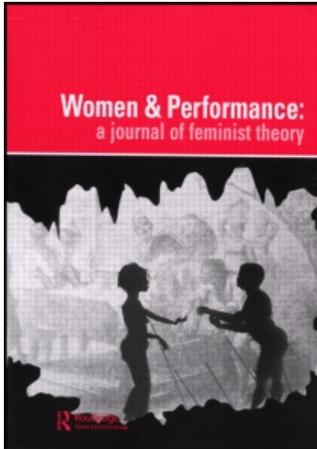


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THE LANGUAGE OF THE LISTENING BODY

Listening and moving in the urban environment

Hope Mohr¹

This article discusses The Language of the Listening Body, a collaborative creative project between choreographer Hope Mohr and composer Michelle Nagai exploring an active listening and moving practice in the urban environment of New York City. Mohr discusses listening and moving practices in the studio and in 'soundwalks'—walking meditations where participants are encouraged to maintain a high level of sonic awareness. The article discusses discoveries and questions that arose during a creative process with a focus on: (1) the relationship between listening-based movement research and public soundwalks, and (2) the unique issues involved in environmentally based creative process and performance.

Introduction

In September 2006, composer Michelle Nagai and I led an artistic residency entitled *The Language of the Listening Body* in which we worked with a group of dancers exploring an active listening and moving practice in the urban environment of New York City. The residency was supported through the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance (iLAND), a new dance research organization founded by choreographer Jennifer Monson.² From her longstanding commitments to environmental issues, dance and creative process, Monson established the creative residency program with an interest in 'reinvigorating the kinetic experience of the urban environment' (Houston-Jones 2006, 24).

The Language of the Listening Body was the inaugural iLAND residency.

As part of our two-week residency, we hosted two public 'soundwalks', walking meditations where the object is to maintain a high level of sonic awareness.³ Through our work with a core group of dancers during the residency, we expanded the soundwalk form to include a broader range of kinetic experience and exploration beyond just walking. The first public soundwalk

occurred in midtown Manhattan; the second in Long Island City, Queens. During each soundwalk, members of the public joined us as we traveled through the city listening and moving.

This article discusses the discoveries and questions that arose in our creative process with a focus on:

- (1) The relationship between our process and the public soundwalks embedded within it.
- (2) The unique issues involved in environmentally based creative process and performance.

Environmental Values and The Context for Creative Process

For dancers, choreographers and many other performance artists, the studio as a site for creative process is usually a sanctuary removed from the world.⁴ To a large extent, the studio can be anywhere, as long as it offers a place to create at a distance from distraction and interference. There are advantages to the studio as a human-controlled environment: you can control external variables like light, heat, and sound, and can therefore work any time. Furthermore, removing the body from the outside world can make it easier to focus on, and prioritize, somatic experience.

For body-based artists like dancers and choreographers, the body itself is a kind of studio. For many dancers—often people with a sense of identity invested in their experience of movement (and, in the case of professional performers, accustomed to a nomadic and uncertain lifestyle)—the body itself is home: ‘dancing itself is a place—a portable country I carry with me’ (Stark Smith 2006, 2). Traditional dance training is an unending practice in mastery and control over the body, and there are benefits to the body as creative site—you can work in your body anywhere, anytime.

In the traditional scenario, when a dancer enters the studio, she silences the noise of the outside world to better hear, and thus respond to, her body. Despite the richness of this practice, we may lose something when we privilege creative exploration that is hermetically sealed. Studio work, and often the performance that results (a black box event removed from outside time and space), perpetuates a human experience fragmented from the natural world. Relying on the body as creative site removed from context risks becoming a solipsistic practice. Especially when it comes to making place-based art, studio work, which frequently strives to decontextualize the body, may be downright inappropriate. As art critic Lucy Lippard remarks in *The lure of the local: Senses of place in a multi-centered society*, ‘context has to be the very bottom line of a place-specific art’ (Lippard 1997, 278).

Ecofeminists remind us that we *are* nature, and that nature is not a place separate from ourselves.⁵ In that sense, we bring nature into the studio and theater with us. But what is it like to bring our creative work into nature? What



FIGURE 1
Long Island City Soundwalk, September 2003, 2006. Photo by Ian W. Douglas.

would it mean to develop a movement-based creative process that aligns itself with ecology, recognizing the interconnectedness of living systems and striving toward sustainability rather than isolating oneself within the studio? Michelle Nagai and I explored these questions through our iLAND residency, *The Language of the Listening Body*. We set out to explore the implications of putting the moving body in environmental context.

The Listening Body in a Visual Culture

One of our main goals for the residency was finding a language—both verbal and physical—for the intimate experience of listening. In selecting listening as our focus for sensory awareness work, we aimed to explore an alternative way of experiencing the body and the environment amidst ‘the incredible dominance of the visual modality in society—“eye culture”, as it has been termed’ (Wrightson 2000, 10).⁶ The cultural dominance of seeing as a way of experiencing the environment has historical roots in the Western Cartesian philosophical tradition, in which the self is fragmented from others and ‘where there is a complete detachment of the thinking self from the body and its senses’ (MacDonald Cornford 1949, 4). As Luce Irigaray explains:

More than any sense, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance and maintains a distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over . . . hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. . . . The

moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality. (Irigaray cited in Owens 439, 70)⁷

In Western culture, the dominance of sight over other ways of relating to the world has created a tradition of seeing that undermines kinetic experience in time and space. As Norman Bryson explains:

The logic of the Gaze is . . . subject to two great laws: the body (of the viewer) is reduced to a single point, the macula of the retinal surface; and the moment of the Gaze (for the viewer) is placed outside duration . . . (Bryson 1983, 96).

In addition to fragmenting mind and body, seeing often functions in Western culture as a distancing device to differentiate self from other. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, 'each self struggles to attain transcendence by turning the other into an object' through the act of looking (Kheel 1990, 130). Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir argues that women are typically 'assigned the role of the looked upon other' (Kheel 1990, 131).

In *The Language of the Listening Body*, we were interested in a specifically *listening-based* kinetic experience of the environment. We did not ignore or deny the role of sight in processing our surroundings, but rather tried to balance it with our attention to listening. Our focus on listening influenced our experience in countless ways, some of which I will mention at the outset. First, in the context of a visual culture, our focus on listening opened space for a larger range of physical experience, process, and perception. By rooting our exploration in listening, we opened a non-habitual mode of being in which we could enter the environment. In so doing, we achieved an immediate state of disorientation—a productive place from which to improvise physically. Also, by subverting our culturally entrenched reliance on seeing as a way of distancing and differentiating the self from others, we were perhaps more open to entering a relationship with the environment not as detached observers, but as engaged participants. Notably, in calling for place-based art, Lippard writes that a "place ethic" demands a respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than . . . the "tourist gaze" (Lippard 1997, 278). Perhaps more than simply looking at a place, listening to it encourages relationships and participation. We were interested in the kinds of kinetic experience an engaged perceptual relationship with the environment might produce.

Two related schools of thought influence the listening work we practiced during the residency: deep listening and acoustic ecology. My collaborator Michelle Nagai was trained in deep listening, a practice developed by avant-garde composer Pauline Oliveros to inspire both trained and untrained performers to explore the art of listening and responding to environmental conditions in solo and ensemble situations.⁸ Nagai is also an acoustic ecologist. The philosophy underpinning acoustic ecology is simple yet profound: R. Murray Schafer, a musician and composer who pioneered research in the field of acoustic ecology, suggests that 'we try to hear the acoustic environment as

a musical composition and further, that we own responsibility for its composition.⁹

In our informal discussions before the residency, Michelle spoke to me about the ethical implications of listening:

Listening is partly about being receptive . . . I think most people don't listen well . . . The impact of people not [listening] is that we live in a world where it's really easy to destroy things—each other, the environment . . . The lack of receptivity in physical listening carries over to a lack of listening as a social practice. Listening can be a barometer of tolerance . . . Ultimately, I believe that a lack of awareness—a general state of not noticing . . . is at the root of many of the problems we face ecologically and socially.¹⁰

In framing our residency work, we were interested in listening not only through the ears, but also in listening as a metaphor for many types of awareness, including ecological and social awareness. We were interested in listening as a foundation for an environmentally based movement practice—the body in context.

As a dancer, I was interested in the kind of physical experience that listening to the external environment might cultivate. Before the residency, I had spent years refining movement based on internal, somatic awareness in the studios of Trisha Brown's company and other modern companies. What would it be like to balance somatic awareness with awareness of the environment? How would our listening work, and the movement it generated, differ from studio to the streets? How could we share the essence of the elusive listening experience through movement? I was used to choreographic processes that privileged movement forms based on visual preferences. What would it be like to value movement based on listening, not looking? How could we share listening-based movement forms in a visual culture? With these questions as the basis of our work, we began our creative process with seven dancers.

From Studio to Soundwalk

Week 1

Monday, September 11. The first week of the residency, we spent most of our time in the studio. We began each day with a movement warm-up and a listening meditation, followed by a moving/listening improvisation score. On Day 1 of the residency, we explored different ways of listening to the environment with the body. We began by noticing how moving different anatomical structures (jaw, skull, spine, pelvis, feet) influenced our listening. We then visualized breath and sound entering the body through those specific places in the body, opening ourselves to different ways of physically receiving sound.

We also observed how the soundscape shifted as we moved. Noise from a fixed source sounded different depending on the angle of my head, the speed at which I was moving, or whether I was turning, changing direction, or standing perfectly still. My posture and degree of activity influenced my listening experience. It was easier to focus on the many layers of the soundscape if I was still than if I was executing a more complicated movement pathway in my own body, or navigating in close proximity to other bodies in the room. I also discovered that symmetrical postures best supported my listening. With both feet on the ground, I felt more grounded and quiet, and better able to process sound. After some solo exploration, we sent and received sound through different parts of the body with partners. Opening our voices in contact with each other, we sent sound into backs, extremities, bones, and muscles. Feeling the resonant vibrations of our partner's voice in contact with skin made it easier to imagine receiving sound from more distant sources.

After these explorations, we left the studio and went outside. It was Fashion Week and Bryant Park was packed. We spread out among the lunch crowd, located a specific sound in the soundscape, and responded to that sound with a gesture or movement state. A rustling plastic lunch bag became a gathering action with one hand along the thigh. Passing human voices translated to gritty pivoting action with both feet. We felt the extreme leap from the quiet safety of the studio to the assaultive noise and vulnerability of being watched by the public. The dancers chose subtle movements, reflecting the felt risk of 'performing' alone amidst the pedestrian crowd.

Tuesday, September 12. On Day 2 of the residency, we began in the studio with master composer and deep listening founder Pauline Oliveros. Pauline led us as we visualized opening different parts of our body energetically—feet, hands, heart, and crown—and then imagined receiving sound or 'listening' through those pathways in the body. We opened the possibility of active engagement with the environment simply by imagining an enhanced physical and energetic connection with our surroundings.

We also spent time imagining the sounds our bodies made ('auralization'). As a group, we had talked the previous day about our tendency, when repeating movement in response to a sound, to silently recreate the sound in our head. We found that often our silent songs would fall into a rhythmic pattern that had little to do with the original sound. Pauline reminded us that 'the rhythm of attention has no meter'.

We then went to the park along the Hudson River and did an extreme slow motion walk. We moved as a pack in proximity, which was a performance in itself. A group of screaming, laughing school kids ran through our silence. We encountered the disconnect between the sonic and the visual in the urban landscape: even though we were spitting distance from the river in front of us, we couldn't hear it; the West Side Highway behind us masked all water sounds.

Pauline encouraged us to respond to the city actively by making our own sounds when confronted with assaultive noise. Even humming or imagining a sound, she said, would bring us into a more participatory relationship with the sonic environment. Pauline called this 'sounding back' to the environment, which I extended to 'dancing back'. By engaging our voices and bodies in response to the soundscape, we more actively entered the environment. Even doing something subtle, private, and non-confrontational like humming or imagining a sound, I became a participant in the environment, rather than merely an observer of it. By discovering our capacity for contributing to the sound/landscape—by sounding (and moving) back to our environment—we acknowledge our place within an ongoing exchange of sound and movement. As Andrea Olsen writes, 'we don't create movement, we participate in an already-moving universe' (Olsen 2006, 3). By responding, we affirm our relationship to, and within, the environment. Engaging the body, we put ourselves in context.

Working with Pauline, we unclosed our senses and responded with the body. We were no longer passing through, filtering, or numbing out. Although it was exciting, it was also exhausting. The question then became, how could we find a sustainable practice (in terms of our own well-being) of moving through our environment with our senses open?

Wednesday, September 13. On Day 3, we explored specific methods of reacting physically to sound, from unconscious to intentional responses. From the unconscious mode, we progressed to exploring two 'conscious' modes of responding to noise: 'mirroring' and 'paralleling'. In 'mirroring', we attempted to represent various sounds with our dancing. With 'paralleling', we considered the implications of a sound: what information or messages did the sound convey? We then tried to represent the message of the sound through movement.

In exploring these different modes of physically responding to sound, we entered familiar terrain to improvisers—deconstructing the decision to move. We examined our options in the gap between receiving sensory information and reacting to it through movement. In the unconscious mode of responding to sound, I tried to short-circuit the gap, to channel directly an unconscious response. My unconscious physicality felt less studied, less linked to my training, and less habitual than the movement I generated in the conscious modes of response (mirroring and paralleling). But even in an unconscious mode of response, it was almost impossible to avoid my will. I discovered that accessing an unconscious mode of responding to sound took more time than the conscious modes of responding to sound.

After our studio work, we went outside to traverse Saturday's upcoming soundwalk route. We went to a plaza on 40th and Park, planning to continue our studio explorations. But once we arrived, we felt too uncomfortable in the space to move. Michelle and I had scouted the plaza on a weekend, when its wide-open

expanse seemed a neutral, inviting place to move. However, during the week day lunch hour, the space was completely transformed. Business people sat around the plaza eating lunch—a readymade ‘audience’ of similarly non-artistic-looking types. Our group, one of whom had experience working in the corporate neighborhood, had a strong reaction against moving there. The space was not ‘innocent,’ but rather inscribed with relations of power.¹¹ We went to Grand Central instead, where we ‘performed’ our listening for two minutes. I felt more comfortable moving in Grand Central, a space flooded with criss-crossing vectors of diverse human energy, than I did in the plaza.

As Lucy Lippard writes, ‘motion allows a certain mental freedom that translates a place to a person kinesthetically’ (Lippard 1997, 17). In the plaza, we did not feel free to move; this sense of kinetic constriction colored our experience of the place. I realized that we could not assume that anyone would feel ‘free’ to move in any given place or time. The built environment, and its human use, had a direct impact on my physical sense of safety, and the ease with which I could access my dancing body. Without theatrical conventions (lighting, proscenium), the terms of our ‘performance’ were more relational and contextual, having to do more with the life in and of the space. Freedom to move could not be assumed.

Thursday, September 14 and Friday, September 15. On Day 4, we worked exclusively in the studio, continuing to explore unconscious and intentional methods of reacting physically to sound. We began with a solo warm-up with earplugs, which facilitated our descent into an unconscious mode of responding to noise. I found it helpful to access the unconscious mode by moving without stopping. From the unconscious mode, we progressed to exploring increasingly intentional responses to sound, first in the mirroring mode, and finally in the paralleling mode. With this progression—from the unconscious mode, through mirroring and finally paralleling modes of responding to sound, our response times to sound stimuli grew slower. As we increased the intentionality of our physical responses, the gap between sensory perception and physical reaction grew. In addition, movement responses throughout the group became shorter in time and less complex within the body. In every mode of responding to sound, it was challenging to listen in the present moment while completing our physical responses to remembered sound.

On Day 5, special guest Barbara Dille led us through improvisational scores and ensemble composition based on listening. She offered a palette of simple movement choices in a defined spatial structure: walking, standing, stillness, turning, arm swinging, crawling, and sitting. Within this ‘elegant pedestrian’ frame, decisions about how to place the body in space in relationship to other bodies and the room became the movement language, more so than choices about movement vocabulary itself. For example, we focused on deciding to walk far away from other people in the room rather than, say, choosing to raise

the right leg to the side quickly and fluidly. Throughout these studio explorations, I felt able to travel fluidly back and forth between listening and moving.

Saturday, September 16: Grand Central Soundwalk. Our first week of work culminated in our first public soundwalk, which traversed mid-town Manhattan from Bryant Park through Grand Central Terminal. The audience for the soundwalk consisted of about 40 people who heard about the event either through friends involved in the residency or through iLAND publicity efforts. Many people weren't sure what to expect, but came through curiosity or personal connections.

We structured the soundwalk primarily from an intellectual place, having spent most of the week in the studio, without a kinetic relationship to the terrain. We began in the basic soundwalk form: simply walking and listening together. We moved as a single group, but at the outset we also designated small groups of five or six audience members in which to travel. Each dancer was responsible for a small group.

Immediately on the soundwalk, I saw what I began to call 'the distinctive look of the listening body'. The listening body is legibly more aware, more open, and more receptive than the non-listening body. The listening body moves through the city differently: less myopic in its seeing, less linear in its trajectory through space, softer in tonus. A listening body is engaged in finding its constantly changing relationship to the environment. The listening body constantly locates itself in space and time. Moving in silence as a group with no apparent 'task' felt powerfully subversive and was visually arresting. At one point in the residency, Jennifer mentioned the 'deafening sound' of the group listening. Passers-by scrutinized us. We weren't legibly 'doing' anything, and yet we shared a common, ineffable physicality. People asked, 'What are you doing?' We were listening. The look of the listening body demonstrated listening as an alternative way of entering the world. Our listening *was* performance. Before the residency, Michelle and I discussed the transformative qualities of performance, which emerged in the distinctive character of our group, simply listening and walking through the city.

Still, despite the richness of the simple soundwalk form, I felt several points of tension. First, I found it impossible to travel fluidly between listening and moving as I did in the studio. In the dense soundscape of midtown, simply walking while listening was all I could handle. Despite encouragements to dancers and participants from the general public, no one did anything beyond walking. I felt unable to access a more expanded physical menu. I did not change my pace or play with speed. I felt barred from the less inhibited body I knew in studio work. By the end of the soundwalk, a tremendous amount of energy had accumulated in my skull, and I had no release valve. The effect was exhausting. I needed a better balance between movement and listening; I needed more movement as a rest for the senses. There is a long tradition of knowing a place

through walking, but I was interested in expanding the physical terms of that tradition.¹²

We had designated the plaza on 40th Street and Park Avenue as a site along the soundwalk for the dancers to break off and move more freely. We had hoped the soundwalk audience would circulate through the space during this time, but the audience sat down in a line, facing the dancers. Suddenly, the group experience of the soundwalk fractured and we entered another paradigm: performance. The shift to a more presentational mode, and the disconnection between the dancers and the soundwalk audience, felt awkward. We no longer moved through the city as a unified community; we became audience and performers. I tried to move in response to what I was hearing, but the awkwardness I experienced made it hard to listen and respond with integrity. At one point, the security guard from the large office building fronting the plaza came out and loudly asked what we were doing; he then walked through our small group of 'performing' dancers, talking on his walkie-talkie. He was the only member of the non-soundwalk 'public' to directly interact with our 'performance' in the plaza. Unknowingly, he circulated among us in the way we had hoped our internal soundwalk 'audience' would.

The last stage of the soundwalk was the resonant hall of Grand Central. Each dancer led his or her small group through the space, and showed the group a card with a listening task, such as: 'Listen as far as you can see'; 'Listen to tiny sounds'; or 'Receive and respond to sound with different parts of your body'. Each group had a different experience depending on whether the group stayed together, where it went in space, and what task the lead dancer offered. Finally, the group gathered into a tight mass near the big clock. Michelle passed out a series of cards designed to tighten the listening awareness of the group: 'Listen to the whole soundscape'; 'Listen to the resonance of this hall'; 'Listen to the sounds of the group'; 'Listen to the sound of this paper passing from hand to hand'; and finally, 'Listen to the sounds of your own body'.

Reflections on Grand Central Soundwalk. Reflecting on the residency's first soundwalk, I realize that our intentions lacked clarity on several fronts. The awkwardness I felt in the planned 'performance' moment in the plaza was the apex of these tensions. Were we raising awareness or making art? Do we abandon aesthetics when we concentrate on the senses? Were we leading a group or performing? What were our intentions about the role of the audience? Were they supposed to be active participants, exploring their own awareness, or passive participants, appreciating a performance?

In response to these tensions, I felt it was necessary to change our approach in our second week. We decided to work exclusively on the site of the next soundwalk, developing practices in relationship to that specific soundscape. To do this, we had to carry the spirit of our studio work outside,

even if that meant losing a certain safety, intimacy, and focus. I hoped that by using the terrain of the soundwalk as our studio, we would better ground the public soundwalk in our group creative process and soften the line between process and performance. I also hoped that by working on site, it would be easier in the soundwalk to move fluidly between listening and moving.

Finally, at the end of the first week, I was concerned about how exhausting it was to open the aperture of the senses wider than usual. What was the lesson in being exhausted from listening? What was sustainable openness? Barbara Dilley encouraged us to 'hold the practice loosely', and rest our senses when needed. As we entered our second week of listening and moving, I wanted to avoid overriding my body's signals of fatigue. I wanted to listen inward as much as outward.

Week 2

Monday, September 18 and Tuesday, September 19. On the opening day of our second week, we set out for Long Island City to traverse the soundwalk route and familiarize ourselves with the terrain. It was the beginning of our weeklong engagement with Long Island City as our studio.

On Tuesday, we spent our entire three-hour session moving and listening along the soundwalk route in a fluid, open ensemble score, silently exploring the soundscape through listening and moving. This was a peak experience for me. Traveling fluidly between moving and listening within the safety and support of the ensemble, unhampered by audience expectations, I found a deep sense of joy and peace. Even when I became separated spatially from the rest of the group, if I remained in visual contact with at least one other 'listening body' in the landscape, I felt energetic support to move my body in response to what I heard. This tangible, kinetic sense of a listening community manifested through my increased eagerness to move, a bigger kinesphere, and 'louder' physical impulses. For the first time in the residency, I connected to my dancing body outside the studio. I also rediscovered the power of movement as a rest for my senses. Movement released the energy that accumulated in my head from heightened listening. I discovered a more sustainable mode of moving through the urban environment with my senses open, but it seemed to require the support of a community. I doubt I would have been able to access my dancing body fully in the streets of Queens by myself.

On Tuesday, our small community was constantly engaged in transient composition, assembling forms in public spaces and drifting on. People passed through us and momentarily became part of us. A cop passed by as I danced in a trio with Yves Musard and Alejandra Martorell on 50th Avenue. I picked up his jaunty stride and traveled with him down the street. He turned the corner and our duet was over; I reconnected with the dancers.

On Tuesday, for the first time, I also began to develop a personal listening-based movement vocabulary. I returned to certain gestures in association with certain sounds. Open flexed palms listened to the wind. Hands at the nape of neck 'danced back' to a loud sound from behind. Crouching, palms hovering above the ground, I reinforced small natural sounds (improbable crickets in an industrial wasteland; the unnoticed sound of a flower growing through a fence).

Having even a small listening-based movement vocabulary allowed me to play with both present and remembered sound: What was it like to dance a form originally made in response to a sound in the past, in reaction to a sound in the present? Usually, by the time my physical responses began, the sound impulse had ended, leaving me dancing to memory. I experimented with dancing remembered forms while remaining open to the present moment.

Once our small group reached the ending point of the soundwalk route looking over the East River to the Manhattan skyline, the visual horizon opened up wider than ever. I felt dwarfed by the river. My form felt smaller than it had just a block away on the street. My dancing impulses quieted down, and I sat for a while in stillness, receiving the subtle presence of the water.

Taking the listening body outside showed me that the language of the listening body has as much to do with placement of the body in space as with physical vocabulary. The listening body listens not only with the ears, but listens for a relationship to the environment, and places itself accordingly in space. To make these decisions requires an active compositional mind—an openness to constantly changing relationships with space and time. Tracking these layers of external awareness, while staying rooted in the internal landscape, draws on dancerly skills. But it also places these skills in a larger context than that of the studio. Outside, somatic reality is but one of many layers of information. Outside, the human form is more humble than in the studio; its scale diminishes in response to a larger context. As the poet Gary Snyder has written, 'Place and the scale of space must be measured against the body and its capabilities' (Snyder 2004, 99).

The practice outside becomes how to respond to both internal and external awareness with integrity. This practice is a powerful metaphor for how to live in a sustainable way: How do we balance our own impulses with the needs of the broader community, ecosystem and planet? How do we act in relationship at all times? How do we put the dancing body in larger context? It's easier to ignore these questions in the cocoon of a studio.

The creativity I experienced in our first group listening/moving session through the soundwalk route also made me realize that my habitual physical relationship to the urban environment is extremely constrained. At one point during the residency, Jennifer noted how many spaces are built to facilitate erect, frontal movement through space, and how it was grounding to see a different physical relationship to place when different dancers chose to lie down on the ground. Similarly, Yves, one of the dancers, commented that whereas vision is frontal, sound comes from all directions. Placing my attention on listening instead

of seeing changed my physical relationship to space. Suddenly, I had more options, and different impulses, in placing my body in my environment. I chose to lie down on a quiet sidewalk, crouch on a bridge that was vibrating with traffic, grab hold of a fence, and lean diagonally into the wind. Listening while moving, I was less fettered to verticality.

We developed a deeper sensitivity to sound in the studio and then tested and applied it outside, where our internal awareness was no longer hermetically sealed. As Andrea Olsen has said, 'The more developed and thorough our capacity for receiving and responding to sensory information, the more choices we have about movement' (Olsen 1998, 16).¹³

Wednesday–Friday, September 20–22. The rest of the week, we continued to work within the soundwalk site, alternating between improvisational scores and planning for Saturday's public event. I led an exploration of Barbara Dilley's 'five eye practices' as they apply to listening. Barbara developed the eye practices to explore improvising while using one's eyes in various ways (Stark Smith 2005, 40). The five eye practices are: (1) closed eyes, which encourages internal seeing; (2) peripheral seeing, in which the eyes become 'demi-opened' and 'not focused in front but are seeing the edges of the world'; (3) infant eyes, which is 'a way of letting the eyeballs move around like a baby's eyes, not trying to analyze... noticing without naming'; (4) seeing in between, which involves 'looking at the space between people or things'; and finally (5) direct looking, in which you intentionally look at discrete things, such as 'the light on somebody's face, or the creases of their arm, or the way they hold their hand' (Stark Smith 2005, 40). We translated these ways of seeing into ways of listening, and explored different combinations of seeing and listening states. In this way, we continued to negotiate the balance between visual and auditory perception.

We also explored Michelle's 'map of everything' score, which offers seven 'creative modalities' and five 'awareness states' to explore.¹⁴ The seven creative modalities include: play; improvised performance; training/study; reference; composition; ritual; and healing. The five 'awareness states' include: active observer, intentional observer, casual observer, unconscious (awake/asleep) observer, and dreaming observer. Michelle asked each dancer to choose one of the five awareness states to work with. She then had us form small groups of two or three people. Each group chose one of the seven modalities to work with together. So, one group of three might have an active observer, an intentional observer, and an unconscious observer, each person working with the improvisation modality. Each group did its exploration for about ten minutes in one location, which was considered 'on site' and 'in the moment'. The groups then relocated to a different area and repeated the score, recognizing the original location as such, and acknowledging the new location as 'off site' and 'after the fact'. The map of everything allowed us to observe how we carry the physical memory of a time and place within the body, and how we can resurrect it elsewhere.

Saturday, September 23: Long Island City Soundwalk. We made many changes in our second soundwalk based on what we had learned through the residency. Whereas we developed the first soundwalk primarily from an intellectual perspective, having little experiential connection to the terrain, the structure of the second soundwalk directly flowed from our site-specific work all week. Second, we carefully thought about the dancer–audience relationship at each stage of the event. Third, we were more clear about when we traveled as one group, and when the dancers broke off to explore movement more fully. We also offered structured moments of explicit rest and gave the audience permission to rest whenever necessary. We let go of the small group idea, relieving the dancers of any responsibility to lead people through space. We broke up the experience more, stopping at points along the way to guide the public’s visual, sonic, and physical attention. We were intentional about our pacing through space, and chose select moments to play with speed. The clarity of our intentions contributed to a more successful listening experience, as I discuss below.

We began with a pure soundwalk structure, allowing everyone time to bring their attention to listening. We then came to a bridge that rose above a traffic-laden tunnel, offering a vast horizon chock-full of visual information. Before walking onto the bridge, we told the audience, ‘Notice what you see versus what you hear’. We walked across the bridge in single file along the right side, creating a beautiful silent parade of listening bodies against the sky (See Figure 2). Once on the bridge, we passed a card down the line of people: ‘Listen as far as you can see’. We wanted to bring awareness to visual and acoustic horizons. This instruction came from our own observations while working on the bridge, where we could see far into the distance, but could not hear all that we saw.

After we descended from the bridge, we traveled through several intersections to a small median strip with benches. For this stretch of the soundwalk, we instructed the public to follow the dancers; the dancers already had agreed to play with pacing. We also gave the public the following instructions:

- Notice the many directions and vectors of energy and sound.
- Notice the plant life.
- Notice the transitions in the visual and sound environments.
- Play with pacing and speed.

The dancers set off, and I was among them. After traveling a bit, I looked back. The entire group was a mosaic of moving, listening bodies, everyone traveling at their own pace, moving in a different way. We were still an obvious community, even though we had become quite dispersed. We moved through the streets with more awareness, kinetic energy, and creativity than ‘normal’ pedestrians. One audience member commented afterwards that she felt a strong sense of group identity among the soundwalk participants. As Jennifer said, ‘we set up our own sustainable ecology moving through a larger ecology’.



FIGURE 2
Long Island City Soundwalk, September 2006. Photo by Ian W. Douglas.

Down the last stretch of street to the river, we asked people to travel in duets with a small score, exploring listening and moving with another person. Scores included:

- Notice how listening affects your moving.
- Notice how moving affects your listening.
- Look at the space between things.
- Play with closeness and distance between you and your partner while listening together.
- Notice how the group moves through space.
- See the space between things.
- Notice how the sound environment changes as you move down the street.
- Notice the space between you and your partner change as you travel down the street.

Once the group arrived at the riverfront park, everyone spread out for a final exploration of moving and listening. After a while, the group gathered at the end of one of the piers. Michelle and I rang a bell several times to signal the end of the experience.

Reflections on Long Island City Soundwalk. Our work developing a relationship to the soundwalk terrain really paid off. Our increased comfort with the sound/landscape (from working on site all week) translated to greater audience comfort and freedom with physical exploration. In the first soundwalk, the public hardly moved beyond walking, and I found it difficult to access my dancing body, even in a designated 'performance' zone. In the second



FIGURE 3

Long Island City Soundwalk, September 2006. Photo by Ian W. Douglas.

soundwalk, the entire group had more kinetic and creative energy, and I found it easier to travel back and forth between listening and dancing.

The increased visual and sonic space in Long Island City, compared to midtown Manhattan, further contributed to a supportive atmosphere for physical and sensory exploration. Long Island City, compared to midtown, was a more spacious soundscape. During the second soundwalk, I felt open, but not assaulted. One audience member mentioned afterwards that she felt softness and gentleness in her body in the soundwalk. Similarly, Margit Galanter, one of the dancers, remarked that listening created spaciousness within her body. Opening the senses through listening had a direct somatic correlate.

Also, in sharp contrast to the first soundwalk, the second soundwalk was not tiring, but energizing for me. Because I was more able to access my moving, dancing body, I could rest my senses through movement. After two weeks of work, I also learned to rest my senses when necessary, and hold the practices more loosely.

In all of these ways, our second soundwalk was more successful than the first. By leaving the isolation of the studio, we treated the environment as a creative laboratory. We spent all week participating in the environment, listening for relationships, placing ourselves in context. Because of these choices, we were able to model a deep level of engagement in the land/soundscape. There was no need to 'present' an active, creative relationship with the environment, because we already had one. We were used to 'sounding back' and 'dancing back' to the soundscape. After the soundwalk was over, I wondered what would happen if we spent months developing a creative relationship to a particular soundscape, not just a single week.

Conclusion

I entered the iLAND residency wanting to develop a 'listening-based movement language'. I originally imagined this as a specific physical vocabulary. As the residency progressed, I held that desire more loosely, and began to think of a listening-based language as a metaphor: How could we communicate a relationship to the environment through our bodies? In this broader sense, we did glimpse a listening-based movement language during the residency. In the distinctive profile of many listening bodies, moving as a community through space, we communicated our receptivity to each other and the outside world. We created a unique spatial syntax along the soundwalk route—the way we placed our bodies along the soundwalk route had significance. Our speed through one stretch reflected our collective discomfort with that particular street. Our decision to walk in single file on the bridge shared essential information about the function of the bridge (bicycle and walking path) and the value of experiencing it with ample space around the body. In my further work with these ideas, I will continue researching a listening-based physical vocabulary. But this

work will be deeply informed by what I've learned about the language of placing the body in space and place, and the significance of context in framing process and performance.

We perform sustainability and ecology when we leave the studio to dance.

Listening to our bodies as we listen to the outside world is a valuable performance. This practice is profound even when it happens in private and alone. But when we create structures that support the listening body in public, and in community, we redefine the terms of creative process. Dancing as we listen to the world beyond the studio, we expand the possibilities for when, where, how, and why we make and perform art.

NOTES

1. Hope Mohr is a choreographer, teacher and dancer based in San Francisco. For more information about *The Language of the Listening Body* workshops contact: hopemohr@gmail.com or visit www.hopemohr.org.
2. For more information on iLAND, visit www.ilandart.org.
3. See Wrightson (2000, 10) and R. M. Schafer (1977).
4. There are, of course, dance studios embedded in the natural environment, such as Anna Halprin's dance deck in Marin County, California, which is open to the sky and surrounded by trees. I would argue that the kind of movement and creative process generated in Halprin's studio is fundamentally influenced by its close relationship to the natural world (and fundamentally different from the kind of creative process that happens in other, less environmentally-related studios).
5. See Kheel (1990, quoting Susan Griffin at 61 and 65).
6. See also J. E. Berendt (1988), exploring the dominance of eye culture at the expense of listening.
7. See also Jay (1993, 439).
8. See <http://www.deeplistening.org/pauline/>.
9. R. Murray Schafer's *The tuning of the world* (1977), remains the best known and most comprehensive text on acoustic ecology. See also <http://www.acousticology.org>.
10. For more background on the process of the iLAND residency, *The Language of the Listening Body*, including participant impressions, see the discussion of the project under 'Critical correspondence' at www.movementresearch.org.
11. Lippard at 243, quoting Edward Soja.
12. See Lippard at 34 ('a place can be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape'); Lippard at 17 ('Walking is the only way to measure the rhythm of the body against the rhythm of the land', quoting Rebecca Solnit); see also Solnit, *Wanderlust*.
13. See also Nancy Stark Smith and Andrea Olsen (2006, 29), discussing further how internal and external awareness can support each other.

14. For more information on the map of everything score, contact Michelle Nagai at www.treetheater.org.

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