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# Swimming with the Salamander: A community eco-performance project

## **ABSTRACT**

*This article uses community writing to explore the ethics and engagements of the Salamander Project, an eco-performance project by The Olimpias, a disability culture collective. In the project, disabled people went swimming together and explored themes of stricture and freedom, access and play, biodiversity and border creatures, hanging out together in the wild..*

## **KEYWORDS**

disability  
performance  
community arts  
eco-performance  
biodiversity  
ekphrasis

At the opening of this article are three exhibit panels, accompanying the Salamander participatory exhibit in its six-month residency at the Women's Studies Gallery at the University of Michigan, and during a two-month visit at Calvin College, as part of their DisArts programming. These three panels guide viewers, participants and teachers toward engagement, offering questions for discussion. As groups and individuals engaged with the topics and the images in the exhibit, they were invited to leave written or recorded material behind – and much of what is gathered in this article emerged out of these writing prompts. As you read them, become aware of your own respons(ability): what would your answers be, what form would they take, would you dive in with us?

1. Here is a list of the authors some of us read as preparation and accompaniment to the Salamander Project, finding nourishment and companionship. These texts have been part of our feminist instrumentarium for a long time – from Cixous' 'Laugh of the Medusa' (1973) and its call to *écriture féminine* to Adrienne Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck' (1973). Other nourishing material were contemporary poems at the limits of human/animal engagements, like Waldman's *Manatee/Humanity* (2009). Many important coalitional and intersectional texts are now being re-found by disability culture writers – see for instance, Morales et al. (2012) and their visit with Gloria Anzaldúa. Another strand of our readings focused on indigenous connections between land and language, in particular Noodin (2014) and Vizenor (1993), yet another on disability studies and eco-criticism, like Clare (1998), Chen (2012) and Kafer (2013).



Figure 1: Petra Kuppers with Sunny Taylor, animal rights/disability activist, 2013. All images are taken by the group: the camera gets handed around underwater, and participants decide afterward if they want their image released. @ The Olimpias.

Salamander is a community performance project, created by The Olimpias artist collective, a group of disability culture activists and their allies. We use underwater photography, dry performance workshops, creative writing and video to find our disabled beauty emerging from the deep, the wild aesthetic of water, deforming ourselves through sleek unhinged control.

We surf in the heritage and presence of Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Ana Mendieta, Anne Waldman, Anne McDonald, Margaret Noodin, Alison Kafer and other feminist poet/artist/thinkers who value elemental change and power in the border zones.<sup>1</sup>

Since May 2013, disabled people and their allies from around the world have climbed into pools and oceans with Olimpias collaborators, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. We float together, enjoy freedom and adventure, help each other, engage in communal self-care, give ourselves to the pressures water exerts on us. We dance at the bottom of our breaths, in precarious zones between life and death.

What is disability culture?

What are the edges of strength and vulnerability, semi-naked, in the pool?

What does water mean to you?

What does freedom mean to you?

Where are your boundaries, and what can happen in the edge zones?

What would your images of wildness look like?

## CRIP TIME

I live life in slow motion. The world I live in is one where my thoughts are as quick as anyone's, my movements are weak and erratic, and my talk is slower than a snail in quicksand. I have cerebral palsy, I can't walk or talk, I use an alphabet board, and I communicate at the rate of 450 words an hour compared to your 150 words in a minute – twenty times as slow. A slow world would be my heaven. I am forced to live in your world, a fast hard one. If slow rays flew from me I would be able to live in this world. I need to speed up, or you need to slow down. (Anne McDonald, an Australian disability activist, on Crip Time – her experience of time as a woman with a communication disability)<sup>2</sup>

In the Salamander Project, the underwater camera gets handed around, images emerge in collaborative practice, and we gift the underwater photos to our participants. If they select an image and agree to make it public, we send it into the social world pool of Facebook.

In our sharings and workshops, we explore a poetics of slowness and translation. We spend time with an image and describe it for each other, seeing what stories and memories come up in the process.

This exhibit shares some of our images, and we invite you to come visit with us and spend time, slowing down time, crip time, suspension.

Over the life of this exhibit, the images will change – images from workshops in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Spain, Sweden, Britain, Germany and all over the United States will morph into a decidedly Michigan and Ann Arbor-based Salamander, as we engage in workshops with each other over the course of the semester.

What is visual culture?

What is performance?

How can activism engage with our image worlds?

How can audio description allow you to see slower, and to see more?

What would your images of time look like?

2. Quote from website, n.d. You can find out more about Anne McDonald, and the centre named for her, which advocates for people with little or no speech, at <http://www.annemcdonaldcentre.org.au/>.



Figure 2: The author in a Salamander workshop with members of the Different Light Theatre Company, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2014.

## DIVERSITY

The salamander and the natural mediation of amphibians ... could be an unpretentious signature of the earth, the trace between land, water, and our stories. Consider the stories and memories of salamanders as the natural traces of survivance.

(Gerald Vizenor 1993: 161)

Salamanders are indicator species for environment degradation and pollution, and their thriving points us to diverse and rich ecosystems. Salamanders and other creatures of the water/land/fire boundaries also appear in many cultures' myths and storytelling.

The Salamander Project invites you to think about biodiversity and human diversity, about being touched by elements and penetrated by our shared world, about vulnerability and strength, about living respectfully and in balance on the land and in the presence of humans and others.

What are relationships between feminism, environmental practice and art creation?

What is human diversity, and how is it valued or devalued?

What are Indigenous perspectives on living in diversity?

How can we rethink balance together?

What stories do we tell each other about wildness, and how we can make homes respectfully?

What would your images of home look like?



Figure 3: Salamander with Company Spinn, Sweden, in a warm pool by the ocean on an island near Gothenburg, 2014.

## THE SALAMANDER PROJECT: DISABILITY CULTURE

In May 2013, a small group of disabled artists in the San Francisco Bay Area began going swimming together as an art project. Initially, Neil Marcus, a spastic disability culture elder, performance artist and poet, needed to exercise more, to loosen his stiffening limbs, and he knew that the neo-liberal dictates of repetitive docile exercise as self-improvement just did not work for him. What did work for him, though, was performing for a camera, to an audience.

Working out what needed to be done, he bought a small underwater camera, and invited his collaborators to come with him and to make photos of him underwater. I am one of Neil's collaborators, and I lead the *Olimpias* ([www.olimpias.org](http://www.olimpias.org)), an international artists' collective. We create collaborative, research-focused environments open to people with physical, emotional, sensory and cognitive differences and their allies. In these environments, we explore pride and pain, attention and the transformatory power of touch. Together, we explore arts-based research, contemporary community art and disability cultural methods.

Soon upon starting, we worked out that this project had a lot of juice and could create a meaningful experience for many people. So we shaped a conceptual frame that included but went beyond self-care. We called the project *Salamander*, as many of us had strong mythical associations with artful water play, with the myth-valency of creatures like salamanders, and with notions of valuing bio/human diversity.

The salamander is a real life animal, of course, and, in our real and local life, it works in ecological frameworks as a marker creature: the presence or absence of salamanders helps mark the toxic load of environments. As Davic and Welsh write, in their review of the literature on key ecological functions of salamanders in North America, 'salamanders are increasingly being recommended for use as bio-indicators to assess the ecological health and integrity of natural areas' (2004: 406). Reading works like Davic and Hartwell, with their disciplinary framing in science-led environment, provides rich nutrients to ecopoetic engagement: we read about 'salamander guilds' and 'nutrient pool of phosphorus', for instance.

Human disability is often seen in similar ways – many see us as canaries in coalmines, and popular discourse has linked conditions like asthma, chemical sensitivities and forms of autism to issues of environmental change. Given these histories, it was easy for some of us to identify with salamanders, their rarity and vulnerability, and with their status as border creatures.

But the salamander is also a mythical creature, a different kind of border creature, one of the original alchemical animals. In alchemy, the salamander is linked to the elements: it connects water and fire, and stands as a marker of transformation.<sup>3</sup> As our project progressed, we gathered more and more border creatures, shared childhood stories, remembered myths, and, through this, garnered new myths, new stories to help us focus on what was going on around and with us.

As disabled people, many of us are cut off from the productive mechanisms of work and use value. We are ecosystems under duress, and the treatment of disabled people and elders often offers insights into a particular human ecology, its organizational structures and values. Neo-liberal policies seem intent on erasing human diversity, as more and more people experience the snipping away of the welfare safety net. In California, with

3. Salamanders appear in a variety of ways in literary culture, sometimes as creatures in slip-stream/magic realist settings, often as holders of transformative agency, liminal beings. There are intriguing cross-cultural literary treatments – for an engagement with fantastical literature and moments of Aztec culture, see Bruno (2005), and for salamanders as a site of Jewish/Yiddish culture, see Szeintuch et al. (2005). Researching salamanders as sites of engagement offers rich resources to understand cultural biodiversity.



4. Ekphrasis refers to the translation of one art-form into another one, often visual works into poems.

In-Home-Supportive-Services and other programmes under constant pressure to let people slip through the cracks, many of us find ourselves under assault, under the pressure to conform to narrow prescriptions of what being human means. Floating together in the waters, we had many conversations about this. The shift in gravity allowed for an opening to talk about pressures and sorrows.

In the Salamander Project, we make the everyday diversity of the pool into a political field, when we consciously insert disability into the pool's framework. Suddenly, we see a whole bunch of disabled people in the water, many with extraordinary bodies, many moving in unusual ways. Our being in this world, not just incidentally, but en masse, inserts a visibility of biodiversity. We are not just the outcome of catastrophe, the embodiment of environmental assaults, ciphers of victimhood. We are here, and we play, aligning ourselves with our worlds.

Our invitation emerges at multiple sites, and through various translatable mechanisms that allow for an opening in the group space to insert one's stranger self, the borderwalker, the creature from the other side. The photo is such a framing device, a poetic gesture that frames a moment as something set apart from the flow of diving underwater.

Many Salamander photos come about when newcomers are drawn into our circle. People involved in their own lives, in these public spaces, see the camera, see what we are up to, find out what we are doing, and want to be part of it. Giving permission to take their photo as a witness to what happened, there they are, dripping wet, skin to skin with Olimpias people, all laughing, all blowing out air, bubbles mixing, all breathless together in the euphoria that comes with depleted oxygen.

## **THE SALAMANDER PROJECT: OPEN POOL WRITINGS**

This section assembles a range of Salamander writings, all emerging out of free writes and ekphrastic<sup>4</sup> work on the photos of our project, during the making of the photos or in the interactive exhibit that followed. Some people wrote after swimming with us, others wrote in response to the images we posted in the world pool of Facebook. Ekphrasis is central to our disability culture politics: acknowledging different sensory access in a poetics of translation across forms is a cultural convention providing access for blind and visually impaired people, people with different cognitive processes and others. When we, in our Olimpias workshops, engage in free writes about an image or experience, and share the diversity of responses, we clearly understand that there are many different ways of being in the world, responding to stimuli, engaging with thought.

The writings below were shared on the Salamander listserv or on Facebook, or in the growing Salamander exhibit: a gallery show that starts with a few images and the three instruction panels that opened this article, and then grows as people describe the images through poetry and open writings, and answer for themselves the questions the panels pose.

Themes that run through these writings are water and flesh as connective media, thoughts on the pain of disability and the violence it engenders in public, meditations on inclusion and exclusion, the mythic status of disability and its lean into stories, public performances as a politics, connection and wildness, and ways of conceiving of ourselves and our relation to the world differently. Presenting these themes in this way, through an assemblage of

voices, is an enactment of biodiversity: many styles and choices, different distances to and within language frames. There are many ways to sing and shroud how disabled bodyminds engage in our worlds. See what lines, images or stories have resonance for you.

Squint into this, I would have  
said to myself, knowing the key  
ingredients and their venom.  
A public swimming pool.  
A camera. This body. I don't need  
to spell it out. Prose says it's all there,  
always fizzing in the marrow.  
The enjambment between us proves  
everything blue, all water. This  
is a series of dances  
we invent as we go, each  
the length of a full breath.  
One body passes over me, another  
winds around my torso, sinuous,  
amphibious, tender, muscular,  
substantial. Deep animal  
play, human mind turned  
against itself and for the new human,  
submerged in the way we move  
together fluidly, or bump  
against bone with apologies and  
laughter, then dive down again  
into the depths where thresholds  
blur and the future  
opens like lungs ...  
Clouds move in as I climb out  
and become singular again,  
rubbing the towel against my body,  
but leaving a few drops behind.  
I know two things –  
it's too cold to stay here all day  
and the world is thirsty for water.

... Andy Jackson

Who can feel comfortable in a bathing suit, in a swimming pool, in what is considered a healthful space in our shared culture? These are questions that come into focus as Salamander gets underway, and our workshops proliferate. Barriers emerge: the chlorine in many public pools is a barrier to our chemically injured participants. Some Olimpias collaborators who identify as trans, either pre- or post-transitioning, are uncomfortable with sharing themselves in public pools.

The slides between experiences of hate, shame and reclamation are complex, and with each e-mail or conversation in these first weeks of Salamander, I feel again and again the power of disclosure, exposure, the toxicity of the public sphere, the sadness of feeling excluded. The privilege of fitting in, or of having assembled enough cultural capital to own one's visible difference as a place of pride, come sharply into focus for me as I see and read of people being attracted and yet unable(d) to join us.



*Figure 4: Melissa Thomson, as part of a group Salamander performance at the Association for Theatre Research, Dallas, Texas, 2014.*

I am writing this a day after I was spat on, in public, by a drunken woman on a public bus. She was upset before we entered the bus – but as the bus waited around for the bus driver to strap us in, to ‘secure’ us according to his regulations, she got more and more enraged, mumbled ‘bitch’ at me, and paced in agitation. When she left the bus, she spat at me, and her spit on my skin and hair smelled of booze. I am a half-time city dweller, full time public transport user, and though used to abuse and bus drama, the intensity of hate pierced my composure.

‘Bitch’: I am a large woman, articulate, owning my space. I signal complexly: my skin color, carriage and German Welsh accent speaks of privilege, my wheelchair (strapped in place, unable to move, when someone spits on me) makes me vulnerable and easy prey. My femininity is hidden for many by the bulk of my person – in public, many people call me ‘sir’: classed and gendered in complex ways, size hides my pendulous breasts.

In the water, I am salamander: I am mobile in ways I cannot be out of the water. Nothing straps me down, and I have the privilege of movement, sidwinder, undulating, rolling in the pleasure of my round strong limbs. In the water, pressure deforms. But even though this is a place of safety for my aching limbs, this is not a place free of the constraints of normativity: race, class, gender, and disability very much inform who has access to my place of freedom. Many people we have swum with so far in Salamander haven’t been in pools for a long time – this is an opening, a tentative step, often hard-won, and we shall understand it to be such. To see ourselves in the pool is a political action in its own right. So we shall swim together this summer, trying to be attentive to who is not in the circle with us, not able to float, deliciously, tenderly regarded.

... Petra Kuppers

Not so much afraid of water now. Perhaps it’s the warm weather, I actually wanted to swim. Not athletic swimming. Just to have fun. Both your bodies are warm. Soft, buoyant, tender, floating in the water. Tried to dive without





*Figure 5: Neil Marcus and Chia-Yi Seetoo, exploring a new medium for dance, 2013.*

goggles on. Then tried to open my eyes. Then tried to stay under water longer. Came up with ways to wave my limbs around, snake my torsos. Neil can stay under water for so long. Amazing. I kept floating back up. What great fun to just float in a warm but not too hot late afternoon in Berkeley. For a moment we all became like kids. Just a moment of playfulness, being together, beyond words.

Dance under water. Work with the buoyancy. Not about defying gravity, nor embracing gravity. Not about erecting or jumping higher, nor ‘sinking’ or ‘releasing’ into the floor, as we might say, when working to inverse a certain upheld aesthetic expectation – of dancing on the ground, dancing on the plane. But water! We are really dancing with it. We are all cuddled and surrounded by the water. We are working in another way. The water lifts our limbs and we succumb to this tender choreography. A tender adventure.

... Chia-Yi Seetoo

I am terrified by water ... But I wasn't once. As a child I loved the water, I loved swimming with my father, I loved the floating and the use of my legs which during the day were not used because they were tucked into my wheelchair. In 1989, surgeons cut open my back and put in a Harrington rod ... Connected it to my spine. The rod took away my love for the water ... Simply made me sink.

I haven't been in the water for swimming reasons in over two decades.

But the smiles, the bubbles, the movement that I see here in the Salamander images ... They call to that child who used to love swimming. They awaken a sort of mystery that I have not felt in many years ... Can I find some sort of rhythm in the water again? Can I pursue movement in a new way?

... Chris Smit

it is hard to get to the pool. I mean ... it has been over the years. but lately its been easier. its art. its performance. its .... Showtime. water has always been my comfort. I fall into i.e. jump into it ... totally. it's the only place. I can ... fall. my body be itself. just who I am. me Spastic ... falling.

turning, twisting, writhing. its o.k. water. in water face down. holding breath like a alligator/log. first thrashing as Tarzan gets me in his grip. I thrash in resistance grappling with him. then I am subdued ... appearing lifeless. though not lifeless at all.

this leads me to theater. the stage. the fourth wall.

I feel also very at home in this world.

the fourth wall, to me is like ... as I am ... in water

another element is the audience. in the pool it is the camera. I know this lens.

I can work with it. it is capturing new images.

I am egged on. I know what I have to 'say' is important.

'Actor' is such a charged word. i guess it means being seen

and knowing how to relate to oneself onstage in front of an

audience. Stages are magic places

... Neil Marcus

Laying into it, the mind, the thinking changes when we are horizontal, when we are afloat. The body changes too. We change in here, in this aqua, suspended.

Hi.

Hi.

Arm, limb, surface tension.

I've missed you.

Hi.

It's been billions of years, I think, since you held me this way, changing my body lifting my spirit up into my flesh and bones.

You.

I missed you.

I think the horizontal thing pushes my spirit more evenly into my body. And then there is your body, our bodies, our spirit inhabited limbs.

Our density against the light, and density floating.

Hi.

Hi.



*Figure 6: Susan Ericsson, with her diabetes pump attached to her sunglasses, in a Salamander swim in Puerto Rico, 2014.*

Have I missed you/woah.  
It's different now, to be back in your embrace. Maybe it hasn't been as long  
as I thought. I am losing track, with all these limbs, bodies, spirits solidified,  
stopping light, and still buoyant.  
It's different when we're horizontal. Isn't it?  
My thoughts change.  
Don't they.  
It's a more level playing field.  
Not so top bottom.  
We all get our say now.  
Now that our spirits are pushed right up into our bodies all even like and the  
light wants to play, and we offer our solid, sharp buoyant bodies for her.  
Earnestly we offer.  
Hi.  
Remember when we used to be more horizontal and kind of even? Kind of  
integrated? With our navels facing upward and our backs open to the earth  
and floating?  
Yeah. That was how it was. I remember too.

... Lucy Beazley

Because the Nibaanabeg and the Nibaanabekwewag live in another realm  
hidden from our sight in the deep, dark waters, they are feared and rarely  
mentioned. However, they are beings who share characteristics with us, and  
they wish for the same recognition as those who dwell on land.

Over time, the Anishinaabeg began to forget to offer asemaa (tobacco)  
to the manidoug (spirits/mysteries) who live underwater. In dibaajimowinan  
(stories), the Nibaanabekwewag are temptresses, drawing unsuspecting men  
down through four spiritual realms into the final realm of death. However,  
it is not out of malice that the Nibaanabekwewag draw these men to their  
world, but from a desire for these men to understand the underwater mani-  
doug's need for asemaa and recognition from those in the land of the living.

... Jasmine Pawlicki



*Figure 7: Jasmine Pawlicki, an Ojibwe artist and activist, in a Michigan Salamander, 2014.*

There is a mermaid clan among the local Ojibwe, and my conduit to that knowledge is slim, and personal: Jasmine, one of our Anishinaabe Salamander swimmers, told me about this clan, and their relationship to sleep. They sleep, and see deeply, in dreams. I dream with the salamander, my mythical companion in the water lands, in my childhood, in my maternal line, in my new homes, in Michigan, in Berkeley. Another participant, Agnieszka, speaks of the difference between her Poland and the Bay Area, and of water and mountains, close and accessible. The difference for me is one of age, and of freshness, of layered ancient water, of accreting skins of moss and lichen and fungi, of losing myself in stony and membrane.

Salamander falls into the fairy tales. My grandmother walked with me the stations of the cross, strewn across miles of farmland and woods. Near one of these stations was a small wood with a lake, and a ruined boat. This, my grandmother told me, was Sleeping Beauty's castle. I believed this, and I still remember the ruined castle, one of many in the German countryside. Weeds wound through the stones, and the lake was calm, full of water roses. I bet a salamander or two made their home in it, too. Black and gold. In the dark green. Water I do not wish to swim in, scum on my arms and legs, the green sludge accumulating under my breasts. Fertile creatures, half soil, half water, plant animals, clinging to me. I am hugged by these sticky German waters, by the Michigan lakes in their own placid greenness, the sign of over-fertilization, the mark of terra-forming upon them.

If I were to find the salamander, he might speak of survivance in a colonized land, of habitat loss and of shrinking gene pools. But he is here, a web search assures me: farmers and urban dwellers have not yet succeeded in excavating each dark nook, the crevasses are still hidden, there is still a dark fetid smell of fecundity and of weeds wrapping themselves over stones and breaking their backs.

... Petra Kuppers

The last salamander I saw in San Diego was not at the body of water I was speaking of when walking in the water there and here with the sense of mom in both places now that she is gone. It was not in the ocean. It was not



Figure 8: Beth Currans, in a Salamander swim in a lake in Michigan, 2014.

in the uncanny valley. It was in the mountains. It was black with red spots. Or maybe I'm making up that it was black with red spots because I want to be inside the myth of all things wet. Landed, I think of all things wet. In the ocean, you don't think of wet/dry, hot/cold, alive/dead ... you think of ocean. I think of not just the sentient being, 'a salamander' but just the word too. Sal/mander. They show up in my poems. I'm not sure why. It doesn't matter. There they are. I am now in a circle of salamanders. We write and write. They do not look like us. I am grateful that demarcations of wet/dry, land/water, beginning/end do not matter. They are both things at once as are we.

Later I dream: of a phosphorescent salamander singing.

Later still I dream: my friend who is dying sits cross-legged on the floor with a blanket wrapped around her but then the blanket is not a blanket it is an octopus.

I dream these in the same night. The family Salamandridae surround. They have something to do with writing in the near amphibious rain.

... Denise Leto

I cast my eyes around and, seeing no one I knew, slipped in. then i saw them. Neil eased into the pool. Petra said he'd have limited time in the water, as he'd get cold at some point. She cradled his head against her neck, fond. we swam and talked, under and over each other, took turns snapping group photos, surreptitious like children in a forbidden club. i somersaulted forward and backward, and at one point neil threw himself against me, his arms flew around my shoulders, they were muscular and firm, and his head covered with thatchy gray curls rough like weeds, and he laughed and i laughed. ...

denise and i exchanged gazes, questions. we were otters, diving and twirling below the surface, bodies agile and lithe. the familiar unfamiliarity of each person new to another, her specific features, nature, how her body and brain respond. how she is and is not like another person. how i am and am not like another. how she and i have fish skin, seaweed hair, bright eyes, limbs, porpoise lungs.



*Figure 9: Adam, aka the Late Paul Cotton, performance artist, one of our Olimpias elders, 2013.*





*Figure 10: Zeinabu Davis and Brian Goldfarb, Salamander workshop, San Diego, 2014.*

It had been glorious. The next day I woke and my shoulders were hard and strong. They were happy I had let them swim again. I had to think. Do I want to swim once or twice a week there and take a powerful, immunosuppressive, blood-vessel-damaging drug afterward? No. Do I want to search for the perfect goggles that, hypothetically, vacuum-suck out every detergent- and bleach-infused drop of pool water? Not if they crush my skull like a vise, as most goggles I've found do. Was this experiment valuable? Yes.

... Susan Nordmark

The salamander, black with red spots  
climbed into her mouth with its pods,  
its sticky pods and it pulled  
at her lips: replenished, stricken.  
Losing the larger frame of sound  
she was unable to speak, her voice  
seized in grainy rivulets, lesser dams.  
The salamander swam beneath her tongue  
it was gorgeous and frightened  
or frightening – she wasn't certain.  
It kept being a world in there  
so she wouldn't swallow its slick  
skin hiding in glottal stops.  
It didn't pretend to be her primal self.  
It didn't pretend to be anything  
other than its own body.

... Denise Leto, from *Lake as Body*

### **CONCLUSION: WHY WRITING?**

When I think of Olimpias' moments of grace, that's usually what comes to me: small time bubbles, 'crip time', blossoming out of time's usual flow. These grace notes are rarely 'in performance', but are moments like this, suspended in the memory amber of writing: a fellow Salamander swimmer, long-time Olimpias participant, meeting me in another niche of the Bay Area's disability culture ecology, a dance jam. I find myself moving with Katherine Mancuso, and we embrace into contact weight-sharing.

I do not know about Katherine's day, and we do not use words. But we sink onto each other's shoulders, a long held embrace, a fleeting kiss to each other's necks. Slowly, we glide over skin, our arms retreating over warm flesh. We find another hold, another point of sharing weight, of counterbalance. We offer anchor points to each other: at one point, my arms are outstretched and Katherine's hands are hanging off mine, and her body rocks in place beneath the hands, safely anchored between our palms and the ground below, teetering back and forth.

The shape we make feels like an egg in space, limbs tucked in, a rocking. A place of possibility and virtuality: emergence and transformation. There is little dynamic work here, this is not a riveting performance when watched with the judging instruments of audiencing. But it is a delicious place to be in, bones in secure contact, muscles warmly aligning, skins cool and soft against one another. From here, we can each make little starts into movements that might or might not be unfamiliar. We can also rest, and prepare for what lies ahead, to the moment we step out of this time bubble. These are the sites I wish to move from and towards, smooth space, de/territorialized zones, stimming globes to reassemble, to self-stimulate towards recognition and emergent new territorializations.

The project writings in the middle of this article or the photos interspersed throughout might offer this emergent quality for a reader: allowing them a way into a very specific/cognitive experience. A few of the texts will glide away without any mark being made. Other ones might well lodge themselves in a readerly hollow. The time of reading itself is a gift, an engagement offer, as is the time it takes to write these, and the courage to post them to the Salamander listserv or Facebook site.

Non-human others appear in these pages – and whether they appear as metaphors, or as experience, remains an open field question. How does it feel to be disabled, deemed non-human and expendable at many different historical junctions? In the open writing, I shared my experience of being spat upon, and many experiences like this structure the voices of people whose voices, bodies or minds are deemed other. Drawing upon the textual fields of salamanders, otters or eggs offers new textual riches to a human biodiversity that has been painted into a medical corner. The scope of our politics is shaped by the social field that we have access to, and the lift over the uncut curb can be a step into unknown territory.

In nature writing, ‘nature’ has so often stood for ‘non-human’, another to be penetrated, conquered, be awed by, or save. In this eco-performance project, the methods of textual creation and critical reflection focus on connectivity and interdependence, on multiple voices in vibrational touch with one another. ‘We are not self-contained in our energies’, Theresa Brennan reminds us, and we open up in a field of connection, into a watery realm in which any wave we make can be more consciously felt by others. Pool, lake, river or sea waters help us understand what interdependence and connectivity can mean, and how we impact each other. The words that emerge, like this writing, can extend the reach of our ecopoetics, local specificity and non-local readerly practice interweaving with each other, overwriting each other, touching in the non-space between words and skins.

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## Drama Therapy Review

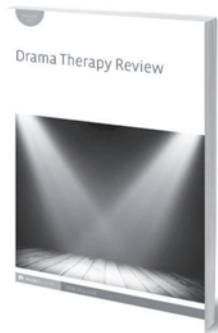
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