

EMILY WELTHER

LANDSCAPE OF LIVENESS;

RE/TELLING PLANT-HUMAN
STORIES THROUGH LIVE PERFORMANCE

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THROUGH LIVE PERFORMANCE

EMILY WELTHER
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Emily Welther to Master Performance Practices,
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HOME OF
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PRACTICES

2021

SYNOPSIS

This thesis disseminates the research *Re/telling Plant-Human Stories* that I carried out as part of the Master of Arts Program at Home of Performance Practices, ArtEZ, the Netherlands. It looks at ways to re/imagine plant and human bodies, and asks: what stories emerge through the re/enmeshment of natureculture, and do these stories bring me physically, metaphorically, and/or virtually closer to the vegetal world? The urgency to find solutions for current and future climate crises, and to de-centralize the human from its self-appropriating position within the natural world propels this research to zoom-in and amplify micro-moments of human-plant part-nership. Imagining the plant, the human, technology, and language as larger bodies consisting of micro-moving and intra-acting fragments, this research reveals the unknown to be irremovable parts-of them. Methods used were Practice-Based Research, Multimodal Storytelling, Digital Experiments, Reflection, and Literature Review, which informed the trajectory of the research, and led to both the Phenomenological Inventory and the digital documentations of my encounters with plants. Culminating in a multimodal, live performance, the re/telling of stories begins in the moment of performing and re/membering, and continues as a changed and re/discovered artistic practice. Major findings revealed that the human is inextricably entangled in an

environment it curates and operates within, and that attempts at amplifying the periphery are themselves not enough to change its positioning. To further explore such concepts of de-anthropocentrism and re/entangling, the amplification of peripheral bodies/technologies/language needs to happen not only by focusing on their parts but by approaching their unknowns. The significance of this research is the furthering of discourses about the invisible/inaudible/unknown through a movement, sound, and image perspective. Additionally, it re/considers the location and situatedness of the performing and/or operating human within a performance. Implications in the longer-term lead to a changed perception and a re/enmeshed body, resulting from the practice of shifting focus to the periphery and to the spaces and voids within it. Through this research, my perceptions of the backdrop, the periphery, and the presence of particular plants have intensified; their impressions have touched me and these re/main.

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Last but not least, heartfelt gratitude goes to my husband, Klaas Voigt, and my daughters, Pella and Lovi, for their willingness to let me explore new things in far-off places and for giving me space to explore them at home too.

DECLARATION

I, Emily Welther, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, Landscape of Liveness; Re/Telling Plant-Human Stories Through Live Performance.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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INTRODUCTION

I began this research wanting to re/tell plant-human stories in order to re/think humanity's current positioning in the world, to bring the vegetal world closer by looking at specific plants in the periphery, to explore multimodal touch, and to see how these experiences affected my own biologically-technologically entangled body.

In being an artist and a human aware of the ecologies around her, perceptible to and perceiving the living nonhuman bodies within them, I asked myself: how can I take myself out of the center? How can I re/move myself to become aware of the periphery? Does magnifying the outer bark of unpretentious trees, or singular blades within tufts of grass, allow me to become less perceptible within the larger scape of land? Similarly, in focusing on my anatomy and its micromovements, does the bigger image of me dissolve, and might that be a way to perceive my body differently, to mute (in moments) other matterings of me?

Dissatisfied with theoretical approaches of de-anthropocentrism in current post-body discourse, I experimented with my own theories of the body in the world and my moving body on stage. I delved into Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti's theories that nature and culture are co-evolving, already-entangled concepts; that humans,

as cyborgs, are enmeshed with technology and linked to nonhuman life by the energy of *zoé* (Harraway, 1991, 5-6; Braidotti, 2013, 60). However, in much of this discourse, the post-body remains quite literally a body, tethered to the human and to language. Re/imagining the body as a constellation of fragments allowed me to focus on the micromovements between intra-acting human and plant parts. Observing and listening to the intricacies and minute details of particular plants, I also discovered the multimodality of touch.

This research contains three parts: 1) the development of the Phenomenological Inventory, which became a digital and tactile catalog documenting my encounters with selected plants; 2) Digital Technology Experiments, which included the discovering of, learning about, and utilizing digital technologies, both the hardware of camera, lenses, microphones, and the software of video- and sound-editing programs; and 3) the re/entanglement of both parts.

Throughout the research, parts one and two informed the further development of each, as well as the experiments which led towards the composition of the final performance. Already-always entangled, the live, phenomenological encounters became documentations of digitally recorded sounds and images. This continuous enmeshment led to the idea of touch as a way to specify both the moments of digital/biological intersection and leaf/microphone intra-action.

Nevertheless, part three, the re/entanglement, remained elusive until the final rehearsals for the performance. Looking for ways of re/entangling the already enmeshed videos, sounds, and movement practices, I curated a multimodal landscape, and, while moving within it, discovered re/entangling by re/membering.

The findings of this research have determined the steps needed to approach a multimodal re/entangling within an artistic research and a performance space, as well as led to fundamental changes in my perception of the periphery. Beginning with already-entangled natureculture bodies, these findings reveal the re/entangling as the re/imagined and re/membered sounds and movements of plant-human intra-actions. Furthermore, the equally relevant void can be touched upon by an amplified human-plant part-nership. Recording, speaking, and listening to sounds as a way to touch vegetal life has fundamentally changed my practice and opened up new fields to inhabit. Major findings for the broader field of performance are the visual and audio documentations that explicate the micro intra-actions of human and plant parts, while attesting to the void as part-of both. The addition of this knowledge to the field can bring awareness to and inspire critical thought about the kinds of touch humans currently share with vegetal life in the natural world; as well as how multimodal touch can bring peripheral plants closer.

This thesis invites the reader to encounter the chapters as singular stories that have emerged out of this research and its dissemination. Stories are broken up into s/to,ri e.s; diffractive portals leading into the plant-human realm. Story 1) introduces the human-plant part-ners and how they began coming closer; Story 2) tells how the larger landscape narrowed down to singular plants; Story 3) explains why the body needs to be re/imagined as fragments; Story 4) describes the practices leading towards the phenomenological inventory; Story 5) delves into digital experimentation and the methods used to clarify modes of touch; Story 6) leads towards re/entangling by including the processes of en/ and de/entangling; Story 7) situates the research within the broader field, expanding into sonic art, while re/instating the urgency of voice; Story 8) re/positions the human by part-nering with the void. This research, which looks for the imperceptible body by amplifying its s t-or,i es an/ db o;d,ie)s, must begin with a perceptible body; so I take my own. Each story is already entangled with each/other/story; each enmeshment can be broken into its parts and, here and now, re/membered.

STORY 1: COMING CLOSER



figure 1

TOWARDS THE HUMAN

As a human body, I am encoded and imprinted with the knowledge I have gained through remembered and forgotten encounters. My body contains the lived experiences and memories of desert-dwelling and mountain rambling; of rolling, dancing, and falling with jointed anatomy and curious mind; of being woman and mother. I am encoded with each present moment and with all that my body holds and lets go. Irrefutably porous, I am also encoded with void.

TOWARDS THE PLANT

The plant begins nestled in its seed in the deep underground. Growing down- and upwards, it touches nutrients, water, and

light. Leaves transform the sunlight into matter, invisible to my eyes. This vibrant, unassuming body is adamantly emitting frequencies, yet I hear only the sound of wind blowing through it. Have I become temporarily part of its ecology? My hand reaches; how close do we come before we touch?

COMING CLOSER

My body is *coming closer*¹ to the weed/flower/tree/plant; part of me travels towards part of it, and I ask: is there an exchange, an intra-action, a dialogue in traveling towards, and what happens when (finally, theoretically) surface meets surface? Learning to listen, sounds arise from these locations and moments of intra-action, and I attempt to hear these minuscule vibrations, imagining an equally felt pressure of contact. Imagining beyond the physical limitations of the body, I am coming closer by observing the underside of a leaf while lying down far below it. My shadow extending to its trunk, the tree touches me, touches tree.

TOWARDS THE STOR(IES)

Within the scope of the research, possible plant-human stor(ies) begin as I contemplate *closer*, and tempt *touching*; as I imagine and re/imagine our physical, remembered, ephemeral, and documented encounters. The stor(ies)

¹ Coming closer implies not-yet close or close enough to another body, while implicitly questioning if close is an attainable destination. The movement of coming indicates a traveling from one place to a slightly nearer one, while closer speaks of infinity; almost-there and almost-touching.

that emerge are themselves part of many other stor(ies), becoming s,to;rie)s, which, when decomposed into matter and voids, continue to fragment into ch-ap-ter and sub-ch-ap:te,r, sect/ions and sub(sect/ions:

There is a woman,

a human, a body, a spine, a thought, a word.

There is a plant,

a leaf, a root, vibrations, responses.

There is a story,

a concept, a category; boxes, structures, frameworks.

There is technology,

hard-soft-ware, micro-head-phones, loud-speakers; language

There is an urgency to fragment,

to dis-integrate, to re-view the void and de-body the body into its constituent and unknown parts; to re/imagine *touch* and to let perception, of the peripheral natural world, shift. The urgency to re/lease the human from its encoded-ness so that it can be *touched* by vegetal life.

STORY 2: BEFORE-IT-BEGINS

The story begins before the actual here and now, in January when I was visiting an old forest near where I live, west of Cologne in Germany. It begins inside this forest, in between tall beech trees on a cold winter morning. There was a monochrome to my surroundings; gray sky and brown-gray bark of the trees. Except for the unusually vibrant green moss growing on fallen branches, there was only a narrow pallet of color and stillness in the air.

Inspired by Annette Arlander's work, and my experiments of performing in an open field during the Dramaturgical Practices Module, I began this research with the intention to perform-with the neighboring landscapes (Arlander, 2012, 9). In the forest, I set up my camera, not unlike Arlander, to capture a wide area of forest and put myself in the frame. I stood in between the trees, in a slight opening where I could potentially move my body. I let my eyes wander, opened my ears to hear beyond the sounds of branches creaking and leaves crackling. I felt the frigid air touch my skin. I took a deep breath and began to shift my weight, raise my arms, take a step, turn.

It is winter and the trees are still. I am no more alive than they; my liveness is just more superficial. I am shivering.

I am too inconsistent as a human, moving my body in far greater amounts and speeds than do the moss or ferns in this landscape. The skin of my hands dries and cracks. It's as if nothing happens to the trees, their movement is so slow. I am impatient, distracted, afraid of being irrelevant to my surroundings. I move to make myself visible, to feel my body, to be conscious of everything possible for me to be conscious of, to see this, hear that, feel this, smell that...

Standing in the middle of the forest in January, I practiced opening up my senses and skin not only to the visible, living bodies of the landscape but also to the air, the temperature, and the sounds. In this highly awake state, the landscape became densely complex and overstimulating. As I listened, the sounds within it extended far beyond what I could see. How could I possibly perform-with a place that consisted of innumerable and invisible bodies, vibrations, and sensations? Arriving at similar fundamental questions in her research, Arlander decided "to see the trees for the forest," suggesting that the overgeneralization of a place or idea will also oversimplify its particularities. Calling the landscape a landscape hinders the necessary specificity needed to change our relationship to it, Arlander argues. My experience in the forest clarified that I, too, needed to focus on the "remarkable and unremarkable" within it (Arlander, 2021, para. 3); so, I chose its inhabitants.

The decision to attend to plants informed the trajectory of the research as well as my artistic practice. In deciding to focus on plants growing in their habitats, I could exclude their house-bound or potted relatives. Choosing plants that grew in the agricultural fields or newly planted nature reserves near my home, as opposed to those in older, undisturbed areas, could have potentially invited certain problematics in determining the "wildness" of a place or its inhabitants. However, it was essential to keep this research practical and manageable, and because of COVID restrictions, to stay close to my home. Therefore, the narrowing of the landscape to about a 5km radius eliminated some of those dilemmas.

Back in January, I gathered my camera, tripod, and cell phone, and left the forest to look for the trees. However, I found, along the way, the blackberries.

STO-R,Y 3: WHAT DO ALL THESE FRAGMENTS MEAN?

Much of my artistic practice within HOPP included filming and editing short videos, and in these, I tended to zoom-in towards the micro-details within an image. Throughout the Technologies of Delivery and Screendance modules, the images that I recorded were often only sections of the body or its surroundings. These tendencies led to a more philosophical query into fragmentation, both as an artistic gesture and as a philosophical base for the research. Furthermore, I was inspired by feminist, post-body, and queer theorists and their concepts of a re-figured body. Donna Haraway unpacks the human as an integrated hybrid of technology and biology (1991, 60); Rosi Braidotti opens up realms beyond the singular, normative subject of Humanism, finding the life-energy of *zoè* at its core (2013, 26); and Astrida Neimanis re-figures the body as water, which infiltrates, flows, and joins the waters of all other bodies (2017, 65).

These re-mixed and re-figured bodies inherently changed my perceptions of the body itself. As I contemplated boundaryless, gushing, and seeping fluids instead of their porous containers, the liquids of sticky sap, dewy grass, and human sweat intermingled, becoming multidimensional and multimodal more-than-bodies (Neimanis, 2017, 66).

Perceiving water instead of its container drew my attention to all its wet parts; water as a possible periphery to its fleshy mass. I reflected on how I perceived my own body; extended, flexible, and skeletal; vulnerable, malleable, and emotional. It began to occur to me that the fluidly flowing waters were stuck within the fragmented and disjointed perception I had of myself. Returning to Haraway, I struggled with the co-evolving techno/bio cyborg, because it still insisted on a body. I questioned how Braidotti's more-than-human could be explored when language was essential to explain it. I needed another re/imagined body that incorporated these theories as parts-of it, instead of as one encompassing concept. As a result, I began to break apart the idea of sweat into its cyborg parts, re/using language to do it: water, salt, bacteria, hydrogen, sugar, oxygen, urea; how you are a genre.

In the workshop, *Demystifying Algorithmic Approaches*, as part of the Wild Bodies Module, we looked at the algorithmic black box as a container which conceals its inner functions as it in- and outputs, while also containing an infinite number of smaller black boxes; a dissolution of the inside/outside dichotomy. Slowly a metaphor materialized for my queries, which I called, the red box². Re-imagining the body as a

² The red box defies the category, the container, the genre, the gender, the medium, the structure, the system, the concept. It refuses integrations of the body, is not lured into the illusion of individuality nor enticed by the ambitiousness of multiplicity. The red box invites the re-imagining of the body as fragments; becoming itself, as a result, imprecise.

red box that contains and releases immeasurable other bodies/red boxes, offered me a way to focus my attention on its micro parts. Rather than putting these pieces together, each fragment, in continuous micromovement, intra-relates with each other fragment, touching and resonating in lively liveness.

The re-imagined body as a constellation of fragments grew throughout my research with plants. My encounters through the Phenomenological Inventory led to experimenting with one particular aspect; the touch between parts-of my body and parts-of a plant. The concepts of touch overlapping fragments generated poem-pieces and continuous-questions:

*Does touch makes parts perceivable
Or is perceiving parts touch?*

Curious as to how humans and plants could come closer if they were imagined as fragments-that-touch, I began to develop the Phenomenological Inventory.



figure 2

S)TO-R,Y 4: PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVENTORY

"If vegetal being is to be at all, it must remain an integral part of the milieu wherein it grows. Its relation to the elements is not domineering: the receptivity of the flower and of the leaf is obvious in how they turn their widest surfaces to the sun, while the root imbibes everything it encounters in the dark recesses of the soil..." (Marder, 2013, 69).

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

On a relatively warm day in February, I took my bike, my camera, tripod, and an audio recorder with a clip-on microphone, and drove to a large field. I looked for a clearing in the bushes to set up, alone and undisturbed. I made my way through the thorny branches of a hawthorn tree and over blackberry brambles and found two, tall trees. Not quite sure how to begin collecting materials for the inventory, I sat and simply watched the trees. Soon after, I got out the audio recorder and described what I saw: pale, bark-less branches against the bright sky. The vocal descriptions led me to approach this particular tree and, in closer proximity, I saw its fissures, cracks, and intricate colorings. I took the camera and recorded as close to it as I could get. The sun was behind me and my own shadow was cast onto it; my head-shadow fitting into the dark crevices of broken bark, and my hand-shadow holding the camera tracing its smooth surface. I took a step back, looked again, and put my hand in those cracks. Setting the camera on the tripod this time, I recorded our physical and shadowy touch.

During these first encounters, I began to realize that I was entering an infinite world that would, both immediately and over time, change me. The pull I felt in wanting to come closer to the vegetal realm intensified as I read and learned about philosophical and artistic work with them. Plants' complex ways of communicating within their species, their chemical exchanges with insects and animals to attract pollinators, and their emittance of vibrations which rise in frequency and amount during times of stress, are fascinating facts that confirm an invisible/inaudible world within which we co-exist (Khait, et al, 2019, 2). Attempting to "unlearn the objectifying approach to the world" (Marder, 2013, 71), these encounters informed each step my practice took in coming closer to the minute detail and faint vibration, while ultimately leading towards the development and documentations of the Phenomenological Inventory. Up close, parts that had been inaudible, invisible, and unknown slowly became perceptible; these led to the practice of recognizing those parts in me.

APPROACHING PHENOMENOLOGY

Merleau-Ponty and Perception

Aware that, in being human, my perceptions of the world are intrinsically connected to my body, I turned to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and realized that I must begin with the body before attempting to fragment it. In entering the field, I am a human approaching a blackberry bush, observing its green and imagining its roots. I recognize

it as a bushy body, complex with thorns, prickly leaves, and pliable branches, and remember past summers with blood-stained scratches on my legs like the dark red juice of the blackberry flesh. I think about getting close without getting scratched. I reflect on skin-prickling pain, on porous fibers; I gather past and present observations, and imagine those in the immediate future.

Yet such a practice does not begin to touch upon perception as Merleau-Ponty considers it. According to him, "we must ... avoid saying that our body is in space, or in time" (1945, 161, italics mine), in order to avoid a continuous fluidity between internal thoughts and external stimuli. We must resist falling into the trap of remembering while sensing, because doing so reduces the potentiality of bodies and world into matters of knowledge, into the listing of qualities, attributes, or other reflective descriptions that are a collage of memories. He argues that we need to perceive the body as inhabiting space and time in order to approach "an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible" (1945, 26). Inhabiting the world instead of being in it would allow past, present, and future to dissolve, and I suggest, would invite particular moments of intra-action; other ways of coming closer and being in.

Exploring other ways of perceiving human-plant bodies allowed me to re/consider how to inhabit space and time with

a plant part-ner. In focusing on finger meeting leaf, the larger concepts of space, time and experience became enmeshed with the encounter. Put inside the red box, the body-in-the-world fragmented into in-body-the-world, which, in a continuous fracturing, revealed body-as-parts-in-the-world; and, significant to my research, world-as-parts-in-the-body.

Marder and Plant-Thinking

In contemplating how to carry out phenomenological encounters with a plant, I asked myself a set of questions. Wanting to approach phenomenology like Merleau-Ponty, without minimizing the senses or prioritizing the qualities of that which I meet over its descriptions, I asked: how can I approach perceiving a plant without being inundated with memories, thoughts, or reflections of it? In creating this inventory beyond a factual or descriptive listing of the attributes of plants, I looked for ways to perceive them differently, refusing to re/enforce our visible and physical boundaries. I attempted to think as it does; to understand “a basic layer of experience... in spontaneous accord with the intentions of the moment” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 25; Marder, 2013, 10). I began with Marder’s parameters in approaching plant-thinking:

“Plant-thinking refers, in the same breath, to (1) the non-cognitive, non-ideational, and non-imagistic mode of thinking proper to plants (“thinking without the head”); (2) the human thinking about plants; (3) how human thinking is, to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the vegetal world; and finally, (4) the ongoing symbiotic relation between this transfigured thinking and the existence of plants” (Marder, 2013, 10).

Marder’s parameter 3), “how human thinking is.. altered by its encounter”, was obvious in observing a hyacinth:

*I dare not touch this pure and perfect flower,
Yet, in passing its perfumed proximity,
mini molecules enter me.*

Remembering the hyacinth later, my thoughts diffract to include not only the image imprinted in me but other meanings and memories I have of white, frail, and luring beings. “Thinking non-cognitively” was only possible close to the plant; grasping the weeping birch’s curved, scratchy branch, the nerve endings at my fingertips jolting through my sacrum and up my spine before wedging themselves at my cortex, invoking colors and visual sensations. These brief moments intrigued me, and I continued to practice suspending my thinking head and its insistence on verbal reflections while observing these micromoving details.

Yet in exploring Marder’s parameters by attempting these particular kinds of plant-thinking, I eventually stumbled. Regardless of how much I adapted my body and its ways of perceiving to think differently, of how much I warded off words, my own fleshy, quick, boney, body-thinking-plant remained very much human. Attempting to lie as still as the crocus flowers, they were suddenly no longer still, blowing about in gusty winds. Again I thought thoughts: how can I

embody their temporality? I have practiced slowing down the movements of my body, releasing my face into the soil; yet now, at this very moment, the crocuses are bending and waving with the wind; again, they are out of reach and far from me.

Barad and Touch

Karen Barad, as a Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness, argues for an onto-ethical-epistemology in practices of determining matter and mattering, and suggests that intra-action is the necessary, preliminary step towards becoming matter or mattering. Her play with and re/structuring of new word-roots offers her a language with which to interweave (intra-weave?) queer and feminist with quantum field and quantum entanglement theories. She disjoints words to question their meanings and in doing so, invites new ones. In quite visible examples, I notice how, on a letter-level, words touch each other, touch the eyes, and touch the psycho-physical body that sees, reads, and absorbs them. She argues for allowing the microcosm to influence the macrocosm, insisting that human and ethical matters be understood through quantum field theories on a particle level of matter; that the moments of movement preceding becoming are what matters (2015, 387-9). Using the example of the electron, which is in constant and continuous contact with its void, she plays with words

and meanings that are absent or de-void of meaning (that matters). The potential of the unknown emerges:

"I am an electron. I am inseparable from the darkness, the void. This [void] annihilates me. I cannot be, and yet - an excruciating impossibility - I am."
(Barad, 2015, 414)

In constant contact with the void, yet still matter-ing; this touch between matter and void is, like any touch, not a meeting of surfaces but an electromagnetic repulsion. My body, on a particle level, never really touches another yet, something happens between and through us; energies intra-sect. I overlap these thoughts with Marder's text in my practicing, changing body, while Braidotti hovers nearby. I come to this conclusion: the unknown at my particle level correlates to the unknown at the particle level of a plant; void touching void. I wonder if it is not *zoé* which is the common denominator among living bodies, but rather this unknown? Merleau-Ponty returns here because, as much as I try, I cannot determine how the plant perceives itself nor the fleshy body in front of it:

".. somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures.. coming from I know not what.. another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own and for a moment I live in it..." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 11).

I can only "live" in my perception of the plant; can only imagine that its alterity, on a particle level, touches mine. Nevertheless, in perceiving the plant, I become part-of its fluctuating environment; its nondominated other. Marder continues: "exposure to the other, typical of plants... denotes

the ethical mode of subjective being." Approaching "exposure to the other" while "open(ing) ourselves up to the other" as the plant does; letting its "private world (become) grafted onto our own", could allow the voids-as-others to become essential part-ners. Significant to this research, I suggest: might not "exposure" to our touching voids invite the already present plant-parts in us to flourish (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 11; Marder, 2013, 69)?

Continuing Barad's line of questioning, "can we trans/form, regenerate, dismember, re-member anew fleshly bodies in their materiality" (2015, 411), I would ask: can we re-member anew vegetal bodies and our plant-parts? If "every level of touch... is itself touched by all possible others" (2015, 399), then the plant, in opening itself up to all other elements, is already doing that. It touches me, as its other, even before finger touches leaf.

Throughout the Phenomenological Inventory, I attempted to open myself up to all others as a video, audio, and movement practice; coming closer through shifts in perception, in remembering, and in approaching possible voids. In seeing, hearing, and feeling the sun-eating, light-transforming, low frequency-producing plant, I intra-act with it as one of its infinite others. The documentations and reflections on these encounters and my positioning in the landscape coalesce into s)to-r,ies, and I come to this conclusion: a plant-part-human-part intra-action allows the plant to matter more (to me), while releasing me into mattering less.

S)TO-R,Y(5: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY EXPERIMENTS

"To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically... it is a constant interplay with the perception of the moment compared with remembered experience... Sometimes what is heard is interpreted... in milliseconds to many years later, or never" (Oliveros, TEDx Talks, 2015).

TOUCHING SOUND

The audio recording part of the inventory began with a portable recording device with two integrated microphones to record stereo sounds. My first attempts at recording audio during a phenomenological encounter occurred during an afternoon in the middle of a small forest, as I spent time with two very large and dying elm trees. The audio recorder captured the ambient sounds together with my spoken reflections, as well as the minute movements of my hand as I held it. In order to record my voice within the bird song, wind, and creaking branches, I needed to turn up the recording level quite high, which made handling the device extremely tricky, as it recorded every sound on or around it. Even the sounds of the headphone cables were recorded if they happened to touch the device; in disconnecting them, I could no longer hear what was being recorded. This kind of coincidental recording captured a quiet voice and loud wind that was nonspecific and uninspiring.

My continuing research into audio recording led to further experiments with recording equipment and a practice of

listening to live sounds, their recordings, and how effects altered them. The results of these experiments informed the continuation and specificity of my practices. For example, with the audio recorder hooked up to external microphones, I could explore speaking into dynamic and clip-on wireless microphones while being outside in the landscape. This allowed the spoken voice to be clearly understood amid the dense, ambient background. However, I still needed to decide whether to hear myself with headphones or to disconnect them and, after checking recording levels, hope for the best. Furthermore, the ambient sounds of the fields and forests were a constant backdrop. While the densely audible environment proved to be valuable later on, in drawing out higher and lower frequencies of bird songs and airplanes, I soon realized that if I was constructing an inventory of singular plants, then I needed to record singular sounds of them. In the sessions with my mentor, Sol Rezza, a sonic artist and digital storyteller, we discussed these difficulties. While the outside landscape might be valuable in recording a wide range of frequencies and volumes, indoor locations could allow for specificity in differentiating them later in sound-editing programs. She suggested that I take the audio recorder and microphones, and head to the bathroom.

At this point in my research, it was not yet clear what kinds of sounds I was looking for, or what my parameters were in the collecting of them. Sol suggested trying other materials

such as plastic bags to reproduce sounds similar to dead leaves. Being intrigued by very quiet sounds which required a high recording level, yet not wanting the white noise that came with it, Sol advised me to experiment with wet surfaces which amplify vibrations, and with different proximities to the microphone. Through these suggestions and the resulting experiments, parameters became clearer: 1) I wanted to collect ambient sounds as well as sounds of plants (which eliminated other materials, like plastic bags); 2) I needed my body to create these sounds with plants; 3) part of my body and part of the plant's body needed, therefore, to touch.

These parameters led me to explore the concept of touch through sound, which brought about new sets of questions. For example, what sounds do different kinds of touch make, and are we touching when my voice describes and remembers a plant? Realizing sound is already always touch, the auditory realm expanded the possibilities of plant-human-encounters: I am physically touched by frequencies and vibrations, whether or not I hear them; in touching all others, the sounds of plants touch me.

In hearing myself speak into a microphone, I became aware of the physical sensation of vocalizing language. My tongue touched my teeth and the inside of my mouth while speaking words; a physical movement, each word a specific choreography of tongue, teeth, roof, and base of mouth

and jaw. Astoundingly I realized, I am physically touched by language I produce and hear, and by wordless, reverberating sound.

TOUCHING VISUAL IMAGES

The process of creating the inventory, by collecting materials and documentations of my encounters with plants, changed as the research progressed. The inventory had become a box of plant specimens, typed listings on a word document, wide-angle video recordings, and ambient sounds with my vocal reflections. However, as I learned to focus on detail, as my eyes spotted, within the highly stimulating environment, intricacy in color, pattern, and movement, the visual documentation of the inventory became a collection of short, close-up videos; the screen filled with just two, often indistinguishable plant-human parts.

Returning to my phenomenological practice, and how the visual part of the encounters altered the video documentation and composition, my ways of seeing meshed with the ways of seeing through the camera, resulting in a poetic form of documentation which I later used for the final performance. My work with the camera was greatly inspired by video artists and Screendance films, in particular the film, *Element* by Amy Greenfield and, as previously mentioned, the *Performing Landscape* series by Arlander.



figure 3

To begin with, Greenfield was fundamental in the 1970s for developing a genre of experimental film that was both choreographed for and with the camera. In *Element*, her naked body is covered in mud as she stands and repeatedly falls, rolling and pulling herself up through the weight of this inescapable earth. This thick, wet substance submerges her barely visible body until she nearly disappears into it, covering her like a malleable, slipping, second skin. The film is shot in close distance; the camerawoman, Hilary Harris, moving with her as Greenfield becomes part of the temporality of the mud, not struggling with its sucking, pulling, irregular tempo but bumpily filming with it (Collectif Jeune Cinema, 2013).

This experimental film portrays a woman's body immersed in an earthy element in close-up shots; framing limbs, mud, and sky in ever-moving combinations. On the two-dimensional screen, the muddied body seems to touch the sky behind it, and my gaze followed these overlapping layers. I began to wonder if zooming-in to fill the screen with plant, human, and environment would invite the watching gaze to perceive these overlapping bodies as touch.

As my research continued, I looked for inspiration in other artistic works immersed in the environment and re-discovered Arlander. Her current work, *Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees* consists of a series of physical exercises she calls, *Becoming Tree*, which she performs

at different times of the year. An edited video portrays her body with upwardly stretched arms next to a maple tree in a small courtyard between apartment houses. She meets this particular tree every day for about an hour over three months. The camera angle is nearly the same every day; the sound is the sound of that particular day and time; some days windy, some days noisy with the voices of neighbors (Arlander, 2021, para. 2). The regular meetings with this maple bring to question the visibility and re- or un-remarkableness of this tree for those living in the apartment buildings, for the viewer of this documentation, and I would speculate, to Arlander as well. The duration of the work, the repetition of her body next to the tree's unchangeable position as the months pass and leaves appear, highlight the movement of the tree (in producing leaves) against the stasis of her own body.

As a viewer, I know that she leaves the image to operate the camera, that she must eat and drink and perform actions away from the tree. I know that she can change location while the tree cannot. I know that this work is a documentation of a temporary encounter, and while that allows me to see the movement of the tree more prominently than the movement of her own body, I question if the experience is not more profound for her than it is for me. I begin to wonder what would happen to my body if I were to perform this meeting as she has done. I begin to imagine what that might do to me, to be inside this image, and what it might do to the viewer

to be inside an experience of an intimate encounter with a plant.

Not intending to bring live plants on stage in order to stay within a digitalized multimodal landscape, I considered how else the audience might be invited to have their own plant encounter through the video and audio documentations of mine. Due to COVID restrictions, I needed to make decisions for the performance which ensured the proper distance between people in the space. I decided to seat the audience on the stage, and considered how the videos could invite closer proximity. I concluded that they needed to be shot not only as close to the touching parts as possible but needed to be projected as large images at different sides of the space. I decided to visually encompass the audience as a form of digital immersion and to see if that evoked an intimate encounter.

TOUCHING LANGUAGE

In approaching language in my reflections about plant encounters, I turned to Andrew Clark's book, *Natural Born Cyborg*, and his argument that language is one of the technologies of the hybrid cyborg, a tool that requires training, effort, and the cognitive machinery of the human brain. He argues that language is not fundamental to the human because we can think ourselves outside of it; however, if extracted from the body and mind, we would be drastically

excluded from most of civilization. Language, therefore, is a technology with which the human is already entangled (Clark, 2004, 28-29).

Entangled in its syntax, grammar, and communicability, humans are also mixed up in its meanings, and in contemplating this, I turned to Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. Derrida's theory of deconstruction as it applies to language argues that words as singular units are meaningless without their existence within phrases or sentences. These units, according to Derrida, need to be joined into the wholeness of context to be understood. In addition, meaning is never fixed, but varies from person to person, or changes within one person over time. If Derrida considers language to be a system of units or signs through which meaning is constructed yet not fixed, Kristeva uncovers these signs to reveal the semiotics that drive them. According to Kristeva, before language is language, it is energies and urges, pre-verbal, internal; if meaning is connected to language, then the semiotic is its pre-meaning (Derrida, 1982, 3-27; McAfee, 2004, 37-41).

I imagine Kristeva's semiotic energies in my dealings with plants; I suspend thinking about them in order to listen to my inner impulses. I do not think "lower arm meets grass;" I wait until a part of me pulls towards a part of it. As I practice writing and speaking words as broken-up sign-als, I am not looking

to understand meaning through their deconstruction, like Derrida. I practice suspending meaning as long as possible in order to hear what happens when letters brush against not-normally-neighbors.

I contemplate words and the inconstant meanings they imply. Human, woman, category, touch; each a red-box-world of its own, filled with multiple meanings and invisible urges. The word “plant”, at a closer look, points to the tendency to over-simplify and unify; a blade of grass the same as a lilac bush. Furthermore, in deconstructing words, how does my understanding of the word “flower” relate to each individual, utterly unique *flower*³? What do the letters of hyacinth have to do with *hyacinth*? Does the word determine and therefore hinder other potentialities in perceiving it? The ease in communication I have in using the word “hyacinth” points to common knowledge about it and other flowers, yet “hyacinth” is not hyacinth, but the part I think I know. What else, beyond and beneath its name, its letters and its meaning, don’t I know? In deconstructing language further than its signs and semiotics, I begin to touch-upon that which I don’t nor can never know, while coming closer to all that can be imagined.

³ These italics refer to the living, breathing bodies present here and now, in the world, in the imagination, and in memories.

S)T;O-R,Y(6: TOWARDS RE-ENTANGLEMENT

ENTANGLING

Sounds and Sol

At some point in the middle, my research took a slight detour, away from the outdoor landscape and plants in their habitat, to inside mine. Equipped with microphones in the bathroom, I learned to listen for the differences in both echoing and absorptive locations. I crinkled dead blackberry leaves and listened to the sounds our leaf- and fingertip-touch created. Intrigued, I began experimenting with the pressure and speed of my palm against the smooth branch of a tree, or my fingernail scratching its ridged bark. In these indoor encounters, I focused purely on the part-icular sounds that rubbing parts made. Touching-as-sound offered me another way of perceiving these resonating part-ners.

Here again, the exchange with my mentor, Sol Rezza greatly helped me determine how and where to take these experiments further. Similarly, the elective with daz disley, *Technologies of Delivery*, invited me to explore the software, Soundplant, as a way to compose and link sounds, which I used extensively for my verbal explorations (Marcel Blum, 2021). After experimenting with how to capture nearly inaudible sounds by recording at high levels, with wet skin,

and in the bathroom, Sol's key suggestion for me was to find my own rhythm both as I made the recordings (the rhythms in different ways of touching), and as I edited the sounds (looping and repeating them). With my background in dance, I am acutely aware of the energy and emotion rhythm has in a space with willing bodies. In suspending my dance practice during this Master, and in looking for my artistic voice, it was also important for me to suspend the possibility of being propelled by emotionally driven and pulsing beats.

In discussing this hesitancy with Sol, she suggested I choose a favorite song and figure out exactly what it is that I like listening to. In choosing one song by the folk artist, Ani DiFranco *Allergic to Water*, I realized what drew me to this song was the simple, gradual layering of acoustic instruments, as well as the raw scratchiness and poetic use of her voice and language (Ani DiFranco, 2014). A multi-layered rhythm that contained various and differing frequencies and textures was a much different concept to me than the symphonic rhythms of classical music I grew up hearing or the syncopated jazz I hear more often now. I began developing my own rhythm as a simple layering of frequencies. A rhythm that arose out of plant-human touch and the experiments with vocal language. This rhythm continued to develop as I learned about equalizing and Digital Audio Workstations such as Reaper and Audition and experimented with vocal recordings of singular words in Soundplant (Cockus Inc., 2021; Adobe,

2021). It transformed into tracks of sounds and words altered with reverb, pitch, and delay, becoming layered rhythms themselves. An example can be found here.

The rhythm also led me towards multimodal storytelling, as I considered narratives through the composition of sounds. As these sounds expanded into songs, the storytelling happened audibly in the change between pulsing beats and bark scratching; in the looped, ringing, thorn-rubbings which quietly entered and persistently stayed. Stories emerged as I listened to the sounds, and these non-linear yet time-based narratives further guided me to experiment with video, language, and movement modes of storytelling.

I don't know

During these Digital Technology Experiments, the Phenomenological Inventory began to include recordings of the soft sounds of touch, recorded close to a microphone in the echoing bathroom. Soon after, I recorded myself describing a piece of a thick tree branch that I held in my hand. I suddenly realized that I didn't know what species of tree it belonged to nor where it had grown. Returning to Barad's void, I began reflecting on all that I didn't know about this branch. The resulting recording led to the I don't know rap, and became an integral part of my process and the final performance. The spoken words of "I don't know," looped and altered in pitch and EQ, became a wordless rhythm and the

base of the song *Story about Touch*. It also became a longer poem, played during the OT301 Residency and ending my final performance. Vocally expressing not-knowing became a way for me to “touch the void” (Barad, 2015, 399); a way to attest to my limited knowledge both about botany and in the field of sound composition. It became a way to make words and their meanings less visible; a way to shift me, as a knowing human, slightly out of the realm of knowledge. Not-knowing became part of my rhythm that informed the soundtrack of the performance, while slightly shifting my research within its field.

DE-ENTANGLING

OT301 Residency

About midway through my research, when I had collected and begun editing both video and sound material, I had the opportunity to join Korina Kordova at the OT301Gallery in Amsterdam for a 24-hour residency, organized through HOPP and Irina Baldini. I came with my sounds on Reaper, a condenser microphone, an interface, and a mini projector.

My sound experiments until now had been heard purely through my headphones and shared only with Sol and daz. This was the first opportunity to play the sounds for a colleague, as well as hear them in a gallery space. Projecting the images onto walls and corners while listening to the sounds coming from two loudspeakers, a potential multimodal landscape

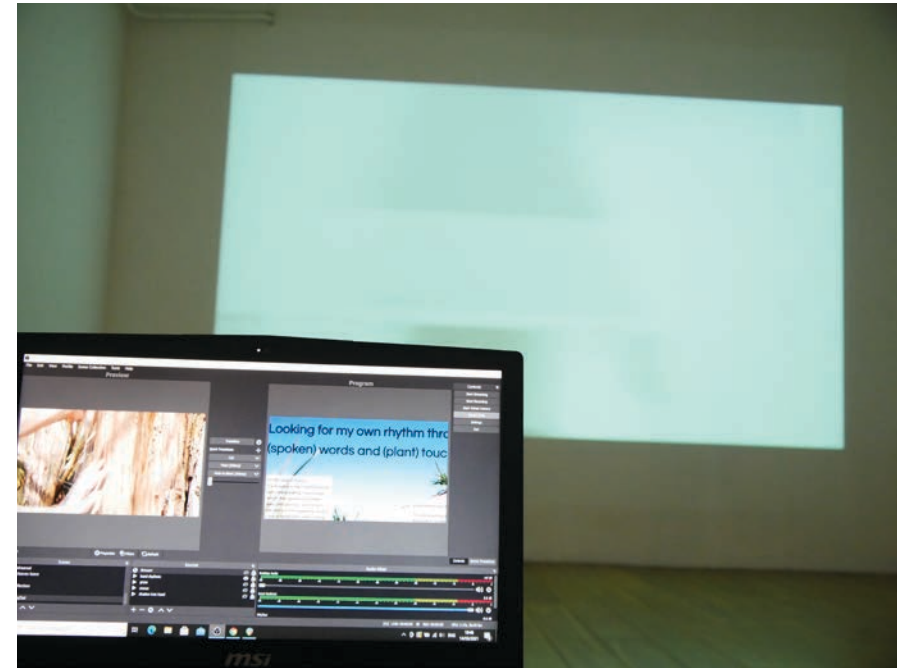


figure 4

began to materialize. In operating both projectors and sounds, I could enter and leave the performance space, which brought about a whole new set of questions. What was my role in this landscape/performance? What kind of movements could I add to the images and sounds? What did the sounds do to me as I re/listened to them in the space, my entire body reverberating with the frequencies I had previously heard only through headphones?

In front of the space was a microphone, and I dared to speak the fragments of text I had prepared while letting myself be inspired by the overlapping researches of Korina and Irina

around me. I altered the lengths and volumes of Blackberry Background based on Irina's projection of shadows; I played my Soundplant composition as she practiced her methodology of confusion, stopping and starting the track to confuse her further; I spoke the emerging I don't know rap towards Korina lying among plastic rocks, improvising text that related to us both. Switching between roles of performer and technician, I began to clarify the format of the final performance and my possible roles in it. Instead of exhibiting the live and recorded documentations of my encounters with plants, could the performance space itself become the landscape, curated and re/inhabited by me (Welther, 2021, *OT301 Residency*)?

RE-ENTANGLING

The Performance, "Landscape of Liveness"

Considering these developments, I began to question how to begin scoring a landscape out of short videos and sounds, as well as how to conceptualize myself as a performer and technician. How would it be possible for me to de-centralize myself as the maker of this piece? Not quite sure how to answer that question, I developed scores based on the sounds I had collected, the size of the theater space, and my movement practice, including its spatial trajectory relating to the levels of frequency. Examples of the scores can be found here:

<https://ewelther.wixsite.com/mysite/scoring>

Following that, I considered the audio set-up of the performance space: four speakers, a mixing desk, and many XLR and extension cables. Grouping the edited and re/ worked sounds into four songs, I named each sound-story, beginning with outdoor sounds and ending with manipulated vibrations of my voice. These were: 1) *Ambient Sounds*; bird/ wind/airplane sounds underneath the ambient reflections of Two Trees; 2) *Stories of Touch*; which introduced a poetic-narrative interspersed with recognizable and digitally re-worked rubbings and scratchings; 3) *Words to Beat*; beginning with the Soundplant vocal experiments, ending in a collage of layered and looped words and rhythms; 4) *Sounds to Vibrations*; blackberry sounds leading to vocal tones lowered in pitch and EQ, becoming reverberating vibrations fading into silence (Welther, 2021, *Coming Closer*).

I wanted to continue to explore speaking live as part of the sound composition and to bring out the element of storytelling that I had been experimenting with. I took the fairytale beginning of "Once upon a time..." and proceeded to break the sentence and the words apart. Delving deeper into the idea of the word-as-body, I separated consonants, erased spaces, and layered this live-spoken text over the ambient sounds and my recorded voice in Soundplant. I finished the piece speaking a repetitive sing-song of unanswerable questions; the longer poem of the *I don't know rap*.

This sound composition created a structure for the performance which then informed my decisions about the length and timing of the videos. However, being able to rehearse only with the separate elements of sound, image, and movement and never all at once, I had to imagine how each piece overlapped. In addition, being both performer and technician, I needed to explore the singular elements of my movement practices as the performer, together with the functional operations of multiple devices as the technician. Being part technician informed not only the performing body but also decisions regarding the practicality of multi-tasking multi-devices as one person. Therefore, the four songs became one soundtrack that played straight through the performance; the videos, timed and edited with blackness could be turned on just once. The body of the performance became more and more a web of interlacing scores, dependent on me.

Receiving feedback from my peers and teachers at HOPP after a run-through, it was brought to my attention that, even if researching and exposing fragmentation, a body that performs multiple actions is still perceived as one body. It was therefore necessary for me to continue to look for ways of breaking-up in order to offer the audience an experience of the fragmented body. Legacy Russel's concept of the glitched body "urges us to consider the in-between as a core component of survival... a spectrum across which we may be

empowered to choose and define ourselves for ourselves" (Russel, 2020, 2). I decided to interpret this "spectrum" between the performer and the technician as moments of failing to be fully one or the other. According to Russel, glitch as a "calculated failure prompts the violent socio-cultural machine to hiccup, sigh, shudder, buffer" (Russel, 2020, 2). While hiccups had been evident in the breaking apart of language, I now embodied them as unexpected hesitations and tiny twitches in the moments of transition between performer and technician. Incorporating the glitch into the performance as the always-possible micro-failure of the body allowed me to move closer to a fragmented body and to include, in those constellations of fragments, the fragments of failure.

RE-FLECTIONS OF RE-ENTANGLING

Finally, inside Theater 1 at ArtEZ, with four speakers set as a rectangle, a mixing desk, a microphone, three projectors, and a cell phone, I began to perform-glitch-operate. The sound composition and projected videos as selected parts of my encounters with plants gradually filled the space. I began performing, telling the s(to;r.ie/s, listening to the birds and the sounds of my live and recorded voice through speakers. I realized: the re of the entangling occurs here and now, while I let my body move between the rhythms and tones of blackberry leaves and fingertips; in front of zoomed-in videos of brushing-crocus-flower-throat. In this moment of liveness,

amplified, equalized, and reverberating, I re/membered. The performance became the moment of re/; the re/telling of live encounters, the re/located recordings, and the re/imagined intra-actions. The performance re/membered the re/mains of all past encounters. The re/ is happening again, here and now, as I write this and re/flect.

(S)T;O-R,Y(7: REFLECTIONS

THE BROADER FIELD

In reflecting on my research leading to the final performance and the form that the performance took, I need to consider the field I currently find myself in and the fields within which I would like to continue. Within the broader field of performance, I have added sonic art, reflecting the trajectories my research and performance have taken.

Having begun my studies at the Experimental Theater Wing of NYU in New York City around the year 2000, I had been introduced to artists developing other approaches to dance and theater such as Mary Overlie and Meredith Monk. Overlie introduced me to the singular parameters of Space, Time, and Story, each containing subcategories, further breaking up these abstract and conceptual realms into practical, improvisational tools (Six Viewpoints, 2021). The interdisciplinary artist, Meredith Monk, continues to merge the mediums of dance, music, and video projection in live, nearly operatic performances. In *Bloodline Shrine*, she uses a computer monitor for each of five performers, alternating between showing fragments of their bodies, x-rays of their internal anatomies, and pictures of their ancestors, while singing in melodic harmonies (Meredith Monk, 2018). Monk's use of projections has been a reoccurring element in her performances, as well as the voice which consists of wordless, clear tones and narrative, poetic text.

HOME OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

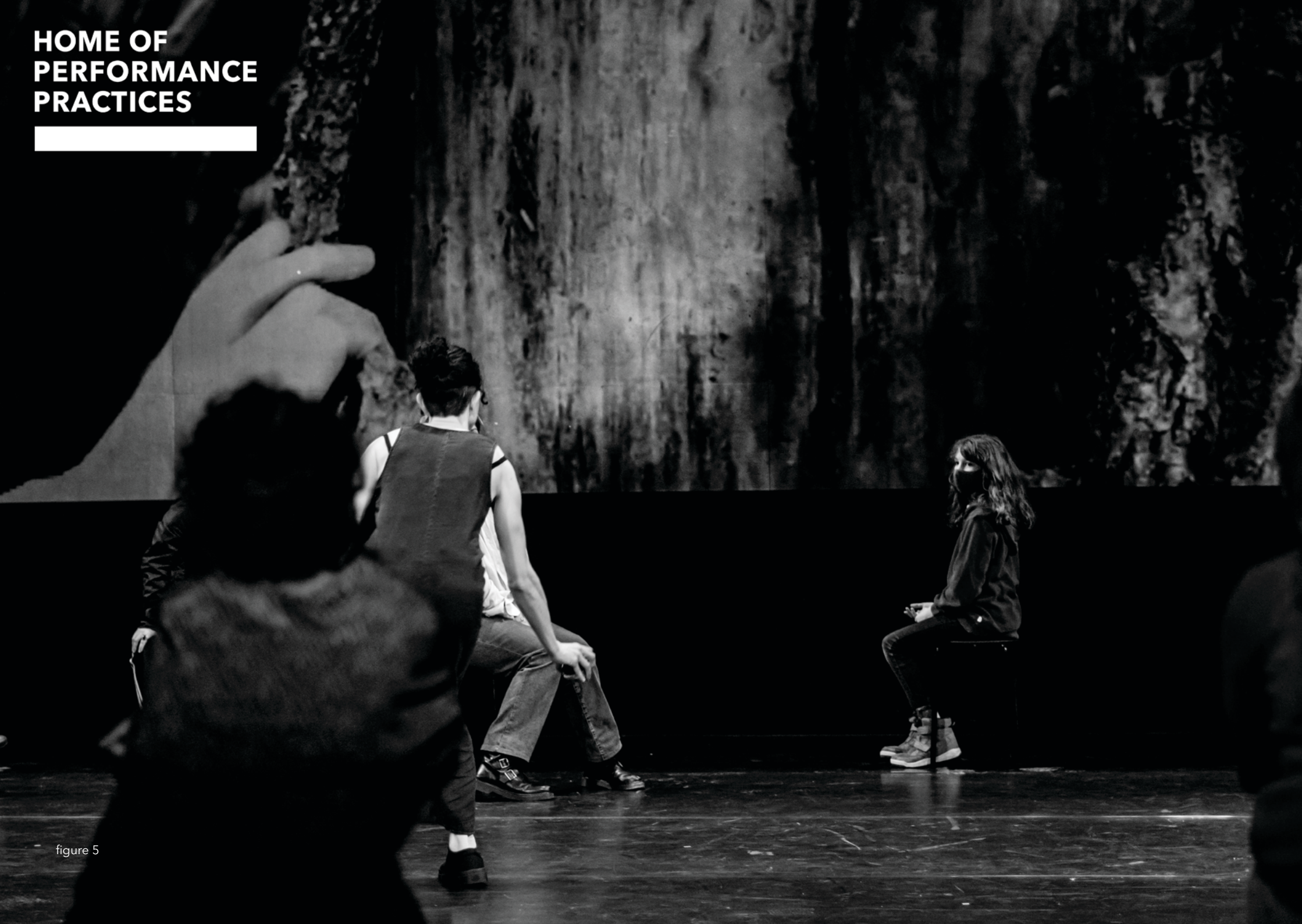


figure 5

The artistic practices that I developed during this research led to an expansion of the field of performance to include electronic music and sonic art. Discovering Delia Derbyshire, a composer of what was then emerging as electronic music in the 1960s, and her piece *Falling*, I listened to a voice recalling dreams amid an ambiance of darkness and slightly sinister harmonies. The texts are abstract and poetic, the deeper tones hinting at what the unconscious might sound like. Devoid of melody, the combination of electronic sounds and the human voice invited me to waver in and out of a dream-like state, at times understanding the words, at others being carried away by the rhythms (Modo de Usar, 2010).

Looking for the “internal sounds” of a body as well as those stimulating the unconscious is Brian Eno, who, in speaking about his compositions, says: “with this kind of music...you can stop trying to be in control of things and allow yourself to surrender” (Eno, 2013). Both Brian and Delia inspired me to consider composing as a way to manipulate the audience’s experience through the vibrations of sounds. I experimented with altering my recordings of plant-touch into high and low looped frequencies and attempted to invoke vibrations in the body of the listener (Welther, 2021, *Sound Experiments*). Later on, I continued provoking physical reactions in the listener by deepening and amplifying my vocal tones for the track, *Sounds to Vibrations*, feeling for myself the struggle to surrender to their resonating intensity. The unease, I

discovered, was related to the duration and volume of the vibrations, so I added and removed sounds with higher frequencies at lower volumes, to invite the listeners to let themselves be moved. This song can be listened to here:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-127748820/sounds-to-vibrations>

ARTISTIC WORKS WITHIN THE FIELD

Examples of current artistic works within the field of performance that overlap disciplines and address our partly invisible environment are that of Alva Willemark, Christina Kubisch, Simon Whetham, and Duncan Chapman. In the live-stream of Willemark’s *and-akter. rehearsal of escape*, the performers are in front of a green screen, immersed in videos of slowly moving and mirrored forest images. The soundscapes of live spoken text, amplified breathing, and the sound designs of Johan Walberg are mixed binaurally so that the audience is surrounded by words and ambient, electronic sounds. The bodies of the performers are visually and audibly enmeshed in their landscape, while the audience watches through a screen and listens through headphones (Willemark et al., 2021).

Making inaudible sounds audible is the focus of much of Christina Kubisch’s work, and relevant to the installation, *Weaving*. This piece amplifies electromagnetic waves and intertwines them with recorded sounds of weaving and sounds from the internet. Wearing headphones while walking

amid hanging electric cables within a cavernous abbey, the audience listens to the repetitive sounds of looms, their individual experience fluctuating with their proximity to the cables as they move through space (Kubisch, 2021).

Whetham's *Traceable Echos* collects visible evidence of sonic energy, using both analog and digital methods. His photographs of swirled or splattered soil, paint, and other materials are the visible translations of captured sound vibrations, which then become part of audio compositions. (Whetham, 2018). Similarly, Chapman looks for ways of recording hidden sounds by designing contact microphones to fit inside trees or setting up wind resistors to collect the rubbing sounds between them, without the wind. He edits these sounds into one-minute selections and puts them online with simple questions for children to engage with, inviting them to practice listening (Minute of Listening, 2021). While the live performance of *and-akter. rehearsals* seeks to hide the performers' bodies through the immersion within a technologically-enhanced landscape, these sonic works reveal the invisible, the inaudible, and the hidden through multiple mediums and modes of delivery, taking the listener with them.

TOWARDS THE VISIBLE/INVISIBLE MIDDLE

Situating myself within the field of performance and these works, my urgency becomes more specific. Imperative to

me and how I intend to continue is the necessity to make unknowns visible and audible, both in the natural world and in ourselves. As well as making invisible knowns visible by zooming-in and amplifying detailed moments of touch, similar to Whetham's sound energy or Kubisch's electromagnetic waves, I also intend to make visible knowns invisible and to watch and listen to what else emerges. A daunting task, I am inspired to continue focusing on the periphery to see how bodies occupying the center *re/move* themselves towards the blurring edge, blurring themselves.

I am equipped with tools to begin this; new knowledge about video and audio recording and editing, and that of my emerging *rhythm*, to name a few. I am inspired to take my audio recorder to very different landscapes and continue my practice of capturing the sounds that touching bodies make. Immersing the listener in loud vibrations of tiny, thorny scratchings, I could, like Whetham, bring these sounds back outside through vibrating speakers, and *re/alter* the landscape. I could compose scores to use in workshops with children, like Chapman, inviting them to search for plants, to hear the sounds they make while touching, and to consider the infinite ways this can be translated, shared, and listened to. Differently than the simultaneous and stimulating sound-voice-video performance of *and-akter*, I can use my *rhythm* in considering each medium as its own layer or *l-a'y.e.r*, before inviting the audience towards an immersive middle.

The idea of the middle brings me back to Marder. Growing up-, down-, and outward, plants are at a place of intersections and “knots” within the present space and time (Marder, 2013, 63). In contemplating how to move away from an anthropocentric positioning not only spatially but in the realm of knowledge and memory, in contemplating a multi-directional imperceptibility, I place my visible/invisible body in closest contact with those inhabiting the middle. In perceiving them, I imagine growing downwards into the unseen underground. In re/turning to roots, parts of me disappear.

V(O;ICE*S AN/D UR)GEN:CIE-S

The voice has its roots in the semiotic, *re/turning* to Kristeva, and becomes either a tool with which to express a factually and/or poetically comprehensible language or an instrument releasing melodies and tonal sounds. In much of the artistic work listed above, the voice fulfills these functions, yet, I would argue, in doing so, neglects others. Inherently unutterable, the semiotic is the urgency from which the voice, language, and movement originate; and, I suggest, is an essential part of the plant-human-story. Having nothing to conceal, the plant has not need for a voice used as a tool to explicate its interior (Marder, 2013, 74). Nevertheless, the plant is not sound-less. It has no use for the human voice because it has its own (*if-only-we-could-hear-it*).

In exposing glitches in both spoken and written language by *re/structuring* words, the silences and spaces in between allow vowels and consonants to touch differently. The frag+m,en-ting w/or \d breaks out of its organization and meaning, and its letters and spaces come into focus. Within this *re/imagined* (s);t;o-r,/y(, the semiotic is *re/moved* from its deeply peripheral position, and the pre-meaning urgencies of plant and human *re/arrange* their w,,or)de d bo;di/e(s): fr- e ;qu e)n” cy u,r g)e/n c yv. oi. c (e.

(S)T;O-R,/Y(8: CONCLUSIONS

THE RELEVANCE OF THE (S)T;O-R,/IES(

Each (S)t;o-r,/y(is its own enmeshed experiment and already entangled with all other here and now (s)t;o-r,/i.es(. I could not have carried out the Phenomenology Inventory without Digital Experimentation, without entering the literal, grassy field nor reading and seeing the work of others in the categorial, performance version. Through these methodologies, each digitally-entwined encounter led to other digital-phenomenological experiments, which fundamentally shifted my artistic practice. I now have options other than movement or dance performance with which to begin an artistic inquiry. Ideas of overlapping fragments can be explored visually, by overlapping living bodies, their movement, and the camera and video-editing knowledge I have gained. Similarly, the audio experiments have allowed me to explore listening as a tangible, emotional, and imaginative experience. Training my ears to hear different frequencies has led to an awareness of vibrations, of inaudible yet present waves passing through and around me. The questions that I now can pose were unimaginable a few months ago, and I am curious to find out, in the practice of answering them, which others arise.

Each story was an attempt to de-anthropomorphize the human by de-centralizing my own body in this research; however, my body remained central to the final performance.

In composing a solo performed and operated by me, I created a mesh of actions and intra-actions with me at its core. I recognized habits through my attachment to movement, as I created the landscape that I needed to move through. I recognized the persistent, underlying urgency for me to find sovereignty in my artistic work, which, I realized, does not mean working alone but finding part-icular part-ners. This research was carried out together with plant part-ners and human-mentors, and practiced fragmenting concepts and language to *come closer*. However, this s:t(o)ry begins and ends with my body.

Therefore, what becomes relevant is not that the human (or me in the research or performance) *re/moves* itself completely from the landscape, but rather shifts its position while recognizing the spaces this *re/positioning* opens up. Through this kind of *re/movement* while *re/cognizing* the unknown, the locations and ways of physically, emotionally, and imaginatively touching multiply and flourish. Minute intra-actions occurring through the wavering balance of knowing and not-knowing invite possibilities for other kinds of human-plant-part-nership.

How might I probe more deeply into botany and biology, finding ways to *re/use* my newly acquired skills with micro-head-phones and macro-word-lenses? How can I shift the elements of a multimodal performance to zoom-in on specific

elements: live voice + video image / recorded sounds + live plant bodies? How might the audience be able to instigate their own intra-actions with plants, and what format might the performance need to take to allow for these? What sub-fields will I find myself in, and which will I create?

*Scratching all surfaces,
Vibrations disperse borders of bodies.*

*I know what I know what I know what I know:
The field is
part sem.iot-ic, part v)o.id
and -
I will listen.*

*How close do we get before we touch,
How to re/lease, re/linquish parts of me?*

*I don't know what I don't know what I don't know
how to let flowers fall,
how to re/tell, re/imagine , re/generate, re/member.*

*I don't know what all this re- means
I don t know what re-me.ans
wh at re- me.a/ ns
w -h 'a t re.-m a-i n /s*

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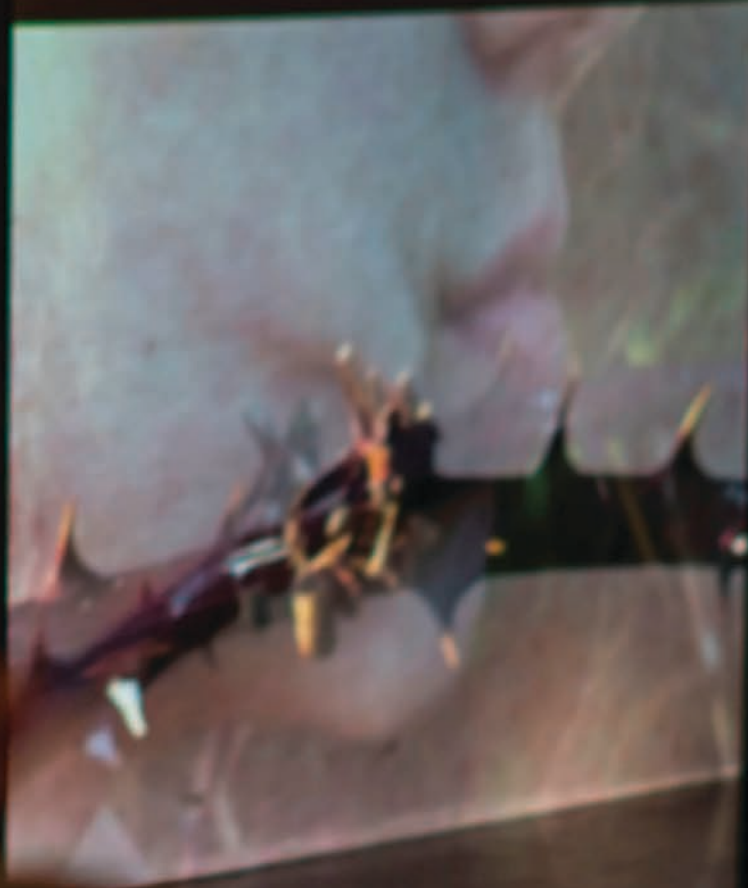


figure 6

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