

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND: PERFORMING PHILOSOPHY IN AN AMERICAN
TERRAIN

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation brings together a site-adaptive performance practice and text-based research to explore the potential of dance performance to exist as philosophical inquiry. The five research sites (Glacier, Joshua Tree, Acadia, Shiloh, and Sequoia National Parks) provided a range of terrains, while the dance I chose to perform (*Significant Figures*) remained constant. Through the persistent effort of one movement sequence within these dramatically different landscapes, distinct lessons about the qualities and circumstances of body and land appeared. The same movement inhabiting different environments allows me as a performer to gain a range of understandings, not simply about what the dance means but also about how a dance can teach its performer and become a process of philosophical inquiry.

As a journey through both interior and exterior landscapes, this dissertation research considers brain, body, and world as inextricably connected in acts of thinking, following Andy Clark's concept of "extended cognition." In addition, philosopher Brian Massumi's exploration of what he terms "the body as sensible concept" further reveals the role of the body in thinking processes. His concept provides a foundation for my work

in this dissertation process, while my work describes an instance of enacting this phenomenon—not for the sake of illustrating his ideas but as a living vibration of some threads of its potential.

Through a combination of philosophical and autoethnographic writing in the text of the dissertation, I am seeking to bring abstract considerations into fleshier communion with readers. Taken all together the data chapters of this dissertation outline an evolution in my thinking, growth, and development of self-knowledge and hopefully also demonstrate the potential of performance to exist as a practice of developing consciousness and philosophical understanding. By inviting the reader into my personal discoveries, I hope to develop a level of trust between us for the purpose of creating a doorway into the reader's own discoveries and into a collective, or at least cooperative, movement of thought and thinking of movement.

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CHAPTER I

A LETTER TO THE READER

Introduction

Three times in the past week I have been told how much goodness exists in the hearts of Americans. This statement is so unbelievable to me that evidently I had to hear it three times in exactly the same words in order to sit up and take notice—to even entertain the notion that it might contain some truth. My assumption (as an American myself) has been that our hearts, and by extension our cultural consciousness, are almost irretrievably lost to corruption, greed, sadness, and fear. The authors of those statements on goodness (one, a man from Hong Kong sitting beside me on an airplane; the second, a new friend from Mexico; and the third, a shaykh from Jerusalem) reflected something that I had lost the ability to see—a grace that permeates both the interior and exterior terrains of America.

A search for a more complete understanding of this “goodness” is a primary reason that I embarked on this dissertation project, although I did not realize it at the time. The proposed efforts of my dancing body were tuned to uncover not necessarily what is good, but a more nuanced experience of qualities that exist in ourselves and our landscapes as well as ways in which the internal and external reflect and teach one another. When designing this research, I initially did not know what I would discover. Admittedly, I

hoped that I would find a possibility for transformation from the greed and fear that I perceived in our culture to a healthier expression of the virtues trapped behind such traits. It seemed that our preserved national landscapes would be excellent locations to explore the purity and beauty of these possibilities. I hoped that I would come to better understand why such intense philosophical awareness arises for me when I engage in the act of performing. It seemed that an explicit determination to track philosophical revelation through performance practice would yield more tangible evidence of this phenomenon. I hoped that I might arrive at another way to speak about the inseparability of brain, body, and world that would honor the significance of the moving, and specifically dancing, body. It seemed that using dance performance as a significant research tool, both in itself and beyond its own process, would offer the potential to view this type of embodied and embedded work as an important effort in the world. Perhaps what I truthfully found, though, was a taste of all of these aspirations contained in the return to wonder—a humble willingness to be in awe.

The five research sites (Glacier, Joshua Tree, Acadia, Shiloh, and Sequoia National Parks) provided a range of terrains, while the dance I had chosen to perform (*Significant Figures*) remained constant. Through the persistent effort of one movement sequence within these dramatically different landscapes, distinct lessons about the qualities and circumstances of body and land appeared. For example, as the location of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, Shiloh provided opportunities to contemplate internal violence, while the desert expanse of Joshua Tree was fertile ground for considerations of patience and initiation. The ways in which these lessons emerged as well as the specific

embodied experiences and philosophical events are detailed in the content of this dissertation writing. While the dance performance practice was a primary component of this research, its equal, and inseparable, partner is a body of philosophical thought. The work of various philosophers would arrive in my hands or come into my mind in steady concurrence with the embodied and embedded practice. In particular, the thinking of Luce Irigaray, John Muir, Jonathan Edwards, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin helped shape the foundation of my belief in the initial effort of this project and was fundamental to my understanding of the lessons I encountered, even though other philosophers sometimes became more influential for the actual writing.

All of these thinkers are seeking an enhanced experience and understanding of love as a cosmic, intellectual, and foundational force of living. Each of them reaches into the tangible matter of body and landscape as a means of exploring questions and articulating awareness, so it is no surprise that my thinking collides and coincides with theirs. Their work reflects on the possibility for and necessity of love as simultaneously the journey, doorway, and goal of human consciousness. Proposing that, “The wisdom of love is perhaps the first meaning of the word ‘philosophy,’” (*Way 1*), Luce Irigaray engages in philosophical thinking as both explication and practice of love. While she mentions this etymological turn as a distinction from those who define “philosophy” as, “the love of wisdom,” I propose that philosophy is *both* the wisdom of love and the love of wisdom insofar as love is not regarded as a finite object or limited means of engagement. Love offers an opening to possibility, and awe provides both the excitement to step into those openings and the humility to learn from them.

Notes from the Heart of Philosophy

Although I don't recall how I first encountered the word *magnanimous*, I do remember running into the kitchen, standing on the tips of my toes to pull my parents' dictionary off a high shelf, and flipping through those translucent pages until I found its definition. Sliding my finger across the entry, I read its meaning (or the definition that I could comprehend as a child): "big hearted." Immediately I knew that was what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wanted to be magnanimous. For me, both reading and writing philosophy offer me another way to grow and potentially another way to become magnanimous. As Victor Hugo suggests, "The intelligence and the heart are sympathetic regions running parallel; one cannot grow larger without the other increasing; if one rises the other mounts to its level" (353). This understanding forms the plane of my philosophical efforts. Similarly, philosophy and love overlap in the tenets and practices of many other philosophers invested in human growth and change, whose thinking continues to impact my own work.

As previously mentioned, much of Irigaray's work focuses on love, and her interests lie in, "philosophy which involves the whole of a human and not only that mental part of ourselves through which man has believed to succeed in differentiating himself from other kingdoms" (*Way* viii). While Irigaray relentlessly pursues philosophy as the "wisdom of love," Emmanuel Lévinas was perhaps the first contemporary philosopher to actually define it in that way. For him, wisdom bears significance because, "Behind reason with its universal logic, wisdom is always there listening, disquieting, and sometimes renewing it" (qtd. in Robbins 248). Although stating that, "Love is

originary” (qtd. in Robbins 169), he dismisses the word *love* due to a sense that, “it is worn out and ambiguous” (qtd. in Robbins 169). At one point in my life, I also abandoned the word *love* out of frustration that no shared agreement on its meaning exists. Eventually I came to recognize that experience can rarely be contained in stable definitions. Love is a multi-faceted experience and a force that changes *us* no matter where or how we encounter it.

Through her insistent precision in language, Irigaray redefined events of love between people from “I love you,” to, “I love to you,” because “the ‘to’ is the site of non-reduction of the person to the object” (*To* 110). Although I appreciate her resistance to objectifying others grammatically, “I love to you” does not escape this tendency but turns *you* into an object of the preposition rather than the verb. Experiencing love does make us susceptible to effects and emotions, not as manipulated objects, but as part of forces that are larger than ourselves.

Although I am not specifically utilizing his work, the thinking of Gilles Deleuze did resurface for me during this dissertation process because of my previous attraction to his understanding of love. For Deleuze, love involves an encounter that opens another world of possibilities, and in fact, multiple worlds as, “the pluralism of love does not concern only the multiplicity of loved beings, but the multiplicity of souls or worlds in each of them” (*Proust* 7). He continues his elucidation of love’s action by proposing, “To love is to try to *explicate*, to *develop* these unknown worlds” (*Proust* 7), and this path of thought connects me directly back to philosophy. While Deleuze defines philosophy as, “the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts” (*What* 2) and philosophers as

“friends of wisdom” (*What* 3), an encounter that opens worlds of possibilities and fosters a willingness to develop those worlds sounds like both love *and* philosophy to me.

Deleuze’s work has often been considered to concern love only on the level of depersonalized, molecular flow, but I am also interested in personalized love—the specific embodied and embedded experience of individuals. In my understanding, personalized and depersonalized love exist simultaneously as two different layers of an inseparable event. In addition, his concept of desire does not always accompany his discussions of love, but for me, they are integral partners. For Deleuze, desire is a positive meeting of forces, not an indication of a lack. Encountering his understanding many years ago helped to reacquaint me with desire as a productive force of imagination rather than as a means of objectification. Deleuze’s sense of motion in events of desire, love, and even human becoming offer insightful ways to resist rigidity, in both physical and philosophical action. However, his explanation of desire and connectivity as random occurrences does not satisfy my thinking. I am interested in unique and intentional connections between body and landscape. Environmental affordances foster movement potential and affinities for connection between human and landscape. Particular connections provide for the production of particular changes. These potentials for change may be felt, but not known, beforehand as part of the affinity for and movement towards different types of connection.

My desire to perform within various environments stems from the fact that my body necessarily connects to and changes with each terrain in a distinctive way. Each site offers me the chance to experience and learn from these unique unions. Performing in

different sites allows me to explore human action as an important but small part of a much larger picture as well as to discover philosophical understandings of human effort, nature, and presence embedded within diverse environments. In addition, a connection to, love for, and even sense of camaraderie with these environments opens other possibilities for the ways in which I understand myself.

Ruminating that, “We all travel the milky way together, trees and men,” John Muir presents the human being as a comrade of trees and other environmental elements within the movement of the universe (qtd. in Ehrlich 203). His reverence for the landscape of the United States was a primary force that led to the establishment of specific national parks as well as the development of the entire system itself. During my research in Acadia, I found one of Muir’s statements running through my head as I performed: “We all need beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul” (qtd. in Burns). Later that afternoon I actually ran into a placard at the visitor’s center displaying the same quote, although it had been edited to simply include, “places to play in” with no mention of praying. A curious means of separating the spirit out of the conjunction between human being and landscape in this public display actually caused me to delve more deeply into my own consideration of performance as a sacred act and to acknowledge it more explicitly in this writing. In order to do so, I sought unanticipated support through the words of two prominent thinkers and theologians.

Although perhaps best known for his 1741 sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards focused much more of his work on

explicating beauty and love—and especially on reading what he understood to be signs of beauty and love present in the natural world. He proposes, “Natural beauty is ‘some image of true, spiritual, original beauty,’” and that in the features we recognize as beautiful, “God has implanted within us an ‘instinct’ to love them as the ‘image of an higher kind...of spiritual beings’” (qtd. in Story 38) [ellipses included in text]. His work unexpectedly became relevant to my research when I had an experience similar to what he is describing during my time spent performing in Joshua Tree. While I was searching for revelation in and through my connection with the environment all along, at that particular location I came to understand beauty as a sign of love. By using the term “beauty,” I intend to describe an instance of interaction as Leonard Koren describes, “beauty is a dynamic event that occurs between you and something else” (51). In and through these events, both entities are potentially changed.

Change, and specifically evolution, is a key component of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s thinking. As both a renowned paleontologist and a Jesuit priest, Teilhard was invested in the coinciding physical and spiritual evolution of the human being. Because these seemingly disparate perspectives were inseparable in his own being, his ideas pierced through the forefront of efforts that intended to diminish the presence of sacred consciousness in more secular applications of thinking.

Writing in the 20th century, his work frequently addresses skepticism that would seek to divide “logical” thought and spiritual endeavors especially around the topic of love in relation to human evolution. In his text *Human Energy* he states:

“Realistic” minds are welcome to smile at dreamers who speak of a humanity cemented and armoured no longer with brutality but with love. They are welcome to deny that a maximum of physical power may coincide with a maximum of gentleness and goodness. Their critical skepticism cannot prevent the theory and experience of spiritual energy from combining to warn us that *we have reached a decisive point in human evolution*, at which the only way forward is in the direction of a common passion, a “conspiracy” (153).

For me, performance and philosophy provide the potential for such a “conspiracy.” Philosophical inquiry is not simply integral to my research—it is integrated with my being (human). In fact, I consider philosophy to be a type of impassioned integrity, not by adherence to pre-constituted dogma but through a willingness to be courageously uncomfortable in processes of questioning that encourage growth and change. By asking questions that do not have simple answers but that are practical (even if abstract or enlarged to a scale that initially seems inapplicable to daily life), philosophy addresses living challenges. Furthermore, philosophy is a portrait of thinking. Seeking nuanced and multi-faceted dimensions of experience, philosophy can bring individual features into focus within a larger canvas. This portrait is painted with what the artist-philosopher has available, including her own hands, as well as with what she encounters as she is embedded in the world. As long as we exist as a human body, everything we do comes through this matter. A philosopher or researcher of any kind cannot be invisible since there is nothing passive about presence. A presence impacts, and even changes, the environment in which it is embedded and moving. Pretending

one's presence as a researcher can be ignored neglects a significant component of the entire research picture.

Combining Autoethnographic and Philosophical Efforts

As a child, I was required to take an I.Q. test during which I was asked to solve several mazes containing the silhouette of a human figure in the center. After I had finished this exercise, the evaluator laughed and asked me why I had worked all of the mazes backwards. From my innocent perspective, I answered that I had drawn a line from the center of the maze where the human figure was located to the beginning of the puzzle because I was trying to help that person move out of the maze. After conversing with the evaluator, it quickly became clear to me that love, including care for other humans, was not factored into this particular evaluation of intelligence. However, the efforts I am most interested in pursuing as a researcher are based in love and weave together knowledge of self, compassion for others, and desire to learn about the worlds we inhabit together.

Bringing our work into the world through our bodies is often the practice that makes it available for other human beings. The particular flavor of our work irrevocably comes from what it is moving through—that is, our human embodied experience. While autobiography may mean writing about one's life, autoethnography can write about the self embedded in the world. In this research, I also am drawn to working with autoethnographic processes, understood as, “creative analytic practice ethnography” (Richardson 929). I find this research approach very compatible with philosophy because, “The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult” (Ellis and Bochner 738). Autoethnography thrives in part because of its adaptability, or its

propensity for fitting the specific shape of a particular inquiry. In autoethnography, I sense the potential to bring abstract considerations into fleshier communion with readers. Similar to other qualitative research methods that provide the reader with context for the researcher's approach, perspective, and even biases, autoethnography can locate the researcher as an embodied presence throughout the research process.

As "autobiography that is aware of its position in the world" (Dillow 1345), autoethnography emerged as a viable pathway for researchers interested in presenting themselves as integral parts of the worlds they were describing. Credited with providing the current definition of the term "autoethnography," David Hayano proposed in 1979 that, "as anthropologists moved out of the colonial era of ethnography, they would come more and more to study the social worlds and subcultures of which they were a part" (Anderson 376). Although it was initially controversial as a type of ethnographic methodology, autoethnography's persistent and expanding presence in ethnographic discourse now has some researchers arguing that, "Being a complete member [of one's research area] typically confers the most compelling kind of 'being there' on the ethnographer" (Anderson 379). Autoethnographic practices also connect to philosophical traditions, which frequently position the philosopher as a narrative "I" guiding the argument, or at least as someone implicated in her own articulated beliefs regarding human experience.

For both autoethnography and philosophy, one definition or method does not satisfy every instance or application. As writing practices, however, both autoethnography and philosophy diligently strive for skilled use of language.

Philosophical methodology often concerns itself with semantic examination and precision. Even scholars who depart from circular arguing of language propositions, especially Deleuze and Guattari, have appreciated in-depth investigation of language by acknowledging that, “etymology is like a specifically philosophical athleticism” (*What* 8). Deleuze himself, as well as philosophers who have followed in the lineage of his work, disrupted an easy reliance on language in philosophical writing while also utilizing those discontinuities for philosophical effect to produce words as events rather than as secure signifiers of stable objects. For the reader of this type of philosophical work, “each reading becomes ‘an occasion for a performance in the field of its meaning—where no single performance is capable of actualizing or totalizing all of the work’s semantic potential’” (Bryson qtd. in Watson 541). Breaking the container of language has allowed philosophical ideas to flow through and evoke more diverse routes of experience.

Through its rigorous practices in language and reasoning, philosophy can push autoethnography to expand its analytical potentials. Autoethnography can also support and challenge philosophical practices. By bringing philosophy to a more grounded context and personal offering, autoethnography can make abstract philosophical concepts more available for readers. Our living experiences frequently evidence movement, change, and complexity, so autoethnographic portrayals can also release philosophy from the confines of proving propositions and instead allow it to further set us and our worlds in motion. Beyond just opening philosophical writing to a reader’s interpretation, this task of putting ideas in motion foregrounds philosophical practices that do not claim to encompass a description of the world “as is” but provoke action to create different

worlds, different systems, and different movements. Similarly, autoethnographic methods are often action-oriented for researchers, participants, and readers. Instead of aligning with traditions which position the researcher as an “expert” reporting on an “other,” autoethnographers implicate themselves in systems, events, and passions in an effort to “assert alternative forms of meaning and power” (Reed-Danahay 8). Through their own living experiences, autoethnographers hope to touch the lives of their participants and readers. Anthropologist Ruth Behar underscores a passion for creating change through integrated intellectual and emotional impact, which affects both readers and researchers, when she proposes that research which, “doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore” (177). Readers and researchers involved in these methodologies may find themselves stirred to create a world that is not yet, but might become. One beauty of reading and writing philosophy is that it allows for the creation of an individual’s own pacing and rhythm. One beauty of autoethnography is that it can provide an empathetic offering of a perspective on living. Together these practices can create compassionate cognition—expanding heart-felt intelligence towards worlds of active possibility.

On Being an Object and an Offering

As you read this dissertation, my body will be present with you in some way. This body is inextricable from this research, although I certainly would not term it a research “tool.” So what is the role of the material human form in this inquiry? In addition to the aforementioned philosophers, concepts originated by Andy Clark and Vivian Sobchack have been essential in the design, approach, and articulation of this dissertation research. Human bodies are inextricable participants in ecologies—environmental lives and

forces— such that human sensation and cognition are not just embodied but also *embedded* within environments. This embedded interdependence between bodies and environments is a necessary component of thinking and learning processes, as theorized by Andy Clark with his concept of “extended cognition” (1997). In these integrated thinking processes, “Brain, body, world, and artifact are discovered locked together in the most complex of conspiracies” (*Being* 33). Following Clark’s work, the philosophical project of my proposed research approaches thinking through movement, in which the concept and activity of “mind” seamlessly integrates brain, body, and environment (*Being* 180). Although the concept of extended cognition immediately made sense to me as a dancer, I fell in love with Clark’s efforts as a researcher upon reading an article he co-authored with David Chalmers. An asterisk draws the reader’s attention to a note that the authors are “listed in order of degree of belief in the central thesis” (Clark & Chalmers 1). This statement reminded me that what seems to be absolutely essential to me could be contested in the minds of others, and that the written words themselves give us a temporary gathering place and way to come together. Please regard this writing as an invitation and also as a space where your body joins mine in a type of uncommon intimacy.

One of the ways in which I hope to foster this sense of intimacy is through sharing stories of my experiences, both in this specific research process and from other points in my life. When I was a little girl, I heard a story in church that continues to shape my efforts as a dancer. This story described a woman who had no money to put in the offering plate one Sunday. As the collection plate arrived in her lap, she placed it on the

floor instead and stood inside it, stating that she was offering herself. I immediately recognized that action as my desire—to be an offering. However, as a woman living in the 21st century, I cannot escape the social complexities of considering myself, and therefore my female body, to be an offering. Following the definition of *public* as, “belonging to or concerning the people as a whole” (“Public”), I am continually exploring ways to negotiate issues of my publicly private body as a performer, as well as what dance practices can contribute to public life through environmental ethics and social engagement.

As a performer, I expect people to focus on my body. As a woman, I have encountered more complicated circumstances surrounding this regard for my physical form. Startled by repeated audience assertions that my work is “feminine” regardless of each dance’s particular content, I became both curious about what such femininity involves and concerned about why I have wanted to avoid being seen and explicitly identified as female. Revisiting philosopher Iris Marion Young’s influence on my early understanding of feminine bodily existence, it became apparent to me that I have feared the connotations of object status, and subsequent loss of freedom and empowerment, that might accompany being seen as female. Although it is a vital aspect of a performer’s work, the experience of being seen has often been considered in feminist philosophy to carry additional implications of objectification, spatial confinement, and even discontinuity of movement for women. As Young proposes in her pivotal article “Throwing Like a Girl,” these internalized, embodied consequences for women stem from, “the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape

and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention" (154). When performing, however, I recognize my body as action and intention, so the confines of this description of female existence are discontinuous with my own experiences of being seen moving.

Considerations of "the male gaze" in feminist philosophy have been reasonable explanations for, but fostered some unfortunate resignations to, limited relationships between perception and embodiment. For female performers who offer themselves to be seen as an integral part of their working relationship with an audience, these theories fail to encompass more complex, positive, and empowered dynamics of being seen being female. Our metaphors and conceptualizations still often position a "seen" object as a possession of a seeing eye, as Peggy Phelan proposes, "the gaze fosters what Lacan calls 'the belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property'" (*Unmarked* 158). *Belonging* need not solely connote possession of a commodity, though. Belonging exhibits just as much potential for describing allegiance, creating inclusive relationships, and enlivening the spaces between our boundaried bodies. The shared terrain of a performance event makes perceiving an inclusive experience (Felt 54), and the performing body can belong as an individual to the whole organism of a society in which it gives itself to be seen.

Potential for connection, belonging, and transformation exists through the common materiality of our bodies. Communion between performer, viewer, and environment can occur through what film theorist Vivian Sobchack terms, "interobjectivity," which, "names the condition of a deep and passionate recognition of

ourselves and the objective world filled with ‘things’ and ‘others’ as immanently together in the flesh” (318). Within this embrace, “the body-subject experiences not a diminution of subjectivity, but its *sensual* and *sensible* expansion” (250). Through a combination of autoethnographic and philosophical practices, this research considers notions of object conceptualization and experiences of interobjectivity. For example, in Joshua Tree National Park, I spent time performing in a dry riverbed. During that session, my body felt relaxed and held in a way that exceeded my understanding. What emerged from this interaction between my body and the land—this instance of interobjectivity—was the realization that this land often holds the raging force of a river, and therefore it certainly has the ability to hold me and any turbulence that I might be experiencing. The additional lesson for me as an active subject was that I desire to be able to have this level of containment; that is, I desire to be capable of holding people and withstanding their raging force without being destroyed. The false notion that subject and object are *oppositional* entities rather than *different* aspects of ourselves imposes a limited frame on living and languaging experiences of our subject and object natures as well as our connections to each other and our environments.

A Letter or a Landscape

Sitting in the red plush darkness of a theatre, I was struck by a sudden illumination as Tony Kushner remarked, “Always assume that your audience is smarter than you are” (Kushner). For the past seven years, I have tried to operate under that assumption when dancing and writing. This assessment does not intend to demean me, but to respect your power, creativity, ingenuity, and autonomy as an audience member

and reader. I am not writing in order to explain something that you fail to understand. I am working to keep us moving; that is, to help us access freedom, range of motion, and the ability to affect and be affected by each other and the world. In terms of simple pleasure, writing and dancing reinvigorate my sense of aliveness, and I always hope that reading and viewing evoke similar sensations for you. The following text describes practices I strive to engage in as a researcher, especially in seeking to create a space between reader and researcher within this dissertation.

1. Work through words not to prove something but to do something.

One difficulty of Kushner's assumption arises in the language with which we attempt to connect. This negotiation of wording is not a dilemma to be solved but a type of precise and creative origami in which we are both involved—working with and through words not to *prove* something but to *do* something. I want to fold language into intricate dimensions, forming a landscape of thinking through which both you and I can move. Language is not just an approximation of understanding that I settle for in the face of an inevitable failure of words to fully capture experience. It can create experience and inspire action. Part of my love for language arises from a pursuit of precision—ways of giving specific life, focus, and momentum to ideas. These ideas are not always known ahead of their articulation. Instead, languaging can be a way of touching the contours of what is not yet known.

2. Writing is a thinking process.

Allowing ourselves to move and be moved through a, “weave of knowing and not knowing, which is what knowing is” (Lather 49), we demonstrate willingness to

reexamine and disrupt what we thought we knew, that is, *to learn*. By this model, learning is not the acquisition of commodified pieces of data, but rather the shifting, growing, changing orientation of ourselves—the ways in which we respond in, to, and through the world with movement. This examination of life and language does not consider words as simply representing an external world but, rather, appreciates the ways in which living creates language and language shapes living. For me, writing is a thinking process. I can arrive at knowing through acts of writing, and, the task of keeping pen to page *produces* thought. It does not merely call upon my hand to record all that is already preconfigured and contained in my brain. Instead, the act of moving in the world, even in the small gesture of a pen, generates and synthesizes ideas, thoughts, and considerations. Cognitive philosopher Peter Curruthers proposes, “One does not *first* entertain a private thought and *then* write it down: rather, the thinking is the writing” (52). Even if I do “have” a thought and then write it down, the having emerged from being in the world, by which I mean *moving* in the world. The writing of this text serves as an integral component in different acts of thinking.

3. *The work of these words is not to convince you of ideas but to invite you into thinking, feeling, and moving.*

Although communication is often its expressed intention, our language frequently separates us. Language can manufacture distance and even discord in our understandings. Language can reflect education or operational knowledge, which may be the result of a particular system or culture as well as a lack of access to or competency in specific fluencies. Language can be a fundamental way of connecting, yet, I am finding that

allowing others into a thinking process is even more effective for fostering connections between reader and writer than the words one chooses. When you, the reader, move with me, you experience and arrive at your own thinking, and I hope that you will feel free to move within the landscape of this text.

When reading, I regard every text as a letter, possibly even a love letter—one that hopes to open another world of possibilities for both reader and writer. It is a love letter in which the author cares to write towards the efforts of being and becoming human. However, writing a personal letter to you does not mean that its purpose is for you to understand *me* nor to have a discussion with me. As Slavoj Žižek implores, “Philosophy is not a dialogue. Name me a single example of a successful philosophical dialogue that wasn’t a dreadful misunderstanding” (50). Written philosophy is a landscape for us to explore, tread through, and jump off of, but not necessarily a conversation. Resonant chords will be struck but not so that we arrive at reductive agreement. Instead, those vibrations can ripple through us and move us. Words would be enough for me visually if they were just the combination of crisp curves and lines, enough orally if they were just harmonies of sound, enough kinesthetically if they were just the movement of mouth or pen, but they are all of these and much more. They are one way we think, move, and make efforts to continue living.

4. Language is another way of moving.

This text constitutes our shared space. It is a way of being alone together. Our presence co-mingles, but with a different texture of corporeality and another sense of temporality. Why do I crave this interaction with you through writing? It insists upon a

spaciousness, pacing, intimacy, and potentiality that I rarely find in conversation.

Performing and writing don't make me feel lonely. Conversation often does. The text is where we can come together but not because we agree on one understanding of it—just as a dance can be an event where we come together but not because it has the same meaning or meaningfulness for each of us.

Reading is a thinking process also, although I suspect sometimes writers can forget that the reader is not just trying to understand the *author* but is inevitably involved in cognition and possibly even re-cognition of the *text*, which involves both recognizing its form and altering its relevance. This type of languaging is not about a longing for reciprocity. This is about engaging—language as another way of moving. Before you actually encounter this writing, I imagine you as what philosopher Babette Babich describes as, “the reader conceived as a thinker: willing to confront and answer the challenge of philosophic thought” (24). Philosophical writing allows for the creation of a landscape for your thinking as well as mine, as you move at your own pace through this process. Language postures as less abstract and more in service of communication than other forms of expression, but it is no more or less of a space to “play in and pray in” than dance. Yes, this writing emerges from my particular knowledge base and history as a researcher, but you are welcome here.

The Lay of the Land

Following this introductory letter to you, eight other chapters comprise this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I discuss thinkers who have specifically impacted the writing (both form and content) of this document. Chapter 3 addresses my methodological

approaches, including a movement description of the dance *Significant Figures* and an outline of the different facets of philosopher Brian Massumi's notion of the "body as sensible concept" that became most prominent in each performance experience. Each of the data chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8), reveal the philosophical discoveries within the various performance events. These chapters are written as letters to you, and each concludes with a theoretical postlude that further elucidates an aspect of the "body as sensible concept" in the context of the other philosophical ideas that emerged in that site. Chapter 4 takes place at Joshua Tree National Park and concerns how I am understanding landmarks in a terrain of knowing. As an exposition on my experiences at Shiloh National Military Park, Chapter 5 explores a process of removing the obstacles or idols of "rightness" in a pursuit of greater understanding. Chapter 6, based on my performances at Glacier National Park, offers an inquiry into a process of change, with a focus on the potential dissolution of self-direction. Following my experiences at Acadia National Park, Chapter 7 describes my quest for purity and the role of self-love in such an effort. Chapter 8 encompasses the events of performing at Sequoia National Park as a way for me to explore how I am understanding the nature of human nobility and insignificance. As a conclusion, Chapter 9 discusses how the physical and philosophical project of this dissertation have propelled me into considerations of public, private, and publicly private, in the sharing of one's body and self-knowledge, and therefore what it has taught me about developing an ethics of intimacy.

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNEY OF WRITING



Fig. 1. Glacier National Park Road. (researcher's photograph)

This dissertation is actually travel writing—journeying through both interior and exterior landscapes. Each chapter unearths an aspect of the totality of the research experience and introduces another way of enfolding the physical and philosophical journeys. Each chapter hopes to be meaningful in itself and applicable to its companion chapters as well. For example, I discuss the nature of landmarks in Chapter 4 and then

present landmarks particular to each site in the following data chapters. Basic preparedness for traveling includes the need to know what station you are departing from and what you are carrying as you move. Therefore, Chapter 2 provides a way of sharing some of my prior investigations with you as a means of setting in motion the actual journeys specific to the dissertation itself. The authors cited here are those who have had an impact on the writing (both action and resulting document) of this project, while those mentioned in Chapter 1 impacted the formulation of the project and those described in Chapter 3 influenced the methodology of the research.

Because this dissertation is written (although it is certainly no less embodied), this chapter seeks to address not only the style and content of other people's writing, but also how I am understanding and approaching the act of writing itself. Writing can directly strike the body's resonance, such as the piercing pain detailed by Margaret Atwood's words: "You fit into me like a hook into an eye. A fishhook. An open eye" (1). Sometimes this effect is possible through words themselves. Sometimes an evocation of sensation is accomplished through the extended development of an idea, the recounting of a memory, or a collage of disparate events that together become synesthetic renderings. As a writer, I find myself engaged in tasks which aim to produce a document that does not subvert performance experience to the expectation that something else (i.e. writing) is necessary to qualify it as *experienced*.

As a performer, I am curious about what writing and moving can offer each other beyond the notions that one is necessary to legitimize the other, that they are redundant, that they frustratingly limit one another, or that they oppose each other. As philosophical

tenets themselves, the following tasks seek to elucidate the ways I have been approaching the act of writing throughout the journey of this dissertation. Rather than allowing the writing to function as either a second-hand explanation of an event or the “legitimizing” factor that brings the body to academic conversations, I consider the writing to be a vital companion to both reading and performing in this dissertation process.

Learn from Every Experience

Task 1: Learn from every experience.

Stating that, “When you place a brick next to another brick you are not placing matter against matter. You are placing effect against effect, *relation against relation*” (204), Brian Massumi lays a foundation for his writing practices as a philosopher. Allowing multiple influences ranging from popular culture to abstract physics to influence his thinking, he weaves his own life into his writing. Like a great comedian, Massumi uses his observations of the world to illuminate larger issues. The colliding forces of his disparate interests create new landscapes for philosophical consideration, populated by Massumi’s considerations of James Turrell, Lucretious, Frank Lloyd Wright, E.O. Wilson, Renaissance painting, snowmen, religion, and experimental performance art. What he experiences and synthesizes in living ideas return as sensations through alternating streams and truncations of words. Refusing to restrict his writing to complete sentences, he allows rhythms to develop that punctuate his thinking and add subtlety to the main thrust of articulating one idea.

Of fundamental importance for my own work is not only Massumi’s style of writing but also the particular thinking he articulates in, “The Evolutionary Alchemy of

Reason,” in which his fascination with the performance artist Stelarc reveals a potent conjunction between body and concept. Stelarc is a self-described “performance artist who has visually probed and acoustically amplified his body” (stelarc.org). His efforts to alter his physical form through the use of technology, including growing an internet-enabled third ear on his arm and creating a prosthetic head, do not anticipate one specific intended outcome, but rather seek to extend the possibilities of the human body. He proposes to use, “the body as a direct medium of expression” (Stelarc qtd. in Linz 21). Yet, what is being expressed becomes a question for both Massumi and others. Cultural theorist and urban planner Paul Virilio proposes, “He’s an artist whose work has religious dimensions without really being aware of it! He thinks that technological forces will allow him to transfigure himself—to become something other than what he is” (Virilio qtd. in Zurbrugg 179). Massumi does not ascribe a religious tone to Stelarc’s efforts, but follows a different line of thinking about the particular relationship between expression and experience in Stelarc’s performances.

Massumi begins his exploration of Stelarc’s work with the following dilemma: “Now there’s a bind: a ‘body artist’ who wants to operate upon intelligence. Would that make him a ‘conceptual’ artist?” (89). Much like the aforementioned writing that strikes the body directly, Stelarc’s performing strives to manifest a “‘physical experience of ideas’” (Stelarc qtd. in Massumi 89). The critical point of his efforts, however, is not that he presents ideas in the form of performance, but that he works through performance to arrive at ideas that he had not fully conceived of before the physical enactment. Many performers experientially understand this phenomenon, but Massumi’s description of it

captures a simple and beautiful truth: “the concepts Stelarc is interested in cannot be communicated about in the performance, because they only come into being through the performance” (89).

As concepts emerge through a performance, the “point at which idea and body have not yet split or have rejoined,” exists as a pivot around which the physical and philosophical forever intertwine (Massumi 90). This inextricability of body and idea describes what Massumi has termed the “body as sensible concept” (2002). Massumi reasons that in a performance event, “expression and experience join,” (Stelarc qtd. in Massumi 89), which makes the body an “actual manifestation of a concept” (Stelarc qtd. in Massumi 89). With this proposal, Stelarc and Massumi present a fresh perspective on physical cognition that does not even momentarily entertain such a beast as an “embodied mind.” Why do I refer to the “embodied mind” as a beast, when I have frequently used this term in the past? Although the phrase “embodied mind” seems to strive to acknowledge the importance of the body, it connotationally does not stray far from the picture of a subject brain operating inside an object body. The body as sensible concept, however, strives to acknowledge the body as active intelligence rather than dominated by a separable “mind.”

Andy Clark’s concept of “extended cognition” (1997) provides another valuable approach to the role of the body in thinking. His proposal that brain, body, and world operate together as a system of thinking reaches beyond a sense of environmental affordances for human action and thought to inquire, “Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?” (*Being* 213). Clark’s desire to understand the ways in which

human beings interact with environments through acts of cognition resonates with my own resistance to the notion that the brain is the most valuable thinking organ. Clark dislodges a sense of hierarchical separations between perception, cognition, and action with the following reasoning:

Perception is commonly cast as a process by which we receive information from the world. Cognition then comprises intelligent processes defined over some inner rendition of such information. Intentional action is glossed as the carrying out of commands that constitute the output of a cogitative, central system. But real-time, real-world success is no respecter of this neat tripartite division of labor. Instead, perception is itself tangled up with specific possibilities of action—so tangled up, in fact, that the job of central cognition often ceases to exist (*Being* 51).

Cognition, in my understanding, is not how we as human thinkers manipulate things in the environment as a result of our separable perception or to facilitate our thinking; instead, we are part of the environment. Cognition is not just embodied, but also *embedded* in an environment. Bodies, even these wonderful, particular human bodies of ours, are unique contributors to cognitive processes but not the only contributors. Human bodies are part of, by which I mean participants in, ecologies—environmental lives and forces. As Clark proposes, “once the hegemony of skin and skull are usurped, we may be able to see ourselves more truly as creatures of the world” (*Embodied* 9). Throughout this dissertation, I approach learning by virtue of performing within different environments. Learning involves integrating the experience of an encounter through all of the ways it impacts and transforms us, especially by acknowledging how we exist as part of a larger ecology.

Do Not Separate Parts of Yourself

Task 2: Do not diminish or separate parts of yourself.

Many circumstances have asked me to separate my work in one area from another aspect of myself. In performance, I have been cautioned by presenters, funders, and other choreographers not to acknowledge that my work is “spiritual.” In spiritual practices, I have been asked to deny the importance of my body or to diminish a focus on intelligence. In pursuing philosophy, some people have assumed that I must be giving up my work as a performer. However, I cannot separate myself into any of those lone strands. When I posed the question, “How can I create an experience for the reader that is integral to but functions differently than performance?” I was asking myself a question that runs tangential to the real matter; that is, what can I bring to an interaction with a reader that does not separate me from what I can bring to a viewer in performance? Similar to a performance event, words can be gathering spaces—temporary architectures for communing. Some feel more stable, some more resonant, and some are entirely unstable because their purpose is mobility or the production of momentum in our thinking. Although sometimes it may seem as if words reduce expansive understandings into finite containers, my interest in words centers on their ability to bring seemingly disparate aspects of our thinking together and to open connections between thinkers.

As a performer, I am forever grateful to Donald Byrd for publicly challenging me on the fact that my performing is spiritual. At the time of his critique, I feared that label—or word container—and therefore tried to conceal that aspect of my work. However, the word “spiritual” certainly does not need to carry any negative connotations,

and I am grateful for the lineage of philosophers who have actively integrated a search for God with a search for knowledge. For example, after rereading some of Descartes's writing I felt that he was working to trace his connection to divinity, not hatching a malicious plan for separating body and mind. The act of searching for God caused him to think through a separation between body and mind, but this separation did not arise because he necessarily considered brain superior to body, even though his work has been used to support that value system. Instead, I began to consider that since he could *feel* but not necessarily see or touch what he called "God," the difference he perceived between brain and body spoke to him of a God composed of substance akin to thought—that which can be felt and "known" but not necessarily seen and touched. Therefore, to be made from or by "God" in "His" image involved being composed of a similar substance, which may be why Descartes identified being with thinking. Similarly, for me, God is not a man in the sky, but that which is simultaneously beyond our comprehension and yet making Itself known to us through every experience. For this reason, divinity factors into both the performance and written experiences throughout my dissertation.

Trying to separate divinity out of my philosophical writing only diminishes the clarity, precision, and mobility it expresses. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I introduce the intertwining search for God and knowledge in my own work, including the words of the Bible, the Quran, and the work of a Jewish-turned-Christian mystic, philosopher, and political activist Simone Weil. Weil's philosophy and mysticism are aptly described by her friend and confidant Gustave Thibon when he states, "She actually experienced in its heart-breaking reality the distance between 'knowing and 'knowing with all one's soul',

and the one object of her life was to abolish that distance” (ix). A collection of journals that Weil entrusted to Thibon combine to comprise the text *Gravity and Grace*. In this collected volume, Weil’s insights about the intersection of divinity and humanity come into relief as she addresses subjects as wide ranging as war, algebra, Israel, and even a chapter titled “The Meaning of the Universe,” in which she writes, “We are a part which has to imitate the whole. Let the soul of a man take the whole universe for its body” (140).

As T.S. Eliot proposes in the introduction to Weil’s book *The Need for Roots*, “What she cared about was human souls” (xiv). Weil only lived to age thirty-three, but her concern for the human soul left its mark on a range of writing efforts, including religious, philosophical, and political texts. By honoring what each encounter can lend to every other one—what one aspect of our souls or one part of our lives teaches another—writing can create a structure for expanding our embodied and embedded intelligence while facilitating our ways of traveling through concepts together.

Surrender

Task 3: Surrender.

Rather than giving up or giving in, surrender can instead be considered to be a gracious acknowledgment that you cannot and do not know everything when engaged in a living process. With this understanding, a willingness to surrender impacts the trajectory of one’s travels by allowing one to be moved rather than to always direct oneself from a predetermined agenda. Acts of surrender in writing can affect the way one arrives at words and descriptions as well as provide an openness to the entire form that a

work of writing takes. Luce Irigaray, Margaret Atwood, and Ann Carson have provided models for me of this type of surrender by writing across pre-determined formats. All of these writers compose various kinds of texts from novels, to poems, to complex theoretical arguments, creatively allowing the *content* of the work to form and inform its structure. Irigaray, in particular, has written theoretical texts, autobiographical reflections, and fluid streams of thought that are no less philosophical than her other work but appear more as prose poems than traditional academic writing. In addition, she frequently blurs the lines of distinction between these forms within a single text. My prior connection to her work shapes my expectations about philosophical writing. Similar to performance, the content of a work itself impacts the shape it takes, dissipating the notion that philosophical work must fit into a prescribed formula or format. In the process of writing this dissertation, I found myself surrendering and having to let go of an image of my ideal document. Instead of creating an abstract philosophical manuscript, I found myself writing very personal content, which took the form of letters to the reader.

During this project, I asked myself, “In what ways can I perform and write my presence into this research process and product without either situating it as the most important perspective or discounting it as too personal?” I do not wish to assume that writing about oneself is problematic and that no one else cares what we write from our own experiences. I do not wish to subscribe to the belief that sharing one’s personal experiences as a thinker reduces the academic legitimacy of one’s thinking. What I can offer a reader are my own experiences and observations—the ways this body senses, feels, and thinks. In dance composition classes, I was trained to ask myself, “Who cares?”

with regards to my choreography. As a choreographer and performer, I have learned to shift the question from, “Who cares?” to “How can this dance be an effort of caring?” Similarly, as a researcher, my intention is to write philosophy as a means of caring for the world—striving to make my own vulnerability a site of permeability, or a way of connecting with the reader.

Commenting on her own research, sociologist Brené Brown proposes, “vulnerability is life’s great dare. It’s life asking, ‘Are you all in?’” (43). Revealing my vulnerability as a thinker, mover, and writer comprises part of my ethics of engagement with the reader. It is a way of extending to the reader my effort to be “all in,” or fully committed to the principles and processes emerging in the research—not as merely abstract thoughts, but as ways I am attempting to move in the world. Brown further suggests that, “Stories are data with a soul” (252). Within this dissertation, I share myriad stories from my life as well as from the research process itself. The inclusion of these stories seeks to provide the reader with living examples of the ideas and to provide me with a means of more fully synthesizing the flow of concepts that I care about throughout my life. Philosophy frequently presents what the writer cares about and is willing to engage in through questioning, reflection, and examination of both herself/himself and a world of logic.

Throughout his works, 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau pursues difficult questions regarding the nature of the self and the engagement of the self in the world. For this dissertation, his consideration of two distinct types of self love (*amour propre* and *amour de soi*) have particular importance. The first, *amour propre*, relates to

the love of the ego self and a way of striving to be held in a higher esteem than others. The second, *amour de soi*, is often simply translated as “self love,” and describes a type of care that values and respects oneself as having inherent worth, not arrived at by comparison with others. With palpable passion, he writes about these concepts in an effort to help create societies that are healthier for both individual and collective interests.

Rousseau put himself in a vulnerable position by frequently introducing his personal beliefs within his writing, not simply to convince others to think the way he does, but as a means of raising philosophical questions. He encourages the reader to, “Always remember that I am not teaching my sentiment; I am revealing it” (*Emile* 277). This distinction between teaching and revealing underscores one challenge of sharing personal beliefs within writing. My effort to surrender during this writing process involved detailing intimate aspects of my belief systems, including my conceptions and misconceptions about my relationship to God. Yet, I am not attempting to convince the reader to believe as I do. Instead, I present my beliefs as an explication of a philosophical travel experience—a journey through thinking and feeling.

By writing about his own spiritual feelings and perspectives, Rousseau demonstrates his willingness to be vulnerable within his texts, especially as he points out what he does not know. He states, “I do not know why the universe exists, but that does not prevent me from seeing how it is modified, or from perceiving the intimate correspondence by which the beings that compose it lend each other mutual assistance” (*Emile* 275).

His ways of attempting to understand divinity feature prominently in his discussion of the nature of human society, intelligence, and will. He proposes:

This Being which wills and is powerful, this Being active in itself, this Being, whatever it may be, which moves the universe and orders all things, I call *God*. I join to this name the ideas of intelligence, power, and will which I have brought together, and that of goodness which is their necessary consequence. But I do not as a result know better the Being to which I have given them; it is hidden equally from my sense and from my understanding. The more I think about it, the more I am confused. (*Emile* 277)

His willingness to present a mixture of what he knows and what he does not know actually strengthens my trust in him. When I follow the flow of his reasoning as well as his self-proclaimed confusion, I feel a sense of willingness in myself to surrender to his thinking process and to let myself be moved by virtue of where he travels as a thinker. Again, he returns to a relation to the self, and obviously, to himself as he proposes, “Suffused with the sense of my inadequacy, I shall never reason about the nature of God without being forced to by the sentiment of His relations with me” (*Emile* 277). By explicitly caring about his relation to God and allowing that consideration to impact the trajectory of his thinking, Rousseau presents his vulnerability not only to the Divine but also to critics who might propose that his relationship to God has no relevance for ideas about society. His spiritual sentiments, questions, and insights form a necessary aspect of his philosophical work since they are primary to how he understands the functioning of the world and his place within it.

As translator Alan Bloom points out, many of Rousseau’s works are “dedicated to meditation on and presentation to mankind of the profoundest kind of soul, his own” (*Emile* 29). In much of his work, including his autobiography *Confessions*, Rousseau

invests himself personally in his writing by revealing his thoughts and feelings. Yet he struggles with how this sharing of his sentiments might make him unpopular in academic and social circles. Without his presence and passion written into the thinking, however, these philosophical considerations would appear merely to be analytical propositions, and I suspect they would not have the same motivational potency for either the writer or the reader.

With Rousseau's example in mind, I am considering that philosophy need not be disconnected from or simply an analysis of experience. Instead, in this dissertation, I am choosing to follow what I perceive to be Rousseau's vulnerability as a site for philosophical possibility—especially its potential to motivate care about the self and the world. From considering the microcosm of the individual to the macrocosm of complex systems, philosophy can provide the ability to turn towards what is beyond our comprehension. It is my intention as a researcher to surrender and allow myself to be moved between what I know and what I do not yet know and to share the stories of this journey with the reader.

Marry the Intimate with the Infinite

Task 4: Marry the intimate with the infinite.

Taken collectively, the five data chapters in this dissertation trace, if not an evolution, at least a shift in my thinking and behavior based on what I have learned through this research. Aspects of my personal evolution are tied to philosophical explorations of the nature of change in a much broader context. Evolution as a philosophical, social, and scientific concept is specifically featured in one of those

chapters (please see Chapter 8). My prior research into the interrelated emergence and interpretations of the term *evolution* and the phrase *survival of the fittest*, particularly as presented by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, provides a foundation for my philosophical considerations in this dissertation. The particular discourse concerning these two terms weaves its way through biological, psychological, and social histories. With their emergence signaling more than simple linguistic significance, these words have histories of complex interaction between what Spencer and Darwin actually wrote, the myriad meanings interpreted from their writing, and the effect those interpretations have had on notions of change and progress. In consideration of human nature, evolution and survival of the fittest are not simply ideas discovered in one field and appropriated by another for metaphorical use, but a genuine struggle to understand how human beings sense themselves fitting with the rest of the living and material world. Because the specific terms themselves have infiltrated colloquial language as well as theoretical writings, the meanings proffered by Darwin and Spencer have far-reaching ramifications for what carries a connotation of being “natural.”

This research employs a first-edition version of Charles Darwin’s seminal book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, which was published in 1859. My inquiry then moves forwards and backwards in time from that point to encompass the arrival of some evolutionary thinking before Darwin as well as his own adoption of the phrase *survival of the fittest* after writing this book. In order to understand this text more fully in its historical context as well as to track subtle shifts in language and ideas, I compared this

first edition to a sixth edition, which is the most recently printed version. This version, with the title shortened to *The Origin of Species*, adds an important “Historical Sketch” written by Darwin to account for evolutionary ideas that preceded his own.

Many scholars credit or accuse Herbert Spencer of originating this view of evolution as progressive, particularly as it applies to social institutions. Spencer’s own texts are incredibly useful in uncovering the application of evolutionary thinking to societies. His wide array of books include two volumes entitled *Principles of Biology* and two volumes entitled *Principles of Psychology* which I used to familiarize myself with his ideas, although I do not quote from them directly in this research. His other books are instrumental in helping me to better understand his vision of evolution within organizational systems, particularly *The Evolution of Society*, *Principles of Sociology*, and *Synthetic Philosophy* – a volume which integrates aspects from his biological, psychological, and sociological theories.

Reaching beyond Darwin’s assessment of evolution and Spencer’s application of these concepts to social systems is another thinker who seeks to bridge physical and social evolution in a unique way, and whose writing has helped me to marry the intimate and infinite in my own understanding. Twentieth-century paleontologist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin enhanced my considerations of evolution as he turns his thinking from the development of physical form to the evolution of human consciousness. His use of the concept of the “noosphere,” or “unifying field of consciousness” provides an important emphasis on growth and change, particularly spiritual growth, through thinking (noosphere.princeton.edu). For Teilhard, the noosphere

exists in conjunction and overlapping with other identified spheres of life on earth, including the “living membrane” recognized as the biosphere (*Human* 123-124). Similar to the philosophy of Andy Clark (please see Chapters 1 and 4), I find in Teilhard’s work another incidence of insisting that physical form is not separate from thinking. While Clark proposes an external scaffold of cognition bringing brain, body, and world together, the biosphere and noosphere are cooperative natural phenomena in Teilhard’s work. Yet Teilhard provides an additional consideration of the impact of such a conjunction. Through the emergence of the noosphere, Teilhard constructs his understanding of the relationships between the development of human morphology, social connection, and cognitive ascent. He details a variety of spiritual evolution that is biologically anchored and collectively achieved, and yet, “it is only through becoming superpersonalized that it becomes truly universalized” (*Human* 187). Teilhard’s way of thinking about evolution and personalization influenced my desire to write intimate stories that both reveal my own personal changes in thinking and also connect me to something much larger than myself, whether that is an environment, a collective potential of human kind, or a sense of the infinite and divine.

In this research process, I found myself considering how consciousness can encompass cooperative efforts between individuals not only in shared space but also over time. In his metaphor based on the myth of Sisyphus, twentieth-century psychoanalyst and writer Silvano Arieti implicates creativity as a force for “cognitive ascent”(414). In the original myth, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a rock up a hill, watch it descend again, and then repeat this futile action forever. Arieti proposes, however, that, “contrary to

Sisyphus, the creative man does not start from the foot of the mountain again, but from where other people have left off [...] accru[ing] collateral vistas to the experience of being human” (414). This “Sisyphus-in-reverse” stretches mind over time such that thinking permeates a collaborative perspective and continuum of learning. By bringing my experiences into creative conversation with a variety of thinkers over time and then into contact with the reader, I am seeking to help us climb a small distance in the larger effort of such cognitive ascent.

Perhaps no one is more surprised by the form this dissertation writing has taken than I am. My preference for a written product would be a highly abstract philosophical treatise, while what has emerged during this process is a series of very personal letters to the reader. Although these letters may contain abstract philosophical perspectives, I nestle them into a story of my own discovery so that the reader has a body and narrative in which to find a foothold. Beyond the communicative function of these letters is another emerging philosophical project—an ethics of intimacy. As Chapter 9 explores, the level of personal considerations that I share in this writing seeks to allow the reader to experience a deeper acknowledgement of her own thoughts. By inviting the reader into my personal discoveries, I hope to establish a level of trust between us for the purpose of creating a doorway into the reader’s own discoveries and into a collective, or at least cooperative, movement of thought and thinking of movement.

CHAPTER III

AN INTERPENETRATION OF WORLDS



Fig. 2. Shiloh Bloody Pond. (researcher's photograph)

The forest holds an irregularly shaped pond of unknown depth. I can see my reflection in the water as my steps trace its edge, and I can hear the presence of something weighty moving under its surface. In late December Tennessee is still 60 degrees, but the damp air and isolated terrain create a chilling effect. Stepping backwards, I allow my fingertips to reach behind me in accordance with the original choreography. As I continue around the perimeter of the pond, however, the choreography unexpectedly shifts. My arms extend forward instead of back, fingertips

digging into my palms to emphasize the curve of my wrists. With my knees lifting higher on each step, my body position evokes the postures of Tennessee walking horses. Only later do I read the posted placard which explains that this is the location where Union troops gathered and burned the bodies of horses killed in the battle of Shiloh.

Introduction

Following a performance—in fact, an installation version of *Significant Figures*—I first began to think of the effort of performing as a type of philosophical inquiry. For many years I had known performance to be a practice in which I was given a degree of open-mindedness that led to insights, as well as the generosity and patience to unfurl deeper understanding. But why? What is happening in performance that allows for this awakening of awareness and transformation of understanding? As I prepared for this dissertation process, further questions arose: What do I experience when I am performing (both internally and externally)? Why is abstract dance movement not a “normal” way to engage with an environment? And, why perform a specific dance as research? These questions propelled me into a simultaneous exploration of form and meaning in which what was I learning about this process and what I was learning through this process became inseparable layers of inquiry.

A Brief History of *Significant Figures*

As a researcher and performer, why would I choose the particular choreography of *Significant Figures*? Why do these positions and movement pathways within the choreography have potentials for expanding my philosophical conceptions? What is significant about those landmarks (in body position and physical location)? Why

choreography rather than improvisation? Why performance? What qualifies this as performance? By delving into the history of my experience with *Significant Figures*, responses to these questions began to emerge.

A specific section of *Significant Figures* inspired me to pursue this research trajectory of dance performance as philosophical inquiry since my experiences of performing it in various sites allowed philosophical insights to emerge. To begin, I took tiny toy “action” figures into the studio to play with ideas of human scale and the body as a terrain. Outlined by these figures, the size of my body reveals itself through movement that lounges inside, crushes, and expands beyond the space the figures define. I originally designed the piece to be performed in a parking lot that was viewed first by the audience from a third floor window so that the act of approaching the performance could be a practice of changing expectation by increasing proximity. From a distance, the small white figures can appear to be a simple chalk outline of my body, and only when viewers move closer to me can they see the detail of what actually composes that border. For that initial version of the dance, I wrote, “My inner world is a post-‘the male gaze’ society,” inside the form of my body—a statement that emerged as a way for me to reimagine the collision of my internal and external worlds. The performance led me to consider what kind of world I want to imagine and to help create as a woman, performer, and philosopher; that is, a world in which levels of intimacy between body and landscape deepen our understanding of both, rather than reinforce assumptions about objectification.

Following this initial presentation, I performed the dance at a space in New York where I could not write on the floor surface. This restriction led to the realization that the piece had developed another kind of significance for me. Because the figures hold a very distinct border that I move beyond during the dance, the performance became a practice of outgrowing limited and limiting perceptions of myself, including my own. As a movement practice, this piece helped me to explore ways that the continually shifting terrain of my female dancing body can provide a site and process for expanding perceptions of body and self, resonating with Rosi Braidotti's concept of "nomadic subjects." For Braidotti, a nomadic subject is not a fixed image of identity but rather, "a spatio-temporal compound which frames the boundaries and processes of becoming" (Braidotti 244). The evolution in my philosophical exploration through the performance of this work continued with subsequent enactments of the piece in other sites.

After a performance of this work in Estonia, I was reminded of my original interest in connecting the materiality of the human body with landscape. Perhaps because Estonia's land has been invaded, occupied, and disputed numerous times in its history, audience members and I experienced my body as a piece of earth surrounded by human violence. During this performance, the image conjured by a juxtaposition of tiny soldiers and slow-moving but continuous change in my body reminded us all of the relentless power and patience of natural ecologies in motion as well as human scales of participation and responsibility within them. Often the same movement will unfold different images for each audience and even offer distinct meaningfulness within the imagination of each individual viewer. Similarly, the same movement inhabiting different

environments allows me as a performer to gain a range of understandings, not simply about what the dance means but also about how a dance can teach its performer and become a process of philosophical inquiry.

A Movement Description

Although the shifts in the movement sequence of *Significant Figures* are continuous and overlapping, distinct initiations exist for me as a performer. How I embody the physical postures and travel through them, both in the original choreography and the ways they were affected in each environment, offers insight into what I was learning through this process. The following description of the movement is provided to better acquaint you with the choreography and to serve as a reference point for the philosophical journeys in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

As the dance begins, I open the front surface of my body to the sky. I call this position the “pancake”—lying flat on my back and leaning into the left side of my torso, with my arms lightly bent at shoulder height. My right leg bends forward while my left leg bends backwards. Although initially this posture was meant to be one of vulnerability, its openness instead became more of a tool of receptivity, and thus the term “pancake” became its metaphorical nickname. When teaching this position to my students, I realized that the position itself has been teaching me to absorb goodness (please see Chapters 5 & 9), much the way a pancake’s atomic structure soaks up the sweetness surrounding it.

Turning from right to left, my head scans the area from that which is immediately in front of my eyes when my right cheeks rests on the ground to a distant expanse of the sky when the back of my head becomes the surface of support. From this moment, I look

directly behind me by arching my neck and tracing a path to the top of my head, which becomes a new balance point. Sharing the support of my weight between the top of my head and base of my sacrum, my feet and arms float off of the ground and slowly drift closer to the center of my torso. As the balls on my feet come to touch the ground again, my arms cross over my face, and my pelvis begins to tip to the left. Once my body fully comes to rest in a fetal curve, my left arm slides under the space between my ribcage and the ground—twisting my arm behind my back with an upward facing palm. Turning my head towards the ground and then towards the reaching arm, I rotate my palm to touch the ground. Because I can now apply more pressure to my left hand, I use this surface to raise my upper body so that I am lounging on my left hip. Rolling again to my sacrum, I place my right hand on the ground beside my left and shift my knees to become a protective shield in front of my chest. While my toes delicately graze the ground in front of me, I use them (and then the support of my hands) to pivot around in a circle, balancing on my sacrum and gradually condensing the space between my chest and knees. Holding this compact shape, I flip onto my knees, crouching inside the space I have just encircled. My palms form parentheses around my eyes as if I am peering into a depth below the ground and into the heart of my outlined body.

Gradually this position of my hands dissolves as my elbows pull to either side, dragging my lower arms to the extent of their reach. At this location, my hands become two tent stakes as my fingertips solidly plant themselves into the ground (please see Chapter 4). As my straight arms move back towards the midline of my body, my hands maintain this shape but my upper body lifts again. Kneeling, I allow my hands to expand,

but my palms still hover off the ground. I lengthen my legs, bringing my head near to the ground so that I am balancing on the tips of my fingers and toes. From this inverted “v” position, I roll down from my toes so that the soles of my feet contact the ground. As my feet become the main surface of support, I drag my fingertips towards my toes (please see Chapter 7). Softening my knees, I begin to roll up through my spine, hollowing out the space between my ribcage and pelvis and accentuating that space with the drooping curve of my arms (please see Chapter 8). When I arrive at a vertical posture, my arms straighten and my fingertips reach behind me. The pull of my fingertips becomes the impetus for extending my left foot behind me as I gradually begin to step out of the five-foot square that has held this movement journey.

A Control Setup

As I embarked on this dissertation research, many people asked me why I was working with a choreographed dance rather than improvising in each environment. Both understated and more explicit elements of improvisation presented themselves in each day and each performance because no two enactments of the sequence could ever be exactly the same. The structured choreography actually allows me to attend to a level of subtle change and response to the environment that I desire. Having an external form and repeatable nature, the dance architecture created a movement environment with an important consistency for me. Similar to how one relies on trees and rocks being in a landscape when you return the next day, the choreographed movement sequence gave me a solid, but not rigid, way to orient myself within each new day and terrain. Obviously, landscapes are always in motion (sometimes imperceptibly and sometimes radically), so

having a choreographed movement sequence provided another layer of mirroring between my body and the land. The sequence is “set,” and also inherently moving. This interplay positioned stability and change as complimentary partners within a unified whole rather than as oppositional forces.

The speed, or rather slowness, of this movement practice allowed me time to experience the simultaneity of microcosm and macrocosm—the mirror of self and universe as metaphors for one another as well as interpenetrating worlds. Although this movement sequence was in effect my control setup in scientific terms, each site provided variation in the meaningfulness revealed through the movement as well as subtle shifts in the physical gestures themselves. My work in each site focused my attention on certain movements, moments, or postures and revealed a new significance. Sometimes elements of the terrain caused alterations to the movement in very practical ways—the thorny desert brush of Joshua Tree necessitated a simultaneous opening of my arms and legs from the fetal curve position because I could not slide my upper body smoothly along the ground. At other times, I began to recognize relationships between my physical form and the landscape. While kneeling under a tree at Glacier National Park, I realized the similarity between my hand shape and the branching root system. Other instances of performing provided unique resonances, such as the aforementioned experience around Bloody Pond at Shiloh. With each performance, additional layers of understanding unfurled, educating me about myself, the environments, performance process, and philosophical concepts—and especially about the intersections of all of these phenomena. This process did not exclude human witnesses since the research was conducted in public

spaces, but instead of focusing on interaction with a human audience, this performing concentrated on the cultivation of heightened awareness, permeable presence, and philosophical conversations between my body and the environments in which it was embedded—a state of consciousness that is largely possible for me only through the act of performing.

A Merging of Body and Environment

Before I could begin this performing on site, I conversed with the research coordinators affiliated with the five different parks and eventually obtained research permits to conduct this work. Since the Department of the Interior currently only offers scientific research permits for work done in the parks, I had a series of interesting exchanges with park officials in order to determine if my study could even qualify as “research” under the currently defined terms of investigatory practices. After examining my proposal, every research coordinator responded with enthusiasm at the prospect of a new type of research appearing in conjunction with the parks. For example, Tara Carolin, Director of Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center at Glacier National Park wrote in a letter of support, “The unique work that Ms. Salyers proposes will examine the human connection with National Parks from a fresh perspective. Salyers’s proposed research has potential to shed light on additional personal human connections that have not previously been addressed in our common interpretive themes” (Conlin). Each park and the Department of the Interior have requested a copy of this dissertation upon its completion.

Most of the specific locations within each park (such as Hidden Valley in Joshua Tree and the Carriage Trails in Acadia) were selected during the permit application process prior to my arrival at the site. Each location was chosen by virtue of its composition; that is, the physical conditions by which they have been shaped, the levels of human activity already present in the ecology, and the particular configurations of human, animal, plant, mineral, and architectural substance that compose each environment. However, during my visits, additional landscapes became performance sites. For example, due to the time of year in which I visited Joshua Tree, I was able to perform in the aforementioned dry riverbed that, during other months, would be overflowing with water.

Unexpected elements combined with intentional practices, enabling this research to foster a merging of body and land. I spent 4-5 days in each park and 5-6 hours per day moving through this dance. This duration was particularly important to me for the purposes of cultivating a deep exchange with the environments. Taking inspiration from dancer and ecological writer Andrea Olsen, I considered how my presence within each landscape would not only affect the terrain but also the composition of my body itself. When invited to present a speech and workshop in Seoul, Olsen asked if she could come a week early, “so that by day seven, I could say that 60% of my body is water from this Korean soil” (Olsen). In a similar way, my presence in each location was not only focused on being with a landscape but also on becoming literally part of the environment and allowing it to become part of me.

A(nother) Layer of Understanding

If we acknowledge cognition as a process of moving within, and as part of, environments, dance movement can certainly be a thinking act. Philosophical inquiry also involves the movement of thought and the thinking of movement in both literal and metaphorical ways. Because dance movement can engage the imagination, it penetrates another level of consciousness as well, which can impact both the architecture of possibility and the tangible world in which one's thinking is embedded. Performing is how I come to know the world and such interpenetration of worlds. As I said to my dissertation committee, "I will be doing the performing whether I write about it or not because it is how I learn. I think you should question my ethics as a researcher if I don't write about the performing as a vital part of this study." An understandable nervousness may exist among dance scholars who fear that performers are simply co-opting ideas to describe their experiences as practitioners. This perspective, while having a reasonable foundation in the desire for intellectual rigor, is obviously problematic in its assumption that the idea precedes the practice, or that the practice can only illustrate the theory, which it snatches after the fact to give some brainy legitimacy to the embodied act. Performance is not putting on its philosophy costume or vice versa, but performance can be a philosophical practice—engaging the love of wisdom and the wisdom of love. For the purposes of this project, such philosophical potential hinges on the experiences of the performer. In this writing, I am focusing on the insights arrived at through instances of my own performance practice and sharing it with you as the new audience of this writing,

whether or not you have seen my performing, and if you have seen it, whether or not it was a philosophical experience for you.

My work bears a debt of gratitude to and carries the DNA of the Practice as Research initiative that originated in the UK as a creative and vital response to the governmental Research Assessment Exercise. Beginning in 2001, the concept of utilizing artistic practice as a research methodology became formalized into the PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) project, which was conducted by Baz Kershaw, Angela Piccini, Caroline Rye, and Ludivine Allegue Fuschini in the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol. The group proposes that practice as research “represents a major theoretical and methodological shift in the performance disciplines — traditional approaches to the study of these arts are complemented and extended by research pursued through the practice of them” (Bristol.ac.uk/parip). Reflecting on the continued development of this methodology ten years later, scholar artists Jane Bacon and Vida Midgelow propose, “The acceptance of practice as a mode of research acknowledges that there are fundamental epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through practice” (6).

As dance artists, Midgelow and Bacon bring an important dimension to practice as research. They intend “to point towards an ontology of the bodily and a conceptualization of PaR in which the critical and the practical are embedded and embodied, existing in movement practices in reflexive and critical ways” (Bacon and Midgelow 9). My dissertation project seeks to honor this embodied and embedded nature of movement and philosophy, and it enacts practice as research in the sense that one of

my dance practices is functioning as a research medium. More specifically and integrally, though, it is performance as philosophy.

Performance and philosophy are sometimes inseparable ways of thinking and of being in the world, and it is from this experience of inseparability that I write. Dancer and philosopher Sondra Fraleigh strives to incorporate the importance of “a dancing consciousness where dancing is a mode of thought, a special kind of knowledge and being in the world” (9) into her writing, and similarly, I seek to acknowledge the inextricable nature of philosophy and dance for me by regarding my performance work as philosophical practice. As a discourse that has only recently appeared, performance as philosophy is still finding its interdisciplinary footing. The incredible incidence of the terms “performance” and “philosophy” applied as metaphors in contexts that are not related to the actual fields further signals something of their importance to the ways in which we understand living processes in general. Perhaps the most exciting perspective (and one of the few published accounts) I have read about the intersection of performance and philosophy is Laura Cull’s insistence that, “We do not yet know what performance or philosophy can do” (4). While I should not have been surprised that Cull is a comrade in this emerging field since she was one of the first scholars to write about a connection between Deleuze and performance, I am thrilled that her thinking extends a desire to hold performance and philosophy as active equals. Her statement emphasizes both the future potential of these fields and their inherent existence as actions.

She asserts that a, “‘critical turning point’ has been reached in terms of the relationship between performance and philosophy,” such that a need has arisen “to go

beyond merely applying philosophical concepts to performance ‘examples’” (1).

Although much of her work formally focuses on theatre rather than dance, Cull’s intention to encourage the consideration of performance as philosophy emerges from a hope that, “philosophers and performance scholars alike might extend their conception of what counts as thinking to include not only activities like performance, but embodied experiences and material processes of all kinds” (1). These fields are not simply using each other to describe themselves as they “are.” As types of action, they not only can collide and expand one another but also enhance the possibilities of rethinking thinking itself.

Cull played a significant role in developing the international research association called Performance Philosophy, which is now celebrating its one-year anniversary in July 2013. This network grew out of the Performance and Philosophy working group, which Cull founded in 2008. As an organization, Performance Philosophy is currently working to develop a journal and has also initiated a book series, with the first edited volume *Zizek and Performance* to be published in 2014. Its mission demonstrates the diversity of ideas and practitioners that bring insight to the intersection of these fields, and furthermore the desire to regard them no longer as separate disciplines but together functioning as an “open field.”

Performance Philosophy could be: the application of philosophy to the analysis of performance; the philosophy of performance and/or the performance of philosophy; the study of how philosophers and philosophical ideas have been staged in performance or how ideas and images of performance have figured in philosophy; the theoretical or practical exploration of philosophy as performance and/or performative; and likewise, experiments emerging from the idea that performance is a kind of philosophy or thinking or theorizing in itself. But it

could also be much more besides. The ambition of Performance Philosophy is to support the interrogation of the ‘more’, to facilitate researchers to create and question the nature of this open field. (performancephilosophy.ning.com)

The notion that “performance is a kind of philosophy or thinking or theorizing in itself” provides the deepest connection between my current work and the efforts of this scholarly association and emerging field. My dance work does not seek to illustrate thoughts but rather to allow moving to be an active agent in the revelation of understanding such that, “It is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside all representation . . . of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind” (Deleuze qtd. in Cull Microsoft Power Point). In such touching of the mind, my understanding of “mind” is not synonymous with brain, but rather returns to the cooperative effort between human being and environment. Through the embodied and embedded nature of the human being within the environment movement can reveal and impact an immediate living ecosystem, a social architecture, and a sense of cosmic unfurling (please see Chapters 1, 2, 4, & 8).

A Body Concept

Philosophers Brian Massumi and Erin Manning propose that, “What moves as a body, returns as the movement of thought” (senselab.ca). Such interpenetration of movement and thinking provides a foundation for my enactment of the physical and philosophical project of this dissertation. Brian Massumi resurfaced as an important figure in my work not because I share all of his thoughts, but because I think like him. Changing my notion of “like-mindedness” from the agreement of ideas to the

compatibility of approach revealed a comrade for me in Massumi's way of philosophizing. While I am not directly opposing him, I am finding somewhat different avenues of understanding the world of movement through a conjunction of his and my experiences. This effort could also be said to be a characteristic of Massumi's work, though, as in his own thinking strongly connects to yet departs from Deleuze's ideas. He proposes that becoming-deleuzian actually means differing from Deleuze and departing from his work, even if repeating his words or sharing resonance with his ideas. Massumi encourages a momentum for enacting philosophy meant to, "Provoke others to repeat to differ, to compose in a way that produces new situations that no sooner gel than dissolve into another consistency. This is to practice a deleuzian pedagogy of the concept" (Massumi 403). What, then, might it mean to become Massumian? Perhaps it involves bringing all aspects of your living encounters into your philosophical writing, and especially to move with the assurance that, "Concepts must be experienced. They are lived" (senselab.ca). As such, bringing my own lived experience into interaction with his concepts may confirm and unravel the expectations of both.

In particular, Massumi's exploration of what he terms "the body as sensible concept" provides a foundation for my own work, while my work describes an instance of enacting this phenomenon—not for the sake of illustrating his ideas but as a living vibration of some threads of its potential. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Massumi introduces the work of performance artist Stelarc as a "physical experience of ideas" (Stelarc qtd. in Massumi *Parables* 89). Massumi suggests that, "Stelarc's art starts from and continually returns to a point at which idea and body have not yet split or have

rejoined” (*Parables* 89-90). Although this rejoining may seem obvious and even “natural” to the artist, it offers a distinct challenge to Massumi as the philosopher and writer examining this phenomenon. He proposes that, “The challenge is to write the rejoining of body and thought” (*Parables* 90). Through his development of the notion of “the body as sensible concept,” Massumi has provided me with an important means of approach to this challenge as I embody both the movement process and the writing practice.

In the Postlude of each data chapter, I discuss how a particular facet of “the body as sensible concept” arose for me in that specific performance event. These aspects include:

1. “The sensible concept is a materialized idea embodied not so much in the perceiving or the perceived considered separately as in their between, in their felt conjunction” (*Parables* 95). (please see Chapter 4)
2. A notion of the suspended body in which, “the implications of the event are *felt* first, before being thought-out. They are felt in the form of a ‘compulsion’: an abstractness with all the immediacy of a physical force” (*Parables* 100). (please see Chapter 5)
3. “Sensation is the direct registering of potential” (*Parables* 97). (please see Chapter 6)
4. “Sensation is the point of co-conversion through which the variations of perception and thought play out. It is the singular point where what infolds is also unfolding” (94). (please see Chapter 7)

5. “The one accustomed conjunction in which a human subject is also an object for itself is reflective thought” (*Parables* 127). (please see Chapter 8)

While my discussion of these aspects in the following five chapters does not just seek to confirm the validity of these ideas, it does affirm a way of understanding their presence in motion.

CHAPTER IV

PATIENCE AND INITIATION: EXPLORING LANDMARKS IN THE TERRAIN OF
OUR KNOWING



Fig. 3. Joshua Tree National Park sunset. (researcher's photograph)

A tremendous peace and calm flood my body while lying in the empty riverbed. This place frequently holds the raging water of an entire river—surely it can hold me and any of my struggles. The dry riverbed is teaching me an aspect of patience I would call “trust”; leaning into an awareness that there is more to know than what I understand in

this moment and that the container of time for knowing is larger than I thought. This experience awakens me to the fact that I want to be like a riverbed for other people—a large container that is moved but not destroyed by their force, able to hold them no matter what, and capable of knowing that there is a longer duration in motion than simply the urgency of this moment.

Introduction

As a child, I pacified myself with the notion that it seemed mathematically improbable for a person to have to wait in a line forever. Therefore, I reasoned that if I was waiting for an expected occurrence, and I would not literally be waiting forever, then the longer I waited, the closer I would actually come to that occurrence. This reasoning allowed me to become a little more excited rather than fatigued by each moment of waiting because I could feel myself drawing nearer to the desired end. As an adult, I find myself all too frequently focusing solely towards the end of that line—that is, to point “B” from my current point “A.” While I still approach that distance with my childhood philosophy, a great lesson emerged for me during this site visit to Joshua Tree National Park about the nature of the journey from point A to point B. I seem to have both some knowledge and no knowledge of what that point B could become or how I might arrive there. Everything I know is tied up with everything I don’t know, or I exist in what qualitative researcher Patty Lather describes as, “that weave of knowing and not knowing, which is what knowing is” (Lather 49). So how do I navigate this terrain of partial understanding? I propose that it is possible through a combination of patience and

initiation, a reading of landmarks, and a revolutionary concept (at least for me) called ease.

The Mystery of Distance

Many parts of the living world flower under stress, including Joshua trees. As I set out to visit this miraculous species of trees—a trip packed into a tightly woven schedule with little room for adjustment—I had my sights firmly fixed on my intended point B, conducting my research at Joshua Tree National Park. However, beginning with a midnight call alerting me that my first flight had been cancelled, I should have realized that this site visit might offer lessons on patience. My plan had been to arrive in California early enough to spend time at the park on the same day I was traveling. Due to the flight changes, this plan was not possible; however, I ended up having an unhurried breakfast with my traveling companion and research assistant, which is a rare occurrence in my life. Taking a detour from Massachusetts to Miami in order to get to California thankfully gave me the time to open myself up to some other possibilities for experiencing time, something I noted as I typed the following into my iPhone at the airport: “Things really do work out for the best when I enjoy the process/journey.”

Patience does not just mean waiting. Patience means having a consciousness of a longer duration while simultaneously being where I am. Patience means understanding that something may take time to unfold and being willing to trust that it is unfolding. If I held an intricately folded piece of paper and tried to open it in 10 seconds, it would probably tear. But if I take time with this process, I not only get to see the complete piece of paper once it is unfolded, I also have the opportunity to experience all of the different,

beautiful shapes and contours of the paper along the way. Initiation of a process means that I do what I can to help it unfold.

Perhaps there is no better laboratory for the unfolding of my understanding of patience and initiation than dance, and especially for me, dance performance. Although I might “know” the ultimate conclusion of a choreographed dance, the particular manifestation of that moment arrives with fresh perspective, unanticipated discoveries, and potentially wholly new experiences every time it is enacted. Similarly, I also “know” where I begin in a choreographed dance as well as the pathways I navigate within my individual body and in a larger space in order to arrive at point B, or the ending. And yet, I am not simply trying to get to point B most of the time—I am enjoying the whole journey. Sometimes I can find myself secretly annoyed when people use dance as a metaphor for life. However, I also realize I am frequently the best human I am capable of being when performing, so I have worked for years to integrate the lessons from that arena into the rest of my life. In this instance, it basically boils down to the maxim I should have embodied at this point: “Enjoy the journey.” But why? What does pleasure offer me, and perhaps others, beyond momentary experience? What impact does enjoyment have on the way I exist in and travel through the duration of a journey—and particularly a journey into knowing?

Patience, Endurance, and Ease

While writing this chapter, the research notebook I was carrying with me in Joshua Tree falls open to a page in which I have written, “Sometimes I am trying too hard. Ease allows things to happen.”

Through my mind run the lyrics of a popular song: “Is it so that my persistence blocks the path of least resistance?” (Lang 1995). I look down at my coffee mug (a present from my mother) and see the words, “Life is the dance we do in the space between ‘making it happen’ and ‘letting it happen.’” I know several dancers who have also received this particular dance-metaphor inspirational mug as a gift, which leads me to believe that we should actually be experts in this dynamic balance. And yet, I have so much to learn about the interaction between patience and initiation. Because I am fundamentally uninterested in viewing anything as oppositional, my inquiry seeks not to look at them as separate efforts but to understand the ways these two qualities work together to create a larger type of action.

Initiation brings willingness to patience, while patience brings ease to initiation. Perhaps I never let myself enjoy the unfolding (and therefore experience the process of true patience) because I am frequently busy blaming or shaming myself. Blame and shame belong to the world of impatience—a desire for a quick and reductive conclusion that operates in a limited logic constructed of uni-directional, linear cause and effect. For what am I usually blaming myself? I blame myself for not knowing, for not being able to stand as the one who knows. In one landscape at Joshua Tree, I am forced to stoop to enter the ruins of a stone structure while I am moving through this dance—a physical position that reminds me of a way I have heard the heavenly gate of humility described. The description proposes that there is no waiting line at the gate of humility because so few people want to enter through that door. The act of having to physically lower oneself to enter is an excellent reminder to be humble, to bow, to put my head below my heart.

This bowing—this posture of humbleness—awakens my sense that not knowing coupled with humility yields learning. I want this learning; I desire an openness to be changed, to acknowledge the incompleteness of my understanding, to receive further insight, and even to let go of what I thought I knew in order to receive a greater knowledge. As the aforementioned experience reminded me, I can open my heart, mind, imagination, and intelligence to something, but I also have to open my body to it in order for it to manifest in this realm. Bodily ease promotes receptivity. Receptivity promotes learning. Learning promotes knowing, and for me, knowing is not a state of grasping information but, rather, a station of integrated moving.

Points on the Terrain of Our Knowing

In Joshua Tree, the “tent” gesture of my hands also becomes a measure of the distance between a point A and point B—a durational span that offers an opportunity to understand something about patience as an active quality rather than the reduction of this span to an inert object called “time.” Specifically, in this case, the movement is not just about the beginning point or the end point, but also about the movement between and beyond as well as the transformation that occurs as points converge. Such transformation and convergence leads me to the conclusion that obviously the “points” themselves are not objects either. They are landmarks in both physical and conceptual experiences of orientation. A point is an imagined aspect of a continuity; and, as such, an opportunity to (slow down and) grasp a microcosm within the macrocosm. The “point” is not the complete reality. It is a distilled moment of a larger picture that offers me some ease in my navigation. The point is a landmark within the journey.

On the Nature of Landmarks

Throughout this dissertation, I will use the terms “landmark” and “wonder” interchangeably due to the fact that together they capture a combined sense of physicality and ephemerality and therefore reflect important aspects of one another which might be connotationally missing if either word was used in isolation. Both are frequently applied to physical features of our national park system. The word “wonder” further suggests a dawning of awe and recognition of significance, while “landmark” grounds that significance within the context of a journey. So, I ask myself, “How do landmarks populate terrains—particularly terrains of knowing?”

I experience landmarks as an organization of observable or imaginable phenomena, which help me to understand the lay of the land and provide me with orientational guidelines or structures for moving. These cues may play tricks on my sight (both insight and outer sight), especially if I ascribe to them the characteristics of mere tools for me, the user. Even with physical, tangible objects I need to remember that one view of them does not necessarily reflect the totality of their existence. For example, as I enter Joshua Tree National Park, a desert forest mesmerizes me. Yet, when I actually step out of the car and put my body into closer proximity with these plants, I realize that what appears to be a tightly gathered grove of trees turns out to be a vast expanse of individuals standing forty to fifty feet apart. If each of these individual trees is a “point,” as described in my previous discussion, then the point does not exist independently of the larger picture. Due to this example, it is also easy to recognize that the larger picture cannot exist without the point; that is, there is no forest without the trees. The “point” is

not, however, simply a component part of the whole. The point is both its own entity and a reference for the whole. I am not describing a fractal pattern, however, because individual trees do not necessarily replicate the overall structure of the forest itself. Instead, I am describing the nature of a landmark or wonder: It exists in itself (even if it belongs to the imaginal realm), and it opens a landscape of understanding or movement potential beyond itself.

To say that a landmark is a reflection begins to capture some of its dimension, especially when considering, for example, the mirrored appearance of a face in a body of water. A reflection has depth, not separate from but different from what is being reflected. A reflection is not an exact replica of what it is reflecting; however, a reflection is also not a diluted version of the thing reflected. A reflection offers another glimpse into and experience of the functioning of the dynamic whole, or conjunction between what is being reflected and the reflection. Therefore, as I describe landmarks in this dissertation, my interest is in the relational depth—the means by which we can understand the natural wonder both as itself and as an opening into terrains of knowing and experiencing what is greater than itself alone.

The human body, the human being, and the material landscapes that we inhabit offer reflections of and for each other. Such an exploration and explication of these reflections is the foundation of my philosophical work in this research—that is, the journey of body and land for the sake of better understanding our shared material and movement existence. It is impossible for me to live my life without noticing myriad opportunities to learn from what surrounds me, but the conscious pursuit of deeper

understanding of such landmarks, especially through the vehicle of dance performance, is the focus of this particular physical and conceptual project.

On the Significance of Landmarks

So why do landmarks matter? To address this question, I return to the problem of navigation—my love of movement and a need for orientation. As a young child, I was invited to a friend's birthday party at McDonald's. One of the party games that the host played with us continues to shape my interest in landmarks and our ways of navigating around both real and imagined objects. A series of differently sized cups were laid out in a linear path, and the birthday girl was invited to traverse this topography by stepping over each cup. Then, she was blindfolded and asked to repeat her journey. Unbeknownst to her, the host removed all of the cups so that the path was clear, but the celebrant still picked her feet up high and extended her gait in accordance with how she remembered the terrain to be organized. While most of the partygoers laughed in delight at the physical display, I was captivated by both the now seemingly "abstract" movement and the celebrant's physical intention of learning to navigate this whole line of motion when interacting with the series of cups—point by point. The young girl could not have even known exactly what line to travel on, whether her eyes were open or covered, without the cups acting as points to describe that trajectory. The points rendered the journey visible, tangible, and ultimately possible.

I am not inclined to favor only the visual sense in instances of navigating, so when a sight-based metaphor is employed in this writing, it most often indicates any means of perceiving. She perceived and conceived of the whole line and the points

simultaneously and inextricable from one another, as perhaps most of us do. However, philosopher Brian Massumi opposes the definition of points in a pathway proposing that, “A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity” (*Parables* 6). While I support this understanding of the “dynamic unity” of a path, I find a conceptual acknowledgement of points to be important so that I can recognize that there might be moments in a continuum when the whole of the trajectory is not apparent. Therefore, even though the trajectory is motion and not position, distinguishing points along with a sense of the whole actually helps remind me that a whole exists. Without this reminder, I might become confused and believe that the point I find myself in is the whole of the trajectory. I only reach an instance of being stuck in motion when I conceive of a given point as the all-encompassing reality rather than as a landmark on a larger mapping of my movement experience. Yet, the landmark is essential for my conscious movement (both physical and metaphorical motion). How I choose to engage with the landmark impacts my journey in the terrain of knowing. As Massumi further suggests, “Landmarks¹ are like magnetic poles that vectorize the space of orientation” (*Parables* 180). Where we head, where we “look” as seekers of knowledge, and what we open ourselves to discover often relies on our relationships to these wonders and our willingness to learn from them.

¹ In this particular sentence, Massumi is writing about physical objects in space around the body, towards his larger effort of explicating, “dimensions of *lived abstractness* that cannot be conceptualized in other than topological terms” (*Parables* 177).

Movement and Cognition

My exterior world continually mirrors the efforts and needs of my interior world. This chapter's introductory description of the riverbed demonstrates how this landmark not only met my own need to be held with patience, but also my need to learn how to hold others in such a way. When these efforts manifest in an external image that reflects an aspect of my journey of learning, I am calling such objects “wonders” or “landmarks.” Landmarks do not just function as a momentary flash on the radar screen of existence, but rather they are essential aspects of my movement and orientation processes. In the case of the riverbed, my connection to this landscape feature did not simply meet a momentary need, it propelled me into an exploration of how to develop more patience in my relationships with other people. My exploration of landmarks and philosophical navigation reaches to the core of how this dissertation regards movement—that is, as an integral and inextricable component in the act of thinking. The choice to consciously heighten my awareness and deepen my understanding of such landmarks while dancing indicates my own interest in learning—and even expanding consciousness—through acts of performing.

The ease I feel when performing opens me up to a different degree of receptivity than other actions. Performing also brings together aspects of patience and initiation by synthesizing the impulse to move in each moment with the simultaneous recognition of a longer duration than any particular instant that I am experiencing. This time dimension is vital for understanding both the moment of experience and the experience outside of any particular time. Sensing an experience outside of the moment in which it occurs reveals

that it has become incorporated into my being as the learned wisdom of living. But where is the learning acquired, and how does it take place? How is cognition related to the philosophical and physical navigation I have been considering in this writing? Perhaps the key for my understanding of both philosophical and physical navigation is once again through the cooperative actions of body and world. As cognitive philosopher Andy Clark suggests, “The mature cognitive competencies which we identify as mind and intellect may thus be more like ship navigation than capacities of the bare biological brain” (214).

Thinking, according to Clark, is not confined to one location in the body (e.g. the brain), but rather occurs through the action of the body in and with the world. For example, let’s consider the following math problem: Please complete these computations in your head (i.e. no paper or pencil allowed right now). What is 7×7 ? And then the resulting number $\times 7$? And then that number $\times 7$? And then $\times 7$ again? $\times 7$? And one last time, that answer $\times 7$? (Please record your answer here _____.) Now, let’s pursue that same equation but use paper and pencil within the figuring process. (Please record your answer here _____.)

Clark’s Parity Principle suggests that if it is possible to arrive at the same answer through both of these methods, then they are equally legitimate cognitive processes. More specifically, this principle proposes that, “if, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in accepting as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (for that time) part of the cognitive process” (*Supersizing* 114). I propose, however, that moving in the world provides not only a comparable but also often an easier and necessary aspect of

cognition. If it is seamless to solve this math problem by brain alone (without envisioning numbers or imaginary objects to manipulate within the mind's eye), then there might be an argument for valuing brain activity over brain-body-world interaction. Yet, if you found yourself more capable of thinking through this math problem when writing, please consider the possibility that thinking often occurs through movement—even the small motions of a pencil. But aren't the paper and pencil only tools for you, the user? If you were simply finding the answer in your brain and then writing it down on paper, the pencil and paper would function only as tools. If, however, the act of writing, of engaging in that movement with material objects in the world actually made your answer possible, then perhaps they are necessary parts of that thinking process itself. Accordingly, Clark proposes that brain, body, and world can operate as an external scaffold for cognition such that, “the system we often refer to as ‘mind’ is in fact much wider than the one we call ‘brain’” (215). Clark does not apply his concept of “extended cognition” to include the type of landmarks that I am discussing, but his work provides a valuable contribution to considerations of how I choose to engage with the world through movement, and in fact, how movement that is embedded in the world can compose cognitive acts.

So then what is the role of landmarks in cognition? Landmarks and wonders provide me with ways of engaging in and understanding my philosophical problems, just as the characters “7” and “x” provided us with ways of engaging in the aforementioned math problem. These characters both present the problem and are the necessary means for addressing it. In the first chapter of this writing, I discussed philosophy as both the love of wisdom *and* the wisdom of love. Perhaps then, landmarks in more abstract

philosophical problems are the ways we pursue a love of wisdom and integrate a wisdom of love—efforts which penetrate the unknown in our inner and outer worlds. And how does any of this involve performance? For me, performance is also an act of love in both a traditional heart-felt sense and the Deleuzian sense—that is, “To love is to try to *explicate*, to *develop* these unknown worlds” (Proust 7). Performing can be an event that opens worlds of possibilities both inside and outside of us.

Lying in the desert sand, I am able to simultaneously see the eye of an ant and the huge expanse of sky beyond us both. These two points focus my attention on the gratitude I have for all that exists beyond my current comprehension. I do not fully understand either the eye of an ant or the expanse of the sky. My perspective on microcosm and macrocosm continually shift as I move to another moment in the dance. Now seated, I see things differently. Rocks slide down my face like heavy tears carving a riverbed across my cheek and remind me that landmarks appear in all sizes and scales.

Postlude to Chapter IV

A Facet of the Body as Sensible Concept

As stated in Chapters 2 and 3, Brian Massumi's idea of "body as sensible concept" forms the foundation for the approach to the performance research for this dissertation. In this chapter, the facet of "body as sensible concept" that became most prevalent for me is the notion that, "The sensible concept is a materialized idea embodied not so much in the perceiving or the perceived considered separately as in their between, in their felt conjunction" (*Parables* 95). Because of the way I am developing an understanding of landmarks through the conjunction of my body and other material presences, this aspect of his thinking guides my research in a practical way by reminding me to continually balance a focus on perceiving with a realization that in the very act of perceiving I join that which I perceive. The nature of this joining is unique because each of those entities or landmarks may not have any consciousness. Therefore, how does the conjunction between an inanimate object and myself avoid weighing solely towards me as perceiver?

For this question, it is important to recognize Massumi's choice of the phrase "considered separately": "embodied not so much in the perceiving or perceived considered separately as in their between, their felt conjunction" (95). Because I am a conscious being and this text is written from my perspective rather than the voice of the riverbed for example, the effort must be not to equate us in intelligence but for me to consider us in our connections rather than in our separate existences. This effort propels

my looking for and writing about landmarks. The meaning and meaningfulness of landmarks and wonders exist by virtue of the connection between them and the perceiver.

Massumi's work takes this idea of connection further to propose that, "Body and thing are extensions of each other. They are mutual implications: co-thoughts of two-headed perception. That two-headed perception is the world" (*Parables* 95). His concept of this two-headed perception constituting the world feels compatible with my exploration of body and landscape as mirrors of and for one another, revealing a depth of resonance both within and beyond the visible form.

Object Relations

In addition, discussing objects and the material body through writing required me to reconsider the way in which the literal language I use implies values laden in the notion of subject and object. The English language frequently reveals, or perhaps establishes, what philosopher Henri Bergson calls a, "logic of solids" (xvii). As he proposes, "the human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids, where our action finds its fulcrum and our industry its tools" (xvii). I love the English language, even with its seeming tendency to oppose subject and object in both sentence structure and concept, but I feel the need to be acutely aware of this inherent value system as I discuss objects and human materiality. Unfortunately, a limited aspect of the noun and object-based language is not simply in the words themselves, but also in how we often use the words to reinforce ideas about active subject and inert object, and particularly a dichotomous (and often hierarchical) split between them.

The human body is the material space of the self. Because the self is a visual and visible being, it shares space with other people and objects, at least partially, through acts of seeing and being seen. Ways of seeing, both literally and metaphorically, are not static. Seeing involves spatiality and relationships – the vital embodied reasoning of movement and proximity. Translating visual, embodied experience into language creates possibilities for both expanding and limiting our understandings of such movement.

Language metaphors can create effective ways of deepening our imagistic experiences, creating connections between concepts, fostering communication, and even envisioning or inspiring potential actions. They can also help us to organize, categorize, and reason through our experiences. In these latter capacities, however, such experiences frequently become metaphorized as objects. For example, in the statement, “I saw the dance,” the activity and temporal event of *the dance* becomes viewed as an entity with discrete boundaries comparable to a solid object. This linguistic pattern by which active, ephemeral events must be contained in noun form renders communication efficient, but creates limited descriptions of experience. Even though the event of “the dance” may *include* and permeate our bodies as viewers, when it becomes an object in language, it takes on the characteristics of a solid container of that experience and is therefore set outside of and detached from the human subject.

Labeling events as separate objects of experience might constrain movement and potential for change in the ways we “see” ourselves within those experiences. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out, we often “conceptualize our visual field as a container and conceptualize what we see as being inside it” (30). Linguistic necessity and

mental habits of reducing events and people to objects in our descriptions affect not only our dialogues but also more fundamental aspects of conceptualization. Although these tendencies strive to accurately depict the world through words, they often only capture limited glimpses of living processes. Much contemporary philosophy, particularly the work of Deleuze and writers who rhizomatically emerge from his thinking, including Massumi, skirts the confines of object metaphors and insinuation by employing the term “becoming” as a solution for describing an ineffable, but tangibly experienced sense of simultaneously being in point A, moving towards point B, and the transformation and convergence of points, both knowable and unknown. By frequently turning and returning to the limits of language in conceiving of and describing dynamic processes, many of these philosophers discuss how words often fail to depict the change, growth, and movement inherent to living organisms. As philosopher Luce Irigaray proposes, “we lack language to express this becoming through which a tree gives itself its form as living” (“Being Two” 145). As I trace the path of this research, I am striving to find words that do not reduce events to the manipulation of static objects, while I simultaneously resist attempts to explain away complexities with the intentionally, yet irritatingly, obscure notion of *becoming*—that everything (that is, *everything*) is a process in process.

Beyond the tendency to consider the material world, our own object natures, or even an imagined materiality (such as a “point”), as tools for some other “subject” operator including a “self” or a “brain,” I propose that the materiality itself functions as an irreducible actor in the world of knowing. A false notion that subject and object are *oppositional* entities rather than *different* aspects of ourselves can limit our understanding

of the dynamic experiences of connection between material forms. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Vivian Sobchack's concept of "interobjectivity" reveals, "the condition of a deep and passionate recognition of ourselves and the objective world filled with 'things' and 'others' as immanently together in the flesh" (318). By cultivating a sense of this shared material presence, the embodiment of our object nature can transform to become what Sobchack insists is, "not a diminution of subjectivity, but its *sensual* and *sensible* expansion" (250). Sobchack provides not only the eradication of a hierarchical split between subject and object but also the consideration that such reconceptualization has potential ethical impact. She states that, "the mutual origin of aesthetic sensibility and ethical responsibility lies in the *subjective* realization of our own *objectivity*, in the passion of our *own* material" (Sobchack 310), an idea that reminds me to reconsider the nature of the conjunction between perceiver and perceived proposed by Massumi. Again, this togetherness or conjunction provides a crucial doorway into processes of not only perceiving, but also of learning and of moving through the world with an ethics of regard for other material entities, including our landscapes. As mobile bodies, as both subjects and objects, we learn not merely through the accumulation or possession of information but through relationships that encompass growth and change, including relationships with other material objects and landscapes.

Following from this emphasis on the human joining with the material world, Andy Clark provides an understanding of this conjunction as a structure for cognition itself. Along with David Chalmers (although, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the authors are listed in order of degree of their belief in the central thesis of this work), Clark proposes

cognition as an “*active externalism*, based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes” (“Extended” 1). Yet, environmental factors are not only serving as catalysts for thinking processes. Instead, Clark proposes that our joining with environments creates an external scaffold of cognition in which, “brain, body, world, and artifact are discovered locked together in the most complex of conspiracies. And mind and action are revealed in an intimate embrace” (*Being* 33). Although he resists the notions of “brain” as the locus of thinking or “mind” as a “logical reasoning device coupled with a store of explicit data,” Clark still constantly negotiates what role the biological “mind” has in cognition (*Being* 1). His emphasis on motion and the human being coupling with the world to create an external scaffold of cognition, however, moves these conceptions beyond the term “bodymind” as a way to describe the ways humans think and move as subjects and objects. In fact, his question, “Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin? (*Being* 213), ultimately provides the foundation for how I am conceiving of cognition. If the brain is not the “mind,” but rather the “mind” forms from the interrelations of human and world, these conjunctions between human and world play a vital role in the activities of comprehension and learning, as well as in the body existing as sensible concept.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPORTANCE OF FALLEN IDOLS: INTERNAL CONFLICT AND A PROMISE OF PEACE



Fig. 4. Dancing in field at Shiloh National Military Park. (researcher's photograph)

Standing in the middle of this open field, I am struck by the fact that there is no place to hide. I feel the vulnerability of my own body in the cold wind and its smallness against the backdrop of the acres of open terrain stretching out on all sides. Due to the high clay content, Tennessee dirt is very red, and my feet bear traces of the rust-colored

mud. Even in December, the grass is green and tall, and I move at the same speed as those blades touched lightly by the wind. The quiet and slowness of this moment contrast with the events that made this land infamous—a torrent of gunfire in which an unnamed lieutenant from Alabama described, “The men fell like grass.”

Introduction

As I officially begin writing this chapter, it also happens to be Memorial Day—a holiday that was originally established to honor Union troops who died in the Civil War. Solemnity blankets the beautiful landscape that became the site of one of the bloodiest battles of that war. Shiloh, the battle and now the national park, were actually named for the church that first stood here. Shiloh means “House of Peace.” Before the church itself was built, the landscape existed as a place of worship; people gathered under the massive trees for their church services until the construction of a formal building. The original church structure was destroyed during the battle but has subsequently been rebuilt in two versions—a replica of the previous log cabin and a modern structure of stone and brick that still hosts an active congregation. When I entered the log cabin, I found a Bible on the simple wooden pulpit turned to III John, and my finger fell upon the second verse of the first chapter: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”

I have never before visited a landscape in this country that contains mass gravesites. Due to the Tennessee heat and therefore necessity of a quick burial, trenches were dug to hold the bodies of soldiers who died here during the battle. Eventually the Union troops were recovered from those plots and reburied in individually marked graves

within an elegant cemetery created adjacent to the battlefield, but the Confederate soldiers were left in the mass graves. Standing before one of the trenches, covered over by so many seasons of fallen leaves and newly grown grass, I say a prayer for the souls of those who are buried here, unnamed and unknown.

I am visiting Shiloh in December, having borrowed my mother's car to make this drive between two places that have been home to me—Nashville and Memphis. Shiloh sits between the two cities, balanced on the Mississippi border. Because I currently live in New England, I am able to notice what was simply natural to me most of my life, that is, Christian overtones on every radio station. Coupled with the fact that it is almost Christmas, the preponderance of songs that celebrate more religious aspects of this holiday catch my attention. I rarely listen to Christmas music in New England. It is often secular, and I seem to only have an affinity for spiritual songs during this season. This spirituality is something I love about the Southern United States, or at least the part of the “Bible Belt” where I grew up. No one is afraid to talk or sing about God. When I first moved to New England, I used to listen to an evangelical radio station, not for the sermons themselves, but because the cadence of speech was so familiar and comforting to me, and the hope of hearing a hymn of any kind brought me peace.

During my drive to Shiloh and then to Corinth, a connected battle site on the Mississippi side of the border, I hear every conceivable version of the hymn “O Holy Night.” Choirs and country music singers, children, and pop stars all sing versions of this song. For some reason I am particularly struck by the line, “the soul felt its worth,” and I begin to consider what impact such a sensation has on our being. What happens if our

souls truly feel their worth? And what happens when souls don't feel their worth?

Perhaps this hymn is a landmark (please see Chapter 4) for my visit to Shiloh. If the soul actually felt its worth, there might be no need for violence, internally or externally.

The significance of this battle at Shiloh as an internal conflict in our country inspires my thinking about other internal conflicts that can rage within the human self. One of the sparks of internal conflict that I recognize in myself stems from a tendency to cling to a belief that I “know,” or being convinced that I am “right.” This sense of conviction lures me into holding onto particular information, even when such information is no longer helpful for me. The friction between holding onto what I “know” and simultaneously needing to let go of it becomes an internal, and sometimes also an external, struggle. Why do I feel a need to hang onto any one point of knowledge?

In some sense, these grasped points become monuments and perhaps even fortifications. These idols of knowledge are limited pieces of information and understanding that I construct and in which I believe. I somehow feel safer by holding onto them, even though I recognize they are only points in a journey of knowing (please see Chapter 4). Solidity becomes rigidity, and if that point of knowledge is threatened in any way, I might defend it as if my life depended on it. What I often forget in the process is that if I am willing to surrender what I thought I knew, far greater knowledge is available.

Conviction, Hiding, and Entrenchment

It is no coincidence that the word “conviction” signifies both a firm stance of belief and being condemned to a prison sentence. This shutting down of possibilities and

confinement marks a primary danger for me in the terrain of knowing. When I construct monuments of my own rightness, I restrict myself from experiencing and embodying the knowledge that lies beyond my current understanding. Some convictions I might readily recognize. For example, I have spent my whole life believing that I am ugly. This belief keeps me trapped in self-consciousness rather than an expanded consciousness I actually desire. Yet, my awareness of the belief does not change its permanence in or pertinence to my lived experience. What could make this conviction, this idol of knowledge, fall? The only thing that can cause a shift is my willingness to be wrong, or more precisely, to admit that I don't know—to surrender and let go of what I think I know. No matter what the individual beliefs themselves are, the nature of holding them as convictions means being convinced of my own rightness about them. When I hold any piece of my knowledge as a conviction, I get the temporary satisfaction of feeling “right,” but I cannot receive much else. A clenched fist is almost completely unable to receive anything—it can only hold what it already has. Obviously, even when I want to let go, if I have tightly gripped something for a long period of time it is physically painful to open my hand—or by extension, to try to receive or perceive differently.

Some convictions lie beneath my conscious perception. These insidious beliefs, not apparent at first glance or available to the grasp of the consciousness, can be powerful influences affecting and operating beneath many layers of understanding. For example, I began this research project partially out of a desire to find some love for the United States, and, less explicitly, to let go of some self-hatred about the fact that I am an American. As I moved through Shiloh, a site of the U.S. “civil” war, it became clear to

me why I hold such self-hatred. Underlying this emotion, a plethora of beliefs combine to form an illusion about the nature of this country and of myself. Placing my body in front of a monument titled “Lost Cause” (a description of the state of the Confederate army at Shiloh), I begin to cry. That phrase captures my attention because I recognize it deep in my being. I believe that I am a lost cause. I believe the soul of the United States is a lost cause. By holding this conviction about myself and our country, I have been enacting my life from that foundation, even though it was unconscious. And, although this belief causes me pain, I am reluctant to let go of it. What is holding this belief in place?

Removing the convictions and idols of rightness I hold often means addressing the fears that led to their construction. Where have I chosen to stop in my pursuit of knowing? What do I fear about letting go of these convictions? Why am I pretending that hiding behind that monument of rightness provides me safety? As I examined my conviction about the “lost cause” status of my soul and the soul of the United States, an unexpected thread began to unravel the aforementioned web of beliefs, addressing my questions about why I continue to hold onto these idols of knowledge.

Alert and Alarm

As I lie somewhat concealed in a grassy field at Shiloh, I am aware both of my own movement and of the number of times that a park security vehicle has circled this meadow watching me. Even though I have a research permit in my bag and the full support of Shiloh’s administrative staff, I fear that I will be accosted for somehow wrongfully dancing in a national park. Placards dot the landscape of Shiloh illustrating the sites where troops were hiding in the tall grass as well as the places where they were

watching and preparing to attack their opponents. The atmosphere of conflict present here has filled my body with a tangible alertness, and a sense of anticipating an attack. While I am under surveillance of the security officers, I feel my alertness turning into a state of alarm. After contemplating this episode in conjunction with other events in my life, I realized that this embodied state of alarm was illustrating an essential component of the belief that I am a “lost cause.”

Following this performance experience at Shiloh, I noticed that the nationwide test of the emergency broadcast system was functioning as a landmark in my life and was connected to the discoveries I was making in this park. Whenever I hear that sound, fear strikes my body and leaves me in a state of alarm in which I expect bad things to happen, even though a recorded voice reassures me that, “This is only a test.” As I considered the feeling of alarm I experienced in that field at Shiloh, deeper contemplation of this alarm system emerged unexpectedly during a conversation with another choreographer who is creating a solo for me. While rehearsing, we spoke to each other about our mutual fear of heights. I said that, for me, this fear relates to the fact that I always expect bad things to happen. For example, I fear heights because I expect that I will fall. She said that heights trigger panic attacks for her. When I asked her to describe how a panic attack feels, she said, “It’s a response to danger when no actual danger is present. It’s like, ‘This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System.’”

As I contemplated this state of alarm further, a documentary about a famous choreographer came to mind. The film showed him flying into rage at his dancers in the process of creating one of his recent dances, while a calm interview with him overlapped

the cruelty and anger expressed in the studio. When discussing his behavior, he said, “What is the antidote to intellectual sloth? Maybe it’s a bastard who asks you to do, do, do, do, do...”(qtd. in Hercules and Quinn). What emerged for me through this accumulation of events and thinking was the understanding that I have a similarly violent stance, although I don’t embody it as a way to punish other people. Instead, I have turned it into a false idea of a cruel and punishing God. I then use that false image of God to goad myself to “do, do, do, do, do...” out of fear that I will succumb to intellectual, creative, and spiritual sloth—fear that I will be a lost cause.

Living under the shadow of that false idea of God and the fear of being a lost cause has always kept me in a low-level of alarm, even if no danger was actually present. My body even responds to this idea of God with physiological symptoms similar to those stirred by the actual sounding of an alarm; my body feels as if I am experiencing a constant test of the emergency broadcast system. How might I release this pattern? How might I receive new knowledge that would allow me to function without such constant fear?

Discernment

The flow between releasing and receiving requires discernment. Just as breathing in toxic substances leaves dangerous traces in my body, inhaling violence even in subtle forms impacts the condition of my consciousness. That violence might be a harsh word directed at me by a co-worker, the unconsciously jealous glance I throw at someone who embodies some quality I want to have, the ways I demean my own work when someone appreciates it, or even the way I might fervently oppose an idea that negates one of my

convictions. Certainly, I can choose to spend as much time as I want convinced that I am right within any of these situations, but why would I want to stay at that point and suffer when more knowledge, deeper understanding, and peace is potentially available?

Discernment plays a key role in learning for me, by allowing me to accept that which is constructive and to release what is no longer useful. Any situation can become a wonder, a landmark (please see Chapter 4), or an opening to greater knowing. Exploring a situation from more than my initial perspective provides an opportunity for changing how I understand a situation and what I understand because of it. Expanding my understanding can offer me a way to let go of the initial intake or perpetuation of violence.

For example, rather than complaining about the way I feel mistreated by a co-worker, I can approach this situation by exploring what the external conflict reveals about my own internal world. Through such consideration, I might uncover the fact that I am speaking harshly to myself internally. I also could consider that my co-worker might be experiencing her own difficulties which cause her to act in a way that feels unkind to me. The external conflict might mirror and reveal an internal conflict for both of us. By considering this internal conflict as a challenge that we share, I am more able to experience the situation from a compassionate perspective rather than to interpret it as a way in which I have been wronged—a stance from which I would merely be perpetuating the conflict. Further, I can allow myself to become like a riverbed (please see Chapter 4) for my co-worker, widening my own perspective to encompass a sensitivity for whatever internal struggle caused her to act in a way that felt unkind to me. What began as a

conflict becomes an opportunity for me to support both of us in letting go of the felt experience of violence and opening to receive new perspectives.

Violence of Opposition

As I slide my ribcage along the grass and raise myself up on my right hand, I see the vast landscape of hills and plains extending from this field in Shiloh. Turning the grass and dirt of this land over in my hand, I notice my own skin carries the stain of its connection to the earth. With my legs folded behind me, I feel as if I have entered Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World" in which a lone figure crawls through an expansive grassy terrain. Yet, Shiloh brings together an unusual combination of landmarks. Populated by cannons and churches, this landscape forever holds marks of seeming contradiction.

Simply perceiving a contradiction between a "right" and a "wrong" has rarely led me to greater understanding. A willingness to be wrong, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, does not necessarily mean abandoning my perspective, but rather holding it with an open hand as an offering to the field of understanding. Simultaneously my other hand can be open to receive additional perspectives, and the joining of my hands can hold these perspectives together. For example, whenever my students encounter resistance to an idea, such as a perspective offered by an author in an assigned reading, I encourage them to move through the following steps: 1. Notice your resistance. Liz Lerman aptly reminds us as choreographers that, "resistance is information" (Lerman, "Resistance is Information," par. 1). 2. Hold your perspective and the new information your resistance revealed to you, and listen more deeply to what the other person is saying until you find a

place of genuine compassion for his/her perspective. 3. Keep stepping back until you can see where these perspectives come together to support one another in a larger world of ideas. 4. Look for what gives you joy in that larger world. The joy indicates a landmark of learning. Similarly, in other areas of my life, I need to look for these landmarks of learning. I do not necessarily need to give up my perspective, but I can release myself from the confines of believing that my conviction is the only right way to think and that it is, therefore, opposed to other ideas.

Opposition of ideas can be a type of violence. While some people consider conflict through ideas to be a necessary struggle, I find that it functions in a limited way. If opposing ideas are held rigidly and the effort of their interaction is to determine which is “right,” then the struggle between them is simply one of domination. If the opposing ideas are not held as convictions, but rather are subject to alteration and expansion by virtue of their interaction with one another, then the ways in which they contrast can illuminate each idea. Contrast between ideas can then provide an expansion of understanding and offer me an opportunity to move towards a sense of a larger field of understanding where those ideas might not only collide but also coincide. F. Scott Fitzgerald proposes, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function” (69). Bringing seemingly opposed ideas together is not easy, especially if I am seeking to find a way that they actually support one another as parts of a larger picture. Yet, I am most interested in the type of consciousness that exists when I can know more about and function from that larger picture in which ideas transcend an oppositional struggle.

The purposefulness of my seeking greater knowing is to find those places of liberty beyond the violence of opposition, or as the Sufi poet Muhammad Jalal ad-Din al Balki al Rumi writes, “Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there” (qtd. in Barks 36). Finding those places where ideas come together beyond conflict requires me to continue moving, even when I feel stuck in the pain or prospect of one point of knowledge. In order to propel my movement, I must let go of the idols of knowledge that I am holding onto or hiding behind. The journey of knowing that I am actually seeking extends past ideas of right and wrong or experiences of good and bad. It is the very effort and generosity of motion called “beyond.”

Internal Darkness and the Field of Light

As I kneel on the floor of the Shiloh Church cabin, I notice the size of my shadow made possible by the streaming of sunlight through the open door. I am intrigued by my own shadow—this darkness and its ability to establish a seemingly separate existence while stealthily staying connected to some edge of my body. Similar to the way the sunlight falling between my body and the floor produces a shadow, the interaction between my metaphorical dark side and light teaches me about the conjunction, rather than opposition, of ideas.

After a recent performance, an audience member asked about my relationship to spiritual darkness, and I surprised myself by saying that I used to think I had to hold onto darkness as though that quality made me interesting. I can sometimes wrongly dismiss light as a superfluous ideal, while I understand that physical life cannot continue without light. It is essential to our nature. Even when I believe that darkness compels me towards

goodness or moves me towards light (such as the dark idea of a cruel God I was using to combat a fear of being a “lost cause”), it is easy for me to get caught in believing that light and dark are equal, but opposite, powers. Shadow accompanies light, but not as an opposing force.

Standing in the midst of darkness, however, I sometimes cannot see the circumference of the shadow and therefore experience it as an all encompassing force. I have always felt drawn to Mother Teresa’s writings, having practically worn out my copy of *A Simple Path* as a teenager. In the past five years, though, her private letters that were only published after her death have significantly contributed to my understanding of the human experience of spiritual and philosophical darkness. My own misery and darkness frequently stems from a misconception of God like the one mentioned earlier in this chapter. The following passage from Mother Teresa’s writing comes startlingly close to a darkness I seem to come around to repeatedly, which keeps me trapped in the aforementioned web of illusions about being a “lost cause”:

...this terrible sense of loss—this untold darkness—this loneliness—this continual longing for God—which gives me that pain deep down in my heart. Darkness is such that I really do not see—neither with my mind nor with my reason. The place of God in my soul is blank. There is no God in me. When the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God—and then it is that I feel He does not want me—He is not there...God does not want me. Sometimes I just hear my own heart cry out “My God” and nothing else comes. The torture and pain I can’t explain. (Kolodiejchuk 210)

Philosopher Simone Weil suggests, “The false God changes suffering into violence. The true God changes violence into suffering” (72). Yet, considering this statement, I propose that the true God does not transform violence into suffering to

simply leave us there or abandon us in our misery. I must consider how the darkness of suffering has purposefulness. If nothing else, it reminds me that I am in need, including in need of a greater wisdom beyond my own, a larger sight than my perspective, and a necessary sustenance that I cannot provide for myself. Yet, I do not intend to belittle suffering or experiences of darkness. The pain can be so excruciating for me sometimes that I actually cannot comprehend anything beyond it. Perhaps in its most extreme form, this experience for humans can be the condition that St. John of the Cross termed the “dark night of the soul”—a phenomenon that so much philosophy has also attempted to explore and explain. He aptly describes this state as, “a painful upheaval, stirring up a myriad of fears and delusions that battle inside the soul” (121). I recognize the pain of this battle and have felt its effects leave me so internally decimated that it seems there is nothing left but a barren field—no idols to hide behind, nothing with which to preoccupy myself, and often no vision of a larger horizon.

St. John explains that, “In dark contemplation, the soul suffers the suspension of all her natural supports and perceptions, which is terribly painful, like hanging in midair unable to breathe” (105). For me at that point of experience, there is nothing left to do but kneel down and ask for help—if not for a conclusion to the suffering then for the strength to endure it and the trust to believe it is not the end of my traveling. I do not want to stop with the pain. It is a point in my movement, not the totality of the journey. St. John proposes, “Even though this holy night darkens the spirit, it does so only to light up everything” (117). Can I trust that my inability to see light in a moment is a necessary part of a larger illumination? Can I surrender the notion that I can, do, or should know it

all? What would happen if my effort was to live in this type of surrender rather than having to continually arrive there through crisis and pain? Can I live without constant tests of the emergency broadcast system?

A Choice of Nonviolence

Just as I can operate free will in choosing to remain stuck at any idol of rightness or any point of knowledge, I can also try to choose the quality with which I move beyond it, including peace. The task is not simply to adopt non-violence as a concept for the sake of avoiding conflict, but rather to embody peace as a philosophical, ethical effort in myself as well as an approach to the rest of the world. This vital effort for peace means I need to change the nature of the struggles I engage in so that what I am fighting for is the worth of my soul not the sense of my rightness. For me, peace means moving from this worth of my soul, not from a tenuous confidence in my ego. This movement contains an essential ease of surrender. Living in surrender does not mean being downtrodden but rather allowing myself to be moved—embodying both patience and initiation (please see Chapter 4) but not trying to sustain myself in a constantly contracted state of alarm.

When I feel stuck in my movement, however, how can I hold open the possibility that anything exists beyond one moment of pain? How can I trust that there is anywhere else to move? If I don't conceive of "bad" as oppositional to "good," then experiencing what feels bad does not further put me in the mindset that I am in an absence of good. It isn't that these "bad" experiences have no effect on me, but because they affect me, they can open me up to experience. They can function as a doorway to what I really want rather than a punishment, trap, or reinforcement of a belief that I will never have what I

want. Pain as an end in itself only sustains suffering for me, but pain as a doorway to greater understanding can actually create pleasure, ease, and a sense of gratitude as I move through it.

Adhering to the idea that I must suffer, however, or worse, that as a “lost cause” I deserve to suffer, limits not only my experience of ease, but also the functionality of ease—that is, to allow me to move more freely and release holding patterns. For example, I could thrust the entire weight of my body into a heavy door all day long and perhaps never cause it to budge. This violent action could have a detrimental impact on my body and still yield no results. If, however, I put my hand on the doorknob and turn it, I might find a much easier and also more effective passage through the doorway. Refusing that ease or remaining in a point of suffering can become arrogance on my part. Two verses of Surah Ash-Sharh in the Quran remind me of a promise of ease amidst difficulties: “For indeed, with hardship will be ease. Indeed with hardship will be ease” (The Qur’an, *Ash-Sharh* 94.5-6). Instead of conceiving of hardship and ease as oppositional forces, this text encourages me to see them present together as part of a larger whole of experience. The abundance of knowledge that I can receive when I relinquish a sense of my own rightness is a substantial part of what rewards and eases my struggles. And, knowledge nourishes my soul, perhaps helping my soul not only to feel its worth but also to move from that sense of worth. Surrendering—which is not the same as giving up or giving in—means laying down the weapons I have used to perpetuate my inner battle and folding the fortifications that were holding the idols of my “rightness” in place. “Fall on your knees...hear the angels’ voices...O night divine...O night...O holy night.”

In the Peach Orchard, I find myself continually turning slowly to the right. Somehow this is the most natural movement I can do here—more natural than walking. My arms open like petals silently falling open again and again. My hands gently float down, palms up receiving tiny tears of rain. There is peace in turning, and falling, and rising again. I am certainly leaving here more peaceful than when I arrived.



Fig. 5. Dancing under Shiloh tree. (researcher's photograph)

Postlude to Chapter V

A Facet of the Body as Sensible Concept

Within the context of this chapter, the facet of Massumi's "body as sensible concept" that emerges most strongly for me is a function of the suspended body. For the suspended body, Massumi proposes, "the implications of the event are *felt* first, before being thought-out. They are felt in the form of a 'compulsion': an abstractness with all the immediacy of a physical force" (*Parables* 100). Although he begins this idea from the specific example of performance artist Stelarc literally suspending himself from ceilings using meat hooks driven into his skin, Massumi uses this event to probe the concept of the sensible body. The suspension of Stelarc's body demonstrates, "an interruption of the body's necessary relation to the grounding force of human action: gravity" (*Parables* 101). At the same time, the tangible experience of one's flesh being pierced with meat hooks strikes the body directly such that, "the implications of the event are *felt* first before being thought-out" (*Parables* 100).

This combination—a disruption of one's grounded ability to act and the fact that, "the implications of the event are *felt* first before being thought-out" (*Parables* 100)—captures an ineffable experience inherent to this chapter and to the experiences brought into consideration for me by performing at Shiloh. I propose that what Saint John of the Cross termed the "dark night of the soul" is, in fact, "an abstractness with all the immediacy of a physical force" (*Parables* 100). Massumi illustrates that abstractness is not something that exists outside of embodied experience. Similarly, St. John explores the "dark night of the soul" as a visceral encounter—an experience that strikes one's

body before it can be thought out, disorients one's ability to comprehend what is happening, and disrupts one's normal course of action.

As a 16th century Spanish Monk "yearning for direct experience" of God, Saint John of the Cross did not intend to write the book that explicates this embodied experience (Starr 4). Instead, the text results from many years of his own spiritual striving and transformation. As a young man, St. John became the close friend of St. Teresa of Avila and joined her reform movement, an effort for which he was imprisoned and tortured (Starr 7). After escaping from his imprisonment, he experienced an ecstatic state in which he penned a poem entitled "Songs of the Soul: One Dark Night," that he described as, "an outpouring of love for God" (qtd. in Starr 6). Mirabi Starr, a scholar on this particular text, explains that, "Although the poem is a metaphor for the spiritual journey, it reads more like sublime erotica than acceptable theology," and St. John was therefore entreated to write an explanation of the poem, which became his book *Dark Night of the Soul* (7).

The experience, or unfolding of experiences, known as the dark night of the soul strikes with seemingly physical force. St. John writes that, "In dark contemplation, the soul suffers the suspension of all her natural supports and perceptions, which is terribly painful, like hanging in midair unable to breathe" (105). He continues his elucidation of the soul's agony in such a state by quoting the Prophet David as describing that the soul feels as if, "God has hung her in the darkness like the dead of long ago, her spirit in turmoil within her and her heart deeply disturbed" (109). Words may not even capture the intensity of this abstract state within the soul, but as St. John proposes, "the prevailing

experience of sensory purification speaks for itself” (60). What is the function of such a state? What does this experience of darkness make possible?

In Massumi’s understanding, a vital component of the body as sensible concept concerns an enfolding and unfolding of possibility within the trajectory of an event. He writes:

Normally, possibility comes before, for a better after: it consists in a certain abstractive operation on the past that projects it usefully into a future, or extrapolates it. Each step toward that future is seen to be conditioned by the possible: what that future comes to be, in particular, is affected by the possible alternatives laid out before it. (*Parables* 102)

Yet, with the suspended body, “The possible appears only at the end, after the movement it concerns has exhausted itself” (*Parables* 102). For me, Massumi’s sense of the possible in this instance provides insight into both the experience of a “dark night of the soul” and the purposefulness of writing about such states. Massumi proposes, “The suspended body is in no position to extend its present situation into a logically expressible next step by choosing from a set of possible actions. It is not only in a needless and useless condition, it is in an utterly dysfunctional one” (*Parables* 101). The recognition of a similar inability to logically choose from possible actions seems to pervade St. John’s text as well, and even to construct its purposefulness as a type of handbook for continuing on one’s spiritual journey amidst the difficulties and disorientation of the soul’s dark night. In such a situation, “The soul sits helpless amid the spiritual wreckage and simply breathes in the darkness. There is nothing else to do” (Starr 19). This description of the state effectively unfolds an aspect of the experience by metaphorically mixing embodied perceptions. An effort is given to the lungs that is

normally an effort given to the eyes—a breathing in (physical action of the lungs) of the darkness (typically a visual perception, involving an action of the eyes). By virtue of this mixture, a palpable force of abstraction can be sensed kinesthetically. The combination of a metaphorical darkness and the physical effort of breathing it in demonstrates an embodied sense of experiencing this concept.

So, how might we solve the problems presented by this abstract, yet tangibly felt, darkness? Massumi suggests, “The problem posed by a force cannot be ‘solved,’ only *exhausted*” (*Parables* 101). An understanding of the possibility and exhaustion inherent in this situation can be further illuminated through scholar, political activist, and mystical writer Simone Weil’s concept of spiritual “affliction.” To first define this condition, she states, “affliction is not a psychological state; it is a pulverization of the soul by the mechanical brutality of circumstances” (*Gateway* 96). Yet, for Weil, affliction can provide an essential medium for continuing one’s journey into spirituality and knowing, and she proposes, “Affliction compels us to recognize as real what we do not think possible” (*Grace* 81). For me, her supposition connects again to Massumi’s inclusion of a “compulsion” as “an abstractness with all the immediacy of a physical force” (*Parables* 100). If such an affliction is not regarded as an endpoint in itself, it carries the potential to open us to change through the force of its presence as it exhausts the limits of our knowledge and typical way of functioning in the process of running its course. Weil suggests, “Suffering, teaching and transformation. What is necessary is not that the initiated should learn something, but that a transformation should come about in them which makes them capable of receiving the teaching” (*Grace* 83). Through such a

transformation, perhaps I can let go of a sense of my own rightness, and even release a rigid sense of my self in order to receive greater knowledge. The problem of my own limited knowing is not solved but hopefully can be exhausted to the point of dissolving.

CHAPTER VI

FEAR AND THE DISSOLVING OF SELF: A PEDAGOGY OF DISORIENTATION

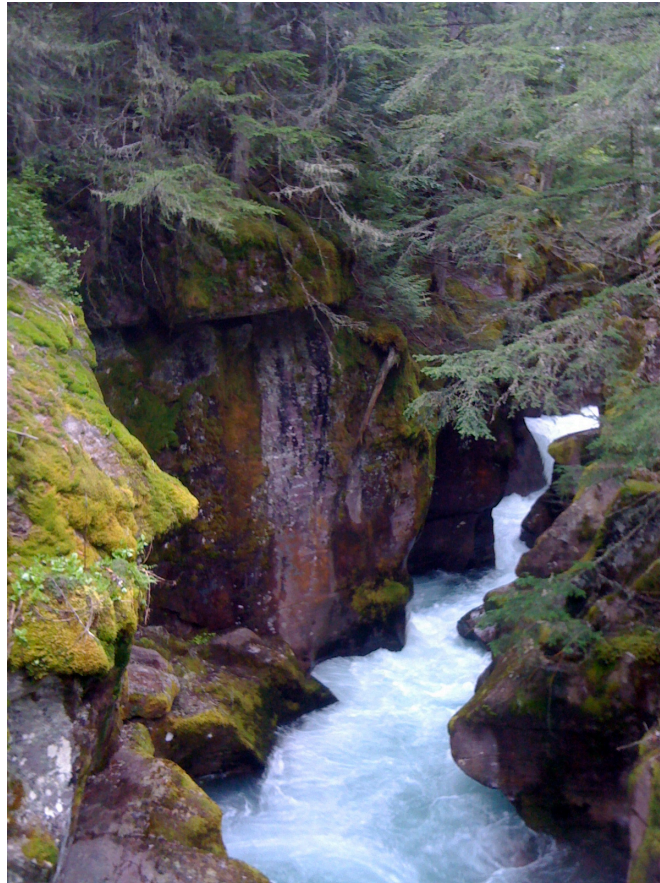


Fig. 6. Glacier National Park waterfall. (researcher's photograph)

It is May, but it is snowing. One of the main park roads is closed to cars due to danger of avalanche, but you are permitted to walk on it and to dance on it. As I find myself perched high above the forests and cascades, I am eye level with the mountains themselves. Walking backwards, I can sense but not fully capture the huge expanse encircling me. Its enormity causes my stomach to drop with dizziness. The frigid air is

numbing my skin, but instead of causing me to be more aware of these distinct points on my surface, it somehow creates a sense that I am joining the snow—dissolving particle by particle into the air itself.

Introduction

Snow offers me an elegant metaphor for various types of consciousness, particularly the intersections of consciousness and self. Viewing a lone snowflake up close reveals the incredible complexity and distinct details that are different about each tiny crystal, the clarity of the individual articulated. If, however, the focus remains only on the details of the individual snowflake, it might seem that the accumulation of a field of snow signals the erasure of these distinctions, or at least eliminates the possibility of perceiving them. However, far from diminishing the details of the crystals, their accumulation actually fulfills the function of those facets by providing ways for the snowflakes to join together. It is not the loss of the individual snowflake but an enactment of its potential to contribute to something larger than itself.

As those same snowflakes melt and become part of the flow of water or sublime (the physical process by which snow changes state directly from a solid to a gas) to become part of the movement of the air, the dissolving of their recognizable form contributes to the continued nourishment of a cycle and ecosystem that is even more expansive than the accumulated field of snow. This change of state again could be perceived as the loss of the individual. However, it could also be understood as the completion of the individual, since the expression of the larger water cycle is embodied through the various stages and states of the snowflake's existence.

While it might be easy to hold all of these truths to be self-evident in the case of the snowflake, it is more difficult for me to hold similar understandings of the human self. Perhaps the individual specificity of the snowflake mirrors a desire I have to be recognized for (and to recognize in myself) a degree of distinct detail and purposefulness as an individual. Yet, what types of change for human selves mirror the changes that affect the individual snowflake? What equivalent layer of human transformation exists parallel to the act of melting into a stream of water or subliming into a rush of air? To feel myself as a small drop folded into the depth of an ocean requires me to change my focus from my individual importance to the vitality of my seeming insignificance (please see Chapter 8)—to melt into the flow of an effort greater than my individuated self. In a similar way, sublimation requires some sense of disappearance for the individual while also indicating the individual's inextricable presence as part of a larger cycle. The term “sublime” can describe not only the drastic change of snow between physical states, but it can also refer to a human state of spiritual bliss. Similar to snow melting or subliming to complete a water cycle, what if the dissolving of my self was not a dreadful loss of individual existence but, rather, a more complete realization of my nature to be part of something larger—and an enjoyable realization at that? What obstacles prevent this blissful layer of consciousness for me?

One obstacle that prevents me from this type of consciousness is a tendency to hold onto what I think I know (please see Chapter 5). In his text *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross writes that, “the ones who pluck the words out of the mouth of someone offering some instruction as if they already knew everything” (40) are those

who will be halted on their spiritual quest. For me, thinking that “I know” frequently occurs as an internal battle rather than a refuting of what someone else tells me. My desire (which thinks it knows what should happen) fights with my fear (which thinks it knows what will happen) within the constraints of my imagination. Since my fear assumes that the worst outcome I can imagine will occur (please see Chapter 5), it prevents me from opening to other possibilities inherent to the unknown. At the same time, my desire firmly grasps onto both what it imagines as the best possible outcome and also to the route by which it assumes that outcome has to be realized. Clinging to these three experiences—a conviction of knowing, a constriction from fear, and a demand of desire—creates an attempt to maintain control over an uncontrollable journey and process of change.

Since it provides me at least a superficial sense of security, the illusion that I have control over such a process can actually sometimes keep me moving. Yet, that movement emerges from a contracted and even constricted sense of possibility. Limited by my own arrogance of thinking that I know what is right and my fear that something bad will happen (please see Chapter 5), such movement stutters towards whatever I can imagine, hope for, or settle on in a given moment. My attempts to control processes and results of change may initiate from a longing to grow and to learn, but ultimately fail to surrender to the fullest measure of what that growth and deepening of awareness could encompass.

In order to fully open myself to unfolding layers of change, I must let go of my need to know how I will be changed. This surrender includes the possibility that “I” as I know myself may no longer exist. Yet, in my travels and quest for greater knowing,

perhaps this possibility of becoming unrecognizable to myself as I move into being part of something larger is exactly what I am seeking. One of my greatest desires is to sublime—to dissolve like snow into a movement, an environment, a journey, a larger cycle, and even into God such that there is no “I” to have knowledge or to suffer fear. But what does it mean for me to dissolve? As a dancer, I frequently taste such an experience when I become so absorbed in a performative state that my consciousness opens to a sense of connectivity in which the molecules of my body seem to disperse, merging with both the seen and unseen worlds around me. My awareness of my individual self and life diminishes or even disappears, and I do not recognize where I end and movement begins. In effect, in these instances, I only know myself as movement.

In both performing and life in general, I long to become unified with experience rather than identified with a personality. I want to be purified from entanglement with my self-consciousness and merge into movement as the Sufi poet Rumi proposes, “Be melting snow. Wash yourself of yourself” (qtd. in Barks 13). With snow as my guiding landmark in this performance experience, I wonder if the lessons from this environment at Glacier National Park reveal not only a desire to dissolve myself, but also a willingness to relinquish my fear and need for control in order to let myself be moved.

Protect and Defend

I grew up in Nashville, home of country music and the Grand Ole Opry. When I was a child, the Opry’s fame had spawned an amusement park with rides having both musical and Tennessee-based themes. One attraction that I refused to ride was called the Grizzly River Rampage, which swept circular rafts of visitors over rapids mimicking the

Tennessee River and deposited them in a murky cave. Once the unsuspecting visitors had a chance to adjust their eyes to the dimly lit cavern, a giant grizzly bear with piercing red eyes would appear, claws raised and bellowing a menacing roar. After much coaxing from my sisters that the bear didn't even look real, I agreed to accompany my mother on this rafting adventure. While eight people journeyed together in a raft, the individual seats were spaced too far apart for my small hand to reach my mother's arm. As the raft spun into the cave, I began to scream in terror. Through my tears, I could see my mother laughing and assuring me that everything would be okay. Did I really think I would die in the paws of a stuffed, automated bear? Perhaps, but it is more likely that I was confronting my relationship with fear itself.

This relationship to fear resurfaced while performing in Glacier National Park. Long before arriving in the park, the dance *Significant Figures* began in the studio by creating a response to an imagined threat—a non-existent danger or one so small in scale to my body that it did not pose any real risk (please see Chapter 1). At Glacier National Park, however, I find myself performing this dance in an environment where being attacked by a grizzly bear is an actual threat. I look down at the canister of bear deterrent (“grizzly tough pepper spray”) that I purchased this morning after being warned by the park staff and posted placards that I should not go anywhere in this landscape alone. I am alone as I enter the dim forest, which is colored by a deep green canopy blocking most of the light. I like to spend time alone, and I like to be silent, neither of which is conducive to safety in this place. This untamed wilderness is a site where you must make noise, and make yourself known to the environment. If the grizzly bear hears you, she will probably

remain at a distance. But if you startle her because she didn't realize you were present, she will probably attack. As I settle on a patch of mossy earth to begin dancing, I employ the speaker function of my phone to create a non-native soundscape, hoping to communicate my presence to any bears in the vicinity. Putting my iPod on shuffle, I smile as it cycles through boisterous pop music lending the support of Janis Joplin, Alanis Morissette, and the Cure to my defense strategy.

Although I frequently dissolve into movement as a performer, the surfacing of fear in this environment disrupts my ability to do so. My body cannot relax, with muscles contracted from my forehead, to my clenched fists, to my lungs. Even with the presence of this music, I am so nervous about the impending danger that I cannot lose myself in the experience of the movement. Much like a young elk I saw grazing here, I can spend only a few seconds engaged in activity before rapidly looking up to scan the surroundings for a possible threat. My breathing is shallow, my heartbeat erratic. I fear that which I cannot control, whether it is part of an interior or exterior environment. More precisely, though, I fear losing control, especially losing control of myself. A line from the Radio Head song "Karma Police" rattles endlessly in my head: "For a minute there, I lost myself, I lost myself." Loss of self illuminates the conjunction between my fear and desire. I am afraid to lose control of myself, and I simultaneously want to lose myself in movement, environment, and God so that my awareness breaks out of self-consciousness into an understanding of that which is greater than my individual being.

Within this forest, the impulse to protect and preserve my life indicates that I must want to continue living. Of course I want to preserve my life, but is it necessary to

preserve my self? In what ways might losing my self² actually be a furthering of the experience of being alive? As I move along the exquisite John's Lake Trail, I unexpectedly encounter direct experience with these questions. Although I am captivated by the splendor of this landscape, with cushions of intricate green moss covering every surface and water colored bright blue from glacial ice, some part of me just wants to get through it to the other side as quickly as possible. I am enjoying being in the midst of such incredible beauty and at the same time wishing the experience would end. Due to fear, I find myself merely wanting to survive the experience. I cannot imagine enjoying the beauty of this environment with ease because my body and imagination are so contracted out of fear.

In this case, I fear the presence of grizzly bears that populate the forest. Yet, this experience reminds me that I have a tendency to merely survive many experiences—even, and especially, beautiful ones—due to fear. Thinking that I am protecting myself by maintaining some semblance of control, I refuse to allow myself to let go and enjoy the experience. A vigilant self-preservation makes me conceive of myself as completely separate from an environment or event, and thus impedes my potential to dissolve into the experience itself. Yet the lesson of traveling down this path at John's Lake emerges not simply from the beauty of the forest or from the danger of the bear but, rather, the fact that they are both inextricable from the very nature of the journey.

² In this chapter, the word “myself” indicates a reflexive consideration, while the separate words “my self” signify an aspect of my being referred to as the “self.”

For me, fear does not only arise in the presence of a threat but also with the anticipation of anything that might overwhelm me. My body demonstrates physical resistance—clenched muscles, squinting eyes, constricted breathing. Regardless of what the stimulus is, this fear can keep me inwardly contracted, aware of the edges of my body as a protective border. The quality of fear in my being reveals what lies on the other side of self-preservation—that is, a sensed potential, and particularly, a potential that I will be changed without and beyond my control. When I am experiencing fear, I attempt not only to protect myself from any kind of death or change, but also to preserve my agenda around what I want to happen or what I fear will happen. I sense the potential, I assume I know the outcome, and my fear creates a barrier to an event of transformation. For example, by fearing a grizzly bear, I sense the potential of change that could occur through our interaction, and I assume that change will be in the form of injury. By assuming that interacting with a bear will inevitably be harmful to me, I do not make space for the possibility that seeing a bear could evoke a sense of awe for me and therefore conjure an appreciation of the interconnectivity of life that defies my prior knowledge and my previous notions of my self.

Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

Returning to St. John of the Cross and his writing in *Dark Night of the Soul*, I am struck by a commentary that philosopher Mirabi Starr makes about St. John's famous statement, "I am nothing" (qtd. in Starr 10). She proposes that, "In a Western world busy recovering from a legacy of shame and blame, John's continual declaration that 'I am nothing' (and the implicit suggestion that we, too, are nothing) may set off alarms" (Starr

10). For much of my life I have tried to use fear and shame to produce humility, but this strategy only strengthens a sense of my self—a negative sense, but an emphasis on the self, nonetheless.

Self-degradation does not dissolve me into a humble harmony with other people, an environment, or God. Instead, it reinforces the idea that I am separate and also capable of controlling, micromanaging, and policing myself. This internal split further distances my consciousness from the ease of being—it causes me to be always both doing and monitoring my doing. This monitoring evokes a rigidity of selfhood—a layer of awareness that cannot let go of the individuated self for even a moment.

Starr explains that St. John's statement reveals something much different about the conception of self than the self-judgment I frequently employ. She writes, "The radical humility that John speaks of has little to do with the pathology of self-deprecation. It is a state of blessedness, where we let go of identification with the small, separate self so that we can rest in our togetherness with the Beloved" (Starr 10). This togetherness with the Divine Beloved that is central to St. John's writing, as well as a substantial aspect of the dissolving that I desire in life, does not exactly indicate the development of a relationship between two entities. Rather, this togetherness is a type of dissolution of the human self into that which is much greater than the individual.

In his original poem *Songs of the Soul*, St. John writes, "On a dark night, inflamed by love-longing—O exquisite risk!—Undetected I slipped away" (qtd. in Starr 33). He explains this passage of the poem in his book *Dark Night of the Soul* by stating that, "In the first verse, the soul sings of the path she followed as she left behind attachment to

herself and to created things. Through radical humility, she has died to her old self” (qtd. in Starr 33). From St. John’s perspective, death of the old self and dissolution into the Divine is not accomplished through a violent rejection of the self, however. The “radical humility” that supports death of an old self actually emerges from self-acceptance. St. John proposes that, “To be truly humble is to feel a tender acceptance of all reality just as it is, which includes compassion for ourselves just as we are” (Starr 10). Through a process of humility and acceptance, a bowing and letting go of my attempts to control an event, I can be open to other pathways towards my desired dissolution. If I reject myself, I do not actually move closer to dissolving because it is my own rigid agenda for dissolving that I am attempting to follow. By accepting what my “self” is and what it might become without simply confining that potential to what I can readily imagine or fear will happen, I am able to allow myself to be moved into unknown territories.

This notion of acceptance in relation to the self, and particularly to the changing self, finds resonance with the perspective of philosopher Brian Massumi. Massumi proposes:

Rather than defining a specific identity as an empirically existing entity, rather than trying to make it what it is, rather than positivizing it—affirm it, take it as it is and is not (but might be), assume it, undefining. In short, embody it, as potential—explicitly including its potential to become other, in connection with as yet unknown forces of the outside (*Everywhere* 33).

The effects produced from being connected with and affected by such “unknown forces of the outside” can appear on different levels of consciousness. When such a connection registers as fear, it promotes for me a tendency I have to hold myself separate from an environment, a person, or an event. What I actually desire is to dissipate this

illusion of protective separation and to dissolve into an experience. For me, to embody the self as potential means living in awe rather than fear. Fear holds me separate from the event, but awe renders my selfness somewhat inconsequential as I recognize myself as part of a larger environment and event. I might be similarly overwhelmed in both of these states, but fear pulls me away from a deeper awareness of the situation while awe opens me to greater consciousness by reducing my self-consciousness.

By causing me to notice that I am affected by other things while also not creating a defensive need to dominate such things, awe can evoke a useful sense of humility. For example, seeing a grizzly bear can cause me to try to defend myself by using force against the bear (even in the form of spraying bear deterrent) or, conversely, to gently recede from confrontation by knowing my place as a visitor in the forest. If I contract into fear, both my actions and awareness operate from an often futile attempt to control what is wild and unknown. If, however, I move from awe, I can respect that everything has a place within the connected web of life, and my actions and awareness honor the bear not as a threat to my individual existence but as a signal of power beyond what I had previously witnessed.

Awe gives me a sense of being connected to a larger environment beyond the edges of my body while not placing me in the role of controlling an environment, event, or even myself. When I observe a wonder or landmark (please see Chapter 4) and experience awe, an opening occurs in my consciousness. With this opening, I feel not only a connection to the immediate environment but also a sense of potential for what exists beyond it. St. John's description of the soul that, "left behind attachment to herself

and to created things,” (33) does not necessarily describe rejection of the world. Rather, it reveals a need I have to detach from the sense that everything, including my self, is a separate object and, instead, to see through the object into an essence that is present in and connecting everything (please see Chapter 4). Awe frequently opens my ability to sense an unlimited presence through the limited external form. Rabbi Abraham Heschel describes a useful understanding of this state of awareness, writing:

Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realizing that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe is a sense for transcendence, for the mystery beyond all things. It enables us to perceive in the world imitations of the divine, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple: to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal. What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe. (75)

The pivot point between fear and awe exists for me in my ability to release control; that is, letting go of the illusion that I have control of knowing, control of a moment, control of an outcome, and even control of my selfhood.

Real and Incorporeal

The philosophical project of this dissertation seeks to explore consciousness, which heretofore has been examined in terms of what is being presented to me at the interface of self and world. With this site visit to Glacier National Park, these considerations began to expand to involve the dissolving of the lines between entities, and particularly the dissolution of the self. But what do I desire to dissolve into? In my understanding, to dissolve does not mean to just become another type of thing but, rather, to merge into what cannot even be considered a “thing.” To dissolve into a movement, an experience, or an environment provides me with a taste of what I truly desire—that is, the

kind of dissolving into Divinity that St. John describes as, “a perfect love of God and disregard of self” (159). Just as he writes that this disregard of self does not entail brutal rejection of one’s human form, he proposes that, “This state cannot exist without knowledge of God and self” (159). When I reject myself, I only conceive of myself as separate from God, events, and environments. How can I stop witnessing myself as separate and find a useful way of disregarding my self?

As St. John proposes, “The most essential benefit of infused contemplation is self-knowledge” (75). Self-knowledge provides me with the benefit of seeing, through my self, the aforementioned essence that I experience as present in and connecting every created thing. This knowledge does not desire to define a persona but, rather, seeks to sense the presence of something greater than my individual self through my form. Perhaps the form is necessary to sense the potential, as the snowflake embodies both its crystal form and the formlessness of the water cycle. Rather than focusing solely on the individual snowflake, I desire to be conscious of the larger, invisible water cycle through the presence of the visible snowflake.

Yet, this form of my self is also specific and meaningful. You and I are not exactly the same. Why? Why is each snowflake individually unique? What are some purposes of a specified self? Perhaps the specified self provides a means of manifesting certain qualities of the formless, although no one form can contain the fullness of all aspects of the formless. When I then come into contact with other people, objects, or environments, the interaction creates an opportunity to both perceive aspects of the other entity that reflect “the mystery beyond all things” (Heschel) and also to become

acquainted more with what is ultimately beyond my comprehension but is the thrust of my pursuit of consciousness—that “mystery,” or formless Divinity. In an encounter with every other object or individual I perceive facets of the familiar and glimpse into unknown territories, making these encounters events of learning both about my self and about that which is larger than my being.

I often fear that being in the world of forms separates me from the divinity of the formless. Yet, this is a misconception—one that can be lived out in lack of consciousness of the formless and confused anguish at being stuck in the world of forms. The effort of this dissertation includes considering how every form can be a wonder and a landmark (please see Chapter 4). These landmarks are doorways to that which is beyond form, as every snowflake signals the larger cycle that moves it and sustains life. It is not only in the state change that the snowflake is part of a larger cycle; rather, its nature is to exist continually as both tangible form and the unlimited potential of formlessness. A sense of embodying the self as potential rather than as fixed entity eases my fears of being stuck in form and separated from the formless. Potential is not a vague ideal but rather the expression of what is moving me and moving through me, made tangible in this world by my form.

Dance gives me the opportunity to understand and experience a coinciding of form and formlessness, which for me joins what I perceive as corporeal and what I experience as incorporeal. A dance is a formless essence enacted by forms (bodies). By using the term “form” in this context, I certainly do not mean to reduce human bodies to the level of mere shells. Rather, I am seeking to propose that these bodies enact a whole

that is much larger than the form I perceive. As Massumi points out, “to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension of the body. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal” (*Parables* 5). My interest lies in the conception of these forms or bodies as mirrors (please see Chapter 4), reflecting and moving with a depth of formless essence.³

I am seeking to balance a sense that “I am” with another understanding of my existence—that is, non-existence. This simultaneous recognition of being and not being goes beyond the sense that I am a small, but important part of a larger picture, an idea introduced earlier in this dissertation. Further, it is not self-degradation. It is the eradication of the limitations of an individuated self within the presence of greater existence, just as snow sublimates into air. This “not being” registers my existence as contingent—only existing through the presence of the formless, despite the fact that I appear in a body, a form. For example, while I might distinguish an individual wave of water, the wave does not exist as something separable from the ocean (Bin Yunus). Similarly, I experience myself as a distinguishable individual at a certain level of perception, but I desire to consider myself never actually separate from a greater flow of life. Movement, by its very nature, teaches me about the interface of form and

³ As I state in Chapter 4, a mirror in this sense offers another glimpse into and experience of the functioning of a dynamic whole, or conjunction between what is being reflected and the reflection. Rather than just the repetition of an image, this reflection provides a relational depth—the means by which I can understand the form or body both as itself and as an opening into terrains of knowing and experiencing what is greater than itself alone.

formlessness – provoking propulsive forces by which structural substance becomes fluid, and potential takes shape.

Beginning the final verse of St. John’s poem are these words: “I lost myself. I forgot myself” (qtd. in Starr 25). In my desire to dissolve, to sublime, it is this losing of self that I am seeking. At the same time, it seems that I can only lose my self while finding myself, a process that involves surrendering self-control, self-direction, and self-consciousness in favor of the dizzying explorations that lead towards self-knowledge. And, it is through an awakening of self-knowledge as a potential, but not clinging to it as a material reality, that I can sense and move into unknown territories beyond the limitations of my individual self.

Perched on the bank of Lake McDonald, I slowly raise my torso to rest on my right hand. As I look across the lake at the mountains on the other side, I feel a compatibility with their solid nature, as well as a desire to be as they are. Mountains do not attempt to control the ways their snowcaps melt and their bodies erode. They allow movement and change with no pretense of an agenda for how that change occurs. My head snaps to the right as I hear rustling behind me, yanking my attention back into the preservation rather than dissolution of self. Softening again, I realize the disturbance I heard was a three-year-old girl in a pink hoodie and black patent leather shoes jumping and spinning joyously in the rocks on the shore. She reminds me that I desire the conscious, but not self-conscious, movement of a child.

Postlude to Chapter VI

A Facet of the Body as Sensible Concept

In this chapter, the facet of Massumi's "body as sensible concept" that emerged for me is the idea that, "Sensation is the direct registering of potential" (*Parables* 97). This statement might seem obvious when one considers an experience of the senses as indicating a conjunction between the human perceiver and environmental affordances. Developed by James J. Gibson, the concept of environmental "affordances" proposes that, "some natural events demand or invite appropriate behaviors" (Gibson 102). For example, the experience of touching and turning a doorknob expresses its potential to open a door and the subsequent possibilities of human movement through that door.

While Massumi's statement perhaps should not exclude such applications, his thinking also complicates the conjunction of perception, sensation, and action by proposing a specific definition of "sensation" which I find useful for contemplating the dissolving of one's self. For Massumi, "Sensation is an extremity of perception. It is the immanent limit at which perception is eclipsed by a sheerness of experience, as yet unextended into analytically ordered, predictably reproducible, possible action" (*Parables* 97). In a similar way, I am proposing that sublimation in terms of consciousness provides a "sheerness of experience" to the extent that the one undergoing it no longer thinks to operate from the perspective of an "I" who is having the experience. Instead, sublimation in this situation dissolves the "I" into the experience itself.

Philosophical and aesthetic curiosity around sublime experiences has extended from ancient to contemporary times, encompassing ideas that range from sublimation as

an action to the proper noun of “the Sublime.” Metropolitan Museum curator Andrew Bolton describes this phenomenon as understood in aesthetics by stating that, “As an experience, the Sublime was both destabilizing and transformative, involving instances that exceeded our capacities for self-control and rational comprehension” (Bolton 12). Although Longinus, the proposed author of the ancient Greek text *On the Sublime*, writes of the Sublime as produced by, “loftiness and excellence in language,” he characterizes the Sublime in a similar way such that it affects the soul by, “acting with imperious and irresistible force” (Longinus). Such force results in, “intensely transformative moments of consciousness which Longinus takes to be a hallmark of the sublime” (Halliwell 330-331). Other philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Edmund Burke have been recognized for their specific delimitations of the term. However, it is again St. John of the Cross whose writing signals sublime experience to me and connects me back to this aspect of the body as sensible concept.

In describing the conjunction of human and Divine, St. John provides a sensory metaphor that is useful in conceiving of a process of dissolving form into formlessness. He writes:

“When fire touches wood, the first thing it does is that it begins to dry the wood out. It drives away moisture, causing the wood to shed the tears it has held inside itself. Then the wood blackens, turning dark and ugly; it may even give off a bad odor. Little by little the fire desiccates the wood, bringing out and driving away all those dark and unsavory accidents that are contrary to the nature of fire. Finally, heating up and enkindling the wood from the outside, the fire transforms the wood into itself, rendering the wood as beautiful as the fire is.” (124)

Through such a process, sublimation evidences transformation, whether that change occurs to a conceptual form or a tangible body.

As “the direct registering of potential” (*Parables* 97), sensation is a key component of transformation for me. Although I recognize physiologically that fear and excitement live very close together in the human body, I sometimes forget to consider what active potential might be folded into my sensation of fear. In fact, by experiencing any sensation, I can glimpse into what is larger than my individual self. If, however, I stop at the experience of fear, I mostly perceive myself in relation to or contraction from an event. If I try to skip over fear, I miss the doorway for action and awareness that sensation is providing for me. Therefore, for me, the ideal mixture of sensation, perception, and action occurs by dissolving into movement. If I move through and beyond the fear, I do not monumentalize the fear as a stopping point, an overwhelming reality, or an inherent condition of my self. Instead, it is an event of potential.

So what is “potential”? For Massumi, potential is a force that may or may not ever be actualized. He provides the following example:

Latent in the flower are all of the differential conjunctions it may enter into. The flower, as a thing “in itself,” is its connectability with other things outside of itself. The connectability is not of the order of action or thought-out anticipation and is therefore not in the mode of possibility. It is of the order of *force*. (*Parables* 92)

With this description, he makes the flower a contingent existence, although in a different way than I describe in this chapter. His sense of the flower’s contingent existence relies not on divinity but on connectability. He continues on to describe the “order of force” of this connectability as “potential,” such that, “The latency in this case is in the mode not of the possible but of energetic *potential*” (*Parables* 92).

Although I agree with Massumi's assertion that, "Sensation is the registering of the multiplicity of potential connections in the singularity of a connection actually under way" (*Parables* 93), I wish to include another component of what constitutes "potential" for my work. In my considerations, "potential" does not only indicate a latent outcome waiting to be realized through such an array of conjunctions, but it is also the simultaneous and inseparable presence of form and formlessness within any conjunction. This inextricably joined presence of form and formlessness then allows the conjunction that Massumi describes to not only actualize an effect (such as a bee pollinating a flower), or sense another connection within that conjunction, but also to reflect what Heschel calls "the mystery beyond all things" (75). This sense of mystery as an inherent part of potential is vital for my understanding of sublimation. A mystery within and extending beyond all forms describes my sense of dissolving the individual self into a greater unknown—as the snowflake seems to disappear into the unknown, but ever present, atmosphere.

Postscript

As I returned to revise this chapter three months after writing it, I found myself asking, "Who wrote this, and what was she thinking?" Rather than a judgmental evaluation of writing, this confusion was actually a genuine estrangement from the self I was when I first penned these words. Can I accept that estrangement? Can I let her go and let myself be moved? Although the experiences and thinking that arose through my work at Glacier National Park have been very important landmarks along the journey, as I have continued to travel, certain considerations no longer make sense to me. However, the

landmarks retain significance as signposts along the journey. This traveling is a process which entails not just letting go of what I think I know but also letting myself move so far away from that “knowing” that I barely recognize it anymore. Returning to this writing, I quietly trimmed what seemed unnecessary, and in the process created another 23-page document of “Chapter 6 leftovers.” I both tried to leave remnants of the original landmark and to record my current understandings of its significance, weaving them into a moving landscape that continues to disorient my desire for control and causes me to simply bow in the process of being changed.

CHAPTER VII

SIMPLY BOWING: A SEARCH FOR PURITY



Fig. 7. Dancing at Acadia National Park. (photograph by Kathy Couch)

Kneeling on the salt-crusted rock, I can feel the surge and splash of the ocean. I am dancing in a location that regularly finds itself under water, but due to the lowering of the tide, it is now a ready platform for performance. The waves still crash against its surface, spraying me with the purifying mist of ocean water. As I slowly move from kneeling to standing, I notice that I pass through bowing. In this bowing posture, I can

see all of the cliffs surrounding me—my steadfast friends, the rocks, who let themselves be polished over and over again by the water, the waves.

Introduction

I yearn for purity. I want to let myself be polished by life the way rocks are polished by the ocean—not battered, but continually washed until rough edges of misconception and resistance dissolve. These rough edges permeate different levels of my being. The jagged cliff of anticipating failure finds the greatest prominence, seeming to jut from my soul all the way out into my physical actions. It inhibits me from moving in certain ways for fear that I will fall off the edge into some dark abyss. Yet, as I stand on a cliff hanging over the ocean in Acadia National Park, I can understand that not only danger but also beauty and freedom are potentially beyond that internal edge. Because I am so small in this landscape (although considerably larger than the tiny red spider at my feet), even my fears feel dwarfed by the majesty of the ocean. What does it really mean to fail?

As an artist, I have always had an agreement with myself that if I am not going to be potentially embarrassed by my work, then I am not risking enough. Consequently, I have had ample opportunity to confront and move beyond embarrassment. Still, a sense of looming failure remains. Perhaps it is actually a component of the longstanding belief that I am a “lost cause.” However, fear of failure functions with a distinct quality of action. The sense of being a lost cause (please see Chapter 5) often fosters feelings of despair. On top of this sensation, I then condemn myself for not being enlightened enough to move beyond despair and hopelessness. This combination slows and even

stops my movement. Fear of failure, while unpleasant, also signifies a sliver of hope—the anxiety and anticipation of failure means I must not have completely failed yet. Instead of rendering me inactive the way that despair can, it actually increases my activity by creating a state of alarm, causing me to “do, do, do, do, do...” (please see Chapter 5) as I drive myself to thwart off the threat of failure through excessive effort. Yet, what if failure is merely the experience of not meeting *my* expectations? And what if *my* expectations are not aligned with the highest wisdom of a situation anyway, but merely self-consciousness?

Hating myself for experiencing hopelessness or fear of failure further entrenches the belief that I am a lost cause. The constriction in body and soul that accompany emotions such as hatred and fear lock the patterns into my body, causing me to cycle through them continuously. What could wash these misconceptions out of me? The patterns of hopelessness and fear of failure cannot dissolve until I am willing to care for myself even, and especially, when I am in the midst of experiencing them—when I can become a riverbed for myself (see Chapter 4). It seems that I must learn to value myself more than I value success.

The desire for relief, for a washing away of these patterns, for the chance to move without inhibition is my yearning for purity. For me, purity is a state in which I am not distracted by these patterns or obstacles and, therefore, am able to fulfill the complete expression of the work that I am given to do. Strangely, the only thing between me and purity in each moment is my unwillingness to let go of what is actually hurting me, such

as the belief that I am a lost cause. What is the process of purification? How might I let go of what is causing me pain and learn to care for myself?

Purification and Love of Self

Purification need not be a brutal process and cannot be an act of self-hatred. Instead, I am finding that purification is an act of self-love. But what kind of self-love is it? Throughout his works, 18th century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau elucidates two distinct types of self-love. The first, *amour propre*, relates to the love of the ego self and a way of striving to be held in a higher esteem than others. The second, *amour de soi*, is often simply translated as “self love,” and describes a type of care that values and respects oneself as having inherent worth, not arrived at by comparison with others. Rousseau proposes that these two types of self-love drive the human being to behave in different ways. He states:

Self-love, which regards only ourselves is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour proper*, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible. This is how the gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love, and how the hateful and irascible passions are born of *amour-propre*. (*Emile* 213-214)

Not only do these states impact the self in question, but they also potentially reflect and affect the societies and systems in which they are present.

Civil and Savage Existence

Rousseau’s philosophy of self-love hinges on his concept of the supposedly natural state of the human being, which he refers to as the “savage.” Far from common connotations of that term, “savage” in Rousseau’s thinking bears a set of noble

characteristics, especially by virtue of an existence free of *amour propre*. The savage's needs are satisfied through his living in harmony with nature rather than by hierarchical competition in society or the development of a pretense of a social self-image. It is within the context of the "savage man" and "civil man" that Rousseau seeks to understand the development of a sense of inequality between people. A split between the savage and civil man along the lines of self-love becomes the basis for Rousseau's reasoning about the corruption of human nature he believes established *amour propre* as a function of civil structures and social hierarchy.

Yet, Rousseau himself struggles with when exactly such a natural man could have even existed. He proposes, "It did not even enter the minds of most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of nature had existed, even though it is evident from reading the Holy Scriptures that the first man, having received enlightenment and precepts directly from God was not himself in that state" (*Inequality* 102-103). He continues to regard his proposed "savage" state as the human ideal while again referencing its improbable existence as he states, "giving the writings of Moses the credence that any Christian philosopher owes them, it must be denied that even before the flood men were ever in the pure state of nature, unless they fell back into it because of some extraordinary event" (*Inequality* 102-103). His supposition that even if, "God Himself took men out of the state of nature immediately after the creation," the imagined state of a "savage" human could teach us something about how to live, and especially how to live together.

Instead of seeking to prove the dated existence of his "savage," Rousseau then pursues a proposal of "what the human race might have become" (*Inequality* 103). Along

with Rousseau, I do not actually find it necessary to locate a point in the lineage of human history when such a being existed. Rather, the importance of this concept resides in the felt sense of the potential of being human—a sense that Rousseau conjures through an imagined history and image of the “savage” for the sake of impacting future behavior. Imploring the audience with his conjectures on such a possibility he declares, “O man, whatever country you may come from, whatever your opinions may be, listen: here is your history as I believed it to read, not in the books of your fellowmen, which are liars, but in nature, which never lies” (*Inequality* 103-104). In this appeal to his audience, he not only seeks to suggest the potential in a type of human unencumbered by the development of *amour propre*, but also to entreat the reader to value nature itself as the bearer of truth in existence.

Yet, how might the human attain a “pure” state within herself, regardless of, or perhaps by virtue of, the other structures in which she finds herself embedded? Instead of assuming that the best of human nature is only present in a raw state of existence outside of any type of society, perhaps the way in which Rousseau’s savage lives in harmony with the natural world underscores a positive potential of the human being’s role in any system—social or environmental. Movement practitioner and philosopher Moshe Feldenkrais elucidates a line of thinking similar to Rousseau’s, although with a somewhat different proposition for the individual’s participation in social systems. He reasons that if “we for a moment disregard the concept of society and turn to man himself, we see that society is not merely the sum total of the people who constitute it; from the individual’s point of view it has a different meaning” (5-6). He continues to write that society “has

import for him, first of all, as the field in which he must advance in order to be accepted as a valuable member, his value in his own eyes being influenced by his position in society” (6).

While he does not employ the term *amour propre*, Feldenkrais considers the human to function under comparable levels of constraint when striving for approval and desiring societal success that “cause the majority of adults today to live behind a mask, a mask of personality that the individual tries to present to others and to himself” (6). Feldenkrais presents his assessment of the impact this process has on the human being by concluding that, “The need for constant support by one’s fellows is so great that most people spend the larger part of their lives fortifying their masks” (6). For Feldenkrais, a sense of needing to be held in high esteem by others and a subsequent development of this false self actually builds inhibitions.

As *amour propre* and Feldenkrais’s concept of the mask demonstrate, an insatiable need to act for the purpose of seeking the approval of others might often preclude following one’s own deeper intentions. Why do I seek the approval of others and perhaps create my own mask? Frequently, I do so as part of a reactive pattern based on past experiences or conceptions as well as a projected attempt to allay anxiety about the future. Purity, for me, means dissolving these patterns and projections—not for the purpose of returning to a supposedly more virtuous “savage” existence but as a means of removing inhibitions that hold my ego in place. Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle proposes, “one way of defining the ego is simply this: a dysfunctional relationship with the present moment” (qtd. in Juline). Following this thought, processes of purification can release me

from such dysfunctional patterns of behavior that are based on past experiences or future anxieties. The resulting presence of being and absence of obstacles allows me to recapture ease and joy in movement, not only for myself but also hopefully as a step towards contributing to a system or society larger than my individual self.

Simplicity and Self-Image

As I stand on another rocky ledge, this one a secret recess under Acadia's Carriage Trails, the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" rings so clearly in my ears that it seems to be coming from outside rather than my internal world. In this location, I can see for miles—the highly groomed trails above my head, the valley far below this cliff, and the spindly bridge hanging amidst a clump of trees at the far end of a creek. A waterfall over my left shoulder completes this lush scene, and it seems as if I have entered a Winslow Homer painting. Leaning forward, I feel a tug on my shirt and realize that a spider has threaded a web between me and the nearest tree. The lyrics of this hymn continue to repeat, as if a record is skipping inside my head: *'Tis the gift to be simple, tis the gift to be free, tis the gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we find ourselves in the place just right, twill be in the valley of love and delight.* What does this being simple involve?

For me, simplicity does not oppose complexity, but rather exists at the conjunction of purity and ease. To move unfettered by my ego, my self-consciousness (please see Chapter 6), and certainly my self-image as "lost cause" (please see Chapter 5), allows for more ease in movement, including the movement of embodied change. Purification, for me, is a process that removes habitual patterns and images, especially

those patterns that are constructed on a limited sense of self. Feldenkrais proposes that, “we act in accordance with our self image” (1). Therefore, how we “see” ourselves impacts our actions. For example, my belief that I am ugly (please see Chapter 5) is rooted partially in an experience from childhood in which I heard someone exclaiming that the way I was smiling ruined a particular photograph. She did not say that I am ugly, but I interpreted having ruined the picture with my smile as evidence that I’m ugly. This understanding and image of myself continues to impact my behavior as I frequently hesitate to smile.

Rousseau addresses an envisioning of self in terms of *amour propre* when he determines that *amour propre* feeds off of our imagined perception of the way in which others see us. In this case, our behavior is constrained by our anticipation of how an action or array of actions will affect others’ perceptions of us. Feldenkrais similarly notes that our actions emerge from the way we see ourselves, which is often complicated by the fact that we may rely on real or imagined assessments of ourselves from other people to even construct a self-image. Feldenkrais suggests that, “this image may be cut down or blown up to fit the mask by which its owner would like to be judged by his peers” (23). The shaky ground assembled by pulling together my assumptions about how people see me and the ways I would like for people to see me obviously does not provide me with a good foundation for moving. I can remain stuck in place, worrying about what someone will think of me.

At the same time, I notice that once negative beliefs are entrenched in my self-image, no outside voices can completely remove them. No one can convince me of the

worth of my soul (please see Chapter 5). No one can convince me that I'm not ugly. No one can convince me that I'm not a "lost cause." All of the negative beliefs that I carry about myself are patterns woven into and therefore constructing the very fabric of my self-image. Although at times I would appreciate hearing some affirmation of my worth, I am grateful that praise has little impact on me because I am seeking a deeper unraveling of these patterns rather than a momentary fix. Beyond the self-image lies the important potential dimension of self-discovery.

The physical work that Feldenkrais developed called "Awareness through Movement" focuses on a type of self-discovery and provides a literal and metaphorical solution for these habitual patterns. In a one-on-one session, a practitioner does not strive to change the body position or physical constraints of a client, but instead does the work of holding that physical pattern so that the client's body can actually relax. By virtue of this relaxation, the physical pattern can be released. In my understanding, purification is not a rigid way of scrubbing out a pattern but, rather, a compassionate cradling of the human being so that inhibiting patterns can dissolve. When I described my desire to be like a riverbed for other people, this is the type of activity I was describing (please see Chapter 4).

Although I do not wish to become a Feldenkrais practitioner, his work reminds me that I do yearn to hold people so that they can relax enough for constraining patterns in their beings to dissolve. Yet, can I also hold myself with that level of compassion? In order to dissolve my self (as discussed in Chapter 6), I must first compassionately embrace myself where I am so that the patterns locking a lingering ego intact can

dissipate and hopefully reveal an entirely different kind of self—that is, one in harmony with its own being and the world around it. For me, this state of harmony is described by the Shaker hymn as “the place just right.” Arrival at such a place reveals an ease of being and a purity of attention free from self-consciousness—both a simple and complex gift.

Harmonization and Self Discovery

After climbing the steep terraced path through a birch forest, I find myself standing in a pond called “The Bowl.” Dipping my fingers into the pristine water, I watch fish dart away from my hands while mosquitoes swarm towards any piece of flesh they can uncover. Vacationers across the pond frantically converse as they think I am a bear, and with my careful movement and black clothing, I am not surprised by their conclusions. However, the longer I remain in this setting, the more I become part of the ecosystem rather than a disturbance to it. Mosquitoes leave for a piece of fresh meat, fish graze my fingers no longer startled by my presence, and I become an anchor for a spider’s developing web.

Rousseau points out, “We have to love ourselves to preserve ourselves” (*Emile* 213). In Chapter 6, I questioned the need to preserve the self, yet what I have discovered about dissolving myself concerns the eradication of what I am now calling the “barrier self”—or patterns based on and creating false and limiting self-image. I am seeking this dissolution for the sake of unfolding a greater potential of being human. Such a being harmonizes within itself and in its role as a part of a larger ecology. In this case, I could be unfettered by struggle, competition, or comparison as a means of arriving at my worth

because none of these methods are effective in truly understanding who I am or what it means to be living that potential. So, how do I begin to live that potential?

Perhaps a clue to such potential reveals itself through desire. As Rousseau suggests, “Our passions are the principle instruments of our preservations” (*Emile* 212). For much of my life, I have assumed that desire and purity could not coexist—that one must obliterate the other. Therefore, I still struggle to acknowledge within myself that I want anything—even that I want purity. I assume that anything I want is simply a manifestation of my ego, and therefore, fulfilling any desire is an indulgence that will move me further from Divinity. Thankfully, Rousseau proffers a strong opinion to the contrary: “If God were to tell men to annihilate the passions which He gives him [sic], God would will and not will; He would contradict Himself. Never did He give this senseless order. Nothing of the kind is written in the human heart” (*Emile* 212). While this text reminds me that my conception of desire as oppositional to purity is in fact a misconception, I still feel the need to discern between when a desire serves a false self-image and when it supports my greater potential.

Rousseau also cautions the reader to be aware that not all desires serve the same self. He inquires, “would it be reasoning well to conclude, from the fact that it is in man’s nature to have passions, that all the passions that we feel in ourselves and see in others are natural? Their source is natural, it is true. But countless alien streams have swollen it” (*Emile* 212). He then provides a key observation about how we might recognize the “natural” passions by stating, “They are the instruments of our freedom” (*Emile* 212).

What is it that makes me free? And how do I cut ties with my own inhibiting self-image in order to move with that freedom?

For me, freedom does not mean that anything goes. Freedom, especially in conjunction with desire, necessitates awareness, even if I cannot understand the totality of a situation. Feldenkrais recounts a Tibetan parable that is useful for considering the joining of desires and awareness. He describes the story in which:

. . . a man without awareness is like a carriage whose passengers are the desires, with the muscles for horses, while the carriage itself is the skeleton. Awareness is the sleeping coachman. As long as the coachman remains asleep the carriage will be dragged aimlessly here and there. Each passenger seeks a different destination and the horses pull different ways. But when the coachman is wide awake and holds the reins the horses will pull the carriage and bring every passenger to his proper destination. (54)

For Feldenkrais, awareness is a key for harnessing and directing movement. This harnessing does not need to be a restriction of freedom, but rather it provides the conditions necessary for arriving at a “proper destination” or “place just right”—the harmonizing of one’s efforts in order to actualize one’s potential, which includes what one desires.

Awareness, then, functions as a vital connection between desire and enactment. Following Feldenkrais’s assertion that, “Individuals act in accordance with their subjective image” (23), his prescription for ameliorating the hindrances and distractions caused by a limiting self-image does not rely on just changing behaviors, but on first being aware of the image (23). He then suggests, “systematic correction of the image is more useful than correction of single actions” (23). Such a systematic correction has revolutionized the way I understand myself and the concept of “self” in general, as I will

describe in the following section of this chapter. This understanding must permeate all levels of my being so that awareness gathers the forces of my being, including desires, into an integrated effort.

Returning to Feldenkrais's assessment of the Tibetan story, he proposes that, "In those moments when awareness succeeds in being at one with feeling, senses, movement, and thought, the carriage will speed along on the right road" (54). Yet, what characterizes the "rightness" of this path? He continues to elucidate the benefits of such a metaphorical road on which, "man can make discoveries, invent, create, innovate, and 'know.' He grasps that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone" (54). Subsequently, Feldenkrais proposes that awareness of unity not only impacts the individual, but the functioning of the individual in society such that, "The few exceptional men who really sought peace and true brotherly love reached this condition by perfecting their awareness, not by suppressing their passions" (172). Again, I feel grateful for the time I have spent performing in these national parks, which has been a continual process of heightening my awareness. Perhaps the lessons shown to me in these landscapes can offer insight into what my self could become if my desires, purity, and action in the world become unified through awareness.

A Lullaby for Waking Up

The aforementioned systematic correction of my self image brings together desire, purification, and action in the hopes of applying my self as a positive force in the world. I have always wanted to be able to sing. My inability to sing, hum, or in almost any way carry a tune is shocking, though. However, for some reason I am given the

ability to sing sacred texts—hymns, scriptures, special prayers, and hallowed chants. Many people who have heard me sing these texts refer to me as a lullaby. This strange moniker and image of me has appeared so many times that finally I had to contemplate what people were responding to and how that might express itself through my being. I originally was not interested in being compared to a lullaby, just as I normally do not feel excited about myself when people call me “sweet.” These terms do not meet my expectations of what makes a person interesting. Yet, after considering my desire to be a riverbed, suddenly I understood: I am a lullaby for waking up. I want to hold people like a riverbed and rock them gently like a lullaby into a new awareness. This dissertation journey has been a process of learning how to first gently hold and rock myself into new awareness.

As I describe earlier, I yearn to have the capacity for cradling people so that they can relax enough for constraining patterns in their beings to dissolve. However, the patience and initiation (please see Chapter 4) necessary to engage in this effort of holding people are qualities that do not belong to me. Instead, patience and initiation are qualities that are larger than my being, part of a formless essence expressed through my form (please see Chapter 6). If I can release my own inhibitions, these qualities can move freely through me, nourishing me and potentially helping other people.

Entering Awareness

So what inhibits me from living and moving as an expression of this awareness? The systematic revolution of self-image that I mentioned earlier is a purification process that I have been moving through, which has not yet eradicated my “self” but has shown

errors in my conception of what a human “self” means. The image I carry of myself as a “lost cause” centers on a misconception that God wants me to fail. Somewhere in my childhood, I misinterpreted Alexander Pope’s statement, “To err is human; to forgive, Divine” (30). Instead of understanding that humans do make mistakes, and even that a generous forgiveness is offered by God, I locked onto the notion that to be human is to fail, to be a failure. My fear of failure and the excessive effort that struggling against anticipated failure evokes, therefore, are attempts to convince this false idea of God to reconsider me as redeemable. If I work hard enough, perhaps God will not reject me. A Sunday school teacher told me that God gives up on people. As a child, this was perhaps one of my greatest fears, although I now do not believe it to be true. Yet, the pattern that developed with this combination of misconceptions persists. Even my reading of spiritual texts that encourage a struggle against the self have been colored by my overriding misconception of the whole human self as failure.

Rousseau’s distinction between two types of self-love has been a comfort to me in this process: his thinking has helped me pull apart which type of “self” I do not desire while encouraging me to receive the love that I need for the preservation of a deeper self. The brutality with which I treat myself in trying to convince this false God not to give up on me is actually a manifestation of *amour propre*. I am not attempting to be held in high esteem by other people, but I am trying to persuade God to think that I’m good. I am holding myself accountable to an illusion of holiness, intelligence, or piety that I hope might make God decide to love me.

When I was in the hospital during this dissertation process, I appealed for help to a prominent spiritual leader whose prayers receive incredible responses. I have heard stories that he can pray for rain, and ten minutes later a downpour begins. He told me that he “prayed and prayed and prayed” for me in one of the holiest sites on the globe. Initially, the fact that he “prayed and prayed and prayed” for me led me to conclude that if he has to exert that much effort, I must really be a “lost cause.” Yet, the same events that I use to convince myself that I am a “lost cause” could just as easily demonstrate that I am cared for and loved. As I allowed him to hold me through his prayers, I could feel my own patterns of believing that I am a “lost cause” start to dissipate.

On my seventh birthday, I secretly committed to live my life in constant prayer. However, in my early twenties, I experienced a darkness so intense that I actually could no longer pray. Although this period of time felt like years, it probably was no more than a few days before I was awoken in the middle of the night with the realization that God is Love. The realization struck me so deeply, my body felt as if it had been shaken by a physical force. If God is Love, then how could I fail to be loved by God? Isn’t a state of being loved then my very nature?

And, if love is my nature, then how could I fail to love myself? Again, fear of failure separates a troubled “me” from a harmony with the rest of existence. At a recent doctor’s appointment, I was lamenting the impact a sense of failure might be taking on my body. When the doctor asked me what I would consider to be success, without hesitation I replied that fulfilling my Divine purpose would be success. So what do I think I was made for? What is the purpose of this self? If my prior reasoning continues,

then I was primarily made to be loved and, further, to be an expression of that love in the world. The additional awareness of an interest in being a metaphorical “lullaby for waking up” specifies a way that love could manifest. Again, what prevents me from living as this expression?

Constant fear of failure frequently results in a state of worry for me, a distraction that fills my time and steals my energy. I worry about not being able to fulfill a Divine purpose. I worry about not having a job next year. I worry about the collapse of the U.S. economy. I worry about the people in this country who are already hungry and jobless. No worry is more virtuous than any other worry; they are all evidence of not trusting the existence of a larger and beneficent wisdom, and furthermore of believing that I know what should happen (please see Chapter 6) since I am worried that the proper outcome will not come to fruition. Thus, my worry is actually arrogance. Although an obvious need to act exists in each of these situations, worry does not actually motivate action or keep me on the “right” path. Instead, worry limits my view of what is possible, constricts my sense of my ability to positively impact any circumstance, and inhibits my movement. Sufi poet Hafiz suggests a quick solution to living in a state of worry. He writes:

“Now

That

All your worry

Has proved such an

Unlucrative

Business,

Why

Not

Find a better

Job?” (234)

Having worked diligently to remove arrogance in the desire for a pure self, I realize now that I was even wrong about that approach to purification. I feared that naming myself as an expression of love is just too audacious a claim. Yet, for me, worrying is actually the unfortunate audacity, a manifestation of arrogance, and an inhibiting pattern locking me into a projection about the future. This projection and anxiety not only trap me in a conviction that I know what the best outcome is (please see Chapter 6), but also create a false sense of self—a mask developed to face a particular situation as if I can control it. By contrast, being an expression of love offers me a way to bow. When I understand myself as an expression of love, I am not separate from, better than, or worse than anything or anyone else. I am simply part of the flow of existence. One of my favorite verses from the Bible reminds me of the importance of love accompanying any effort:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (New International Bible, 1 Corinthians 13.1-7)

Love connects and harmonizes what seems disparate, what vies for attention, and what struggles for preservation both inside and outside of me. It is a riverbed, rocking me gently into new awareness.

Standing on a cliff thousands of feet above the ocean waves, I face my fear of heights. The yacht below looks like a toy boat, and even the edges of rock that once seemed enormous are rendered lowly at this new place of ascent. Similar to my attempt to use shame as a means of procuring humility, I have tried to maintain a low self-image out of fear of arrogance. Yet, heights allow an expanded vision and broader understanding of relationships between things. I simply can see more and can better realize how everything is connected. As I move through this dance into a bowing and then a kneeling stance, the lesson becomes clear--Don't be afraid of heights. Just be willing to bow at any height. The echo of the Shaker hymn returns: "When true simplicity is gained, to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed. To turn, to turn will be our delight till by turning, turning, we come round right."

Postlude to Chapter VII

A Facet of the Body as Sensible Concept

In this chapter, the facet of Massumi's "body as sensible concept" that emerged for me is that, "Sensation is the point of co-conversion through which the variations of perception and thought play out. It is the singular point where what infolds is also unfolding" (94). Although Massumi's definition of sensation is not necessarily concerned with the construction of self or self-love, its existence as the crucial point of the unfolding of the infolded lends its applicability to my exploration of the mysteries of human consciousness. For Massumi, sensation is a realm in which, "Possibilization and potentialization, simplification and complexification, fold into and out of each other" (94). It is a movement idea in which what constitutes something also creates its potential for unfurling, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. In this way, form and movement are not separable object and action, and qualities such as simplification and complexification are not oppositional but, rather, inextricably joined. For my work, the infolded potential of what being human can mean also unfolds through recognizing lessons inherent to experiences of being. In terms of the experiences explored in this chapter, such an idea fosters the ability to turn what enters my awareness as perception into reflective thought and finally into potential.

Massumi applies his considerations of this infolding and unfolding to the development of what he terms "intelligence." He proposes that, "The overall process of the actual extending into the possible and then looping through sensation into a mutual intensification of potential, perception, and thought: this is *intelligence*" (94). This

looping can signal not only emerging thought forms, but also what Massumi proposes to be the impulse within the unfolding of intelligence: “Intelligence is an outgrowth of need” (95). Throughout this dissertation journey, the looping of sensation, potential, perception, and thought has emerged for me as “an outgrowth of need” (95), whether I call the result “intelligence” or not. For me, this need is for movement. Moving through combined physical, intellectual, and spiritual journeys requires me to unfold what my self might become. In unfolding my self, I am finding that I must also consider what I sense as potential for the human being (beyond my misconception that to be human is be a failure), similar to the effort that Rousseau undertakes in imagining what a “savage” state might be.

With his inability to pinpoint the actual existence of the “savage” while nonetheless making use of the idea as a productive force for changing the awareness of self in civil society, Rousseau demonstrates a positive power of imagining that which does not exist, but could exist. Similarly, Massumi proposes, “Human perception is unique in the degree to which it can extend itself into the only-thought and, thus, into the future in more and more varied ways. It can do this because it is capable of connecting with a thing as if it somehow existed outside of any particular perception of it” (93). Although projection into the future seems to be a primary cause of anxiety and limiting self-image for me, Massumi’s assessment of this type of perception encompasses a sense of potential without having to know (and therefore constrict) the exact manifestation of the future event.

Such “only-thought” might also be considered abstraction, which Feldenkrais actually suggests is “the basis of verbalization” (51). He continues, “Words symbolize the meanings they describe and could not be created without the abstraction of the quality or character of the thing represented” (51). Again, a consideration of language, not only as its own phenomenon but also in the power it has to shape thought and action, enters the conversation I have with philosophers. Although Feldenkrais suggests that abstract thought is an important aspect of human society, he also cautions that, “at the same time abstraction and verbalization become a tyrant who deprives the individual of concrete reality” (51). By contrast, Massumi, extending the work of Deleuze, proposes that, “The problem with the dominant models in cultural and literary theory is not that they are too abstract to grasp the concreteness of the real. The problem is that they are not *abstract enough* to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete” (*Parables* 5).

I obviously have a concern for bringing abstract thought into fleshy communion with readers; the premise for combining autoethnographic and philosophical practices in my research is to provide a bridge for readers through these layers of reality. Yet, I align with Massumi in wanting to explore this “real incorporeality of the concrete,” which is why I insist that sensation, as word and experience, not only appear as a function of the five senses, but also as an indication of real but not-yet tangible aspects of an unfolding event. For me, this notion of sensation includes conceiving of the self as an unfolding event.

Another Problem with Language

As I wrote this chapter, I paused periodically to ask myself, “How dare I align with a philosopher’s concept when only male pronouns are employed?” Both Rousseau and Feldenkrais inexorably use “he” to denote the universal human. Yet, feminist philosopher and linguist Luce Irigaray importantly notes that, “Grammatical gender is neither motiveless nor arbitrary” (*Tu* 12). Rousseau was writing in the 18th century, while Feldenkrais’s *Awareness Through Movement* was first published in 1972. If either of these thinkers had been writing today, perhaps his work would have made a different use of gendered language. However, Irigaray presents an interesting conundrum. She writes:

Sexual difference cannot therefore be reduced to a simple, extralinguistic fact of nature. It conditions language and is conditioned by it. It not only determines the system of pronouns, possessive adjectives, but also the gender of words and their division into grammatical classes: animate/inanimate, concrete/abstract, masculine/feminine, for example. It’s situated at the junction of nature and culture. (*Tu* 12)

Even though I deeply believe in the importance of Irigaray’s assertion, I also feel personal resonance with the content of Rousseau’s writing and Feldenkrais’s thinking. I cannot assume how either of these men might rewrite the gender implications of their work today, but the work itself still seems necessary for my thinking. A tension persists in my being because I feel such relief and resonance when reading Rousseau’s work, while I am still uncomfortable with a masculine pronoun being used to describe God as well. However, this difficulty is also related to the language in which Rousseau was writing. In accordance with the gendered system of the French language, the word for God, *dieu*, is a masculine noun, not simply a “He” in terms of an English language

pronoun. While this noun/pronoun distinction does not solve the problem, it offers me a different understanding of the origin of Rousseau's particular use of this gendered language. Yet, despite the unease I have with these language choices, I do not feel distracted from Rousseau's philosophical project because of them. I recognize myself not so much in the supposedly universal "he" described, but rather in the voice of the philosopher.

Comrades in Thinking

Both Rousseau and Feldenkrais impress me with the efforts present in their thinking—particularly the ways in which they encourage humans to reconsider their perceptions and potentials. Alan Bloom, a translator for Rousseau's book *Emile, or On Education*, writes that Rousseau implored his contemporaries to refrain from, "impoverishing the human phenomenon" (*Emile* 28). Similar to both of these thinkers, a desire to understand what it can mean to be human, to rethink the potential of who we have been and could become, and to honor a relationship between the human and the rest of the living world permeates my work. Although discussion of the individual self factors highly in each of our work, the purpose of this individual exploration is not for the mere benefit of a lone being. Feldenkrais suggests, "not everybody is capable of identifying himself easily, and one may be greatly helped by the experience of others" (23). I do not presume that my work inspires or enlightens the reader in any grand way, but I do hope that the elucidation of my experiences will be of some use to the reader in her or his own life, thinking, and movement.

CHAPTER VIII

NOBILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: REFLECTIONS ON BEING INSIGNIFICANT



Fig. 8. Dancing in Sequoia National Park. (researcher's photograph)

A cathedral of trees surrounds me, and the sun slowly shifts its angle to light the spaces between these giants. It is so quiet here that I think perhaps silence really can exist. Their quietude conceals the challenges that befall these trees time and again. Most sequoias bear tar black scars and hollowed trunks—evidence of surviving strikes of lightning and strokes of fire. As I stand amongst them, I am humbled by their perfection.

They stand completely as what they were made to be, without trying to be anything more or anything less.

Introduction

Before embarking on my first day performing in Sequoia National Park, I suddenly felt inspired to scrawl the following question in my notebook: What is nobility? My initial excursion led me to the Giant Forest, introduced to visitors by a plaque bearing the words of John Muir: “A magnificent growth of giants . . . one naturally walked softly and awe-stricken among them. I wandered on, meeting nobler trees where all are noble” (1873). A hushed reverence permeates this landscape. The strength with which these trees stand, as individuals and together, creates an architecture of awe. I find myself not only stunned by their height but also especially struck by the breadth of their hairy bark. In most cases, this thickness is carved through with black scars, and some are even burned hollow while still standing and continuing to grow. Yet, their presence is not one of defiance in the face of that wound, but rather a grace to grow from it. In fact, for sequoias, “rapid growth often occurs after a fire” (Giant Forest Museum). Additionally, they are usually born through fire, as the tough outer cone containing seeds the size of oatmeal grains breaks open with the heat of forest fires, and seedlings become nourished by the ashes of their fallen ancestors (Sequoia National Park Visitor’s Guide). Considering their incredible ability to heal and especially to grow from injury, I wonder if these giants are impervious to death. Although sequoias typically have a long life, often 3,000 years or more, they “don’t die of old age and are resistant to fire and insect damage. Most die by falling over” (Sequoia National Park Visitor’s Guide). This toppling

makes itself apparent across the forest floor as fallen trunks stretch a final gesture of their 300-foot length from where they once stood. I am humbled by their ability to fall so completely.

In a recent performance, I fell on stage for perhaps only the second time in my life. While dancing a solo created for me by another choreographer, I unexpectedly hit the floor three times. Luckily, each fall was so inevitable that no pretense of remaining vertical existed and, therefore, the audience perceived this movement as an intentional part of the piece. Despite my embarrassment, the choreographer also felt the tumble had a rightful place in the dance and proposed to change the choreography accordingly. As I continued into the next dance in the concert (a collection of six different solos that I was performing), I said a prayer, asking what I was meant to learn from that experience. Clarity struck with these words: If you're going to fall, fall completely.

As I reflect on the lessons presented to me while performing in Sequoia National Park, I realize that to let myself fall completely seems like a tumble into never-ending depth. Whenever I suspect I have found ground on which to kneel or stand, it opens up again, and I fall further into another unknown landscape. I continue to shrink as the cavernous depth into which I descend grows ever steeper. Standing amidst the sequoias echoes this sense of scale, as they often reach beyond what I can see and sometimes beyond what I can fathom. With the sequoias, a sense of my own insignificance arrives through peaceful awe. In other instances in my life, this understanding feels more challenging. How can I learn to be content with being insignificant in all situations?

To be content being insignificant, I must recognize that I am not worthless. Landmarks in my journey of life and learning have meaningfulness but not by indicating the relative worth of my being moment by moment. For example, if I encounter a difficult landmark, this does not mean that I am bad or being punished. In fact, consciousness itself—the ability to witness and contemplate any landmarks or wonders—is a gift that offers me movement potential (please see Chapter 5). In order to be content being insignificant, I must understand that I am not a failure (please see Chapter 7). Like the sequoias, I am nothing more or less than what I am made to be. In order to be content being insignificant, I cannot only have my eyes fixed on point B or getting where I want to go (please see Chapter 4). If getting there is possible, it will only be by sincerely traveling this path, and allowing myself to be moved (please see Chapter 6). Finally, I can only be content being insignificant if my life—my survival—does not depend on being the best or most important.

Hierarchical Survival

As I ponder the question, “What is nobility?” I find myself considering hierarchy since “noble” can connote a special rank. In hierarchical systems, the ways in which we differ from one another become a basis for valuation – often causing us to perceive ourselves as “better” or “lesser” than one another, and reflecting a willingness to and “propensity for ordering complex variation as a gradually ascending scale” (Gould, *Mismeasure*, 56). In particular, I notice my own thinking about hierarchy influenced by the concept of “survival of the fittest” in both its actual and metaphorical applications. This phrase is often used to imply that what is most significant rises to the top of a

hierarchical structure and therefore will survive and thrive while other beings, ideas, or systems perish. To further understand the ways in which “survival of the fittest” has influenced my conception of significance and insignificance, I found myself returning to prior research I have done in this area. Although this may seem to be a common phrase or simply a natural phenomenon, the words “survival of the fittest” have had incredible influence on my thinking.

Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer are both credited with inventing the phrase “survival of the fittest” and thus with propelling the power of this concept. For Darwin, the articulation of this phrase arises in his seminal text, *On the Origin of Species*, as the title of Chapter IV: “Natural Selection; or The Survival of the Fittest” (*Origin*₆ 93). The direct equating of these two phrases only occurs in later editions of the text, however. The first edition of the book does not actually include the phrase “survival of the fittest.” In the 6th and subsequent editions, Darwin describes his use of this terminology when he writes, “This preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest” (*Origin*₆ 94).

The 6th edition further takes up a discussion of his chosen vocabulary, defensively arguing for his word choice. Surprisingly, this guard is not mounted for “survival of the fittest,” however, but in defense of the phrase “natural selection,” as critics might try to find underlying creationism in its semantics. Darwin proposes that, “In the literal sense of the word, no doubt, natural selection is a false term; but who ever objected to chemists speaking of the elective affinities of the various elements?” (*Origin*₆ 94). Citing

additional parallels in other scientific ideas, he asserts, “It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or Deity; but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets?” (*Origin*₆ 94). He arrives at a somewhat startling conclusion that, “Everyone knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions” (*Origin*₆ 95), but it is largely the discrepancies in knowing what is meant by these words that has propelled controversy, misunderstanding, and misappropriation of the notion of “survival of the fittest” for another 150 years.

In both the first edition and sixth edition of *On the Origin of Species*, it is actually the chapter entitled “Struggle for Existence” that outlines Darwin’s conception of selective survival. As paleontologist, evolutionary biologist, and scientific historian Stephen Jay Gould asserts, “Darwin began by drawing a distinction between two kinds of ‘struggle’ in his famous phrases – ‘struggle for existence’ and ‘survival of the fittest’” (*Full House* 142). While Gould proposes distinguishing factors between these two phrases, related to the difference between an organism struggling against its environment and two organisms struggling against each other within the confines of an environment, Darwin himself in both the first and later editions of the text describes “struggle for existence” as encompassing both varieties. Darwin then extends this notion beyond what might be commonly assumed. He writes, “I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny” (*Origin*₁ 62). Throughout this text, he affirms his theory that individuals who survive any permutation of either biotic or abiotic struggle succeed in supporting the

continuation of the species through the production of offspring. The fact that “fitness” in a struggle for existence encompasses “dependence of one being on another” and “success in leaving progeny” demonstrates an important sense of non-hierarchical relationship among beings in the process of evolutionary change.

Fit, Fittest, and Fitness

Haze covers much of the upper atmosphere as intentionally set forest fires rage in one section of the park. Performing here, or even remaining in this area is difficult. The effect of the smoke on my body causes me to consider the effect of the flames on the bodies of the trees. Although fire is a necessary occurrence for the growth and evolution of the forest as a whole, I know that it will scorch the bark of individual trees. I can feel myself flinch at the thought of being a tree burned in this way, even when knowing it is for the benefit of the forest. Yet, my desire to escape the difficulty, or worse, to have others bear it reconnects me to a prayer from Mother Teresa’s book *A Simple Path* that I always kept with me as a child —“please deliver me from the desire to be preferred” (37).

In human social systems, the phrase “survival of the fittest” may be misappropriated to satisfy and justify a desire to be preferred. The use of “survival of the fittest” as a metaphor frequently supports hierarchical structures with an embedded notion that, as social and educational theorist Stephen Brookfield asserts, “If the fittest really do survive then the ones who are in positions of power must be there by virtue of their innate strength or superior intelligence since this has obviously allowed them to rise to the top” (Brookfield 47). Employing the phrase “survival of the fittest” also enforces

the idea that an individual's lack of "natural"⁴ ability is the rational reason for her failure to prosper. This combination of ideas and the assumption that they are based on an environmental order promotes competitive survival and releases us from any responsibility for each other's success and from the recognition that we also bear responsibility for shaping, as well as being shaped by, our environments.

Considering Darwin's notion that the struggle for existence includes both "the dependence of one being on another" and "success in leaving progeny" (*Origins*₁ 62), a self-serving, hierarchical approach to "fitness" demonstrates not only a misappropriation of "survival of the fittest" as a metaphor, but also a misunderstanding of Darwin's assessment of the "natural" law. Darwin points to characteristics that enable successful survival as constituting "fitness," although, in his perspective, these traits may arise from random mutation rather than inherent superiority or even conscious change. Further, these traits may be advantageous only when matched with a particular occasion or environment. In the summary of Chapter IV, Darwin proposes that, "If variations useful to any organic being ever do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterized will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life" (*Origin*₆ 141). One of the difficult issues that lingers in discussion of "survival of the fittest" for me is the underlying sense that this "struggle for life" inevitably results in death for those not "fit."

⁴ The term "natural" in this instance indicates the assumption of a quality as inherently and innately present.

In his theoretical model from 1837, Darwin proposes that, “The number of species must be approximately constant. When a new species appears, an old one must become extinct, or ‘die’” (Gruber 136). Although he modifies this position in later work, he constantly reinforces the idea that, “many more individuals are born than can possibly survive” (*Origin*₆ 94), thus indicating some adherence on an individual level to the earlier “numerical conservatism” (Gruber 136). Writing that, “Although some species may now be increasing . . . all cannot do so, for the world would not hold them” (*Origin*₆ 79), Darwin’s notion of competitive survival arises due to a sense of limited living space for individuals. His conception of this limited living space proposes that even if variations within species may increase, their overall populations will be regulated within these processes.

This sense of high-stakes competition and death as the result of failure to win that competition perhaps provides one of the most problematic understandings of “survival of the fittest” in both my own thinking (please see Chapter 7) and in human social systems. Outside of a “survival of the fittest” mentality, however, competition actually may have value as part of a cooperative act. As a biologist, sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher working at the same time as Darwin, Herbert Spencer brought a multi-disciplinary perspective to these considerations. Spencer writes, “Though commonly thought of as a phenomenon exclusively social, competition exists in a living body” (*Principles* 76). He proposes that the process of competition, “in each social organ, as in each individual organ, results from the tendency of the units to absorb all they can from the common stock of materials for sustentation,” (*Principles* 76). Although this “common

stock of material” and the competition surrounding it seem to reflect internal struggles for scarcity of resources, he concludes that, “evidently the resulting competition, not between units simply but between organs causes in a society, as in a living body, high nutrition and growth of parts called into greatest activity by the requirements of the rest” (*Principles* 76).

The conclusion of Spencer’s metaphor relating body and society presents an important consideration that those parts “called into greatest activity by the requirements of the rest” may in fact receive more resources in a given moment—not merely for their own benefit, but as a means of supporting the whole system or organism. For example, if a body undergoes a digestive process, intestinal cells may require more energy and blood flow at a given time than cells in the reproductive organs. This requirement for and receiving of resources does not mean that the intestinal cells are better than cells in the reproductive organs or that only one area of the body can survive, but simply that the digestive tract is being called into greatest activity at that moment for the eventual nourishment of the whole body. If inherent superiority is not a cause of success and death is removed as an inevitable result of competition, the growth of certain aspects of a system can cycle back to sustain the whole rather than viciously divide the parts.

Connected Progress

Moving inside the hollow of this tree, I have a new understanding of the word “core.” Perched amidst plains of grazing cattle is what remains of one of the giant sequoias—a stump. Although it might seem insignificant in its current condition, its worth becomes apparent not through comparison to its stately neighbors but by looking

inside its hollow core. Busy colonies of insects, birds, rodents, and other plants populate its hidden terrain. So much life is wrapped inside what appears to be inert. This tree's significance is now not determined by its own height, but by how much it supports other life. As my spine rolls from a bowing posture to standing, I become one of those beneficiaries, completely enveloped inside this stump—sheltered by the heart of the tree.

The responsibility of being called into activity to serve a greater whole need not be a story of superiority or sacrifice. Instead, an individual's progress can beneficially impact the movement of both itself and a whole system. Although Darwin's supporters may disagree over his promotion of evolution as progressive, his words bring the question of systemic advancement as a function of evolution to the forefront as he writes, "The inhabitants of each successive period have beaten their predecessors in the race for life, and are, in so far, higher in the scale of nature; and this may account for that vague yet ill-defined sentiment, felt by many paleontologists, that organization on the whole has progressed" (*Origin*₁ 345). What might it mean for the "organization on the whole" to progress?

As I write this letter to you, the words of twentieth-century biologist Lynn Margulis continually echo in my thoughts: "Evolution is a science of connection" (44). Reframing the hierarchical assumptions that might be inherent to a "survival of the fittest" mentality, Margulis's statement provides a different way to imagine evolution as progress. Considered in this way, the durational development of anything, including the human species and its consciousness, perhaps can rely not on a hierarchical sense of competitive survival but on the profound interrelation between everything in the universe.

Similarly, paleontologist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote extensively in the twentieth century about the possibilities of evolution as unification. In developing his theories of unification, he focuses on material form first, stating that, “there is a certain unity to forms in Nature. We did not have to wait for Darwin to note that there is a resemblance between Man and the monkey, between the crab and the crayfish, between the cat and the leopard” (*Heart* 108-109). He continues by reasoning that, “The immediate consequence, universally recognized, of the existence of a morphological continuity in Nature is that since living beings form an ‘arranged’ whole, they are not scattered objects completely detached from one another” (*Heart* 109). Morphological unity is one key to recognizing connection, and Teilhard pursues this evidence from his experience as a paleontologist as a means of expanding the possibilities for evolution as a process, and even a progressive process, from his perspective as a theologian.

Teilhard extends the scientific concept of evolution, not through metaphorical application, but in consideration of its impact on the ways in which humans participate in, experience, and become conscious of the world. His belief that, “Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that every line must follow” (*Human* 152) establishes the foundation of his arguments for evolution as a phenomenon also affecting human perception and thinking. Teilhard states:

Whether we admit it or not, we have today no choice: we have all become ‘evolutionists’. Through the narrow Darwinian crack opened a century ago in zoology, the feeling of Duration has now so completely and permanently coloured the whole of our experience. (*Heart* 84)

Although he acknowledges the widespread impact of evolutionary concepts such that, “we all inevitably think and act as if the World were in a state of continual formation and transformation,” Teilhard also indicates that a greater potential exists for how evolution can function as both a concept and process in our thinking. He continues, “This is far from meaning, however, that this general frame of mind has yet reached its final and complete expression in our thought” (*Heart* 84).

In Teilhard’s theory, the complete expression of the concept of evolution as well as its fulfillment through the inseparability of matter and thought develops through the “thinking sphere” of the planet, which he calls the “noosphere.” Describing Teilhard’s perspective, writer David H. Lane states, “The term ‘Noosphere’ (Greek *Noos*, spiritual intellect) is perhaps the best known of Teilhard’s many neologisms” (Lane 9). However, both Teilhard and Russian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky are credited with originating this terminology. For Vernadsky, the “noosphere” describes the, “aware and conscious layer of the earth’s ecosystem,” and features an “awareness of interconnection” (Doyle 11). Similarly, for Teilhard, the noosphere exists as the, “thinking envelope of the biosphere,” as well as, “the conscious unity of souls” (*Vision* 63). Both thinkers considered this thinking layer to be a scientific phenomenon, inextricable from the material layers and evolution of life on earth.

Cooperative Ascent

For Teilhard, the noosphere exists in conjunction and overlapping with other scientifically identified spheres of life on earth, including the “central, metallic barysphere—surrounded by its rocky lithosphere—itself surmounted by the fluid layers

of hydrosphere and atmosphere” (*Human* 123). In addition to these four layers, the “living membrane” called the biosphere is connected to and extended by a “thinking layer” such that, “Over and beyond the biosphere there is a noosphere” (*Human* 123-124). Similar to the philosophy of Andy Clark (please see Chapters 1, 2, and 4), I find in Teilhard’s work another incidence of insisting that physical form is not separate from thinking. While Clark proposes an external scaffold of cognition brings brain, body, and world together, the biosphere and noosphere cooperate as natural phenomena that link the physical form with thinking in Teilhard’s work.

Teilhard provides an additional consideration of the impact of such a conjunction. Through the emergence of the noosphere, Teilhard constructs his understanding of the relationships between the development of human morphology, social connection, and cognitive progress. He proposes that it is the noosphere, “which is the final and supreme product in man of the forces of social ties” (*Nature* 81). The potential that this “supreme product” of the thinking sphere developed through social ties drives me to consider non-hierarchical possibilities for the progressive development of human consciousness.

In considering possibilities for an ascent of human consciousness, I notice how the movement potential of ascent differs from hierarchical placement at the top of a structure. Ascent need not be a rigid separation from or diminution of others as it might appear in a hierarchical system; instead, this movement can function more like a pulley structure enabling the rising and falling, ascending and descending, to be a cooperative cycle. As some individuals or aspects of the system are “called into greatest activity” (*Principles* 76), they may progress in growth, learning, or ability. Yet, this ascension can

positively impact not only the individual but also a larger scale of movement as the individual's growth is brought back into the system for the benefit of others.

Consciousness can encompass cooperative efforts between individuals over time such that an individual's ascent contributes to the movement of the system as a whole. In his metaphor based on the myth of Sisyphus, psychoanalyst and writer Silvano Arieti proposes that creativity operates as a force for such "cognitive ascent"(414). He proposes that, "contrary to Sisyphus, the creative man does not start from the foot of the mountain again, but from where other people have left off . . . accru[ing] collateral vistas to the experience of being human" (414). This "Sisyphus-in-reverse" stretches mind over time such that thinking creates a collaborative perspective and continuum of learning.

Re-Introduction

As I reconsider the question "What is nobility?" proposed at the beginning of my journey into this park, I find that it has surprisingly linked arms with insignificance. Rather than appearing to be oppositional, nobility and a sense of insignificance both reveal to me the importance of respecting the interconnection of all life. My sense of insignificance does not threaten my life but rather awakens my awareness that I am part of something greater—inextricable from the flow of total existence. Teilhard proposes that evolution "is extending itself with increasing speed beyond our own insignificant individual centers in the direction of a Complexity-Consciousness of planetary dimensions" (*Heart* 86). His proposal returns me to my attempt to understand the vitality of my insignificance.

As described at the beginning of this chapter, I am humbled by the ability of the sequoias to fall so completely. In my own journey, I have had my focus set on a point B (please see Chapter 4) that is a place of ascension—in a sense, the top of a hierarchical model. With this frame of reference, I have been seeking separation from the world as a way to pursue proximity to God. However, Teilhard's thinking makes me reconsider the importance of descending, and of falling completely as the sequoias do, rather than valuing my intended point B. I have had a selfish idea of what proximity to God means. Rather than separating from the rest of humanity in a quest to be closer to God, any truly spiritual ascent that I might pursue will hopefully involve a subsequent descent in which I may become a medium for the ascent of others. In the movement effort of ascending in order to descend, my own growth and life is not simply concerned for itself or hierarchical achievement, but rather participates as an inextricable part of a larger ecosystem and movement journey.

As I move through this landscape, I am constantly surrounded by the magnitude of Sequoias and the delicacy of butterflies. With one hasty move I can wound or kill these beautiful insects and vital pollinators. Even though my physical power seems diminished in the presence of such enormous trees, it reveals itself through its impact on all the life surrounding me. Perhaps nobility is not a measure of how much you are revered, but it is measured by how much you revere life.

Postlude to Chapter VIII

A Facet of the Body as Sensible Concept

In this chapter, the facet of “body as sensible concept” that became most prevalent for me is the notion that, “The one accustomed conjunction in which a human subject is also an object for itself is reflective thought” (*Parables* 127). For Massumi, this consideration emerges from one of Stelarc’s performances in which a prosthetic third hand is attached to the flesh of his right arm. This additional hand serves as a network connection and relays information about his physical gestures into a computer, which then feeds other impulses back into his body (*Parables* 126). Because “the body was acting instrumentally as a subject when it sent out meaningful information” as well as existing as object when it was on the “receiving end” of an inflow of information, Massumi suggests that the body functioned as both subject and object (*Parables* 127).

While Massumi states that, “the body is always and asymmetrically both a subject and an object,” he proposes that, “in normal human mode, it is a subject for itself and an object *for others*” (*Parables* 127). Stelarc’s prosthetic event further creates a different option in which, “it [the body] is a subject and object *for itself*—self-referentially” (*Parables* 127). Although in this particular experiment, Massumi explains that, “the networked coincidence of subject-object is neither reflective nor self-mirroring but rather operative and relaying,” he uses this example to bring to light another possibility for the body’s coexistence as subject and object for itself. In contrast to the aforementioned subject-object asymmetry, Massumi suggests that, “Reflective thought aspires to self-mirroring symmetry” (*Parables* 127). The nature of such self-mirroring symmetry

becomes particularly important when reflecting on systems in which one participates and perpetuates undesired thinking or action. For example, considering hierarchical structures in which I participate makes it necessary to examine my experience within the system (my felt condition as receptive object) and my responsibility for perpetuating it (my action as participating subject). Reflecting on simultaneous subject and object aspects of my involvement in any system, idea, or approach can perhaps illuminate a more complex and truthful engagement with such events and situations. In addition, this reflective thought can provide an assessment of and motivation for further self-responsibility to change or sustain a system.

The vitality of this phenomenon presents itself to me not only in the form of my own reflections and personal considerations, but perhaps also in the development of evolutionary thought itself. Teilhard highlights the contradictory nature of researchers failing to recognize the implications an observed process might have on them, particularly early evolutionists. In the process he further unveils attitudes towards body and mind and the association of subject with mind and object with body. Teilhard proposes:

Subject and object seem to tend almost irremediably to separate from each other in the act of knowing. We are continually inclined to isolate ourselves from the things and events surrounding us as though we were looking at them from outside, safely sheltered in an observatory where they could never reach us, as spectators rather than elements of what is happening. This explains why once the question of human origins was posed by the interlinking of life, it was restricted for such a long time to its somatic and bodily aspects. A long animal heredity could perfectly well have constructed our limbs. But our mind itself always emerged from the games whose moves it calculated. Even though the first evolutionists were such materialists, the idea never occurred to them that their own scholarly intelligence itself had anything to do with evolution. (*Human* 153)

While Teilhard concludes that, “Obviously humans could not become aware of evolution around them without feeling themselves borne up by it to some extent” (*Human* 153), I find that evolution as both a scientific phenomenon and model for thinking requires additional self-reflection in order to truly understand the ways in which we might be assessing, approaching, and even misappropriating these ideas.

Duties and Responsibilities

Instead of pursuing a “survival of the fittest” template for living, I am interested in how both survival and cognitive ascent rely on connection rather than competition. With the giant sequoias as landmarks of nobility, I found myself continually contemplating the French axiom *Noblesse oblige*, or the idea that nobility carries responsibility, during my research in this park. As previously mentioned, this research revealed to me the idea that nobility is not measured by how much one is revered but by how much one reveres life—including one’s own. Based on what I have learned from these magnificent trees, marks of such reverence include making space for other life, contributing to the benefit of a larger ecosystem in both one’s ascent and descent, as well as being as big as one is without harming anything else in the process of one’s growth and life. For these reasons, as I reflect on the practice of self-reflection itself, I can understand its potential function not only as a means of learning about oneself but also, and especially, applying that learning to the ethics of one’s engagement in the world. If self-reflection can exist as a noble act by virtue of its striving to respect, revere, and understand living, then perhaps one responsibility of this process of self-reflection is to

be changed by it. Taken collectively, the five data chapters in this dissertation trace, if not an evolution, at least a shift in my thinking and behavior based on what I have learned through this research. The interdependent actions of thinking and moving within this philosophical project do not stop within the boundaries of this text, but rather, continue to influence the ethics of my engagement in the world, as both active subject and object.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS: PUBLICLY PRIVATE: EFFORTS TOWARDS DEVELOPING AN ETHICS OF INTIMACY



Fig. 9. Private land within Joshua Tree National Park. (researcher's photograph)

Introduction

Sitting at the back of a spacious auditorium, I notice each new face that enters. Fewer than thirty people compose the audience, and we are dispersed throughout this room, which holds seats for hundreds of people. We are all listening intently to the Buddhist teacher Tulku Lobsang Rinpoche. Despite the fact that this auditorium is on a college campus, his message is not one that would be considered conventional scholarship. Instead, in a gentle but clear voice he describes a challenge that he observes

in U.S. culture—many of us have the privilege to obtain academic knowledge but have a deficit of self-knowledge. I smile at this reminder, having read an account of the importance of self-knowledge in a Sufi text a few days before this lecture. One of my prayers for days has been asking for help to better understand what has emerged through this dissertation writing. Beyond hearing the Ancient Greek aphorism, “Know thyself,” echo in my mind, the significance of self-knowledge has surfaced during this dissertation process as a vital component of my movement in the world.

After my first month in this Ph.D. program, I asked one of my professors to recommend some reading for me. She smiled as she refused to do so, and instead told me that I would find whatever I needed to stimulate my thinking on the back of cereal boxes, in fashion magazines, while walking down the street, in songs, and in any living encounter. She seemed to know me better than I knew myself at that point. The one scholar’s work that she suggested I explore was that of spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti. As a dutiful student, I located an old VHS recording of an interview with Krishnamurti at my local library. Although I was moved by his perspective and spiritual insights, after watching the interview, I somehow forgot to continue looking into his work. Yet, at the very end of this dissertation process, his words came back to me with new relevance:

What will bring peace is inward transformation, which will lead to outward action. Inward transformation is not isolation, is not withdrawal from outward action. On the contrary, there can be right action only when there is right thinking and there is no right thinking when there is no self-knowledge. (jkrishnamurti.org)

Many people have asked me why I enrolled in a Ph.D. program—was I hoping for better job prospects, a desire to publish writing, or a stronger research base? When I applied for this program, however, I actually was seeking another way to grow as a human being and artist. Taken all together the data chapters of this dissertation outline an evolution in my thinking, growth, and development of self-knowledge and hopefully also demonstrate the potential of performance to exist as a practice of developing consciousness and philosophical understanding—as well as the vital role philosophy can play in human growth. The data chapters act as companions to one another, reflecting, refracting, and expanding each other, yet they do not present a simple linear idea of change over time. Chapter 4 presents an interest in orientation and knowing, while Chapter 6 finds me in the midst of disorientation, not knowing, and dissolution of self-direction. Chapter 5 examines alarm and hopelessness that impede movement while Chapter 7 presents the potential of love to ameliorate those impediments. Chapter 8 continues to bring the story together by acknowledging each of the previous steps and proposing non-hierarchical interconnection as a means of understanding my integrated action, thinking, and movement in the world.

Into-me-see

Beyond the scope of this dissertation, I am currently working on a performance project in which I am creating and commissioning a total of 100 solos that explore different physical and conceptual perspectives on female sainthood. After performing one of those solos, I suddenly understood something more about this dissertation project. In this particular dance, the choreographer himself sits inches away from me while I move.

Although it might seem that I am performing for him, my experience of the piece is that what is occurring is not between him and me personally. Instead, what is emerging is the presence of the body as sensible concept. The performance event reveals a “felt conjunction” between perceiving and perceived (Massumi *Parables* 95), the implications of which are “felt first before being thought-out,” (Massumi *Parables* 100) where “what infolds is also unfolding” (Massumi *Parables* 94). My body becomes a medium of intimacy as the event of movement coming through my form creates an opportunity for closeness and communion.

However, I forget that people are seeing a human woman when they look at me during this performance. While some audience members interpreted this performance situation as an exemplification of the male gaze since a male choreographer/power figure sits watching a female body, I felt something much different happening. He is merely a stand-in for every other individual in the audience. His proximity to me seeks to serve as a way for each audience member to imagine himself/herself participating in that closeness. And, that closeness is not merely proximity to me as a personality, but rather closeness to whatever is moving me and moving through me.

In a similar way, the elucidation of self-knowledge that takes place in this dissertation writing seeks to bring you closer to my experiences, but mostly for the sake of bringing you into your own process of self-reflection. Social worker Bill Herring proposes that, “the best definition of ‘intimacy’ is simply ‘into-me-see’”(Herring). In this way, I imagine myself as a window—a transparent opening through which, by seeing into me, you can hopefully see something more than just me. By making my private thoughts

and experiences public, I am seeking to create a space that illuminates a proximity and interpenetration between interior and exterior worlds, as their surfaces press against and slide through each other. Yet, for me, this interpenetration necessitates what I discuss in Chapter 1 as an “impassioned integrity” that composes philosophical inquiry. How might I pursue an expansion of my private experiences into a public sphere with integrity?

As I mention in Chapter 2, perhaps no one is more surprised by the form this dissertation writing has taken than I am. My preference for a written product would be a highly abstract philosophical treatise, while what has emerged during this process is a series of very personal letters to the reader. Although these letters may contain abstract philosophical perspectives, I nestle them into a story of my own discovery so that the reader has a body and narrative in which to find a tangible foundation. Beyond the communicative function of these letters is another emerging philosophical project that addresses my interest in integrity—a developing ethics of intimacy. What constitutes an ethics of intimacy for me? This question has been at the forefront of my effort throughout the dissertation writing process. Yet I am still seeking to further unfold my understanding of an ethics of intimacy between body and landscape, performer and viewer, and reader and writer as my work continues into the future.

As I engage in the present dissertation writing and contemplate this future work, I have found myself returning to the past, especially childhood memories. In her book *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings*, choreographer, performer, and teacher Susan Rethorst uncovers her ways of thinking about movement by recounting childhood memories that reveal early evidence of how she perceives herself and the

world around her. Terming this period of life her “childscape,” Rethorst reflects on the terrain of her inner experience as a child in order to articulate the underpinnings of her adult choreographic mind. She writes, “the inclination to wonder at movement and to assign it significance was there from at least age three” (Rethorst 50). During the process of writing this dissertation, I consulted a dance scholar and colleague to get her advice about the fact that my own childhood memories were emerging as a substantial component of my thinking. She recommended Rethorst’s book to me (which I had not read at the time) as an example of how sharing these early memories can provide the reader with another window—a way to see into the mind of the author and by extension to gain insight into our own lives.

Transparency and Remembrance

Seeing into the mind of the author does not necessitate stopping with the author’s own story, but rather provides the opportunity to use such a narrative as a doorway into greater understanding. In describing her spatial awareness and memory as a child, Rethorst recounts a story of how her mother came to rely on her internal map of the Safeway store when organizing a grocery list. She states, “I would walk her down the virtual aisles, telling her what we were passing, and she would see through me what she would otherwise forget” (15). This poignant statement about allowing another person to see through oneself what she might otherwise forget sits at the heart of my desire to share my own personal stories.

As I share in Chapter 1, when I was a little girl, I heard a story in church that continues to shape my efforts as a dancer. This story described a woman who had no

money to put in the offering plate one Sunday. As the collection plate arrived in her lap, she placed it on the floor instead and stood inside it, stating that she was offering herself. I immediately recognized that action as my desire—to be an offering. The relating of this story is not intended to simply introduce me to the reader but, rather, through this introduction to also remind the reader of a similar impulse she may have had—a childhood glimpse into who she would become. Such a reminder hopes to reignite the passion that the reader feels for her own purpose and movement through this life, not only to show her mine.

For me, an ethics of intimacy includes creating space and respect for differences between people's purposes and understandings, while acknowledging one's own vantage point. Rethorst begins to unveil her own dawning recognition of difference when she reveals, "As children do, as I had done with mom and the Safeway, I thought that everyone must share similar sorts of interior landscape" (50). This assumption is certainly easy to make, but by opening a doorway into my interior experience, I am not proposing that my perception and conception are the only ways to understand a self or the world. Although I can sometimes unconsciously assume that everyone experiences the world as I do, the process of writing this dissertation has further taught me that speaking for myself and of myself can provide readers with a point of contact or point of orientation, instead of a dominating monolithic presumption that some ineffable "we" act or think in a certain way. The point of contact, the "I," can become the reader's friend, with whom she sometimes shares similar experiences and with whom she can also freely differ in perception and action.

An illustration of this friendship principle between reader and writer exists for me within Rethorst's work, as I find comfort and resonance in what she writes. Her writing invites me to be as I am, and permits me to differ from her while sharing a similar interest in movement. For example, Rethorst describes that the way she perceived others became a means by which she conceived of them perceiving her. In this way, she "assumed that everybody was looking at how people moved and drawing conclusions from it; that everybody was reading everybody, and probably with dead on acumen, certainly seeing through me" (50). By assuming that other people's internal experiences matched her own she concluded that, "through movement, we revealed ourselves for all the world to see" (51). I carry similar presumptions and feel utterly revealed in performance by the sheer nature of the fact that others are witnessing my body, and particularly my body moving. Therefore, it often does not feel startling for me to reveal personal information in text because I assume that it is already visibly written on my body. If you have seen me move, I assume you know more than I could tell you.

While Rethorst and I might actually have somewhat similar interior landscapes, they have perhaps permeated our outer worlds in distinct ways. Again, I find resonance with Rethorst's reasoning that, "I was transparent (so I thought) and thus, already so on view that there was little need to explain myself" (51). Rethorst attributes her shyness to this phenomenon, while for me, it often presents itself as genuine confusion—I honestly sometimes don't understand what people don't understand. However, my assumption that people can see through me and that, therefore, there is no need to explain myself has led to a frequent truncation of my thinking in previous writing. I would discard any material

that I thought was part of the thinking process and simply present the concluding ideas (offering point “B” to the reader while not sharing the point “A” of departure or any traveling between the two—please see Chapter 4). In doing so, I found that the writing was often difficult for people to understand, despite the fact that I thought the conclusions were obvious (no doubt because I had been privy to the process as well).

A turning point in this situation arose at the end of my doctoral coursework when a colleague and I were practicing presenting our research to one another in preparation for a more public event. After I had completed the reading of my paper, she excitedly declared that instance to be the first time she had really understood my work. After talking with her and the chair of my dissertation committee, it became clear that in that particular presentation I invited the audience into my thinking process rather than simply sharing my conclusions. Similarly, in this dissertation, it is through sharing what I know to be private, or belonging to my interior realm, that I am seeking to enhance the comingling of reader and writer as well as our potential to travel together through a thinking process. The effort of allowing you to see into me seeks to provide a way for you to see through me into yourself and your own movement.

Proximity and Connection

Much of what I explore in this dissertation writing is a journey through both knowing and not knowing, or as Patty Lather describes (please see Chapter 4), “that weave of knowing and not knowing, which is what knowing is” (49). This weaving illustrates another component for defining “intimacy,” which is a sense of closeness. For me, the proximity between knowing and not knowing does not position them as

opposites, but rather reveals their inextricability as mutually supportive aspects of learning. A sense of closeness between knowing and not knowing, between body and landscape, between human and Divine, and between public and private permeates this dissertation project and writing for me. Such closeness manifests through actual physical proximity as well as through a sense of deep connection.

Since I feel a deep connection between my physical form and the body of the earth, I tend to regard both types of matter as intelligent terrains. Yet, when describing my body as a landscape in the past, I have often been accused of objectifying myself as a woman—a strange collision of my private experience within public discourse. As I describe in Chapter 3, one of the initial impulses for the dance *Significant Figures* was to present a subtle conjunction of my interior and exterior worlds. Following the completion of the movement sequence in the original version of this dance, I would write, “My inner world is a post-‘the male gaze’ society,” inside the outlined form of my body—a statement that emerged as a way for me to re-imagine such a collision of my internal and external worlds. The performance led me to consider what kind of world I want to imagine and to help create as a woman, performer, and philosopher; that is, a world in which levels of intimacy between bodies and landscapes deepen our understanding of both, rather than reinforce assumptions about objectification of material substance.

By performing this work in a variety of different external terrains during this project, I continued to enjoy the expansion these physical terrains and material events provided for developing internal understanding, or the movement of my thinking. By writing about many of those internal understandings, I find myself seeking to contribute

or bring back into the material world that which was revealed to me through it. This cycling and return coincides with the non-linear change I describe earlier in this chapter—an understanding of evolution as connection. The ethics of change for me lies in a consideration of how I attempt to move within the proximities and connections that emerge.

As I describe my desire to be close to God in chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, I track an evolution in my understanding of what that proximity can mean. In Chapter 8, I conclude that I have had a selfish idea of what proximity to God involves and what kind of movement is necessary for reaching that closeness. Near the end of this dissertation process, I found myself reading a surprising consideration of closeness in a text detailing the life, prayers, and letters of 17th century Carmelite monk Brother Lawrence. Entitled *The Practice of the Presence of God*, this book describes Brother Lawrence's intimate connection with God and his effort to make every action an expression of love for the Divine. The introduction to this book explains, however, that, "The great mystery of prayer, as the life of Brother Lawrence shows, is that this single minded concern for God does not lead us away from people but, to the contrary, closer to them" (11). Rather than separating from the rest of humanity or the material earth in a quest to be closer to God, any truly spiritual journey that I might pursue will hopefully involve subsequently, or even simultaneously, drawing closer to other people.

What does moving closer to others make possible? Considering this sense of proximity to others reminded me that many months ago I was contemplating a similar type of closeness to people, which I had written in my notes but not yet been able to

describe in this dissertation: “Friendship as a medium of learning.” Sharing myself and my experiences with a reader in the intimate way that I might share my experiences with a friend helps me learn about myself. The fact of the reader’s existence has generously provided me a space in which to reflect upon, synthesize, and articulate my understandings. In a similar way, I hope that reading this writing provides a journey in which the reader can also learn about herself by coming into contact with my experiences.

My movement is an invitation. By opening one particular pathway of motion, I am hoping to reawaken others’ sense of movement potential and to extend the invitation to explore a journey into self-knowledge. Although I might never know the reader, I care about her desires for movement. By writing to her, I am seeking to invite her into an uncommon friendship and intimacy. While she and I might never meet, our shared interest in movement causes our paths to cross in the text. Just as the public land of our national parks belongs to all of us and somehow holds us all despite, with, and through our differences, I regard the efforts contained in this dissertation project as belonging to everyone who comes into contact with the writing. It is not simply *my* private thoughts recorded in the form of a dissertation but, rather, seeks to be a public act of friendship—and as friendship, a medium for learning and movement.

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