

Écosomatiques, gestes et communautés

24 septembre 2024 au Centre National de la Danse de Pantin

10h à 13h : • **Écosomatiques et communautés** : Quels gestes écosomatiques créent ou interrogent des communautés, durables ou éphémères ? Quelles pratiques du collectif et de l'émancipation et quels liens avec d'autres savoirs (soin, pédagogies, écologies sociale, mentale et environnementale, activismes) transforment les manières de faire communauté ?

14h à 17h : • **Écosomatiques et situations** : Que font les écosomatiques à la « situation » ? Comment appréhender les transformations sociales, écologiques, post-coloniales, interspécifiques, de soin, de genres, de sexualités sur les territoires à partir d'expériences somatiques de pensées-pratiques et créations situées ?

10 AM: Roundtable Discussion "Ecosomatics and Communities"

With the association LOBA (Paris), Karen Barbour (NZ/Aotearoa), Vicky Hunter (England), Laetitia Angot (Paris).

How have ecosomatics contributed to and continued to **create a collective**? What does the ecosomatic gesture establish when it creates and simultaneously questions communities (whether lasting or ephemeral)? How can we relate the collective experiences of somatic practices over the last 10 years? Moreover, what other collective practices, coming from different fields (care, pedagogy, social work, activism) and emancipatory practices, are transforming the ways of creating ecosomatic communities?

Faced with the urgencies of our present, we gather this morning around **ecosomatic practices as spaces of invention and support for new collective and solidaristic dynamics**. Ecosomatic processes, in our view, open up experiences that modulate, question, and transform our **ways of inhabiting the world**, starting from **the foundations of our sensing bodies**. These modulations, both subtle and radical, simultaneously affect the core of our sensations and emotions, **our human and more-than-human connections**, and their social and political dimensions. In a time when violence and power inequalities are intensifying exponentially, we are interested in the diverse ways of creating collectives, stemming from the intersection of knowledge of gesture and sensing with other knowledge engaged

in struggles. What happens in these encounters? How are the tools of dialogue forged, in each context, when we strive to embrace our singularities, our vulnerabilities, our differences? **How can our practices contribute to restoring our power of expression, with a focus on equality and reciprocity?**

Our practices aim to break down barriers in spaces (physical, social, and symbolic), **making the visible and invisible boundaries that fragment our living environments porous and mobile.** They primarily seek to support processes of individual and collective subjectivation, processes that are both subversive and hospitable, and that **reengage our commitments to the world(s).** These experiences of communalizing sensitive knowledge, which are conveyed through practices of movement—sometimes danced, sometimes “somatic,” sometimes functional (gestures of care, gardening, relationships...)—challenge modern divisions. They help to bring forth or reconfigure communities of thought, practice, and life, whether lasting or ephemeral. They often do so by relying on the existence of previously communalized spaces, networks of commons or their remnants, and they align with various movements resisting the destructive and homogenizing powers of capitalism. By blending bodily and sensory knowledge with other forms of knowledge, such as those of struggles and the commons, the multiplicity of practices that we label as ecosomatic manage to **revitalize and deepen the experience of a being-together that is always yet to come,** which sustains them.

From the question of the connections between gesture work, inhabiting, and collective becoming, and from the richness of the local contexts and practices of the researcher-practitioners invited to this meeting, we wish to reflect together on the specificity of these processes, the tools they mobilize, and what they invent. Together, let's **revisit what connects somatic and dance practices to their ecosophical potentials**—those of the numerous struggles that attempt to think territories and communities together, individual and collective subjectivities, biodiversities, and the multiple forms of micro-politics. To do so, we share with you some questions and avenues for discussion that can support our exchanges:

-**Under what conditions can these practices engage us,** involve us in our relationships with others, and make us sensitive to a multitude of modes of existence, even those most foreign to ourselves, including the most vulnerable among us?

-How, in each situation, do we **seize the critical and poetic powers at work to create the conditions of hospitality, listening, and welcome** that we need for new commons to emerge?

-What are the **specificities of somatic attentions** that enable us to weave dialogues

with knowledge from the field of care, emancipatory pedagogies, or other cultural, ecological, and political anchors?

-Where do we find **our allies?** What are the territories and fields of knowledge **where our ecosomatic arrangements find their grounding?** What enables the circulation of knowledge and the transformation of practices in each context?

-How do we **make space for our singularities, within the communities** we become, as well as in the **narratives we create about these processes?**

Note:

We use the term "ecosomatics" and "ecosomatic gestures" to designate several things:

-A set of practices that engage the body in a sensitive way, that is, considering the body and its movements from the perspective of perceptual activity, and therefore, in its exchanges with the environment; practices often referred to as "gentle," such as relaxation, meditation, etc. These practices are important resources for dancers but are also mostly known in the wellness and personal development sectors, under the influence of neoliberalism.

-On our side, we use these terms beyond these practices, to question the bodily and sensory dimension that ties our bodily experience with our experience of the world, including, and especially, in its social, political, and ecological dimensions. Thus, in the term "ecosomatics," we include the practice of movement, and particularly dance, as a vector of our actions in the world, especially the relationships between the constraints that hinder us and the actions we take, which affect both our bodily experience and our capacity to act in our environments. It is therefore an expression that seeks to include, rather than separate, the dimensions of art, care, and agency.

We are the new commons and we must bring our colleagues across the disciplines together into our local places to be present.

Initial ideas and wonderings: Ecosomatics and Collectives

In the context of the environmental crises of the Anthropocene, our collectives are of the 'more-than-human world, and if we are to pursue ecosomatics – ecological somatics - we must be fully engaged in thinking beyond the human species and smaller ecosystems, to thinking about the ecology of the earth. Given our human predisposition to obsess on our human concerns and to pay scant attention to the rest of the more-than-human world within which we are small but destructive part, we need a significant paradigm shift. We are not only facing localised environmental crisis – loss of biodiversity, species extinction, increasing fires and droughts and more frequent extreme weather events – but global climate crisis, global temperature warming and sea level rise.

For me, the question of what I might be able to do, in some small way, as a dance artist and researcher, is pressing. It is past the time to just make dances about environmental concerns and it is past the time to talk about how our somatic attention affords us potential to connect with the world around us. I've done these things and it is no longer enough. It is the time to be activating for change, both by continuing with the long-term educational and research aims, and importantly, to engage in any immediate ways we might have accessible to us to act. For me, somatic dance and site specific dance and place responsive dance are valuable in the long-term. However, we need to be willingly transdisciplinary in our work and to engage with colleagues in other disciplines in order to seek ways to engage more immediately.

One project for me is in considering how we respond to environmental change – climate change – through thinking with the ideas of 'action competence'. In the USA, in the area of Mississippi and Louisiana where I was based in the summer of 2022, however, the need simply for rehabilitating young peoples' relationships to their local places around was brought to my attention, following the pandemic. Somatic dance and site-specific performance became one means to do this. In Aotearoa, in 2022 we initiated the first undergraduate degree called the Bachelor of Climate Change, and the reality of the climate anxiety many young people experience became apparent. Somatic movement became a means to discuss these experiences and encourage practices of wellbeing. With my dance students in Aotearoa, somatic dance, site-specific and place-responsive dance are part of the learning, but in the context of young dancers general post-pandemic anxiety and social disconnectedness, somatic dance learning as a process of seeding action competence through movement may be enabled.

What has become evident to me is the significance of the role that ecosomatic dance may play in developing and affirming relationships with local places as we move beyond/learn to live with the pandemic, and in contributing to growing

awareness of environmental changes and wider climate change. This work may be even more significant in places in the world in which populations have been both more affected by the pandemic in terms of their engagement with local environments and in which environmental issues are less acknowledged in the public consciousness.

This leads me more strongly into considering how we work internationally as colleagues to expand embodied action in our communities – opening ourselves to the multiple and nuanced perspectives that arise in diverse places – and providing support for each other. As a dance researcher and educator, I am so much more concerned about environmental activism through movement activities, and so much less concerned about particular dance techniques and stage performance. I acknowledge that I really feel the juxtaposition of what I perceive to be important and what my young undergraduate students seem to want when they choose to add a Minor in Dance within their first degree. I am wondering if I can be courageous enough to transform my own teaching, and to lead a change in Theatre Studies and Dance, even within my School of Arts as a whole. Because I want what I do to matter much more than the mark a young person achieves for a dance assignment.

That juxtaposition has me wondering where I do from here. All paths seem to lead me away from what I have been doing in the university and into something else, something with more reach, with more teeth, that can be more open hearted and embodied, while also grasping for the kind of change I want to see in myself, in my family and those closest around me, in our communities and our institutions and in our nations.

I can share that I wish to write, ideally collaboratively, a kind of ‘guidebook’ on living creatively in the Anthropocene. Also, I can’t do this while constrained in the neoliberal university, and while I see the need for leadership in this time in the arts, I am not satisfied with where I am as the context to enable change. Institutions mostly serve to constrain, but they also enable these kinds of crucial meetings. Institutions create visible and invisible boundaries on us individually and collectively, and they circumscribe the power we can enact. To seize the critical and poetic powers of our work in ecosomatics and to create the conditions of hospitality, listening, and welcome, we need to meet in genuine community and collectivity, self-defined, inclusive and accessible. And we need to meet in places in which we can be present with the more-than-human world. There are no untouched, natural places in the Anthropocene – we humans have impacted everything and everywhere – visibly and invisibly. So we have to seek and connect with the more-than-human world even in our cities, to make space for other kin, to sense the weather and the passage of time, hear the birds and observe the insect activities.

What we have to share through the practices of somatic attention fostered in our embodiment - bracketing an experience, rehabilitating our relationship with a planet in crisis, engaging in agential cuts, creating cartographies of what we are becoming, being present in the more-than-human world, experiencing the flowing live present – these are our methods of research and our methods of pedagogical change...

We have practices and methods to share. We have knowledge that arises from these practices and methods. We have creative artistic ways to represent our knowledge. What will we do with this? On what scale? With whom? With what impact?

Relevant literature:

Kretz, L. (2013). Hope in Environmental Philosophy. *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* 26, 925–944 DOI 10.1007/s10806-012-9425-8

“limited presence of hope in ecological philosophy, and outline reasons why environmental hopelessness is a threat” (Kretz, 2013, p. 925)

“Hope, on my account, is substantive, motivates action, can be taught, is catchy, has a multitude of beneficial outcomes, empowers, and is epistemically and socially responsive. Moreover it is a self-fulfilling prophecy given the causally efficacious enabling function of hope when, through placing oneself in a state of hope, one begins a process that brings to realization desired states of the world. The future is shaped, in part, by our current attitudes, methods of framing, and attendant actions. Hope bridges the gulf between the beliefs and actions of today and possibilities for tomorrow. If positive moral action is the goal, hope is a vital concept for underwriting ecological philosophy and inspiring positive ecological action. As such, hope is a practice requiring considerably more attention” (Kretz, 2013, p. 926)

Very limited twentieth century considerations of hope in philosophy, but “In the wider cultural milieu, popular literature has engaged with the pragmatic importance of the role of hope within the ecological movement” (Kretz, 2013, p. 927).

“In spite ample evidence that negative human impacts are destroying the ecological systems that underwrite the possibility for life as we recognize and value it, little progress has been made toward sustainable solutions...”

“... Hopelessness, at times like these, is a profound threat...” (Kretz, 2013, p. 928).

Kretz advocates “for an account of hope that is substantive, is psychologically informed, induces positive action, enhances agency, is responsive, is socially supported and is proactively pursued” “... ecological hopes, in the positive sense, pertain to a desire for the flourishing of diverse life forms (human and more-than-human) and the complex ecological systems that support them. Additionally, I take moral ecological action to be motivated by a desire to respect, protect, care for, and generally not oppress non-human others” (Kretz, 2013, p. 929).

“The virtue of radical hope that Lear points to is “basically the hope for revival: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible” (Lear 2006, 95 in Thompson 2010, 49). Radical hope, says Thompson, “is against despair, even in the face of a well-justified despair. It is the idea that an inadequate grasp of the good should not lead one to believe it is not to be hoped for” (2010, 49)” (Kretz, 2013, p. 931).

Learnings and wonderings:

Dance, Anticolonialism and Place-Based Praxis: Activist Approaches October 2022 Vancouver, Canada, Dance Studies Association.

What was this experience for me? An opportunity to hold space for others, to uplift the voices of those connected through place-based praxis and anticolonialism, at a Dance conference, with an unexpected additional provocation to break open the colonialist sentiments that were circulating apace in the conference. I was able listen and to hold space for tears, introductions, stories, shame, anger and confusions. What came forth from us all was influenced by the conference context and grounded by real stories of people's relationships to place – conflicted and honoured, settled and unsettled. It was perhaps, an unsettling and beyond the opening of space we imagined we might create. If our intention was to

“investigate what it means to politicize the situation of emplaced dance practice in different sites around the world, particularly in light of the larger social and environmental crises we face”

Then I was reminded that emplaced dance practice is necessarily always highly politicised and also necessarily within the context of environmental crises. What grounded us was coming back to place and acknowledging that our uniqueness relates to place. What was difficult to address was the politically charged context and as often happens for me, the drive of people overwhelms the voice of place.

This work must be done in environments that allow us a stronger connection with place. Even talking about place with conviction, and sharing ‘storied matter’ does not allow place to communication with us. I feel like the only way to make this change is to engage together when we are present in the more-than-human world.

Intersecting place-based dance practice with the drive toward anticolonialism, in this Hub we will examine the past, present and future of dance that takes dialogues with place as a main motivator. The Hub will consider larger questions of activism in relation to place-based methodologies including efforts to address social justice, gender- and race-based violence, ecology, climate change, and more. Dissecting trends in postcolonialism, posthumanism, and more diverse ontological/epistemological concepts, the Hub will give space for discussions of how such trends become emplaced and embodied via site dance research or in other self-identified place-based creation. As well, the Hub will connect these discussions to larger issues of protest,

decolonization, neoliberalism, political economy, environmental and social justice, Indigeneity, global policy-making, and new narrativity.

This Hub will be structured to give ample opportunity for Hub participants to have embodied and place-based engagement with the unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples – including the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations – on which the conference will take place. Via lecture-performance, embodied presentations and workshops, video screening, paper presentations, and, importantly, place-based activities, the Hub will jointly investigate what it means to politicize the situation of emplaced dance practice in different sites around the world, particularly in light of the larger social and environmental crises we face. In preparation for the final plenary, we will collectively negotiate around what a group format of feedback might entail with the potential for a place-based report/engagement for conference participants.