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Bec(h)oming with Simon Whitehead: Practising a Logic of Sensation

Abstract: In this text and image essay, I introduce a new concept to the environmental humanities; one which seeks to trouble metaphysical notions of dwelling by combining the idea of home (the *oikos* in ecology) with a notion of permanent becoming. In this way, home loses its conservative and reactionary connotations with atavistic origins and identities and instead is opened up to nonhuman forces and powers. As I explain in the opening section, bec(h)oming is a matter of affect; it depends upon the capacity of bodies to move beyond themselves, to be impressed and transformed by the environments which they move through, to tap what the philosopher Gilbert Simondon might see as the "pre-individual" energy that runs through all organisms. Humans are no exception; they, too, are caught in the flux and flow. By focusing on bodies, the essay not only looks to depart from conventional narrative-based notions of ecocriticism and theatre ecology, it aims to provide a lexicon, a new idiom for thinking through corporeal ecologies that are attuned to sensations, the virtual play of a cosmic Earth. To do that, the text provides the first detailed account of the work and practices of influential UK movement artist Simon Whitehead, whose Locator workshop has proved pivotal for so many dancers, choreographers, and artists over the past few decades. Integral to the paper is a desire to experiment with alternative modes of writing, a style that would express the enthusiasms of bec(h)omings and give some sense of its somatic potential.

Keywords: Bec(h)oming, sensation, Gilbert Simondon, Simon Whitehead, post-geopathology, dance, bodies, Locator, the nonhuman, pre-individual

Irrespective of the diversity of disciplines that compose the environmental humanities, textual criticism, of some form or another, has long been the favoured medium and method within that research paradigm. Ecocritics, for instance, find significance by reading for ecological themes and ideas (sometimes with and sometimes against the grain); historians engage in detailed archival contextualisations and discursive excavations; and ethnographers practice modes of narra-

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tion, finding stories to "make kin with," tales that will allow for survival. Consider this from Thom van Dooren, writing from the "edge of extinction":

> at the same time as they may offer an account of existing relationships, stories can also connect us to others in new ways. Stories are always more than simply descriptive: we live by stories and so they are inevitably powerful contributors to the shaping of a shared world. [. . .] I see storytelling as a dynamic act of storying the world, utterly inseparable from lived experience and a vital contributor to the emergence of what is. Stories arise from the world, and they are at home in the world. [. . .] As a result, telling stories has consequences: one of which is that we will inevitably be drawn into new connections, and with them new account-abilities and obligations. (10)

But what if this compulsion for stories, no matter how troubled, were misplaced, just another framework of humanist consolation, a way for text-focused scholars to remain in control, disembodied, even when writing about affect and sensation? In this article, I attempt to move away from the primacy of interpretation and narrative in order to focus on one of the specific ways in which theatre and performance studies can make a different contribution to the environmental humanities: namely, through the medium of the body. Importantly, the body to be investigated here is not a gendered, sexed, racialised, or class-positioned body, as it mostly has been in theatre and performance, but an ecological body, a body that is expressive of a neutral force, a vehicle for becoming, for "individuating," as the philosopher Gilbert Simondon puts it (1). In writing that sentence, I know, immediately, that many will be disinclined to agree with my initial premise, seeing the desire to step to the side of the marked body as impossible, a dangerous return to some spurious, whitewashed universalism. But while some will undoubtedly remain unconvinced, I have no desire to leap out of history or "markedness." I am fully aware that all bodies, even ecological ones, are marked, located, and contextualised. However, I am equally aware that these bodies, irrespective of their "identities," are shot through with a nonhuman power that breaks on them and takes them beyond their sociohistorical located-ness, making the very act of being in the world a process of what I call "bec(h)oming." That is to say, a mode of virtual dwelling, an iterative and corporeal negotiation with objects, things, and forces that are both material and immaterial at the same time, and always in movement, in surplus. Others, perhaps more sympathetic to my logic, might interject that there is a necessity to think environment and politics together. To which I would respond that that is exactly what I am trying to do, but in a way that places the onus, in this article at least, on manufacturing a language for a sensate encounter with a specific place; one that is experiential and expressive of my own condition as a white, middle-aged male academic outside of his comfort zone.

To bec(h)ome an ecological body, then, is to suspend, albeit momentarily, human signs and cultural histories in order to expose oneself to the concretions, sedimentations, and weatherings of something cosmic-terrestrial, what Simondon sees as a pre-individual force that makes bodies other than what they are, always out of sync with themselves: "being does not have a unity of identity, which is that of a stable state wherein no transformation is possible; being has a transductive unity, i.e. it can phase-shift with respect to itself, it can overflow itself on both sides from its center" (12). Ultimately, it is this suspended body that I am looking to explore. Not because I see it as being in any way opposed to politics, but because it is a body that more attention needs to be drawn to, its power understood, its affordances underlined. It is also a body that needs a lexicon, a vocabulary for expression that critics such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Erin Manning, and Karen Barad (amongst others) have been looking to forge for some time now. In attempting to add to that lexicon, my objective is not to produce an ecological reading of a text, but to explain a methodology for creating an ecological *habitus* – a way of living the environment, not just knowing it, cognitively.

In order to start on that adventure in bec(h)oming, I adopt what one could call, after Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, a methodology of "diffraction" (86–94). Here, neither artworks nor artists are things to write *on* but practices and peoples to get messed up *with*, vehicles *of* individuation, diffractive "probings" that demand new ways of thinking and writing about terrestrial affects, the sensations of landscape. And yet as much as diffraction encourages one to set off on new lines of flight, there is nothing to be gained ecologically by merely overwriting or abandoning the initial premise, or milieu, that catalysed the becoming. The imperative, rather, is to hold these two competing imperatives in tension, a tactic that explains the structure of this article. In the first part, I provide an overview of the work of Welsh-based movement artist Simon Whitehead, and in the second, I attempt to give expression to how the ecological body was brought into being through my participation in Whitehead's Locator workshop, almost a decade or so ago now. While I kept detailed notes of my participation all those years ago, I did not possess, at the time, the full conceptual vocabulary necessary to express the ecological affordances of Locator (although, as will be evident, I was already trying to practise some of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas). In keeping with the nature of any proper event, the "intelligence came later" in the wake of the impression, in the re-turn of a diffraction pattern, a latency disclosed. As Barad put it in a later essay:

> Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling. As such, there is no moving beyond, no leaving the "old" behind.

> There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is nothing that is
> new; there is nothing that is not new. Matter itself is diffracted, dispersed, threaded through
> with materializing and sedimented effects of iterative reconfigurings of spacetimemattering,
> traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed). ("Diffraction" 168)

Home, Place, and Ecology: Post-Geopathologies

In 1995, the New-York based theatre scholar Una Chaudhuri published *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, an important text in which she advanced the notion of "geopathology" (xii), an existential condition expressing a discontent about being in space, "homesickness at home" (11). In Chaudhuri's schema, geopathology in modern drama progresses in three relatively discrete movements. The first phase runs from the 1870s to the 1920s and dramatises a desire to flee home in the hope of alighting on a transcendent elsewhere, a utopia – the key works here are August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888), Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). In the second phase, from the 1930s to the 1970s, the desire to leave, Chaudhuri contends, has been replaced with an equally anxious and futile attempt to return home. To illustrate her point, Chaudhuri concentrates here on the plays of Eugene O'Neill, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter. The third phase, which, according to Chaudhuri, starts in the New York scene of the 1980s and continues unabated today, is characterised by a radical reversal in trajectory. In the work of US playwrights such as Rachel Rosenthal, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Spalding Gray, Chaudhuri contends that geopathology has given way to a post-geopathological condition. The old desire to flee and return has been dismissed. In its place, contemporary playwrights have set themselves the task of relating to their environments aesthetically, ethically, and politically. The emphasis now is on locating oneself, in engaging with the immediacy of the world, in committing oneself to what Chaudhuri sees as spaces of a "sub-lunary," "multi-cultural" US (248).

For Chaudhuri, the contemporary shift from geopathology to post-geopathology combines two important "turns" that have occurred in the humanities in the past 30 years or so. On the one hand, the spatial turn that saw scholars in a host of arts disciplines start to engage with phenomenological, economic, and social constructionist ideas in human geography; and, on the other, the ecological turn that resulted in the creation of ecocriticism and ecosophy in the disciplines of English studies and philosophy.[1] According to Chaudhuri, post-geo-

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1 I take this word from Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (19).

pathology fuses the local with the ecological: the objective being to "get back into place," in such a way that the nonhuman world is accorded both importance and agency.

For all its cogency and passion, one of the strange absences in *Staging Place* – and this is repeated in Chaudhuri's subsequent work with Elinor Fuchs on *Land/Scape/Theater* – is an exploration of the work of artists and performance-makers interested in site-based practice, in what we might call a rematerialisation of the artwork. Chaudhuri's focus, and she has been criticised by the UK scholar Baz Kershaw for precisely this, is resolutely on the dramatic text, the text that takes place within a theatre. Basing his argument on the fact that theatre is a machine for looking (*theatron*), Kershaw argues that Chaudhuri tends to invest in the same distanced, ocular-centrist, and metaphorical version of the environment that her book purportedly attempts to critique:

> Chaudhuri's appeal to the literal is not, however, the result of any lack of ecological insight, as she develops a highly reflexive critique of theatre's protocols. Rather, the problem is in the object of her attentions, the theatre itself and its production of spectators. It is through the latter that theatre contains the "culture" (which includes "nature") created by performance like a glass-walled zoo, hermetically sealing it off from ecological engagement of the most significant kinds. (311)

To overcome the contradiction he finds in Chaudhuri's unquestioned attachment to the space – the home – of theatre, Kershaw invites practitioners to depart the building (the "glass-walled zoo") and to create various forces of immersive and site-specific performance in order to, as he puts it, "suture more fully human 'nature' with nature's nature" (318). The problem with Kershaw's language of "suturing" is that it merely tends to reverse the nature/culture binary that he finds in Chaudhuri, positing the outside as a site of/for self-presence, of restoring a proper way of being, of returning without a hyphen, so to speak. So while I am sympathetic to Kershaw's desire for a more materialist engagement with place, I am not convinced that a communion with a substantialist view of "nature" offers a progressive way of doing that. Something else is needed. Something that would trouble the very idea of suturing by positing "nature" itself as always already theatricalised because always already other to itself, part of a very different ontology, a diffractive one. Barad notes that a "quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of dichotomy – cutting into two – as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then. It is rather 'a cutting together apart'" ("Diffraction" 168). But how to do this? In what ways can one create post-geopathological forms that would be diffractive, allowing place itself to be a creative process, both here and elsewhere, grounded and ungrounded, virtual and actual?

Bec(h)omings

In the same year that Chaudhuri published *Staging Place*, 1995, the dancer and conceptual artist Whitehead relocated from London to the Llyn Peninsula on the North-Western seaboard of Wales. Building on the environmental dance piece *Birnham* (1993), in which he "walked across London from places that refer to the old woodlands of the city," planting bulbs and dancing with people on the way, Whitehead's move to Llyn was an attempt at experimenting with a located arts practice (32). For the past two decades, Whitehead has been concerned with establishing an intimate relationship with place, inspired by a progressive and sustainable environmentalism. Throughout Whitehead's work, the human being is only one element amongst many in the landscape. In the sound recordings that make up the *Dulais Suite* (2006), for instance, the autonomy of the artist, his humanness, is radically tempered. Instead of being the primary figure, Whitehead is an actant in a water-music-electricity assemblage that he activates by wading through the River Dulais, close to his home in the Teifi Valley, with a guitar strapped to his back, capturing nonhuman harmonics, transmitting atmospheres.[2]

Whitehead's work can be usefully interpreted through Chaudhuri's post-geopathological paradigm – at least up to a point. In his practice, place is not something that we return to or disclose, as it is in the writings of Martin Heidegger, the great philosopher of homecoming who ghosts Chaudhuri's text. On the contrary, place is processual, something that we make again and again. For Whitehead, it is ontologically incorrect to assume that we are "at home"; rather, it makes more ethical and existential sense to say that we "become" at home, producing territory through acts of never-ending *poesis*.[3] Yet if Whitehead is a good exemplar of Chaudhuri's claim that contemporary theatre-makers are concerned with post-geopathological aesthetics it is important to point out the ways in which he departs from her ideas. Unlike Chaudhuri, and this returns us to Kershaw's critique, Whitehead's practice of *poesis* does not privilege text or language. His work is founded on a rigorous materialism, that is, in how the body is involved in a reciprocal intertwining with place that always allows for a distance, a surplus. In Whitehead's aesthetic, the body is a metastable place to start from, a locator that allows for a distinctly materialised topology, a somatic mapping that is forever indeterminate and incomplete. Reflecting the corporeal phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the body, for Whitehead, is the foundation of consciousness,

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2 For more on atmospherics in Whitehead's work, see my essay "Participation, Ecology, Cosmos."
3 For an earlier discussion on homing, see Lavery and Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an Ecology of Place."

flesh in the "flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 146), the thing that registers and is registered upon. It is also, to borrow a term from Guattari and Deleuze, a "molecular" body, a body that we share with animals, plants, the elements, an instrument for becoming Other (345–346).

In Whitehead's "corporologics," ecology is most accurately approached as a kind of immanent relationality, dependent on a body whose capacity to be affected, to resonate with intensity, is what allows it to pass beyond the envelope of its skin. In this practice, there is no higher power beyond the world; only bodies, forces, and affects. As a consequence, the propensity of human beings to stand apart from the world by measuring, interpreting, and narrating is foreclosed. Instead, "human being" is now one mode of sensate being amongst many, a differential within a monad of multiplicity. As David Fancy puts it in an underrated essay: "No longer polarized around foundational anchors or imitation, immanent ontological equality results in the full distribution of participation and causes across all of being" (65). There is no end to the distribution that Fancy speaks of, at least not until the heat death of the sun in four billion years' time – only processes of bec(h)omings, attempts to affirm the "thisness" of where one is, to follow the individuations of the Earth, its own spatio-temporal distance from itself, the source of its creativity and expressiveness. While bec(h)oming obviously resonates with the ecocosmopolitanism of thinkers such as Ursula Heise, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Rob Nixon, it is important to stress a major difference: in bec(h)oming, place is not just made by humans interacting with their environment in a dialectical operation that insists on opposites coming together; it is part of a larger process of individuation in which pre-individual forces work through "nature" and "culture" simultaneously and refuse all synthesis and scale, a "co*mos*politanism" rather than a cosmopolitanism. Difference, in other words, is not just *between* things, as Heise et al. assume; it is *within* things, too, force as well as relation, a nonhuman pulsing.

Tracing a Trajectory

The ecological and locational aspects of Whitehead's post-geopathological practice can be divided into three phases, all of which evolve out of and remain present in the other two. The first phase (1995–1998) is centred on Whitehead's relationship with the landscapes and ecosystems of the village of Clynnog Fawr on the Llyn Peninsula. In this period, Whitehead created a series of solo and collaborative dance pieces with the sound artist Barnaby Oliver. Although it would be a mistake to categorise works such as *Shed* (1995), *Salt/Halen* (1996), *Folcland* (1997), or *Skyclad* (1998) as site-specific art per se, primarily because they often

took place in what land artist Robert Smithson in a text on his piece *Spiral Jetty* (1970) called "the non-site" of the studio (180), Whitehead's working method for these dance pieces was inspired by and developed out of a body-based exploration of his surrounding. These are works where the outside is brought back in and where the mountains, rivers, and flora and fauna of the Llyn swerve, migrate, and move through time and space. Here the body is a located and sedimented body, the body that becomes place through processes of witnessing, immersion, and embodiment.

In *Salt/Halen*, for instance, Whitehead made an ambient dance piece, based on his sensory experience of walking the North coastline of the Llyn Peninsula. On his journeys, he recorded the sounds of wind, wave, and birdsong and sent them, by audio cassette, to Oliver, who weaved them together into a soundtrack. His intention, as he put it in *Walking to Work*, was to capture the sonic ambience of the littoral: "a zone of transition where land, air, the body and water continually meet" (20), and to use his somatic response to the coastline to "distil [choreographic scores] from the sensory experience of winter sea weather, from the instability of my body, the rise and fall of tides" (20). Recycling a large sheet of distressed aluminium to move with, Whitehead and Oliver created a dance installation – an assemblage, a magical model – of movement and flickering lights, in which live and recorded sound were mixed together.

At this point in Whitehead's trajectory, dwelling is a be-longing, an impossible quest that results in an affirmation of open-ended becoming. There is nothing spiritual or metaphysical in Whitehead's engagement with the land; rather, location is always physical, the most materialist of pursuits. Whitehead's concern to remain concrete and sensate in his work on the Llyn Peninsula is perhaps most evident in *Tableland* (1998), in which he carried a table through the coastal lanes that skirt the coast around the Llanealhearn uplands in the area. Remembering, as Whitehead is careful to point out, that a table is a domestic object, *Tableland* articulates, through a powerful, concretised image (one that can now only be accessed through a photographic document), that to be at home has little in common with bounded notions of domesticity. Rather, it is to exist on a border – a nomadic border – that moves endlessly and forever between inside and outside, and to realise the necessity of opening oneself to the "ex-orbitant." Home, then, is neither a place nor a state; it is a dynamic process, a bec(h)oming, a table one can neither relinquish nor cast away. Home sticks to us.

The second period of Whitehead's work in Wales (2000–2009) coincides with a change of place. After injuring his back so severely that he was unable to walk for a year, he moved to West Wales in 1999 to recover. On establishing himself in the village of Abercych in the Teifi Valley on the North Pembrokeshire/Ceredigion border in 2000, Whitehead continued his body-based exploration into the land-

scape, but with an important shift in emphasis. Henceforth, the solo work was complemented with an increasing interest in working with animals; and, in addition to this, there was a new concern with social ecology, with creating work that facilitates and amplifies the ways in which people make sense of and relate to their environments. According to Heike Roms:

> More and more it is "ordinary people" who are invited to take a walk in Whitehead's work [. . .]. The work has shifted from a discrete performance practice to a daily practice to the labour of the audience itself, whose task is to visualize the cycle of energy and movement around which so much of Whitehead's work revolves. (5)

On the surface, Whitehead's commitment to "working where we happen to be" (14) appears to echo ecopoet Gary Snyder's celebrated slogan to "dig in, wherever you are" (101). However, whereas Snyder's located archaeology is inherently vertical and so open to the charge of "boundedness," Whitehead's mode of location is more open, taking place, as it does, on a horizontal axis, an axis of resonance. In his 2002 work *2mph (a pace for walking in rough country with cattle and sheep)*, Whitehead walked with the artist Peter Bodenham, his Jack Russel, and a stuffed goose along old drovers' roads from Abercych to Smithfield Market in London. This playful piece operated on several levels – ethical, environmental, and economic – to highlight the interpenetration and mutual dependency between village and city, and rural and local. Not only did it evoke historical memories of West Wales's role as a supplier of dairy produce and livestock to London, but it made an oblique comment on the handling of the foot-and-mouth pandemic that so decimated Wales in the early 2000s. In this way, Whitehead showed (and this demonstrates the extent to which his work has expanded) that to work as a post-geopathological artist is to find ways of producing layers of significance, to show that everything is connected, part of the same network of resonance. In this period of Whitehead's work, home is a socio-somatic process, not a circumscribed place.

Whitehead's desire to expand the very notion of home outwards is also apparent in works such as *Test* (2003), where he broadcast the sounds of a small triangular patch of land in the Preseli Hills to the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff; and also in the journey pieces *Host (Transplant)* (2003) and *Rupture and Residue* (2004). In these spatially disjunctive works, Whitehead took objects from the area around Abercych (an apple tree and a piece of driftwood) to Darmstadt, Germany, and Queensland, Australia, and engaged in acts of ritual "re-planting." In a world dominated by what the art critic Miwon Kwon terms "the itinerant artist" (46), Whitehead appears to be making an oblique statement here, subverting the contradictions inherent in contemporary modes of site-specific performance. Where current forms of site-specificity often ask artists from outside the community to make work in foreign locations, and thus relinquish the specificity of their prac-

tice, Whitehead takes Abercych with him. By doing so, he retains the "located-ness" of his own site-based aesthetic and establishes site-specificity, yet again, as a relational endeavour, something that happens between places, a planetary practice.

Whether solo or collaborative, environmental or social, Whitehead's practice uses simple, everyday structures – walking, talking, listening – to encourage attentiveness to one's body, and, more importantly, to allow that body to interact with *the worlds* that it simultaneously inhabits. Unlike conventional architectonic modes of site-based art which tend to occupy a building and/or sculpt landscapes (I am thinking here of the work of Brith Gof and Robert Smithson), Whitehead's work is fragile, subtle, and always in danger of falling into the same chaos from which it emerges. In a sense, Whitehead's method seems to owe more to the sober aesthetics of Japanese and Chinese art than it does to the practices and discourses of site-specificity promulgated by artists and theorists in the West. Several of his pieces are perhaps best described as drawings made with a single brush stroke, lines and curves that draw a faint, and easily erasable, line around the immensity of the void.

In *Louphole (Howl)*, a piece that took place in Newtown, Powys, in 2010, Whitehead choreographed a group walk for about 250 people. The performance started with the audience listening to a brass band in the public square of the market town and then following Whitehead, now carrying a trombone on his shoulder, as he walked up the hill to the common land above the town. After a walk of about a mile, the audience gathered in the field and heard Whitehead tell the story about the last wolf in Wales. After this short and humorous explanation, the group howled for about 30 minutes, sending its cries and shouts – the materiality of voices – into the cold, starlit night. Afterwards, the group descended into the town, listening to the howls of children and dogs in the nearby houses, and had tea and coffee in the town hall. There was a space here to decompress, to share experiences, and to analyse the work.

On the surface, *Louphole* appears to be made out of almost nothing, its artfulness almost indiscernible – a walk, a howl, a cup of tea. Yet the more one reflects on it, the more one is compelled to see how sophisticated the structural thinking behind the piece is. Whitehead has no interest in dramatising space; the point is to produce a time and space for attunement, for participation. For that to happen, audience members have to be given time to locate themselves in their surroundings, be willing to engage in a new experience. This accounts for the importance that Whitehead places on the invitation, which, if practised properly, is something that, as Gregg Whelan of Lone Twin explained, *must* always have the potential to be disinclined (Lavery and Williams 11). The invitational logic of the piece decentres and reverses the habitual positionality of the art contract. Hence-

forth, it is neither the artist nor the art product controlling the situation, dominating the space; it is up to the spectator to partake in the act of co-composition, a bec(h)oming with.

The same sobriety is at work in the third phase of Whitehead's career that is currently centred on *Soft Matter*, an emergent research project in which pairs of living human hands are sewn into gloves, and the gloves – a kind of cast or exoskeleton – imagined as choreographic objects, things that move us, corporeally and emotionally. In this work, what is most intimate about human beings – their hands – is detached from them and sent out into the world, a vehicle for haunting the people that put them on. This shift from the actual body to the virtual one, from living hand to spectral glove, signals a diffraction in Whitehead's practice. For while *Soft Matter* is still engaged with an ecology of touch, of being affected by the outside, the outside is no longer an actual person or thing or element. Rather it is matter in its simultaneously raw and virtual state, something that corporealises the folded quality of human subjectivity, the sense that to be alive is to be always more than one, "a welling into movement," as Erin Manning puts it (5). The effect of *Soft Matter* is uncanny; it discomfits; it locates us in a different way. It allows us to bec(h)ome, to realise that one is always here and elsewhere, a human that can never return to some fixed abode because the origin was always punctured from the beginning. Not so much with a lack but with an excess, a too much that no individual could ever control or coincide with. The poet Tim Lilburn in his collection of essays *Living in the World As If It Were Home* gives some sense of what that excess could be and how it operates:

> There is something other than the grass within the grass; this is the grass as distant, unassimilable, yet in its otherness beckoning. Beckoning but in flight from human seeing, understanding, concord. Beckoning but unreachable by what powers respond to the invitation. (83)

This "unreachability," the intimate distance that Lilburn speaks of, is what the gloves in *Soft Matter* appear to hold and pass on. Significantly, these remains of a being in flight, this transmission of "what" in a human life refuses to be communicated, is, for Lilburn, the same drive that provokes an *eros* of/for place, that causes us to "bend into the world":

> Having no home, while bending into the world where one would live as if it were home, is the human home. The refusal of this paradox, its littling, is the source of any pursuit of firm control and the delimitation of the probe of desire. The experience of moving erotic homelessness is us in the world as the grass is the grass and the river is itself. (84)

Soft Matter, then, is distillation and intensification, a fractal for Whitehead's entire process of bec(h)oming. These "bendings" do not restore the essence of the

human, as if that were ever a suitable goal to attain or end to reach. Instead, they are germs for ontogenesis, instances of matter's own creative play, its drive for form and expression – a kind of haze that inheres as a thisness, a haecceity within things. As Simondon notes: "to seek the principle of individuation in a reality that precedes individuation itself is to consider individuation strictly as ontogenesis. The principle of individuation is then the source of haecceity" (2). As a haecceity infused with pre-individual power, the *anthropos* is never complete but "partial" and "relative," a subject "that includes a certain incompatibility with respect to itself" (3–4). In such a dynamic ontology, one based on opening the organism to pre- and transindividual forces that cause it to de-phase and become other than what it is, the artwork is no longer an artefact to decipher and understand; it is both receptacle and catalyst, a machine for individuating. To make sense of this machine, it is not enough to stand at a distance from it; rather, one needs to use it, to be set to work by it. In Whitehead's case, this means being willing to submit to the test of the body, opening oneself to what Deleuze in his writings on the paintings of Francis Bacon calls "a logic of sensation" (83). For, ultimately, it is in sensation that one feels Lilburn's "erotic homelessness" (84), the somatic experimentation with terrestrial matter that Whitehead has long been obsessed by, and what I have called bec(h)omings.

Figure 1: Simon Whitehead, *Soft Matter*. Stitched gloves, 2020. Photo: Julian McKenny.

As a method of expressing these sensate bec(h)omings in Whitehead's work, the remainder of this article offers a first-hand, body-based account of taking part in Locator, a workshop for artists that Whitehead has been running in his "home patch" of Ty Canol forest near the Preseli Hills in North Pembrokeshire since 1993. In keeping with the thinkers whose ideas provide an important theoretical ballast in this article, I have attempted to create a "writerly assemblage" in the text below. By which I mean a form of writing which consciously refuses the professional, distanced style usually associated with notions of academic objectivity, and instead tries to weave lyrical expression, critical reflection, and thick description to create a consistency of rhythm and tone, the "flavour" of a haecceity. To capture the transductive quality of my engagement, I have drawn on the diary forms used so beautifully and gracefully by the eco-theorist Theresa J. May in her account of participating in Jerzy Grotowski's workshops in Wrocław, Poland, in "Remembering the Mountain: Grotowski's Deep Ecology" and dance scholar and somatics teacher Sondra Fraleigh in her essay "Spacetime and Mud in Butoh." I have also been influenced by the "lyrical conceptualism" of process philosopher Manning in her diverse attempts to "think-with" artworks, to track them as generative events that "propels being to become across the phases of its individuations" (26). These accounts allow for a different type of scholarly engagement. Here, language is neither Saussurian nor Derridean, a system of deferral; it is conceived of as matter itself, content that is expressive. Sometimes it flows; sometimes it breaks sentence structure and syntax apart in a kind of exuberance; at all times it looks to express a sense of being moved by an outside: all the multiple components of place as they course through me, provoking sensations and thoughts. Crucially, though, this expressiveness is not the articulation of autobiographical experience, an extroversion of self, the attempt is to get to something more neutral, the writing of a bec(h)oming, text that joins and disjoins, the stuttering coming into being of a body at a particular time and place. As Manning puts it:

> Landing sites are force-fields tending toward relational form. Through the eventness of force taking form, landings site the environment bodying such that it coalesces into a singularity to which we can attach content. This becoming-event of worlding or landing is first and foremost a feeling, a way of relating, a mode of engagement. Subtracted into an actual occasion, the event folds the infinity of potential landings into a singular iteration, an iteration poised, always, to individuate again, under different and new conditions. (12)

The written text is broken up, too, with fragile black and white drawings from Whitehead himself, each of which acts as a "landing site," an emblematic iteration recalling some of the Locators that Whitehead has produced over the past three decades or so.

Re-Locating Relocator: Embodied Reflection

Saturday 11 July

I arrive at the Urdd Centre in Pentre Ifan from Aberystwyth in the late afternoon; I take a look at the schedule and note how the workshop is tightly structured. It's as if Simon is constructing a training regime, a framework for becoming different in landscape, for shedding your skin and growing a new one, perhaps; a skin readied for an individuation, capable of giving out and giving in, of folding and unfolding itself into place,

> becoming
>   more
>   through
>   an
>   ecology
>   of
>   TOUCH

Haecceitism like this, becoming like this, doesn't happen by itself. Preparations have to be made. The Locator workshop is a controlled experiment, an investigation into the ambiguous tension existing between location and dislocation. As Whitehead explains: "my role as guide is to encourage people to get lost" (38). Through that lostness, we bec(h)ome.
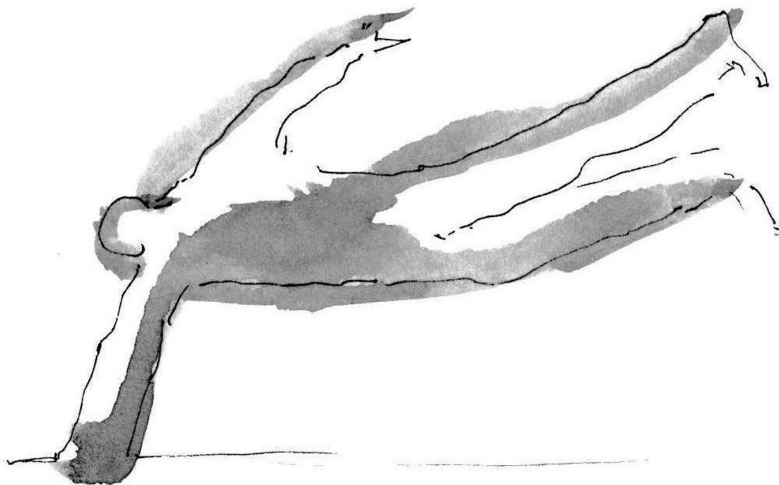

Figure 2: Simon Whitehead, *Locator 30: Preparations for Landing* (2020).

Experiential

Tonight – the Saturday night – the weather holds. By which I mean, it isn't raining. The summer of 2011, like the past six summers in Wales, has been wet: the average temperature 16–18 ºC. The rain that comes in all forms is everywhere. There is salt in the air, too, blown from the waves of Cardigan Bay at the end of the valley. But tonight – under a canopy of cloud – we set out, orientating ourselves in Ty Canol, tracing its ancient borders, sketching its edges, moving through its undergrowth. Leaves, bridges, streams, mosses, cow parsley, badger sets, rabbit holes, buzzards, owls, bats, rock. We tune into its excess; listening to a forest refrain. The slower we move; the faster the world becomes.

Authentic Movement

Sunday 12 July

Today the work of bec(h)oming begins. We start with the body, getting lost in somatics. Simon introduces us to Authentic Movement, a therapeutic technique and improvisatory method pioneered by Mary Starks Whitehouse. Authentic Movement is transversal and singularising – in it, the person is connected somatically to interior and exterior worlds. S/he is encouraged to find a different pace and rhythm, to leave the enforced movement patterns of the normative world behind, and to find a stimulus – a ludic one – for the production of autonomous gestures and shapes. The mover is connected to the environment through his/her senses and to the human community through the eyes of a person, the Other, who witnesses him/her move. In Authentic Movement, the body is a crossroads, a site where different planes of existence meet, a *soma* that cathects, ready to capture forces of the pre-individual.

In the gentle relaxation that precedes the movement proper, Simon stresses the dynamism of bone, the fact that it is always in movement, transforming, pulsating, bathed in fluid. We find our own postures and positions, move where we want to, when we want to, at our own pace. We close our eyes, acting on impulses and intuitions. We have a partner for this work, someone who watches and observes our body, who cares for us – a witness. I work with P. I roll on the floor: knees, hands, and stomach on wood. I navigate the room with my nose. I move to the light. There must be a window here. I can feel the heat of light on glass, sensing through the eyelids. The boundaries between my body and the world loosen up and recalibrate, instantaneously. Habit comes undone. I am organism within an environment, a membrane, an assemblage, a this + this + this (and so on), a surface for inscription.
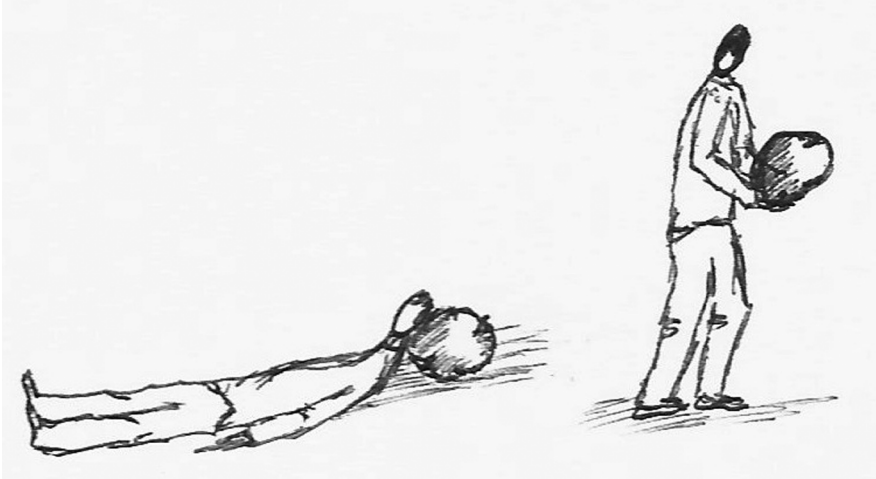
Figure 3: Simon Whitehead, *Locator 24: Rest and Resilience* (2014).

The Molecular Soul

In *The Soul at Work*: *From Alienation to Autonomy*, the Italian Deleuzian philosopher Franco Berardi points out how contemporary capitalism sets "the soul to work" by controlling somatic affect (24). The soul, here, is not a metaphysical substance, something that exists outside of the body; rather, in Berardi's materialist ontology, the soul is the body, "the vital breath that converts biological matter into an animated breath" (21). Berardi goes on to show how changes in modes of production, in particular the shift from material to immaterial labour in the past 30 years or so, have produced a "*cognitariat*" (105), a workforce whose bodies have become petrified, locked in posture, denied all possibility of becoming Other.

According to Berardi, subjects today are no longer panicked by "nature," by their presence in a sublime world that overpowers them and sets them reeling, but by "the technological context," "the constant acceleration of the rhythms of the global machine, a constant expansion of cyberspace in the face of the individual brain's limited capacities of elaboration" (101). The effect of this acceleration of life is unbearable. Individually and collectively, subjectivity is shipwrecked on dry land, worm-eaten, bereft of flows: "The infinite velocity of the expansion of cyberspace, the infinite velocity of exposure to signs perceived as vital to the survival of the organism produce a perceptive, cognitive and psychic stress culminating in a dangerous acceleration of all vital functions, such as breathing and heartbeat, leading to collapse" (101).

The "ecologic" implicit in Whitehead's usage of Authentic Movement counters this deadening of the body, this depression of the soul. The objective here is to short-circuit the normative *soma*, and through that momentary rupture or hiatus, to enable a retuning of one's affective life – a different body for a new way of being. By adopting strange, hybrid postures and experimenting with alternative rhythms and pacings, something in me starts to shift. I take on new monstrous shapes. I roll, twist, arch my spine. I am my nerves, my cells, the tension in my shoulder, an arm that extends into finger and sweeps the dust on the floor, a breath in a ribcage, adrenaline, and ligament. I expand on the inside and start to morph, corporeality becoming immaterial, becoming anomalous. I am not what I was. I am becoming more: a type of rhythm. This is surplus value that cannot be exchanged, an ungraspable thisness, a virtuality in movement.

Nothing to Make Them Shine

Later in the afternoon, we go for a group walk, heading for the sea at Newport, about five miles away. Things have slowed down. Metabolic time. We walk through Ty Canol Woods. The clouds are low but again the rain stays off. The foliage of the forest is dull, mat. No light to illuminate the ferns and brambles.

Affective Attunement

I think of the sky, and of how it "colours" everything, producing moments of absolute thisness – haecceities. Bec(h)oming is not an activity of grounding, the essentialised discovery of a place. It is temporary event, what Barad in the article "Diffracting Diffraction" calls "a making and remaking of scale (spacetimemattering)" (176).

We come across a series of small streams, tributaries of the larger Nevern River that crisscross Ty Canol. We take off our shoes and enter the stream. All of us, one following the other, in a line. The bed of the stream is uneven, and it is easy to lose your footing. There are lines of barbed wire overhead, markers of territory between fields; you have to duck and weave to avoid it. Some of the wire has fallen into the river and lies there rusting and aggressive. All my concentration is *in* my body, in trying to move, looking for footholds and soft footfalls.

On leaving the valley, we enter the start of a wooded valley that winds its way to the sea. The treescape here is not as dense as at Ty Canol, and there are patches of open land with scrub and fern. In one of them, we stop and practice another round of Authentic Movement. It's raining now, and I put on my "wets" and work

with T., a dancer from London. We work in the grass, in the soil, on the trunks of weather-bent trees. The sod is dark, dank – it smells of land. T. lies in a tree. The rain stops for a moment. I roll down a bank.

In the final stage of the journey, the valley widens and becomes steeper. We rise and fall with it, following its contours, feeling it through knees, thighs, and hips. Our knowledge of the world, in its primary sense, does not only come to us through an image or picture, but as a consequence of how we move through it, inhabit it, feel it – a kinesis. Movement then is a form of practical knowledge, a *praktognosia*. We locate ourselves through acts of physicalised sensation – in this case, through our feet, by walking the landscape, navigating streams, becoming part of a momentary thisness, a felt neutrality, the passage of an excess. Manning is keyed into the nonhuman, pre-individual quality of this experience, to its unspeakability:

> Affective attunement is a preconscious tuning-with that sparks a new set of relations that in turn affect how singular events express themselves in the time of the event. [. . .] Affective attunement makes felt the activation contours of experience, the intensity, as Suzanne Langer would say, of virtual feeling. This links affective attunement to affective tonality rather than either to empathy or to the matching of behaviour. (11)

Figure 4: Simon Whitehead, *Untitled*.

We cross the Nevern and follow the estuary. Dunes, gulls, mud, and marshes – salt grass, samphire. We stand in the sea, cup our hands, and put the sea in our mouths. I work with T. and allow her to hold my weight as the sea breaks on my legs, higher and higher. I fall into her arms and hang in the sky. Buffeted and floating in a wind and wave philosophy. The sea is in my bones; my bones are in the sea. And yet always that gap, the awareness of disjunction. What Barad terms

"difference as differencing" ("Diffraction" 175); what Simondon names "more than unity and more than identity" (12); and what Lilburn calls "the effortless eccentricity of things," their "resistance to homogeneity" (82).

Capturing Sensation

Monday 13 July

Today it's wet and rainy. Grey morphing into grey. Simon tells us to conserve energy. We are to fast for 24 hours. In the morning, we work together in groups of three or four, doing body work, then sleep and walk. In the evening before bed, we gather in the main room, and engage in a collective drawing session. Simon has unfurled a long sheet of drawing paper on a table and given each of us a pencil. He asks us to hold it in our nonwriting hand. This disperses any idea of mastery and creates a sense of equality. There is only one rule: your pencil cannot leave the table. A dance, a choreography, ensues. Crawling, climbing, waiting, taking opportunities to navigate the table. In this abandonment of form, drawing becomes music, a matter of pace and beat, harmony and dissonance. A map of intensities and swells, a transcription of Ty Canol's energies, a sensate geometry, a cartography of gestures made in landscape, of arms thrown into the sky. In his writings on the drawings of autistic children, artist and educator Fernand Deligny says this: "A child's drawing is not a work of art; it is a call for a new circumstance" (qtd. in Sauvagnargues 178). To which I would add, in this context, a method for becoming ecological.
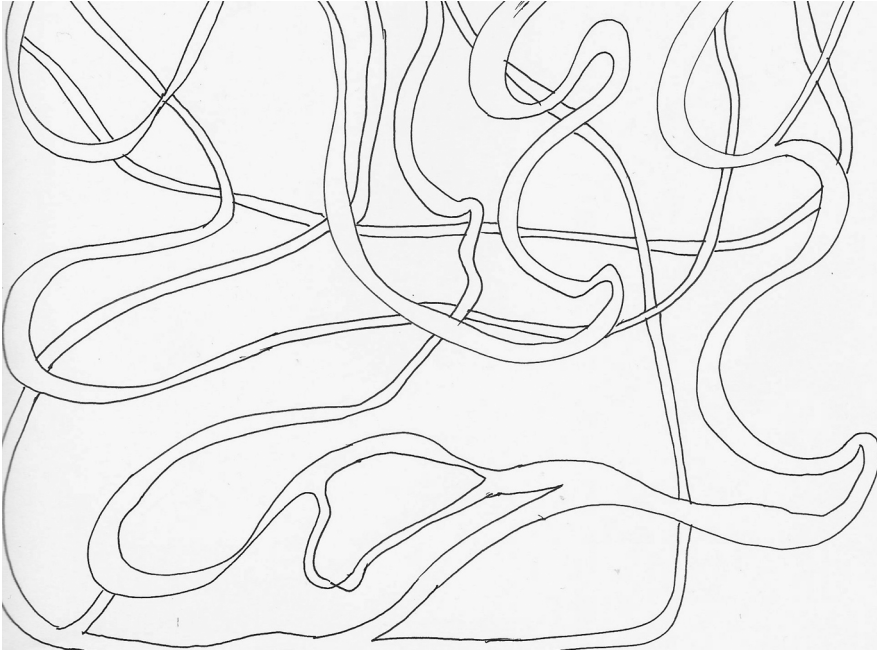
Figure 5: Simon Whitehead, *Locator 29: Everywhereness* (2019).

A Glass Harmonica

Tuesday 14 July

After breakfast, I walk with A. back into Ty Canol to perform in the landscape. The rain is heavy now. It's falling from the oaks in Ty Canol. No escape from it. I ask A. to crook his finger, to join his index finger to his thumb, making his hand into a child's eyeglass. He does so; and stands in Ty Canol looking outwards to an open field. The rain slants across the sod. I walk diagonally across the field, stop at the edge, and then walk a reverse diagonal back, a cross of sorts. The performance lasts about ten minutes; I've walked about 500 metres in total, with a slow, steady pace. I'm dressed in "wets" and have my hood up. My figure, a solitary body moving in the field, was intended to be what Deleuze and Guattari in a *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* call a "*glass harmonica*" (348), a corporeal instrument that by allowing light molecules to vibrate chromatically creates a "melodic landscape" (349). As I went about making this small piece, I felt that I had grasped the point of Simon's workshop, and perhaps gained an insider's perspective into his artistic process, grounded, as it is, in bec(h)oming, not understanding, in participating in an ecological event. In Simon's sensate methodol-

ogy, location is produced through intensification, an oscillation, a syncopated beat, something contrapuntal. Our relationship to Ty Canol Woods is musicalised. It resonates within us like a vibration, like a refrain.

Refrains for Bec(h)omings

In their writings on the refrain or *ritornello*, Deleuze and Guattari define it as:

> *Any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains). In the narrow sense, we speak of a refrain when an assemblage is sonorous or "dominated" by sound – but why do we assign this apparent privilege to sound? (323)

The question posed by Deleuze and Guattari is rhetorical. Sound dominates because the refrain is a rhythm or melody that produces order from chaos – "the black hole" – by creating a sense of territory that is at once existential, geographical, and aesthetic:

> The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. [. . .] Now we are at home. But home does not preexist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space. [. . .] Sonorous or vocal components are very important: a wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it. (311)

The Locator workshop operates like "a wall of sound." Only nothing is sung. No words; only bodies. A methodology for tuning into the pulses and throbs, the rhythms and beats of spatial individuations that are vaster than the individual's being. What is expressed here – the thisness or haecceity of Ty Canol Woods – does not assume that place has an essentialised identity that we simply tune into. There is no desire to speak the "truth" of location, to know Ty Canol as a thing in itself, a fixed place that would form part of a nationalist discourse, for instance. Whitehead's objective resides elsewhere: namely, in the attempt to evoke what Deleuze and Guattari term "a local absolute" (494) – that is to say, a passage that moves from the particularity of a given place on the Earth to the indiscernibility or becoming-everything of the cosmos. This is what to have a body ultimately means, to exist as a saturated atom that allows subjects to bec(h)ome, to give themselves a future in the thisness of a now that is always on the move.

While the focus of this text, as I mentioned, is on forging a language for an ecological body, it goes without saying that bec(h)oming is a militant practice. Not only does it oppose capitalism's energetics, underlining Berardi's argument above, but it also problematises the deterritorialisations of Empire, the sense in which

colonialism insists on extracting resources from the Earth, in refusing to respect the homes of others, in all senses of that word. In the manner of Gayatri Spivak's notion of "planetarity" (290), a neologism conceived, tellingly, as an "untranslatable" (290–291), a singularity haunted by a meaning that refuses to be exchanged by any totalising system of language or economics, bec(h)oming is an impossible practice. It shows that there is no way beyond post-geopathology, no synthesis that would keep the local and global in balance. Rather, bec(h)oming discloses the essentially unbalanced quality of place, the sense in which it is always here and elsewhere, an individuation that never stops and that no human individual, collective, or ideology is ever in control of. To bec(h)ome ecological is to believe in haecceities with a body that has been made vulnerable, opened up and out, never itself, a locator – a participant in what Melanie Lavery has termed a "dancing refrain" (5), a rhythmics that acts as a compassed resonance, a new habitus. This resonance is the ecological force that I have been struggling to find a language and style for in this article, and which is always both natural *and* cultural, a product both within *and* outside of history; and always at the same time, or almost.[4]
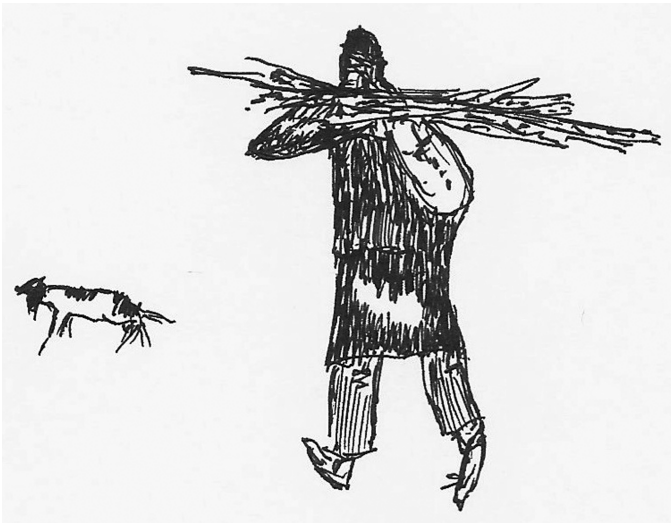

Figure 6: Simon Whitehead, *Locator 28: Hunters in the Snow* (2018).

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4 It is interesting to highlight Lisa Robertson's reading of Émile Benveniste as a linguist who "disarticulated rhythm from its now customary etymologies, which connect the word to the natural recurrent movement of waves" and instead placed it in history (15). I agree wholeheartedly with Robertson and Benveniste, but I would want to trouble the implicit binary in their thought: rhythm is both political and terrestrial, if indeed the two can ever be so easily separated.

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Bionote

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