

The Profane Halo: Becoming Breath

Breathing Philosophy: embodiment, encounter, ethics

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Abstract

Breath is a perceptual practice, a form of listening, of attending. These words begin to mark out the unique space of this thesis. It is 'written from the breath', a stance that breaks free of the silencing of breath in contemporary language theory.

Importantly, the thesis makes the large claim that the closing down of conceptual breathing spaces in the twentieth century parallels the asphyxiation of a spiritual connection with the world. This is seen by Helen Sharp, the author of this posthumous thesis, as 'the loss of the profane halo'.

Sharp acknowledges a debt to Giorgio Agamben's notion of the 'Halo' in *The Coming Community* as composed of a 'tiny displacement'. She identifies such displacements as breath movement. 'Each breath event develops as a potentiality of relationship where self is re-conceived and born anew in tiny little flutters...' of each inhalation and exhalation. Here lies the core of her thinking where the movement of life surges forth in the 'imperceptible trembling of the finite'. This, she writes, is equivalent to 'the illuminated field of the breath as halo'.

Moving into the realm of the artistic-poetic, the thesis itself comes to take on the character of a work of art. Its three edges are written dialogues, performance prologues, and breath practice including breath dialogue.

'Writing from the breath' is not an attempt to see in a pervasive darkness. It moves out towards the light and in the company of others. Breath meditation is a way of 'practising philosophy'. The way of breath, of 'the profane halo' within the realm of the spiritual, is one revealed in philosophical meditation and dialogue. It encompasses the artistic, performance drama, the poetic: '...a sound of the wind whistling through the prison that is my soul' Foucault 'said to me...' Helen Sharp wrote late in 2008: 'The touch of the world was upon me; I became breathless'.

As the thesis moves from the realm of the intellectual tradition of Foucault, of Merleau-Ponty to the work of contemporary scholars reliant upon the signifying role

of language, critical attention is paid to the work of Luce Irigaray, to that of Judith Butler and other scholars – Alain Badiou for example. The author’s dialogue with a range of contemporary thinkers gives depth and strength to her argument in addressing a forgotten subject in Western intellectual tradition. Breath comes to the surface of her inquiry in this way. Her critical approach places her in a position to see what often remains hidden. So for instance in her dialogue with Deleuze she writes, it is ‘his concept of becoming molecular that whispers most directly of experiences of breath’. Dialogue is a conversation, a way of breaking fresh ground as well as reaffirming older understandings. Its prominence here is a sign of mature thinking, of clarity of thought matched with the confidence and the courage to speak frankly. Her dialogues with Colebrook, Due, Grosz, Lorraine, and Deleuze, speak further about resonating as a moving surface of language.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and in her work on performativity, Judith Butler writes of how the construction of materiality occurs through the signifier. According to Helen Sharp, she, like others, remains prisoner of the signifier. Without a sense of breath movement as a resounding vibration, this account cannot encompass the making of the person that goes beyond the signifier. Butler remains ‘locked in a stasis that obscures the poetry of human becoming’. Luce Irigaray draws upon yoga as her experiential referent and conceptual paradigm. She relies on the assertion of the male/female as her grounding account and this cuts her off from an understanding of the making of human being.

This project in breath time pursued ‘in the company of others’ is given expanded meaning over five years. It goes beyond the human world within the richly endowed world of Trepina Gorge in Central Australia, a nourishing terrain where Helen’s spirit is freed, her courage regained. The outcome is a work of art where the artistic-poetic is matched and underpinned by her courage and her intellect. In her last days in 2012 she wrote: ‘The way of breath is not ... a stated methodology, but encompasses the artistic fold that opens the halo as a breath-by-breath guide rope that is being spun in each cycle of the perceptible breath encounter. The question of art then becomes the art of existence,’ (p. 145).

Nonie Sharp

April 2014

I, Elaine Martin, declare that this posthumously submitted PhD thesis entitled 'The Profane Halo: Becoming Breath' is at least 60% complete. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is the work of Helen Frances Sharp.

Signature *Elaine Martin*

Date *12th May, 2014*

Acknowledgements

'The Profane Halo' is submitted on behalf of the candidate, Helen Sharp, who died on 16 December 2012. In September 2011 Helen was diagnosed with fourth stage colon cancer with innumerable metastases in her liver. In October 2011 the cancer perforated her bowel and she underwent major life-saving surgery and had to recover sufficiently from this before commencing chemotherapy in December 2011.

By March 2012 Helen had recovered sufficiently to return – sporadically, depending on her responses to the chemotherapy and other treatment – to assembling a final draft of her thesis. She was close to completion by September 2012 but not able to work any further after that because of the progress of the disease.

Two months after Helen's death we – Nonie Sharp, Helen's mother, and John Howard, Helen's husband – were encouraged to submit a thesis posthumously, so we began the process of sorting through all her writings. Aside from the draft they fell into three groups. First there were earlier versions of pieces already included in her draft, so these were put aside. Then there were many journal writings, mainly from 2009 to 2011. We collated these into a single document in chronological order and found there were over 100,000 words. These writings clearly show the development of Helen's ideas over this period, and we have included selections in Appendix A of this final document. Thirdly there were a small number of finished pieces not yet included in the draft. Where these were of the same general quality as the work already in the draft, we added them to that draft.

Aside from this sorting and assembling we have clarified references, corrected occasional grammatical errors and assembled a list of the illustrations Helen had already included. In short, these were minor clerical contributions. The substance and detail of the work being submitted are exclusively the work of the candidate, Helen Sharp.

Helen began her PhD with the supervision of Mark Minchinton. When he moved from Victoria University to RMIT University he was not able to continue as Helen's supervisor. This was a difficult time for Helen who had found Mark's support of her

ideas and writing valuable. Given the singularly unusual nature of the project, the process of finding other suitable supervisors was a complex and fraught one, although the eventual combination of Elaine Martin as Principal Supervisor and Julie Robson as Associate Supervisor proved most fruitful. We thank Elaine and Julie for their support of Helen in the latter stages of her project and for their invaluable assistance and guidance in seeing this project through to completion.

Many friends gathered around Helen in the time after her diagnosis. We would like to thank particularly Michelle Fox, Liu Ponomarew, and Victoria Bonte, all of whom supported Helen in the continuation of her breath practice without which, as she often said, she could not write.

The practice of Middendorf breathwork is very difficult to describe. Helen intended to write a 'workbook' on different aspects of the practice, and towards this end during 2012 she engaged photographer Lisa Businowski to take photographs of her demonstrating some of the 'forms' traditionally practised in Middendorf breathwork. She did not complete this workbook, but some of Lisa's pictures are included in the dissertation that follows.

John Howard PhD Victoria University
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The Profane Halo: Opening statement

At the core of this thesis is what Helen Sharp names ‘the profane halo’. In each breath movement the self is reconceived and born again in the tiny little flutters of each inhalation and exhalation. From here she addresses a lost subject in Western intellectual thought: how each breath illuminates and casts light upon the others: ‘the chandelier effect’.

In the written thesis this is seen as a multi-levelled process where each insight illuminates an area. In doing so a pattern is created that offers understanding to others – a build-up effect with a glow from many sources, places and in interaction with one another. Here we have Helen Sharp’s ‘conceptual tool box’. The glow of many candles gives light at each place, gathering power as it travels.

Helen Sharp’s work focuses upon the experience of breath, a somatic practice based upon the work of Ilse Middendorf. This is a practice of sensory awareness where one attends to the movements of one’s body with the breath as it is allowed to come and go on its own. Years of immersion in this practice led Helen to realise that it changed her experience of her own embodiment and at the same time her understanding of the language used to describe this experience. Familiarisation with philosophical and social theoretical texts helped her to understand that breath and bodily awareness had been excluded from most of these texts. She demonstrates this within her dissertation in wide ranging dialogues with contemporary thinkers.

The dialogues are one pillar of this project, the others being ‘performance prologues’ and breath practice, with breath practice underlying her whole project. Her performance prologues combine breath practice with intellectual practice. She saw these as tools for developing her ideas further in the company of others. Outlines of a number of these prologues are placed towards the end of this dissertation.

As she makes clear early on, Helen’s dissertation is in no sense a flat surface of linear progression. She sometimes described her work as a ‘chandelier’, a whole made up of many smaller pieces where each piece illuminates surrounding pieces.

The image of the chandelier was developed from that of the spider's web, drawing upon three-dimensional webs she had seen especially in the Otway ranges in Victoria, her home state.

Helen had begun a first draft of her dissertation well before her final illness. As indicated above, she was able to return to that at times during 2012.

Following Helen's death in December 2012 we sorted through all her writings and found a great deal of journal writing that we collated in date order. These gave us insight into how she worked and how her ideas developed through the process of breath practice and reflection upon it. The selections included as Appendix A were chosen to represent the broad range of her journal writings.

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*God guard me from the
thoughts men think in the mind alone,
he that sings a lasting song
thinks in a marrow bone.*

*William Butler Yeats
The King of the Great Clock Tower*

~ Touch of breath

The breath touches me

Inside

Through out my entirety

In each moment

I am

in relationship

with

the

other

inner world

outer world

transmuting and merging

formed in space

gathering in time

in stillness

the breath moves

the living body in perpetual motion



Photo: Lisa Businovski

Photo by Lisa Businovski 1



Photo by Lisa Businovski 2

Breath Cuddle: a dialogue with visual artist Liu Ponomarew.



Cuddling the breath

Photo by John Howard 1

Wrap your arms around yourself and cuddle, which usually involves a little rocking or squirming, a little pressure of hands meeting ribs. Allow your breath. Then release the posture (the composition) and continue to perceive the allowed breath. Perhaps yawning arises or an alteration in body sensation.

The quality of touch in the meeting between hand and torso, the tonus of the composition – the breath composition – the human music in the rhythm of breath, changing tone, play upon in the generosity of the movement of breath embraced. Luce Irigaray articulates the phrase the *fecund caress* and I can think of no term more suited to this breath encounter as it engenders a blossoming of the life force, the vitality of carnate breath invited into the play of breath, sensation and presence where form is dissolving and gathering. Here composition is not static but the musicality of human existence as breath tone is singing the self into being – being in each perceptible breath cycle – being as a movement in breath time. And here is an opening to a profound relationship with the verb *to be* no longer identified with the passive but as a threshold of the movement of life.



Breath cuddle 1 by
Liu Ponomarew

To embrace the breath



Breath cuddle 2 by
Liu Ponomarew

To embrace is to gather to one, to meet in the tactility of flesh contact and resonance.

To touch speaks in an immediacy of con tact.

I receive the breath in my sensate surfaces of dimensional existence and I am altered in this meeting. I am becoming, breath by breath, in a flux beyond my comprehension that nonetheless brings me home to self as in-formed by the breath event. In-formed by the play of breath my existence takes form: these forms encompass the cultural and extend beyond them, reconfigure them and revitalize them.

I sense myself under my hands, between my hands, and in the experience of breath my breathing flesh begins to open to the touch of the world, under my feet, under my backside but also in the all-around-ness of the world including the arc of the sky above and the curve of the ground below.

Implicit in the breath cuddle is the proposition that the quality of touch, 'the meeting' or, as Middendorf



Breath cuddle 3 by
Liu Ponomarew

encapsulates it in her early book *The Perceptible Breath* (1990, p. 94), working with 'devotion and awareness', is a sensuous proposition that unfolds in delicate nuance with the touch of each breath as it comes and goes and alters the substance of sensory breathing flesh. The texture of how I lay my hands on my own flesh and listen to the coming and going of the breath with my felt senses is intricately part of the dialogue with the experience of breath refolding me.

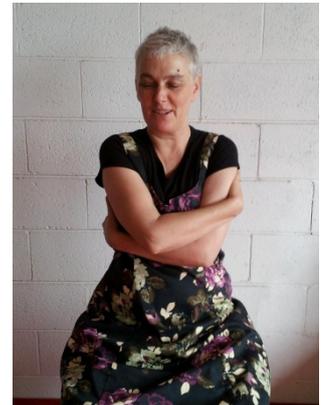


Photo by John Howard 2

The Profane Halo: Becoming Breath

Deleuze speaks of becoming dog, becoming woman, but it is his concept of becoming molecular that whispers most directly of experiences of breath and how these might inspire a sensuous rethinking of the conceptual place of breath in philosophical formations.

Becoming Breath, as experiential encounter with breath, gives rise to the need to recreate, rearrange, rip open the conceptual spaces that breath inhabits within dominant discourses. The closing down of conceptual breathing spaces throughout the twentieth century parallels the asphyxiation of a spiritual connection with the world, the loss of what I will term the profane halo. Walter Benjamin's famous essay about the loss of aura, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1968), unwittingly contributes to this demise. Numerous conceptual spaces have been lost to the experience of breath as key terms have been taken up in theoretical contestation that implicitly assume the absence of breath in the temporal play of becoming. Yet paradoxically Benjamin was groping toward the resonance of breath in language, in the mysteries of the Kabbalah. This thread continues in the work of Giorgio Agamben where the poetic dimension of philosophy begins to come to the fore. In *The Coming Community* (1993a) the halo signifies the malleability of form: the morphological flux of breathing matter changes shape, the meaning of words pulsates with a breath rhythm. In the etymological play of words like spirit and aura the resonance of breath is moving.

Only through the refolding of language, the re-stuffing of various words within a contemporaneous breath can some things such as the experience of breath be spoken of. Agamben alludes to this in his statement, 'every lament is a lament for the loss of language'. It is from this place of mourning that breath re-finds a place in the world. The potency of this impulse is felt in the reconfigurations of vibrating flesh. In Nietzsche's declaration 'God is Dead' the loss of the breath in Western thought is felt as the movement of reflection that resides only in a surface that can be bent with foreknowledge, measured and analysed. The permeating force of resonance as sensation reconstituting form is obscured: the act of reflection as that which bends

form anew where the illusion of subject dissolves into the rhythms of breath sensation. It is the entry of the word into the flesh that opens the human to potentiality, a resounding power of breath movement creating perceptuality. The flesh of the word is breath resonance through the movement of the world remade in the breath rhythm of each human creature, a resounding that marks the human in the silence of breath sensation as well as the glossolalic currents and intensities of vocality. Written in the breath, the word in all its constituent parts and relations is both carving and dissolving material. The word as a resonant field of vocal vibration is a field of breath in sensation, in dimensionality, in the perceptual play of the human within the world. The death of Nietzsche's God also heralds the potentiality for the reincorporation of breath into the conceptual play of philosophical movement, in what Tamsin Lorraine (1999) might term 'visceral philosophy'.

In Deleuzian speak the movement of affect, the bloc of sensation, resounds as force and intensity but the absence of the play of breath in contemporary accounts of materiality limits the conceptual planes: the *material* remains held within the confines of what we might call a Christian account of the body with its emphasis on the carnal in a narrowly sexual way, that identifies the human in terms of gender while breath remains apart as the spirit of God and the word as authority and law. It is only by overturning this conceptual paradigm that breath enters the world in all its elusive and provocative play.

This ripping open of conceiving the play of breath occurs in the molecular, in the compulsion of a breathing that cannot be totally contained, domesticated and predictably regulated but retains a volatility, an explosive force that defies in anarchic violence. Wreaking havoc on the boundaries of a normatively inscribed breath, in the aesthesis of the gasp of wonder, the silent permeation of the contemplative touch of the mind, the illuminated field of the breath as halo, or as Agamben would have it, the 'imperceptible trembling of the finite', that which transcends the theoretical stasis of knowledge not as a movement into truth but a movement of life (1993a, p. 56). An abundance and fecundity of becoming surges forth from the putrescence of decay and deathly matters. All that appears still is not death. In the micro movements of breath sensation the subtle movement of life is experienced in the reforming of substance. Receptivity, stillness, 'being' are not stasis but endless becoming. Breath

movement is an action, yet this enactment takes a different form to that 'recognized' in the dominant conceptual paradigms of the human breath.

Inscribed in the Breath

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and in her work on performativity, Judith Butler begins to peel open the way in which the construction of materiality occurs through the signifier, the word acting upon flesh and constituting the cultural body as the person(al) body. Yet without an articulation of the sensation of the movement of breath that comes and goes as a resounding vibration, this account cannot encompass the making of the person beyond the signifier, by gesture, climate, geography, landscape and wind. It engenders a sense of stasis that obscures the poetry of human becoming. The poetry of furniture, floor and walls, the architectural space of dwellings and surfaces that shape my thinking body, have no place in her account. Nor does she offer an adequate account of what we might call 'traumatic inscription' that so often manifests in exotic and wondrous breath rhythms and locations, loss of sensory perception, a transfiguration of sensory perception, alterations in bodily configuration and locomotion, incapacity for linguistic articulation and sequential thought. Here the capacity to enact the norm, to materialize the norm, is compromised and overrun by a compellingly anarchic potent dynamism of creative force of random origin.

Normative inscription is a breath inscription, inscribed in the moving sensations of cross sensory breathing flesh. The elusive breath is not primarily under the control of the will, neither is it 'free'. It forms the 'between' where terms such as form and matter begin to dissolve in the experiential play of sensation and presence. The 'between' is breath as a movement where presence is not a term but a multifaceted relationship between sites of diffuse and moving sensation: in a Deleuzian frame a BwO (body without organs). Yet paradoxically these human sites also resound in perceptible breath rhythm experienced as sensation, distinct from one another but not separate from one another or the resounding sites of other matter. Presence in this 'incarnation' is neither the presence of God, truth, or metaphysics, but the temporal event of polyphonous resounding in the sensuous experience of breath rhythm to which the cultural body opens. In the micro movement of breathing flesh,

resounding thought, kinaesthetic image, the substance of the corporeal gathers potency in becoming molecular that is the saturation of breath sensation in temporal flux. The textural densities and permeability of the human as musical score at play, playing and played on by the world, enter every breath cycle, subjected to the world, yet simultaneously the site of breath movement. Site specific resonance forms this fleshly substance, the resonance of (language) word, of grammatical structure as rhythm leaving its traces in configuration and musical tonus. So too the resonance of gestural form and image, auditory intensity, generates breath substance as sensation, and the movement of this field is not adequately explored in current notions of 'affect'. The breath tones of affect have intricate subtleties that belie accounts that render them absent. They resound in temporal form, location, potency, gathering in substance in the perceptible breath rhythm of each person. The carnal – body as flesh – is not a pre-given in the mode that dominant discourses in the Christian philosophical tradition continue to purport. 'The breath' imparted by God is no such thing, but rather an encounter that not only makes shape but dissolves it, travels and collects, is of the one human life and of the many simultaneously. To reapproach this term is to bring into question the 'making of the human', what this category might signify. It is in this terrain that Giorgio Agamben, across both his key themes of philosophical enquiry related to human language and law, offers a further series of thresholds to reconceiving 'breath'.

The Profane Halo

In her own unexpected way Judith Butler reclaims the impulse of the Christian tradition by asserting that the word becomes flesh. In doing so she assists in highlighting a threshold to re-conceiving breath. For the question arises, what is the word if it is not the word of God, the law of the Father, the truth? Yet it is in reading the work of Giorgio Agamben, drawing on his writings around 'the halo' and the profane, that the play of breath arises with a potency that challenges the dominant discourses around breath. The play of breath as potentiality: to conceive is to create life anew, to reform and transfigure the pre-existing.

The sounds of language are inscribed in the resonating structures of the person as music.

The Forgetting of Breath

One of the few philosophers to offer significant attention to the breath, Luce Irigaray, unfolds various lines of thought around the 'autonomous breath' and the absence of breath in Western philosophical thought. Yet the experiential referent and conceptual paradigm she is drawing on is heavily derivative of Eastern yoga practice and this limits the versatility of the conceptual realm she opens. The experiential realm she draws upon to shape her thinking is arrived at by way of yoga form: spiritual practice as outside the everyday, the making of the spiritual embodiment.

In a fundamental way Irigaray is unable to develop the account of the making of the human she offers as she is cut off from it by the very grounds of her thinking: the assertion of the masculine and feminine as her grounding account. Paradoxically her insistent use of the category of the feminine precludes an exploration of the breath in more intricate ways: those related to gesture, quality of movement, the becoming of perceptual encounter. In a way she occupies the cultural site of the 'feminine' with such vigorous creative force that she succeeds in playing it through to this limit where breath permeates the category. To play further she would need to dissolve the category rather than restate it. Receptivity to the perceptual action of breath is not the feminine but the worldly play of materiality that masquerades as some more essential truth. At this historical juncture it is necessary to pluck this out of such categories, return it as a gift to the 'masculine' and thereby challenge the Deleuzian conceit that the category of 'becoming man' is too molar to contend with.

Becoming man is not a molar 'identity': it is a realm of breath inscription in sensation and relational play held in place ironically partly by the illusion of the 'abjection' of women, the exclusion of women from language, muted in the silence of the body. Yet the body is language. I am stood up by language, I am subject to it, subject of it whether I speak or breathe in silence. Every utterance of vowel sound or consonant carves the postural form of my materiality as perceptual becoming in relational breath movement. I stand apart as a breathing resonating structure in flux yet permeable and subject of the world. Yet language is a dimensional play of multiple surfaces, intensities and substance all met in the vibrational forces of movement;

breath, wind, currents, stars are all molecules of language. The illusion that the reflectional surfaces of signifiers constitute language is evidence of the abjection of the 'masculine', a fundamental exclusion from the touch of breath as the touch of the world across all bodily surfaces, contours and dimensions, not only the exposed and visual but the haptic, auditory, kinaesthetic configurations and morphological fluxes that make the resounding of flesh an act of encountering the interrelatedness of the world and the inseparability of the person from this firmament. 'I' is not the subject merely of the signifier, nor the illusory identity of the speaking subject who claims the position of I for I is simultaneously a temporal resounding that is experienced as the sensation of breath rhythm and the utter resonance of the world travelling through self as an 'inspired' act that *makes* me, in each immeasurable moment, beyond my own volition or act of self agency.

Breath - The Eternal Return

In his account of the eternal return Nietzsche touches on the heart of the experience of breath. Each cycle can be experienced in a distinctiveness beyond repetition; yet paradoxically one of the fundamental aspects of 'breath' is this cyclical return that comes again and again and in doing so declares life, bare life, human life, creaturely life. The coming and going of the breath is felt, sensed, perceived as self and between things. Within the dominant paradigm of the West this is 'known' to be a biological feature, a measurable anatomically located activity; yet it is this paradigm that holds in place an experiential realm that is no more than a figment of the predominant scientific imagination.

Aura : (ˈɔɪrə) [L., a. Gr. αἴρα breath, breeze.]

Spirit : [a. AF. spirit (esprit), spirite, = OF. esperit, -ite, esprit (mod.F. esprit), or ad. L. sp̄ritus (It. spirito, Pg. espirito, Sp. espiritu) breathing, breath, air, etc., related to sp̄r̄re to breathe.

The earlier English uses of the word are mainly derived from passages in the Vulgate, in which spiritus is employed to render Gr. πνεῦμα **PNEUMA** and Heb. רוּחַ. The translation of these words by spirit (or one of its variant forms) is common to all versions of the Bible from Wyclif onwards. (OED online)

The Breathing Ear

I lower my ear toward my shoulder
sensing breathing through my ear,
I allow my breath to come and go
and perceive the experience of breath in sensation -
my presence in the world,
resounding in breath vibration
the silent music of self
inhalation, exhalation, pause(if there is one)
surrendering to perceiving the Other
as the touch of breath
where inner and outer suffuse



Breathing ear 1 by Liu Ponomarew

I invite being carried by the ground, the world
Throughout the whole of me,
Self in becoming, micro breath sensation
Permeating density, re cognition
Sculpted in the moving encounter of receptivity
The art of breathing
Endless lines of flight
A breath drawn through flesh
Opens to the aesthesis
The gasp of wonder, silent awe
Body openings, portals of re con figuration

I behold in wonder
Becoming breath the profane halo
Permeates form
Refolding the labyrinth
The only thread the guide rope of breath
Touch of movement in sensation
Movement of sensation in the touch of breath
Beyond skin, dissolving walls
In forming the image till it ruptures the line of form
A boundary experience in the breath by breath
touch
in multi perceptual un- naming
Seeing is forgetting the name of what one sees
Listening, silent reverberation the touch of wind
Passing through, and over
The auratic breeze
Breath of the world
Clarity of touch,
particularity too great to comprehend
moving breath by breath
carnate breath a movement of time
without measure ungraspable
yet abundant in sensuous touch.
The erotic folds of language
Acoustic space as silence
Where materiality is breathing



[Breathing ear 2 by Liu Ponomarew](#) Photo by Lisa

Perceptual sense.

Illuminated halo

The threshing room floor

Breath becomes me in its own rhythms

An intimate meeting

A fecund caress

I am held in the arms of the world

And to be held is to be carried

By breath that is my becoming.

The halo of the threshold

The breathing labyrinth

Self refolding in felt sense

The anatomical body is not the perceptual body

But breath music in vibrational tone.

Skin opens to the touch of breath

Clothed in air a worldly garment

Caresses my existence into being

Each breath

Continuing and beginning



Breathing ear 3 by Liu Ponomarew

The Conceptual Tool box



Photo by John Howard 3

To engage in the practice of the perceptible breath is to enter into the realm of the experiential. There to meet breath encounters that so extensively exceed the cultural paradigm that exists as the norm, the known, the factual truth, that they challenge the boundaries of what is commonly asserted to be 'the real' not because they are in some sense fundamentally unreal but because they recast the relationship between what is commonly understood as mind, body, soul, spirit.

Within the perceptible breath practice that Ilse Middendorf founded and developed in Germany during the twentieth century are a range of conceptual propositions that are not truths about the breath but tools to support each person's own breath practice and articulate collective exchange with others. The meaning of these conceptual propositions is founded in the sensate intelligence of breath encounters

that speak primarily not through the word but in the alteration of the bounds of cross sensory experience that underpin peoples use of language as a word based modality. These encounters with breath are so diverse, nuanced, and reforming that the very truths by which one's life is framed or spoken of are brought into question. They make clear that the experience of breath in its perceptible sensate tones is a dimension of language, knowledge and intelligence in ways that are often obscured in academic discourse, research practices and paradigms.

There is a play between breath, sensation and presence – they like each other and where one turns up the other two are likely to follow.

I let my breath come, I let it go and I wait for it to return of its own accord.

Breath out of movement ~ Movement out of Breath

Devotion and Awareness

I invite being carried

A sense of the whole

The inner smile touches my lips in its many shapes

Sensory pleasure invites presence and receptive sensation

Particularity dances in relationship to the whole

The exhale returns

The breath wants all

I remain present throughout each breath cycle –inhalation, exhalation and the pause if there is one- and all the transitions between.

I open the root of my nose

Humour becomes me

I enjoy breaking the rules – that is what they are there for.

I allow my breath to come and go in its own rhythms – as long as it is a pleasure

I re 'cognize' that the experience of breath occurs as perceptible sensation, and arises in the patience of learning to receive the play – that joy, ease and patience can entice it – but I cannot make it, direct it or take it. To receive a gift is to be given unto by another which becomes me.

In receiving the breath in the play of breath, sensation and presence I am becoming anew.

I perceive the diffuse field of presence as it waxes and wanes within and beyond the skin surfaces of my physical body.

The action of the breath dissolves the philosophical intellectual academic distinction between being and becoming. A re cognition occurs in the experience of breath that allows both perspectives in the dimensionality of the experience of breath to occupy a multiplicity of positions and breathing grounds as a part of the rich fabric of existence.

Lightness and ease

Micromovement of body and breath

Antithesis Structure

Making shapes in words and writing. I am not envisaging writing a thesis as a continuous surface, a flat surface, a series of chapters that develop a central theme in a linear direction. It is composed of broken surfaces, pieces.

Giorgio Agamben's 'Halo' in *The Coming Community* encompasses a number of things I am interested in, including the movement of form and matter. I particularly liked the structure of this book. It seemed to be made from fragments and they sat with a lot of space around them. In the actual Halo piece itself the notion of a 'tiny displacement' is what I sense as breath movement and a possible writing structure. Here a collection of fragments of writing do not 'fit together' to make a whole but displace each other at various edges, contradict, or occupy a different layer or site of language, resonate and invite breath movement between them.

I see my thesis as composed of fragments that overlap but have space. The tiny displacements do not add up to say any one particular thing. There is not an explicit thesis, there is a (w)hole in the middle, empty space or a breathing space, a core that moves. The pieces need to move and breathe. It needs to fold in on itself, reverberate, have dimensionality but no single point of view. It needs to contradict itself, yet have a lightness and playfulness of tone. Is a thesis with no solid centre an 'antithesis' and if so does it contribute to the breathing body rather than the body of knowledge? Spaciousness, lightness, fine subtle movement, humour are all necessary ingredients of such writing.

I imagine returning to more of Agamben's work especially in relation to the glossolalia and language as well as notions of the profane, gesture, existence, ease and 'being such'. Daniel Heller-Roazen, who has translated a number of Agamben's books, has recently published *The Inner Touch: archaeology of a sensation* (2007) and I propose to make a breath dialogue with parts of this. Some of this new work is directly conceptual but other parts are actually embedded in breath practice using the writing of Agamben to articulate experiential practices and how these breath experiences reconstitute various conceptual boundaries.

Last year I started reading Colebrook, Due, Grosz, Lorraine in relation to Deleuze as a way into speaking further about resonating as a moving surface of language. I am interested to develop this further in relation to becoming and encounter, and particularly as a tool in creating conceptual spaces for the breath drawing on notions of 'sensuous thought' and 'the fold', and extending the breath into dialogue with these accounts. At this stage I have read little by Deleuze himself and am wondering where to start. Other secondary texts such as O'Sullivan's *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: thought beyond representation* (2006) have been useful and help me think about structure, framing. Also I like the title as it fits in with breath experience as moving thought, the junction of various planes as the dimensionality of breath.

At the moment I am working with the concept of the 'dimensionality of language' as a way of speaking from different surfaces, linguistic, breath, imagery but more importantly the breath play between them. Dimensionality is a conceptual term in the breath work that becomes a kinaesthetic image in the experience of each breath, a perceptual polyphony. Perceptuality as materiality in motion. This plays out through the surfaces and refolding of language in reflection and resonating. Resonating alters the substance of language, the textures of materiality. The image of the Mask of Janus that I was rehearsing with some time ago offers the image of thresholds. This was useful in bringing to articulation this sense of dimensionality as a way of speaking about the interrelationship of thought, linguistic signifier, gesture, and felt sense. There is a congruency between Agamben's work with thresholds and the writings of Ilse Middendorf using the Mandala and multiple points of entry to the perceptible breath practice that assumes a non-linear play of existence and different thresholds to encounter.

Probably refraction is a term here as well, in the fracturing and reconstellation of perceptual experiences, linguistic concepts, perceptible breath encounters. (Refraction as a breaking apart occurs when the bodily forces, responses of involuntary gasp, shaking, the tremour, sensory overwhelm, disturb or fracture the continuity of the architectural form that has been established. The building quakes so to speak. This rupture arises from within a seismic shudder that loosens the hold and allows movement beyond the familiar). These breath words like

tremor, gasp, yawn, pant are body verbs, actions that are not primarily acts of will but have a power of breath and sensation. Remaking actions of visceral power. Simultaneously the etymology of words has started to figure as a way of opening up words, peeling out gesture and finding unexpected edges to play with. I have a collection of breath words and am wondering how I might structure some of the writing through the etymology of particular words as breath gesture/experience. I have incorporated some of this into the writing/practice – gasp, tremor, yawn, pant, resonate, vibration, aura, asphyxiate, spirit.

At the moment I would say my project has three edges that are not really separate but part of a developing dimensional play. The experience of breath is unpredictable and leads to the unexpected. The writing fragments begin to reflect this. Breath permeates what appear to be limits, boundaries and reconstellates perceptuality.

The three edges of my project at the moment are:

1. **Written Dialogues:** with various theorists/texts from the experience of breath, more in the style of my BA Honours Thesis in relation to Grosz/Irigaray - breathing ground, Irigaray – the autonomous breath. Deleuze - Posture as Architecture, Agamben - Breath and Gesture, Foucault - Breath, sensation, presence -the gasp in S&M , Butler - Breathing Foucault's Prison, Rereading Irigaray's rereading of Plato's cave – the cave of the lungs, James Hillman/Henry Corbin - The 'Enthymesis' of Sofia, thought as formless substance in the Heresies of Iraneus. Merleau-Ponty - The flesh of the world. Levine/Conger - breath, sensation and trauma, Lowen - spirituality and the body. Giorgio Agamben -*The Profane Halo*, (re)placing breath in language.
2. **Performance Prologues/Solo:** These are performance pieces I started rehearsing last year. They are more like workshops in the sense that the audience is part of the practice. A sort of visceral philosophy project. I am wondering whether this is actually my thesis and that all the writing in relation to Agamben and others are performance notes, and performance prologues. Thinking through practice in company

The pleasure of breath (Foucault)

Stroking my brain-skin surfaces of thinking

The breathing stone

Violence Mourning Politics (Butler)

Restuffing the Signifier

Solo Performance - Song of the Breath: The eight eyes (I) of the spider –
frocking philosophy, incorporating glossolalia and philosophical texts.

- Breath Practice:** Studio practice, breathing in landscape, breathing in public places, hands-on breath dialogue practice, and breath dialogue with others via the web; not only reading and writing but creating structures and pockets for breath experience. Trepina Gorge, Northern Territory is a part of my project in exploring breath experience; becoming breath in relationship to landscape/living sculpture, the invitation to dimensional awareness that shifts my experience of sensation, materiality and perceptuality. I move from being a 'flat surface' a physical body with thoughts into a sensory dimensional play of multiplicity. I become located in landscape, the all-around-ness of this world. This particular world at Trepina, invites a different breath encounter if I listen for it. Yet mostly I cannot listen in this way, I cannot hear through my flesh when I arrive, and nothing occurs if I do not make a practice that begins to let me sense my skin – the capacity to resonate with subtle touch has dissolved. If I do not experience the surfaces of my own flesh, the refolding, the movement of sensation in the subtlety of breath that is paradoxically diffuse and intense then this gradual meeting with the all-around-ness of the world is absent. I cannot see in the same way; proximity does not occur in my vision. The tactile meeting with the world around that extends into layers, depth, distance has/is a peculiar visceral breath becoming. This encounter is not primarily through the surface of the linguistic signifier. I cannot see/sense in the same way when my mind is adhering to this surface as it has an effect for my flesh/breath/senses. Maybe I can come to do so. At the moment it has more to do with the aesthetic gasp of wonder that Hillman refers to (1997, p. 107). Mainly I am interested in the experience but I have been wondering about aesthetics and nature.

Breath dialogue

Another part of breath practice is to do with the touch of breath in hands-on breath dialogue work: the experience of two distinct breath rhythms and the appearance in sensation and substance of the breath body as a gathering of substance in temporal rhythm. It explores how this is relational and how in this sense no one 'has' a body or is a body in isolation; yet the experience of individual breath rhythm in sensation and dimensionality marks a boundary of self.

The sensation of light, the luminous arises from the burning of sensation in breath; this has different textures, gives rise to the luminous. The breath gives air to the textures of sensation, ignites or disperses them like the wind.

Labyrinth #1 Ariadne's thread



Photo by Victoria Bonte 1

I let the breath come, I let it go, I wait for it to return of its own accord... Within this encounter is the interplay of breath, sensation and presence – the body of breath. Breath is not a servant but leads us to thresholds and movement in the folds of thought.

Breath as methodology

From doing nothing something comes – by-passing epistemological certainty

I collapse, subside to the floor, give up 'striving', look for the pleasure, the breath, the what-is-pleasurable-for-the-whole-of-me in touch and contact with the floor. I immerse myself in these sensory encounters and after a period of time a change comes over me. I start to gather energy, where before I had become more lethargic. I start to have moments of rising rather than just of subsiding. Through no effort I am renewed, reawakened. Slowly I re-emerge into larger gestural movements that invite my whole body in action out of the loci of micro movements. Curling and unfurling, turning and rolling, extending and squirming, rocking and rubbing. I meet the possibility that, if I listen and respond to my breathing body, collecting sensate cues from the detail of each moment, not pre-empting but receiving and responding, proposing and listening to the reply, I am not an inert heap. I discover moment by moment what continues to invite me into sensory dialogue and presence and how the breath plays a key part in this. I discover that I do not have to be 'ringmaster', that 'all I know' is not enough. 'All I know' marks the boundary of my linguistically structured consciousness; but in my temporal becoming, in sensate consciousness, in the field of sensing free of the shackles of knowledge, other glimmers emerge.

Fear of sloth, inertia, laziness and decline seem to permeate the culture. The stupid body needs regulating, educating, cultivating. Not to have a goal, a direction, a clear and achievable aim, an authoritative notion of what will be good for my body, is seen as a shortcoming. But to work with pleasure requires attention, presence, sensing, decision, perception, and choice. It is a pleasure to breathe. There seems sometimes an assumption that if we don't direct, exert, act upon, initiate, 'the body', this corporeal matter will remain undeveloped, dumb, inert. Yet is this so?

Pleasurable sensory awakening is corporeal rumination (Sharp, 2006, pp. 2-3).

What is it to breathe with the whole body? How does this affect my thinking, my thoughts, my conceptual boundaries and perceptual encounters? How does breath stand me up in the world and form me? The experience of breath as a somatic sensory encounter is the basis of my practice and has led my doctoral research in performance studies. The project has two working titles – ‘Breathing Philosophy: embodiment, encounter, ethics’ and ‘Breathing Performance: breath, sensation, presence’. It involves a dialogue between perceptual breath practice and various theoretical and philosophical texts that merge into performance making and a written dissertation.

Over many years my practice has developed around the non-verbal realms of voice, presence, movement, and, in more recent years, breath. It has been influenced by a number of people and traditions: those oriented expressly to breath work, and also to theatre making, extended voice and movement. They include theatre practitioners such as Michael Chekhov, Dawn Langman, Jean Pierre-Voos, Zygmunt Molik, Linda Wise, and Cristina Castrillo alongside body-based practitioners such as Paul Newham, Alexander Lowen, and Ilse Middendorf.

My focus has not been primarily with words or writing but with practice of a largely kinæsthetic, proprioceptive, non-verbal engagement. After more than twenty years of work – in theatre practice, directing, teaching, and, more particularly, exploratory body voice projects – I found I wanted to articulate experiences that arose through these practices, to work with different aspects that resounded for me and that I felt could be interlinked. In my honours project, ‘Encounters with the breath: nine introductions’ (2006), I struggled to find the words, the elegance of simplicity and clarity, the poetics of articulation that might offer a way of putting them together. While I still struggle, a curiosity to engage the experiential practice further and to rethink these shapes through the practices of writing and breath kinæsthesia has guided this project. As Foucault writes in *The Use of Pleasure*:

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (1990, p. 8).

How is this question pursued, encountered and engaged with? Must a question be a linguistic proposition or can it be a breath encounter as experiential critique where the leading edge of inquiry occurs in the sensation of the movement of breath? Where conceiving anew occurs in the unexpected creases and folds of the familiar of perceptual encounter defying the already known truths, facticities and certainties of established knowledge. In the movement of my embodied knowledge a shift occurs in my understanding of linguistic terms, words gather new meaning and conceptual spaces arise that were previously unknown.

The experience of breath

German breath practitioner Ilse Middendorf proposes there is an interrelationship between breath, sensation and presence that can be perceived in each breath cycle – the perceptible breath. Her way of working with breath is to ‘let the breath come, to let it go, and to wait until it comes back on its own accord’ (Middendorf, 1990, back cover). This approach is a background theme in my project, which is set within the field of experiential breath work as a multilayered perceptual practice encompassing movement, touch, voice, and relationship.

Middendorf’s approach encapsulates a radically different conception of the experience of breath from those held by most other bodies of work dealing with breath. Her intention is not to work the breath but to experience the particularity of each breath. Every breath cycle is different from the preceding one. This experience of breath, in relation to sensation and presence, affects in each moment (and is affected by) my posture, thought, emotion, perceptual field, clarity of vision, sense of spatial relationship, movement, and voice. I experience myself becoming in each moment that I am present to the sensation of the movement of breath as it comes and goes on its own. This carries the paradox that I can experience traces of my palpable sense of being, yet I can never know myself as I am always becoming different in each moment of the breath. I experience my being in becoming. I am neither the architect of my own becoming, nor am I simply subject to it. I can be present in sensuous moments of reconfiguration, but to do so I must relinquish control as to the outcome.

Breathwork as Enquiry

There are a number of different layers of breath practice at play in my enquiry. In the background are basic conceptual proposals and tools of practice from my training as a Middendorf breath practitioner. These provide perspectives and approaches to breath experience that I can use as departure points. Most importantly, they offer an expanded scope of ideas about breath that I can use as inspiration for creating alternative hybrid practices. Or they may provide a basis for reflecting upon various assumptions implicit in contemporary theoretical writings, many of which seem to overlook the singularity and temporal becoming implicit in breathing.

The fundamental grounds of the Middendorf breath work – the interplay between breath, sensation and presence – remains core to the research practice; but it is played out through an ever increasing diversity of modes. Experiences arising from my studio practice redefine my understanding of these terms. Extended dialogue with various theoretical positions also shifts the context and meaning of these terms. Redefining, deconstructing terms occurs alongside an experiential ‘interplay’ that reconfigures my experience of my materiality. Reflection arises from these altered surfaces; the play between them occurs in the resounding dimensionality of embodied perceptuality – breath experience.

Moving, Resonating, Resting

Middendorf breath work uses many different short movement forms to stir sensation, breath and presence to assist in developing a perceptual breath practice. In this phase the work has three steps. First, a short movement form or sequence lasting up to a few minutes; second, a time to sit in outer stillness and perceive what this has done for me, or, as they say in the training, ‘to resonate’, to bring my sensory attention, rather than my thoughts, to my embodiment; and the third step, a rest. Gradually it becomes more possible to perceive directly how the breath stirs perceptible sensation, areas of presence, directions, movement, and how this has a direct effect on my sense of encounter in the world. Here are two examples:

Holding my foot

I sit on a flat top wooden stool. I allow my breath to come and go. I lift one foot into my lap and hold it between my hands, for a number of breath cycles. I may choose to gently tap it all over, or massage it. Can I meet my self between my hands? Can I invite a simultaneous sense of my whole and still allow the breath to come and go in its own rhythm? This is one short movement form. When I place my foot back down on the floor and sit and resonate what do I perceive? Is that foot different from the other foot? What does it offer or create in my sitting? Do I perceive sensation of breath movement somewhere in or through my body? In my leg, in my foot? Do I like this? Would I like to do it again? This is not an exercise with a particular expected outcome: it is an experience. The repetition of the form will not bring the same experience again. But something accumulates. A potentiality is created in the repetition, but I cannot 'know' this other than as experience.

Rolling my shoulder

I sit. I roll my shoulder. I allow my breath. Then I resonate, I collect the experience. What has this done for me? Is the *sensation of the movement of breath* perceptible and if so where? Is it inviting me to move in some smaller or larger way? Perhaps it remains an inner movement and I feel my body walls swing wide on inhalation or a subtle area of sensation suffusing my flesh.

I play with this now in between typing these words – as you might while reading them. I roll my right shoulder a few times around anti-clockwise. When I resonate a swelling of breath movement comes with the inhalation on my right side. On the exhalation it swings back. My sensory awareness has altered; my flesh feels different. Now I perceive a movement of breath horizontally across my upper chest, a light, quick rhythm. My spine is moved by this breath. An easy undulation arises if I don't resist. I try rolling my shoulder in the other direction, forward. When I resonate I can sense more clearly the bony areas of both shoulder joints, and a forward movement of my upper chest, an expansion, a sense of opening out that flows up the front of my throat. I am no longer drooping over the keyboard. Simultaneously I sense a tightening in my mid back, some abdominal muscular tension above the navel. This dissolves with the next breath, the sensation of which descends to my sit

bones. I feel breath movement in my buttocks, backs of my thighs, and opening out under my armpits too. It moves me. I am inclined to little circles of my spine. I am called to micro stretches. I drop my chin a little down just to stretch the skin on the back of my neck. I am interested in what feels good, not in what is supposed to be good for me. At this point sensing breath movement leads me. I have left behind awareness of the original form of shoulder rolling. I have started to yawn, to pant. Breath is finding its own rhythm. Yawning stretches me. Can I sense the whole of me in this breath encounter? Ah yes, the upper surface of my thighs responds in sensation to the breath cycle, but my knees and lower legs seem unaffected. Does this alter if I continue to perceive and allow? Receptivity to breath sensation can start to lead the inquiry through sensing or I can offer an invitation by curling my toes or opening the palm of my foot. Does this stir sensation that meets the breath cycle? Many questions or simply one: is it a pleasure, this breath perception, such that I will continue? In either case it is clear that a 'sense of the whole' is a tool, a linguistic referent that I can use, but there is no such experience as 'the whole'. In the 'experience' of breath temporal particularity exceeds signification, but nonetheless 'inspires' a dialogue.

A Sense of the Whole

A sense of the whole is a background conceptual tool, an active invitation to expand the perceptual field, the interplay of different surfaces, depths, the experience of bodily dimensionality. As a practice it takes many forms. A simple one is a global body scan – expand your attention to take in the entirety of your physical body rather than just focusing in one small area. On the other hand, awareness of breath begins to stir perception so that I do not need so much to direct my attention as simply perceive where a frisson of enlivened fluxing sensation is arising, and changing with the inhalation, exhalation or pause. If I am 'receptive', my attention will be directed, my sense of presence will arise in various happenings. These small or large events in breath sensation have a different nuance, textural quality to more familiar sensation: they are influenced by emotion, movement, vocal vibration, sound, image, vision, rhythm, colour. A pleasurable spaciousness of sensation, diffuse, suffused with sensation, an "imperceptible trembling of the finite" (Giorgio Agamben, 1993a, p. 56). These breath events occur at multiple sites simultaneously. In perceiving the

interplay between them, relationships emerge that I had not envisaged. Theatre practitioner Shannon Rose Riley uses the evocative phrase ‘perceptual polyphony’:

My claim is that what I will outline as embodied perceptual practices offer the actor a means to develop an ability to think and problem-solve with his/her entire organism, and an increase in the ability to hold simultaneous attention on various layers of perception, from a fine-tuning of attention to various psychophysical processes, to perception of one’s being in relationship with others and the environment. This creates a state of what I will describe as perceptual polyphony that allows both expansion and clarity of focus for the actor (Riley, 2004, p. 449).

Experientially, a ‘sense of the whole’ is the temporal particularity of perceptual polyphony.

Pleasure

For me pleasure is an invitation to ‘presence’, to sensing the touch of breath in sensation. I am sensing, asking, is this a pleasure? I mean in an immediate sensuous way, in bodily sensations, in the perceptual polyphony of relationship between areas of sensation, in the shifting textures and intensities that breath encounter offers. This includes my sensory relationship in visual perception, spatiality, proximity, auditory play – does this resound pleasurably? This is what draws me away from my attachment to linguistic signifiers and into nuanced touch of breath in increasingly subtle and unexpected ways. It is here in this flux of breath materiality that a felt-sense language of perceptuality opens.

In my studio I sit on a stool, with my feet on the floor. I sense whether I can perceive a bodily experience of my breath as it comes and goes. Barely. I place my hands over my solar plexus. Do I perceive the movement of breath under them, swelling and receding? Is it a pleasure? Or am I caught up in thinking of other things, yesterday, today? It is too faint. My neck is stiff. I move my hands and stroke my body around the middle area. It starts to move. Mmm, easier, breath movement comes. Is it a pleasure? Can I perceive this breath sensation? Can I let my breath come and go? Where in sensation does it come to, go to, in what surfaces, is it a pleasure? If I stroke my hands over my neck does the sensation of the movement of

breath extend here? Relocate? If I squeeze the back surface of my neck what occurs in my breath perception? Laying my hand on the contours of my sternum: is this a pleasure? Can I meet myself under my hand, perceive the sensations of the movement of breath? Have I wandered off in my thoughts to consider, reflect on other things? What quality of touch is pleasurable enough to draw my attention back to some area of my sensate becoming in breath? Does the movement of breath itself begin to stir sensation pleasurablely? Can I sense it stirring new intensities, directions, textures? Have I slipped into categorizing the value of these responses, thinking about my progress, measuring the result against what I know to be good for my voice, my breath? Can I offer a movement, an alteration in my postural shape, a touch with my hands that creates an invitation sufficiently pleasurable to draw me back into perceiving the perceptible breath and allowing this to move me? There are no rules other than where, how, does this pleasure arise that allows me, invites me to immerse myself in the coming and going of each breath cycle and experience the singularity of each moment of encounter as it waxes and wanes with kaleidoscopic intensity.

A Conscious Place of Intuition: Unstructured and Polyphonous Methodology

It is not intuition alone but the interplay of the felt sense with linguistic modes of thinking that builds a methodology. The scope of artistic practice allows for a multiplicity of sensory modes including language, space, time and rhythm. Breath is implicit in all these and the experience of breath in perceptible sensation offers moments where intuitive processes that may usually be outside the field of attention, or of articulate language, are perceived. The experience of breath is how I think through my practice.

In my honours thesis I did not begin with a formally preconceived methodology. I sensed that I needed to write about my own practice in order to clarify some questions. Some of these were personal, woven into the fabric of my practice – questions about ‘presence’, sensing and the interrelationship between form and matter. I needed to feel how this investigation proceeded from phase to phase, not

necessarily in the emotional sense of feeling but in the sense of bodily sensate breath. I had to find what questions it inspired, what associations it brought up with other bodies of work that constellate the breadth of practice that I have been taught but also have embodied, developed, inherited, been gifted and shared with others in my field. I was supported in this by my partner and colleagues, and by my supervisor who encouraged me to write, who read and responded to an enormous amount of my written material without demanding that I clarify a 'methodology' other than my practice. In hindsight I can speak of my 'methodology'; but at the time it was a venture into the unknown, a venture that relied on the relational presence of others. Without this I could not have completed the project.

Initially this material was composed of journal writings based on my studio practice, some of which were descriptive, some were questions, considerations, reflections on the form of my practice and my experiences; later entwined with fragments of theory from authors such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Martin Buber. Eventually a dialogue between the experience of breath practice and theoretical texts emerged. This took a long time; it was messy, full of uncertainty and pleasure.

Emerging breath experiences in my studio practice expanded my understanding of terms like breath, embodiment, perceptuality. The work of these theorists enticed, soothed, intimidated and cracked open possible dialogues. The sheer perplexity of terms, unfamiliar words was baffling and led to me reaching for the dictionary.

Thinking through my practice invites experiences of breath that I could not have conceived of earlier. In its initial appearance this thinking occurs in texture, contour, perceptual field, intensities and dimensionality of breath movement. These appearances are imprecise, without recognizable form other than the felt sense of intricate polyphony. Breath experiences reveal interconnections between my senses, posture, emotion, mental activity – and, important to note is that these change my point of view in the world. My understanding of certain words like breath, materiality, form, receptivity, is expanded. The interrelationship between mind and body shifts. The breath plays between many surfaces in and through the body and is implicitly dimensional. If I 'allow' the breath, this play creates unexpected relationship.

Re-stuffing the Signifier

'Breath as methodology' continues to reframe the terms of its own boundaries through experientially undoing and re-constellating linguistic terminology. Words, terms, concepts are remade and the malleability of meaning is allowed to gather shape in the temporal flux of experience. This now becomes the basis of a dialogue with existing texts, both philosophical and poetic, elucidating how the questions raised in philosophical tradition and contemporary theory can be re-explored and used to further the perceptual practices of the experience of breath - how the experience of breath and how artistic practices can peel open some of the assumptions and limits of theoretical exchange.

This thinking occurs in dialogue with reading texts, with words, and with images. As I am reading the texts of various writers a spontaneous visceral sense often arises from the tone of the writing and/or the perspective. I imagine aspects of the author's breath embodiment permeate the text. I sense a gap between us, or an ease of meeting, or a comfortable embrace. All have their possibilities. Within one piece of writing each may arise. Each has an effect for my breath as I read. Earlier I quoted Foucault in regard to thinking and perceiving anew. I enjoy this writing of his, I am enticed by and share his perspective. Yet simultaneously I recognize a difference in sensibility when he says,

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (1990, p. 8).

For me, perception is cross sensory but first and foremost a visceral kinæsthetic meeting with the touch of breath. Tactile breath experience resounds in the felt sense of my materiality and perceptuality. The physical and visual become co-joined, but sensing is often what leads. My seeing and my looking alter with my experience of the touch of breath. Thinking touches me, as does image. Thinking and perceiving in this way are intermingled surfaces of linguistic reflection and felt experience – auditory, visual, tactile – and this creates a dimensionality that is cross sensory. The breath as a 'sign' of life touches and plays through all these surfaces, gathering perceptible resonance, fleshly substance and enlivening vitality, which is bent and

refracted through signification. So I enjoy these words of Foucault yet if I were to write the sentence myself I would have to use the word 'senses' instead of 'sees' and find some other word instead of 'looking' as too much is left out. The experience of difference in this way, 'the gap', assists me to reflect, and to reconsider also, perhaps, what I leave out of my practice, whether it is time to return to working more directly with image or visual relationship. 'The gap' creates a space for me to reflect and experience my difference.

Resonating

Resonating is central to perceiving and receiving the breath. Resonating reveals to me the touch of breath, the sensation of the movement of breath. My breath is formed by my bodily education, but can also inform it, reform it. Being remade by breath encounter arises not primarily through linguistic reflection but through experience, perception and presence. It arises through each breath cycle in its distinctiveness.

The term 'resonating' refers to a whole range of experiential encounters with the breath. The most interesting edges arise when an encounter with breath in resounding is felt as a dissolving of form, of surfaces, a transmutation of materiality. The sensation of the movement of breath alters my perception of my materiality in such a way that it diffuses, becomes as if permeable to the breath. These experiences are never the same but share recognizable qualities that are quite distinct from my usual perception of my body, my physical form. The perceptual body is not the anatomical body. A fusing of perception and matter leads not simply to a malleability of form but to the possibility that the familiar edges of my form are dissolved. My very composition is altered. Breath finds its own shapes in this altered substance. This is not an experience I 'observe', as if from a distance, but a breath by breath becoming that subsumes the mental into the polyphony of perception, the micro detail of subtle breath sensation fluxing in the breath cycle. It flows through to my vision and tactility. I occupy the world in different density, relationship. As I search for words to articulate this experience I try out words from various writers. Giorgio Agamben has this to say:

One can think of the halo, in this sense, as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility. This is that *potentia permixta actui* (or that *actus permixtus potentiae*) that a brilliant fourteenth century philosopher called *actus confusionis*, a fusional act, insofar as specific form or nature is not preserved in it, but mixed and dissolved in a new birth with no residue. This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo (1993a, p. 56).

Each breath cycle is a threshold, an opening to possibility, inhalation, exhalation, pause, the transitions. Agamben's phrase 'this imperceptible trembling of the finite' beautifully evokes the pleasure of the fine vibrational resonance that the subtle sensation of the movement of breath has in this sort of encounter. The movement and polyphony of this "imperceptible trembling" arises in the breath cycle and is perceivable as a fusional act through sensation and what for the time being I will rudely call presence. Presence which is not essence but the tiny displacement, a supplemental gift, if you will, that comes after the act. The act of every breath cycle dies away, a discontinuous continuity, breath by breath becoming. The fusional act of the breath creates at times the appearance, or sensibility of the halo, where infinite imperceptible trembling becomes luminous, the supplemental excess spills over as lightness, as ephemeral as the becoming of each breath cycle, that burns away with no residue. Yet in this space the traditional binary opposition of form and matter is apparent as an imaginary figment of a breathless discourse. Many performance practitioners play on this edge of breath, this space where matter exceeds form as act of fusional creativity. This is where the play of perceptuality occurs, where perceptual practice is intimately at play, and as Agamben has said, 'a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable'.

Writing from the breath

Breath practice is the core of my project and also the grounds, the possibility, of my writing. I feel my way into language. I don't entirely *grasp* what it is I want to say,

what it is I need to find the words for. I *grope* my way toward an articulate account. I choose the term 'grope' because it conveys a sense of tactile searching. 'Grasp' implies a direct seizing of understanding, whereas 'grope' indicates the need to search, to find an as yet unknown shape in language. This brings to the surface a further philosophical theme: the way in which so many tactile words like 'grope' have been largely subsumed into sexual associations, leaving little room to articulate the extended realms of the breath body in experience and thought.

I have come to spend time in the Oxford English Dictionary with the etymology of words. Sensing shape, collecting words, phrases, pieces that speak something of the experience, one surface, a small portion, an edge or intensity, a collection of fragments. There are many different experiences in the breath: they do not speak of a unified whole but of a polyphony of possibilities.

I keep a studio journal and describe my breath experiences in detail. This is probably the most fundamental aspect of my writing. It keeps it very immediate. If I don't have a breath practice I cannot write. The breath practice alters my relationship to words, and my thinking. It alters my body tonus, sensations, and breath rhythm. This is reflected in the pace of my thoughts – they become less entangled; my sense of time alters. The practice is a surface of thinking in that it leads me to new experiences. It then becomes possible to describe or evoke something of this in writing.

I often write before I know what I think, or I am writing as I think and various thoughts fall out. Sometimes they are only fragments, pieces of thinking. Other times they are more like strange convoluted tentacles within which I am not sure what I am getting at. Yet with the passage of time, practice, rehearsal, and reading they re-emerge. I recognize that, months before, they were a forerunner of a new edge or shape to my articulate thought.

There is an enjoyable irony in the way that the breath practice is oriented away from the linguistic surface yet helps me write. My mental perception, focus is subsumed into staying attuned to the detail of sensation, the interrelationships that can be sensed, the textures and locations, directions and rhythms. Yet in this flux thinking arises, subsides; little fragments of it come and go and re-constellate in different

association. Particular breath experiences that emerge resound on through the day and bring words and images to mind. The ideas and proposals made in the writings of others rub up against this.

Working with an emergent practice methodology has a vulnerability, at times utterly personal and confronting. How to go on is not clear. Recently in my project I have been entering a dialogue by finding one or two words in a piece that I can enquire into through breath experience. Or it may be an image or a gesture, a quality of movement. This has begun to offer a much stronger sense of the relational exchange that I can experience in breath practice with each text. The pleasure in meeting the diversity of ideas and points of view in the writing arises out of finding some place or edge, a threshold for breath practice to emerge in response. In this way my lack of confidence at times in why, or what I am embarked on subsides into a gentle sort of courage that arises breath by breath in experience around some element of the text. I find a new thinking emerges, a dialogue, even though initially I create this in silence and through sensing. It is relational and spills over eventually into image, thought, writing.

Experiential critique

In his introduction to Judith Butler's 'What is critique? An essay on Foucault's virtue' (2001), David Ingram writes:

In both the works from which Butler draws here, Foucault characterizes critique as a mode of ethical self questioning that is akin to virtue, where virtue does not denote obedience to the law but its opposite – a critical and questioning relation to the norms by which subjects are constituted (2001, p. 302).

The practices with breath, sensation, and presence drawing on the breath work of Middendorf can be seen as practices of visceral or experiential critique within the parameters proposed by Foucault. A perceptual world is brought into repeated question, subjectivity is reconstituted by dialogue with breath. This repeatedly brings in a questioning relationship with the norms that constitute the experience of performer, and of self.

Ingram goes on to say,

For both Butler and Foucault, virtue is a practice of self-making and self-transformation which opposes itself to the established order by interrogating the terms by which subjects are currently constituted. As always, these interrogations take place within existing discursive structures, so that rather than a refusal of morality, virtue is 'a specific stylization of morality' where 'stylization' is opposed to codification and 'fixture' (2001, p. 302).

In dialogue with my breath in the realm of 'corporeal logics' (Lorraine, 1999, p. 7) the question and reply move beyond the 'fixture' and 'codification' referred to by Ingram. The dialogue brings me into perceptual encounter with my codification, and yet, paradoxically, creates the grounds of its transmutation, its micro dissolution. It returns codified sensation into the amorphous realm of the *extra-linguistic*. The practice of experiential philosophy engages with what is outside the linguistic, the not yet named, or never to be named.

In the context of breathwork this practice of 'self-making and self-transformation' occurs in dialogue, in encounter rather than interrogation. If I enter into this corporeal dialogue with the breath through sensation and presence, this meeting takes place most readily when I am able to sense, receive, perceive, when the tonus of my body is not rigid, held, locked, when I am not in the grip of particular emotions. The relationship is one of receiving, receptiveness in sensory perception from moment to moment. I keep re-meeting the breath in myriad ways that largely remain nameless – as the crucial dimension of the encounter in each moment of the breath cycle is my capacity to stay present in sensation, available to shifts in my perceptual field within the whole of my physical body. This invites a constant shifting of body tonus, an availability to become re-formed – in skeletal arrangement right through to imperceptible micro movement and, however subtly, including my mental, emotional, physical, formations.

So this experiential critique, the meeting with myself as sensation and breath movement, is a constantly unfolding provocation, an invitation to patterns of corporeal arrangement to reconfigure themselves.

I make a proposal to – or I could say, ask a corporeal question of – my breath through movement (that is, sensation, rhythm, location, direction, relationship) – I might massage my foot, stroke my belly, reach my arms up – then I listen. I resonate. I collect the experience, what is this reply? What shape does it take in sensation of breath movement, rhythm, dynamic, substance? This dialogue is complex as it flows both ways. To ask my breath a corporeal question requires my sensibility to be with my body. It is not a monologue disguised as more, as the breath that comes and goes on its own also asks me questions. The breath makes me a proposal, I receive it and respond. As 'I am' subsumed into this reply, there is a relinquishing of the illusion, the vanity of an 'I' that can stand back. I allow my formation, my structure to be permeated by the breath, the sensation aroused, the sensibility of presence. My cleaving to codification as it manifests itself in my skeletal, muscular, perceptual schema is offered over to the experience of breath. This experience is temporal, immersing, sensuous. It reconfigures me through the sensation of the movement of breath in ways I could not have envisaged. It touches my sensibility in micro movement and internal locations, and it rearranges my perception of external boundaries.

This breath dialogue lets me 'know' my breath; my vulnerability to temporal life resounds through me in sensation and the field of presence. This reshaping through breath, presence, sensation, is an experience of body and subjectivity that is dependent upon the momentary surrender of identity and knowledge. The role of observer disintegrates.

There are particular themes in Judith Butler's 'What is critique?' that speak directly to the experiential processes of working with breath, body, and presence even though she is not at all concerned with breath. Butler asks:

What is the relation of knowledge to power such that our epistemological certainties turn out to support a way of structuring the world that forecloses alternative possibilities of ordering? (2000, p. 307).

Here she touches on a crucial factor in the breath encounter as critique, the challenge to 'epistemological certainties' that it offers. This challenge is made in corporeal dialogue and is not the less profound for being so. In fact it is this interface of corporeal and conceptual that bites deepest in challenging the epistemological certainties that reflect the dominant knowledge and power base.

Thinking through my practice

The experience of breath allows me to think *through* or *with* my practice rather than simply think about it. New experiences of embodiment arise that alter my sense of self, my subjective formation, my visual perception, my body image, my sense of relationship with other. I encounter the world and myself differently – not primarily from an idea but through the experience of breath as it comes and goes. New knowing arises from this breath experience. Breath is not only a physiological feature but also a perceptible feature, a mental and emotional feature of my existence. My practice shapes my thinking.

This realm of morphological sensation in flux is neither 'nature' nor 'culture' in their traditional delineations. My breath is inscribed by my experience in the world from the first moment to the last. It is of this world. My experiences of breath do not return me to some imaginary natural irreducible encounter yet, nor do they reside only in the interpretive. I do not need to understand them for them to change me.

Gathering in the Breath spider tree



Russell Watkins, U.K. Department for International Development¹

Breath Spider – Ariadne’s thread invites movement through the labyrinth as the dimensionality of language where the breath is not a servant but a multiplicity of thresholds; threads of sensation arising through breath encounter that inspires movement in the folds of thought that permeate the conceptual.

I let the breath come, I let it go, I wait for it to return of its own accord... Within this encounter is the interplay of breath, sensation and presence – the body of breath. Breathing philosophy in the breath substance of the corporeal reweaves the threads and textures of discourse.

~ Breath Utterance

She did not utter a sound
Yet the fold of language was upon her
Weight bearing down
Crushing out the breath
Squeezing the contours of her form
Forcing an exhalation to be expunged

Such a violent breath does not serve her
No rhythm of her own to claim a self
No inner pause of sensation to hold a thought
The suspended space of absence is not breath
But the word of another holding place
My place, her place occupied in a foreign tongue
A tongue that licks and spits a consonant
A formative tone to declaim its position as master in the house
Breath house occupied but not inhabited
Not her words but the word as given
An unwanted gift, soon to be returned.

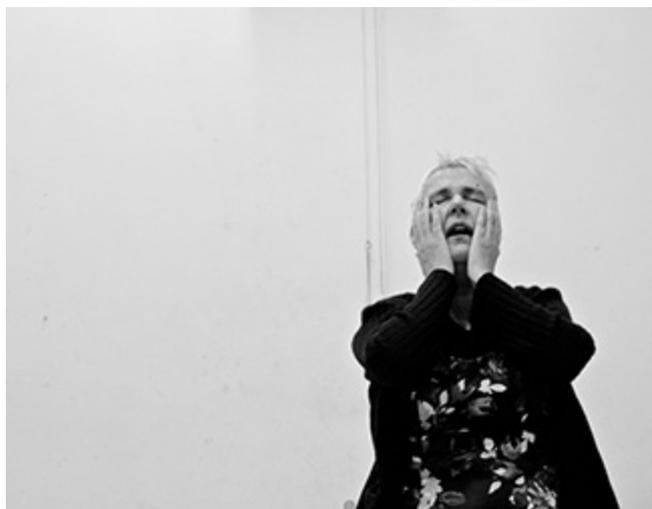


Photo by Lisa Businovski 4

Breath Song – Song of the World – Moments of Visceral Philosophy

We often think of song as some thing that is sung out. Yet where does this song come from?

The inner landscape? The psyche? What gives rise to this song? And is it really us or the world singing us through the breath. The breath resounds and permeates my perceptual encounter. I sing out the resounding of my breath in meeting with my being in resonant motion. Being in resonant motion in every breath cycle I am becoming in the action of every breath cycle. My existence as an enfleshed sculptural formation in flux is enlivened and opened in the micro movement of sensate breath vibration.

Embodied song sings through the cellular textures of my formations in the world. It sings me into being, being able to encounter breath by breath the gathering and dispersing, the separation and co-joining of my resonant existence within the fold of the other singers, and songs that arise and fall on the breath of the wind, and between humans, and all shapes of the world. The world is singing in many tones and voices, the song of the river rising in flood, the flutter of wings, and scuttle of insects. Each place has a tonal resonance that can be received in its diversity as a breath encounter.

Can I sing in, the silent vowel songs of the breath shape, my being in relationality with the world? This song of the breath occurs in silence as well as in sound, I listen to its music in the vibration of the sensation of the movement of breath taking shape, direction, texture, density, permeability. It is a song that is as much tactile as it is auditory for the felt sense receives the music, the tone is enfleshed. In the experience of breath sensation the visual, the image also pulsates with musicality, the colour, the line, the vibration of form to inform the breath encounter and alter.

I surrender to the rhythm of the breath.

Does the song of the world sing me, through me?

Carnate Flesh and Becoming Vulva

What is the relationship between experiencing and conceiving – is this an inspired act? How does the breath play through language, materiality and sensation in ways that are obscured in philosophical discourse? If the breath doesn't serve the word but exceeds it, is made by it but dissolves it, if the shapes of glossolalia are the resounding movements of materiality and do not precede speech as a linear development but are simultaneous thresholds of the profane halo where resemblance is not the threshold of reflection but breath sensation is, then how does this play through to Deleuze in terms of themes such as sensuous thought, the fold, the affect of Francis Bacon's head, thinking as an act that instigates 'the between' rather than asphyxiates it.

Desire and Pleasure: The breath is not a servant.

Desire and Pleasure: these terms are associated with Deleuze and Foucault and they point to somewhat different encounters with carnate flesh. Foucault has a sense of the 'potentiality' of breath, that it offers a distinctive line of flight, a line that leaves a trace in the formation of flesh. He grasps the dimensional realm of materiality that breathes and is implicitly relational, that offers an encounter that opens the subject to community through making perceptuality an enactment of care of the self. Deleuze on the other hand is unable to speak from this dimensional surface as the gasp of the singular breath rhythm entering sensation is elided into generality of assemblage. The passing of affect is not the gathering of singular breath substance in this account. These [fine] distinctions between the two speak of quite different encounters with the breath.

Carnate flesh is sensuous flesh, that which is imbued with breath, saturated and formed in the experience of breath and no longer able to be spoken of as if it were separable. Breathing matter not only breathes as a living enactment but is created in this encounter from one breath cycle to the next. This becoming flesh in breath is a poetic enactment that defies the categories of the linguistic signifier yet is nonetheless inseparable from language. In the Oxford English Dictionary the term 'carnate' refers to flesh, but it simultaneously refers to the sexual, the sensuous.

Flesh can refer to the living or the dead but carnate flesh is the sensuous life of breath-infused flesh. The place of the breath in relation to the concept of spirit and flesh demands re-thinking if a consideration of the term 'human' is to extend beyond theory and return to ethics as a question of flourishing. Giorgio Agamben probes this territory in questioning the terms sacred and profane. By making these terms 'inoperative' a new terrain is opened for contemplation. Contemplation is a breath experience and opens the way for an enactment to occur that is as yet inconceivable; is as yet a potentiality that can only emerge by creating a breathing space in language that is not fixed to a pre-determined position. The political is also poetic and without this dimension becomes a flat surface of dogma.

4. Not spiritual, in a negative sense; material, temporal, secular. *arch.*

†b. as *n.* in *pl.* 'Carnal things', temporal or worldly goods. [Rendering τὰ σαρκικά, or Vulg. *carnalia*, in *Rom.* xv. 27. 1 *Cor.* ix. 11.] *Obs.*

1607 [S. COLLINS](#) *Serm.* (1608) 89 They haue aduanced..the spirtualls of other men, with the loss..of their own carnalls. 1625 [BURGES](#) *Pers. Tithes* 10 Euey man..that is made partaker of the Minister's Spiritualls, must render Carnalls. *Ibid.* 14 Spiritualls doe well deserue carnalls.

5. Not spiritual, in a privative sense; unregenerate, unsanctified, worldly.

1510 [MORE](#) *Picus Ded.*, All faithfull people are rather spirituall then carnall. 1526 [TINDALE](#) *Rom.* vii. 14 The lawe is spirituall, but I am carnall [WYCLIF *fleischli*]. 1611 [BIBLE](#) *Rom.* viii. 7 The carnall minde is enmitie against God. 1667 [MILTON](#) *P.L.* XI. 212 Had not doubt And carnal fear that day dimm'd Adams eye. 1712 [ADDISON](#) *Spect.* No. 494 ¶ 1 To abstain from all Appearances of Mirth and Pleasantry, which were looked upon as the Marks of a Carnal Mind. 1865 [MOZLEY](#) *Mirac.* iii. 65 To a carnal imagination an invisible world is a contradiction in terms – another world besides the whole world.

In 5. the definition of carnal as 'not spiritual' and 'unsanctified' opens a fissure of thought around Agamben's discussion of profane and sacred in rethinking the human. In exploring the etymological unfurling of the carnal, the link to death in the charnel and the sense of flesh as 'flesh-house' arises. Inviting a conceptual shift is this sense of 'breath-house' not because it houses the breath but because it is the breath. The demise and putrefaction of flesh in deathly transition is a graphic exposition of the inseparability of the flesh from breath. The insistent division between flesh and spirit in the Christian tradition plays through the place of breath in philosophical and contemporary theoretical discourse on the human, ethics and

language. The sensuous basis of thought and meaning is inaccessible within a paradigm that incessantly resonates with their fundamental opposition. To draw on the work of Agamben is to dismantle that division, to work toward making it 'inoperative', but to do so without closing down the terrain of the spiritual, the breath, the profane halo. The profane halo is a profoundly sensuous encounter with the sensation of breath movement as material morphology and perceptuality.

Carnalize, *v.*

SECOND EDITION 1989

(¹k^ɑ_nɪ^z) [f. [CARNAL](#) *a.* + [-IZE](#).]

1. *trans.* To make carnal; to rob of spirituality; to sensualize. Hence ¹carnalized *ppl. a.*
1685 [J. SCOTT](#) *Chr. Life* i. §2 A sensual and carnalized spirit. **1755** [YOUNG](#) *Centaur* vi. (1757) IV.
 264 We are so carnalized by our lusts. **1850** [M^cCOSH](#) *Div. Govt.* (1852) 21 A tendency to
 carnalize the Divine character by representing it in symbol. **1884** MISS COBBE in *Contemp. Rev.*
 Dec. 803 It will not merely belittle life, it will carnalize it, to take Religion out of it.

[†]2. *intr.* To act carnally, have carnal intercourse. *Obs.*

Conceptual tools within in the experience of breath.

Inviting 'being carried' is a conceptual invitation to diversify the field of sensation, and is combined with a 'sense of the whole' not because there is one but because the potentiality of an extended play of breath movement and sensation opens to this threshold. A conceptual threshold, the crossing of which occurs in a particularity that is imprecise, in such profuse detail that it remains unnameable as it continues in the temporality of breathing existence. Particularly that is imprecise because the multiplicitous scope of its resounding extends beyond what can be gathered within sense impression in the movement of breath time. Yet yielding to this realm opens a different meeting with materiality to the attentiveness to the definitional logic of linguistic surface. The focus of attention is not the one but the many. Directed attention is surrendered to the impulse of breath reception in sensation that fires and permeates across expected or recognizable boundaries. When it reaches a tonus, and ease of breathing matter that holds its own rhythm, that allows a perceptuality that opens on to a dialogue with the world without being entirely subject to it in the sense of receptive to the point of disintegration. It remains attuned to discerning

pleasures of sensory intelligence, breathing flesh has an ethical foundation. A flourishing of life underpins an ethics.

Becoming Vulva: Flesh, Fold, Infinity.

Deleuze's concept of the fold offers rich possibilities for speaking of breath which I will elaborate further in another setting. Patricia MacCormack's article, "Becoming Vulva; Flesh, Fold Infinity" (2010), offers 'becoming vulva', drawing on Deleuze's concept of the fold as an alternative metaphor to the phallus or Irigaray's two lips that are not one. What these metaphors collectively serve to emphasize is the continued inclination to found an image, a reference point, in some aspect of 'the flesh' as the real. This is an instance of a dominant theme in the West of the body as a tangible reference point, a certainty, a grounds for speaking from even if metaphorically.

There is no image for becoming. Becoming has no form but is the perceivable micro flux of that which has discernable substance but not recognizable shape. The skin, the phallus, the lips, the vulva all offer images of bodily recognition yet fail to evoke the formless potentiality of life as that which becomes in folds that dissolve form as much as create, meet or engender it. This orientation to form is part of the West's preoccupation with the recognizable, measurable, knowable surfaces of life, that are equated with a normatively apparent body that can be seen, that appears as a facticity. In another view the fold is created by the movement of breath sensation, the boundaries of the fold, the crease, the edge, the surface and the dimensionality between surfaces is an experiential encounter with language. It is located in image, gesture, biological, phantasmagorical elusive play. In this view sense recognition is existence when I know not what it is yet I encounter the morphological as self in becoming. The nuance of every breath is the lived encounter of existence not only apparent in the coming and going of respiration but in the life force that gathers in flesh. In Buddhist tradition it is the leaving of this perceived life force that signifies the passage of death not the ceasing of breath movement. This departure is not recognised as distinct in the Western medical model. Breath is gathered into the folds of flesh, into the molecular in ways that are offered no account by turning to fleshly metaphors as the relationality of breath, the capacity of the world to take my breath away, to work my fleshly sensuous becoming into new resonances and

shapes occurs in this enactment. The potentiality of I is obscured by the intentionality of breath encounters that emphasize the notion of control, direction, development of capacity without encompassing the creative forces of relinquishing the known habitus. Succumbing to the non-productive forces of sensation that constitute an experience of self but not knowledge.

Vulvas are materially formed of multiple folds of flesh. The body becoming-vulva is involuted and undone, creating what Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* calls a larval sexuality – immature and transformed at every synthesis, which acts not toward a thing but toward its metamorphosis, toward encountering the self which is sensed but not wholly perceived, toward the imperceptibility within repetition where all elements within syntheses are dissipated, disoriented, and reoriented with each turn, each folding and alteration in the aspects of involution. Pleasure is folding with the planes of flesh. Beyond metaphor becoming-vulva enfleshes as fold every part of the flesh, every nerve, every tissue mass, every artery, every organ, the unfolded skin as libidinally provocative. In the event of thinking over knowing vulva is present but not present to itself, sensed but not perceived and known (MacCormack, 2010, p. 94).

The meaning of words is stuffed with experiential referent which alters according to the speaker's milieu. Within academic settings this orientation is often to a linguistically formulated series of associations, a lineage of articulate discourse that is marked by the work of significant figures. We often fail to grasp when we are speaking with, to, or about these words used in other settings, especially the somatic sensory fields, that these words have a different lineage, that they are often used casually and what may appear to be in ignorance of 'current meaning' in ways that are clearly dated, untrue. Yet this often reflects a vast literacy of perceptuality in the user such that the word as a container, as a signifier, is regarded as having relatively little significance. Its meaning is not carried in the historical layers of intellectual philosophical formulation but in the sensory encounters that resound in and between those whose literacy perceptually is tactile, auditory, cross sensory and resounding in details; fleshly encounters that alter mood, posture, thought rhythm and yes the very boundaries of what a referent may be alluding to.

The expression the 'natural breath' is a lovely trigger point to perturb 'serious thinkers' who would posit that the user of such an expression fails to grasp that 'the

natural' is a contested category that has capitulated. Yet in somatic body work the use of this phrase often refers to nothing more than allowing the breath rather than consciously trying to manipulate it, to trusting that it will continue to come and to go even if I stop trying to make it longer or shorter, deeper or smoother. Not only this but that it will alter and take on more nuance of sensation if I simply perceive the sensations of it. That these sensations of breath movement will invite changes in posture, weight, sensibility, mood, relationship, attitude, all the constellated surfaces that shape my thinking. For thinking is a shape, a sensation searching for articulation. Challenged on the use of the word 'natural' some practitioners would say fine let's call it 'unnatural', 'fat', 'juicy': the experience is not in the name; it is a pointer to a distinction between controlling the breath rhythm and insofar as possible allowing it. 'Allowing the breath' is a threshold to an experiential terrain that reworks all sorts of assumptions, definitions and understandings of language, definitional terms, and bodily encounters. The breath that comes and goes on its own – where does this lead? As a threshold 'allowing the breath' is an entry point that alludes to nothing precisely but the temporal potentiality to embark on an adventure that cannot be known, only undergone. In this sense it is a quest: to know is to be reshaped for in this temporal realm of breath there is no I that stands apart from the experience.

Implicit in the meaning of the word 'perceived' is the idea that this is something that allows clear recognizable access to what a thing is, but this only occurs in the sense that the whole notion of thingness collapses. In the sensate realm perception is always imprecise, always incomplete. Often it is the intricacy of its incompleteness, the multitude of unclaritys, that constitute its complexity as a visceral fullness. To those who inhabit the linguistic play and image oriented surfaces of language perception seems to be equated with knowing something recognisable. In the somatic sensory literacies this is not necessarily the case. Perception is never complete and is always moving.

MacCormack goes onto say:

Skin may be peeled, planes touched, parts intensified or moved around, corporeal minutiae explored and every plane of the body reorganized into a new configuration with new function

and meaning. *Becoming-vulva makes skin-flesh of the world, not the self upon becoming* (2010, p. 94).

Well I am not sure about this: 'every plane of the body reorganized into a new configuration' carries an emphasis on the new which obscures the potentiality of the old. At this juncture the question of 'time' arises. Or perhaps the newness inherent implicitly in each breath cycle, a rearticulation of this living materiality, one which has a potentiality of substance in sensory encounter that is not organized but experienced. Perhaps it is because inherent in the claim is a sense of the body as flesh, 'something' to be reorganized, but the breath is a more complex player in this life than 'flesh' offers account of in Western thought.

The perceptual body is not the anatomical body yet it remains breathing matter; this matter is living matter the pulse of which can be sensed but not mastered.

Judith Butler challenges this 'mute facticity' of the body as a reference point of any stability or ontological status.

If I were to take up a body part myself it would be the lungs as they exist as a pair and as a singularity; the one that is both. The resounding of breath in flesh brings to resonance the biology of the organism in reverberant life, and simultaneously brings to language the glossolalic and the word, the historical and cultural, geographical and extended milieu. The sensation of language moves across all these terms as the infinitesimal tremour of breath movement. The vibration of breath across vocal folds, the movement of bodily folds with each wave of respiration, the subtle meeting of sites of sensation that give rise to perceptuality, speech, song, and sounds play back through the breath encounter recreating fleshly folds and resonances. Yet any attempt to locate an image of the fold in bodily anatomy cleaves to flesh without opening out the resonance of flesh where each person breathes and in this breathing can experience thresholds of encounter that move across all sensory modes and where language is subject to breath and not only served by it. Yet the dominant mode of attention is so comprehensively oriented toward the signifier that the experience of perceptible breath is barely accessible to most people. The experience of this so-called 'real' body is offered as self-evident proof. Butler's challenge to this

category of 'mute facticity' begins to open the way to ask how 'real' is this body? How does our experience of our 'natural' breath support a conception of the body, and a conception of the human, that offers up as 'knowledge' what is no more than a reflection of the dominant power structures?

MacCormack goes on to elaborate the 'vulvic paradigm', touching upon various key themes around self, receptivity, affectuation, force. She refers to the notion of 'pure immanent one-ness'.

It is compelling at this stage to refer the reader to Deleuze's pictorial sketch of Foucault's foldings and inside of thought (1999, p120). The similarity between this image and the undifferentiated vulva is astonishing. This diagram is made of four elements which could be oriented to feminist theory. Line of the outside refers to the vulva's affectuation of and by other elements. Citing Blanchot and resonant with Irigaray Deleuze states this zone has become 'intimacy and intrusion' (1999, p120). Strategic zone refers to the powers of thought as creation over knowledge as pre-formed constitution masquerading as reflection. (always by the structure that allows it to emerge). Deleuze states these are fictions but no less capable of affectuation shifts in the folds (2010, pp. 95-96).

MacCormack articulates 'becoming vulva' in relation to language in various thoughtful ways.

Because the vulva is made up of folds, shared language is always expressed from one fold and is neither independent of the perspective of the speaker's position nor entirely apparent to that speaker – language, rather than seen as coming from outside as a transcendental structure, free itself to inherent independent ambiguity at the crease where two folds are juxtaposed, fused only through inflection nor assimilation or metonymic juxtaposition. Incommensurability is therefore always part of the vulvic structure, neither a failure nor celebrated rupture ... Deleuze's continuity thus incorporates other elements, a continuity between what is traditionally discontinuous. Continuity is constituted by particle-intensity elements, not forms (2010, p. 98).

This final line is pertinent to the conceptual realm opened by reincorporating breath, as a movement that comes and goes of its own accord. This process creates a continuity that paradoxically is based on endless micro kaleidoscopic movements of 'particle-intensities' more comprehensive than can be given form, named or

perceived yet resounds in sensuous potentiality. Such movements are experienced in their imprecision rather than identified, yet this is enough to alter the resonance of flesh: carnate potentiality that is discerning, capable of following lines of flight that swoop between the surfaces and densities of language both familiar and strange. Reworked according to a flourishing, where possible a joy and delight permeate the becoming eye not only in vision, but in the touch of sensation, the reverberance of breath which is always more than I am. The experience of breath can imbue a lightness, an ease, a permeable scrim through which the movement of affect is felt not as a physical ravishing but a sensate lucidity.

MacCormack continues:

Becoming-vulva emphasises the movement of the two lips as our folding with them and our fold – planes forming connections which we cannot see but which affect the singularity nonetheless, as we perceive relations with elements of other planes that do not perceive themselves but affect to infinity (2010, p. 98)

This reference to what we cannot see is significant as the emphasis on seeing, recognition, and identity seems to be part of what is at stake. The seeming incapacity to account for how the play of language occurs in what is not known, recognizable or understandable is related to the place of breath in philosophical discourse. Breath is a conceptual force, a movement that refolds. And the act of reflection is a comprehensive movement that travels in sensuous time. Abstraction is an illusion, as is the transcendent is. Breath, an elusive mark that carries the formless – given over to form but not able to be contained – breath finds its own shape.

In relation to the fold-unfold-foldings of becoming-vulva is the fold itself as a fluid inflection, what Irigaray has called blurring and mucosal. This resists the risk in creating yet another binary from the mechanics of fluids versus solids. Mucosal describes the fluids emergent of and from the vulva which connects the vulva's folds with itself and blurs demarcations of externality (MacCormack, 2010, p. 98).

The sexual imagery of bodily fluid offers movement but continues a tradition of linking sexuality to anatomy within a paradigm that is so profoundly divided between

body and language. It carries the mark of gender/sexuality that is unquestioningly contiguous with two sexes represented infamously in Adam and Eve who, as an afterthought, was made from a rib.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler offers an account of performativity in relation to gender and sexuality imbued with breath sensation. What fold and move are sites of sensation, intensity and the play of kinaesthetic image reshaping, in-forming corporeal matter underscoring that anatomy is not the defining point of sexuality. Nor is it an adequate paradigm for opening the way to rearticulating life force and the movement between all. There is much in what MacCormack writes about the fold as 'becoming vulva' that touches close to the morphological flux of breath, 'just as becoming-vulva is morphology-in-action'.

As a fold structure we also do not occupy one versus many spaces but one space which stretches, folds, inflects and thus multiples are aspects not sets of singulars which can co-opt other singulars. In this sense Deleuze would emphasize the fold as a consistency-relational space more than the hybrid form posited in *A Thousand Plateaus*. He calls this a dimension, not a physical environment. (1999, p109). The vulva thus could be a dimension-form, and Irigaray's terrain a material dimensional reality, in excess but not ignorant of 'real-life' dimensions. Indeed as Deleuze offers the singularity of dimensions there can no longer be a doubling of real versus abstract places. They are always both, like the fleshy vulva configurations (MacCormack, 2010, p. 99).

Here arises the dimensional and this image of language which is not an image but a sensuous account of the breath encounter of perceptuality that occurs in the experience of breath in the play of sensation and presence: an encounter that is never repeated but a threshold to a temporal literacy that experiences the sensate movement of language in breath time.

spirit animates the given rather than existing in the realm of the abstract, so we connect with spirit by engaging - and not unnecessarily interfering - with the given. By embracing the given even in its most

adulterated forms, we reinhabit our own contemporary, mundane reality in the same kind of profound way that traditional Aboriginal peoples inhabited their reality, the still edenic land.

Freya Matthews (2004 para 61.)

Halo

The 'threshing room floor' figures in the etymological root of the word 'halo'. In the temporal breath encounters that occupy the elusive site of the halo we find thresholds between different molecular surfaces of language are formed in perceptuality, a resounding of carnate flesh. This luminous space of the halo is the permeable, where breathing matter exceeds form. That which 'hangs around', encircles but exceeds form is perceived yet not necessarily visible. The contour of recognition remains imprecise and exceeds representation.

The Intertwining – The Chiasm

What is this prepossession of the visible, this art of interrogating it according to its own wishes, this inspired exegesis? We would perhaps find the answer in the tactile palpation where the questioner and the questioned are closer, and of which, after all, the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 133).

In the experience of breath I am touched, and can perceive this touch of breath in my vision of the world. I touch with my eye. This is different from how I see most of the time. Implicitly Merleau-Ponty recognizes this relationship in the phrase 'inspired exegesis'. I experience this 'encounter' as having palpable meaning: it shifts the intensities and directions of my sensate spatial experience in each breath cycle. In this resounding I am lightened, lengthened, proximated: I sense that the distance between me and what I am looking at alters; it becomes more palpable and I am brought closer to it. I sense I occupy my physical embodiment in a way that is more receptive to the intricacies of the touch of the world. I sense the surface of my eye extends to cover my whole body: this is a different look. It is also a different feel. Breathing flesh sees differently.

Nuanced breath sensation alters my physical sensibility, and my felt relationship to the world alters. I feel a quality of trust, an easing of bodily distresses, tensions; but more than this a feeling of being able to dwell in my skin and in the world. The minutiae of variation in breath sensation and perceptuality come to the fore. These subtle bodily experiences are immediately meaningful. I sense myself as unfixed, my familiar sense of 'self' becoming subject to shifts in palpable sensibility yet more comfortably located in relationship. Inner sensation continues to shift, intensify, diffuse, in each breath. How I look alters. In my experience this statement is literal: not only do I see differently I look different. These polyphonous shifts of palpable perception play through my sensory apparatus both in how I perceive my body in space and how I perceive the space around me. They shape my thought and cognitive responses. These palpable encounters through the tactile eye reform how I look at the world and consequently how I conceive of things.

The touch of breath

Merleau-Ponty speaks of touch in a number of ways. Tonus, gesture and touch interplay in breath experience.

The resonance of vision plays through the experience of each breath cycle in perceptible sensation and text(ures) of presence.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to ask,

How does it happen that I give my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and rough? (1968, p. 133)

The meeting of surfaces, and the subtle textures that comprise them is a meeting in breath and sensation, a stimulus to bodily cross-sensory breath play that constitutes my lived body. These nuances of touch impression reshape my flesh in the breathing enfoldment of the world. This may be not so much visible as sensible in the imperceptible micro movement of sensation that nonetheless informs my proprioceptive encounter.

In the experience of breath derived from the work of Ilse Middendorf this meeting in touch is also perceived as a perceptible breath experience in each breath cycle. One aspect of the work involves what is termed 'breath dialogue' between practitioner and client/other. This is often undertaken with one person lying on the breath table and the practitioner seated on a stool. By placing hands on the person the practitioner senses the person's breath movement, direction, dimensionality, rhythm, substance, presence. The emphasis is on dialogue rather than directing the person's breath to some ends. This dialogue requires the perceptible presence of both. To understand the realm of this dialogue and the meaning of contested words like presence in this context takes not only a deconstructing of the term but an encounter with perceptual practices outside the norms of scholastic training. The capacity to perceive nuances in each breath cycle is rarely acknowledged in theoretical accounts of embodiment within the academy. In laying my hands on the breathing

body of another I am able to perceive the rhythmic coming and going of their breath cycle as it changes from one to the next. I am also able to perceive changes in the texture of flesh under or between my hands, the interplay of dimensionality between different surfaces, the gathering of substance, the vacation of breath movement or the relocation, the merging of a multiplicity of bodily areas in breath. I can do so and simultaneously maintain an awareness of the coming and going of my own breath rhythm in sensation, location, field of presence. I can more or less inhabit these perceptions simultaneously. I can more or less allow my own breath to come and go without it merging with the rhythm of the other. I can perceive their rhythm and be touched by it without being compelled to join it. An encounter occurs that encompasses difference, vision and tactility of perception.

My flesh in becoming, their flesh in becoming is a breath experience. We do not become each other, yet an encounter, a dialogue can be felt, can be understood to have taken place, to be taking place.

The quality and texture of touch is a resonant reflection of my experience of breath which is becoming in temporal encounter.

To perceive the subtlety of breath movement in perceptible sensation requires a softening of linguistic babble. A breath between words, a spaciousness in words. A great deal of mental focus flows into perceiving the sensation of movement in each breath cycle and generally speaking this is not a focus that academic training turns to. What is more, as with the manipulation of linguistic signs, the capacity to play, to engage and occupy this terrain develops with exposure, with practice. This is not always immediately accessible for those of us deeply cooked in the academic pot, whose flesh has been marinated in linguistic signifiers, whose primary source of agency, engagement, and sensory contact has been filtered through many years of schooling that focuses on the sign not the sensation. Not that they are separate but rather different engagements of the same flesh. Different experiences of the same linguistic flesh. One oriented to the surfaces of reflection and less often to the resonances of breath figuration as sensation and felt meaning.

I use my brain differently in this breath encounter it seems. To register sensation, location, surfaces, dimensionality, intensity, contour is a mentally subsuming activity. The shifting, linking, organizing of linguistic chains of association also require a mindful engagement. They are not mutually exclusive but the perceptual realm of breath encounter is given scant attention compared to the cultivation of linguistic competence.

My methodology could be said to be a breath dialogue within my own practice but also in the reading of various texts. As I read Merleau-Ponty I am invited to recall various experiences of the touch of breath; in myself and in touching the breath of others with my hands, eyes, skin. Breath resonates through vocal vibration but also in the silence of the breath inhabiting flesh, refiguring flesh. I perceive its resonance in sensation, tactility, auditory touch and vision. My gaze reflects my breathing flesh, as does my flesh resounding in the subtlety of breath sensation, shape my encounter with another that permeates beyond the glaze of gaze into the palpable.

Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 133).

For me this 'kinship' Merleau-Ponty refers to occurs and clarifies in the experience of breath. Part of this clarity is a gradual awakening to the diversity of subtle breath experience that accompanies every breath cycle and is invoked by gesture, shape, rhythm and sensory engagement. The sensation of the movement of breath is both a sensation and a movement, one that is simultaneously of me and of the world.

The tactility of engagement with the world changes the nuance of every breath cycle. This palpable experience occurs not just through touch and the skin but through the touch of the eye. The shape of my standing, my perceptual sensitivity to different peripheral surfaces, skin and what lies below, I sense more or less, in shifting

interrelationship. I am the play of my skeletal form within this breathing sac, sensing the world meeting different surfaces and dimensional enfoldment. As my form alters so too does imagery, memory, emotion, the capacity to think between sensation and word. My capacity to resound in a multiplicity of emotional textures and to recognize them in the breath of others complexifies through this play of breath. The diversifying of my human breadth of reference occurs partly in this breath rhythm that I experience as my own in relationship with sensation and the flesh of the world that enfolds me. Perceptual practices, whether framed as artistic, forms of somatic bodywork, spiritual practices, gardening, playing, sporting, elaborate these textures of breath, sensation, kinaesthetic play of action, gesture, form and spatial relationship. The substance of breath reverberates as the nuance of sensation in breath movement, cross sensory interplay in perceptual enfoldment and linguistic play.

The more I become permeable to the sensation of breath the more I perceive the touch of the world upon me, within me and upon me. Not only through the touch of vision but also through my inhabitation of the spatial dimensional world in which my flesh is located. 'I am breathing in the world' simultaneously declares my relationship to inspiration but also to my location, I am located in the breath of the world. The touch of breath is a fleshly encounter.

Enfolded in the breath flesh of the world

the look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory—I do not look at a chaos, but at things—so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 133).

As my palpable experience of breath unfolds I find my encounter with the world takes on different characteristics. I no longer see in the same way all the time. In the act of perceiving what is before me I also perceive what perceptible breath experience comes and goes. This seems to lead me into increasingly subtle nuances of breath in sensation, variation in breath rhythm and in perceptual visual field. Proximity and

dimensionality alter along with my sense of shape and space, line and texture. I have less of a sense that I see things as they are and more as if I come to know them in this meeting. I do not look so much as breathe, breathe in, move out in palpable relationship. I am subtly shaped in sensation and posture by each breath cycle of the encounter. Yet it is not clear to me what makes this breath shape, this experience.

I am not so much looking at the world as becoming in relation with it through each movement of breath. I am part of the breathing flesh of the world. Enfolded and enfolding with each breath that enters the folds of my body; expiration refolds anew my sensory perception of sensations that arouse my thought, perception and standing. Inclusion and difference simultaneously mark my worldly life. As Merleau-Ponty says I am both the seer and the seen. I breathe in the world through my eyes, ears, the sense of the world on my skin and in my tissue, resounding.

This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 133)

The play of the breath is central in this felt encounter from within and without. My experience of my flesh alters. This takes many guises but a sense of being permeable to the sensation of breath arises in areas of my body or to varying extents throughout. In these moments it is as if the constitution of my flesh becomes subject to breath. As subject to breath I find the meeting of the sole of my foot and the floor takes on a relationality that I don't always experience. I become receptive to the touch of the floor. I experience a sensation of the movement of breath in my feet, legs, sole of foot, so that the inhalation, exhalation arouse different sensory awareness. Receptiveness to sensations of the movement of breath in my periphery is interrelated with a heightened sensing of my own skin boundaries. I sense myself rubbing up against the world, caressing and stroking, moulding and meeting. This occurs even though there appears to be no material object for me to rub up against. It is a sensory meeting and it can have a significant effect for my breath experience and my desire and capacity to meet the other in a sense of mutual palpability. I can play with, engage in a dialogue through sensing, moving, offering my attention, to the

interplay of breath sensation and my physical form. My perceptual presence comes more clearly to one surface or another. This enhances my capacity to perceive the effect of allowing my breath cycle to touch me. The touch of breath is simultaneously central to what arouses this perceptual clarity. It comes, it goes; some days a breath ball, others a dough ball, a knotted up ball, a breathing sac or a vibrating lump. This allowing I speak of is not under the control of my will. It is not an action but a perceptual practice that alters in each breath cycle and is not subject to the constraints of my desires, will, intention.

My skin becomes the skin of the world. I am enclosed in a membrane that enfolds me. My skin is not so much my own discreet boundary as a boundary of the world of which I am a part.

The more I perceive this meeting of breath and sensation the more my borders come into a clearer perceptual awareness, one that creates a frisson. Paradoxically the enlivened breath perception around my periphery, which is an internal felt sense that permeates through to the surface of what is referred to as my skin, enhances my bodily sense and yet increases receptivity to the touch of the world in a way that includes my feeling less separate. I become one with the world and yet my sense of my boundary is maintained.

There is the tactile sense of the world that leaves an impression on my breath, and there is a visual sense of the world that leaves an impression on my breath. Can I receive the breath? I meet the world in my breath experience. I resound in every breath cycle and the scope of my resounding speaks of my formation; the scope of my perception of this resounding speaks of my attunement to the possibility of participating in this dialogue through perception.

The tactility of touch resides partly in the experience of breath. It is in the touch of breath that the world touches my eye, ear, imagination.

Through this crisscrossing within it of touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. It is no different for the

vision—except, it is said, that here the exploration and the information it gathers do not belong “to the same sense.” But this delimitation of the senses is crude. Already in the “touch” we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. Between the massive sentiment I have of the sack in which I am enclosed, and the control from without that my hand exercises over my hand, there is as much difference as between the movements of my eyes and the changes they produce in the visible. And as, conversely, every experience of the visible has always been given me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the “tactile qualities.” We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothing-ness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes—even more, every displacement of my body—has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 133-134)

It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 134)

These accounts offered by Merleau-Ponty assist to locate my perceiving body in the world as part of the world. Introducing the experience of breath into this account offers an opening to the multiplicity of surfaces, depths and meetings that this invokes. The visible and the tangible are not fixed. These relations reach beyond the readily describable as they emerge in both flux and form. The visible and the tangible are both in motion and appearance of stability, or tangibility, visibility is not a simple surface. The meeting is in constant reformation. This flux and form is sensed in contour, dimension, relation, and in linguistic form, grammar, image, and signifier.

The play of the sign plays through the breath flesh and is part of its figuration and perceptual engagement, both tangible and visible as breath movement in cellular resonance. Meaning resounds through multiple layers not only on the surface but through the folds of the world. I recognize a shift in my tangible breath sensation. This act of recognition is meaningful without a (sign)ifier, I register its (sign)ificance.

The linguistic signifier becomes a place of anchorage, an illusory stability built on an arbitrary sign but nonetheless grounds for play. The play of the experience of breath also provides grounds for a meeting, but it is a meeting of the flux of felt experience bringing me to sense the ground beneath my feet, the surfaces of my embodied kinesphere, the coming and going of my breath as it gathers substance within my tangible sensations of body and invites my skeletal, cellular, perceptual incarnate resounding self into sense and view.

There is an interesting continuity in the place of the body, the sensible, within modern discourses. It is simultaneously reinvented into language, recognized as culturally constructed and then the implications of this are ignored and left unexplored. The body as perceptuality, an integral dimension of thought, is not explored. So that the historical tradition of failing to come to a bodily position in the world is continued, no longer in the name of God, spirit and all that is superior to flesh but in the name of the sign, the play of signifier and the demise of the breath encounter. The sense of the dumb body still prevails, culturally constructed but dumb nonetheless. Within all this attempts to reconsider the body continue to be founded on pain and sexuality, the two great themes of the Western Christian tradition. 'In the beginning was the word' we hear and so the tradition continues. In the beginning was the breath and the breath was permeating the world, the sign, the dance and the palpable body. The Word continues to be the fixation and preoccupation of philosophy as it has been since the word became a point of biblical pronouncement. The body is formed in language and breathes.

Restuffing the Signifier

Judith Butler's proposal of 'subversion', challenging gender construction in the drag show tradition as a means of peeling back the layers of normative inscription of

embodiment doesn't go far enough. The body is constructed in breathing flesh. Permeated by the signifier my perceptual flesh resounds differently in each breath cycle. I am embodied in language and this breathing is nuanced in vocality, imagery, proprioceptive relationship. The breath is also a sign, a sign of life, and it resounds through the arbitrary boundaries of signifier, consonant, vowel, gathering an abundance and vitality that spills over the postural formations of 'normative inscription'. I am subject to language but I am also subject to breath. Resounding in breath is not a singular 'I' but a multiplicitous 'I', each breath cycle from one to the next a continuous discontinuity. 'I' is many voices, fragments entwined and unravelling. The present moment is not a fact but a movement. My breath presence is a palpable experience of the resounding contours of this encounter but it cannot be contained except perhaps in death. While there are still signs of life the resounding breath is both reflexive and permeating. The signifier is stuffed with the breath that comes and goes of its own accord. Breath perception becomes a subversive sensuous pleasure when I experience myself enfolded back into the flesh of the world and recognition of a mutual continuity.

Breathing is Meaning

Judith Butler's contribution to rethinking the body provides a useful invitation to rethink the term 'breath' and the complexity of breath experience as felt sense. I experience the world differently in dimensionality. The complexity of breath experience and the inadequacy of theoretical language to encompass this breadth becomes clear. This clarity doesn't deny theory or other linguistic expression a place but implicitly recognizes that it offers a partial account, a shifting point of view. The capacity to shift is inherent in the usefulness of such engagement. The overview is a point of view. My experience of breath reminds me that there are many perceptual surfaces to view from. I cannot bring them all simultaneously into language. Yet within this shifting perceptual clamour some draw my sensibility more than others. If I allow the movement of breath I am brought to perceptual encounters that I had not conceived of. This is a further expansion of my perceptuality, my body in the making. This made body resounds with implicit meanings that shape my thinking.

Butler's reworking of the term 'matter' allows a lot more scope for the consideration of felt meaning, the cultivation of perception as a significant way of knowing. The fixity of the 'natural body' is replaced by a more comprehensive and malleable account that allows for the richness of cross sensory interplay and the intermingling of touch and vision, tactility and thought.

"To a carnal imagination an invisible world is a contradiction in terms – another world besides the whole world". [OED Carnal]

This is a strange quotation in that the carnal in perceptuality is unequivocally a resounding of sites of sensation in fleshly location, so much so that the resounding as a subtle flux of the breath cycle is indivisibly linked to the invisible yet felt frisson of breath encounter. The gathering of breath cores along the spine or elsewhere are simultaneously invisible yet sensuously palpable. They have discernible shape and movement yet remain without fixed form as it is the oscillating quivering of their perceived formation and the play of this throughout the bodily form that alters the perceptible textures of flesh.

The unreflective carnal that is uninspired by the breath, the invisible, does not have existence because it does not have experiential sensuous place but also because it does not have conceptual lines of flight. The resonance of ideas is partially what forms flesh, opens it to breath, is breath in sensation. Becoming breath, becoming attuned to sensations of the invisible opens the conceptual space where the movement of the invisible is felt and even seen – the perceptible breath.

Gathering in the breath cloud



Photo by Victoria Bonte 2

I let the breath come, I let it go, I wait for it to return of its own accord... Within this encounter there is an interplay of breath, sensation and presence – the body of breath. Breath is not a servant but leads us to thresholds and movement in the folds of thought.

~ Sacrificial rite

Peeling herself open

The breath enters

Offering up layers

A sacrificial rite

Akin to death

The subject dissolving

Breath rhythm unnamed

Becoming other

Than one was

Known to be

But no longer



Photo by Lisa Businovski 5



Photo by Lisa Businovski 6

In the unknown

The resounding of breath sensation

Eats the word

Grinding, corroding, dissolving enactment,

Guts roiling,

Peristaltic surging and thrusting

The erotic becoming of digestion

To be taken up again into molecular resonance

The word is a living encounter with the certainties
of history



Photo by Lisa Businovski 7

Foucault: Taking Religion into the Heart of Culture

The central force of my reading of Foucault is to show how what I call a 'spiritual corporeality' and a 'political spirituality' undermine the traditional space of religion as understood in Western Christian society. After Foucault 'religion' is taken out of its privileged realm and brought into the body politic and into the heart of culture (Carrette, 2000, p. xi).

My aim is to 'fold' Foucault's texts upon each other, to establish some coherence and order in the religious ideas held at the margins. Such an exercise is comparable to Gilles Deleuze's commentary on Foucault which describes the 'folds' in Foucault's work, where the 'interiority' of thought is seen as a doubling of what is outside of thought.⁹ The 'religious question' in this sense is part of the 'unthought' of Foucault's work. My work aims to shape an 'inside' (an interiority) of his work with the 'outside' (the unthought). It is to explore the 'folds' of his texts in order to reconstruct a 'religious question'. I seek to read the multiple strands of his religious sub-text back on each other, to find Foucault's own 'religious question' (Carrette, 2000, p. 3).

Carrette elaborates this theme well:

Deleuze also suggests with a slightly different emphasis that the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality* concerns the world problem of the 'fold' (incarnation) when it stresses the Christian origins of flesh from the viewpoint of the history of sexuality'. Deleuze [1986] (1988) p.149 n 36. This illustrates how creative the idea of the 'fold' can be to different readings of Foucault's work on religion. I am, however, using the idea of the 'fold' to play different parts of Foucault work against each other and also to play with the idea of an 'inside' and an 'outside' in Foucault's thinking. I am suggesting that Foucault's 'religious question' exists within this fold (Carrette, 2000, pp. 153-154 note 9).

Further on Carrette articulates the place of silence and speech in his argument.

Finally, I will return to my main argument and show how Foucault's work holds a single critique of religion in the two ideas of 'spiritual corporeality' and 'political spirituality'. I will reiterate that as Foucault sees 'silence' and 'speech' as inseparable, so the notions of 'spiritual corporeality' and 'political spirituality' are inseparable. My aim is to show how Foucault's work holds a single critique of Christianity with two interrelated dimensions. After Foucault, religion is radically

transformed, and in conclusion I will briefly outline what I see as the distinctive challenges he offers to religious and theological thinking (Carrette, 2000, p. 5).

At the end of the introduction Carrette talks about his and Foucault's use of words like, religion, spirituality, theology, and Christianity. This discussion is important as it relocates co-ordinates of the 'religious and theological "subject"'.

The alteration in traditional religious meaning is brought about by repositioning 'religion' in the space of the body and the politics of the subject (Carrette, 2000, p. 6).

This alteration mentioned above is very important to my project as it sits within the conceptual space of the 'profane halo' and the place of 'encounter' as a dimension of language. Encounter is not outside language as it is a shaping and in-forming: that is to say it gives rise to forms of recognition. As Carrette goes on to say.

'The 'truth' of religious discourse is in effect taken out of the binary opposition between spirit and matter and rewritten in terms of the dynamic power-knowledge and embodiment (Carrette, 2000, p. 6).

In his final studies Foucault reconceptualized his work in terms of how individuals were made into 'subjects'; not only subjects of knowledge and subjects of power, as his previous work had demonstrated, but desiring subjects. The shift in his thinking was coupled with a move from exploring the techniques of domination in human societies (power) to an exploration of the techniques or technologies of self. This meant that his later volumes of his history of sexuality were recast in terms of a 'hermeneutics of self'. According to Foucault the fundamental axis of sexual ethics could be seen to rest upon the 'self's relation to itself' (*rappor a soi*) (Carrette, 2000, p. 23).

Silence and Confession

Breath is a formative encounter of and with self, a relational force if you will, a distinctive and elusive power. In all of Foucault's investigation of power the place of breath remains obscure, a silence within his body of work. In his second chapter Carrette raises the place of silence within Foucault's work and this has a number of interesting openings for discussing breath as perceptuality. The concept of silence

as an abundant space of perceptuality fecund with meaning and resonance, the experience of the pleasures of becoming carnate flesh –perceptual breath flesh – has not been extensively articulated as a part of language.

The discussion here is of Foucault's work around the interrelation of silence and speech. This breath flesh is an ethical flesh, a perceptual literacy. Silence that is full, dimensional, immersing and creative of a relationality with the world more extensive and sensuously accessible than through other mediums is a silence that is enfleshed with meaning in every breath nuance. Felt meaning which is in silent dialogue, gathering, extending, making connection, garnering surprise and humour. The subtle nuances of silence are felt in these intricate movements, intensities and transmogrifications.

This silence is enculturated, discerning. Yet it is not a silence of oppression, not 'silenced', not held back, rather endlessly becoming yet gratifying in immediate sensation, the silent gathering of the breath body as substance. The paradox of the breath fold is this simultaneous dissolution and gathering, accumulative form and ephemeral flux where concepts such as being and becoming are inadequate points around which to hang a conversation. Once again the 'inoperative' of Agamben's philosophical project brings to the fore the need to create a different conceptual terrain in relation to the experience of and referents of the term 'breath'. The morphological construction of my postural matter as breath-infused flesh occurs in silence but is not silenced; rather, it is allowed, received, impressed and inscribed.

The silent is not necessarily silenced, not mute nor oppressed but the threshold to the multiplicity of *the fold* as a breath encounter opening on to *the human* as potentiality. The silence of the body is a creative dimension of language where the dialogue, the reflection, takes place in sensation and movement. Breath is a threshold to this domain. This domain is not singular but extensive *beyond measure*. A perceptual literacy is at play inextricably interwoven with speech, word, image, history, and environment. Breath time folds the self through silence and word and the glossolalia of resonant sound. There is no confession, *I am* is no longer the speaker but the movement of self as a worldly meeting occurring in each breath cycle. 'I' refers to self and self is not 'identity' necessarily, but an encounter with breath,

memory and imagination fluxing in sensation. I as a referent has no fixed place yet emanates in utterance from a breath body more or less articulate in language. The perceptible resonance of self as sensation folded through the recognizable surfaces of 'identity' is a resonance of breath movement, a micro tonal movement, an erotic overtone that allows a subtle sensing of substance as bodily form to utter from moment to moment.

It is an uncovering of the 'silent and subjugated discourse of religion' that opens to the conceptual terrain of 'the breath' in its philosophical locations. Knowledge and power in regard to the breath play through any discussion of body, sexuality, spirituality and the conception of language as a formative absence.

His work can therefore be seen as an attempt to identify the underlying forces which control and shape the religious 'subject' and as an exercise to uncover the silenced and subjugated discourses of religion. While Foucault never formulated such a clear position about his overall work on religion, my sub-textual reworking takes its inspiration from the centrality of silence within his own writings (Carrette, 2000, p. 25).

The Christian confession implies the capacity to 'know the self through words' to reveal and expose this self. Yet self in breath is a listening in silence to, an apprehension that invites no question, an entering into the sensation of time that is life. The sensation of time as self arises in the perception of breath that transmutes, where breath experience opens to the verb 'to be' as a happening, an event that *I am* as part of the world. This sensate perceptible realm of breath sensation is not the 'real' breath that we all know as invisible, mysterious, vague movement, or anatomically located lung expansion. The conceptual terrain of breath as a term rests on the misplaced experiential reference of 'the real', 'the natural', the self-evident experiential knowledge of what it is, backed up by various authoritative training practices in the arts and physical sciences that purport to know what it is and how best to handle it.

It is a re-folding of conceptual spaces inspired by the breath that moves me to search for a way of articulating. I hear the resonance of ideas arising through breath experience and these surfaces bear a different relationship to one another. They are

in cacophonous and polyphonic play; the thought of one brings to mind in image, word and sensation, the surface of another. The disparate voices of different writers are singing to each other often across what may appear to be an abyss of difference. Yet in the travelling of vocal tone they come together as a body of sound; the difference of appearance melts into the harmonic overtones of vocal vibration and the kinaesthetic resonance of breath stirs bodily sensation across multiple sites. The making of the erotic, the ethical, the perceptuality of a shared world is breathed into being. Such a being can never be fixed as breathing is the fold of movement in life.

The generosity of silence opens a portal to sensing the movement of breath as perceptible sensation. In Carrette's discussion of 'the gaze' and the directed force of attention we are returned to the question of what it is to perceive breath movement. To **look** at my breath is to stand apart and in doing so, or in order to do so, an inclination to hold it often arises. This is so established that it presents itself as a truth, a reality that is expressive of some immutable fact of the world. To experience the intricate movements of 'self' is a deeply unfamiliar sensation for some of us. 'To experience' in this context means to be subject to, permeated and fragmented by this meeting, altered and affected, stripped of the illusory position of observer. But the play of breath in sensation is not generally speaking an assault but a potentiality to live within as an erotic space constantly renewed with vitality and pleasurable encounters of resounding perceptuality. Within a libidinal framework to be subjected to the gaze is not to be objectified but to be left in the frisson of a cultural power nexus which imbues fear as a basis of the control of female sexuality. The threat of being subject to, subjected is the subjectivity we are speaking of.

As existence becomes more erotic so too does my experience of language as they do not exist as separate planes but comeingle in unpredictable and visceral formation. Held apart language becomes a prison of terminology that appears to hold fast that which can only have a place in movement.

Foucault's Untimely Struggle

Rabinow's article of this name (2009) is very useful as it speaks of the appropriate form for thinking, the contestatory style as a choice, the notion of a vigorous

meditation, an inopportune thinking and the relevance of any of it to the present. This helps me think. So too does Mauro Carbone's book on Merleau-Ponty, *The Thinking of the Sensible*. Through a discussion of sensible thought, how thinking arises from experience and perception, I am reminded that the cross-sensory interplay that moves through the folds of life gives rise to thinking through many thresholds. And as the etymon for 'halo' suggests, the halo is the threshing room floor, where thresholds are made, appear and dissolve in the folds of breathing sensation, meeting the time of history as one, where past, present and future in the 'imperceptible trembling of the finite' receive 'the supplementary gift', the 'between' of breath, the potentiality for grace.

If Nietzsche's preferred affect was contestatory, the title *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, grouping these disparate interventions together, indicates the mode in which he was operating. That mode is a distinctive and significant composite; it can be pursued in a variety of affective registers (Rabinow, 2009, p. 27).

The proposition that breath finds its own shape is implicit in the labyrinth as something experienced in the dark where the light of reflection does not occur; but rather, the kinaesthetic reverberance of felt sense opens the halo.

Rabinow's continued discussion of the terms associated with the title of Nietzsche's essays brings to clarity that 'defining one's terms' fails to encompass the poetic breadth of resonance that various terms can gather, accumulate, garner and provoke that extends beyond the term, arises between the textures of words, images, sounds and that it is this breadth of thought that becomes dimensional and enlivened. One is brought to thought, enticed and seduced into an affective sensate encounter that is fecund and opens a conceiving space. The breath of sensation begins to move into thought.

Combined, the two terms and their affective stylization yield a mode best captured by the French term *'intempestif'*. The semantic range of the term covers not only 'untimely', but 'ill-timed', 'unreasonable' or 'inopportune'. The term captures a striving to bring something forth, something that could be actual but does not yet exist. Of course, this claim does not mean that there is something waiting around to come to fruition but only that, taken up in a distinctive way, the things of the actual and existing world can be made into something appropriate as well as

inopportune. Such an event would be appropriate at least retrospectively in that it reconfigures existing things and relations, and inopportune in that it disrupts those existing things and relations and changes their tone, register and directionality' (Rabinow, 2009, p. 27).

Rabinow's article opens with a quotation from Foucault:

If we define spirituality as being the form of practices which postulate that, such as he is, the subject is not capable of the truth, but that, such as it is, the truth can transfigure and save the subject, then we can say that the modern age of relations between the subject and truth begin when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of the truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject (Foucault, 2005, pp. 19, in Rabinow 2009, p. 26).

Spirituality to my sense is more around experience including that which is given to us, not only as a practice but as an encounter. It is one that arises through and around the folds of the flux of cross sensory sensation and thresholds opening beyond the 'truth' of parameters that have appeared to enclose them. Spirituality 'transcends' truth, the boundary of history, remaking in the temporal different shape – a moving beyond the known, a breaking up of the real, the true, the certainties of authority and knowledge.

Rabinow has a lovely quotation from Nietzsche's essay 'On the Utility and Liability of History for Life':

'In any case, I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating my activity. These words are from Goethe, and they may stand as sincere [*ceterum censeo*] at the beginning of our meditation on the value of history. For its intention is to show why instruction without invigoration, why knowledge not attended by action, why history as a costly superfluity and luxury, to use Goethe's word, should be seriously hated by us – hated because we still lack the things we need and the superfluous is the enemy of the necessary' (F. Nietzsche, 1983 [1874], pp. 59, in Rabinow, 2009, p. 27).

In my desire to consider what is a concept, and therefore the work of Deleuze the following quotation is helpful.

Like Nietzsche although in a different form, Deleuze affirmed the challenge of philosophy as finding a way to produce concepts and affects, ones necessary for our survival and our flourishing. Method alone was not the route to such invention (Rabinow, 2009, p. 28).

Under the sub heading 'Thought Must Be Defended Against Society' he offers this about Foucault's project:

Whatever else critical thought was, it always concerned one form or another of examining, up close and in detail, an existing (often historical) state of affairs in an affectively engaged yet contemplative way. Like Nietzsche, Foucault almost always in an uneasy and restless fashion – *Pour une morale de l'inconfort* – strove to invent and practice a form of asceticism, by which he meant an active attention to work on the self, on those he worked with and the material he was considering, as well as the price to be paid for forging a different mode of relationship among and between these elements (2009, pp. 28-29).

According to Rabinow,

Foucault experimented with a number of different forms of criticism and inquiry, almost always attempting to find ways to connect them (2009, p. 29).

This is important for the project here: what are different forms of criticism and in what tones and registers can they be evoked? Poetic criticism – implied, implicit, lyrical – these are some of the threads that can carry the inquiry around breath that is not encompassed only in the critical.

Apparently Foucault said in an interview concerning methodology,

'Each one of my books is a way of dismantling an object, and of constructing a method of analysis toward this end. Once a work is finished, I can of course, more or less through hindsight, deduce a methodology from the completed experience' (Foucault, 1991 [1981], p. 29). This claim alerts us to the privileged status of objects and of analysis for Foucault, as well as the secondary standing of method as either a guide or a guarantee, a theme he would take up explicitly and to which he would give great significance in his lectures of 1981-2 (Rabinow, 2009, p. 29).

Rabinow offers an accessible account of this engagement and opens it out further:

The task of the History of the Present was essentially a diagnostic one: to trace out – *analyse* – the sedimented concepts, practices and organizations of knowledge and power – objects – that made it seem coherent and plausible ...The reason for making this distinction and underlining it is that the work to be done was diagnostic, the work of freeing-up the recent past to a concerned objectivity, an untimely attention to objects and practices (2009, p. 29).

When I consider my own project in these terms I see that there is some congruity with Rabinow's statement – that it helps to elucidate a way of contextualizing it and moving it out of the personal. The 'Historian of the Present' poses a question. In Rabinow's account of this work around *Discipline and Punish* the conflict between Foucault and various historians is mentioned and his response in terms of 'thumic affect' is mentioned and also that it was 'vigorously analytic'. Rabinow goes on to say,

To me the most striking counter-movement is found in the following challenge:

'Perhaps we should also investigate the principle, unexamined and taken for granted, that the only reality to which history must attend is society itself' (Foucault, 1994 [1980], p. 15).

This challenge to focus on the tacit baseline, the unquestioned and assumed-to-be-self-evident, ontological reality – society – opens up a vast terrain for exploration (2009, p. 30).

And furthermore,

As Hans Blumenberg has argued in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1983 [1966, 1973]), a cornerstone of this anti-substantialist mode of thinking requires the reflective recasting of certain older questions and concepts (as well as objects and practices) that had been honed in a different problem space. Philosophic fragments forged in the workshops of history and historians could not be taken over unexamined (Rabinow, 2009, p. 30).

My Honours project theme of 'breath as experiential critique' could be renewed in this context: the shifting of perceptual boundaries re-forms the parameters of words, the restuffing of the signifier with multiplicitous resonances opens the play of language to movement. The wordless becomes the word, yet is formed by the word, folding and refolding layers and surfaces endlessly becoming and gives rise to new edges of meaning and experiences within which to inhabit the world. The shifting

contours of my habitat invite new habits, an unfolding of potentiality cries out into the world.

Thus Foucault's task consisted not only of making what was self-evident contingent, but in analysing how it had been linked in complex ways with 'multiple historical processes, many of them recent' (Foucault, 1994 [1976-77], p. 22; Rabinow, 2009, p. 31)

Likewise within the experience of breath claims are made that some 'facts' are self-evident when they are really the results of, rather than the source of, various practices and conceptual paradigms.

Care of the Self

Foucault being Foucault, he explored this theme both existentially and conceptually. The question of a venue – a scene or setting in which something takes place – a place to come to work with others, to undertake research, to teach, learn, question, contest findings and methods with some earnestness and excitement, unquestionably formed a problem of concern (Rabinow, 2009, p. 35).

The emphasis on sexuality and gender to which theoretical debate around the body has given rise obscures the play of perceptuality as well as the continued dominance of the Christian theological paradigm. As Johannes Brahms asks in the Serious Songs, drawing upon Ecclesiastes, 'Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?' (Eccles. 3:21)

As Foucault wrote in a number of essays at the time, his previous battles to argue to himself and to others that sexuality was not the deepest meaning or key to the self was being demonstrated, before his very eyes (Rabinow, 2009, p. 35).

Foucault: a History of Madness

First it is without a doubt an analysis of the history of madness considered as a cultural, legal, political, philosophical and then medical construct, from the Renaissance to the beginning of the nineteenth century. But is also a reflection on the notion of history and on the methodology of the historian, a reflection influenced by Nietzsche's criticism of historical teleologies (Foucault, 2006, p. xiv).

This statement continues on in interesting ways and I ask what happens if I entitle my dissertation, 'History of Breath' in the same manner. If I play with inserting the word breath into the whole page what does it provoke? The word breath as a conceptual space, as a term in anecdotal experiential encounters has a scope that is constructed by power. Yet the breath also has a power in temporal play. The loss of this power in temporal becoming marks the prison. The prison is to be shut in, closed off, lost to the play of perceptuality in cross-sensory sensuous reverberation.

Dialogue with Plant

The impact of Foucault's work can still be felt across a range of academic disciplines. It is nevertheless important to remember that, for him, theoretical activity was intimately related to the concrete practices of self-transformation; as he acknowledged: 'I write in order to change myself' (Plant, 2007, p. 531)

Writing is a surface of embodied reflection, creating shape in the play of breath, sensation and presence. Reflection is a transformative engagement that bends my shape to new form. The resounding sensations of breath remake my posture. My posture turns out to resound with thought, mental focus, image, and idea.

To use Foucault's terminology my experience of breath 'transgresses' the limits of my posture as stasis. By engaging with the breath in this receptive mode I am 'exposing' my self. Agamben speaks of this 'exposure' and it is intimately connected to the halo where matter exceeds form. This breath transgression is subtle, incremental, imperceptible.

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows (Foucault, 1988, p. 73).

Ironically it is well described by Middendorf as the 'perceptible breath' as it is a sensuous experience, felt in alterations of density, weight, dynamic, substance where the perceived boundaries of physical form dissolve, rearrange, melt, recompose. In the transformation of these limits the 'exposure' undergoes an alteration. Each breath alteration is particular, some times a radical violent gathering at others a delicate diffusion of limits. This is a sensory transformation felt in the transmutation of materiality which is simultaneously revealed to be perceptual, mental and emotional; an ephemeral transmutation, one that leaves traces that resound in bodily flux and in reflective conception.

A further statement Plant offers in the opening to his article is:

'I do not like it.' – Why? – 'I am not up to it.' – Has anyone ever answered

like that? (F. W. Nietzsche, 1990, p. 185)

This is a tremendous statement for summing up the failure I often experience in encountering my breath. I can't. I cannot let it come and go. I cannot allow it to permeate through me. The more I try the less I can. The less I try the less I can. I is not at the centre of this encounter. My identity is obsolete in this moment. I am nothing to this encounter. There is nothing to do. I am nothing more than an elusive structure in language. But if I gather myself into pleasure, if this is possible, I may encounter the perceptible breath in this pleasure.

I experience numerous differentiations in breath experience; some of them frighten me, I am profoundly afeard, yet this may take a long time to be apparent. 'I am not up to it' is a very useful limit to recognize. The expression to be 'bent out of shape' comes to mind. This is different to being bent into a new shape. The gasp is a significant sign. The gasp arises in pleasure and in pain.

[I]t's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence . . . is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure . . . [I]t's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise (Foucault, 1997, p. 262; Plant, 2007, p. 536)

Breath is a new possibility of pleasure. With a myriad of positions, intensities, touches the breath can enfold, permeate, stir my viscera, imagination, and thought. The pleasure of a particular breath experience leaves its traces and creates the grounds for further pleasure. This breath pleasure is capable of seeping into the way I sit, walk, see; the pleasure of ease, the nuance of the gasp are enfolded in the pleasure of breath.

The tendency to think that "We have to liberate our desire" ought therefore to be rejected, and instead we should focus on how to 'create new pleasures. And then maybe desire will follow.' On this account, pleasure comes first; desire (perhaps) later.

A question of motivation naturally arises here. For one obvious advantage of prioritizing desire (and the language of 'discovery' or 'recovery' over that of 'creation') in this context is that it provides some explanation of *why* we might engage in novel, hitherto unexplored sexual

activities, or *why* we might seek to retrain ourselves and thereby generate 'new' desires (Plant, 2007, p. 535).

Pleasure has a bodily dimension: thinking, reading, writing, along with other pleasurable surfaces are at play in the dimensionality of breath. I can enter the realm of the Middendorf breath work from the standpoint of desire or pleasure. But in order to perceive I find it is the experience of pleasure that dissolves my impulse to 'try', that invites me to glimpse perceptually the breath creation that is in motion. This glimpse I refer to is a felt understanding; I grasp the 'inborn idea' that here is a dimension of existence hitherto obscured. I am not liberating my inner essence, I am partaking of the creative act of my breath existence becoming pleasurable. I exist in the pleasure of breath. Pleasure has a bodily resonance, a stirring of sensation. The movement of breath responds to and stirs the flux of these sensations, transforming in rhythm and location. As this occurs I am brought to a threshold. The breath calls me into play and this is the grounds of my existence.

Desire too may have sensations, frissons and come to play in the immediacy of my breath experience. Immersed in proprioceptive detail, surrendering my focus from some idea or goal associated with the desire, I perceive the touch of breath as my existence. The work of art Foucault refers to is existence, the breath of 'being- such'. This existence is a breathing perceptuality, a materiality socially formed, the traces, layers of breath impressions that resound through my flesh. These breath impressions leave their mark. I am formed in the breath through normative inscriptions, through touch, gesture, geography, climate. Perhaps something I could refer to as traumatic inscription that leaves its mark on my breathing rhythm, reduces my capacity to sense sensation in various areas, emotional textures. I am touched and moulded into my living matter. But simultaneously I am becoming in every breath; the act of reflection occurs from many surfaces. The action may begin in writing or in touch but the resounding moves through the play of many surfaces.

Plant's ensuing discussion of sado-masochistic practice raises various questions about the access to the experience of breath, the location of authority.

The power exchange [in S&M] is a psychological-spiritual-sexual contract between two men [or women] that defines their roles and their relationship. It can last for a few minutes or for a lifetime. Unlike any other contract though, this one is never signed. Its terms are never settled. Every gesture, every sound, every audible breath can be either a confirmation or a renegotiation of the essence of the contract . . . Safety and sanity depends on an unconditional commitment to some agreeable form of consensuality (Bean, 1994, pp. 34-35; Plant, 2007, p. 541).

This description where Plant quotes Bean draws attention to the breath. I am struck by the detail of perceptual cue, the sense that the game requires acute participation of the interplay of breath, sensation and presence not only in oneself but simultaneously for the master at least in that of the other as well. For the recipient an invitation to transgress the grip of inscription that forms the surface of breath experience, a relationship that invites the gasp by superseding the static intensity of sensation around which the breath rhythm is structured, by inspiring muscular reflexes. In the Middendorf breath work there is a phrase – the ‘reflexive breath’. It refers to periods where the rhythm of the breath may become short, rapid, intense, sometimes focused to a specific location. This does not necessarily result in hyperventilation; sometimes it is quite small and if perceived will change of its own accord. It is associated with something changing and can lead to new possibilities.

Hyperventilation or various intensities of breath work that result in sensory overwhelm are part of the realm of possibility but not one where I find a pleasure. I am looking to meet the breath experience including intensity but in sensory clarity. In fact, part of the game is played on this edge. I am not entering an ‘altered state’. I am allowing the state I am in to be altered. I am exposing my self to the encounter with breath. The textures of my materiality change with the experience of breath. These traces accumulate and create new edges; the limits are altered.

Various forms of breath work involve recovery, discovery, creation, spirituality, by altering the rhythm, intensity and perception of breath.

Plant goes on to discuss Foucault’s ideas about consent in the sadomasochistic relationship. This brings to my attention the idea of ‘surrendering’ to the breath in the Middendorf breath work. The extent to which I am able to consent to allowing the

breath to come and go is not primarily a linguistic issue. Nor one of desire. I find myself in effect unable to consent, not only at the obvious level of holding my breath in stasis; but the extent to which it is revealed to me that I hold my breath in micro ways all over and throughout my materiality. I hold the location, the intensity of sensation, the rhythm, the experience of inhalation, exhalation and pause. I struggle to consent.

While we tend to think of *explicit* consent in broadly linguistic terms (as either verbal or written) it is not obvious what communicative acts pertain to *tacit* consent. As already suggested, bodily behaviour is doubtless relevant here. But so too might context be an important factor; *tacit* consent would thereby consist of one's 'being-*here*' and 'playing-along' (Plant, 2007, p. 543).

Can I 'play along', can I be here? Is there exposure or only the illusion? Well this is where the relationship with breath experience is more double sided. It is not a master-slave relationship necessarily: I am led, taken to new edges, new intensities. I am softened and yet a gentleness of sensuous surfaces emerges, at my skin or in the sensations that are aroused in the movement of each breath cycle. 'New relational possibilities' emerge in each breath cycle but in a given practice session new vistas of bodily pleasure are met. My relationship to the experience of breath alters; so too does my sensory relationship to sight, touch, the intensities of the world around me.

For the 'new relational possibilities' he envisages would not necessarily be 'sexual' at all. Indeed, if there is any residual sense of 'liberation' in Foucault's work then it is the liberation *of* pleasure *from* explicitly sexual (genital-oriented) pleasure. While he does occasionally talk of the need for 'liberation' from 'certain conceptions about ourselves and our behavior', and thus also from certain notions of 'subjectivity',⁵¹ Foucault's wanting to liberate pleasure from explicitly *sexual* pleasure is just part and parcel of this broader liberatory picture (Plant, 2007, p. 535).

Meeting the intensities of sensation that resound, lurk, seem at times to inhabit my flesh and bone is an intimate relationship. The inclusion of breath offers a shift from stasis to movement and a breadth of relationality. I am able to change roles. Am I responsive to the breath? Is the breath the master and I the slave submitting to what it stirs? No I don't think so; in fact it is this third element where I am sensing what is

pleasurable. Surrendering to the experience but not by submitting; playing on a fine line distinguishes the encounter.

The broader liberatory picture that Foucault was offering is still unclear to me. Yet I doubt it has much grasp of the relationality with children, the sick, the elderly, others. Creating oneself as a work of art possibly doesn't include anything else. A work of art in isolation perhaps lacks an audience and is irrelevant; the art of nothing.

Here is a further comment on play. This is an interesting theme to pursue as is the play of the breath with my existence. Am I pretending to play, being played?

For Foucault, sexual role-play frees us from the ominous lures of essentialism; there simply is no 'deep' subjective essence *within* which our desires are located, and *from* which they can be excavated and acted in accordance with. Indeed, for him there is *nothing but* games of power-play (recall what Foucault says about the universality of power, freedom and resistance) (Plant, 2007, p. 548)

When I read in Plant on Foucault's ideas about child sexuality I am struck by the superficiality of his thought. Children are not skilled in thinking from many surfaces and therefore are not in a power relation to adults that is commensurate. They lack the ability to contextualize it, comprehend its repercussions, to weigh up their strategies. The failure to acknowledge the vulnerability of another is not recognition of their freedom, but an abuse of power.

There are children who throw themselves at an adult at the age of ten – so? There are children who consent, who would be delighted, aren't there? . . . I'd be tempted to say: from the moment that the child doesn't refuse, there is no reason to punish any act . . . [O]ne would be tempted to say: it isn't true that one can get a child to do what it doesn't really want to, simply by exercising authority (Foucault & Kritzman, 1988, pp. 204-205; Plant, 2007, p. 539).

Labyrinth #2 Threshold



Photo by Victoria Bonte 3

Labyrinth #2 Threshold

I let the breath come, I let it go, I wait for it to return of its own accord... Within this encounter is the interplay of breath, sensation and presence – the body of breath. Breath is not a servant but leads us to thresholds and movement in the folds of thought.

Agamben

Pleasure is the play of materiality as it exceeds form. This pleasure occurs in the micro movements of sensation in flux, in breath movement. The shifting edges of the linguistic signifier, the play of image, colour, vocal vibration are all possible sensual pleasures of the tactile resonance of flesh in thought. The pleasure of thinking, making shape in language reverberates in subtle tones. This too is a breath experience.

One can think of the halo, in this sense, as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility. This is that *potentia permixta actui* (or that *actus permixtus potentiae*) that a brilliant fourteenth century philosopher called *actus confusionis*, a fusional act, insofar as specific form or nature is not preserved in it, but mixed and dissolved in a new birth with no residue. This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo (Giorgio Agamben, 1993a, p. 54).

This statement that claims no residue overlooks the multiplicity of truth. The same but different – a tiny displacement, a single breath. ‘To make itself whatever’ is one of those strange leanings towards essentialism that creep back into these discussions. The messianic invitation to transcendence rings like a church bell in the subtext, resounding through as an inspirational call.

The Play of the Breath: After the gasp

Lament is the gasp, breath threshold of existence. To speak of the ‘coming’ is to speak of the postponement of what is already existent, language dissolves, ‘the fall’ into breath; to adhere only to the linguistic surface, to attempt to ‘grasp’ existence through the word, is to cling to God. ‘In the beginning was the word, and the word was god’.

When I turn away from the linguistic signifier I am invited to expose myself to the edges of breath. The sensuality of breath, permeating materiality, existence

exposed; breath an intimate touch that exposes the tactility of existence. The word, the signifier resounds through the sensation of breath, is conceived in this union. I come into language 'as existence' through breath. Foucault in *The Uses of Pleasure* uses language to entice me further into the immersion of conceiving in the breath. Conceiving in the breath is not a feminine pleasure as some would have it; 'being thus' is not gender determinate. Conceiving is a sensuous pleasure of existence.

The eroticism of sexuality is at play, vitality arises, a power in the breath.

I turn away from the linguistic signifier; the turning can only be dimensional so it travels with me through the touch of breath. Yet instead of hovering above as the word of God, it resounds in the imperceptible movements of breath. Existence is the fall.

The Coming Community is, it appears to me, a spiritual text, a breath text. Agamben engages in relocating the place of existence in space and time. He offers a series of inspirational fragments on 'being-thus'.

The halo is a perceptual space, an auric field that can be sensed within the imperceptible movement in stillness of the breath in relation to sensation.

The resounding of breath sensation does not adhere to the expected limits, is not contained in conceptual forms but moves through. Moving stillness alters form, imperceptibly but with radical force; the delicate touch of breath is at play in the halo.

Being-thus is not a substance of which *thus* would express a determination or a qualification. Being is not a presupposition that is before or after its qualities. Being that is irreparably *thus* *is* its *thus*; it is only its mode of being. (The *thus* is not an essence that determines an existence, but it finds its essence in its own being-thus, in its being its own determination) (Giorgio Agamben, 1993a, p. 95).

Here Agamben articulates the 'what is' of breath experience 'being-thus' an ephemeral resounding in breath sensation. There is no identity, no I that precedes

'being-thus'; yet in its capacity to register the shifting constellations of sensation, breath movement offers a tactile sculpting of the moment.

Every lament is a lament for language, just as all praise is principally praise of the name. These are the extremes that define the domain and the scope of human language, its way of referring to things. Lament arises when nature feels betrayed by meaning; when the name perfectly says the thing, language culminates in the song of praise, in the sanctification of the name (1993a, p. 56).

In these lines from Agamben I hear the word as Christian theology reaching its arms through history. Or is it Agamben reaching for the word as the liberatory prophecy it was declared? There is no betrayal of nature by language except in Christian theology.

Lament as a song is language and arises when there is no thing to be said only the saying of the dimensionality of meaning that is obscured by the thing. When thingness has dissolved the song of Lament is 'the tiny displacement', wrought by the breath that allows the finite to tremble. Lament is a surface of language that resounds through the limits of the thing, when no name is needed, no perfection is sought, when the capacity of the word is its incapacity. The resonance of voice is language.

Lament is for something, lost, broken, rent asunder; the breaking apart of something. The structure of Agamben's *The Coming Community* has structured this loss into the writing. There is no unity to be broken. Lament is the entrails of love spread exposed and left hanging. The dominance of linguistic surface, the broken structure, the keeping apart, the space between, the eloquent grammar of postmodern lament occurs in between the terms, a small hyphen, a reaching out to the next world.

Below Agamben refers to a 'bringing to together', where body and image can no longer be separated. Language has many surfaces, reduced to the linguistic surface of sign, the exteriority of the reflective surface loses the refractions of dimensionality, the breathing surfaces of language, the breadth of language occurs in between surfaces. The experience of breath defies the binary opposition of interior–exterior

that a flat linguistic surface offers. The absurdity of speaking from flatness is felt in the resonance of breath bending the signifier, forging a relationship between body and image. In reflection the body and image meet. This is a savage act, where matter exceeds form. It occurs in the collapse of structure or the permeation of the form by the halo. The breath of materiality exceeds form.

To appropriate the historic transformation of human nature that capitalism wants to limit to the spectacle, to link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated, and thus to forge the whatever body, whose *physis* is resemblance – this is the good that humanity must learn how to wrest from commodities in their decline. Advertising and pornography, which escort the commodity to the grave like hired mourners, are the unknowing midwives of this new body of humanity (1993a, p. 49).

This account above stirs thoughts of Corbin and the *mundus imaginalis*. The linking of ‘image and body in space where they can no longer be separated’, forged in a *physis*. Well this occurs when reflection is no longer a single surface but inflected with breath. Breath experience – perceptible and enlivened – dissolves and binds the image within the sensations of flesh. Within each breath cycle materiality is inseparable from perceptuality; the resounding textures, shapes and intensities that ‘inform’ thought. Breathing matter transmutes form in the perception of ‘being-thus’. Agamben encapsulates this encounter when he writes ‘of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo’.

The Coming Community: XIII Halos

for Saint Thomas the singularity here is not a final determination of being, but an unravelling or an indetermination of its limits: a paradoxical *individuation by indetermination* (Giorgio Agamben, 1993a, pp. 54-55).

Resonating in the breath has this blurring of limits, dissolution of edges and matter that accompanies the sensual encounter with the perceptible breath. In the resonating field the fixity of contour and posture recedes.

One can think of the halo, in this sense, as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentially and actuality become indistinguishable (Giorgio Agamben, 1993a, p. 54).

Agamben encapsulates here the experience of breath where I both feel the actuality of my physical body in sensation, contour, shape, density and yet simultaneously experience myself as becoming. A becoming that is ceaseless movement.

The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility. This is that *potentia permixta actui* (or that *actus permixtus potentiae*) that a brilliant fourteenth-century philosopher called *actus confusionis*, a fusional act, insofar as specific form or nature is not preserved in it, but mixed and dissolved in a new birth with no residue (1993a, p. 55).

This reaching of the end is occurring in each breath cycle and the fusional act is the metamorphoses of form in breath, form which is simultaneously matter. Agamben's claim that there is no residue is an interesting one. Not that I disagree, but the past is transmuted into the present which does not exist yet can be felt in the transience of breath movement in sensation. The halo is a 'sign' of this dissolving of limits, a going beyond the edge.

Dialogue with Leland de la Durantaye

Potentiality

Under the heading 'Aristotle's Question', de la Durantaye offers an elucidation of Agamben's preoccupation with the idea of potentiality.

For Agamben's part, he makes no secret of the fact that the fundamental contours of his idea of potentiality are to be traced to none other than Aristotle. He has noted that "in both his metaphysics and his physics, Aristotle at once opposed and linked potentiality (*dynamis*) to actuality (*energeia*), and bequeathed this opposition to Western philosophy and science" (2009, pp. 90-91).

Immediately without pause the question arises, where is breath implicated in the movement between these two terms? In both linking and opposition the resounding movement of breath is at play. The play of breath, the question of breath, is a performative event. Abstraction only exists as an illusion within the performative, the folding of these terms, the reflexive acts that bring them closer or further apart are enacted in the sensation of breath. Attention is deflected to the performative gestures of each term in the play but this is a theatrical illusion that allows the show to go on.

The pause, a pause for thought, the breath pause: in the silent movement of sensation a thought is occurring. The taking place of thought, the act of thought is a dimensional encounter of folding surfaces and resonant vibration travelling through and gathering in flesh. History is not an evolutionary event but a refolding of infancy, a continuous discontinuity. Reborn in the breath cycle, potentiality remains a threshold coming from and going nowhere.

The experience of breath continues in the pause, the transition between exhalation and inhalation is a breath space. Between the words that are spoken or written, alongside or within a resounding of breath occurs. Illusory stillness, silence the word become flesh remains as a movement a trace of textural sensation. An intimate vibration of existence not as an idea apart but a 'trembling of the finite' that occurs in every breath cycle.

As Agamben points out, Aristotle discusses “the potentiality to not-be” with respect to “the supreme theme of metaphysics” – thought itself. Aristotle observed that if thought were only the potentiality to this or that intelligible thing, it would by definition be less than its object. We think of an astounding variety of things, and yet thought is unquestionably more than the sum of the actual things of, or about, which it thinks. What is more, if thought were merely the sum of things of which it has thought, not only would it be inferior to its object, but it would also leave unexplained thought’s most singular feature: its ability to reflect upon itself (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 5).

Thought is a movement and as such intimately bound up with breath in sensation. Reflection occurs in resonance, ‘sensuous thought’ a concept elaborated by Deleuze plays through multiple surfaces of dimensional breath existence.

In discussing Agamben’s idea of potentiality attention is drawn to the Aristotelian notion of *the potentiality to be* and the “potentiality to not be” or also “impotence”. The sexual resonance of this latter term is worth looking into further as it plays through the masculine framing of God, the power of the word and the intelligible in significant ways. The distinction between impotence and receptivity, the idea of non power to do, to be, the receptive action starts to cut through what is obscured from view.

In my honours thesis I was attempting to allude to what I referred to as ‘the not yet named or the never to be named’ the ‘extra linguistic’ an attempt to refer to this potential. Is this potential not actual or not recognizable and hence within this term not actual. In the quotation below the question of existence comes into play. To what does this term refer? This distinction between existence and potentiality is perhaps the way of breath, where the nebulous remains an animate force without form.

This “potentiality to not-be,” or “impotence” is not to be understood as a privation, as an actual weakness or incapacity, for the reason that it is not to be understood in the context of actuality at all. It denotes the possibility for a thing not to pass into existence and thereby remain at the level of mere – or “pure” – potentiality.

At this point Agamben's reader might well wonder why he is so interested in a category without substance, a mode of potentiality that by definition never enters our actual sphere (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 5).

Thought like perception is not a thing, not an entity, it is an occurrence, a breath play. I have to ask does this potentially never enter our actual sphere, what is being assumed or implicitly asserted here. What is the sphere of the 'actual' and insofar as it is formless substance that can only be sensed in the flux of sensation dispersal in breath rhythm is this the actual or the potential? What is the boundary between the actual and the potential? In the above quotation it is 'a category without substance' 'a mode of potentiality' the possible folds of inflexion where *dynamis* and *energeia* create the possible. Earlier we are told:

The first of these is easy to grasp: *the potentiality to be*. For a thing to be, it stands to reason that it must have first been possible (for if it has been *impossible* it could never have come to be) (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 5).

This does not stand to reason at all. In assuming a binary opposition it sounds reasonable on the surface, but the dimensional play of breath brings to possibility the unexpected, unforeseen creative movement. It was not possible before but arises in the crossing of a threshold, from the reshaping of the perceptual field the inflection of linguistic surface and image, the breath touch of the world in affect. The possible does not delineate a thing but an act of becoming.

In the lived breath cycle the distinction between the possible and the potential take a strange collusion, neither term exists but dissolves into a temporal flux. What is possible for one person opens a potential for another which may not be possible and remains distinctly singular.

The potential to not be is an important holding open of the imaginal realm – or more than that the yet to be that may never come. It somehow releases the grip of the past, or the sensibility of powerless inaction. The breath returns to the flesh no longer imprisoned by the narrative of the past, of what must come to pass, but once again a threshold of *potencia* – the open. Infancy comes to the fore rather than the

burden of the impetus of history. This surely is a very strange thing given the horrific historical focus that Agamben brings to his work. Yet the capacity to see, to look to be touched through meeting the vision of the world is an essential dimension of breath rhythm opening into perceptuality.

The potential to not be asserts the place of creativity to refold rather than simply unfold the pre-existent but to bring to existence.

Words belong to context and situation, to the breath rhythm that partakes of them. This ephemeral quality of words, the porous and resonant vessel becomes obscured within the academic milieu that acts to stabilize meaning in the realm of abstraction. The meaning of words comes to appear as fixed, established and already negotiated but the terms of agreement remain between a small grouping. The biopolitical joke is that the resources for language, the multiple surfaces, remain in a hierarchical configuration with the power of words confined to those who are willing to play by the rules. Words do things, they perform, create they do not merely describe.

The word become flesh is not the speaking subject but the breathing subject, this subject is a molecular sensory breath rhythm not the Oxford English Dictionary implanted into the body.

Ethics, Potentiality, Politics

For Agamben, the question of potentiality is intimately linked not only to the idea of politics we saw earlier, but also to concrete instances and institutions of political power. What is more, he contends that whether we are aware of them or not, our conceptions of potentiality condition our ideas of power and its limits. In the years when Agamben was beginning to publish his work, Arendt lamented that “the progresses made by science have nothing to do with the I-will; they follow their own inexorable laws, compelling us to do whatever we can, regardless of consequences”. She then asked in desperation, whether “the I-will and the I-can have parted company?” (Arendt, 1970, p. 86). It is precisely such a failure to reflect on the difference between practical possibility and ethical actuality, on potential and possibility, that motivates much of Agamben’s writing. As a result, he has characterized his goal as nothing less than, “to bring the political out of its concealment [*occultamento*] and, at the same time, return thought to its practical calling [*vocazione pratica*]” (Georgio Agamben, 1998, p. 4). This practical calling

is one that he in turn links to a particular urgency: “the urgency of catastrophe” (Giorgio Agamben, 1998, p. 12). (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 15).

The politics of breath comes to the fore within the account of potentiality, politics and thought that Agamben is offering. What his work offers is not a polemic but a range of performative spaces, invitations to develop some thread further. De la Durantaye elaborates it this way:

In one of his most recent books, *Signatura rerum* (2008), Agamben declares that “the genuinely philosophical element in any work, be it a work of art, one of science, or one of thought, is its capacity for being developed” (SR, 8). Elsewhere, he similarly remarked that “the properly philosophical element in any work, be it a work of scholarship, of literature, or of art, is that which goes unsaid therein, and thereby possesses a possibility for development”. For Agamben, the philosophical element—rich in potentiality—is that which, while present, goes unstated in a work and is thereby left for others to read between the lines and formulate in their own (2009, p. 9).

This creates a very generous provocation, an inspiration as it were a conceiving space. A conceiving space is a potentiality that is not blank, nor empty, yet does not have existent form. It comes to form as it is conceived in the breath. A space may have shape, atmosphere, location or it may be a conceiving substance that has location but a diffuseness of form, a felt sense density without clear form that nonetheless is a breathing altering substance that can be shaped by this meeting. An invitation to touch form and be altered, an invitation to see what is called into shape, a declaration of the capacity for life.

As we saw above, Agamben invoked “thought—that is, politics” ...This does not mean that politics is anything and everything one might choose to bring under its heading; but it does mean that, for Agamben, there are aspects of our lives that are informed by political conceptions and rich in political consequences we are inclined to neglect. For this reason Agamben will not simply ask “What is politics?” but instead, “From where does our culture—both in mythic and in actual terms—derive its criteria for the political?” (RG, 283). (2009, pp. 13-14).

Where does our understanding 'of the word become flesh' derive from and what might this phrase come to signify if deconstructed through the experience of breath?

A Critique of the Dialectic, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*

Infancy and history correspond, for Agamben to transcendental categories of human experience: language and time. Although as a conceptual pair *infancy* and *history* point to *language* and *time*, the question of their relationship to one another is nevertheless left open ...

What is most surprising about this book is the links it makes between linguistic categories and historical ones. Agamben's following of the two lines of inquiry named in his title will lead him to a point of luminous intersection that, in years and books to follow, he will call *potentiality* (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 81).

The ensuing account by Durantaye helps me understand what is meant by this phrase 'the destruction of experience'. It also draws attention to the way in which words can be used to stir response, grasp the imagination, shock and open up fissures in thought or ways of seeing the world. Yet it is a reminder that words do not represent: they evoke, and this is transitory – their meaning is ephemeral and contextual. Yet in a given community they can be stuffed with shared resonance that is located in the felt sense of materiality. So paradoxically the emptying of language, the freeing up of the sign is part of the loss of experience. The capacity to have experience is a temporal vibratory event I can 'have' not in the static sense but in visceral sensuous movement: this leaves a series of marks. As a resounding vessel these marks alter the potentiality of tone, the tonus of flesh and bone. Perceptuality is marked incremental pixelated micro-moments that hover in transitory form and nonetheless come to hold and even lock a formation of resonance. Experience in breath is ephemeral yet ongoing. This continuous discontinuity between each threshold of inhalation, exhalation, pause opens onto the horizontal plane of time. I have an 'experience' of breath and time is reconfigured into dimensionality.

Adorno's most elegant book begins with a blunt epigraph: *Das Leben lebt nicht* ("Life doesn't live") (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 82).

This use of language to shock, bestir is simultaneously part of the biopolitical joke. The signs of life are constantly obscured by an utter conviction that the

deconstruction of power occurs primarily through the linguistic signifier in knowledge, ideas that can be exchanged through this mode. However the mode itself is part of the regulation in which the biopolitical structure is founded. The folding and peeling open of language occurs not only at this surface. In fact the illusion of surface, the focus of attention on appearance, the recognisable, the graspable obscures that breath is a fundamental 'sign' of life that is perceivable yet not graspable altering form in flesh in micro moments of discontinuous time where past and present collude and dissolve, reconstitute and fracture. This time of existence is fundamentally an expression of 'life does live'. The destruction of experience that Agamben refers to cannot be approached through a single surface without becoming again captive to the linear imperative – the illusion that life occurs as a line on a single surface of the 'real'.

De la Durantaye draws attention to this paradox in the following lines:

Isolating the urgency that motivates Agamben's extreme formulation, however, is not the same thing as understanding it. The experience in question is direct, personal experience – that on which our culture places increasingly less emphasis ... Our globalized world and networked age indeed often seems to find little place and still less time for firsthand experience, and clarity about what sort of knowledge corresponds to our continually growing wealth of information often seems in even shorter supply.

It is to this radical devaluation of firsthand experience – the first-hand experience that formed the core of the social and intellectual lives of earlier ages – that Agamben directs his reader's attention, and it is this that leads him to a diagnosis as extreme as "the death of experience" (2009, pp. 82-83).

This relationship of experience to knowledge and to information is confusing, but the knowledge that arises from the experience of breath has a resonance in materiality that provides a referencing point. It is strange in a world with endless talk of rampant individualism that people seem unable to perceive their breath existence in sensation, in the stillness of receptive breath movement. This is a horizontal threshold in the linear illusion of time. The melting of history as chronology occurs in this breathing place. The momentary relinquishment of the linguistic surface, a turn toward breath sensation, creates a fissure in time. Breath rhythm alters the speed and texture of existence; becoming the sensation of breath rhythm dissolves into a

different time, the movement of time becomes the experience of surrendering and falling out of time.

Like a good theatre director, Agamben offers a number of creative provocations around the theme of 'the destruction of experience'.

The longest of the six chapters that make up the book, "Infancy and History: An Essay on the Destruction of Experience," begins with an announcement: "Every discussion of experience today should begin with the acknowledgement that it is no longer accessible" (Giorgio Agamben, 1993b, p. 13, translation modified). In militant tones, Agamben claims that modern man has been "expropriated [*espropriato*] of his experience" (1993b, p. 13). That this expropriation will prove more than a passing concern is attested to by what Agamben has called in a recent work "the museification of the world [*la museificazione del mondo*]" (2005, p. 96). Expanding on the meaning of this formula, Agamben goes on to state that "everything today can become Museum [*Museo*], because this term simply names the exposition of an impossibility to use, to inhabit, and to experience" (2005, p. 96, italics added). This hard fact forms, following Agamben, "one of the few certainties regarding himself" that modern man possesses. (1993b, p. 13) (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 83).

Well 'expropriation' is implicated in the linguistic dismantling of concepts such as presence and authenticity where the conceptual deconstruction has been confused with the experiential realm. The use of articulate language to ridicule, dismiss, overrule, and belittle those whose use of the word is not dominant or is less developed is disguised as the espousal of knowledge, insight, learned account. The play of the sign has been used as an instrument of power and status in the hands of those most 'educated' to gain and sustain economic advantage and power. The desire to listen, to receive is overwhelmed by the demand that people articulate, hold forth in erudite floods of words to demonstrate the breadth and depth and wealth of their knowledge. The possibility that some of the most significant knowledge may not be located in this mode, or arise through this technology is not acknowledged. Ironically many of the people engaged in these discussions 'know' so little of other ways of knowing that they are unable to conceive the limits of their deliberations.

Experience of breath is a threshold that is intrinsic to life, one obscured from view in current dominant paradigms of knowledge; yet this expropriation can be confronted

in any moment. To do so transects various sacred conceits of modern identity: sensing and sensation are foremost, tonus and surface, spatial configuration. The grammar of breath perception is highly sophisticated and not immediately accessible. The body is not the self-evident body of knowledge but comes into breath relationship in transitory and unexpected ways. This experiential knowledge arises in the border country of breath matter forming substance and reconfiguring texture, affect and percept. The reluctance to hear the I of first person experience is integrally bound up in this removal of the formation of knowledge in experience. The vigour of the postmodern emphasis on the formation of the subject as normative inscription has contributed to this bizarrely dead account of human agency and experience.

The Genealogy of Experience

Here a link is made between the expropriation of experience and the rise of modern science.

From Bacon to Galileo, the first steps toward modern science brought with them a denigration of “mere” experience and a mistrust of the senses. Agamben sees this nowhere so clearly crystallized as in the figure of Descartes and in the latter’s radical doubt as the veracity of the experience transmitted to the senses (in the form of his hypothesis of a *malin génie* set on deceiving us precisely through sensory experience) (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 88).

The ensuing account of how individual subjectivity was elevated to a ‘decisive role in the formation of the greatest certainties and the attainment of the highest knowledge’. This discussion is useful in its account of knowledge and experience in the religious realm. With the disintegration of this realm the place of knowledge alters – I like this. A new linking of knowledge, language and experience is needed in a post religious world.

De la Durantaye traces the expropriation of experience to Hegel’s dialectic including:

Hegel’s masterful dialectic, with its “negation of experience” and “negation of the moment” in favour of a continually postponed future horizon of “absolute knowledge” and “absolute subjectivity,” is for Agamben the beginning of the end of experience ... “The fact that consciousness has a dialectical structure means that it can never grasp itself in its entirety, but is

only whole in the total process of its becoming." He also notes that in Hegel's conception, "experience is ... something which one can only undergo but never have" (*Infancy and History*, p34) (2009, p. 89).

This distinction between undergo and have is dubious I think as anyone who works/lives experientially knows that you don't have it like an object but you have it as something you undergo that alters you. Within an experiential milieu words are understood as movement, passages not static; this seems to escape many who write at the theoretical edge. Those who engage predominantly through the experiential mode simply take for granted that nothing is inert, fixed, or even graspable. They understand that 'not only can't you jump into the same river twice you can't even jump in once'. Experience relates to a sense of having been altered, of being altered. It occurs in felt sense, it may be immediately obvious or incremental but it is registered, it is entered into because it enters the felt sensibility.

Quoting Benjamin the loss of experience is discussed in terms of the First World War. This is itself an interesting line as this loss is accounted for more implicitly in relation to trauma and the muteness and sensory impairment that ensues. This sits alongside a more conceptual account which is traced back to the 'negativity' in the dialectic of Hegel.

"The supremacy of the dialectic in our time, far beyond the limits of the Hegelian system, beginning with Engel's attempt to construct a dialectic of nature, has its roots in this conception of the negative and unattainable character of experience – that is, in an expropriation of experience" (*Infancy and History*, p.34) ... Agamben later stresses the "urgent necessity" of "a critique of the dialectic" (*Infancy and History*, p.34)(2009, p. 90).

Durantaye is suggesting that Agamben traces this loss of experience back to the influence of ideas: do they shape things or describe them?

The Introduction of Infancy

According to Durantaye,

Agamben is led to this term [*infancy*] via *experience*. "Does a mute experience exist?" he asks. "Does an *in-fancy* of experience exist?" ... As Agamben's hyphenation (in-fancy) stresses, the *infancy* in question is to be taken literally as the state of being without language (the Latin term *infantia* designates an inability to speak). Agamben's historical excursus thus serves to frame a question about experience and its impoverishment or destruction as a question about language (2009, pp. 90-91).

Durantaye then explicates Agamben's account of subjectivity in a way that I find pretty boggling.

What is the relationship between the so called ineffable and becoming molecular? They simply allude to experience in felt sense – detailed, diverse, diffuse multi-textured. This experience 'exists' independently of the words used to describe or 'represent' it. This particularity has significance where my existence is felt as a resounding. When I utter *iee aye* is it a sound or a word?

"It is Kant's basing the problem of knowledge on a mathematical model that prevented him, as it did Husserl, from discerning the original place of transcendental subjectivity within language," claims Agamben, "and therefore from clearing tracing the boundaries separating the transcendental and linguistic" (*Infancy and History*, p.44, translation modified) (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 91).

This idea that the boundaries can be clearly traced is quite at odds with my experience of becoming breath. It is the movement of this boundary that the experience of breath brings to clarity.

Basing his reflections on the linguistic analyses of Benveniste and, most centrally, on the latter's studies of pronouns, Agamben concludes that "subjectivity is nothing other than the speaker's capacity to posit him- or herself as an *ego*, and cannot in any way be defined through some wordless sense of being oneself, nor by deferral to some ineffable psychic experience of the *ego*, but only through a linguistic I transcending any possible experience" (*Infancy and History*, p.45) (2009, p. 91).

I so much don't know what I think of this. My visceral breath response is one of wariness, for as I read it I perceive myself simultaneously in sentient breath movement. This has an imprecise density, weight, shape, sensation, sense of

location, and I regard this existence as my subjectivity. It is not definable simply as experiential becoming; I perceive this as the temporal sign of my existence. In uttering 'I' an alteration in this reverberant structure occurs and this can be felt in particularity, distinctiveness, specificity in the relation within which this utterance is occurring. It alters in the course of the utterance. The tone, volume, resonance and pitch are reflective of the embodied responsiveness occurring between I and you and the world simultaneously. Subjectivity is a temporal dialogue in breath.

Animals are "always and absolutely language," in Agamben's formulation, because there is no distance or distinction between signifier and signified, no unmotivated relation between the semiotic (the level of the sign) and the semantic (the level of meaning) in their communications. Animals thus communicate immediately – that is, without the mediation of a sign system, and for this reason they are always and absolutely one with their language. Human speech on the other hand, is acquired and, once it is, mediates our communication. We indeed achieve an inestimable gain in sophistication of communication, but at the price of immediacy (De La Durantaye, 2009, pp. 92-93).

It is important to remember that this is Durantaye's account of Agamben and covers some highly sensitive ground. How he understands what is being proposed reflects his own experience of wordless sentience. The possibilities of wordless sentience are not immediately apparent: this 'muteness' or perhaps 'resonant silence' is not a given of the animal but a sophistication of felt existence in temporal becoming.

As a result, we are aware of a disjunction that we can never directly formulate; the mediating effect of our language is not something we can ever fully grasp. As Agamben remarked elsewhere, "To adopt an image from Wittgenstein, man exists in language like a fly trapped in a bottle: that which it cannot see is precisely that through which it sees the world" (Sofri, 1985, p. 33) (De La Durantaye, 2009, p. 93).

The temporal eye of language is felt sentient uttered in the pronoun that enunciates my temporal existence. I see the other with this eye as I feel myself; vocal breath vibration comes upon me, from me, through me. A mysterious existence, an 'infinite trembling of the finite' that resounds in discernable textures and morphological flux. Can I breathe *in* (inhale) your presence? Does an atmosphere surround, emerge between us? The movement of affect and percept register in the fine quivering of my

existence, virtually imperceptible yet not absent. In the company of another my breath vibrates differently; the sensation of existence differentiates within each breath cycle. This image of the bottle and the fly is important to discuss. This phrase 'man exists in language' rather man is language and language is more than the linguistic signifier. This bottle image is not adequate: man is not in a bottle. As Judith Butler is indicating, the construction of materiality is cellular, it applies not only to the sense of sight, it affect what man sees, senses, hears and touches. However because we are language it is not a glass wrapped around us but a breath inscription, a molecular formation of sensation in flux; it is not outside of us but in us; 'the word become flesh' is not an idea in carnate perceptuality.

Durantaye drawing on Heller-Roazen writes,

Actualizing linguistic capacity means leaving behind some to this undifferentiated potentiality, and for this reason Heller-Roazen writes, in an intuition kindred to Agamben's in *Infancy and History*, that "it is as if the acquisition of language were possible only through an act of oblivion, a kind of linguistic infantile amnesia...Perhaps the loss of a limitless phonetic arsenal is the price a child must pay for the papers that grant him citizenship in the community of a single tongue" (11). It is for this reason that Agamben, like Heller-Roazen, sees in *infancy* the sign of the human and the center of our experience (2009, p. 93).

Does this mean to indicate that he sees the human and the centre of experience in the non-verbal? The wordless? According to Durantaye Agamben moves from what appears as a sociological critique of contemporary experience to an 'ancient philosophical question concerning what defines the human'. These sorts of shifts give a provocative power to Agamben's writing, the change of register, tune creates movement and music in the writing.

I have nothing to say to you, only to breathe

If you put your hand here

I have a question to ask you

What do you feel

Under your hand

Frocking Philosophy: the erotic folds of language.

Spider Woman

Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly, and in this chamber thought is subsumed into sensuous experience, the raging mind is bound tight and devoured by the enveloping body of the spider. Many selves, and dimensional relationships to the world strung between ground and sky, located in crevices yet able to emerge and string across the world a habitat, create a structure to capture and hold.

There is a hole where philosophy is proclaimed to be, a breathing whole that pulsates with the real and not only bends in reflection, but resounds with sensation – moving stillness. Where the power of the world gathers silently in breath sensation, exuding atmosphere, vibrating some might say with spirit.

Philosophy is no longer a hard core of tightly disputed lineages of argument. There is no longer a sexual organ for thinking belonging to lines of men whose potency is measured in the intelligibility of their shared dominance of language expressed as the definition of word, passed down and held in reverence



[Image from the Haindl Tarot by Hermann Haindl, sent by my sister-in-law, Jennifer Clancy, 22.7.12.](#)

apart from all other surfaces of language. Philosophy is a conceptual space located in breathing flesh that encounters the world in the company of others and attempts to sculpt this experience into a life, aloud with potentiality for joy, and the creation of meaning in flesh time.

This hole is alive with moving sensation, able to be filled yet not empty. Evocative of sexuality the folds of its walls are soft yet yielding, able to gather in intensity, draw out, entice the sensation of other, a holding force that beckons and contains; able to dissolve the breath experience of self in meeting the bounds of another in a vitality of sensation that calls rudely and unequivocally to breath; in the panting, gasp, or tremour of breath that is allowed to come and go on its own; breaking the illusion of the privileged place of control as the site of subjecthood. But this unveiling can be taken further for it is not only orgasmic sexuality that unmasks the power of breath in the reconstitution of self-experience. Breath has a verisimilitude of sensory textures. These textures, nuances, directions, molecularities are accredited no meaning as they slip and slide, and alter in particularity in each moment. Yet even in their vast variety they carry similarities alongside the distinctness of each in time – time as decay, death time that carries the bounds of a life rhythm in breath. Resonating and reflecting the experience of my breath body in movement and shape gives rise to the fold of language.

Nothing is repeatable, and there is no method that can be elucidated as a path to be followed. As Foucault proposes there is no truth that can save us, but then why would we want to be saved? The entire concept belongs to a facile hope that there is an answer. It is a turn to the question. The artistic question 'What if', the imaginary if, tied to the 'yes and' of theatre practice offers a philosophical path. The terms and concepts of philosophical practice are tied to the experiential investigation in breath time. The bending of thought in ways that meets the moments of space and time in which it is encountered and created within a community of exchange. This knowledge cannot be measured and analysed, preserved like a desiccated husk and returned to life as if it were a 'real' coconut.

The sensuous pleasure of breath arises, invited through touch, a flux of sensation that transgresses the boundaries of conceptual categories returning thought to a folding movement of dimensional encounter.

I read that Dr Rena Czaplinska-Archer led an embodying drawing event at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's 'Drawing Out' Event, referring to how it can rewire the brain. The instability of language resides in the somatic experience of sensation in breath movement perceiving not according to recognized categories but according to pleasure and the potency of perceptual encounter. This turn away from the signifier is not an escape, yet it is a subversive reworking.

The Tumescient Self

The tumescent self is the phallus. Under my hands the substance of breath arouses into perceptual presence the contours of my extended, dimensional human form. I am the phallus, the 'eye of form' the experience of breath in each moment melded into the vibrational substance of breath flesh. The eye of form dissolving and reforming in the touch of the world as other met in the experience of breath. The touch of breath permeates beyond the bounds of form into the halo that signifies the profane space of the spiritual that occurs in breath time. That which spills over and signifies the ephemeral disintegration of the bounded self as an illusory cultural identity yet holds in delicate touch carried by the distinctive breath rhythm attuned to the micro movement of each human life.

The creation of form is an art of breathing substance into image, signifier in sound where the play between them is not tied to the lines of knowledge already traced but opens to a different crease.

I am the phallus: this gathering of power to seize, to form, to grasp and shape traverses the outline of my erect upright form, the *be- holding* myself in the embrace of breath that pulsates through this fleshly configuration that thrusts itself up and out into the world. Both vibrating receptacle and penetrating power, contained and container, and met in the breath movement of the world that enters me in every moment. Eye, ear, taste, smell, touched by breath, surrendering I to a becoming

which dissolves and creates me, un-names the naming and opens the walls *in-forming* identity.

I don't have the phallus, I am the phallus ever arising and dissolving in the power of breath that moves and stands me up in the world. An inner pulse of breath and intensity gathering, permeated by the touch of the world that surrounds me in enveloping folds of tissue, arousing sensation, stirring and squeezing me tight till the exhale returns to me in the sensation self- becoming. A being with my breath as it moves my vibrational substance through recognizable form.

To re member the body is to enter the experience of breath that comes and goes on its own creating a perceptuality of existence in breath time.

Where art meet the formless the spiritual begins and this occurs in the turn of every breath cycle.

Judith Butler: Gender Trouble

In reference to the category of 'women' Butler says,

The definitional incompleteness of the category might then serve as a normative ideal relieved of coercive force (1990, p. 15).

This could just as well be said of the term 'breath'. Why is breath a term and not a category? In this term 'breath' is a profound multiplicity that cannot be said to stand in relation to itself but *is* relation. Not only are there many breaths, there is no breath that is the same as another. Each breath occurs as an utter particularity of time. The illusion, the appearance that breath has a location – diaphragmatic – and a length that can be measured in counting is not breath but a conceptual schema that removes breath from perceptual encounter and in doing so obscures the value system that it instigates as a form of normative power.

Butler also speaks of dialogue,

The very notion of "dialogue" is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated. Otherwise, the model of dialogue risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and speak with the same presuppositions about what constitutes "agreement" and "unity" and, indeed, that those are the goals to be sought (1990, p. 15).

In hands-on breath dialogue the dialogue is silent and guided by the yes and the no, the perhaps and the maybe of the encounter. The experience of silent dialogue between people is different from 'communion with nature' or 'group prayer' in that it is oriented to the somatic kinaesthetic of sensation and breath movement in touch. The power of prayer or communion is also a felt sense experience, but often of a diffuse sense or field of perceptual dimensionality. But perhaps I am wrong about this. My imagination says this as I have little experience to draw on. 'We are gathered here' is perhaps an expression that refers to a gathering in the breath.

The breath is a threshold between the terms nature and culture, one that returns agency to what is commonly seen as the mute facticity of nature, the female waiting to be inscribed with meaning by culture. Each breath is marking me, inscribing, and is my becoming; self is the experience of the sensation of the movement of breath arising across various bodily sites, creating and residing the perceptuality of thinking flesh (Journal 21-04-10 Trepina Wed morn).

Anthropologists Marilyn Strathern and Carol MacCormack have argued that the nature/culture discourse regularly figures nature as female, in need of subordination by a culture that is invariably figured as male, active, and abstract (1980). As in the existential dialectic of misogyny, this is yet another instance in which reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject. As in that misogynist dialectic, materiality and meaning are mutually exclusive terms (Butler, 1990, p. 37).

Horizons of the world, is how I could think of 'nature' – living moving form that reawakens my senses and alters my breath rhythm in sensation.

The problem with grounding her book's argument in psychoanalytic theory is that the tool one chooses for the job determines the outcome. Use a pick to dig a trench you get a trench that looks as if it was dug with a pick, rather than a shovel. The materials used determine the sculpture to some extent and yet when the word, the linguistic abstracted account is the tool it is constantly overlooked that this produces a certain outcome. Not surprisingly the word, the contents of the analytic frame, the concepts and terms that articulate it are determining and generative of the truths that are revealed. The importance of the analytic concept in determining the body, enculturating it, is revealed to be the central truth of enculturation. Butler draws attention to this generative process in sex and gender but it then plays itself out in the implicit assumption of how the body is constituted culturally and this limits the scope of subversive or creative thresholds for moving through. The place of perceptual literacy as an intelligible part of thought is inadvertently undermined by an absence (Journal 20-04-10 Trepina Tues Eve).

Gender is also inscribed in the resonance of perceptuality, as is sexuality. As Agamben articulates in Homo Sacer, there is much that can be unmade in the human, given a re

contextualization of a radical kind, but in more subtle ways the making and unmaking occurs in every breath cycle for the subject is not a stable entity, or should I say identity, but a variously fragmented and shifting music. Psychoanalysis fails to adequately grasp the somatic resonance of sensation, breath, image, and touch. The 'analytic' factor is an inadequate lens from which to offer an account (Journal 18-04-10 Trepina Sun Eve).

What is the relationship between perceptuality and gender? What is it I don't understand in the proposal of power and gender? The power resides in proclaiming language as separate to matter in some radical way other than just a halo of movement. The law of the father is a myth that generates its own truth, the separation of language as signifier, a result of rather than cause – see Foucault's approach for further elaboration. That which designates the important business of the world, the word, is no more important than a dirty nappy. Care of an(other), care of the self, care for the world are all coextensive. The breath ensures that all permeates the materiality of each breath rhythm and identity, self are significant in their contradictory and elusive play. Moving fields of sensation in the fluttering wind of each breath cycle's distinctive rhythm and formation (Journal 18-04-10 Trepina Sun).

Continued reading Gender Trouble. The theme of power arises. I am not sure what I think of it all but I will continue on. Too much psychoanalytic theory for my taste; I prefer Deleuze's anti Oedipus. The phantasy of a post sexual body how blah. The place of language is interesting to consider, the place of women as discriminated against, patronized more like with tales of such, just refuse to hear it, see it, is it the power of inscription or the power of social structures. My project has been like one big gender joke, but theory never folds enough times to get the joke.

Poor men, disadvantaged, discriminated against, silenced and unable to speak of what matters only mouth the theoretical husks of a desiccated life. We are talking about the sexual but what is meant by the sexual here, libido, desire, orgasmic potential, the scope of the conversation questions some terms but not others. In what way is sexual encounter breath encounter? Apparently in the Trobriand Islands sexual congress is referred to as 'breathing together' or some such. The language of perceptuality occurs across multiple breath sites of sensation. These are not all gender determined or controlled in the narrow signifiers of power that are outlined by Foucault and others (Journal 14-04-2010 Trepina Wed).

What other foundational categories of identity – the binary of sex, gender and the body – can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original, and the inevitable?

To expose the foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire as effects of a specific formation of power requires a form of critical inquiry that Foucault, reformulating Nietzsche, designates as “genealogy”. A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. The task of this inquiry is to center on—and decenter—such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, pp. viii-ix).

Does being female constitute a “natural fact” or a cultural performance, or is “naturalness” constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? (Butler, 1990, p. viii)

I am unclear what the term ‘discursively’ means in this context yet I have a sense it is very important to the scope of the argument and conceptual play that Butler is offering.

Monique Wittig’s theory and fiction propose a “disintegration” of culturally constituted bodies, suggesting that morphology itself is a consequence of a hegemonic conceptual scheme (Butler, 1990, p. x).

Yes it seems to me also that morphology can be construed as an embodied play of conceptual schemata yet the breathing body remains the inscribed dimensional fold. And this is inscribed by encounter with the world where the breath is moving, where the fold of pleasure opens the flesh to breathy receptivity. This pleasure is not confined to the precarious parameters of the term ‘sexuality’ as offered in the prevalent discourses pervading cultural institutional life. The sensuous surfaces of the world resound in tones of affect and desire co-mingled yet not one. Threads of experiential encounter are being drawn into existence with every breath. To draw a breath is to make a trace, create a mark that alters both through dissolving and remaking simultaneously. Remaking language and experience in the encounter of touch.

If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself? (Butler, 1990, p. 32).

This is a great quotation as it functions as a threshold: the repetition of breath in sensation outside the known parameters of use, relevance, health, or inside the sensory parameters of pleasure which extend to include sexuality but are not confined by this term; the creation of new pleasures and intensities 'that bring delight and hurt not', the resounding music of the world. The auditory evocation of sensation that melds with and shapes the resonance of breath sensation, cross sensory breathing flesh where words do things; each mark is recorded in a breath drawing. The invisible writing machine: a recording that vibrates and dissolves into a field of potentiality. The parameter between hurt and delight is itself a breath encounter that can only be experienced within the temporal flux of becoming, a parameter that moves, twists, turns and breathes into new and unexpected places.

The breath threshold: finding the thresholds is a fine and tenuous encounter, making the thresholds led by the breath, offering and waiting, knocking and waiting for an invitation, the breath threshold.

'A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin'
(Harcourt, 2006, p. 159)

Breathing (w)hole



Simple Sea Life 1: Ceramic artist Wendy Rouch

In the experience of breath particularity and expanded perception are invited simultaneously. An alternative conceptual frame articulating the potentiality of breath as a perceptible and moving life force in play with sensation and presence is offered. Or one could say is being both created and proposed – brought into conceptual and experiential existence simultaneously in the breathing life of the person who has opened her perception to the sensation of the movement of breath.

Performativity – Butler, Loxley

'Derrida' she says, 'appears to install the break as a structurally necessary feature of every utterance and every codifiable written mark, thus paralysing the social analysis of forceful utterance' (Butler, 1997, p. 150). In other words, deconstruction is too formal a resource for making sense of how performativity works through bodies as a mode of interpellation. Butler wants to be able to focus on what she calls 'social iterability', the forces through which the body is stylised and composed in 'embodied rituals of everydayness' (1997, pp. 150, 152). This would be a notion of the social that includes language, but cannot be captured by the kind of purely linguistic, and overly general, model of performative force that she here takes Derrida to be offering.

The kind of performativity that Butler is interested in, then, works itself out through the body: 'social conventions' can be seen as 'animating the bodies which, in turn, reproduce and ritualize those conventions as practices'; the force of performativity is that of a 'citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body' (1997, p. 155) (Loxley, 2007, p. 134).

How, though, can the chance of resignification now be comprehended? How can it be possible if not on the structural basis Derrida set out? Here, too, Butler invokes the force of corporeality itself. 'The body,' she suggests, 'is not simply a sedimentation of speech acts by which it has been constituted. If that constitution fails, a resistance meets interpellation at the moment it exerts its demand' (1997, p. 155) (Loxley, 2007, p. 134).

What Butler takes from Felman's account, as she says in her Afterword to the 2002 edition, is the emphasis on the consequences of apprehending the performative as corporeal (2002, p. 113). Felman's insight, the 'scandal' that she explores, is that the speaking body is both the condition for any possible performative utterance, and the occasion for an excess of 'saying' over what is said:

For Felman, the body that speaks is a scandal ... because the bodily action of speech is not predictable in any mechanical way. That the speech act is bodily does not mean that the body is fully present in its speech ... Speech is bodily, but the body exceeds the speech it occasions; and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of its enunciation. (1997, pp. 155-156)

Thus the body actually interferes with the process of sedimentation, of composition or ordering through repetition, that it has to undergo. It is not just the predictable product of that process of identity formation or subjection, and the promise of resignification can be apprehended once the power or agency of corporeality itself is considered. In this way, Butler seeks to locate the political opportunities of the performative in a theory of social iterability that neither neglects

the body nor, as a consequence, finds itself unable to give a proper account of the particular interplay of constitutive domination and challenging resistance that takes place through its social life:

In such bodily productions resides the sedimented history of the performative, the ways in which sedimented usage comes to compose, without determining, the cultural sense of the body, and how the body comes to disorient that cultural sense in the moment of expropriating the discursive means of its own production. The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, in a moment that founds a future through a break with that past. (1997, p. 159)

In recasting iterability in this way, Butler claims that she has revealed 'the political promise of the performative', and in so doing opened up 'an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking' (1997, p. 161). Her sense that the deconstructive analysis, for all its strengths, cannot attend effectively to the ways in which performativity works as a social force finds an echo in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's warning that a theory of performativity 'needn't and shouldn't have the effect of hiving off a depersonalized understanding of performative force from a psychologized and spatialized understanding of affective force' (2003, p. 90). Sedgwick, though, also suggests that Butler's formulations are themselves cast too generally: her own project of 'attending to the textures and effects of particular bits of language' thus 'requires a step to the side of anti-essentialism', the larger claims about the relation between doing and being that inform Butler's thinking about performativity (Sedgwick 2003: 6) (2003, p. 6) (Loxley, 2007, pp. 134-136).

The Play of Gesture: The Beauty of Violence

... a potency arises in breath sensation, a vitality of resonance that permeates carnate flesh, a glow of radiant form.

In the quality of gestures such as push, pull, fling, whack, punch, rip, tear the notion of violence is called up. This quality of force, power, impulse, is related to a potency of enactment, a passionate movement of impulse that creates gesture and propels form into the world, thereby forming the world.

Through joyous encounter with violence as breath sensation in which the movement of all parts of the breath cycle are discernible, where the exhale returns with an ease to sites of sensation in bodily perception and gather discernible textures of substance, I experience myself as morphologically fluxing breath body. Like the encounter with 'becoming molecular' this is an 'opening', one which stirs the breath in subtle pleasure of bodily becoming divesting the rigidities and congealing of affect and postural form imbued in other meetings. Sites of deadened sensation come to life with unexpected dynamic and potency in a range of textures and shapes that exceed the boundaries of normative expectation.

The potentiality of life to fold and move with a vitality and passion is renewed in the poetic imagination and the substance of resonating flesh that audiences in a cross sensory play. The audience is a kinaesthetic vibratory field. Some things occur in the company of others; a potentiality arises that greets and surrounds, affirms and receives, provoking and diversifying the ethical body. The 'cultural corpus' shares each breath in becoming and the capacity for this to take on new shape is a worldly happening. The individual breath rhythm of each person contributes to this. In temporal time, turning towards receiving this play, experiencing this play alters the becoming. Location in time is creating the shape and potentiality of time.

In this essay I probe the word violence to see what it can offer up, be coerced into proffering to a breath account of ethics, wrest from it meanings that are reluctant to come forth as the word is heavily culturally colonized and part of this colonization is reflected in the normative categories of gender. Violent women, or violence done to

women, women subjected to the threat of violence. Yet startlingly the enculturation of girls does little to offset this; rather it promulgates a physical ineptitude in violent gestural forms or at least imaginary space that denies violence its place as a magnificent force, a power and impulse for not simply resistance but for making the shapes of the world breathe in multitudinous dimension, creating form and remaking perceptuality.

OED SECOND EDITION

1989

violent, v.

Obs.

[*ad. OF. (also mod.F.) violenter, or ad. med.L. violent re to compel by force: see prec.*]

1. *trans. To strain or wrest the meaning of (words, a passage, etc.). rare. 1549 LATIMER 5th Serm. bef. Edw. VI (Arb.) 150 Thus they force and violent thys place to make for theyr purpose, wher no such thyng is mente.*

The association with force, coercion, compulsion bending the 'other' to meet one's own will and desire, needs and impulse. Violence is not an undifferentiated force, it takes many 'forms' and in the breath experience of each of these the micro tonal multiplicity of breath potential is deeply linked to the experience of perceptuality.

violent, a. (adv., n.)

OED SECOND EDITION 1989

(*va¹ɪənt*) Also *5 wyolent, 5-6 vyolent, violente*. [*a. OF. (also mod.F.) violent, or ad. L. violent-us (whence It., Sp., and Pg. violento) or violent-, violens (whence It. violente), forcible, impetuous, vehement, etc., f. v̄'s strength.*]

A. adj. I. 1. Of things: Having some quality or qualities in such a degree as to produce a very marked or powerful effect (esp. in the way of injury or discomfort); intense, vehement, very strong or severe: a. Of the sun, heat, etc. † violent signs (see quot. 1679).

In etymological background the word retains more of this complexity in its Latin 'invitare' as it simultaneously combines, to invite, to challenge, to summon. Or in the Latin word vis, strength, force, power.

Violence as a range of gestural actions, thresholds of breath experience, opens onto the concept of 'power' and the constitution of subjectivity in interesting ways. In Foucault's proposition 'the soul is the prison of the body', the place of breath as an elusive vibratory force can be said to be active in soul making. The power of breath exists not only as a measurable biological feature but as indivisibly implicated in the making of perceptuality, where concepts such as matter and perception are recognized as one. In a visceral philosophy where all is moving the distinction between conceptual categories is always transitory; the conceptual is always a tool not a truth.

The pleasure of breath experience lies partly in the multitude of thresholds it offers to encountering subtle movements of materiality as breath infused. Ironically this experience of breathing matter that can be fed with all kinds of delicious textures of breath, experienced in nothing other than the living movement of a breath body that gathers substance. In the saturation of breath a power arises, dynamic or gentle the detail of each breath cycle can open out, altering the shape of time. I begin to experience self as the movement of time that has sensation. Time passes through me and perhaps this is what is alluded to in the phrase 'becoming real', the encounter with time as dimensional sensation in space.

Art 'invites' 'challenges', 'summons' people to experience 'the fold', the visceral sensory experience of altered boundaries of signification, the felt sense of meaning that oscillates between accrued associations in sensation, image and sound and territory. This artistic encounter violates the congealing of breath experience. The art of breathing, the drawing of breath occurs in tiny little scribbles throughout the flesh, making flesh tone, creating the resonating body.

Vulnerable Breath

The wound, the opening, the window allows seeing but is simultaneously a threshold, is something that is crossed; a movement of sensation occurs.

The breath sensation of movement that occurs when one is permeable open to the experiential terrain which is constantly being reformed.

Vulnerability becomes the opening to relationship, to recognition that is not so dependent on the dominant forms of linguistic organization but opens the imperceptible trembling of the finite which cannot be fixed – to a potentiality – the flux of life.

The risk is that in turning the encounter away from ‘the open’, an asphyxiation of the living world occurs, one which can only occur as a movement including disintegration and obliteration of extant forms. The dissolving, disintegrating, decomposition of form, structure, the known of familiar arrangement opens to the movement of breath, wind, elemental force. There is a violent rending of enclosure.

The identity of the subject becomes the dominant holding form of the culture and as such holds in place a closure that refuses the potentiality, the valuing of the demise, the regathering of spirit into new form. The fall from form.

Corbin Dialogue

In reading Samin Mahmoud's account (2011) of the thought of Henry Corbin my experience of breath as receptivity is aroused. I am not sure what is meant by it all but it is not necessarily postulating a religious dogma, more perhaps an experiential encounter with meaning that is felt. I do not have to believe in God, religion or anything fixed to have these experiences.

Corbin would later find parallels with Luther in the works of Ibn Arabi in whose work, "the divine attributes are qualifications that we impute to the Divine Essence not as convention might bid us postulate it, but as we experience it in ourselves" (Corbin, 1998, p. 300 no. 325). The divine names are not attributes conferred by the human intellect upon the Divine Essence; they are the traces of their action in us, of that action by which they fulfill their being through us. That is to say, we discover the true meaning of the Divine names "insofar as they occur and are made within us, according to what they make of us, insofar as they are our *passion*" (Corbin, 1998, p. 117). In the words of Ibn Arabi: "Those to whom God remains veiled pray to the God who in their belief is their Lord to have compassion with them. But the intuitive mystics [*Ahl al-Kashf*] ask that divine compassion be fulfilled [come into being, exist] through them" (Mahmoud, 2011, p. 4)

This sense of the situatedness of presence is particularly useful when attempting to discuss the experience of breath in the light of Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Felt meaning as understanding is a sort of revelation through sensation, breath and presence, shifting the edges of my embodiment as structured by the signifier, the touch of the world.

'The phenomenon of meaning, that is fundamental in the metaphysics of "Being and Time", is the link between signifier and signified. But what makes this link, without which signifier and signified would simply remain objects for theoretical consideration? This link is the subject, and this subject is the *presence*, presence of the mode of being *to* the mode of understanding. Presence, *Da-sein* (Corbin, 1976, p. 2).

This subject is the presence, "the presence of the mode of being *to* the mode of understanding." Thus, Corbin interprets Heidegger's *Dasein*, which is translated as "being-there", to mean a being-there that is "to be enacting a presence, enactment of that presence *by* which and *for* which meaning is revealed in the present." The mode this presence assumes is a revelatory one such that "in revealing the meaning, it reveals itself,

and is that which is revealed" (Corbin, 1976, p. 2) Thus, the fundamental link that phenomenology discloses to us, as we said earlier, is the link between the *modus intelligendi* and the *modus essendi*. The modes of understanding/knowing correspond to the modes of being and any change in the former entails a change in the latter. The modes of being, Corbin concludes, are the "ontological, existential conditions of the act of 'Understanding', of the 'Verstehen', which is to say of hermeneutics" (Corbin, 1976, p. 4; Mahmoud, 2011, p. 14)

It seems to me what Corbin is saying here is that 'being' is a form of embodiment. That being is constructed, culturally and possibly environmentally as well. Being arises from what one is born into although this is not to say that birth is the beginning. We hear 'in the beginning was the word', I would say 'was the breath'. But I would rather say there is no beginning. If there is no beginning there is no one place to stand, no fixed point of view, no ultimate truth and language becomes once again a creative act. The experience of 'being' is for me a perceptual encounter in temporal flux: it is the movement of breath. Every nuance is different and never recurs.

Perhaps breath allows a soul movement, a movement of the 'prison' that is not simply a reflection of normative inscription. Just as Butler speaks of being undone by grief so the 'prison' becomes momentarily undone in this way of breath. The nature of Western intellectual training and enculturation is such that the avenues of 'undoing' are constrained by cleaving to reflective surfaces. The descent into 'loss' and 'grief' becomes a central motif of shared humanity. This reflects the intactness of felt experience as a fixed body tonus, posture and breath rhythm. It reflects an experience of the materiality of a body that is not 'perceived' except cursorily. Perceiving the materiality of my physical body in breath movement deconstructs me, but more to the point it cultivates power, movement, offers an undoing of the certitudes of my subjectivity, a vulnerability. The stable identity of the 'subject' is an illusion of perceptuality. The 'undoing' of these is not an act of the will. It is something that comes upon one; it does not accord to a plan or an outcome. Presence is felt as a perceptual nuance, subtle body; this is not a capacity cultivated in most Western scholastic training.

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you" by trying to

translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know. (Butler, 2003, p. 36)

Disorientation and loss are not the only modes of coming into relationship. The work of Martin Buber around I and Thou indicates an alternative path, one that is not predicated on the primacy of language and subject formation through terms of normative recognition.

There are many forms, modes of relationship that can be cultivated within the social. This multiplicity includes not only the surfaces of reflection but also the movement of resonance. This resonance can occur in the imaginal and also in the sensing of breath. Butler wants to ask: 'Do we want to say that it is our status as "subjects" that binds us all together even though, for many of us, the "subject" is multiple or fractured?' This makes me aware that I don't understand what is meant by the 'subject' in these discussions.

I can be undone in language in many ways and also in breath movement. This undoing remakes my flesh, reshapes my heart; this is an undoing in which I am not 'beside' myself. For me there is no self to stand alongside, 'to be' beside. I cannot be beside myself except as an idea in language. Nor is this undoing necessarily a loss, a disorientation, an unravelling into grief; rather, in some encounters an undoing of grief, of the sensory deprivations that accompany loss. A coming into grace, an inhabiting of my body, my perceptuality more akin to James Hillman's account of the gasp of wonder that opens me to the world. A coming into relationality that undoes the grip of grief that holds the rhythm of my breath in thrall.

In questioning how relationality might be conceived Butler offers an opening to reconsider.

And does the insistence on the subject as a precondition of political agency not erase the more fundamental modes of dependency that do bind us and out of which emerge our thinking and affiliation, the basis of our vulnerability, affiliation, and collective resistance?

What allows us to encounter one another? (2004, p. 49)

I would ask: at an experiential level can I feel the vulnerability of another if I cannot feel myself? Does the capacity to feel myself in sensation outside the preconceived value categories of language contribute to my capacity to recognize the vulnerability of another? To sustain my own autonomy, identity without the demand that the other conform to my terms of subjecthood? Can I be touched by another if I cannot touch myself? This reference I make to 'myself' is a multiple and fractured subject. It is in this multiplicity experienced in perceptual sensory awareness that I become possibly more able to recognize the vulnerability of another? It is through this means that I gain insight into the ways in which I am subjected to myself; and this has many surfaces including those which are altered in the relationship of each breath cycle.

Deleuze

What Is Philosophy?

This process of “a parallel evolution” is exemplified in the “conceptual vitalism” of this book. Deleuze and Guattari are the thinkers of “lines of flight,” of the openings that allow thought to escape from the constraints that seek to define and enclose creativity. This conception and practice of philosophy as conceptual creation poses some special difficulties for the translator, as some concepts must be indicated by an extraordinary and sometimes even barbarous or shocking word, whereas others make do with an ordinary, everyday word that is filled with harmonics so distant that it risks being imperceptible to a nonphilosophical ear. Some concepts call for archaisms, and others neologisms, shot through with almost crazy etymological exercises (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, pp. 7-8). (Tomlinson & Burchell, 1994, p. viii)

To philosophise is a verb, an action in the world. The notion of visceral philosophy highlights the way this occurs in the dimensionality of language; not in the armchair of truth but in the creative chaos of encountering the world as experience. The play of breath in sensation is acutely involved in making this event. The rubbing of surfaces alters the movement of breath.

This making of concepts as tools rather than descriptive accounts or argued positions, is congruent with the use of language in relation to breath experience. The emphasis is on movement, relocation, shifting and turning rather than establishing firm and reliably perpetual ground. The ephemeral comes to the fore and location is constantly shifting as in the experience of sensation in breath. The conceptual terms used refer to ways of working. They denote illusory parameters that allow an area of focus to be created, the building of shared propensities to take place that engender the joy of a collective body. The making of the collective breath body has a libidinal joy of composure and potentiality; an erotic sharing is taking place where the nuance of concept, sensation, and image are offered in their inseparability. As I listen to a woman describe the chicken that has arisen in breath sensation snuggled under her left ribs I am opened to a potentiality. I may never meet this chicken in my own torso but the gathering of soft substance with contour, the growing of something new and unexpected opens the imaginary edges of my embodied resonance. Residing in the

sensations of breath in this imagistic breath flux invites a 'becoming real' not fixed in time, nor locked in stasis. Here one draws upon the accumulative propensity to subtle breath body gatherings in flesh that stand me up in the world, that build a perceptuality that flourishes, rooted in the pleasures of breathing matter that I experience myself to be. Here to be is becoming textural, receptive to the gifts of the world that abounds in every breath.

Body without Organs (BwO)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the organism must be dismantled in order to separate the body from its organs, which in turn allows the BwO to become a transformative machine free from the domination of an "organic" reality.

Actually, dismantling the organism is no more difficult than dismantling the other two strata, significance and subjectification. Significance clings to the soul just as the organism clings to the body, and it is not easy to get rid of either. And how can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, tie us down to a dominant reality? Tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from significance and interpretation in order to make it a veritable production: this is assuredly no more or less difficult than tearing the body away from the organism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 159).

The body without organs is nonproductive; nonetheless it is produced, at a certain place and at a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product: the schizophrenic table is a body without organs. The body without organs is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 9).

What strikes me here is the congruency of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas with notions of the breath body or the body of breath which are not an experiential encounter with anatomy but a realm of becoming permeable, malleable, where the sites of sensation in breath diffusion become increasingly imprecise but extensive and nuanced.

These last few lines are particularly relevant:

The body without organs is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image (*ibid*).

This sense of the body without an image is integral to the experience of breath in the minutia of each breath cycle, a dissolving into, a billowing out of, a play of sensation that has space and time. In this place terms such as 'sensuous' can be misleading as they are often associated with 'the body' as an organism, a perceived site of anatomical reference points. The carnal body as flesh is evoked but this is not the body of breath I refer to. The resonance of flesh incites sensation yet this is not necessarily experienced as a play of breath. The orientation to breath is not a perceptual focus that is commonly articulated; the experiential terrain is likewise obscured. Deleuze declares it has nothing to do with the body at all, but this is not so: the conceptual plane breathes; conceiving is an inspirational act, the realm of the imaginary vibrates in breath tones. Yet this body without image is a significant threshold to the breath body, one that Ilse Middendorf proposed as an alternative encounter to the dominant Western paradigm.

In the passage below it is possible to hear the diagram of breath practices that are thresholds to the experience of breath.

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole "diagram" as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs. We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. It is only there that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows,

continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready to be plugged into other collective machines.

For the BwO is all of that: necessarily a Place, necessarily a Plane, necessarily a Collectivity (assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, people, organs, powers, and fragments of all of these; for it is not “my” body without organs, instead the “me” (*moi*) is on it, or what remains of me, unalterable and changing in form, crossing thresholds) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 161).

Tarchin Hearn: Breathing the natural way to meditate.

All this without words. Perhaps it is possible to probe and question without words. When consciously immersed in this process of seeking and growing without words you are really meditating (Hearn, 2005 p. 17).

The term 'consciously' in this context would need to be elaborated for an academic audience as they would not understand its meaning. The subsuming of the mental into tactile sensing rather than oriented to the word is an unfamiliar terrain to most of this readership. Academia mainly trades in words that are collected, archived, retrieved, rearranged, evaluated and sold. Consequently a term such as 'consciously' is not easily grasped as it is an experience that is largely encountered when words drop away to a more minor role.

Is meditation a sexual activity? Or in what way can it be? As I sit in the car and write this I can feel a shift in sensation in various areas as more responsive to breath movement. An inhalation arises from my pelvic floor, moves up to my chest, and the exhale subsides down. This has some connection to my inner thighs.

I am beginning to realize that I regard every man as a potential rapist and threat – well not all but all whom I don't know and think differently of. What is it to have my body for myself? Sensuously, but also physically? The shapes and contours?

It's not enough to verbally ask a question. You also have to be open for response. Imagine you are in a field of wild flowers and want to know which ones the bees prefer. Without speaking but with your senses open and alert, carefully observing bees and flowers, we could say that you were in a state of question. Basically, the state of question is a state of open receptivity. It is a state where the body and mind are vitally alert and fully engaged in the present moment. It includes a willingness to be continuously transformed through experience. In a way, this too is meditation (Hearn, 2005 p. 18).

The sensation of meditation

The place of sensation in meditation is only just coming to the fore in more complex ways in a range of books on meditation, where the notion of emptiness is being replaced with a more sensuous account.

Writing from the Breath

Writers are often asked: “how do you write? With a words processor? an electric typewriter? a quill? Longhand?” But the essential question is: “Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write?” Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas – inspiration (Lessing, 2007, p. 6).

This empty space to which Lessing refers arises for me through the experience of breath as a perceptual practice. The encounter is like a form of listening, of attention. ‘I let the breath come, I let it go and I wait for it to return of its own accord’. This practice is like a Western form of yoga; it brings me to a mindfulness that is immersed, embedded in the perceptual field of my tactile sensing, the periphery and dimensionality of my surfaces. An ease and lightness in breath rhythm arises out of the eutonus of my fleshly breath encounter in each breath cycle. Inspiration creates this space; expiration affirms the sensation of the movement of breath. I feel it return to me in sensation as it travels out into the world. I am surrounded by space; the touch of this surroundedness rests upon my skin in delicate spacious awareness. In this mode of mindfulness, skin surfaces of thinking, porous receptive flesh breathes in and out. I open to the world, feel the touch of my skin upon it, the breath of the world within; a space surrounds and yet touches and enfolds and inspiration moves me. I feel it move me, move through me, alter the tone of my occupation in space. I, in listening, arise, these tones of silent flesh sonorous in sensibility, and from this place of breathing an inner spaciousness emerges in fine nuance, a breath body mindful in perception moving in breath sensation unbounded by the parameters of given words waiting for them to arise in the currents and stirrings of this inspiration that touches me altering my sense of lucid body tone. I allow the movement of breath to play me and in the arising tones, sensibility of word and image are tossed forth, offered up, secreted and laid upon the shore of my articulate self.

The storyteller is deep inside every one of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is attacked by, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise ... but the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us,

when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative (Lessing, 2007, p. 11).

Ah but it is also our perceptible breath body in a myriad of tones that shapes us, creates us. The breath event is inspiration and as we open our fabric to it by perceiving the touch, the textures and threads of flesh, the story begins to weave and run. The breath rising on the inhalation allows the flight of the bird – the phoenix is a breath, gestures of breath – to hover and swoop, plummet and soar. The movement of breath comes to us and calls in the word, the writing, the folding of image and word. Opening to the sensation of breath is not an imagination but a kiss of the breath cast upon us, creating us anew as vibration finding form. The mark upon the page is as if to draw a breath, the mark upon the body, drawn breath by breath making line and contour, cursive script embodied image. The words come with the experience of breath.

Alain Badiou elaborates the concept of 'event' (see Essay # 5 the Breath Event). In the realm of visceral philosophy a conceiving space is born in the perceptuality of the 'breath event'. In this encounter, self is increasingly experienced as a breathing materiality permeable to the nuanced particularity of each part of the breath cycle. As the experience of carnate breath (see Essay #3 Carnate Breath) comes to the fore the concept of a 'breath event' that occurs in every breath cycle makes more sense. It is this sense that leads my thinking, 'inspires' my writing. I am moved to write by this alteration of what Lessing refers to as that empty space that surrounds, full of breath sensation but empty of yesterday's thoughts, the clatter and chatter of cacophonous words. Where the mind has opened and resides as the perception of skin surface in the touch of breath, here the mind creates a breathing receptacle. Where the mind has joined the perceiving of breath sensation a conceiving space opens and words are born, concepts, images and the poetic folds of meaning.

Performance Prologue # 1 Ease: Writing from the breath

One of the key propositions of Middendorf breathwork is to allow breath.

'I let the breath come, I let it go and wait for it to return of its own accord'

within this arises

'the play of breath, sensation, and presence'.

There are many thresholds through which to enter the terrain of

'the perceptible breath';

moving with a quality of ease is one. Ease is not in this context a word, or a thing but an experiential terrain of movement quality, arousing inner sensation at play with allowed breath and an invitational presence of sensing ease by trusting the body already knows how. Accompanying myself, listening for where this ease leads my shape, rhythm, style of movement, sense of self. A labyrinth of movement shapes in space lead my sensing ease and from moment to moment recognizing when one movement path, line of flight ends and where necessary returning to begin again, to move in another direction, or tempo, to repeat until these 'lines of flight' cross and entwine. I am drawing the breath body in space by allowing the breath to come and go in the ease of movement.

From time to time coming to outer stillness sensing whether an inner sensation of a feeling of ease continues on, sensing this vibration and as it fades returning to full bodied movement. To enjoy and to stir this inner sensation that might resound on as a texture of sensation, when I come to outer stillness and resonate.

Resonate

To resonate is to cease the outer movement and come to stillness where sensing dominates, sensing inner sensation, the sense of the whole (whatever that is from moment to moment – global body scan, touch of the world all over...) sensing movement of breath – inhalation, exhalation, pause if there is one, and the transitions. Perceiving and surrendering to the experience of breath.

In stillness [the sensation of] the movement of breath may gradually become more perceptible in sensation, location, direction, substance, surface, density. It is possible to use many words but every breath cycle is a different 'breath event' never to repeat so any word is no more than a little signpost to a terrain of experiential encounter and understanding that is often wordless, unrecognizable in linguistic parameter but rather met in its distinctive nuances in the momentary apprehension of the imprecise but detailed accuracy of sensing – dissolving into the sensuous tactility of the experience of breath, that creates the permeable breath body. The perceptual body is not the anatomical body: it extends into the world, gathers power and substance, dissolves, into new form in every breath cycle. The I of the self is created in this meeting of continuity and change. Breath out of movement – Movement out of breath. The sensation of the movement of breath as perceptible substance permeable and dimensional, holding rhythm and gathering power.

Repetition and Difference (see Essay #6 Deleuze and the Breath Fold)

In the repetition of entering the experience of breath through the threshold of ease, each engagement is different yet leaves a trace, marks carnate flesh; a becoming-permeable begins to alter the disposition of this breathing body. Incrementally an easing of breath rhythm in sensation, a eutonus of body that has become congealed with density and tension of enforced powers of cultural breath inscription, or trauma and physical dis – ease may perhaps begin to melt, dissolve, open, or gather in the touch of breath as an invitation to ease, to a reconfiguration of self and posture. Such a subtle process without predicate or linear path, infused with the complexities of the dimensionality of language. Nonetheless the potentiality exists to become, in the ease of breath in sensation, a felt rhythm of self, different in every cycle. Lightness and ease ensue. Such an ease is a mindfulness in the sensuous understanding of the term where my mental is subsumed into 're' 'cognition' by the power of inspired perceptuality as self. Re 'cognition' occurs at this nexus where breath, mind, perceiving, self and body are moving in a flux that I surrender to in breath sensation, ever more perceptible as a disposition of the sensory. When it is understood that the breath sensorium occurs when the mind is open to perceiving, not interpreting. In this place the verb 'to be' is the action of every breath cycle that comes upon me, creates me, that moves through me. Here 'recognition' is occurring

in a way that can be articulated more clearly perhaps in the language of contemporary neuroscience, where 'somatic markers' are formed and formative of a felt sense of identity. This perceptual literacy embraces a territory of breath, sensation and presence that both holds and dissolves the boundaries of perceived self. In the work of Judith Butler the place of 'recognition' is located in the power of language, words to form the subject, the body, the power to shape matter. The power of breath to shape matter is located in this realm of perceiving the allowed breath play in sensation and presence. Presence being the relocation, the recognition into a mindfulness that is perceptual and oriented not to the word but to the sensation in breath as a threshold, a portal to a different terrain; one not in binary opposition to language, nor a liberation from it but a recognition in the felt sense experience of the dimensionality of language in breath time. Each breath event is dimensional and entry into this terrain develops as a disposition, a potentiality of relationship, where self is re-conceived and born anew in tiny little flutters of each inhalation and exhalation. So to take up Butler's questions of subversion is to recognize that they move beyond the reflective surfaces of academic knowledge or the critical framework based only on the signifier and include the art of breathing form into formlessness, where the 'congealed' begins to move.

03/07/2011

With thanks to Claire.

Visceral Philosophy

The Breath Event : Alain Badiou

Gathering in the Breath

the permeability of form – the body of knowledge breathes – breath the heart of corporeality.

'Unnatural acts' breathing philosophy

The experience of breath is the seed kernel of an idea

Hands on Breath Dialogue: dramaturgical propositions through the touch of breath

What a dialogue does – triggers, leads, invites, meets, touches, encounters, offers, receives – this is different from joins, blends, merges. It holds, beholds, provokes, entices, stirs ... the prompt to framing what the dialogues are, how deeply one can be moved by breath dialogue, or how lightly, easefully or playfully one can become one with the experience.

Performance Prologues

Performance Prologues/Solo: these are performance pieces I started rehearsing last year. They are more like workshops in the sense that the audience is part of the practice. They constitute a sort of visceral philosophy project – thinking through practice in company. I am wondering if this is actually my thesis and that all the writing in relation to Agamben and others are performance notes, and performance prologues.

Possible prologues are:

- Recovering the Breath
- The Pleasure of Breath (Foucault)
- Stroking my Brain-Skin Surfaces of Thinking
- Becoming Animal
- Violence Mourning Politics (Butler)
- Restuffing the Signifier

Plus a solo performance - Song of the Breath: The eight eyes (I) of the spider – frocking philosophy, incorporating glossolalia and philosophical texts.

Performance Prologue #2: Recovering the breath



Photo by Victoria Bonte 4



Photo by Victoria Bonte 5



Photo by Victoria Bonte 6



Photo by Victoria Bonte 7

performance

prologue #2

Recovering the
breath

The Breath Performs: practising philosophy.

In the experience of breath sensation as an encounter that makes and dissolves form within every breath cycle it is possible to build a performance score. One that is intricately woven as cross-sensory play of the dimensionality of language – of existence. Through body, breath, voice, image in the fluxing forms of halo as a field of presence that moves with the breath tone within, through and between persons and the all-around-ness of the world.

One of the key aspects of such a breath encounter is a re-cognition, and shift in other words, of the interrelationship between mind, body and spirit as they are often termed in the Western tradition. The breath performs – I let the breath come I let it go and wait for it to return of its own accord. I immerse myself with patience in the play between breath sensation and presence and I listen for that which nourishes me. I cleave toward the intuitive call and abandon the known, the exercise, the path. The way of breath is not a path, a stated methodology, but encompasses the mystery of the artistic fold that opens the halo as a breath-by-breath guide rope that

is being spun in each cycle of the perceptible breath encounter. The question of art then becomes the art of existence.

In the work of *The Perceptible Breath* as an experiential practice and simultaneously a conceiving place in dialogue with the soul-centred acting system of Michael Chekhov and a range of performative breath tools, methodology can be created, ways of approaching the creation of a performative score.

I refer to the breath meditation we have been doing as 'practising philosophy', and that is important because it no longer refers to it as a somatic bodywork but as a philosophical practise in which the first thing you do is place a hand on yourself. A long time ago when I looked up the etymology of 'philosophy' I found it came from *sophia* meaning 'wisdom', and that's very important because as my friend noted when she sent that quotation, 'a wise man breathes in his feet'.

Philosophy is an engagement with the dimensionality of language. That's where the conceiving space folds through sensation and the sensation of the movement of breath; and the categories of grammar and language are part of that possible movement. The meaning of words, they're part of the dimensionality of it and rooted into the breath. A philosophical practice in that way is much more located within a sensibility of wisdom rather than just in word play or theoretical paradigms or abstracted generalized propositions. It folds general conceptual propositions, but it also folds the particularity of every single breath cycle and the experience in sensation and presence of the sensate location and altering of one's sense of the breath body and that sort of thinking; that's actually dimensional, has a philosophical foundation that has substance and significance.

So I was going to write this short piece and then segue off into Deleuze's writing in his final book, *What Is Philosophy*, by articulating in what different forms of breath dialogue as practising philosophy and the reshaping of conceiving places, the conceptual space moves. It allows, it is actually what really forms the basis of people's intelligence, their intelligent engagement in life, because you can think for yourself, you think in the act of experiencing yourself, and this builds in people a sense or capacity that they can think for themselves, that the authority for lots of

things is located in themselves – in dialogue with others, but not totally subject to the knowledge or paradigm of others. So in some ways I am just stating the obvious. I am talking about breathing philosophy as the title of my dissertation, but I can also talk about practising philosophy, and run a line, a thread, back to the way I am trying to articulate how the experience of breath that comes and goes on its own shifts one's sensate and cross-sensory standing in the world in ways that re-stuff the signifier in the sense that leads to experiences that I could never have conceived of, and therefore it opens conceptual space into new shapes and ways of articulating oneself in the world.

So breath is a conceiving space. That is in one way what I was trying to say, it links back to 'I am the phallus' in a more extended way because it is trying to link back that 'frocking philosophy', 'philosophy is a breathing (W)hole', 'I am the phallus', the sexualized, genderized material, and the humorous parts of it, but back into a sense that a conceiving space as a fecund engagement in one's breath body. Moving and altering one's perceptuality is not in any essential way gendered – it is a potentiality of the person, the human, and so this emphasis on associating overly strongly *conceiving* related to women in terms of birth and bodies and sexuality and Irigaray and that the *conceptual* is related to the abstract and men and language and words when in actual fact it is the silliest division you could come across.

So I'm trying to drag words like 'conceiving' and 'fecund' 'potency', 'tumescant' back into more conventional theoretical philosophical terrain in order to 'recolour' them. To talk about the fecund male is a bit odd at first; it's an odd combination of words. But certainly with the breathing philosophy stuff I'm trying to evoke or articulate to some extent how breath is a fundamental actor in the conceiving space, not just a servant of words, and that is very central to my thesis, and it turns out I have got one. A while ago I said I had an anti-thesis.

The experience of breath in perceptuality is a conceiving space. And perceptuality is where one is trying to articulate the extent to which, in the experience of breath what's often called 'perception', as if there's a subject who perceives, is intimately integrally part of materiality. And yet in the experience of breath as it starts to manifest in different locations, directions, densities and forms with qualities of

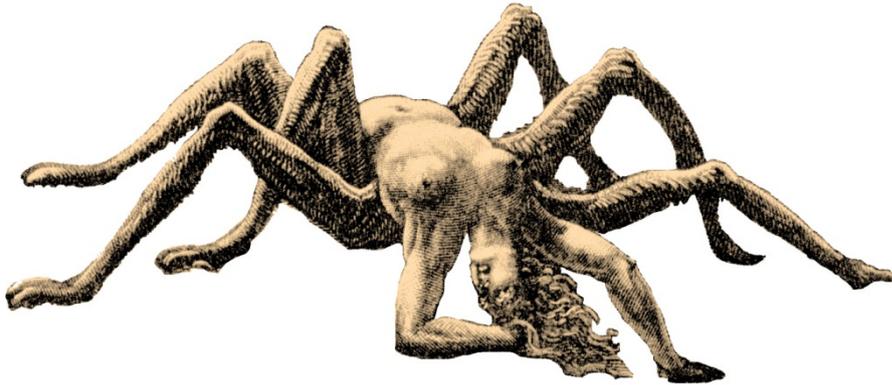
lightness and ease and cross-sensory play the whole realm of the intelligent play of language, if you open up the meaning of the word 'language', or the intelligent realm of the experience of breath, if you open up the word 'breath', shifts.

I have been thinking about the extent to which there's scope for talking further about the way the Anglo-Celtic tradition and experience – and it's more than that, it's a European tradition in a more major sense – particularly of the twentieth century, saw such violent brutalization of men in the world wars and in the whole boarding school tradition and so on that it really isn't appropriate any more to talk about discrimination against women. The disadvantaged position of women might be better – there's certainly discrimination with a vengeance – but the sense that women are in some sense treated badly or are in need of being given a leg up ... for me this was partly what became problematic in feeling as if I was being patronized and inculcated with an 'I know better than you' generosity out of the mutinous and the abject into the world of words. But it doesn't have any – and in that sense I agree with Irigaray – scope or account in it for the whole terrain of perceptuality through breath and touch and other ways of knowing. And that absence in lots of men's experience and embodiment is so radically fundamentally extensive, it would seem, that whether they're trying to ram gender theory down one's throat or just going along in the world doing whatever they do – including glassing people in the face and generally engaging with the world as if they don't have a person or a personal space, a personal sense of vibration – that is part of a culture of violence and an incapacity to be anything other than violent because there's no multiplicitous sense of the permeation of breath in a lightness and ease that doesn't preclude violence or violent action but allows other situations of bodily rhythm and sense of self.

Performance Prologue #3: Becoming Animal

Deleuze, Paul Newham, Body Breath Voice, In the Company of Others.

An instruction manual for becoming human through breath forms as perceptuality. The formation of breathing flesh that experiences the sensation of the receptive rhythm that gathers in substance and the powers of breath.



*Arachne changing into a spider: illustration by Gustave Dore created in 1861 for an edition of Dante's *Inferno**

#Spinning the thread occurs in the breath my breath encounter with the play of sensation and presence.

Performance Prologue #4: Birth to Presence

Jean Luc-Nancy, Catherine Fitzmaurice

Birth takes place in a community of impartation – that of the mother’s womb, that of love, that of being-together-among-many.

Impartation itself signifies birth (*partum*). To be born – not to have one’s birth behind one, but incessantly be born, in trembling – is to be imparted. It is not the *having been*, and it is exactly what the subject will never be able to have behind it, as a past or as the present of its past. But the subject never ceases being born, or trembling. This is how difference comes to identity: it *occurs* to identity. Identity itself does not let itself be identified, and it gives identity. Identity is given by the difference that is not *its own* (Nancy, 1993, p. 33).

The Breath Sensorium – the breath performs

Breath dialogue between philosophical and performance, theatre, and somatic practitioners, with particular reference to Michael Chekhov, Zygmunt Molik, Dawn Langman, Ilse Middendorf, and The Company of Others.

James Hillman: The Thought of the Heart

This link between heart and the organs of sense is not simple mechanical sensationalism; it is aesthetic. That is, the activity of perception or sensation in Greek is *aisthesis* which means at root "taking in" and "breathing in" – a "gasp", that primary aesthetic response ... What is it to 'take in' or breathe in the world? First, it means aspiring and inspiring the literal presentation of things by gasping. The transfiguration of matter occurs through wonder. This aesthetic reaction which precedes intellectual wonder inspires the given beyond itself, letting each thing reveal its particular aspiration within a cosmic arrangement.

Second, 'taking in' means taking to heart, interiorising, becoming intimate with in an Augustinian sense ... Third, 'taking in' means interiorising the object into itself, into its image so that *its* imagination is activated (rather than ours), so that it shows its heart and reveals its soul (Hillman, 1997, pp. 47-48).

If I approach the writings of James Hillman in *The thought of the heart* as a breath text I am first drawn to the associations with gesture and quality of movement and ask myself how might my experience of breath resound? The only answer is to explore in practice and experience what arises.

First: my heart is my humanity, my courage to live, my strength and fierce passion. By means of it nothing is foreign to me; all can be admitted to its kingdom of dignity. My most noble virtues emanate from the heart: loyalty, heroic boldness, compassion. Let us call this the heart of the Lion, Coeur de Lion (1997, p. 9).

I begin from the very simple practices of moving, resonating, resting. I combine this with the principles of I let the breath come and go of its own accord, I perceive the interplay of breath, sensation and presence, I invite a sense of the whole. I keep it very simple. I draw on the Chekhov exercise 'The Imaginary Centre in the Chest'. I know from past experience that this gathers perceptible shape and substance with repeated visits, and has a particularly rich effect on my sense of embodiment and breath. I identify my gestural associations with the text. I ask myself what gestures, directions, rhythms, qualities I associate with boldness. I then translate these into breath movement sequences. They include stepping forward, sweeping gestures, expansion, thrusting, flinging, all sorts of gestures that go out, send objects out with dynamic force across space, throwing, striding; they have a largeness and freedom

movement about them, they are inclined to incorporate the whole of myself in movement.

Hillman goes on to say,

Second: my heart is an organ of the body. It is a muscle or a pump, an intricate mechanism and secret holder of my death. Let us refer to this pumping heart as the heart of Harvey (1997, pp. 9-10).

The flesh of the heart begins to invite my breath experience into the imagination. When I perceive the sensation of breath permeate this area of my body I am inspired to thought and image and a perceptuality of encounter that encompasses the world. This pumping heart is part of my bodily whole; it does not exist in isolation but in relationship.

As I read the text I am struck by the emphasis on image in relation to the imaginal. To me the imaginal resides equally in sensation and breath.

Philosophy enunciates the world in the images of words. It must arise in the heart in order to mediate the world truly, since, as Corbin says, it is the subtle organ which perceives the correspondences between the subtleties of consciousness and the levels of being. This intelligence takes place by means of images which are a third possibility between mind and the world (Hillman, 1997, pp. 6-7).

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Appendix A: Journal selections

Tuesday 16 January 2007

The question in resonating 'what has this done for me?' transmutes into 'what is this doing to me'? I no longer 'collect' the experience so much as experience the ongoing encounter that has been aroused and continues to unfold with each breath cycle, and within each part of the breath cycle.

I arrive at a place where I am subject to the breath. And this statement resounds with some reasonably radical implications.

For at this point my subjectivity is permeated by the movement of breath. I receive this and it shapes my perception not only visually but in proximity, touch, time and spatially it influences my relationality with others, the other.

Poem: The Myth of Neutrality

Breath and the facial muscles remind me of the pictures in *Towards a poor theatre*. Exploring the way in which small facial movements trigger a breath response and in resonating a subsequent breath perception.

At first it seems as if my breath is stuck to my muscular movements of extension and contraction but as the tonus changes the breath then seems to permeate and this brings quite incredible nuances. Breath movement then takes on a different meaning: it is not movement of the body so much as moving through the body – it gathers, arrives, travels, resounds in barely perceptible yet utterly lucid ways.

Micro movement and the Breath

Becoming imperceptible

Weaving the fabric of the body in space. Threads of vocal sound.

I sit on a stool

to let my breath come and go

Many days pass

I cannot let my breath come and go

I am attached to it

I drag it

Pull it in

Push it out

I hold it

In shape

In rhythm

Location

At the beginning of inhale

Exhale

I have seized the other and made it my captive and servant

What if I were to let it go?

How could I let it go and come back of its own accord?

I am struck by the ever becoming: there is no place to stand which is neutral. There is no place to arrive at, there is no freedom, there is only death. There is no place to return to.

The simulation of neutrality is a desensitization of the experience of embodiment, an illusion or aspiration. There is nowhere to stand and nothing to stand on which is not

of this world yet if I come to this standing in the breath I discover that I have not neutrality or arrival but I have relationship with the breath and the world. I am neither alone nor abandoned, I am in company.

Breath journal November 2007

I have been at the second one-day workshop with Susan West on teaching singing as outreach. More difficult encounters.

This morning breathwork in the studio I find that the body of breath has become imperceptible, sort of vanished back into my bones. I have shrunk away from the world. I feel my shoulders have narrowed and slumped in a little, there is no horizontal breadth to my outer edges, there is no front to my front. I have nothing holding or streaming me upwards. I have become inertia: 'polite inertia' not heavy but just very little movement or inhabitation of breath awareness and perceptible changes. Sensation and breath have largely parted company.

Monday 19 November 2007

Am I a boiled toad?

'Am I a boiled toad?' is the proposed title of this essay on the breath.

Where if at all does a breath practice intersect with the social world?

Okay the particularity of breath perception actually provokes questions about the world; perhaps particularity allows me to perceive the saucepan, the shift in heat is discernible. I do not boil in the pot because perception is not an alternative to other modes of thought and knowledge but entwined. Perception is political and abstracted, gives rise to movement, direction, vitality, and particularity assists in reshaping the standpoint, it puts me in touch with the ground I speak from. If I perceive the breath right through my feet rising me in the vertical drawing down in the vertical, the horizontal, the dimensionality of perceptual sensation that is not only the word I experience the world as a breathing entity of which I am part. My

relationship to the earth is different and I am reminded of this in every perceptible breath cycle. I am interdependent with the earth I stand on.

Tuesday 20 November 2007

Breathing the ground I stand on

One of the distinctive aspects of the arts is that so often the methodology is found in the practice, it resides as strongly in the half formed questions, the intuitive impulses, the confusion and doubt, the random acts of choice and necessity. It is this very openness of the conceptual framework that allows for a complex interplay of known and unknown patterns, rhythms and perspectives to be synthesized anew and uncovered, made and sensed. I do not know how I will proceed, or what the outcome will be. This uncertainty becomes an anathema within settings that define 'productivity' as measured by a predetermined use value.

Where art meets philosophy.

Accounts and overviews of methodology readily become generalities and are in this manner the refuse of inquiry rather than the guiding portents. The particularity of encounter which creates the specificity of thought and journey is lost in the tracks that are set down. The terrain is not necessarily traversed any more interestingly or productively; the measurements and indicators that form the methodological frame obscure as well as lead. To know before one begins is to shape the outcome, prescribe the meeting, the shifts in perspective or conception.

The arts are generally engaged with through an emerging methodology, one which is revealed in the process of the particularity of temporal engagement. This is its power, strength and a fundamental dimension of creativity. It allows and invites associations, connection, insights and experiences that are beyond the conceptual bounds available at the time of inquiry, the practice. The intuitive arises in part through the sensory perceptual engagement with breath, the meeting with the other of the world: I am thought beyond the cultural bounds of my immediate embodiment. If I surrender to this I surrender to not knowing – this is the aesthetic realm.

The artist creates shape in the world that occupies space, that recasts time and perceptual encounter. I am provoked into different perceptual encounters by art. The certainties I live by shape me and are disrupted by the artistic dialogue that encompasses the speechless movement of breath, sensation and presence, the remaking of the world and the individual.

Friday 30 November 2007

Well it is time to begin.

The thesis is now written in body and the articulation in words can commence. Also the articulation in performance.

Breath Journal December 2007

I am in relationship to the world

I am the world

I am woven into the fabric of the world, I neither end at my skin nor begin

The extraordinary the source of wonder opens my breath and I am embraced by the world without this touch I have no care.

The art of breathing brings meaning into my life and for this alone I am grateful and understand that the meaning of grace is an all-encompassing perceptible experience.

April 2008 Journal

The underlying grounds of the Middendorf breath are that there is interplay between breath, sensation and presence. This proposal forms the basis of my project. It is not

to propose that these terms are in any way fixed or 'true'; in fact it is the relationality that is the resounding aspect of the proposal.

One of the most provocative dimensions of the Middendorf breathwork is the reconsideration of the term 'receptive', a word often equated with passivity. The encounter with breath offers a new account: receptivity becomes a meeting point between breath and consciousness. The breath that comes and goes of its own accord, rather than being directed by conscious will, meets the sensate grounds of my being and this relationality gives rise to a constantly shifting sensibility.

The body of breath and the body of knowledge

My body of breath can be sensed as an area or location where I perceive the sensation of the movement of breath. This perception is constantly shifting within each breath cycle, shrinking and expanding in different directions, surfaces, dimensionality, relationality. Dialogues are possible with my body of breath; it is responsive and open to suggestion.

Knowledge that arises through my body of breath is not a thing but an experience. This experience changes me, I perceive a myriad of nuanced breath encounters with my body walls, weight, perceptible densities and textures, shape and contour, depth and location. My being in the world is altered in this perceptible breath encounter, I am more at one with the world or I am withdrawn. Mood and emotion are subtly permeated so they seem finely attuned through my bodily presence.

Wednesday 16 April 2008

Breath Dialogue

Breath, sensation and presence are the basis of the hands-on work, which is one of the two major aspects of the Middendorf breathwork. This work is based in perceiving primarily through touch, but sensing is the key and perceiving through the interplay of the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modes.

In this dialogue the focus is not on empathy or emotional resonance in the manner that is so highly valued in various notions of caring. Love is not to join the other but to meet them where they are able to be met. Where and how they are present to the relationship. The relationship with the experience of their own perceptible breath in sensation. The dialogue is not based in empathy; I do not need to 'know' the other person to have this dialogue. In fact the more I imagine I know about them the more inclined I may be to offer my opinion, to insist on a certain breath development when in fact the work is grounded in a sensibility that you can never know another person, that the need to know obscures the encounter. The narrative in this sense that is developed in arranging this knowledge is what leads me away from the sense of the breath proposing in each part of the cycle inhalation, exhalation, pause, the guide rope, the dialogue. It is about nothing and for nothing. Nothingness that resounds with resonant breath. I follow the person's breath, I perceive the body of breath before me, I am in touch with it, and in the dialogue may make proposals to it (them) in movement, pressure, direction, quality of touch. Many of these may be micro proposals.

The day of return to Melbourne

The creation of experience through language is what is brought to clarity by my engagement with the breath training. The cultivation of centre core and the location of the self is a strange and wondrous process. The cultivation of revelation is the phrase that comes to mind. The rightness of the experience reveals that this is where the self is located and needs to be consolidated and built. It feels good but part of this feeling good is the approval of the group. Exercises elaborated from this experience that are hard to participate in without this basis of bodily encounter reinforce the experience that this is where self is located as all seems to flow well from here.

It seems to me the variety of experience is important, the capacity to move between experiences and perceptual frames.

That encounters engaged in that are not measurable, necessarily repeatable, nor even linguistically translatable can and do play a significant part in the enrichment of

language, relationship, sensory awareness, science, sport, emotion and the capacity to think, to perceive and imagine in new ways.

Melbourne May Journal 2008

Presence

In my experience presence is asymmetrical, ephemeral, diffuse, and certainly unreliable in the sense that it appears and disappears, retreats and extends, is in surfaces or contours, has edges but they are shifting and not always precise. I think of presence as a bodily encounter which paradoxically I perceive as extending beyond the skin. I do not associate it with effort as I find the physical sensations associated with effort take over my perception in a manner that precludes my ability to perceive what I call presence. I associate presence with a sense of the whole, which is itself a paradoxical concept insofar as I have no whole, yet in polyphonous perception what is encompassed in my sensorium with this peculiar quality from moment to moment presents itself as the contours of my presence, or the field of presence if it moves beyond my contours, or the textures of presence insofar as it resounds in the interplay of breath and sensation and reworks the substance of my physical being from my mundane perception to a resonating flesh that meets every breath cycle as an alchemical invitation to be in the world anew. I experience my body anew. The inner vibration is different; well it is more that I have a sense of bodily being in which the word vibration seems apt despite its Beach Boys association. And it is certainly not a good vibration or a bad one; it is more that it becomes a possible experience, the more it permeates my sensation the easier it becomes. But it is associated with emotion, thought, and image. My impression or imagining is that it is the breath as it comes and goes that permeates my sensations; where they meet without resistance some happening takes place.

What I like about the proposal that there is an interplay between breath, sensation and presence is the intrinsic claim that knowledge arises in my encounter: that it is my participation rather than my passive submission to the knowledge of others that can guide me, provoke me, allow me to come to know myself by meeting and discarding the many forms in which I am formally constructed. That the demand of self-responsibility is simultaneously the invitation to investigate, to inhabit other

selves; that the fixity of self is not a burden of excavation of the past but a coming into the present.

I am not so interested in picking over my habits, coming to know my patterns, building a narrative of my past, understanding my formation. I find the therapeutic paradigm an unattractive consumer product. I do not wish to be sold myself. In this paradigm 'I' only exist as the buyer. If I engage with the interplay of breath sensation and presence then I find something occurs, something which changes my sense of self, embodiment, and capacity to relate, and this is enough.

So to return to the interplay of breath, sensation and presence, what can it offer me? First I must sense for a shape in which they meet, or a movement that might stir them, then I allow them to guide me, or some days I can simply receive the breath and see how and where it shapes me. This is not an effort as they create a vitality, a clarity of their own. The field of presence and Caspar the ghost have something in common: they pass through things with ease, they permeate. So I am not looking to resistance, nor effort. I am not focused on my patterns, my trauma, my habits, my resistances, my 'self'. I am perceiving the interplay of breath, sensation, and presence. Part of this interplay is my situatedness in the world, my sensory location. My breath or *the* breath? Air become breath? What is this breath? I breathe in air and exhale breath. I breathe in and out and the air comes and goes.

Breath Meditation Friday 30 May 2008

General Notes:

A sense of the whole is the single most important guide I am using in this daily investigation. Inviting 'perceptual polyphony' by sensing and checking in, what have I left out of my field of awareness of body that I can re-include by sensing it in relationship to what is currently occurring. I find this often revitalizes, and 'allows my breath' and 'being carried'. This sensing of the whole is a perceptual encounter and does not refer to the anatomical whole or some imaginary whole simply to expanding my perceptual focus to include other sensations that are able to be encompassed by my perceptual sensibility in that moment. This includes what I might call edges,

surfaces, densities, textures, vibrations (some feel more recognizable as my fleshly physical body), muscle, tissue (others are more diffuse and unclear in terms of any category of language). They include my sense of dimension, inner spaciousness, continuities of surface, of rhythm and of contour. But in the passing moment of collecting these experiential resonances naming is inconsequential and more often absent or a distraction. There is too much to take in to waste time lingering over linguistic exactitudes other than those that announce themselves with clarity in kinaesthetic, proprioceptive resonance. Often it is as simple as noticing that I am using excess tension in my upper body, or that my head is poking forward uncomfortably. It can be this basic. In altering this I sense in what direction it or some other part of me can move in order to reduce the level of tension. This may be accommodating by introducing more elsewhere. There is nothing wrong with tension, it just depends where and in relation to what other areas, muscles, breath, gravity etc. Insufficient tension in the form of collapse, flaccid hypo-tonus is just as relevant to the interplay. However my experience of breath in radical nuance is linked to what is generally referred to as bodily tension, holding patterns. It is the capacity to perceive sensation and its interplays that is central to the game.

One of the striking aspects of working with the interplay of breath, sensation and presence is the expansion of this palette of sensory referents. In my time working this way the realm has become far more nuanced and diverse, precise and multitudinous. The inclusion of the experience of the sensation of breath when it is allowed, not consciously willed, has brought a whole new sense of the breadth of this experiential territory. This phrase 'not willed' is inadequate to convey the scope of what I mean. In some sense thought or at least mental activity becomes embedded in breath encounter and this moment is not conceptual linguistic categorization but of a different order. However they are related: 'will' insofar as it is a manifestation of intentionality is linked into the field of sensation and presence. It is possible to think an action into sensation; attention can be an aspect of this. Directing thought is a form of will to action. Cicely Berry gives an example of this in *Voice and the Actor*.

Therapeutic Breath: Middendorf Breath Therapy

I am interested in following up the 'therapeutic' framing of the work as I wonder if this is one of the things that undermines a more creative pedagogical approach and

hinders the development of the work in a wider context. To frame it within therapeutic boundaries in some ways reincorporates it into dominant Western paradigms of the formation of self in the social and psychological, and obscures the more complex and contentious edges that in my view also constitute the radical and 'juicy' edges of the work. The breath is reclaimed into therapy at the expense of broader and more controversial challenges to the dominant paradigms of contemporary Western assumptions and 'truths'. It is interesting to see this played out in a body of work such as Middendorf breathwork that is being recolonised by and ultimately subsumed back into the medical psychotherapeutic model where some of its impulses reside, but at the expense of a more comprehensive experiential realm of a somatic investigation of consciousness and the breathing world. Are Buddhist meditation practices therapeutic? Is Tai Chi a therapeutic work? Qi Kung? The tendency for various practitioners to articulate the work in terms of its therapeutic and healing aspects is reflective of the struggle to articulate the relevance of the work in modern culture and to earn a living, to market the work, to communicate its relevance in an accessible way. Paradoxically in some ways this undermines the practice as it is primarily a somatic practice that does not produce guaranteed results of a specified sort within a time frame. What will it do for my knee? Will it fix my sore neck? Well no probably not today. How can I be sure that it is worth pursuing? Well you can't. Why would I bother? Good question. Will it fix my anxiety attacks? Quite possibly, but most likely only in concert with a wide variety of other experiential shifts in perception and sensory embodiment.

Breath Meditation 30 May

This morning one of the most notable experiences was a move onto all fours and then into and around child pose. All fours was both a dog/cat walk and a crawl. This emerged out of following the breath sensibility. It felt very 'natural'! It came out of walking, which was three dimensional in space and asymmetrical in form. Inhalation seemed to draw me down in my leg and spine in various ways, directions, and exhale never fully stood me vertical but shaped me in space also. Eventually this led to palms onto the floor and impulse forward on the exhale and there I was from time to time walking. 'Becoming dog' as Deleuze would say. This encounter of dog is also reminiscent of Paul Newham's Voice Movement Therapy work which is strongly

integrated in 'spherical space', the three dimensionality of sensory encounter with the experience of breath. I found today increasingly in my sitting a return to the three dimensionality of being sat. When I am sat by my breath, I surrender my known sitting form to the sensory dialogue and find that sitting is many shapes. All they have in common is that in some way my backside or part thereof is on the stool. I sit and the form of my sitting emerges, and changes with the breath cycle in sensation and presence.

June 2008 Daily Practice

Wednesday 4 June 2008

Breath meditation so **I sit**, slumpy and lumpy, some bits won't give in and feel like they are pulling or unable to follow the contour. But what contour? Do I proceed to try and manipulate this according to some ideal, adjust myself, lift my head, lengthen my spine, or 'imagine' doing so? My ideals as garnered from public accounts of what is healthy, appropriate according to experts, anatomical 'facts', skeletal physics. In some ways it is the felt sense that a certain area of my body feels fine until some point, where this is interrupted. It can feel like a contour is puckered up, or an internal area is tight, hard, knotted. Some of it is simply that it doesn't feel easy or comfortable, not so much a failure of an ideal body as a yearning for a shape that is easy. An image arises of what this might be but I would settle for something else too I reckon, just because I can't sit up straight without effort or rigidity, here and there are pockets of discomfort, areas of strain or even absence. Frankly what I perceive of myself bodily is a funny amalgam of bodily presence that has shape and weight and areas that are painful, yet there are lots of places that I could name anatomically or have experienced perceptually which I barely register. Their 'almost absence' is part of my posture, my sitting shape and experience in this moment. What is not in immediate perceptual play 'makes' me in my sitting. The joy of sitting 'badly' and following this into a more bodily felt comfort is a form of the 'amplification' that Arnold Mindell speaks of in various writings such as *Working with the Dreaming Body*. Amplification becomes a tool for 'loving what is', perceiving what is rather than trying to change it according to some prior knowledge or desire. In order to amplify it is necessary to sense its contours, textures, perceptible qualities. In allowing breath as

I do so, sensing favourable tension, a sense of the whole, being carried or to put it in a nut shell what is pleasurable and invites my presence, I become engaged in the dialogue of breath, sensation and presence rather than caught up in internal debates about my habits, patterns, what I know that might improve them or how I must simply surrender to breath. Sometimes I do not need to consciously amplify I can sense a movement of breath that is inviting me into a new shape or edge of posture and this leads me, or the breath experience retextures me so that my experience of the shape is altered.

'I love my patterns' of bodily formation, I perceive them rather than trying to change them. I invite my presence and breath to mingle with the sensations that accompany them and change, movement is occurring in each breath cycle as breath has shape, and rhythms. I resound in feeling; the intensity of sensation is brought into movement of a different order with the ebb and flow of each breath cycle. This is an incredible invitation. I can allow, I can accept, I can refuse, I can experience the nuances of encounters that arise in polyphonous perception. And yet I encounter all sorts of times and terrain in which I cannot experience the nuances in sensory presence, the surge of feeling is too encompassing, the breath rhythm is beyond what I can sustain my eyesight and hearing in. But I can only occupy some of this territory with pleasure, I can only traverse the multiplicity of encounters in certain degrees, relationships, intensities. I encounter areas where I hold my breath, or control its rhythm so I don't go there or I don't insist on remaining there. I continue to follow what allows my breath, I continue to follow what invites my presence as felt sensibility, my perceived bodily whole rather than my thoughts only. The stirring of sensation in particular areas of my body, in relation to particular dynamics of breath rhythm, or posture, gesture or relationship gaze can become overwhelming and suck me into states of disassociation, or hysterical overwhelm, or violence, or inertia. Therapeutic paradigms go into this in all sorts of ways. States of disassociation from bodily feeling or presence are articulated in the literature around abuse.

Thursday 5 June Breath meditation

Where the image meets the body

A clear image of a butterfly developed. The clarity of the image at a kinaesthetic level developed over a number of breath cycles. This area in the centre of the sternum lengthened upwards and what originated as a series of movements on my left side ribs and alternated depending on my impulse with right side led to experiences of the breath cycle moving these areas at the front of my body, moving through them, into them, so that the quality of sensation varied and felt attuned and effected by the breath cycle, the shape of the area affected altered. Once this butterfly image arose my inclination was to experience the breath encounters through how they subtly altered the image as kinaesthetic, proprioceptive encounter. Simply because this presented itself, the image held but altered. In a strange way it felt as if the butterfly was plastered across the front of my chest as these areas became more tangible: plastered and also part of me. The upper part of my sternum toward my throat did not feel particularly involved yet eventually as if it was free to breathe in an upward dimension that it wasn't so much part of my front surface but belonged to the dimensionality of the tops of my shoulders, that it could move up, or be permeated by the breath and sense the sky more than being part of my front.

These are a lot of words to put around an experience and yet they do little to convey the detail of the experience. The felt sense of the image varies in each part of the breath cycle in a multitude of micro ways. These intensify, alter, extend or reshape aspects of the image as a felt sense, and simultaneously have an effect for the movement of breath. The image is living and resounding in the breathing encounter. Along with this it is my living embodiment in motion and vibration, my relationality to the world and sensory formation. In her article about embodied perceptual practices Shannon Rose Riley discusses the embodied image and I will take this up in later discussion.

The work of Arnold Mindell also comes to mind again. Having just written yesterday about his use of the term amplification I now find myself experientially in dialogue with other aspects of his work. In *Working with the Dreaming Body* he speaks of the interplay of sensory channels and how we swap perceptual modes. He says that they are interchangeable and offer the means of tracing out the meaning in word, action, image and proprioception. Implicit in his process work is the 'felt sense' underlying language that Gendlin elaborates. Possibly I will explore Mindell's work

specifically in relation to breath, sensation and presence further in the thesis, looking at how this might connect to the work of breath therapist Magda Proskauer who combined breath and dream work and shares some common heritage with the work of Ilse Middendorf.

The Middendorf work claims to be a somatic body-based work rather than a psychologically focused work. This has been one of the things that appealed to me about it. Yet it is influenced by the work of Jung and I find the American training draws it further in this direction. I am reluctant to be drawn too readily down this path: excessive emphasis on the personal narrative, the re-chewing of the past seems to shrink the field of presence to the individual body as an independent entity, 'the inner world'. This is bothering me at the moment in the training and in myself.

Breathing Animals

So far I have a possum in my centre core, a butterfly across my chest in clear encounter. I also am finding various four legged animals cat and dog emerging in the breath meditation.

Wednesday 11 June 2008

The main thing I noticed after the meditation today was shortly after finish I realized that I felt a greater clarity in my face, eyesight and head, and a calmer sense of body, of sensation distributed all over but not peaking in intensity of pain or agitation. My breath was moving through my upper back and shoulders in an easy manner that felt unspectacular, just liveable. So I was pleased that this integrated sense had come about regardless of the quality of the mediation which I had sort of felt didn't meet the 'requirements'. I like these reminders that there is no need to do it right, perfectly, it is primarily the dialogue not the achievement of a deeper, ideal, or 'new' encounter. The ordinary muddle of thought, discomfort with perceiving, too much breath cycle movement, inattention to breath detail, all these 'inadequacies' are part of the simple sensing and being with my bodily self in breath. My bodily self is as in sensation and presence as I can be and this is more than my directive will can arrange or control.

Thursday 12 June 2008

Sensing and seeing, these themes are central to pedagogical questions in the Middendorf training. The work of Thomas Hanna, especially his coining of the term 'somatic' and the definition he offers goes to the heart of this distinction. Somatic practice emphasizes the authority of sensory encounter as experienced, a first person site. In *Textures of Light* Cathryn Vasseleu traces the place of touch and the realms of light and vision in philosophical discourse. In the beginning was the word, and the word was breathed, and resounded through flesh.

As I was exploring in the studio earlier I was reminded of the loss and disappointment I felt with the form-based approach that was revealed to be the basis of the Middendorf training. For me the link between form and the field of presence I experience is very direct and to have the form dictated or prescribed ironically removes me from many of the subtleties of the field of presence that I sense in my formation from moment to moment. I am left dependent on attempting to sense the breath rather than a multi-pronged series of possible access points and meetings.

Allowing the Breath

The notion of 'allowing the breath' was one of the aspects of the training that I found confusing and contradictory. This is purported to be one of the central principles of the work. However the actual training in America is full of instructions on when to inhale and when to exhale, in what direction these should occur, and often what the desired outcome is. My experience is that breath finds its own form, it moves my body in space, it moves my surfaces, it moves dimensionally, it moves through me in fine and subtle ways that are barely visible but quite perceptible to me and at times to others. It moves my emotions, I am moved by the breath and in this movement I am shaped in space and time.

The 'degree of allowing' this is a phrase that is used in the breath training. Is 'allowing' some achievable state or a far more complex reference? This complexity resides in the somatic, the sensing, which can be in its variety far more nuanced and evocative than anything the observer can come up with.

What is the perceived relationship theoretically between allowing the breath and the experience and development of centre core?

The claims of the Middendorf work to be a 'feminine' body of work are well worth attention. My experience of the training is that this is not so in any 'pure' or consistent fashion. The training is directive rather than receptive, not somatic in any complex sense of the word and more focused on training the student to assist them in accessing particular breath experiences rather than developing their capacity to sense and self direct in receptivity to the interplay of breath, sensation and presence. Presence is sacrificed to the authoritative forms of the work that define the principles, the 'laws' of breath that the work lays claim to. I would say the experience of breath can be in any direction, the capacity to allow the breath is not some neutral state that is achieved but always in relationship to the other, emotion, location, rhythm, and thought, imagery and touch. It is never total, pure, arrived at, or established. Allowing the breath is a multiplicitous encounter always in breath and hence always in flux.

Receptive presence moves beyond the linguistic as the polyphonous complexity that it encompasses, draws the mental into the sensory encounter to be with the resounding experience in the flux of the breath cycle, offers a wealth of mental stimulation in colour, line and contour, depth, texture and insofar as the other is resounding an ongoing dialogue. Receptive presence in this sense is related to heart and the resounding of imagery in sensation which is moving with the breath. As James Hillman suggests in *The Thought of the Heart*, the quality of wonder is linked to inspiration and the gasp. The quality of wonder that resounds in the breath precedes intellectual wonder is his claim. In this he along with Gendlin is establishing the integrated basis of the linguistic in the felt. I feel the world with my eyes.

Sunday 15 June 2008

Opening and Closing the Hands

As far as I am concerned the radical realms of breath experience are secondary to teaching the capacity, the practice of breath, sensation and presence, not because they reveal ultimate truths but because they offer the scope of ongoing dialogue, a relationship with the breath as an ally and source of intelligent encounter, sensory

presence. And this cannot be taught as information or knowledge. It does not exist in fact: it exists in temporal encounter, impermanence. The hands-on breath dialogue is a good case in point: it is not what I know about the person or even about breath at a linguistically articulate level, not what I could say or write that is important; these things form merely a background to a possible meeting, a dialogue with another in the temporal flow of each breath cycle. If I place my hands on someone who has been deeply traumatized it is not that I know how to heal them or need to ascertain what happened to them, nor do I need to focus on the absence of breath in their legs or movement in their diaphragm. I am sensing to meet them where they are. I make an offer by being present in my own breath, sensing myself in this flux with sensation and presence in their company. I am as I am in this moment perceptually present to allowing the breath to permeate me while being in relation to them. This is an offer and a receiving. I am receiving myself and them within the ebb and flow of my breath experience.

July 2008 Journal

Monday 7 July 2008

Am suddenly coming alive and recovering spirit and energy. Vitality and play emerge out of breathing the imbalance in motion. The thrust into movement, into falling through space is joyous and allows me to abandon my habits of holding back. This holding back prevents my receptivity to the inhalation coming easily and freely all over, to the surges and splurges of vitality, the chaos of not knowing and the rhythm of breath being freed. I play with the impulse of inhalation and exhalation that impels me into movement in space or form, not resisting the loss of balance but allowing the experience of being moved beyond the bounds of what I choose or maintain from will. I 'surrender': this concept of surrender is strong in Middendorf training, to surrender to the breath, yet very rarely do I see work that involves being flung, tossed, thrown, rolled, spun and swung through space. The swing has a place in various forms but they are regulated, delineated in shape and even at times breath direction. The vertical and the horizontal exist as fixed planes within the realm of balance. I am interested in the territory that is unmapped, uncertain as to the form

and rhythm it will take. As I encounter the breath and relinquish my hold on stability what can arise in new experience?

In some ways perhaps the actual Middendorf training reveals its historical formation and the gymnastic training of Ilse Middendorf that informs the background to the work. An awareness of the whole informs a gymnastic practice in some way in order to execute rolls, flips and other inverted and extended moves. Alongside this sensing of the whole body in space is an inclination to symmetry and balance, precision and direction in planes related to the cross bar.

Friday 11 July 2008

reflection

Bending words breath practice. To bend a word is the work of reflection. I bent it to my will, I played it, moved it, coloured it, rubbed its edges till they shone, positioned it, gave it dynamic, impulse, resonance. Words are a bodily practice of action and perception, words breathe.

Saturday 26 July 2008

The traveller

I have three questions.

What happens when you stroke your brain?

Can you feel the touch of your breath?

Does the world breathe?

Tuesday 29 July 2008

The difference between perception and presence – is there one? To discuss this extensively is something of a challenge to perceptual practice insofar as it locates me in a linguistic mode that is based on the ‘meaning’ of words – experience bounded and contained and as these boundaries are in fact arbitrary and able to be relocated continually the focus becomes one of fence rather than paddock or terrain.

I am constantly examining the boundary, the division, the parcelling. I am focused perceptually in a certain way which disallows the other point of views, locations, encounters etc. These are not necessarily linguistically exchanged. Linguistic based discourse is a perceptual formation not ultimately a path of flight and liberation. The post structuralist utopia is no more real than the Marxist or Christian vision that it follows on from.

I have no position, this is my position. The essentialism of deconstruction is mind boggling in its pretensions to an ultimate freedom (read utopia) which does not exist. My deconstruction is a construction.

I make this as my performance piece. I take no position, I keep moving, there is no stasis, the breath keeps moving, there is no stasis, my point of view keeps changing, this is my point of view. Flight, freedom are perceptual encounters, temporal and short lived. They fire and burn in the vitality of breath. The postmodern fantasy is of flight: what of the embrace? Dreams of flying; penguins can't fly, they are a bit like humans they are not good for lift off. Flying through language and the brilliance of the night sky. I hate Shakespeare, well actually I hated having Shakespeare shoved down my throat by those who know. I could feel his feet sticking out.

I fart therefore I am said Descartes. I think therefore I am: it has taken me a long time to realize that he understood that farting and thinking were intimately connected. Body and mind are not separate and Descartes recognized this: to think is to be embodied. I am located as this breathing body. I do not exist outside this body.

Another important theme for this thesis is the concept and experiential realm of 'receptive presence'. I have found this lacking in the Middendorf training in the sensibility of the teachers and the general texture of the training. All in all I find it excessively linguistically framed, linear, and directive, visually oriented rather than sensing and somatic. The power relations are quite traditional – the authority resides in the teacher who is not in dialogue with the student particularly but with colleagues and the certainties of the established body of knowledge – theirs. The body of knowledge resides in the teacher and not in the student in this paradigm. Thinking

from experience and through it is not followed through. However my experience of academia is similar. The dominant ideology drives the dialogue. The power structure is oriented to maintaining a stasis and privileging those who have a vested interest in its maintenance.

Perception and what is perceived. This is a rich territory as it is unclear to me that they can be distinguished. The content is the perceptual frame perhaps. This theme arose in the last half day workshop when S questioned the expression, “does this affect how you perceive your breath?” And she suggested perception doesn’t change but the content does. However my sense is that my perception does change and with this the content. This is clear in my relation to the world: I can perceive what is before me in quite different ways, this effects my breath, sensation and proximity.

Judith Butler

What strikes me about her writing so far is that when it comes to discussing an ethics of responsibility she reaches to an experience of body which is profoundly visceral, bodily, and grounded in the breath, that is grief. Grief may be a social construct yet such an account is inadequate to the experience. Or if it is the phrase social construct is far beyond what I understand by the term. Does a cow experience grief when separated from her calf or is this simply dumb distress? She bellows all night, she breaks down the fence or runs up and down the fence line frantically. How do I perceive this? What effect does it have for my breath? Plunged into despair as a human or paralysed by uncertainty and distress, misery, fear.

When I am born I breathe. I experience the world before I am born in acoustic resonance and vibration and in many ways. I am already in the world yet enfolded. Helene Cixous speaks of the ear as being the first sense and certainly it is intimately associated with vibration but so is the entire body through breath and touch and sight. The kinaesthetic eye is shaped in language and is language. The conceptual does not exist independently.

September 2008 Journal

Monday 1 September 2008

Receptivity: hands, palms facing my body opening on inhale only insofar as I perceive my breath movement. This may be a very fine small movement but it gathers clarity and develops the more I allow this perceived breath movement to lead rather than the conscious willed opening of my hands dominating.

The Middendorf work seems to me to be suggesting that the centre core experience of breath with the uprising exhalation from the lower and the down flowing from the upper is what stands me up in my humanness. But what bends me down in my animality? The vision of the upright stance of the human, the evolutionary development of consciousness is intrinsic to the dominant notion of consciousness that is a movement forward, upward, onward. Uplifted to God, forward to new territory, onward Christian soldiers to war, to salvation. Heaven and earth meet in centre core, neither too far back nor forward. But centre core doesn't exist independently of the rest of me. The breath doesn't gather here and then radiate out. I am in encounter with the breath and this is the all of me that I perceive or am. Much of this is opaque or unknown to me, imperceptible. I sense these edges of emergent presence. My breath comes and goes to different centres, areas along the spine, peripheries and locations, I sense the movement of breath in my limbs, finger tips, feet.

Thursday 4 September 2008

The parameters of Butler's account don't give me room to breathe. They insist on my constructedness in language but offer less about my agency. But the receptive is active anyway, my perceptual breath experience, agency does not exist in linguistic utterance alone. This would be a return to grasping onto some minimally self-aware actor 'the doer behind the deed' creating their agency. Just because of this construction of my sense of self doesn't preclude my cultivation of, the power of breath. Power resides in the breath, in vitality and this is able to be gathered, sensed, directed and transmuted into substance. This power arises through cultivation.

Monday 8 September 2008

Carozzi speaks of the formation of the scholar.

The instruction to sit 'still' is common.

This statement is quite antithetical to the experience of breath as the breath moves me in every breath cycle. To inhibit this I need to adopt a tonus or a perceptual style that allows me to overlook this or block this. Alternatively I can sense the breath moves through me but this requires a level of favourable tonus that is not common either, in the West.

The breath stands me up. The breath sits me up. Sitting is a social construction.

Sitting, I sense my foot meeting the floor, I begin to move these surfaces together, as I do I sense the whole me in relation to this meeting. How does my sitting rearrange in configuration into a tonus that is favourable to my ease and pleasure, my perceptual presence. Different edges and surfaces of me come to perception. The intensity and textures of these vary and continue to change.

Tuesday 9 September 2008 Thesis Overview: where to now

As a training the Middendorf precepts felt a prescriptive framework, overly linear and the 'natural laws' of the breath seemed to be at times uncomfortably self-fulfilling. I felt increasingly confused and uncertain about the work and myself in it. I also became very depressed.

The advent of Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler and other body theorists was less useful to my immediate project as my gut response to their writings is that they have little grasp of the perceptual body at a visceral felt sense level. They are writing about 'the body' within theory at a more abstracted level than I was intending. I was writing about my bodily practices but they are writing about the linguistic body. In my recollection Butler moves beyond this in her essays 'Violence, Mourning, Politics'

and 'To Give Account of Oneself'. In these she grounds the discussion in the corporeal experience of grief, the felt sense of unravelling and disintegration that can accompany this realm of experience. Also in *Bodies that Matter* she teases apart notions of materiality, and receptiveness from a standpoint questioning the inertia of the signification.

Reflection, deconstruction do not only take place through some play of the linguistic sign but through the resonance of matter 'informed' by breath, perception, and the flux of sensation. Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* starts to tease out the grounds for such an extended account when she reflects on the historical meanings of the term 'matter' and how this has become more inert over time.

Wednesday 10 September 2008

The gap

I sense the gap between my experiential encounter with my embodiment and the account being offered in the philosophical writing. Where do they meet? Is there a sense of recognition, of resonance? Do I know this concept in my breath experience? Writing the gap: how do I put into words the felt sense that arises from my practice that is primarily non-linguistic and speak from it into this gap? I am reaching out to meet. I have a desire to sew together various threads that hang loose, the rent in the material.

The Embrace

I have a visceral response to all the writers that I am inclined to have a dialogue with. They are there to assist me develop in my practice. I am not really so interested to argue with them but to respond to their 'invitations' to breathe more perceptibly.

I experience the writing in kinaesthetic resonance, in spatial relationship. I sense the distance or closeness of the writing to me as a spatial encounter, and what it does for my breath.

Friday 19 September 2008

The irony of the dominance of theorists such as Butler in the discussion of the materiality of the body is that it continues to obscure a sensibility of embodiment that is actually part of the dominant power structure. Much as Butler is promoting subversion and looking to ways of challenging normative inscription, the encounter with theory and way of engaging with the world is for a somatic practitioner like me an experience in the inscriptive power of theory to colonize. I must turn my attention, submit my perceptual body, to a series of practices that, as Carozzi points out, shape me, determine my embodiment according to the cultural inscriptive processes that hold that institution intact. Whose interests does this serve? To be listened to, to have a voice, a speaking requires one to speak the language of the dominant persons. Yet to do so is to capitulate, to surrender the perceptual spaces of my practices that speaks and knows in a different tongue.

Artistic practice is a research the results of which are the art work. The failure to recognize this language speaks of the perceptual limits of the listeners. The congealment of knowledge around linguistic surface is an expression of a dominant power structure that receives only input in specific modes.

People working in perceptual practice are involved in restuffing words, reconfiguring perceptual boundaries through experiential encounter. This is not to say that this reveals some irreducible truth but that it reconfigures the edges of meaning, the referential stuffing. Normative inscription doesn't just occur at one surface.

Sunday 21 September 2008

I breathe before I am born through the breath of my mother. I resound before I am born through the felt sense of vibration and resounding that permeates the body of my mother. I have already met the world before I am born. I am already inscribed. The issue is not whether I pre-exist linguistic signification and the normative inscriptions of the social construct I am born into. What needs further opening is how the social construction occurs not in human signification isolated from the perceptual world but as part of it and this as with my breath is more than linguistic signification.

In some ways it seems to me that the notion of language is severely abstracted and lacking in breadth. There is nothing outside language. But an account of language in terms of signification is entirely inadequate. Perhaps identity is not only a signifying practice but also a somatic perceptual practice. The intertwining of the two creates the lived illusion of identity and creates a subjective reality.

I is not an 'identity'. I is a perceptual encounter which is implicitly permeated with breath, sensation and presence. I can give an account of myself but that is simply my interpretative narrative, signification is a tool for 'articulating' an identity but my perceptual identity whilst permeated by signification has also a visceral and sensory formation that is constantly in flux and reconfiguring. It is not stable, yet it exists. A breathing constellation of embodied language and perceptual formation is in constant flux yet moves through form and structure, tone and horizon. An overemphasis on the 'normative' modes of social construction fails to grasp the slippery and morphic aspects of breath. The 'intelligible' resides not only in linguistic signification. Deconstruction occurs not only in reflexive processes of intellect but also in perceptual resonance.

Thursday 25 September 2008

Resonating, like reflecting, is something that is cultivated and develops over time. There are various structures and tools that can be used in becoming more apt in engaging with, creating, resonant experience that brings pleasure. I breathe within the possibilities of language but these do not all reside in the linguistic. In resounding I reposition myself, or perhaps it is easier to say I am repositioned. In yawning I am remade. I am reconstructed by the yawn.

Theory Practice and the Breath Wednesday 1 October 2008

Day Two

I walked here

But how to arrive, how to be here,

In the meeting I and thou

I is a sound of the wind whistling through the prison that is my soul
Foucault said to me
The weeping prison
Stone of the gaze
Breathing the Eye

I awoke to find my eye breathing
Open exposed to the world
The touch of the world was upon me
I became breathless

Monday 17 November 2008

Breath as methodology becomes the relationships that I am part of not the archival knowledge or the previous person's experience. There is no path and there is no established 'way'. I find a way and this becomes knowledge. I am accompanied by others but I am making my own way in the company of others.

December 2008 Journal

Judith Butler anchors her ethics in the experience of grief. The question is does grief have a taste? Is it this strange taste and smell that are in my head? They arrived a number of days ago now and show no signs of fading. Am I ill and if so is this a philosophical illness? Then why not ground it in experiences of terror or trauma, horror, or anxiety. Because these very experiences debilitate my capacity to relate, to breathe a sensory life that nurtures my thinking and actions in the world. I am overwhelmed in these states. In a strange way Butler's corporeal location of ethics in the experience of grief, the undoing that one can be subjected to, reaffirms the sense of body as beyond language. The dejection of mourning pervades me. The body is also within language and the felt sense informs coming to writing and speaking. But in silence the body is still reverberating in the textures.

It could be said that the recourse to grief that Judith Butler espouses as a grounding for an ethics of human relation follows in the idealism that has pervaded left politics. It fails to acknowledge the intimate relationship between grief and violence. That the well-spring of much violence could be said to resound in grief. That rather than being things apart they are things together.

Touch of the world

Merleau-Ponty and the touch of skin, the moulding the sensing which surface can touch, touching the surfaces, listening for where the breath touches. Resonating is a way of being receptive – perceptive to the touch of breath. Then in the stirring of presence gathering occurs.

When I feel the touch of the world through breath sensation of my periphery my visual sight begins to alter.

The breath of my skin, in my periphery enlivens by edges to perceiving the touch of the world. I make contact with near and far. This contact is a breath encounter.

Encounter

The boundaries of my physical body are not fixed. The more I engage with perceiving my breath movement in sensation the more I experience the unfixing of my perception. That perception has an intensely tactile and shifting series of surfaces and densities. Deleuze comes to mind. The anatomical body is not the perceptual body, the physical body is a category in language that too readily has come to mean only that which is described in science and the dominant bodily modes that have been produced with the cultural power structure.

This resonating is different from reflecting. I do not bend the surfaces of my body, they dissolve and reform, the frissons and textures take on new contour. This is not an act of moving but a surrendering to being moved. Breath out of movement, movement out of breath, and the edges where it becomes unclear which approach is leading.

In resonating I start to experience the unfixing of my body surfaces, they move they open and they transmute. The materiality of my perception continues to change. My touch is not impersonal, it is not professional, it does not keep distance, I feel myself. I sense what is most enjoyable.

My sense of self in the world is altered by which surface of my body I most perceive sensation in, by the inner expansiveness of my chest, by the quality of sensation in my belly. The familiar sensations of my body, my posture, provide an illusory sense of a familiar self, the alterations a sense of diversity and a reassurance that I perceive my body. But I do not know my body, I do not 'know' the scope of my perceptuality from these highly regulated and constrained encounters.

My methodology is to take the gap, the meeting, the embrace. I do not know how at the time.

Resonating is about perceiving what is prior to expectation according to linguistic categories of analysis. Authorised knowledge.

I must have a breath practice to write. No words come without my perceptual breath. My anxious breath breeds dead words. My anxious mind breeds dead thoughts.

Anxiety and intuition are not the same breath experience for me. I experience my thoughts differently, my bodily experience that accompanies my thoughts is different.

How How How How

I read Judith Butler with my breath, intuition, generosity, imagination. To take her in I must make room, space, so I can hear her without shrinking, wilting, retreating.

The breath of grief is only one breath, the breath of joy, anguish. Overtaken by grief is a subsuming experience and we are taken. But what is this grief she speaks of and what of coming to my senses – is this also a ground for ethics? A oneness with the world. If the grounding of ethics is to be a return to bodily experience what of the many other bodily experiences? Ones that do not reduce but possibly expand my capacity to meet the world rather than separate into the sensory silence of the griefs

which seize my body and hold me in thrall. Enwrapped in grief. I can also be enwrapped in the world.

Grief holds me captive, imprisoned, but this is not the only way in the world. Unwinding grief with the touch of the breath is a delicate meeting. An intimate touch, I am held in the embrace of the world.

Dimensionality holds contradiction. The flatness of theory confined to the linguistic signifier readily takes on a static truth, fixity, loss of relationship with the multiplicitous.

The breath of the world

The breath is inscribed
But remains elusive
Responsive to the breathing world around
The breath wants all

Monday 29 December 2008

Autoethnography

Grief. I am not beside myself, no I am become in grief. The materiality of existence is permeated with grief; it resides in my cells, closes my ears, glazes my eyes, and seizes the tonus of my muscles, flesh, viscera. It gathers me in, holds me in hardened lumps and claims the rhythm of my breath. But this is a quiet grief that holds me politely in thrall. Enthralled by grief the caress of the world upon me goes unnoticed. The gasp of grief is to be struck from inside. I am no longer becoming I am become grief and this inscription is carved through my viscera and has become my bones. Deposits of grief intermingle in calcite form. In desperate times I can hear it singing my bones, a low vibratory murmur, just below the threshold of sound. I live in fear of its unleashed violence emanating forth.

January Journal 2009

Saturday 3 January 2009

Evening now, this lighter body and breath, persists. Less held, softer muscle tonus. The experience of inhale and exhale is gentler, smoother, easier. The experience of the sensation of breath travelling through my flesh has altered in the area of my sternum, through my neck into my head. I am struck by the degree of shift in my musculature, the tightness has dissolved, it is not something I expect. I am completely colonized in a sense that only stretching, massage, focused moving will achieve this effect. But I have done none of these. Sat at my laptop all day. Only discomfort is in my face bones around the cheeks.

When I discuss this with John my awareness of it rises and so does my sense of self confidence. My vocal tone is firmer, clearer, more adult. I am more contained and for myself than for others. It is a most unusual state.

Sensation reverberates in my bones. I have become lighter. More permeable, lighter and porous. I sense my breath is small and light. I am nearly shaking but not. The bones in my face are still holding on. Coming into sensation in my arm bones and legs.

Cultivating my openness, my receptivity to the touch of the world.

Merleau-Ponty describes an encounter with pleasure: this resounds with Foucault's discourse on pleasure.

I can't write unless I am able to perceive my breath. I don't have another way. I find what I want to say by writing. The shape comes out preformed. Without enough breath it gets stuck together. Writing is the thinking process. I do not have recourse to grammar as I have no idea. Perhaps the 'whole' refers simply to the multiple areas of sensuous stirring that I can gather into my perceptual awareness as it ebbs and moves in the breath, never complete but the extended relational focus is different to a fixed point.

There is no such thing as the whole as the perceptual body is not the anatomical body: the whole of what? Yet paradoxically I am extending my perception to encompass multiplicity. The action is to gather in, to gather into perceptual relationship surfaces, intensities, and to experience them altering and becoming suffused with the sensation of the movement of breath. Becoming the experience, breath is a pleasure.

Foucault in *The Use of Pleasure*:

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. (1990, p. 8)

The experience of breath in perception is one of these necessities for me. I do not know what it entails. I have only inhabited these practices for a few years, touched on edges of perceptual encounter that indicate the territory extends in scope further than I grasp.

My experience of breath encounters at the river bed above Trepina Gorge is one example. I do not really have a point of view on this in any fixed way only the beginning of an articulation. Where it leads me philosophically, spiritually or politically is not in any sensed fixed.

Foucault refers to the aesthetics of existence

Wednesday 7 January 2009

The Mask of Janus

9.47 This morning when I awoke this symbol of the mask of Janus arose, the two-faced statue or god facing in both directions, to the past and the future. I was struck by the dimensionality of the figure, the inclusiveness of two surfaces and the figuration between them. Substance, density, dimension, depth, circumference, the in-between-of, arises. This is not a simple reflective surface but a surface that has other surfaces.

Working with this image (weeks back) as a breath exploration a sense of the circularity of movement in the horizontal was evoked. This immediately had dimensionality and in this there can be no single surface. Hands back to back in front of me, one palm turned toward my body the other turned out to the world.

Reflection in the dimensionality of breath experience need not be led by the linguistic signifier as the movement of breath itself in concert with sensation and perception bends and rearranges my point of view, resounding through unexpected refractions and taking on textures of sensation that are met and stirred by this meeting.

This is different from standard Middendorf training forms yet very evocative of breath experience. I find I am turning, I am released from binary oppositions that frame the training of up down, back front, into the sphere in movement.

Resonating and reflecting are two linguistic surfaces of the same living dimensional body. I can speak of these two terms as complementary, as oppositions, but they are linguistic masks, surfaces to invite recognition. In the lived experience of breath perception they inhabit each other. In the resonating of breath I reflect. In the act of reflecting I resound in subtle breath textures. The directions and intensities of breath movement move me, stir me, arouse imagery and emotion. From these grounds the desire to speak, to write, the capacity to choose the sign arises in the play of breath.

Resonating: materiality in motion

The term resonating is intimately in play with the breath. Formally speaking it is a term used to describe the second phase of the breath out of movement work. The experience of resonating that encompasses materiality in flux of breath movement arises from breath movement leading. This is not so immediately accessible to me. It is not a skill I possess but an experiential encounter that arises, different every time but more often when I have been engaged in breath practice over a period of time. Hours, months, years.

Perceptuality in the flux of breath sensation dissolves the dominance of the linguistic signifier as my mode of recognition, as the reference to meaning occurs in this resonant breath encounter. Where the nuance of micro movement, sensation and dimension is sufficiently extensive and responsive to the ongoing touch of breath movement so it is constantly renewed without my interference. I reside in the complexity of perceptible breath. My attention is called, held, aroused, guided, expanded by the unexpected nuances of sensation that are gathering, dispersing, arousing vitality, or subtle energy. This is a sensual experience but heightened breath experience has qualities of sensuality that are distinct from those that I may experience as explicitly sexual. Not to say they are not interrelated nuances of the realm of the sensible.

Wednesday 14 January 2009

The chapter

I allow the breath, play of breath with presence and sensation and this practice forms the basis of my methodology. What allowing breath might mean shifts with the practice

Yawning – the gasp

The reflexive breath

A sense of the whole

I allow the breath

I follow a structure, movement, resonate, rest

The whole, ease, stroking, joints this is important and not so common

Contraction

Expansion

Reflexive breath

I stroke all over

Pleasure – presence – touch

Nuzzling the world

Resonating the halo

I follow the exhale

Surfaces

Vowel song
Dimensionality
Stroking my brain
Vocal vibration and song, pitch, vowel sound,
The exhale
Images arises from the breath

Saturday 17 January 2009

The experience is personal, full of uncertainty, yet the pleasure resounds in my person. So too the distress, confusion, the looking for a way forward that turns out to be sideways. The dimensionality of breath invites movement in a multiplicity of directions. That the need to know and all I know are the limits that I am looking to dismantle sits in discomfort with the doubt that I know what I am doing. I don't know what the outcome will be. So I go on breath by breath in dialogue with a range of different surfaces, ideas, images, sounds, words, physical shapes, movement and especially the emerging relationships between these experiences that occurs as I continue to live and breathe. This is a messy encounter, with passages of clarity; hindsight provides the appearance of a path.

Dialogues with the breath

A question may have many answers. There may be an immediate answer and the answer that comes later, or arises in the interplay of this question and another meeting, creating a new answer. The same question may provoke a different answer the second and every subsequent time. The answer may grow as a result of repeating the question.

The question generates change. Knowing is not necessarily explicit, attributable, linear. The question is more interesting than the answer. The answer just is, its 'interest' is sometimes obscure. The experience of what, to draw on Agamben, I could refer to as the experience of 'being such' is not an answer that is necessarily met at a linguistic surface. It is a thinking that takes place at a cellular, or visceral, felt sense of substance in flux. It may be a singular answer of no particular relevance

to anyone but me. Yet it has meaning, creative force, contributes to the play of breath and emergent practice.

Sunday 18 January 2009

I found meeting with some theoretical writings daunting, shocking, even debilitating at times.

Deconstructing the meaning of terms is particularly challenging when words have not been my dominant mode of articulation, way of thinking or practising. Most theoretical discussions are marked by an absence of the play of breath. Many seem to be generalized and assume a sort of stasis, or be set within a perspective that reflection only occurs with the use of linguistic signifiers; that thinking occurs on a single surface when implicit in an extended breath practice is the play of many surfaces, the dimensionality of the body of breath.

Tuesday 20 January 2009

Writing from the breath

Breath practice is the core of my project and also the grounds, the possibility of my writing. Without practising I find I cannot bring myself to write or my writing deteriorates in literacy, partly, I think, because my thinking changes – not what I think but how: it deteriorates as it becomes more repetitious, stuck, muddled, incomplete, and this emerges directly in the writing. Mainly I write by sensing what I want to say. I have little formal grasp of grammar so I have great trouble playing with it once it is out on the page. Often I don't know what I am going to say before the act of saying it. If it is unclear I have to say it again, and again. To look at it on the page and rearrange it is tricky as I don't know the rules or structures people use to do this. I have trouble 'seeing' the 'sense' of it on the page.

I keep a journal and describe my breath experiences. This is probably the most fundamental aspect of my writing. It keeps it very immediate. If I don't have a breath practice I cannot write. The breath practice alters my relationship to words, and my thinking. The practice alters my body tonus, sensations, breath rhythm. This is

reflected in the pace of my thoughts: they become less entangled, my sense of time alters. The practice is a surface of thinking in that it leads me to experiences I have never conceived of before, that I couldn't imagine. It then becomes possible to attempt to describe, or evoke something of this in writing. There is also a thinking that occurs between these experiences that the act of writing or finding words assists in bringing out, giving a shape to. In various ways the act of writing allows relationship to develop, to discuss the experiences in relation to the writings, the ideas and thoughts of others.

I write before I know what I think, or I am writing as I think and various thoughts fall out. Sometimes they are only fragments, pieces of thinking. Other times strange convoluted tentacles in which I am not sure what I am getting at. Yet with the passage of time, practice, rehearsal, and reading they re-emerge. I recognize that months before they were a forerunner of a new edge or shape to my articulate thought.

Working with the breath can allow a spacious ease with my relationship to words, especially in writing, as if they get more space and time. It becomes easier to pause and punctuate. The inhalation, exhalation, pause of the perceptible breath cycle permeates my relationship to the writing. This capacity to write through the breath continues to develop. Increasingly I have found I can rearrange words in a sentence, delete excess ones, divide a sentence into two. The idea that a sentence might make 'sense' has begun to take on a kinaesthetic dimension through my breath. The practice of writing becomes a form of breathwork. Writing becomes a making of space and shape.

This altered relationship has not emerged in the isolation of [or solely through] my breath practice. In my honours project I wrote tens of thousands of words of journal writings that included descriptions of breath experience in relation to movement, voice, presence, sensation, as well as thoughts and images that arose. Some lucid, descriptive, but much fragmented, entangled and as I was trying to discover, create practice. Often illiterate gropings towards something ill-defined, unclear even to me. My partner, who is literate and grammatically skilled, sub-edited. My supervisor read endless pages of this material and offered en'courage'ment about my writing or my

efforts to write. The courage to write, to continue to struggle with the search for words rather than returning to silent practice or non-verbal voice practice was in this sense fundamentally relational. The courage to continue was not something I found in myself but in relationship. I learnt in the company of others who could already write, who engaged with my efforts to practise writing as part of my wider practice. I continue to have a great unease around writing but it has opened different edges to my studio practice. The current PhD project is still immersed in this thinking through various practices the experience of breath.

What is clearer to me now is the extent to which I felt compelled to move out of the isolation of my somatic breath practice and into relationship.

Friday 23 January 2009

If I write that my work is about being with the pleasure of breath I am immediately seen to be saying something about essence, some unity of subjecthood when actually I am speaking of temporal immersion in sensory encounter, the experience of becoming that is the pleasure of breath. This experience leaves traces in my flesh, in my bones, in the formation of my perceptuality. The breath that comes and goes on its own in relation to sensation and presence is the making of shape, the stirring of substance.

Wednesday 28 January 2009

Resonating

The term refers to a whole range of experiential encounters with the breath. The most interesting edges arise when encounter with the breath in this resounding is felt as a dissolving of form, of surfaces, a transmutation of materiality. The sensation of the movement of breath alters my perception of my materiality in such a way that it diffuses, becomes as if permeable to the breath. These experiences are never the same but share recognizable qualities that are quite distinct from my usual perception of my body, my physical form. The perceptual body is not the anatomical body. A fusing of perception and matter leads not simply to a malleability of form but the possibility that the familiar edges of my form are dissolved. My very composition

is altered. Breath finds its own shapes in this altered substance. This is not an experience I observe but a breath by breath becoming that subsumes the mental into the polyphony of perception, the micro-detail of subtle breath sensation fluxing in the breath cycle. It flows through to my vision and tactility, I occupy the world in different density, relationship. As I search for words to articulate this experience I try out words from various writers. Agamben has this to say,

One can think of the halo, in this sense, as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility. This is that potentia permixta actui (or that actus permixtus potentiae) that a brilliant fourteenth century philosopher called actus confusionis, a fusional act, insofar as specific form or nature is not preserved in it, but mixed and dissolved in a new birth with no residue. This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, to make itself whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo. The Coming Community p.28

Each breath cycle is a threshold, an opening to possibility, inhalation, exhalation, pause, the transitions. Agamben's phrase 'this imperceptible trembling of the finite' beautifully evokes the pleasure of the fine vibrational resonance, the subtle sensation the movement of breath has in this sort of encounter. The movement and polyphony of this 'imperceptible trembling' arises in the breath cycle and is perceivable as a fusional act through sensation and what for the time being I will rudely call 'presence'. Presence which is not essence but the 'tiny displacement', 'a supplemental gift' if you will that comes after the act. The act of every breath cycle dies away, a discontinuous continuity, breath by breath becoming. The fusional act of the breath creates at times the appearance or sensibility of the halo, where infinite imperceptible trembling becomes luminous, the supplemental excess spills over as lightness, as ephemeral as the becoming of each breath cycle, that burns away with no residue. Yet in this space the traditional binary opposition of form and matter is apparent as an imaginary figment of a breathless discourse. Many performance practitioners play on this edge of breath, this space where matter exceeds form as

an act of fusional creativity. This is where the play of perceptuality occurs, where perceptual practice is intimately at play, 'a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable'.

Thursday 5 February 2009

Self is akin to a creative act of not knowing but perceiving. The experience of breath is the perceptible play between surfaces that exceeds the limits of who I know myself to be, or I identify myself to be and enacts the verb to be in every breath cycle. 'To be' is an act of perceptible breath.

Thursday 12 February 2009

Okay I am on the cooker again wrote also in the Macnaughton dialogue re breath and trauma. Trauma, anxiety, the incapacity to say no, overwhelm and passivity, unable to act, the descent into depression. Withdrawal, silence, the muteness of it all, inflected with fear, panic and anxiety. Immobilized, suffocated, paralysed, asphyxiated, stifled: in all these words the breath does not come and go in animate liveliness. The pleasure of presence and the presence of pleasure are not the experience of breath in this world. Macnaughton's chapters refer to the absence of a sense of safety and this is very familiar to me. The idea that there is some other possibility even now remains elusive. Trepina Gorge offers me some place and space where I feel safe, the beginnings of trust and relationship with the world. I feel held, in touch, able to open my eyes, I feel inclined, invited to come into my skin, through my skin, able to be touched, safe.

Trepina Gorge Journal April 2009

Breath Practice –Landscape – Helen's email 080409

Trepina Gorge is a part of my project in exploring breath experience. Becoming breath in relationship to landscape/living sculpture, the invitation to dimensional awareness that shifts my experience of sensation. I move from being a 'flat surface', a physical body with thoughts, into a sensory dimensional play of multiplicity.

I become located in landscape, the all-aroundness of this world. This particular world

at Trepina invites a different breath encounter if I listen for it. Yet mostly I cannot listen in this way, I cannot hear through my flesh when I arrive, and nothing occurs if I do not make a practice that begins to let me sense my skin: the capacity to resonate with subtle touch has dissolved. If I do not experience the surfaces of my own flesh, the refolding, the movement of sensation in the subtlety of breath that is paradoxically diffuse and intense then this gradual meeting with the all-aroundness of the world is absent. I cannot see in the same way; proximity does not occur in my vision, the tactile meeting with the world around that extends into layers, depth, distance has/is a peculiar visceral breath becoming. This encounter is not primarily through the surface of the linguistic signifier. I cannot see/sense in the same way when my mind is adhering to this surface as it has an effect for my flesh, breath, senses. Maybe I can come to do so. At the moment it has more to do with the aesthetic gasp of wonder that Hillman refers to. Mainly I am interested in the experience but I have been wondering about aesthetics and nature, spirituality; it makes me think of Sean Slavin's article. I am interested to follow this further.

Douglas Daly River Saturday 18 July 2009

One of the things about the hands-on breath dialogue work is the sensibility of meeting another, an encounter between I and you which is not framed in judgment based on identity or subject predicate but on the breath by breath possibility of a meeting in which two breath rhythms are responsive and listening but do not become the same.

Trepina: In this place the resonance of shame dissolves. The sensory contours of traumatic inscription loosen their perceptual grip. The flatness of the gaze gives way to touch and contour in the layers. This landscape, the materiality of my flesh transmutes with each breath cycle. If I think of Judith Butler I would say my matter becomes hyle: I experience it becoming imperceptibly permeated by breath sensation. Becoming molecular I am held in the dimensional embrace of the world; I encounter the world anew. "I" in this context is a temporal moment of perceptual time, encounter in the sensation of the breath cycle. Becoming molecular, becoming breath, the surfaces of my flesh become sensitive to the touch of shape, surface, contour and line surrounded by the living sculpture I experience as receptivity. A

state of grace offers an unexpected insight into a previously foreign phase 'to be reborn'; nothing dramatic, just a subtle silent becoming different. Deleuze writes of becoming animal, woman, this is more like becoming nothing in particular in recognizable linguistic category, becoming textural, real, actual, virtual, lighter, tangible, reverberant, delicious. In his book about artist Robert Irwin, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of What One Sees*, Lawrence Weschler articulates this well.

Irwin has become increasingly convinced that perception precedes conception, that every thought or idea arises within the context of infinite field of perceptual presence which it thereupon rushes to delimit (p.180).

Such a point of view may well be out of favour now but I am interested in this experiential encounter which is so significantly different from seeing through the linguistic signifier. I am not particularly interested in the 'truth' of it but the distinctive nuance and becoming of materiality in breath cycle clarity, the alteration of my sensibility, the profound gratitude and grace it evokes and the quality of perceptuality that it can give rise to whereby sensory encounter with the world around is clarified, opened. Deleuze makes reference to sensuous thought and in this world of encounter I am 'inspired' to a rethinking, an alteration that occurs and changes my knowledge of the world.

The discussion in Chapter 14, 'The Desert', is central to my interest in place, atmosphere, visual relationship that touches, where the gaze drops away and an opening occurs and in this opening a breath encounter occurs with the extensiveness of my perceptual materiality as animate hyle, where it is not a question of unsayable as it has already been said within the intelligible felt sense of the encounter.

Hot Dirt and Breath: I like hot dirt, dust, the texture. The ground I like is dusty, soft, thick, silky: it receives the impression of my toes, feet, weight. Not sand, that won't do. I feel received, met. Dust has sky and horizon.

Friday 31 July 2009

Well it is July 31st and I have just arranged to stay until August 18th.

Yes good!!! I have just been down the billabong

Yes good!!!

I am becoming imperceptible again!

Walking back I had a sense of happiness again, not quite joy but something like this.

On my stool facing the billabong, thinking of the horizontal and the vertical, the zenith of the arc of the sky above, the peripheral vision of the horizon plane around me to the edges of my vision. Sky and horizon and this soft-packed clay under my feet. The rustle of bush turkeys, the sound of the wind in the bird of prey above diving and climbing, the plop of fish or prawns, the silent uncertainty of the bark float that might be the croc from yesterday. Yes this is my place for sitting and coming back to the breath.

Hand on body wall, sensing the inhale, the exhale under my hand, the driving thoughts, drifting, but if I bring more of myself to this encounter in perceiving the affect starts to imperceptibly shape me. I feel Francis Bacon moving across my head. In this the micro tonal breath perception begins to clarify.

The transition between inhalation and exhalation begins to have texture. I hold my head; it breathes in my hands; my finger knuckles are moving like little tendrils. I open my hand – the stretch brings an inhalation but it is a broad stroke without detail or nuance. It is the curling and wavering of the fingers that stirs the subtle textural sensations. In this moment I am becoming plant, sea anemone, little fronds, filaments; it is the tiny movements that bring the most perceptible breath response in this moment.

Monday 3 August 2009

I am made, but I am made in breath and constantly remade, remaking. ...Experience of temporal becoming, experience of becoming molecular, these experiences are distinct and reveal the world as a movement not a static image, but an event to partake, participate and revel in.

Tuesday 18 August 2009: Trepina

I am here, yes it is the place, my place, I love this place. The breeze is incredibly gentle and active. I have been down my river and started my breath meetings, I am much more here than last time. I am liking being on my own, I have a huge bus thing but luckily Kate lent me a swag and tent. I am happy. This is happy country. Turns out Agamben is right – happy is a word to live by.

March Journal 2010

She who breathes has many eyes (I) and can be miss taken for a spider.

Sunday 17 October 2010

HELEN'S SOUNDINGS - OCTOBER 17, 2010

A CHALLENGE

My study seeks to change the conceptual understanding of breath, which immediately raises linguistic issues of how to even speak of and reflect on experience through words and writing. It must then ask, what is being taken for granted about the experience of breath to language or words?

*

ADDRESSING THE LEGLESS BODY

We only need to look at drama paradigms of voice to illustrate what is embedded as the philosophical: that the breath serves the word. But *does* the breath really support the word? ... like a boat bobbing along on this exhalation... where are the legs of this body? The implicit image offered in these texts or schools is of ribs, lungs etc, remaining mysteriously medical and fundamentally legless. There is no breathing ground. This performing arts voice training is emblematic of the dominant philosophical place of breath in language and the

dominant philosophical place of assumptions about body, spirit and soul. My written and performance work would need to oscillate between a philosophical, phenomenological, proactive-based discussion or dialogue with other people and experiences of breath that is outside functional anatomy, playing through the philosophical terrain to grab its 'famous' concepts and bring them into breath practice. The other way this work is going is that it is bringing the breath practice to the philosophical field.

*

ALICE AND THE LOOKING GLASS / CHANDELIER / PORTAL

A discussion on the drama paradigm is actually more of a surface, an entry point or portal. It wouldn't be long before I would want to draw on the piece "Carnate Breath" because I'd want to say that the play of breath sensation and presence through flesh is what forms perceptuality. And therefore it is not a question of voice and breath in drama training. It's actually the question of what constitutes, or has constituted, the actor. This then needs to pull in Agamben's ideas around what constitutes the human and the subject, bringing us back to language and the relationship of language to experience: how the utterance of I creates the subject as a breath experience in sensation.

My discussion would rapidly cross over into the way the Michael Chekhov acting system focuses on perceiving different kinds of sensation throughout the whole body. This starts to bring to the fore the way that the formation of acting exercises and vocal training is in fact a form of breath training. You can actually change the voice through gesture and breath as readily as in other approaches.

*

WHY OPEN-ENDED ENQUIRY IS CRITICAL

Importantly, working in the performative context allows things to go in any direction and make a shift within the actor's conceptual space that allows a different voice or gestural realm, or image to come up for them through a sensation-breath encounter. But it arises *because it's not locked into* a paradigm of "this is a training that will work on your vocal tone". It is because it is not training that works to a purpose that it can "play" in dialogue, in a performative setting. In this devising setting, this play is as much a shift in the conceiving

space as it is the upending of some unrecognized assumption about the significance of a particular image or its further associations that arise. So it shifts categories of language, it shifts what is known about, what is being created, and why. So it is re-making the meaning of particular words in resonant sensation. And in that sense, the fun and the play of it is that the unexpected leaps out in moments of inspired practice. The “oh”.... The breath is not a path but it offers a way.

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UNDER YOUR STANDING IS A BREATHING GROUND.

There is in fact no stable ground. The ground moves. With a moving, breathing ground, a whole realm of sensate breath-infused flesh develops or resounds, which is different from saying all language is unfix and is an endless river of theoretical postmodern waffle. It HAS tones, and degrees, and gathers in substance. The body of breath is in “act”ual fact an experiential terrain that develops and wanes and refigures and is experienced as SELF in the rhythm of breath cycle as carnate breath.

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REPETITION AND DIFFERENCE

This title is a fundamental Deleuzian concept that I use to challenge the idea of repetition. In breath, nothing ever recurs as the same. It can develop, nevertheless, an incredible subtle micro-difference. In this micro shift you are able to start to ‘slip through’, experiencing your familiar sense of materiality or flesh metamorphosing into perceptuality, which is a far more subtle cross-sensory breathing-carnate embodiment. The state is far more permeable to shifts in vocal tone... You know that nice sense you get after having started off with a tight vocal tone: when you move it in pitch up or down there is not much range or ease but then it starts to extend. A tone begins to take on flesh or dimensionality that you can hear as it moves through your singing partners. This is the acoustic tone of the breath – it can’t be ‘heard’ *per se* but can be felt in a bodily ‘tonus’. So that when you get into the realm where each breath cycle is altering that tonus you are starting to move through habitual posture. You are starting to dissolve or reconstruct or alter your familiar habitual embodiment, beyond your known, accessible understanding. You don’t know where it will turn up. You are simply perceiving where it emerges across your series of ‘emerges’.

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ON BENDING BODY AND FORM

Following on from Agamben, within this work there are all sorts of potentialities for re-conceiving, for pleasure, for being in the company of others, nurturing and unfolding lines. In the end, it's not just an endless linguistic unfolding. Agamben has helped me to think about articulating the way in which the human subject is formed in language is also occurring in breath tone; that the tones of carnate flesh come to form (the person and the community). So education is not just simply about the information or knowledge you teach or pass on. It is whether the person is invited to either sit in a chair or move through the space and experience breath rhythm that has the power to bend and fold so many different surfaces and meanings.

Journal November 2010 Trepina

Wednesday 24 November 2010

Just arrived back at Trepina. I am here to encounter the landscape and to find my flesh in the contours of breath so that becoming real is a permeable 'being available' to the touch of breath as it alters in every cycle. This perhaps is what Irigaray refers to as the 'autonomous breath'. This altering in every breath cycle is perceptible in shifts of sensation in location, depth, relationship and texture. In the dimensional enfoldment of Trepina I sense the world behind me even as my eye casts forth. I am not presented with the information – the blackboard, white board, auditory screen – but I am located in a place that speaks from every direction; distance and proximity abound, shape contour, texture and colour. The breeze moves across my surfaces – wind, air, breath of the world.

I am back here to reclaim my courage and to re-find my way, to be touched by the grace of the world should I be so fortunate. To see the world anew is to be touched by breath in a way that alters my materiality, that enters my flesh not only my lungs.

Earlier I started to keen after reading some final part of *Singing Saltwater Country*, not in clear response to it but out of my thoughts about my thesis project and the many strands of complexity.

This book gave me a good sense of country and the singing of breath and sound as a relational audiencing: the power of singing into a life that listens, not in prayer to God above but into the surrounding world that is in one and becomes one.

Breath is an access point to what you don't know and this partly occurs because it dissolves challenges, expands and thereby alters what you think you know.

Thursday 25 November 2010

During meditation much thinking came up and eventually I would find myself again and return until the thoughts eventually started to be overrun by the body sensation of every breath. Once I reach this territory I find it very soothing.

Friday 26 November 2010

As I sit on my stool opposite the Bluff I am struck by the offerings of breath to the pelvic area, the multiplicity, the detail of area, density and arising intensity. If I remind myself not to know but to be carried, easily, without trying to enhance or direct, then in a breath cycle or two the unexpected arises in a light and subtle movement of its own accord. Each of these moments is a tiny act of grace, a gift, a reminder that I am not the sole agent of my becoming but the recipient, that my life as it were is not under my control but offered unto me in tiny imperceptible invitations, propositions, micro-movements of perceptuality arising through breath as relationship that forms and alters me in every moment.

One of the things that struck me as I finished *Singing Saltwater Country* was the way in which the country offered to listen, that one was not alone even when on one's own but in company, in relationship with an other who was kin but not the same: an invitation into a world, an active receptive encounter, one not only to be initiated but also to be met. This has moments of clarity with the concept of being carried, the

sense that a meeting takes place that involves a participation not only of self but of other, a coming together not in deadness but mutuality. In this paradigm touch has endless nuances and qualities as relationship. It is never static but a movement of space and time. Here at Trepina I feel the scope of being embraced, received. My breath opens to this. The country here is willing, able to hold me, encircle me, encompasses me with the gentle touch it offers. And even though I cannot immediately respond to this in my material textures nor in the perceptual thresholds of my sensation in breath, the offer remains.

Saturday 4 December 2010

Walked up the gorge for a swim, wash. Sat on a stone for a while. Am starting to get the feel of the power in the landscape and the water birds in the water. It rained last night and the world is damp. The buzzing of a single bee can be a distraction. As I walked back from my swim last night, down the road I found my arms lifting at the sight of the bluff rock line and a sense of power arising that had bird-like shape and I thought of the way that the form of different animals invites their spirit power, their breath substance into the dancer, creating shapes of power, locations and intensities. So too does the contour of country, shapes and densities. Movement and stillness resound in this power and enter the human in the movement of breath. The feet of the Kangaroo strike the earth and also move in small steps as I impersonate a kangaroo, the kangaroo's power im-persons me. My person is revealed to be not a static identity or known anatomical body but an unknown potentiality to become. This becoming though is not simply a linear unfolding of becoming, one thing then another, but a becoming of substance, a gathering of power, a relational dynamic.

I feel that the work I did earlier in the day and the day before were flowing into my bird wings arising from the power of landscape.

Sunday 5 December 2010

Becoming younger

This afternoon as I bend over to pluck my glasses or book off the stool I find elasticity is returning – I am not so fixed at the joints. As I sit here and breathe I find

my attention drawn to the lower abdominal area above the pubic bone and this is perceptibly moving: interesting, it seems to be drawing inward on inhalation and expanding outward through the buttock surface, sacral and pelvic floor. Experiencing which surfaces expand or contract with the inhalation opens up new territory as breath experience and offers up my bodily experience in these moments as unfamiliar new possibilities some of which situate me differently in the world. I am not tucking my tummy in, yet it is drawing in and as I allow the breath to come and go it meets an intensity of sensation that accompanies the tuck; it locates me further back on my sit-bones, lower down in my sitting. I am sitting into this. I begin to feel my lower back is waking up, my hip joints too, but all these terms of reference give the misleading impression that it is a specific location, but it is far more comprehensively tactile, detailed and various than the generality of such words calls up. It is beyond words in this way, for each encounter is different and therefore no path can be laid for another to follow.

Some might say this is an esoteric practice but it is a simple breath by breath practice. The perceptible dimension of it offers something utterly tangible and far from being mysterious it is palpable and ever so bodily even as it bends the understanding of what this body might be. As the experience of the breath body takes on greater familiarity, the experiential terrain folds upon itself in intensities and dynamism.

Saturday 11 December 2010

When I awoke this morning I was thinking about particularity. Each tree not only looks different but has a different spirit, just as each breath has this particularity. The categories of language as a classification category obscure and dissolve this into generality. The power of knowledge is partly founded in the academy on repeatability and generalization. In breath experience it is the distinctive particularity encountered that is fundamental, the power that knowledge offers, creates and inspires, a gathering substance of spirit power arising from the particularity of breath substance.

Journal January 2011

Trephina day two

The weaving of being is something that takes place in the textures of carnate breath.