

First published in 2019 by art.earth Books in Liquidscapes ISBN 978-0-9957196-7-5 available at <https://artdotearth.org/shop/bookshop/>



*le deasghnátha* / DON  
CHUARDACH NAOFA SEO

In this scared search:  
Lough Foyle as cormorant  
and barnacle.

Beatrice Jarvis





I stand, my lower legs submerged in the ice-cold Atlantic.  
A cormorant stands close.  
His feet solid on the rock.  
I wish to stand beside him.  
He dries his wings in the dawn air.  
My clothes sodden.  
**A wave arrives.**  
I am caught.  
Alone and together now with breath and wave  
A shock and pure joy  
Here I am  
**I am here.**





**This sacred search.**

*This paper delicately stomps and marches through the wilds of Donegal, barefoot from mountain to shore line, from water to rock. Singing with seal and questioning fluidity, authenticity and the senses stimulated by the Atlantic air. Here, in this walk, this paper, lies my search for the return to the fluid self. A cascade through deep nettles, nestled in heather past the roaming sheep, this watery way, this collection of cells, falls towards to the ocean seeking home.*

This research process is seeking to explore what Deborah Bird Rose refers to an 'emplaced ecological self' that is permeable where, 'place penetrates the body, and the body slips into place' (2002: 312).<sup>1</sup> This fluid intermingling of landscape and self is a delightful dance and the question this paper poses is how can such a dance allow us through a process of experiential learning encounter ourselves and place in deeper and more authentic manner.

This reflection is of a particular journey I make several times a year to PortKill in Donegal where St Columba left Ireland on his way to Iona. There is no path, no route, just a deep muddy bumbling scramble down a steep face, a descent rather treacherous. The water awaits, cool, clear and crisp. The Lion's Mane jellyfish all congregate here when the water warms in May, sometimes a seal sits and sleeps as the tides ebbs and flows, but mostly, one arrives to this place alone. For some years I feared the descent, observing the water from dizzying heights, unsure how to partake in the scene,

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<sup>1</sup> East, A. (2018), 'Home imagined: Uncovering a sensuous history of people and place through ecosomatic improvisation', *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 145–68, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.145\_1

then one June, I decided to fall. Tumbling down, clutching, grasping, I wondered how this journey to the water could become something more scared to my year, monitoring the passing of time, sensing shifts and nuances in the landscape, this slope became my guide, leading to the water's edge.

My entire practice is seeking to explore the possibility of somatic practice to generate a process through which I can articulate the specific natures, narratives and sensations of the landscapes which I traverse. The real question; one familiar with all disciplines remains constant:

**How do I embody and articulate my experience of time and space; of water and of being close to, surrounded by, immersed within water. How can my movement practice share, expand and explore the experiences I share with water, that water has with land?**

This form of somatic practice does not always have tangible outcomes; as East asks: "What does this kind of somatic research contribute towards the world of knowledge? Can we seek to understand habitation of previous others to a place through our own experience and imaginings? Eco-somatic research lies somewhere amongst this quiet action and contemplative stillness."<sup>2</sup>

There is a need for stillness in this ever faster world; the need to tread very slowly; I stand in the water, closer to the source, this scared search will be constant. As I stand, I feel the nettles which have stung my legs, my heart is beating fast from the descent, my hair has thick brambles in. I exhale, and jump in. The water is ice cold, it takes me quickly, breath short, held, that queer shiver of ice which engulfs. For a moment I cannot swim, or move. I see on a rock close to the shores edge, a cormorant is also still, he or she looks out to the horizon, unflinching, a fixed meditation. Clumsily, with all my strength, gathering in my core, I swim to his rock and scramble beside him. In this cold state, I too, watch.

Dance to me is a form of learning; of knowing and of deep listening. This is very much on a personal level and when this is applied with a more socially conscious stance and this process of deep listening is applied to a wider cultural context; as Fraleigh explores: "Dancing can be employed as a language promoting change in the Anthropocene."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> East, A. (2018), 'Home imagined: Uncovering a sensuous history of people and place through ecosomatic improvisation', *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 145–68, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.145\_1

<sup>3</sup> Fraleigh, S (2018) Performing ecologies in a world in crisis. In *Choreographic Practices*. (2018) Issue 9. Volume 1. 10.1386/chor.9.1.3\_2 Intellect Ltd Editorial.

Fraleigh explores somatic work as a regenerative practice<sup>4</sup> and explores: “Ways of moving that stimulate an experience of ‘being part of’, ‘being among rather than being at the centre.’<sup>5</sup> Her work can be seen as key as she describes somatic learning as: “the two-way process of co-creation, ‘inter-learning’ and mutual influence that goes on constantly – how I affect my environment and how it affects me as we adapt to, calibrate with and learn from one another.<sup>6</sup> This process of exchange and learning is central to my creation of eco-somatic ritual performance.

I am still on the rock, my skin pimples, the process of seeking to *establish oneself*<sup>7</sup>, to root myself to this place and allow the sensations present to become my anchor.

Through my habitation, working and workshoping in particular landscapes of Innishowen Peninsula in Donegal; I seek to explore the idea that it is indeed: ‘possible to move beyond something called ecological or sustainable performance to a consciousness of regenerative performance. Through exploring my relationship with water in the landscape; I am also exploring and expanding my relationship to place. This means aspiring not simply to leave things in as good a condition as we find them, but to create the conditions in which they can begin to revive, regenerate and thrive.<sup>8</sup> I use the process of making films and workshops in these particular landscapes as mechanism to develop an ecologically aware dance practice which supports, nurtures and enriches a sense of place.

In her seminal chapter *Ritual is everything*, Chappelle asks us to question: “How can we learn from the Salmon?”<sup>9</sup> Taking specific parts of an ecological system and tracing how their habits and routes can expand and deepen our understanding of a particular landscape or place and eventually that of ourselves. The cormorant and I are sat still, beside one another. Unflinching observation of this blue line before us, where sea meets sky, sky meets sea, endless exchange of particles in this glorious circle.

Throughout my research process I have pondered upon the notion of what it truly means to connect with ourselves and with landscape. I often feel “without discipline,” very disciplined in what I am doing but without a discipline in which I feel this work truly sits. It was through a very detailed literature review of deep Ecology I feel I have almost found a home. Chappelle explores: “If we are truly to reconnect with the land, we need to change our preconceptions and approach more than our location. As long we limit ourselves to rationality and its limited sense of practicality we will be

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<sup>4</sup>Reeve, S. (2018), ‘On the way to regenerative choreography’, *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 75–80, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.75\_1

<sup>5</sup>Reeve, S. (2018), ‘On the way to regenerative choreography’, *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 75–80, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.75\_1

<sup>6</sup>Reeve, S. (2018), ‘On the way to regenerative choreography’, *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 75–80, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.75\_1

<sup>7</sup>This refers to a term used in McHose, C and Frank, K (2006) *How Life Moves*. Explorations in meaning and body awareness. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P15

<sup>8</sup>Reeve, S. (2018), ‘On the way to regenerative choreography’, *Choreographic Practices*, 9:1, pp. 75–80, doi: 10.1386/chor.9.1.75\_1

<sup>9</sup>LaChapell, D *Ritual is Essential* in Drengrson, A & Inoue, Y (1995) *The Deep Ecology Movement*. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P222

disconnected from the deep ecology of our place.”<sup>10</sup> As Heidegger explains: ‘Dwelling is not primarily inhabiting but taking care of and creating the space within which something comes into its own and flourishes.’ It takes both time and ritual for real dwelling.”<sup>11</sup>

***Light of sun***

***Radiance of Moon***

***Splendor of Fire***

***Speed of Lightning***

***Depth of sea***

***Stability of earth***

***Firmness of rock***<sup>12</sup>

***This search for the possibility of deep peace.***

**I return to standing still in the bog.**

**My feet buried deep into the earth.**

**Sodden, damp, entrenched, entwined.**

**I am listening to the sound of distant waves**

**Roaring**

**Softly.**

LaChapelle explores: “Ritual is the focused way in which we both experience and express respect.

Ritual is essential because it is truly the pattern that connects. ... Ritual provides us a tool for learning to think logically analogically and ecologically as we move toward a sustainable culture.”<sup>13</sup>

In my long distance walks close to PortKill, circling the water, slow improvisations of the sensations, exploration of movements and delving’s in to the depths of defining the somatic I have feel that ritual is a term best to describe my action; again LaChapelle explores how ritual provides a space for the mover that is: “Neither opposing nature, nor trying to be in communion with nature, but of finding ourselves within nature, and that is the key to a sustainable culture.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> LaChapelle. D Ritual is Essential in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P224

<sup>11</sup> LaChapelle. D Ritual is Essential in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P224

<sup>12</sup> Words from the Breastplate of St Patrick.

<sup>13</sup> LaChapelle. D Ritual is Essential in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P225

<sup>14</sup> LaChapelle. D Ritual is Essential in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P222





## Defining ritual through the language of Deep Ecology

I wonder when I am thinking so closely of the Atlantic water, where terminology and language sit in relation to such experiential practice.; Devall most clearly articulate in our search for a meaning to our actions through the tongue of Deep Ecology:

‘It can potentially satisfy all our yearnings; faith and trust in our most basic intuitions; courage to take direct action; joyous confidence to dance with sensuous harmonies discovered through spontaneous and playful dialog with the rhythms of our bodies, the rhythms of flowing water, changes in the weather and seasons, and the overall processes of life on earth.’<sup>15</sup>

Gary Snyder calls this practice ; “the real work” the work of really looking at ourselves and becoming more real.<sup>16</sup>

As he most aptly states:

**stay together**

**learn the flowers**

**go light<sup>17</sup>**

Let us consider this term; **Learn the flowers..** For a moment, the term can become learn the shore, learn the waves, learn the seals, learn the cormorant, this process of deep listening to place, of allowing all of your senses to become so finely attuned to the weather of a place that you in turn become truly emerged and submerged. I equate this to a strong summary of the deep investigation of self in landscape which can be linked to the explorations of the self in the Eastern Taoist study. Taoism tells us there is a way of unfolding which is inherent in all things.<sup>18</sup> The poem; Recovering our Roots in the Tao Te Ching further develops this;

**And see**

**Now all things rise**

**To flourish and return**

**Each creature coming home**

**To recover its roots.<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>15</sup> Devall, B., & Sessions, George. (1985). *Deep ecology*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith. P 7

<sup>16</sup> Devall, B., & Sessions, George. (1985). *Deep ecology*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith. P 7

<sup>17</sup> Snyder. G. For the Children (<http://moralground.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/GarySnyder.pdf>)

<sup>18</sup> Devall, B., & Sessions, George. (1985). *Deep ecology*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith. P 11

<sup>19</sup> From Devall, B., & Sessions, George. (1985). *Deep ecology*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith. P 14



To give a wider context to the term deep ecology: David Rothenberg describes the term as a way of transforming society; exploring how in order to do this we first need to transform ourselves. Arne Ness also describes the ecological self as: “that with which this person identifies. This key sentence emphasis here is that rather than definition about the self-shifts the burden of clarification from the term self to that of identification.”<sup>20</sup>

The term deep ecology within my practice is a searching, a need for belonging and a quest for a home within landscape. A seeking to connect deeply with the ground under my feet and to feel the soil between my toes; as Rothenberg explores: “We feel estrangement from the Earth because we have imposed complication upon the complexity of nature.”<sup>21</sup>

If one takes to the notion of realisation and expansion of the self seriously it involves considering more and more of nature and one’s environment as an essential part of one’s identity.<sup>22</sup>

By looking towards ecosomatic practice we can transform ourselves and our relationship to environment and be more aware of the multiple narratives which coexist in the texture of place:

This work can be seen a ritual pilgrim; a journey of transformation which was a personal ritual and process to overcome the grief of losing my close friend to suicide. In some ways this all began in the process of running away; from turning to landscape in search of answers and healing. The moment of descent down the steep mountain to meet the water, to cleanse, to power, to learn, to feel. Akin to Buddhist practice exploring transformation of suffering into healing and relating this to the principles of deep ecology; sensing **nothing can be changed and everything can be done**. There is a strong optimism and enquiry within my work exploring the concept of healing earth and self through practice.

Linda Bauer; In her key article: Body and Earth as One<sup>23</sup> explores how somatic practice seeks to explore and embody the whole person; physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Somatic practice is traditionally defined as; “The body experienced from within.”<sup>24</sup> She goes on to explore significance of adding ‘eco’ to the term: “begins to include an organisms relationship with its environment. Somatic practice in its many forms actively encourages a sense of attentiveness; a

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<sup>20</sup>Naess. A (1987) Self Realisation; An Ecological Approach to Being in the World. The Trumpeter. USA (pp35-42) P 35.

<sup>21</sup> Rothenberg. D. A Platform of Deep Ecology in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P160

<sup>22</sup> Rothenberg. D. A Platform of Deep Ecology in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P164

<sup>23</sup> Bauer. L ( 2008) Body and Earth as One. Conscious Dancer ( 2008 Spring edition) Accessed on line: <http://susanbauer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Ecosomatics-CONSCIOUS-DANCER-8-9.pdf> ( April 2018)

<sup>24</sup> Bauer. L ( 2008) Body and Earth as One. Conscious Dancer ( 2008 Spring edition) Accessed on line: <http://susanbauer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Ecosomatics-CONSCIOUS-DANCER-8-9.pdf> ( April 2018)

process of gradual attunement to the self and environment to allow for deeper sense of presence which seeks to have a positive effect on overall well-being and daily experience of time and space. I feel somatic practice really allows me to question; **what is it to experience being me, being human?**

Bauer also suggests that on going and sustained somatic practice can; “begin a process of self-enquiry and learning that empowers us to a more ongoing sustainable self-care.”<sup>25</sup> This fused to with concepts of Deep Ecology can therefore allow us to: ‘reawaken to our interconnection with nature in a profound and personal way.’<sup>26</sup>

Stepping away from dance in its most conventional form of repetitive routines; avoiding learning “step”; avoiding studios and seeking to generate movement material in the heightened state of the ecological self all form a seminal part my own journey.

This process of seeking and acknowledging a closer relationship to landscape, through process is one which Paul Shepard aptly explores in relations to the concept of boundaries;

“ Ecological thinking requires a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a ponds surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self-ennobled and extended rather than threatened as part of a landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves.”<sup>27</sup> The skin submerged in the cold water, the seaweed which brushes my torso, the swell of the wave which covers my head, all a process of the duet of the body and landscape, how close can they be. I hold my head under a wave and open my eyes, a blurry world, clear almost somehow, unknown but welcoming, to be quite at home here, under the sea’s surface.

Naess further points to the significance of Deep ecology as a platform to: “ask why and how where others do not.”<sup>28</sup> This process of asking deeper questions to ourselves and landscape as one in order to maximise self-realisation to improve a more active sense of collective being and responsibility. Bauer furthers supports this idea exploring; “Embodied presence can potentially support a more ecologically conscious perspective.” Olson, (Body and Earth 2002) also suggests; “Our bodies know so much. It is our job to listen. We are part of, not separate from the earth we inhabit. Our bones

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<sup>25</sup> Bauer. L ( 2008) Body and Earth as One. Conscious Dancer ( 2008 Spring edition) Accessed on line: <http://susanbauer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Ecosomatics-CONSCIOUS-DANCER-8-9.pdf> ( April 2018)

<sup>26</sup> Bauer. L ( 2008) Body and Earth as One. Conscious Dancer ( 2008 Spring edition) Accessed on line: <http://susanbauer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Ecosomatics-CONSCIOUS-DANCER-8-9.pdf> ( April 2018)

<sup>27</sup> Shepard. P ( 1969) p2 In Devall. B. The Ecological Self in Drengson. A & Inoue . Y ( 1995) The Deep Ecology Movement. North Atlantic Books. Berkeley, California. P102

<sup>28</sup> Devall, B., & Sessions, George. (1985). *Deep ecology*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith. P 65

and breath, and blood are minerals, air and water around us. Not separate but the same”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this pilgrimage, this ritual has no outcome, perhaps it only remains in my bones, but there now a knowing, a feeling quite unlike anything else I have ever known.

What do we learn when we attempt to pause. To stand, subsumed in the wild waters, unknowing, waiting, porous and receptive. Here is where we are and here is where we begin.

### **Exchanging words and feathers: Knowing the Body | Knowing the Land**

In terms of detailing the specific nuances and scores of my practice, I am keen to remain slightly aloof in the sense that it is a very personal, haptic and evolving process. To explore broadly; my practice seeks to generate a direct sensory perception of surroundings learning to reengage through specific movement rituals which allow for emphasis of the mutual connectedness of body to earth. I am in some ways fusing meditative Movement and awareness of proprioception.

As Steinman explores: “Becoming conscious of our structure, becoming conscious of our movement habits and bringing them to our attention of the conscious mind allows us to have the opportunity to change our patterning.”<sup>30</sup>

Studying with choreographer; Laurie Booth; I am fortunate to exploring his development of a “new” movement form: Primal Modern Movement; in which we make a detailed exploration of connection of Fascia and our bodies ability to self-heal and self-learn, leading improvisations with Deborah Hay’s question in mind: what do these cells hold? My practice also draws great strength from my studies of Yoga and the principles of self-study. In various schools of Hinduism, Svadhyaya is a Niyama (virtuous observance) connoting introspection and “study of self”..<sup>31</sup> The word itself is made up of *Sva*, meaning *own, self*, or the *human soul*, and *Adhyaya*, meaning *lesson, lecture, or reading*, and can imply the practice of studying scriptures, as well as a practice of studying the Self.

Steinman explores: “There is a certain humbleness that comes with working with one’s own body. Every day one must start anew.”<sup>32</sup> Drawing from my understanding of proprioception and the remarks made by Olson who states: “That one’s life is informed from and by one’s own literal body, the gain being that movement or action is home.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bauer. L ( 2008) Body and Earth as One. ConciouS Dancer ( 2008 Spring edition) Accessed on line: <http://susanbauer.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Ecosomatics-CONSCIOUS-DANCER-8-9.pdf> ( April 2018)

<sup>30</sup> Steinman. L (1986) The Knowing Body: The Artist as Storyteller in Contemporary Performance. North Atlantic Books. California. P19

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ekhartyoga.com/articles/the-niyamas-svadhyaya-or-self-study>

<sup>32</sup> Steinman. L (1986) The Knowing Body: The Artist as Storyteller in Contemporary Performance. North Atlantic Books. California. P24

<sup>33</sup> Steinman. L (1986) The Knowing Body: The Artist as Storyteller in Contemporary Performance. North Atlantic Books. California. P12

**How to become wave.**

**I watch the cormorant dry his wings.**

**The expanse of feather**

**The wind breathes.**

**I return to breath.**


Duncan explores in her seminal essay, *The Dance of the Future*: “The movement of free animals and birds always remains in correspondence to their nature, the necessities and wants of nature and its correspondence to Earth nature. The movements of a beetle correspond to its form... Even so the movements of the human body must correspond to its form. The dances of no two persons should be alike.”<sup>34</sup>

In this watery haven, removed from the complexity of urban chaos, I return to the shore. The coarse sands clings to skin on my damp feet and legs, the evening is coming and chill shares the air now. The seal who has been sleeping this whole time, shifts his weight, he pours himself over on to his side, a rough tumbling, again and again along the shore line until he meets a wave. On meeting the wave, he too enters the sea, slowly with no sense of exaggeration or caution, as though meeting a dear friend. I cease my shivering, watching in awe as the blue line again changes its hue.

The ascent up the steep bank seems to be without cause for comment, a necessary endeavour for such learning, to scramble, to fall, to learn.



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An aerial photograph of a turbulent sea. The water is a deep, dark blue, with a large, irregular area of white foam and churning water in the center and right side. The foam appears as bright, intricate patterns against the darker water. The overall scene is dynamic and powerful, capturing the raw energy of the ocean.

To question only lightly.  
To return to the sensation of the hand on the heart,  
the sun on the chest,  
the wind the hair,  
the seal swimming beside,  
and the boots which fell in the sea  
after falling over.







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