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Carol Brown

THE AIR BETWEEN US

ABSTRACT

A phenomenology of atmospheric experience is often performed in dance tasking, but how might scientific understandings of meteorological change catalyse new dramaturgies of relation between breath and atmosphere drawing attention to our changing climate? In this writing, I discuss the dramaturgy for LungSong, a performance research project that draws together the labour of atmospheric science, place-responsive dance, videography and sound. The meteorological turn in art raises critical questions about the relation between performance and science, particularly in how we address changing architectures of air. Whilst methods and practices of choreography may provide opportunities for freeing the breath, global research into atmospheric change evidences planetary breathing that is in peril. Ground truthing in weather and atmospheric science calibrates the findings of remote instruments such as satellites, with land-based testing such as weather balloons. Specialising in measuring CFCs, Ozone, UV light levels and greenhouse gases, NIWA's atmospheric research station in Lauder is well known for its ground truth data. In collaboration with scientists at the station, LungSong developed choreographic thinking for reconfiguring relations between ground and sky, human and non-human breathing, corporeal and cosmological systems of breath, in an atmosphere that is shared. Situating the research praxis through intercultural and interdisciplinary research, through partnership with indigenous artists, professional dancers, and scientists, the emergent dramaturgy culminated in an audiowalk, public talk, video installation and rooftop performance.

Keywords: Atmosphere; Choreography; Eco-Sexuality; Cosmology; Hau; Breath

> You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life – a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). (Deleuze 1987)

Our bodies, suffused with atmospheres, ancestors and chemical compounds produced by sunlight are 'meteorontological'1 (Wallace Art Trust 2018). We are the weather. And yet an apocalypse of the skies threatens the futures of our children. Though life on earth may cease to exist as a result of the warming atmospheric system, the planet will continue long after we have gone (McKenzie 2019). Critically, climate change concerns material agencies that impact on biomass and energy, it erases borders, geological and nanographic time, and accelerates extinction events. Though the era of climate change has mutated systems we are dependent upon beyond 20th century anthropomorphic models, it has been, until relatively recently, outside representation. Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook, in the Foreword to *Art and the Anthropocene (*Turpin & Davis 2015), describe the current state of depletion, decay, mutation and exhaustion resulting from Climate Chaos as calling for new modes of address. What, we ask ourselves, can the arts do? In particular, how might choreographic thinking, applied through an intercultural and interdisciplinary research project addressing our aerial bloodstream through place-based performance and media, propose new perceptual thresholds for reckoning with the temper(ature) of our times?

LungSong is a multi-modal interdisciplinary collaboration that has emerged through our concerns to confront the question of the sensual address of performance from within a condition of climate emergency. As a creative team of artists, engaged in dialogues with scientists and embodied research with critical sites of atmospheric research data capture, we seek

1 'Meteorontological' is a compound term, bringing together 'meteorology' and 'ontology' to propose the inseparability of becoming, or being, and the weather.

to open thresholds of perception, to enable movement and the sensation of the movement of breath within our bodies, to be tuned to the critical function of a breathing planet that is in trouble.[2] Our approach is premised upon an urgent need to embrace "intergenerational accountability for the future" (Fensham et al. 2018).

If much of what happens in our atmosphere is invisible and inaudible, and seems only to be revealed by the quantitative measurements of science, how might an interdisciplinary and intercultural performance work and related activities attune us to the unseen pathologies of the atmospheric system, our relations with and of the world through cultures of breath, both human and non-human? What new modes of address might be catalysed by such an approach? The performance research project *LungSong* partnered the sky, as home to ancestors, with data from a planet – Gaia – in distress.

Between March 2018 and its premiere in Wanaka for The Colour Festival (6th April 2019), and subsequent performance in Auckland for the EcoWest Festival (13th April), interdisciplinary and intercultural performance research shaped an ecology of relations that underscored *LungSong* as process and event/s (Scoones 2019; Brown 2019b). This collaborative labour overcame disciplinary differences and methodologies through a shared sense of purpose and values in relation to environment, and the urgent need expressed by the scientists to 'get the message out'. At the heart of this project, however, was the simple act of breathing.

> *Where is it?*
>
> *Inside/outside*
>
> *Flowing*
>
> *formless*
>
> *virtual*
>
> *unmeasurable*
>
> *This relation which is never stable*
>
> *Inhaling*
>
> *Exhaling*
>
> *Constantly recomposing*
>
> *This respiration*
>
> *This mouth that speaks, that out-pours – voice, moisture, heat – that over-runs itself in language and longing*
>
> *This incomplete body, this incoherent fragment, joined by the fragments of other voices, the traces of other breaths*
>
> *This air between us*
>
> (Brown 2019) .

Scaling between human breathing and planetary breathing, *LungSong* sought to produce spatial and choreographic relations that attune audience and performers climactically, and corporeally, to our aerial bloodstream. By addressing diverse cultures of breath – indigenous Māori, Eastern and Western – we sought to "make sense of air" (Welton 2018), furthering and complexifying discussions in performance studies on the role of the atmospheric in performance (McCormack 2018). Cultures of breath, I argue, compliment physiological understandings of breath, aligning with a natureculture view of the world. Partnering with indigenous artists and scholars towards an expanded conception of epistemology through its cosmological foundations, we explored *how* to think, move and connect in atmospheres that carried not just phenomenal potential, but also genealogical and ancestral relations.

For over 30 years, atmospheric research scientists have been collecting data relating to the ozone and the chemistry of the atmosphere at NIWA in Lauder, Central Otago; their models reveal an upward trend of the tropopause height associated with increasing greenhouse gases. In sonifying and visualising this data as material for choreographies, *LungSong* brought climate change science into conversation with the cultural breaths of artists who sing, move and speak through live and mediated presence of the changes and challenges we are confronting.

2 *LungSong* was created by Carol Brown (choreographer), Russell Scoones (composer), Tia Reihana (performer and researcher), Nic Faye (videographer), Emilia Rubio (dancer), Maryam Bagheri Nesami (dancer), Jasmin Canuel (dancer) and Neêa Jamnikar (dancer). Richard McKenzie (scientist), John Robinson (technician), Richard Querel (scientist) and Wills Dobson (scientist) collaborated with the artists through their residency at NIWA's weather station in Lauder, Central Otago New Zealand.



Fig. 1: Neža Jamnikar and Tia Reihana in Living Archives of Breath. The Colour Festival, Wanaka 6th April 2019. Photograph by Raymond Tiddy.

Drawing on different ways of knowing – including kaupapa Māori, Practice as Research, feminist eco-sexuality, scientific investigation and technological innovation – *LungSong* sought to develop relationships and processes that contribute to climate change art (its expression and understanding) through public performance and talks.

LungSong sought to develop connecting, overlapping and dissonant conversations between the ways in which Mātauranga Māori embodies the world and the ways that meteorology and atmospheric science describe it. The research took place at the interface between Māori and non-Māori methods and practices. In respecting the integrity of each knowledge system, the research itself became a host for crossover discussions and encounters that sought an ethics and aesthetics of practice that was reciprocal, respectful and equitable.

LungSong research and development sought to develop a transdisciplinary methodology to contribute towards enhanced, healthy and sustainable relationships with the natural world through artistic research. As ecological performance, it was important that the work evolved in situ, within environments where we could feel the movement of air and be awake to its whakapapa, or ancestral presence. At Rauhoto Marae near Taupo, we initiated tasks such as: walking with the stratosphere across the *atea* (the ground in front of the whare or meeting house); moving for the length of *ha* or breath; whole body as a *taonga pūoro* (indigenous wind instruments usually carved from bone or wood); body as instrument for music and sound; polyphonic chanting; and, being breathed by another through intercorporeal touch and sensing.

Starting with the corporeal experience of breath, we were attentive to the provocation of French feminist eco-philosopher Luce Irigaray, who claims that we have "forgotten to breathe" (Irigaray 1999). The privileging of groundedness, of terrain over atmosphere, has led, according to Irigaray, to the "forgetting of air". In her critique of Heidegger's *Being and Time,* Irigaray suggests that though we all know how to breathe, we neglect to breathe 'consciously', connecting our breath with other spheres of human life and political action. For her, the conscious practice of breathing offers a non-hierarchical mode of exchange providing the basis for a non-essentialist politics of sexual difference *and* environmental awareness.

> So, air is an element that we can never fully appropriate. We can simply exist within it, use it to sustain our body and spirit, and share it with others. For this matter, breathing unites us with the others, at the same time that it underlines our individuality; it generates proximity and distancing at

> the same time. (Grammitokopoulou 2014, n.p.)

Discourses of dance, in particular since the development of modern dance in the early 20th century in Europe, were founded on the releasing of breath, something I have explored previously in addressing how dance genealogies of presence through intercorporeal transmission transmit archives of breathing practices (Brown 2017). Foregrounding breath as the source, initiator and motivator of movement is a tacit knowledge for most contemporary dancers, and yet, we seldom address our trainings in breath practices within a cultural paradigm. A challenge for the project research was to address different cultures of breath that are founded on ontologies of breath-body-atmosphere relations. This aspect of the research involved workshops and wānanga (learning communities), including a noho marae (gathering), led by different contributors to the project who introduced practices of breath-body-atmosphere relations from their distinct practices, including Wushu (Yin-Chi Lee), Taonga Pūoro (Libby Johns), Patu (Ria Paki) and Somatics (Neža Jamnikar). Documenting these practices through a shared blog, *Ao o Hā* (the breathing world), Pneûma, Prana and Chi'i were explored for their capacity to enable "bearing the other within me through breath" (Irigaray, cited in Škof & Holmes 2013, p.7).3 Whilst we sought to acknowledge a diversity of approaches within a global atmosphere of shared air, we were particularly attuned to the Māori understanding of *hau,* given the research was taking place within Aotearoa New Zealand with artists of Māori and non-Māori descent. In combining artistic, scientific and technological processes, Māori notions of environmental sustainability were the underscore of the project's purpose.

Māori understandings of *hau,* the 'breath or wind of life', provided a guiding force in the research. For Ann Salmond, *hau* is a relationality structure between humans and the non-human that is key to understanding a Māori worldview. When I met with Anne Salmond to discuss her research, she reaffirmed to me the importance as a Pākehā scholar not to mistake *ha* or breath for *hau.* As she notes, "hau drives the whole world, not just human relations" (Salmond 2017). The concept of *hau* proposes a 'middle ground' where "recursive exchanges, identity takes shape, and shifts" (p.13). Relationships are forged across time, space, and worlds, which are enacted and reinforced through ritual and exchange. *Hau* is a dynamic liminal space where past, present and future "intermingle and change places" as people, ancestors, and cosmologies meet (p.13). The *hau*, or wind of life, flows from one to the other and back again in an endless cycle, nurturing, sustaining and transforming all whom it touches. This, according to Salmond in *Tears of Rangi,* is a core principle of *te ao Māori.* Salmond explains how this Māori worldview underpinned early encounters with Europeans, and how an ontology of *hau* structured cross-cultural engagement, and also shaped the grounds upon which communication could take place.

Hau in *LungSong* provided an image of thought that, as Māori and non-Māori, we sought to honour in the conduct or *tikanga* of the research. Tia Reihana introduced *wairua* to our rehearsals on the rooftop of Lopdell House, demonstrating how breath, the movement of air, and a deep activation of her core could fire up the movement pathways and intent of the dancers.

Kasina Campbell was a kaitiaki for crossing the *ātea* of the Ruahoto marae as we explored 'breathing with the stratosphere', and Ria Paki trained the performers in how to cut the air with a *patu* (hand-held weapon carved from stone, bone or wood) drawing on her extensive knowledge of Māori martial arts, at the same time evoking cultural memories of different warfare techniques that Māori used when confronted by the British army during the New Zealand Wars. In this way, cultures of breath, drawing upon somatosensory trainings in contemporary dance, were brought into dialogue with Te Ao Māori cosmological thinking.

An understanding of *hau* allowed us to address the slow, deep time of the atmosphere, its intergenerational presence, making it both palpable and sense-able. It also raised the important issue of, as Tia Reihana asked in her interview with NIWA scientist Richard McKenzie,

3

"what does climate change mean for our whānau?"[4] (Scoones 2019). The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, in responding to the earlier 20th century devastations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki made an appeal to remain 'exposed', that is, to endure our encounter with catastrophic loss by allowing ourselves to sense it (Nancy 2015). In *LungSong's* audiowalk performance, *Living Archives of Breath* for the Colour Festival, Tia Reihana encounters the audience who are guided by a soundscape of voices to meet her on a pathway at the edge of Lake Wanaka. Her *wero* (challenge) as the audience approached was fierce with *ihi* (presence) and *wehi*. Slicing through air with *wairua*, her *pūkana* was both warning and challenge. Leading the audience down off the path and to a beach strewn with driftwood and lake weed, she paused at the edge of the lake before continuing to walk into the water. Leaving the gathered audience on the beach, the voice of ten year-old Cassidy Scoones speaks of how serious the situation is that we are in. A second performer, Neża Jamnikar, is sighted/sited on a pontoon floating on the Lake in the distance and underneath the magnificent *maunga* (mountain) of Mt. Roy and Black Peak of the Harris Mountains. The two performers move in and out of rhythm with each other and in dialogue with the movement of air, clouds, *awa* (lake) and *maunga*. Their gestures call the audience to see-feel the depth of the sky. They signal to *maunga* and *awa*, evoking the presence of *hau* in 360 dimensions. Pointing in different directions, and measuring the air between index fingers, they map the atmosphere to their bodies, quantifying the self. Fingers which extended away from the body are then placed on the *tinana* (body) as if to measure the sky against the human proportions of hip bones and ribs. In this re-scaling, mapping gesture, the performers propose that we read them as barometers of change, and, that we are deeply entangled with the weather. As receivers and transmitters, their actions become performance indicators of the state we are in. This is reinforced by Cassidy addressing the adult audience:

> There no Planet B. This is our world, how and why are we doing this? Just stop and think about his for a moment. Just think how serious this is. If we don't stop this, then suddenly, you won't be able to breathe. I know that this is quite a serious thing, and that we should stop this now. (Cassidy Scoones in *Living Archive of Breath*, Scoones 2019)

Tia plunges churning arms repeatedly into the cold lake water breaking its surface, feeding and cycling oxygen and hydrogen with breath, stimulating more oxygen to flow through particles of water and air. Under the clear blue sky, Cirrus clouds and clouds with wave structures induced by upper level winds in proximity to the mountains become a slowly mutating aerial choreography, and are reflected in the lake surface as a mirrored world (Liley 2019). Audience absorb the experience whilst listening to the sound of a *pūrerehua* (bull roarer) in the soundscape. Revolutions of air, caught and spun, create vibratile sound waves that whistle and whirr. At the same time, Tia skims the surface of the lake water whilst Neża brushes through the air. They revolve in relation, rotating on their axes like planets in dialogue. Their co-presence, in rhythms that fall in and out of unison, create micro-cycles of turbulence that we can identify with larger cycles of weather and planetary forces.

A recalibration of the senses is something that is called for by philosophers and environmentalists, including Karen Barad (through entangled intra-actions between humans and non-humans), Timothy Morton (hyperobjects and ecology and without nature), Donna Haraway (staying with the trouble and becoming cyborg and lichen), Bruno Latour (the science of care) and Luce Irigaray (vegetal thinking). However, beyond and preceding these posthumanist and environmental thinkers, there exists indigenous knowledge of the environment that remains relatively under-acknowledged in discourses on climate change art (Todd 2015).

The term 'Anthropocene', as the basis for posthumanist accounts of human-environment relations and climate change, is critiqued by a number of indigenous scholars who see this term as perpetuating white Euro-American thought and the continuing violence of colonialism. This is evidenced in meteorological history where, for instance, Robert FitzRoy (Captain of the HMS

4 *Whānau* is family.

Beagle and former Governor General of New Zealand) is credited as the inventor of the weather forecast as we know it (The Weather Book) (Moore 2015).[5] FitzRoy developed a system for reading changes in temperature and wind and for making storm predictions. He analysed atmospheric data through the use of barometers that were positioned around the globe and telegraphed storm warnings and weather predictions to the Met Office (Moore 2015). FitzRoy lives on in the name of one of the sea areas in the British marine forecasts, a mountain in Patagonia, numerous streets in New Zealand and in New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) in Lauder where an IBM supercomputer the 'FitzRoy' is named in honour of him.

Feminist geographer Juanita Sundberg takes such accounts of the origins of 'the weather' as erasing non-European ontologies and understandings that preceded the discovery of the barometer. She writes, "literature continuously refers to a foundational ontological split between nature and culture as if it is universal" (Sundberg 2013). Indigenous epistemologies, as an alternative, urge scholars to enact the sense of a 'pluriverse', in other words, a world that is not 'universal' but one in which "many worlds fit" (p.59). This understanding of pluriversal thinking in relation to decolonising the nature/culture binary, forms a foundation for *LungSong,* as a project which activates movement and multiple modes of voicing to *open the sky* through intercultural and interdisciplinary practice.

BREATHING

Movement is necessary to bring a decolonising methodology of pluriversal thinking to fruition: "as we humans move, work, play, and narrate with a multiplicity of beings in place, we enact historically contingent and radically distinct worlds/ontologies" (Sundberg 2013, p.39). A methodology of decolonisation through movement aligns closely with experiences of working in intercultural workshops in Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular with Māori performance artists and scholars including Charles Koroneho (*tinana/whenua*), Louise Potiki-Bryant (*whaahua*/coming to form) and Jack Gray (Atamira, *Mitimiti*). First Nations scholar Sarah Hunt (2014) reaffirms the value of dance as a way to negotiate the demands of colonial academic institutions and praxis, as she claims, it is through dance that Indigenous ontologies are brought to life.

CONCLUSION

How might we come to our senses to bring about the kind of action that climate chaos demands? To attune not only to the sensory properties of air, but also to our imbrication within atmospheric conditions? In *LungSong,* rather than represent the weather, we sought to *become climate.* Climate, not as an isolated object but as a set of interlinked processes. Breathing, essential to dancing, operated through an expanded awareness and consciousness of planetary breathing (understood within atmospheric research science) and *hau* (within a Māori worldview) within an inter-generational 'embodied telling.'

We are all breathing the same air. Through inter-arts, intergenerational and intercultural collaboration, we invited witnessing air, atmospheres, breaths and cosmologies in relation. Breathing at its most elemental level is an exchange of chemicals and particulate matter that happens invisibly. The body is an apparatus that is in constant exchange with atmospheric systems.

> *Nature courses through us.*
>
> *We are testing the air*
>
> *Being breathed by the planet*
>
> *On air*
>
> *Releasing breaths*
>
> *Engaging in inspiration and expiration becoming conscious, more conscious of how we are here*
>
> *Sharing a living archive of breaths.*

Rather than engage with the Anthropocene as a teleological fact implicating all humans as equally culpable for the current ecological state of the world, how might I as a Pākeha (white European) dance scholar support the ongoing

5 http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32483678



Fig. 2: Maryam Bagheri Nesami in LungSong. Photograph by Carol Brown.

emergence of non-dominant expressions of *ecological imagination* through a sustained creative research process in partnership with Māori dancers and scholars? In challenging ourselves to respond to climate change, how might dance, music, and digital design, as modes of address that offer aesthetic, discursive, visual, kinesthetic, vocal and sensual strategies not confined by the regimes of scientific objectivity, colonialism, political moralism, or psychological depression, have something to offer the pluriverse?

LungSong used digital technologies' radical potential to alter perceptions of space, time and atmosphere to map between the personal and the planetary scale. Audio recordings of NIWA's Spectrometer (a device for measuring the sun ray's hitting particles of air) were edited as part of a soundscape that included Tia's interview with Richard McKenzie, and listened to on headphones worn by audience-participants as they witnessed the performers. 360 cameras were installed inside the satellite sphere where data is captured from NASA's passing satellites and two of the performers – Neža and Emilia, engaged in an improvised exchange of breaths holding and releasing their human breath whilst the satellite dish tracked the skies to capture atmospheric data. Drone videography captured the performers emerging from the research station with its advanced computing, to walk across fields of long grass populated by cows whose belching contributes significantly to New Zealand's methane emissions. In sonifying, capturing through video, and representing scientific research as well as juxtaposing this with the uncanny presence of the performers, we sought to make connections between human breaths and the earth breathing, bridging science, art and technology. This process was triggered by my email correspondence with one of NIWA's technicians, John Robinson who described Gaia in trouble:

> The daily 'diurnal' breathing of the Earth (sucking in CO_2, exhaling oxygen) occurs on a larger timeframe over a year, up and down, but unfortunately rising each time to a higher level of CO_2 as we burn more fossil fuels – more patterns.
>
> (Robinson, email correspondence with Carol Brown 02/11/17)

LungSong coterminously addresses climate change and social change through the sensuous address of the creative and performing arts and design. As we face the devastating effects of climate emergency, we see the role of the arts as essential in telling stories and communicating through voice and gesture the changes and challenges we are confronting. Rescaling big data from climate change science into visual

patterns, avatars and sounds, listening to the voices and movements of artists and scientists who draw upon their experiences and knowledge, respecting stories and cosmological thinking that is older than climate change, and finding space to express the sense of loss that peoples feel in relation to disappearing habitats, *LungSong* sung into the cracks between disciplinary knowledges and temporal and spatial dimensions to *awaken the senses*.

LungSong moved between the intimately corporeal experience of breathing (our most vital gesture), and air as substance and atmosphere, our *aerial bloodstream*. Lungs, voices and respiratory systems became the interface for an engagement with the world and its atmospheric conditions in these 'strange climes'. *LungSong* was a gathering and a rallying of performers who created and exchanged breaths in protest and lament, contemplating and confronting climate chaos. Singing a new dialect, a 'babble' of syllables and movement, they created their own war and peace ceremonies, uniting in rituals. Shifting between realities, they took on different identities; inhabiting virtual avatars, they became environmental warriors who travelled through solar and data dust clouds. They sang and howled from the edge of the world, and the edges of seven heavens. The echoes of their songs awakened struggling hearts and activated minds.

LungSong combined the sound of the sun, *waiata* (song) of wind and the movement of breaths. Drawing on ceremony with a punk attitude, fearless and furious, our anger cut the air. This event was a lament, a performance cosmology, a yearning whole body cry. Moving between fact and fiction, illusion and disillusion, the performance dramaturgy of *LungSong* invited audience to witness and experience the temper(ature) of our times.

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