

Performing Bioregionalism for the Non-Human Self

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MA in Theatre Practice and Production

College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies

University of Galway

August 2024

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“Living things in contact with the air must acquire a cuticle, and it is not urged against cuticles that they are not hearts.”

- George Santayana, 1922

Life on an island often parallels the essence of meditation through its inherent qualities of isolation, simplicity, and a close connection to nature. As a windswept landmass bearing the brunt of the Atlantic Ocean, Ireland, and particularly its west coast city of Galway, is at the mercy of the elements: the water, the wind, the Sun, and the rain. These natural forces erode the land and impact the environment and lives of both humans and non-humans alike. As technology drives competition for resources, primarily jobs or means of livelihood, the need to be productive in the landscape of late-stage capitalism has restricted the applications of consciousness to the processing of information as it can be translated to personal or societal gain. As such, most people are forced to stay attentive to intangible statistics and screens, separated from nature and the living beings that are arguably more integral to a realized human experience. As an antidote, mediation can help reconnect individuals to their true sense of Self by fostering introspection and self-awareness. Through regular practice, it quiets the external noise and mental chatter, allowing deeper access to one's inner thoughts and emotions. This mindful presence enables individuals to understand their true desires, values, and purpose, detached from societal influences. By consistently focusing the individual's attention inward, meditation fosters a sense of clarity and alignment with the authentic Self. As the observer, meditation encourages deep listening, not only to oneself, but also to the surroundings that inevitably shape the moment, the experience, and the perception of Self. By anchoring the mind in the weather, non-human actors, and site-specific history, one's sense of Self expands to include the place in which they find themselves and the space they symbiotically occupy and affect.

This thesis will critically examine a performative investigation of mindful bioregionalism through a practice-as-research enquiry. The aims of the enquiry evolved drastically throughout the course of the concurrent literary and performance research period, carving a path of artistic intentionality and authenticity crucial to the ongoing development of my work as a performance artist.

Through trial and observation, there occurred a psychosocial shift in the insight and tools garnered from “performing bioregionalism” as I came to call it, and many of these tools have important applications outside of the artistic realm, resonating with endeavors in mindful community-building, environmental advocacy and activism, and mental health welfare.

Before detailing more of the performance methodologies of this project, as well as considering some of its limitations and ethical concerns as they relate to ongoing performance building, it is important to situate this study within current and historical lineages, both theoretical and artistic. The first chapter will establish the Dadaist movement as the foundation of performance art as it still practiced today by performance pioneers from Marina Abramović to Ireland’s own Amanda Coogan. This chapter will also set the stage for later contemplation of the “performance” of the Self, creating a “backstage” state of mind, and the art of doing nothing. Following this, the second chapter concerns performance art in outdoor public spaces. Considering the research fields of placemaking as well as site-specific and site-responsive theatre, this section of the report will relate the opportunities and challenges of establishing a public performance space without the physical boundaries of theatre walls. The third chapter will build on the performance space in the wild, looking to experts Minty Donald (2019) and Michelle Browne (2016). Furthermore, this chapter will begin to discuss the presence and influence of non-human actors on life in and outside a performance. Before elaborating more on the concept of bioregionalism as detailed by Jenny Odell (2021), the fourth chapter will delve into the Self, as performative façade and a neoliberal subject. By detaching the concept of Self from projection, perception, and production, it is possible to give attention to parts of the Self – past, present, and future – that are natural and non-human. Chapter five will then meditate on the relationship between bioregionalism and the Self as a way to feel more connected to and present in any time or place.

With the theoretical and practical basis of my investigation established, this report will turn to the personal as I detail my practice-as-research experience. Within this sixth chapter, I will introduce my main collaborators, including a colleague from my master's program, a cluster of swans, the elusive Irish Sun, and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). I will also consider those members of the

“audience” that participated in my performance, those who did not, and the efficacy of a QR code in the wild. As I present my longitudinal study, its findings, and evolution, I will draw in concepts previously mentioned from some voices important to the inception and execution of this project including Erving Goffman (1959), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and Thich Nhat Hanh (2015). As I consider ethical and environmental concerns for future iterations of a similar performance series, I will situate my work in current fields of ongoing performance practices that provide some insight into the further development of some of this investigation’s key concepts.

Chapter 1. Dada & the Art of Everything

The Dadaist movement, emerging during the early 20th century, is a pivotal foundation for modern performance art. Originating in Zurich in 1916 amidst the chaos of World War I, Dada was conceived of as a protest against the atrocities of the war and the cultural and intellectual conformity of the time. Key figures like Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, and Marcel Duchamp spearheaded this avant-garde movement, embracing absurdity, spontaneity, and anti-art sentiments to challenge established artistic conventions and societal norms. Dada performances, or "happenings," were characterized by their unpredictable, chaotic nature. These events often included a blend of poetry, visual art, theater, and music, creating an immersive and often bewildering experience for audiences aiming to disrupt traditional perceptions of art and engage viewers in a direct, confrontational manner (Trachtman, NP). The movement's radical rejection of traditional aesthetics and insistence on direct action continue to inspire artists to push boundaries and redefine the nature of art throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Moreover, the genre’s emphasis on ephemerality, audience participation, and the breakdown of barriers between art and life has deeply influenced modern practices (The Art Story, NP). Performance artists today continue to draw on Dadaist principles, using their bodies and real-time rituals to create art that is experiential and transformative.

Considered “the grandmother of performing art”, Yugoslavian Marina Abramović embodies the Dadaist spirit through her exploration of endurance, pain, and human interaction (Parry, NP). Using

her body as the object and subject of her bold performance pieces, her work proposes to expose uncomfortable truths about human nature, including its fragility. Abramović's performances often demand active engagement from her audience, blurring the lines between artist and viewer, much like the Dadaists intended. In 1974, Abramović performed *Rhythm 0* as a response to the popular criticism that performance artists were using their bodies in a way that was “masochistic and sensationalist” (Graf, NP). She arranged 72 objects and substances on a table, ranging from honey and paint to scissors and a gun with a single bullet. Audience members were instructed to use the objects to interact with Abramović however they wanted while she stood silently, assuming all risk. What followed was a six-hour “endurance art” piece during which Abramović was fed, kissed, cut, and stripped naked (The Fundamentals of Endurance, NP). Certainly an extreme example of Dada’s modern influence, Abramović has paved the way for performance artists to experiment with experience all around the world.

In Ireland since the late 20th century, Michelle Browne and Amanda Coogan are two groundbreaking performance artists who have significantly influenced the “contemporary” art scene with their provocative and thought-provoking works. Browne is known for her interdisciplinary approach, blending performance, installation, and social engagement. Her work often addresses themes of community, identity, and the socio-political landscape (Michelle Browne | Artist & Curator. *Michellebrowne.net*). Like Abramović, Browne’s performances are noted for their participatory nature, inviting audience members to become active collaborators. One of her notable projects, *Open Spaces*, explored the oppression architecture can place on public life and community-building. Through a series of participatory events with teenagers in Dublin, Browne fostered dialogue and reflection on the use of public space to improve a community’s health (Browne, 2016). Browne's ability to integrate art with social practice has made her a key figure in Ireland's performance art scene, exploring the boundaries of how art can engage with and impact society.

Amanda Coogan, another influential figure in Irish performance art, is celebrated for her endurance-based works that explore the body, language, and the experience of living with disabilities, namely hearing impairment. Her performances are characterized by their intensity, physicality, and

emotional depth (Coogan, “About”). Coogan, who studied under Marina Abramović, often uses her body as a site of meditative inquiry and examination on how the duration of her performance affects it. As part of the 2024 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art honoring Abramović’s life, it was Abramović’s wish to have some of her pieces re-performed by the next generation of performance artists. Coogan was invited to re-perform Abramović’s 2002 piece *The House with the Ocean View*. Coogan was installed in a three-room diorama, escapable only down a ladder of knives, where she mindfully fasted, showered, and slept in front of the public for 12 consecutive days (Coogan, “Live Performances”). In another example of her intensive observation of the present, her 2011 piece, *The Passing*, Coogan remained silent for 24 hours as she moved up and down a multi-story flight of stairs inside the public Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Moving determinedly among museum goers, she examined themes of presence and absence, interference and cooperation, all while questioning the traditional performance parameters of abbreviated time and space (Hayes, NP). Coogan’s commitment to exploring the limits of the body and embodying complex human experiences has garnered her international acclaim and inspired a new generation of Dadaist performance artists around the world.

The essence of the Dadaist genre is intentionally enigmatic. Challenging the ideas of what constitutes an art piece or performance, the existential undertones of this genre can often feel parallel to the human experience lauded with its tropes and guises. Get rid of the stage, the costumes, and any sense of time or place, and what is left? By stripping away the props and pulleys, is it possible to liberate the definition of art and performance to include even the simplest acts, like walking up and down a set of stairs? This begs the question: can anything be a performance? Can *nothing* be a performance? As this report aims to support -- absolutely.

Chapter 2. Making Space into Place

Performance art in outdoor public spaces often intends to democratize art in the public realm, making it accessible and engaging for a diverse and inclusive audience. This form of performance transforms everyday environments into dynamic stages, fostering a unique interaction between the

artist, the artwork, the space, and the audience. Central to this practice are concepts such as placemaking, site-specific, and site-responsive theatre, which together create rich, immersive experiences, often resulting in permanent change in the use or narrative of the location.

Placemaking is a collaborative process that seeks to strengthen the connection between people and the places they share (Coundon, NP). It involves designing and managing public spaces to create vibrant, community-centered environments. Performance art in outdoor spaces often employs placemaking principles, transforming underused or overlooked areas into lively cultural hubs, much like Michelle Browne's work with teenagers in Dublin. By opening these spaces, artists contribute to a sense of community identity and belonging. Performances can highlight the unique characteristics of a place, drawing attention to its patriarchal history, culture, and social dynamics. As permanent placemaking with city planners requires multidisciplinary and longitudinal coordination for social change, it is not quite within the bounds of this project. Instead, this investigation looks to pay homage to existing sites while calling attention to their natural and historical significance which can be overlooked amidst the activity of modern life. Infused with the communal and healing ideals of placemaking, this investigation looks to methods of site-specific and site-responsive theatre making.

Site-specific theatre is created specifically for a particular location. The chosen site is integral to the performance, influencing its themes, narrative, and staging. Unlike traditional theatre, where the setting is secondary to the story, site-specific theatre makes the location a central element of the experience. For example, a performance in a historic building might explore its past, while one in a park could interact with natural elements like trees and water. This approach creates a deep connection between the performance and its setting, offering audiences a new perspective on familiar places (Singleton, NP). Site-responsive theatre, on the other hand, goes a step further by adapting to the specific conditions and context of the performance site. These performances are tailored to respond to the physical, social, and cultural environment in which they are staged (Pearson, 7-12). Artists consider various factors such as the layout of the space, the history and stories associated with it, and the daily activities of people who use it. This live responsiveness allows for a more nuanced and immersive experience, as the performance evolves in dialogue with its surroundings.

An example of effective placemaking through site-specific and site-responsive performance is the work of the UK-based company WildWorks. Their production *The Enchanted Palace*, staged in Kensington Palace, utilized the palace's history and architecture to create a deeply engaging narrative (Marschner, 8). By integrating the specificities of the site into the performance, they created a unique, immersive experience that resonated deeply with audiences. Though no permanent changes to the architecture or use of the palace were envisioned, the performance made the space approachable and accessible in a way that momentarily dissolved its heavy history and created a space of wonder and delight for people from all walks of life to enjoy together.

Performance art in outdoor public spaces, through placemaking, site-specific, and site-responsive theatre, transforms ordinary environments into extraordinary stages, imbuing new meaning and importance into overlooked places. These kinds of public performances foster a deeper connection between people and places, enrich community life, and offer fresh perspectives on familiar surroundings. By engaging directly with the physical, historical, and social context of their locations, these performances create meaningful, impactful experiences that resonate long after the artist is no longer present, as demonstrated through the analysis of performance art in this section.

Chapter 3. Performing in the Wild

Performing in public outdoor spaces is a unique and dynamic form of artistic expression that transforms everyday environments into stages for creative exploration. This approach to performance art challenges traditional boundaries of where, when, and how art can be experienced, surprising passersby with the invitation to engage with the work in real-time. These showcases blur the line between art and life, integrating performances into the fabric of daily routines and public life. One of the key aspects of performing in public outdoor spaces is the equal consideration of the environment and the audience.

Of course, performing outdoors also comes with its challenges. The unpredictability of the environment, such as weather conditions, noise, and unanticipated interruptions, requires performers

to be highly flexible and resilient. With the traditional stage gone, the wild performer must define the parameters of their performance area using intentionality or signposting. Finally, without a closed space to prepare or avoid attention before or after the performance. To that end, a “backstage” mentality can be construed to help the performer differentiate their performative and cotillion life. This idea will be further unpacked in the next chapter as I delve into the behavioral side of everyday performances. Beyond the environmental considerations of performing in the wild, the public nature of outdoor performances can lead to varied reactions from audiences, ranging from enthusiastic engagement to indifference or even hostility. Navigating these responses is a crucial part of the performer’s skill set, as they must maintain the integrity of their artistic vision while being responsive to the audience. While I am tempted here to divulge my personal experience weathering stormy skies and attitudes throughout my performance-as-practice series, I will first discuss some relevant work going on in the field of wild performing and how professionals put the spotlight on the environment as an artistic collaborator while providing an accessible point of connection for other human actors.

Professor and artist-researcher at the University of Glasgow, Minty Donald, is a renowned performance artist and has extensively explored the potential of public outdoor spaces in her work. Donald is acclaimed for her ecological performance work that integrates environmental activism. Her performances, such as *THEN/NOW* (2014), utilize elements of the natural environment, such as rivers and other waterways, as both stage and subject, highlighting the interconnectedness of humans and nature (Donald, et al. NP). As Donald puts it, she likes to focus both her practice-as-research and performances on the “other-than-human in theatre” (Donald, “About”). Donald’s approach often includes participatory components, inviting audiences to interact with their surroundings and reflect on their relationship with the environment. These immersive experiences foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of ecological issues, advocating for sustainability and mindful living.

Another significant artist in the field of outdoor performance art is New York-based climate artist Sarah Cameron Sunde. In 2022, Sunde completed a nine-year performance *36.5/ A Durational Performance with the Sea*. As a response to the devastation of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Sunde created a participatory performance piece to foster awareness and discussion about the rapidly

changing climate and the immediate effect it has on the geophysical earth. For a full tidal cycle, or 12 to 13 hours, Sunde stood in a tidal body of water, allowing the water to be the main actor as it slowly engulfed the human artist's body and then eventually receded. The location changed throughout the course to highlight areas at risk of climate destruction around the world including The San Francisco Bay, California in 2014, the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh in 2017, and the Te Manukanukatanga ō Hoturoa in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa – New Zealand in 2022 (Schuerman, NP). Globally, passersby watched Sunde for hours, beat pieces of driftwood like percussion instruments to mark the passing of time, and even joined her in the water, allowing the climate crisis to be imagined and felt within their own bodies. More than that, however, it provided a democratized public space to acknowledge, witness, and discuss the effects of the climate crisis. For her part, Sunde aims to decentralize the anthropomorphic element of climate art and turn the respectful focus to the non-human actors that are also facing unknown adversity and change.

These non-human actors – water, plants, animals, and atmosphere – participate in every performance, indoors and out, and they influence and define the human experience of art as much as any human artist. Setting a participatory performance piece in an open outdoor setting helps put the spotlight on the natural creations present in every moment: from the rhythm of waves to the patterns of Sun and shade to the song of seagulls. When an outdoor performance has the opportunity to be repeated, the variable elements make each iteration unique, drawing attention to the changing weather and burgeoning need for adaptation. By allowing nature to take center stage, outdoor performances become more immersive and resonant, emphasizing the interplay between human creativity and the natural world, and the symbiotic need for its restoration and care. In the coming chapters, I will further discuss the impetus for even non-actor humans to connect with the non-human parts of themselves as it pertains to the practice of Odell's bioregionalism, a key reference point for this performance project. Before it is possible to speak more on that, I must first turn to the Self itself, particularly concerning its unnatural modern performance of productivity.

Chapter 4. The Performance of Life

In the age of the Anthropocene, it is easy to get caught up in the self-proclaimed importance of the human race. Humans have contributed enormously to the activity and functionality of the Earth, so it is natural that, as a species, it continues to focus its energy on creating more to do and to use. Human activity related to the performance of the productive Self often places importance on an individual's efficiency, achievement, and constant output. In modern western societies, individuals are frequently measured by their productivity, leading to a culture that values work above rest or pleasure. The pressure to maintain high levels of productivity can impact mental and physical health, contributing to stress and burnout. To learn more about the psychosocial and increasingly neoliberal need to perform a Self at all, and what a Self could look like without the need to be productive, I turned to the works of Erving Goffman and Elís Ward, respectively.

Goffman's seminal behavioral psychology text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, has been touted in university classes since 1959. On the basis of its outdated misogyny and sexism alone, not to mention its overt racism and classism, this book should no longer be a primary source when studying the modern representation of the Self, theatrical or otherwise. That said, some concepts and more relevant citations within the text translate interestingly into the current fields of study concerning the psychological and behavioral science of the self, including one's ability to guide and control impressions, impact "the psychobiology of their own personality", and hack the psychology of backstage for implementation in public life (Goffman, 230).

Most social interactions feel like small performances. The world is not a stage, but individuals must often "put on a mask" in order to successfully communicate or negotiate (Goffman, 3). Individuals adopt an appearance and manner tailored to the situation. "Appearance," Goffman offers, "refers to those stimuli which [...] which tell us of the performer's social statuses [...] [or] the individual's temporary ritual state" while "manner refer[s] to those stimuli which [...] warn us of the role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (Goffman, 8-10). In other words, the way people look and how they act is an expression of "the individual's own belief in the impression of

reality that [s]he attempts to engender” in others so they may operate within the situation at they wish, for personal gain or otherwise (Goffman, 1). The performer must make quick work of their “dramatic realization,” so any audience member or participant of the interaction sees as much of this designed Self as quickly as possible (Goffman, 11). “The individual’s initial projection commits [her] to what [she] is proposing to be and requires [her] to drop all pretenses of being other things” (Goffman, xxii). To summarize, it is easier to control the course of the interaction with a successful first impression performance than it is to “alter the line of treatment” expected from one’s character once the interaction has begun (Goffman, xxiii).

In the same way one can change their appearance and mannerisms to influence others, performing tasks with an almost dramatic intentionality can have powerful intrinsic effects on the actor herself. Sometimes it is necessary to wear a mask to practice new ways of being. As Robert Ezra Park remarks in *Race and Culture*, “this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be [...] We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons” (Ezra, 249). In the 1922 edition of *Human Nature and the Social Order*, American sociologist Charles H. Cooley agrees, writing, “[i]f we never tried to seem a little better than we are, how could we improve or ‘train ourselves from the outside inward?’” (Cooley, 302). By practicing desired behavior, it is possible to forge new ways of being with others or with oneself. However, constant masking is physically and emotionally exhausting and resting barefaced or unanimated is important for maintaining one’s physical and mental health.

For performers of all kinds, the backstage area provides a refuge from public eyes and ears; a place they can drop their character and act like themselves. Beyond a traditional theatre, Goffman’s “back regions of a performance” translate to scenarios like a bathroom stall before a business meeting or an empty room at a rowdy party (Goffman, 92). In these scenarios, the “back region” functions as a control area, a place for the performer, be it an executive or an introvert, to collect themselves and limit the amount of time their character is under the spotlight to avoid any missteps. The “front region”, then, is the meeting room or the pool deck, where the performer must light up, step into the character they have chosen for this situation, and operate convincingly while under observation

(Goffman, 88). Once the interaction is over, the performer may retreat to their back region and relax, though for some, their front region activity has become so habituated that “it may be necessary to handle ones’ relaxation from it as a performance” (Goffman, 114). This is certainly true for many modern productivity-driven individuals. In a modern world that values sharing each moment of one’s and everyone else’s personal life on social media platforms, it seems the collective backstage -- safe places to rest and stop performing for others – is disappearing.

As an anecdote to the impossible performance of the neoliberal Self, I turned to Eilís Ward, social scientist and zen practitioner. Her book, *Self*, is appropriately published within a series called *Síreacht*, an Irish word which speaks to “the longings for and imagining of a better world” (Ward, ii). In it, Ward describes her work with students at the University of Galway, during which she witnessed the development of what she describes as a “pandemic of mental ill health” (Ward, 9). Instead of wandering curiously through their chosen fields of study or engaging in community-building, her students were working furiously on *themselves*, as they believed their future success could only be defined as a “‘becoming’ rather than a ‘being’” (Ward, 9). For Ward’s students, self-control and perfection had become the drive for work and reflection, with the idea that insecurity – resulting from shifts in the economy and climate – was inevitable, acceptable, and able to be adapted to. Fear of failure to secure stability has led to an “economisation of all realms,” as the neoliberal state has convinced the masses that money is the key to a safe and comfortable life, no matter what happens in the rest of the world (Ward, 7). As such, participants in late-stage capitalist societies have been conditioned to work tirelessly towards peerless perfection; to be the best, and to be alone.

Ward warns readers that trying to perfect oneself in isolation as a response to climate or economic uncertainty is just as corrosive as the external disasters themselves. Instead, she prescribes social engagement and direct sensation through meditation as a healthier way to approach life. She claims, “the self is irreducibly relational, irreducibly social, constituted by relationships and without permanence or essence” (Ward, 70). Here, Ward is not arguing for a nihilistic view of being, but rather for finding great freedom in the knowledge that “our self [is] nothing more than our perceptions” and experience of collective stimuli (Ward, 73). By presenting the idea of the Self as an entity not to be

controlled and hidden, but rather something to be observed and shared, Ward describes how humans can find meaning and connection in their lives. She goes on to extend the influences on the Self beyond other living people, to places, elements, and the past. “Self,” Ward explains, “is at any one moment, filled with everything else in the field of experience of that moment. But that particular moment has been shaped by the near and distant past and by expectations and fears for the future” (Ward 90). By acknowledging the connected web of all things “inter-being” on this planet, humans can foster “an appreciation of flux” and how “each thing contributes to the meaning of all other things” (Ward, 92-94). In this way, getting to know the flora and fauna which act upon the sensorial Self is a path towards deeper knowledge of the world and the place everyone therein occupies.

In a time of performative productivity, the pressure society places on individuals to be superlative can lead to an unsustainable and unsatisfying human experience. While a sense of Self can be important when functioning in social situations, striving for the perfect iteration of every “front region” activity is futile, and only leads to exhaustion and isolation. Instead of retreating in burnout to a private room to unravel, Ward’s alternative of decentralizing the human experience and instead focusing on social and natural relationships could help foster a collective sense of backstage, or the idea that humans do not need to perform rigid perfectible humanness. This could beget a culture that encourages humans to allow their beings to simply be and to appreciate its constant changes in harmony and collaboration with other non-human actors.

Chapter 5. In the Third Space: Mindful Bioregionalism as the Self

Before I read *How to Do Nothing* by Jenny Odell, an artist and author teaching at Stanford University, the design of my project looked quite different. In fact, it looked a lot like Sarah Cameron Sunde’s afore-mentioned piece, though I had not yet discovered her work. The performance work was to be one of endurance, meditating on themes of the erosion, loss, and destruction caused by climate change as it pertained to the Irish coast and language. However, within the first five pages of Odell’s introduction, there was a tectonic shift in the scope of my project. The book breathed new life into my

intentions not only for this practice-as-research dissertation, but also the way I approach my own meditation and performance art practice. To begin, Odell's call to cease *doing* and replace value in simply *being* is resonated across various areas of my life, as an artist, a student, and a feminist. Additionally, Odell's work put into words a concept I had been struggling to define: "the third space", what she calls, "an almost magical exit to another frame of reference" where people can break out of their routine and perceive their reality differently (Odell, 69). In terms of creating an intentional place inside a wide-open space, the creation of this third space offers opportunities for psychological and spiritual refuge, as well as political and intellectual protest, though its actual parameters interested me most as a theatremaker. Finally, Odell's term "bioregionalism", which provides a rich sense of identity and belonging within the natural world, as well as a responsibility to know and protect it, became a key term for the organization of my performance and audience engagement.

In an era of competitive productivity, doing nothing emerges as a vital act of political and technological resistance. The relentless drive for efficiency perpetuates a cycle of overwork and constant busyness. In 1877, Robert Louis Stevenson called "busyness a 'symptom of deficient vitality'" (Odell, ix). Almost one hundred and fifty years later, competition for resources, including the attention of others, has never been fiercer, and many find themselves constantly occupied with their endeavors to fight for a stable place in the world, spun into "a profitable state of anxiety, envy, and distraction" (Odell, xii). With busyness as a barometer, it would seem the vitality of the human experience is rapidly declining. For Odell, the act of doing nothing, or rather being an active and informed observer, is "for any person who perceives life to be *more than an instrument* and therefore something that cannot be optimized" (Odell, xi). This concept is so Dada.

However, even Odell admits, "doing nothing is hard" (Odell, xvii). For a performance artist like Abramović or Sunde, this could not be truer. To do nothing is to resist the temptation to escape discomfort, to dive back into the "sensory-deprivation chamber" of technology and anthropocentrism, and to ignore the more-than-human parts of the world that are out of human control (Odell, 29). In terms of the perception and reception of the sometimes-subtle art form, doing nothing provides a critical challenge as well. Odell elaborates on the urgency with which ephemeral Dadaist art must

continue. “Given how poorly art survives in a system that only values the bottom line,” she explains, “the stakes are cultural as well. What the tastes of neoliberal techno manifest-destiny and the culture of Trump have in common is impatience with anything nuanced, poetic, or less-than-obvious” (Odell, x). In other words, doing nothing is “resistance-place,” a poetic act of justice for the human being in the midst of a global capitalist crisis (Odell, 18).

More and more, however, spaces in which it is acceptable and safe to do nothing are disappearing. A performance artist working in an outdoor public area has multiple challenges to contend with when conjuring a conjuring an arena of observation and reflection. As Michelle Browne discovered in Dublin, much of “public” space has been designed to encourage isolation and dispersion (Browne, “Open Spaces”). Outside of those architectural limitations, most who occupy communal areas like metros, city squares, and local parks are entrenched in their own habits, endeavors, and thought processes that prevent them from recognizing a public space as a potential site of community-building and reconnection to their own humanity. What performance artists are tasked with then is the creation of Odell’s third space that registers with the observer as a disruption of the busy buzz of normal life. Ideally, “the artist creates a structure – that holds open a contemplative space against the pressures of habit, familiarity, and distraction that constantly threaten to close it” (Odell, 6). In creating an inviting third space which embraces periods of stillness and quiet, performance artists advocate for a more humane pace of life, fostering critical reflection on the societal values that prioritize productivity over the well-being of humans and the planet.

Ultimately, doing nothing can be a radical act of reclaiming time, space, and mental sovereignty. As Odell herself began to take on the role of the observer in her environment, she noticed how limited her own attention was. She became aware that her habitual need to check her phone or make plans for her weekend gave her “less access to [her] own human experience. Her attention was constantly being kidnapped by designed-to-addict, habit-building software. To [her], the only habit worth ‘designing for’ is the habit of questioning one’s habitual ways of seeing, and that is what artists, writers, and musicians help us to do” (Odell, 115-116). It is commonly accepted that artists possess the ability to view the world in unique ways, but that perception drives reality is true for all. So, “if

it's attention that makes our reality, regaining control of it can also mean the discovery of new worlds and new ways of moving through them" then the urgency with which attention must be given to humanity's collective attention cannot be understated (Odell, 89). By retraining individual and collective attention and becoming rooted in direct sensation, it is possible to reframe the anthropomorphic perspective with which humans bulldoze through the planet and to notice the connectedness of all things, "the phenomena inside and outside of the imagined 'bag of skin'" humans call the Self, and the "nuanced ecologies of being and identity" (Odell, 151, 155). Under the lens of bioregionalism, by doing nothing in a safe place, the contrived and tired Self can fall away and make room for everything that is already present.

Bioregionalism, an intersectional term of identity and stewardship, seeks to define a more connected human experience whereby people are aware of the historical and ecological forces symbiotically creating and affecting every moment and every being. Odell asserts humans must forge new connections – simple awareness -- to "the local and present" to foster "sensitivity and responsibility" to that natural order (Odell xiii, xvii). In her explanation of bioregionalism as a tether to the life of a place itself, Odell echos Ward's description of the Self as a sum of its parts, in this case, every species, element, and atom interacting with it, and she insists that becoming more attentive to those actors in one's environment is an anecdote not only to the climate crisis, but also the loneliness of the human species.

The idea that a woman could be "alone in nature", Odell muses, "is a humorous oxymoron, an utter impossibility" (Odell, 141). By training one's attention on forms of life, be they composite granite or seaweed, it is difficult to view them as inanimate or lifeless. Moreover, recognizing the transformation of one's bioregion, humans can understand the nuanced connectivity between climate, human activity, and the inhabitants of the Earth. In a way, bioregionalism as a way of thinking is meant to stir empathy and awareness, encouraging everyone to acknowledge where the present arrangement of plants, animals, and people came from, how they have been affected over time, and how they continue to be interdependent. "Attention", Odell suggests, "forms the ground not just for

love, but for ethics” (Odell, 154). Only once empathy for non-human actors has been learned can healing occur for everything on the planet.

Humans need non-humans, and they need spaces where they can connect to their non-human parts. For many, including Odell, the need to preserve natural spaces is also “a self-preservation instinct [...] insofar as [we can’t] feel truly at home in a solely human community” (Odell, 183). The slow-going dissolution between natural and human culture, whereby nature is seen “not as separate, but as a partner in collaboration” can be seen in efforts like natural lawns and rooftop gardens, but it can still seem as though progress or awareness is not spreading fast enough (Odell, 195). For Odell, the lack of public space and time for dialogue about the environment is preventing widespread unification on natural restoration and protection. For her, there is “little difference between habitat restoration in the traditional sense and restoring habitats for human thought” (Odell, 181). In her moments of feeling frustrated and helpless about the entangled web of technology and policy that keep humans distracted and isolated, Odell quotes a local legend of her own, Oakland environmentalist Chappell R. Hayes. Though referring to a technique of tree-drilling, the invitation also resonates for environmental and humanist stewards: “stay perpendicular to the Earth. Don’t pitch forward, don’t fall back” (Odell, 203). In this upright position of still centeredness, awareness and sensitivity can expand to embrace, celebrate, and treasure the most minor of natural miracles.

Chapter 6. Performing Bioregionalism

Having aligned the intention of my project with the ethos of Odell and doing nothing, the artistic image of the following practice-as-performance series became clearer. Supported by the lineage of Dada performance pioneers like Abramović and Coogan, I would use my body and subtle signposting to cut a hole in the fabric of daily public reality. In a display not of spirituality or even mindfulness but of, in fact, nothing at all, it was my intention to cause minor disruptions, not in civilian life but in thought. By sitting still and focusing my attention on the natural forces and actors

creating and affecting my environment, I hoped to carve out of a heavily trafficked place a space in which observers could stop their habitual performances and breathe, listen, and be.

What follows is an account, dramaturgical analysis, and reflection of the four iterations of my practice “performing bioregionalism” at different significant water sites around Galway city during the month of June 2024. As a fishing city and port of historical importance, Galway is irrevocably linked with water and impacted by its prosperity and destruction. More than that, as water becomes increasingly limited, it is crucial humans pay attention to natural water sources, develop a relationship with them, and care deeply for them. Through meditation and compassionate awareness in a public space, it is a secondary aim of this project that empathy for Galway’s water sites can be fostered into the collected consciousness.

For each iteration, I generated a series of bioregional and historical questions to familiarize myself with the non-human actors present at the site, and how they and humans in the past have interacted to create the site as it is today. I then created a Google Form linked to a laminated QR code which I posted at each site (more on the stage setup forthcoming). The questionnaire invited participants to sit with me and think about the rocks, plants, animals, and other non-humans at the site, as well as their personal and historical perception of the area (Appendix, 1). I also included links with more relevant information like environmental site surveys, endangered species lists, and historical reports. In this way, it was my intention for piqued observers to connect with me and the area under the lens of bioregionalism.

When considering the design of the public performance, I was determined to keep my carbon footprint small and my signposts simple. In the spirit of doing nothing, I did not want the stage design to economize an excess of time or resources, nor to be such that it would distract from the real star of the show: Nature. The first and foundational signpost in all four iterations was an orange meditation cushion. It is my personal possession, though it was not my initial choice. Throughout the practice series, I was conflicted using orange as the unifying color of my series. Often associated with the spiritual practices of Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia, I was aware that an orange meditation cushion could create undertones of practicing mindfulness, a type of performance made popular by

what Eilís Ward calls McMindfulness, a Lululemon-clad craze sweeping the western world (Ward, 61). However, when I considered other cushion alternatives, including no cushion at all, I concluded the bright orange color would be most effective in attracting attention, creating the first crack in the observer's automated reality. Moreover, with the Irish summer as chilly and unpredictable as it can be, I was limited in what my "costume" could be insofar as the weather would likely dictate a number of waterproof layers. Still, I was confident I would be wearing a knit cap of mine which is also orange. Thus, orange, a color of spirituality and saffron but also energy and attention, became a key signpost in the perimeter of my performance.

When it came to the perimeter itself, I was highly interested in its establishment and perception in wide open spaces, like a beach or a public park. How does a space go from an infinite expanse to the specific site of a finite performance? Victoria McCormack, Head of Creative Engagement at acclaimed Galway performance company Macnas, is also a public performance artist. Having worked with Michelle Browne and Amanda Coogan, McCormack has ample experience working in the wild west of Ireland in such productions as Browne's 2010 *Pregnant with Infinite Possibility*, a reflection on bogs as a source of "fuel, or power" (Browne, "Pregnant"). In speaking with McCormack, it became clear the most important tools when establishing a public performance perimeter is the performer's intentions and rituals. Echoing themes from Goffman's public communication of the Self, mannerisms, actions, and her own steadfast belief in her art are sometimes the only tools McCormack has to indicate to observers the existence of her public performances. This conversation with McCormack helped me create a vocabulary for establishing the bounds of my performance within familiar public spaces.

Ultimately, my performance area would be what I perceived it to be, and to contextualize the area and the performance itself for observers, I would frame my imagined stage with five full-page QR codes (Appendix, 1). My second and final signpost, I would attach these QR signs to structures before the performance, then remove and reuse them for the next iteration. In coordinating the color of the QR code to my hat and the meditation cushion, it was my hope to clearly connect my presence

to my artistic or least performative intention so as to initiate engagement or thoughtful consideration from the passersby.

6.1 Blackrock Diving Tower – Wednesday, June 5, 2024. 10:00h – 11:15h

With the production design created, the artistic intention set, and the bioregional research completed, I felt prepared for the first iteration of the performance series. The location was Blackrock Diving Tower, a site of cultural and natural significance for the city of Galway. As I headed to the site on public transport, I became aware of how nervous I was. Here, I thought of Goffman's musings on embarrassment in public interactions and how human actors do everything they can to avoid those moments. Though embarrassment is an intrinsic experience I am less and less privy to with age, I was concerned with the receptivity of my performance, especially that it might be misconstrued as a performance of a "holier-than-thou" character I was not intending to portray or worse, nothing artistically intentional at all. Still, the Sun was shining, and I was grateful for that.

When I arrived at Blackrock, it was buzzing with friendly, social energy. Still, I encountered an ethical dilemma that remained central to my project throughout its evolution. As I looked around at the people swimming and enjoying the Sun at ten in the morning on a Wednesday, I realized my performance and message would be perceived by a particularly privileged group of people: retirees, youths on their carefree summer vacations, and middle-aged people who, unlike most of their peers, did not find themselves engaged in employment at that time. While it was maybe not the most groundbreaking audience, I was aware that their class orientations would potentially open their perception and reception of public Dadaist performance art and also lend to their understanding and appreciation of meditation.

Almost at the same time, I was confronted with Goffman's backstage quandary in that I had none. Only with clear intention could I indicate to myself and others what the performance was and where exactly it began and ended. I scanned the changing area, which ironically, formed a sort of open-air stage in its half-moon design. Intuitively, I was drawn to the top of the rock mound central in

the open space. It would be impossible to not be seen and anyone wishing to get into the water would have to walk past me. I would be visually disruptive, using the space in a non-conventional way and causing observers to question my (lack of) activity and maybe also their own. When I took out the QR codes and zip ties, I left my meditation cushion in my backpack, as I did not want to draw attention to it just yet. I kept my attention inwards and my focus on my task of attaching the QR codes to structures around the changing area. Once the QR codes had been fixed in locations both near and distant to my meditation site so as to invite a more timid observer to engage with it, I removed my meditation cushion from my pack and took it to the top of the rock, where I placed it down, scanned the horizon, and began to sit.

Instantly, I was forced to make choices I had not considered. What would I do with my hands? By taking a *mudra*, or a symbolic hand gesture used in Buddhist and Hindu spiritual practices, stronger tones of spirituality than I had intended to convey might be signalled. As such, I let my hands rest where they felt naturally comfortable, which was primarily one hand resting in the other on my lap. I was also struck with the thought of what to do with my eyes. In traditional meditation practices, it is custom to keep the eyes closed or softly fixed on a point down in front of one's nose. Still, as my attention was less on my inner world and more on the outer one, I was interested in looking around me, observing the dance of waves and the birds. However, in surveying the scene, my mind began to get carried away with narratives and perceptions that distracted me from my artistic intention of doing nothing. So, I decided to close my eyes, and focus purely on the direct sensations of my being inter-being with nature. The main non-human actors that influenced my performance that day were the very strong wind that swayed my upper body, the rare but powerful Irish Sun that brought humans and non-humans alike to the shore, and the granite glacial boulder that held my body as it has held so many humans and animals throughout time.

As time went on, my legs became very uncomfortable; my ankles were getting sore from pressing on the rock and my legs were painfully asleep. In a traditional meditation practice, stillness and transcendence of discomfort would be encouraged, however, as I was highly concerned with not performing spirituality, I gave myself permission to adjust my body, sit with my legs straight out in

front of me instead of crossed, and tilt my face up to the sky as the wind blew and the sky shone on my face. In this moment, I welcomed a Beckettian ideal of optimistic persistence in the face of monotony, a lesson best embodied by Winnie's upper body as she finds joy and gratitude in her repetitive rituals, the Sun of a new day, and even just the idea of Willie's silent companionship out of view behind her (Beckett, 1961). Finding ease in my physical form was key to opening my perception of myself to include those non-human parts such as the wind, the granite I was sitting on, and the waves that were crashing against it. For its part, the weather was kind to me, and only the last fifteen minutes did rain make an appearance along with a chill.

When the one-hour timer on my phone went off, I was struck with relief at the performance concluding and embarrassment at the presence of the phone. For the design of this project, I decided one-hour iterations would be sufficient time to firmly establish my artistic presence and invitation while not posing any serious physical difficulties to myself as I am not an expert meditator. I do not own a watch and did not want to buy one exclusively for this project, so I decided to put my phone in airplane mode, rendering it but a humble timekeeper. The fleece jacket I ended up wearing in each iteration due to the mild weather has an inside breast pocket where the phone was kept. In each of the iterations, it felt slightly disingenuous and, again, slightly hypocritical to utilize a technological device in a biodynamic performance, but it was also the simplest way for me to track the performance's duration without relying on a third party.

In terms of audience engagement in the forms of physical and technological participation, this iteration was objectively the most successful. Following the performance, only one set of very brief responses had been submitted through the Google Form (Appendix, 1). For the rest of my iterations, no more responses would be submitted. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know if more people scanned the code but chose not to participate. That said, in respect to fostering a sense of collective connection and a space to take a break from the daily humdrum of life, this iteration yielded qualitatively meaningful social interactions and dramaturgical observations about teamwork.

It is important here to introduce my project's documentarist: Alaoise Scherer. A colleague in my master's program at the University of Galway, Scherer volunteered her time and talent to record

the performance iterations. Beyond helping me complete the requirement of documentation, I had not considered Scherer's impact on the performance itself, which was bifold. On the one hand, Scherer was a constant participant in each iteration. By sitting with me in meditation, Scherer potentially strengthened the scenario's artistic image and clarified the means of participation possible.

Additionally, though, by taking pictures of me "performing bioregionalism," Scherer's effect was interesting, and only made obvious to me after the performance. At Blackrock that morning, a friend of mine was present and aware of my performance. Following the performance, she commented to me on how engaged people were; how they were sitting with me, talking about the performance, and even taking pictures of me sitting! It was my understanding that my artistic movement was so effective that outsiders were documenting its aesthetics. After speaking with Scherer the next though, it became clear that it was only her that was taking pictures and that she had been one of the few people (my friend and her companion included) that actually sat with me. The impact Scherer had on my public performance was unintentional and at once buoying and deflating.

The effect another person can have on the performance of the Self and construction of the performance space is elaborated in Goffman's text, stating "when we turn from a one-man team to a larger one, the character of the reality that is espoused by the team changed. Instead of a rich definition of the situation, reality may become reduced to a thin party-line" (Goffman, 67). Indeed, as an island of artistic intention, observers could conceive a myriad of attachments and connections to me as a human actor or the action of nothing as a protest-in-place. However, once Scherer entered and began to document the project, its definition became sharply performative and even, hypocritically, productive. Not only does the need to document solo performance art present ecological dilemmas in terms of disrupting natural habitats to mount a tripod or the consumption of technological energy, but it can also detract from the soloist's artistic and social intentions and interactions with the public. Beyond that, the modern trend of performative documentation on social media can lead people to distrust the sincerity with which any public performance, intentional or otherwise, is being enacted. I did not want to impede Scherer's participation in the piece, as I valued her engagement as a means to

incite other participants, I only asked that she take fewer photos over less time, so as to limit the amount of time observers could witness the documentation element of the project.

Though it is impossible to know, as Scherer was not present for the entirety of each iteration and my eyes were always closed, I do believe this iteration at Blackrock was the only time any members of the public audience sat with me. In addition to my afore-mentioned friend, a musical colleague of mine was also present at the diving board that morning unbeknownst to me. Her son was about to sit a difficult exam, and she was anxiously thinking about it, a spiral that not even an ice-cold swim could stop. She later told me that the space I had created to sit and breathe was one she would not have otherwise accessed that day, and it was the only space that morning she was able to disconnect from the anxiety she was holding for her son's academic success. She was effusively complimentary and grateful for the opportunity I had curated, and this feedback fed my desire to cultivate this disruptively unproductive third space again.

6.2 Claddagh Quay – Wednesday, June 12, 2024. 10:00h – 11:00h

The preparation of the performance space varied slightly in this iteration, as I was interested in including it in the front region activities of the performance. As such, I began the ritual by scanning the Claddagh, intuitively chose the boat ramp in front of Claddagh Hall as my stage, and placed the orange cushion in its center between a cluster of swans in the water and the popular walking path. From there, I focused on framing my stage with the QR signs, scanning the area to acknowledge the non-human actors I had read about and considering the historical significance of this site as a fishing village and representation of indigenous Irish heritage. Here, I was struck by a feeling of existing in the past and present simultaneously where, by focusing so strongly on the past events at a particular site, the perception and experience of the site itself takes on a keen awareness of and reverence for those who have come before and the impact they left behind. In generating a strong connection to the past, it is possible to imagine the evolution of natural or man-made environments and experience a deep sense of belonging in the trajectory of humankind. With the remnants of fishing boats all around

and the infamous Long Walk across the Corrib River, “was-ing”, as I came to call it, enthralled me and became a pivotal concept for my future iterations. In general, after the positive feedback from the Blackrock iteration, I was feeling optimistic about the outcomes of this performance.

After some time of listening to the river and the squawking swans, it became clear to me that at this time of day, the walking path behind me was not as trafficked as in the afternoons and evenings. The sound of an occasional bike whizzed behind me, and at one point two older men sat on a bench near me and talked about their day, assumedly giving me or my performance no notice at all. Though I tried to focus my attention on my natural co-creators of the present moment, I could not help but feel I had chosen a bad location and wasted the opportunity of my second iteration. As I had placed myself on a slant, my body soon became as uncomfortable as my mind, with my ankles and shins resting heavily on the cement. Though I remembered I had the freedom to move in my performance, the adjustments of my limbs felt less like listening to my body and more like rolling around restless in bed. Even after I made an adjustment, discomfort quickly returned, and I found myself thinking about the alarm in my pocket and hoping it would go off. Eventually, I heard the jangle of Scherer’s keys, and she took a few quick photos of me. A text I would later read informed me that she had not been able to sit with me that day due to time constraints. What seemed like an hour after Scherer had left, the timer sounded but with intentionality, the performance ended only after I ritualistically taken down the unused QR signs and loaded my backpack.

Ultimately, I left the site of the second iteration feeling annoyed and also recognizing that my reaction was something interesting to investigate. Though I felt disappointed by the lack of human collaborators, I noted how important the presence of the Claddagh swans was to this performance. Any people that did stop to observe the site, Scherer later told me, were looking at the swans, not me. Had I not been present, they likely would still have stopped to marvel at the number and proximity of these massive and beautiful birds. In the spirit of anti-anthropocentric performance art, this second iteration was the most unimportant I felt in terms of the natural masterpiece this project aims to showcase. However, as an artist who wants her art to be perceived as such, I felt as though my expectation for the outcome of the performance series was limiting me in terms of making art without

needing to be valued or quantitatively productive. That afternoon, I read *How to Sit* by Vietnamese zen master Tich Nhat Han, and the artistic intention of my performance was profoundly changed.

This book imparted three ideas of great significance to the evolution of this project: the impact of simply being seen sitting calmly, the value of sitting without waiting, and the existence and importance of beauty that is not seen. Han describes the first time he saw someone meditating he was impressed by his stillness and peace. Still unsure at that time what the man was doing, Han knew that he wanted to experience that kind of stillness for himself and began his study of meditation and mindfulness. Ultimately, Han encourages meditators to focus their attention on performing their mindful activities, especially meditation, from the inside out, not worrying about how it looks from the outside. He advises, “practice the non-practice practice. We can best convey the essence of the practice to others simply by doing it with our whole being” (Han, 39). After reading these words, I felt a sense of relief as I let go of doubts I had been harboring about the accurate perception of my message and invitation and anchored my attention once again in my intentions.

Another influential thought of Han’s that resonated with this project, especially in a Beckettian sense, was the notion of “sitting without waiting for a miracle” (Han, 49). Just as I sat on the boat ramp anxiously waiting for someone to walk by, Vladimir and Estragon struggle to find direction as they wait for Godot to arrive and provide some meaning for their lives (Beckett, 1952). Had we all considered Han’s idea that “the present moment contains the whole of life”, we may have not only stopped waiting in the expectation that something more needs to happen but have found peace and rich meaning in the complex miracles present in each moment.

This reframing of my artistic intentions from active educator to avid observer was further edified as I continued to read Han’s words about the interconnectedness of all things and the “non-us elements” like “ancestors, culture, food, air, and water” that make up every individual. As Odell amusedly proposed earlier, there are so many actors present in each moment, it is impossible to every truly be alone, especially in nature. Han agrees when he offers the thought, “when you sit alone quietly, it’s something beautiful, even if nobody sees it. When a little flower appears in a crack between rocks, it’s a beautiful sight. People may never see it, but that’s ok” (Han, 85). Here, I

considered that perhaps performing bioregionalism was inevitably created for and with a myriad of actors. In this way, the collaborators in each moment of my performance, including my humble self, were at once the actors and the audience. In this knowledge, I reflected on this second iteration at the Claddagh as something of beauty, seen perhaps from the many people gathered at the Spanish Arch across the river or the occasional commuter on the perpendicular path, but beautiful and important regardless.

6.3 Eglinton Canal – Wednesday, June 19, 2024. 10:00h – 11:30h

Though I was keen to have this iteration based in a busier site, I was armed with Han's ideas of simply being present; to be seen in a state of calm by others. For the third week in a row, the Irish Sun was dazzling, and I was feeling very lucky indeed as I walked to the university campus. As I crossed the bridge from Fisheries Field, I looked ahead to an intersection of walking paths connecting the university to the rest of town. In the middle of these paths was a circular area of cement at the intersection of a loud rushing stream, joyful singing birds, lush green foliage, and the bright blue sky. Since the inception of this project design, I had been interested in themes of subtle subversion and disruption of public spaces, but I did not want to cause any traffic accidents. After placing the meditation cushion in the center of intersection, I watched for a couple minutes as bikers, boarders, and walkers moved past it unbothered before arranging the QR signs around the area and taking my place on the cushion.

During this third iteration, I had three significant human interactions, the first being the only negative encounter of the entire series. Despite dozens of bikers moving past me without issue, one biker grumbled on his way past me, very loudly so he was sure I would hear him, "Right in the middle of the fucking road!" I became conscious of my position in the intersection and thought I was in the way, but as more commuters zoomed around me, I regained a sense of calm and intention in being an active symbol of inactivity. In this iteration, I was not attached to the idea of people sitting with me or even scanning the QR code. Just being there as a reminder to slow down and pay attention to the

present was enough. At one point, I briefly opened my eyes to take in my surroundings and I noticed a young man walking towards me on the bridge just as he completed a round of neck circles. In that moment, I hoped maybe my sitting had inspired his brief body check-in, that maybe he had also taken the deepest breath he had taken all day, and relaxed his shoulders down his back, finding ease and relaxation in the moment. With this joyful sentiment, I sat with my main non-human collaborators at this site including the gregarious birds, the roasting Sun, and the rushing stream until the timer went off. I silenced the timer and continued to sit, deeply connected to the environment and what I was doing and why. My Epicurean ideal was shattered however, when a riding lawnmower rattled across the bridge heading straight toward me. As I watched the front of the machine inch closer to me, I began to consider the effects of not moving. However, before I could envision the ensuing interaction, the vehicle had already cleared its turn and was headed down the path away from me. Slightly rattled, I decided it was a good time to conclude the performance, so I unset my stage, feeling alive in and connected to my inner-most human and non-human parts.

6.4 Ladies Beach – Wednesday, June 26, 2024. 10:00h – 11:00h

It served as a constant source of inspiration and evolution for this project that my literary research was ongoing throughout. Though the spirit of American naturalist and essayist Henry David Thoreau’s “civil disobedience” had been infused into the project since its reference in Odell’s work, it was not until just before the fourth and final iteration of performing bioregionalism that I revisited *Walden and Other Writings*, and I was pleasantly surprised to find many concepts central to this project echoed in the words of this intentional recluse. In three of his essays, *Sounds* (1854), *Walking* (1862), and *Civil Disobedience* (1849), Thoreau writes on his revelations of the natural world and how humans operate therein.

On retreating to a self-built cabin on Walden Pond, Thoreau discovers meditation, or rather a break from incessant doing. “There were times”, he writes, “when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands” (Thoreau, 105). By sitting

silently and listening to the birds or gazing at the flowers, Thoreau discovered an untapped state of bliss and wonder he felt the civil society would not understand. Meditating as he was “was sheer idleness to [his] fellow townsmen, no doubt.” However, he muses, “if the birds and flowers had tried me by their standard, I should not have been found wanting” (Thoreau, 106). In his mind, simply existing in appreciation of what already exists fulfills the moment. More than that, Thoreau believed that to be receptive to the influence of climate and environment on one’s being will manifest greater imagination of and compassion for our natural world.

These ideas about the value of non-human actors had already been central to the intention of my performance for the past three iterations. However, as the scope of the project evolved from trying to invoke multi-level audience participation to simply practicing Han’s “non-practice practice,” my resolve to be present without expectation had taken on a new political zeal. No longer was I interested in educating observers about the rock composition of the site or its historical ongoingings, though I still curated a Google form questionnaire for this site. Now, I was almost exclusively concerned with just being seen doing nothing, in the hopes that observers would notice the uncommon inactivity and consider their own state of busyness. The words of Thoreau, “let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine” resonated loudly as I arrived at this final location (Thoreau, 677). While I contemplated loosely the non-human actors I could feel and hear all around me throughout my meditation at Ladies Beach, including the glorious Sun again, my focus and intention was on my physical being as an image of peaceful disruption amidst the bustle of the promenade.

Chapter 7. Reflection & Conclusion

The trajectory of this project followed that of my ongoing literary and personal investigation in the practice of mindful bioregionalism. In a delightfully Dadaist manner, the journey documents a tectonic shift in my artistic creation from a qualitatively neoliberal urge to demonstrate receptivity and efficacy to a biosocial longing for a public reunion with Nature and non-performance of the Self such that it might inspire the passerby to feel, if only for a moment, their human (and non-human) life is

worth more than their demonstrative output. Like a *vipassana* meditation itself, witnessing the ups and downs of this project was a valuable experience, as one cannot fully appreciate the Sun without shade. As island weather constantly reminds me, everything changes, and sitting firmly in the role of the observer, embracing the rain or the wind as important actors who support other natural forces, can create an inner steadiness and peace that can withstand even the strongest storms and help other people do the same. In an age of violent political division stemming from isolation, hate, fear, and misinformation, it is more important than ever that public spaces be held for safe and egalitarian reflection and discussion, especially as it pertains to issues of social and political import like the climate crisis, so communities can build tools of empathy and organization to foster healing and growth in their own environment and beyond.

While the value of this project is absolute, there are a few details in its design that could be altered to increase the population demographics and accessibility to the public art piece including the date and time of each non-performance performance, and the dissemination of information regarding the project's aims, the inclusion of additional cushions. It is true that, in the end, my objective was simply to demonstrate stillness as a counter-friction to the machines of late-stage capitalism. However, with an updated design, the evolution of the series provided an interesting layout for important social impact, not in terms of biological education or QR interactions, but rather on collective community connection, engagement, and mutual understanding.

When I determined the schedule for my four iterations, my focus was on repetition and consistency; really, parameters set for myself in the spirit of endurance and potentially discomfort. The idea was to set the dates and times irrevocably so that I would experience the weather of each Wednesday morning in June. In that way, I could honor the theme of resilience and radical acceptance characteristic not only of a meditation practice, but also performance artists like Abramović and Browne. In the end, not only was the weather consistently sunny and mild for each iteration, but the pre-determined time severely limited the people who might have witnessed my protest-in-place to those who did not need to work or study at 10 AM on Wednesday morning; in other words- retirees and upper-class homemakers. While their observation and participation were valuable, this

population's access to leisure time indicated they had resources making them privy not only to time and space for quiet reflection but also the idea that this could be valuable. In future iterations of this performance series, the day, time, and place would be selected not for its proximity to water or alignment with my own schedule and pursuits, but for its accessibility to individuals in areas of the community that might not normally be the site for public art, such as low-income areas, areas with restricted educational or cultural resources, or areas with high levels of violence. This socially driven implementation of the performance series would require collaboration from support from local schools, community welfare organizations, and, in an even more optimistic iteration of non-violent collaboration and community healing, local law enforcement. Moreover, a detailed plan for public performance for social change would likely require increased access to information about the project itself.

When I designed this project, I considered advertising the performance series with flyers around the site the day before the performance. I decided against this based on the ethos of eco-theatre. As it was my intention to keep the consumed resources and environmental impact of this project to a minimum, it felt hypocritical to tape non-reusable paper flyers around important water sites. The result was a sort of flash-mob performance mentality whereby I entered the site as it was functioning as normal and worked intentionally to carve out a third space of unusual stillness. I appreciated this approach, as it meant no member of the public had expectations about my activity and my presence was up for interpretation. However, I do think this vagueness prevented maximum public understanding and therefore participation in the piece.

The QR code proved ultimately ineffective, with only one response, so my intended means of disseminating information did not work. I kept using the QR code as a constant, interested to know if different areas in town, like the university, would correlate to different engagement with it, but not only did the engagement decrease, so did my interest in it. I do think the color-coordination of the QR code with the cushion and cap served to frame my performance and maintain the third space, but future iterations of a more community-minded approach would require different signposting and potentially advertising. Instead of requiring the audience interact with QR to gain understanding of the

project, reusable posters around the performance site clearly state the aim and invitation of the third space. Moreover, a schedule of widely accessible dates, times, and sites would be shared within the communities of intended impact, including at local schools and community halls, in public zones like parks and open squares, and on social media with the intention of preparing the communities to engage, allowing for increased collaboration.

A final element of the project that could be altered to foster maximum participation would be the inclusion of extra cushions for the public to sit on. When I was designing the project, I considered at length the parameters of inclusion. I only own one proper meditation cushion, and only a few other small cushions ideal for meditation. I considered using no cushions at all, but I knew that I wanted duration to be a key element of my performance and sitting directly on rocks for an hour at a time could prove damaging to my body. Moreover, the orange cushion was, in my mind, a key signpost of the performance. As such, I decided against bringing a couple random pillows and chose to have just my own, but to be sure to create a third space that included plenty of space for others to sit with or near me. In each of the four locations I chose, the perceived stages had more than ample surface area for other participants, but I was conscious of the request I was making for others to sit on the ground while I was on a comfortable cushion. In future iterations, to increase the appeal of my invitation, I would surround my cushion with other reusable pillows, creating not only a space for people to come together, but also a seat.

In this first practice-as-research performance of this series, my focus as a performer and theatremaker was admittedly quite egocentric, though anti-anthropocentric. By initially placing the boundaries on awareness of QR codes in order to engage with me and oft-ignored non-human actors, I missed the opportunity to emphasize the accessibility and importance of doing nothing and doing it together. By the end of my series, the aim had shifted due to the lack of human interaction I was perceiving and the strengthening of my essentially Dadaist ideals echoed by Tich Naht Han. The change in the intention of the project felt more socially impactful, and I felt supported in the notion that simply doing nothing where my peace might be seen and spread. However justified I felt in my intentional inaction though, there was a part of me that felt I was choosing a more egocentric

performance path than I had initially hoped. This project's evolution gave me great freedom as a performance artist and human actor to create a backstage space wherever I find myself, and in future iterations of this project, I would work to expand that space into other areas of my environment and community to include those who might otherwise not have the opportunity to drop the urge to do, feel the interconnectedness of themselves to all other things, and practice being.

Appendix

1.1 – Google Form

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/192FLxtIRJ_63jFqCxLvY-Y_Gdf0NmzwhKVUcvYapM/edit

1.2 – The one and only Google Form Response

The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "Wet Rain: Bioregionalism and the Self" with 1 response. The form contains several questions and their answers:

- Question: "Would you sit with me for a little while?"
Response: A pie chart showing 100% for "Huck yes!".
 - Huck yes! (100%)
 - No way, Jose! (0%)
 - Maybe another time. (0%)
- Question: "How's the weather today?"
Response: "Just started raining! But was Sunny before this"
- Question: "How's the water today?"
Response: "Cold for June but lovely"
- Question: "What brought you here this morning?"
Response: "Swimming keeps me sane :)"
- Question: "How do you feel being here? Is there anything you this place makes you think about?"
Response: "Makes me think about how lucky we are to have this place. It's amazing!"
- Question: "Do you know much about the history of Ladies Beach?"
Response: "No unfortunately, thank you for the info"
- Question: "Which animals can you see? Are there other animals you know are here?"
Response: (Empty text box)

1.3 – QR link to Google Form

- THE QR
- THE HORIZON
- YOUR BODY



2.1 – PICTURES of Iteration 1 @ Blackrock Diving Tower



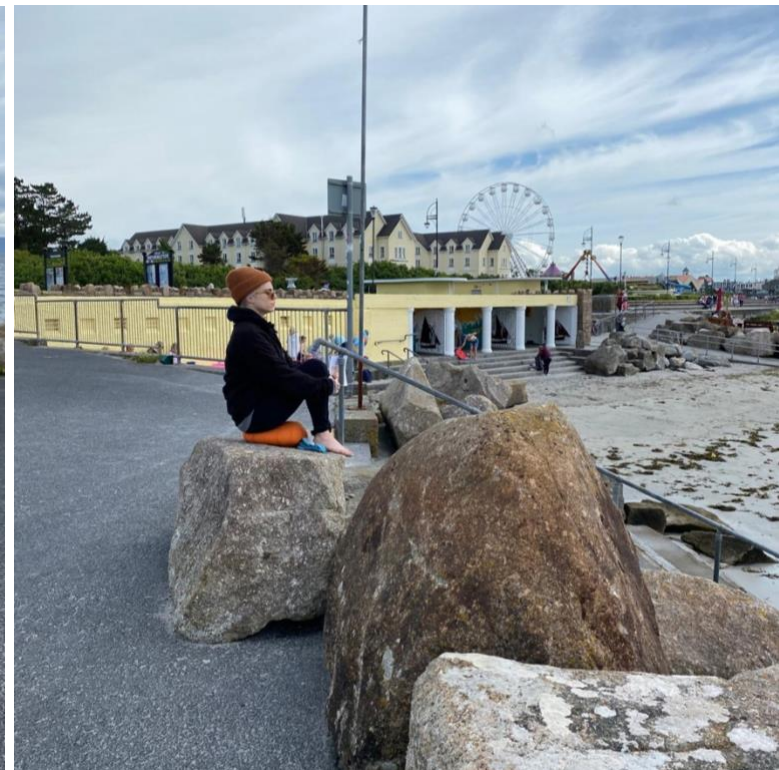
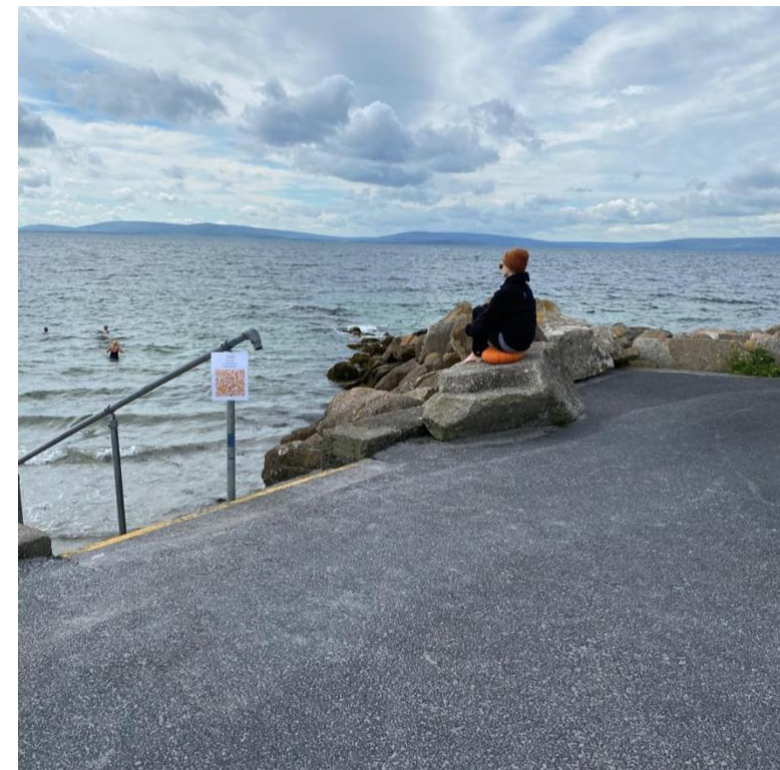
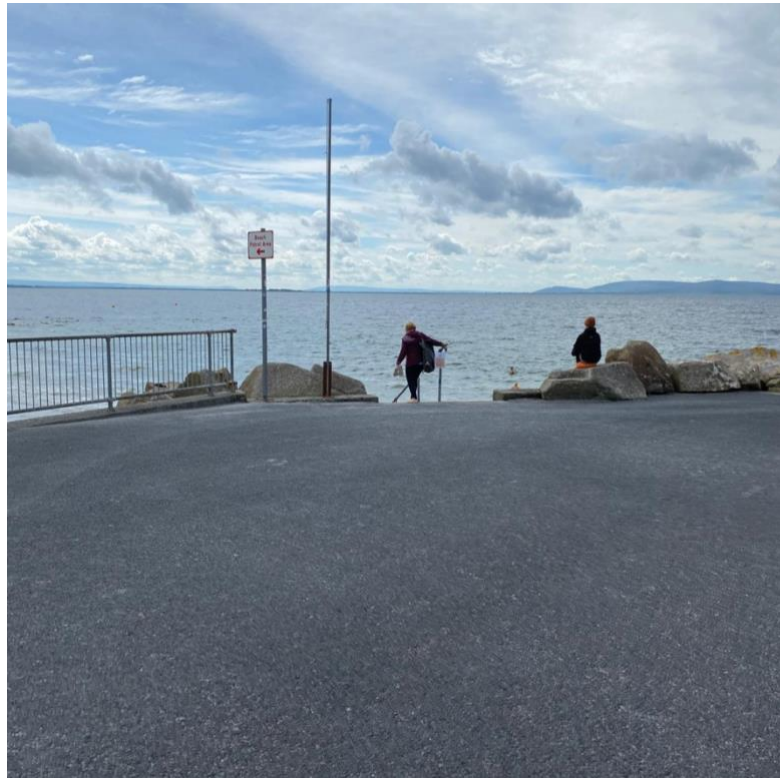
2.2 – PICTURES of Iteration 2 @ The Claddagh



2.3 – PICTURES of Iteration 3 @ the Eglinton Canal



2.4 – PICTURES of Iteration 4 @ Ladies Beach



3. PaR Pre- & Post- Reflection Questions and Journal shorthand

PaR No. 1

Date: Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Location: Blackrock Diving Tower

Bioregional Research Questions:

What other bodies of water is the bay connected to and where do they lead?

Who are some of most prolific non-human actors in this location?

Which non-human actors may be at risk due to human activity?

How was this location before the dive tower was erected?

What is the geological composition of the rocks?

Historical Research Questions:

Have any historical events occurred at this site, ie: immigration?

Why was this spot chosen for the dive tower?

How has the landscape been changed by the human activity?

Who “owned this land originally” and how was it “acquired”?

What has been/is being done to protect or restore the land?

Reflection Questions:

How is this coastal area being affected by erosion?

How does this spot help Galway’s human actors connect with the non-human actors?

How has water helped people travel the world throughout history from this site?

JOURNAL

I was quite nervous heading to this site, even though there were literally no stakes at all. The weather gods were smiling on me, as it was sunny and warm with a little breeze. When I arrived at Blackrock, it was buzzing and full of people. I had not previously decided on an exact spot, as I wanted to be drawn to it in the moment relative to the action of the people and non-human actors. After I scanned the area, I was drawn to the top of a mound of rocks in the middle of the site. I wanted my location to be subversive and nontraditional without being a danger or nuisance. I also wanted to sit somewhere where someone would have room to sit next to me if they chose to. Truthfully, since the conception of the project, I’ve struggled with idea of me sitting on a cushion and asking others to join me on the ground, but the bright orange cushion was an intentional choice, as I believe it catches the eye, looks out of place, and leads people to believe something out of the ordinary is happening. Still, orange and meditation have been linked in Buddhist groups, and I didn’t mean to double down on that idea with my orange hoodie, but in retrospect, it may have seemed to allude to that culture. After I chose my location, I set to work putting up the QR code signs. I used laminated signs that will be reused for the rest of the PaR, and I used zipties and gorilla tape to secure them to three different areas that I felt sort of “framed” my performance. Even though I was nervous to start, once I sat down and closed my eyes, I felt so serene and joyful. I listened as people braved the cold water and chatted about their lives and the weather. Because there were many people near me, I felt seen in the way I wanted to: just to give people a second thought about their busy-ness. However, I didn’t want to perform spirituality or present a holier-than-thou façade. For that reason, I chose to not take a mudra with my hands. As the hour went on, my legs and feet started to become very uncomfortable. In a formal meditation experience, it would be encouraged to transcend the comfort in favor of stillness, but once I reminded myself that I was not performing meditation, I gave myself to permission to stretch my legs and gently stretch my neck, all while keeping my mind on the water, the animals, the rocks, and the history of the place. I felt at least two people sit next to me (I know now one of them was my documentarist – Alaoise) and when they did, I felt so buoyed and affirmed—I felt like what I was doing was really valuable and provided people with a respite.

The weather was weathering: I was able to let myself loose into the wind, feel the chill of the shade, and bask in the sun. Only in the last 10 minutes did I become actually quite uncomfortably cold, it started to rain, and I started to actually shake. But my timer went off, I brought my performance to an end, and then took shelter in a public bathroom to warm up.

The timer is an interesting element, as the inclusion of technology and especially the phone is counter-intuitive, but I needed a way to keep track of time so as to not cut the hour short. I turned the phone to airplane mode, so it was effectively just a timer, but it still felt a little disingenuous to whip out my phone after the hour of meditation.

After the “performance”, only 1 person had responded to the QR survey. Perhaps there was an issue with the phones reading the sign in bright light, but it also could have had to do with the signs’ positioning or people’s time/interest in engaging with technology.

Later, someone who had been at the performance site told me people were taking pictures of me. I immediately felt a sense of accomplishment that my act had been perceived as art, or something other than just someone sitting on a cushion, but later I found out it was probably Alaoise and I felt a bit silly. However, it was interesting that Alaoise’s presence and action contributed to the performance in that way.

MAIN NON-HUMAN COLLABORATORS: WIND, ROCKS, water, sun, rain

PaR No. 2

Date: Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Location: Claddagh Quay

Bioregional Research Questions:

Where does the water come from and where does it lead?

Who are the most prolific non-human actors in this location?

Which non-human actors may be at risk due to human activity?

What did this region look like before any human activity?

What are the bioregional predictions for this site?

Historical Research Questions:

Have any historical events occurred at this site?

How is the landscape being changed due to human activity?

How did the water connect Galway to the world?

How is Irish culture/ landscape being preserved?

Reflection Questions:

How is Galway shaped by the water at this site?

How did/does this water support Galway?

How is the traditional Irish heritage/history preserved in modern times?

JOURNAL

Being vs wasing

NOT performing meditation/spirituality (hands, colors, posture, eyes)

Non-humans actors (swans)

Traffic “bad”

Beautiful weather

“NOT” successful, so wasn’t feeling great in “performance” and was happy when it was over. Did not leave in high spirits.

MAIN NON-HUMAN COLLABORATORS: SWANS, sun, water

PaR No. 3

Date: Wednesday, June 19, 2024

Location: Eglinton Canal @ The University of Galway

Bioregional Research Questions:

Which bodies of water does the canal connect?

Which non-human actors are most present at the site of the canal?

Which non-human actors have been affected by human activity?

What was the landscape before the canal/University was built?

What are the bioregional predictions for this site?

What would happen if the dams were removed?

Historical Research Questions:

Have any historical events occurred at this site?

Why was the canal built? How does it work to contain/connect the water?

How is it maintained/protected against erosion?

How was the landscape before the canal was built?

What was the land used for before the canal/ University was built?

Reflection Questions:

In what ways are humans and non-human actors disconnected from each other?

How can humans regain connection with non-human actors in meaningful ways?

How/Why do humans work with/ against nature (especially water)?

JOURNAL

For this one, I wanted to be by the university for traffic reasons. I also had the idea that students would be more likely to stop and scan a random qr code. Today I arrived and felt out my spot. It turned out to be the center point in the middle of a walking roundabout. Here, at the intersection between a bridge, a canal walkway, the ODC, and a parking lot, I felt sure I would be seen and maybe joined. I decided to go right smack in the middle as it felt most like a “stage”. I also felt confident about the clarity between the QR code and my performance, as the circular effect was amplified by the surrounding signs. I felt it was a perfect micro stage. This was an area I had walked through many times, usually late. I had always been struck by the loudness of nature here: the rushing stream, the chirping birds, the picturesque tangles of trees... and the big square human structures that had been plonked in the middle of it all. But despite that, the strength and beauty of the natural world here remained strong.

At this location, I was conscious of my desire/choice to engage in subversion and disruption. I wanted my location to be slightly in the way so as to be noticeably out of the ordinary and also so people may have to disrupt their own hurried path/thoughts to mind me. I was a little concerned I might be in the way that could be dangerous for bikes, but after putting my cushion in my spot and watching people pass it as I set up my QR codes, I was confident there was plenty of circumference around me to pass easily. An interesting moment came when one biker (only one, out of the dozens that passed me) said, very loudly so he was sure I'd hear him “right in the middle of the fucking road” as he whizzed past me. I became “upset” thinking I was in the way or doing something annoying, but the thought quickly passed as I considered his frustration a projection of his own morning, not my position. I was reassured over and over as bikes and people moved past me without a word or concern. Right at the very end, a giant riding lawn mower came across the bridge and I was sure I would have to move, but I didn't, and the driver seemed unbothered to move right past me.

I opened my eyes just as someone walked away from me across the bridge and I was him circle his neck. I hoped maybe he had breathed deeply to connect his mind, body, and breath in that moment and that maybe I had inspired him.

Leaned in to Nacht Han's idea that simply being there was enough. The qr code (which no one participated in [I wish I could see who even clicked on it because I'm pretty sure I heard people stopping to check it/me/the situation out]) wasn't very important to me, but I do think it was a

reference to, again, something purposely out of the ordinary. I didn't feel anyone sit with me, but I was buoyed by the idea that maybe just seeing me sitting calmly was infectious as an idea, just to even inspire a deeper breath.

I thought a lot about doing the thing, past iterations, and future iterations as I was doing it because this experience was so much different my last week. This spot felt fecund and alive with human and natural traffic in a way the Claddagh was more calm. The energy felt at more trafficked spots like blackrock and the uni has made me reconsider my final location at the docks.

No "backstage" at these locations make storage of personal goods tricky- trust, non-attachment

MAIN NON-HUMAN COLLABORATORS: BIRDS (found myself wanting to know who they were), SUN, breeze, water

**** letting my non-human parts connect with other non-humans****

PaR No. 4

Date: Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Location: Ladies Beach

Bioregional Research Questions:

What bodies of water lead into the Ladies Beach ?

Which non-human actors are most present here?

How has the bioregion evolved over time at this site?

What are the bioregional predictions for this site?

What was the landscape like before human activity?

Historical Research Questions:

Have any historical events occurred at this site?

Why was this site chosen for the location of a swimming spot for women?

How has the land been "claimed" or "possessed" throughout time?

How has the landscape/ non-human actor population been affected by human activity at the Beach?

How has water been harnessed for human activity?

How was water influenced activity/ development at this site?

Reflection Questions:

How does water sustain and destroy human activity?

How does water connect all of human and non-humankind?

JOURNAL

Mná

Teal – blue – longing

Open palms, absorb nonhuman elements

Salt air

Squawking birds and women

Water water water

Churning

Frivolous and determined

Location? Pile of garbage? Image?

QR half hearted but barrier important

Sun and breeze

Who is on the beach at this time/day – ethics

Rock – GODOT – god is already here

Parallel to the earth

Past and present – WASing

Third space – carving out and dropping in

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