

Dancing into the Chthulucene:
Sensuous Ecological Activism in the 21st Century

Dissertation

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By

Kelly Perl Klein

Graduate Program in Dance Studies

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Dr. Harmony Bench, Advisor

Dr. Ann Cooper Albright

Dr. Hannah Kosstrin

Dr. Mytheli Sreenivas

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Abstract

This dissertation centers sensuous movement-based performance and practice as particularly powerful modes of activism toward sustainability and multi-species justice in the early decades of the 21st century. Proposing a model of “sensuous ecological activism,” the author elucidates the sensual components of feminist philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway’s (2016) concept of the Chthulucene, articulating how sensuous movement performance and practice interpellate Chthonic subjectivities. The dissertation explores the possibilities and limits of performances of vulnerability, experiences of interconnection, practices of sensitization, and embodied practices of radical inclusion as forms of activism in the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and competitive individualism.

Two theatrical dance works and two communities of practice from India and the US are considered in relationship to neoliberal shifts in global economic policy that began in the late 1970s. The author analyzes the dance work *The Dammed* (2013) by the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts in Ahmedabad, India, in relationship to the Narmada Bachao Andolan—or, the Movement to Save the Narmada River—on which it was based, as well as to India’s history of modern dance, nationalism, and women’s movements. She discusses *How to Lose a Mountain* (2012) by the Dance Exchange in Washington, DC, alongside the anti-mountaintop removal movement in Appalachia to

which the work speaks, and in relationship to the Dance Exchange's "Moving Field Guides," the choreographic and community-based education methods created and utilized in the piece's creation, as modes of sensuous ecological activist performance and pedagogy. The primary somatic practices of the transnational contact improvisation community and the interconnected transnational Burning Man community, contact improvisation (CI) and ecstatic dance, are studied as practices of pilgrimage and nomadic subjectivization, which the author argues foster Chthonic subjectivities.

This cross-cultural analysis highlights the transnational development and circulation of sensuous activism in India and the US, which further elucidates possibilities for sensuous bodily practices in and as activism in diverse local but globally imbricated contemporary contexts. The dissertation investigates how activists, artists, and movement practitioners create spectacles and/or facilitate sensuous experiences of ecological awareness that stand at oblique angles to neoliberal ideologies. The author shows how the examples resist the possessive individual's sense of separation and isolation at the level of the body and its perceptions by bringing attention to one's embeddedness within and responsibility for human and nonhuman ecologies, revealing the body as a political agent and bodily practice as an important mechanism for ecologically-conscious social transformation.

Dedication

For the co-creative world-makers—past, present, and future—calling us to embrace, revel
in, and dance with our many earthly entanglements.

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Vita

- 2008..... B.A. with High Honors in Dance and Feminist, Gender,
and Sexuality Studies, Wesleyan University
- 2010..... Community Outreach Director, Pick Up America
- 2011..... 200-hr Yoga Teaching Certification
- 2011-2012, 2017-2018..... Dean’s Distinguished University Fellowship, The Ohio
State University
- 2012-2013, 2014-2017..... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University
- 2013..... “Ecological Consciousness Through Somatic Practice in
Community-Based Performance: Palissimo’s *Bastard*.” In
joint Society of Dance History Scholars and Nordic Forum
for Dance Research conference, Norwegian University of
Science and Technology.
- 2013..... Graduate Research Associate, The Ohio State University
- 2014..... Artist-in-Residence, Gram International Artist Residency,
Paradsingha, Madhya Pradesh, India.
- 2014..... “Staging Displacement: Darpana Performing Group’s
Creative.” In *Imagining Alternative Modernities:*

- Interventions from the Balkans and South Asia, Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, The Ohio State University.
- 2014..... “‘Performance Floats’: Orphanhood, Individuality, and Modernism in Murray Louis’s Choreography and Pedagogy.” In Society of Dance History Scholars and Congress on Research in Dance conference, Univ. of Iowa.
- 2015..... “Staging Displacement/Staging Mobility: The Political Interventions of the Indian Dancing Body in the Age of Neoliberalism.” In joint Society of Dance History Scholars and Congress on Research in Dance conference, Athens, Greece.
- 2016..... Adjunct Instructor, Columbus State College
- 2016..... “Authenticity and Efficacy in Activist Performance.” In joint Society of Dance History Scholars and Congress on Research in Dance conference, Pomona College.
- 2016..... “Dancing the Indian Body Mobile: Displacement and Mobility in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization.” In Dance Research Forum Ireland, New York Univ.
- 2017..... “Dancing into the Chthulucene: Experiencing Interconnection in Dance Exchange’s *How to Lose a Mountain*.” In Dance Studies Association Conference, The Ohio State University.

2018..... “Conflict in Activist Performance.” In Dance Studies
Association Conference: University of Malta, Valletta.

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Fields of Study

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Introduction. Disrupting Homo Economicus: The Soft Power of Sensuousness

In August 2012, fifty-one villagers in Madhya Pradesh, India entered the backwaters of the Narmada River. The river is the site of many large-scale dam projects. Proponents claim these dams are crucial for providing potable water to nearby rural desert communities, but in practice they largely benefit corporations like Coca-Cola and urban middle- and upper-class neighborhoods (Roy 1999). The dams have subsequently flooded the lands on which local villagers subsisted, forcing them to evacuate. Since the 1980s, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (loosely translated as the Movement to Save the Narmada River) has advocated for the rights of these communities to their land, or at least to equitable compensation for loss of their land. The group had exhausted the usual repertoire of nonviolent resistance—marches, blockades, and sit-ins—so when the Omkarehswar Dam was scheduled to be raised without a plan to relocate and fairly compensate the displaced, the group decided to try a new tactic—the *jal satyagraha*, a variation on Gandhi’s famous nonviolent demonstrations. Land protectors stood submerged in the water up to their necks for a full seventeen days until the government agreed to a relocation and compensation plan. The protest has been repeated several times since, as the land and resources that the government promised were not delivered. Other communities have since adopted the *jal satyagraha* as well. In this act, protesters stage an apocalyptic spectacle of their future in crisis if the dam were to be raised. With this

nonviolent tactic, they highlight and perform their bodily vulnerability as the rural poor in a capitalist, industrializing country, which is exacerbated by the privatization of natural resources under neoliberal capitalism. Insisting on stillness in this particular place as outside forces compel them to move, they demonstrate their interconnection with their nonhuman ecologies, including their land into their performance of self. Vulnerability continues to be deployed by the Narmada Bachao Andolan as a source of strength.

The struggles endured by the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the rural poor they represent exemplify a performative response to a pervasive problem with contemporary political activist efforts in an increasingly privatized world. Since the mid-twentieth century, when nations around the world began to embrace neoliberal policies that divert the power of the State to the private sphere such that nations are run more and more like (and by) private corporations (Brown 2016, 3-5), previous models of public activism have been rendered less and less effective. In this current age of late capitalism,¹ marches, protests, and petitions no longer hold adequate sway over policy in part because policymakers and leaders are increasingly dependent on and beholden to private corporations rather than constituents. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, for example, chose to resort to a dangerous, viscerally impactful performance of their own exacerbated vulnerability after their marches and more traditional tactics of political activism proved ineffective. Their efforts show that it is not enough for dissenting or vulnerable populations to “speak” of their experiences of injustice and demand change, as their voices are easily ignored. Instead, they must perform their vulnerability in sensuous,

¹ I follow thinkers like Ernest Mandel (1975) who mark the late capitalist era as beginning after World War II. The current project focuses on the post-2001 period of this era.

visceral ways in order to cultivate policymakers' empathy. It is clear that now, more than ever, in addition to advocacy for specific policy changes, activism requires multi-faceted, networked approaches that address the underlying cultural beliefs and subjective perceptions that shape our socio-political and material worlds. Contemporary activist efforts toward more sustainable and just futures must resist existing paradigms to forge new ones.

While scholars and activists identify a variety of causes and solutions to large-scale problems—ranging, for example, from the ubiquitous “patriarchy” to “big oil” to “the market”—many of these theories examine notions of and experiences of self and other for the ways in which they support unjust and unsustainable social formations and modes of production. Several poststructuralist theorists posit that the modern capitalist notion of a possessive, autonomous human subject—implicitly white, male, and heterosexual—is the basis for the development of unsustainable social, economic, and production practices (White 2012; Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Haraway 2016; Braidotti 1994; Grosz 1994; Foucault [2004] 2008), and therefore its dismantling is crucial for the creation of more sustainable ways of being. One branch of this scholarship questions, in particular, what is identified as human exceptionalism—the notion that humans as a species are separate from and superior to nonhuman beings, inclusive of animals, plants, and the elements. They call for new models of intersubjectivity—notions of the self as intimately and inextricably linked to a multitude of other “Others,” some of which will be explored in this dissertation. For example, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s mobile, fluid figure of the nomad comes to being through “emphatic proximity [and] intensive interconnectedness” with others (1994, 27). Addressing what he identifies as a

“perceptual problem” in contemporary “modern” societies, philosopher David Abram (1996, 27) turns to phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl to recuperate intersubjective modes of perception through sensuous engagement with the world. Feminist philosophers Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013, xi) call for a form of dispossession that does not “systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice” but through which “one is moved to the other and by the other—exposed to and affected by the other’s vulnerability” (1) in discussing the material-discursive benefits and problems with the poststructuralist “dispossession” of the modern subjects. These and other similar thinkers construct alternative models for subjectivity that ideally shift our understandings and experiences of self to create and dwell within more just, sustainable communities. In these pseudo-utopic socialities, community members share risk with and mutually aid one another and uphold relations of reciprocity rather than competitiveness with one another and their nonhuman environments.

For this investigation, I turn to feminist philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway’s (2015; 2016) notion of the Chthulucene as a primary guide in identifying and elucidating possibilities for ecological activism. The Chthulucene is, for Haraway, an epoch of multispecies justice, ongoingness, and recognition of human and nonhuman interconnection and mutual vulnerability. It is realized in part by cultivating a myriad fluid, interconnected, and dispossessed possibilities for subjecthood. Named for the many ancient and contemporary “beings of the earth” and forces such as: Gaia, the personification of Earth in ancient Greek mythology; Terra, the goddess of Earth in ancient Roman mythology; and Spider Woman, a deity of the Earth for many North

American indigenous cultures especially in the Southwestern US, including Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo traditions—the Chthulucene “entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus” (Haraway 2015, 160).

Notably, Haraway’s Chthonic beings are not safe, owned, or fixed. Chthonic subjectivities, rather, are relational, in-process, and mutually vulnerable to one another. In what follows, I heed Haraway’s call to identify and explore possibilities for cultivating Chthonic subjectivities capable of realizing an age of ongoing, multispecies justice and livability in the wake of ecological destruction undergirded by the modern notion of human exceptionalism.

With this dissertation, I explore the question: What possibilities exist for Chthonic activism today? Specifically, how do dance and movement performance and practice contribute to the cultivation of sustainable cultures in the contemporary moment? How do certain movement-based performances and practices disrupt engrained experiences of competitive individualism and human exceptionalism? I develop a theory of sensuous performance and practice as able to work against assumptions of human exceptionalism, functioning as ecological activism in the context of neoliberal capitalism, globalized consumerism, and climate change. I propose a version of Chthonic activism that includes movement-based performance and practice that I am calling sensuous ecological activism, recognizing that these endeavors inherently shape our conceptions of self and the world. I identify particular possibilities of sensuous ecological activism through performance and practice that, I argue, provide important information and tools for large-scale social change toward creating sustainable and just communities.

This dissertation explores instances of activist performance and elucidates sensuous body- and movement-based performance, practice, and protest within and as forms of ecological activism. Focusing on examples after 2001, I investigate possibilities and limits of performances of vulnerability, experiences of interconnection, practices of sensitization, and embodied practices of radical inclusion as forms of activism in the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and rational competitive individualism. For my inquiry, I have chosen two theatrical dance works and two communities of practice from India and the US that have similar functions and/or forms. I contextualize these recent examples in relationship to neoliberal shifts in global economic policy that began in the late 1970s and were intensified globally after the Cold War, with special attention to the post-2001 period marked by an increased alliance between consumerism and patriotism in both India and the US. I analyze the dance work *The Dammed* (2013) by the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts in Ahmedabad, India in relationship to the Narmada Bachao Andolan—or, the Movement to Save the Narmada River—on which it was based, as well as to India’s history of modern dance, nationalism, and women’s movements. I examine *How to Lose a Mountain* (2012) by the Dance Exchange in Washington, DC alongside the anti-mountaintop removal movement in Appalachia to which the work speaks, and explore the Dance Exchange’s “Moving Field Guides,” the choreographic and community-based education methods created and utilized in the piece’s creation as modes of sensuous ecological activist performance and practice. For the transnational contact improvisation community and the interconnected transnational Burning Man community, I analyze their primary somatic practices—contact improvisation (CI) and ecstatic dance—in connection with notions of pilgrimage and

nomadic subjectivization, arguing that these communities of practice foster Chthonic subjectivities. These examples allow for a cross-cultural analysis that highlights the transnational development and circulation of sensuous activism in India and the US, which further elucidates possibilities for sensuous bodily practices in and as activism in diverse local but globally imbricated contemporary contexts. I investigate how activists, artists, and movement practitioners create spectacles and/or facilitate sensuous experiences of ecological awareness that stand at oblique angles to neoliberal ideologies that foster the ideal citizen-consumer as a rational, autonomous, and possessive individual (Brown 2016, 4-11).

This research on the embodied performances and somatic pedagogical practices of contemporary sensuous activism contributes to emerging scholarship on nonviolent activism, the environmental humanities, and dance studies. These efforts are important to critically assess as they both interrupt the dominant global narrative of development that facilitates environmental destruction and violence against marginalized communities and the nonhuman realm in the name of economic progress and help cultivate more sustainable and just alternatives. By investigating the embodied tactics of environmental activism and sensuous bodily practices together in the context of the Chthulucene, I elucidate not only the possibilities for the body as a political agent, but the significance of cultivating and recognizing the sensate body as an activist practice. In particular, I argue throughout the dissertation that these embodied tactics resist ideologies of neoliberal capitalism and cultivate more just, sustainable Chthonic alternatives.

I take the current ecological crisis as a serious focus for performance practices and performance scholarship given the plethora of violences caused by industrialization,

supported by neoliberal economic policies, and exacerbated by global climate change. Framing my analysis within a critical ecological perspective, I explore bodily practices as they relate to social change and the cultivation of sustainable social and physical ecologies, attending to the sensate body as a political agent. Further, I utilize a transnational framework appropriate for the contemporary globalizing moment with particular attention to the distinct contexts of India and the US as well as their transnational relationship and interactions. To burgeoning literature on the body as it is affected and compelled by neoliberal ideologies and policies, I bring a consideration of sensuous practices and performances of vulnerability as activism. I explore how activist performances and practices travel and the ways in which they can contribute to ecological consciousness and responsibility. “Dancing into the Chthulucene” addresses a gap left in the environmental humanities for scholarship on embodied practices and performance as it relates to ecological issues, deepening performance studies perspectives on the construction and dismantling of the nature/culture binary, and furthering dance scholarship on the political implications of and in movement performance and practice. I intervene in each of these fields by examining the performative and sensuous deployment of and resistance to vulnerability and sensuality in contemporary activist and artistic ventures.

In what follows, I introduce the conceptual and methodological frameworks of this dissertation, which draws primarily from feminist theory, queer theory, and the environmental humanities alongside dance and performance studies. I begin by locating this research in the intersection of the environmental humanities and dance studies. I show that a performance- and embodiment-oriented perspective can contribute greatly to

the study of social movements, politics, and ecological sustainability in the time of human-accelerated climate change in what scientists and cultural theorists now call the Anthropocene, a designation of the current planetary epoch in which human processes greatly—and mostly negatively—impact and alter major earth systems, threatening life on this planet as we know it (Moore 2015, 27). Then, I discuss climate change as a hyperobject created by industrialism and exacerbated by the pursuits of the possessive individual subject of late capitalism—a subject driven by economic self-interest and freedom of choice, identified as *homo economicus* by philosopher Michel Foucault ([2004] 2008,147; 268-280). I examine the ways in which subjects in neoliberal economic structures are interpellated into competitive systems marked by ideologies of individual autonomy and independence as freedom, foreclosing possibilities of understanding interdependence as freedom. I go on to define what I call sensuous ecological activism, a form of embodied activism capable of cultivating Haraway's Chthulucene. I then further introduce my research in India and the US, explaining the advantages of a transnational approach. I summarize the particularities of this transnational relationship and show why this comparison is important and relevant to understanding activism in the contemporary moment more broadly. After a brief discussion of my research and analysis methodologies, I outline the dissertation and introduce each chapter.

The Environmental Humanities and Dance Studies

The burgeoning field of environmental humanities considers how aesthetic and narrative forms shape conceptions of the environment, ecology, human-nonhuman relationships, and environmental challenges, but often overlooks movement and

performance practices. Haraway (2015; 2016) calls for an era of multispecies justice marked by new ways of “making kin” liberated from paradigms of compulsory heterosexual reproduction to remediate and avoid environmental destruction in the age of the Anthropocene. Toward this end, she asks feminists to “exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species” (2015, 161). Understanding current ecological crises as inextricable from histories of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan’s 2015 volume, *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, brings together a variety of scholarship that provides models for such analysis with attention to the postcolonial condition. For example, Susie O’Brien’s essay “The Edgework of the Clerk: Resilience in Arundhati Roy’s *Walking with the Comrades*” explores the concept of resilience as it functions in Roy’s nonfiction text and circulates in contemporary environmental discourses. While this literature takes seriously Arturo Escobar’s (1996, 65) call for “new narratives of life and culture,” it omits bodily practices such as dance from its assessment of how arts and culture affect ideology, ecological conditions, and environmental recuperation. Dance and performance studies have much to offer interdisciplinary methodologies that often fail to fully articulate bodily experience and the stakes of embodiment.

Dance and performance studies allow for a consideration of the ways politics function through performance: both theater and politics require actors who perform and spectators who receive, evaluate and react to these actions (Rai and Reinelt 2015). A dance studies framework centers bodily actions and activities as important kinds of cultural knowledge. As dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar (2008, 85) notes, exploring the

“somatic, or felt, dimensions of movement...offers a determining yet indeterminate source and medium for examining the processes of cultural manipulation.” Similarly, performance studies scholarship articulates and explores the connections between performances that happen as theater and those that happen in the course of daily life. The performance studies approach utilized in this project invites an expansive definition of activist work that includes everyday acts and artistic production. Together, dance studies and performance studies methodologies and frameworks allow for a rich and dynamic investigation into the many imbricated frames of performance comprising our worlds that elucidates their political implications.

Since the late 20th century, dance scholars have considered the ways dance reflects and shapes political conditions and ideologies. Understanding the body in motion as inherently embedded within complex socialities and structures of power, dance scholars analyze movement practices for both how they are shaped by as well as how they shape their sociopolitical surround. These theorists look for ways in which bodily movement indexes, intervenes in, and is implicated within politics—what dance scholar Randy Martin (1998, 3) calls the “forces that devise the world.” The “performative turn” in the humanities (see Butler 1990 and Schechner and Brady 2013) bolstered poststructuralist dance scholarship such as that by Susan Leigh Foster (1986), Ann Cooper Albright (1997; 2013), Jane Desmond (1993), and Sally Banes (1994; 1998), which theorized dance as constituting a liminal space through which cultural codes can be made manifest, critically reflected upon, and reconfigured. Martin’s (1998) argument in *Critical Moves* that certain strategies deployed in and through movement cultures and choreography can be applied to political theory inaugurated a new direction for thinking

about politics in critical dance studies and scholarship. In Martin's (1998, 4, 13) view, dance studies as a discipline theorizes political mobilization as choreography in that both deploy strategies for setting bodies in motion toward a common vision. In this vein, dance scholars like Susan Leigh Foster (2003) and Mark Franko (2002) have developed theories of dance as a manifestation of political will and as political agent, drawing connections between dance practices and political affiliations. Further, dance scholars have contributed significantly to burgeoning theories of kinesthetic empathy that recognize bodily movement as a medium of human connection and social transformation (Foster 2011; Reynolds and Reason 2012). Dance studies has long tackled the intersection of movement and politics, and these discussions have elucidated strong links between political ideologies and choreographies on stages, screens, studios, and streets, as well as the political significances of movement cultures.

The performative turn has also impacted scholarship on the environment and society. Environmental studies scholars Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, and Claire Waterton (2003) bring together environmental studies scholarship that has turned to performance theory to explore nature and nature-human relations not as fixed structures but as actively produced and emergent. By extending the notion of performance to include both human and nonhuman action, "one loses a sense of nature as pre-figured and merely being 'played out'; instead, the performance of nature appears as a process open to improvisation, creativity, and emergence" (Szerszynski, Heim, and Waterton 2003, 4). Taking cues from literary ecocriticism, performance studies scholars since the turn of the millennium have begun to explore the ways in which conceptions of the human relationship to the nonhuman, as well as of "nature" itself, are performatively

constructed, and thus performatively disrupted. Performance scholars Theresa J. May and Wendy Arons (2012, 4) argue that theater artists and scholars have a responsibility to critically apply an ecological perspective to theatrical production in order to shape cultural and ideological formations of the ecological. Seeking ways to trouble the “othering” of nature, these scholars value performances of the “more-than-human” in which the human is shown to be interdependent with the nonhuman as critical interventions that can transform ideologies of human exceptionalism and reshape the material formations of the human and nonhuman toward more sustainable and just ends.

To this new body of ecocritical performance studies literature, I bring a consideration of movement-based performances and practices that, I argue, cultivate Chthonic subjectivities and align with queer ecological projects’ call for practices that disrupt the fixed heteronormative, possessive humanist subject. I argue such a disruption is achieved through sensuous ecological activist performances and practices. For queer and feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2006, 115), the illusion of the autonomous subject that stands separate from and superior to the object-world is formed through repeated orientations *toward* nonhuman objectified “others.” A sensuous ecological subjectivity, on the other hand, is queerly oriented *around*, rather than toward, the object-world, which for Ahmed “is to be taken up by something, such that one might even become what it is that is ‘around’” (2006, 116). The sensuous performances and experiences of human and nonhuman interdependency discussed here orient the performer/human into an intimate connection with the nonhuman world that enables and threatens its exceptional status, embodying a queer ecological critique of the possessive individual.

Some scholars have begun to bring embodied dance studies approaches and critical environmental studies together. Environmental studies scholar Catriona Sandilands (2003) explores queer interventions into the disciplining regimes of environmental governmentality against pollution. Arguing that such discourses perpetuate the false divide between the human and the nonhuman, Sandilands insists that critical ecology needs to “*stage* embodiment differently in order to interrupt governmental materializations and thus render them negotiable at the levels of both representation and ritual” (2003, 32). Sandilands proposes the embodied practice of Butoh as one way in which to experience our bodies/selves as open to their surroundings and in constant exchange with the “outside,” to the point that the division falls apart. The form invites practitioners to layer other nonhuman and human others in their bodily experience, not mimicking a singular other but “taking in and taking on” the felt sense of others (34). The current project contributes to burgeoning scholarship that explores the confluence of embodiment and critical environmental studies.

“Dancing into the Chthulucene” continues the work of articulating the embodied subjectivities of neoliberalism, as well as those in resistance to it, paying particular attention to human bodies as political—and precarious—agents. It explores the role of advocacy-oriented theatrical works and communities of transformational movement practices in developing important translocal and transnational alliances and subjectivities that resist ideologies of rational self-interest, instead cultivating more ecologically-sensitive modes of being and relating. To communication scholars Britta Knudsen and Carsten Stage’s (2014, 4) theory of performances of vulnerability as “soft power,” I add a consideration of sensuous embodied experiences of interconnection, sensitization, and

radical inclusion. My work brings a body-centric performance-based inquiry to bear on transnational feminist and queer theory, dance studies, and the environmental humanities to explore connections between the activist potential of sensuous movement and performance practices and the sensuality of certain activist performance tactics in the 21st century. “Dancing into the Chthulucene” reveals the radical potential of sensuous bodily performance and practices in the contemporary moment.

Homo Economicus and Climate Change

Climate change is one of the most pressing concerns of our time, threatening agriculture, potable water, and coastal living conditions, as well as endangering an unprecedented number of species. According to the 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have increased with industrialization, especially with accompanying economic and population growth, and “are now higher than ever” (4). Increased industrialization has “led to greater atmospheric concentrations of atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide that are unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years” (ibid.). The report summarizes that these gases and other “anthropogenic drivers” have been the dominant cause of climate change since the mid-20th century (ibid.). Ecological philosopher Timothy Morton (2013, 1) calls climate change² a hyperobject, which he defines as something that is “massively distributed in time and space in relation

² Morton prefers the term “global warming” rather than “climate change” because he argues the change in terms has resulted in a decrease in political concern over the issue (2013, 7). He writes: “the phrase climate change has been such a failure that one is tempted to see the term itself as a kind of denial, a reaction to the radical trauma of unprecedented global warming. That the terms are presented as choices rather than as a package is a symptom of this failure, since logically it is correct to say ‘climate change as a result of global warming,’ where ‘climate change’ is just a compression of a more detailed phrase, a metonymy” (ibid., 8)

to humans,” and notes the extreme threat it poses to existence as we know it. This dissertation begins from the argument made by leading environmental scholars that the proliferation of neoliberal economic policies is supporting rapid industrialization, especially in large, populous nations like the US and India, and accelerating climate change trends by exacerbating global carbon dioxide emissions (See Schreuder 2009). Such policies intensify existing economic inequalities and are propelled, I argue, by ideologies of possessive individualism and rational self-interest that characterize neoliberalism. The possessive individual subject, especially under late capitalism, assumes an entity fully separable from its surround, able to properly own objects, such as private homes or vehicles, as property. This entity is inherently self-contained and ideally rational, able to act according to its best interests, which are measured by material stability and wealth. Driven by rational self-interest, it seeks to maximize its financial wealth at all costs, leading to corporate decision-making practices that prioritize short-term gain over long-term health and environmental consequences.

The current age of neoliberalism is marked by increased privatization and corporate control over public space, media, and social services, as well as a “programmatically scorn” for public spaces and discourses outside of capitalistic machinations (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005, 10). Wendy Brown (2016) argues that neoliberalism cultivates a rational individual subject mainly concerned with maximizing personal gain, measured in terms of financial profit, to the detriment of community support structures and structures of belonging. This is the age of *homo economicus*—economic man—a particular form of Anthropos driven by economic rational self-interest that Foucault ([2004] 2008, 147) calls “the man of enterprise and production.”

Under neoliberalism, in which rational activity is measured by economic profit (Foucault [2004] 2008, 268-269; Brown 2016, 3), *homo economicus* is propelled by an “egoic mechanism” (Foucault [2004] 2008, 275) to maximize their interest. As Foucault (279-283) articulates, with neoliberal economic theory following Adam Smith (1776), the totality of the economic realm, its causes and effects, cannot possibly be known well enough to account for the interests of all subjects. This theory proposes that if each individual acted according to their self-interest, the “invisible hand” (Smith 1776) of the market would guide individual actions toward the benefit of all. Foucault (275) explains that within neoliberal ideology, “Not only may each pursue their own interest, they must pursue their own interest, and they must pursue it through and through by pushing it to the utmost, and then, at that point, you will find the elements on the basis of which not only will the interest of others be preserved, but will thereby be increased.” The neoliberal subject is imbued with a moral imperative to maximize their financial gain through competition with others.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, marking the end of the ideologically-driven Cold War in the late 1980s, the reign of *homo economicus* gained traction throughout the world and ushered in an age of neoliberal globalization. As more communities become reliant on the global capitalist economy, local cultural practices and sustenance methods are marginalized if not erased all together, resulting in what biologist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (1993) has identified as “monocultures of the mind.” In such a homogenizing political and economic climate, alternative cultural formations are increasingly subsumed into neoliberal capitalistic machinations or lost altogether—and the cultivation of diverse, heterotopic alternatives are increasingly urgent.

Extracting resources from the nonhuman environment in the name of economic benefit without due concern for ecological interconnectedness, *homo economicus* is the primary agent of the Anthropocene. Others call this age the Capitalocene, which recognizes capitalism and its globalization, rather than Anthropos—”species man”—as the culprit of large-scale alterations of the earth and its processes (Haraway 2016, 47-51). Still others have named it the Plantationocene to mark the shift from human-tended agriculture to plantations relying on forms of exploitative, alienated labor like slavery (Haraway 2015, 160). Indeed, *homo economicus* is as much a product of exploitative capitalism as it is of human exceptionalism. As the editors of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* argue, “Our era of human destruction has trained our eyes only on the immediate promises of power and profits. This refusal of the past, and even the present, will condemn us to fouling our own nests” (2017, G2). *Homo economicus*’s sense of separation from and ownership over the nonhuman world has influenced the development of vast and complex systems of production, consumption, and waste-management. These systems not only destroy nonhuman environments and threaten nonhuman species, but, as environmental justice literature makes clear, also threaten the livelihoods of many human communities, primarily those who stand as “other” to *homo economicus*—implicitly white, male, heterosexual, and financially wealthy (see, for example, Scanlan 2011, Agyeman 2005, and Schlosberg 2002). Communities of color, indigenous communities, and people of low socioeconomic status disproportionately endure the negative effects of environmental destruction, while white, middle- and upper-class populations disproportionately enjoy the financial benefits of neoliberal capitalism. In short, climate

change is a hyperobject (Morton 2013) that came into being with the Anthropocene, exacerbated through the reign and global propagation of *homo economicus*.

Foucault ([2004] 2008, 268) explores power, knowledge, and the body in his late 1970s lectures collected in the anthology *Birth of Biopolitics* and identifies neoliberal capitalism as era marked by an extension of market metrics into every domain of human life. Following Foucault, scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to identify cultural and political shifts underway in late capitalism, especially in relationship to neoliberal ideologies and the global proliferation of the free market. Economic and even existential precarity is the unacknowledged, perhaps strategically ignored, but omnipresent condition in late capitalism, as explored by Judith Butler (2004; 2012). Wendy Brown (2016, 3) argues that the neoliberal promise of individual freedom actually generates “intensely isolated and unprotected individuals, persistently in peril of deracination and deprivation of basic life support, wholly vulnerable to capital’s vicissitudes.” With an overemphasis on utilitarian relationships and individual gain over collective responsibility, Kate Soper (2008) argues that late capitalism is marked by a population of depressed, over-worked, stressed-out individuals who feel disconnected from each other and a sense of true value and meaning in their lives. These individuals repeatedly try, unsuccessfully, to remedy this by buying more goods and products in a doomed process to satisfy their desire. Attending to intersections of race, class, and gender, dance and performance scholars such as Randy Martin (2012), Anusha Kedhar (2014), Louise Owen (2012), and Shannon Jackson (2012) have begun to articulate how neoliberalism affects bodily, artistic, and activist practices. These authors argue that neoliberal ideology compels individual bodies to be both hyperflexible and mobile, able

to move in any direction at any time according to the demands of the choreography and the market.

With this research, I show that communities and artists are responding to growing inequality and climate change in late capitalism with sensuous ecological activism. I propose that certain sensuous movement practices, performances, and pedagogies cultivate what anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2001, 157) calls alternative “place-based imaginaries” that protect against Shiva’s (1993) “monocultures of the mind”—and body. While neoliberal ideologies emphasize the possessive individual consumer, the performances, communities, and somatic practices discussed here cultivate modes of embodiment and being-in-community that are more attuned to human vulnerability, more sensuously engaged with the social and physical surround, and more responsible for ecological and cultural sustainability, revealing important insights into the corporeal politics of the contemporary moment.

Chthonic Activism

In this time of anthropogenic environmental and economic crises, we are faced with the difficult task of creating sustainable, just ways of being in and as communities. This task requires profound and deep shifts in the ways we think about categories like “society” and “nature,” as well as about ourselves as human beings. Haraway (2010, 1) calls for an end to human exceptionalism that undergirds much of the theoretical and institutional scaffolding of modernity and late capitalism. Similarly, in the introduction of their anthology, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, the editors Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elain Gan, and Nils Bubandt argue against the tendency in natural and social sciences to imagine “the world as a space filled with autonomous entities and separable

kinds, ones that could be easily aligned with capitalist fantasies of endless growth from alienated labor” (2017, M6). They urge us instead to “notice the worlds around us” with curiosity and practice the arts of imagination toward co-species survival (M6-M8). Toward this end, education scholar D. Carsten (2016, 265) aims to deconstruct and problematize the “fictions of separation” between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature through pedagogy, challenging humanist models of the citizen-subject and requiring profound epistemological and ontological shifts in how we think about ourselves as individuals, as humans, and as inhabitants of Earth. Timothy Morton (2010, 4) proposes “ecology” as a way of thinking with and through the interconnection of all beings:

“Ecological thinking might be quite different from our assumptions about it. It isn’t just to do with the sciences of ecology. Ecological thinking has as much to do with art, philosophy, literature, music, and culture. Ecological thinking has as much to do with the humanities wing of modern universities as with the sciences, and it also has to do with factories, transportation, architecture, and economics. Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence.”

If we humans are to live through this period of global volatility, we need paradigms that move beyond notions of human exceptionalism to acknowledge human and nonhuman interconnection and mutual vulnerability. Endeavors to foster ways of being and being-in-community that honor these interconnections and support integrated human and nonhuman flourishing are therefore rightfully considered ecological activism.

A revision of both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, Haraway's Chthulucene offers "a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (2016, 2). As Haraway writes, the Chthonic ones reveal the meaningfulness of earth's processes and "critters" and demonstrate the consequences of actions across a diversity of time-scales and geographies, offering a "fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital" (2016, 2). The pessimistic Anthropocene and Capitalocene maintain an undue allegiance to human exceptionalism, which Haraway shows locks us further into despair and apocalyptic worlding by "sap[ping] our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds" (2016, 50). The Chthulucene, though, recuperates a sense of ongoingness made possible through old and new forms of worldmaking in alliance with other critters. Entering the Chthulucene, not a teleological endpoint but always already present just beneath the surface of humanist awareness, requires us to acknowledge and embrace the interdependencies and uncanny entanglements between seemingly unrelated or even opposing entities, especially between culture and nature, human and nonhuman.

For Haraway, the Chthulucene is a theoretical framework and narrative capable of producing more sustainable and just futures by forging inclusive structures of belonging, dissolving divisions between species, and demolishing notions of human exceptionalism. Importantly, the Chthulucene is an age of living and dying in diverse embodied entanglements of human and nonhuman beings of all kinds—an age of multispecies justice. Recognition of Chthonic physical enmeshments of human and nonhuman require the creation and development of stories that eschew the seductions of modernism and its division between human society and nature. However, this dissertation focuses primarily

on performances and practices that foster connections between human subjects, between the human and the more-than-human, and between humans and place. It does not focus on performances and practices of connection between humans and plants, animals, bacteria, or other nonhuman living beings. I believe that the cultivation of subjectivities configured as interconnected with other species requires first dismantling the autonomous bounded individual subject, which can occur through performance and practices that experientially dissolve boundaries between human subjects. I consider the performances and practices discussed here to begin the work of dissolving notions of bounded individualism that can eventually soften the perceived distinction between the human and nonhuman, disrupting human exceptionalism and leading to experiences of interspecies connection and mutual aid.

As Haraway (2016, 35) says, “It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories.” She explores what she calls “art science activisms,” in which artists and scientists collaborate on projects that reveal and communicate human and nonhuman interconnectivity and interdependence (79, 89) as ways to forge Chthonic thoughts, knowledges, relations, worlds, and stories. While I do not discount the potential of these projects to revise disciplinary paradigms, cultivate important knowledges about human and nonhuman interconnection, and dismantle human exceptionalism at the level of theory and epistemology, I believe that we must also explore ways to disrupt the experience and perception of an individuated, separate, and autonomous self in order to bring about large-scale social change toward sustainability. Such activities prepare individual and collective perceptual maps to be able

to incorporate the Chthonic knowledges produced by art science activisms. While Haraway's project stops at the level of theory, science, and knowledge, I explore the sensory, performative, and experiential components of Chthonicness.

Further, Haraway encourages new nonreproductive modes of "making kin": "the stretch and recomposition of kin are allowed by the fact that all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time)" (1, 102; 2015). She proposes "Make Kin, Not Babies!" as a defining slogan of the Chthulucene (102). Indeed, Haraway's concept of the Chthulucene can be read as anti-human in its plea to reduce the human population (Lewis 2017) and her position has been criticized for bolstering racist projects of population control (Murphy 2017, 138). Even as we must contend with and work against complicity in racist and xenophobic agendas, it is crucial to forge lines of connection and structures of belonging beyond bloodlines and genealogy to dismantle patriarchal social structures and realize multispecies justice. In what follows, I explore performance and practices that I argue cultivate innovative ways of making kin in unexpected and mutable configurations. I believe in these practices as activism not because they support an anti-natalist disciplinary injunction against reproduction but because they are able to foster empathy and relations of care between various "others." As we make kin beyond bloodlines, we dissolve competitive relations and constructed notions of division like race, nationality, and ethnicity and are more able to forge connections with nonhuman others. As the boundaries of self are rendered more porous, fluid, and open to others through Chthonic practices of making kin, the imbricated notions of both autonomous individual subjecthood and human exceptionalism become increasingly untenable.

While Haraway's description of the Chthulucene can be dismissed as nebulous and unwieldy—its vagueness undermining its critical utility—it continues to be useful for the present project as it provides a theoretical framework through which to consider and articulate alternative processes of subjectivization oriented toward human and nonhuman interconnection, mutual aid, and ongoingness. Unlike the autonomous possessive individual subject of late capitalism, Chthonic subjectivities are configured as materially connected and inherently entwined, providing the basis for more sustainable and just self- and world-making. They experience themselves not as separate from but continuous with their human and nonhuman surroundings—parts of the same flesh. As such, they recognize what Stacy Alaimo (2010, 2) calls trans-corporeality, which emphasizes movement across bodies and “reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures” such that the human is understood as “always enmeshed with the more-than-human world.” Trans-corporeality for Alaimo acknowledges what philosopher Nancy Tuana (2008) describes as a “viscous porosity of flesh,” recognizing that, while entities are inextricably linked to one another, physical and discursive membranes mediate interaction between the self and world such that self and other are not completely fluid and open to one another. As an intervention into the gendered dualisms that justify and perpetuate violence against certain groups of human and nonhuman life, Alaimo's trans-corporeality aligns with a Chthonic perspective by recognizing that the human is a material entity continuous with and constituted by its nonhuman ecologies. Haraway (2016, 103) demonstrates a similar view when she writes, “All critters share a common ‘flesh,’ laterally, semiotically, and genealogically.” Trans-corporeality is the ontological basis for Chthonic subjectivities that recognize their inherent embodied interconnections

with other beings, materials, and ecologies. Trans-corporeality has profound political implications for how we act in the world as individuals and collectivities. Indeed, entering the Chthulucene requires us to think and act ecologically (Morton 2010) as trans-corporeal social flesh to emphasize interconnection and continuity rather than separation, autonomy, and hierarchy.

Chthonic subjectivities come about through ethics of mutual aid and entanglement rather than competition and separation. Such a position reflects environmental ethicist John R. White's argument, with phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler, and F.W.J. von Schelling, for an environmental ethics based not on the usual intentionalist paradigm in which humans are seen as separate from nature and approaches to the environment are cast as either anthropocentric (subject-focused) or ecocentric (object-focused). Rather, White articulates a transcendental model that reveals humans and nature not as diametric opposites but unified and inseparable through the very ideologies that understand them as subjects and objects. He believes this is the ground of an environmental ethics that moves beyond the scarcity of the intentional model of environmental ethics to work for the benefit of humanity and nature alike, understanding their needs as inherently connected and mutual. Similarly, Haraway acknowledges her agreement with feminist environmentalist Eileen Crist (quoted in Haraway 2016, 49-50) who argues that scarcity and suffering are caused by human exceptionalism, while a humanity with more earthly integrity "invites the priority of our pulling back and scaling down, of welcoming limitations of our numbers, economies, and habitats for the sake of a higher, more inclusive freedom and quality of life." With a transcendental environmental ethic, human and nonhuman needs are not seen as in competition even as consumption

patterns change to facilitate ecological flourishing. Further, Chthonic subjectivities acknowledge that beings of all kinds “require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway 2010, 4). Chthonic subjects, then, demonstrate transcendental environmental ethical perspectives by refusing false notions of separation between humans and nonhumans and shifting into more sustainable relationships with one another.

To summarize, modern, rational, possessive individual subjects configure themselves as separate, autonomous entities. They are responsible for themselves, their circles of responsibility limited to their immediate kin. They move of their own volition. Their skins are barriers between them and not-them. They assert their will on and through a passive, malleable world of objects. *Homo economicus*, the late capitalist version of the modern individual, acts according to their rational self-interests, which means toward greater financial wealth. Violences committed by *homo economicus* are rationalized by the philosophy of maximizing one’s economic status—significantly, not only measured in present material possessions but in future financial prognoses—at all costs.

Chthonic, entangled subjects, on the other hand, constitute themselves as what Haraway (2016, 60) calls “holobionts”—whole, sympoietic beings comprised of and comprising intimately interconnected, trans-corporeal networks that are “not the same thing as One and Individual.” They are response-able (29)—able to respond—to their ecology; their circle of responsibility extends to the present and distant others that they shape and are shaped by—whose effects are felt through attunement to one’s senses and

experiences of interconnection. They move with distributed agency³ (Krause 2011), vulnerable to others who are likewise vulnerable to them. Their skins are porous organs that allow one's constitutive outside in. They are performatively co-created with and through an agential, unpredictable world of things. Chthonic subjects move through the world with a sense of deep time, attuning to the present from the perspective of both the future and the past. They attend to consequence, to "becoming with" human and nonhuman others as mutually vulnerable fellow holobionts. They make kin in multispecies configurations that dissolve linear familial bloodlines. Wealth is found in the sustainability of material processes, in maximizing pleasure, and in experiences of interconnection with one's multi-species kin.

How, then, might Chthonic trans-corporeal subjectivities with transcendental environmental ethical perspectives come into being? While Haraway's project is largely intellectual, I hope to highlight with the notion of sensuous ecological activism that the body and sensory experiences shape our understandings of self and knowledge of the world, and that certain experiences and modes of attention and perception can elicit Chthonic subjectivities. Significantly, White's (2012) transcendental environmental ethical model and Alaimo's (2010) notion of trans-corporeality center bodily experience as a site of knowledge production about human interdependence. White (2012) argues that a transcendental environmental model and ethic can be achieved through the body and sensuous engagement with one's surroundings. While the stereotypical American ethos based on 17th century Puritanism values utilitarianism, specifically efficiency, and

³ Political theorist Sharon Krause (2011) understands agency as both embodied and distributed, such that one's actions must be taken up by others in order to have their intended effect, making impossible the ideology of sovereign agency perpetuated by the individual humanist subject.

rationality over emotionality, White (2012, 228) articulates a phenomenologically-grounded ethics in which the experience of appreciation for oneself as an organically living being, not the intellectual understanding of one's organic vitality, cultivates identification with—or “vital sympathy” for—other living beings. Indeed, the more one experiences love for others, the more one can act and live morally in relation to the environment. White's theoretical model calls upon our bodies as ethico-political entities, asking us to practice sensuously engaged ways of being in order to foster deeper empathic connection to the human and nonhuman beings of our ecologies. Similarly, Haraway contends that the task for us in bringing about the Chthulucene is to “become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response” (2016, 1). She urges us to “become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimogenesis on a damaged planet” (2016, 98). Becoming response-able, or capable of response, is necessarily an embodied practice of attunement. Throughout “Dancing into the Chthulucene,” I demonstrate how practices and performances of sensuous ecological activism do this work of cultivating more sensuously attuned modes of perception and response-ability. Through the movement-based performances and practices I address in this dissertation, performers, audiences, and practitioners become aware of their own sensations and embeddedness in their world.

Sensuous Ecological Activism

If neoliberal ideology and institutions—and the consumer cultures and environmental destruction they perpetuate—are based on the ideology of the autonomous possessive individual subject, I contend that sensuous experiences of embodied

interconnection and mutual vulnerability, such as those facilitated and performed in the examples discussed in this project, can expand the sense of self, moving us out of the apocalyptic Anthropocene and Capitalocene and into a commitment to ongoingness with the myriad critters of the Chthulucene. Here, I flesh out a theory of sensuous ecological activism as those performances and practices that cultivate processes of Chthonic subjectivization.

Taking Haraway's notion of the Chthulucene as the theoretical skeleton for my notion of sensuous ecological activism, I depart from her primarily intellectual focus to discuss the sensuous dimensions of the Chthulucene and Chthonic subjectivities. Instead of focusing on art-science activisms that intervene in our intellectual understandings of the human and nonhuman, nature and culture, self and other, I propose sensuous ecological activist ventures as capable of opening perceptual maps to more readily connect to and entwine with other others and identify an ethico-political imperative of such endeavors in the particularly volatile beginning of the 21st century. While I agree with Haraway that we need new Chthonic stories, I believe these stories are in part created through and supported by embodied experiences of human and nonhuman interconnection and vulnerability—activities that loosen and soften self-perception to more readily include other others. To manifest a Chthonic age of radical interconnectivity and mutual vulnerability, we must change not only how we live with one another, not only how we think of ourselves and our place with others and in the world, but how we experience ourselves, which supports shifts in how we think of ourselves and how we live. Throughout “Dancing into the Chthulucene,” I argue that sensuous movement-based performance and practice—what I am calling sensuous ecological activism—offer

particular promise for Chthonic activism, cultivating profound shifts in self-perception and ecological attunement capable of ushering us into the Chthulucene.

In looking at these examples as sensuous ecological activisms, I am asking about the futures these performances and practices call into being, or usher us toward. I utilize activism as a lens through which I interrogate these possible futures and ask how the works act on the somatic identities (Albright 1997, xxiii) of participants, audiences, and performers, to interrupt and redirect existing flows. I attend less to the cultural identities (ibid.) and relations performed and more to the somatic experiences they foster. Sensuous ecological activisms are anti-dystopian and utopian projects rooted in the material world while speculating on and striving for more ideal futures. They reveal and critique the disproportionate experiences of injustice, violence, and systemically exacerbated vulnerability endured by marginalized and oppressed communities in late capitalism while fostering empathy for these communities. They contribute to inclusive social kinesthetics⁴ (Martin 2004, 48) attuned to the interdependent needs of both self and other, cultivating the bodily capabilities, perceptual maps, and societal narratives for more sustainable and just futures. Sensuous ecological activism promotes transcendental environmental ethics and cultivate Sensuous ecological activism elicit experiences of interconnection, vulnerability, sensitization, and radical inclusion such that audiences, performers, and practitioners come to a deeper awareness of their trans-corporeality with other others and cultivate transcendental environmental ethics.

⁴ Randy Martin (2004, 48) defines social kinesthetic as “the capacity to move an idea in a particular direction through the acquired prowess of bodies in action.”

Sensuous ecological activisms are projects of nomadic subjectivization (Braidotti 1994). They conjure “nonunitary” subjects (3), destabilizing the exclusionary, divisive power of identity structures in favor of more fluid, dynamic, relational experiences of self (10). Processes of nomadic subjectivization are achieved in sensuous ecological activism through both external and internal pilgrimages—psychic and physical journeys of transformation that often occur together. In external physical pilgrimages, travelers venture to a particular meaningful place as an act of penance, devotion, or self-discovery and are transformed temporarily or permanently by the experience (Turner 1978). These rituals “undo” the pilgrim, destabilizing a sense of a coherent, stable self in favor of nomadic alternative subjectivities. With inner psychic pilgrimages, the pilgrim turns their attention inward to their physical and psychological experience, paradoxically coming to awareness of their interconnection with the world outside of the self, disrupting or dissolving this boundary temporarily or, with repeated practice, more permanently. Sensuous ecological activism turns the practitioner’s and/or audience’s attention both inward and outward, transforming unitary, stable experiences of self into more nomadic subjective possibilities—fluid, relational, and in-process.

Activism happens in laboratories, classrooms, town halls, and community centers. Activism occurs in legislative offices as well as on the street, in writing as well as in the flesh, in mundane interactions as well as exceptional ones. Thus, I consider sensuous ecological activism as a network of performances, practices, and communities that sensitize practitioners and audiences to human and nonhuman interdependence and attune them to more equitable, and sustainable, ways of being. I propose that sensuous ecological activism constitutes potent Chthonic critiques of neoliberal rational

subjectivities as they insist upon and cultivate intimate, sensuous relationships between humans, nonhumans, and environmental flows.

The case studies that comprise this project illustrate what I identify as four imbricated modes of sensuous ecological activism—vulnerability, interconnection, sensitization, and radical inclusion. For my purposes, vulnerability refers to human and nonhuman material finitude, injurability, permeability, and mortality, recognizing that living beings are open and exposed to one another and ecological processes in ways that can be both life-affirming and life-threatening. In recognizing our vulnerability, we come to terms with our materiality as mortal creatures inherently connected to one another, able to both harm and be harmed by various others. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler (2004, 28) understands vulnerability as a shared existential condition of all humans; we are not autonomous beings but rather dependent on one another for care, support, and recognition due to what she calls our “primary sociality.” Vulnerability is the embodied analog to precarity—the omnipresent existential state of economic and social instability exacerbated and exploited in late capitalism (Butler 2012). Interconnection similarly recognizes that the autonomous individual is illusory, since all beings exist in and are animated by a complex web of material and ideological flows that are never fully extricable from one another. Radical inclusion, as opposed to liberal discourses of tolerance that acknowledge otherness without substantially engaging with others, accepts interconnection such that self and other are indivisible. Taking a holistic perspective, a radically inclusive community seeks to hold space for all, indiscriminately, finding ways to live together while allowing for unavoidable ruptures and divisions that do not supersede our inherent interconnection. Sensitization occurs through processes that

encourage modes of being and being-in-relation in which individuals and collectives more fully listen and respond to the needs and conditions of others, including the ecological environment. While the possessive individual of neoliberal capitalist ideology is compelled to act according to their individual rational (i.e. profit-maximizing) short-term self-interest (Brown 2016), a more sensitized, radically inclusive subject experiences interconnection with and mutual vulnerability to others and is able to take action with a more holistic ecological perspective.

Together, these modes comprise a theory of the sensate body as an important agent of political mobilization in the contemporary moment. With a dance studies disciplinary framework elucidating bodily practice through in-depth movement and choreographic analysis bolstered by phenomenological ethnography, critical theory, and historical contextualization, I argue that sensuous ecological activist practices promote community resilience as well as environmental and economic sustainability. These practices not only make explicit human and nonhuman interdependence and mutual vulnerability, they also cultivate more attuned modes of being that, I argue, can promote more just social structures and communities.

Transnationalism

Recent transnational theories have arisen in a variety of disciplines in response to increasing global connectivity due to technological, economic, and political shifts. Of special interest here is transnational feminist and queer scholarship that complicates the nation as the primary governing power over individual experiences and collective identities. Establishing connections between global forces and local conditions, scholarship such as that by V. Spike Peterson (2003), Chandra Mohanty (1991), and

Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock Swarr (2010), contributes to a more complete understanding of the world and its cultures as they are impacted by neoliberal policies at home and abroad. Queer theorist Suparna Bhaskaran (2004, 9-11), for example, uses the term “trans/national governmentality” to describe the increasing privatization of resources and social services in neoliberal nation-states and shifting centralization and decentralization of power and capital within and between states in relation to global economic institutions. The notion of trans/national governmentalities highlights the instability between local, national, and global levels of power and circulations of capital that further entangle marginalized and stigmatized groups in complex webs of power while leaving them increasingly isolated, unprotected, and vulnerable. Further, while neoliberal capitalism works in large part through multinational corporations, the transnational linkages it enables also provide the basis for wide-ranging solidarity among disparate communities facing similar experiences of oppression, as explored by transnational feminist scholars. Grace Kyungwon Hong (2006, xix), for example, describes a “new transnational proletariat” arising in conjunction with neoliberalization, providing a new global—albeit slippery—foundation of feminist organizing. The transnational networks of the 21st century have only amplified with advanced communication technologies, proliferation of increasingly interconnected mediascapes, and enhanced awareness of global physical and economic interdependence, necessitating a transnational perspective on contemporary activism that elucidates both local specificity and global connectivity. Transnationalism is at once an inherent reality of our globalized world and a theoretical basis for understanding modes of belonging, identity, collective experience, cultural flows, and material conditions beyond the nation and nationalism.

Given the global reach of climate change's causes and effects, my work employs a transnational framework that attends to ecological activism, sensuous performance, and communities of movement practice in the US and India. This particular transnational relationship is significant in light of the extensive cultural and material exchange between the United States and India over the past century, during which they have greatly influenced each other's somatic, activist, and consumer practices. While US-style consumerism and industrialization has increasingly influenced Indian society and culture, especially since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, romanticized versions of yoga, Buddhism, Hinduism and Tantra from South Asia have been taken up as part of US environmental movements, the sexual revolution, and New Age spirituality since the mid 20th century. Counterculturalists in the US, seeking liberation from and alternatives to what they perceived as the perverse materialism of consumer capitalist culture, turned to the East, especially India, for insight into cultivating more utopic possibilities of self- and world-making. Many Indian citizens and leaders, seeking liberation from legacies of colonial oppression, the caste system, and poverty, turned to American-style consumerism as a way to gain global political power and financial wealth. Sensuous ecological activism is ideologically connected to and influenced by romanticized aspects of Eastern spirituality and culture, especially Tantra, that value the body, pleasure, and sensuality and are perceived by many counterculturalists as the antidote to American Puritan prudishness, consumerism, and competitiveness. In fact, Indian gurus throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries explicitly promoted yoga as a way toward achieving "universal unity and brotherhood," or global connectivity rather than competition, and many US practitioners today practice yoga as an antidote to the ills of modernity (Strauss

2005). Further, nonviolent resistance tactics utilized successfully by Mohandas K. Gandhi in the Indian nationalist movement against British colonization directly inspired similar activist maneuvers in the US Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As such, the relationship between US and Indian cultures and countercultures is particularly significant in shaping both neoliberal consumer cultures and resistant alternatives. My exploration of connections between the world's two largest democracies establishes a framework through which I can explore performances and experiences of sensuousness, interconnection, radical inclusion, and vulnerability as Chthonic ecological activism.

Methodology

This dissertation draws primarily from original ethnographic research conducted between 2013 and 2018. I spent several weeks in each of my four sites, collecting data through a variety of ethnographic and archival methods, including participant observation, interviews with participants, performers, and artists, and viewing of relevant social and news media. The four sites discussed here are but four landmarks of a much larger transnational journey that took me to permaculture farms, yoga classes, activist communities, and dance movement therapy programs throughout India and the US. The examples discussed here provide one route into the question of contemporary activism in the Anthropocene, one perspective from which to explore what it might mean to do Chthonic activism in this moment. When I refer to interview subjects in this dissertation, I usually use their real first names or pseudonyms, as per their request. For public figures and people in leadership positions, I provide their full names.

I came to think of my research methodology as informed by contact improvisation, a movement practice based on the question of how two or more bodies can move in contact with one another discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Aiming to explore contemporary activism broadly defined, I ventured into fieldwork—like I would to a contact improvisation jam—open to possibilities and unexpected alliances. I did not have a well-defined plan for how this fieldwork would go in advance. Instead, I allowed every interview, each site visit, and even random encounters to lead me to new sites, people, and communities. I kept my senses open and available to the unexpected links, connections, and directions revealed to me through the research process.

It is important to note that my privileged identity as a white, cis-gendered, English-speaking, educated, able-bodied, middle-class American woman affiliated with a major US-based university facilitated this type of open-ended exploration. Not only was I physically capable of traveling in unfamiliar places, sometimes in harsh climates, and participating in the physical activities at the various sites I encountered, but I was also financially secure enough to embark on such an extensive journey. While I did learn some Hindi to help with my travel in India, I was only rarely in situations without other English-speakers and people often graciously worked with me as unofficial translators in both my research and every day business. While traveling in India, countless people intervened on my behalf, whether by helping me communicate with taxi drivers, providing advice on places to go and helping me find my way around unfamiliar places, or connecting me with potential research subjects. Many people at the four research sites graciously welcomed me in, spent time talking with me, and provided me access to archival and ethnographic sources. I may not have been as easily welcomed had I held

another less privileged identity. Further, my status and identity may have also produced blind-spots in my experience and this research as conversations around class/caste, religion, gender, and nationality were often difficult or glossed over, especially during my research in India. I am both grateful to the many people who aided me on this research journey and cognizant of both the affordances and limitations of my positionality in conducting this research.

Moreover, my specific background and experiences connected me with these communities which facilitated our encounters. I became aware of the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts, discussed in Chapter 1, because my late grandfather was friends and colleagues with Dr. Mallika Sarabhai's graduate school advisor at Harvard University. I worked with Cassie Meador, Liz Lerman, and others from Dance Exchange, discussed in Chapter 2, while at Wesleyan University working on my Bachelor's degree in dance. These personal connections surely facilitated the ease with which Dr. Sarabhai granted me access to her home and the school and Meador invited me to work with and research Dance Exchange. Similarly, I was involved with contact improvisation and attended Burns before conducting this research. My status as an insider in these communities, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, surely affected the degree to which I was welcomed in as a researcher. It is likely that my interlocutors at Forgotten Land and Burning Man especially assumed I was sympathetic to these communities and perhaps opened up about intimate details that they might not have to a researcher perceived as an outsider. However, like at a contact improvisation jam in which dancers have the ability to both consent to and refuse encounters with others, these communities and individuals did have agency in choosing to interact with me or allow me in. I had originally sought to conduct

research on a form of movement pedagogy at a site in southern India. However, the originators of the form refused my proposal on the basis that I was not experienced enough with the form to adequately represent it through my research. I am immensely grateful for those who generously opened themselves and their work to me, as well as for those who clearly expressed their boundaries to me and refused my proposals.

Influenced by anthropologist Ruth Behar's notion of the anthropologist as "vulnerable observer" (1996), it was important for me to include myself and my subject position in my fieldwork. In addition to analyzing verbal and written sources, I specifically collected information about bodily movement and experiential data through my own experiences on-site and through accounts on social and news media. My experiences as a dancer, dance scholar, and traveler deepened my description and analyses of movements, sensations, and affects, reflecting anthropologist Dwight Conquergood's (1991) call for performance ethnography by those who share experiences with their subjects. As a dancer and choreographer, I have performed in and created modern dance works like the two performances explored here, as well as participated in both communities of practice before and during my research. By incorporating my personal voice, I hope to, as Behar urges, bring the reader into the "the enormous sea of social issues" (1996, 14) raised through the performances and practices of these sites. As she explains, the "purpose of bearing witness is to motivate listeners to participate in the struggle against injustice" (27). Highlighting the lived reality of these sites and the complex social structures, environmental injustices, and neocolonial contexts they illuminate, I aim to not only foster empathy and engage readers into activist engagement, but to inspire critical engagement with new holistic possibilities for and formations of

Chthonic activism that take seriously the political import of bodily practice and performance.

After collecting field-notes and interview transcripts, I utilized movement, performance, and discourse analysis to identify a variety of common themes and tropes, finding many relating to performances and experiences of vulnerability, interconnection, sensitization, and radical inclusion. These allowed me to articulate the theory sensuous ecological activism presented here in conversation with secondary sources and critical theoretical perspectives. With this myriad of print, video, and ethnographic data, I combine historical and ethnographic along with choreographic, performance, and movement analyses to unpack the ways in which late capitalist possessive individual subjectivities are resisted through bodily practices that encourage sensuous engagement and experiences of interconnection.

Sensuous Moves: From Performance to Practice

This dissertation explores the sensate body as a political agent in the 21st century, marked by the globalization of neoliberal economic policies and the acceleration of climate change. Bringing together contemporary theatrical performances, alternative intentional communities, and somatic practices, I articulate and argue for what I am calling sensuous ecological activism. In the four chapters and brief conclusion that follow, I elaborate four primary modes of sensuous ecological activism, including vulnerability, interconnection, radical inclusion, and sensitization, that emerge through a variety of embodied practices. In the first two chapters, I explore theatrical works directly connected to activist movements and the somatic techniques utilized in their creation. The second two chapters highlight communities constructed as intentional alternatives to

capitalism, investigating the ways in which their respective physical cultures embody their ideological foundations. Together, these examples allow me to elucidate the concept of sensuous ecological activism as it occurs through the 21st century manifestations of select bodily techniques.

For each chapter, I focus on one of the four case studies. After providing some historical and cultural background, I explore each example as a political, performative, and pedagogical endeavor, focusing on the choreographic qualities and movement practices of each. By separating each example into its own chapter, I do not intend to erase the many commonalities and relationships between the sites. In fact, despite their geographic separation, threads of connection, commonality, and community weave through them. Many in the transnational community of contact improvisers in Arambol discussed in chapter three, for example, also attend Burning Man or other events in the Burning Man Regional Network discussed in chapter four.⁵ Cassie Meador, the choreographer of Dance Exchange's *How to Lose a Mountain* discussed in chapter two, engaged in a pilgrimage as part of the project, recalling legacies of Gandhian nonviolent activism also evident in Darpana's *The Dammed*, discussed in chapter one. By dedicating a chapter to each site, I am able to give and maintain focus on the specificity of the movement practices and performances present at each. I hope the threads of connection between these examples will become visible through these in-depth descriptions and analyses.

⁵ In fact, a 2014 issue of *Contact Quarterly*, a CI-oriented publication, placed an article on CI at Burning Man and another on CI in India on the same page.

With these examples, I trace a continuum between activist performance and movement-based activist practice to elucidate the multi-dimensional nature of movement-based activism. Performances function as activism not only for what they address topically, but the affective subtleties of how they organize bodies in time and space and the phenomenological experiences they conjure. Movement practices, similarly, do not only heal, empower, and strengthen the individual practitioners,⁶ but embody philosophical ideals that impact subjective and social experiences. Dance performances and practices, therefore, carry political import for the subjective experiences they cultivate and support. The first two chapters analyze contemporary theatrical performances, following a more traditional dance studies approach, as well as practices of various kinds that directly influenced the choreographic processes for the works. The second two chapters shift to examples of communities of practice. Together, they bridge performance-based and practiced-based perspectives on dance as activism to highlight the multi-layered entanglements of sensuous ecological activist approaches.

Chapter One, “Addressing Vulnerability and the Paradox of Dispossession in Darpana’s *The Dammed: Performance as Political Pedagogy*” focuses on performances of vulnerability in performance for social change, including political demonstrations and theatrical productions. I discuss the dance theater piece *The Dammed*, by choreographer Naomi Deira and videographer Yadavan Chandran, produced by the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts in Ahmedabad, India. Inspired by protests in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh organized by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) against the

⁶ See, for example, Kajiwara, Gray, Singer, Harris, Fitzgerald, Ross, and Bessing’s contributions to Jackson and Shapiro-Phim’s 2008 anthology *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion*.

raising of a dam, the work premiered in Darpana's 2013 InterArt festival. In both the protests and their theatrical counterpart, vulnerability is choreographically presented and performed, making explicit the violence endured in the name of large-scale capitalist development. I explore the political implications and impacts of these performances of vulnerability to address larger questions regarding the politicization of vulnerability in 21st century activism. Under what conditions do performances of vulnerability attune audiences to the systemic inequitable distribution of precarity in the contemporary global political economy? How are such attunements achieved choreographically? In other words, how is the vulnerable body performed in the late 21st century, and to what effect? The chapter also highlights the choreographic methods and styles used by the Darpana Performing Group in creating the performance, which blended Western modern dance and Indian Classical dance, as well as a staging of the Narmada Bachao Andolan's protests. I explore the ways in which the performance and its choreographic processes utilize bodily vulnerability as a kind of strength, and how these experiences manifest and contribute to an empathic cosmopolitan politics.

My second chapter, "Performing and Experiencing Interconnection in the Anti-Mountaintop Removal Movement and the Dance Exchange's *How to Lose a Mountain*," considers this 2011 work as the starting point for an investigation of the performance of interconnection as a mode of sensuous ecological activism. In this project, choreographer Cassie Meador walked from her home in Washington, DC to a site of mountaintop removal mining in West Virginia from which coal was extracted to provide her home with electricity. In marking this distance with her body and creating choreography with local groups along the way, Meador's performance accounts for the particular journey of

electric power that is often invisible in the everyday experience of flipping a light switch. She stood as witness to the environmental and cultural devastation endured by local communities for distant consumers and multinational corporate interests and communicates her experience to audiences of the theatrical work created in dialogue with the workshop series and walk. The intimate connection to place that Meador experienced and performed critiques the abstraction of place into space that allows for alienated hyper-consumption ignorant of its material and social impact (Abram 1996, 183-184) and instead highlights a politics of interconnection. Through her investigation, she and her audience are compelled to viscerally understand the connection between their own consumption of electricity and their not-so-distant ecologies. Similarly, efforts against mountaintop removal and destructive forms of coal mining attempt to also make such interconnections explicit through marches, demonstrations, and the refusal to move. I explore the bodily tactics of the anti-mountaintop removal movement for how they highlight the interconnection between coal consumption and environmental damage and the concomitant interdependency between the human and the nonhuman. I show how this movement must not only make visible the environmental impacts of the coal industry but also Appalachian culture, whose history of “otherness” in relationship to mainstream white America enables the exploitation of its people, environment, and culture. I additionally consider the choreographic and somatic pedagogy techniques Meador utilized in her community-based workshops, elucidating how they emphasize and enable the bodily experience of interconnection.

In chapter three, “Practicing Chthonic Sensitization at Forgotten Land: Politics, Pilgrimage, and Pedagogy,” I examine Forgotten Land, a venue on Arambol Beach in

Goa, India, that hosts an annual contact improvisation (CI) festival and other related somatic programming as a contemporary pilgrimage site, educational venue, and locus of social change that troubles common delineations between spiritual practice, movement pedagogy, and activism in the first few decades of the 21st century. I elucidate CI's potential as an emergent Chthonic practice, analyzing the ways in which the form sensitizes practitioners to their own experience as well as the experience of others, inviting them to, as feminist philosopher Donna Haraway (2016, 1) calls for, "stay with the trouble" of becoming-with an other. As I will show, CI and related practices at Forgotten Land cultivate somatic experiences of trans-corporeality as practitioners attune to "becoming with" a multitude of human, nonhuman, and more-than-human others. Attending to the legacies of colonization that shape this locality and relations at Forgotten Land, I explore contact improvisation and related activities at Forgotten Land as Chthonic activist practices capable of disrupting for practitioners the experience of separation pervasive in modern capitalism and cultivating experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality that disrupt the separation between individual humans, as well as between the human, nonhuman, and more-than-human, imposed through rational, possessive individualism in the age of neoliberal capitalist globalization. I draw from ethnographic research I conducted at the Goa Contact Festival at Forgotten Land to consider CI as a transformative, even activist, practice because of its potential to sensitize practitioners toward greater response-ability. I argue that contact improvisation can expand the practitioner's sense of self beyond the bounded, possessive, separate individual subject of capitalism by loosening and revising the practitioner's perceptual

maps and body schema to include and attune to the various “others” of the practitioner’s surrounding ecology.

The fourth and final chapter, “Burn Culture: A Radically Inclusive Social Choreographic Score for the Chthulucene,” examines the annual festival Burning Man, which occurs in the southwest US. Burning Man is founded on ten basic principles intended to foster a viable temporary non-capitalist community, one of the most important being radical inclusion. Under such a premise, people of all identities are welcome and encouraged to take part in the gifting economy and culture of radical expression. In the liminal space of the festival, “burners” experiment with building communities free of the profit motive that pervades mainstream “default” society. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which embodied practices at Burning Man and in the Burner community cultivate the culture of radical inclusion, which I read as a mode of sensuous ecological activism. At the festival as well as during smaller events throughout the nation based on the same principles, burners participate in a variety of movement styles, including CI and a loose collection of practices referred to as “ecstatic dance.” Ecstatic dance events usually involve improvisational freestyle dancing of all kinds and are influenced heavily by contact improvisation as both a technique and a culture. All types of movement expression are ideally accommodated, fostering an ethos of individuality and connection characterized by pleasure—a philosophy and practice of rapturous unity through difference. I show the ways in which these practices lend themselves to queer ecological projects that aim to destabilize the nature/culture binary and human/nonhuman separation, in this case through movement practices and cultures that blur the boundaries between self and other and emphasize radical inclusion. Full

radical inclusion is an ideal yet-to-be-realized at Burning Man and other Burn events, but by examining these practices as they occur today, I elucidate the possibilities and limitations of ecstatic dance practices at Burning Man and as part of burner culture more broadly as a sensuous ecological practice of radical inclusion, developing kinesthetic awarenesses of the self as it is imbricated in and inclusive of the other.

In response to the complex levels of culture, ideology, geography, and political economies that contribute to climate change trends and exacerbate the unequal distribution of human vulnerability, activism for sustainability and environmental justice must occur on multiple interconnected fronts. With “Dancing into the Chthulucene,” I wish to contribute to an understanding of what it means to work for progressive social change in circumstances where ideal citizenship is increasingly understood as “uncomplaining accommodation to the economic life of the nation” (Brown 2016, 10). If, as Wendy Brown (2016, 8) articulates, in neoliberal capitalist contexts, the economization of all spheres of life impedes upon the public sphere and the notion of the social “diminishes all significant venues for active citizenship,” what possibilities exist for activism that promotes justice, equality, and sustainability and resists capitalist industrialization and other factors exacerbating climate change caused by global warming? The question becomes, what does it mean to do embodied activism toward sustainable, equitable, and inclusive culture? How are bodily possibilities shaped by capitalist ideologies and consumer cultures, and how can the body then bring into being alternative ideologies and cultures? How can activist and artistic practices sensitize us to specificities of place, sensation, and interdependence with many diverse others?

If it is to be truly transformative, contemporary environmental activism cannot merely target a clear, stable, and localizable enemy in the guise of, for example, multinational corporations or “big oil.” Instead, it must address the systemic, economic, material, behavioral, and psychological processes contributing to climate change while developing alternative models of self, consumption, and community. Sensuous ecological activism that cultivates experiences of vulnerability, interconnection, radical inclusion, and sensitization are central to this complex task. Through this investigation, I argue that somatic practices are important drivers of activist work that (re)sensitize us to our bodily interdependencies with our human and nonhuman ecologies, rendering us more responsive to and responsible for our inherent vulnerabilities to one another and to our material, finite world.

Chapter 1. Addressing Vulnerability and the Paradox of Dispossession in Darpana's *The Dammed*: Performance as Political Pedagogy

It is a warm December evening in Ahmedabad, a major city in the Indian state of Gujarat, on the last night of the 2013 Vikram Sarabhai International Art Festival at the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts. The festival addresses the displacement of people in the contemporary moment. Neoliberalism is marked by unprecedented human mobility—increasingly, the privileged classes have the luxury of chosen mobility while disenfranchised communities are coerced into movement by forces such as structural violence, natural disasters worsened by climate change, or the search for employment opportunities. This evening is the premier of *The Dammed*, created by choreographer Naomi Deira and videographer Yadavan Chandran. This dance-theater work takes displacement caused by large-scale development projects—such as dams—for its primary inspiration.

Upon entering the gates of Darpana's campus, I am transported into a glowing refuge away from the blaring horns weaving down Ashram Road. Candles on the ground illuminate photos on the campus's fenced perimeter depicting groups of people standing shoulder-to-shoulder and submerged in water. I stop to read an article next to one of the photos describing protests staged in 2012 against the damming of the Narmada River. The dam would flood arable farmland on which thousands of people subsist, displacing these communities in the process. The protesters of the Narmada Bachao Andolan

(Movement to Save the Narmada) (hereafter, NBA) sat in the water up to their necks for a full 17 days (*India Today*, September 10, 2012). I had to pause to let this sink in. The protest is an example of a *jal satyagraha*—a Gandhian tactic of nonviolent resistance—and was repeated a year later by this group after the land and resources that the Indian government promised as compensation to the displaced were not delivered. The article describes the protesters' steadfastness as the water rose with the rain, as their skin softened, as fish nibbled at their water-logged feet, evoking an uneasy heaviness in my stomach and crawling sensation over my skin which stay with me as I turn to approach the small gateway to the theater.

The Dammed is an example of staged protest and activist performance that aims to influence public consciousness of human rights issues caused and exacerbated by neoliberal development projects. Both the performance work and the NBA protest on which it is based stage vulnerability and the violence of dispossession in order to incite drastic social and economic change. They both cultivate Chthonic subjectivities that trouble intertwined national imaginaries of the ideal middle-class Indian citizen and the possessive individual humanist subject. The stage work intends to make present for its middle- and upper-class audiences the plight of the rural dispossessed and displaced. The choreography highlights the embodied experience of the vulnerable displaced and the embodied, sensuous experience of the protesters' resistance, making visible the displaced in their community and bringing these marginalized communities into the national imaginary. In Haraway's (2016, 1) terminology, the work encourages its audiences to "make kin" with the dispossessed excluded from national narratives of progress, modernity, and citizenship. Both the stage work and the NBA's performative protest

highlight the interconnection between the human and nonhuman, in this case, the human rural villagers and the nonhuman land on which they live and sustain themselves.

The rural protest itself has reached people through news outlets, but it has not incited widespread outrage, perhaps because such reports are easy to ignore. It is beyond the purview of this study to evaluate the effectiveness of news reports in evoking empathy for the disenfranchised, but it is disturbing that news reports of social injustices like mass displacement, perhaps because of their pervasiveness, are not enough to inspire political action towards their amelioration. While news reports are often short, can be emotionally-distanced, and are easily turned off or turned away from, audiences of Darpana's evening-length dance-theater works are immersed in emotionally-evocative experiences with live performers. Darpana hopes that live theater can have greater emotional resonance and impact than a news report because the narrative and affective choreography makes information about the issue, as well as its human impact, more accessible and empathetically relatable. With *The Dammed*, the dance company intends to increase the audience's emotional connection to such issues through education and the cultivation of empathy, and thus functions as a form of sensuous ecological activism through performance. Most modern dance-theater, however, reaches a small audience nationally and internationally, because these live performances are labor intensive, underfunded, and often take place in small theaters. Darpana as an institution in particular has endured controversy and political strife with the increasingly conservative Hindu nationalist government, which has limited their resources and reach.

Although Darpana's reach and influence is limited, especially since 2002, *The Dammed* enacts a Chthonic postnationalist framework that resists the myth of a

homogenous, unified citizenry as the ideal body politic of the sovereign nation. In so doing, the work accounts for those left out of the ongoing Indian nationalist project even as Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team do not directly espouse a Chthonic postnationalist critical stance. Aligning with Chthonic orientations, queer politics urge for radical critique of the sovereign nation and the fostering of inclusive community based on difference rather than imposed homogeneity in service to an imagined national identity. A queer postnationalist perspective understands the heterosexual patriarchal family as the main source of political identity in the modern nation-state, suggesting that a feminist critique in modern and contemporary contexts must also directly address heteronormativity within the family and nation. Menon (2007, 40-42) argues for a postnationalism “from below” that works both “over” national boundaries—with strategies of exit and movement across borders—and “under” them—with a politics of refusal that inserts counter-hegemonic histories and notions of kinship into the imaginations and physical bounds of the nation. For Menon, these are exemplified in movements against big dams, mining, or other development projects that require further marginalization and exclusion of those that do not fit neatly within modern nationalist or corporatist aspirations, such as those highlighted in *The Dammed*. Similarly, Chthonic politics transgress national borders and boundaries constructed between individuals and species alike and revise notions of progress, belonging, and development. While neither *The Dammed* nor the anti-displacement movement to which it refers directly confront the heteronormativity of the Indian nationalist project, these efforts do seek the inclusion of rural villagers and indigenous populations into the national imaginary, challenging the ideal middle-class model of the Indian citizen and supporting Chthonic impulses.

In what follows, I first discuss the history of Darpana in relation to Indian nationalism, the Indian women's movement, and Indian modern and classical dance. I follow the organization into the present, explaining how it functions in relation to the current political landscape. I explain how Darpana conceives of and practices the arts as a form of pedagogy and an important part of progressive social change, highlighting *The Dammed* and the displacement-themed festival of which it was a part. Then, I introduce the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and current Indian anti-displacement activism, as well as discuss the complex political terrain of displacement, dispossession, vulnerability, and precarity as theoretical concepts and lived experience in the current moment of neoliberal capitalist globalization and profit-driven development models. I then discuss how the NBA's *jal satyagraha* and *The Dammed* performatively conjure Chthonic ethico-political awarenesses through the performance of vulnerability. Through performance and choreographic analyses, I discuss three main choreographic components of sensuous ecological activism: making kin, performing vulnerability, and stillness. Last, I discuss the impact of the 2013 International Art Festival as a whole in relation to transnational cultural flows and norms of the global stage.

Introduction to Darpana Academy for Performing Arts

Founded by Mrinalini and Vikram Sarabhai in 1949, shortly after India gained independence from British colonization, Darpana Academy for Performing Arts in Ahmedabad is a performing arts institution with a mission to teach and use the arts for progressive social change. The Sarabhai family is an elite, intellectual, and socially conscious family, likened in a 1987 *India Today* magazine article to the Rockefellers in the US (cited in Lynton 1995, 53). Vikram Sarabhai (for whom the annual festival

discussed here is named) was a famous scientist credited with establishing India's space program, while Mrinalini Sarabhai was a famous classical Indian dancer who used performance and writing to address social justice issues, especially those concerning women and the environment. Just after independence, the family stood as a model of success for the new nation state, understanding themselves as global citizens with a duty to use their privilege to help better Indian society and the world as a whole (Grau 2013, 10-12). In what follows, I discuss Darpana as an institution in relation to shifting political and aesthetic contexts, shaped by the Indian independence movement, notions of modernity, feminist and women's movements, and legacies of nonviolent resistance. I follow the organization into the present, considering how Dr. Mallika Sarabhai, the current artistic director, is positioned in relation to state and national political trends in contemporary India.

Historical Context: Indian Independence and the Women's Movement

From the turn of the 20th century until Indian independence in 1947, nationalist and women's movements in South Asia were closely affiliated, if not intertwined. Both sought gender, caste, and religious reform in alignment with British colonialism and missionary activities in order to strengthen claims for independence. Indian nationalist discourse in the first part of the 20th century "revolved around the need to reform religious practice and the imperative to protect women while modernizing them" such that a feminist consciousness arose alongside and intertwined with nationalistic aspirations (Deo 2012, 153-154). Most of these activists belonged to the cosmopolitan elite and engaged with transnational discourses of modernity, development, and morality. The Indian nationalist movement was transnational from the beginning, given the

colonial context in which Indian and British people lived together (151). The colonial power dynamics were such that Indian nationalist activists were compelled to appeal to the British government for legal reform. The culture and goals of the movement were therefore informed at least in part by British norms and ideals as Indian nationalists advocated for self-rule and the end of British colonization.

Further, efforts to classicize indigenous dance and music featured prominently in the nationalist movement. Beginning in the mid-1930s, the performing arts in South Asia were “revived” by “middle class engineers of tradition” (Peterson and Soneji 2009, 5) into classicized forms. These invented classical traditions served the nationalist agenda by both asserting an unbroken connection to a spiritual Hindu past tradition, largely accomplished by referring to the ancient texts like the *Natyashastra* and using them to guide the revival, and by aligning with modern, scientific ideologies (7). For dance in particular, this meant a de-eroticization and sanitation of the movement itself, as well as a transfer of the form to more “appropriate”—i.e. elite—practitioners. These critiques are not intended to completely undermine the activist role that dance played in the women’s and nationalist movements, as these practices did provide support for the struggle against colonization and were sites through which at least middle class and elite women gained cultural capital. Recognizing that the field of Indian classical dance is more diverse than one definition allows, for my purposes, I follow dance scholar Pallabi Chakravorty (1998, 115) and use the term “Indian classical” dance to refer to regional dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Sattriya, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, Chhau, Oyilattam, and Kuchipudi that connect to notions of an authentic precolonial past and are invested in both Indian nationalism and the continuation of tradition.

Often constructed as in opposition to Indian classical dance, Indian modern dance is a diverse category of performance influenced by Expressionist art and marked by increased movement experimentation. Unlike most Indian classical dance, Indian modern dance emerging at the same time tended to engage directly with politics, sometimes inserting itself as social protest and often asserting feminist visions of dance as a form of secular spirituality, reconfiguring the connection between dance and Hindu religiosity celebrated in the Sanskritization of indigenous performance (Purkayastha 2014, 7). Recently, scholars have differentiated Indian modern dance from the more recent Indian contemporary dance (ibid., 8; Chatterjea 2013). I use the terms “Indian modern dance” and “Indian contemporary dance” to refer to related secular theatrical movement-based performance forms that break from the established formats and religiosity of Indian classical dance and connect to transnational modernist and postmodernism artistic movements. For my purposes, Indian contemporary dance refers to theatrical dance works devised from abstract movement vocabularies that often, as dance historian and performance studies scholar Prarthana Purkayashtra (7) notes, neither completely reject nor overtly express spirituality, “negotiated and redistributed within a secular (and often feminist) vision of the role of dance.” Like Indian modern dance, Indian contemporary dance often connects to political themes. While Darpana also stages Indian classical dance choreographies, Darpana’s stage work *The Dammed* highlighted here is most accurately referred to as Indian contemporary dance as it experiments with and combines Indian classical dance and abstract movement vocabularies in a secular theatrical dance-theater work.

While some in the early women's movement aligned with Indian nationalist elite rhetoric and sought to embody the ideal Indian wife and mother in service to the independent, sovereign Indian nation by taking her rightful place in the home, Indian modern dance ventures of the early 1900s, such as Rabindranath Tagore's dance-dramas, demonstrated an alternative approach to women's empowerment. These groups provided opportunities for middle-class women to enter the public sphere in radical ways despite dance's "depraved" status (Purkayastha 2014, 12). Similarly, choreographer Shanti Bardhan worked during the late colonial era as director of the Communist Party-affiliated Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), creating works in service of their mission to use local indigenous art forms to represent contemporary realities, promote human rights, and create a mass patriotic movement. Purkayastha (2014, 104-5), looking to autobiographical accounts of women performers in the IPTA, argues that these artistic ventures fostered a vision of gender equality and, within the context of 1940s India, "afforded women the possibility of feminist struggle at both discursive and material levels, even though the aim of that struggle was not gender equality but something equally fundamental—civil liberty." Thus, modern and classical Indian dancing bodies of the early 20th century both supported and disrupted the boundaries of nation, culture, and gender being asserted by Indian nationalist and women's movements.

Indian classical dance and Indian modern/contemporary dance are not completely separable, however. As Purkayastha (2014, 6) argues, the 20th century reconstruction of Indian classical dance was a thoroughly modern project, given its time period, as well as its collusion with colonial notions of proper and modern womanhood, family structures, forms of worship, and community structures. Similarly, classical Indian dance

practitioners and choreographers “continue to assert that their dance forms, in spite of inheriting ‘a centuries-old legacy,’ continue to have relevance to the present-day social milieu” (ibid.). Thus, the binary between “classical” and “modern” in the Indian dance context is a false one, with neither being fixed, pure, or stable traditions. Still, the development of modern dance in early 20th century India was largely eclipsed by the Indian cultural nationalist quest to reconnect with an “authentic” pre-colonial, and therefore non-modern, past. The history of Indian dance, whether “modern,” “classical,” or hybrid, reveals sites of rupture and dissent within the story of India’s development as a nation.

Mrinalini Sarabhai and Darpana’s Early Years (1949-1977)

Mrinalini Sarabhai was one of the beneficiaries and prime movers of the imbricated women’s, independence, classical, and modernist art movements in India. Born in 1918 to the elite cosmopolitan Swaminathan family, Mrinalini Sarabhai came of age as the Indian independence and women’s movements gained traction. Her family, believing in modernist principles like women’s education and committed to the Indian independence movement, provided Mrinalini with early schooling in Switzerland and a college education at Vishwa Bharati, the university established by progressive activist and pedagogue Rabindranath Tagore (Grau 2013, 9). She began dancing at a young age during a transformative period of dance in India. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, a diverse group of primarily upper-class women such as Rukmini Devi Arundale and former low caste temple dancers known as *devadasis* such as Balasaraswati were transforming *sadir*, the movement practice of *devadasis* who had become increasingly

associated with prostitution and had fallen out of favor under British colonialism,¹ into the classical form that came to be known as Bharatanatyam (O'Shea 2007). As a classical Indian dancer and choreographer with a modern cosmopolitan agenda, she contributed to the Indian independence movement by creating and expanding dance forms like Bharatanatyam both in India and abroad, her international travels serving as diplomatic efforts and opportunities for cultural exchange.

A few years after her marriage to Vikram Sarabhai, who came from a similarly positioned elite, progressive family also sympathetic to the independence movement, Mrinalini established Darpana to train students in classical Indian dance forms, especially Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, and continue developing her own experimental dance dramas (Grau 2013, 9; Chandran 2 and Sarabhai 012). Unlike many other dancers at the time credited for revitalizing Indian classical dance forms, Mrinalini's forays into the newly classicized forms were experimental from the start, using her dance and composition abilities—cultivated in part by Rabindranath Tagore—to create works that experimentally addressed social injustices, especially those primarily affecting women

¹ The late 1800s and early 1900s saw a series of national purity campaigns, or anti-nautch movements, against hereditary dancers like devadasis and nautch girls who were increasingly associated with prostitution and obscenity. A woman performing in public for men was seen as an indicator of her sexual availability, which fell outside of the purview of proper domesticity with the modernist emphasis on the conjugal family unit. Thus, ritual performers, classical courtesans, and transgender performers alike were in need of purification and redemption, despite the independence and revered status that many enjoyed. Ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom (2013) argues that these projects aided early constructions of the Indian nation through the exclusion of certain groups of performers, who were largely of lower caste than their patrons, if not of low caste, and deemed illicit and unfit because of their public and/or erotic performances. The reform movements cast auspicious ritual performers out of the temples, dispossessing them of their rights to property, means of securing livelihood, and artistic lineage. Early women's movements in South Asia, then, through their alignment with nationalist discourses that sought to uplift and educate women into their proper roles as modern wives, necessarily excluded groups of female and transgender public performers. The "woman" defended and benefitted by early South Asian women's movements, then, was a particular kind of appropriate and ideal woman—modern, middle-class, and domesticated—and constructed in opposition to the illicit public female performer.

(Grau 2013, 10). As anthropologist Andrée Grau (ibid.) argues, Darpana has closely followed the Nehruvian philosophy of modernity, marked by “national unity, parliamentary democracy, industrialism, socialism, scientific temper, and secularism.” Vikram and Mrinalini Sarabhai² were not only upper-class elites, but they pursued progressive social and economic agendas through their individual work and creation of institutions like Darpana.

From its inception, Darpana has embraced and embodied the complexities and interrelations of Indian classical, modern, and contemporary dance by experimenting with classical forms not exclusively to rehash or connect to an authentic past but to imagine and bring about a more just, modern, and globally connected future for India and the world. Mrinalini’s work as a teacher, activist, and artist supports Purkayastha’s (2014, 4) proposed alternative history of classical, modern, and contemporary dance in India that challenges the “view that India’s dance works are not-yet-modern and that there exists a Euro-American prerogative to modernity over other cultures.” Indeed, Mrinalini’s works utilized the burgeoning Indian classical dance forms in experimental ways much like modern choreographers of the time. In particular, she often made physically expansive dances that allowed dancers to take up more physical space, choreographed complex group compositions, experimented with abstract movement rather than illustrating the lyrics of songs, and created works that educated audiences about social injustices. For example, her work *Memory is a Ragged Fragment of Eternity* (1963) brought attention to violence against women and the frequent suicides of young wives who were killing

² For the sake of clarity, I refer to Mrinalini and Vikram Sarabhai by their first names and Dr. Mallika Sarabhai as Dr. Sarabhai.

themselves to escape hostile home situations throughout India (Grau 2013, 10; Chandran and Sarabhai 2012).

Mrinalini was also the first woman to learn the all-male form Kathakali. She created Kathakali choreographies without the usual elaborate costumes to show the “power and beauty” of the form (Chandran and Sarabhai 2012)—a technique of simplification also used in modern and post-modern dance. As Mrinalini (2011) wrote on her personal blog:

To be traditional in art is to be able to recognize a known structure which has retained a clarity that has withstood time...The creative artist is often the real ‘knower’ of tradition...and gives new vitality to ancient forms. At Darpana, I tell my students that our work is rather like the catapult, one draws ‘way back’ in order to ‘spring forward.’

Since Mrinalini founded Darpana, the organization has taken an experimental approach to tradition in the pursuit of a more just, equitable, and modern India.

Dr. Mallika Sarabhai and Darpana after 1977

In 1977, Mrinalini’s daughter Dr. Mallika Sarabhai took over leadership of Darpana, initiating a new phase in Darpana’s political engagements even as Mrinalini stayed involved with the organization until her death in 2016. In a 2017 interview with me, Dr. Sarabhai describes her work as “much more political and much more confrontational” than that of her mother. She explains, “Amma³ didn’t consider herself a political animal, though she was. She thought that the issues she picked up were purely from compassion, but not everybody who’s compassionate brings out such passionate

³ Honorific in Hindi for mother.

performance pieces that move people.” Further, while Mrinalini worked more often with solo dance performance, Dr. Sarabhai was been more interested in collaborations “across genres, across countries, across belief systems, and so on” that utilize a “broader canvas” than dance to include theater, puppetry, martial arts, and multimedia. Darpana as an educational institution under Dr. Sarabhai’s leadership has strayed from the guru-oriented pedagogical style promoted by Mrinalini in dance at Darpana, encouraging instead more horizontally-structured relationships between instructors and students. Both Mrinalini and her daughter, though, see the arts as transformative, which continues to propel Darpana’s artistic work.

Over the years, Darpana became increasingly committed to the political dimensions of their work. In 1999, after a review with a team from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, Dr. Sarabhai instigated an overhaul of Darpana aiming to shift the organization’s focus from teaching children to creating a platform for international artistic collaboration with state-of-the-art infrastructure (Sarabhai 2013). Toward this end, Darpana’s separate departments became more integrated and Darpana’s staff were cross-trained in a variety of specialties. In 2013, the organization was comprised of five departments: the Darpana Performing Group, a professional dance, theater, and music company performing mostly for middle and upper class audiences; Darpana Academy, a music, theater, dance, and puppetry school for youth; Darpana for Development, an organization that helps rural areas put on street theater works dealing with health issues, women’s rights, and environmental degradation; Darpana Communications, a film and television studio that runs a local television station; and Janavak, which focuses on the revival and preservation of folk forms in India.

The year 2002 marks a watershed moment in deepening Darpana's political resistance to the state and national governmental agendas. That year, about 60 Hindu pilgrims died when two train cars caught fire in the Muslim-majority city of Godhra. The fire was initially thought to be intentionally set by Muslim people protesting the Hindu activists' presence, instigating several months of violence primarily against Muslims throughout the state of Gujarat. About 1000 Muslims were killed and many more injured. However, a 2005 investigation discussed in a *New York Times* article from January 18, 2005, determined the fire to be an accident. As violence raged throughout the state, police officials did not arrest Hindus who were raping, maiming, and killing their Muslim neighbors, and in many cases instigated violence themselves, endorsed by Chief Minister Modi. (Dugger 2002; Majumder 2011). As Dr. Sarabhai describes in a 2013 interview with me, the 2002 pogroms "politicized [her] completely":

[The incident] made me realize a lot of things that must have been in me but were never put into the fire to be tested... I believe in India's secular culture. That all Indians are equal and religion and caste cannot be something you goad and torment another Indian with. And I realized that everything I had done in the past had put me in a position where I was ready to take on the fight, whatever it would cost. And it cost a lot.

She wrote an article for the *Times of India* exposing the Modi administration's complicity with and instigation of violence and filed the first public interest litigation against the Chief Minister, the police, and the administration in the Supreme Court of India. She explains, "I was the first person [to accuse the Chief Minister] with two other friends and became the point of hatred instantly." Still, Modi was re-elected after the pogrom of

2002, running on a platform promoting Hindu Nationalism,⁴ and was elected Prime Minister in 2014.

With this act of resistance against the Modi administration, Dr. Sarabhai instigated a public campaign of opposition against Modi and solidified Darpana's political stance. While Darpana has a long history as a resistant organization going against public attitudes and societal beliefs, especially those regarding the status of women and environmental destruction, Darpana has taken an active and vocal stance against the government since 2002, first at the state-level and then nationally. After filing a complaint in the Supreme Court of India against the Gujarat government, she became a target of Modi's administration, which accused her of trafficking Indian nationals to the US through Darpana's folk dance company, Janavak. Dr. Sarabhai was forced to give up her passport and seek special permission to travel outside of Gujarat. This limitation on her mobility is further indication of the larger cultural values surrounding one's physical mobility as a sign of privilege and means of increasing one's socioeconomic status. Dr. Sarabhai's public opposition has led to increased surveillance of Darpana and its activities, as well as widespread hesitancy to hire Dr. Sarabhai to perform, cutting off a major source of income for Darpana's nonprofit arts and activist activities. As Dr. Sarabhai explained in a 2017 interview with me, in recent years, Darpana has been forced to seek new revenue streams and organizational strategies in order to keep afloat.

Like her mother's use of Indian tradition as a catapult into a more just and progressive future, Dr. Sarabhai understands India's rich spiritual history and diverse

⁴ The BJP advocates *hindutva* ("*Hindu-ness*"), an ideology that defines Indian culture in terms of *Hindu* values, and is highly critical of the secular policies and practices of the Indian National Congress (Congress Party) (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).

tradition as an important resource, not only for India as a nation but as a model for the world capable of leading the global community beyond the destructive, divisive tendencies of neoliberal capitalism. She explains, “We [in India] are steeped in history, and we are very modern. We have deep traditions but we are very contemporary. We live in 5000 years all at the same time” (Sarabhai 2013). This bridging of ancient pasts with the contemporary moment recalls Haraway’s description of the Chthulucene as entangling “myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages” (2015, 160). Haraway explains, “Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute” (2016, 2). Unlike the neoliberal economic policies, cosmopolitan commercial ambitions, and social conservatism promoted by the Modi administration, Dr. Sarabhai’s vision for India speaks to a more Chthonic notion of interconnectivity and ethical response-ability to and for the diverse lifeforms on this planet. She continues:

I think instead of becoming a wannabe of the United States of America, if we take our strengths and lead our country into the kind of spirituality—I don’t mean religion at all—but I mean the spirituality that leads to the understanding that we are a tiny speck on this earth that needs to do our thing and only in being concurrent with every other human being, every other race, every other color, the animal kingdom, the earth, can we as a race survive. I think India at its best has the possibility of this leadership, I don’t think any other country does. (2013)

Defying the human exceptionalism, divisive rhetoric, and violence of ideologies like neoliberalism’s possessive individualism and Hindu Nationalism’s exclusionary politics, Dr. Sarabhai promotes a Chthonic vision of the future that centers the inherent

relationality and interconnectivity of all beings, rather than their separation. However, she also believes the residual oppressions of colonialism are the primary forces blocking such large-scale revolution and perpetuating the forces of Western imperialism and global neoliberal consumer capitalism:

If you just scratch a little, we are still slaves of the white. We never got independence. We still think that what [the US does] is better and we want to emulate [it]...Rather than saying 'let's leap frog their difficulties and lead them.' So, we pick up Ayurveda when Madonna picks up Ayurveda. And we start listening to the sitar when George Harrison listens to the sitar. So, we need this white stamp and that is a mental slavery that didn't go with independence. I mean even look at our advertisements. We still want white brides. Fair and lovely.
(2013)

Here, Dr. Sarabhai is highlighting an important intersection between race, Western imperialism, commercialism, and environmental ethics. Specifically, in the neocolonial context in which India as a nation is vying for global power, success on the individual level is marked by a complex conglomeration of consumerism and buying power, whiteness, communal and religious belonging, and human exceptionalism.

Dr. Sarabhai has produced much of her politically conscious artistic work within and against the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India, exemplified by Prime Minister Modi (Grau 2013, 1, 26-27). She is a high-profile and outspoken critic of Modi's development strategy and human rights record. She believes that Modi's policies favor big business and economic development and discriminate against poor and Muslim citizens. Their history of conflict with one another illustrates their opposing notions of progress, with

Prime Minister Modi's aligned with neoliberal ideology favoring the free market and Dr. Sarabhai's informed by a Nehruvian philosophy of social democracy (10) but diverging from Nehru's notions of development to incorporate anti-consumerist and Chthonic perspectives.

Performance as Political Pedagogy

For Darpana as a company, theatrical performance is political: a method of communication through which important ethical lessons with political implications can be imparted to an audience. Indeed, Dr. Sarabhai (2013) describes Darpana as using the arts as a method of "value education" while company member and administrative employee Priyanka (2014) states that Darpana "uses art to educate." Understanding their work in opposition to most commercial media intended to entertain a consumer, the Darpana team emphasizes the messages communicated through their work and intends for their audiences to be educated with specific understandings, recognitions, or insights elicited by each artistic work. Performance for Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team offers an enhanced kind of communication impossible with written or verbal language alone. Dr. Sarabhai (2013) describes performance as an "insidious language" capable of changing attitudes as it educates its audiences. She believes that "the arts are really underutilized," arguing that "we think lecturing and criticizing and doing poster campaigns and internet campaigns are what is going to change the world and I genuinely think that it is art that is finally going to solve many of the attitudinal problems." The performing arts are utilized by Darpana as an important medium for ethico-political education.

Part of the company's strategy in using performance as a form of political pedagogy is blending familiar stories with unfamiliar aspects, messages, or outcomes, especially by connecting Hindu mythology with contemporary issues. Dr. Sarabhai (2017) describes that Darpana's work often utilizes "twisted" versions of Hindu stories, which she argues aligns with the tradition of Hindu stories shifting alongside their societal contexts. By taking up Hindu symbols, characters, and stories, she better communicates to her primarily Indian audiences. She explains, "If I go [to an audience] and say, 'you are completely screwed up,' they immediately build a wall which I then can't penetrate. If they think I am on their side, primarily, they accept [my messages] much more." Further, she believes "the familiar goads people into [thinking], 'oh yes, this is my stuff.' And then you bring the sting in the tail" (2013). For example, she describes a moment in *Nataraja Vandanam: Love Songs to Shiva* (2017) in which a character is speaking to the major Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. He thanks Brahma for creating the universe and Vishnu for sustaining it, but tells Shiva, known as the destroyer, "Shiva, you can take a holiday because we have become better destroyers than you. We have destroyed the seas, we have destroyed the mountains, we have destroyed the earth, we have destroyed our air, why do we need you? You can go home" (2017). Such a blend of the familiar Hindu imagery and symbolism and the unfamiliar activist messaging allows Darpana's work to function as a form of political and ethical education for their primarily Indian audiences.

In India's increasingly Hindu Nationalist political climate, it might appear counter-productive for a progressive organization working against communal violence and discrimination to take up the trappings of Hinduism to perpetuate their agenda.

However, for Dr. Sarabhai, Hinduism provides context and characters that are familiar even to non-Hindu Indians and is a vehicle through which she can influence the perceptions of her audiences (2017). For her, Hinduism is intended to inspire questions rather than dogmatism or blind faith and is “about saying that no reality is static, and no right or wrong is static... That relativity is what life is about.” She told me in a 2017 interview, “Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Islam which are ‘thou shalt not,’ there is no ‘thou shalt not’ [in Hinduism]. There is ‘ask yourself,’ which is why Hinduism is so real for me, as I understand.” Further, the gods and goddesses in Hinduism “have foibles” and are more relatable than the all-powerful entities in monotheistic traditions. Dr. Sarabhai finds potent political potential in Darpana’s “twisted” versions of Hindu stories.

For Dr. Sarabhai and others on the Darpana team, dance is akin to writing and language, and the various dance styles they utilize are like different languages, specifically chosen for the context in which the team intends to communicate. She explains in a 2013 interview with me, “It’s like if I am talking to you in English or I am talking to you in Hindi or am I talking to you in French, depending on which one I think would be most effective at that time.” For example, Dr. Sarabhai works with the softer, rounder aesthetic of Kuchipudi to retell traditional Hindu stories with her own perspective. A stage work like *The Dammed*, however, combines the format and abstract movement repertoire of Western modern or contemporary dance-theater with gestures and stomping patterns from Bharatanatyam to create a familiar but unique “hard-hitting” aesthetic capable of affecting its primarily Indian audience in addition to touring internationally. She explains in a 2017 interview, “I find Bharatanatyam the strongest... To me, dance is architecture. Just like buildings make different statements, different

dance forms make different statements. Filigree is very beautiful, but it is not necessarily what you would show if you wanted to show the strength of mud.” Darpana draws upon a diverse array of dance styles to communicate various messages to their audiences.

Self-identifying as an artist, a political being, and a communicator, Dr. Sarabhai (2017) sees herself as “deeply engaged in the path taken by our world” through both her political and artistic work. In fact, she sees her political and artistic work as imbricated rather than disparate, thriving off of the challenge of doing many tasks and occupying many roles at once: “I think each thing feeds into the other, none of them are disparate. So, for instance when I say I’m a political being a lot of my political being comes into my artistic work. And when I am giving a political speech a lot of my art comes into that in the way I communicate with people.” Dr. Sarabhai believes it is particularly important to “sensitize” the youth through arts programming and education:

I find it very frightening that young people think this is the way the world is and don’t even know that there was a different kind of world that existed and can exist and must exist. So, just to give them that perspective, that one can live with love and humanity and tolerance and acceptance and celebration of differences, to me is a very important project. (2017)

Continuing Mrinalini’s tradition of using theatrical performance to forward a progressive political agenda, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team create diverse theatrical works that function as political pedagogy for their primarily Indian, upper- and middle-class audiences.

Like Dr. Sarabhai, many of Darpana’s company members express that they do not experience a divide between their work lives and their personal values, such that their

artistic and organizational work at Darpana allows them to engage in what is for them significant and fulfilling political and artistic pursuits. Company member Pinakin (2014), for example, told me in an interview that he left a career in commercial dancing to join Darpana where he felt he could “do something very meaningful.” His work as an artist with Darpana allows him to “spread messages” and help highlight “unheard voices.” Similarly, filmmaker Yadavan Chandran was trained in commercial film but told me in a 2014 interview that he “hated selling products to people who didn’t need them” and has found more fulfilling work at Darpana, continuing his father’s legacy of creating socially engaged film work. Company member Sonal is impressed by working with Dr. Sarabhai and Mrinalini at Darpana because their dances are “not just entertaining” but connected with “social issues or environmental issues” (2014). She explains, “At Darpana, we are always dancing for a reason.” While Priyanka (2014) hesitates to call herself an activist, she considers herself to be “a person who has been gifted with skills and as a person who questions what happens, as a person who stands up for what is right... as a person who is willing to fight the fight against things that are wrong.” She recalls transitioning to work for Darpana after working in advertising and thinking, “I can write copy and make cool ads but at the cost of what? Does that mean that I’m going to add to a stereotype that already exists? Does it mean that I’m going to be reinforcing something that I don’t really believe in? Does it mean that I am going to be selling something that I think should be banned? Then my writing has no value to me.” Darpana allows her to work directly to “make change happen,” as she says. For the Darpana team, their artistic work is political work and supports their personal ethico-political commitments.

While the Darpana team engages in experimental artistic collaborations and blends a variety of movement and performance styles, including the abstract movement tradition of contemporary and modern dance, Dr. Sarabhai sees their theatrical work as very different from what she sees as “self-indulgent” experimental art, especially dance, that she observes coming from many European artists. She explains, “as an artist I do not give myself the luxury of [experimenting for experimentation’s sake] in a world that’s crumbling” (2013). For Mrinalini, choreographing in the period immediately after independence, appealing to middle- and upper-class notions of artistry meant highlighting a classical Indian dance aesthetic, even in experimental ways. In recent years, Dr. Sarabhai has sought more diverse collaborations, especially with Western modern and contemporary dance styles.

Today, Darpana continues to employ the arts for social change. As Pinakin states, “Whenever we do anything, if we work in television, if we perform on a stage... if we create something new, our main center is always recent issues and whatever imbalance is going on in society against humanity.” Priyanka explains that Darpana “celebrates what goes right and questions what is wrong” with Indian and global politics and culture: “We have the ability to see a problem and when we feel that other people don’t see that problem we have the ability to make that problem larger and articulate it in a way that people are able to answer it.” Darpana and Dr. Sarabhai are prominent in the Indian modern and contemporary dance community, highlighted in scholarly texts on Indian modern and contemporary dance (Purkayastha 2014; Grau 2013; Munsu and Burrige, 2011; Grau 2007; Chatterjea 2004; Kothari 2003). The vehemence with which Darpana is opposed by certain governmental forces, particularly Hindu nationalist ones, is a

testament to the organization's success and power which are also marked by the number of civil service awards Dr. Sarabhai has received.⁵ However, Darpana is the only large organization of its kind using the arts for social change, revealing the difficulty of funding and sustaining such organizations.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan and Late Capitalism: Vulnerability, the Paradox of Dispossession, and Possibilities for Chthonic Subjectivization

In this section, I introduce the controversy around the Sardar Sarovar Dam, the displacement it has caused, and activist efforts against it. I contextualize these efforts in the contemporary moment of neoliberal globalization, marked by pervasive precarity and hypermobility tempered by nationalist allegiances. I highlight the theoretical and material paradox of dispossession highlighted in particular by cultural theorists Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) and suggest the Chthonic subjectivization as a theoretical frame that can reconcile this paradox. I explore how the NBA's *jal satyagraha* performs vulnerability, defining vulnerability as the embodied dimension of precarity: like fish nibbling waterlogged feet.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Neoliberal Development

According to a September 2017 article in *Al Jazeera*, the foundation stone of the Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat, the second largest dam in the world and the largest dam

⁵ Dr. Sarabhai has been recognized by several awards, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Creative Dance, in 2000, Woman of the Year in 2003 by the Indian Merchants' Chamber (IMC), and the 2010 Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award in India, in recognition of her invaluable contribution to the arts.

project in India, was laid in 1961 by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who hailed dams as “temples of modern India” (quoted in Kothari 1995, 425). The dam epitomizes Nehru’s agenda for India’s rapid industrialization in the 20th century, which included mass infrastructure development such as large dams (Raina 2000). The project has been a source of controversy for decades, with proponents of the dam claiming that it is necessary to increase irrigation and create hydroelectricity for the rural poor in four surrounding states: Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra. Opponents like the Narmada Bachao Andolan cite the project’s destructive environmental impact and the large numbers of people displaced by the rising waters as reasons to abandon the project or include ample rehabilitation efforts for the displaced communities. By 1958, even Prime Minister Nehru recognized dams as a “disease of gigantism” (Subramanian 2018).

In a time of both increased destruction and ecological awareness in which large-scale development projects are both more common and more readily challenged, the Sardar Sarovar project has become a “highly emotional symbol at the center of an international controversy” (Fisher 1995, 8-9). A pro-dam Narmada Movement has flourished in Gujarat since the 1980s after Gujarat’s government acclaimed the Narmada Valley Project as crucial for the state’s economic prosperity and survival through droughts and famines. The government and prominent news outlets portrayed other states and dissenters against the dam as rival enemies of the state (Mehta 2010). As Mona G. Mehta outlines (2010, 516), the pro-dam Narmada Movement gained enough power in Gujarat that “the dam had become synonymous with the collective interests of Gujarat.” Further, “support for the dam became the litmus test for ‘loyalty’ to Gujarat and

opposition to it, the ultimate act of disloyalty” (514). In fact, Mrinalini Sarabhai was asked to resign her position as chairperson of the Gujarat State Handicraft and Handloom Development Corporation because she supported efforts that questioned the environmental and social implications of the dam and called for rehabilitation for the displaced in 1988 (518). Support for the dam reified and strengthened an exclusive structure of intimacy through which Gujarati people came to see themselves as not only as a collective, but as the victims of various adversarial “Others,” including other states and those who oppose the dam. Mehta (2010, 510, 519) argues that support for the dam conjured a “coercive Gujarati nativism” that “helped consolidate yet another consensus surrounding Hindutva politics, which envisions Gujarat (and India) as essentially a Hindu polity where Muslims and other minorities would be second-class citizens.” These efforts helped cultivate both nationalistic and regionalistic structures of intimacy and belonging, casting dissenters and the rural poor as others to both the nation and their region.

Mobility, Displacement, and the Paradox of Dispossession

The people displaced by large-scale development projects like the Sardar Sarovar Dam are vulnerably mobile—forcibly dispossessed of place as their homes, livelihood, and community are submerged by the dammed river—revealing the ambiguities of mobility in this age of neoliberal globalization that links one’s political power and social status to one’s social and physical mobility. Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk recognizes the ontology of modernity as “pure being-toward-movement” (quoted in Lepecki 2006, 7), idealizing continuous kinetics and unencumbered movement. I argue that this is only exacerbated with the neoliberal valorization and globalization of the free market, which, marked as it is by an extreme compression of time-space (Peterson 2003, 117),

proliferates the idealization of this “being-toward-movement” across disparate localities indiscreetly and indifferently. Within this system, progress is measured by economic profit achieved through the unregulated motion of goods and capital in the free market. As such, we are increasingly compelled to move in search of economic opportunities, ideal weather, or simply a change of scenery.

While for some classes and groups in late capitalism, mobility is a privilege and a sign of success, for others, like those rural villagers displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam, it is a burden forcibly imposed and a disempowering experience of dispossession. Philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) and Paolo Virno (2004) name nomadism—frequent movement and geographic mobility—as a feature of late capitalism, especially as it translates to the increased flexibilization of the workforce (cited in Braidotti 2011, 5). Mass media often glorifies human mobility as both the means and ends of socioeconomic success for the middle and upper classes, but the already disenfranchised are more often forced to migrate or seek asylum to make way for development projects, to escape natural disasters and armed conflict, or to search for wage labor. As Braidotti (1994, 6) writes, the “disposable” bodies of women, racialized communities, and other marginalized populations are “dispossessed of their embodied and embedded selves” as they are forcibly displaced.

Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (1993, 98) writes about two forms of mobility in late capitalism: “One group is mobile on a world scale, with no country, no home, but the whole world as its property, and the other has lost even the mobility within rootedness and lives in refugee camps, resettlement colonies and reserves.” As the neoliberal subject’s very subjecthood is bound to its economic productivity—and thus to its

mobility—its access to basic needs, political recognition and rights hinges on its individual productive activities—those actions that propel both capital and the subject into motion with unevenly distributed negative effects. To be displaced, one must be placed. And in the current moment, with its fetishization of movement, those who are dis/placed are more easily ignored, and those who are unplaced and mobile more easily rendered ineffectual and ignorant of such inequality in their experiences of precarity and vulnerability as compared to various others.

Like mobility, dispossession is an ambiguous concept in contemporary feminism and cultural theory—at once infused with utopic liberatory potential and justifications of violence. Poststructuralist feminists like Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) intend to challenge the notion of a unitary subject, which they argue serves a masculine sort of power that “enacts mastery over the domain of life” (2013, viii) and perpetuates many forms of violence and destruction, such as that against the natural world in order to serve human interests.⁶ By thinking of ourselves as separate individual subjects capable of owning objects, we more easily harm others and disregard our interconnectedness—our mutual precarity, vulnerability, and response-ability for one another. They call for the dispossession of the individual, autonomous, possessive humanist subject in favor of a more unstable, interdependent, vulnerable subject that experiences itself as continuous with its nonhuman and human ecologies. Butler and Athanasiou acknowledge, however,

⁶ Poststructuralist feminist theory questions the subject of politics and reveals its contingent status. Proposing the signifier as completely independent of the signified, the link between one’s biology and one’s identity is severed, thereby calling into question whether or not “woman” can exist in the first place as a subject of feminist politics. However, while some may fear that postmodernism does away with the notion of the subject, upon which all political projects like feminism rely, Judith Butler (1992) argues that interrogation of the subject does not annihilate it but exposes the exclusions and violences invoked for its creation, which is itself an act of agency and a project with political importance.

that “forces of racialization and feminization” shape the ways in which one experiences dispossession (2013, viii) and address the ambivalences of the term—an inequality that I call the paradox of dispossession. While the model of a unitary individual possessive humanist subject must be dispossessed of its autonomous self-hood, we must also account for the suffering of those displaced and colonized populations who struggle daily for autonomy and selfhood. In the case of victims of forced displacement, their claim to rights as individual citizen subjects is one of their only resources in the fight against their physical displacement.

Chthonic Subjectivization: Reconciling the Paradox of Dispossession

I turn to Haraway’s notion of the Chthulucene and Chthonic subjectivization as a theoretical framework that both dispossesses the individual human subject of its exceptional status and dispels the myth of its autonomous existence. Chthonic subjectivities account for differentials in experiences of vulnerability, acknowledging they are affected by economic and cultural systems, and work toward livability and ongoingness for all beings. With Chthonic subjectivization, the possessive individual dissolves to make way for an expanded sense of self that entwines with beings human and other-than-human. Haraway explains, “the Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet. We are at stake to each other” (2016, 55). I argue that NBA’s *jal satyagraha* is a potential site of Chthonic subjectivization, able to harness the power of shared, but unevenly distributed, experiences of vulnerability to revise them towards the co-creation of postnational, ongoing, just, multispecies worlds.

The *jal satyagraha* sensuously conjures Chthonic worlding in that it performatively conjoins the community being displaced and the river on which it depends. Within Haraway's Chthulucene, beings acknowledge their own and one another's vulnerability, as well as their intimate connection to place:

“Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story.”

(2016, 55)

Further, Haraway's Chthulucene fights for the specificity of “actual places” rather than abstract space (2016, 98) and fosters a “kind of material semiotics [that] is always situated, someplace and not noplac, entangled and worldly” (2016, 4). The NBA's action simultaneously summons a sense of humans being “with and of the earth” as the protesters' bodies are submerged in murky waters and highlights the importance of this particular valley for this particular community through their refusal to move and physical merging with the river.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan's Chthonic Activism: Performing Vulnerability

Both the nationalist myth of India as a unified, evenly developing nation and the neoliberal capitalist valorization of unchecked development and never-ending growth rely on the exclusion, invisibilization, and/or “othering” of the dispossessed. Activist movements working for the human rights of the dispossessed often seek justice by re-visibilizing such communities and centering them in the stories they tell. The story of India's success as a developing nation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries necessarily

ignores the many communities displaced and disenfranchised by consumer capitalism—those people who, whether by design or by choice—do not enter the capitalist waged work force and utilize natural resources directly for sustenance. Communities like those living in the Sardar Sarovar Dam’s flood plain are unaccounted for, both in the calculus that justified building the dam and the official stories told about its success. Through protests like the *jal satyagraha* and other demonstrations, these communities amplify their strength in making themselves seen, heard, and accounted for in the stories told about their country. In other words, through their activist efforts, they work to tell Chthonic stories—stories of the Earthbound “others” to the possessive individual, of humanity’s embeddedness with the earth—that center those made most vulnerable by neoliberal capitalistic machinations.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) was started by Medha Patkar in 1989 as an organization in resistance to the Sardar Sarovar dam. Since its founding, the NBA has expanded to assist efforts against similar dam projects along the Narmada River, developing evolving repertoires of resistance tactics like the *jal satyagraha* (Pate 2002). Vulnerability, performed by the NBA and related groups in the *jal satyagraha*, is for my purposes the embodied dimension of precarity. Because humans are fleshy, mortal creatures, they are inherently vulnerable to injury and decay regardless of class, race, nationality, gender, or sexuality. However, in contemporary capitalist economies, bodily vulnerability is exacerbated by financial precarity and disproportionately experienced by rural, poor, feminized, racialized, and otherwise marginalized populations.

A variety of scholars have brought attention to pervasive experiences of vulnerability in the late capitalist era, especially since 2001. Social movement researchers

Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage (2014) establish mediatized spectacles of vulnerability as an important component of the contemporary political and cultural landscape. They argue that, whether “authentic” or “manufactured,” mediatized spectacles of vulnerability like the *jal satyagraha* are meant to attune their audience—to force viewers to relate to a certain issue in their own way” (89). They discuss how vulnerability is performed through the tactics of a variety of social movements against austerity measures that have disproportionately affected poor and marginalized communities, exacerbating the uneven distribution of precarity and bodily vulnerability. Importantly, vulnerability is also the basis for our ethical responsibility to one another. As Butler (2012, 142) writes, “my answerability and my injurability are bound up with one another.” Vulnerability is at once the result of capitalist competition, oppressive violence and environmental destruction, a source of performative power, and a pervasive existential condition that forms the basis for ethical relating. In the *jal satyagraha*, a dramatized spectacle of authentic vulnerability is manufactured as a source of strength.

The 2013 Vikram Sarabhai International Arts Festival: Displacement

The Vikram Sarabhai International Arts Festival, held annually, began in 1974, three years after Vikram’s untimely death. As Dr. Sarabhai explains, the festival is intended to “celebrate his love for the arts.” At first, the festival highlighted the work of international artists, but by 1994, when the Natarani Theater was built, the festival shifted to feature collaborations between international artists and the Darpana team. More recently, the festival has been given a guiding theme, including the 600th anniversary of Ahmedabad, Rabindranath Tagore, and women and violence.

As the audience took their seats in Darpana's outdoor amphitheater, Natarani, for the 2013 Vikram Sarabhai International Arts Festival (hereafter called the 2013 InterArt Festival), what they did not see was as important as what they did see. Up until a few years ago, just behind the theater were 35,000 families in a slum neighborhood living along the Sabarmati River. As part of his campaign to beautify and develop Ahmedabad, Modi, who was Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time, and his administration moved the community to another location, further from the city and with worse living conditions, in order to build a park and promenade along the river intended for middle-class leisure (Pathak 2011). For Dr. Sarabhai, the displacement of the community behind Natarani reveals the human price of Modi's vision and development method. Worse, this process is widespread, with an estimated 50 million people displaced in India due to development projects alone over the last 50 years (Ray 2000, 33). A review conducted by the World Bank estimates that 13,000 people are displaced with each large dam construction, and, with over 3,000 large dams constructed in this time, this amounts to over 39 million (34). Any accommodation the government provides for those who are displaced is usually of dismal quality. Such large-scale displacement is a symptom of the rise of neoliberal globalization and affects mostly poor and marginalized people all over the world.

After witnessing displacement from their own backyard, the Darpana team selected displacement as the theme for the 2013 InterArt Festival. Through this event, literally back-dropped by the absence of a community, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team contribute to the public discussion of displacement so that the public is more educated, emotionally invested, and motivated to work for environmental justice and

cultural sustainability. Dr. Sarabhai mourns the many forms of displacement occurring in the contemporary moment:

We see so much internal displacement. We see so much illegal immigration to the white countries. We see such agony. Now there is climate displacement. I'm involved with so many of the displaced communities who are never rehabilitated. And now greed is what is creating this displacement, greed and government complicity. All across India where Adivasi⁷ people are being thrown out of lands where they've lived for thousands of years because that's where the mining is. They are not made party to the spoils, so to speak. They are just displaced, and they are put in some dump camp where the next five generations will spend.

(2013)

For Priyanka (2014), the displacement festival is intended to bring attention to a group of dispossessed people who are easily forgotten or ignored:

[The purpose of the displacement festival] is to bring the issue of these marginalized people to the fore. To get people to remember them...we are saying development means bigger roads but at the cost of what? ... All our tax money goes into this but what about these people? The idea was to get people to start talking about it, maybe get even the government to question it in some way.

As I will discuss further in detail below, the festival was intended to educate about, give an embodied affective experience of, and inspire reflection on displacement and the paradox of dispossession on multiple levels, including spiritual displacement, forced displacement, and opportunistic migration.

⁷ The term Adivasi refers to indigenous tribal people and their descendants living in India

With the 2013 InterArt festival, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team aimed to create a show that could tour nationally or even internationally, and so expanded the theme of both *The Dammed* and the festival as a whole to be relevant to a non-Gujarati and even non-Indian audience. This is consistent with a trend toward universality in Dr. Sarabhai's choreographic work, which dance anthropologist Andrée Grau argues is "steeped in Indian culture, [but] must be seen as cosmopolitan rather than as solely Indian" (2013, 5). Dr. Sarabhai is not interested in serving as a representative of Indian culture but instead "sees her message as universal and applicable throughout the world since, in her view, no society is devoid of exploitation" (ibid.). This work and the larger festival of which it is a part connects the specific case of displacement in Madhya Pradesh to experiences of displacement worldwide. Dr. Sarabhai imparted this prerogative to Naomi Deira when she hired her to choreograph *The Dammed* for the festival.

As a whole, Darpana's displacement festival troubles the celebration of mobility in neoliberal capitalism by staging displacement, the violent side of mobility. Through three dance theater works on the theme of displacement broadly, Darpana's festival connects the spiritual and physical displacement of the middle and upper class to the human cost of neoliberal economic development models displacing and disrupting the livelihoods of mostly lower-class communities. In what follows, I argue that taken together, the three works in the festival address the paradox of dispossession by exploring commonalities and differences in the causalities of displacement and their impacts on individuals and communities. Bringing the works included in the festival in conversation with Butler and Athanasiou's philosophical discussion of dispossession as both an

inherent existential state and basis for ethical relating, I highlight the way in which the festival addresses forced, voluntary, and subtle forms of dispossession alike. With this tactic, the festival performatively dispossesses its middle- and upper-class audience of egoic individualism and, ideally, configures an interdependent ethico-political awareness. Butler and Athanasiou argue that “the predicament of being moved by what one sees, feels, and comes to know is always one in which one finds oneself transported elsewhere, into another scene, or into a social world in which one is not the center” (xi), which resonates with the Darpana’s intention for the displacement festival to displace and dispossess its middle- and upper-class audiences of their egoic individuality and myopic communalism.

The first piece of the festival, *Unearthed*, is based on Gabriel Garcia Marquez’ short story, “The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” and was co-created by Gowri Ramnarayan, Dr. Mallika Sarabhai, and Yadavan Chandran. In a small, seaside village a married couple finds a very old man with enormous wings. Injured and weak, the creature cannot speak their language or communicate who he is or how he got there. The couple decides to take advantage of their neighbors’ curiosity by selling tickets to see the man, whom they keep in a cage outside. Widespread argument over whether the creature is an angel or a demon is settled by the local priest who determines that he is of the devil and should be feared, evidenced by the fact that he does not understand Latin. The couple’s business venture is initially very successful until a new traveling act, the spider-woman, comes into town and upstages the winged man. After several months, the creature slowly becomes strong enough to fly away, revealing an angelic nature that the village people could not recognize.

Through this piece, the Darpana team tells a story of spiritual displacement—an inability to recognize the “other” within ourselves and ourselves within the “other”—and how it breeds toxic egoism and negatively affects communities, recalling Butler and Athanasiou’s (2013, xi) argument that our ability to be “moved by what is outside of us, by others, but also by whatever ‘outside’ resides in us” is the basis of ethical relating. By relinquishing their spiritual beliefs to the priest and the larger religious institutions he represents and serves, the villagers are unable to recognize the sacred when it literally falls into their backyards. The angel, himself displaced, is an outsider—a refugee even—in need of help, whom the villagers ultimately objectify and exploit. Rather than seeing their sacred self in the other, they see an opportunity for shortsighted selfish financial gain. In Indian culture, where hospitality for guests is extremely important, this juxtaposition is especially obvious. Overall, the message is two-fold: We are all potential “others” vulnerable to and responsible for one another; and, in blindly following the orders of an external higher power, we more easily displace ourselves from our own humanity, generosity, and capacity for love and compassion toward others.

The next work, *LDR*, explores the world of contemporary long-distance relationships facilitated through technology, such as Skype and mobile phones. As a result of the increased mobility among India’s middle class, more families, romantic relationships, friendships, and working relationships take place across long distances, a phenomenon common throughout the world. Taking a fictionalized semi-autobiographical approach, choreographer Revanta Sarabhai, who is Dr. Sarabhai’s son, depicts the emotional and practical difficulties of sustaining such relationships. He employs a variety of theatrical conventions, including a game show segment inviting

audience members to engage in the art of love letter writing and a pseudo-traditional Bharatanatyam solo telling stories of long-distance love relationships in Hindu mythology and Indian folklore.

Revanta addresses the ambivalences of the increase in contemporary mobility and the impact this trend is having on family, love, sexuality, friendships, and community in India and beyond. *LDR* neither overtly condemns nor valorizes technology, modernity, or even voluntary urban displacement. Rather, by connecting to the personal story of how *LDR*'s upper-class narrator found himself in a long-distance romantic relationship and exploring the variety of emotions brought up by his condition, the work reveals one perspective on the psychological, interpersonal, and cultural impacts of the pursuit of economic gain and upward social mobility, both positive and negative. The goal of economic gain and upward mobility is one familiar to much of Darpana's middle- and upper-class audience, who are invited to reflect on how their own personal and societal values are both enabled and compromised by their lifestyle choices.

As discussed above, the final work presented in the festival, *The Dammed*, was commissioned by Dr. Sarabhai to depict the particular struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan in Madhya Pradesh, India while also addressing the many displacements around the world caused by climate change and the industrializing neoliberal policies that undergird it. Inspired by imagery from a *jal satyagraha* organized by the NBA, *The Dammed* is intended to educate audiences about displacement caused by big dams and other development projects, as well as by climate change, in India and around the world. *The Dammed* blends the modern dance format with classical Indian dance movement into a cosmopolitan choreography in order to universalize its particular subject matter and

cultivate a globally-minded and responsible citizen aware of the unequal and unjust experiences of mobility and displacement, exacerbated in this age of neoliberal globalization.

Importantly, the choreographer Deira is herself a cosmopolitan and internationally mobile artist. Born and raised in Holland to racially mixed parents, Deira went on to study dance at the Ailey school in New York City and eventually settled in London. In conceptualizing and developing *The Dammed*, she made a point to incorporate influences from the local area and dancers' embodied repertoires, which included various Indian folk dance, martial arts, and classical Indian dance styles. Her choreography evidences a global cosmopolitan perspective by blending movements reminiscent of Indian classical dance, particularly Bharatanatyam—such as stomping and abrupt, angular arm and hand gestures—with the vocabulary and format of Western contemporary dance—emotionally-driven, abstract, full-bodied movement on a proscenium stage. Deira's choreography seamlessly integrates movements from a variety of genres. This multi-media work captures the confusion, disorientation, and pain created in processes of forced displacement for a middle- and upper-class audience, most of whom have not experienced such struggle first-hand.

In an Indian political climate so drastically influenced by pro-dam rhetoric and in which any questioning of the Narmada project is cast as anti-Gujarati, a theatrical work like *The Dammed* that directly speaks to the human toll of the project and others like it is a potent act of political resistance. In this context, *The Dammed's* presentation in Ahmedabad, a major city in Gujarat, is a significant choreographic act of resistance to the popular acceptance of the Narmada dam projects as the “lifeline of Gujarat” (“*Gujarat ni*

jivadori”). As I will discuss further below, the work seeks to revise the audience’s structures of intimacy to include the displaced and others who speak out against the dam, recalling Haraway’s (2015; 2016) injunction to “make kin” in innovative ways in the Chthulucene. This effort is especially powerful in the festival as a whole as it seeks to displace the audience’s sense of belonging and expand their ethical responsibility to others by bringing their attention to their own vulnerability and interdependence with their human and nonhuman others.

Making Kin, Experiencing Vulnerability, and Resisting Displacement in the NBA’s *Jal Satyagraha* and *The Dammed*

Choreographically, the NBA’s *jil satyagraha* and *The Dammed* perform vulnerability and aim to impart a Chthonic ethical awareness to their audiences by evoking empathy. In the following comparative choreographic and performance analyses, I identify three main choreographic tactics through which the *jil satyagraha* and *The Dammed* performs vulnerability and cultivates empathy: making kin, sensuously performing and evoking experiences of vulnerability, and resisting hypermobility through insistence on stillness. These choreographic tactics function as sensuous ecological activisms that address the paradox of dispossession by both highlighting the intensified experience of vulnerability endured by the displaced and troubling the autonomous individual citizen subjectivities of their middle- and upper-class audiences.

Evoking Empathy and Revising Structures of Intimacy: Making Kin

With *The Dammed* and the *jil satyagraha*, the Darpana performing group and the NBA respectively aspired to shift their audiences’ structures of intimacy to include the victims of forced displacement. These efforts aim to evoke an ethical awareness—defined

by artist and performance scholar Rose Parekh-Gaihede as “a sense of seriousness and urgency, a sense of something being ‘for real’ and something of concern to me” (2012, 177)—of victims of large-scale development projects who are otherwise easily ignored by urban middle- and upper-classes. Haraway writes that “healing and ongoingness in ruined places requires making kin in innovative ways” (2016, 138)—in this case, through the land protectors’ sensuous interconnection with the nonhuman and Darpana’s sensually evocative choreographic representation of the displaced. While the NBA seeks to visibilize the displaced and include them in the national imaginary, *The Dammed*’s revision of the middle- and upper-class Gujarati structure of intimacy performs an innovative act of “making kin” that forges new structures of belonging. Ideally, these performances successfully urge audience members to be more empathically connected to the structurally dispossessed by educating the audience about the human toll of large-scale development projects and sensitizing its audiences to experiences of displacement. Such efforts trouble the notion of India as a unified, developing, capitalist nation of middle- and upper-class consumer citizens, demonstrating a critical postnational politic.

In her vision of a future society in the Chthulucene, Haraway imagines that the majority of people are “symbionts engaged in intense work and play for sustaining vulnerable beings across the hardest centuries of planetary crisis and widespread human and other-than-human suffering” (2016, 159). Unlike the autonomous, individual possessive subjects of contemporary modernity, inhabitants of the Chthulucene sensually experience themselves as “symbionts”—beings inherently connected to and interdependent with others—and work to sustain rather than ignore vulnerable beings. With the *jal satyagraha*, NBA activists’ sensuous performances of vulnerability call for

the inclusion of the dispossessed within the story of India's development, such that their sustenance and ongoingness is accounted for by development models. Promoting more Chthonic ethico-political ideologies and modes of world-making, their performance of vulnerability highlights their heightened precarity under neoliberal capitalism as well as brings attention to humans' inherent vulnerabilities and dependencies on nonhuman systems.

While *The Dammed* was not intended to create any direct policy change, unlike the NBA's *jal satyagraha*, the Darpana team hoped it would inspire its audiences to political action in their local communities to address displacement and rehabilitation for the displaced by creating an empathic connection and including the displaced in the audience's structure of intimacy, connecting both to a Chthonic ethico-political commitment and a critical postnational agenda. To forge an empathic connection between the displaced and the middle- and upper-classes who are primarily benefitting from the projects causing forced displacement, the Darpana team considers embodied, felt experience of the pain of displacement to be invaluable in creating meaningful performance work that can impart a particular ethic to and attune its audience. The creative team began by connecting personally with the community displaced from the waterfront behind their own theater. Dr. Sarabhai (2013) describes sending the company to the community's new location as a way of connecting with the broader phenomenon of forced displacement: "I said go and see what displacement really is. These are people you used to see across the river. The washer people and the dyers. And look at the trauma they are living. And think of the trauma of the people in Madhya Pradesh that submerged themselves in water for 17 days because the government wouldn't listen to them." In a

2014 interview with S. D. Desai, Naomi Deira describes the visit to the displaced community as crucial to the process of creating the production:

It was important as a company to visit those affected so that the stories and themes we were exploring would become tangible for all of us. It was very influential and possibly the most important point in the process to fully understand the extent to which the topic we were exploring was having an effect on those experiencing it firsthand. This experience of visiting the displaced fed into the rehearsal process and gave a solid context from which both the performers and I could draw in taking these ideas and translating those themes into the resulting production.

The belief in the importance of embodied connection in learning about the issue of displacement is so strong that when I returned to complete my research in 2017, Dr. Sarabhai insisted that I go with a company member and local activist to see the conditions of the community displaced by the riverfront project myself, just as the company had done in 2013. Unfortunately, not much has changed for that community in that time. Sonal (2014) describes, “they don’t have basic things there. They have shifted them out of the city, far away from here,” and highlights that they lack basic access to work and education “because our Minister [Modi] wanted to make a beautiful riverfront.” She asks with desperation, “We are making our city beautiful but what about the people who suffered?” Their experience with the community displaced from their own neighborhood enhanced the company’s conviction in the displacement festival in general and deepened their emotional connection to their work with *The Dammed* in particular.

Darpana's philosophy of performance as a form of ethico-political pedagogy relies upon a notion of theatrical performance as a form of deep communication capable of making its audience more empathetic toward others. With *The Dammed* in particular, Darpana's purpose was to inspire empathy in as well as provide values education for their audiences. Unlike news reports which can be easily dismissed, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana company believe live performance is better equipped to inspire a change in values and ethics in its audiences. Dr. Sarabhai (2013) explains: "People see [coverage of the *jal satyagraha*] on television and they say, 'Darling can I have the butter please.' That's what we want to change." Parekh-Gaihede (2012, 179) explores how "performance can provoke a reflexivity that is tied to an immediate embodied experience. Through this experience it can bring us closer to the other in a subtle, non-possessive way." Similarly, the creators of *The Dammed* aim to give the audience an embodied experience of the pain and torment of displacement to create an empathic connection between them and the materially dispossessed.

An emphasis on embodied empathy carried into the process of choreographing and producing *The Dammed*. Pinakin (2014) describes starting the choreographic process with Naomi by watching footage of a *jal satyagraha* before moving at all: "[This] gave us a sense of the feeling in our bodies. In the eyes, brain, and heart." For Priyanka (2014), the experience of telling the story of the forcibly displaced was profound because it shifted her sense of self: "[Working on *The Dammed*] pushed me...into a place where I feel like I am the displaced, that is me. That honestly has been the most difficult but also the most enriching experience." The performers also re-enacted the *jal satyagraha* in a

pool, which Chandran filmed and projected behind the dancers during the performance, giving them a short, sensual experience of the protest. Chandran (2014) describes:

I had some extraordinary experiences shooting for *The Dammed*, being in the water for 6 hours... I forgot about Naomi, I forgot about the VS festival, I forgot about Mallika-bahan⁸, I forgot about all of that and it was just those people who sat through those 17 days in the *jal satyagraha* that came to mind. I'd read extensively about their struggles and I was trying to reconstruct them. And if I couldn't go through this process, I knew they could never materialize in front of me, they won't come through.

By visiting with displaced communities first-hand and recreating the conditions of the *jal satyagraha*, the creative team hoped not only to create compelling imagery for the audience—a point I will return to below—but also to enhance the performers' felt sense of the displaced they are representing and deepen the affective impact of the performance.

The Dammed's ending further exemplifies the creative team's efforts to encourage its audience to “make kin” with the displaced. The final scene depicts a protest march in which a large group of people enter the stage holding protest signs in Hindi and English with messages like “65 Million Displaced. Won't you care?” The performers stand tall in a group holding their signs in silence at first, raising one sign at a time. Eventually, they begin to shout over audio clips from TV reports and steady, slow drumming, powerfully confronting the audience with their demand to be heard. The soundscape eventually settles on Charlie Chaplin's famous speech from *The Great Dictator*, urging his audience

⁸ *Bahan* is an honorific meaning sister in Hindi.

not to “give yourselves to these unnatural men—machine men with machine minds and machine hearts!” Most of the people in the group walk out into the audience, directly yelling at individual audience members. Dr. Sarabhai, a man who is singing, and a small boy remain on stage facing the audience with stoic faces and resolve. The other performers return to the stage, exhausted. The lights fade as they walk backward away from the audience, maintaining eye contact. The dancers do not bow but come to sit on the edge of the stage to prepare for a question and answer session with the audience.

When the work toured to various cities in India, groups from communities of displaced people in that city appeared in this scene as protesters (Sarabhai 2017). Blurring the line between art and protest, these groups were able to directly confront the audience, largely comprised of middle- and upper-class people indirectly and directly benefitting from, and likely unaware of, their displacement. With this choreographic move, Deira stages a face-to-face encounter between disparately situated subjects, evoking empathy without slipping into possession of the other’s subjective state. With the live presence of the locally displaced and the close-ups on the faces of the dancers in the staged *jal satyagraha*, the work asks its audience to consider, empathize with, and make kin with those who are forcibly displaced.

In essence, the Darpana team intends to dispossess their audience of the individual possessive self so they are more able to “enter into forms of collectivity that oppose forms of dispossession that systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, xi). In this form of dispossession, “one is moved to the other and by the other – exposed to and affected by the other’s vulnerability” (1). With *The Dammed*, the Darpana team creates a

choreography that ideally provokes the affective state of the disorientation and anguish of displacement in the audience and a sensuous embodied experience of the *jal satyagraha* to evoke an empathic ethical responsiveness to those victimized by forced displacement.

By fostering an empathic connection to the forcibly displaced both through the process of making *The Dammed* and by presenting it to audiences, the Darpana team brings disparate classes and communities into proximity to afford a more intimate, close relationship. Chandran (2014) describes, “We want more people to get involved, to talk about it, to make it into an issue, bringing it closer so it’s not so far away.” With *The Dammed*, then, the Darpana team sought to revise their audiences’ structures of intimacy away from the coercive nativism conjured by the Narmada Movement to include the displaced, cultivating an enhanced ethical responsivity to the structurally dispossessed. In this way, the work revises the normative middle- and upper-class Gujarati structure of intimacy to include the rural poor in other states, especially and including those that oppose the Narmada dam project. With this dance-theater endeavor, Darpana demonstrates commitments to critical postnationalism and to the cultivation of Chthonic kin.

Performing Vulnerability and Addressing the Paradox of Dispossession

As discussed above, contemporary neoliberal capitalism exacerbates existing structural inequalities that render already marginalized and disenfranchised populations—primarily those “other” to the possessive consumer subject—to be disproportionately precarious and vulnerable as they are increasingly dispossessed of land, culture, and resources. At the same time, dispossession of the individual consumer subject is understood by poststructural feminists to be a necessary step in achieving just and

sustainable ways of being and being-in-community, revealing what I am calling the paradox of dispossession. Both the NBA's *jal satyagraha* and *The Dammed* address this paradox, asserting the rights of the displaced, highlighting the inherent connection of the human and nonhuman, and troubling the bounded, possessive individual subject, through Chthonic performances of vulnerability.

With the nonviolent tactic of the *jal satyagraha*, NBA activists demonstrate their vulnerability as the rural poor in a capitalist, industrializing country, which is exacerbated by the privatization of natural resources under neoliberal capitalism. By entering the river for an extended period of time, they put their bodily integrity and life at risk in an extremely vulnerable position. Indeed, many demonstrators vow to take "*jal samadhi*"—meaning they intend to protest until their deaths—if their demands are not met (Trivedi 2017), a testament to both their desperation and commitment. As their skins soften in the rising waters, they compel their audiences to consider this community's extreme vulnerability. The *jal satyagraha* as a performance accounts for their dependence on this particular land and perform their vulnerability to both environmental and economic forces that intersect in the dam project.

Choreographically, *The Dammed* also performs the vulnerability of the displaced it seeks to represent. Through a seamless blending of classical Indian dance movements—mostly from Bharatanatyam—with the full-bodied, abstract movements of modern and contemporary dance, *The Dammed* conjures the disorienting, painful experience of forced displacement. The piece opens with four women, their torsos contracted in tense flexion with their bodies doubled over as if in pain. They wear simple loose-fitting tunics, pants, and scarves of various shades of red that exaggerate their

movements and obscure the contours of their bodies. They pull at their hair, reach out flexed, tense hands, and clasp their fists over their heads in unison. As if dragged by an outside force, their clenched fingers bring them to standing where they maneuver around each other with reluctant urgency in a swarm. The soles of their feet hit the floor with loud, insistent clapping sounds. Their bodies, like ragdolls, move not of their own volition, with movement sequencing through floppy limbs, released torsos, and the cloth wrapped around them. Finding themselves leaning on each other in a close huddle, they jostle and bump into each other as the group struggles to come to stillness, only to be flung across the stage again in crazed running. More people steadily join the swarm, drawn in by its gravity and force.

The scene resolves to leave one man alone on the stage, cowering down. He comes to stand with his fists clenching the fabric of his clothes, his muscles shaking as he lifts his chest to the sky. His face is taut with pain, his brow furrowed, as he leans his torso over his legs and covers his head with his clothes. He walks sideways, his body cowering low to the ground and his head shaking. He begins to laugh, quietly at first, almost imperceptible whimpers growing into maniacal chuckles. He runs forward and off of the stage, almost sitting in the laps of those in the front row, facing them directly, looking into their eyes. This face-to-face encounter creates a moment of direct confrontation and an ethical appeal—a point to which I will return. Another man’s voice begins to speak—”After all this time I see you again.” The dancer laughs and falls over. The speaker continues, “Don’t claim to be making peace because I’m tired of your lies...My alcohol-stained breath is the aftermath of my daily medicine. I’ve grown tired of feeling.” The dancer slowly begins to walk up the center aisle, through the audience, as

they film him on their camera phones. He then runs back on stage, running frantically back and forth across the stage, much like the group in the opening scene. He is erratic, his arms sweeping through the space and taking him down to the ground, falling backward, alternating between crying and laughing.

A later scene begins with a large group of dancers running horizontally across the stage. Immense rectangular canvas packages fall from above onto the stage with loud thuds. The dancers run back on stage, holding small cloth packages which they throw to the ground with frustration, slide and roll on, throw their bodies on, spin over head as they jump. Do they need these items or hate them? Are these packages proxies for their own bodies, thrown around and discarded, moved at the will of another? Are they painful reminders of home, or items that they cannot take with them? The frenzied group collects into a pack, their focus drawn to the same offstage adversary who seems to tower over them. The music grows more intense, gaining speed and volume. They continue tossing their small packages around, circling them away from their bodies, sweeping them back and forth, throwing and catching them. Eventually, one dancer falls on one of the large packages at the back of the stage, flopping her body onto it loosely, and others join her. They kick, flail, and bang their body into the soft rectangles, like dusty, oversized marshmallows, before rolling them forward and sliding them back in a futile dance.

The work's abstract movement style is demonstrated by the exaggerated tension in the dancers' bodies and the pained expressions on their faces in these scenes. Abstracted movement is deployed in *The Dammed* as a tactic to depict vulnerability and elicit an emotional response from the audience while relating the particular case of displacement in Madhya Pradesh and the NBA's *jal satyagraha* to a larger global trend.

The dancers in the opening scene and the scene with the packages are not any particular victims of forced displacement but represent the experience of losing home, feeling disoriented, and being forced into movement that is disproportionately experienced around the world by marginalized and disenfranchised communities. The man laughing and moving to the poem does not represent a particular person but highlights the way in which victims of displacement struggle to recover and survive and alluding to the use and abuse of alcohol as a means to dull the pain.

In order to use the arts as a means for education and social change, Darpana generally strives to align with the aesthetic values of their middle- and upper-class audiences while also challenging their assumptions and worldviews. Dr. Sarabhai (2013) explains, “We have to keep the bums on the seats. And then we will convert half the audience, or we’ll convert 10%, but if the bums disappear who are we going to convert?...[Our work] has to be of very high artistic quality.” While the message of their work is important, Dr. Sarabhai is wary of the line between art and agit-prop, recalling a classic debate in American modern dance history (Graff 1997).⁹ Performance work that is too overt in its message or theme risks being dismissed by its audiences and critics as agit-prop devoid of artistic value. Dr. Sarabhai believes Darpana’s activist-oriented work cannot “be a bludgeoning of a subject. There is no use trying to swat a fly with a hammer. So, it has to be subtle [and] filled with artistry.” By presenting an abstracted story of displacement in general, *The Dammed* can appeal to a broader educated transnational

⁹ Early American modern dance critics fiercely admonished theatrical works with what they considered to be obvious storylines and political messages, privileging abstract work as high art and overtly politically-oriented work as agit-prop (agitational propaganda), referencing the use of art for political purposes by the Soviet Union. See Graff 1997.

audience and speak to a multitude of experiences rather than simply educating about a particular community or situation, which might be dismissed as agit-prop or only hold local relevance.

The choreography also suggests and stages the disruption of the possessive individual subject necessary for its middle- and upper-class audiences to fully empathize with the displaced. About halfway through the work, the mood shifts suddenly as digital patterns of blue, pixelated lines begin to flash across the backdrop. Dr. Sarabhai wanders slowly onto the stage, in a white, angular dress with sharp shoulders, puffed sleeves, and a geometric skirt, vaguely recalling the structured dresses worn by British women in the Victorian-era, her focus magnetized upward. The other dancers walk backward as if rewinding. A buzzing drone-like sound pulses in and out as three dancers continue to throw packages around, open-mouthed, their bodies moving with the momentum of their baggage. They suddenly stop, clutching their packages to their chests, and wander offstage slowly while looking to the sky, their shoulders tight to their ears, their bodies tense. In a flash, the backdrop darkens like a TV turning off. A simple melody as if from a music box begins to play as two women in similar dress join Dr. Sarabhai on stage. They smile, a drastic difference from the rest of the piece, and perform Bharatanatyam-like stomps, spins, and hand gestures with delicate, subtle side-to-side head movements. Their arms are open, their torsos upright as they perform distinct hand gestures and careful steps with an air of propriety emphasized by the hoop skirts. This pleasant, symmetrical dance is a harsh juxtaposition to the frenzied, tense, and full-bodied chaos that characterizes earlier scenes.

Two dancers exit, leaving Dr. Sarabhai alone on center stage. A loud sound stops her in her tracks and she looks up. Lines fly across the backdrop and a scrim that stretches across the front of the stage, surrounding Dr. Sarabhai on all sides. The lines zoom out to reveal a line-drawn animation of a peacock. Animated bird tracks are cast in front and behind the dancer, who appears both protected and trapped. The images morph into a crowd of people yelling, the peacock flying over them. The dancer is mesmerized by the images surrounding her as drumming sounds pick up speed. Suddenly, she is in a bird cage, moving slightly with it as it sways back and forth. In a panic, she realizes she is trapped. She holds her arms up over head, instigating a loud crash as the bird cage dissolves into a flurry of feathers that explode around her as if flowing from her outstretched arms. She escapes the cage as a woman's voice sings elongated vowels in a minor key. With this scene, Deira stages the moment of realization—even dispossession—that occurs when “one is moved to the other and by the other – exposed to and affected by the other's vulnerability” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 1). Free from the confines and safety of her sheltered life—symbolized by the cage—the upper-class neocolonial subject—represented by the women in crisp, geometric white dresses—is dispossessed of the illusion of her own sovereignty, confronted by the vulnerability of her “others,” and disoriented by that encounter with alterity. By highlighting both the bodily vulnerability of the displaced in an abstract way and performing the dispossession of the individual middle- or upper-class subject, *The Dammed* addresses the paradox of dispossession in the contemporary moment and conjures Chthonic ethico-political commitment through the recognition of our mutual vulnerability.

Stillness: Staging Resistance to Displacement

For both the performers in *The Dammed* and the protesters they represent, stillness plays a crucial aesthetic and political function, especially in light of the neoliberal compulsion toward mobility discussed earlier. Anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis writes, “Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen” (1994, 12). Dance and performance theorist André Lepecki identifies the still-act as a moment that “reveals the possibility of one’s agency” (2006, 15). Further, Lepecki notes that the still-act in contemporary dance, disrupting the virtuosic displays normatively valued in Western concert dance, conjures a critical stance by showing that not all move easily across the neocolonial racist terrain of contemporary society (17, 92-96). As Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 21) write, the territorially displaced “are compelled to leave their proper place, and in those cases, staying in place is precisely an act of resistance.” It is the still-act of standing in water for 17 days by which the Narmada Bachao Andolan imposes itself in the perpetual motion machine that is a profit-driven society—as well as by which *The Dammed* interrupts the audience’s pleasurable gaze and elicits empathy. It is the still-act by which the choreography of *The Dammed* and the activist actions on which it is based resist and reveal the violences of forced displacement in the name of development projects.

Insisting on stillness in this particular place as outside forces compel them to move, NBA activists perform their Chthonic interconnection with their nonhuman ecologies, including their land. As Arturo Escobar and Wendy Harcourt explore (2005), women and various subaltern groups (i.e. indigenous, rural, lower class, and racialized

populations) are more intimately associated with and dependent upon the land on which they live and localized notions of place, especially as they are structurally excluded from or refuse to participate in consumer capitalist cultures. Unfortunately, as neoliberal capitalism spreads globally, the possibilities for sustaining alternative community ecologies through land cultivation and small-scale natural resource extraction for local use are undermined. The increasing disconnection from and loss of place with neoliberal globalization implies a loss of culture, meaning, subsistence, and security, especially for the rural poor who lack access to alternatives (10). To undergo forced displacement caused by a development project, then, is to experience profound dispossession not only of one's home, physical support structures, and community, but of one's sense of self and belonging.

For *The Dammed*, Chandran recreated footage of the recent protests with the performers. He (2014) describes that the decision to film long, durational takes came from the subject matter itself and enhanced the performers' sensual experience of the protest:

Every image, I could not say 'cut.' How could I say cut to something that people were waiting for justice, how could I say enough? There is so much breathing in that. If you look at the footage, the footage is breathing constantly...I needed it to remain that way for such a long time. And the artists did not know what was going on. They continued staying, wondering whether we should do something more, something less. But then they also got into that space. And then they just stayed. Nobody needed to instruct anybody on anything.

Stillness became an important component of the creative process as it allowed the performers to get a sense of the determination necessary for the *jal satyagraha* as well as more deeply engage with the sensuous experience of being still in the water for a prolonged period of time.

The footage is projected during the dance, especially during a slow-paced scene in which the dancers enter one-by-one holding lanterns. A man sings long, droning notes that quiver in and out, refusing to resolve, responding to recorded music in a minor key. The dancers sit and face the audience for a long, pregnant pause, before standing again and walking on a diagonal in unison with slow and sustained lunges. Together, they lean over with one hand on their heart as they continue their slow walk forward. One dancer coughs, and they all turn away from the audience and walk to the back, silhouetted by the projections. But they cannot stay still for long. A column of light appears center stage, forming a new pathway for the group to traverse. A woman is in the light at the back of the stage, her back broken to the side as she slowly comes to stand. She watches her hand make flowing figure eights vertically in front of her that pick up speed and get more frantic, the other dancers standing on either side holding their lamps. The woman in the center lets her long black hair loose and it partly covers her face as she begins to move forward with large flowing sweeps of her leg, again in a figure eight. The others join her in her movement forward until they stand to face the audience. She begins to move through the group, finding gaps in their line through which she stares at the audience, bewildered and steadfast. Long takes of close-up images of the dancers submerged in water up to their necks linger on the screen, their eyes penetrating into the audience. These shots steadily and patiently transition from one to another, slowly taking us from

day to night. The central woman gains speed and urgency, moving frantically as if shaking ants out of her clothes and suddenly stopping to take slow, deliberate lunges. The other dancers form a circle and Dr. Sarabhai moves to the center, opening her mouth in a silent scream before coughing loudly. Her body convulses with silent cries and screams. At the sound of a gong crashing softly, the dancers disperse across the stage to sit, their lamps the only light aside from dark glimpses of stoic faces in the water projected on the back. The imagery of the re-created *jal satyagraha* lingers in long, meditative takes on the back of the stage, illuminating the slow patient movement of the dancers now finding more slowness and stillness in their movement.

Resisting Displacement: The Effects of the 2013 InterArt Festival

The three-day festival invited the audience to reflect on displacement in their own lives as well as those of others, as a means toward corrective action. Through this event, the Darpana team furthers an alternative narrative of modernity, development, and the ethics of governance and citizenship based on empathy and compassion across difference. Their work encourages its middle-class audience members to reflect on their own experience of displacement and complicity with human rights abuses. With this festival in particular, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team sought to fill a gap between the lives of those most affected by displacement and those in power who are causing and allowing it to happen. She describes, “the educated middle class who go onto television shows and who read the newspapers and who are the opinion leaders, they are not the ones who are displaced, so for them it’s a non-issue. And what we want to do with this festival is to bring it into their cultures and say it has to be an issue” (2013). By offering a platform to address displacement and emotionally connect Darpana’s middle-class audience to the

humanitarian crisis, the festival resists the idealization of a neoliberal approach to economic development. Even more, Darpana intended to tour both within India and internationally with the displacement festival, because, as Dr. Sarabhai notes, displacement is pervasive global issue exacerbated by things like climate change and war.

The displacement-themed festival toured a few cities in India but had a difficult time reaching audiences because of the controversy surrounding Dr. Sarabhai and the company's lack of funding. Unfortunately, while Dr. Sarabhai (2017) felt the festival audiences were affected by the issues that the festival raised, the performance did not generate the kind of "public comment" as was her intention. The audiences, she explained, did not include public officials who have the power to avoid displacement and/or rehabilitate displaced communities. Darpana's other activist-oriented works, which often address gender-based violence and women's issues, usually tour in cooperation with local NGOs engaged with similar issues. These NGOs attract their own stakeholders and recruit local officials to attend, allowing the work to inspire high-profile conversations and press to have a more direct impact on the local community. With women's issues, Darpana is able to connect to a vast transnational network of women's organizations who affiliate with one another, even as they address a wide array of particular issues. However, a similar type of network does not exist with displacement, as people are displaced for a variety of reasons and the activism tends to be focused locally on the unique causes in each case rather than connecting transnationally. They advertised the displacement festival as a Darpana performance, downplaying its activist orientation. As Dr. Sarabhai (2017) explained, "the audiences that came to see us were people who come to see our performances, not necessarily people who needed to listen because we

were not able to find local civil society organizations that could actually organize the show and, at the local level, get in the right audiences.” Because of the lack of a robust transnational network of NGOs working on displacement, in addition to the limited funding, Darpana could not do the degree of pre-planning necessary to recruit local officials and people with power into the audience.

Following the cosmopolitan aesthetic codes of the larger global artistic community gives Darpana access to an international audience and social capital within and beyond the borders of the Indian nation, at least in theory. Notably, however, *The Dammed* and the other works of the displacement festival were not included in Darpana’s 2017 US tour to a variety of US colleges and performing arts centers. Instead, the company brought works like *Nataraja Vandanam: Love Songs to Shiva*, which portrays traditional Hindu stories and characters in unusual ways in order to make a political or ethical point. Perhaps these works more closely align with Western ideas about the kind of work that an Indian dance company would present—i.e. more “Indian” performance works—and/or are more accessible to the nonresident Indian community living abroad, highlighting the difficulty non-Western artists face in negotiating access to the global stage. Further, *The Dammed* is perhaps too overtly political to be presented as high-art modern or contemporary dance abroad and not “Indian” enough for inclusion on the global stage.

Notably, the festival is very much a comfortable middle-class endeavor that might spark interest or raise awareness of displacement as a humanitarian problem but is itself part of a lifestyle enabled by the forced displacement of marginalized communities and does little to directly disrupt these injustices. Still, the works in this festival engage their

audiences not as passive spectators of entertainment, but as citizens who share a common space and community initiated into a broad structure of intimacy that includes the distant rural ‘others’ impacted directly and negatively by large-scale development projects and neoliberal economic restructuring. Proposing a Chthonic mode of relationality, belonging, responsibility, and awareness, the festival fosters a compassionate global citizen aware of and invested in correcting human rights abuses at home and abroad.

Conclusion

In this age of neoliberal globalization, marked by the fetishization of mobility, those who experience mobility as a privilege easily ignore those who are violently displaced. With mobility and displacement fast becoming a new global norm, it is crucial to understand how these processes are cultivated and represented culturally and what possibilities exist for intervention in and through the body, as eventually the social body and body politic. It is further necessary to address the paradox of dispossession. While dispossession of the autonomous individual is an important step in achieving environmental justice and cultural sustainability, dispossession endured by marginalized and disenfranchised communities has dangerous, deadly, and violent effects.

As I have shown, the NBA’s *jal satyagraha* and Darpana’s displacement festival strive to critique and trouble the neoliberal sociopolitical order by cultivating Chthonic, empathetic awarenesses through performances of vulnerability. They both demonstrate “persistence in the making of equality and the many-voiced and unvoiced ways of refusing to become disposable” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 197) and address the contemporary paradox of dispossession. With the *jal satyagraha*, land protectors highlight their vulnerability to intersecting environmental and economic forces,

demonstrating Chthonic interconnection with place and nonhuman beings. With the 2013 InterArt festival, especially *The Dammed*, Dr. Sarabhai and the Darpana team use a global cosmopolitan perspective to interpellate its middle- and upper- class audience into an ethical relationship with the lower class of India and the globe, even cultivating an intimate kinship connection. Darpana's innovative festival reveals the complex and violent face of India's development agenda. Both of these endeavors enact Chthonic postnational critiques that trouble corollary notions of the possessive individual subject and the sovereign, unified nation.

Choreographically making kin between the middle- and upper-classes and the violently displaced by sensuously performing vulnerability and resisting forced displacement through insistence on stillness, both the NBA's *jal satyagraha* and Darpana's *The Dammed* demonstrate Chthonic commitments to environmental justice and sustainability. These efforts reveal important qualities of sensuous ecological activism. Specifically, Chthonic activisms trouble normative structures of belonging and forge new kinship alliances, evocatively performing and inducing experiences of vulnerability that dispel the myth of the autonomous individual and critiquing the neoliberal compulsion toward ceaseless motion and hypermobility that violently oppresses marginalized, disenfranchised, and disproportionately vulnerable communities. Performances like the *jal satyagraha* and *The Dammed* evoke empathy through sensuously-engaged choreographies that address the paradox of dispossession and cultivate more Chthonic modes of being, values, and ethical awarenesses.

Chapter 2. Performing and Experiencing Interconnection in the Anti-Mountaintop
Removal Movement and the Dance Exchange's *How to Lose a Mountain*

"I'll tell you a story about distance." Standing on Kayford Mountain in West Virginia before 1986, before the earth-movers reshaped the landscape, before the explosives disintegrated the rock bed, before the mountaintops tumbled into the hollers¹ below, you would be immersed in a vibrant Appalachian farming community with roots reaching back into the 18th century. *Sarah's arms reach out as her body careens off-kilter to the floor, her hand grasping Shula's just in time to slow her fall, their bodies counterbalancing each other.* If you accompanied Cassie Meador and Dance Exchange company members on their trek to Kayford Mountain in 2011, you would see this historic community reduced to Larry Gibson (*"an authority on distance"*) and a few family members. The fiery Gibson would lead you through the trees to the edge of his property. *Shula reaches out her open palm to Sarah. The gravity of Shula's invitation pulls Sarah in. She reaches out for Shula's hand which tugs her into a full body embrace.* You would look out, where Gibson's ancestors once stood to gaze up at the mountaintop, and look down on 7,500 acres of a gray, rocky expanse below you. His property, once nestled low in a holler, now stands alone—*"an island in the sky."* *Matthew lowers himself to the floor face down, completely collapsed except for his right foot, which remains suspended*

¹ A "holler" is a term used often in Appalachia to refer to a small valley between mountains.

in the air, exposed. Because of the rise of mountaintop removal coal mining (MTR), what was once a living, green, growing, and biodiverse ecosystem has been flattened to a moonlike landscape. *Sarah's gaze is fixed downstage left, unable or unwilling to see the group of dancers behind her who catch her body when she teeters uncontrollably, counter-balance her falls, initiate a change in direction, or guide her weight into a buoyant arc above their heads.* To see what still stands of Kayford Mountain today is to see Gibson standing defiantly in place, even after his death, enmeshed with the land that was so integral to his identity, his family's history, and his way of life. *"It's about a sense of place. It's about a sense of home. A sense of security. About a sense of comfort. It's a comfort zone for me. It's what I know. It's not about money, I mean, I don't have money. All the money in the world I got's in my pocket right now. It ain't money. It's the idea that I can keep coming here. Ya know? I wanna keep coming here."* Gibson and the land he loved so much—each now absent in their own way—haunt Dance Exchange's stage work, *How to Lose a Mountain* (2012), described here.

The choreographic process for Dance Exchange's *How to Lose a Mountain* (HTLM) took the creative team to Kayford mountain, a site deeply impacted by coal extraction, as part of their exploration of our interconnection with our sources of power and place. For this project, choreographer Cassie Meador walked roughly 500 miles from her home in Washington, DC on a pilgrimage to trace the path of her home's electricity to its source on Kayford Mountain, a site of MTR. This controversial method of coal mining utilizes explosives and twenty-story-tall excavator machines to remove about 1,000 feet of topsoil and rock from mountaintops, literally levelling the terrain (Kaneva 2011, 933). Since the rise of MTR, the Appalachian landscape has been irrevocably

altered, biodiverse ecosystems have been lost, water tables have been poisoned, and the air quality has drastically decreased, leading to innumerable illnesses and deaths (Cordial et al. 2012; Boyles et al. 2017).

Like Darpana's *The Dammed*, discussed in the previous chapter, *HTLM* addresses experiences of dispossession and precarity under neoliberal capitalism, disproportionately experienced by rural, poor, and otherwise marginalized communities, and the human and environmental toll of large-scale development and resource extraction projects. Meador's walk accounts for a particular journey of electric power that is often invisible in people's everyday experience of flipping a light switch. Marking the distance from her home to a source of its electricity with her body, Meador created choreography with local groups along the way. In this act, she stood as witness to the environmental and cultural devastation endured by Appalachian communities in the wake of resource extraction projects that provide cheap electric power for distant consumers and steep profit margins for multinational corporate interests. She then created a theatrical work in dialogue with local communities through workshops she and other Dance Exchange company members conducted throughout the long walk. Meador is clear that the performance outcomes of this project include the walk itself, the workshops along the way, the website, and the theatrical work (2017). Meador and the core creative team did not complete the walk solely in service of creating a stage work, although the task of creating a theatrical product provided a context for them to deeply engage with the subject matter as well as facilitated meaningful interactions with the people and places they were traveling through.

As a pilgrimage, pedagogical endeavor, and performance, *HTLM* is in many ways characteristic of the community-based social justice-oriented dance projects for which Dance Exchange has become known. Dance Exchange is a nonprofit contemporary dance organization based in Takoma Park, MD, near Washington, DC, known for its community-based, collaborative choreographic processes, its multi-generational company, and its continued engagement with social issues. Founded in 1976 by Liz Lerman, with artistic direction by Meador since 2011, the organization can be considered both a “think tank and action lab” (Lerman 1995, 7). Advocating for and utilizing dance as a means of social/political engagement, the organization has developed a choreographic and pedagogical “Toolbox” to facilitate movement activities and generate choreography collaboratively with community groups and individuals of varying abilities, ages, and backgrounds. With their collaborative processes, the organization hopes to “advance how individuals and communities come together through process and performance to reflect and create change in the world” (Dance Exchange, N.D., “Mission & Vision”), indicating an overt social agenda in their artistic work.

HTLM was Cassie Meador’s inaugural project as artistic director for Dance Exchange and it in many ways continued Lerman’s tradition of creating theatrical work about social issues through community-based collaborative processes, in this case, the consumption of nonrenewable resources and the urban consumer subject’s relationship to place and their sources of electrical power. Continuing Lerman’s legacy, the act of asking relevant questions through the creative process of making *HTLM* is as important, if not more so, than any singular resulting product. With the walk, workshops, and choreographic process, Meador experienced, performed, and helped workshop

participants cultivate intimate, sensuous connections to place and consider their interconnection with the resources they consume. I argue these experiences counteract the modern abstraction of place into space which enables environmental destruction for financial profit under capitalism. The disavowal of place in favor of abstract space undergirds consumerist machinations by encouraging both profit-driven corporations and the ideal consumer-citizen of late capitalism to remain ignorant of the material and social impact of their production and consumption practices. Dance Exchange's *HTLM* instead highlights a politics of interconnection, trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2010), and a transcendental environmental ethic (White 2012). In other words, Meador's investigation compels her, the Dance Exchange team, and their audiences to viscerally comprehend the inherent interdependencies between their own consumption of electricity and their not-so-distant ecologies and perceive their own corporeal enmeshment with the nonhuman. In so doing, *HTLM* points to what Haraway names the Chthulucene—a time of multispecies ecological justice inaugurated by the dissolution of the possessive individual human subject and the cultivation of response-ability for human and nonhuman entanglements. This chapter takes the Dance Exchange's 2012 choreographic work *How to Lose a Mountain (HTLM)* as its starting point into an investigation of the performance and perception of interconnection as a mode of sensuous ecological activism suited for the Chthulucene.

Similarly, activists in the anti-MTR movement in Appalachia demonstrate an environmental justice orientation and conjure a critical posthumanist place-based politics. Concerned with the resulting deforestation, water pollution, and threats to biodiversity (see, for example, Pond, et al., 2008; Wickham, et al., 2007), many residents actively

voice their resistance to MTR as a coal-extraction method, both because of the damage it causes to the nonhuman environment as well as the risks and harm endured by the human community that depends on and is entwined with its local environment. In highlighting the negative public health effects of MTR-caused air and water pollution, anti-MTR activists consider their trans-corporeality—their embodied interconnectedness (Alaimo 2010)—with the Appalachian Mountains and their mutual vulnerability under the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital: sick societal and economic structures lead to sick mountain ecosystems, which lead to sick people. Bringing attention to the psychic and cultural devastation caused by loss of place, anti-MTR activists account for the Appalachian Mountains as integral agents to the human and nonhuman communities they sustain, rather than passive interchangeable backdrops for human activity.

Activist efforts to stop MTR and seek sustainable alternatives to Appalachia's coal-based economy draw attention to Appalachian people's bodily and cultural interconnectedness with the mountains. Unlike previous Appalachian labor-rights and environmental conservation movements that understand the natural environment and the human economy as separate and competing entities, the anti-MTR movement, largely comprised of Appalachian citizens and people who grew up in Appalachia in addition to progressives and environmentalists outside of the region, understands the mountains as integral to and embedded with Appalachian culture (Barry 2012, 12). Appalachia's cultural diversity is the result of displaced indigenous communities and primarily Scotch-Irish, German, and Anglo-American settlers inhabiting and comingling in the Appalachian mountains over the last three centuries (Dunaway 1996, 51-86). While the indigenous population is low in Appalachia today, many in the anti-MTR movement

identify as at least part Native American, primarily Cherokee or Shawnee. The cultural diversity of Appalachia and the region's history of defiance unifies the movement for activists like novelist Silas House (2008, 18):

We come from people who were the first people in these mountains, the Cherokees, Shawnees, the Crow, the Mingo. We come from the tough Scots-Irish who came to settle it next, and the Italians and Germans who worked like dogs to make their way in the world and the black men and women who were brought here on ships to be slaves and later sent here on trains to work for half-scale down in the mines. . . We are a true melting pot of strong peoples, a culture of immigrants, all joining strengths to become Appalachians, and in the past we haven't backed down, so this time we can't back down either.

The anti-MTR movement highlights and esteems Appalachia and Appalachian culture and seeks to connect Appalachia with the rest of the US and the global community. Appalachia has historically been cast as "other" in relationship to mainstream white, urbanized, middle-class America, enabling the exploitation of its people, environment, and culture. As Appalachian novelist and activist Denise Giardina (1992) argues, Appalachian problems must be understood as American problems: "It is convenient, this habit of relegating Appalachia to the margins of national life. For if the situation should turn out otherwise, if the mountains are populated by average Americans with concerns common to the country at large, then the blame for our problems would have to be located elsewhere. The nation's view of Appalachia and itself would have to change." Combating the stereotypical othering of Appalachia, the anti-MTR movement also connects resource extraction in Appalachia to larger global concerns like climate

change and global environmental health (Barry 2012, 125-150). The anti-MTR movement, then, must both identify Appalachia as a unique place worthy of care while also advocating for its interconnection with the rest of the nation, as well as the globe.

Dance has been largely unacknowledged by scholars and activists for its potential to support and further anti-MTR activism and other environmental justice movements, even though dance activists intervene alongside activist practitioners of music, poetry, writing and film (Stimeline 2012). Writer Ann Pancake (2013), for example, argues that literature—fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry—immerse the reader in an active engagement with an individual’s personal story and can encourage empathy and advocacy. However, *HTLM* encourages its participant-audiences to explicitly experience and perceive their own interconnectedness with the nonhuman in general and the Appalachian Mountains in particular in a sensuously-engaged, embodied way. I argue that the place-based choreographic and sensuous somatic pedagogy techniques Meador and her team utilized in the community-based workshops emphasize and enable bodily experiences of interconnection and trans-corporeality with nonhuman elements such as the landscape, flora, and fauna, and that they further engender an understanding of human and nonhuman entanglements and mutual vulnerability. This example of sensuous ecological activism disrupts Western dualistic perceptions of the individual human as separate from and superior to the nonhuman, while also accounting for how Appalachia’s otherwise abject positioning is an integral part of mainstream imaginaries and capital participations in the United States and global communities.

In this chapter, I draw from archival sources and interviews that I conducted with Meador and the company involved with *HTLM* as well as from participant observation in

Dance Exchange programming and choreographic processes conducted in 2017 to argue for *HTLM* as an example of sensuous ecological activism. The project engages local communities that Meador encountered on her walk through movement and choreographic pedagogies that sensitize participants to their interconnection with both human and nonhuman others. The stage work archives these encounters, giving an impression of Appalachian culture and land, as well as the felt experience of MTR. I begin by introducing Dance Exchange as an organization and its history, outlining Lerman's (2011, xv) political commitment to "horizontality," which she defines as efforts toward creating a nonhierarchical world, that I argue aligns with Chthonic perspectives. I then describe MTR and the anti-MTR movement, highlighting the way in which this social movement differs from previous labor movements in Appalachia by taking on an environmental social justice orientation and transcendental environmental ethic that takes the Appalachian Mountains and their human inhabitants as cosubstantial and interconnected. The next section explores how both the anti-MTR movement and the stage work of *HTLM* embody a Chthonic politics of interconnection. The remainder of the chapter focuses on *HTLM* itself, first focusing on the walk as an activist pilgrimage with political import for the way Meador connects the urban US to rural Appalachia by tracing the path to her home's source of electricity with her body. I go on to explore Meador's pedagogical and choreographic methods—collected into a series of practices now known as the Moving Field Guides—utilized with community groups along her path, describing the way in which they sensitize the practitioners to place. These, I argue, produce a Chthonic subjective awareness, by which I mean a mode of perception and being that acknowledges one's interconnection with and response-ability to myriad

others. Last, I present a choreographic analysis of the stage component of the project. I explore how the work performatively conjures a sense of what queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls “temporal drag” and brings a sense of Appalachia as place to the stage. I argue that these tactics can foster empathic connection between its urban audience and the rural communities negatively impacted by MTR, as well as inspire its audience to contemplate and sensuously experience their connections to distant places, nonhuman beings, and people through the resources they consume.

Dance Exchange Background

Meat, milk, produce, grain; heat for our houses; power to run cars and computers: Behind every product we use is a story that has been lived and a distance that has been traveled. Behind every resource we consume are communities, lands, and processes that often exist beyond the scope of our awareness. What happens when the source of a resource is examined? Could knowing the story behind our stuff change our relationship to process and use of product? Who gets to tell the story? As the source of art, what can the body reveal through the telling and retelling of stories? (Meador, N.D.)

How to Lose a Mountain opens with Zeke, who both plays music for and narrates the work, explaining the history of the old, broken piano that sits downstage left. “I’ll tell you a story about distance. This piano was in a basement under a pile of junk. Broken, silent, no one had made music on it for a long, long time...Built by a Baltimore company before the Civil War. It’s seen a lot of use, like a lot of old timers. And fallen on a lot of hard times, like a lot of old timers. Slated to be cast aside or thrown out. But it’s made of

wood, ya know? And the wood for this piano was cut down in the early 1800s, at a time when that work was done with an ax or a whipsaw. It was the sweat of a person's brow that brought the tree down. It was trading labor for a life. Cutting down a tree is ending a life, ya know? All the wood for all the things in our lives started out as living trees...It's not the ending of the life that's the problem, it's what you make of it. So, here's this old piano, made out of wood that came from trees that were alive when this country was born...I learned all that about this piano and I couldn't let it go to the dump or get burned up. When you do something like cut down a tree, you want to get as much use out of it as you can." This opening scene establishes the company's intention with this work in particular, to examine our relationship to the products and resources that sustain us as consumers in the US. Zeke's monologue clearly encapsulates the larger social agenda behind the work and contextualizes the performance that will follow, making both the nonhuman and the past, already in the room through objects like the piano, more present for the audience.

As demonstrated in *HTLM*'s community engagement and collaborative dance-making processes, Dance Exchange views dance and creative engagement as a human right ideally accessible to all. To support this inclusive artistic perspective, Lerman established a series of four deceptively simple questions that continue to guide Dance Exchange's work: "Who gets to dance? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? Why does it matter?" (Dance Exchange N.D., "Mission & Vision"). Rooted in Dance Exchange's work is the fundamental belief that creative, embodied practices can be useful to many realms of human activity, including but not limited to aesthetics, politics, sociality, urban planning, policy, and spirituality. In what follows, I outline Dance

Exchange's commitment to horizontality as in alignment with my reading of the sensual aspects of Haraway's notion of the Chthulucene, trace Dance Exchange's emergence as a community-based dance company in the context of American social justice-oriented artistic practice, and explain some of the core tenets of the company and its community-based work as established by Lerman and continued by Meador with *HTLM*.

Dance Exchange: Community-Based Theater and Cultural Democracy

While Lerman is no longer the artistic director, her vision is fundamental to the organization and her legacy continues to shape Dance Exchange and its endeavors. I provide a bit of her biography and artistic philosophy here to contextualize her mission for Dance Exchange and how this translates into Meador's *HTLM*. Working both with her company and various community groups around the country, Lerman's work combines her artistic proclivities with her commitment to equality and community building. Like Dr. Sarabhai, Lerman is committed to using the arts for transformative social change. She committed her career to staging the experiences and histories of marginalized communities while also developing ways to work with and for a variety of groups (Rossen 2014, 169). Lerman and Dance Exchange's community-based methods mirror some of the strategies used by the Darpana team in their village theater projects especially—rural theatrical projects in which local people both help create and perform plays intended to educate their communities, often about health-related issues like water sanitation or family planning. Recognizing the deep-seated psychological roots of systemic forms of oppression, community-based performance artists like Lerman experiment with ways in which the arts can gradually transform fundamental beliefs and ideologies supporting unequal social structures and injustices (Haedicke and Nellhaus

2001, 13). In the first few years of Dance Exchange's existence, Lerman troubled the normative youthfulness and able-bodiedness of most professional dance companies by forming another company called Dancers of the Third Age featuring senior adult dancers, demonstrating her commitment to dismantling ageism and promoting social justice through her work. This company performed with the core company and offered hundreds of performances in Washington DC-area schools, and in 1993 combined with Dance Exchange, creating an intergenerational company (Dance Exchange N.D., "History,"). Lerman furthered her mission to use the arts to "promote such values as social capital and civic dialogue" (ibid.) in a variety of endeavors, including *Shipyard Project* (1994-1996), a two-year engagement with the Music Hall in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that explored the history of Portsmouth and the cultural significance of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in a collaborative process with local citizens and stakeholders. These ventures demonstrate Lerman and Dance Exchange's commitment to dismantling powerful structural hierarchies by including a diversity of participants, strengthening local community relationships through collective creative processes, dissolving the divide between audience and performer through participatory performances, and making artistic endeavors more accessible to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to create and perform.

Overall, community-based performance such as that which occurs at Dance Exchange exemplifies what Baz Kershaw (1992, 184) defines as a move from *democratization of culture*—"a hegemonic procedure that aims to cheat the mass of people of their right to create their own culture, and that conspires to hold them in thrall to their own uncreative subjugation" by bringing high art to the masses—to *cultural*

democracy, in which the masses are actively engaged in cultural production and distribution. Building on her belief that dance can build community by providing “a sense of collective existence,” Lerman seeks to take “the best of contemporary art forms and [turn them] to usefulness” as practices that foster relations of belonging across difference (Lerman 2011, 32-33, 35). By incorporating communities into their creative processes, Dance Exchange exemplifies Kershaw’s cultural democracy. Even more, I argue that a move toward cultural democracy supports the realization of the Chthulucene, which Haraway (2016, 7, 86; 67-98) highlights as an inherently creative, inclusive time-space that requires its creatures to be more active in their “worlding practices.” The Chthulucene has left behind the possessive relations and compulsory injunction to consume of the Capitalocene. When Haraway discusses the Chthonic possibilities of “world games...made with and from indigenous people’s stories and practices...[that] both remember and create worlds in dangerous times” (2016, 86), she implies that the Chthulucene is an age in which mass culture loses its seductive appeal in favor of more inclusive, localized cultural efforts. While Dance Exchange’s works do not usually address indigenous stories and practices explicitly, their efforts to source material from and include local communities in their artistic work create space for diverse worlds to be created and expressed. As I will explore further, *HTLM* in particular remembers the lost mountains and cultures of Appalachia and conjures experiences and performances of the human interconnection both to Appalachia in particular and the land in general. With dual senses of purpose and pragmatism, Lerman has managed to bring dance practice and performance to a variety of people who normally do not attend, help create, or perform dance.

Horizontality: a Transversal Onto-Epistemology for the Chthulucene

In an ongoing effort to facilitate gradual transformations of collective psyches and ideologies toward more just and sustainable ends, Dance Exchange works to dismantle powerful hierarchies by demonstrating a commitment to what Lerman notably calls the “horizontal.” She has written extensively on the notion of “hiking the horizontal”—the title of her 2011 book—as a guiding principle in her and Dance Exchange’s creative community work that allows the team to pursue uncanny connections and embody an inclusive politics of interconnection, answering Haraway’s (2016, 7, 63-67) call for dissolving structural hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries through sensuous performance and practice. As Lerman states, “Hierarchy becomes a problem when it imposes right and wrong without fresh thinking, causing those left out to feel victimized and those on top to get by on entitlement. Both victim and entitled end up crippled” (2011, 256). For her, “hiking the horizontal” is characterized by allowing for multiple perspectives to be respected and included at the same time, recognizing the value of making distinctions, and maintaining permeability between these distinctions (xvi). Dance Exchange further describes its work as rooted in an “aesthetic of inquiry” and an “ethos of dialogue” (Borstel 2005) centering intersubjective exchange as primary to the organization as a whole and its artistic work. Through the intersubjective movement explorations pursued in their workshops, the Dance Exchange team finds uncanny connections between individual stories and universal themes and explores them through the choreographic process.

Dance Exchange’s demonstrated commitment to the horizontal in its collaborative approach to dance-making and inclusive company structure reflects the transversal onto-

epistemology of critical posthumanist perspectives. Education scholar D. Carstens (2016), for example, argues for transversal thinking as a means to upend the powerful and pervasive myths of the separation of humans from nature and human exceptionalism. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's notion of schizoanalysis, Carstens (255) proposes a transversal onto-epistemology that "favors inclusiveness, flexibility, mutability and multiplicity, acknowledging the entangled kinships between humans and a multitude of non-human others." As Haraway argues, a Chthonic subjectivity "stays with the trouble" of uncanny transversal entanglements between seemingly unrelated or even opposing entities, especially between nature and culture, self and other (2016). Dance Exchange's horizontality, evidenced in particular by its collaborative choreographic methodology and inclusive company structure, aligns with this critical posthumanist, Chthonic perspective and sensually evokes horizontal experiences of interconnection. I argue that the movement practices and choreographic processes pursued by Dance Exchange's community-based work stays with the trouble of embodied entanglements and uncanny connections between diverse earthly beings.

A few of Dance Exchange's primary tools used in a variety of their workshops and processes exemplify how their commitment to horizontality—a transversal onto-epistemology—influences their pedagogy and choreographic processes. First, during the Critical Response Process, a method the company developed to give and receive feedback on any creative endeavor, the group is preferably arranged in a circle. This physical orientation encourages dialogue among equals, rather than reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics that are likely also present in the group. Second, Dance Exchange workshops often begin with a "Blind Lead" exercise in which one person leads

another with their eyes closed around the space. Besides simply encouraging and cultivating trust among people collaborating on an artistic process, this exercise gives a direct, embodied experience of interdependence and interconnection with another. “Blind” participants often say they had a “heightened awareness of people” during the exercise and vividly describe their non-visual sensations (Borstel 2005, 12). Third, during the creative process the company often draws upon what Lerman terms “Big Story/Little Story” based on “finding the connections (often unexpected) between personal story and the stories of history, collective lore, or world events” (13). Similarly, in “Frame it Bigger” exercises, a personal perspective is zoomed out to connect to broader or shared themes and experiences (ibid.). As former Humanities Director for Dance Exchange John Borstel explains, “both are devices for understanding the experience of the individual in the context of a larger issue” (ibid.). Rather than only telling personal stories or exploring global themes, Dance Exchange seeks to explore their interconnectedness through art-making and embodied practice, elucidating transversal connections between individual experiences and broader phenomena.

Liz Lerman’s Dance Exchange: Artistic Lineage and Aesthetics

As an artist interested in the political implications of dance, Lerman exemplifies an impulse within postmodern American dance to utilize arts for political engagement, community building, and activism.² Dance Exchange’s movement pedagogies hone workshop participants’ internal attention and responsiveness in relation to their external circumstances, which is the first step toward affecting personal perceptual shifts and, I

² Lerman’s work is best contextualized within a century-long lineage of Jewish American artists who saw their work as part of realizing feminist and socially progressive ideals, especially that of Anna Halprin.

argue, progressive social change. Movement workshops are usually open to people with little or no dance experience and almost always include practices that ask participants to attend to their own sensations and perceptions of the world around them. Rather than coaching elaborate virtuosic movement skills or complex choreographies, participants are asked to generate most of their own movement material, which allows for a wide variety of people with varying bodily abilities and experiences to dance together safely.

Lerman's choreographic and organizational methods are akin to a genre identified as community-based theater. Haedicke and Nellhaus (2001, 8) note that "rather than an aesthetics of sublimity, community-based theater pursues a *grounded* aesthetics" and argue, "the 'groundedness' of community-based work is one of its strongest and most invigorating features," (6). Consciousness of the present moment in movement and performance, which performance studies scholar Jan Cohen Cruz (2007, 223) deems an "aesthetic of commitment," is far more important than a flowing, smooth aesthetic for Dance Exchange. Further, Dance Exchange's diverse company membership includes people of a variety of ages, body types, skill levels, races, ethnicities, and dance backgrounds. By incorporating older people into her work (a handful of Dance Exchange company members are over the age of sixty), "the thrill, as Lerman puts it, cannot possibly be seeing how high someone's leg is going to go," which has effectively "[weaned] audiences from the habit of overvaluing technique," (ibid.). Lerman's commitments to inclusivity and social change engender a community-based approach to dance-making that results in more grounded, personal aesthetics, rather than virtuosic ones. I argue Dance Exchange's grounded aesthetic is in alignment with the inclusivity and messy entanglements of the Chthulucene, subverting both the polished, symmetrical

spectacles of mass entertainment³ and the virtuosic displays often found in most professional theatrical dance.

Like postmodern choreographers of the 1980s and '90s, Lerman creates what she calls subject-matter dances (Lerman 2011, 68) that are based on particular issues and themes that are intended to be obvious to her audiences. She believes that the “reality/abstraction dichotomy and the representational/’dance for itself’ dichotomy are ultimately lies” (74), and she opts instead to communicate with her audience through a blend of concrete and abstract imagery. It is important to her mission that her work and the subject matter it presents be accessible to the public, which, in her words, means:

I have spent enough time with my subject to understand its concrete meaning and its potential for depth through abstraction, form, style, point of view, tone, and vocabulary. I have suffered through many iterations of [an] idea so that I can believe that the art and the audience have a chance to be moved together toward new understandings. (72)

Researching through the choreographic process, Lerman seeks to understand the topic deeply enough that she can easily communicate the subject matter at hand to an audience, who will more easily understand and be moved by the work.

As part of her quest for accessibility, Lerman came to incorporate talking and text into her work that directly address the subject matter. Lerman finds that many in her audiences are “relieved, excited, and profoundly affected by the mix of dancing and talking,” (Lerman 2011, 76). Most often, text, such as the monologue that opened this

³ Mark Franko (2002) elucidates an aesthetic and political connection between dance-based spectacles Broadway and film featuring large, synchronized groups of performers appearing nearly identical to one another and the rise of mass production and capitalism.

section, allows for the story or subject of the dance to be made more explicit to the audience by communicating information that cannot be explicitly referenced through movement. By incorporating theatrical, textual, and scientific elements, Lerman's work destabilizes the boundaries between art forms, as well as between art and everyday life.

In order to maintain their commitment to the horizontal, the group models inclusivity and equality in the diversity of bodies present in the company, by including trained and non-trained performers, and in the accessible and democratic choreographic tools used to create choreography itself. As scholars of community-based theater note, the "diversity of people involved" is crucial to this kind of work (Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001, 5). Cohen-Cruz (2007, 215) recognizes that, in Dance Exchange, "the company members [serve] as representatives of a range of ethnicities, races, religions, and sexual preferences." The commitment to diversity in body type, background, age, ability, etc. is consistent with the recent shift in modern social theory from notions of community based on commonality to one based on difference (Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001, 2). The notion of cohesive communities inclusive of difference provides a ground for a politics of interconnection that seek to reveal the interdependencies and mutual reliance between disparate entities. Rather than fostering an image of cohesion through likeness and similarity, the aesthetics of difference pursued by Dance Exchange allow for a more inclusive and fluid notion of community that can expand to include human and nonhuman "others."

Given the diversity of the company and their continued inclusion of non-trained performers, small gestures are an integral part of Dance Exchange's choreography. A choreographic tool that Lerman calls "spontaneous gesture" sources movement material

from people's hand and head movements that they make while speaking about a particular topic (Lerman 2011, 51). Thus, small detailed gestural phrases recur throughout many of her choreographic works, with idiosyncratic movement input from a wide range of people. This is a choreographic tool accessible to people of a variety of abilities, movement backgrounds, and styles. These gestures also serve as the foundation for uncanny connections between personal stories and universal themes. By utilizing a spontaneous gesture made in conversation in choreography and experimenting with it, the individual and their artistic collaborators might kinesthetically come to understand a new aspect of what they are talking about or experiencing, and they might discover similarities to another choreographic idea that elucidates an uncanny point of connection in the material and themes.

Dance Exchange has created and presented work in a variety of nontraditional performance spaces, including a shipyard, public squares and parks, places of worship, and art galleries. These place-based works come about for various reasons. At times, a building attracts a company member, or a specific site is exceptionally meaningful for a community or a topic the company is interested in exploring. At other times Dance Exchange is asked to make a dance for a particular occasion and thus must work with the space provided, or ventures to create dances for certain people in their home environments (Lerman 2011, 118-119). Lerman describes that she is committed to site-specific work because it "often inspires a shift in attitude among people who live or work in the space in which the event is happening, accompanied by new perspectives on the place and new understandings about art and dance" (121), reflecting a politics of place. As a dancer in a 2017 Dance Exchange Summer Institute performance that I attended

remarked, “Dance can be used to learn about a place.” Consistent with her belief that the powerful medium of dance is a human right rather than a luxury for the talented few, Lerman made it a mission in her career to “keep one foot in the professional world and one in the community” (xvii), and site-specific work is central to that undertaking. Lerman utilized unconventional performance spaces for the ways that these performances could encourage their audience, the performers, and the larger community to more intimately connect with place.

Since Lerman left Dance Exchange to Meador in 2011, the company continues to embody a strong commitment to creating art and artistic opportunities that create diverse and inclusive communities and promote equality. Lerman’s commitment to horizontality, community-based theater, and grounded aesthetics prepared the ground for Meador to embark on *HTLM*, a choreographic project that addresses relevant social and environmental issues through a collaborative, multi-pronged, and innovative process. Continuing Dance Exchange’s troubling of the line between art and life, Meador’s pilgrimage to Kayford Mountain stands as its own performance. In aiming to level established hierarchies between rural Appalachia and the urban US by traversing this particular route and facilitating experiences and performances of human interconnection with place, the past, and the nonhuman, the walk itself and the stage work continue Lerman’s legacy of “hiking the horizontal.”

Appalachian Anti-Mountaintop Removal Movement

Mountaintop Removal Mining

With *HTLM*, Meador and her team aim to bring attention to the sources of products and commodities that many Americans use without considering the

environmental and cultural damage endured by other for their extraction, processing, and distribution. The work highlights the consequences of practices used by the coal industry to reveal the interconnections between fossil fuel extraction in Appalachia and urban consumers of electricity. Coal mining has been a primary industry in the Appalachian region, primarily in West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania since the 19th century (Marley 2016). Historically, absentee landowners and multinational corporations have been the main financial beneficiaries, able to profit from the development of industry without having to directly work in the mines or experience the negative environmental and cultural impacts of mining practices. Notably disconnected from the region as a place of residence, absentee landowners instead regard it as an abstract “space” of and for financial gain. Because they lacked sufficient revenue to own the land on which they lived, many local residents intimately connected with Appalachia as their home were dispossessed and displaced, unable to develop the area “beyond a one-resource economy” (Burns 2007, 11). As of the time when Meador made *HTLM*, the region still depended on the transnational coal industry for economic wealth within the profit-driven conditions of consumer-capitalism, compromising residents’ agency over their lives, communities, and land.

Yielding two to three times more tons of coal per man-hour than underground mining (Burns 2007, 5), MTR has become increasingly popular in the Appalachian coal industry since the 1980s when large draglines were first introduced to MTR sites (17). The Clean Air Act in 1990 set regulations that increased demand for low-sulfur coal, most easily extracted through MTR, which increased the use of MTR further (6). However, MTR strips about three times as much land per ton of coal extracted (Bruggers

2018). Coal companies argue MTR is necessary for their business because it is cost-effective and allows them to sell coal competitively (Almasy 2011; Garrun 2014). As a result, they promote MTR as necessary to maintaining a profitable coal industry and local employment on which the majority of residents rely. Some residents even refer to MTR as a “necessary evil” (May 2009, 87)—an attitude rooted in the historical dominance of the coal industry in Appalachia and the story of the region as “Coal Country” (Barry 2012, 16), as well as a hierarchical possessive onto-epistemology that conceptualizes human and ecological needs as separate, competing forces (White 2012). Meador’s representation of Gibson and Kayford Mountain shows the human and ecological toll of these monopolizing decisions. In a self-perpetuating cycle, the environmental degradation of MTR decreases property values and compromises community health, which impedes the development of other cultural resources and community structures and discourages other forms of industry from entering the region (Burns 2007, 53; Barry 2012, 24). Feminist scholar and anti-MTR activist Joyce Barry (2012, 33) recalls a 2009 clash between anti-MTR activists and coal miners on Kayford Mountain in which a miner exclaimed, “You may have another way of living, but we don’t.” Thus, the coal industry remains a main employer in the region and local residents have few options other than to seek employment within or supportive of the coal industry, sell their land or mineral rights to coal executives if a deal is offered, or, as many do, leave the area. This mass exodus from coal country has further impoverished the region of community, culture, and natural resources, increasing Appalachians’ reliance on the coal industry.

MTR poses significant health and environmental threats to the human and nonhuman communities in mining regions that are largely unaccounted for by the

companies profiting from this form of extraction. The most obvious effect is the significant alteration of the landscape as explosives and extractors level mountains and dump the removed land into nearby valleys (Burns 2007, 6). This “spoil” buries streams, resulting in polluted water, dried-up aquifers, and flooding, and renders previously lush, biodiverse ecologies uninhabitable (Pond et al. 2008, 724). Further, the explosions that dislodge the topsoil to expose coal seams disturb residents, cause landslides, and blast mineral particles into the air (Burns 2007, 35). The practice poses several health risks to residents, including increased rates of asthma, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting in children. Additionally, floods and landslides displace families and communities, and sometimes even prove fatal (Reece 2006). The coal industry does not think in an expanded sense of time and place with attention to consequences or acknowledge human and nonhuman’s inherent trans-corporeality. In other words, it lacks a sense of interconnection and expanded perspective necessary for a Chthonic imagination. The coal industry constructs the coalfields as “a market rather than as places for the exercise of democratic participation and eco-cultural sustainability” (Fisher and Smith 2012, 13). As a result, the industry perpetuates practices like MTR that severely impact the environment and compromise the health of local communities.

In addition to environmental degradation and negative impacts on public health, MTR targets a crucial component of Appalachian identity: the Appalachian mountains themselves. With MTR, the “placeness” of particular mountains such as Kayford Mountain, which Gibson insists is integral to his, his family’s, and Appalachia’s history, identity, and culture, is levelled barren. MTR sites are treated by coal companies as empty space, open to be transformed into any number of profitable enterprises—from

golf courses to shopping malls—that continue to accumulate wealth for out-of-region corporations by dispossessing Appalachian communities (Almasy 2011). While the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 requires mining sites to be restored to their “approximate original contour,” the government grants exemptions if there is a plan to develop the land for “equal or better economic use” such as “industrial, commercial, residential or public use” (Henry 2000). However, despite coal company claims, a study by Appalachian Voices analyzed aerial imagery and found that only about 10% of unreclaimed MTR sites had been converted to economic uses. A 2011 study by the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) found that MTR leads directly to substantial alteration and degradation of stream ecosystems. The practice of MTR impacts Appalachian ecosystems so drastically that their significance to human and nonhuman communities as places integral to their survival, identity, and sense of belonging, is severely compromised if not destroyed.

The Anti-MTR Movement

The environmental and social degradation of Appalachia has spurred a wave of activist resistance from residents and nonprofit groups in the area, led primarily by working-class white and Cherokee women (Barry 2012, 36). There is an ongoing conflict between those who support Big Coal as the region’s cultural and economic lifeblood and those who affiliate with the mountains and the human and nonhuman ecosystems they enable. Support for the anti-MTR movement is undermined by the common narrative perpetuated by the coal industry’s massive advertising budget that Appalachian life and identity is inescapably reliant on the coal industry. When I drove through West Virginia in 2010, for example, I encountered many billboards that insisted the “Coal Keeps the

Lights On.” A billboard campaign in Pennsylvania links the coal industry to both environmental efforts and American pride, claiming, “Affordable Clean Energy: Increasingly Green and Always Red, White, and Blue.” Anti-MTR activism resists this narrative by promoting affiliation and alliance with the Appalachian Mountains as materially and symbolically integral to Appalachian life, culture, and identity, cultivating an embodied sense of trans-corporeality and a transcendental environmental ethic. They express their opposition through protests, marches, and educational campaigns, as well as by simply refusing to sell their land to coal companies.

Marking a break with Appalachia’s history of labor-based activism which sought reform for, but ultimately supported, the coal industry, the anti-MTR movement advocates for transition to a more diverse and sustainable economy free from Big Coal. Barry (2012), an Appalachian native, writes, “Coming of age in West Virginia, the beautiful mountains that surrounded us were inextricably linked to our history, culture, and sense of place in the world” (1). Her book *Standing Our Ground: Women, Environmental Justice, and the Fight to End Mountaintop Removal* (2012) outlines how those in the Anti-MTR movement, especially women, uphold the mountains and their nonhuman inhabitants as central to Appalachian identity. Understanding the Appalachian Mountains as her home as well as that of the women activists she highlights, she argues women in anti-MTR movement experience the mountains as “inextricably tied to the area’s culture and history” and focus on creating economically and environmentally sustainable communities rather than reforming the coal industry (12). She traces how the anti-MTR movement disrupts the general acceptance of Appalachia as a “sacrifice zone” in which “the lives and environment of the few are sacrificed for the greater good of the

many” (15). This new wave of activism allies with critical posthumanist standpoints that acknowledge a fundamental interconnectedness between humans and the nonhuman ecologies of which they are a part. These efforts reflect environmental humanities scholar Stacy Alaimo’s (2010) notion of trans-corporeality which emphasizes movement across bodies and “reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures” such that the human is understood as “always enmeshed with the more-than-human world” (2010, 2). The anti-MTR movement highlights the trans-corporeality of the mountains and the people who dwell within them, aligning with a critical posthumanist perspective.

The movement against MTR takes on an environmental justice perspective that sees human and nonhuman flourishing as necessary allies rather than mutually exclusive ends. Diverging from more traditional environmental conservation movements by focusing not only on the effect of MTR on the nonhuman mountains and ecosystems as well as on the human community, the anti-MTR movement demonstrates what environmental ethicist John White (2012) calls a transcendental environmental ethic in which the human and nonhuman are trans-corporeal, mutually vulnerable, and compatible. White calls for a transversal model as a way out of the intentionalist paradigm in which humans are seen as separate from nature and approaches to the environment are cast as either anthropocentric (prioritizing human needs, or subject-focused) or ecocentric (prioritizing the preservation of nature, or object-focused). Rather, through philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler, and Friedrich Schelling, White articulates a transcendental model that understands humans and nature not as diametric opposites but unified and inseparable through the very ideologies that

understand them as subjects and objects. He believes this is the ground of an environmental ethics that moves beyond the scarcity of the intentional model to work for the benefit of humanity and nature alike, experiencing and working for their needs as inherently connected and mutual. Indeed, a flourishing environment is coherent with human flourishing “through a healthy tension of identity and difference” (White 2012, 237). In this transcendental model, the human “ego” and the surrounding environmental “eco” are understood as in a cooperative, co-creative relationship rather than a competitive one. A transversal concept of trans-corporeality supports White’s transcendental environmental ethic that assumes human and environmental flourishing go hand-in-hand. Similarly, Haraway (2016) calls the “ongoingness” of life on Earth in the Chthulucene such that the human and nonhuman “become-with one another or not at all” (2016, 4). Such a paradigmatic shift from an environmental conservation to an environmental justice-orientation resonates with the Chthulucene’s recognition of the intimate and inextricable interconnections of human and nonhuman, its attention to the future consequences of actions with an expanded sense of time, and its commitment to ongoingness.

Performing and Experiencing Interconnection

Sarah stands behind Shula, who is seated holding a stack of cards. Sarah incessantly plucks cards from Shula’s hand and throws them on the ground with nonchalant and unceasing greed. Matthew is thrown into the air by the reverberations through the floor as each pile slaps the ground. Paloma brings more and more cards to satisfy Sarah’s hunger, and Shula patiently continues to refill her hand as Sarah snatches them away until the supply is exhausted and the floor is littered with rejected cards. Sarah scatters

hundreds of cards, creating an unstable, slippery landscape. Only then does Sarah see where the cards have been coming from. The cards are shuffled, kicked, and spread apart as the dancers move across their debris in a trio, gestures migrating through and across bodies that seem to be gravitationally compelled toward one another precariously. One's fling of the arm is transposed into another's launch in the same direction. One interrupts a unison moment between others to carry a third dancer across the stage. They pull at each other's wrists, counterbalancing in brief moments of suspension that are cut short when one releases their grip. They offer their outstretched palms to the others, who take hold graciously to support themselves as they dive forward with their back leg lifted. The dancers, rarely in exact unison, are impacted physically and energetically by the presence of each other, even as they go off into their own solo moments.

The choreography of *HTLM*'s stage work highlights a politics of interconnection and mutual vulnerability as dancers' physically rely on and are impacted by one another, as in the section described above. As a whole, the project explores the human's interconnection with and reliance on the other human and nonhuman entities that sustain them through the products they use and methods of extraction and production used to make them. Like the anti-MTR movement, *HTLM* explores the human interconnection with place and the environmental and social impacts of disrupting a community's connection to place.

Interconnection with Place

Activists in the Appalachian movement against MTR often frame their dissent as rooted in a deep interconnection with the places in which they live—a connection that they argue is threatened by MTR. In the movement's discourse and actions, the

nonhuman entities that comprise particular places are constructed not as inert, passive matter but beings worthy of integrity and to whom we are response-able. For example, in 1998, a group of anti-MTR protesters built a “stream cemetery” on the grounds of the West Virginia State Capitol (Hufford 2010, 562), aligning with a posthumanist politics of place and an environmental justice orientation by publicly and spectacularly mourning the loss of streams as life-supporting, nonhuman entities. Filmmaker and Appalachian native Mari-Lynn Evans invokes ancestral ties to the land as an important part of the Appalachian community, its struggles and its joys. She describes feeling kinship with her family’s mountain as a connection point between the past, present, and future: “The mountain was a part of our family. It was a living testament that stood throughout time, a link to our past and our gift to the future... My family had lived in one place for generations, surrounded by relatives and friends, doing a specific work, and one day it was all taken away” (9). Such a valuing of place—at once material and symbolic—opens up the human self to be continuous with nonhuman entities like physical environment.

As Stephen Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith (2012, 1) write, for varied communities struggling against capitalist globalization, place “is at once a symbolic landscape of cultural tradition and human connection (the place of home) and the tangible ground that is a source of livelihood and focus of contestation (forests, watersheds, farms).” Similarly, several anthropologists and social movement scholars have identified the importance of place to notions of identity and selfhood, especially for marginalized, disenfranchised, or otherwise dispossessed people. Arturo Escobar and Wendy Harcourt write about a “politics of place” that specifically recognizes how women’s lives in particular are connected to place. They construct a model of women and the politics of

place (WPP) that understands subaltern struggles of the body, environment, and economics as interrelated, in recognition of their belief that “in many cases the vulnerability of place and environment increases with the development-driven integration into the global economy” (2005, 10). Arguing that we need to cultivate and desire new ways of being in order to support justice and sustainability globally, for Escobar and Harcourt, place-based struggles like the anti-MTR movement “reveal that people do inhabit their bodies, relate to their environments, and act like economic subjects through practices that are often quite different from the mainstream and that cannot be reduced to them” (2005, 12, 7). A politics of place resists a utilitarian or rational perspective that casts place as abstract space—evacuated of those human and nonhuman beings who occupy it—and instead recognizes the inherent connectivity between landscapes, ecologies, and socialities. In this view, beings and processes are understood as in relation and in process rather than as fixed, consumable, and able to be possessed. Further, drawing from fieldwork with citizen activism over environmental issues in Appalachia, anthropologist Betsy Taylor (2009, 826) identifies “shared stewardship of ‘place’ as important grounds for democratization” because such efforts can produce “understandings of a shared world arising from civic and environmental commons.” In other words, activities that encourage a sense of interconnection with place cultivate holistic knowledges of local ecosystems such that democratic engagement and civic agency become more possible. With the posthumanist, new materialist, place-based perspective reflected in the anti-MTR movement, the humans of Appalachia make Appalachia as much as Appalachia makes the humans that dwell within its ecosystems.

The anti-MTR movement attends to the “placeness” of Appalachia, working against neoliberal onto-epistemologies that render place open and available for ownership, extraction, and consumption. With a neoliberal ideology, places are less valued for their inherent uniqueness, but, as abstract space, are made equally available for incorporation into the capitalistic machinery and valued according to their ability to generate profit at a given time. In a neoliberal economic climate, subjects and institutions are increasingly alienated from place and configured as maneuvering abstract space. This enables privileged subjects to ignore the pain of the people affected by unsustainable practices that maximize profit. Production practices are made more mobile in order to be able to find sources of cheaper labor, more relaxed environmental regulation, or inexpensive construction costs, all to cut down on costs for the corporations that own them. People migrate, often from rural to urban locations, to join the labor force for multinational corporations after traditional subsistence methods are made impossible with environmental destruction or land privatization. The wealth of diverse natural and cultural resources is invisibilized under the shadow of Big Coal in places like West Virginia, and many people who once experienced a deep, intimate connection with the places they inhabit are severing this connection with place, selling their land, and moving away. *How to Lose a Mountain* stands as a monument to one man who refused to do this.

Violent Mobility and Revelatory Stillness Under Neoliberalism

As a central icon of the ongoing tension, Larry Gibson exemplifies the ways a strong connection to place leads to anti-MTR attitudes and propels activism against the practice. Gibson’s family has lived on Kayford Mountain for over 200 years. In 1986, the area, once a thriving mountaintop farming community, began to undergo MTR (Keeper

of the Mountains Foundation, 2010) because, as a dancer states in the stage component of *HTLM*, “a bunch of people from a great distance away decided that what was under Larry’s land was worth more than what was on top of it.” His family’s 50-acre property, which used to be the lowest point in the area, lies on forty coal seams (Reece 2006) that the Arch Coal Company wants to extract. Gibson refused to sell his land (Burns 2007, 44), which now stands as the highest point, the last remaining forest overlooking 7,500 acres of MTR sites. Gibson could have been a millionaire, but instead endured years of harassment from coal company employees, including threats on his life and destruction to his property, to maintain a connection with Kayford Mountain, his ancestry, and his sense of identity of belonging. While other families sold their land to the Arch Coal company and moved away, Gibson stayed on his land until his death in 2012, a few months after Dance Exchange’s visit.

Gibson’s reasons for resisting the coal company reflect Cheng, et al.’s assertion that “places take on an iconic quality” for people, influencing individual behavior (2003, 91). In this case, Kayford Mountain symbolized Gibson’s sense of his own worth. He defended Kayford Mountain until he died on it because it connected him with his heritage while providing him tangible, but not monetary, value. He was not a financially wealthy man but experienced pride and value in his land that countered his socioeconomic status, revealing his sense of self was interconnected with his sense of belonging and ownership over his ancestral land. In one interview, he stated that if he were to sell the land, he would also sell his heritage: “We have no past after that. Where can we show our family where our roots are?” (Vollers 1999). In a talk with students, Gibson asked, “What do you hold so dear that you don’t have a price on it? And when somebody comes to take it,

what will you do? For me, it's this mountain and the memories I had here as a kid.

...Here I was equal to everybody. I didn't know I was poor until I went to the city and people told me I was. Here I was rich" (Reece, 2006). Gibson explains his defiance as an attempt to protect Kayford Mountain, an important place for him, his family, and his sense of self-worth.

Gibson's experience of interconnection with place not only provided Gibson with a sense of home but also bolstered his sense of personal power. Gibson, despite being of a low socioeconomic status, could exert a degree of power over the oppressive reign of "King Coal" (a nickname used on both sides of the debate). He recalled that when Arch Coal propositioned him to buy the land, the man declared, "We haven't seen anything we can't buy," (Vollers 1999), a statement that reinforces the coal industry's economic power over the region. This comment and the sentiment for which it stands fuels Gibson's resistance as he defends his symbol of home, as well as rejects his perceived status as "poor." By refusing to move, Gibson demonstrated a transcendental environmental ethic that takes his own wellbeing and sense of self as fundamentally interconnected with the ecological integrity of the place of his family's home. Gibson's refusal to move from Kayford Mountain was a constant rebellion against Arch Coal's relentless desire for profit, an act protecting this particular patch of earth despite countless efforts to lure him away with money or scare him into flight. Kayford Mountain for the Arch Coal Company was a source of coal ripe for incorporation into the global flows of capital and an abstract space that, once leveled, can be transformed into a profitable site of consumption, such as a mall or a golf course. For Gibson, however, Kayford Mountain was a place worthy of care, connected to his past, his current sense of

self, and his future livability. It is this sense of interconnection with place that anti-MTR activists hope to cultivate in the public and Meador seeks to cultivate through the pedagogical and choreographic process of creating Dance Exchange's *HTLM* project.

In the foreword to *Coal Country* (2009), Appalachian native and journalist Nick Clooney (actor George Clooney's father), tells of his Irish family immigrating to the US during the nineteenth-century potato famines and finding a new home along the Ohio River in Maysville, Kentucky. Growing up in Appalachia, he describes experiencing a marked isolation and poverty of the region, such that certain technological advancements failed to make it to his community while the natural resources around him were exploited for generations. With such struggle came a sense of identity and a deep understanding of the importance of connection to family and place. He writes, "We may not have been mobile, but we were centered and grounded. That has been our gift to the rest of the nation" (2). Like many other Appalachians, Clooney experienced what could be called a Chthonic sense of interconnection and intimacy with the land of Appalachia, which, as he implies, is increasingly unusual in an increasingly mobile world. Filmmaker and Appalachian native Mari-Lynn Evans expresses her deep connection to Appalachia as place when she reports bringing a box of dirt from her family's Appalachian land with her as she travels the world to keep her connected to her home. For many Appalachian residents in the anti-MTR movement, a grounded connection to place is not only an important icon but a deeply embodied experience central to one's sense of self and interconnection to nonhuman ecologies and human communities, past, present, and future.

Chaotic sections of the stage work of *HTLM* reflect the experience shared by many Appalachians impacted by MTR as the constant, tumultuous, and often violent motion of neoliberal capitalism disrupts one's grounded connection to place. In particular, Meador was interested in the physicality of the startle—the jolting reaction to an unexpected stimulus, like an explosion at an MTR site. The dancers' forward momentum is often tossed unexpectedly off course, as if blasted by a nearby explosion. The musician Zeke bangs on the exposed strings of the piano, creating a mechanical, menacing sonic landscape, as three dancers hit the ground up stage, hardly releasing themselves from the floor as they roll, thrust their pelvises into the air, swing their arms along the ground to change their body position, and propel their bodies up and out with their knees and pelvises. The stage is dark and shadowy, highlighting the contours of their bodies but obscuring their connection to the floor. They appear suspended in abstract space. Their arms fling in wide, horizontal circles, gaining momentum to toss their bodies with resilience and recklessness. When they do find their way to their feet, it is as if they are still low to the ground, bouncing into vertical for a brief, floppy moment before collapsing back into gravity. They spin and their arms go along for the ride, at times catching a breeze which suspends them in mid-air. Their heads flail in response to their whipping spines, sending their upper body through space. The momentum is cut short as Sarah is propelled as if by an outside force diagonally across the stage to the pianist and slams her hands down on the piano. While this section alludes to the perpetual motion of the ideal neoliberal subject—whose mobility is a privilege—this choreography highlights the violence of this way of being by highlighting the dancers' interconnection with and impact upon one another.

Exploring the ideal consumer subject of neoliberal capitalism that moves easily, constantly, and according to their own will, *HTLM* also tells a story of a more grounded, interconnected, attuned, and vulnerable subject. The work ultimately reveals that both are inescapably vulnerable to the beings, actions, and processes in which they are enmeshed. The stage work experimented with the physical vulnerability of the dancers, beginning with the processes of walking and living outside through which it was created. One of the most poignant moments of movement-making along the walk occurred right after the company completed the first 70 miles. Many of the dancers accompanied Meador on this part of the journey, and they ended at a movement studio in Knoxville, MD. Cassie asked the dancers, exhausted and sore, to capture their bodily experience of those 70 miles by creating movement phrases immediately after completing the walk. Initially resentful of such a request, the dancers found that the pacing and simplicity of these phrases communicated the mix of emotions they were experiencing, the difficulty of the journey, and their own senses of vulnerability. These solos are unconcerned with virtuosity. The dancers take their time and use energy carefully. They pause. They ground. They pause. They are unexpectedly knocked off-kilter. They repeat. Moments of imbalance resolve with the dancer in low stillness, a moment of recuperation before changing course. By creating movement along the walk, the creative team captured the energetic and kinesthetic essences of the vulnerability they were experiencing on their nomadic pilgrimage.

The phrasing of these first-70-miles solos repeats throughout the stage work, juxtaposed by more explosive fast-paced movement sequences. At times performing what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls the ceaseless “pure being-toward-movement” ontology

of modernity (quoted in Lepecki 2006, 7), the choreography of *HTLM* also interrupts this flow with contemplative moments of stillness. The dancers pause to scan the horizon, catch their breath leaning onto another's lap, or wrap their arms around themselves in a comforting gesture. Simple gestures, moments of stillness, and pedestrian movements are lingered upon, repeated, and interrupted by the body exploding sideways or spinning chaotically off-kilter. They are often sent back into motion reluctantly, even unexpectedly, as if by an outside force rather than their own volition. Slow, careful pacing is juxtaposed by more frenzied movement occurring at the same time. After a monologue in which Sarah complains about the sun as "old light, light that's on its own schedule" and speaks excitedly about the miracles of modern progress—"we can get things faster...and more compact and more efficient and cheaper and and and and..."—Matthew, Paloma, and Shula join her in a quartet. Sarah and Paloma move quickly with flinging arms and steps that land firmly but never settle while Matthew and Shula move through similar choreography performed at a much slower pace. Eventually, the two groups meet somewhere in the middle, moving through their respective choreography with a common, steady pace. With this exploration of timing and pace, Meador accounts for the slower experience of time and repetitive daily rhythms experienced on their walk in contrast to the modern compulsion toward movement and fast pace of contemporary urban life.

Experiences of Entanglement with the Nonhuman

Entangled with an experience of interconnection with place is a sensuous, intimate sense of interconnection with the nonhuman entities that comprise a place. Anti-MTR activist Janet Keating, for example, writes that living in the biodiverse Appalachia

provided her with a “sense of place” which she defines as “connection with nature and the land” (Burns 2007, 249). Intimately engaging with the land she grew up on, her senses were heightened and she was aware of her interconnection with the many life forms around her, invoking a transcendental ethic through a Chthonic mode of perception. She describes understanding the “worms in the earth were food for the fish that became food for our dinner table and me” (251). Further, Keating’s sense of place extended her connection to the past: “Awed by the moon and stars, comets, an eclipse, I feel a deep connection to generations of my ancestors who watched the same night sky season after season” (ibid.). Considering the Appalachian Mountains as a place important both for human and nonhuman life and to individual and community senses of identity, home, and belonging, the anti-MTR movement acknowledges a fundamental trans-corporeality between nonhuman and human realms. The attention to place supports a transcendental environmental ethic that understands human and nonhuman flourishing as mutually compatible rather than competing intentions. Meador’s *HTLM* materializes these ideas into an experience people can identify with and then, ideally, take action.

If, as White (2012) and feminist political theorists Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi’s (2007) argue, embodied, experiential knowledge of interconnection is necessary to encourage a vital sympathy between the human and the nonhuman, discursive claims of the mountains as integral agents to Appalachian life might not be sufficient in cultivating a transcendental environmental ethic in the urban-dwellers benefitting from MTR. Some anti-MTR direct actions have made the interconnection between the human and nonhuman explicit and embodied, such as when Catherine-Ann MacDougal and Becks Kolins stayed for about two weeks on a platform eighty feet off of the ground in a

tree about 300 feet from active blasting at an MTR site in 2011, temporarily halting mine operations (RAMPS 2011). The action of the tree-sit itself entangles the bodily vulnerability of the human protesters with the actions of the mine and stages the interconnection between the human community, both local and distant, and the nonhuman ecology of the Appalachian Mountains. MacDougal explicitly articulates this connection in a statement about the protest:

Research has demonstrated these environmental impacts and many more, but those who are drinking tainted water, breathing coal dust, and watching the mountains fall around them don't need a scientific study to tell them what's wrong...I'm sitting for those who are depressed because they are manipulated and imprisoned by a system that breeds a festering discontent in order to sell products of global pillage. I'm sitting for the salamanders and tardigrades that are being buried in rubble. I'm sitting for my little sister who has asthma from breathing coal-polluted air. I'm sitting for Junior Walk, whose stomach has been poisoned from a childhood of drinking mine-polluted water. I'm sitting for all those who don't have safe well water because the land around them was ravaged to support the coal-based electricity that *I* have been using all my life. (N.D)

Actions like these implicate the (usually Appalachian) activist as interconnected with the mountains as the part of its ethical injunction to ban the practice.

However, the bodily experience of interconnection with place is difficult to communicate to others, especially to city dwellers physically and culturally removed from the Appalachian Mountains and MTR. Further, while noble in its pursuit of environmental and social justice, this strategy risks reifying the trope of rural, poor, and

otherwise marginalized people as closer to nature. To be successful, the anti-MTR movement must convince consumers outside of Appalachia to attend to and value place and their interconnection with the nonhuman such that they demand an end to the practice that provides them with cheap electric power. Appalachian native and writer Silas House (2009, 8) attempts to do this by extending an awareness of trans-corporeality between the land and its human inhabitants to his readers both in and outside of Appalachia: “[The land] is a part of [Appalachians] because it’s the land they were raised on, the land their parents and grandparents were raised on, the land their great-grandparents settled. The land is in their blood.” He further asserts that “the land is a part of anyone who is holding this book in his or her hands” (ibid.), imparting a lesson of interconnection to the reader in hopes that such a lesson will foster a transcendental environmental ethic and awaken the reader’s inner anti-MTR activist. Rural and urban communities alike must account for their interconnection and trans-corporeality with the land and their mutual vulnerability—conjuring what I am identifying as a Chthonic trans-corporeal subjectivity—in order to cultivate a transcendental environmental ethic and achieve environmental justice and sustainability. As I will explore later, the choreographic and pedagogical methods Meador utilized along the walk with the creative team and community groups gave participants and company members alike the opportunity to explore the “placeness” of the Appalachian Mountains.

Through *HTLM*, Meador explores, inspires reflection on, and facilitates experiences of the human interconnection with the nonhuman materials, processes, and conditions that create and power the products we use every day. She hopes the experiences and performances of interconnection facilitated through *HTLM*’s various

components will foster a deeper connection to the earth and sense of response-ability for place for her, the creative team, and their audiences. Meador (2017) mourns, “We’re losing our connection to our planet and part of that is losing a connection to our bodies. We can’t disconnect the health of our bodies from the health of our planet.” With this sentiment, she articulates a Chthonic politics of interconnection that propels *HTLM* as a choreographic and pedagogical project.

Walking to Kayford: A Chthonic Pilgrimage to Source

After realizing how unaware she was of the sources of the things that power her in her daily life in DC, Meador conducted what I am calling a Chthonic investigation into the nonhuman and more-than-human processes that sustain her way of life. Discovering that the electricity used to power her home in DC came from coal, mostly from West Virginia, and often from mountaintop removal mining (Abrams 2012) inspired her to cover the journey taken by the electricity she uses daily in reverse—a pilgrimage to source—in this case, Kayford Mountain. Journalist Lauren Green (2012) calls the walk a “transcendental journey,” highlighting its secular spiritual significance. Her journey and the rest of the *HTLM* project tells a story of the Appalachian coal industry and its consequences, a Chthonic story stretching further back and further forward in time and space than the stories of instant gratification sought by the late capitalist consumer: a story of human and nonhuman becoming-with one another, of loss, devastation, and grief, and of interconnection and making kin.

Through the act of walking to the source of her home’s power, Meador becomes pilgrim, a particular kind of nomadic, wayfaring subjectivity that seeks transformation and spiritual awakening through an experience of an arduous journey (Turner 1978).

With Haraway (2016) and Braidotti (1994), we are invited to consider wayfaring as a method for cultivating awareness beyond a bounded sense of self necessary for a fluid Chthonic response-ability. Haraway describes “Terran wayfarers” (2016, 34), by which she means those who are “earthbound” (41) and able to “entangle” (36) their sense of self with various others as the ideal subjects of the Chthulucene. Braidotti (1994, 11) writes that the figuration of the nomad “[accounts] for the material conditions that sustain these different subject positions” and “call into play a sense of accountability for one’s locations,” suggesting a Chthonic subjectivity. I argue that the sensuous experience of wayfaring, such as the nomadic activity performed by Meador on the walk, softens the edges of the individual possessive consumer-subject and cultivates a nomadic subjectivity capable of both being at home anywhere and fully, sensuously attending to place.

Meador’s walk recalls a legacy of secular activist pilgrimages in which people perform long walks to bring attention to a particular cause or political agenda. Examples include: the journeys of the Peace Pilgrim, who walked North America unsponsored spreading a message of peace and simple living from 1953 until her death in 1981; the 1965 marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement that hoped to correct unjust laws blocking African-Americans from exercising their constitutional right to vote; the Longest Walk performed in 1978 by Native Americans from Alcatraz to Washington, DC that marked the culmination of the Red Power movement; and the 1930 Salt March led by Mohandas Gandhi as an act of nonviolent resistance against British colonization.⁴ As exceptional and durational events, secular

⁴ I personally have experience with a secular activist pilgrimage that followed a similar route as Meador’s. In 2010, I co-founded an environmental nonprofit initiative called Pick Up America that performed the

activist pilgrimages are modeled after religious pilgrimages undertaken by practitioners of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, maintaining several of the ritual functions of religious pilgrimages. Anthropologist Victor Turner argues that the pilgrimage, as a unique choreography of walking, offers “liberation from profane social structures that are symbiotic with [the] specific religious system,” (Turner 1978, 9). Turner argues that religious pilgrimages taken after the Industrial Revolution often function as “an implicit critique of the life-style characteristic of the encompassing social structure” as they emphasize “transcendental, rather than mundane, ends and means,” foster *communitas*, and “search for the roots of ancient, almost vanishing virtues as the underpinning of social life” (38). Secular activist groups in the US have likewise taken up the choreography of the pilgrimage to critique society and perform a contrary ethic. Taking time away from everyday life, religious pilgrims and secular activists alike enter a liminal state on the pilgrimage, seeking transformation of themselves and, especially for contemporary activists, their society as a whole. As a proxy for her larger community, especially her middle-class urban audience, Meador-as-pilgrim seeks to highlight the ecological costs of their consumption habits and the natural resource extraction that supports them, providing an opportunity for the public to realize their own interconnection with practices like MTR.

Like other pilgrims, Meador hoped that the journey would instigate long-term change for herself and potentially for others toward environmental justice and sustainability through an increased sense of interconnection with the nonhuman. In the

nation’s first coast-to-coast litter pick up, offered environmental education programming, and advocated for a zero-waste economy. This effort took me to Kayford Mountain about two years before Dance Exchange.

introduction for this project, the Dance Exchange asks, “Could knowing the story behind our stuff change our relationship to process and use of product?” (N.D., “How to Lose a Mountain”). Meador told journalist Cyndy Patrick (2012), “I don’t want to make the same choices. I don’t want to live my life in the same way. I feel I have to cover this distance in order for some of that to change.” While she never called herself a pilgrim in our discussions, Meador did tell me that, much like those on pilgrimages, she intended for the walk to have a lasting effect on her: “I do remember saying, I want this walk to change the way I am living in the world” (2017). As journalist Pamela Squires (2012) noticed, Meador appeared thinner and “more vulnerable than usual” after the walk, “her shoulders hunched slightly forward,” highlighting the physical toll the walk had had on Meador. Meador completed this secular Chthonic pilgrimage to source as a sacrificial offering for personal and collective change through cultivating a greater awareness of her interconnection with the human and nonhuman communities that fuel her lifestyle.

Most pilgrimages are guided by a choreographic logic that brings the seeker to a particularly powerful place, symbolically and materially—for Meador, the destination was Kayford Mountain, a place being steadily dismantled by MTR. Just as Haraway’s Chthulucene calls for a kind of material semiotics that is “always situated, someplace and not noplacement, entangled and worldly” (2016, 4), it was important for Meador to follow the particular route of her own power, bringing her out of urban DC and into mountainous, rural West Virginia. To more fully know the story behind her own home’s power, Meador found it necessary to physically encounter and connect with the particular people, ecosystems, and places affected by the methods of resource extraction that literally fuel her lifestyle. In other words, in order for her to embody her interconnection

with these distant and not-so-distant places and be changed by this experience, it was important that Meador's pilgrimage connect her home in Washington, DC to Kayford Mountain. The walk, a secular pilgrimage to source grounded in place, would ideally make it impossible for her and her team to take for granted the electricity coursing through their homes, or to see the Appalachian Mountains and the diverse ecosystems they sustain as abstract entities easily taken up by the machinations of capitalism; possessed, processed, and sold without consequence. Through their journey, the Appalachian Mountains and the lives they sustained are brought into the team's structures of intimacy. They are rendered for the wayfarers as real, vulnerable homes for a variety of real, vulnerable beings enduring profound violence and irreversible destruction.

Unlike the majority of the hikers Meador encountered along the way who were journeying to a summit (or many summits), Meador and her team were walking toward the absence of a summit: a lost mountain. A large portion of Meador's pilgrimage took place on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (also known as the Appalachian Trail, or AT), an iconic route that follows 2,200 miles of the Appalachian Mountains' ridgeline from Georgia to Maine, crossing many of the highest peaks. The usual AT hiker's story is one of triumph and victory (as well as arduousness and pain)—the human communing with and overcoming nature's challenges to literally stand on higher ground—while Meador's arrival to a deep wound on the earth's surface was shadowed in loss and grief. For her, the walk culminated in a sense of personal, community, and planetary loss—not celebration. Sitting down at Larry Gibson's kitchen table, on land surrounded on all sides by MTR, Meador encountered a man who had endured a great deal of loss and commiserated with the grief she was experiencing. While her peers on the AT

demonstrated their power and grit as they summited peaks and navigated valleys, in many ways fulfilling the myth of Anthropos's ability to overcome nature, Meador's Chthonic pilgrimage to a site of MTR tells a story of humans' enmeshment in the nonhuman and their mutual vulnerability, as well as a story of consequence with an elongated sense of space-time. Kayford Mountain, now a grey, rocky pit, is lost and will not return.

Witnessing and Experiencing Mountaintop Removal

Meador's pilgrimage took her on a tour of a power plant in Virginia, along the Appalachian Trail, and to Kayford Mountain. By following the route electricity takes from its sources to her home in reverse with her own body, Meador brings attention to the sources that enable her middle-class lifestyle and makes an ethical intervention. Walking this particular pathway, Meador accounts for the environmental and cultural devastation endured by Appalachian communities for the benefit of distant consumers and multinational corporate interests. The walk through this particular place is an act of witnessing, "publicly illuminating a social act that one does not know how to change but must at least acknowledge" (Cohen-Cruz 2007, 5) through which Meador and Dance Exchange highlight for their audiences the environmental and cultural harm caused by coal extraction methods. The story of Meador's journey of witnessing implicates other middle-class urbanites—like Dance Exchange's primary audience members—who presumably live a similar lifestyle that is supported by a similar set of production processes and practices of consumption. Most audience members could, in theory, physically trace the source of their homes' electrical power as well, and might in the process discover the social and environmental injustices endured to accomplish this work. Bringing together the concept of "witnessing" and White's call for embodied experience

as a means to achieve a transcendental environmental ethic, Meador's walk exemplifies the possibilities of embodied witnessing as an ethical intervention making felt one's interconnection with place.

Importantly, many anti-MTR activists were "awakened" and inspired to publicly oppose MTR after having bodily experiences of mining practices and their effects on the immediate surroundings. For example, in House's (2009, 5) editor's note opening *Coal Country*, he describes living across from a strip mine as a teenager in the 1980s. Invoking his own bodily cosubstantiality with the ecosystem being disrupted, he not only mourned the trees he had once played in being "thrown aside like useless things" but experienced his own body as penetrated by the actions at the mine: "We breathed the dust and listened to the groan of machinery for the entire two years the mine was in operation." Even though he grew up directly affected by MTR, House describes being able to ignore MTR before actually seeing its effects up close. While most MTR sites are far from the public eye, especially roadways (Pfleger 2012, 227), House came across one close to a country road he was taking in the mid 2000s in Kentucky. He notes, "The mountain that just the previous spring had been crowded with a thousand redbuds was now a barren plateau dotted by struggling saplings and shoots of brown grass. The land looked as if a nuclear bomb had gone off there" (ibid.). House's testimony points to the importance of bearing witness to MTR and its effects in person, of being present with it, to fully grasping its devastation.

Gibson and other anti-MTR activists' such as those in Mountain Justice often brought people to MTR sites in order to both educate them about the practice and inspire them to work for its abolition. Many anti-MTR activists, such as those highlighted in the

book *Coal Country* (Burns et al. 2009) discuss the first time they saw MTR, often with Gibson on Kayford Mountain, as a crucial moment in the awakening of their environmental consciousness. I had the same feeling when I saw the area around Kayford Mountain in 2010, as did Meador and others on the core creative team. Appalachian activist Regina Hendrix also describes being “reborn” after viewing an MTR site during a flyover (2009, 254). House (2009, 5) went to view an active MTR site in Kentucky with thirteen writers and the renowned activist and writer Wendell Berry. He catalogues the difference between the healthy, lush forest covering the mountain, still standing, that they traversed to then look down upon a site of MTR, a mountain with “its head cut off. Discarded.” Their walk and subsequent flights over MTR sites were followed by a town meeting, where people shared their experiences living amidst MTR. Recalling Clooney’s experience of immobility as an Appalachian, House writes that the people testifying “are a part of the land, and they live with mountaintop removal every day. It is their stories that matter” (6). A direct experience of MTR such as that Meador and the Dance Exchange team had at Kayford Mountain can help invoke a Chthonic perception of transcorporeality between human and nonhuman ecologies and cultivate a transcendental environmental ethic.

Reterritorializing Appalachia

With the walk to Kayford Mountain, Meador stood as witness to the destruction and human cost of MTR and offered her own difficult journey for the betterment of herself and others—a way to refigure their ethical response-ability and structures of intimacy to include the not-so-distant human and nonhuman others made proximal by currents of electricity and capital. Here, I consider the walk from urban DC to the

Appalachian Mountains as a pilgrimage to source, a political statement, and process of secular spiritual alchemy—a performance that I argue expands the urbanite’s structures of intimacy to include rural Appalachia as a place and human community.

Appalachia is commonly cast as an “internal ‘Other’” to America, “a repository of either backwardness and ignorance or, alternatively, the homespun relics of the frontier” (Fisher and Smith 2012, 2). Anthropologist Mary K. Anglin (2002, 566) argues that Appalachia is often written about as if it exists in an out of the way place “outside the narratives of history and advanced capitalism or the machinations of modern states.” Such a positioning supports the continued exploitation of the land and its people, as impoverished Appalachian people are not made to matter in a system that prioritizes national profit. As one local man declared, choking back tears, “We are just throwaway people” (6). The anti-MTR movement, then, must work against the trope of Appalachia’s otherness by emphasizing its interconnection with America. Appalachia is not an “other” to America but rather its very foundation—a source of natural resources upon which the rest of the nation, and a variety of multinational corporations, rely. The environmental justice perspective of the anti-MTR movement seeks to empathically connect non-Appalachian urbanites and rural Appalachian residents in order to garner support for their anti-MTR platform outside of Appalachia, resonating Beasley and Bacchi’s (2007) notion of social flesh⁵—their proposed ethico-political ideal that assumes embodied

⁵ Beasley and Bacchi’s (2007) ethico-political ideal of “social flesh,” offered as a means to acknowledge human responsibility for and mutual reliance on one another, assumes interconnectedness as the inherent ontology of human existence and a useful basis for ethical politics and world-making. For Beasley and Bacchi, the notion of social flesh provides the basis for a radical egalitarian politics that recognizes our mutual embodied reliance on one another. As a new ethico-political ideal and political metaphor, the notion of social flesh can help imagine and move toward alternatives to the ethos of neoliberalism and the assumption of autonomous individual subjectivities.

interconnection and mutual reliance as inherent ontologies of human existence and a useful basis for ethical politics and world-making. Appalachians and the non-Appalachians who benefit from the extraction of Appalachia's natural resources are understood as part of the same social flesh, trans-corporeally connected to one another and the mountains that sustain them. To bridge the gap between Appalachia and the rest of America and include Appalachians in the mainstream US's structure of intimacy—by which I mean the formation of subjectivities and affective attachments that shape to whom we are response-able—for example, anti-MTR groups like Mountain Justice connect rural coalfield communities to activists on college campuses in metropolitan areas across the country (Pfleger et al. 2012, 226-227). Indeed, as Barry (2012, 126-127) explores, the anti-MTR movement is invested in revealing “the global health and safety implications for the human and nonhuman environments” of MTR, notably positioning Appalachia as interconnected with, rather than separate from, the rest of the world.

Many in the anti-MTR movement recall experiences that taught them about their interconnection with the land, which also connects them with the rest of the world. For example, Clooney (2009, 3) relates an experience he had with his grandfather, who taught him that while he might feel isolated, he and the rest of Appalachia were connected to the rest of the world. When he was five-years old, his grandfather took him down to the Ohio River where he instructed his grandson to put his hand in the water. After Nick did as he was told, Grandpa Clooney told him, “Now something from your hand is going to go down the great Mississippi River, and it's going to go past New Orleans, and it's going to go out into the Gulf of Mexico, and it's going to sweep past Florida... You can never think small again. You've got to be part of the big world, and this is part of the big world.

You just touched it” (ibid.). This haptic lesson in interconnection is one that does not often make its way into formal education protocol, and yet its importance endures and, I would argue, intensifies in an increasingly mobile and globalized world. Grandpa Clooney imparted a lesson in cosubstantiality and trans-corporeality, expanding his grandson’s sense of self to include his surroundings, near and far. From this, the younger Clooney understood that it is important “to care for Appalachia’s waters, and its people, because the effect of abusing them will ripple through the rivers of America” (Ibid.). In recognizing their interconnection with the land, Appalachians like Clooney more easily understand Appalachia as central to, rather than abject from, the rest of the US and notions of Americanness. With the experience and understanding of interconnection between the human community and the land—a Chthonic mode of perception and awareness—it is clear that protection of the Appalachian Mountains is not only important to the integrity of the local community, but also to that of the world. As I will explore later, *HTLM* similarly highlights a politics of interconnection by bringing attention to urban America’s interconnection with rural Appalachia as one social flesh through the extraction of natural resources and production and distribution of electricity.

Like Anglin’s (2002, 566) revisionist anthropological work on Appalachia, Meador pushes against the “myth of [Appalachia’s] exceptionalism” that measures a distance between rural, working-class Appalachia and the urban, elite US. Meador’s pilgrimage to Kayford Mountain “reterritorializes” her—and ideally her urban audience’s—notion of “America” and structures of intimacy to include rural Appalachia, demonstrating a Chthonic commitment to making kin with the variety of others, near and far, with whom one is interconnected. Using her body in concert with her company

members' bodies to connect urban DC and mountainous rural Appalachia, often constructed as separate, distinct locations, Meador emphasizes their continuity and interconnection. Meador observes that, when she first heard about MTR in Appalachia as she was working on another dance work about mining, she had the sense that it was something that happened someplace far away and had nothing to do with her and her lifestyle. Meador physically connects these two sites and explores their complex relationship by walking. While her journey in one sense measures the distance between Appalachia and the rest of the US, her pilgrimage across this distance is offered as a mode of connecting—a gesture bridging the gap rather than maintaining or further entrenching its impact. Her pilgrimage de- and reterritorializes the region, revealing and enhancing a sense of interconnection and interdependency.

Interconnection with Resources

Meador's walk to Kayford Mountain enacts Chthonic alliances between the human and the nonhuman, working against the possessive individual consumer-subject of neoliberalism. Meador's decision to make the walk came first, before there was any thought of creating a theatrical component, when she was far from her home in DC and living outdoors in Guyana. During these few weeks, she was intimately close to and aware of the sources of the materials that sustained her such as food, water, and shelter. When Meador returned to DC, she told a local reporter that she was surprised by how quickly she lost her awareness of the sources of the products and materials she consumes. "To really know," Meador says, "it has to involve my body" (Abrams 2012), reflecting White (2012) and Beasley and Bacchi's (2007) argument that bodily experience and embodied cognition is central to fully comprehending and incorporating knowledge of

one's mutual reliance on one's human and nonhuman ecology. As Meador explained to me in a 2017 interview:

I realized I had little knowledge about the resources that created my way of life and I became curious about their origins. I began to wonder, could I travel on foot the full distance back to the source of my home's energy? And by doing this as a walk, could I engage audiences and communities along the way to think about the connections to the choices we make at home and their effect on both local and global systems?

The walk, then, was in part a Chthonic ritual of re-embodying a close connection with place and the natural resources that power her in order to enhance her consciousness of her own interconnection with these resources and the processes used to extract them. Working against her middle-class urban conditioning, Meador sought to use her art-making practice and the organization with which she was taking up artistic leadership to explore her own interconnection with the sources of the products and resources she consumes, understand the stories of the human and nonhuman communities that make them available for her consumption, and facilitate similar explorations for others.

Walking for a long period of time over a great distance requires the walker to be aware of their resources and where their resources are coming from, as many of them need to be carried or acquired along the way, as well as an intimate and deeply embodied connection with place. The 500-mile walk stripped Meador and her team of their familiar urban comforts, instead highlighting their vulnerability to, and dependence upon, their environment. For Meador, it was important for her to complete the walk herself and to have the experience of reducing the amount of "stuff" she brought with her. She

describes this with words like “shedding,” and “stripping down,” invoking images of reduction, simplification, getting smaller, lighter, leaner. Instead of careening down the highway, seated comfortably in a fast-moving vehicle that provides a physical experience of separation from the land, surroundings, and other people, the walkers carried heavy loads through snow, rain, and dirt with blistered feet, sore backs, and aching knees. Meador’s hiking partner Mahaney notes that, in order to sustain oneself, “you’re monitoring how wet your clothes are, judging the daylight that you have left when you need to be thinking about how to get yourself dry or warmer so you can have a good day the next day” (Theys 2012). The slow pace allowed for close, sensuous interaction with flora, fauna, and structures capable of generating a Chthonic sense of the “thick, ongoing presence” (Haraway 2016, 2) of the myriad beings surrounding them. Close attention to weather patterns, terrain conditions, and temperature are a key component to completing all of these walks and are experienced in and through the body of the walker.

For Meador and her team, the walk was a novel physical challenge that gave them not only an awareness of their interconnection with the earth and the materials and products that they consume, but a new experience of and appreciation for their own body as resource. While they were accustomed to pushing their bodies in the studio in order to cultivate their physical capabilities, explore a subject, and create work, many had not gone on a long hike nor lived outdoors for a long period of time. Meador discusses the walk as having a profound impact on her body and describes it in relation to processes observed in her outdoor surroundings: “[T]here’s an equal softening and sharpening. Much like what happens when it rains, the ground softens and opens up but all the trees and leaves become so clear and sharp and upright—I feel that happening in my body”

(Theys 2012). She told me in a 2017 interview that, through the experience of the walk, she felt increasingly connected to the earth. At first, she felt “very other and separate from the environment and the forest. Then, one morning, the separation went away and my feet were more part of the ground.” Sarah Levitt Ramey (2017), a dancer and member of *HTLM*'s core creative team, told me that the walk expanded her sense of her body's capabilities and limits through a more intimate sense of the ways her nonhuman environment supported her on the difficult, elongated journey. In the Chthulucene, the body is not a passive receptacle for the mind but an organic process interfacing with a myriad creatures, materials, and flows—and the self is not a possessive individual consumer but an interconnected being ethically response-able to its human and nonhuman kin. Dance Exchange's pilgrimage helps revise the travelers' senses of self to bring this Chthonic subjectivity into being.

The act of walking a long distance and living outside requires an attuned relationship to one's body in order to care for oneself and avoid injury, drawing attention to the dancers' bodily vulnerability. Meador hurt her foot after she and her partner both took the same fall and had to rest, dampening their forward momentum. This is a poetic moment: Meador's bodily vulnerability becomes apparent and increases in the moment of injury. She needs care, rest, and a moment of stillness, which can feel like moving backwards for those who seek perpetual forward motion, unlimited exponential growth, ceaseless momentum. But this reproductive moment of stillness is necessary for the body to be able to move forward. The body trained by late capitalism experiences slowing, a pause, or a retreat, as failure or as a fall. On an x-y graph, with forward motion as indicative of greater success, a pause or movement backwards would look awfully,

terrifyingly, like a fall, a dip, even a crash. Nevertheless, Meador needs to rest in order to keep going, and she follows her body's wisdom instead of the capitalist compulsion toward movement.

Upon her arrival to Gibson's home on what is left of Kayford Mountain, Meador learned that he performed his own activist pilgrimage across West Virginia in 1999 to bring attention to MTR and advocate for the integrity of the Appalachian Mountains and culture he cherished. In this walk organized in part by the Ohio Valley Environmental Council (OVEC), Gibson and another activist, Julian Martin, walked west from Harper's Ferry to Huntington, WV, carrying the West Virginia flag and speaking with groups along the way about MTR and its effects (Hufford 2009, 51). The walk emphasized the loss endured by the human and nonhuman community by presenting Carol Jackson's "mountaintop removal cemetery," an art piece comprised of 1,025 tombstones in a mock graveyard, each representing a stream, mountain, or community destroyed by MTR (ibid.; Hufford 2010, 562). While Gibson and Martin's walk was intended to raise awareness of and rally support for the anti-MTR movement within West Virginia, reinscribing state borders and a sense of West Virginia's inherent Appalachianess, Meador's performance of pilgrimage crossed state borders and geographical divisions between the urban and the rural, urging everyone who encountered the project to consider and experience their interconnection with both Appalachia and the other places they inhabit. Both, though, brought attention to the impacts of MTR on people and the places with which they are interconnected.

Sensuous Pedagogy: Moving Field Guides

Glen Echo Park, 2012: Dance Exchange company members Cassie and Matt convene with a park ranger to lead a group of Girl Scouts in a movement and outdoor education workshop. First, they get oriented to the place, identifying the cardinal directions and tuning into their sensations and sharpening their attention. The gnats are plentiful and relentless. As they walk along the trails, constantly swatting gnats away from their faces, the ranger points out flora and fauna that they encounter, teaching the group about the ecology of the park. Cassie and Matt use choreographic and improvisational exercises to create movement with the group that reflects what they are learning, making movements for the ways different plants grow, for example, or how a certain animal locomotes. These movements become a dance that recalls the unfurling plant tendrils, slithering snakes, and the experience of swatting gnats away as one walks through the forest. They break into smaller groups and each situates the choreography into a particular site in the park, making unique variations of the choreography that relate to their specific location.

More than a performance endeavor, *HTLM* was also a pedagogical one that encouraged its participants to consider and sensuously experience their interconnection with their nonhuman kin, reflecting a mode of embodied activist pedagogy for the Chthulucene. The global volatility and precarity of the 21st century poses specific challenges to pedagogues, as articulated by education scholar D. Carsten (2016, 266), who argues for relational, critical, anticipatory, and complex forms of knowledge and learning. In this time of crisis, environmentally just and progressive education must “encourage anticipatory, uncanny and transversal forms of thinking” in this time of crisis (ibid). Arguing that various pathologies, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

and depression, are perpetuated by the capitalist hyperreality that at once over stimulates and conjures a deep sense of paralysis, Carsten calls for educational models that help students become actants rather than passive consumer or victims of late capitalism (2016, 268). Haraway (2016) calls this engagement with difficult, entangled, uncanny knowledge as “staying with the trouble” and argues this is important in avoiding human exceptionalism and comprehending—and I would add, experiencing—the complex interconnections of the Chthulucene. Here, I consider the pedagogical components of *HTLM* for the ways in which they “stay with the trouble” of our Chthonic enmeshments, bringing others into an intimate sense of interconnection with the nonhuman through sensuous engagement and embodied exploration. As I will show, the pedagogical endeavors used in the community-workshops and in the making of the stage work in *HTLM* serve as a transformative pedagogy that explicitly seeks uncanny connections across forms of knowledge and fosters a sense of transversal interconnection between geographically disparate humans as well as between the human and nonhuman mountains, coal, power plants, and the variety of human and nonhuman creatures connected to the story of power production.

Demonstrating Dance Exchange and Meador’s commitment to a politics of interconnection, they chose to facilitate for others an experience of their own interconnection with place and resources. The core creative team engaged with people and held creative movement-based workshops with variety of local communities along Meador’s route, asking participants to consider their own connection to place and the resources in their lives. They also practiced many similar activities themselves, using these experiences to generate movement material that would be incorporated, with

material from the workshops, into the stage work. Meador's pedagogical and choreographic processes sensitize workshop participants and company members to the places they inhabit and cultivate experiences of interconnection with their Chthonic kin, especially the Appalachian Mountains and the diverse lifeforms they sustain. How do these practices allow the nonhuman to act in and through the human? How do they leave traces of the nonhuman in the sinew, muscles, bones, and nerves of the human participant? And how, as I argue, do they cultivate what White (2012) calls a transcendental environmental ethic—one that understands the human “ego” and the surrounding environmental “eco” as cooperative, co-creative, and trans-corporeal rather than competing and mutually exclusive ends—an ethic that speaks to the ethico-political conditions of the Chthulucene? In what follows, I discuss the pedagogical tactics utilized in *HTLM*, arguing that they sensitize participants to place and cultivate a transcendental environmental ethic, dissolving the bounds of possessive individualism with an experience of interconnection and enmeshment with the nonhuman. Through this particular choreographic strategy, Meador connects herself, her dancers, and her workshop participants to place through choreographic methods that source movement from sensorial experience of place.

Along the walk, Meador and her team hosted a variety of opportunities for community engagement events that encouraged their participants to consider their interconnections with place, resources, and the past. Squires (2012) describes one workshop in a newspaper article about the project:

Cassie Meador is trying to conjure movement out of memories. Eight people sit with her in a circle, but only one has any dance experience. The rest are mostly

middle-aged residents of this town about 30 miles west of Lynchburg, Va., including two teachers, a postmaster, a nonprofit administrator, and a full-time mom. Members of the Takoma Park-based Dance Exchange offer prompts to the group: How has the landscape changed around you over time? What's something you've made? When have you taken a risk or chance?

Other prompts written on include "From where I stand, I see..." and "I am powered by..." Participants could write on the cards in the moment or send them in later, and the postcards were compiled on the website documenting the project. Potentially, after such an experience, the individual will experience the everyday act of flipping on a light switch with more conscious awareness of the sources of that power and the impacts of its extraction, cultivating an experience of embodied interconnection with their resources.

Through the process of walking and conducting these workshops, Dance Exchange developed and utilized "Moving Field Guides" (MFG), a pedagogical framework funded by the US Forest Service for using Dance Exchange's Toolbox in environmental and historical education. As the teacher training toolkit for MFG describes, MFG "uses movement and dance-making as creative tools for exploring changes in the environment around us and offers a way for students to discover a deeper connection to the world around them" (Dance Exchange 2015, 7), speaking to a Chthonic notion of interconnectedness and response-ability to one's surroundings. MFGs are "immersive experience(s)" that combine artistic and ecological pedagogical approaches in which participants "activate their senses and observation skills through a series of outdoor movement activities" (ibid.). Importantly, MFGs cultivate a Chthonic awareness of "connections between our bodies and the environment" (ibid.); in other words, trans-

corporeality. In MFG, participants walk with a Dance Exchange member and another “knowledge keeper,” a term they use inclusive of naturalists, historians, and others. Reflecting Haraway’s (2016, 75, 79) call for “art-science activist worldings,” Mark Twery, Forest Service lead partner for the Dance Exchange Moving Field Guides explains,

Both scientists and artists look for ways to better understand the world and to express that understanding...MFGs can act as a vehicle to merge the parallel processes. Introducing movement into the act of leaning about ecology can help convey scientific concepts to students while stimulating more questions about the environment...From my perspective and experience, MFGs are an excellent way to get students outside, actively learning about the world around them. That is an essential step in education and in preparation to become active and involved citizens. (2015, 9)

These accessible and flexible pedagogical and choreographic tools encourage intimate, sensuous connection and engagement with the participant and the nonhuman, attuning the participant to the particular place in which they are exploring.

As the knowledge keeper teaches the group about the place, a Dance Exchange member leads them in improvisational and choreographic activities. These ask participants to both sensuously attend to and choreographically respond to their experience of their environment. One exercise involves orienting participants to a natural place by identifying the cardinal directions and then asking students to face a particular direction and attend to what they experience through their senses. For example, the teacher training toolkit instructs students to “Turn to face the west and close your eyes.

Using your other senses, what do you observe? What do you hear or smell? Can you feel where the sun is?" (Dance Exchange 2015, 18). With this sensory orientation, students practice attuning to their senses and becoming more aware of their surroundings. In another activity, the facilitator helps the group "Build-a-Phrase" by collecting and putting together gestures that the participants make when answering a question like "What do you notice about what's growing in the sun versus what grows in the shady area?" In the example given in the toolkit, the facilitator might say, "When Derek talked about the grass growing toward the sun, he held his fingers up in front of his face and wiggled them. Let's all try that" (27). In another activity, the facilitator asks the group to physically mirror or embody what they observe around them: "Put the shape of the tree's branches into your body. Make a movement that captures the texture of the tree bark" (ibid.). With these types of activities, participants become aware of and explore their connection with their nonhuman surroundings through embodied, movement-based exploration. The spontaneous gestures they make while talking about what they are observing and the movements they create based on their sensory experiences give a felt sense of nonhuman beings and environmental processes. I read in these choreographic and pedagogical methods the potential for mutual crossing in which, as the participant attunes to their experience of inhabiting a place, the place comes to inhabit them.

Chthonic movements. Meador and her team aimed to bring workshop participants into contact with their physical environment, hoping, as Meador explains, that these experiences would cultivate more affection in her participants for the places they lived, which would ideally lead to an increased sense of responsibility (and response-ability) for that place's environmental well-being.

For Meador (2017), the Moving Field Guides are more than a nature walk, but are also “a bit like a rehearsal, where a dance or a piece of art is being made along the way.” The movement collected through these collaborative processes with dancers, community members, and place are for Meador the “lumber” from which the stage work was made (ibid.). As Squires (2012) describes, the stage work was composed of “the myriad impressions and sensations and observations that come from being so close to the land; the transformative experience of living without electricity and sleeping on the ground and moving under your own power for days, even weeks, at a time.” But, as Levitt Ramey asks in a 2013 blog post, “how does one capture what it feels like to walk till you think you can’t anymore, look out into a dense forest, spot an owl, eat like a horse after you come off the trail? What is of value from these experiences that translates to the stage work?” In the choreographic process, the company utilized activities similar to those in the Moving Field Guides to create movement material that encapsulates the experience of the walk. As Levitt Ramey notes, “we never could have created the kind of physical material we did without the experience of being outside, and I’d add: being outside together” (ibid.). The physical experience of walking to Kayford Mountain as a group, archived through Moving Field Guides processes, was an integral component of the stage work.

To be able to translate their sensuous experiences of the walk into repeatable, transmittable movement, the core creative team spent time before and during the walk practicing a partner exercise, usually done outside, called “sensory archiving.” A riff off Lerman’s “Blind Lead” exercises, in Sensory Archiving, a seeing partner leads the other with their eyes closed to a place where they tune in to one sense (visual, audio, or tactile),

and respond to what they are experiencing with movement. Much like Silas House's grandfather, who instructed him to put his hand into the river as part of a lesson in his interconnection to place, the seeing participant would put their partner's hand on an object or place them in a certain spot and ask them to tune into their sensation, and then use this sensation as an impulse to move. In such an endeavor, the dancer is asked to be moved not by their own choice but by the sensational experience of place curated for them by their partner. With Sensory Archiving, dancers are asked to bring their sensory experience of their more-than-human environment into their bodies, attuning to their own trans-corporeality and "capture" their sensory experience through movement. After honing their sensorial awareness and responsivity, the dancers utilized a practice called "choreo-sprints" in which they went through a similar process with a partner but quickly created choreography based on their experiences, creating a phrase comprised of their responses to each sensation.

These activities along the way allowed the dancers to transform their physical experiences of tuning into their nonhuman environments into transmittable choreography. In other words, they creative team and workshop participants created embodied traces of place, fostering experiences of interconnection with place like that experienced by many Appalachian anti-MTR activists. I read the use of these pedagogical tools as a chthonic tactic, one that blurs the boundary between human and nonhuman, self and other, highlighting their trans-corporeality with the nonhuman and the more-than-human. Such a practice encourages an empathic felt interconnection with place, rather than an analytic or practical one, and a transcendental environmental ethic necessary for imagining and bringing forth the myriad human and nonhuman alliances of the Chthulucene.

Performance: Staging How to Lose a Mountain

Created through a process intimately connected to the places and people encountered on this particular trajectory, the theatrical stage work of *HTLM* reflects human and environmental aspects of the Appalachian region. With the stage work, Meador hopes to conjure a sense of Appalachia as a place to the audience through the bodies of the dancers and bring attention to human and nonhuman interconnectedness rather than tell a particular story. Here, I focus on the stage component of *HTLM*, utilizing choreographic analysis and archival research to consider the relation between the choreographic process and the resulting theatrical products. I consider how the work embodies and cultivates a Chthonic subjectivity by forging connections across distance and difference between humans living in different locations as well as between humans and the places with which they are entwined, performing vulnerability, grief, and shock, and by creating what Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls “temporal drag,” bringing the past into the present in a way that changes our experience of the present. In this section, I refer to dancers using their first names. I want to point out, however, that the dancers in this work are not exactly playing themselves—it is a theatrical work, after all, and their movements have been shaped and composed into a narrative conglomerate of other people’s biographies. They also are, in a way, playing themselves, as the work was created using the dancers’ experiences through a very personal, involved process.

Dancing with Lost Mountains

As discussed above, Dance Exchange’s work is centered on four primary questions: Who is dancing? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? And why does it matter? With *HTLM*, the “who” of the dance is not only the dancers on stage, the

workshop participants, and Meador and her team; it is also the human and nonhuman beings that comprise the “place” of the walk’s path. Meador’s choreographic strategy allows these places to speak with and through the embodied experiences of the people moving through them. The work is not an explicit condemnation of MTR, but rather conjures a sense of Appalachia as a unique place through the choreography’s intimate connection to the walk through the region and explores embodied interconnection and temporal drag. As reviewer Emily Theys (2013) writes:

What is made visible on stage...are pieces of choreography developed by the cast from their experiences on the trail, songs written and sung by those who felt compelled to share what struck them from the stories they heard and a commentary on what we risk for short-term reward and what we lose when we take those risks. (Theys 2012)

With this description, Theys conveys the way in which *HTLM* conjured the experience of Appalachia and those human and nonhuman others Meador and her team encountered. Her interpretation of the piano—a relic that carries the past within it through the wood that comprises it—underscores the sense of temporal drag in the work.

Meador (2017) recalled that in her first meeting with Gibson, he pounded his fist on table and told her “You have to make something that gives voice to this mountain!” Heeding this commission, Meador created a performance that summons a sense of transcorporeality with and affection—even kinship—for the mountains and their inhabitants. The process of making the work, drawing from practices like the Sensory Archive and those in the MFGs, allowed place to leave traces in the bodies of its inhabitants, traces that were consciously recognized and cultivated. The dance does not necessarily allow

the mountains or the nonhuman to speak, nor does it speak *for* them, but it does speak *with* the mountains and other nonhuman critters of Appalachia.⁶ Through her community-based choreographic process, Meador also brings the voices and perspectives of Appalachian natives and anti-MTR activists into the stage work. This effort embodies the sort of anthropology called for by Carol Stack in which anthropologists look to local constituencies for their understandings of and responses to their social and economic contexts (1996). Anglin similarly argues that Appalachian people “want their own voices to be heard *directly*, not through the misrepresentations of others” (576). By engaging with these communities in making *HTLM*, Meador seeks to include these voices in the making of a theatrical work. With this example of sensuous ecological activism, Meador and the dancers account for, move with, and grieve the lost mountains of Appalachia and their inhabitants.

Temporal Drag

Recalling anti-MTR “cemeteries” commemorating buried streams and decapitated mountains with MTR, Meador asks us to experience through *HTML* what Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls temporal drag such that we more intimately know and ethically account for the sources and processes of extracting and utilizing the resources we consume daily. A queer sense of time, temporal drag implies experiences in which the past exerts its influence—its gravitational pull—upon the present, revealing the continuity of the present with the past. In *HTLM*, Sarah’s character is changed through an experience of temporal drag, ideally inciting a similar change in the work’s primarily

⁶ Thank you to Michael J. Morris for bringing this distinction to my attention during a presentation of this research at the 2017 Dance Studies Association conference.

urban, middle-class audience. Feeling the past through the present invokes a Chthonic sense of deep time, awareness of consequence, and experience of interconnection with both past and future generations forged through material trans-corporeality.

When *HTLM* begins, Sarah's character is enamored with modern progress and development, waxing poetic about the benefits of speed and modern technology, and lacks both Chthonic awareness and a sense of temporal drag. Close to the beginning of the dance, she stands under a line of unlit lightbulbs. She illuminates one by pulling a string and explains with a laugh, "this happens every day," almost rolling her eyes. "But you wanna, you wanna talk about it, you wanna think about it, you wanna mull it over, consider the options, sing a damn song about it, instead of just"—her body braces and she shifts her gaze directly forward—"looking down the barrel and pulling the trigger." She takes aim with her hand, suddenly weaponized. Abrupt, stiff steps take her backwards on the recoil, out of the light. Her monologue also reveals an underlying anxiety that perhaps compels her—and other urban consumer subjects—fetishization of speed: "everything is fast and moving faster and if I don't keep up – I don't know." She cannot fathom a viable life outside of the perpetual motion machinations of modern capitalism; the thought is physically paralyzing. I read her "I don't know" as the Anthropos' stutter at a Chthonic imagining. From Anthropos' perspective, to slow down is to enter a mysterious unknown, perhaps the deadly Chthulucene to which Haraway invites us. Sarah's performed inability to imagine is also an inability to stay with the trouble, an avoidance of "the sense of thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities" (Haraway 2016, 2) through a pointed, myopic obsession with forward motion and bounded, possessive individuality. In the first part of the dance, Sarah's character, devoid

of Chthonic imagining, demonstrates an inability to recognize the past as it asserts its pull on the present.

Sarah will ultimately change after an experience of temporal drag, but not without a significant struggle against the past that she ultimately loses. Standing alone on a small chair, she articulates an inner conflict between attending to the past and moving forward. She begins to ponder, “You know, someone used to sit in this chair”—the past asserting its pull on the present—”and she—Don’t! Don’t say ‘used to.’” Sarah resists this moment of temporal drag, cutting it off abruptly. “Say, ‘Oh, this? This is just a chair. Not much to say about it at all, actually. Don’t say *what* it was before, don’t say *where* it was before, don’t say *who* was here before. Don’t say before!” She sits, regaining composure. “It is how it is *now*. Listen, listen, now.” An ambient humming answers her call. She begins to hum along but suddenly ejects herself from the chair and takes a few steps away. Zeke, the musician, watches her from his seat at the piano. She starts to sing, “You...” until a bolt of electricity suddenly shoots through her, sending her body up and back, her limbs flinging out and recoiling. She tries again, “You walk all...” but this time her arm cuts in front of her face, turning her to the side, one knee buckling under her as the other kicks up sharply. Sarah moves with tight muscles, sharp gestures, and abrupt changes in direction. While bound in its flow, her dance conjures a sense of constant motion. Each movement is distinct, unaffected by those that came before or after, but she moves easefully and steadily through harsh transitions. Her joints become looser, her limbs flinging out from her torso rather than cutting through space as they did before, and she comes to stillness seated on the ground, leaning back on her hands. She begins to sing again: “You cut m-,” but suddenly curls herself to the side and stands, interrupting

herself. Sarah's resistance to temporal drag emphasizes Meador's larger agenda: to inspire curiosity in and a greater awareness of the story of our products and resources—where they come from, how they come to be, and what impact they have on livability for human and nonhuman creatures alike in the past, present, and future. Sarah avoids looking backwards at the risk of succumbing to the pull of the past and the ethical response-ability it might require.

By the end of the dance, Sarah's character physically softens, slows, and awakens to her interconnection with her nonhuman kin. In the final scene, Sarah moves, slowly, to the piano which sits low to the ground, and vulnerable; its legs cut out from under it, its strings exposed. Larry Gibson's voice plays over an ambient suspended drone: "It's about a sense of place. It's about a sense of home. A sense of security. About a sense of comfort. It's a comfort zone for me. It's what I know." Sarah leans against the piano, rests, pauses, scans the horizon to look over her shoulder upstage. She has returned to the slow, tempered pacing of the solo she made in Knoxville, MD, after 70 miles of walking toward Kayford Mountain and living outside. She keeps turning and faces the piano, places her palm onto it, much like she did in her original solo. Using that connection as a pivot point, she comes to stand, slightly wobbling on her feet. The perpetual motion machine has softened into a vulnerable, fleshy human, her focus on her feet. Larry's voice continues: "It's not about money, I mean, I don't have money. All the money in the world I got's in my pocket right now. It ain't money. It's the idea that I can keep coming here. Ya know? I wanna keep coming here." Sarah slowly looks up, leans into a deep resilient lunge, which rebounds her body back upright. She stiffens her torso and shoots her gaze upwards, fixated. For a moment, she is sky gazing Anthropos (Haraway 2016,

53). Her clenched fists are pulled tight toward her shoulders, elbows tight by her sides. Her body drops once more and on the rebound her focus is drawn to her hand carving the space in front of her in a wide, horizontal arc with a patient, sustained pace. Her torso leans forward as she swings and suspends herself precariously over the piano, her feet limited to the sturdy edges, before walking along the back edge with a slow walk, each heel strike coming to rest just in front of the toes of the other foot. She glances over her shoulder, looking backward for a moment before coming to sit with the rest of the cast on the wooden porch downstage left. It is here that she sings the full song that she's been struggling against, a slow, patient, eerie tune: "You walk all over me. You took me for everything I had. You cut me down real low. But I will not be moved." She is singing with the mountains, endangered or lost by the machinations of capitalism of their mutual vulnerability and resilience. Sarah's transformation is testament to power of Chthonic imagining to reveal Anthropos's vulnerability—and response-ability. Confronted with the loss of the mountains, her own mortality, and the temporal drag of the past, Sarah comes to a Chthonic awareness of her interconnection with human and nonhuman others and experiences their mutual vulnerability.

Conclusion

After a showing of the stage work in Wisconsin, a boy who had been in the audience approached Meador, distraught. Holding back tears, he told her that he was upset that the dancers left the cards strewn across the floor. Like many coal companies in Appalachia, they had not cleaned up the mess they had made. Fortunately, cleaning up a stage floor is much easier than reclaiming a decimated mountain. The boy asked to help pick up the cards and got his friends to help. With this act of service and stewardship, the

young audience member demonstrated an awareness of the environmental ethic Meador and the Dance Exchange team had sought to impart.

With *HTLM*, Meador and the creative team in many ways connect with the environmental justice perspective of the anti-MTR movement as a whole, articulating human and nonhuman interconnection and mutual vulnerability. As a pilgrimage, the project rectifies the “othering” of Appalachia that enables the environmental and social devastation caused by surface mining, especially MTR, to go unnoticed by the urban US consumer by reterritorializing Appalachia as interconnected with the rest of the nation and the world. *HTLM* bridges the gap between urban and rural, Appalachia and the rest of the nation, with the walk itself—which traverses a path from the urban to the rural—and through the community-engagements along the way that cultivate perceptions of the mutual interconnectedness and trans-corporeality between its rural, urban, and suburban participant-audiences and the nonhuman. As a community-based choreographic and pedagogical project, *HTLM* encourages its participants and audiences to sensuously engage with the resources on which they depend, the places to which they physically and symbolically tied, and the earth and the many nonhuman entities to which the human is inherently interconnected. As a stage work, the performance presences rural Appalachia and configures an experience of temporal drag that ideally invokes a transcendental environmental ethic for its middle-class, urban audiences. The choreographic and somatic practices utilized in the project make explicit what writing, marches, and most demonstrations can only reference by effectively facilitating embodied, sensuous experiences of interconnection with place and intimate trans-corporeality with the nonhuman. This form of body-engaged research into and embodied exploration of the

human interconnection with the nonhuman offers promising insights into the radical potential of the moving, sensate body as an agent of sensuous ecological activism for the realization of the Chthulucene.

Chapter 3. Sensitizing to and Becoming-with Others: Practicing Chthonic Transcorporeality and Sympoiesis at Forgotten Land

Every year over the winter, a cohort of international travelers makes its way to Arambol Beach on the south western coast of India in the state of Goa, a former Portuguese colony infiltrated by primarily European hippies in the late 1960s. In this beautiful beachside setting on the Arabian Sea, they teach and practice a range of spiritual traditions and somatic practices like yoga, contact improvisation, and meditation. While the electronic dance music scene predominates in many other coastal towns in the state of Goa, Arambol is known less for its nightlife and more for its wealth of opportunities to learn about the body, movement, and spiritual practices. As a contemporary pilgrimage site, Arambol is a temporary and often recurring home for a global constituency of spiritual tourists and somatic nomads seeking personal and collective transformation. Since 2009, a group of European dancers, in collaboration with Indian dancers and administrative support people, have hosted the Goa Contact Festival (GCF) in the winter, Goa's high tourist season. A week-long series of contact improvisation (CI) classes, jams, scholarly discussions, and socializing, GCF attracts people from all over the world. Some experienced contact improvisers come to Arambol specifically for GCF, while others already in Arambol as spiritual tourists decide to participate in the festival with little or no dance experience. In 2018, the festival was

hosted at Forgotten Land, a typical Arambol beachside venue that also hosts other contact improvisation classes and jams, ecstatic dances, and live music concerts for about three months each year. In this chapter, I draw from archival sources as well as participant observation and interviews that I conducted at Forgotten Land. Over a three week stay in Arambol in December 2017 and January 2018, I attended a three-day Somatic Water Flow workshop taught by Dolores, a community class and CI jam facilitated by Vega, and the week of GCF, where I participated in classes taught by Malcolm, Guru, Vega, Hugh, Irene, and Marielle.

On the first day of the festival, I met Ivory, an American woman of Indian descent who was on her first solo trip to India, which she described as a “a journey of identity-seeking and soul-searching” (2018), a time to try new things and explore the nation from which her parents came. Having just landed in Arambol the previous night, she walked by the festival during registration. She had never heard of CI before, but she decided to give the festival a chance because she wanted to “do something boundary-pushing” (ibid.) while in Goa. When we met, she had just finished her first morning session—a beginners-oriented class—and was confused and unsure about her decision. “Why do people do this?” she asked. “Is this just for dancers?” With answers as abundant as GCF participants, her questions inform my own inquiry: Why do people choose to spend their time, especially while traveling, practicing CI? What can this practice do for people and their communities? What ways of being and being-in-community does CI cultivate? How do these challenge the possessive individual subject cultivated by neoliberal capitalism? In other words, what work does CI accomplish in the world, especially in the touristic, intercultural context of Arambol?

In this chapter, I examine Forgotten Land as a contemporary pilgrimage site, educational venue, and locus of social change that troubles common delineations between spiritual practice, movement pedagogy, and activism in the first few decades of the 21st century. I elucidate CI's potential as an emergent Chthonic practice—an example of sensuous ecological activism—analyzing the ways in which the “formless form” invites practitioners to, as Haraway (2016) calls for, “stay with the trouble” of becoming-with an other. She warns that “Bounded (or neoliberal) individualism amended by autopoiesis is not good enough figurally or scientifically; it misleads us down deadly paths” (33). For Haraway (2016, 58), wayfarers of the Chthulucene recognize their sympoiesis—that they are “made-with” others: “[Sympoiesis] is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it.” Similarly, CI is an intentionally sympoietic form. Through the following exploration and analysis of CI at Forgotten Land, a locale fraught with complex neocolonial power dynamics, I highlight the sensual, perceptual, and bodily components of these sympoietic worlding practices and their possibilities as sensuous ecological activism.

I argue that CI occasions sensuous attunement to and experiences of interdependence and co-substantiality with practitioners' partners and surroundings, expanding their senses of self to include both human and nonhuman others and functioning as sensuous ecological activism. As I will show, through practices of sensitization and interdependency, CI and related practices at Forgotten Land cultivate somatic experiences of what environmental humanities scholar Stacy Alaimo (2010, 2) calls trans-corporeality—in which human corporeality is “always enmeshed with the more-than-human world” such that “the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the

environment’.” Practitioners attune to “becoming-with” a multitude of human, nonhuman, and more-than-human others. I explore CI and related activities at Forgotten Land as Chthonic activist practices capable of cultivating experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality.

The activist potential of CI is not only directly discussed (and debated) by the CI community (see, for example, Keogh 2018 and Westfelt 2017), but also has been explored by performance scholars. Drawing from her own experience teaching CI at Oberlin College during the Movement for Black Lives, Albright (2017, 238) describes how CI can cultivate experiences of “resistance, resiliency, and responsiveness” that can help practitioners navigate current political tensions more effectively and with more empathic connection to those with whom they are in tension. Her students, for example, found that the sensitivity and awareness cultivated with CI by their group aided them in responding collectively in a nonviolent protest in which they spontaneously linked arms and walked into the road to block traffic (231). Similarly, Danielle Goldman (2007, 73) explores parallels between the bodily techniques of the Freedom Riders of the US Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and CI, arguing that CI “is a practice of making oneself ready for a range of ever-shifting surprises and constraints.” While CI is not, in and of itself, a form of protest like that of the Freedom Riders, CI holds political potential as an activist practice because it revises, on a bodily level, the experience of separation perpetuated through the reign of rational individualism under capitalism, especially in its neoliberal configurations.

With my reading of CI as sensuous ecological activism, I argue that the community at Forgotten Land, representing a broader transnational networked

community of travelers and somatic practitioners, elaborates an embodied “arts of existence,” which philosopher Michel Foucault ([1984] 1990, 10-11) describes as “those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.” By attuning to their own sensations and moving with various others, participants at Forgotten Land cultivate Chthonic subjectivities that traverse a middle-ground between individual responsibility and an ethics of care, resolving seemingly opposed political ideals of individualism and collectivism. Through interdependent, sensitizing explorations, practitioners at Forgotten Land participate in sensuous ecological activism, an art of existence that disrupts the experience of competitive separation between individual humans, as well as between the human, nonhuman, and more-than-human imposed through rational, possessive individualism and machinations of Empire in the age of neoliberal capitalist globalization.

The arts of existence cultivated at Forgotten Land are activist practices congruent with emergent social change theory that recognizes small personal and local changes as having large scale effects. This theory, articulated by American writer and black rights activist Adrienne Maree Brown (2017, 7) following organization theorists like Nick Obolensky (2014), works with principles found by observing patterns in the nonhuman world to “intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.” Brown’s emergent strategy aligns with Haraway’s call for the Chthulucene and Alaimo’s theory of trans-corporeality in that it seeks to understand the human as embedded in, inextricable from, and responsible to the nonhuman, and it

seeks sustainable alternative social patterns and ways of being. It articulates ways in which we as human animals can foster awareness of our interconnectedness, fleshiness, vulnerability, and possibility for radical re-creation, as well as take action in accordance with those new ways of experiencing the self and the world. Brown identifies six elements of emergent strategy that are inspired by patterns evident in the nonhuman realm, including fractals, adaptation, interdependence/decentralization, nonlinearity/iteration, resilience/transformational justice, and the creation of more possibilities (2017, 33). As I will explore further, many of these can be identified in CI and in the transnational community that has formed around it, suggesting that CI might be an effective somatic practice for cultivating emergent cultures based on the ethico-political implications of human and more-than-human trans-corporeality. Perhaps most important for my purposes, Brown's emergent strategy¹ takes our bodies and embodiment seriously, seeking a holistic approach to both understanding and cultivating sustainable cultural formation that is grounded in bodily experience and practice.

Just as Brown privileges the body as a site of political subjectivization, Haraway (2016, 36), with Hannah Arendt and Valerie Hartouni, warns that the "surrender to... immateriality, inconsequentiality, or...thoughtlessness" in Western ontologies and epistemologies. Privileging economic rationality over material consequences leads to large-scale and deadly injustices, such as the Holocaust and climate change, as subjects are compelled toward profit and desensitized to the impacts of their individual and collective actions. Haraway argues for a moral imperative to attend to materiality,

¹ Obolensky (2014, 88) defines emergence as "the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions," and provides a foundation for Brown's theory of emergent strategy.

including the bodily, the physical realm, and nonhuman ecologies, as a way to encourage awareness of consequences and a commitment to ongoingness. With the legacy of Cartesian dualisms—conceptions of the mind and body as separate that privilege the abstract realm of thought over the material realm of embodiment—in Western thought, the earth, the bodily, and the material have been epistemologically and ontologically debased. Similarly, Alaimo (2010) identifies a troubling parallel between the immateriality of contemporary economic theory and philosophy and a widespread, popular disregard for nonhuman nature. As economic systems are increasingly compelled toward ceaseless growth, actors within them are compelled to compete with others toward their own short-term profit maximization and disincentivized to attend to the ongoingness of the material realm of nonhuman beings and ecosystems. The Chthulucene, however, is the realm of the Earthbound who acknowledge and revere material finitude, the co-substantiality of all beings, and their ecological embeddedness. In times such as these that require urgent transformation, she urges that we learn “how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise” (98)—lessons that, I will argue, CI can help us learn on embodied and collective levels. In a similar vein, Alaimo (2010) argues that a shift toward trans-corporeal conceptualizations of the individual self is necessary for the emergence of a new ethico-political ideal that can compel more sustainable and just futures. With their new materialist, post-humanist critical stances, Haraway and Alaimo show the importance of attention to the body and materiality in creating ongoing, sustainable, and just futures.

With her theorization of the Chthulucene, Haraway (2016) recognizes the impact that ideology has on material and bodily conditions, urging us toward stories and

worlding practices that shift us away from dualistic hierarchies and abstract systems of value, and toward experiences and stories of interconnected sacredness. In this chapter, I propose the inverse of this claim is also true. While Alaimo and Haraway argue that ideology has material effects, I aim to show that material movement practices shape our bodily experiences in ways that also impact our ideological frameworks. Like Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) image of the body as a Möbius strip, ideology and material practice flow in and through one another. In order to revise our stories of self and world such that we can cultivate more Chthonic ways of being and becoming-with others, we need to revise our material dealings with one another. The Möbius strip of ideology and material practice and Brown's (2017, 34-38) articulation of the world as composed of fractals such that small changes and actions can have large effects reveal the radical potential of a relatively small community of practice. As I will argue in this chapter, CI is an embodied technique capable of bringing about the perceptual transformations necessitated in these urgent times of crisis. Small changes in one's physical experience of self in relation to others affects one's personal ideological frameworks which can ripple out into larger scales. In this chapter, I explore one site of the transnational proliferation of CI along spiritual tourist routes, exploring how this community of practice facilitates alchemical encounters and experiences that can perform such revisions.

As I will explore throughout this chapter, CI shifts the practitioners' senses of self by encouraging them to connect and attune to both their own bodies and to that of others through attention focused on sensation to their physicality and materiality, dissolving experiences of separation from others in favor of Chthonic interdependent worlding. For this reason, many practitioners at Forgotten Land experience this secular dance practice

as having sacred effects and spiritual implications. This practice speaks to Haraway's call for a re-valuation, even a re-sacralization, of the earth, materiality, and the body, that honors their complex interconnectivity necessary for the realization of the Chthulucene. Haraway (2016, 2) writes: "Chthonic ones...demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences." In other words, Chthonic subjectivities are deeply grounded in the body and bodily experiences as well as in the mind's thoughtful attention to consequences, linking mind and body. Similarly, in CI, thought happens in and through bodily movement and attention to sensation with meaningful, profound effects. Rooted in physical sensation, CI is a Chthonic practice in which the materiality of the body is honored as meaningful—even sacred—in and of itself. Attention to one's own sensation enhances one's sense of profound interconnection with others, and the consequences of one's actions are immediately felt.

Indeed, CI's potential as sensuous ecological activism comes from the sacredness it fosters—the profound, ineffable experience of connection, interdependency, and response-ability for beings and processes that are both larger than and expand the self. In this way, while CI is a secular aesthetic practice in that it is nondenominational, nondogmatic, and nonreligious, it can also be a spiritual one as it can deeply shift practitioners' senses of self and enhance their experience of interconnection and belonging with others. In particular, the dissolution of the individual that the practitioners in my study experience through the practice of CI resonates with Tantric philosophy and practice which Weinstone explains:

moves us through and past the exclusions wrought by current formulations of difference and otherness, by the general rejection of pleasure at the scene of human-human relations. Tantric philosophy and practice encourages us to think of and experience ourselves as composed of circulating and partial personalities, sonalities, feelings, gestures, skills, memories, topologies, sensations, beliefs, affects, and longings which we do not own, but with whose care and development we are charged. This formulation breaks the frame ‘individual,’ and demands an enlarged, albeit altered, concept of responsibility that comprises both self-care and the care of others. From a Tantric viewpoint, these are, in fact, the same. (2004, 39)

I identify a “Tantric-impulse” of CI that elucidates a posthumanist ethico-political resonance of CI, similar to that which Weinstone recognizes in Tantric philosophy and practice, as both disrupt the boundaries of the autonomous possessive individual.

In what follows, I explore the transnational community of CI practice manifest at Forgotten Land, arguing for its potential as a site of sensuous ecological activism that holds important promise for the realization of the Chthulucene. After a brief description of the geopolitics in which the festival occurs on local and national levels, I introduce CI as a form. Then, I zoom in to CI at Forgotten Land, a hub of CI in India situated as part of a transnational circuit of spiritual tourism, discussing how CI is taught and practiced and articulating the Chthonic modes of embodiment/awareness it cultivates, specifically a resilient and responsive mode of attention. Then, I consider the festival as a site of pilgrimage for somatic nomads and spiritual tourists—often voluntary exiles of their mainstream culture—and argue that the practice of CI takes on more efficacy as a

practice for personal transformation and social change in the context of pilgrimage. After discussing the ambivalent politics of CI's global circulation more broadly, I articulate CI at Forgotten Land as a rebellious art of existence, especially in relationship to right-wing Hindu Nationalism and mainstream Indian culture. Last, I discuss the practice of CI in the pilgrimage site of Forgotten Land as cultivating sensorial engagements with place and inviting intimate connection with the nonhuman (dogs, cows, banyan trees, the ocean) in this particular Arabian Sea beach setting, disrupting possessive individual subjectivities with nomadic, even Chthonic, alternatives.

Political Context

Goa, December 2017. It is about 2 am, and I am finally in a taxi on the way to Arambol. The drive from the airport is about two hours, most of which is through small towns and along windy roads surrounded by trees. The roads are nearly empty, a rare experience for me in India. For the last hour or so, about every third of a mile, we pass small packs of dogs patrolling the streets. During the day, the dogs lie in the streets and hardly seem to notice as cars narrowly meander around them. But with nightfall, they are on alert, charging the taxi and barking. In addition to a few temples, we pass several impressive churches, large and illuminated, another rare sight for me in India. Large billboards advertise an arts festival happening in a nearby town. As we get to Arambol, we see a few night revelers—mostly white with some Indian people—roaming the streets, bottles in hand. A few Indian shopkeepers are still awake. The dense streets are punctuated by signs for yoga classes, yoga teacher trainings, Tantra, restaurants, bicycle and motorbike rentals, shipping services, and clothing shops. While many are simple stalls, others are larger enclosed shops with tall windows and an assortment of mannequins displaying

merchandise that might also be seen in boutiques in New York City or San Francisco.

The taxi driver takes me as far as he can in his car, and then helps me carry my luggage across the sand and up the beach to my waterfront guest house.

While many travelers to Arambol seek and report to experience liberation from confining social structures and expectations through the spiritual endeavors practiced there, the locale is haunted and shaped by legacies of colonialism that complicate these pervasive discourses. Still, the communities that gather in Arambol at places like Forgotten Land also propagate and develop practices and ways of being that run counter to current Hindu nationalist and neoliberal capitalist ideologies and values, fostering interconnected and sensitized modes of awareness and response-ability rather than competitive othering.

The Portuguese colonized and governed the state of Goa from the 1500s until as recently as 1961, even after the rest of India gained independence from the British Empire in 1947. Dissenting Goans living under Portuguese colonial rule had argued that they were facing brutal, discriminatory policies and constant governmental campaigns to convert Hindu Goans to Christianity. The Goa Liberation Movement sought to end Portuguese colonial rule in Goa from the 1800s with a series of *satyagrahas*,² revolts, and diplomatic efforts both within and outside of Goa, but Portuguese rule did not end until the Indian Army invaded Goa in 1961.

² A *satyagraha*, as discussed in the first chapter, is a Gandhian tactic of nonviolent resistance, roughly translating to “holding firmly to the truth.”

Today, Goa is a popular destination for Indian travelers because the climate is favorable, many Hindu temples attract pilgrims, and the state has few restrictions on the sale of alcohol in comparison to most of India. While hardly any international tourism occurred in Goa during Portuguese colonial rule, in the late 1960s a horde of hippies traveled to Goa's coastal areas from Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand in rebellion against the "conventions and constraints" of their societies of origin (Mayrhofer 1997, 34). Often sleeping outside or in empty houses amongst the fishing community, the hippies made little effort to overcome the language or cultural barriers and stayed relatively separate from the local Goan community, interacting mostly to buy or trade goods. This first wave of hippies made way for the arrival of backpackers to Goa in the 1970s, and in the late 1980s, the Goan government created a master plan to support the development of the tourism industry in Goa, especially for more affluent Indians and foreigners. Goa shows "comparatively high open-mindedness toward the 'Western World,' the residents' hedonistically-tinged image is considered an effective asset in advertising and thus is deliberately used in tourism advertisements" (34-35). Today, Goa is a place of cultural convergences, where Indians can buy Western products to "experience so called 'Western culture' without leaving India" (35) and where foreigners can experience Indian culture while also having access to "familiar elements of everyday life" (46).

The colonial history of Goa in general, in conjunction with the more recent influx of Westerners, is impossible to ignore when confronted with the dynamics of Arambol today. While Indian citizens do live in Arambol and travel there as tourists, the majority of the tourists in Arambol during the high season are non-Indian. The beach is

particularly popular among Russian tourists, as well as other Europeans, North Americans, and Australians. Many local businesses cater to tourists' needs and tastes, and the area is known to be more expensive than the majority of Indian towns.

Zooming out to the national Indian context, the political import and potential of activities like the 2018 GCF is especially poignant given the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India that overtly promotes certain sanitized, health-oriented versions of yoga *asana*³ that align with modernist discourses of science while suppressing Tantric Hindu impulses and practices—which I argue are present in CI. As discussed in relation to Dr. Mallika Sarabhai and the Darpana Academy for Performing Arts' activist performance endeavors in Chapter 1, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing, Hindu-nationalist political organization, has gained significant traction in national politics since the 1980s. Hindu Nationalism not only increasingly promotes Hinduism and Hindu culture above the many other religions practiced in India, especially Islam, but also prioritizes “traditional” cultural norms, especially gender roles and relations, and Brahminical Hinduism as opposed to other Hindu religious elements like Tantra, Shaivism, and Vaishnavism (Puniyani 2010, 34). In the 1980s, the party originally supported *swadeshi*, an economic strategy of Gandhi's *Swaraj* (self-rule) promoting indigenous industries and products, and economic liberalization within India but in the mid 1990s shifted its economic position toward free-market liberalization with increased global connectivity (Shulman 2000, 378-380). In the spring of 2014, the BJP took control of the federal government when Narendra Modi, longtime Chief Minister of Gujarat, was elected Prime Minister

³ One of the eight limbs of yoga, *asana* refers to the physical practice of executing and moving through various poses and breathing exercises.

based on a campaign promising to improve living conditions in India and end governmental corruption. During the election, the media represented Modi as a “chest-thumping strongman” (Denyer 2014), cultivating what media scholar Sanjay Srivastava (2015) calls a “Modi-masculinity” that integrates the seemingly opposing forces of neoliberal consumerist-aspirations with notions of “traditional” Indian culture and gender. Modi-Masculinity seamlessly integrates Western-style consumer culture and neoliberal capitalist ideology with more conservative cultural norms to emphasize national purity and progress through economic development, increased consumerism, and Brahminical Hindu values.

In terms of foreign policy, the Modi administration has focused its efforts on improving India’s economic standing with initiatives like the “Make in India” campaign that seeks multinational corporate investment in India’s manufacturing infrastructure and promotes yoga and other spiritual traditions of India to increase India’s global standing and influence. Most poignantly demonstrated in the UN’s annual International Yoga Day (BJP 2014, 39; Hall 2015, 248; Tandon 2016, 59-60), the Modi administration works to leverage India’s “soft power” of its spiritual and yoga traditions. Photos and videos of people participating in International Yoga Day depict large crowds on neatly organized mats following an instructor in perfect unison. Focusing on the scientifically-proven health benefits of yoga, the UN’s International Yoga Day promotes yoga asana practice by depicting yoga as disciplinarian, sanitized, and ascetic.

Aligning with Brahminical Hinduism and right-wing Hindutva ideology, the Modi administration’s efforts specifically exclude Tantric Hindu yogic traditions that focus on the body, sensation, and transgression of social norms. The Modi administration’s

initiatives like the United Nations International Yoga Day cultivates a reputation for India as a spiritual nation, perpetuating deeply held Orientalist fantasies of India in the West that simultaneously romanticize and reject the region's spiritual traditions while also "cleansing" India's image of its sensual and erotic associations to align with the functional epistemologies of neoliberal capitalism. The Tantric tradition of yoga is particularly fashionable in the contemporary West as a repository for ancient sexual and spiritual wisdom desired as an antidote to modern alienation and sexual repression (Urban 2013; Urban 2003), exemplified by the hippies who started an enduring community in Goa.

A Brief History of Contact Improvisation

Contact improvisation, born out of a desire to develop egalitarian and physically-ambitious modes of dancing with others, requires its practitioners to attune to their own experience and the body of their dance partners and cultivates Chthonic modes of awareness and response-ability. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Steve Paxton, a US-based dancer, choreographer, and teacher, initiated the movement explorations that would become Contact Improvisation (CI). Utilizing techniques from the Japanese martial art Aikido, Paxton taught his students how to roll and fall safely, eventually becoming the basis for CI—a movement form that emphasizes fluidity, momentum, and bodily awareness in contact with another. Paxton and a group of other artists, especially Nancy Stark Smith, developed CI to explore improvisational movement between two or more bodies in contact with one another along with the forces that govern their motion. Not a specific style or technique, CI emerges through the alchemy of the bodies, forces, and conditions present as they explore moving in relation to one another. Nancy Stark Smith

and a vast network of others have continued to contribute to the form's development and articulation over the four decades since Paxton's initial explorations.

Coming of age in a time marked by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and widespread social change, CI has a history of disruption of aesthetic and cultural norms, i.e. the use of narrative and predetermined composition in American modern dance performance, verticality, gender norms, and the audience/performer divide. Rejecting the narrative, virtuosic stylings and predetermined compositions of modern concert dance—as well as its perceived inaccessibility, rigidity, and allegiance to an exclusive canon—CI seeks to cultivate a more physical approach to and experience of the body in relation to others free from social norms such as gender binaries, racial identities, or other lines of separation (Novack 1990).

While initially touted by the community as a “neutral” and democratic dance form able to be practiced by anyone, as dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright (2017, 226) argues, CI “carries a subtle socialization that paradoxically contradicts the freewheeling, egalitarian ethos that was the ground for its inception.” She argues that the refusal of the CI community to address issues of cultural difference “whitewashes somatic practice, limiting the kinds of people who feel welcome within this realm of contemporary dance” (225). Albright (*ibid.*) reveals how CI discourse, like that of other somatic forms, tends to promote softness, ease, and moderation in the body as “natural,” even “healing,” dissuading tension, resistance, and wildness as inefficient, even harmful. As dance scholar Isabelle Ginot (2010, 22) articulates, the strategies of initially countercultural discourses like somatics and CI can sediment into “social norms of good movement or good sensing” that subtly and overtly discipline bodies to exclude certain modes of

expression that do not conform to these values. This emphasis on a particular soft and easeful way of moving has perpetuated a white norm,⁴ often overlooked as “universal” or “natural.” Interestingly, anthropologist Cynthia Novack (1990) discusses CI’s African-American influences, especially from break dance, jazz and tap. Similarly, dance scholar and cultural historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996, 55-56, 58n, 144; 2018; 29) identifies an Africanist impulse in CI, evident not only in its grounded movements—a hallmark of Africanist aesthetics (8)—and “gender-democratic concept of partnering”—a defining feature of Lindy hop (56)—but in use of the word “jam,” which comes from African American jazz culture, to refer to CI dances (55). Yet, the Africanist attitude of CI is often invisibilized, and the majority of practitioners are white, further complicating the form’s relation to whiteness.

CI was also born out of a desire to increase a sense of connection in dance practice that is also reflected in the practice at Forgotten Land. Paxton was especially interested in breaking down the isolation that he felt in traditional modern dance and ballet classes—what he called an “appalling barren” of partnering in these contexts. “Although you might have another twenty-five people in the room with you,” he explains, “you kept a certain distance from everybody... You learned technique as an isolated person” (quoted in Pallant 2006, 10). Actively resisting these experiences of bodily separation pervasive in modern dance pedagogy at the time, Paxton developed a form that centers partner work and interconnection with others. While sometimes used in performance, CI is primarily a social dance practiced in what are called “jams.” These informal events have no fixed audience. Instead, participants move fluidly between

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observing and dancing. The CI programming at Forgotten Land is one example of CI's current global circulation, in this case traveling through the intersecting transnational spiritual tourist and somatic nomad communities and, as I explore in the following, emphasizing the potential for the practice as a way to connect with one's self and others.

Spiritual Tourism and Somatic Nomadism in Arambol

Saturday morning, December 23, 2017. I am going to my first CI jam at Forgotten Land in Arambol, a few weeks before the big festival begins. It is just before Christmas, which is high season in Goa for tourists and locals alike. Goa has a higher Christian population than other parts of India, and large churches stand as monuments in many towns, including Arambol. Families are gathering for the holidays in town as a hoard of international tourists fill guest houses along the beach. As I walk along the beach to Forgotten Land, I pass women and men selling roasted masala corn-on-the-cob from small carts, complete with a small stove to freshly make each one. The smell is seductive, but I'm in a hurry. I notice a steady crowd of other beach dwellers, about a quarter of which is Indian, the rest white—mostly from Western and Northern Europe, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, the US, and Canada. Some sit in lounge chairs sipping drinks, others eating omelets and toast. Still others are doing their morning yoga, alone or in small groups, while some are slowly flowing through Tai Chi or Qi Gong repertoires. Every now and then I see someone getting a henna tattoo or a massage from a woman in a baseball cap and sari. Her jewelry box and a stack of fabric, which she also sells, are always also nearby, ready for business. All of the restaurant staff, food vendors, and people selling jewelry, fabrics, and henna tattoos whom I can see are Indian.

I've come to really enjoy this walk, along half a mile of the beach. I know I'm getting to the strip of restaurants when a young man, standing close to the water but looking away from it, begins to approach me. "Yes, please, come sit at my restaurant." I smile but keep on my way—he won't be the last to approach—past a small group of primarily white people who are dancing wildly, wearing orange robes and singing kirtan, a series of Hindu devotional songs, often sung in call-and-response style. I pass more people doing yoga, others swimming in the ocean, fishermen preparing their nets. I'm carrying my shoes and the sand yields deliciously to each bare footfall. Without a thought, I'm knee-deep in the ocean waves.

Forgotten Land and the Goa Contact Festival in Arambol

Arambol Beach is a popular destination on a transnational circuit of spiritual tourism and somatic nomadism—a pilgrimage site to which seekers sojourn to explore yoga, dance and other movement-based and spiritual practices. Part of a transnational network connected through the practice of CI and similar forms, they travel the world teaching and attending workshops, festivals, and retreats as pilgrims seeking personal and collective change with a community beyond their nation of origin.

In 2009, a small group of European dancers that would eventually start GCF followed separate, intersecting paths to Arambol. Like other spiritual tourists and somatic nomads, they were in this particular part of Goa to practice and teach yoga and meditation and simply to relax with other like-minded people. Dance artists and pedagogues Vega and Tara from Finland met several years before at the Osho

International Meditation Resort in Pune, India,⁵ where they practiced a repertory of moving meditations. They encountered Volker, a dancer, theater artist, and dance festival organizer from Germany, at CI festivals in Europe the year before. All three were attracted to the freedom of CI. Feeling limited by the emphasis on stillness, alignment, and asceticism in the yoga and meditation programs that saturated Arambol and other spiritual tourist destinations in India, they longed for an opportunity to dance CI. To satisfy this desire, they hosted a CI jam at a yoga center owned by one of Volker's friends, inviting the local community through Facebook and posting flyers. An eager crowd of about sixty people attended, most of whom were visitors to India. The single jam immediately turned into a four-day "mini-festival," as Volker (2018) describes, during which participants took classes by Vega, danced at jams, and enjoyed meals together at a local restaurant. Sensing the spiritual tourist community's demand for CI in Arambol, Vega, Volker, and Tara decided to continue the event annually, inaugurating the first official Goa Contact Festival (GCF) in 2010.

In 2018, about 200 people from five continents, including myself, attended the festival. Tara (2018) describes the participants and teachers that flow through Arambol as "hopping around the globe to community meetings," indicating their mobile cohesiveness

⁵ Osho, previously known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was a controversial spiritual figure from India who founded the Rajneesh movement and started an ashram in Pune, India, in the mid 1970s, and a US-based community of followers in Oregon in the early 1980s. He embraced capitalism and is known for owning many expensive vehicles and a large amount of expensive watches. His teachings embraced, rather than rejected, the body and its pleasures as sacred, and he became infamous as the "sex guru." To help his followers connect to their bodies and emotions, Osho developed a series of Dynamic Meditations based on movement, often excessive and repetitive, performed for up to an hour at a time, that connected to the broader Human Potential Movement. Religious scholar Hugh Urban (2016) argues that Osho's teachings aligned with late capitalist yearnings for sexual liberation, explaining his success in the US and Europe. He was a prolific public speaker, with many of his teachings compiled into books, and there are many ashrams dedicated to his teachings and methods that continue to be influential in the spiritual tourist community and seekers around the world.

and connection. Arambol has become one of the top destinations on this circuit of spiritual tourists and somatic nomads, who will stay in places like Arambol for several months or even years, with many returning regularly. As Volker (2018) claims, “We have here [in Arambol] a complete traveler’s society. It’s big, really big,” boasting some of the largest ecstatic dances and contact jams in the world.⁶ Visitors to Arambol are of all ages, as many families travel to the site together, but most are between the ages of 18 and 65. Forgotten Land participants are typically in their 20s, 30s, or 40s, but there are some in their 60s and children occasionally join the jams and other public events.

Before coming to Goa in 2009, Vega and Tara met Guru, a young Indian man in his early twenties from Jaipur, at the Osho International Meditation Resort. Dancing together during one of the regular dance celebrations, they became known as “the floor sweepers” for the way they would unabashedly roll around on the floor. As Guru (2018) describes, Vega and Tara told him he “listened well” on the dance floor, which he did not fully understand at the time. Although he had danced for religious purposes most of his life and enjoyed dancing as a follower of Osho, he had never been trained as a dancer, nor had he heard of CI. Intrigued by Vega and Tara’s ways of moving, he traveled with them to Goa for the first jam that Vega, Volker, and Tara organized. Attending GFC nearly every year after, Guru was dismayed at the lack of contact improvisation anywhere else in India, a part of the world where CI is mostly unknown. In 2017, he and a small group of Indian dancers at GFC started CI India, a CI collective, and launched Play Support Explore (PSE), a year-long initiative to spread contact improvisation throughout

⁶ The organizing team estimates there are usually about 120 people at regular CI jams and about 200 at the annual festival.

India. The group traveled from city to city teaching workshops, performing, and hosting jams.

To facilitate organizing the festival, the founders formed Forgotten Land, a seasonal coalition of dance halls, a restaurant, and people who host a variety of movement workshops, music events, and community dances during Arambol's tourist season over the winter months. The name Forgotten Land comes out of the idea that bodily awareness, community connection, and playful creativity are qualities with which we were born but have forgotten as we are socialized. The venue's website explains, "Forgotten Land invites you to return and remember... We come together to remember what it means to connect to each other, through movement, music, and community... Many of us have forgotten what it means to be embodied. Here, we find the path back into our own true essence" (Forgotten Land 2018). Further, Forgotten Land's intention to encourage creative exploration is presented as explicitly sacred but non-denominational or religious: "This is a place of living art. We practice fully embodying our creativity, and allowing it to flow through us in divine and spontaneous ways. Forgotten Land brings together a melting pot of musicians, artists, dancers, and spiritual seekers. We gather to: Deepen our presence, Surrender to the moment, Discover what truly wants to be created through us" (ibid.). Positioned as an artistic and spiritual community, Forgotten Land exemplifies the intersections of artistic and sacred practices explored by the transnational spiritual tourist community, of which Arambol is one hub.

Spiritual Tourism/Somatic Nomadism

Many of the participants at Forgotten Land are Westerners already traveling in India not only to vacation as tourists on holiday but as "spiritual tourists" drawn to

India's spiritual reputation. Spiritual tourism is not a new phenomenon, although it was only officially recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2013 (Cheer et al 2017, 253). For my purposes, spiritual tourists are defined as those who travel in order to seek personal transformation, learn from wisdom holders, and/or connect with the more-than-human through practices, classes, and experiences such as yoga, meditation, prayer, and pilgrimages to specific meaningful sites. For example, spiritual tourists often come to Goa for the winter by way of Rishikesh, the "Yoga Capital of the World," in the Himalayan foothills north of Delhi.

Other Forgotten Land participants are more aptly described as what I am calling "somatic nomads," those who travel or live abroad specifically for movement- and embodiment-oriented experiences. However, I do not wish to imply a strong delineation between the spiritual tourists and somatic nomads, as Forgotten Land-attendees and others in Arambol often encompass both spiritual and somatic dimensions, demonstrating a productive entanglement of sacred practice and secular somatics. Indeed, in using these two separate but imbricated categories, I highlight the fluidity of spiritual and embodied practices and transformations, rather than their strict distinction, to underscore the experience of the sacred in a secular practice like CI. I sometimes refer to them together as spiritual tourists/somatic nomads to indicate them as imbricated communities.

In the winter of 2017 and 2018, organizations in Arambol with overlapping programming like Forgotten Land's included The Source, which hosts regular CI jams, ecstatic dances, music concerts, and other movement workshops, and Magic Park, which offers a packed schedule of yoga and meditation classes, among others. Spiritual tourists and somatic nomads move easily between these venues, spending their days practicing

various movement and meditation styles, while also attending organized programs like yoga teacher trainings, Tantra courses, and meditation workshops for a few days or weeks at a time. The wide variety of workshops and events reflect the international demographics and diverse interests of visitors to the area, especially during the winter tourist season. Many of the practices are influenced by “Eastern culture,” especially the Indian yogic tradition—itsself already diverse and developed in part through historical and ongoing transnational exchange (see Singleton 2010 and Strauss 2004), complicating simple dichotomies of East and West. CI, for example, is considered an American—i.e. Western—form, as it was developed originally by Americans, but is influenced by Japanese Zen Buddhism and Aikido, a Japanese martial art. In Arambol, the cosmopolitan community of spiritual tourists and somatic nomads further expand and hybridize the realm of movement and spiritual practice.

Contact Improvisation and Spiritual Tourism

Posed as an embodied question—how can two bodies move in contact with one another?—rather than a formal technique that must be mastered, CI is particularly conducive to the spiritual tourist scene where participants have a wide variety of movement experiences, styles, and skills. CI does not require the practitioner to have dance training as the form is highly adaptable to the practitioner’s individual movement capabilities. While in Europe and the US many dancers travel specifically for contact improvisation festivals, most of the spiritual tourists who attend GCF, regular jams, or other programs at Forgotten Land are exposed to CI and related programming for the first time. According to the organizers, about 40% of GCF participants in 2018 were new to the practice.

Because of the number of new practitioners in the winter bridging 2017 and 2018, a range of movement styles and abilities were present at Forgotten Land and GCF. Many new dancers accustomed their bodies to listen and respond to their partner by bringing their forearms, wrists, and backs of their hands together, maintaining contact as they explored new configurations and sensation, their gazes softly taking in the dancing images of their limbs. Others moved slowly and low to the ground, one rolling on top of the other's prone body, and rolling into a prone position so their partner could do the same. Some took on the crouched position of a cat about to pounce, playfully roaring at their partner as they collide and roll to the ground. Those with more experience ran around the space in groups of four or more, jumping on one another and smoothly rolling to the ground, lifting each other on their shoulders, and interrupting each other's momentum with abrupt changes in direction, their faces bright and playful, if also a bit mischievous. The instructors at GCF also represented a variety of movement styles and pedagogical approaches. embodying the diversity of approaches and movement dynamics allowed for in the open-format of CI. While some tended to move with athletic, explosive energy and taught techniques to stay on balance and connected to a partner while moving quickly, others were more soft, fluid, and grounded, emphasizing the importance of attuning to the subtler aspects of movement and communication in CI. CI, then, often looks very different on different people and at different times, even as the dances are all based on an exploration of the same embodied question. This openness of form enables CI practice within the spiritual tourist community at Forgotten Land and beyond, many of whom have never danced before.

Teaching and Learning Contact Improvisation at Forgotten Land

Saturday morning, December 23, 2017—continued. After a few more minutes, I am welcomed to Forgotten Land with a large sign on the beach in front of the venue, advertising the upcoming Ecstatic Arts and Contact Improvisation festivals. I ascend the stairs built into, and mostly buried by, the sand, walk through the open air restaurant called Golden Pyramid where a few people are having breakfast, and to the large dance hall, where I stand in a short line of smiling, eager people at the entrance. I've never met them but they look me in the eyes and say hello. One by one, we dip our sandy feet in a small bucket of water and dry them off with a towel hanging on the entryway, and pay a suggested donation of 300 rupees, about \$5, at a table before entering.

I place my backpack in the corner of the large dance studio, which is a large rectangle about 150 feet long and 100 feet wide. A low stage on the end opposite the door has a few microphones, speakers, and two musicians warming themselves up on a hang⁷ and a guitar. While the space is covered with a thatched roof, the walls are not completely closed in, which provides important ventilation in the hot south Indian sun that will soon pour in. From the ceiling hang off-white, orb-shaped paper lanterns that shed a warm, yellow glow at night. The floor is made of large sheets of linoleum, with a wood-grain pattern, stretched out over the sand and taped together, which has just a bit of give but the smoothness of a wood studio floor. The dance hall is built around two trees that act as structural support, in addition to several long wood posts.

⁷ Sometimes referred to as a hang drum or handpan, the hang is a metal, hollow instrument, usually played by striking it with the hands.

Dolores gathers us toward the center of the room and invites us to sit. She introduces herself as a student of both CI and Body-Mind Centering ®, which she is studying in England, where she is from, under the founder, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. She asks us to consider our bones by palpating and feeling the bones of our arms and hands, and sensing and exploring other skin and bones. She invites us to our hands and knees to continue the exploration. This led us into full body spiraling into and out of the floor.

As I move, I'm noticing that new parts of me, such as my rib cage, my forearms, the sides and backs of my pelvis, feel alive, alert, and able to move according to their own will. Laying on the floor on my side, I extend one arm in a sweeping, twisting reach and it meets the back of a fellow dancer. Resisting the impulse to move away, I let it roll along the curve of their rib cage, which presses back slightly. Soon, we are back to back, still on our sides, our ribs gently pressing into each other as we breathe. We begin to roll over and around one another, spiraling spines and entwining limbs. My bones feel more resilient than brittle as they press into my partner, following our joint momentum. Our dance gains height as we begin to move through kneeling, crouching, and standing, and then add speed and momentum. With my partner in a downward dog position with his hands and feet on the ground and his pelvis lifted high, I find a moment of lift as I press my pelvis into his, extend through my limbs and head, and release my feet from the earth. In a moment, I'm rolling, again grounded, and he is rolling over me. We use each other as support to stand together and begin to move around the room, pressing into and pulling one another across the space. We are getting more daring. I pull away from him

before ricocheting back toward him, altering my course suddenly, and our spongy, resilient architectures stumble over one another awkwardly. We laugh and keep going, slowing down a bit and lowering down to the ground. As if on cue, my pants get caught between us and the floor and we hear a short but definite “rip” from one of the pant legs. Again, we laugh and keep going. I am suddenly aware of the intimacy of these dances, seemingly magical moments of spontaneity and flow mixed with awkward surprises and halts. It’s beautiful to experience such intimacy with a stranger, to tune in first to their embodiment.

After our dance comes to a close, I get my bottle of water from my backpack along the side and watch the room for a bit. I am struck by the sense of play, wonder, and exploration. People are dancing both slow and fast, some completely absorbed in the sensuality of their partner’s softness, others playfully jumping on, tousling, and slinking on and around one another. I see Dolores back to back with another woman ebbing and flowing in and out of the floor. They take long moments to pause in seemingly precarious positions, balancing at the edge as if subtly testing each possibility before gravity chooses one for them. Back-to-back with her partner, Dolores’ eyes are wide open and focused, but not at what is in front of her. She is attuned to her back space, and her open eyes seem to be responding to the subtle shifts she is experiencing through the points of contact with her partner and the floor. Her arms and limbs move in ways that seem to surprise even her. Her jaw is loose, her mouth often open as she stretches into a starfish-like expansion over her partner’s back. She is listening with her whole structure, her eyes offering just one of many kinds of information.

The spiritual tourists and somatic nomads who spend time at Forgotten Land are united as a community of practice—a group of people informally-bound by a common concern and/or a passion about a topic, and who come together regularly to share ideas and deepen their knowledge (Wenger et al. 2002, 4; Wenger and Snyder 2000, 139)—through shared pedagogical approaches and ideologies that encourage openness and sensitivity to various others, cultivating Chthonic subjectivities. In general, as Albright (2017, 237) describes, CI “retrains” the body by first “releas[ing] the tension that is a direct result of what I call a territorial approach to the body’s integrity,” linking the experience of the skin as a barrier to other-ness to a Cold War mentality. In CI, the skin is instead a “conduit” or a “porous interface” that facilitates exchange with the outside world (ibid.) The movement pedagogy at Forgotten Land reflects a similar commitment to dissolving the perceived boundaries of the practitioner’s body, and the environment within which such learning happens further supports the emergence of sensuous ecological activism and cultivation of Chthonic subjectivities.

Here, I explore CI at Forgotten Land as a site of Chthonic subjectivization through sensuous ecological activism;⁸ a community of practice for what Haraway calls “learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimogenesis on a damaged planet” (2016, 98). While she looks to various art science activisms as avenues to realize

⁸ In a 2018 presentation at the Dance Studies Association, Nita Little articulated a similar argument as will be presented here for somatic practice as activism with new materialist thinkers like Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, exploring how such practices, especially CI, help the practitioner “think of the self as emergent, entangled, and sympoietic.” She explained, awarenesses and modes of being cultivated through somatics “extend the self into ecological multiplicities,” and discusses the Chthulucene as a time of the “rising up of body/mind.”

response-ability, I argue here that CI, such as that being taught and practiced at Forgotten Land, is a movement practice that, develops response-ability and expands the practitioners' sense of self from an individual to a trans-corporeal being in sympoiesis. This being is, in Haraway's terminology, a holobiont—an "entire being" or "safe and sound being... decidedly not the same thing as One and Individual." While in Haraway's project, the holobiont is largely an intellectual model of being, I discuss how CI as a community of practice forges experience of the self as holobiont, embodying a Chthonic art of existence through embodied, sensuous explorations that resist hierarchical logics. In CI at Forgotten Land, the dancer practices bringing their attention to materiality before sociality, to their mutual precarity with others they are becoming with, rather than their separation or competition. Working at the level of perception to cultivate heightened sensitivity, openness, and fluidity, CI has the potential to dissolve the boundaries of the possessive individual and expand the practitioner's sense of self such that they experience themselves as both vulnerable to and inclusive of others, conjuring experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality.

Attuning to the Thick Present

Haraway's Chthonic becoming occurs "in a thick present" rather than an abstract future or past, underscoring the importance of present, immediate awareness of Chthonic sympoiesis and trans-corporeality. Haraway urges us that "staying with the trouble" of our volatile present "requires learning to be truly present" (2016, 1). Significantly, Haraway urges us to an immediate, sensuous somatic mode of attention oriented toward the present that is reminiscent of meditative mindfulness, but she gives little information about how such presence is actually learned. Addressing this gap in Haraway's

intellectual project, I argue that attention to the present, cultivated through CI at Forgotten Land, offers an embodied mode of resistance to the rationalism, abstraction, and goal-oriented ethos of neoliberal capitalist ideology.

CI offers one practice that cultivates a visceral sense of immediacy and attention to the “thick present,” to what is perceived in the moment rather than what should or could be, to its present sensation rather than its social meaning. Rather than moving in accordance with abstract concepts, goals, or ideas, CI dancers practice attending to and moving with the fleshy presence of their partners, including other dancers in the space and the environment they inhabit, as many GCF attendees expressed. Kishur (2018) describes the importance of full, immediate presence while practicing CI: “The one thing I like about contact is the now. You have to be present, in what is happening now. You have to think about what’s happening in the moment. Don’t think about what will happen in the jam or what is going to happen what am I going to do after this. Be in the moment.” Kira (2018) explains CI as a “moving meditation” in which she has to be fully present to a constantly changing experience. Hanak (2018) enjoys CI as a “practice of being present” while Sebastian describes getting “lost in the moment”: “On the one hand you are present in your body but on the other hand you’re in an absolute state of flow. Time is gone, it’s no longer effective.”

Similarly, R (2018) is attracted to movement practices like CI because they help her to “come back to a natural pace,” which she laments is lost in capitalist-oriented cultures in which people are conditioned to value efficiency and progress. Not seeking to achieve a certain outcome, CI dancers attune to and move from their own experience as it emerges in relation to a variety of others, which means resting when they feel tired,

quicken when they feel energized, and indulging in the process of improvisation rather than attempting to create a finished product. A marked difference from *homo economicus* described in the introduction, a subject that ideally transcends the material limitations of earthly cycles and whose main prerogative is to accumulate as much profit as possible in as short amount of time as possible, the CI dancer's attention to the present re-orient their awareness and behavior to account for their materiality, their earthly-embeddedness, and their finitude—in other words, to their inherent animality and Chthonic-ness.

Cultivating Response-ability: Listening with the Skin

Through a CI duet, dancers practice “listening” and responding to one another with their whole body in an immediate, empathic way. During classes and jams at Forgotten Land, we were often encouraged to attune to our sensations—mostly visual, auditory, and tactile—in order to cultivate the bodily responsiveness that will enable dynamic communication and relatively safe improvised encounters. Instructors coached us on various modes of sensory attention, often asking us to “listen” with our skin and fascia or “tune in” to the energies swirling around the room. Participants responded to these cues by softening their visual focus, slowing down—as Vega put it, “moving at the speed of attention”—and allowing their attention to permeate their body. In one exercise, Marielle instructed us to practice moving both with and against the touch. With one partner placing their hand on the other and dragging the skin in one direction, the partner being touched alternated between following and resisting the tactile information coming through the touch. In so doing, we attuned our tactile sensation to register subtle shifts in direction through the degree of tension on the skin. Practices like these answer Haraway's (2016, 1) urging that we “become capable... of response” by enabling participants to gain

a more nuanced awareness of their possibilities in and ability to respond to stimulus, cultivating their response-ability.

Many of my interlocutors discussed how practicing CI has encouraged them to develop greater awareness and capabilities to respond. For Adi, CI provides an opportunity to “listen” with his whole body that he does not have in more performance-oriented forms. He recalls a blindfold jam at the 2014 GCF that changed his experience of the form:

It hit me really strongly because the sense was very different and perception of listening and understanding was very different from the technical classes. And I think from there on it changed, a lot of things changed, my idea about CI changed. A lot of understanding of just being technical changed. I wanted a lot more lyric kind of listening... a more somatic approach. (2018)

Aksha (2018) had a similar experience coming from the commercial world of Bollywood dancing into CI: “[CI] is something else because it heightens all your senses.” By drawing attention to sensation, *Forgotten Land* participants were better able to incorporate a range of sensory information as they negotiated moving with their partners’ constantly shifting landscapes, gravity, and the environment, conjuring sympoietic experiences of trans-corporeality, interdependency, and becoming-with the many present “others.”

CI practice invites dancers to attune to their senses more holistically, subverting the emphasis on visual stimulation. Albright (2013b, 266) identifies “focused attention to sensation at the level of the skin” as a foundational element of CI. She argues the foundational training in CI reverses the Western emphasis on the visual sense as the most

trusted source of information “by reducing our dependency on the visual and bringing awareness to the nuances of the tactile. In [CI], one’s skin becomes a primary site of communication” (265). As Tara (2018) explains, in CI the practitioner “can actually tune into reading the body rhythms and all these impulses from within the body and from [their] partner.” She (ibid.) elucidates a flow state in CI that is achieved by staying “aware” and connected to one’s sensation rather than “forgetting oneself [or going] into a trance.” In CI, the whole body is sensitized, as this attention to the kinesthetic enables improvisation and communication with a partner. Such holistic attention to one’s senses is necessary for us to become capable of the type of response Haraway calls for.

At Forgotten Land, we were trained in CI classes and jams to be supple and fluid rather than hardened and stiff, which, along with the sensory attunement of CI pedagogy, I argue can further enable response-able states of being. As CI co-founder Nancy Stark Smith states, “Tension masks sensation, and sensation is the language of the body” (quoted in Olsen and McHose 2004, 15). Even when engaging tension or resistance in CI, as Albright (2017, 230) describes, the movement is not hard or brutal but a “tactical engagement at precise moments, where force is used strategically and then released when it is no longer useful” which she postulates can “maintain a responsiveness that might just help us deal with pressures (social, professional, personal) without becoming defensive or reactionary.” Just as tension obscures sensation, suppleness heightens responsiveness. In classes at GCF, instructors often encouraged us to soften our joints, creating a buoyant, fluid relationship between our bodies and the floor. The CI practitioner usually stands with slightly relaxed and soft knees. In Malcolm’s intensive, he led us through a partnered exercise in which we lay with our bellies on our partners’ backs and “melted”

into one another, finding that we felt lighter to our partners and were more able to listen and respond when we allowed our weight to release down rather than trying to hold ourselves up. In Guru's class, while on our hands and knees, we practiced supporting the weight of our partners on our backs with a strong and flexible, rather than a stiff, spine. Direction to soften the body helps the CI dancing body become more resilient rather than rigid, allowing the dancer to be more protected from injury and more available to follow the momentum of the movement with one's partner. Still, the CI dancing body is never completely slack, nor completely hardened as these extremes typically halt the momentum of the dance without great effort by the dance partner to compensate, either by moving the passive body entirely or ceding to their partner's rigidity. Rather, the CI dancer adjusts their muscular tone in response to the trajectory of the dance, softening to release into momentum and hardening to support their partner's weight. CI trains full-bodied "listening" and sensory awareness as well as bodily suppleness, cultivating a bodily state of response-ability suited for Haraway's Chthulucene.

Making Kin: Forming Structures of Intimacy through Touch

Haraway urges us to "make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other," articulating the Chthulucene as marked by a radically inclusive ethics of care. For Haraway, "making kin" determines to whom we are responsible (2016, 2). Our current converging global crises require that we "make oddkin...in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles... [recognizing that] we become-with each other or not at all" (2016, 4). With a Chthonic awareness, not only are all beings recognized and honored despite their differences, they are all family. Importantly, Haraway highlights "making kin" as a "practice," not as a

static state of being, suggesting that regular activities like CI are important to cultivating and maintaining kinship connections through sensitized perceptual maps and bodily experiences of connection.

Because touch is a way that people in a variety of cultures establish, communicate, and enact their kinship connections to and responsibilities for others, I argue that CI at Forgotten Land is a practice of making kin in which participants have intimate encounters with and account for various others through touch. The joint notions of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality implied with Haraway's call to make kin outside of the habituated purview of bloodlines and those "like us" requires a move beyond competitive understandings of the nonhuman and instead recognize our mutual becoming-with one another in the spirit of cooperation. Ben sees CI as an opportunity to confront and shift the "competitive othering that is a human trait, especially these days." There is no goal or way to "win" a CI duet—indeed, CI encounters are practices in ongoingness through connection with others rather than attempts to achieve a particular goal or to physically overcome one's dance partner(s).

CI dancers at Forgotten Land practice caring for their partners through embodied experiences of interdependency with and responsibility for one another. Attuning to their mutual precarity and sense of cooperation rather than competition, CI dancers at Forgotten Land, many of whom began as strangers, become connected through the practice. They demonstrate care for one another in precarious moments, such as when one presses into their partner's pelvis to support their rise off of the floor and follow their partner's momentum and trajectory to ensure a safe, smooth descent. They practice "listening" to the other's movements and energy, coming in and out of contact, and

sharing and supporting one another's weight. Sometimes this care manifests in exchanges of body work or affectionate embraces along the sides of the dance space during jams. A sense of an interdependent community was made evident to Shari (2018) at her first CI jam when during the opening circle a woman she did not know placed a hand on her back—a simple moment of connection which highlighted for Shari the sense of mutual care in this community. As Zuza describes, the physical experience of connection with others in CI allows for a deep embodied knowing of interdependence, which is more potent than only cognitive knowing. CI is a practice of extending one's structures of intimacy to include and make kin with various others, expanding the field to whom we are response-able and responsible.

A sense of kinship and belonging is obviously and overtly cultivated through CI practice among the participants. GCF 2018 ended with a performance night at which a participant shared a song he had written declaring GCF participants as part of the “tribe of touchy people,” a sentiment that resonated with many participants and organizers. Vega (2018) describes this group of spiritual tourists and somatic nomads as “like a community, a temporary family in a way.” Shari (2018) sees CI as a practice that moves emphasis in our experience from the individual “I” to a more holistic sense of what she calls a “tribal system.” Ben, a longtime contact improviser from England and participant at the festival describes how he experiences a sense of “soulful connection and knowing home” through CI. Hanak (2018), a participant from Germany, explained, “I’ve had often the feeling that I’m a stranger and that I cannot understand the other people, I cannot understand their rules. And that I do not belong to them... And then I discovered contact improvisation... From the beginning I felt very safe and comfortable in that. Like being

at home and being like, ‘oh, I can be like I am.’” While many participants describe that they felt uncomfortable dancing so intimately with strangers when they first started dancing CI, the practice for them led to an experience of ease in connecting and affiliating with others, even those they had never met or with whom they did not share a language, fostering experiences of making kin with diverse others. The “tribe of touchy people”—an inventive kinship formation—forged at Forgotten Land and in the rest of the spiritual tourist/somatic nomad community is created through the shared experience of pilgrimage and participation in interdependent somatic practices.

The physical interdependence between people in CI is often highlighted by the participants in my study as a potent component of the dance practice’s transformative power, as well as its role as an activist practice. Vega (2018) believes that people come to CI at Forgotten Land and beyond because they want “to be part of something, to belong to something, which can be a tribe, a touchy tribe.” Her comment highlights what many attendees perceive as a lack of community connection in mainstream consumer culture—a lack that spiritual tourists and somatic nomads seek to rectify by finding community with fellow pilgrims interested in related embodied and spiritual activities and living similar multi-local lifestyles. Similarly, Jackie (2018) understands CI as a “cure for loneliness,” especially for people in the West who spend most of their time at work, in their car, or in their isolated single-family homes:

People are separate, they’re lonely. They’re feeling disconnected from the earth, which is causing all kinds of problems. You see the trash all over the place... [CI] helps us connect to each other through touch, finding heart connection, finding empathy... We’re finding a way to let go of the fear of the other by humanizing

each other, by having connection. So, I don't see [CI's activism] as needing to go to a politician and make a statement, I see it as going into the fascia, the connective tissue of the people, bring us together, get us moving together. Then the politicians are going to fall away at some point. If we are connected enough and not afraid, that's what they do is put a lot of fear in us so that we're afraid of each other. If we can break through that fear, find the connection with each other, they lose their power. And then that's it, we get to be happy.

Likewise, Ivory (2018), whom I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, believes people would be happier in consumer-oriented cultures like the mainstream US if they practiced activities like CI:

I think you'd find less people who achieved the American Dream but are still left so hollow inside and are left questioning why they are so miserable because they did all the things that society told them to do and they're so deeply unfulfilled. If they just knew it could be so simple, something so basic, so animal, so human, as touch. I'm not saying it's a cure-all, certainly there are other requirements as well, but this is a big one.

As an interdependent practice, CI cultivates structures of intimacy between people, which many understand as a cure for the loneliness and sense of separation endemic to contemporary capitalist life.

For many who are socialized in contemporary neocolonial cultures which transmit concerns surrounding purity, sanitization, and individual selfhood, dissolving one's separation from other and the outside world can be quite uncomfortable and scary. As Albright (2013b, 268) writes, "given the anxiety swirling around boundaries and bodies

in contemporary society, however, this [type of] sensibility requires a bit of practice.” Taking this into account, the instructors of CI India ease their students, most of whom are new to CI, into full-bodied contact by starting with small exercises of sensitization and tactile communication. Kishur (2018) recalls that while participants in the Play, Support, Explore workshops often feel uncomfortable touching and dancing with one another at the beginning, the instructors lead them through a progression starting with trust exercises that emphasize eye contact and activities with a small amount of contact—”some little thing like two fingers touching.” By the jams at the end of the workshop, “they want to dance with everybody” and the group often socializes together after the workshop. He laughs, “The thing with contact people is they always want to do contact. Whether they say, hi, good morning, or goodnight, bye, they want to do contact...And goodnight will happen like, four times. Good night, and then they’ll dance, and then ah ok, *chalo*. ”⁹ The openness cultivated in participants is not only physical but emotional. Guru (2018) describes feeling overwhelmed by the potential behind CI as a way to connect a community and heal people:

[The students] were opening up from a really deep space. They were just sharing their really intimate lives which we didn’t expect. Or we didn’t even want to have. But they were just in that space which opened up so much they just wanted to share whatever they cannot share with other people...[They asked us], ‘What can I do now? Tell me. Like I’m kind of open now, and I don’t know what to do now.’ We don’t even know, figure it out yourself. We’ll just be support, we’ll be near you.

⁹ Hindi colloquialism that roughly translates to “Let’s go.”

The experience of dancing with and touching one another cultivates a strong sense of openness to and trans-corporeality with others, which takes on a potent meaning in a culturally diverse and co-ed group like the one at Forgotten Land.

Merging without Grasping

The embodied relationship between CI dance partners is not one of possession or ownership but one of fluid, emergent, and polymorphous partnership, disrupting the logics of possessive individualism. Unlike in mainstream social situations in which, as Cameron notes, touch is a way to claim, “this is my person,” CI dance partners touch, connect, and even merge without possessing one another. This is demonstrated not only in the social norms at Forgotten Land’s jams and classes that encourage individuals to switch partners often, so they touch and dance with a range of other dancers, but in the technique itself. To avoid injury and maintain a variety of movement possibilities, the hands in CI are usually kept open, the fingers outstretched. Dancers often touch their partners with the backs or sides of their hands rather than with grasping, clenched fists. In Vega and Hugh’s intensive at GCF for new CI practitioners, they instructed us not to grasp partners with our hands but to find other ways to support and be supported through resistance. They demonstrated and led exercises of finding and maintaining a “rolling point of contact” along the backs of our arms and upper backs and pressing into our partner rather than grasping them to support and guide their weight. With these exercises, we practiced non-possessive ways of interacting with other, subverting the grasping hand that symbolizes possessiveness, neediness, and control. The grasping hand undermines the ability for the grasped to consent to an interaction.

With CI technique at Forgotten Land, dance partners fluidly meet, mingle with other individuals and groups, and separate, demonstrating polymorphic, emergent relationship structures and cultivating a culture of abundance. For example, in one jam at the festival, I watched a woman in a very intimate, writhing entanglement with a man get swept into a bubbly, bouncing quartet who moved past. Neither partner seemed phased as she parted. The man continued moving along his own trajectory until he collided with another man, with whom he started exploring sharing weight in a rippling, wave-like motion. Zuza (2018) describes that when she first started dancing CI, she felt “super jealous every time a guy left the dance. I was only dancing with guys. I was super needy. Very needy. Contact for me became a platform to observe my feelings very very intensely in a very short amount of time and suffer very intensely.” With continued engagement with the form, she practiced moving in and out of meaningful connections without attachment. Cultivating resiliency and fluidity in her body. She learned how to be responsive to her present sensation and make herself available physically to a variety of others without grasping, she experienced migrating fluidly between dances and dance partners. With this physical practice of connecting and letting go by staying present with what is, Zuza released feeling overly attached to her dance partners and instead cultivated a more polymorphous sense of connection and belonging with the community rather than to individuals. Similarly, after a particularly powerful and blissful dance, Ivory (2018) was surprised: “I didn’t feel any form of attachment to my partner that gave me that high, I didn’t feel like clinging to him.” In CI, one need not grasp or possess because another dance partner—human, nonhuman, or more-than-human—is always available.

Entangled Selves: Sympoiesis, Trans-corporeality, and Chthonic Worlding

As CI practitioners attune to present sensation, make their bodies more supple and more resilient to more easily connect and communicate with others, and maintain attention to the present in a CI dance, they foster experiences of sympoiesis, trans-corporeality, and Chthonic worlding. They cultivate more open subjectivities than the willful, autonomous possessive individual of capitalism. This vulnerable openness allows them to connect physically and energetically to their partner(s) and their surroundings and to create a dance through improvised embodied dialogue with many others. This shift in somatic perception away from a sense of separation to a sense of embeddedness in and exchange with “others” or the outside has the potential to psychologically and sensorially expand our experience of self and dissolve a sense of separation between self and other, recalling Merleau-Ponty’s famous phenomenological reading of touch as able to dissolve the boundary between self and other. As Vega (2018) describes, “what I find so beautiful in contact is how we practice the ability to really merge into each other. How do we touch, how does the touch enter to my body? Or what is this place where two people, or our bodies, come together? And it’s about this availability, how can I invite the touch and listen?” Volker (2018) notes that the body is open and available to others in CI: “[dancers] can kind of connect with the body and go on a physical journey with each other.” For ZinnDa (2018), CI makes “people open up and share their insides with each other.” Vansheka (2018) explains, “[when I’m doing CI,] I’m dissolved in the person I’m in contact with and I think that’s the most beautiful feeling. It’s like a form of freedom for me.” Hari (2018) describes CI as allowing practitioners to explore themselves in relation to others: while in CI, “you’re in touch with another person, another world. So,

who am I when there's another in the space?" As CI dancers at Forgotten Land open their skins and attune to sensation to move and create an emergent dance in fluid contact with another, they feel, explore, and experiment with their trans-corporeality in a practice of sensuous ecological activism. Ultimately, their senses of self expand beyond the boundaries of their skin to entangle with their dance partner(s), cultivating interdependent, Chthonic subjectivities aware of and attuned to their response-ability for and vulnerability to one another.

Balancing Personal Responsibility and Interdependence with Others

While CI is an intersubjective improvisational form usually practiced in duets, one of the guiding principles of CI is that each dancer is responsible for their own experience. GCF instructors often emphasized that each person is empowered to participate as they want and are not obligated to do any activity or dance with any individual according to their own comfort. Even as CI cultivates a more interconnected, expanded, and open subjectivity, the instructors at GCF emphasized that the dancer's sense of individuality does not dissolve entirely. Two GCF instructors in particular focused significant class time on practices to help dancers be, for the most part, in control of their own body—for example, prepared to catch themselves if they fall. Irene and Malcolm both led exercises around maintaining control over one's own weight even while dancing in contact with another. For Irene, overreliance on one's partner to support one's weight limits the possibilities of the dance. Rather than completely leaning into the support of their partner, she asks her students to practice maintaining control over most of their weight by squatting with an upright torso and fluidly straightening the legs to stand as a way to increase their agility and sense of independence and personal responsibility.

Malcolm coaches his intensive students in finding both horizontal and vertical weight-sharing such that the point of contact can move with agility between two independent bodies. He encourages dancers to avoid completely releasing their weight into their partner in order to make more movement possibilities available. Response-ability to and for others requires both self-care and self-knowledge.

In both of these classes, the instructors coached students on how to maintain their own individuality while dancing with another. With a surface reading, these pedagogical imperatives work to discipline the overly-lax dance partner who requires a great deal of support, paralleling neoliberal disdain for social security recipients like the proverbial “welfare queen”¹⁰ who, cast as sexually undisciplined with a poor work ethic, is considered to be a drain on the system rather than a productive member of society worthy of care. However, I do not believe the imperative to maintain personal responsibility in CI perpetuates neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility at the expense of socialist discourses of care, shared ownership, and community connection. Rather, the embodied exploration of weight sharing and support between two or more people in CI is a potent experimental ground for synthesizing the individually-responsible subject of neoliberal capitalism with the communal subject of socialism. As one becomes more aware of their own sensation and sense of weight, the CI dancer is more able to respond to and care for the weight of others. CI demonstrates that it is possible, even necessary, to be both personally responsible and communally response-able, aligning with the Tantric

¹⁰ See Anne-Marie Hancock’s (2004) discussion of the role that stereotypical beliefs about poor African American mothers played in the 1996 welfare debate that drastically disempowered the welfare system in *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen*.

perspective of responsibility as comprised of “both self-care and the care of others” (2004, 39). The individual and the importance of individual responsibility is not obliterated through CI, but instead the CI dancer practices a specific scope of risk management as self-care—which, as the divide between self and other liquidizes, ultimately is experienced as care for others in the community.¹¹

An active culture of consent enables participants in this radically inclusive, open space to navigate both personal responsibility and an ethics of care in a relatively safe way. Adi (2018) sees beauty in the culture of inclusion that welcomes people who might come to dance with a sexual intention and are ushered into the culture rather than immediately shunned: “We always say every time at every workshop you have the right to say no, and that is something which is extremely necessary for us also. As a participant or as a student you have the capacity to say no.” Zuza (2018) describes, “What I learned from contact as well was to first take care of myself and my needs rather than the other’s... I was giving always, a lot a lot a lot, over my boundaries. I never respected my boundaries.” With participants empowered to actively consent to any encounter, they protect against unwanted encounters by focusing on desired ones. Their collective efforts shape the emergent microculture of their particular dance space, integrate the diverse community, and shift dominant experiences and practices of touch. This cultivates a safer “container” in which dancers can explore their own curiosities and desires without feeling obligated to meet another’s desires or needs. At the same time, many participants discuss feeling connected to the other dancers at the jam, often demonstrating great care for their

¹¹ I would like to thank Dr. Harmony Bench and Dr. Ann Cooper Albright for their insight in articulating and resolving the paradox between individual responsibility and an ethics of care in CI and other communitarian practices.

partners' safety and pleasure. Shari, for example, describes that she enters the CI context "to have my own dance but also to share this space... You have to be responsible for yourself but also I'm going to do what I can to not throw you to the floor... Together we're going to work to make this beautiful dance." While the CI frame emphasizes personal responsibility, in dissolving strict delineations between self and other, care for others becomes part of one's personal responsibility, cultivating a Tantric, and Chthonic, notion of responsibility and response-ability.

The Third Mind: Synthesizing Self and Other

The act of dancing CI is a practice of becoming-with an other such that the bounds of each dissolve and meld into a third entity—neither completely self nor completely other. Attuning their full attention to the present moment through their sensory experience, CI dancers ideally create what many in the CI community call the "third mind"—"an intersubjective space in which one is aware of sensations both internal and external without necessarily categorizing those feelings into socially recognizable roles" (Albright 2013b, 270). The third mind allows the flow of the CI duet to be co-created improvisationally in real time between two (or more) entities, rather than in accordance to pre-designed choreography. The concept of the third mind elucidates CI practitioners' abilities to respond to another, not as an objectified Other but as a part of oneself. As Albright (2013b, 264) argues, CI "can help us revise Western notions of empathy that are based on a psychological conception of the individual *subject* and an *object* of sympathy" as it encourages practitioners to dwell in the "third mind"—a productive space between these false dichotomies. Lady (2018), a GCF participant from Spain, explains, "I like to see how my position dissolves. How when I dance with

someone we create another thing that is not you or me but is just that, and we are both that.” CI cultivates modes of being and perceiving in which the subject/object binary in classic conceptions of empathy suspends. This mode of empathic interconnection has profound implications for realizing more Chthonic modes of being and being-in-community in which the many “others” of one’s ecology are experienced not as objectified others but as co-creative and cosubstantial trans-corporeal beings.

As two or more dancers move in contact with one another and attune to the emergent third mind that forms between them, the dancers experience decentralized agency and a sense of interdependence between them. The CI dancer is not designing or executing the dance according to their personal will nor the will of a singular central authority, nor are they moving independently from their partner(s) or their surroundings. Rather, they are ideally finding and following impulses between their own agency and their complete reliance upon their partner’s will. Choreographically, the dance’s creation is decentralized and agency is distributed; it emerges in real time as two or more bodies improvise in contact with one another. Physically, they lean into their partner who leans into them, highlighting their interdependence. Decentralized and interdependent, the responsive and resilient body dancing with the third mind is simultaneously self (tuned to individual sensation), not-self (becoming with and response-able to an other), and not-not-self (personally responsible).

Responsivity and Resiliency: CI’s Somatic Mode of Attention

The types of activities and instructions described above cultivate what I am calling a responsive and resilient somatic mode of attention, characterized by versatility and suppleness. Csordas (2002, 245) describes somatic modes of attention as “culturally

elaborated,” meaning that they carry social meaning in relationship to the cultural contexts in which they emerge. These embodied modes of being and perceiving aligns with the emergent strategy’s emphasis on resiliency and adaptation. CI’s responsive and resilient somatic modes of attention belie normative (i.e. masculinist) notions of strength as hardness, success as assertiveness, and individuality as separateness. This responsive and resilient mode of attention corresponds in ways to neoliberal discourses and ideologies that value increased flexibility in production practices and highly adaptable products that can be easily marketed and sold to drastically different constituencies, but toward non-capitalistic ends. While the neoliberal subject moves with the intention of rational self-interest and profit-accumulation, the CI dancer moves with the loosely defined intention to keep the dance going in contact with another. The neoliberal subject is more flexible than resilient, behaving and shifting according to the whims of the market without much regard for consequences beyond their own profit maximization. The CI dancer, on the other hand, attunes to the other as part of the self, caring for both as they venture to create and survive a dance of interdependence.

Further, while the neoliberal subject remains a cohesive, autonomous individual as they move and act with responsiveness and resilience, the CI dancer is “undone” through the dance as they experience their body as aware, available, and open. This responsive and resilient mode of attention is relational; the dancer is in dialogue with another to which they are response-able and responsible. Indeed, the dancer softens and hardens to meet their partner’s body with not complete receptivity and acceptance but a degree of resistance. It is through this resistance that the dancers support one another and follow the momentum of their dance. The “undoing” of the CI dancer through the dance

occurs concomitantly with their continuous “redoing” in the third mind emerging between self and other: a potent liminal zone of encounter, communication, and in(ter)dependence between the responsive and resilient bodies of CI. An important medium of communication in CI, the edge of resistance between two bodies in contact is a realm outside of false dichotomies like passivity and activity, leading and following, and self and other, in which the individual simultaneously wields and relinquishes individual agency, independence, and personal responsibility. Coached to attune to one’s individual sensations as well as the rhythms of their partner(s) and surroundings, CI dancers find a range of possibilities dwelling in the third mind that dissolves the boundary between self and other by cultivating their responsiveness and resiliency, demonstrating that in dancing in contact with another, one is both independent and interdependent.

Outer and Inner Pilgrimages: Chosen Exile and Transformation at Forgotten Land

In the first few days I felt very uncomfortable being touched by strangers, particularly men, so I just had female partners for the first three days and actively avoided any male partners. I just had a lot of discomfort and unease and nervousness in being touched. And yesterday and today I was completely rolling around, getting butt massages... That’s one way that I feel really liberated and transformed. I feel more beautiful today than I did at the start, I feel really beautiful in my skin, I feel like my body is really beautiful, even my little lumps and humps. I really love it... It’s so great, it’s such a beautiful body. I feel really proud of it and all that it can do and express... I’m so grateful and fascinated by

this experience and have definitely been transformed in ways I'm sure I'll understand through time. – Ivory on the last day of the 2018 Goa Contact Festival.

[At my first CI workshop,] allowing myself to roll on someone was a big thing for me then. But just in one day, one evening, I was totally transformed, I felt. I realized every mental block I had, and was able to just be myself. I literally felt I was flying which is my aim to do at the end of the day. Just fly. Fly. It was just three days...CI is really helping me and it did transform me a lot. – Shruti (2018)

Contact to me is to be challenged, to evolve, to listen and to be heard, to love and to connect. – Panda (2018)

For many disenchanted by Western consumer culture, India represents a romantic alternative that promises meaningful “authentic” spiritual experiences (Maddox 2015). As Tara (2018) speculates, “I think there is some magic in India.” Daniel (2018), a participant from the US, told me in an interview that he came to India “as an expression of big life changes, and a sense of freedom and exploration and opportunities to learn and connect more generally.” A journey to India, then, is for many Westerners a pilgrimage to what they perceive as a more spiritually-connected culture with an alternative value system to consumer capitalism, even as consumer culture proliferates among India's growing middle class. Forgotten Land attracts an international cohort of spiritual tourists and somatic nomads who travel not solely as consumers seeking entertainment and leisure, nor as performance artists aiming to hone their craft, but as seekers of personal

and collective transformation. Their experience of travel is more like a pilgrimage than a vacation—more a way of finding and/or creating an arts of existence; an alternative lifestyle to the mainstream models of neoliberal success they are offered in their cultures of origin. In this way, spiritual tourists/somatic nomads in this transnational community are often “chosen exiles” of their home cultures seeking what they perceive as more meaningful lifestyle alternatives to consumer culture.

CI at Forgotten Land, as part of Arambol’s spiritual tourist/somatic nomad community’s oeuvre of sacred transformation and interconnection with others, is not only an aesthetic practice, but a spiritual one. As people dance CI at Forgotten Land, they explore not only their weight, momentum, and force, but also their interconnectedness with others, senses of self, and social conditioning through improvised embodied encounters with others. While this type of personal reflection occurs in many CI spaces outside of the spiritual tourist/somatic nomad community, I suggest that the cultural conditions in places like Arambol that support spiritual exploration, self-inquiry, and openness to new things occasion a wider diversity of people to encounter and try CI and perhaps to have a more potent experience of the sacred in the practice. Here, I explore how CI functions as an inner pilgrimage within the context of the external pilgrimage to Arambol, creating potent conditions for sacred experiences of interconnection, personal reflection, and transformation.

The people who journey to Arambol and Forgotten Land often prioritize spiritual seeking, healing, or personal transformation—hallmarks of pilgrimage—over consumption, leisure, and entertainment—hallmarks of consumeristic notions of tourism. In this way, they travel more as pilgrims than as consumeristic tourists. Pilgrimages are

rituals of travel—often difficult and/or extended—away from one’s home to a specific place or set of places that hold symbolic value. These practices offer opportunities for the pilgrim’s transformation, healing, and/or repentance. Victor Turner (1978) classically defines pilgrimage as a rite of passage through which the pilgrim undergoes a transformation—permanent or temporary—in the eyes of their community. Differentiated from consumer-based travel by their “totality”—meaning that pilgrimages immerse the traveler in a totalizing experience—pilgrimages can be important rituals of healing and transformation (Dubach and Winkelman 2005, xv). For the pilgrims in Arambol, participating in activities at places like Forgotten Land have a more potent spiritual significance than an aesthetic one, cultivating sacred processes of connection, healing, and transformation. Tara (2018) notes that often attendees at the festival are traveling as part of a major life change: “They have left their marriage, and their work.” As Vega (2018) elaborates:

The crowd who comes to this festival is a bit different because there are travelers who are traveling in Asia...who are, let’s say, spiritual seekers, people who want transformation, they are looking for something... like really changing their lives or processing something. And then this is just part of their travels. They don’t come here only for this... they are already in a special state of mind... Then they take part in the festival and maybe contact improvisation is not the main point of their life, actually, but they also do that... So, this brings a variety of people who are pretty open minded and a special vibe.

Volker (2018) attributes CI’s success in Arambol, in part, to its population of spiritual tourists on pilgrimage who, as he says, “are super open to trying new things” and have an

“extreme openness.” Because those in Arambol are typically seeking personal transformation through novel experiences, they are more likely to try CI while on their pilgrimage to Arambol. As tourists, they certainly go to restaurants, book local tours, purchase souvenirs, and seek entertainment, holding a noted privilege of mobility, capital, and power in relation to most local people they encounter and affect. Still, an added dimension of spiritual seeking, learning, and openness to change suffuses their travels.

GCF is, as Volker (2018) describes, a “festival within a big festival,” meaning that Arambol itself functions as a way to unlearn limiting cultural conditioning. The transnational community comes to the festival not only to develop their range and ease of motion and movement abilities, but also to develop themselves personally, heal, deepen their sense of spiritual connection, and/or connect to a community. Forgotten Land participants not only make the external pilgrimage to a liminal ritual space, they also go through an internal pilgrimage through the practice of CI and related somatic activities that can bring the practitioner’s perceptual and behavioral habits, cultural conditioning, constructed limitations, and belief systems to their awareness so they can, ideally, be consciously transformed, even healed.

Pilgrimage and Transformation

Pilgrimages are transformational rites of passage that, in anthropologists Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman’s (2005, xi) analysis, are potentially healing on many levels—“from healing of specific physical ailments, to redressing social suffering, to healing the wounds of the past, to creating a better world.” The organizers of Forgotten Land and CI India recognize the transformational personal and social effects that the

practice of CI can have on participants' lives beyond the dance floor, arguing the practice can expand participants' perceptual maps and emotional awarenesses. For example, Adi (2018) believes that "life somehow connects to CI"—he understands that the practice of CI impacts the practitioner's life and outlook beyond the dance floor. I argue that those who participate in events like GCF tend to a transformation through the external pilgrimage to Arambol. Further, the movement-based programs of Forgotten Land function as "inner pilgrimages" that take on potent significance as loci of personal and collective change in the context of the external pilgrimage. I consider CI at Forgotten Land as occasioning an inner pilgrimage that, especially within the totality of an external pilgrimage, can cultivate fluid subjectivities that temporarily dissolve possessive individualism and experiences of separation. As the practice is repeated, these temporary shifts in subjectivity potentially become more permanent and contribute to both personal and collective shifts away from experiences of separation toward experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality, and therefore can be considered a form of activism.

Dubisch and Winkelman (2005, xv) acknowledge that the pilgrim's complete immersion in the pilgrimage as a more potent, profound experience than mundane forms of travel, "may be one of the keys to pilgrimage's efficacy as a healing journey." As discussed previously, Forgotten Land participants are usually in Arambol on either an extended stay and/or as part of a longer journey, a total experience that takes them into novel places and experiences. As such, when a participant joins the programming at Forgotten Land, they tend to do so as part of a holistic experience of pilgrimage to Arambol and often beyond it. GCF in particular allows practitioners to immerse themselves in the practice and culture of CI for a week, much more than a single

workshop or jam can offer, rendering the experience more conducive to personal and collective transformation. Adi (2018), for example, explained that the immersion in CI at GCF allowed him to understand the form more deeply:

If it was just a class, I would see it as any other dance form... But I think when I reached here and I saw the festival...is when it hit me, how evolving it can be. Like 200 people in the same jam and it's all strangers...And suddenly you have to just listen to them and understand them, it's not easy. It's with the festival that I got the hang of it, or I could say the feel of it, the sense of it. Where this could probably lead us to... That made me understand that CI is so much more open than just a dance form.

The spiritual tourist and somatic nomad's experiences at Forgotten Land, then, are often more than aesthetic practices or opportunities to deepen one's dance abilities; they are immersive, totalizing experiences with healing and transformational potential.

While CI is not explicitly spiritual or religious, the CI jam, which Volker (2018) describes as a "neo-ritual" has ritualistic elements that foster powerful, transformational experiences for participants. Like a ritual, which is framed temporally and spatially with opening and closing practices, the CI jams at Forgotten Land open with a warm-up led by an instructor aimed at preparing the participants to interact with one another by first attuning them to their own sensations and solo movement. This frames the jam as separate from the normal flow of life and cultivates a Chthonic resilient and responsive somatic mode of attention (Csordas 2002), as discussed above. Within this frame, people interact and communicate primarily through movement and touch rather than speech, and most talking is prohibited, further differentiating the jam from typical social encounters.

Participants sweep through the space, roll on the floor, lift one another and are lifted by others, and sit on the edges of the dance floor exchanging massages and other body work or simply laying entwined. CI jams end with a closing circle or reflective practice with which participants transition out of the ritual frame.

As an improvisational form, CI encourages the dancer to be fluid and playful in their expression which destabilizes the normative notion of one's identity as fixed. As Volker (2018) describes, "In the jam happens this playing and this freedom without music, listening to the inner rhythm, meeting people who are strangers, you can change all the time, you're not obliged to dance with one person, and you play and play and play. You improvise. You create stories, you create a whole world." Volker points to the fluidity of expression fostered through CI as having transformational effects, aligning with the emphasis in theories of emergent strategy on creating new possibilities. Practicing new perceptual maps through the play and fluidity of the CI context, CI dancers loosen stagnant notions of self and identity and become more able to change sedimented personal habits and, through the fractal nature of social change, collective social structures.

Like Tantric practice, CI calls for "effortful surrender: the surrender of static, limiting self concepts, of the limited self, into the world, a world whose intrinsic character is that of continually becoming" (Weinstone 2004, 34). Many participants at Forgotten Land experience CI as facilitating not only their personal physical exploration but holistic transformation beyond their habituated cultural conditioning. A new CI participant, Shaswat (2018) notes, "[CI is] a dance but for me it brings a lot of other realizations about myself. I'm exploring myself a lot. More than physical but mental

levels. The boundaries that I have. The weaknesses that I've been ignoring a lot for a long time. But now I start feeling these subtle blockages that I have in the body which I don't really see when I'm doing other things." Hari (2018) describes the form as undoing "boundaries in the mind" while Ben notes that "CI has shown me that I can cut through the fixing of my identity." Zuza (2018) finds CI valuable because it "[changes] my patterns of thinking. Of moving, obviously, but of thinking more." Adi (2018) describes "I know how much it opened me up, so that's why I wanted to share something similar. Because it's a lot more comfortable." Through the ritual of a CI experience, the participants disrupt their own habituation and cultural conditioning, thereby loosening and shifting the underlying ideologies and paradigms of existing social norms.

It is important to acknowledge the relative privilege of this community of chosen exiles, both in relation to their home cultures and in Arambol. While these globe-trotting touchy-people are in many ways "chosen exiles" of their home cultures, many are only able to participate in this community because they are economically privileged within their home culture. Often college-educated, many in this community are "digital nomads" who support themselves through technology-dependent work that they can do remotely while traveling. As Cameron (2018), a participant from the United States, describes, "We're privileged to get to be here, but we are also privileged that we are dispossessed from our cultures back home to the extent that we ran away to India and found this weird thing where people are willing to touch each other." The "tribe of touchy people" is ideally inclusive of all, regardless of economic standing, but is only practically accessible to those with the financial and personal means to travel often. This importantly limits the community to a certain transnational class of mostly white people and renders it more

exclusive than inclusive, undermining CI's discourse of inclusivity and accessibility.

While the class and racial homogeneity of the somatic nomad community is worthy of critique, in seeking alternative ways of being and community affiliations through pilgrimage, this tribe of touchy people is both expressing their dissent with current consumer culture and taking steps toward personal and collective transformation by forging a Chthonic arts of existence.

The Globalization of Contact Improvisation

Arambol Beach, Friday, January 19th, 2018. The sunset is a particularly beautiful time on the stretch of beach in front of Forgotten Land; as the glowing red orb of the sun sinks into the ocean an other-worldly shimmer dances across the steady ocean waves. The warm light beckons people into it to practice yoga, Qi Gong, flow arts, to participate in a silent disco, or simply to relax over a meal. Forgotten Land is both a movement-arts and music venue, complete with several outdoor and semi-enclosed dance floors, as well as home to an on-site restaurant called Golden Pyramid offering up a menu of Indian, Israeli, and continental food typical of other tourist-oriented restaurants in the area from which diners can gaze out over the ocean. The entire venue is built directly on the sand, which people traverse barefoot to the buffet and, with plates full of food, maneuver to a cushion on one of many platforms under the thatched roof. As they eat, the sun sets and night falls.

As I walk along the beach away from Forgotten Land, I can hear the sound of the nightly drum circle, which marks a shift in the commercial landscape to a series of venues that combine restaurants, educational spaces for yoga and other movement and spiritual

practices, and recreation, like concerts and social dance. Some people dance to the large group of people drumming—a mix of primarily foreigners and some Indians—while others spin various “flow art” apparatuses, some illuminated with LEDs, others with fire. It feels enough like Burning Man to question where on Earth I am for a second. Just past the drum circle, a long row of people sit with blankets displaying careful arrangements of goods to sell, ranging from handmade jewelry and freshly made food to poi and kombucha. Unlike at the other end of the beach, these vendors are mostly, but not all, foreigners, giving it the title “The Hippie Market.”

As described in the introduction to this dissertation, the contemporary era, referred to as the Anthropocene, is marked by increased global social and environmental volatility in the wake of the industrial revolution and advent of fossil-fuel burning industry. As large numbers of people, especially in densely populated places like India and China, make efforts to emulate Western-style consumption, climate change trends are exacerbated. Feminist scholar Grace Kyungwon (2006, 107, 109) describes the globalizing machinations of contemporary Western capitalist consumer culture—both the overt dominating power of colonization and subtle ideological interpellation—as spreading the “neocolonial injunction to consume,” fueling excessive desires that cannot be contained or resolved. Western mass media is disseminated broadly, acting as “soft power” that can easily adapt to the tastes of each audience and recruit new devotees. Seductive and alluring, people throughout the world are gaining an appetite for Western consumer culture. Consumer-culture leaders like the US are not making concerted efforts to limit carbon emissions or curb consumption patterns—quite the contrary—leading to

increases in industrial activity that results in more waste, carbon emissions, and intensified climate change trends.

Like other cultural artifacts in the age of globalization, CI is a mobile and emergent movement form taken up by a vast global network of practitioners and instructors. We must, therefore, consider CI's relationship to and complicity with imperialist structures of power as a Western movement form migrating throughout and beyond the West (Hardt and Negri 2001), especially to a former British colony. However, unlike many mass cultural products globalized through colonialism and imperialism, CI has not been fully adapted to a capitalist model. It is not owned by a centralized authority who profits as it is taken up by more people in more places, nor is it branded or franchised. Rather, like a CI duet, it spreads and evolves organically as a range of practitioners all over the world take up the form and share their interpretation with others. The form, though, is not completely outside of capital or relations of Empire, as Hardt and Negri (2001) would argue is impossible, in that it surreptitiously perpetuates a white aesthetic, and, in places like Arambol, is charged by legacies and present relations of colonialism and imperialism in India. Are spiritual tourism and somatic nomadism in India and other developing nations contemporary forms of exploitative neo-colonization or earnest cultural exchange? As Inderpal Grewal (2005) argues, the current global political economy perpetuates and exacerbates power differentials established during India's colonization, including through tourism, and any study of spiritual tourism and somatic nomadism in India must take these dynamics into account.

Despite these valid criticisms, I argue that the form of and community surrounding CI as manifest at Forgotten Land subvert the logic of Western-style

consumer culture, functioning to cultivate both ecological integrity and sustainable culture. Rahul (2017), an Indian software engineer who attended a workshop at Forgotten Land, described CI as “outside” of, even an antidote to, the imperialist forces of Western consumer culture, “because if you can derive exhilaration or something of that harmonious sensation from something as simple as contact jams then obviously you don’t need to buy as much stuff and you don’t need to put in as many hours [at work] to feel good about yourself.” For Panda (2018), the sense of connection, trust, and acceptance she finds through the CI practice and community provides satisfaction that is often sought through consumption and material culture:

The more that I feel confident of these within myself, then it’s like, no I don’t need that new iPhone, I’d rather buy a ticket to India and come have a mushy squishy fest... It all comes back to touch. It’s so basic. Because as we know in the West we just don’t touch. I went back to the West and there you hug and that’s it. I’m like, I’m not done yet... what do you mean no one’s touching me every day? It’s interesting seeing how that gap just widens as we get to the West where materialism comes in and goes oh, you don’t need loving trust, you need this new dress, or you need to be seen here.

CI and the global community that is emerging around it are developing and putting into practice potent arts of existence in resistance to mainstream possessive consumer culture that gesture toward and hold wisdom about the realization of modes of Chthonic trans-corporeality.

Forgotten Land as a Neocolonial Site

CI in India moves much like forces and products of colonialism and imperialism. Indian dancers often come to the festival after meeting European dance teachers through their dance company and schools. They might feel compelled to learn CI after it is introduced to them by their European teachers who, in the wake of colonization and given the complexities of global power dynamics, may be perceived as superior artists and/or who have real influence on the types of opportunities or role the student or company member receives. However, the GCF instructors do not directly financially benefit from bringing more Indian dancers to the festival given both the nonprofit structure of GCEO and the Scholarship Program that funds most of the Indian festival participants. Also, as discussed earlier, the form itself is decentralized—it is not owned or franchised by any one in particular—and the structure is open and evolving, such that even the micropolitics of the contact jam in some ways defies hierarchical neocolonial power dynamics. Still, while GCF claims to be inclusive, communal, and nonhierarchical, the organizers, instructors, support staff, and participants are somewhat segregated and differentially empowered. A hierarchical divide is even more evident between the participants and the Forgotten Land staff who cook and clean for the group of over 200 and do not participate in the practice at all.

In this context, Forgotten Land can be criticized as a neocolonialist project taking advantage of continuing power imbalances. The festival, started by a group of Europeans teaching an American dance form, is marketed mostly to non-Indian tourists who pay more to attend than Indian citizens. Some have expressed this criticism to GCF's organizers directly. As Volker (2018) describes, detractors express sentiments like, "Why

do you go to India to colonize the poor dancers?” He explains that he understands the work of the festival as primarily cultural exchange rather than colonization:

We are not colonizing the dancers, we are inviting dancers to find their own way into contact improvisation, create their own experience, and co-create the form of contact improvisation. As the Americans came to Germany to show the Germans what is contact improvisation, we did the same here. Not out of an idea that we want to have business or take over but it was passion, passion about what we are doing. And open doors, one door after the next, open open open.

The line between cultural exchange and neocolonial cultural imperialism is an uneasy one.¹²

Further, as discussed above, CI carries a distinctly white ethos, and so can operate as a colonial force as it subtly disciplines—and capacitates—the bodies of its Indian participants with its implicitly soft, fluid aesthetic. Yet, unlike at other jams that I have attended with mostly white dancers in institutional settings, the dancers at Forgotten Land are eager and willing to engage in feisty interactions, playful aggression, and reckless rambunctiousness, suggesting the whiteness aesthetic of CI is at least in part troubled through its practice at Forgotten Land.

¹² Many dance scholars address the nuances and implications of cultural exchange and appropriation from a variety of perspectives. For example, Priya Srinivasan (2012) considers the history of the transnational exchange of dance practices and the unequal power dynamics between India and the US in the throes of colonialism, post-colonialism, and neocolonialism through the 20th century. Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996) reveals the appropriation of black culture and the invisibilization of black artists by popular white artists like Elvis and Balanchine and in white popular culture in general, outlining how such appropriation and invisibilization were made possible by and supported ideologies of white supremacy. Anthea Kraut (2016) addresses the development of American intellectual property rights in dance, revealing how this history both consolidates and contests racial and gendered structures of power.

Contact Improvisation as a Tantric Practice

As I have explored throughout this chapter, CI is, in a way, Tantric in that both are invested in the body, sensuousness, and boundary-crossing, especially of self and other. I recognize that it is problematic to romanticize Tantrism as a repository of sexual liberation available for appropriation by modern Western subjects in that it risks objectifying and othering Indian subjects in relation to Western modernity. However, I want to identify a commonality between the body-centric focus and emphasis on boundary-transgression of Tantric philosophy and the earthly sacredness that is denied and/or subjugated in functionalist colonial/capitalistic onto-epistemologies and cultural practices. Inasmuch as Tantric traditions and cultures (and other religious and spiritual traditions) are excluded in favor of Brahminical Hinduism both historically under colonialism and with the BJP's contemporary neoliberal economic aspirations, they offer promise as practices capable of disrupting oppressive norms of propriety, social hierarchization, and human exceptionalism for the way in which they privilege the body, sensation, and the material nonhuman world. Like Weinstone (2004), I am interested in the alignment of posthumanism and Tantra, acknowledging that while both are diverse realms of thought and practice that cannot be simply reduced to one another, they carry similar value-systems that challenge those of neoliberal capitalism and Hindu Nationalism, as well as fundamentalism in the American Christian right. Just as Tantra aligns with posthumanism, I believe that a "Tantric-impulse" is also present in CI as a praxis, suggesting that CI can function as a practice that resists the violent separation, hierarchization, and exclusion shared by Hindutva ideology, global neoliberal capitalism, and American religious fundamentalism.

As a practice with a Tantric-impulse of boundary crossing, physicality, and sensuality, CI in many ways fosters an arts of existence in resistance to neocolonial and imperial logics of domination, gender binarism, and chaste heteronormativity. Indeed, ZinnDa (2018) speaks about CI as a transformative practice for Indians, citing that in precolonial India:

Being close to each other and being kind of intimate without any sensuality and sexuality, this is Indian culture. It used to be in India all the time... And still you see that boys are going hand in hand and girls are going hand in hand but there are some strange situations happen when boys and girls are not feeling comfortable touching each other. So, I think somehow this contact dance has some connection with our old Indian culture...More than just a dance form for Indians this is something to learn about the humanity and being with each other.

ZinnDa's claim that touch paradigms, especially between men and women, in precolonial India were more egalitarian and freer is an interesting point that would take a great deal of research beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore. For my purposes, it is significant that ZinnDa experiences CI, an American-born dance form, as able to disrupt for Indians norms of propriety and decorum connected to colonial and neocolonial ideals of gender and sexuality. This notion of CI as connecting Indians to the more open touch paradigms and less restrictive gender relations of their past is in part rooted in a similar romanticized/Oriental notion of precolonial India that attracts contemporary spiritual tourists and somatic nomads.¹³ Still, the experience offered through CI of liberation from cultural conditioning—especially with the denunciation of Tantric traditions and

¹³ See, for example, Maddox 2015.

increasing divisions between genders, classes, and religions under right-wing Hindu Nationalism—can instigate a powerful revision of one’s notion of self toward more Chthonic, entangled, and sensuous subjectivities.

Contact Improvisation at Forgotten Land as a Rebellious Art of Existence

For many, many years, I was always doing things that I thought I should do. I studied linguistics, communications, technology. I went to the Emirates and built up a waste management company. But I was working against my morals. I was always at the edge of depression and burnt out. I experienced many, many mind fucks during that time. Then I went to Thailand for a yoga workshop and never came back...For the last four years, this is what I have been doing. I work three or four months a year as a coach, I earn enough money to come here to do the festivals, and in the summer I do the festivals... Maybe it’s just a phase but I’ve accepted that this is the life that I have now. – Zuza (2018)

The external pilgrimage to a spiritual tourist destination as well as the internal pilgrimage of CI experiences initiate practitioners into a transnational community of practice; chosen exiles rebelling against mainstream cultural norms. Many of my interlocutors discuss feeling different from their colleagues, peers, or family and describe CI as outside of what they consider to be the norm for their home cultures, mostly because of the way in which CI transgresses normative touch behaviors—and therefore transcends cultural taboos regarding gender and sexuality. Shruti, a young Indian dancer, explains that she has not fully told her grandparents about her CI practice as they would consider the amount of touch between men and women to be inappropriate and indicative

of her unacceptable desire for men: “They never would understand. It’s only going to create chaos. I just told them its therapeutic movement.” Similarly, Vansheka (2018), a participant from India, speculates that for her family, her CI practice would be “a big cultural shock” because it is not widely accepted, and they are very concerned about judgment by others. For Paul (2018) from Germany, the CI community allows him to explore gender stereotypes and expression in a way that he does not feel is possible with his usual circle of friends: “I don’t think I could talk to most of my male friends about being queer,” he explains. While Judith, also from Germany, feels she lives in a “bubble” of people “already in this body thing,” she believes that CI is even for them an unusual practice. Ben (2018), a participant from England shares this sentiment: “I’ve lived in hippie bubbles for quite a long time, but most of the people in that hippie bubble see contact as something quite weird still. And, using sexualization in a negative way, they sexualize it. And I’ve introduced contact to many of those people and they’ve transformed. But I do think even open-minded people see what we do, and it is pretty weird stuff.”

CI directly disrupts dominant touch paradigms in both the West and India, even as touch norms in each context vary drastically. While local differences exist, on the whole, Western touch paradigms buttress the gender binary, express and create power differentials, and distinguish between sexual and nonsexual interactions (Goffman [1976] 1979). Many of the Western participants I interviewed described their home cultures as touch-phobic, especially of touch in public with people other than romantic partners. Judith describes that in German society, touch is sexualized and is often experienced as “penetrating of individual space.” Ben feels that people in England often “take offense”

when they are touched, especially in public, because their personal boundary has been crossed. Zuza (2018), a German organizer of GCF, describes that when she first started dancing CI, she was not able to distinguish between sensuality and sexuality: “For me, touch meant sexuality... I fell in love with every person I was dancing with.” In the CI context, touch is ideally freed from the sexual and threatening penetrative connotations it is burdened with in normative Western touch paradigms.

In India, touch between two people of the same gender is common and accepted, but touch between men and women is largely taboo and, in some cases, punishable offense by law¹⁴ because of its sexual connotations. CI’s full-bodied inter-gendered touch, then, subverts the dominant touch paradigms in both Western and Indian contexts. In a country that traditionally prohibits touch between unmarried men and women, the form can be quickly judged as sexual, lewd, and indecent. As ZinnDa (2018) warns, “It is difficult for [Indian] people to accept this openness of dancing,” by which he means the full-bodied close contact between people of all genders while dancing. “What we do is a little bit not understandable in Indian culture and society,” he continues. For Hari (2018), CI shifted his perspective and freed him from societal norms, especially regarding gender segregation and the meaning of touch: “I distinctly remember in jams with females and dancing and having these feelings, ‘Oh, wow, this is nothing. I’m just holding her hand and it’s intimate, but it doesn’t have to be sexual. There’s nothing wrong, there shouldn’t be guilt attached to it, it’s with consent. [I experienced] a lot of opening in that sense.” Vansheka (2018) feels that “in Delhi people resist touch so much.” She questions the

¹⁴ Section 294 of the Indian penal code outlaws “any obscene act in any public place” and offenders serve up to three months of imprisonment and/or a fine.

significance Indian society puts on gender roles and sees CI as a way to free herself and others from the restrictions attached to gender: “Society has given so much importance to all [gender] structures but at the end of the day we are just bodies. And I think we all like being touched, being loved, and I think that’s all we need in life. And contact gives us the opportunity of being touched, being loved.” Regardless of their cultural conditioning, for many Forgotten Land participants the opportunity to touch and be touched by people other than their immediate family or romantic partners is transformative in and of itself, and many of my interlocutors experienced touch outside of sexual contexts as revelatory and powerful. While normative touch paradigms in India and the West tend to reinforce gender divisions and individual separation, in CI, especially as practiced in the context of pilgrimage, practitioners can experience the dissolution of this boundary and make room for a more radical experience of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality.

Further, many see CI as an experience of inner pilgrimage that can shift one’s career path and models of success. For example, Guru (2018) sees profound implications of experiencing more freedom through CI that allows people to imagine and create more fulfilling lives than those narrow models offered under notions of neoliberal capitalistic success:

What I’m seeing as a pattern of people who come into CI in India is somehow they start to do what they want to do rather than just doing [what society expects]. Because in India [and] I think throughout the world there is always this pressure of things to do for living but there is always an option to just live with what you feel like and what you love...Somehow, I see this pattern; people live how they want to live or at least they just see...the freedom of being a rebel.

Rahul (2017) explains that CI stands in stark contrast to the “systemic life” he usually lives as a government employee in economic policy. He does not tell his co-workers about his life as a CI dancer because he does not think they are open-minded enough to understand. He explains, “People who haven’t kept an open mind are not able to discover themselves. It’s very very easy when you’re in the system to stop the self-development thing and use material possessions to derive exhilaration and bliss and purpose and legacy, everything.”

As an experience of internal and external pilgrimage, the practice of CI coalesces a rebellious community of resistance to perceived norms of decorum, lifestyle, and modes of interaction in consumer capitalist culture. The spiritual subtext of Forgotten Land as a pilgrimage site combined with the somatic modes of attention practiced and honed during GCF cultivates nomadic pilgrim subjectivities characterized by sensorial openness to the surrounding environment, including human, nonhuman, and more-than-human others. From a neurobiological perspective, Dubisch and Winkelman (2005, xxxiii) describe that the release of endogenous opioids that can occur through peak experiences like pilgrimage increases feelings of certainty and belongingness in the individual, as well as strengthens social relationships. They describe that the “sense of identity with group members and community identity can facilitate the dissolution of self-boundaries, enhancing identification with others and their needs.” CI, especially when practiced in an intercultural context like Forgotten Land, can expand one’s sense of affiliation beyond nationalism, ethnicity, or race—perhaps even species.

Chthonic Worldings at Forgotten Land

Forgotten Land, Somatic Water Flow Workshop. December 21, 2017. About ten of us are gathered in Little Banyan, an open-air studio built around a beautifully complex Banyan tree, countless roots entwining and slithering into the sand. Dolores tells us we will use CI and Body-Mind Centering® activities to attune us to the water of our bodies and prepare us to enter the water for a CI jam this afternoon. First, we introduce ourselves and name a sensation we are experiencing. A man from the UK is experiencing heaviness in his legs. A woman from Germany is enjoying the breeze on her face. A couple, one feeling buzzing in her head, the other grains of sand on his skin, have come from the US. A man from northern India speaks of his excitement as a fluttering in his chest and behind his eyes. When we complete the circle of introductions, Dolores invites us to close our eyes and imagine a gigantic cell in front of us that we are holding with our hands. With our hands palpating and spinning this vision of a cell, we attune to its weight, the sloshing of the liquid inside, its gelatinous integrity, and the viscosity of its membrane allowing some of the outside in and the inside out. Dolores continues, “The fluid in this cell, as in all of our cells, is the ocean within us. Connecting with these inner oceans will help us connect to the ocean when we go into the water later.” She then invites us to release the cell and move our hands to our bodies, feeling the fluidity of our bones, our organs. We start to move with this sensation until we connect with a partner, supporting them as they expand and contract, pouring their fluid bodies to move them through space, and vice versa. As my partner expands and contracts in and out of a starfish-like shape, I use my body to help him into more full expansions and more complete contractions. He presses against me to expand outward, wraps around me to draw himself inward. When

we switch roles, I breathe in and feel myself expand in all directions. At first, my partner's hands feel as if they are manipulating me in specific ways instead of following my flow. I ask him to give me more space in his input, to let me move more on my own. Much better. I find a rhythm, steady, guided by my breathing of expansion and contraction, moving over and around the support of my partner's body. I can almost sense our weight transferring through the liquid of our cells and into our partner, our gelatinous cells interfacing and intermingling.

After a lunch break, we put on our bathing suits and walk down to the ocean. The waves are steady but moderate, the water just cooler than the air. We take a moment holding hands and closing our eyes, facing the water, to breathe together. Then we enter the water and put on our nose-plugs. In pairs, we practice a version of the exercise we had done under the Banyan tree of supporting our partner as they expand and contract, pouring their weight to move. As I'm floating face up in my partner's arms, the sun warms my face and I am deafened by the waves rushing over my ears. I feel weightless and vulnerable, but cared for, trusting my partner to keep my face above the waves, until I am comfortable enough to start rolling and submerging myself. After we've both had a turn in each role, we start to move together and with the other pairs in a CI jam. It took me a few minutes to be able to trust my body not to take a big inhale while under the water, and to find the right position for my nose-plug, but soon I was rolling and spinning in 360 degrees, lengthening my limbs to press away from the others and contracting in to wrap around them. The Body-Mind Centering® work prepared our senses and perception to flow in concert with one another and the dynamism of the

ocean. We slither around each other with our eyes closed, enfolding in soft embraces. The waves push us away from each other and roll us over one another until our collective dance takes on the rhythm of the ocean. I am completely disoriented, but unconcerned with questions like, “whose leg is that?” only recognizing “up” when my face hits the air and I take another deep inhale through my mouth. We transform into a school of cuddly fish, completely absorbed in our ebbing and flowing, until a confused lifeguard on a jet ski approaches us and tells us we’ve drifted too far. Only as we start to swim toward shore do I realize how absurd we must look.

Encountering the Nonhuman and More-Than-Human at Forgotten Land

Each morning of GCF begins with a singing circle in which early risers gather after breakfast to sing songs, mostly in English, around a guitarist who leads the group. One of the staples of the singing circle is a song called “Pachamama, I’m Coming Home,” originally written by Ronny Hickel. The song has become popular at the international network of Rainbow Gatherings, a loosely-knit global network of countercultural congregations usually held for free in remote forests and other public lands in which attendees enact a shared ideology based on peace, freedom, and respect without consumerism. Pachamama is the name of an Incan earth goddess that roughly translates to “Mother Earth” and the song describes an earthy interconnection between the singer and their nonhuman environment. The song’s lyrics declare, “Pachamama, I’m coming home, to the place where I belong,” and refer to a variety of nonhuman creatures, as well as the inevitability of death and the aspiration of “being one and loving all.” The popularity of the song at GCF elucidates a Chthonic ethos in the community that was also

evident in the CI pedagogy of the festival and came up in many of the interviews I conducted with participants and organizers.

I argue that the intimate engagements with the human, nonhuman, and more-than-human others facilitated through CI practice experientially dissolves a distinct separation between self and other and can cultivate experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality in which the human dancer experiences their animality and interconnection with other nonhuman beings. As Vega (2018) explains, in CI the practitioner is “really aware of the whole space. [They] see everything as a part of [their] composition and there is a different kind of awareness.” Like many Tantric meditation and bodily practices and posthumanism, CI is “aimed at sensitizing the practitioner to ontogenic relationships between self and others, self and world” (Weinstone 2004, 34). The attention to the present moment, attunement to one’s bodily sensation, and open, fluid subjectivity cultivated through the practice of CI create conditions for the experience of interconnection and union between the human CI dancer and the nonhuman and more-than-human elements. For example, Anup expresses gratitude to be “here connecting with the Earth and all five elements” while CI allows Kira “to be one with the sky, with the earth.” Hanak (2018) believes that CI is one of the “right tools for human beings to be reconnected to themselves, to others, and also to the earth.” Forgotten Land’s open architecture and design, as well as the sensually-engaged somatic modes of attention cultivated through CI invites sensory awareness of and intimate connection to non-human and more-than-human elements such as the sand, trees, ocean, and dogs.

Especially with the open-air layout of Forgotten Land, participants can have an intimate experience of becoming with their nonhuman surroundings. The festival’s

workshops occurred in four different dance halls, all of which have thin, linoleum flooring placed directly on the sand. Volker described that this flooring solution took many years to find. The organizers initially attempted to recreate floors like those they had danced on in Europe, building an unstable wooden floor the first year. Eventually, they developed a method of watering down the sand to flatten it and then placing the linoleum on top, which creates a mostly flat, soft, and resilient surface. Recalling the flexibility of a sprung dance floor, the sand gives way a small amount as feet stomp, jump, and land across it, creating small divots. Volker (2018) describes, “It’s the best. It’s like dancing on earth.” Three of the dance halls are covered by woven thatched roofs, the walls partially open for ventilation. Little Banyan, a dance hall named after the stunning Banyan tree around which it was built, has no roof but is partially shaded by the tree itself. Banyan trees are impressive for the way in which they expand. A single tree grows long tendrils from its branches which take root in the soil and eventually form substantial trunks. Like CI, the Banyan tree complicates our understanding of an individual organism, embodying a rhizomatic mode of existence. While dancing at Little Banyan, practitioners share the floor with the leaves the tree has dropped and are invited to explore the complex trunks, winding branches, and sturdy limbs of the tree. For Volker (2018), the trees are a “mind-blowing” and important aspect of dancing at Forgotten Land and at the nearby dance hall The Source, which is built around two enormous Banyan Trees. He explains, “It’s the nature, the recall of nature. Bringing people back to movement and connecting with nature. And that is something old, that is something very old. It’s ancient, that is the strength of that place. I don’t know if you have it in your country, we don’t have trees like this in [Germany]. Four hundred years old tree with one

hundred different trunks. Where do you see things like this?” The open-air format of Forgotten Land and warm climate of Arambol allow for participants to engage and connect with a variety of nonhuman others.

While most Western dance venues separate the human and nonhuman with closed doors and walls, the open-air nature of Forgotten Land and other venues in the area allow nonhuman creatures to wander into dance classes and jams. Reptiles often skitter along the walls of Forgotten Land, bird calls punctuate the silence of a CI jam, and dogs walk nonchalantly across the dance floor to join the opening circle each morning. Dogs are a particularly prominent feature of Arambol Beach where they roam in small groups, chase birds into the water, and lounge with their human companions. Unlike in most places in the Western world where most dogs are privately owned and kept inside, most dogs in India are not entirely domesticated and are loosely cared for by the community. For Jackie (2018), an American GCF participant, the dogs are a delightful component of the Forgotten Land experience. She describes,

It’s such amazing therapy to see all these free dogs running around and wandering into the dance space and seeing how they’re attracted to what we are doing...I feel like what we are doing is so primal and they’re tapped into that state, so it’s obvious for them to find a home here. And it makes me feel more at home to have them present in such a peaceful state with us.

I argue that the openness to others and sensitivity to one’s surroundings that the CI dancer cultivates primes the dancer for a more interconnected experience of becoming with nonhuman others that enter the space. As Ben suggests, “part of the jam is starting to feel the whole space and the natural organic process that happens when we move around

each other.” During one of my group interviews, one of the participants interrupted her response to point out an iguana coming up over the wall behind me. She declared that the reptile was “part of the interview now,” which demonstrates her ability and willingness to include the nonhuman creature into our group experience.

Similarly, Tara (2018) finds it meaningful to organize GCF on the beach where the climate is warm, as many of the ocean-side locations in Europe are either too expensive for a CI festival or are very cold. She explains that most European CI festivals take place inside, “isolated from nature.” Recalling her experiences at festivals held in school buildings, sometimes sleeping on the floors of classrooms, she describes she is “always a little bit suffering in those environments.” GCF, though, is her “favorite festival,” in part because the natural environment is a dynamic participant: “It’s such a rare setting to be actually just by the ocean and to be able to integrate the natural elements and roll from the dance floor directly to the ocean. It’s so nourishing.” In fact, the Indian Ocean provides more than a beautiful backdrop for Forgotten Land; it is also a dance partner. While attending an event like GCF at Forgotten Land, participants swim in the ocean during breaks, often engaging with one another in CI-inspired duets, group dances, and solo dances with the ocean as an agential force. Forgotten Land also hosts Somatic Water Flow classes, jams, and workshops. These lead participants through somatic practices inspired by Body-Mind Centering techniques and CI as preparation for movement exploration in the ocean. Somatic Water Flow at Forgotten Land is part of a larger trend of ecologically-oriented festivals and organizations that combine CI with outdoor activities in natural environments, including Skiing on Skin in Finland that combines CI, skiing, and very cold ocean-swims, Oceans and Flow, a traveling program

that combines free diving with CI on land and in the water, and Contact and Flow in Mexico that practices CI on land and in the water.

Cultural Exchange and Cultivating Transnational Structures of Intimacy

In order to continue and expand the festival, the Indian organizers of GCF started an Indian nongovernmental organization called the Global Cultural Exchange Organization (GCEO). In addition to supporting Forgotten Land and GCF legally, GCEO brings a cultural education component to the curriculum at the Trimurti Yoga Center that aims to educate its primarily Western student population about Indian culture and yogic traditions beyond the posture practice of yoga *asana*, as well as organizes a program that both teaches dance to disadvantaged children in Delhi and prepares them for school. GCEO also houses GCF's Scholarship Program, which provides full or partial scholarships to Indian dancers who want to attend GCF but cannot afford it. The Scholarship Program began out of the organizers' desire to integrate more Indian dancers into the festival. As Volker (2018) describes, "In the beginning we felt it was many Westerners coming and it was not easy to integrate Indians. Because this beach is full of Westerners but also Indians. So, we worked from the second festival on how to invite Indians and then we started the scholarship idea." They invited dancers from dance schools, university programs, and companies, many of whom had come into contact with other European dance teachers associated with the festival, to apply for the program.

As a site of encounter for Indian and non-Indians, Forgotten Land is a rich nexus of cultural exchange and development. Tourism scholar Yvette Reisinger (2015, 7-11) discusses travel experiences as particularly potent opportunities for personal and collective transformation, highlighting that both the tourists and the hosts undergo

changes of consciousness, perception, and perspective through their encounter. As tourism scholar Stephen Wearing (2001, 8) argues, both hosts and tourists can enlarge their senses of self through touristic encounters. Such is the case with Forgotten Land: both the transnational community of pilgrims participating in programming at Forgotten Land and the local citizens interfacing with attendees have the opportunity to learn from and about one another, promoting mutual transformation through cultural exchange and forging transnational structures of intimacy. As Erica Kaufman (2014, 41), a CI and contemporary dancer and a former teacher at GCF, explains, “CI in India is not only a new form of dance but perhaps a new way of experiencing our human commonalities.” Participants at Forgotten Land, a site of cultural exchange, have the opportunity to enlarge their senses of self, as well as their structure of intimacy, across national borders—an arguably important task in the early decades of the 21st Century, marked by increased xenophobia, racism, and isolationism.

While the spiritual tourist/somatic nomad community is predominantly white and Western, with Forgotten Land and other similar organizations along the spiritual tourist circuit in India, it is becoming more racially and culturally diverse. For example, the CI India organizers, all of whom are Indian citizens, are now also part of the somatic nomad community as they make the annual trip to spend time in Arambol for GCF. In creating the project Play, Support, Explore, the group became even more nomadic as they travelled around India and hosted CI workshops and jams. ZinnDa (2018), a long-time GCF organizer from India and Founder and General Secretary of GCEO, traveled to the US to attend Burning Man with Camp Contact, a CI and embodied arts theme camp, demonstrating his integration into this transnational community of practice. Through

Forgotten Land, like other hubs of spiritual tourism/somatic nomadism, the CI community grows more culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse. The CI India team exemplifies one tangible example of how Forgotten Land has supported the development of an initiative to spread CI throughout India even more through primarily Indian, rather than European or American, dance artists.

Many of the organizers and participants at Forgotten Land praise the organization for facilitating fruitful and valuable cultural exchange despite being of and within the neocolonial context of Arambol. While the divide between Indian and Western tourists established with the first wave of hippies to Goa remains in Arambol, GCF actively encourages cultural exchange between Indians and non-Indians through the Scholarship Program. ZinnDa (2018) notes that GCF is special because people come from all over the world and share their cultures and perspectives with one another. He observes that such exchange is not happening in other places in India, as Indians and foreigners are usually separated, either by custom or by design. Indeed, cultural exchange is the primary directive for GCEO. ZinnDa explains that the goal of GCEO is “to make a bridge between different cultures... [to make a] community feeling without any boundary of country borders.” This language points to a utopian ideal of global unity as well as reflects the cosmopolitan ideal of neoliberal capitalism’s free market ideology. Indeed, ZinnDa notes that this type of cultural exchange and education is especially important for Indians, who, in the current geopolitical climate, are increasingly compelled to work or travel abroad. ZinnDa draws from his own experience traveling, noting that he was able to feel more comfortable and have more respect for other cultures when he understood more about the cultural context he was in. While neoliberal globalization prioritizes the

flow of capital across borders, GCEO seeks to help individuals navigate and appreciate new cultural situations, especially foreigners in India and Indians as they venture out of the country.

GCF's focus on cultural exchange sets it apart from other CI festivals and disrupts normative boundaries of belonging and affiliation. As Tara (2018) explains, the teachers at GCF often express that the highlight of their experience was having contact with Indian dancers. She notes that the Indian dancers express a "different bodily logic" and that the festival allows for people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences to learn from one another's bodily wisdoms. For many, the pilgrimage to Arambol and along the international spiritual tourist circuit expands their sense of belonging beyond lines of division like national borders. In the opening circle at GCF, participants were asked to introduce themselves and say where they were from. Many claimed that, while they were born elsewhere, India is now their home. Others claimed "Earth" as their place of origin, indicating their disaffiliation with an identity based on nationality and a broader affiliation and interconnection with the global community as a whole.

Diversity and Inclusion: Contact Improvisation's Democratic Politics

The sociopolitical climate of the early 21st Century, marked by increased—or at least more publicly visible and violent—racism, xenophobia, and isolationism, requires the CI community to revisit issues of diversity and inclusion. The community acknowledges that the democratic ethos of CI is undermined by the whiteness of the form, and true diversity and inclusion can only be achieved by challenging the norms of the form on the bodily level and by re-evaluating how CI spaces are created and maintained. CI spaces are often discussed as "safer spaces" because they allow for people

with a variety of movement styles, abilities, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities to engage with the form in a non-judgmental space. However, as Taja Will (2018, 38), who identifies as queer and transracial, explains, “A safe space for a white practitioner is not the same as a safe space for a POC [People of Color] practitioner. Folks with marginalized identities are somatically and psychically guarded, from generations past and a lifetime of systemic oppression; it is in the body, and it will enter the dance” (ibid.). The CI community, through the publication *Contact Quarterly* and other forums, actively address the implied whiteness of the form and work to achieve the form’s democratic and inclusive ideals. While true inclusivity is arguably impossible to achieve anywhere, especially with the drastic class and caste divides, stifling gender politics, and marked difference in access to education based on factors like class and gender, the festival organizers’ and GCEO’s efforts to make GCF more accessible to Indian people are a testament to the CI community’s commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The democratic values of the CI community also require CI spaces to allow for, and even encourage, bodily explorations of conflict and other dynamics that loosen the practice’s predominantly white aesthetic. Many artists trouble the softness and ease—and, by proxy, the whiteness—predominant in CI. For example, Ishmael Houston-Jones and Fred Holland, both African American dancers, presented an improvisational duet in the early 1980s in which they aimed to break from the norms of CI by wearing combat boots and “street clothes,” allowing their movement to get rough and confrontational, and by being black (Albright 2017, 227). In recent years, the CI community has more readily and directly addressed the “whiteness” of CI, with artists like mayfield brooks (2018, 39), who identifies as black, queer, and non-binary, “refusing” CI by creating her own

practice, “Improvising While Black” (IWB). She describes that in her teaching, she does not assume people want to be touched—as is generally assumed in CI—because of her own experiences of trauma existing in a culture in which anti-black violence is pervasive (ibid.) When entering a CI class, workshop, or jam, she describes, “I challenge myself to practice refusal. I make noise, disrupt comfort cuddle zones, and keep dancing, touching myself and other objects, asking permission to touch others, and doing CI (see I/eye) on my own terms” (ibid.). With these interventions, artists challenge and revise sedimented habits of the form and, ideally, as Albright argues (2018, 36), “[propose] the terms for working out our politics in motion.” The bodily practice of CI allows for people to experience, investigate, negotiate, and transform their modes of being and being-in-community.

Despite the criticisms of CI as unwittingly complicit with the subtleties of white supremacy, CI holds significant political potential, especially if practitioners challenge the norms of softness and fluidity with fiercer modes of encounter and acknowledge that, as Albright (2017, 229) argues, “resistance is support.” Importantly, such a valuation and acceptance of conflict and tension, as opposed to softness and ease, reflects Haraway’s (2016) call to “stay with the trouble” of becoming with bumptious others. She writes, “the arts of living and dying well...on a damaged planet must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself—and not safely other, either. Neither One nor Other, that is who we all are and always have been” (98). Reflecting a Chthonic commitment to ongoingness despite “trouble,” Albright (2017, 236) argues that a valuable lesson in contact is the “sense of being willing to continue, even in the midst of disorientation” and “a sensory awareness that we are implicated in

surviving this dance together.” In learning how to live and die well together in the Chthulucene, we can expect trouble, conflict, and disharmony—physicalities increasingly explored in CI, including at Forgotten Land, as I will explore later in this section.

Limits to Inclusivity

It is possible that the experience of pilgrimage and the community’s shared set of somatic practices simply create new lines of division—in this case, between those who practice CI and those who do not. One is either in the tribe of touchy people or not. As R (2018), a participant from Germany, laments, “there are many, many people who don’t have access to [things like yoga, contact improvisation, and ecstatic dance] in different kinds of ways,” by which she means both materially and ideologically. This is especially problematic as the practice of CI—especially within the somatic nomad and spiritual tourist community—is largely inaccessible to those without the financial means to attend classes and jams, or those who feel alienated or threatened by the amount or type of touch for cultural or religious reasons. While the practice is theoretically inclusive of everybody, regardless of identity or ability, such radical inclusivity is impossible to fully realize. The exclusivity of Forgotten Land and the festival is perhaps best epitomized by the signs posted at both entrances to Forgotten Land during GCF: “Festival Participants Only.”

While the festival organizers make an effort to bring in Indian dancers as participants and instructors, these are often middle class, educated people, similar in social standing to their non-Indian counterparts. Like the many foreign spiritual tourists participating in Forgotten Land programming, they often come from outside of Goa to take part. Further, Forgotten Land and GCEO do little to unsettle the hierarchical divide

between local Goans and tourists. Forgotten Land is an exclusive and expensive space¹⁵ that promotes cultural exchange but maintains deeply entrenched class divisions and neocolonial relations. This divide is particularly salient every time an Indian woman in a frayed sari, often with children, stands at the threshold of Forgotten Land's dining area asking for food and money as relatively affluent festival participants eat their buffet lunch. She is decidedly not part of the tribe. As discussed above, the neocolonial context of Arambol perpetuates violent and unequal social structures that are difficult to ignore or ameliorate. At the same time, many tourist venues in India are fortified by gates and guards that would disallow interaction between beggars and tourists, and Forgotten Land's open layout facilitates such encounters, drawing attention to the discrepancies between CI and Forgotten Land's inclusive rhetoric and its limits. Further, the practice of CI and related somatic activities are meaningful for practitioners in that they trouble their subjective experiences of separation that maintain such unjust and unsustainable modes of being and being-in-community. These practices hold potential for cultivating experiences of sympoiesis and trans-corporeality and fostering empathic connections with human, nonhuman, and more-than-human others both on and off of the dance floor.

Conclusion: Contact Improvisation as a Chthonic Activist Practice

While my interlocutors hold differing definitions of activism, many understand CI as a transformative practice that can change both individuals and collectives and see CI's politics as inherently resistant to mainstream ideologies and social patterns. The inner pilgrimage of CI takes on added power in the context of the practitioner's physical

¹⁵ In 2018, the Goa Contact Festival cost 350 Euro for non-Indian attendees for six days, including all classes, workshops, and events, and three meals a day. For Indian attendees, the cost was 18,500 INR, about \$250, although many Indian attendees received full or partial scholarships.

pilgrimage to a site of spiritual significance. Having voluntarily left their home cultures and nations, either temporarily or permanently, CI practitioners in places like Arambol are primed for change. In arguing for CI as a form of Chthonic activism in the current moment, I do not mean to suggest that the practice will have direct, measurable effects on policy that will alleviate climate change or dismantle the oppression inherent in capitalism. I do, however, believe the practice of CI is part of an emergent cultural cultivation of sympoietic sensibilities and trans-corporeal subjectivities suited for the Chthulucene. Cultivating responsive and resilient modes of somatic attention, CI prepares the body, its perception, and its sense of self for the cultivation of Chthonic subjectivities, functioning as a form of sensuous ecological activism. Rather than changing social structures or policy directly, CI works at the level of the individual—in partnership and in community—to create micro-cultures that can influence the mainstream, like an immense, expansive fractal emerges from a single unit. Demonstrating a Tantric commitment to sensation and embodiment, the practice of CI as demonstrated at Forgotten Land has the potential to sensitize practitioners toward more Chthonic subjectivities capable of response. With the principle of consent, CI practitioners experiment with the middle ground between individual sovereignty and self-possession on the one hand and an ethics of care and collectivism on the other. A practice of sensuous ecological activism, CI in the transnational spiritual tourist/somatic nomad community has the potential to loosen sedimented habits of possessive individualism in favor of more entangled, earthly, Chthonic subjectivities.

Chapter 4. Burn Culture: A Radically Inclusive Social Choreographic Score for the
Chthulucene

If all your self-worth and esteem is invested in how much you consume, how many likes you get or other quantifiable measures, the desire to simply possess things trumps our ability or capability to make moral connections with people around us. – Larry Harvey (quoted in Limbach 2014)

Wednesday morning bike ride, Black Rock City 2017. I have been at Burning Man for five full days now. Given the heat, biking, long nights, and early mornings, I have a surprising amount of energy. I'm upbeat, chipper even, as I bike down E street a few blocks to Anahasana Village. It already feels like a familiar route. To my right, Camp Shitshow's unreasonably large sound system is blasting their morning selection of terrible music—this time, a series of Christmas songs—even though no one dwells within their shade structure haphazardly erected with metal poles and tapestries to enjoy it. To my left, a few people are sleeping in hammocks provided by another camp for weary passersby. When I get to Chairman Meow's edifice, predominantly adorned with a five-foot tall portrait of the furry leader's whiskered face, I know I am close. The streets are relatively open, as most people are still sleeping after late nights. I see a dark figure crossing my path and it takes me a moment to realize it is Death incarnate, complete with

a black hooded robe and a scythe. An omen? I am reminded of the message I saw inside a Porta-Potty a few nights ago, “You are not dying, you are transforming.” I choose to interpret Death’s appearance as a sign of my own transformational process and continue my ride.

Every year for the week leading up to Labor Day, roughly 70,000 people¹ from a variety of contemporary countercultures² converge in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert to create the community’s annual festival, Burning Man. Since it began in 1986 as an intimate summer solstice ritual on San Francisco’s Baker Beach, Burning Man has evolved into a full-fledged annually-constructed temporary city dedicated to the cultivation of an experimental heterotopia infused with creativity, freedom of expression, and civic responsibility. Foucault ([1984] 1986, 24) defines heterotopias as “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” At Burning Man, participants experiment with and disrupt the logics and symbols of mainstream consumer society and build temporary alternatives. Burning Man has inspired a transnational “Burn culture” manifest in an international network of regional “Burns”—events ranging from one to eight days with a few hundred to several thousand people organized around the same guiding principles and following a

¹ Most Burning Man attendees in 2017 were from the US (76.2%), and about half of those were from California (Burning Man Census 2017).

² For performance studies scholar Rachel Bowditch (2010, 4), “Countercultural movements form a set of values and beliefs that comprise a reaction against the dominant culture and, in doing so, develop significant innovations and social forms that eventually get folded back into the mainstream way of life.” Sociologist John Milton Yinger (1982, 9) argues, “Today’s counterculturalists can be thought of as the shamans of urban society, dreaming new dreams, formulating new myths, forging alternative paradigms.”

similar format, including the climactic ritual burning of an effigy. While the form the effigy takes varies between events and from year to year, Black Rock City's center is marked every year by a new incarnation of "the Man," a towering wooden android overlooking the city. Burns are contemporary pilgrimage sites often located in rugged outdoor spaces in which most infrastructure—primarily portable toilets and a wide variety of tent structures—must be brought in and constructed for the duration of the event and promptly deconstructed at its conclusion. The Black Rock Desert is particularly unforgiving, and "Burners"—the community's term for attendees of Burning Man and/or other Burns—must contend with harsh winds, temperature extremes, and pervasive dust to build and dwell within Black Rock City—a fully functioning ephemeropolis (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005, 2)—complete with its own airport and post office. Like other Burns, Burning Man is comprised of a myriad of "theme camps," some of which are organized into larger "villages," offering an array of events, experiences, workshops, and interactive artworks. While the community is not completely free of the relations of commerce and commercialization it critiques, performance studies scholar Rachel Bowditch describes, "Burning Man enacts the 'not-yet-here', a new paradigm for living in a new and different world, one that is continuously infused with creativity and community" (Bowditch 2010, 319). Unlike attendees of most commercial festivals, Burners experiment with an alternative social contract—delineated in *Ten Principles* by co-founder Larry Harvey in 2004 (*Ten Principles*)—that, as I will argue, directly resists those of mainstream consumer culture. Instead, this social contract functions as sensuous ecological activism by cultivating Chthonic subjectivities, by which I mean imbricated modes of awareness, senses of self, and ways of being that experience the self as an

active, sympoietic agent inherently interconnected with and response-able for human and nonhuman others.

Through their pilgrimage to Burns, attendees are separated from the default world of late capitalism and brought into what many consider a liminal emergent heterotopia. As feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (1994) would say, they undergo processes of nomadic subjectivization, or what she understands as processes that cultivate fluid and mobile, rather than fixed, experiences and notions of self—an important component of Chthonic subjectivization. Burners' habits, modes of awareness, and senses of self are rendered profoundly fluid, porous, and mutable through the nomadic experience of pilgrimage. As American studies scholar Jeremy Hockett (2005, 76) argues, Burns are collective performative practices distanced from mainstream consumer culture, which provides the necessary critical distance to bring awareness to the ways in which values and norms of late capitalism are constructed, embodied, and revised. These practices, therefore, are necessary in order to bring about social change. With Braidotti's (1994) notion of nomadic subjectivization, I argue that Burns offer liminal pedagogical spaces through which participants learn and practice radically inclusive, non-consumeristic ways of being-in-community. Through the critical reflection on default societal norms and structures and the forging of new possibilities of self and society allowed in these uniquely framed worlds, this community of practice destabilizes and softens fixed notions and experiences of personal identity and collective possibilities. Entering the liminal frame of a Burn, Burners become pilgrim nomads open to transformation.³

³ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, the majority of attendees reported having had some kind of transformative experience at Black Rock City with 22.3% of attendees reporting they “absolutely/definitely” had a transformative experience, and 10.5% of attendees reporting they did not have

Burning Man and other Burns associated with the nonprofit Burning Man Organization (BMO) (known by the community as the Borg) share a common code: the Ten Principles that shape life on and beyond “the Playa,” the desert expanse on which Black Rock City is located, as well as the physical sites of other Burns. The Ten Principles are a living code rather than strict dogma, written by Larry Harvey after almost two decades of experience creating and dwelling within Black Rock City to articulate the emergent community’s values (“Ten Principles,” N.D.). They include: radical inclusion, self-reliance, self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leave no trace, participation, gifting, decommodification, and immediacy (Ten Principles). Many in the community also often refer to an eleventh, or even the Zero Principle—consent—which speaks to the Principles’ openness to revision (See 11thPrincipleConsent.org). As I explore in this chapter, these Principles are supported by the variety of movement practices and pedagogies present at Burns. Nomadic pilgrim subjects, having destabilized their senses of self through the experience of pilgrimage—much like after Meador and her team’s experience of pilgrimage discussed in Chapter 2—are more open to the transformation made possible by practicing what I describe as the score of the Ten Principles. After Burn experiences, Burners carry these lessons and modes of subjectivity into “default”—Burner-speak for the world outside of the frame of a Burn—thereby realizing the political potential of the Principles. As a whole, these Principles work against the reductive stereotype of the passive, conformist consumer subject of late

a transformative experience at all. Of those reporting having had a transformative experience, about half experienced this as a moderate transformation. Only 9.3% reported experiencing a nearly-complete or complete transformation and 17.7% experienced a minimal or slight transformation. Most (86.3%) reported that these changes persisted long after they left Black Rock City.

capitalism for whom freedom is reduced to a choice between predetermined products, self-expression is accomplished through the consumption and display of mass-produced items, and civic engagement occurs primarily through voting every four years. Instead, the practice of the Ten Principles cultivates processes of Chthonic subjectivization that interpellate individuals as active, creative agents interconnected with and response-able for their human and nonhuman environments.

On the surface, it may seem paradoxical to include Burning Man in a dissertation focused on practices and performances bringing about Chthonic subjectivities, since Haraway herself (2016, 46) characterizes Burning Man as the ultimate symbol of the Anthropocene—its gigantic flaming effigy demonstrating Anthropos’s intent to burn as much fossil fuel as possible, consuming itself in an enormous fiery rage. Between travel to Black Rock City and its annual construction and deconstruction, participation in the event certainly entails a great deal of consumption of both fossil fuels and commercial products.⁴ I interpret Haraway to be taking the position that Burning Man’s apocalyptic aesthetic is a dismal warning that the end of the world is inevitable and since it is our (humans’) fault, we might as well party. Or perhaps she means that the effigy of the burning Man and the counterculture that surrounds it implicitly critiques the political and social forces leading to environmental destruction and ecological volatility but fails to see past Anthropos as the willful antagonist of this global drama. With her articulation of the

⁴ According to Cooling Man (N.D.), in 2006, Burning Man’s 40,000 participants generated about 27,000 tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, traveling to and from the event and generating power while on Playa. This totals about .7 tons per participant, roughly twice the weekly national average per person. For more information on the impact of Burning Man on the nonhuman environment and efforts to ameliorate Burning Man’s environmental impact, see Gillies 2014.

Chthulucene, Haraway instead calls for a decentering of the human that comes with a Chthonic awareness of human's transcorporeality with both human and nonhuman others.

There are certainly Anthropocentric discourses and qualities present at Burning Man, especially evident from a distanced perspective. In this chapter, though, I venture to explore the Chthonic possibilities of Burn culture, which could also be called the Burner community of practice, as it is embodied and lived both as an event that conjures a particular ethos—shaped by the structure of the event itself and the Ten Principles—and in the movement-based communities of practice that gather and form at Burns. I demonstrate how Burns, as examples of Joseph Beuys' social sculpture (Beuys 1974, 48) to which tens of thousands of people journey every year as liminal pilgrimage sites, offers experimental grounds and pedagogical principles for the Chthulucene. Specifically, I argue that the Ten Principles⁵ function as a social choreographic score that cultivates a sensuously-attuned Chthonic subjectivity with a radically inclusive sense of being-in-community, and emphasizes social relations of gifting that undermines the machinations of late capitalism and the self-contained individual consumer subject. Burns function as training grounds for more sensuously engaged, inclusive, and participatory ways of forming both self and society.

The Principles at Burning Man promote Chthonic response-ability for the human and nonhuman community. Unlike more ascetic environmental activist cultures that value simplicity and encourage minimalistic lifestyles, the ecologically-conscious ethos of Burning Man exemplifies philosopher Kate Soper's proposal of "alternative hedonism" (2008, 571) in which pleasure is celebrated and sought through means other than mass

⁵ When referencing one of the Ten Principles, I will hereafter use the capitalized "Principle."

consumption. Soper argues that the environmental movement and the political Left's historical asceticism undermines their mass appeal, and unnecessarily stunts the movements' aspirations for sustainable and just futures. Instead of denouncing pleasure in allegiance to the revolutionary struggle—whether by living more simply to reduce environmental destruction or in pursuit of egalitarianism—Soper (2008, 570-571) calls for the pursuit of “other pleasures” through more sustainable means. Positing that the affluent consumerist Euro-American mode of consumption, which is now the model of the good life for people all over the world, will only be resisted by a “seductive alternative,” Soper (*ibid.*) writes that “affluent global elites” must begin to embrace “new modes of thinking about human pleasure and self-realization.” At Burns, a Dionysian ethos of sensuousness, play, and debauchery is palpable, constituting an alternative hedonist imaginary of consumption, as I will show over the course of this chapter. Soper argues this type of consumption transforms an individual sense of self toward a sense of interconnection and an ecological ethic: alternative hedonists become aware of “the collective impact of aggregated individual acts of affluent consumptions... and [take] measure to avoid contributing to it” (572). A party as well as a pilgrimage site, Burns are liminal spaces that foster alternative hedonisms. Burners loosen Anthropos's sedimented individuated perceptual maps and consumeristic habituated behaviors, allowing for individual and collective experimentation with more Chthonic ways-of-being, circulations of value, and community rituals.

After attending Burning Man in 2017 and 2018, as well as several regional events in Ohio, West Virginia, and Washington DC, I have come to think of Burns as pilgrimage sites, social laboratories, and festive convergences of a nomadic community in

diaspora—chosen refugees of mainstream consumer culture from nowhere in particular and who find home and family with fellow Burners. In what follows, I draw upon ethnographic participant-observation research and interview data gathered through my experiences at Burns to discuss Burns as sites of sensuous ecological activism in resistance to the ideologies and structures of late capitalism through pilgrimage, pedagogy, practice, and protest. I argue that the Burner community of practice is cultivating modes of being and being-in-community capable of ushering us into the Chthulucene. First, I describe Burns as sites of pilgrimage with potentially transformative effects on the nomadic Burner-pilgrims who sojourn to them. With Braidotti, I discuss Burns as cultivating processes of nomadic subjectivization that soften the perceptual maps, habits, and senses of self of those who enter and participate in them, allowing for subjective experimentation and malleability. Then, I consider the Ten Principles as an activist social choreographic score that guides the ways participants move within and experience the liminal space of Burns, arguing that they destabilize the passive consumer subject—*homo economicus*—and encourage the development of more Chthonic subjectivities and forms of being-in-community. I then discuss the movement practices of Burns, especially contact improvisation (CI) and ecstatic dance, introducing Anahasana Village—a community of theme camps offering various movement-based practices and workshops—as my primary case study. Outlining a brief history of CI at Burning Man and Anahasana Village, I discuss how movement rituals and experiences at Anahasana Village are not purely aesthetic or artistic practices but take on spiritual and therapeutic meaning for participants, highlighting their functions as sensuous ecological activism. Last, I explore the Ten Principles as a Chthonic social choreographic score taught with

the help of a range of somatic pedagogical techniques and practiced at Burning Man and regional events. I argue that while Burns are temporary by design, suggesting that “Burn culture” is unsustainable, the Ten Principles are, as a score, capable of carrying these modes of experience and being-in-community into the everyday life of default. Fostering alternatives to the consumer subject and the subject of economic self-interest (Foucault [2004] 2008), these experimental social sculptures, I argue, can both cultivate and critique nomadic, sensuously attuned, and response-able subjectivities and can be considered a form of sensuous ecological activism.

Pilgrimage: Burns as Sites of Transformation

As an event-culture that is optimally ritualized albeit non-dogmatic, spectacular yet participatory, temporary yet ubiquitous, a city more than a festival, Burning Man may exemplify the leading edge of *religiosity without religion* characterizing middle class lifestyles in contemporary consumer driven and neoliberal pressured democracies. (St. John and Gauthier 2015)

The pilgrimage to Black Rock City, August 24, 2017. We pull into a Wal-Mart in Nevada after a full three days on the road, where we stock up on last-minute supplies. After yet another round of real-life Tetris, the car actually packed to the gills with costumes, tents, food and camping supplies for the three of us and several of our campmates, we secure the bikes to the bike rack, load ourselves in, and are Black Rock City-bound. Just off I-80, we stop at another gas station in Fernley around 11 pm. The joint is crawling with art cars, trailers impossibly packed with bikes, lamps, metal bent into odd shapes, suitcases, and large jugs of water. Ready to go, we merge into the line of cars slowly snaking into the darkness toward Gate Road.

We turn off of the pavement around 12:30 am. The immense number of cars quickly come to a dead stop, only inching forward every 20 minutes or more. We are in for a long wait. People are getting out of their cars to use the portable toilets, chat with old friends, meet new ones, give Playa gifts, and stretch their legs. The mood is subdued but anticipatory, a mix of excitement, irritation, and exhaustion. I am lulled into a short sleep but awaken as the sunrise elicits whoops and hollers from the crowd.

*It's around 7am when we finally make it to the Gate, the entrance to the city. We are invited by two big, burly men—one wearing a ship-captain hat, the other in a skirt—to get out of our car. They offer us hugs, exclaiming, "Welcome home!" as they embrace each of us. They ask how many Burns we had been to, which was zero for me. As a "virgin," someone who hasn't been to Burning Man before, I am put through a special rite of passage. After explaining some of the basic rules of Playa, like "if it doesn't come from your body, it doesn't belong in the potty," orienting me to the layout of the city, and handing me a *WhatWhereWhen Guide*,⁶ he suggests that I remove my shirt and mimic his movements. Together, we kneel and put our palms to the earth, touching a thick layer of compact dust. My legs are already slightly covered, and my new pink sparkly shoes have turned a bland musky-white color. We run our fingers through the thick alkaline dust as he encourages me to get very comfortable with this substance—playa. "It will be everywhere. All the time." Following his guidance, I lay belly down, press my nose into the dust, and move my arms and legs out and in, making a "dust angel." When I stand, I*

⁶ The *WhatWhereWhen Guide*, or WWW, is a listing of some of the events that people intend to offer on Playa. Not all events are listed, as not all are planned enough in advance to get them printed, and many do not end up happening as planned. Events are also publicized on a website and an app.

am plastered with playa. My Greeter places a mallet in my hand and shows me to a gong hanging in a modest frame. As I strike the gong, I yell at the top of my lungs, "I am not a virgin anymore!"

Distinct from consumer-based festivals, Burns are potent contemporary pilgrimage sites, and so are ripe sites for personal and collective transformation. Larry Harvey explains, "The pilgrimage to the Black Rock Desert is really an initiation and a catalyst for the formation of a community" (quoted in Bowditch 2010, 317). As discussed in the previous chapter, anthropologist Victor Turner (1978) famously theorizes pilgrimages as rites of passage into a liminal realm that transforms the pilgrim, either temporarily or permanently, in the eyes of the larger society. The pilgrim-Burner leaves their home community and often travels great distances to inhabit a place described by scholars and Burners alike as a site of personal and collective transformation, a liminal space in which default norms of decorum and propriety are open to revision or discarded all together. Bowditch (2010, 321) argues, "Ultimately, the pilgrimage into the desert is about a need for personal transformation aligned with a need to build community, one that is meaningful and self-selected." Black Rock City forges what art critic and scholar Nato Thompson (2015, 134-135), by way of philosopher Félix Guattari, calls a space of becoming that creates the conditions for "a person to change" through transversal methods that expand rather than attempt to control desire. As religious scholar Lee Gilmore and artist/art critic Mark Van Proyen (2005, 10) argue, some of the most important features of Burn culture are "psychic nomadism," which indicates Burners' willingness to explore and move freely between a range of worldviews, cultural norms,

and belief systems, and “its irony-laced encouragement of fluid, boundary-effacing identities,” pointing to the transformative potential of Burn experiences. Once they enter the Burn space, Burners are transported into a liminal realm with logics, norms, and ways of being that differ drastically from mainstream consumer society and, as Hockett (2005, 67) argues, allows for critical reflection on habituated norms. As a ritual of liminality often performed with the stated intention of achieving personal and/or collective change, the act of pilgrimage brings the pilgrim into a softened state of being that is more malleable and open to profound shifts in perception, interpretation, behavior, and consciousness.

Many Burners travel to Burns with the distinct intention to change themselves, their lives, or their communities. First-time Burner Diane (2018) describes that she and her friend Anna were attracted to Burning Man for this very reason: “We were both looking to open and to experience new things.” By engaging in this diverse counter culture with a constantly evolving and expanding community, Burners shed habituated structures of being, literally and figuratively opening their selves up to new ways of being. She recalls that, before embarking on the journey from her home, she often said to herself and others, “I’m going to leave this and that in the dust” (2018), indicating her intention for personal transformation through this pilgrimage experience. Even Burners who do not arrive with the intention to transform undergo a state change when entering the frame of the event. Burners move through a physical gate upon their entrance to every Burn where they are greeted on a “one-on-one basis, mano-a-mano, facia-a-facia” by designated “Greeters” (Burning Man N.D., “Greeters”). In addition to an intimate

initiation into the dust, Greeters offer each participant a hug and a hearty “Welcome home!” before explaining the Ten Principles and other rules of that particular Burn.⁷

Further, the burning of the effigy is a climactic ritual of all Burns; a sign of their ephemerality, signaling the beginning of the Burn’s dismantling and making way for the opportunity to rebuild next year. The effigy burn also performs a symbolic destruction of the self from which a new personal and collective identity can rise, phoenix-like, out of the ashes (Bowditch 2014, 161). For first-time Burner Mel, the effigy burn was an opportunity to release the past and integrate the changes in self and perception that she experienced at the Burn. This aspect of the event makes it more transformative than the other festivals she attends: “Yea, you can party, but it is also a spiritual event. It’s about understanding more about your gift, burning the past [with the Man], and bringing that into your everyday life.” While the burning of the effigy is not “officially” imbued with any particular significance, on a basic level the collective ritual signifies death and rebirth—an opportunity for personal and collective transformation. This transformation is in part enabled and empowered by the liminal space created by the pilgrimage. Importantly, the transformation is never complete. Rather, like Burns themselves, the notion of self-transformation in Burn culture is a continual process of change, highlighting a fluid, nomadic understanding of self.

The closing of the Burn is marked with the ritual burning of the Temple, an art piece intended as a non-sectarian site of prayer, reflection, and honoring of the

⁷ These rituals are similar in function to rituals performed by the Cacophony society, an antecedent to the Burn community. On what they called Zone Trips, members of the Society would venture to a space to create a zone of existence outside of the norm. They performed a similar ritual “crossing” into the Zone, initiating a new realm of possibility (Bowditch 2010, 39).

community's dead. Throughout the duration of the Burn, citizens sojourn to the Temple to write messages to those they've lost on the walls, construct memorial shrines, meditate, or simply to get respite from the chaos of the Playa. The Temple burn is a quieter ritual of reflection, especially in contrast to the celebratory energy of the effigy burn the night before. These rituals, along with the "trash fence" which designates the limits of the ephemeropolis, establish the liminal frame of the Burn as a pilgrimage site, separate from default with its own guiding principles.

The pilgrim offers us one way of understanding Burn culture as a site of nomadic subjectivization in relation to well-established anthropological observations of common ritual practices. The tourist is important to consider here, as well, for, as Turner (1978) argues, the pilgrim is "half-tourist." The tourist, like the pilgrim, travels from their home community to a new place and enters a new culture temporarily. Both are ways of thinking about and modeling a contemporary mobile subjectivity. They are not so much opposite or even completely separable "ideal types" (Weber 1949), but I would argue that while both are based on experiences of mobility and travel, the figure of the pilgrim is notably more nomadic in Braidotti's (1994) sense than the tourist. The tourist on the one hand essentially stays the same and maintains consumeristic relationships as it moves, gazing upon rather than interacting with cultures and communities as objects (Cohen 1979; Olsen 2010). On the other hand, the American tourist, especially, is not greatly disadvantaged by the language gap as English becomes more and more prominent in these elite circuits. Tourist spaces like hotels, restaurants, and shops tend to mirror the consumer spaces at home, increasing the tourist's comfort and ease of travel. They are oriented toward the consumer-tourist, who maintains a distanced perspective as they

encounter new worlds. This tourist subjectivity is decidedly more passive, a consumer seeking entertainment, experiencing new cultures and societies from a safe distance, perhaps in a climate-controlled car or bus, and attending commercial events oriented to this global consumer (Cohen 1979). “The nomadic body,” as Braidotti (1994, 25) describes, “is a threshold of transformations,” open to being changed by its encounters. Nomads travel with an intimate but non-possessive connection to “place” (65). They “account for the material conditions that sustain these different subject positions” and “call into play a sense of accountability for one’s locations” (11), suggesting an ecological consciousness as inherent to nomadic subjectivities. They are dependent on the land and people around them. They experience those places differently, more intimately, more directly, with an open heart and mind. They never settle but are constantly evolving in conversation with their experiences and places they find themselves in. Similarly, Turner (1978, 39) acknowledges pilgrimages as capable of fostering feelings of connection across difference and transforming the worlds in which they occur: “The pilgrimage...serves not so much to maintain society’s status quo as to recollect, and even to presage, an alternative mode of social being, a world where *communitas*,⁸ rather than a bureaucratic social structure, is preeminent.” Pilgrims are nomadic as they seek experiences of interconnection with human and more-than-human others and personal and collective transformation through their sacred travels, destabilizing and softening their perceptual maps, habituated ways of being, and senses of self.

⁸ Victor Turner (1969, 96-97) describes *communitas* as a model and sacred experience of community as undifferentiated by hierarchical structures or identity categories, a “communion of equal individuals.”

I argue, with Braidotti (1994), that if we are to achieve a more sustainable, just, and inclusive society in this time of globalization and increased mobility, it is important to cultivate processes of nomadic subjectivization, rather than touristic ones. The Ten Principles encourage participation, civic responsibility, and communal effort specifically to discourage “touristic” experiences or behavior at Burning Man, which does not mean that the tourist is completely absent, of course. Indeed, the community refers to those that do not participate fully or hire people to set up their camp for them in what are known as “turn-key” camps as “tourists.” Still, the general ethos of the event is infectious, and the various modes of engagement available to participants undo much of the touristic impulse. One of my informants, Mary (2018), described that she first attended Burning Man expecting a typical music festival but became enamored by the participatory ethos and feeling of existing as part of a “tribe” for which she was responsible. After a few years attending as part of other camps, she founded her own camp, indicating that individuals are acculturated into this participatory, nomadic culture. The nomadic pilgrim experience opens the attendee up to personal transformation within the liminal space of the Burn, potentiating lasting changes in the participant’s value-systems, ways of being, and senses of self.

Burns as Social Sculptures: The Ten Principles as Score

Burning Man is planting the seeds of an alternative way of living in the world.

(Bowditch 2010, 5)

2:00 am Thursday, 2018, The Temple of Galaxia. Always located at the outer edge of the city, surrounded by mostly empty land punctuated with art rather than dense residential

streets, a Temple is constructed at Burning Man every year. Beyond the Man at 12 o'clock, The Temple requires a bit of a trek to visit, a pilgrimage of its own. It is a space of reflection and mourning. Throughout the week, people sojourn to the Temple to build altars, write messages, or just reflect. When it is burned on Sunday, the last night of the event, it is a somber community ritual of release.

In 2018, the Temple of Galaxia is a complex, majestic circular sculpture composed of hundreds of hollow pyramid-like wooden structures stacked into a towering, swirling vortex. The shape recalls that of a campfire, a wide base that rises into a swirling central point. Construction had run behind schedule, and it had just opened this afternoon, a full three days into the weeklong event. We've been biking all night, exploring the art scattered around deep playa—the expanse beyond the circular clock-face of the residential city, but within the trash fence. Slowed down by an influx of massive dust storms, we eventually made the trip to the Temple.

The Temple of Galaxia is awe-inspiring. Glowing, warm, welcoming lights softly change colors along the curved lines of the structure's towering walls, arcing toward the center as they rise to form a small circular opening at the top. We enter through one pathway along the edge of the giant circle. Once inside, we are dwarfed by the immensity of the spacious sculpture. In the center, thin planks of wood are delicately arranged into a tall, concave column—the wick of the Temple. Some altars have already been constructed—photos of loved ones, notes written in permanent markers of all colors, handwritten letters, and clothing hanging from the beams speak of those who have been lost,

memories to be released, and personal habits to be transformed. A crowd of a few hundred people write on the walls and admire the space. Many are crying. Most are dressed in jackets and hats—covered in lights, fake fur, sequins, and other eye-catching finery, as well as dust. The eerie quiet is amplified by its contrast to the thumping rhythm of the city. As we enter, my friend stops when she sees an old friend of hers—a serendipitous encounter exemplary of what many Burners call “Playa magic.”

I continue in toward the center, taking in the messages and images already arranged on Temple walls. To my right, a man kneels, bows his head toward the central pillar, and ceremoniously cuts off his ponytail with a knife. The fierceness of his focus is palpable in this poignant moment, only softened by the vulnerability of his crouched, humbled body. His friends gather to support him as he struggles to emancipate the last bit. As if on cue, I notice people across the circle are holding hands, their arms outstretched. Without words, hundreds of people are spontaneously arranging themselves into a circle, palm-to-palm. They are backing up to accommodate more people, and I notice a grieving man sitting on the ground with his head down in their path. I go to him, kneel down, and ask him if I can give him a hug. He looks up and embraces me. I gesture to the line of people moving toward him. As we stand up together, we are swept into the enormous circle. Connected, we stand silently in a spontaneous expression of reverence. I am struck by the ways in which this performance is not only shaped by the open circular structure of the Temple and its somber ethos of reflection, but by the Ten Principles themselves. The spontaneous communal ritual in the Temple is a potent demonstration of the radically inclusive, radically expressive, and participatory ethos of Burn culture.

Burns embody Joseph Beuys' (1974, 48) notion of “social sculpture”—an expanded understanding of society itself as a large-scale work of art and “social sculptors” as those creating structures that shape behavior and transform society.⁹ The notion of social sculpture troubles the division between life and art, conceptualizing society itself as a work of art to which everyone contributes as participants, citizens, and artists. In this view, it is our limited understanding of art that keeps us bound by stifling and oppressive social structures. Social sculptures, for Beuys, “mold and shape the world in which we live” (Beuys and Harlan 2004, 9). The chaotic world of Burns, like Beuys' social sculptures, are containers for experimentation with ways of being that provide loose guidelines rather than delineating specific modes of engagement or making a particular statement. The Burn itself is a work of art—an emergent, immersive world co-created in a particular space and time by Burners and their human and nonhuman communities.

As a social sculpture, the format of a Burn guides attendees in subverting mainstream consumer cultural norms by co-creating alternative socialities and economies of value through the Ten Principles, a basic code of conduct or social contract that guides all activities in Black Rock City and at other Burns. While federal and state laws still apply, it is to the Ten Principles that burners hold each other accountable, chastising each other for creating MOOP (Matter Out of Place)—known in default as litter—and

⁹ Fluxus artist of the post-World War II era and cofounder of the German Green Party, Beuys developed his idea of social sculpture as a profoundly ecological conception and perception of art and creativity in the late 1960s and 70s. Beuys himself worked at the intersection of art and ecology, pioneering a variety of sculptures, drawings, performances, lectures, events, and installations that addressed the “primitive wisdom of being” and interconnections between human life and natural ecologies (Adam 2004, 29). He felt it was important for his works, rather than appealing to linear rational thinking, to work on more intuitive, spiritual levels of understanding to undercut the post-Enlightenment separation of science from art and the subsequent devaluing of the natural world as dead matter (Adam 2004, 28).

engaging in ongoing debates on online discussion boards regarding tensions between loud sound camps' rights to radical self-expression and others' need to sleep. If the events themselves function as social sculpture, the Ten Principles function as a social choreographic score that guide the interactions and influence participant experiences at Burning Man, as well as seep into life off-Playa. Importantly, the Ten Principles were defined descriptively rather than prescriptively by co-founder Larry Harvey in 2004 to facilitate the creation of the Burning Man Regional Network (Burning Man, N.D.). In order to create more events with a similar ethos, Harvey defined that ethos so it could be replicated elsewhere. For Harvey, this is a highly political move, as he believed "politics is about how we live together" (Burning Man 2015), and the Ten Principles shape a transnational experiment in living together.

Like other choreographic scores, the Ten Principles guide ways of being and interacting at Burns without defining them exactly. As Harvey explains, "We [at the Borg] don't prescribe content, we design context" (Burning Man 2015). He is wary of turning "what were originally fresh, breathing ideas into dogma that is more restricting," and so composed the Principles and the Burning Man non-profit in such a way as to allow for and encourage self-examination and evaluation as well as organizational flexibility. In dance scholar Randy Martin's (1998, 205) words, the Ten Principles shape the practice of sociality at Burning Man, or "what emerges at the juncture between what is given or structured of a particular historical moment and what is generated through forms of agency." As a choreographic score, the Ten Principles impact social configurations through mobilization, which Martin (1998, 208) defines as "the means through which bodies gather and are assembled and the materialization of identity that is accomplished

in the process.” Like a dance practice, the Ten Principles mobilize burners’ bodies toward a common, emergent vision in ways that affect their perception, their ways of being, and their identities, providing insight into the way in which politics are always already “in motion” at the level of the body and its ongoing, adaptable practices. The social choreographic score of the Ten Principles allows the values of Burn culture to be communicated to and guide the creation of other events without imposing strict limitations or dogmatic scripture on these events.

Burn culture, as articulated through the Ten Principles, prioritizes participation over spectatorship, immediacy/improvisation over predetermination/choreography, and decommodification over commercialism. These values are potently synergistic with the practice of and culture surrounding CI, with which the Principles share a common value system. Camp Contact member and CI teacher René Alvarez sees CI as a form that incorporates and supports the Ten Principles:

The freedom of the form fits perfectly in the mentality of radical self-expression. Other Principles it embodies are radical inclusion, radical self-reliance, participation, and immediacy. Even decommodification is part of Contact Improvisation, because it is the one dance form that is free of branding.¹⁰ Often in the default world it is taught freely as well, because the way many people learn it is through person to person transmission at jams. (quoted in Ver 2014)

While CI works more specifically against the prevailing values of high art modern and classical dance in addition to normalized social hierarchies like gender, Burn culture as

¹⁰ CI is not the only dance form that is not copyrighted, and in many ways CI functions as a brand that is not centrally owned or commodified.

articulated through the Ten Principles is more broadly constructed as an antithesis to mainstream consumer culture. While, as dance scholar Hannah Yohalem (2018, 46) argues, CI emerged and evolved through the 1970s and 80s “as a historically specific theory of group interaction and communication translated into a tactile, physical medium,” in the late 1980s and 90s Burning Man translated similar political values into an emergent community structure. As a dance form, CI rooted in the body “the anarchist political values of mutual aid and individual freedom” (ibid.). As the emergent guiding score of a social sculpture, the Ten Principles rooted similar political values into a resilient, nomadic culture of co-creation.

Within the score of the Ten Principles, individual Burners and the variety of theme camps can make their own choices regarding how to behave, what to create, and how to interact with others. Like the founders of CI, the founders of Burning Man sought to create a framework for experimentation rather than a specific way of moving, being, or being-in-community. CI is based on the question of how two bodies can move in contact with one another while Burn culture explores the question of how people can live and thrive in a non-capitalist, creative community. Both value equality and non-hierarchical organization over rivalrous individualism, evidenced in the Principles of communal effort and radical inclusion, as well as embodiment, evidenced in the Principle of immediacy. Both communities of practice attempt to integrate the values of mutual aid and individual freedom that have come to be understood as inherently mutually exclusive in the wake of Cold War ideology that pitted socialism and democracy against one another. Perhaps these overlapping communities of practice offer insight into how these seemingly paradoxical values can be balanced on the individual and collective levels.

Transformational Dance and Movement at Burns

The transformational potential of Burning Man is immense. The desiccated desert brings us all metaphorically to that stripped down place where spirit can be heard above the din. Listen to your heart. Listen to your body. Quiet your mind. Find your way. – Naked Heart

I park my bicycle, its frame wrapped in solar-powered Christmas lights, near a set of metal racks engulfed in a sea of ornate bikes. The kissing booth on my right, I enter a welcoming structure with a gold flower gong-shaped ornament hanging. This is Anahasana Village.

A welcome board clearly displays the schedules for the week with hand-written edits of new, changed, and canceled offerings. Listed are a series of talks, workshops, and events: Contact Improvisation Fundamentals, Ecstatic Dance, Emot-A-Thon, Speed Therapy, Tantra for Couples. The mix of workshops on movement, sex, decentralization, and non-monogamy offered here represents the diversity of activities, subcultures, and perspectives on Playa. Once I get past the entrance, I am surrounded by seven dome structures – geodesic domes covered by fabric and tarps. Some of these are cooled by swamp coolers, a luxury in this heat, often reaching above 110 degrees Fahrenheit. About thirty-five people bask in the glorious shade, some simply relaxing, others chatting or practicing acro-yoga, others sipping chai tea. A deep bass rhythm from a nearby camp permeates the Village, a common experience on Playa at all times of day. Sounds of “mmm” and “aaah” emanate from participants in one of the nearby workshops.

There is no one “look” here. Most of the people are white, about evenly male and female. Some are topless, both men and women. I see naked butts and superman shirts, flowers tucked into hair and metallic temporary tattoos pressed onto tanned skin. Some wear dreads, braids, extensions, or weaves to keep their hair manageable in the dusty heat. A woman in a gold crown and red tutu talks with a group of people in shorts and desert hats. Most carry goggles hanging around their necks. The wind picks up and rustles the shade structures. Everything is covered with a fine, white dust.

I hear many accents—Eastern European, British, American, German, Australian, South American, and more. “Is this your first time out here?” a young man asks a woman to settle the debate about whether or not the “free laser eye surgery” listed in the WhatWhereWhen is real or a joke. You never really know in this temporary city where wealthy technocrats of Silicon Valley mingle with Portland anarchists. If Elon Musk can bring a Tesla coil to the Playa, surely a surgical laser is also possible.

Emphatic screams and shouts emanate from one dome. “Let your tail bone drop down toward the floor. Mmm... welcome, I’m so glad you’re here. Ahh... Open to receive the welcome” from another. A man asks the young blonde doing yoga if the lunge he is doing is a variation on pigeon. He says, “I think so... it’s really deep but good for the hips.” “If you want to, you can share a hug with your partner. Staying in silence. There’s a sacredness in the silence,” comes from the welcoming dome. I’m suddenly aware that the

Contact Fundamentals workshop I'm going to starts in thirty minutes and my body is feeling stiff, hunched, and tired. Time to warm up.

As a convergence of subcultures, Burns attract a variety of groups, including many movement-based communities of practice. Those most commonly associated with Burns are the electronic dance music community and the flow arts community,¹¹ especially fire spinners, as they are highly visible and publicly featured at Burning Man, as well as most other Burns. Electronic dance music blasts through powerful speakers that reverberate a steady thumping bass across the Playa. Large groups of fire spinners audition and are selected by the Fire Conclave Council to perform in what is called Conclave, a celebratory performance surrounding the Man or regional effigy just before it is burned (Join the Conclave; Fire Conclave). However, there are a variety of other somatic communities of practice present at Burning Man and similar events, such as many styles of yoga, ecstatic dance, and CI.

Gilmore and Van Proyen understand Black Rock City as a landscape of various “educations of desire” accomplished through the experience of creating and traversing the city. While they do not elaborate upon what they mean by “educations of desire,” explaining it is best understood through experience rather than description, I attempt in the following to articulate a component of these interlocking “educations” through a description and analysis of the various movement pedagogies and rituals that take place

¹¹ The Flow Arts Institute (2014) uses the term “flow arts” as a general term to refer to the intersection of a wide variety of movement-based disciplines such as dance, juggling, fire-spinning, and object manipulation: “The broad category Flow Arts includes a variety of pursuits that harmonize skill-based techniques with creative expression to achieve a state of present-moment awareness known as Flow. Common forms of Flow Arts include Poi & Staff spinning, hula hoop (or “hooping”), juggling, sphere manipulation (or “contact juggling”), and fan dance. New props and expressions are emerging all the time as flow artists cross pollinate with martial arts, yoga, circus, belly dance, and beyond.”

in Anahasana Village, a community of theme camps that describes itself as a “campus of Transformation.” The Anahasana Village website claims, “Our constituent camps gift workshops that are immersive, experiential, edgy, somatic, and designed to take you into a direct experience of you.” It is one of the largest and most established villages on Playa, offering over 165 different workshops attended by over 6,000 people in 2017 (Our Village 2018). With Anahasana serving as a snapshot of the larger Burner movement culture, I describe the somatic practices, movement rituals, and dance experiences facilitated at Black Rock City, providing some of the historical background of the village and the practices they teach. Presenting these practices as spiritual, pedagogical, and therapeutic, Anahasana Village highlights movement practices as transformative laboratories of human relating over their aesthetic and artistic applications. As I will explore more in the next section, these practices allow Burners to learn, experiment with, and cultivate perceptual maps and bodily habits in alignment with the Ten Principles. The variety of movement practices, rituals, and ecstatic states-of-being made available to the Burner community are important drivers of Burn culture’s sensuous ecological activist impulse as they provide opportunities to practice attuning to one’s sensations, cultivating empathy, and softening one’s experience of self to be more fluid and inclusive of many others.

CI at Anahasana Village

Friday morning at Center Camp, 2018. As I bike across Playa to Center Camp to join the daily CI jam, I smile and thank the man on a megaphone offering me a Bloody Mary I cannot accept at the moment. I catch a rare view of the purple mountains surrounding the Playa that have been obscured most of the week in the high winds and intense dust

storms. The sun is rising quickly. When I get to Center Camp, a large circular structure with two stages, art displays, informational tables, seating, and a coffee shop, it is fairly crowded with both all-night revelers and early risers. Some are listening to a talk about fungi and insect symbiosis, some are perusing the BRC Weekly newspaper, and others are chatting over a fresh cup of coffee. At the center of the space is a square vinyl dance floor, roughly thirty by thirty feet, under a billowing shade cloth. People are already dancing with quiet, rapt energy when I arrive. One pair, a man and a woman, move slowly with focused attention, carefully climbing on, lifting, and lowering one another, completely absorbed in their dance yet aware enough to shift directions as another pair moves into their path. Maintaining an even pace and steady effort, their limbs entwine into novel configurations. Another pair flashes stylized arm gestures reminiscent of ballroom dance yet move with a similar attention and steady energy as the first. A solo dancer melts into the floor, rolls, and rises pelvis-first into a downward-facing dog pose, his hands and feet firmly rooting downwards as his tail bone stretched upward. A topless woman with a sarong loosely draped around her waist lies over the lap of another woman who massages and rocks her gently. A few people are seated around the dance floor, watching the dancers and talking.

CI has been a regular part of Black Rock City for at least two decades, as well as some regionals since around 2007.¹² In addition to jams, performances, and classes at camps and around Playa, a group of people meet every morning for a CI and acro-yoga jam in the center of Center Camp. The Center Camp jam, now organized by Camp

¹² Duane first brought CI to the regional Playa del Fuego in Delaware in 2007 when he started Camp Contact. It is certainly possible (and probable) that people practiced CI at other regional events before this time, but I have not found evidence to support this.

Contact, has been a Burning Man tradition since Lawrenzo Share started it at his first Burn in 1999 (Ver 2014). Center Camp is one of the primary public meeting spaces of Black Rock City where attendees can get oriented, get information, and buy coffee or tea.¹³ In the open layout of Center Camp, passersby watch CI and acro-yoga, often for the first time. Curious, many strike up conversation with the dancers and learn more about what it is they're doing. As Evan, a long-time Burner and member of Camp Contact, recalled, "We're definitely in the spotlight in the middle of Center Camp... There are all these people around coming up like, 'What the fuck are you doing? What is happening?' And that's kind of neat, explaining it, and to see people are enjoying it even if they don't know what's happening." Some, in the spirit of the Principle of participation, join the jam and seek out more opportunities to dance at or after the Burn. The daily Center Camp jams, then, serve as a contact point between the CI community of practice and other Burners, and can inspire people to take up the practice both at the Burn and even in default.

In 2005, CI dancer, artist, and teacher Karl Frost started the camp that would become Camp Contact (it was called Contact Camp at first) (Ver 2014), and it has served as a central hub of CI and related embodied practices at Burning Man and a selection of other Burns ever since. Darrell Duane—known on Playa as Spacious—took over leadership in 2008 when Karl stepped down. Duane, after he had first been introduced to CI at a Center Camp jam in 2004, had organized his own camp, Camp Contact, at a

¹³ Besides Camp Arctica where people buy ice throughout the week, Center Camp is the only place where commerce is allowed.

regional burn in 2007 to fulfill his desire for CI as part of his Burn experience and had camped with Contact Camp at Burning Man later that year.

Camp Contact's website describes that, as a community "We believe in embodiment as a powerful state of being that allows for health, easeful relationships, and joy. Through the practices of Contact Improvisation, Authentic Relating, Acro Yoga, Ecstatic Dance, Meditation, and more, we seek to live a fuller, deeper life, exploring what it means to be connected with fulfillment." CI is not the only practice of the community, but part of an ecology of practices offered through Camp Contact that teach movement techniques and encourage participants to explore connecting with others. Further, Camp Contact is part of the Anahasana Village which also includes Naked Heart—a camp founded by longtime CI practitioner David Braun that brings CI-inspired activities into workshops on sexuality and sensuality to experiment with and broadcast "new ways of being, relating, and connecting" that "honor and celebrate the feminine" (Naked Heart)—and Decentralization Camp, which hosts a variety of talks and lectures on theories of decentralized economies, power, and modes of governance. Because these three camps are so proximal to one another and share some infrastructure, attendees can experience a variety of workshops and events in one place, ranging from Feldenkrais' Awareness Through Movement, to Polyamory 101, to CI Fundamentals, to a talk on cryptocurrency. The variety of offerings and experimental uses of CI suggests that the community's priority is not CI, per se, but the personal and collective shifts it can engender through the attention it brings to one's bodily sensations and one's connection to others—in other words, the form's spiritual and sensuous ecological activist functions.

In the spirit of the Principles of radical inclusion and radical self-expression, Anahasana Village encourages experimentation with CI as a form. In its past, the Village has hosted naked contact jams, defying the CI community's norms intended to reduce sexual connotations of the practice, and the Eye Contact Jam in which contact is made through the eyes rather than the skin. Longtime Camp Contact member and CI teacher Ronja Ver (2014) praises the experimentation at Camp Contact with CI as it supports Burn culture's exploratory ethos:

Since its beginning as Contact Camp, its participants have explored the edges of the form, and people have asked questions and offered approaches that to a puritan dancer might sound wrong or even scary. Burning Man is a place where people's perceptions are busted wide open, and the same goes with Contact Improvisation. What would be a safer, clearer setting to explore what is edgy, unclear, or not talked about within the form?

Frost sees Burning Man as a place in which it is important to both represent CI as a form and explore its possibilities beyond those accepted by the broader CI community:

We wanted people to get a sense that there is this practice that can be sophisticated kinesthetically even as there are no rules, and that it was not intrinsically sexual or about intimacy. We also felt like if there was any place where we should have permission to bust out of the frame and experiment, the Burning Man was that place. (quoted in Ver 2014)

This experimentation with CI as a form is indicative of Anahasana's view that CI is not only an aesthetic practice or means to develop movement skills but is also a "lens toward human interaction" (Braun, quoted in Ver 2014). As Mel (2018) told her Contact

Fundamentals class of a few dozen students, who were mostly beginners to CI, she looks at CI as a way to approach life: “Bringing [CI’s] approach into everyday life is really special because there is a euphoric sensation of touch. Not necessarily sexual, it can be pleasurable, but it is more of this euphoria of totally being present.” Aligning with Burning Man’s Principles of radical self-expression and immediacy, CI functions as a tool for practitioners to develop not only their movement skills, but to transform their ways of being-in-the-world and being-in-community.

The ethos of experimentation, participation, radical self-expression, and gifting of Burning Man creates the conditions for new people to be exposed to, interested in, and able to practice CI at Burns. Evan, for example, during one of his first times to Black Rock City, first saw CI late one night at a dance party on Playa. “I came across this camp at two in the morning and they had this giant wood dance floor... There were about one hundred people in complete silence doing something that I had never seen in my life, all this weight sharing and lifting and flowing. I thought, ‘what the hell is happening?’ It was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.” Enthralled by the beauty of the scene, he sought out CI experiences in default, joining Camp Contact a few years later.

In a sense, Burning Man includes its own CI festival, which, like the Goa Contact Festival and other CI programming at Forgotten Land discussed in the previous chapter, caters to beginners who first encounter the form at Burning Man (Ver 2014). The accessibility of Anahasana’s offerings reflect the wider Burning Man community’s emphasis on the democratization of art-making (Chen 2012). Subverting the notion of art as something only trained professionals could create, Burning Man instead encourages all

attendees to create and participate in the event as co-creators.¹⁴ CI and Camp Contact's other offerings are enjoyed by people with a variety of interests, skills, and experiences in movement. The purpose is not to present a polished performance or hone the skills of accomplished, experienced dancers, but to expose more people to somatic practices of embodied awareness and performative experimentation through accessible, participatory offerings.

At Anahasana Village, CI serves as the basis for a variety of workshops that blur the boundary between a dance experience and an interpersonal skills laboratory, utilizing basic CI techniques, such as sharing weight with a partner, to foster embodied interpersonal literacy—skill sets that I argue are necessary for the emergence of Chthonic subjectivities. For example, in 2017, I attended a class based on CI called *Humans and Skin* that included partner work in which we practiced communicating how pleasurable our partners' touch was for us. The instructor encouraged us to reflect on our experience of touching our partner—did we want to maximize or minimize our partner's pleasure? Or were we indifferent? This activity attuned us not only to our own experience of touching another or being touched but encouraged us to practice cognizance of their experience of our touch. Likewise, Haraway's *Chthulucene* is characterized by an increased response-ability between beings of all kinds, such that organisms function more as what she terms *holobionts* by sensuously attending to and acting with responsibility for various others, rather than as a singular, autonomous, competitive individuals. Attuning to one's impact on others, such as through the CI-inflected practices utilized in *Humans*

¹⁴ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, 56.2% of attendees reported being inspired to learn or practice art creation skills after Burning Man and 24.8% were inspired to learn or practice performance art skills. The majority of attendees (75.9%) self-identified as an artist or considered themselves to be creative.

and Skin, cultivates self-awareness as well as kinesthetic empathy with others, encouraging a Chthonic experience of interconnection with and response-ability for others and suggesting sensuous ecological activist possibilities of these and similar practices at Burns.

Ecstatic Dance at Burning Man

Monday evening, Anahasana Village, 2018. A group of over one hundred people is gathered on the outdoor, shaded dance floor called the Pinwheel, a rectangle of about nine hundred square feet. This is a large crowd for an event so early in the week. The participants are dressed in a variety of eccentric and subtle adornments. Many wear metallic temporary tattoos across their foreheads, chests, and arms. Some are simply wrapped in chiffon scarves. Others dress in colorful leotards, tight leggings with loud patterns, or bold vests over bare chests. A few people are topless. Most of the participants are white, although many races and ethnicities are represented. While most people speak to each other in English, albeit in a variety of accents, several people chat in Spanish as they settle into the space. The ceremony begins with us gathered in two concentric circles as our facilitator tells us about the cacao, which he had brought from Peru and Bali. He had spent all day preparing the vat of cacao drink, first shredding the large blocks of cacao and simmering them with coconut milk, cayenne, and honey. He explains the “heart-opening” qualities of this subtle plant medicine, and encourages us to spend some time holding, smelling, and “tuning in” to the cacao before we drink it, so we might get the optimal benefit. “The more you put in, the greater your reward,” he tells us. While he had facilitated cacao ceremonies and DJed ecstatic dances separately, this was his first attempt at merging the two. The idea to blend cacao ceremony with

ecstatic dance had come to him a few weeks earlier as he realized the potential compatibility between the heart-opening, transformational effects of the cacao and the similar benefits of ecstatic dance. He encourages us to harness the power of the cacao by contemplating “the memories of past events, relationships, energies, habits, or thoughts that we wanted to release,” which we will focus on during the first part of the dance, and then shift our attention to qualities, experiences, or relationships that we want to cultivate, which we will focus on during the last portion of the dance. Then, it was time to begin.

He and an assistant begin to dish out scoops of the cacao mixture to the eager crowd, many of whom, in the spirit of self-reliance, have brought their own cups. One by one, we approach the vat with our cups to receive the fragrant brown liquid. Returning to the circle, which at this point had lost its integrity as more and more people have joined in, we sit with our cups. Many hold them reverently to their chests, eyes closed, bringing them periodically to their noses and taking in sensuous, indulgent inhales. The cacao smells earthy and bright, almost like a rich botanical garden after a storm, and sends a sensation through my skull and ribs that I can only describe as buzzing electric green. As we connect with this plant medicine, he speaks of the plant’s agency and power, not as a separate, omnipotent force, but as emerging through the symbiosis with our human bodies and intention. When we all have our cups of cacao and are seated, he gives us a few more minutes to smell, hold, and gaze at the cacao and gain clarity of our personal intentions before he instructs us to take small sips, fully tasting and feeling the creamy, subtly spicy, bittersweet liquid. I hold each sip in my mouth, swishing it around or

allowing it to rest on my tongue before swallowing. Small, hard bits of the raw cacao float into my mouth with each sip. Their solid texture feels nourishing and potent as I crush them between my teeth and swallow. I take in sips with my eyes closed. Soothing, airy music begins to play.

The facilitator instructs us to walk around the dance floor, seeing and making brief eye contact with the others present in the space. “Meet someone else’s eyes,” he tells us, “and go to them. Really see them.” We stand, gazing into this stranger’s eyes, until he instructs us to silently thank our partner and begin another walk around the space. We repeat this exercise a few times, simply locking eyes with several others. The drums grow more prominent, a steady rhythm permeating the space. “For now, just move,” the facilitator tells us. The dance floor is packed, forcing most people to stand in place. Some close their eyes, turning their attention inward, while others look at the people around them with wide, bright eyes. Some begin to shake, vibrating their heels into the floor. Some fold over at the hips. Arms spiral into the air with delicate fingers. Shoulders lift and yearn. Spines snake and writhe. As the music gains a bit more speed, the facilitator instructs us to bring to our consciousness the things we want to release. “Shake it off,” he urges us. I begin to fling my arms away from my torso as if flicking water off of my fingers—and then with more vigor as if trying to fling my hands off of my arms. My torso contracts sharply, my hips jutting forward and then back. I churn my spine in the bowl of my pelvis to stir up the deep-seated self-doubt, fear, and heartache it is holding on to and stomp and shake my limbs to release it. Guttural vocalizations escape from my throat. My heart is racing. As the music gets even faster, the facilitator asks us to “really shake

now.” I don’t have any more energy to shake with, I think, but my body is already moving with more vigor. A small group of dancers form a cypher of sorts, undulating their torsos and shaking their limbs with abandon, their faces brightened with big smiles. A few move through the space, playfully dodging spastic limbs. My eyes meet those of a shirtless young man in his late twenties wearing orange, loose fitting pants, resembling the same style I had seen in countless tourist markets throughout India. He moves with a sinuous torso over grounded, resilient knees, maintaining eye contact with me as he twirls his body completely around the axis of our gaze. I join his dance, finding undercurves in my legs with long, earthy strides and a gooey elasticity in my upper body. Another heavy drum beat kicks in. “This is your chance,” the facilitator yells. “Let it out!”

With the next few melodic songs, the facilitator encourages us to “call in” those things we want to cultivate. “It does not matter how ridiculous you think your desires are. Bring them into your body now. Dance them.” Dancers spill out beyond the dance floor onto the bare Playa. With more space to move, some explore quick weight shifts and flowing, dynamic movements with outstretched limbs slicing through the air. A few pairs roll on and lift one another. One dancer shares weight with and pulls at one of the ropes holding the Pinwheel’s shade cloth up, finding a range of possibilities with this anchor. Their bodies are covered in layers of Playa dust of varying thickness revealing the story of the dancers’ dances: thin, greyish-white dustings from simply moving through the dust kicked up into the air by the wind; imprints on the edges of their thighs, butt, or shoulders from brief connections with dusty surfaces; thick coats painted on the bottoms of bare feet. Passersby, attracted by the music, steadily join the open-air dance floor.

In ecstatic dance, a form prevalent at Burning Man and some regional Burns, participants improvise and move however they want without harming or impeding others, and without talking, sometimes with guidance from a facilitator, who encourages them to experiment with new ways of moving while also maintaining an awareness of their sensation. Unlike electronic dance music parties, ecstatic dances are typically substance-free spaces. However, at Burning Man, where an assortment of mind-altering substances is readily available, this tenet is not strictly followed.¹⁵ Still, the focus of the ecstatic dance is on creating a container for each person to explore their own embodiment and connect to others nonverbally rather than socializing. This form guides participants through an improvised exploration and discourages talking on the dance floor. Stephan (2018) has practiced an ecstatic dance form called 5Rhythms¹⁶ for about a decade. He describes, “I like that I can get out of my head. I don’t have to talk, there are no words. I can just be. If I can really drop into that space and the facilitator is good, I am in a structure in which I can just float. The structure is the male energy and the flow is the female and I can actually drop into my female.” For him, 5Rhythms cultivates an embodied, sensual subjectivity that contrasts the structured, task-oriented way of being he typically experiences.

Atticus, an ecstatic dance DJ and Burner, danced competitively as a child and teenager and even served as captain of her high school’s kick line dance team, which

¹⁵ The cacao drink offered at the ecstatic dance described here might be considered a substance, as it is a mild stimulant. The facilitator cautioned participants using certain recreational substances, such as MDMA, not to drink the cacao mixture to avoid adverse substance interactions, but the cacao itself is about as mind-altering as a cup of coffee.

¹⁶ 5Rhythms was created in the late 1980s by the late Gabrielle Roth, a dancer and teacher who lived and worked in New York City. (www.5rhythms.com)

promotes a uniform and precise aesthetic. However, feeling stifled by the pressure to achieve a narrow model of perfection, she stopped dancing. She credits her experiences in ecstatic dance at Burning Man with bringing her back to dance because of the community's emphasis on radical self-expression:

“I didn't dance for many years and it was the darkest period of my life. I felt like I couldn't come back to dance because of the ideal and stigma of the performance world... It was finding ecstatic dance, which, like Burning Man, removes the spectator/performer barrier and invites everyone to co-create equally and celebrate the weirdness as much as the beauty in things. That is what opened me up to dancing again. It satisfies my soul on a whole different level.” (2018)

Dwelling within what she calls a “space of nonjudgement” at Burning Man, Atticus felt empowered and inspired to start dancing again and offering ecstatic dance to her community in default. At Burning Man, dance for her transformed from an aesthetic practice to a spiritual one that allows her to experience interconnection with human and more-than-human others. She describes:

When I'm in that space, I feel like I'm never going to ever be closer to God, Goddess, essence, and truth. It's that purity of play. The no words aspect really soothes me. Words are the finger that points to truth, but it can never be that truth. While dancing at ecstatic dances, I see other people's truth and I feel my truth. It feels like the most real experience ever. I get a high of connecting with everything, seen and unseen. (ibid.)

Movement practices at Burns, such as ecstatic dance and CI, are spiritual, even therapeutic endeavors rather than purely aesthetic ones. In the spirit of radical inclusion,

they are meant for all people regardless of body size, type, or previous experience, and participants often discuss and experience them as potentially transformative experiences. The ethos of these and related practices and their accessibility at Burns speaks to their potential as practices of sensuous ecological activism.

The Ten Principles: A Chthonic Social Choreographic Score

Build Week, August 2017. We arrived at camp around 8 am, having been in line all night. Some of our campmates are sleeping in the rented U-Haul truck. The sun is already blazing as we erect our tents. Tending to a cut I had gotten on my finger from my campmate's razor blade—and the resulting nausea—I crawl into my tent to rest. Within ten minutes I hear movement outside and then, Sarge's voice: "Ok, let's get building so we can have shade before the sun gets too hot!" She's right. What's that saying about the wicked getting no rest? In the spirit of self-reliance, I need to make sure my finger will be protected from playa while we work, so I take a few minutes to clean and bandage it well before sliding on my work gloves and joining the others that have come to help build camp a few days before the event officially starts. This is a close-knit crew and I, as well as a few others, are new. We have mutual friends but don't know each other well. Still, Sarge and the others welcome us in. We will rely on one another to both survive and have a good time out here, which establishes an intimate and convivial atmosphere.

Our camp is directly across the street from a behemoth of a camp, one of those turn-key camps I keep hearing about, made of large circus tents. Forming a wall, the tents block the view to several rows of identical small trailers standing in rows. The main public attraction is a ballroom-type structure, complete with chandeliers, antique furniture, and

elaborate mannequins. Sarge tells me that this camp has been the source of much controversy as it has a reputation for catering to wealthy Burners and hosting private invite-only events. As we build structures out of conduit tubing and shade cloth, erect tents, and hammer rebar into the ground to use as tent stakes, a young woman with a basket comes by, flashing a big smile. “Hi! Do you want iced coffee?” Of course we do. As she hands out small bottles of iced coffee, she tells us to come visit her camp any time—the massive complex right across the street. This small iced coffee, given in a gesture that feels like some combination of a peace-offering and a genuine effort to give to, support, and include the neighbors, is my first Playa-gift.

The value system shared by CI and the Ten Principles is also synergistic with and supportive of nomadic, Chthonic subjectivization as discussed by Haraway and Braidotti. Burn culture’s value system as articulated in the Ten Principles supports the emergence of Chthonic subjectivities without dogmatic interpellation into a fixed identity or predetermined way of being.¹⁷ I argue here that the Ten Principles offer a promising choreographic score for the emergence of Chthonic subjectivization, by which I mean forces of interpellation into ways of being that dissolve the autonomous self-interested individual subject in favor of more fluid, expansive, and relational ways of being that understand themselves to be inherently interconnected with others of all kinds. As Haraway (2016, 2) writes, “Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and

¹⁷ The 2017 Burning Man Census found that the Ten Principles are “Important” or “Very Important” to 78.7% of Burning Man attendees and that 94.3% of attendees believe the Ten Principles are “Important” or “Very Important” to “creating an authentic Burning Man Experience,” suggesting the centrality of the Ten Principles to the Burning Man community.

manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. They are who they are.” As I will show, the Ten Principles “make and unmake” those that practice them, attuning practitioners to cooperative interconnection with various others.

Throughout this discussion, I highlight how the Principles are taught and practiced through the movement activities at Anahasana Village, showing how these movement practices support the embodiment of the Principles and concurrent processes of Chthonic subjectivization. Taken as a whole, I discuss that the Ten Principles as score, treading the middle ground between the individualist ethos of libertarianism and the collectivist orientation of socialism and incorporating environmental ethics and mindfulness practices, provides insight into potential new ways of organizing socialities suited for the Chthulucene that do not obliterate individual responsibility or sovereignty while cultivating response-ability to and for others. First, I discuss what I am calling the Principles of context, including participation, gifting and decommodification as Principles of economic context, and communal effort and civic responsibility as Principles of moral context. These Principles create the conditions for Burns as spaces of resistance against consumer capitalist norms. Then, I discuss Principles of being, which include immediacy, radical self-expression, and radical self-reliance as they relate to the dance and movement forms taught and practiced at Burns and support processes of Chthonic subjectivization. Last, I move to what I call the Principles of relating to the human and nonhuman community: radical inclusion and leave no trace. I discuss the Chthonic possibilities engendered by these Principles and argue that they form a social choreographic score of sensuous ecological activism.

Table 1 Burning Man’s Ten Principles

From (Burning Man, N.D. “Ten Principles”)

Category	Principle	Explanation
Principles of economic context	Participation	Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.
	Gifting	Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.
	Decommodification	In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.
Principles of Moral Context	Communal Effort	Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, of art, and methods of communication support each interaction.
	Civic Responsibility	We value civil society. Community members to organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.

Principles of Being	Radical Self-Expression	Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.
	Radical Self-Reliance	Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise, and rely on his or her inner resources.
	Immediacy	Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and the recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.
Principles of Relating to Human and Nonhuman Community	Radical Inclusion	Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.
	Leaving No Trace	Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

Table 1 continued.

Principles of Context

The economy of Black Rock City primarily runs on the interrelated Principles of participation, gifting and de commodification. Burns are not meant to be consumed by passive observers but actively participated in. They are not created solely by a central organization who books acts, hires vendors, and creates an experience to be consumed by the ticket-holder, as is the case for most festivals. Once an attendee has purchased a ticket, their active participation is their currency. Commercial transactions are limited to the sale of beverages at the Center Camp Café and ice at Camp Arctica. Burners are encouraged to bring items and provide experiences to “gift” to other participants, such that there is no central bandstand or main stage providing entertainment, but a diverse landscape of artworks, experiences, performances, and workshops to meander through. Gifts at Burning Man are not conditional on “a return or an exchange for something of equal value” (10 Principles) but facilitate community connection and interaction between strangers, cultivating a culture of trust, care, and generosity. Burners might teach a dance workshop, give new friends handmade jewelry, provide a carefully curated collection of costume pieces for passersby, set up massage tables and offer bodywork or spa treatments for weary, desiccated bodies, or spin fire for people relaxing in an outdoor lounge watching the sunrise for nothing in return except the experience of the interaction itself. These Principles of economic context reflect a desire on the part of the Borg and the community to allow for people to create and experience their own structures of value outside of capitalism.

Importantly, Burn culture promotes a gifting economy, not a barter system. This non-capitalist ethos of Burns is more suited to Chthonic subjectivization as resources and

energy are freely exchanged between Chthonic networked entities with no expectation of equal return. Haraway notes that unlike the Anthropocene, which is based on the idea of scarce resources that can only be attained through competition with both other humans and nonhuman beings, a gift economy implies a sense of abundance such that materials and goods can be given away without fear of not getting enough. With feminist environmentalist Eileen Crist, Haraway writes against “the managerial, technocratic, market-and-profit besotted, modernizing, and human-exceptionalist business-as-usual commitments of so much Anthropocene discourse” marked by a persistent assumption of scarcity, which she argues “saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds” (2016, 49-50). I argue that acts of gifting practiced at Burning Man support such imaginings of other worlds, not only by parodying and subverting the machinations of consumer capitalism, but by cultivating and practicing dwelling within cultures of generosity and abundance detached from the exploitative profit-motive. With the practice of giving and receiving gifts free from the hypercommodification of default, Burners generate new economies of value based on quality of experience rather than the market.

Principles of moral context—communal effort and civic responsibility—guide the ways in which people form social structures and relate to them as moral creatures. Burning Man culture asks members to cooperatively and collaboratively “produce, promote, and protect” their community and space, and take “responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants,” (10 Principles). Rather than purchasing a ticket to an ideally seamless, pre-planned event where there is a hard divide between organizers and attendees, performers and audience, “Burners” pay “taxes” to the Burning Man Organization (BMO) for the city through the

purchase of their entry ticket that provide basic services (i.e. toilets and streets) and are otherwise responsible for creating and sustaining the city and the countless events and performances that occur within it. Burners ideally hold each other accountable for living according to the 10 Principles and upholding a sense of responsibility for the whole community's well-being. These two Principles encourage community response-ability alongside self-expression, dissensus, and experimentation, so that self-expression is practiced in such a way as to maintain the sovereignty of others and the integrity of the culture and community. The inherent tension between the related Principles of communal effort and civic responsibility—which are more community- and ecology-oriented—and radical self-expression and radical self-reliance—more individually-oriented—provides a balance between the collectivism of socialist ideals and the individualism of libertarian ones. With the Principle of communal effort, Burners make kin with one another by cooperating with, giving to, and accepting one another across their differences. With the Principle of civic responsibility, especially in conjunction with the Principles of relating to the human and nonhuman community discussed below, they develop a sense of response-ability, even kinship, to one another, as well as to the community and the nonhuman environments in which they gather.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interestingly, a relatively recent change in the Burning Man structure might indicate a threat to the ethos of participation at Burning Man itself. After 2011, when the event sold out for the first time in one day (Bruder 2011), the Borg started allocating theme camp group ticket sales, under the condition that the camp makes something available to the public. To facilitate these structures being when the bulk of attendees arrive, theme camp leaders now arrive a week early for “build week,” and are provided special Work Access Passes that allow for early entry into Black Rock City. This extra time allows theme camp attendees to set up their infrastructure but also puts an extra burden on camps and can undermine the ethos of communal effort. When I arrived during build week on Playa in 2017, I drove at five miles per hour around the streets of the city and was surrounded by almost complete nothingness. Center Camp was mostly established, a few personal tents were set up, and large art pieces were half-erected, but what I saw was nothing compared to the colorful and exuberant array of structures that would form by the opening ceremony. I watched people in their boots and hats hammer stakes into the ground, work in groups to build shade structures, climb precarious scaffolding, and even create a giant pink flamingo with the help of a

Resisting the stereotypes of the neoliberal possessive individual subject, these five Principles cultivate non-capitalistic spaces in which Burners experiment with collective forms of leadership and cultivate senses of responsibility for the community, making room for Chthonic possibilities. In a sense, Burns are comprised of a variety of families that are not competing or rivalrous but instead are all included in the larger Burn community.⁵⁵ People are expected to respect one another, the space, and the art and to do no harm. As Mary (2018), a former Camp Contact member and current organizer of another camp, describes, she is compelled at Burning Man to “take care of [her] home.” She appreciates that, while she must work hard to live and play in Black Rock City, she and her campmates work together and become like a family. Instead of relying on relations of consumer capitalism to meet her needs, she found herself turning to her camp and the broader Black Rock City community. Together, they worked hard to build camp. “I saw how wonderful it was that we could be like a tribe, working together, giving what we could give, giving joyfully.” Here, Mary highlights the Principles of participation, gifting, decommodification, communal effort, and civic responsibility as central to her experience at Burns, especially in contrast to other consumer-based festivals.

crane. I helped a neighboring camp set up their kitchen, and I saw the city come into being with the collective labor and active participation of so many. Most others, however, arrived to a fully-constructed city without seeing how it came to be from nothing. This new arrangement resembles the client-guest relations of consumer capitalism, and perhaps alienates some city-dwellers from the labor of constructing and maintaining Black Rock City while making it painfully obvious to others. This can lead to more “spectatorship” or “tourism” as well as an increase in the number of “sparkle ponies”—a term the Burner community uses to refer to people who arrive on Playa without the necessities and expect others to provide for them, usually because they are particularly beautiful and/or entitled.

⁵⁵ All camp members are usually expected to contribute in some way to their camp, and about 2000 Burners at Burning Man alone volunteer for the Borg.

Principle of Relating to the Nonhuman and Human Community

As Principles of relating to the nonhuman and human community, radical inclusion and leaving no trace affect how Burners think about and relate to “others.” Together, these Principles call for a sense of interconnection with and responsibility for one’s human and nonhuman ecology and shape the behaviors and senses of self of Burners toward Chthonic subjectivities. Especially with the Principle of immediacy, these Principles are particularly important drivers of sensuous ecological impulses at Burns. I discuss each in detail here.

With the Principle of radical inclusion, Burning Man organizers forefront the idea that Burns are, ideally, for everyone, with no limits on who can participate based on race, nationality, religion, subcultural affiliation, or political beliefs. The Ten Principles provide a broad score for how people are expected to act and relate to one another, which inscribes loose parameters for who is welcome, paradoxically limiting the inclusivity of the event. Still, the event does not cater to any particular subculture or group of people, nor does it explicitly exclude anyone, and most, once they are at a Burn, seek to make their events and ways of being inclusive. At its core, the Principle of radical inclusion asks Burners to “welcome and respect the stranger” (10 Principles) and serves as a basis for community-building based on difference rather than sameness. As Mel described, being at Burning Man was an opportunity to “welcome all into my heart.” She explains, “[At Burning Man, I am] looking out with the eyes of being on Playa, which means the love and openness of saying hello. Spreading your arms and being friendly. Your heart is your home and it is a nonjudgmental space.” Atticus (2018), a Camp Contact member, explained that Burning Man was attractive to her because “it felt like one of those

‘coexist’ bumper stickers.” For her, it was “incredible and inspiring to see so many flavors of humans...every inch of the spectrum was represented.” United by their shared experience of pilgrimage, their allegiance to the guiding principles, and their dedication to dodging the grips of any singular dogma, Burners forge a cohesive community across difference (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005, 10) welcoming of a variety of identities and ways of being.

A radically inclusive ethos is vital to cultivating Chthonic subjectivities in which the human community is acutely aware of its vulnerability to and enmeshment within nonhuman agents. Haraway (2016, 4) calls for radical inclusion when she urges us to “make oddkin” by acknowledging that “we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles.” With the construction of modernity, the borders of the ideal (i.e. white, heterosexual, male) humanist autonomous subject have been buttressed by the “othering” and exclusion of women in relation to men who are taken as the ideal and the norm, racialized “primitives”—those who do not or are perceived not to subscribe to modern notions of civilized behavior—and sexual deviants—those who differ from the heteronormative model of sexual desire and behavior—along with nonhuman and nonliving “strange strangers” (Morton 2010). In contrast, Haraway argues for a radically inclusive conviction that “we become-with each other or not at all” (2016, 4). With Chthonic subjectivization comes awareness that “all of the players are symbionts to each other, in diverse kinds of relationalities and with varying degrees of openness to attachments and assemblages with other holobionts”

(Haraway 2016, 60).⁵⁶ The subjects of the Chthulucene have no stable boundary between the self and the myriad strange strangers with which they are enmeshed, revealing both their constructed-ness and inherent fluidity. They sensuously experience their enmeshment with others.

There are limits to inclusion at Burns, however. Burning Man is particularly inaccessible for many people. The high entrance fee, large time investment, and amount of travel limits the population of people who attend Burning Man to primarily white, middle- or upper-class, able-bodied, educated people.⁵⁷ While there are efforts to support people with limited mobility to attend and enjoy Burning Man,⁵⁸ the outdoor setting is a significant barrier for people with disabilities. The regional events provide more accessible alternative Burn experiences, but many only offer limited numbers of tickets, and the time, expense, and remote, rugged settings are still a deterrent for many who might otherwise be interested.⁵⁹ As Anna (2018) notes, “I look at [Burning Man] as a big business operation. It’s really expensive for people to come [Black Rock City]. The cost is prohibitive. They buy all of their things from Amazon before and there are these turn-key camps... Even the process of getting a ticket and paying for it creates a financial

⁵⁶ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, 66.7% of Burning Man attendees perceive self and other as partially entwined. Only 3.8% perceive no overlap between self and other and only 3% perceive self and other as almost completely the same. Similarly, in 2017 33.7% of Burning Man attendees reported that they felt “very connected” and 50.8% of attendees reported that they felt “mostly connected” to others at Black Rock City during the event. Further, 53.2% of Burning Man attendees reported that they consider the Burning Man to be a family.

⁵⁷ According to the Burning Man Census, the median income for Burning Man attendees in 2017 was \$60,700 and 27.1% of attendees have a personal annual income of \$100,000 or above. About 58% of attendees identified as male, 77.1% were white, and 73.3% held either a bachelor’s or graduate degree.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Mobility Camp at mobilitycamp.org.

⁵⁹ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, Burning Man attendees reported that their family and friends who are interested in Burning Man but do not attend are primarily prohibited by the cost, their dislike of the dirt, dust, camping, and portable toilets, and the harsh desert weather, as well as the difficulty of getting a ticket and the distance of travel required.

hierarchy that is not inclusive.”⁶⁰ She laments what she sees as a “false sense of openness”:

Frankly, I don’t necessarily see [radical inclusion] here as much as I expected. Even though technically everything is open, there are vibes you can feel when you go into certain camps or certain dances... I’ve been quite disappointed that I’ve seen so much that is not radical inclusion here. I get the vibe that it is not about radical inclusion, they are just trying to not be overtly exclusionary... Did you go out of your way to bring people in who are different than you beyond saying ‘Hi, want a drink?’ but really trying to connect with that person? (ibid.)

Anna’s concerns are supported by the data. The 2017 Burning Man Census found that about 77% of attendees that year were white, and most were college educated.⁶¹ Further, Larry Harvey (quoted in Thrasher 2015) is infamous for saying, “I don’t think black folks like to camp as much as white folks.” Harvey’s overtly racist comment suggests that he believes Burn culture’s whiteness is inevitable and he and the Borg are absolved of responsibility to make Burns more accessible for people of color. In eschewing the call to more actively welcome in people of color to Burn culture, Harvey directly compromises the Principle of radical inclusion. Anna’s concerns and Harvey’s dismissal of Burning Man’s whiteness raise questions about the definition of radical inclusion. Is it enough to avoid explicitly excluding certain people? Or does it require a more active welcoming in?

While the radical inclusivity of Burns themselves, especially Burning Man, is significantly compromised by structural barriers to many folks’ participation, individuals

⁶⁰ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, 66.7% of attendees spent between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to attend Burning Man.

⁶¹ 43.4% of Burning Man attendees in 2017 had a Bachelor of Arts degree and 30.3% had graduate degrees.

and theme camps in the community strive to uphold the Principle through their actions, activities, and offerings at Burns such that they are open and available to all who are interested. At Anahasana Village, radical inclusion is practiced both at the structural level of the camp and its members as well as at the programming level. As noted above, Camp Contact is not strictly a CI camp but, in the spirit of radical inclusion, offers a variety of workshops and programs related to movement and embodiment. For Duane (2018), radical inclusion means he does not exclude people from joining the camp who cannot pay the full amount for dues.⁶² Further, while a few workshops at Anahasana Village require participants to attend with a partner, most are open to include anyone, regardless of skill, experience, or ability.

CI serves as the basis for many of Anahasana's offerings, and, as an improvisational form posed as a question to explore rather than a specific movement style, creates an inclusive movement frame in which most people can participate. As explored in the previous chapter, the specific mode of being-in-relationship cultivated through CI and similar activities encourages the radical inclusion of one's dance partners, both human and nonhuman, into one's subjective experience. Dancing in close contact with another, often times a stranger, a participant in a CI workshop will smell, feel, and engage with their partner such that their bodies are at times experienced as contiguous and cosubstantial—trans-corporeal—rather than separate and entirely autonomous. The movement practices at Anahasana Village, as well as the structure of the camp and its

⁶² Many camps charge their members "camp dues" to cover costs for camp infrastructure, food, and transportation of camp equipment. These vary drastically.

offerings, embodies and provides opportunities to experience and practice the Principle of radical inclusion such that bounded notions of the self are rendered impossible.

In accepting and welcoming “the stranger,” I suggest that the Principle of radical inclusion at Burns extends to both human and nonhuman beings enmeshed within the ecology in which the Burn takes place. As outdoor events that encourage the Principles of leave no trace and immediacy—attention to present sensation—Burns attune attendees to the particular place in which they occur, including the land as a crucial part of the Burn experience. For Black Rock City, the primary being that is necessarily radically included is the dust. While Larry Harvey calls the Black Rock Desert “a space which is so vast and blank that only your initiative can make of it a place” (quoted in Bowditch 2010, 1), the pervasive dust of this prehistoric lakebed defies such a characterization of the desert as blank. There is no escaping this fine alkaline material that will inevitably coat—and sometimes chemically alter—every vehicle, piece of art, and human on Playa. Winds stir up powerful dust storms that cause complete whiteouts that Burners must learn to navigate. The greeting ritual described above is testament to the way in which the dust is necessarily radically included as an agent in the Burning Man experience. Indeed, the dust is both an omnipresent agent of Burning Man and has become a metonym for the Burning Man experience. As one makes their way to Black Rock City, one will inevitably encounter cars with bumper stickers with phrases like “Dust or Bust!” or “In Dust we Trust.”

Further, many Burners experience a deeper connection to the parts of their own bodies normally excluded from their awareness in default, breaking with the late capitalist ideal of a well-manicured, sanitized, and rational individual devoid of, or at

least in control of, their animalistic aspects (Haraway 2007, 11; Taylor and Twine 2014, 9). Their sense of their bodies becomes more inclusive of and vulnerable to the elements as they attune to their exposure to various human and nonhuman others at Burns.

Bowditch (2010, 321) describes that the harsh conditions require participants to “interact in immediate and visceral ways” with each other and their surrounding environment, meaning that survival in the desert necessitates close, sensuous engagement with and attention to the weather and to the community. Dry skin, chapped lips, and irritated noses are common, and it is the only place, as longtime Burner Ash (2017) says, “that it is socially appropriate to ask about your friends’ urine” in order to help assess their hydration status. As Maybel (2018) observes:

People don’t have the repression of the natural composure of the body. We don’t have the usual comforts [at Burning Man]. First, people don’t have the affectation or expectation of being super clean, elegant. It is more, this is your body. You relate with your own pee and poo in a very basic way. The sensation of the body being in the desert, the body gets much more awake in that environment. And then second, the emotional permission that brings into your body. You can be in vulnerable states [at Burning Man].

Mel (2018) describes that her experiences on the Playa, especially being naked and covered in dust, helped her get in touch with her body as “raw dirt,” embodying Haraway’s call for humans to recognize their mutual vulnerability to one another and nonhuman beings (2016, 4). As an outdoor event, the desert ecology is an omnipresent participant and agent in the overall experience of the Burn. Rather than trying to overcome, control, or manipulate the environment to meet human needs, with an

ideology of radical inclusion, participants are primed to experience themselves as inclusive of, rather than separate from, this landscape.

In an effort to avoid harm to the physical ecology, Burning Man culture aims to “leave no trace of our activities,” a common trope of environmental conservation discourse (10 Principles).⁶³ With this Principle comes injunctions in the Survival Guide for Burners to prepare “leave no trace” plans for their camps. For example, Burners are encouraged to bring cardboard to place under their cars to protect the ground from oil leaks. Grey water from camps must be either taken off-site and disposed of or placed on plastic “e-vap ponds” that allow for the water to evaporate (Survival Guide, 2017). While these activities are specific to leaving no trace in Black Rock City, other Burns publish their own guidelines for leaving no trace in their locations. For several weeks after Burning Man, volunteers run a large-scale effort to clean up every remnant of Black Rock City after it is dismantled. They sweep the entire area of the burn to collect MOOP, digging several inches into the dust to retrieve any buried items, no matter how small. All items found are marked on a published “MOOP Map,” and camps are rated according to the amount of MOOP found on-site. A camp’s status on the MOOP Map plays a big role in where, or whether, that camp is placed the following year. At my camp in both 2017 and 2018, we spent several hours on our hands and knees looking for any traces of MOOP, including fabric fibers, small shards of wood, and hair, in an effort to maintain a good status on the MOOP Map. Such efforts intimately acquaint Burners with the Playa and evoke a sense of responsibility for the place in which the Burn occurs.

⁶³ Burning Man itself is touted by the Bureau of Land Management to be the single biggest “leave no trace” event in the world (Lewis 2007).

Over the years, the Borg has changed their procedures and policies to be more in alignment with the Principle of leave no trace. The event changes locations slightly every year so as to not disturb one area too much, and the perimeter of the city's outskirts is marked by a "trash fence" which collects most items that blow away from the city center, so they do not escape into the desert. The Playa floor is protected from burn scarring by fire blankets, and all fires must use them. There is also a bus service that transports people from San Francisco and Reno to the event to decrease the number of cars at the event, as well as to make the event more accessible to those without personal vehicles. Further, in an effort to address the larger-scale environmental impacts of Burning Man, which involve emissions from the thousands of vehicles that transport people and equipment to the Playa as well as from the large fires, an effort called Cooling Man (2016) has recently started offsetting the carbon footprint of certain camps. The Earth Guardians camp, first organized in 1999 and prominently located near Center Camp, hosts a variety of workshops, talks, and events that aim not only to connect Burners to Black Rock City, but to teach about environmental issues like climate change and encourage Burners to consider their connections to and impact on their nonhuman ecologies (Earth Guardians).

For many Burners, learning about and practicing leaving no trace inspires a greater ecological awareness and respect in their default lives. Leave no trace is PM's (2018) favorite principle because he always cared about respecting the environment and has been concerned about climate change for a long time. "All of [the Principles] go beyond the Playa, but Leave no trace is important because of climate change and the impact we have on the world around us... I am trying to reduce my carbon footprint in

default...by really thinking about things like, ‘Do I really need the next version of iPhone?’” he explains. “Seeing people practicing leave no trace on Playa has inspired me to do more.” Mary’s experiences at Burns have inspired her to carry around a bag to collect litter when she goes on walks, doing her best to “leave no trace” by integrating a practice common for many Burners—that of collecting MOOP, even if they did not create it, and bringing it off-Playa to dispose of it. As one sign at Camp Contact reads, “If you see MOOP, it’s your MOOP.” The Principle of civic responsibility also bolsters this ethos of responsibility for Burners’ impacts on the ecology and the places they occupy.

With the Principle of radical inclusion, which encourages connection to and inclusion of the nonhuman in one’s experience and sense of self, leaving no trace as an ideal cultivates processes of Chthonic subjectivization with which subjects experience transcorporeality with their nonhuman environments. Further, these Principles foster a transcendental environmental ethic, explored in chapter two, that understands ecological integrity and human flourishing as interrelated and interdependent, rather than competing, forces. As Haraway writes, “Actual places, these are worlds worth fighting for” (2016, 98). Considering the Black Rock Desert—as well as the physical sites of other burns—as an integral component of the Burn experience, Burners are compelled to maintain its integrity and well-being to ensure the event can continue while doing no harm.⁶⁴ The

⁶⁴ In a presentation at Center Camp during Burning Man, 2018, geographer Kerry Rohrmeier argued that the Black Rock Desert is an integral component of the Burning Man experience, disagreeing with Larry Harvey’s conviction that the future of Burn culture would be in the regional events. With this argument, she highlights the importance of place cultivated through Burn experiences, but undermines the breadth and possibilities of Burn culture as a transformative force in society writ large. In an article responding to the presentation, long-time Burner and anthropological researcher Ash Anderson (2018) argues for Burning Man not as confined to a particular place but an “act of co-creation” that conjures an intimate connection to place is not exclusive to the Black Rock City experience. She argues,

If tomorrow we lost the rights to the desert, and moved the festival to the plains or even to the hills, we would lose the Black Rock City experience, but not Burning Man. We would lose, among other things, the extreme blankness of the canvas on which we create the city, an aspect which is poetic

desert itself is a co-creator of the Burning Man experience and worthy of respect and care, rather than a passive, malleable site for the expression of human will or an exploitable site of violent extraction. Further, these Principles require attunement to the particular place of the Burn, such that each regional event must adapt to the particular needs of the present ecology. Leaving no trace in the desert requires very different protocol than in an Appalachian forest or on the National Mall in DC. The attunement and cultivation of response-ability for the particular ecology of a Burn takes seriously one's enmeshment within and trans-corporeality with one's physical environment.

In Anahasana Village, the ideal of leaving no trace is practiced not only in how people relate to the earth, ecology, and place but also extends into interpersonal relationships. As Duane explains, "We aim to leave people clearer and the earth cleaner than we found them." On the physical level, this means avoiding injury to one's fellow participants in movement workshops, and can also apply to the emotional realm. When Maybel, an experienced Burner, leads workshops, for example, she makes it a point to clear emotional residue that might come up for the participants, especially because her workshops involve intimate interactions between people that may cause discomfort or activate previous traumas. "If you are going through something in my class," she

but not necessary. We would lose the alkaline dust...And we would lose the difficulty of just getting there and surviving, a factor which has probably kept the "tourist" population down, as going to Burning Man is right now a major commitment, and the shared struggle is part of the experience. What would remain is the culture, and this is the ground on which Burning Man is built. It would look different, but the meaning would be the same. The promise of burning is, at its core, the invitation to contribute to the culture that we create by participating in it. The blankness vital to this creation is not environmental but human, a resetting of expectations, a putting on the table of everything as being fair game for questioning and creativity.

With this, Anderson highlights Burn culture, articulated by the Principles, as cultivating intimacy with the particular place in which it is practiced but not defined by or restricted to any particular location. In highlighting Burns' connections to place, I do not intend to romanticize Black Rock Desert as a site of transformation but instead highlight Burn culture's ability to interpellate its community of practice into a nomadic, Chthonic subjectivity entwined with and response-able to place.

explains, “I will try to close it... I have that ethical commitment to people.” She recalls one instance in which a person in her workshop experienced a consent violation and was physically molested by another participant: “I stopped everything and we gave attention to this woman to resolve this problem, so we don’t leave a trace on her emotionally.”

With the Principle of leaving no trace, Burners attune to their cosubstantiality with and mutual effect on their surrounding ecology, including human and nonhuman beings, cultivating response-ability for these various others. Still, it is worth noting that movement practice inevitably leaves traces on those that practice them, calling into question of what kinds of traces are acceptable, and which are not in Burn culture, as well as how the creation of such traces can feasibly be navigated through practices of consent.

Principles of Being: Immediacy, Self-Expression, and Self-Reliance

Immediacy, self-expression, and self-reliance are Principles of Being that affect how people perceive their surroundings, behave, and take care of themselves on Playa. Together, they cultivate Chthonic modes of being that are attuned to present sensation, free from certain disciplining social pressures and limitations on public expression, and, as much as possible, responsible for one’s own well-being. Because these Principles deal directly with the body’s perceptions and performances, they are reflected in the kinds of movement practices and performances present at Burns. For this reason, I discuss each in detail here.

Immediacy, considered “the most important touchstone of value” in Burning Man culture (10 Principles), highlights the importance of embodied experience of and attention to the here and now. Attention to one’s sensorial experience is considered a way to “overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the

reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience” (ibid.). The immediate mode of experience contributes equally to Burns’ playful and sacred qualities. Immediate experience and novelty are the main currencies at Burns, which Erik Davis (2005, 21-24) argues creates a “Cult of Experience” in which value and social status are attached not to financial wealth or material exchange, but to participation, spontaneity, and immediacy. In this “ultimate attention economy” (Davis 2005, 22), Burners navigate an ever-changing landscape of seductive interactive artworks, colorful communities, and awe-inspiring experiences—a world in which default patterns and markers of success no longer function in the same ways.

With the Principle of Immediacy, Burners are encouraged to be present and open to possibilities rather than attached to a particular schedule or series of events. Anna (2018) describes, “For me it means not being as structured and being tapped into what I really need in this moment. Whether it’s that I need to stretch, or I need some quiet time, or I need to be with someone or I need to be alone, to really be in tune with that. Which I never really think about that much in default.” Diane (2018) sees immediacy as a practice that takes time to master:

You’re going to have to live it. So, for me being here was getting back to being outdoors and being able to just look up and not think about what was going to happen next. Seeing a magical moment or a picture of something and not thinking about my job. It’s been so long to not be thinking about my job scratching in the background. That immediacy has been so wonderful for me to tap into.

Experiences of immediacy are rooted in the body and its sensation. Stephan (2018), for example, is able to practice immediacy by “listening to inner voice, heart, whatever you want to call it. The gut feeling.” His comment highlights immediacy as inherently attuned to bodily experience.

Similarly, the beings of Haraway’s Chthulucene are necessarily attuned to immediacy, able to navigate the tangled web of interconnections “as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (2016, 1). When she argues, “staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (ibid.), I read a call for immediacy as an important sensuous mode of perception in the Chthulucene. For her, attention to the present produces “thickness” through time and space. Paradoxically, Chthonic awareness of the present can make present what is absent such that the myriad entangled beings, their interconnections across time and space, and their mutual vulnerabilities are palpable (2016, 36). The present awareness of Chthonic subjectivities fosters connection to the deep time and space of the Chthulucene.

Like the entities of Haraway’s Chthulucene, Burners practice immediacy by attuning to their own sensory experience which brings forth their “thick copresence” with and “response-ability” for others (2016, 4, 33). Indeed, for Stephan, his commitment to immediacy allows him to “listen to what’s needed” by those around him, which helps him “take care of people” in the spirit of civic responsibility, decommodification, and communal effort. He explains, “Having no money here is perfect because it taps into the

idea that we are responsible for each other,” and attention to immediacy allows him to know and help meet the needs of others. Similarly, immediate awareness allows Maybel to respond in the moment to the needs of her students when teaching workshops at Burning Man: “I go into the room and I create the workshop there. It’s fascinating because I have some ideas, but I’m not planning...When people come, I start to create the workshop as I see them, who is showing up, what kind of energy people are bringing.” Immediacy encourages Burners to be open and available to their present sensation, which makes them more able to be response-able to and meet the needs of others.

CI and similar movement practices actively encourage their participants’ immediate awareness. Attention to sensation in these practices is ideally maintained in order to allow bodies to improvise with one another, which, in the absence of predetermined choreography, requires full attention to the moment. As Evan (2018) explains, “planning five seconds out in CI completely pulls you out of the moment.” He describes himself as a “planner” and is challenged by the Principle of immediacy but found that cultivating immediacy through his dance practices first at Burns and then in default has extended into his daily life. “My wife says I’m more present [after developing a dance practice],” he notes. In ecstatic dance, Atticus (2018) practices immediacy, which for her means “saying, doing, and feeling what needs to be done in the moment...Immediacy comes through by allowing movement to organically and non-judgmentally be expressed. It’s a practice, of course.” Similar to Evan, she was initially resistant to the idea of immediacy. “I felt both in awe and inspiration at the burn and had moments of intimidation and trepidation. I was not accustomed to such freedom. Coming from a routine lifestyle [in default], it was hard to just say yes as much as possible.” On

the CI and ecstatic dance floors, as well as in similar movement practices, participants attune to Chthonic “thick co-presence” (Haraway 2016, 4) of their being enmeshed with others, not with the false promise of safety and harmony, but with the awareness necessary to “stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability” (Haraway 2016, 2) with one another as vulnerable beings in a finite, precarious world.

Acknowledging “the unique gifts of the individual,” the Principle of radical self-expression means that participants are encouraged to abide not by external rules and regulations or cultural norms but according to their own desires, whims, and beliefs. Individual and group expression is considered a gift to the community, and the content and specifics of the gift are up to the giver(s). Still, “the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient” (10 Principles), such that gifts are not forced upon a recipient without consent. With the principle of radical self-expression at their base, Burns are sites of self-experimentation and creative expression at a scale not easily found or accepted in default world. This results in many attendees trying new playful modes of expression while on Playa, as well as after the Burn.⁶⁵ Burners will often make jokes, announce useless facts, or express their enthusiasm with passersby using loud megaphones, unafraid to make their presence known and express themselves. As Maybel explains, “You can be weird [at Burning Man]. You don’t need to participate in the social codes of how to walk, how to talk.” She recalls one experience at the Temple when she started to dance, sing, and cry spontaneously: “No one thought I was weird. I was doing my own dance in front of the Temple. It was the morning and felt safe saying hello to the

⁶⁵ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, 60.4% of attendees reported engaging in new playful activities after Burning Man.

sun in that way and I felt so free... That is complete embodiment. I have a thought and I express it through movement in that moment.” Racoon Hands (2018) describes that for him, seeing and practicing radical self-expression at Burns allowed him to be more radically expressive in default:

Seeing people be who they really want to be, not influenced by upbringing, by peers, by society, by culture, by media, whatever is influencing people, allowing them to come out and be who they want to be has allowed me to open up in myself and be in the real world and be like, this is who I am. I’ve openly come out as bisexual and poly⁶⁶ to all of my friends and family because of Burning... I can open up [at Burns] and no one judges me, so it gave me the confidence to do that outside of the events.

In addition to providing an outlet for disallowed desires and emotions while at Burns, the practice of radical self-expression at Burns also allows Burners to be more radically self-expressive while in default.⁶⁷

For many of my interviewees, dance experiences ranging from ecstatic dances to electronic dance music raves to CI jams provide opportunities for radical self-expression. As PM, who has attended workshops at Anahasana for the past three years, explains, “Radical self-expression is the Principle that changed me the most... [Dancing at Camp Contact] has helped me open up my own self-expression in the default world as well.” They report feeling more accepted dancing in unusual ways or fully expressing

⁶⁶ Poly refers to polyamory and other practices of ethical nonmonogamy.

⁶⁷ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, 51.5% of attendees report that they can easily express emotions when they want to at Black Rock City, while only 18.1% report that they can express emotions when they want to while in default.

themselves uniquely because they felt the Burn container offers a space of “nonjudgment.” Duane describes that dancers in CI jams will make animalistic sounds while dancing with less inhibition than he experiences at CI jams in default. Evan notes that he feels invited to dance in ways that many might consider “weird” while at Burns, and this has helped him experiment more when dancing in default. Atticus felt empowered and comfortable in her body in a new way when she decided to confront her fear around being naked in public and danced topless at a sunrise DJ set. “I was really owning it,” she describes. Further, the nonjudgmental ethos of the Burn cultivated through the Principle of radical self-expression allowed her to start dancing again after a long hiatus. When teaching a Contact Fundamentals class at Camp Contact, Mel brought in inspiration from the creative, playful imagery and architecture of Burning Man—work made in the spirit of radical self-expression—to inspire her students’ radical self-expression. “Dance like a disco jellyfish! Be a ballerina ninja!” she coached. She also made it clear to her students that her instructions were suggestions— “Take it or leave it”—and that they were empowered to dance according to their own self-expression.

Self-reliance asks participants to utilize their “inner resources” to thrive in the highly stimulating and chaotic environment of Burning Man, as well as to come prepared to survive in the harsh conditions of the Black Rock Desert (10 Principles). Rather than relying on the availability of food, shelter, and water for purchase, as one would do at a commerce-driven music festival or concert, Burners must take care of their own basic physical needs, bringing in, at the very least, water, food, and shelter. The process of preparing for, getting to, and surviving in Black Rock City necessitates gathering a careful inventory of what one actually needs to survive for the week, cultivating an

intimate connection with these items and the human/nonhuman landscape. First-time Burner Diane (2018) describes calling on her “MacGyver skills” to build camp, like using the impact drill to stake tents down, make-shifting things that needed repair, and using a staple gun to attach the top of a bar: “Helping build things using my hands again has forced me to remember that it is really good to build and use your hands and get into the dirt. It has been a good experience that I didn’t think would show up here.” Providing for oneself, and likely working closely with others in one’s camp to meet group needs, can increase knowledge and appreciation of the labor and objects required to sustain human life and allow the community to thrive in ways disallowed in most middle-class Western consumer lives.

This principle also encourages Burners to be attuned to other, less materially-based needs. As Mary (2018) describes, “self-reliance is much more than being prepared, it is taking care of your body mind and spirit at all times. At all times. So, I always say I have three babies inside me. Body, Mind, Spirit. I want to make sure my babies are taken care of.” Similarly, Stephan (2018) notes that self-reliance is “unavoidable,” and for him most often is practiced in various self-care activities. Paradoxically, self-reliance includes being able to ask the community for help when a participant cannot meet their own needs. As stated on the Camp Contact website, “We are a strong Do-ocracy, practicing Radical Self-reliance. We want you empowered as an individual to do -xyz-, and if you need help with -xyz- there should always be enthused campmate(s) there to help you” (Consent at Camp Contact).

The principle of self-reliance in some ways supports a neoliberal ideology that centers the autonomous, individual subject and enforces individual responsibility. As

Evan (2018) describes, being completely self-reliant, as he usually is, “can lead to more isolation to some degree because you aren’t interacting with others or being as cooperative.” On the surface, the insistence on a responsible individual of radical self-reliance has no place in Haraway’s *Chthulucene*. She insists, “Bounded (or neoliberal) individualism amended by autopoiesis is not good enough figurally or scientifically; it misleads us down deadly paths” (2016, 33). However, the experience of attending a Burn reveals the impossibility of autopoiesis, as the whole social sculpture is an immense community effort. Individuals rarely attend alone or only with their nuclear family but instead usually join camps that function as temporary—sometimes recurrent—families, combining resources and working together to meet the needs of the group. Also, combined with other guiding principles like communal effort and participation, the individual is equally encouraged to connect with others rather than solely forging ahead as a solitary hero. The principle of radical self-reliance also compels the individual to avoid overburdening others with their survival—as the modern consumer does on the environment in an unsustainable, violent, and dominating way. The Principle of radical self-reliance undermines the passive consumer subject who, ideally, moves frictionlessly through the world, their interactions and experiences lubricated by financial transactions. Instead, Burners must create what they want or need themselves—oftentimes with the support of others. The Principle of radical self-reliance, then, as one component of the Ten Principles as score, can support the dismantling of the individual consumer subject and the conjuring of Chthonic subjectivization.

It is important to note, though, that Burners do rely on high amounts of consumption in preparation for Burning Man, indicating that realizing self-reliance and

decommodification within the temporary frame of the Burn is dependent on consumer culture in default. Full and complete self-reliance is never possible nor ideal, as I believe Burning Man and the other examples discussed in this dissertation make apparent. Still, the practice of preparing and producing the means of one's survival requires a close connection to and intimate, sensuous attention to the items and activities largely taken for granted in contemporary everyday life, such as flipping a light switch or preparing a meal, as well as an increased awareness of one's interdependence on their community that can shift behavior, perception, and community relations in default world. Beyond this, the practice of radical self-reliance can empower attendees to attune to their own emotional, spiritual, or collective needs and desires and work to find ways to meet these needs and desires in default rather than wait for societal machinations to do it for them.

In workshops at Anahasana Village, participants are coached to practice “consent culture,”⁶⁸ which is central to the Principle of radical self-reliance, especially when the

⁶⁸ While consent is an integral component of radical self-reliance, especially in terms of respecting one's own boundaries and taking care of oneself in vulnerable contexts, there is also an organized effort to make consent the 11th Principle (see 11thPrincipleConsent.org) as well as some who understand consent as the Zero Principle that makes Burn culture possible. All who enter a Burn consent to exposing themselves to an unpredictable physical environment and experimental culture, and consent is a prominent component of the community's discourse. The 2018 Survival Guide that Burners receive in the mail with their tickets states: “Consent is the cornerstone of a healthy community. It's simple: whether it's a potential sexual encounter, physical touch of any kind, something requiring permission that will radically alter the experience of another person, or involving the recording of someone's image or voice, you are responsible for getting verbal consent before engaging. It is neither ethical nor acceptable to proceed without that person's awareness and clear consent. Period. As the Bureau of Erotic Discourse reminds us: ‘Silence is not consent.’ Black Rock City citizens are encouraged to understand and help others understand the importance of consent.”

While the community still experiences consent violations and sexual assault, there are concerted efforts to increase awareness of consent culture, such as the formation of the Bureau of Erotic Discourse that offers sex positive consent education (Bureau of Erotic Discourse).

Consent offers a discourse and guiding principle for this community in attempting to navigate the middle ground between individual freedom and socialized support for others. Like Yohalem argues of CI, Burn culture proposes a model of democracy based not on consensus but on freedom of choice—in other words, consent (2018, 45). While the prevailing political model of democracy in the US requires consensus, supposedly achieved through the voting process, Burn culture points to another possibility based not on forced consensus through voting which gives the illusion of choice but of true consent that necessarily can

class involves touching, emotional vulnerability, or sexual themes. Instructors are asked to include some discussion about how to give and receive consent at the beginning of each workshop, and often explicitly tell participants to communicate with one another about their needs, desires, and boundaries in the spirit of radical self-reliance. In preparation to teach a workshop in 2018, I received information about the Consent Team who offered support to people in learning and navigating consent culture, as well as the following instructions in an email:

Remind your students that radical self-reliance applies in your class. Here are some ideas on what you might want to say: Take care of yourself, and be aware if/when you need to pause, stop, change partners, ask for more information, ask for support, ask for space, leave. Take care of your physical and emotional safety. You only know when and how much you want to push your edges today. If you don't want to continue an exercise, you don't owe anyone an explanation. Saying No, and taking No for an answer, are important skills, and your clarity with boundaries is of service to your exercise partners, and the teacher. (Razor 2018)

CI and similar activities at Anahasana Village provide potent containers in which to explore radical self-reliance by identifying and communicating one's own boundaries and listening for consent from their partner in the relatively safe container of a workshop, which can help participants negotiate and communicate consent when they leave the dance floor and venture onto Playa, as well as when they re-enter default. Participants at

be both given and revoked. Bridging radical self-reliance and civic responsibility, a democracy based on consent allows for the ideals of mutual aid and individual freedom to co-exist.

Anahasana Village are encouraged to communicate with one another and uphold their own boundaries for interactions with others at movement-based and sexually-themed workshops in the spirit of radical self-reliance.

Staying with the Trouble: Conflicts in Practicing the Principles

Burn culture values both play and the cultivation of novel experiences, which Burners find liberating but also threatening, especially when norms of decorum are troubled. Mary, for example, describes that at her first Burning Man, she experimented with behaviors that she was uncomfortable with. “I lost many things that were precious to me,” she explained. She was particularly “unsettled” by the degree of sexual openness, especially public acts of sadomasochism such as spanking which she finds “repulsive.” Still, with the Principles of radical self-expression and radical inclusion, activities that are readily suppressed or outlawed in default are welcome and encouraged at Burns. Many attend Burns in order to experience new things, which inevitably will result in the pushing the limits of if not obliterating participants’ pre-existing comfort zones. The unofficial eleventh Principle of consent also encourages participants to communicate their boundaries to others and participate in activities according to their desire. Mary, for example, practices radical self-reliance by avoiding camps and events in which overt sadomasochistic activities are likely to occur. Still, traversing the Playa, one can never predict what kind of art or activities they might encounter. Mary notes, “I don’t have to stay [in a place where people are participating in overt sexual activity] but I have to accept that other people like that. Radical inclusion has been difficult. Sometimes it is uncomfortable. But I can see that it is my prejudices that are coming out. They are not doing anything wrong, they are just being themselves.” Such conflicts of interest are

difficult, if not impossible, to resolve while completely upholding the Principles for all parties, suggesting the very real and substantial limits of utopic experimentation in practice. A certain amount of radical acceptance of the other must be practiced along with respect for one's own boundaries of consent in order to maintain the experimental play afforded by the score of the Ten Principles. The combination of Principles encompassing radical inclusion, radical self-expression, and radical self-reliance provide some tools that allow Burners to practice "staying with the trouble" of living within a diverse experimental community and navigating conflict when it arises.

The ideal of radical self-expression also can be the source of conflict, such as when an expression like loud electronic dance music is desired by some but unwanted by others who cannot escape the thumping bass. In the spirit of radical inclusion, it has been difficult to accommodate everyone's needs and self-expressions, resulting in various experiments with city planning and ordinances. Large sound camps are now limited to the center ring of the city, serving as a "downtown" of Black Rock City where DJs play electronic dance music and people dance until the sun is fully risen. A quieter camping area is kept on the outer rings of the city and a certain area is intended as a more family- and kid-friendly to deal with conflicts around sound, for example.

There are also problems with practicing radical inclusion when an individual's behavior conflicts with the frame or desires of others in a particular space. For example, Evan (2018) admits he is not "100% behind this Principle" because there are people he does not want to include in the spaces he helps create, such as those with aggressive interaction styles or people who come to CI jams with sexual intentions. Racoon Hands (2018) explains, "Radical inclusion does not excuse you from being an asshole. I include

you, I accept you, but you're going to do it over there because you're being a prick.”

With the ideology of radical inclusion, participants are encouraged to understand themselves as embedded in a community with people they might not identify with, or with whom they profoundly disagree, as well as with those who are like them. In this temporary heterotopia, all subcultures and individuals are, in theory, welcome, despite apparent contradictions and fissures between the ideologies and practices of certain villages, theme camps, and individuals, which inevitably leads to conflicts.

The attempt to stay with the trouble of the conflicts that arise between and through the Principles, I argue, points to a Chthonic acceptance of the limits of utopian ideals in practice yet maintains a commitment to response-ability for the messiness of “mortal earthlings in thick copresence” (Haraway 2016, 4). The Principles offer a flexible score to guide individual behavior and community decisions with Chthonic awareness of human and nonhuman interconnectedness that is utopic in its vision but practical in its executability. Still, there are real limits to inclusivity. There is an inherent tension between the prerogative to maintain the culture of the Ten Principles, the liminal nature of Burns, and their subversive possibilities, and the Principle of radical inclusion. What happens, for example, if someone sets up a booth and starts selling their artwork, or another dumps a trash can out on one of the streets and leaves it? While people are not often ousted from the community officially for failing to follow the Principles, Burners tend to hold one another accountable, especially through debates on ePlaya. All (who make an honest effort to follow the score established by the Principles) are welcome, and the score is open enough to ideally be possible to follow in countless different ways and cultivate a diverse community.

The Political Potential of The Ten Principles in Default

People come out here, and all their lives they've said to themselves, 'I'd realize my vision, except for circumstance...Otherwise, I'd go for it.' Then they come out here and they see other people who have miracled worlds out of nothing. And they did it through cooperating, collaborating, and creating resources. They go back home and they think... 'I was the only one stopping myself.' – Larry Harvey (1998)

A common topic of conversation both at Burns and on ePlaya is the importance of practicing the Ten Principles both at Burns and in default. A wealth of discussion boards and blogs of the Burning Man community explore how to extend lessons from the Playa and the ethos of Burning Man to life beyond Black Rock City. As Bowditch (2010, 321) concludes, “While Black Rock City is a simulated environment, the conditions are real... Combining survival with play, Burning Man offers new paradigms for community formation, modes of performance and the invention of ritual that seep back into the mainstream.” Understanding the Ten Principles as a social choreographic score highlights the political importance of this community of practice as the score enables the ways of being cultivated in these social sculptures to manifest in default.

Many of my interlocutors highlighted that they were working on bringing the Principles more into their lives in default and described Burns as places in which they both become comfortable with practicing the Principles and gain energy and support from the Burner community that helps them integrate the Principles into their default lives. Mary (2018) explains:

Absolutely the Ten Principles are not just for Burns. Integrate them into your everyday life. They become part of you. You are going to be the most full, whole, complete human being you can be. They are precious... You can be a burner at home. There is more fun, enjoy colors, ride your bicycle, have beautiful lights for your bicycle, can also dress with colors, experiment with new things.

Mary describes that, while the Principles are very easy for her to understand, it is difficult for her to integrate them into her life. "I'm still working on it, and it might take a lifetime," she says with resolve. Her experiences at Burning Man give her an opportunity to express herself with less fear and more openness, such that she can then do more to incorporate the Ten Principles into default because she feels empowered, energized, and supported by the Burn community. Stephan (2018) describes, "I come to Burns because I love connection but talking sometimes gets in the way. At Burns...I can connect with people on different levels... I can bring this energy into my conversations in default." Diane (2018) explains that she hopes her experience at Burning Man will help her reconnect to a "feeling of childhood immediacy and inclusion" while in default. Anna (2018) says that after Burning Man, "I want to continue to be gentle with myself and others and manage the expectations of what I am and what others are." While she believes the Ten Principles are a valuable ethical framework, she is disturbed by how far default culture is from embodying them, explaining, "The fact that we have to remind people about the principles like consent shows how far away we are from what I think basic humanity should be. It's daunting but it's great that there is dialogue happening about it." Racoon Hands (2018) echoes Anna's sentiment when he explains:

I look at the tenets and I go into society and I see where they conflict, and I assess and evaluate what is going on. Is there something wrong with the tenets? Is there something wrong with society? Where is the disconnect and what can I do to help make that better? Because I think the tenets work, I really do. But sometimes they don't always work in the real world and usually that means there is something wrong with the real world. Usually that means there is something wrong with the real world.

He describes that, for him, consent is a priority. In default, he organizes consent meetings to educate people about what consent is and how to negotiate and communicate consent with others, as well as establishes consent committees for regional Burn events. Mel seeks to bring “the eyes of the Playa” to her everyday life: “I want to be connected with and spend my days practicing looking out with the eyes of love, and the idea that my heart is my home. The practice of welcoming anyone into my home.” As the score of the Ten Principles is practiced at Burns, the Principles shape the bodies and perceptual maps of the attendees to be carried into the world beyond the Burning Man network, affecting not only their immediate default communities but the mainstream society in which they are enmeshed.⁶⁹

Conclusion: Sensuous Ecological Activism in Burn Culture

Burning Man and other Burns, following their own modes of organizing and fostering a unique, diverse heterotopia based on the Ten Principles as a social

⁶⁹ According to the 2017 Burning Man Census, decommodification, immediacy, and radical self-expression are the most difficult Principles to practice in default while radical self-reliance, civic responsibility, and communal effort are the least difficult to practice in default. Further, the most frequently practiced Principles in default are reported to be radical self-reliance, leave no trace, and radical inclusion, while the least practiced are decommodification, communal effort, and participation. Most attendees (64.2%) report that they attempt to incorporate any of the Ten Principles into their workplaces in default.

choreographic score, are sites of dissensus—which is, for philosopher Jacques Rancière (2010, 38) true art and politics in which a “gap in the sensible” is manifest—in relation to default. They create a break in normalized regimes of the sensible and allow for experimentation within their frame. As voluntary (and temporary) exiles, burners flee their default lives to sojourn to and co-create a temporary world (ideally) free from many of the oppressive, repressive, and discriminatory rules of engagement that have become habitual, normalized, and widespread under consumer capitalism. Burners are nomadic pilgrims, open for transformation and shaped by their other-worldly experiences on Playa. As Maybel describes, Burning Man is a place where “a collective gets together to explore other kinds of existence.” Paradoxically, Burners’ dissensus creates a new but temporary consensus within the space and time of the Burn, articulated in part by the Ten Principles. By Rancière’s (2010) theoretical account, dissensus is necessarily fleeting, as it will always resolve back into consensus, only to erupt again. He writes, “democracy implies a practice of dissensus, one that it keeps re-opening and that the practice of ruling relentlessly plugs” (54). Yet the ephemeral nature of Burns allows them to exist as sites of dissensus for their duration and recur annually, each incarnation an opportunity for revision. However, even as Burns are temporary, Burn culture endures in the subjectivities, bodies, and lives of those involved, and therefore can function as a vehicle for social change in default. I identify a sensuous ecological activist impulse in Burn culture because, in the frame of a Burn, participants are encouraged through the Ten Principles to practice more attuned, response-able ways of being. They experience self-creation and interconnection with human and non- or more-than-human others, disrupting human exceptionalism and the individual consumer subject’s presumed separation of the

human and nonhuman. Further, the social choreographic score of Burns is reminiscent of that seen in the communal camps organized in public spaces in the transnational Occupy movement in the early 2010s (Biddle 2014) posing opposition to the influence of money over politics (among other interrelated issues) and the Standing Rock resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (Van Proyen 2014). The skills and modes of awareness needed to build and sustain diverse communities of response-ability prove to be politically indispensable in the efforts to not only resist the oppressive, destructive forces of the Anthropocene but to foster more just, sustainable assemblages of the Chthulucene.

As opposed to a political protest, which usually expresses indignation at or objects to a perceived injustice or destructive policy, Black Rock City creates a liminal space separated from default with the necessary critical distance for burners to reflect on their own preconceptions and social habituation. Within this space of gifting and decommodification, Burners experiment with ways of being and practice more attuned modes of being-in-community, functioning as sensuous ecological activism. Even if the transformation that occurs at Burning Man is short-lived, the very practice and experience of dwelling outside of one's norm opens space for the creation of more just, sustainable, and equitable socialities. Out of this temporary experience of chosen exile, a more permanent sense of nomadic possibility can emerge, such that even in default burners are compelled to more playfully, experimentally, and ethically engage with, participate in, and shape themselves and their home communities. This experience, I have shown, can transform their perception of the world and themselves, as well as their behavior away from passive consumerism and toward as-yet-to-be-determined, utopian, and nomadic alternatives.

Conclusion: Sensuous Ecological Activism in the 21st Century

Resipiscence

Originally: repentance for misconduct; recognition of one's past misdeeds or errors.

Later also: the action or fact of coming to one's senses, or of returning to a more acceptable opinion. (Oxford Living Dictionaries)

As I was writing the prospectus for this dissertation, the United States was in the middle of the divisive 2016 presidential campaign that not only pitted the candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump against each other, but also endorsed the rise of white nationalism, xenophobia, climate change denial, and sexual harassment, among other unsavory impulses. We knew that in the short term, the results of this election would determine the fate of an activist effort working to protect Standing Rock, a significant sacred site for the Sioux in South Dakota slated to be disrupted by a proposed Dakota Access pipeline, threatening potable water in the region and First Nations' sovereignty. When the results came in, we knew the fact of the next presidency legitimized racist, isolationist, and nationalist rhetoric, and threatened the safety of women, immigrants, people of color, and the environment. It was no surprise when the administration promised to withdraw from the Paris Accords, or decimated the Clean Air Act. We knew

climate change was not going away, and that the new administration would not do much to ameliorate the causes of climate change—that it would likely set climate change policy back. We knew that climate change would continue, and worsen, causing all sorts of displacements, water shortages, violences, agricultural collapse, ecological devastation.

His appointment rocked me, and I considered leaving graduate school or using my dissertation year funding to go to Standing Rock and either write about that activist effort or abandon academia all together and join whatever resistance I could. I knew the election meant we were entering an even more potent time of fear-mongering, attempts to divide us, anxious attempts to bolster human exceptionalism and its corollary, American exceptionalism. I knew there was a growing array of things to fear, but the differences present in our human and nonhuman communities were not part of them.

While the results of the 2016 election created a heightened sense of danger among progressive circles, communities of color, immigrant communities, and women, the threats that its resultant administration poses are not new. They are rather more potent versions of processes, discourses, and violent tendencies that have been underway for a long time. This presidency itself is part of a wave of isolationism, xenophobia, and violence sweeping the globe, with the concomitant rise to power of leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in India, Great Britain's exit from the European Union, and the increased boldness of governments in attempts to control constituents' ways of being.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I proposed that sensuous ecological activism disrupts the self-interested subject of late capitalism. When I think of the ideal capitalist subject in 2018, I often think of a jet-setting business executive heading a

branch of a networked transnational corporation bouncing across the globe from one Hilton Hotel to another. Distanced physically from the earthly processes that sustain him, he is separated from nonhuman beings and elements in highly controlled office buildings. His sense of security comes from his financial status. His wealth is increasingly beholden to a virtual economy and less connected to material, earthly value and resources.

Ironically, as he “ascends” the corporate ladder, he is more and more removed from the resources he needs to survive, increasing his existential anxiety and maintaining his injunction to accumulate and consume. Sensuous ecological activism reveals that this figure, like other beings of the earth, is actually vulnerable, injurable, and ultimately dependent on the material processes and resources he exploits in the pursuit of profit.

Here, I want to address a corollary effect of sensuous ecological activism. These practices and performances also disrupt ideologies of nationalism, isolationism, and human exceptionalism by fostering Chthonic—earthly, interconnected, and fluid, rather than nationalist—structures of belonging. Such isolationist and nationalist agendas reflect a doubling down of sorts on “us vs. them” paradigms of many kinds—mainly along boundaries of race, nation, and species. In October of 2018, Trump explained his allegiances at a rally in Houston, Texas: “A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly, not caring about our country so much. And you know what? We can’t have that... You know what I am? I’m a nationalist, okay? I’m a nationalist” (qtd. in Cummings 2018). Since the term “globalist” is used derisively in the white nationalist community to refer to Jewish people (Milbank 2018), Trump’s statement also thinly veils overt white supremacist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic sentiments. With this comment, he pits the nation’s interests against global ones in discriminatory and environmentally

combative language, disregarding their interconnectivity and demonstrating a competitive, self-interested nationalist perspective.

While neoliberal ideology promotes the free trade of capital across borders, superseding the state as a structure of belonging, it is in ways counterbalanced by efforts to shore up national borders in order to maintain the power of the state. With the experience of increased mobility comes growing anxiety about the location and boundaries of the self. At the same time as we are seeing hypermobilization and flexibilization of the financial realm and economic systems, of capital, we see a shoring up of national boundaries and borders of the self. Further, the nationalist and isolationist discourses of the current uprising of right-wing politics not only threaten the lives and well-being of people of color, women, queer folk, and ethnic “others,” but also demonstrates unrelenting allegiance to paradigms of human exceptionalism, which is especially evident in climate change denial. If Trump’s “globalist” is more concerned with global interests than national ones, his “nationalist” works for (white) nationalist interests at the expense of global ones—and climate change is as global of a concern as they come. It is in the administration’s interest to ignore the global condition of climate change and suppress discourse about it as it is exacerbated by myopic nationalist efforts to increase the state’s wealth through the private⁷⁰ domains of unchecked industrialism and enterprise. It is also disturbing that Trump’s appropriation of the term “globalist” affirms anti-Semitism and climate change denial while uniting a diversity of prejudices

⁷⁰ The line between public and private enterprise is ostensibly mangled as government responsibilities are increasingly privatized under neoliberalism (Brown 2016) and corporate interests exert increasing degrees of influence over the election of officials and policy with the granting of corporate personhood after *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* in 2010.

under a broad right-wing white nationalist agenda. We are urgently in need of new paradigms of self, belonging, and responsibility if we are to survive the threats posed by climate change and ecological collapse.

Considering these issues in the aftermath of the power grab of an isolationist, nationalist, populist, climate change-denying President, I began to develop the theory of sensuousness as ecological activism presented here. It grew, expanded, and took shape throughout the first two years of Trump's term as I became increasingly convinced that these urgent times called for profound shifts not only in policy, but in how we conceive of and experience ourselves as selves. While isolationist and nationalist discourses and neoliberal ideologies are based on the idea of autonomous human subjects, separated from one another and the earth, collected into national structures of belonging, competing with one another for scarce resources as individual, self-interested enterprises, we have other options. Just as the idea of "nations" constructs lines of separation on an inherently interconnected earth and then treats them as though they are natural fact, the humanist sense of individually bounded human subjects constructs lines of separation between what are actually interdependent entities, not only with one another but with the earth and wide variety of co-inhabitant species. As sensuous ecological activism cultivates Chthonic, earthly structures of belonging rooted in place, they work against national imaginaries and cultivate Chthonic paradigms of self as interconnected with and response-able to human and nonhuman others rather than primarily to one's nation.

I am of the mind that the keys to creating such paradigm shifts are rooted in our relationships to our bodies, which mirror relationships to earth. Both body and earth have been denounced in the history of Christianity, Enlightenment-era Western philosophy,

and colonialism as comprising the lower feminine realm of materiality in relation to the higher masculine realm of soul, intellect, and whiteness—even as not everyone in Western cultures subscribe to these ideologies. I believe both body and earth must be prioritized, their wisdoms and knowledges attended to and cultivated, their interconnectedness understood and explored, in order to bring about large-scale cultural shifts toward sustainability and environmental justice.

We have inherited a legacy of rational immaterialism. We have inherited philosophical and religious legacies of bias against the body; a long history of denying the body and its wisdom, its sensations and pleasures as worthy of consideration. Some call this a masculinist stance. I'd like to get beyond the gender-based terminology here as I believe that people of all gender identities are affected by these legacies and people of all genders will be a part of transforming them. Without denying the gendered aspects of such legacies, I would like to explore this instead as a conflict between immaterialism and materialism. Our economic system is becoming more and more immaterial, more difficult to track, less able to provide resources where they are needed as more and more profit is captured by fewer and fewer people and is less and less connected to real earthly resources and value. We are living more and more of our lives on virtual platforms, which hold promise as connecting and empowering forces if used wisely. We can now impose our will across great distances at the speed of light via fiberoptic cables and satellites. We participate in cultures and are influenced by cultural information all over the world. Yet, we remain fleshy, vulnerable, earthly, and entangled bodies and selves.

Donna Haraway's notion of the Chthulucene provided my theory of sensuous ecological activism with a philosophical ground, one rooted in the earth's materiality and

its entangled beings and processes and committed to their ongoingness. Exploring what it could mean to cultivate Chthonic subjectivities and considering how they conceive of themselves in relation to others, Haraway is clear that the Chthonic ones are attuned to materiality—their own and that of others—such that they experience and know their inherent interconnectivity with others. When I read her call for us to “become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response” (2016, 1) to the many diverse creatures in our entangled ecosystems, I am convinced that bodily practice holds important insights into how we can collectively go about cultivating such response-abilities—how we might undergo processes of resipiscence, of coming again to one’s senses. While this term carries a moralistic tone, I want to shift focus from resipiscence as repentance for one’s wrongdoings and more so highlight the sensuous implications of resipiscence. Resipiscence: attuning, again and again, to one’s present sensation; coming again, or for the first time, to a sensuously-engaged mode of being.

I wrote this dissertation to articulate examples of movement performances and practices of resipiscence that are functioning to help us come again to our senses, to give us the opportunity to learn those ways of being, those modes of perception, those somatic modes of attention, capable of revising our structures of intimacy and expanding our sense of self to include the myriad creatures of our worlds. Together, the four case studies of Darpana’s *The Dammed*, Dance Exchange’s *How to Lose a Mountain*, Forgotten Land in Arambol, Goa, and Burn Culture elucidate possibilities for how sensuous movement performance and practice can contribute to processes of Chthonic subjectivization and the concomitant paradigm shift. They point to the importance of cultural formations that take seriously our materiality and embodiment. They demonstrate four imbricated modes of

sensuous ecological activism—vulnerability, interconnection, sensitization, and radical inclusion. Further, they are but four examples of a global ecology of movement-based performance and practice that hold potential as sensuous ecological activism. Coming from India and the US, these case studies elucidate one thread of many entangled transnational relationships in this increasingly globalizing and interconnected world. Many other examples of sensuous ecological activism include Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephen’s Love-Art Laboratory’s eco-sexual artistic work that cultivates loving, intimate, and erotic relationships between the human and nonhuman; Eiko Otake and Takashi Koma’s Butoh-inspired other-worldly choreographies that embed the human dancer in nonhuman ecologies; or Anna Halprin’s *Still Dance* and other nature performances outside and with nonhuman elements. These sensuous performances and practices function as activism, especially in the early 21st century, because they disrupt bounded, individualistic, and possessive notions of the human self and cultivate more sensuously attuned, interconnected, response-able ones. They help prepare people to form and dwell within worlds of multispecies justice, ongoingness, response-ability, and sustainability.

Humans have not always lived as *homo economicus*. Cultures have cycled in and out of more symbiotic, interconnected relations with the earth and its processes in order to survive and thrive. In earlier times and at many places, humans’ survival dependent on being able to navigate and cultivate nonhuman ecologies without destroying them—and of course one must only look to the example of Easter Island to know that even ancient humans have drastically changed and destroyed many of the places they have inhabited over the millennia. As David Abram (1996) describes, past generations of humans living in direct contact with the earth, its critters, and its processes were more able to “read”

their environment through their senses because their survival depended on it. They cultivated deeply attuned, sensuous awarenesses imbricated with intellectual analysis, intuition, and planning. Many of us today have neglected these eco-literacy skills, as they no longer seem pressing or as relevant to our survival. Ecological literacies come from honing our instincts, attuning our senses, and allowing them to guide us in our conceptualizations of self in relation to the earth and in our actions toward one another, and they can be cultivated.

When I speak of resipisense as a reclaiming or returning, a coming again, I am not intending to return us to an edenic past, as Haraway (2016, 1) would say. I am not nostalgic for a romanticized harmonious past that never was. What I mean is that we inherently have capabilities of response, of sensuous engagement. They are not far from us, deep in our morphology and our perceptual capabilities. But sensuousness is not well-practiced or encouraged by our culture of competitive othering, self-interested enterprise, and passive consumerism. The machinations of neoliberal capital are invested in keeping us desensitized, shocked and awed (Klein 2007), in fear of the other. They work by keeping us numb, dissatisfied, inclined to buy more without considering the sources of consequences of our consumption and production. I am not trying to return us to a simpler time. I am asking that we come again to our senses in order to survive and thrive within the possibilities and perils of the volatile present.

At the Goa Contact Festival, a young man organized an informal presentation and discussion on “self-organizing systems” that hold promise for finding more just, sustainable alternatives to hierarchical forms of social structures and argued for CI as an embodied self-organizing system. Similarly, I am arguing here that performances and

practices of sensuous ecological activism prepare our bodily perception, intellectual conceptual structures, and experiences of self-with-others to create and dwell within self-organizing systems that might offer us more sustainable and just ways of being. In a way, this proposal is the antithesis of Adam Smith's invisible hand: by attuning to our own sensation and experience with others, rather than merely our rational self-interest, we are more able to support the flourishing of the many present and distant others with whom we are entangled and to whom we are response-able and responsible. With more sensuously attuned modes of thinking and being, we are able to act not out of individual, rational self-interest but out of mutual aid, recognizing and heeding the many entanglements that make us possible.

Sensuous ecological activism are performances that bring their audience's attention to real injustices and devastation that they are implicated in but that are often invisibilized to them. Sensuous ecological activism occurs within communities of practice that are forging Chthonic ways of perceiving, being, and relating that can help us create and dwell within more sustainable, just worlds. These activism help prepare us for other ways of being as they are manifesting those ways of being. As they make more Chthonic ways of being possible, they are creating Chthonic worlds. These practices prepare us to be within self-organizing systems by cultivating Chthonic cultures, ways of being, modes of perception that are more sensuously attuned to our world and with one another; Chthonic subjectivities that perceive more interconnections, less boundaries, perceive more webs, more entangled tendrils, less walls, less borders, more viscous membranes and morphic fields that hold and connect us. They dwell within the fascia, the connective tissue that implicates beings of all kinds in an ethic of mutual aid. The

practices and performances discussed here revise our structures of intimacy, expand them to include many diverse others. At the same time, they make us more response-able to the beings in our immediate surroundings, those that are present. Paradoxically, by attuning to present others, we connect as well to many distant others—future and disparate others separated in time and space are made present through attunement to our own sensation and our connections to those immediately present.

This research makes clear the importance of the body as a political agent, especially now in this time of advanced technology, in which we can more easily than ever communicate in real-time with someone halfway around the world without much thought of our body or using our body and its movements. This limited sensory experience imparts illusory evidence to bolster the myth that humans will be able to overcome the limitations of their fleshy bodies. By participating in sensuous ecological activism, we experience ourselves as vulnerable, interconnected, sensitized, and radically inclusive beings. We become more aware of our fleshy selves as response-able beings. We cultivate empathic ways of being, loving, and being in community, producing and consuming. Tuning in to our embodied wisdom rather than disregarding it. As Ann Cooper Albright writes, we are implicated in surviving this dance together. Coming again to our senses, we will be more able to love, live, and move Chthonically as entangled beings of the Chthulucene.

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