the world is not the world, and writing about embodied ecological experience is not the experience described. Rather, it is the possibly-embodied experience of writing. In being resolutely practice-centred, my project offers a corrective to confusions about discourse which threaten the reduction of embodied experience to theories about it. Or the kind of mission creep that leaves no workable distinction between discourse and material. These may be co-constitutive from certain (cosmically recent) angles, and existence itself ultimately monistic – I agree with new materialism and posthumanism here – but as Conquergood suggests above, it would be just like Western academia to turn concern for the dignity of actual materials into scriptocentric abstractions about materiality.

The World in the Body in the World

Where ecological performance and its discourse describe the wider terrain in which my project sits, the nascent field of ecosomatics is closer to home, focussing on somatic research into ecological realisation. As I completed my thesis, *Geographies of Us: Ecosomatic Essays and Practice Pages* was published, marking 'the first edited collection in the multidisciplinary field of ecosomatics' (Fraleigh and Riley, 2024, p.1). It is an emergent field in which 'it is apparent that there is much to be done to gather the ecosomatic approaches going on in other geographies' (p. 4), and that even 'somatics is a field of practices not well understood' (p. 83). I will therefore describe examples from ecosomatics here and situate my project amongst them, with the caveat that more comprehensive mapping remains to be done.

My first observation is that *Geographies of Us* does not fall prey to the failure to credit non-Western knowledges which besets new materialism. Whilst some of its contributors choose the language of intra-action and assemblage, these are contextualised via whole chapters devoted to discussion of Native American practices (Wakpa, pp. 36-63), and to decolonial ecosomatic practice by black trans artists (Coleman, pp. 64-74). This suggests that while practice-based researchers are already incorporating critical theory into their thinking, there might be some benefit in encouraging traffic in the opposite direction.

Here are two examples of ecosomatic practice which can be brought into conversation with my

own. Brittany Laidlaw and Tanja Beer propose a method which shows striking overlap with mine, and their research declares influence by Body Weather, a somatic practice related to Butoh in that its founder Min Tanaka was a younger contemporary of, and collaborator with, Hijikata. Though Tanaka distinguishes his method from that of Hijikata, many Butoh dancers (including me) seek out Body Weather training due to its congruent approach via Hijikata's impact on Tanaka (Tanaka and Ozaki, 2022). Much of the ecosomatic research I reviewed similarly holds some connection to Butoh – Sondra Fraleigh, the editor of *Geographies of Us*, is herself a noted Butoh practitioner, and Lani Weissbach's chapter in the book centres on Butoh (Weissbach, 2024, pp. 104-10) – bolstering my assertion that such methods are particularly suitable for embodied ecological practice.

Laidlaw and Beer's model posits a five-step process comprised of

> (1) an open willingness to surrender; (2) whole-body listening; (3) moving as one; (4) finding identity through place-making; and (5) reverence and gratitude.

> (Laidlaw and Beer, 2018, p. 283)

Surrender here may correspond loosely to emptying, and reverence and gratitude accord with my own practice experience, though I did not explicitly codify them in my model since they are, for me, effects of practice rather than tools in themselves (see my journal **entry eighteen**, 'Vanishing into Gratitude'). In common with emptying, surrender seems difficult or impossible to square with the preservation of an external, analytical self. I have not used the notion of place-making, but through it Laidlaw and Beer recognise that identity, perhaps roughly synonymous with selfhood, is malleable and can be expanded beyond the skin to implicate the surrounding environment. 'Moving as one' is explained as Laidlaw's experience of 'synchronicity of movements between herself and her surroundings, as if they were sensing and reacting to each other simultaneously', as well as seeing dance as providing 'an insight into how my body is earth because all life is movement' (p. 294). This concords with my journal findings regarding synchronicity (discussed in chapter four).

Christine Bellerose, through her doctoral ecosomatics project, proposes a model called 'moving-thinking', and refers to the inclusion of both 'felt real' and 'felt imagined' phenomena in her practice (Bellerose, 2021, p. 224). She also stresses the importance of engaging in 'nonsense' or 'not making sense' (p. 23). This model too was influenced by Butoh and

mentored by Sondra Fraleigh. The 'felt imagined' connects with my concern for embodied-imaginal work and opening to the surreal and a-rational in Playing with the Cut – one of Bellerose's examples is her experience of 'dancing at the speed of ice' (p. 57). As noted above, my explanation for this necessity is that the embodied imagination appears unconcerned with rationality or skepticism, and that once the floodgates open by means of emptying (in my case), a profusion of images and sensations arise which are better approached with devotion than circumspection.

Ecosomatics, in my case and possibly that of Bellerose, is a significantly child-like thing to do: what if I turned into water? What if I merged with this tree? What if I grew tentacles or hatched from an egg? Such notions can be embodied in surreal ways, and the fruits of this embodiment are a fundamental shift in selfhood towards metamorphosis and entanglement. Tangentially, Bellerose also objects to theorising her practice through the lens of new materialism and specifically Bennett's vibrant materialism, regarding it as 'thinking the body from the neck up' (p. 64). This resonates with my critique of scriptocentrism above. The similarities discussed between Playing with the Cut, the method of Laidlaw and Beer, and Bellerose's 'moving-thinking' confirm ecosomatics as an appropriate field in which to locate my project.

I will argue for four aspects of my method which are new to ecosomatics. Firstly, Playing with the Cut emphasises selfhood. As seen in chapter two, I ally with the writings of Varela (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993) and Nagatomo (1992) in as much as they both stress phenomenology as an enterprise which ought to take account not only of the phenomena appearing but of the embodied *who* to whom they appear. This expanded phenomenology is open to malleability and transformation of the who, and the who's self-perception or selfhood. I have not found this emphasis in other ecosomatic research, though I believe it is latent in statements such as 'As Laidlaw began to merge with place, she absorbed its features into her identity' (Laidlaw and Beer, 2018, p. 296).

Playing with the Cut is radical in the amount of leeway it affords for the who to transform thanks to its basis in Butoh, and to Hijikata's injunction to metamorphose by forgetting the fact of being a human at all (Centonze, 2018, p. 16) – incidentally showing one more precedent for posthumanism which I have not seen acknowledged. This psychological technique is of course not my creation, but it underpins my emphasis on labile selfhood. This emphasis seems to be new in ecosomatics. Though my efforts to connect somatically with what is outside the skin

are common in this field, my project is distinct in explicitly*,* and simultaneously, turning the gaze back towards its own source and encouraging selfhood-transformation. My method is also distinguished by not being posited as a decentring of the human as in, for example, Weissbach's discussion of Butoh (2024, p. 110). This is because the human as centre is dispensed with through emptying so that the issue of concern is fluctuations in an undefined, rather than *human,* selfhood.

Secondly, Playing with the Cut is presented as a flexible, cyclical, and overlapping process. The opening move is emptying (ideally preceded by physical warm-ups and stretching). After this, the orientational guidelines around relating to core phenomena and managing intellectual responses are seen as resources to be employed responsively as dancing unfolds. Each situation being unique, I am presenting my method as an experimental process which will continually surprise in its unfolding. This is somewhat of a contrast to the model by Laidlaw and Beer, the ecological therapy model by Jennifer Beauvais considered in chapter one (Beauvais, 2012), and Anna Dako's 'felt thinking methodology' (Dako, 2020). Each of these is presented as a series of steps to be performed in linear order.

This flexibility is due to respect for individual differences – even the same person will respond differently on different days. It also springs from my focus on selfhood and what I see as a spectrum of possible selves which may arise through dancing. I doubt I have exhausted this spectrum's possibilities so I am not codifying or over defining it, but it includes an *amalgamated* self which incorporates material from outside (expansion), a *resonant* self which maintains difference but encounters material as I-Thou (resonating), and a *metamorphic* self which leaves the normal me behind to become something else (metamorphosis). Playing with the Cut is kept open to account for the fact that which of these modes of *selving* will arise is unpredictable. Selving is negotiated between the ego and the images appearing autonomously from beyond the cut, and my method's ways of relating to phenomena is a map of possible ways to respond.

A third novelty in the context of ecosomatics is my uncompromising stance on thinking. Where others such as Bellerose propose a paradigm of 'moving-thinking' (Bellerose, 2021, p. 1), or 'felt thinking' (Dako, 2020), I am following both my training and my research results in declaring Playing with the Cut a thought-free activity (I recall a workshop in Germany where the teacher posted a sign on the door reading 'Please leave shoes and brain outside'). I have

referred to this stance throughout as no-thinking and as researching-by-definitely-not-researching, with the intention of pin-pointing the types of mentation – theorising, abstracting, conceptualising, analysing – which are detrimental to practice. Embodied imagination is the engine, and whilst terms resonate differently for different people and I do not know how Bellerose would define the term thinking, I have found it valuable and clarifying to designate it as a barrier and include no-thinking in my method (fig. 29). Emptying as a process involves emptying oneself of thought above all.

Lastly, my project is unusual within ecosomatics in presenting three performance works as part of my dissemination. Almost all the ecosomatic research I encountered was presented textually, and sometimes photographically. Textual descriptions of practice often resemble my own journals: phenomenological narratives of dances already performed. This is an appropriate mode of conveying the dancer's internal experience to the reader. But text about ecosomatics is abstraction (revealed by the word *about)*, and I do not see why the field should confine itself to written dissemination since this further entrenches scriptocentrism. I share the unease of many dancers I have spoken to over the years regarding filmed performances: the nagging feeling that something essential refuses to translate into pixels. But video nonetheless shows a simulacrum of a dancing body in much higher resolution and specificity than can be achieved through writing.

There are sometimes excellent reasons for omitting direct evidence of practice. One such is ethnographic refusal, explained by Alex Zahara (cited in Tria Blu Wakpa's chapter in *Geographies of Us)*:

> "Ethnographic refusal is a practice by which researchers and research participants together decide not to make particular information available for use within the academy. Its purpose is not to bury information, but to ensure that communities are able to respond to issues on their own terms." Because many Native people view Indigenous dance as sacred knowledge, they may regard writing about such practices as controversial if not also disrespectful. Additionally, writing about these practices may unwittingly contribute to cultural appropriation.

> (Wakpa, 2024, pp. 32-43)

This does not apply to my practice however, nor to that of many other researchers since we are already ensconced in Western discourses, pursuing hybrid practices, and not entrusted with the

safekeeping of traditional knowledges. Embodied communication through live performance or its proxy on video seems to me crucial in preventing the dismantling of ecosomatic experience into sentences about it.

My own methods of embodied communication in this project are idiosyncratic and inflected by my non-dance aptitudes: musical underpinnings that enrich the world being presented, and dramaturgies which contextualise and enhance the communicability of the selfhoods being exhibited. These selfhoods are manifold and confront diverse themes and issues across my three performances. I have never been so conceptual an artist as to wish to demonstrate one thing to an audience, and Playing with the Cut is presented both as a generator of ecological selfhoods and the producer of a gaze through which themes may be explored. My performances do not seek to present faultless expertise and often display my struggle with a culturally conditioned skin-self as it encounters prompts to expand. This positions me on both sides of the veil: by turns trapped in individualism and transcending it. *Show, don't tell* means exposing my ineptitudes as a dancer and broken Buddha, and it means surmounting the suspicion that filming robs my dancing of something undefinable. But it is the closest to a warts-and-all dissemination of my practice as is possible when performance in person is not an option, and it offers the considerable advantage of repeated viewing, which allows my performances to be analysed and validated by myself and others.

Mine and not-mine

I will close this chapter with an acknowledgement brandishing an objection. My status here is as an artist-researcher extending methods whose basis is widely employed by other artists. My friend and teacher Atsushi Takenouchi is an excellent example (Takenouchi and Frank, 2021), and could argue for his work of many decades as pioneering ecosomatics-in-performance or indeed a precursor to new materialism and posthumanism were it to be conducted in an academic context. He avoids verbiage: I have seen him explain his dancing by chatting with stones about deep time, ventriloquising their responses in a manner that provokes belly-laughter rather than chin-scratching. But Takenouchi immediately corrects anyone referring to him as master or sensei, insisting that he is 'only a child of Butoh'.

The perils of overstating newness and originality have been considered already, and I am after all building upon somatic and philosophical endeavours some of which (Indigenous animisms, Buddhism) are hundreds or thousands of years old. Given my theme of ecological selfhood, it seems appropriate that I ask you to imagine scare quotes around all references to 'my' contribution and 'my' method in what has preceded. I am, in truth, uncomfortable with the obligation to declare a unique addition to knowledge and progress (whose knowledge? Whose progress?). I have no firm suggestion for an alternative framing of institutional research, but I think it should be up for discussion.

Allow me to undermine MySelf by offering the Cosmos-Ancestors-Sun-Plants-Quarks and Shrimp their unknowable majority share of credit and blame for 'my' contribution. If ecological selfhood is to mean anything it must involve a genuine, ontological reckoning with individualism which is permissible to state at every turn. I am not-two.

SHIFTING YOUR POSTURE

ALTERS THE CONFIGURATION

OF THE UNIVERSE

Conclusion: A Shell Cracking Open, Sometimes Messily

The individualism defining Western concepts of the human reaches its apotheosis with neoliberal *consumerism*: the skin-bound self which is in it for itself and in competition with what is not itself. By a curious coincidence (perhaps), this ideology of the self has been perfected just in time for the arrival of the Anthropocene, whose cascading ecological crises show that neoliberal orthodoxy cannot be maintained for much longer if humanity hopes to survive.

Happily, individualism is just one of many ways to conceive of selfhood. As seen in chapter one, biology now posits more accurate alternatives such as Lynn Margulis' *holobiont* – an entangled, context-dependent being which includes all the species living in and around it (Guerrero, Margulis, and Berlanga, 2013). Western ecophilosophies such as deep ecology, posthumanism, and new materialism offer ways to view the self as ontologically equal to and entangled with other beings and species, and non-humans as vital and valuable. Buddhism and Indigenous animisms have been here all along, waiting to be noticed. All of these proffer the possibility of selfhoods which, rather than heralding a demotion for humans, may instead be joyous good news. Separation is over! We can cease to be lonely, embattled skin-bags, and recognise the ecological interdependence and interbeing that have always been our condition (and that of every entity whatsoever).

These two concerns – the transgressable nature of the skin-bound self, and the mounting Anthroposcenic consequences of not transgressing it – lie at the core of this project. My principle research question has been: how can an embodied practice generate and express realisations of ecological selfhood? This reflects my desire to methodise experiences I have had since I began training in Butoh dance in 2009, and to articulate the strategies which inculcate ecological self-transformation and allow its communication to others.

My methodology has been to employ Butoh-derived dance to research the generation of ecological selfhood-transformation and hone the most promising strategies. Data from this activity was collected through my technique of researching-by-definitely-not-researching, which was my means of navigating my secondary question: how can such a practice be

researched without the trappings of research themselves becoming a hindrance? The researcher's gaze was banished from practice sessions and reinstated afterwards as I used phenomenological journalling to capture my experiences. The expression of ecological selfhoods was researched through the creation of my three performances: *Shrimp Dance, My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off,* and *Excuse Me I am Expanding.* Data for this was collected by repeated viewings of the performances. Collation and analysis of my data for both activities was conducted through grounded theory, coding salient features so that the key aspects and interactions between them could be seen. The results of this were checked against my embodied experience of the research to correct for the abstracted and reductive nature of the coding process.

My articulation of a new method is based on this methodology and informed by a conceptual framework gleaned from my contextual review. Emmanuelle Coccia (2019) provided me with an ontology by positing existence as based in immersion and mixture, a description which coheres with the worlds I find myself dancing in through practice. Thich Nhat Han's coinage interbeing (2017) gave me a way to articulate the sense in which all entities are necessary to each other, appearing as a total cosmic picture in which everyone implies everyone else; this is an extension of the more dynamically apparent interdependence, the manner in which beings exist through constant material exchange with each other. Shigenori Nagatomo's revision of phenomenology offered the concept of the *subject-body* (1992, p. 5), which names the phenomenological experience of a changing *who* which expands beyond the skin that is basic to embodied ecological selfhood. Robin Wall Kimmerer and Martin Buber articulated useful orientations towards otherhood in practice: the former by dignifying all beings as persons (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 385), and the latter by distinguishing between an instrumentalist I-It gaze towards others, and a relationally sacred I-Thou (Buber, 1958). Finally, James Hillman named the cut, the demarcation between self and non-self which forms the essential focus of my research in this project (1995, p. xix).

So how can I adjust the cut between me and everyone else? How can I access ecological selfhoods that feel transformational rather than merely conceptual, and how can I share them with others? Playing with the Cut is my answer, a method for trying on different selves through dance, and communicating this by direct embodied resonance. The keys to the method are emptying and devotion: a freeing of the bodymind from habitual self-concepts and discourse (no-thinking), and an orientation towards the consequently arising core phenomena that is

based in love and a willingness to be changed through relations with them. The ritual creation of a vessel aids this process by minimising interference from hampering physical and psychological influences. With these essentials adopted, the practitioner is immersed in an experimental process of *selving* which is negotiated between their ego and the images arising from outside it. They are playing with their cut.

Expressing the manifold ecological selfhoods thus generated inheres in the simple but challenging act of showing them, rather than explaining them, to an audience. This mode of dance is non-representational and relies on resonance: the capacity of beings to be moved and informed without mimesis or semiotics, based in attendance to one another's presence and state. Expression can be enhanced through other media (text and speech, video, lighting, music, editing) and through location and scenography, all of which provide ways to orient and situate the dancing bodymind in relation to its audience.

The main insight produced by Playing with the Cut is that selfhood can be pliable and contextual: skin-bound when a tiger is chasing, planet-sized in the face of ecological crisis. The core of unfolding practice is embodied-imaginal rather than thought-based. This keeps the process grounded in the soma and senses, focussed on the territory rather than a map of it, and this factor is what makes ecological selfhood realisations transformational (metamorphic) rather than merely conceptual.

I have located my project within the fields of Butoh studies, ecological performance, ecological performance discourse, and ecosomatics. To Butoh studies my method contributes an adaptation of this dance form for the specific challenge of navigating the Anthropocene, focussed on undoing neoliberal individualism by exposure to incompatible states of ecological selfhood. To ecological performance, Playing with the Cut offers an unambiguous aim and the means to achieve it: the cultivation and performance expression of experiences of ecological selfhood. Ecological performance discourse is addressed through my project's advocacy of a more diverse philosophical base than the predominant new materialism and posthumanism (as well as the preceding ecocritical approaches which privileged theories of mimesis and representation). Analyses of agency, complicated jargon, and a somewhat hermetically sealed Eurocentric view are challenged by my project's recognition of alternatives in the shape of self-emptying, animist image relations, and a wider cultural context which acknowledges the non-Western and forgotten-Western philosophies which have long had answers to the problem

of neoliberal deadenism. And Playing with the Cut contributes to ecosomatics by foregrounding labile selfhood and revision of what constitutes a *human* being as key concerns. It also shows the value of flexibility in guidelines for ecosomatic exploration so that the unpredictable outcomes inherent in it can be enfolded in the process, as well as cautioning against abstraction by advocating no-thinking. Lastly, my project contributes to ecosomatics a process which is shown on video in its own right rather than recounted through text – an already dominant research medium to which embodied practice can offer a counterbalancing redress.

Regarding the limitations of this project: I am part of a cohort of researchers with the strange luck of pursuing a doctorate amidst a global pandemic. This circumstance resulted in fortuitous shifts for me, such as the imperative to develop my film making practice in lieu of performance for live audiences. But I cannot escape the cost of COVID in limiting my scope. The two main casualties were research into the efficacy of Playing with the Cut on bodies other than my own, and my portfolio's presentation for examiners through video only. I cannot pretend there is no loss in swapping live presence for video editing.

I had intended to conduct workshops with structured participant feedback so that the effects of my method on others could be studied. Social distancing and building closures made this impossible. Secondly, planning for performances of *Shrimp Dance* was compromised since it was not clear if Edinburgh Festival Fringe would be going ahead in 2022 until quite late in the day. As a result, there was no time to arrange examined live performances. Another limitation which may have arisen regardless of COVID due to time constraints is that I have not made a qualitative study of the reception of my performances by audiences – this means my confidence in their impactful expression rests upon my years of performance experience and the feedback I have received, rather than in data I can validate here.

Two further limitations inherent in my method bear mentioning. Firstly, its inclusion of expertise is an acknowledgement that prior somatic training provides the practitioner with increased fluency in Playing with the Cut. I do not see this as a requirement, but simply a factor which may restrict the method's accessibility to those who have not engaged in such training previously. Secondly, the risks identified as inhibitors (isolation and capacity) point towards care needed around mental and emotional health when engaging the method. This relates back to expertise in that there may be a case for the presence of a facilitator when new participants are exploring it.

These lacunae point towards further research to be pursued. I believe I have hit on a novel entry point to embodied ecological selfhood with the radial body exercise explored in my piece *With Your Eyes Closed*. This was inspired by mixing my Butoh practice with the articulation of a 'subject-body' by Nagatomo (1992. p. 5). The exercise could be used as an accessible introduction for more nuanced workshops with diverse participants through which a qualitative study of experiences of ecological selfhood could be conducted. Combining this with a study of audience experiences of performances would shed light on how these techniques can be made maximally accessible, and how far audiences find their self-perception shift through embodied resonance.

A related project would be to research my method through the lenses of demographic difference and personal specificity which I have largely avoided here. This would be timely for me in that my PhD coincided with the upending of my own skin-bound sense of self through diagnoses of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, ADHD, and possible autism. I would like to research how Playing with the Cut can be neurodivergence, trauma, and otherwise intersectionally sensitive so that my tools for accessing ecological selfhood can take account of differing lifeworlds and experiences. Such issues are something of a gap for Butoh generally and addressing them could assist its contribution of vital resources for Anthropocene living to as wide a demographic as possible.

A final avenue for research is the notion of ecological selfhood as gaze. This was evident throughout the performances in my Practice Works (see chapter four), where the core practice of emptying and devotion produced a sense of self which has a particular orientation towards the world around it. It was brought to bear on mental health in *Shrimp Dance*, on mass extinction in *My Whole Face Sort of Fell Off,* and on ancestry and cultural displacement in *Excuse Me I am Expanding*. This gaze led to my approaching these topics relationally and empathetically, seeking connections and macro-analyses of them across species and generational boundaries in a way that felt so natural as to be inevitable given the expanded selfhood from which I was viewing them. Further research is needed into the novel perspectives an ecologically expanded self can contribute to the myriad problems attendant to the Anthropocene.

As it stands, the audience for my project includes dancers, performance artists, visual artists,

musicians, writers, therapists, and those with congruent somatic and spiritual practices and an interest in changing perceptions around ecological collapse. These are the demographics who have been attending my *Dreaming Body* workshops for the last decade, in Scotland and internationally. Though Playing with the Cut is new knowledge produced through my PhD, its seeds already existed in my workshops and I have a good indication of the cross-disciplinary audience who will be drawn to it.

I hope the project will also be useful within academia in influencing other artist researchers focussed on ecology. The fact that my model is a clear and flexible guide to embodied art making around ecology makes it unusual, and I hope such researchers will employ it as a template or hand-rail for their own exploration. And my choice to pursue my doctorate through a 50/50 split of practice and writing reflects my desire for an audience within theoretical domains – specifically ecological performance discourse. As argued in chapter five, I feel this field is currently too narrow. There is also something of a one-way traffic such that artists follow theorists unduly, limiting their work by conceptualising it through a select few philosophical frameworks. My project shows, I hope, that those with embodied art practices have distinct, valuable perspectives which theorists can benefit from considering.

Playing with the Cut is my contribution to knowledge, and can be encapsulated as follows. In an immersed world, an individualised human performs a ritual. Circumscribing time (now) and space (here), they empty themselves of themselves, casting thought to the wind. The human with its skin-cut between me and not-me is offered on the altar of ecological intention, and the bodymind as a vehicle for expansion. Embodiedly, they wait. Imaginatively, phenomena appear, and devotionally they address them: I to Thou, person to person. They are willing to be changed by what they encounter, to absorb and be absorbed. In a dancing of the total self they resonate, merge, expand, and metamorphose by a process that is fundamentally mysterious. Through it, they are altered and experience a me-world as fluid interplay, leaking and seething, paradoxical and alive. Ecological selfhood, the embodied-imaginal realisation of interbeing. Different every time, the import is nonetheless consistent: I am involved with everyone, and if I hope to love myself I had better love you too. I am you.

Post-Script: The Tree at the Bus Stop

I am born in 1980, with no instruction manual. In utero my dependency is total and one-sided, and I give little back to my mother as she nourishes me. Post-partum the situation scarcely changes: my needs are catered to, my excretions buttled out of sight. The selfhood I form likely resembles the narcissistic, 'all-consuming' one of neoliberal consumerism (Kanner and Gomes, 1995, p. 77), or what Freud called 'His Majesty the Baby' (Sandler, Person, and Fonagy, 2012, p. 21). My powers seem to grow over the years, allowing my skin-bound me to instrumentalise more of what lies beyond it.

Behind the scenes, the matrix in which I am immersed continues to circulate its bounty – oxygen for carbon dioxide, flowers for mulch. If it stops, my pretensions of agency will immediately fall apart. But neoliberalism – forty-four years later still the only ideology to have governed the society in which I live – is on hand to guide the development of my strange skin-bag self. I am to be a consumer; a hard worker whose hard work dignifies the continual provision of *stuff*. I will not know how most of it works or where it comes from. But the stuff will be mine, a garland of my me.

I remember persistent childhood experiences such as the following: I am standing at the bus stop, waiting to go to school. I do not know the proper name for the tree next to me, but when I turn towards it, it speaks. The language is a resonance, a numinous declaration of life and a shimmering address to my embodied consciousness. I feel that what the tree is, I am too. I feel my boundaries soften as life transgresses my skin and the bark of the tree, intermingling us. The me-tree gestalt is an experience, a suchness requiring no validating theory or mediation by thought. I know the way I am relating is somehow taboo. I tell no one, file it away with other mysteries which have no place in the languages of home or school. I learn these languages as best I can.

Years later, exploring ritual, Buddhism, indigenous cosmologies, and animism, I realise there are others who know my secret: I do not stop at my skin. Even more: my imagination is not all in my head but profoundly shapes my perception of everything around me. I find poets who

know what I know: William Blake's 'As the Eye – Such the Object' (Erdman, 1988, p. 645), Walt Whitman's 'For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you' (Whitman and Karbenier, ed., 2004, p. 78). Butoh provides a framework for exploring this territory through the body, gifting me back my childhood. By the time I encounter it I am aware of the Earth's disarray, and dancing through the following years I hear phrases like climate change, ecocide, and Anthropocene more frequently. A mixture of despair and vindication – despair at the havoc and pain humans are wreaking, vindication that my younger experiences seem to have been valid after all.

Beneath my consumer's isolation, I am involved with all things – not because they are mine but because they are parts of my self, as I of theirs. The Anthropocene shows me this. I feel solidarity born of embodied immersion, of self-metamorphosis rather than the self's calculation or moral injunctions (which for me only ever produce guilt). I wonder if we have the heart to redefine ourselves, even at this late stage. Self-interest as solidarity, altruism as self-care – given a wide enough cut between me and not-me. I think about the tree at the bus stop.

THESE ARE (FOR) YOU

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