

Humans, Trees, and the Intimacy of Movement: An Encounter with Ecosomatic Practice

Raffaele Rufo

Independent Artist-Scholar

Abstract

This essay takes the reader into a synesthetic landscape to explore the possibility of relating with trees as intimate companions of movement and becoming. David Abram's ecophenomenology of perception is brought into dialogue with Kimerer LaMothe's philosophy of dance and with other voices in the growing interdisciplinary field of ecosomatics. Based on the author's inquiries as dancer-researcher, encounters with trees are staged as slow improvisational rituals of listening and attunement. In opening the senses and the imagination to the presence of trees, ecosomatic practice exposes the porosity and permeability of bodily boundaries and reveals the possibility of a perceptual shift into a heightened experience of embodiment. We are not only touching, witnessing, and dancing with trees, we are also being touched, witnessed, and danced by them. In these in-between spaces the soma is reached sensorially by ecological wounds and dance is reclaimed as a healing force.

Keywords: ecosomatics, bodily earthly ground, ecology of perception, ecological wounds, dance, soma, touch, reciprocity, with-ness, co-healing

Introduction: Turning to Trees

As a response to the first, long Coronavirus lockdown, I followed the everyday impulse to search for natural sites in my small town, on the periphery of Milan (Northern Italy), where I could feel more alive, connected, and creative. I “just” had to listen to the embodied presence of the grass and the river, of the trees and the birds, of the wind, the rain, the sun, the moon and of all the other nonhuman living beings and systems I had forgotten or previously taken for granted. With the urban parks closed for preventing the assemblage of people, I was pushed to venture into the wilder spaces of the local natural reserve. In the ironic reversal of the typical anthropocentric narrative, while the lockdown created spaces for nonhuman animals to reclaim their place within the city, I was driven away from human-built spaces.

I began to explore the less known area stretching like an amoeba from the source of the river Molgora and following its course across various towns of the local territory. Isolated from other humans, and faced with a state of sensory deprivation, I began to feel part of a larger multispecies ecosystem which defies the well-rehearsed perceptual boundaries of suburban life.

Moving from one urban park to the other and then, from one small strip of woods to another, I was induced to focus my attention on the presence of the trees around me. In a moment of deep disconnection from the human world, I turned my senses to trees as sensuous partners of movement and inquiry. I was struck by the recurring sensation that, when I am sensing a tree, I am not alone. The deeper the silence of the lockdown, the heavier the weight of this realisation. I began to observe how their roots, their trunk, their branches, and their leaves have a presence that can be felt inside my body. What began as an experience of seeing trees led to noticing how I was also, at the same time, being seen by them. Day after day, the felt sense of separation from trees turned into a more complex physical and affective state in which presence and absence, calm and anxiety, joy and sadness could hardly be disjointed. Not only did I have the sensation of being seen by trees, but I also felt touched by them in an exchange far more intimate than I could have imagined.

In climbing the same tree, every day, for three months, I was led to question the dominant image of trees as inert compounds of organic matter positioned outside the sphere of human perception and indifferent to humans. Through touch, smell, sight, hearing and movement, my attention was drawn not only towards my breath, my weight, my core, my limbs, and the pull of gravity, but also to the perceivable qualities of trees as living creatures. I began to realise how, as I climb, I am demanding something from the tree and the tree is demanding something back. It is demanding my responsiveness to its inner and outer movement. It is demanding my sensitivity to its structure and to the shapes, curves, textures, and consistencies of its different parts. The tree is demanding me to listen with my senses to its height and width, to its softness and firmness, to its individuality and to its embeddedness in our shared ecosystem. How can I respond to these demands without reducing the complexity of the human-tree encounter to the anthropocentric assumption of being the subject of an abstract consciousness separate and untouched by the inert materiality of the tree? How can I embrace the complexity of this encounter as an improvisational dance of co-healing with the tree?

In his ecophenomenology of perception, geophilosopher and cultural anthropologist David Abram asks how it is that nonhuman phenomena “*no longer address us, no longer compel our involvement or reciprocate our attention*” (Abram, 2017: p. 132, *italics in the original*). For Abram, our separation from the larger, “more-than-

human” living landscape is deeply connected with the lack of direct sensory perception in the ways we experience the world. Abram claims that, through direct, pre-reflective perception “the things and elements that surround us” are disclosed “not as inert objects but as expressive subjects, entities, powers, potencies” (Abram, 2017: p. 131). Asking how human perception is intertwined with the livingness and responsiveness of the earth implies challenging the paradigm of human exceptionalism underpinning modern capitalist/colonialist cultures. Under the dominant model there are no other sentient beings but us: we are the only species capable of thought, language, and technology. Arguably, this self-proclaimed superiority is harmful both for humans and for the other species and living systems on which we depend for our sustenance and survival. The more we reject our solidarity with the felt experience of the human body and of the bodily earthly ground in which we are radically embedded, the more painful it becomes to elaborate the wounds of having fallen into the path of separation.

Following the cues offered by Abram across his various works on the ecology of perception (Abram, 2005; 2010; 2017; 2018; 2020), we can also start to grasp how our fundamental lack of perceptiveness towards the sensuousness of the earth is intertwined with the ecological disasters of our age. Sensing our corporeal embeddedness is an important step towards caring and becoming accountable for the effects of our actions on nonhuman forms of life. The challenge of our time, Abram argues, is that of “allowing ourselves to be taken up” within the sensuous terrain in an ongoing process of “interweavement” (Abram, 2010: p. 58). This requires “a new way of speaking, one that enacts our interbeing with the earth rather than blinding us to it” (Abram, 2010: p. 3). In this essay I address this challenge by exploring the emergence of an ecosomatic dance practice which nurtures and sustains the awareness of being embedded in a larger and deeper field of perception. I approach ecosomatic practice as a sensory invitation to engage the perceptual threshold into the more-than-human.¹

The ecosomatic inquiries evoked in this essay occurred between Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021 and were based on an “actual, in-the-flesh kinaesthetic experience” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011b: p. 158). When referring to trees, I am not referring to them as independent entities separated from each other and the rest of the natural and human-built environment. Rather, I am referring to the ecosystem - the soil, the river, the air, the sun, the clouds, the wind, the grass, the other plants, the insects, and the urban environment - in which they are embedded and in which my moving body and the movement of my thoughts and of my words are embedded. In following a first-person approach which prioritises the felt sense of connection with trees, I

¹ For a conceptual framing of the growing interdisciplinary field of ecosomatics, see Bardet, Clavel and Ginot (2019) and Kampe, McHugh and Munker (2021).

have attempted to incorporate the insights emerging from the inquiry in the experience of improvisational movement itself. This process of embodying the encounters with trees worked through a creative tension between what is felt somatically and what is evoked and brought to life again through words and images. I engaged in a daily practice of documenting visually my movement excursions and of writing down or recording the audio of my verbal responses. In what follows, through text and photographs, I try to capture, or liberate what was felt in and as movement.

In turning to trees ecosomatically, I draw on the phenomenological studies of kinaesthetic consciousness in dance, a tradition which goes back to *The Phenomenology of Dance* published by philosopher and former dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in the 1960's (Sheets-Johnstone, 1966/2015). Bodily movement is approached practically and conceptually as our “mother tongue”, our primal form of speech and of relationality with the world (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999/2011a; 2011b). However, I concur with dancer and philosopher Kimerer LaMothe (2014; 2015; 2018) when she writes that we still lack the sufficient conceptual resources to appreciate what is occurring when we dance and to reclaim the fundamental role of the body in the unfolding of ecological consciousness. My aim here is to evoke dance as a conscious, improvisational engagement with our sensory awareness. I weave Abram's emphatic call to allow ourselves a direct sensory experience of the more-than-human with LaMothe's plea for giving dance its due in our culture. I hope that the practical processes the readers are invited to engage with will contribute to the cultural debate on the role of dance and other somatic arts as agentic forces for ethical and sustainable living.

When *Oikos* and *Soma* Meet

Where will I go to meet nature today? I jump on my bike, as I often do. As I start riding across the streets of my small town, an encrypted map of possible destinations surfaces from below conscious awareness. This is a map that speaks secretly with my pushing legs. It speaks through the memories stored in my body, traces of the places I have visited and the resonances I have felt. These memories are not abstract categories filling the mind. They are embodied pathways into the impressions of the present moment. I ride my bicycle towards a mosaic of new sensory stimulations. I move towards new ways of making sense of past and future encounters, human and more-than-human.

This morning, and it is not for the first time, I followed the impulse to witness the ever-changing calm of flowing water. There is a small river crossing my town. The red-brick bridge crossing the river marks the boundaries of the ancient Roman site. How many times have I crossed that bridge! Every time I cross, I am called to stop

and listen. I feel addressed by the rhythmic sound created by the water pushing through air and through rocks to find its way forward. Time slows down. A soft breeze touches my skin. From the bridge I notice two white ducks dwelling on the riverbank alongside each other. I have a feeling that they are observing what is going on around them, in stillness. Apparently doing nothing, they seem to be waiting for something to happen. They look very present, attentive to their feathered bodies and to the ever-possible shift from stillness to swimming. I observe them and sometimes I utter sounds that mirror their sounds. Are they influenced by my presence? The simple encounter with the bridge, the river, and the ducks, rehearsed again and again, has taught me an important lesson: there is no right place to dwell in nature. What can be found is a pathway towards a heightened sensibility to the ways in which natural elements are always addressing us. We need to develop practical and conceptual tools, processes, and perspectives that enable us to experience bodily perception as a gateway between the human and the more-than-human. We need to honour the somatic intelligence of our being as a way of honouring our ancient solidarity with other forms of life.

The term somatic (as a quality of bodily experience) and the cognate expression somatics (as a field of study) derive from the ancient Greek word *soma* and were introduced and discussed systematically in the 1970's by existential philosopher and Feldenkrais practitioner Thomas Hanna. Hanna's aim was to bring together a broad range of first-person approaches to movement based on the human body as an internally sensed and immediately perceived living process of physical, mental, and spiritual awareness (Hanna, 1985; 1986). In "What Is Somatics?" Hanna argues that the human body is the phenomenon perceived when we observe a human being from a third person perspective. When, on the other hand, this same human being is observed "from the first-person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive senses", argues Hanna, "a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma" (Hanna, 1986: p. 4). In her concise history of the field, Martha Eddy claims that modern somatic practices emerged in Europe on the cusp of the twentieth century as ways to find "answers to bodily needs and communicative desires through internal bodily awareness" (Eddy, 2009: p. 6). These experiments led practitioners to "discover the potency of listening deeply to the body" (Eddy, 2009: p. 6). Glenna Batson describes these discoveries in terms of "listening to bodily cues arising from breath, touch, and movement" (Batson, 2009: p. 1). Following the paths traced by Hanna, Eddy, Batson and other somatic practitioners and scholars, in this essay I refer to "somatic" to indicate practices, tools and perspectives that enables a connection with the sensibility and sentience of one's bodily systems and that emerge as a space of meeting and integration between movement and thinking. In developing an ecosomatic dance practice, I have also drawn on my previous doctoral study of the nexus between movement, touch and somatic listening in the practice of

improvisational dance and particularly in the Tango dance (Rufo, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c).

The term ecology derives from the ancient Greek word *oikos*, meaning household, habitat, or dwelling place. Ecology is the study of how organisms interact with one another and with their environments. By focusing on relationality and interdependence, ecological thinking displaces the human from the centre of the world and foregrounds the key role of natural elements and forces like water, plants, minerals, and gases in our survival (Bottoms et al, 2012). Ecosomatic practices investigate the relation between the direct experience and knowledge of the body's sensations and systems—which is central to somatics, dance and other embodiment practices—with the ecological understanding of and dynamic connection with the larger terrain of living beings and systems in which human life is embedded. Attention shifts from the body and the environment as separate entities to embodied ecological connections as a perceptual continuum.² The soma, argue Kampe, McHugh and Munker (2021: p. 4), “exists in relationship to all life, not as a separate unit of being”. This leads to a question that could unravel the potential of the ecosomatic approach in the field of ecopsychology: How can ecosomatic practice help us articulate new ways of healing ecological wounds?

Wandering in Movement

Next time you cross the threshold between your home or your workplace and the outside world, I invite you to wander until you feel you have reached a place that calls you to meet trees in an intimate and playful exchange. I invite you to let go of the temptation to decide in advance where you will go and how you will get there. Give your bodily senses a chance to guide you and trick you into non-habitual pathways. Once you are out in the world, wait to be moved by the sensory impulses you receive from the surrounding living beings and systems. Let your perception be touched by what happens in that very moment and in the next one. It can be the reflection of sunlight blinding your eyes or the appearance of shadows on the ground. It can be the colour of the sky, a hole in the street, the chatter of people, the noises from a building site, the engine of a car, the singing of birds or the changing rhythm of your breath. Take the time to enjoy the absence of a fixed destination, to go back to where you came from, to try another way. You cannot know in advance what will move you, but you can refrain from automatically moving in the ways you always do. Waiting to be moved might feel awkward, especially when you notice other people are looking at you. I invite you to meet this awkwardness as a chance to honour the somatic intelligence of your being.

² For examples of ecosomatic practice frameworks, see Olsen (2002); Schell (2005); Bauer (2008); Kramer (2012); Nelson (2018); Hirtz (2020); Milgrom (2020).

Once you have reached your meeting place with trees, I invite you to start playing a simple movement game. Start by walking around and exploring the place. As you keep walking, bring your attention to the changing distance between your body and the other forms of life populating this place. Keep walking until you sense a connection with the tactile mesh beneath and around you. When in the woods, I felt embedded in a mesh of broken branches, pieces of bark, leaves of grass, flowers, roots, stones, etc. Wherever you are, bring your attention also to the air, the soil, the sun, the clouds, the weather, the colours in which you are embedded. As you keep walking, you might notice the haptic quality of the spaces emerging in front, behind, to the sides, above and beneath. Let this process of noticing trigger an acceleration in your steps. Now walk around with some speed exploring the spaces opening between the trees. Run into these spaces! Then go back to walking, in your time. You do not know when the shift from running to walking and from walking to running will happen again. Let this shift unfold from the felt sense of being touched by what is happening, moment after moment.

In the next stage of this exploration, I invite you to follow the inspiration to touch what you perceive beneath, above, and around. The physical contact with the materiality of the place might take you into stillness. Stay there and explore your internal states with the eyes closed. Then start shaping the body into the material qualities of what becomes present to you. Play with closing and opening the eyes. When reopening the eyes, is anything addressing you from a distance? Will you go there or take that call somewhere else? Shifting somatic attention between running, walking and stillness is a playful way to deepen our perception of the world. One can notice the tensions held in the bodily tissues or the resistance to let go of cognitive thinking. This kind of work of listening to what the body needs can soften the will to control what happens and become a gateway for a surprising encounter with the more-than-human. As a way of concluding this exploration, I invite you to try and give voice to the internal adventure of the senses. Wait. Move. Observe what happens inside and outside when words are whispered. Is there a continuum between movements, breath, touch, words, and the meaning of this experience?

Lying Under the Tree: Witnessing and Being Witnessed

One day I was riding my bike to the park near home. As I crossed the gate and began to wander the dirt track, I noticed a large bed of leaves resting on the grass under a hornbeam tree, and a powerful landscape of trees lurking from the distance. The immediate reaction was to stop, get off the bike and take photos of the scenery around me. It is not easy to let go of the drive to capture what attracts our eyes before we even have a chance to embody the encounter through the concerted activities of the senses. Not without resistance, I put the camera away and gradually engaged the possibility of lying on the pile of leaves under the hornbeam tree. My ecosomatic exploration began by allowing a more intimate contact

with the earth to occur. Gradually, the possibility of a fleshy interplay with the surrounding environment became tangible. I was not alone in the park anymore. I was embedded in a larger and welcoming sense of presence, of shapes, colours, and voices. I was awakened in thoughts, feelings, and movements. What had triggered my reaction as a spectacle was now enveloping me as a thicker web of relationships: the air, the fallen leaves, the smell of autumn, the songs of the birds, the pointy shells of chestnuts, the grass, and the moisture and ... my body! Yes, my body.

You are lying on your back under the crown of this tree, resting, with the eyes closed. What do you see when you look up? The tree is watching you, isn't it? You can yield your weight and your thoughts into the ground. You are in good hands. Listen to your breath: can you hear the earth breathing? Observe the points of contact between body and earth. Some parts of the body are touching the earth directly; others are not. Where do you sense your heart beating? Is it the chest? The belly? The hands? The arms? The legs? Then bend the knees and soften the pelvis into the earth. Play little games of pressure with the feet. Notice the smallest impulses in your inner landscape. Just stay where you are. Stay vulnerable. This is a process of waiting. (see *Figure 1*)



Figure 1. Human-Tree Encounter#1 (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

Trust your intuition to tell you when it is time to depart from this intimate encounter. Take the time you need to unfold into standing again. Stand back and observe the rich mesh of vegetal life gathered under the tree. How many things had gone unnoticed before! Layers of broken branches, pieces of bark, bits of leaves of different kinds and colours, pebbles, worms and insects, moisture, and dried matter. The tree is not there on its own. From close-up, this underlife feels so elegantly entangled. (see *Figure 2*)



Figure 2. Human-Tree Encounter#2 (Photo by Raffaele Rufo)

Humans and trees can dance with each other because we are both earthbound. It is the pull of gravity that binds us to this body and to the larger body of the earth. In doing so, gravity defines the conditions of our sensibility and of our sentience. So why the widespread aversion to moving down to the ground and meeting the skin of the earth with the whole body? Is it the fear of recognising that we, too, are part of the earth? Andrea Olsen, a pioneer of the field of ecosomatics, argues that “We are part of, not separate from, the earth we inhabit. Our bones, breath, and blood are the minerals, air, and water around us—not separate but same. This isn’t a metaphor, as I once thought: it is a fact” (Olsen in Schell, 2005: p. 3). In the book *Body and Earth*, Olsen (2002) explores the interconnection between the intrinsic intelligence of bodily and earthly systems and their relationship to place as a process of “inviting awareness”, of waiting as well as placing attention, and of moving attention to various parts of the body as they meet the nonhuman through physical contact (Olsen 2002, p. 10). One instantiation of this process is the practice of the “body scan”, well-known among somatic practitioners around the world (Olsen, 2002: p. 10). With a sense of “nothing to do” (Olsen in Schell, 2005: p. 6), I rest under this hornbeam tree inviting a state of expanded and, at the same time, deepened attention. I release my weight into gravity and try to allow movement to happen very slowly, not out of an intention to do something. It is the pressure into the soil and the release of such pressure that generates the sensation of moving different body parts. Each movement is a door into the next movement. (see *Figures 3 and 4*)



Figure 3. Human-Tree Encounter#3 (Photo by Raffaele Rufo)



Figure 4. Human-Tree Encounter#4 (Photo by Raffaele Rufo)

It makes sense to begin a duet with the tree by lying under its crown. This earthly space is a space in-between, neither body nor tree, both body and tree. Lying under the tree is a mode of embodiment where human perception is met by a radically different way of sensing and responding. Trees are slower creatures, much slower than us. To connect with their movement, we need to embrace the stillness which they so beautifully embody. The key to this sensory attunement is breathing. What

is breathing if not an endless duet of giving and taking, of inner and outer, of human and arboreal? A leaf falls off the tree and touches my face. My eyes open suddenly. A tiny insect crawls across my neck, and then another one tickles my ear. A bird lands on the branch above my head and suddenly takes off again. Another leaf falls from a tree behind me, to meet her destiny on the ground. Breath goes in and breath goes out. The body is inflated and then it is deflated. To stay here is to become a witness. It is in this silence, when I do not speak, that the world can speak.

The importance of the felt experience of witnessing in the emergence of my ecosomatic dance practice resonates with the basic principles of the somatic discipline of Authentic Movement introduced by Janet Adler in 1979. In describing her decennial engagement with Authentic Movement, Olsen claims that this somatic discipline is “a resource for cultivating a discerning inner witness” (Olsen, 2017: p. 211). At the same time, Authentic Movement “develops our capacity to witness others and nature, being seen, being moved without changing or judging” (Olsen in Schell, 2005: p. 8). The mover closes his or her eyes and attends to movement impulses as they emerge. This happens in the close presence of a witness. The session is followed by a dialogue between the mover and the witness through which memory, insight, and reflection are supported (Olsen in Schell, 2005: p. 4). In engaging with ecosomatic practice, my perception of the relationship with trees as inert compounds of matter was destabilised in a process of waiting and suspending judgment. The porous spaces between witnessing and being witnessed became more tangible. I wonder whether the tree is witnessing me as I engage this slow and small improvisational dance under its crown? Rather than focusing on the separation between witnessing and being witnessed, we can shift our attention to the continuum between these two modes of perception. Speaking of “with-ness” invites the possibility of an intimate encounter also with trees and other forms of life³.

Grounding with the Tree: Between Earth and Sky

Like trees, human bodies are the meeting point between earth and sky. As the trunk pulls upward, the roots are pulling downward. As the roots pull downward, the trunk is pulling upward. We too as humans can feel that, to expand we need to condense first and that, to condense we need to expand first. This constant tension between different forces defines the movement of becoming. Grounding is bringing awareness to the empowering effects of being bound to this earth. Grounding is growing creatively out of the constraints that define our sensibility and our sentience. Grounding is dancing with gravity to become the meeting point between freedom and necessity. Trees are masters of grounding. To learn this art, we need to awaken

³ For a more comprehensive discussion of “with-ness”, see Rufo (2022).

our senses and our imagination to the possibility of a more-than-human perceptual interchange.



Figure 5. *Human-Tree Encounter#5* (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

I invite you to stand under the branches of a tree, on the outer edges of its crown. I invite you to face the trunk from a distance, in stillness. Observe the tree, with the whole body. Let the presence of the tree work as a mirror of your body. Take your time. Meeting the tree is a process of negotiating the space between the human-body and the tree-body. From where you are, when you are ready, start walking around the tree, under the outer edges of its branches. As you walk, attend to your breathing. Can you hear breath being inhaled and exhaled? If you capture yourself breathing while you are walking, I invite you to pause. Shift your attention to the space between your body and the trunk. This might take some time. Do not anticipate that shift. From where you are, start walking towards the trunk on a diagonal path. Do you feel like going straight to touch the trunk? How does the perception of the space between your body and the tree change as you walk towards the trunk? What is the level of physical proximity that makes you feel a sense of reciprocity with the tree? Is the tree responding to you getting closer? If you feel you are getting too close, if you notice a tension, or even a resistance to move forward, then feel free to pause or move back. It might take some time before you have a sense of standing at the right distance. (see *Figure 5*)

Once you feel welcomed in the proximal space of the tree, you can close your eyes to find a deep state of comfort and peace. Place the palm of one hand below the belly. Place the other hand behind your back, on the sacrum bone. Soften your pelvis. Soften your knees. Meet the earth with the different parts of the feet.

Observe how your feet are being touched by the earth you are standing on. Attend to how your weight is being poured into the ground and out of the ground as you are standing. As breath goes out, notice the expansion of the space between the two hands you placed on the body. As breath goes in, notice the condensation of the space between the two hands. It is likely that at this stage the question of the distance between you and the trunk has shifted to the background of your attention. If so, open your eyes, very slowly. What do you see? The tree is watching you, isn't it? Inhale the external presence of the tree: the height of the trunk, the shapes of the branches, the texture of the bark, the thickness of the wood, the colour of the leaves. Then exhale the felt sense of your body. Observe how your inner awareness meets the awareness of the tree in a perceptual space that is neither inside nor outside, that is both inside and outside.



Figure 6. *Human-Tree Encounter#6* (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

If you sense the tree is welcoming you, I invite you to move even closer and reach out (see *Figure 6*). You are nearly body to trunk, skin to bark. These feet finding depth into the earth, they are your feet. But as you touch the trunk with your hands, you can also feel the roots of the tree. The tree is pouring its weight into the ground as you are pouring yours. The more you stay in touch with the trunk, the more you might notice a growing sense of intimacy and respect. The more touch becomes a contact, the more you might feel you are also being touched by the tree. There is very little muscular tension involved. I invite you to yield your weight into the trunk, to lean into it in the head, the arms. Play with increasing and decreasing tactile pressure on the bark. Move around the trunk without losing physical contact. Don't think you have to move in a particular direction or in a particular way, just let it happen.



Figure 7. Human-Tree Encounter#7 (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

Slowly, very slowly, turn your back to the trunk without losing contact. Observe the meeting between your pelvis and the bark. Allow your pelvis to rotate on one side. Observe how the pressure of your pelvis into the bark makes your body turn. Notice how the body reorganizes itself at every step. Expand your arms and your neck and look up at this beautiful tree. Become small again. Keep moving around. Change the levels of your dance: go higher and then go lower. Engage with different points of contact at the same time. Grounding is becoming dancing. (see *Figure 7*)

Shaping into the Branches: Touching and Being Touched

In presenting her embodied art activism project “My Body as the Valley”, Rena Milgrom begins by asking us to consider how we can enter the sensuous world and integrate it as a living being in our dance practice and in our vision of reality (Milgrom, 2020). Her proposed answer is that we need to practice “sensorial awakening” and develop “intuitive sense knowing” by absorbing information from the environment with the skin, the nose, the mouth, and other sensorial channels. We need to “feel in love” and “get into dialogue” with the valley (Milgrom, 2020: np.). According to Milgrom, by shifting focus and attention between active and passive processes of perception, such as touching and being touched, it is possible to awaken the “animal body” and sense the “character of the valley” (Milgrom, 2020: np.). During her workshop session at the 2020 online Embodiment Conference, Milgrom shared images and reflections from her collective artistic residence in the Czech Republic and proposed the practice of shaping one’s body into an object to experience her approach first-hand.

As a participant in that online workshop, I worked with a chair. I was impressed by the change in my bodily and affective state I experienced throughout the shaping practice. In conducting my ecosomatic inquiries in the parks and woods of my town during the Covid emergence, I then tried to experiment with shaping into the branches of trees. I engaged shaping as an active and relational process of yielding weight and adapting to the physical qualities of the tree in a constant dynamic of giving and receiving information.



Figure 8. Human-Tree Encounter#8 (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

Have you ever abandoned your body on the surface of a branch, in a state of suspension between earth and sky (see *Figure 8*)? When you sit, lie, or stand on a branch, your movement depends, literally, on the presence of the tree. Shaping into the branches is a pathway for dwelling in the porous space between softness and tension. Shaping is knowing that I am shaping the body and not knowing how my body is being shaped. It is one thing and the other at the same time, without contradiction. As I lie on this branch, I notice how becoming smaller makes me feel more comfortable. The branch is expanding, and my body is condensing into it. I try to meet the sensation of being cuddled by the tree. The branch is my cradle. As soon as I say these words, I start observing whether I can be a cradle for this branch. The branch is here for me. I am here for the branch. I invite you to find a comfortable branch you can sit on. You might need to overcome the resistance to lift your feet from the soil and be suspended, even when the branch is very low. Find a point of contact with the branch. Caress the bark. Listen and wait for an impulse to move. Use touch and pressure as leverage to climb up. Notice the qualities of the physical contact between your sitting bones and the wood. Experiment with different sitting positions.

Play with folding the pelvis inward and downward and then outward and upward. You can lean on other branches nearby. If possible, drop the weight of your legs off the branch so you can swing them. The free arms will help you feel safe. Notice the playfulness of this moment. Look out into the larger space around you. Connect what you see with your felt sense of movement. Exhale: haaaaa! (see *Figure 9*)



Figure 9. Human-Tree Encounter#9 (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

I now invite you to lie on the branch on your belly. Release your weight into the branch with the face, the chest, the legs, and other body parts. Sense the texture of the bark and the knots of the wood. Notice if there are twigs shooting off from the branch. This shaping cannot occur until your body is willing to be shaped by the tree. You might need more resistance of some parts of the body to yield other parts into the branch. Observe what this yielding tells you about the presence of the tree. Play with sensing your centre of gravity in relationship with the branch. Wrap your body around the branch. Observe how you depend on the tree to hold your position. The tree is sharing the burden of gravity with you. Do you feel supported? Would you fall if you let go of the grasp? Drop a leg towards the ground. Drop an arm towards the ground. Feel the suspension. As you lie on your stomach, I invite you to rotate your pelvis to one side, and then to the other, very gently. Play with turning until you find yourself lying on your back. Explore this space on the branch as the only space you have, as the space of your body, of your becoming body, of your bodily becoming. All limbs are in contact with the branch now. Extend the arms and the legs to follow the extension of the branch.

Expand until you touch the trunk. Explore the possibility of touching other branches with your hands and feet. Observe how the branch you are lying on is always connected with the trunk and how your limbs are always connected with your core. How much tension is too much when shaping your bones into the wood? How much softness can you achieve while offering the tree a structure to feel you?



Figure 10. Human-Tree Encounter#10 (Photo by Valentina Vitolo)

Now bend your knees. Find comfort in the intimate contact between your spine and the branch. Play with different points of pressure: the feet, the sacrum bone, the pelvis, the vertebrae behind the chest, the back of the skull. Notice how your shape changes when you change the points of pressure on the branch. Start turning the pelvis very gently from one side to the other. Notice how the increased pressure of one part of the pelvis on the branch generates the rotation of the whole body to the side. As one side of your body seeks balance on the branch, allow the other side to feel the possibility of imbalance. Experiment with the tipping points: the points where, if you follow through the rotation, you fall. Are you afraid of falling? Feel how gravity is pulling you down. Then find your stability again. Gradually, allow this gentle dynamic of yielding and resisting to take you into falling. Climb up on the branch again. Lie on your back again. Rotate to the sides and explore the tipping points again. Let your movement potential be released into falling again. Notice the shivers of your body when you approach the moment of falling. Work on the thin line between fear and pleasure. (see *Figure 10*)

The Mystery of Reciprocity

As these insults to the elemental earth pile up—as the waters are rendered lifeless by more chemical runoff, by more oil spills, by giant patches of plastic rotating in huge gyres; as more glaciers melt and more forests succumb to the stresses of a destabilized climate—the sensorial world of our carnal experience is increasingly filled with horrific wounds, wounds that we feel in our flesh whenever we dare to taste the world with our creaturely senses. It's too darn painful. Hence there's ever more reason to *retreat from the body's world, to avoid the sensuous terrain with its droughts and its floods and its flaring wildfires, taking refuge in ever more mediated and virtual spaces.* (Abram, 2018: np., italics in the original)

Every time I visit the woods, the river, the park, or another natural site to conduct my ecosomatic inquiries I am faced with the challenge of having to let go of the need to control what is happening and allow the unfolding of a deeper presence. It takes time to recognise and honour the somatic encounter with my body and with the body of the earth. It takes time to be led by what embeds us. Each exploration begins as an invitation to silence the voice of the abstract mind so that the forces of nature can speak with and through bodily movement. If I want to do justice to the research I am doing, I am called to place attention right where I am, to dwell and to listen to the embeddedness of this living body in this earthly field of perception. I am called to wait to be moved before I try to make a move. No matter how much I believe in the possibility of encountering trees sensorially, each time I engage with them I need to accept the frustration of having to let go of the will to transcend mentally the fleshy becoming of our encounter.

There is a fine line between deciding to engage in a certain improvisational task and falling into an exploration by allowing each moment to guide perception into the next moment. Something in the distance is attracting my attention and distracting me from the compulsive drive to analyse the workings of the mind. I feel relieved, if only for a moment. Then I start to move faster, to run towards that tree. Now I slow down, and, in stillness, I begin to recognise the felt sense of a perceptual shift. Words start to come as I am witnessing the embeddedness of this body and of these trees, and of these broken branches and the leaves and the pieces of bark meeting the soil in a powerful dynamic of textures and shapes. Then I keep moving. I walk through another space opening between trees. I notice what happens in me and around me when movement occurs. The overall perceptual field changes as I move. Something closer grabs my attention. This tree near me has fallen, and the trunk is bent towards the soil. It is because I am sitting on and crawling through this trunk that this or that detail envelops my attention.

I wonder whether there is an inevitable suffering implicit in the fact that, as modern humans we aspire to a consciousness of the whole and yet we cannot arrive at that consciousness as separate thinking selves. Borrowing Abram's language, this suffering can be approached as the consequence of breaking the ecology of perception. For Abram the ecology of perception is a phenomenon in which our sensory organs "actually work almost like a kind of glue binding our individual neural system into the wider ecology, the wider ecosystem" (Abram, 2020: np.). If it is true, as Abram (2010: p. 58) argues, that "We experience the sensuous world only by rendering ourselves vulnerable to that world", then the interweaving that constitutes the very fabric of perception is not something independent from our experience as perceiving selves. It is something that reaches our senses and our sensibilities in the experience of having a felt sense of being addressed by the perceived world. We need to make ourselves available to it, though. This is a key passage in ecosomatic practice. As Abram claims in the quote at the beginning of this section, the ecological disasters of our age expose the denial of this ancient reciprocity with the earthly sensuous while calling us to confront its painful consequences. However, Abram continues, the felt inability to recognise and honour the "mysterious" interpenetration between the human and the nonhuman and between the perceiving self and the perceived world makes these disasters too painful to be addressed, or even to be recognised (Abram, 2018).⁴

In my solo improvisational dance practice, the encounter with trees revealed the sensory separation and the spiritual alienation from the larger movement of relating and becoming. For Abram (2018) the longing for reciprocity with the nonhuman clashes with the lack of awareness and of ways of languaging the potential interbeing vibrating in the spaces between our inner and outer life. It clashes, I would argue, also with the lack of awareness and of ways of languaging human movement and the human body as an ecology of systems and intelligences integrated in the wider ecology of life. As a connection to the larger cycles of nature, reciprocity is also a connection with the finer cycles of bodily life, like the patterns of breathing, of heart beating, of blood flowing. The mystery of reciprocity and its intimate relation with the wounds of separation from the human body and the larger body of the earth is not a problem we have to solve or something that needs objectification in the quest for knowledge. Attending to this mystery requires words and movements that are shaped by the forces of the earthly ground. This is a dance which involves a weaving of threads rather than an explanation. A dance which requires dwelling in the shadows of the visible fabric of perception to allow something unexpected and unintended to address our conscious awareness whilst remaining outside our mental grasp. Abram (2010) describes this process as the experience of something coming to our knowledge in a process of "crossing paths" with other living beings and systems.

⁴ See also Abram (2017), especially p. 66-67 for a discussion of the mystery of perception which draws on French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work on the phenomenology of perception.

Throughout my inquiry, the pain of separation has become more tangible in the mirror of the sweet and generous presence of trees. Confronted by such presence, I was led to wonder whether the human form of my movements diving into the flesh of arboreal life can work as a mirror for a longer history of cultivation, suffering and ecological destruction those trees have been subjected to. In engaging day after day with ecosomatic modes of belonging and thanksgiving to the body and the earth, I felt addressed by trees as fragile and vulnerable creatures. Where do these trees come from? Who brought them here? Who dwelled here with them before me? As I was dealing with my own isolation from other humans, I felt invested with the responsibility to reach out towards a more-than-human kinship, to become a mediator between the human and the arboreal. I felt called to mobilise intuitions and receptiveness towards the enactment of an interspecies connection so that it can be felt also by others. There were moments of at least partial relief from the fear of being addressed by a mystery outside my conscious grasp. These were moments of meeting with ecological wounds rather than running away from them.

Dance and Healing

And once we affirm that dancing is and has always been a medium and agent of healing, we will be ready to consider the process of healing as one of learning to dance. (LaMothe, 2015: p. 139)

According to LaMothe (2015: p. 8), “Through attunement to internal sensations and the surrounding world, dance opens within us a vulnerability to being moved by the movements we perceive”. This experience grows in those who dance and those who bear witness to it an “ecokinetic”, “life-enabling” knowledge about how “we cultivate mutually nurturing relationships with the earth in us and around us” (LaMothe, 2015: p. 8). Drawing on this position, Laidlow and Beer (2018: p. 287) contend that dance has a great potential for environmental change through “the embodiment of relational ethics which dissolve notions of separateness between humans and nature”. Can dance as a vital art play a role in the mainstream culture of ecological consciousness?

Exploring the nexus between dancing and healing can help to bridge the fields of ecosomatics and ecopsychology. How can we approach the connection between dance and healing? In describing the kinaesthetically conscious experience of dancing as interweaving and coextensive with the development of self-consciousness, LaMothe (2015: p. 143) defines dance as a pathway for recognising pain by “attending to the materiality of a bodily self as a source of agency and intelligence, knowledge and novelty”. In another passage of her discussion, LaMothe weaves together dance, pain, and human consciousness by associating the ability to feel pain to human adaptability:

Perhaps, then, our human ability to feel pain so precisely and acutely, on the one hand, and our ability to dance it out, on the other, emerged together, pushing and pulling each other into existence, as the oscillating rhythm that has enabled humans to make ourselves at home wherever we are. (LaMothe, 2015: p. 149)

Drawing on a personal experience of physical injury, LaMothe (2015)⁵ describes with surprise how, despite being a long-time practitioner of conscious movement and dance, she fell into the automatic and culturally sanctioned trap of dealing with pain by shutting down the processes of sensing and responding to the bodily unfolding of life. This behaviour is associated with an attempt to avoid the feeling of being addressed by the condition of pain. LaMothe (2015: p. 147–149) then asserts that pain and healing are “always already happening” and that, as a “primary element of sentience”, pain involves all creatures. Scientists have observed how plants are able to remember and move away from sources of past trauma by “storing and recalling patterns of sensations and responses” (LaMothe, 2015: p. 248). The practice of dance calls us to engage the question of how we can participate in the healing that is occurring in and around us even and especially when there is pain:

Consciousness of our movement, of ourselves as movement, takes shape along the trajectories of physical and emotional movement that we make, as what those movements are making. And at every step along the way, from sensation to emotion to thinking, pain acts as a catalyst. (LaMothe, 2015: p. 146)

In this essay I have evoked the ways in which an ecosomatic practice of improvisational dance can help us cultivate the capacity of the human body to heal the wounds of separation from the earthly ground while, at the same time, attending to the healing power of trees. Human-tree reciprocity emerges as a form co-healing with an untapped potential. What happens when human and arboreal life meet in the experience of recognising and honouring the primacy of the body in the experience of perception? Practices of listening and sensory attunement to internal impulses are intertwined with practices of incorporating the temporalities of trees, the vibrancy of their mattering and the richness of their surrounding impulses and inputs. Movement emerges as a call to respond not only to my own wounds but also to the wounds of the trees that I encounter. In returning to the experience of the field work, I can still feel the memory of how each exploration began with an intention to engage a particular mode of sensing, like scanning, grounding, or shaping, and ended with a perception of being sensed, scanned, grounded, and shaped by arboreal livingness and responsiveness. This mode of perception involves intercepting and engaging the forgotten response-ability of dwelling in the spaces between the inside and the outside. In these in-between spaces the human-body and the tree-body register each

⁵ Especially Chapter 6 is relevant.

other's presence and are affected by each other's presence. How do we recognise and cross the threshold of reciprocity? How do we become aware that trees, the soil, the leaves, and the air are touching us physically and affectively? And how do we know how to respond to the sensuous touch of the earth? My improvisational dances with trees reveal healing as an experience of sensory inter-penetration. How can we engage and become aware of the movement of a tree if, approached with our unaided senses, we perceive it as a static entity? We cannot physically move and be moved by the tree as we can move and be moved by another human being. We can bring attention to the agency of other natural forces moving the tree, like the wind moving its leaves, the sun feeding it with light, the soil providing it with minerals and nutrition, and the air exchanging carbon dioxide and oxygen with it. These movements are much more subtle and harder to perceive within human spatio-temporal patterns. Seeking cues on the tree's movements leads to shifting the focus of inquiry to the livingness of the in-between spaces: between the tree and the land, between my body and the land, between the tree and my body. These meeting spaces are spaces of contamination: both body and tree, both body and land, both tree and land. It is in the earthiness of these in-betweens that the perception of our human spatio-temporality meets the spatio-temporality of trees. For example, when I lie under the tree and observe how body and earth are scanning each other, I can meet the movement of the tree in the complex microcosmos unfolding between its fallen leaves, the soil and the vegetal and animal beings participating in the process of decomposition occurring above and around its roots. I can also meet and be met by the movement of the tree in the ecosomatic exploration of grounding. The roots of the tree are embedded within the same ground I am pouring my body weight into and out of through my feet. In this case, as I lean with my body on its trunk, it becomes possible to sense how reciprocity is incarnated in the transmission of movement impulses occurring across the circuit created by the tactile connection between land, body, and tree.

Embracing reciprocity is a painful process. We are called to confront the repressive and exploitative histories of civilisation, colonisation, and urbanisation. This requires placing oneself in a painful and yet beautiful position of vulnerability so that the human and the tree can meet each other in their own bodily ground. LaMothe (2015, p. 149) argues that "The act of dancing can serve to open wide sensory fields within ourselves [...] A dance-enabled sensory awareness is a 'place' where we can embrace our pain as a catalyst to our fundamental sensory creativity". In my ecosomatic inquiry, this "place" emerges as a field of in-betweens and unfolds through and as the sensory awareness of touching and being touched, witnessing and being witnessed, dancing and being danced.

Conclusion

Like many other dancers faced with a profound sense of uncertainty, isolation, and disempowerment during the long Covid-19 crisis, I was called to seek new ways for mobilizing dance as a counter-cultural force capable of inspiring ethical and sustainable

living between humans and with other forms of life. The more people learn from their kinaesthetic senses – from bodily experience, the easier it becomes to challenge the assumption that each of us exists as a solitary individual, isolated from communal encounters with the world. Ecosomatic dance can contribute to understanding and befriending the ecology of perception by restoring our relationship with the human body as a part of nature. It can do so by offering us pathways for engaging in a direct and intimate sensory and imaginative connection with the bodily earthly ground. This requires reclaiming the regulatory and transformative power of movement in our lives so that we can reclaim our fundamental bond with the earth as our home. We can start by experiencing our body somatically, that is, as an internally sensed living process of awareness. Such a simple step can help us deepen our ability to attune and empathize with other forms of life we have progressively learned to exclude from our perceptual field.

Ecosomatic practice reveals the possibility of a perceptual shift from a narrow experience of embodiment, focused on the will to move, to the deeper and expanded experience of being moved by the world. Human-tree encounters expose the porosity and permeability of bodily boundaries. We are called to suspend the belief in the anthropocentric dualities between active and passive, internal and external, physical and spiritual. In this sensuous state of suspension, it becomes possible to hear the echoes of our alienation from the body and from other beings and living systems. At the same time, we are reminded of our ancient solidarity with the bodily earthly ground. Trees enter our larger perceptual field as mirrors of our fragile condition. When the immediate sensory power of the human-arboreal dance fades away, one is called to ask how *we* can be a mirror of *their* history of ecological destruction and exploitation. How do we allow trees to speak of their pain through our embodied memories and desires, habits, and preconceptions? How do we seek a reciprocity that extends to a mutual healing by engaging the wounds of modern civilisation rather than trying to transcend them through sensory experience? We can start by considering that trees are not there only to heal and save us. They are there also to find out about our history of suffering and alienation and to receive our healing. This is where earth-body practices can nurture our love for the more-than-human and ground our ecological thinking.

Engaging the nexus between dance, healing and the ecology of perception requires developing new pathways for engaging in more depth with the power of natural forces to resonate with our somatic movement and to befriend the perceptual states that facilitate such resonance. I reiterate the invitation for readers to engage in the explorations proposed above – wandering in movement, lying under the tree, grounding with the tree, and shaping into the branches – as participants in a sensory journey of empowerment and co-creation. We need to genuinely engage with the ways in which our body has an impact on the embodied presence of trees and with the ways in which, at the same time, we are touched by trees and influenced in our sense of self and movement. However, from the narrow perspective of mainstream contemporary culture, movement is too often

associated with the mechanical, goal-oriented image of a body controlled by the brain and deprived of spirituality. This limited and distorted understanding of movement does not support a deep ecological commitment to the future of the biosphere. To awaken and instigate the biophilic proclivity of the human species, we need to raise awareness on how the health of the planet is intimately interdependent with the health of our bodies. To argue that humans are not separate from the earth but a part of it is not enough if we do not really come to terms with the coextensive life of body and mind. If we treat our bodies as instruments rather than as sources of knowledge, meaning, and pleasure that have a value in themselves, how can we stop treating the earth as an instrument of our unsustainable political economies?

References

- Abram, D. (2005). "Depth ecology", in B. Taylor (ed.). *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Abram, D. (2010). *Becoming animal: An earthly cosmology*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Abram, D. (2017). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Abram, D. (2018). Magic and the machine: Notes on technology and animism in an age of ecological wipeout. *Emergence Magazine*. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/magic-and-the-machine>.
- Abram, D. (2020). The ecology of perception. Interview by Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee. *Emergence Magazine*. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from <https://emergencemagazine.org/podcast/the-ecology-of-perception>.
- Bardet, M., Clavel, J. and Ginot, I. (eds.). (2019). "Introduction", in Bardet, M., Clavel, J., Ginot, I. (eds.). *Ecosomatiques: Penser l'écologie depuis le geste* (pp. 9–19). Montpellier, France: Deuxième Époque, ISBN: 2377690629.
- Batson, G. (2009). Somatic studies and dance. Resource paper for the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS). Accessed on 23 March 2023 from <https://iadms.org/media/3599/iadms-resource-paper-somatic-studies-and-dance.pdf>.
- Bauer, S. (2008). Body and earth as one: Strengthening our connection to the natural source with ecosomatics. *Conscious Dancer*, Spring issue, 8–9.
- Bottoms, S., Dranks, A. and Kramer, P. (2012). Editorial: On ecology. *Performance Research*, 17(4): 1–4.
- Eddy, M. (2009). A brief history of somatic practices and dance: Historical development of the field of somatic education and its relation to dance. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, 1(1): 5–2.
- Hanna, T. (1985). *Bodies in revolt: A primer in somatic thinking*. Novato, CA: Freeperson Press.
- Hanna, T. (1986). What is somatics? (Part I). *Somatics: Magazine-Journal of the Bodily Arts and Sciences*, 5(4): 4–8.

Hirtz, M. (2020). Eco-somatic research: What if the complexity of nature can teach me a dance? *International Journal of Creative Media Research*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.33008/IJCMR.2020.14>.

Kampe, T., McHugh, J. and Munker, K. (2021). Embodying eco-consciousness: Somatics, aesthetic practices and social action. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, 13(1–2): 3–8, https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp_00063_2.

Kramer, P. (2012). Bodies, rivers, rocks and trees: Meeting agentic materiality in contemporary outdoor dance practices. *Performance Research*, 17(4): 83–91.

Laidlow, B. and Beer, T. (2018). Dancing to (re)connect: Somatic dance experiences as a medium of connection with the more-than-human. *Choreographic Practices*, 9(2): 283–309.

LaMothe, K. (2014). “Can they dance?": Towards a philosophy of bodily becoming", in A. Williamson, G. Batson, S. Whatley and R. Weber (eds.). *Dance, Somatics and Spiritualities: Contemporary Sacred Narratives* (pp. 131–149). Bristol, UK: Intellect.

LaMothe, K. (2015). *Why we dance: A philosophy of bodily becoming*. New York: Columbia University Press.

LaMothe, K. (2018). “As the earth dances: A philosophy of bodily becoming”, in S. Fraleigh (ed.). *Back to Dance Itself: Phenomenology of the Body in Performance* (pp. 123–140). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Milgrom, R. (2020). Embodied art activism: My body as the valley. Online presentation at The Embodiment Conference, 14–25 October 2020. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from <https://portal.theembodimentconference.org/sessions/embodied-art-activism-gd3h57>.

Nelson, M. (2018). Embodied ecology: The eco-somatics of permaculture. *Choreographic Practices Journal*, 9(1): 17–30.

Olsen, A. (2002). *Body and earth: An experiential guide*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Olsen, A. (2017). Thresholds: Moving between worlds. *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, 4(2): 211–22. https://doi.org/10.1386/dmas.4.2.211_1.

Rufo, R. (2020a). “Re-engaging touch in Tango: An experiential framework for kinesthetic listening”. Ph.D. thesis. Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University, School of Communication and Creative Arts. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339947887_Re-engaging_touch_in_tango_An_experiential_framework_for_kinesthetic_listening.

Rufo, R. (2020b). “Touch in Tango as a form of contagion”, in M. Sarco-Thomas (ed.). *Thinking Touch in Partnering and Contact Improvisation: Pedagogy, Philosophy, Practice* (pp. 129–48). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rufo, R. (2020c). (Re-)engaging touch as a tango dancer: An experimental framework for kinaesthetic listening. *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 12:2, 207–228. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp_00024_1.

Rufo, R. (2022). Sensing with trees: Explorations in the reciprocity of perception. *Venti Journal: Air, Experience, Aesthetics*, 2(2): Special issue on “Senses”. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from <https://www.venti-journal.com/Raffaele-rufo>.

Schell, S. (2005). Sense of place: An interview with Andrea Olsen. *A Moving Journal*, 12: 3 (Fall-Winter 2005), 3–8. Accessed on 21 March 2023 from <http://amipastissues.blogspot.com/>.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1966/2015). *The phenomenology of dance*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1999/2011a). *The primacy of movement*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2011b). The corporeal turn: Reflections on awareness and gnostic tactility and kinaesthesia. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 18(7&8): 145–168.

Correspondence

Email: raffaele.rufo@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.raffaelerufo.com>