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Embodying an Ecological Condition:
A Dance Practice Approach to Sensing Multiplicity

There is an ecology of the world within our bodies.

– Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

I have come to see... nature and all that is in it, is also in each of us

– Anna Halprin, *Moving Towards Life*

Introduction

In this paper, I explore how contemporary dance practices affect awareness of multiplicity in the body's inner and outer environments. Through analysis of my dance practice and the practice-based scholarship of key artists in my field, I offer insights into how embodied perceptions of multiplicity contribute to "ecocultural" (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor 2020) and "trans-corporeal" (Alaimo 2008) perceptions of the self as ecologically constituted and interconnected with the "more-than-human world" (Abram 1996). I draw frameworks from the fields of material feminism (Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Haraway 1988) and environmental humanities (Abram 1996; Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor 2020) into dialogue with methods of contemporary dance practice informed by somatic and improvisational practices (Crisp & Ginot 2014; Nelson 2010; Parkinson & Bigé 2018). In doing so, I explore how embodied awareness of a condition of multiplicity troubles Western/ised human-centrism and makes one sensitive to the dynamic bio-ecologies co-constituting and entangling them with their Earthly surroundings.

In moments of dance performance and practice, a bounded sense of myself sometimes gives way. A multitude of materials and energies seem to crisscross and entwine my inner and outer environments. Parts of me contact and momentarily coalesce with parts of my environment—even parts at a distance. These experiences tend to produce a profound sense of familiarity with, and affection for, the place as well as the living and non-living beings with which parts of myself temporarily resonated. Such experiences of

tacit embodied connection with one's more-than-human context involve a form of awareness, an embodied form of ecological awareness, which I sense is relevant both within and beyond the fields of dance and performance research.

In the context of the interlocking social and environmental issues active within the climate crisis, the capacity to perceive one's bodily self as ecologically constituted and interdependent with the Earth emerges as a significant knowledge position (Abram et al. 2020; Haraway 2016). Dominant Western/ised knowledge systems, and the extractive and colonial logics that descend from them, are oriented by anthropocentric ideas of human separateness from, and superiority over, the environment (Corbett 2006; Haraway 1988; Plumwood 2006). In their efforts to transform such destructive and pervasive epistemes, significant material feminist and environmental humanities scholarship theorises the importance of sensing the human self as an ecological being in interdependent and inseparable relation with the Earth (Alaimo 2008; Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor 2020). For example, Stacy Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality highlights the ethical implications of perceiving the sites of the corporeal and the environmental as co-continuously animated by lively agential matter (2008). Additionally, Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor's ecocultural identity theory identifies the recuperative possibilities of acknowledging and cultivating the ecological—in addition to the sociocultural—relations which contribute to the formation of all identities (2020). Together, these theories offer pathways for considering how embodied perceptions of one's material and energetic interlinkages with place enrich understandings of the self as ecologically constituted and interconnected with the more-than-human world (Abram 1996).

By methodically tuning¹ awareness to the multiplicity of materials, beings and energies constituting and interconnecting the body's inner and outer environments, I propose that dance practices foster trans-corporeal and ecocultural perceptions of human-Earth enmeshment. In first becoming aware of the multiplicities that compose one's inner environment, I perceive that the dancer becomes increasingly aware of the way this multiplicity is supported, enabled, and dynamically interconnected with the materials, energies and agencies of their surrounding outer environment. Drawing attention to the always ecological character of these relations (Abram et al. 2020), I develop the term 'embodied ecological awareness' to describe this bodily knowledge of the more-than-human relations that enmesh the self-with-place. With the aim of foregrounding embodied knowledge practices, this term highlights how being within a body is always already ecological and offers a hyper-localised material-sensory locus for perceiving the ecological condition that permeates life on Earth. I propose that 'embodied', sensation-rich 'awareness' of being 'ecologically' made up of and interconnected with one's environment has the capacity to mobilise trans-corporeal and ecocultural knowledge of ways our embodied selves entangle us with the well-being of the Earth's ecosystems.

These perceptions have developed through my embodied practice as contemporary dancer and choreographer (Newton 2010—). My practice participates in a lineage of post-modern dance informed by somatic and improvisational methods, and the ways these lineages manifest in the Australian context (Banes 2011; Brannigan & Baxter 2014;

Eddy 2009; Midgelow 2019). In the first part of this paper, I highlight the practice-based scholarship of North American artist-scholars Chrysa Parkinson and Lisa Nelson, and the dance practice method of Australian artist Rosalind Crisp. Parkinson's performance practice of "Real-time Authorship" (Parkinson & Bigé 2018) troubles singular authorship within dance; Nelson's "Tuning Scores" improvisation method "makes sensible" (Nelson 2010, 4) the relations which interconnect the body's inner and outer dimensions; and Crisp's "d a n s e" improvisation method cultivates embodied attention within a dispersible corporeality (Crisp & Ginot 2014). In identifying the trans-corporeal and ecocultural ways these practices attune awareness to a condition of more-than-human multiplicity, I hope to contribute to the ways in which theirs' and others' methods are understood as supporting embodied forms of ecological awareness.

As a dancer and choreographer, it is through my embodied practice that corporeal experiences of more-than-human multiplicity and interconnectedness have emerged in sharpest relief. The second part of this paper, centres on a case study from my solo practice during a long-form artist residency at Helsinki International Artist Programme (HIAP) in 2019. In my broader research, I analyse experiences of 'embodied ecological awareness' in a range of settings: as a participant in a workshop with Nelson (2019), leading a choreographic process (2020), and facilitating a group dance laboratory (2021). However, within the context of this paper, detailing the methods used to guide myself during daily solo practice provides a focused framework for documenting my changing awareness of multiplicity within my body and its surroundings. I use the term 'exercise' to indicate the dance practice methods moved through, intentionally (and somewhat playfully) emphasising the behind-the-scenes and methodical character of dance practice processes, along with the embodied transformations they engender. I draw on a body-centred autoethnographic research approach (Bartleet 2021; Parker-Starbuck & Mock 2011) and my documentary embodied writing practice to analyse the changes in embodied awareness that occurred as a result of the exercises. The resulting account of solo practice, in which a singular or bounded sense of the self is complexified, highlights the trans-corporeal and ecocultural modes of perception and identification engendered by my engagement in dance practice.

Situating Notes

This research is oriented by my position as a woman of Scottish, Welsh and English heritage who grew up on Dughutti land on the Mid-North Coast of NSW and who lives and works on unceded Indigenous land—specifically the lands of the Wangal and Gadigal peoples in inner western Sydney. I pay immense respect to the Indigenous elders of the lands on which I live, work and undertake this research. I am privileged to work amongst a community of First Nations, migrant and settler artists whose approaches to dance practice embody diverse human-Earth ontologies. My standpoint is limited and informed by my embodied inhabitation of largely Western/ised North American and European lineages of contemporary dance knowledge. I, therefore, respectfully acknowledge that the embodied understandings of ecological interdependence I explore reflect understandings foundational to Indigenous knowledge systems ontologically

oriented by kinship with the more-than-human world (Moreton-Robinson 2013). I also critically recognise that embodied practices, particularly dance, are a central part of diverse First Nations knowledge systems (Neale & Kelly 2020). While my research aims to engage with crises embedded in the anthropocentrism of dominant Western and colonial ideologies, in doing so I recognise the historical and ongoing damage to Indigenous ecocultures reaped by these ideologies, while mourning the significance of missed opportunities to walk with and learn from First Nations peoples. From this standpoint, I aim to reflexively critique and indicate alternatives to the disembodiment of knowledge that permeates dominant Western/ised anthropocentric, colonial and capitalist logics which have ideologically severed and elevated humans from the environment—and the mind from the body (Abram 1996; Parker-Starbuck & Mock 2011; Plumwood 2006).

This paper mobilises parts of my MPhil research (2022) which developed the concept of ‘embodied ecological awareness’ and articulated four intersecting dance practice approaches: 1, sensing multiplicity; 2, attending to an in-motion condition; 3, indivisibility at the body-world threshold; and 4, multisensory knowledge. Focusing here on (1) sensing multiplicity, these approaches also include (2) perceiving and integrating one’s action with the mutable and processual aspects of even seemingly static aspects of the body and environment, (3) attunement to the lively material processes of exchange interconnecting the body’s inner and outer environs, and (4) how a foregrounding of less dominant senses such as the kinaesthetic and haptic diminishes perceptions of the world as at-a-distance and enhances one’s sense of “reciprocal participation” in others’ being (Abram 1996, 128). Using the lens of multiplicity, with this paper, I traverse some of the interlocking ways these approaches foster trans-corporeal and ecocultural understandings of ‘embodied ecological awareness.’

My research in dance practice is situated within a growing area of scholarship and practice committed to embodied knowledge of human entanglement within the Earth’s ecosystems, in which perspectives from fields of choreography, somatic practices, performance art and theatre intersect (see Frischkorn 2023; Kampe et al., 2021; Sprinkle et al. 2021; Pearce 2024). My term ‘embodied ecological awareness’ emerged as a logical way of describing the bodily more-than-human attunement I encounter while dancing. Within this expanded field of bodily practices and associated theory, this term enters into circulation with a collection of aligned concepts such as “eco-consciousness” from the field of eco-somatics (Kampe et al. 2021), “eco soma” from the performance research method of Kupperts (2022) and “ecognosis” from the ecological philosophy of Morton (2016).² While as a term ‘embodied ecological awareness’ (with its three words) necessitates a kind of slowing down and lacks the kind of unification expressed in other terms, retaining a sense relational dynamism between the concepts of embodiment, ecology and awareness feels important to accurately indicating the particular phenomena I experience as emergent from dance practice. While this, and the aforementioned terms, each function slightly differently to express embodied enmeshment with the more-than-human world, these intersecting disciplinary approaches enable a growing discourse for considering the ways dance and other

embodied practices contribute to and can be valued in understandings of ecological interrelatedness.

Dance Practice Approaches to Sensing Trans-corporeal and Ecocultural Multiplicities

In this section, I explore some of the ways the dance practice methods of Chrysa Parkinson, Lisa Nelson and Rosalind Crisp can be understood to cultivate embodied awareness of a condition of multiplicity. I draw on my embodied learning experiences during their workshops (Parkinson 2016, Nelson 2019, Crisp 2012-18) as well as their practice-based scholarship to detail how their methods cultivate the capacity to sense multiplicity in one's internal and external environments. In identifying that embodied awareness of multiplicity undisciplines anthropocentric perceptions of the self, I highlight how these contemporary dance methods cultivate trans-corporeal and ecocultural experiences of interdependence with the more-than-human world (Abram et al. 2020).

Parkinson's performance practice of "Real-time Authorship" (Parkinson & Bigé 2018) offers a framework of embodied multiplicity in the context of both improvised and choreographed dance. Troubling the notion of a dancer singularly embodying the vision of a choreographer, Parkinson and Bigé identify even the simplest of gestures as a collective of coalescing movements (2018, 19). They explain this gesture as authored voluntarily and involuntarily, consciously and unconsciously by a multitude of agencies active both from within and beyond their embodied selves (19). In acknowledging this multitude of anonymous movements intersecting in and contributing to the performer's gesture in a real-time, Parkinson and Bigé propose that the dancer's agency lies in their awareness of and collaboration within their immediate network of environmental and corporeal materials and forces.

They further explain that this recognition of multiplicity creates a "plasticity in the border between what [the individual is] included in and what [they're] made up of" (19). As the distinction between bodily and environmental agencies intertwines, the dancer's self-awareness and enactment circulates through an expanded field of body-environment interactivity; a particularly trans-corporeal field of attention and action. Highlighting the more-than-human multiplicities they embody, Parkinson and Bigé describe authoring with "movements that belong to other kinds of beings (from rocks to plants to animals to fellow humans to things made by humans) that circulate [within them]" (23). In detailing how the more-than-human world in which they are enmeshed plays, and is replayed, through their embodied action, Parkinson and Bigé emphasise "the multitudinous work of sensing that constitutes [a self] and constitutes what [it] make[s]—moment to moment, over and over, in real-time" (23). Sensing multiplicity through the practice of Real-time Authorship submerges the dancer in a relational network of agencies in which historical embodied knowledge of, and live attunement to, the more-than-human world actively contributes to and enables one's action.

With the concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo identifies the environmental ramifications of recognising the embodied self as constituted by multiplicities continuous with the more-than-human world (2008). Trans-corporeality draws attention to the way plasticity (Parkinson & Bigé 2018) at the edge of the self enables perceptions of the “interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human” (Alaimo 2008, 238). Drawing on Karen Barad (2003) and Donna Haraway’s (1988) respective theories of “agential realism” and “situated knowledges”, trans-corporeality highlights how embodied recognition of a condition of always-relational material entanglement troubles nature-culture divides and makes it difficult to relegate nature to the position of resource or “mere background for the exploits of the human” (Alaimo 2008, 238).

In providing a theoretical framework that expands corporeal ethics toward the more-than-human world, Alaimo problematises the primacy of discursive human-centric ways of knowing and emphasises how embodied knowledge foregrounds continuances between bodily and Earthly (bio)spheres. With “Real-time Authorship,” Parkinson and Bigé practice embodied awareness of the multitudes that constitute and enable their action from one moment to the next. They act with and as a collective of more-than-human agencies coalescing in a lively trans-corporeal contact zone. Hence Parkinson and Bigé’s “Real-time Authorship” can be understood as a method for becoming aware of the continuities that transgress and entangle humans across nature-culture divides. In engendering embodied awareness of a condition multiplicity, Real-time Authorship fosters trans-corporeal perceptions of enmeshment with the more-than-human world.

In a similar manner, Nelson’s “Tuning Scores” dance improvisation method engages with the materiality of the senses to make sensible the multitudes connecting the body’s inner and outer environments (2010). Nelson describes the first phase of the “Tuning Scores” as a pre-technique which “tunes the senses to follow features in both the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ environment, measuring stillness and movement through each of the senses and shifting from sense to sense and sensing to action” (2010, 4). Drawing on the somatic experiential anatomy techniques of BodyMind Centring (Cohen 2012; Nelson 2008), as well as Gibson’s theory of the “ecology of perception” (see Nelson 2008), Nelson develops the term “attentionography” (2010, 4), to describe this conscious practice of tuning of one’s multisensory perception. “[T]asting sensations entering and exiting the body’s theatre of awareness” while “sampling the feedback afforded by local conditions”, the “Tuning Scores” sharpen the synaesthetic ways the senses interconnect inner and outer multitudes and reshape habitual ways of perceiving and acting with relation to one’s surroundings (5).

Nelson’s “attentionography” correlates with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram’s phenomenological analysis of the way the senses create “chiasm” of interconnection between the perceiver and the world: “the interplay of the different senses ... enables a chiasm between the body and the earth, [a] reciprocal participation – between one’s own flesh and the encompassing flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty in Abram 1996, 128). In this crisscrossing synaesthetic matrix, the visual and auditory senses that transmit the world-at-a-distance entwine with and activate localised fleshy haptic and kinaesthetic senses. As such, the perceiver experiences meeting-up with – and reciprocally

participates in – the sensual nature of the world (and other beings) at-a-distance (Abram, 1996, 128).

As a participant in a “Tuning Scores” workshop with Nelson at Movement Research in New York City in 2019, the methodical practice of inhibiting the dominant visual sense in synchronisation with my breath, and intentional movement and stillness, tuned-up my less dominant haptic and kinaesthetic senses. This “Tuning Score” cultivated a particularly sensuous experience of interconnection between parts of my inner and outer environments. Specific textural and material details of the surrounding studio environment and other bodies seemed to land upon and reverberate within specific parts of my fleshy self. This synaesthetic experience of feeling in-touch with parts of my environment cultivated a sense of bodily immanence with my more-than-human surroundings. A tacit knowledge of my environment emerged and became inscribed within different parts of my nervous system’s muscle memory. In becoming multi-sensorially attuned to multiplicity in my inner and outer environs, the “Tuning Score” reconfigured how I sensed myself as palpably interconnected within an active web of more-than-human agency.

Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor highlight the transformative impacts of perceiving oneself as palpably environmentally interconnected. With the framework of ecocultural identity, they draw attention to the environmental relationships that shape identities and foster awareness of human interdependency within and as a part of the Earth’s ecosystems. Describing humans as both “cultural and ecological beings ... made-of, part of, emerging from and constantly contributing to both ecology and culture” (2020, xix), ecocultural identity conceptualises all selfhoods as contingent and fluidly constituted by their immediate and historical environmental interlinkages.

Moreover, Milstein identifies that in Western/ised culture the threshold between the human self and the more-than-human world is a normatively and anthropocentrically patrolled boundary, where behaviours that celebrate and cultivate ecological connection are culturally disciplined and inhibited (2020, 30–38). In the experiential, embodied and multisensory practice of Nelson, attention and sensation shoot along unbounded continuances that weave together the multiplicities of internal and external environments in a thick network of sensuous resonance. This sensory resonance, or chiasmic participation in another’s material being (Abram 1996) unravels a bounded sense of the self in a manner that correlates with Milstein’s ecocultural call to undiscipline anthropocentric boundaries and foster a more ecocentric self (2020, 45). Such a more-than-human “attentionography” may enable the kind of “fully being in conversation with our own interrelated ecological vulnerability” which Milstein and Alaimo argue is the foundation from which “a new and necessary environmental ethic can be forged—an ethic steeped in inextricable ecocentric transcorporeality” (Alaimo, 2009 in Milstein 2020, 46). In tuning awareness to multiplicity in the body’s inner and outer environment, Nelson’s “Tuning Scores” cultivated a multisensory experience that enacted Abram’s theory of feeling in contact with, or reciprocally participating in, the world at-a-distance. In activating a lively trans-corporeal contact zone, Nelson’s “Tuning Scores” method can also be understood to have, as Milstein suggests, undisciplined an

anthropocentric mode of perceiving the self in favour of tacit embodied knowledge of one's immediate ecocultural constitutions and inextricable interrelatedness.

Trans-corporeal and ecocultural identity theories provide pathways for perceiving how embodied knowledge of multiplicity fosters understandings of the very material and localised ways the corporeal self is co-constituted by and inseparable from its Earthly relations. While Nelson and Parkinson and Bigé don't explicitly describe their methods as giving rise to environmental or ecological awareness, I highlight how the relational, more-than-human and ecological characteristics of their dance practice methods facilitate forms of awareness that embody the transformative knowledge positions called for by trans-corporeal and ecocultural theories of Abram (1996), Alaimo (2008) and Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor (2020).

Further to the practices of Nelson and Parkinson, my engagement with Australia dance artist Rosalind Crisp's "d a n s e" improvisation methodology has informed my embodied understanding of how dance practices attune one to a condition of multiplicity. Crisp's method, like the "Tuning Scores," encompasses a toolkit of scores that train how one's embodied attention moves (see Crisp & Ginot 2014). "d a n s e" is characterised by methodically undoing habitual movement patterns in an approach that emphasises how the body is dispersible, composite, simultaneous and multitudinous (Crisp & Ginot 2014, 21-23). In my experience of training in Crisp's method during workshops and practice intensives between 2012 and 2018, touch-based tools were instrumental to developing awareness of embodied multiplicity. During these exercises, a partner's tactile input moves one's attention through a locus of unexpected and potentially underutilised corporeal localities, which one might begin to move from (or at least become newly aware of). These tactile techniques created a constantly refreshing rhythm of embodied questioning; a habitual movement pathway would begin, but before it could fulfill itself my nervous system insisted on a kind of opening toward the multiplicity of other possible movement pathways available. This methodical unwiring of habituated ways of moving and perpetual re-engagement with the multitude of embodied localities and motions available at any instance cultivated an embodied awareness of multiplicity and infinitely bifurcating pathways for action. In enabling a real-time method of reflexively analysing how and with what part of oneself one chooses to act/move, Crisp offers a particularly alert form of embodied attention attuned to a condition of multiplicity. This is a form of embodied awareness in which the body's singularity is vigorously complexified and therefore available to trans-corporeal and ecocultural sensations of the material and energetic continuums through which the self is interconnected with the more-than-human world.

Crisp's recent choreographic works and ongoing dance research projects are rigorously engaged with the intersection of environmental activism and dance practice.³ In highlighting the way the "d a n s e" method at a bodily scale engenders awareness of a condition of multiplicity in each incremental instance of being and acting, I hope to draw attention to how embodied practices such as Crisp's mobilise knowledge of bodily contingency and relationality. I perceive that such sensation-knowledge of a condition of contingent multiplicity, underpins the capacity to recognise oneself as ecologically

interrelated and vulnerable—a recognition which Milstein and Alaimo argue is foundational to the development of a new ecocultural and transcorporeal ethic.

With my research, I argue that dance practices such as Crisp's, Nelson's, and Parkinson's develop 'embodied' forms of 'awareness' that cultivate knowledge of the 'ecological' relations that enmesh humans with the more-than-human world in a manner that mobilises transcorporeal and ecocultural understandings. In so doing, I propose that the term 'embodied ecological awareness' might aptly encapsulate this form of knowing that emerges from these dance practice methods.

Starting from Multiplicity: Solo Practices on Suomenlinna

During a three-month solo residency at the Helsinki International Artist Program (HIAP) on Suomenlinna Island, Finland (2019), daily studio practice supported the deepening and development of my embodied methods. Through this practice, specific approaches for perceiving a condition of multiplicity within my body and surroundings evolved.

While the residency was an important period of deepening my practice, it also coincided with a period of rehabilitating an injury. Therefore, the creative work and the practices are coloured by an almost hibernation-like withdrawal into a rhythm of daily practice within which the dynamism of the Nordic autumn made the transformations occurring at my body-scale all the more resonant. My daily solo practice consisted of three stages: a structured warm-up, an improvised movement practice, and a timed period of documentary embodied writing. For this study, I will focus on the second and third components of this daily practice because they capture the specific procedural methods engaged with and the forms of awareness they cultivated.

The practices reflect an emergent figuring of the embodied methods which continue to support my solo practice, pedagogy and choreographic works. While the specific processes detailed do not replicate a particular score or process from Parkinson, Nelson or Crisp, their praxis constitutes the broader somatic, enactive, self-guided and improvisational dance epistemological framework I inhabit and enquire from within. My point of interest in the practice, is not the production of something new, but rather to get closer to understanding what is happening in the instance of dancing.

The daily movement practice regularly began with a 20–30-minute period of exploratory improvised movement, during which I would support myself with questions such as: What am I doing? What does this part of the body or world feel like? Where is my attention being drawn? This was followed by a shorter timed exploration that aimed to concentrate an interest emerging during the first session. I then engaged in a timed period of embodied writing practice. This practice aims to transpose the way my awareness moves between parts of my internal and external environments during the action of dancing to the action of writing, tracing the way my focus continues to move through (and is moved by) my embodied and environmental context. The writing

documents the things composing my awareness, as well as my ongoing enquiring into how I am guiding and supporting my attention.⁴



Figure 1. Photograph of Newton in residence at HIAP, Helsinki, 15 November, 2019. Image by: Sheung Yui.

In one of my first days of practice during the residency the question—what do I do?—provided a useful support. The singularity of the question seemed to highlight the multiplicities presented by this new body-world context.

Journal Entry, 21 September 2019: What do I do? I notice the moment of contact, of first touch, and the complexity of all feelings and possibilities that in that moment rise up. I trust that something will continue, that allegiances will form between the multiplicity I have within me and the multiplicity of the situation. Such is the nature of a meeting—these things need time, duration, to mix, understand one another.

This excerpt of embodied writing reflects on the multiplicities present in the moment of entering practice, and my process of focusing my awareness on the web of relations emerging between my immediate inner and outer environments. Nelson’s term “attentionography” describes this sensing and attuning to the particular situated reality the dancer encounters (2010), while Parkinson and Bigé acknowledge the involuntary or unconscious components — “the anonymous movements” which contribute to the overall authorship (2018, 19-20). I recount how not rushing into movement allows time to notice the emergence of relations between these intersecting multiplicities. I give myself time to become aware of possible relations and then move in a way that aims to participate consciously in this multiplicity that involves the agencies of many “anonymous” and more-than-human others.

This practice of attuning to the differing multiplicities I encountered each day in the studio actively tuned my awareness both inwardly and outward and gave rise to an experiment that tested how far this multiplicity went. Firstly, I guided myself to sense my body as one undifferentiated unity — moving any part of me implicitly involved moving all of myself. I then explored my body as constituted by two parts: the left, right, top-half, bottom-half, etc. This exploration presented more options for movement, particularly locomoting (while embodying key Fundamental Movement Patterns (Hackney 1999)). However, rather than exploring movement possibilities, I attempted to keep my awareness gently distributed between the two parts, sensing their co-present relational action.

I proceeded with this process, methodically distributing my awareness toward double the amount of body parts. Four parts heightened awareness of my limbs; eight and sixteen parts made me quite aware of my bones and joints — a scale of complexity that felt particularly familiar to my dance training. However, sustaining awareness of thirty-two or sixty-four parts throughout myself was near impossible. To approach this level of complexity in my attention, I found myself zooming-in on a segment of my body such as my forearm and sensing its material components — its skin layer, the tautness of the muscle, the pair of bony structures. Quickly, I’d then move my attention along to another body part and re-perform this sensing of material components, while the residue of the former parts still buzzed in my awareness. This produced a particularly textural and differentiated form of awareness that hummed throughout my kinaesthetic and haptic sensory systems.

In continuing the process, a sensation of my body as granular or atomised emerged. Textural details shimmered and darted through this particulate awareness of myself, and I became attuned to a sense of perpetual instability between these tiny components. The tiniest of movements in one part seemed to involve so many others, and ricocheting, follow-on effects echoed near and far. This form of awareness hovered on the edge of the possible – only with the gentlest of awareness could I glean this sense of myself as composed of so many.

This process prompted an inverse procedure for perceiving multiplicity in my surroundings. I allowed my eyes to lead this process. Moving them filled my vision with aspects of my surroundings – the yellowing leaves visible in the courtyard, the hard surface of the concrete wall. Allowing a view to linger, I would invite these proximal bodies to similarly de-constitute in my real-time sensory imagination; to separate into their component material parts. Details such as the once wet sand compacted in the dense cement of the wall and the differently temperate air particles meeting at the warm-cool threshold of the doorway became tacitly apparent.

As with the former process, this approach revealed an especially atomised and mobile perception of my surroundings. I sensed the tiny granules of the wall squashing down on one another, doing their best to resist gravity's persistence; I sensed the lung-warmed air crossing the distance between my exhale and the fog misting the window. Quickly this granular mode of awareness mixed up and made connections between the particles I sensed as constituting my body and those composing my surroundings. In this sci-fi-like trick of perception, I had dissolved myself and my surroundings into a granular state of multiplicity and interconnection.

In reflecting on this exercise, my embodied writing details how this attunement to the composite parts of myself and my surroundings produced an almost dangerous sense of decomposition at the same time as an invigorating sense of flow and connection to my surroundings.

Journal Entry, 9 October 2019: The broken apart body. The unbounded body. It feels so different, the body that is many, that is more connected to that that is around it, connected to already moving materials, swimming, literally, amongst all the fragments of the environment.

In this especially trans-corporeal experience of swimming together with the materials of my proximal environment, my awareness becomes distributed amongst a decentred network of fragmented agential matter. Reflecting the quality of plasticity Parkinson and Bigé identify at the edge of the self (2018, 19), this granular mode attunement is particularly sensitive to the material and energetic flows of what Alaimo identifies as a trans-corporeal contact space. Parkinson and Bigé acknowledge that perceiving one's action as ongoingly authored by multitudes is a negotiation rife with glitches and inconsistencies. Yet they highlight how recognising the partial nature of the dancer's authorship supports them to make decisions informed by an understanding of the world

as perpetually constituted by multitudes of intersecting always more-than-human agencies.

Such dynamic and environmentally entwined experiences of the self also embody Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor's ecocultural formulation of identity, which perceives individuals as "outrageously fluid composites, composed ... many different voices, [in which] different trajectories ... flow together here to create [a temporary self] at any moment" (Abram et al. 2020, 6). In the final phase of this exercise, the previously void-like zone between my body and edge of the studio gains a material thickness and fluidity that further resonates with an ecocultural formulation of the self. The warmth of the air expelled from my lungs is perceived interacting window's surface and causing a visible material change in my environment, making basic thermodynamic and respiratory bio-ecological chains of cause and effect sensible. Abram outlines how identifying with one's bodily materiality undoes the tendency to "treat matter as though we were outside it" (2020, 24). He states:

we treat our body and the body of the Earth as though it was something for us to instrumentalize, manipulate ... and control, rather than how we would engage this world if we really identified with our materiality and realized that we were completely in and of the Earth—pieces of Earth—and, hence, that the Earth is our real Body, our larger Flesh. (24)

Through the process of attuning to increasing resolutions of multiplicity within myself, a particularly material and (de)composited sense of corporeality emerged. In this way the exercise can be perceived as enacting Abram's call to recognise the way one is constituted by the materials and processes of an encompassing Earth that surrounds, is and enables being from all sides.

During the exercise, my "attentionography" almost seemed to step back as it attempted to stay in touch and act in concert with the expanded condition of granular multiplicity perceived throughout my inner and outer and environments. A small movement in one area was kinaesthetically sensed as reverberating through the greater particulate trans-corporeal mass; the warm matter filling my lungs was felt condensing and liquifying as it met the cooler surface of the glass (some four meters at a distance). This expanded sensory more-than-human bio-ecological mesh, embodies the synaesthetic chiasm (Abram 1996) and "Tuning Scores" practice of Nelson (2010), in which one experiences themselves in as sensorially and materially in-touch with the world-at-a-distance. Perceiving the self as in-touch with and constituted by the same Earthly materials as the world-at-distance transforms one's sense of ethical responsibility and affective entanglement within the well-being of that world (Abram et al. 2020; Alaimo 2008; and additionally see Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

In becoming aware of the materials and relations interconnecting me with my environment, a boundary between a culturally patrolled self separate from its environment was not so much ruptured (Milstein 2020) but found materially non-existent and already afloat on tides of trans-corporeal flux and exchange. This experience of

being “broken apart” in my previous journal entry resembles the dispersible characterisation of the body offered by Crisp (Crisp & Ginot 2014, 21) and reflected a destabilisation of a habituated or *usual* self. This destabilising, however, produced an immanent feeling of connection to my surrounding environment. A former sense of myself, which seemingly floated without impact or trace through my external environment, was reconstituted as a dynamically, materially and relationally networked thing in thick affecting connection with its surroundings. Additionally, the more-than-human relations I became attuned to seemed to accumulate and become more apparent through my ongoing engagement in practice. Even today, as I revisit and reform aspects of this writing, the more-than-human movements and agencies encountered in this time-place in Suomenlinna wake up and seemingly become animate within particular but distributed parts of my body.

Reflections

In the experiences described, my solo dance practice involved a methodical process of becoming attuned to a condition of multiplicity. This gave rise to embodied awareness of the complex material relations and energies composing and enabling my trans-corporeal and ecocultural being. The perceptions of multiplicity documented resonate with Parkinson and Bigé’s description of the more-than-human multitudes involved in the authorship of dance (2018, 20), the ways Nelson’s “Tuning Scores” enact multisensory experiences of contacting and reciprocally participating in the world at-a-distance, and the potentialities of the high-resolution embodied attention encountered in my experiences with Crisp.

This account of my solo dance practice, along with my analysis of Parkinson, Nelson, and Crisp’s dance practice methods and scholarship, highlights how dance practices cultivate awareness of and actively negotiate a condition of multiplicity. The resulting plasticity that emerges at the edge of the self, the sensation-knowledge of being constituted by the same matter as the Earth, and capacity to resonate with (and as) parts of the world-at-a-distance, demonstrates how these practices develop trans-corporeal and ecocultural perceptions one’s entanglements with the more-than-human world. Consequently, I propose that these dance methods reflect—and can be understood to cultivate—the embodied knowledge of a condition of human interdependency with the Earth, which Alaimo and Milstein assert is key to transforming destructive human-centric ideologies. It feels laughably minor (and potentially counterproductive) to suggest that the introverting action of sensing one’s material self (and the tacit ways this matter is interrelated and continuous with one’s environment) might be meaningful in the context of the climate crisis and the scale at which life on Earth is at stake. However, with the concepts of trans-corporeality and ecocultural identity, Alaimo, Abram, Milstein, and Castro-Sotomayor assert that remembering our own localised, immediate and embodied ecological constitutions, makes visceral the vulnerability of human positionality within all-encompassing ecological chains of entanglement, impact and affect. They argue that embodied knowledge of one’s participation in a more-than-human *communitas* has the capacity to invigorate this positionally with action that is aware of and responsible within

a robustly ecocultural socius (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). Quoting Klein (2014), Milstein states that such embodied knowledge of an ecological condition enables “not just an alternative set of policy proposals, but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis—embedded in interdependence rather than hyperindividualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy” (Milstein 2020, 44). Vast expertise must intersect in such immense and vital ecocultural transformation. However, in drawing attention to the way the embodied methods documented have affected knowledge of a permeating ecological condition of multiplicity and interdependency, I hope to advocate for the vital role of embodied knowledge practices in the knowledge systems that must underpin such a rival worldview.

To assert the value and transformative character of the awareness I encounter as emergent from engagement in dance practice, I offer the term ‘embodied ecological awareness.’ In figuring this trans-corporeal form of attunement to the relations that constitute and enmesh the self in-place, I hope that the notion of ‘embodied ecological awareness’ contributes to the ways extant and emergent dance practices are valued and enacted as a meaningful form vigorous ecocultural identification and knowledge making within the ongoing challenges and wonders of life on a damaged planet.

Notes

1. The terms *tuning* and *attunement* are used in line with dance artist Lisa Nelson and her definition of tuning as “the activity of bringing one thing into a sensible relationship with another” (2010, 4). I also draw on the environmental communication approach to attunement offered by Milstein et al. (2024).
2. Terms such as *eco-consciousness* as well as *ecological consciousness* are used in the field of eco-somatics. See Nuding (2021) for a critical perspective and Kampe et al. (2021) for an overview of the field. Morton’s concept of “ecognosis” or ecological thinking (2016, 2018) is a cognitively focused philosophy on how humans make sense of human-Earth entanglement. See Kupper’s *eco soma* (2022) for a performance research approach to embodied and environmental loss. Further to these examples, see *ecosexuality* (Sprinkle et al. 2021) for a performance art practice consideration of the erotic potentialities of embodied experiences of connection with the Earth, and Pearce (2024) who also arrives at the term “embodied ecological awareness” to describe the effects of more-than-human embodiment in the theatre methods of Jacques Lecoq.
3. See for example DIRt (Crisp et al. 2017–), interview, “Dancing Over Ashes” (Haby & Crisp 2023), and performance, *The Real Time it Takes* (Crisp 2023). Crisp’s earlier explorations with how dance makes sense of ecological loss during my engagement in her workshops and practice (2012-18) were influential to my proceeding embodied, choreographic, and scholarly enquiring into the ways dance practices contribute to ecological understandings.
4. My embodied writing practice has evolved alongside my dance and choreographic practice. In part it is shaped by my early collaboration with Australian dance artist and scholar Jo Pollitt (2009-12; see *Responsive Writing*, 2001) and it is understood within expanded practices of embodied, choreographic and performative writing (see Rouhiainen et al. 2024), while significantly influenced by my engagement in the creative practice of Norwegian choreographer Mette Edvardsen (2016-2024, see Edvardsen, 2010–).

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