**Informed by the Goddess: explicating a processual methodology**

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Abstract

This is a self-reflexive approach to practice-as-research in dance and performance that draws on what Jungian Scholar and feminist Susan Rowland calls a “Jungian goddess feminism” which is a kind of “experiment in the imagination” (2002, p.48). This methodological and feminist approach is based on previous research into ‘authentic movement’ (Adler, 2002). The article sets out a methodological approach and style of writing for practice as research that embraces and reconfigures ‘the goddess myth’ by embracing subjectivity for its value that is comparable and yet different to rationality. There are personal reflections, exercises for the reader and a theoretical frame braided throughout the article. Through this Bacon reflects on her doctoral studies to question why the emerging ‘spiritual’ aspects apparent in herself through her engagement with her fieldsite were not explored more deeply. A post-Jungian feminist frame of reference enables both a reconfiguring of essentialist readings of ‘goddess’ as well as a theoretical space where spirituality is named, embraced and from which new understandings for practice-as-research in dance and performance can emerge.

Key Words

Spirituality, goddess, practice-as-research, Jungian, belly dance, feminism

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In this chapter I continue a journey I began many years ago – probably as far back as I can remember – a lived and creative journey which is both autobiographical and anthropological (Okely, 1992) in that it contains stories from my life and an approach to constructing fieldnotes as a crucial and developing aspect of my methodological approach to practice-as-research in dance and performance. This has been the site of my research throughout my career as a Jungian Analyst, Authentic Movement practitioner, and Professor of Dance and Somatics.[[1]](#endnote-1) In this writing I aim to bring into focus a previously un-named element of this methodological approach. It is an ideological imperative which shapes my research, informed by what might be called the ‘goddess myth’. It has remained in the shadow of my research to date because it has been difficult to find language that allows the approach its full worth.

*I am twenty. It is 1975. It has been five years since the publication of Kate Millet’s Sexual Anarchy (1970) and Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1970). I am a feminist. I am one of those feminists who is fighting to take up my place in a world where men previously and primarily resided. I wear boots. I don’t wear make-up. I speak forcefully, loudly, aggressively to get what I need from life. I will tell you, if you ask and often even if you don’t ask, I am not an ‘earth mother’ type.*

During this period of history some young feminists were claiming the ‘goddess’, ‘earth mother’ or ‘Great Mother’ as an image to help them reclaim their power in the face of a patriarchal culture that had (and has) long been oppressing women. Texts such as *The Great Cosmic Mother, Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (Sjöö and Mor, 1989) suggested to those searching for meaning that

The Great Mother in Her many aspects – maiden, raging warrior, benevolent mother, death dealing and all-wise crone, unknowable and ultimate wyrd – is now powerfully reemerging and rising again in human consciousness as we approach the twenty-first century. Isis, Mawu-Lisa, Demeter, Gaia, Shakti, Dakinis, Shekhinah, Astarte, Ishtar, Rhea, Freya, Nerthus, Brigid, Danu- call Her what you may – has been with us from the beginning and awaits us now. She is the beauty of the green earth, the life-giving waters, the consuming fire, the radiant moon, and the fiery sun.

 Sjöö and Mor, p,xviii,1989

Texts such as Sjöö and Mor (1989), Baring and Cashford (1991) and others embrace the perspective that the goddess myth has appeared throughout history and cultures as “the vision of life as a living unity” (Baring and Cashford, 1991, p.xiii). In these texts there is an invitation for women (and men) to return to the beginning, to a time before the patriarchy when goddesses were part of life and their symbolic existence was foundational to the making of meaning. In this time, so these authors tell us, there was an inescapable and unknowable connection between individuals, the collective and the earth. But we cannot return, turn back the symbolic clock to an idealised and romanticised time. We can only live in the present and move into our future. But does time operate in linear fashion?

In a personal reconfiguration of the ‘goddess myth’, my voice will be heard and read throughout these pages as a woman seeking to be present and able to speak and write “from my heart, moment by moment” (Tempest Williams, 2012, p.164). In the here and now of your reading there will appear a series of vignettes, creative flights of fantasy, snippets of a life remembered, performances made, papers published, as attempts to alter the trajectory in ‘goddess studies’. This methodological and feminist approach builds on my previous research into ‘authentic movement’ (Adler, 2002) as a methodological approach for practice-as-research in dance and performance.[[2]](#endnote-2) In other words, I do not seek to valorise the power and potential of ‘women’, ‘nature’, ‘bodies’, or ‘goddesses’. I do not long to return to a time before memory when some purport we were united with nature. And yet, paradoxically, I do long to valorise the power and potential of ‘women’, ‘nature’, ‘bodies’, or ‘goddesses’ and discover a way of living that allows a deep and meaningful connection with nature and yet acknowledges and employs many of the advances that are the bedrock of the developed world in the 21st Century.

In other places and at other times I have referred to my practice-as-research methodology as auto-ethnography, or as a somatically informed feminist approach to artistic research. Here it is my contention that a more conscious understanding of ‘goddess worship’ and the ‘goddess myth’ can help to clearly and creatively develop a unique writing style and methodological approach to research in the arts. Here I articulate some of the process toward generating that writing style. This process aims to embrace the subjective experience of the researcher and yet acknowledges that our research must find and articulate a unique context (both practical and theoretical) for our subjective research experience; remembering that practice-as-research in dance and performance is still young and exists primarily within the patriarchal values of the academy.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In the course of this chapter you will find some writing in italics. This is intended to signal a more personal and imaginative or poetic writing style. This technique becomes the dominant mode of address as you progress into the depths of the chapter and then subsides as you and I find our way to a conclusion. It is an homage to that great poet, essayist, playwright and feminist Susan Griffin. Her work *Women and Nature, the roaring inside her* (1984) was so moving for me at twenty-nine years old. I wept tears of deep joy and gratitude at the discovery of a woman writing in such a living and alive form. Her prologue in that text needs no explanation and is a better guide to my own writing than I could compose.

He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her eyes and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says it is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature.

And so it is Goldilocks who goes to the home of the three bears, Little Red Riding Hood who converses with the wolf, Dorothy who befriends a lion, Snow White who talks to the birds, Cinderella with mice as her allies, the Mermaid who is half fish, Thumbelina courted by a mole. (*And when we hear in the Navaho chant of the mountain that a grown man sits and smokes with bears and follows directions given to him by squirrels, we are surprised. We thought only little girls spoke with animals).*

*We are the bird’s eggs. Bird’s eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are sprigs of ivy and leaves of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak.*

*But we hear.*

 Griffin, 1984, p.3.

 Griffin is clear that she does not believe one element is closer to nature than another but that we are all part of nature. But in her introduction to the 1999 second edition of the book, she suggests that perhaps one gender may be more *aware* of their connection to nature than the other (Griffin, 1999, p.1) but that this must be dealt with subtlety. No one is created more closely to nature but is shaped by the images generated in society. In this sense, what I write here is an attempt to challenge the societal image I know has influenced me and my generation of women and men. I hope you can imagine this writing like you would a dream that you gradually fall into and emerge from. I offer this as an example of a self-reflexive approach to practice-as-research and the makings of a performative comment on the world as I have experienced it.

*During my doctoral study, I was conducting ethnographic field work and the subject of my study was a group of UK based belly dancers who were involved in paganism, new age ‘goddess spiritualism’ and related practices. I was encouraged by my supervisor to acknowledge my role in the research, my own subjectivity, but only if that was a means of clarifying the subject of study. When I found myself being pulled into the world of the belly dancers I was advised to withdraw to gain some ethnographic clarity and objectivity.*

Over my career I have become deeply concerned about the processes of supervision and mentorship in practice-as-research in performance and dance. I have wondered how I might develop a kind of focus and methodology for doctoral and postdoctoral research that might be supportive of the whole person rather than the ‘academic’ who is shaped by a societal image of ‘objectivity and rationality’.[[4]](#endnote-4) Of course, this concern has been generated by my own unsettling experiences during my doctoral study. But the field of Practice-as-Research in Dance and Performance, or Artistic Research, is still small and young. It is a tender new shoot growing in an otherwise well-established forest. I wonder how to tend the tender new shoots growing in the forest of the academy, I ponder the tender shoot of a new doctoral student with her eagerness to know, to challenge, to contribute new knowledge to the field; or the practice-as-research project that may lurk within me and given the right conditions gestation will happen. I notice my desire to nurture all these aspects, I notice my generative capacity and realise I associate this with a construct or image of ‘feminine’.

*Towards the end of my research, the leader of the belly dance group sent me a letter. She wrote, ‘what is it you want from us besides your research? You are part of the research now like it or not’. It seemed, according to this woman, I had been looking for something from this group and the group pointed right back at me. Was it their goddess worship that I longed to find within myself? She was suggesting that I too was the subject of study. I had read plenty of postmodern and feminist ethnographies and thought I was well versed in understanding the difficulties of my role and place in the fieldsite. Of course I was part of that site, but this felt of another order. They were suggesting to me that I was looking at them because they had something I should be looking for in myself. So, after my PhD I turned my attention inward. I certainly didn’t think of this as a search for the goddess within. My turn toward my inner world created a shift in my ego attitude and generated a trust in an inner sense of Self that appeared to help formulate life and living. Whether this is imaged as ‘god’ or ‘goddess’, ‘woman’ or ‘man’ seemed (and still seems) less important than the felt sense. It was the process of allowing felt experience to develop more fully in consciousness that helped me to become congruent and uniquely me. This, in turn, meant my research also became uniquely my own.*

Jungian Scholar and Feminist Susan Rowland calls a “Jungian goddess feminism” a kind of “experiment in the imagination” (2002, p.48). It is an attempt to embrace the fact of who I am: a white, western woman working in academia where overall value is placed on rationality, objectivity and evidence with an interest in the feminine as well as the role of feeling, intuition and the symbolic in our creative processes.[[5]](#endnote-5) Although I understood that some research objectivity was imperative at the time of my doctoral studies, I was also left with a feeling of discontent because I did not fully understand my own interest in ‘goddess worship’. I had been focused on what I knew rather than taking the symbol of the goddess as something unknown that might be shaped and developed within the individual as a life and performance practice. Years later I realised, mine was not an interest in the sign or *subject* of ‘goddess worship’ but could be framed as a Jungian goddess feminism. Rowland calls this a “feminist fantasy fiction” (Rowland, 2002, p.68). Here I employ this as a processual tool, or methodological approach to my research. To construct such a fiction, imagination must be embraced and feelings will operate as guiding principles of the journey. This is, and always was, less about the subject of study out there in the world and more about the process of unfolding (whatever it is) into conscious awareness, and then into an appropriate articulation one’s own creative process (Bacon and Midgelow, 2014).

Perhaps, as you begin to read, you might allow a moment to recall something from your past creative research projects. Find a place in the room where you might comfortably place that memory and then notice where it is relative to where you are right now. Now imagine a place in the room for your future creative research project and place that in the room. Notice how it is situated in relation to you as you sit reading in the present moment and to the placing of your ‘past’.

Rowland (2002) gives a full and rich critique of early approaches to Jungian feminism and suggests that these early attempts to turn the theories of psychologist C. G. Jung into a theory of gender that was inclusive and complex were too fixed on objective theory rather than processual, experimental and in flux. Much feminist performance and film analysis has taken a Freudian or post-Freudian approach with a Jungian or post-Jungian approach being considered less suitable for critical feminist analysis. Perhaps this is because Jungian feminist analysis is not as politicized as Freudian approaches (Basil-Morozow and Hockley, 2016, p.146). Basil-Morozow and Hockley refer to the writings of Jungian Analyst Andrew Samuels (2015) who indicates that a Jungian feminist perspective follows Jung’s theories of the psyche in an approach that tends toward the spiritual rather than the socio-political. This means that usually a feminist or post-feminist Jungian analysis will focus in some way on a woman’s transcendental journey rather than her social and political oppression (Basil-Morozow and Hockley, 2016, p.146).

Perhaps it is the focus on a transcendental journey that has, historically and culturally, led researchers to link women with alternatives to the religious patriarchy. In this line of enquiry an idealised ‘goddess myth’ that was available in some undetermined bygone time and place leads us onto a biologically determined ‘goddess’ path. On this path women are associated with the ‘goddess’ and become unequivocally connected to nature and it isn’t long before we find ‘woman’ is ‘essentalised’ and stereotypical qualities such as her shape and overall body image are considered biologically determined rather than culturally constructed. This was exactly the problem the early Jungian feminists were having because any theory of sex and gender based on biology alone leads to an essentialising and universalising of our understanding of ‘woman’ and, in turn, women dancing and performing. As Dance Anthropologist Andre Grau (1994) points out, the assumption that all people sexed female are the same results in the notion of an ‘essential’. This ‘essential’ becomes a universal as the following syllogism reveals: since being a woman is defined by her biology and biological sex determines the ability to enact certain movements, these movements can be enacted by all women. Therefore, dancing, as in the example of belly dancing, becomes universal.

*I didn’t like belly dancing and, at the time, I didn’t understand how the dancing was a spiritual experience for them. The deeper and more involved I got with the belly dancers the more confused I got.*

Any turn toward the spiritual, as the women participating in belly dancing were doing, confronts us with contemporary culture’s potential loss of the ‘myth of the goddess’ (Baring and Cashford, 1991, p.xiii). This loss, or lack of acknowledgement, of mythic images of the feminine principle in a culture such as our own conjures notions of a symbolic lack and one-sidedness evidenced in much contemporary disregard for nature, the lack of acknowledgement and respect for the deep connection between all things and the overarching patriarchal (or ‘god’) systems governing our lives. Turning toward a goddess feminism, without falling into a biologically determined ‘feminine’ trap, is an attempt to work with the unity of all things particularly trusting that, even though written language is a system of signs rather than symbols, the symbolic potential of a goddess feminist approach to research in dance and performance can be communicated via the written word.

Do you experience yourself as ‘in time’ in that you see the future ahead of you and the past behind you? Like a line drawn on the floor running ahead - the future - and then another line out behind you – the past. Time is often perceived as a linear event. But you can choose to play with this construct. Imagine and re-imagine your research and your place within that research. Choose a place to sit in relation to your past, present and future as you read this chapter.

When Rowland considers a full critique of postmodernism and poststructuralism in relation to Jungian feminism she arrives at the following: “Goddess feminism may offer fictions of the self for a postmodern era” (Rowland, 2002, p.48). This is a vital re-imagining of Jung’s theoretical approach to the theory of gender. Rowland has an innovative suggestion regarding the writings of C. G. Jung. She posits that Jung should be read as thinking and imagining in process rather than an attempt to fix a grand psychological theory. My own version of this, without wanting to insinuate that my writings are in any way equal to those of Jung, I have called processual thinking (Bacon, 2006). I would suggest, in keeping with Rowland, that this way of writing and thinking offers feminists “more postmodern ways of constructing the preoccupation with ‘goddesses’” (Rowland, 2002, p.48).

Goddess feminism is an approach that invites us to re-instate the myth and symbol of the goddess and this facilitates a critical perspective from which we might critique the patriarchal values implicit in academic discourse and to re-position research by practice without needing to (unconsciously) relegate our work to the under-privileged territory of the patriarchal version of the feminine. Crucial to this approach is a re-evaluation of the epistemological role and value of feeling, intuition and symbol in the development of new knowledge.

*Interactions with people (fieldwork and other) are relational and dialogic… I am more than my ego position…there is an ever-changing relationship between conscious and unconscious…There is always much more to know... There is always the unknown… What of the smell of you, the feel of you, the sound and taste of you? I see the space around you, your ‘subtle body’, your astral projection… feel your presence. Can I still see you, do you see yourself from this subtle space in-between you…me? Is this like Bakhtin’s idea of a language and thought that is all around us, reformulating all the time? Or is this Heidegger’s indwelling god? Is this the unthought thought? Or even Hegel’s everything with opposing parts? Or is it best to put down the words of these men and trust my own. Is that possible? Will you still listen?*

To re-appropriate feeling, intuition and symbol we could do no better than to turn to myth as constructed from this post-feminist Jungian psychoanalytic model. Myths are not only, as Barthes would have it, falsehoods created externally to the individual. They are “models by which human beings code and organize their perceptions, feelings, thoughts and actions” (Feinstein and Krippner, 1989, p.4). In contemporary urban societies people can construct distinctively individual personal myths. Myths inspire, generate conviction, galvanise action, and unify individuals and groups by creating passionate participation (Feinstein and Krippner, 1989, p.4).

The notion of personal myth allows a tension between the growth of individual identity and wider cultural processes. These personal myths or mythologies inform and govern, often quite unconsciously, an individual’s expectations and aspirations. Individuals use this personal mythology to construct their understanding of themselves, their place in the world and their choice of research topic. These “expectations are typically an amalgam of images and stereotypes derived from the mass media, one’s friends and acquaintances, in some cases popular books read on the subject plus, on occasion, distinct fantasy projections and wish-fulfilments” (Rees, 1999, p.18). These unconscious myths we live by drive our feelings, intuitions and shape the symbolic material that helps to construct meaning in our lives. When we understand the myth of our family of origin, our individual myth, the myth of our research culture and the myths of our times we are more able to see the connections between all things in and of the world rather than believing we are unique individuals separate to nature and the wider world.

The concept of a personal mythology moves us into the realms of practice in the sense that it is not simply the *thinking* about being a particular kind of person that drives individual choice and expectation. It is *action*, in this case practice as research in dance and performance, which shifts these myths from fantasy into the realms of conscious action. This research, in turn, creates a new awareness of the individual’s existence and helps facilitates new knowledge for the field of research as well as attendant life changes.

Binaries are fun to play with when we are conscious of their impact on our lives. Choosing to articulate the binary creates a new way, a third way, of seeing yourself and your research:

Do you experience your practice-as-research as existing through time with your project unfolding in front of you? This spatial metaphor places your past on the one hand and the future on the other; as though time was a line running from left to right. Perhaps you imagine time running in front of you like a river which you watch from the bank.

But I am getting off the topic, I can feel it, the thoughts divest themselves of my bodily sensation and I fly off into heady thoughts where I lose my ground. It is the bodily ‘felt sense’ (Gendlin, 1978) that brings me back to the present moment exploration of a Jungian goddess feminism that doesn’t lose the body. In a fictional, fantasy world where there is no loss of the myth of the goddess, she, goddess would affirm my desire for connection to all things. She is everywhere and nowhere, all things and no things, all feelings and no feeling. The image and feeling of her as it resides in my internal world reminds me we are a minded body, an embodied mind. If Rowland is right, then a preoccupation with goddesses would offer a fluid reading of gender in and beyond the world in which we live. It would not offer up the centrality of our bodily knowing and a deep connection to the earth as evidence of ‘her’ existence but of the existence of the mythic nature in all of us. I am not concerned with ‘studying’ goddesses of any particular persuasion. Myths give meaning to our lives. I attempted to articulate just that in my article and performance, ‘Myths and Stories by Her’ (2007). Once you become conscious of the myth of your life, family, social group, culture, period of time then you can begin to question, to critique, to challenge and make new knowledges. Truth and origins are of no concern here. That would be to fix the past, present and future in linear fashion.

*If it weren’t for the belly dancers I would probably have kept my own spiritual longing in the shadows and I would have lived a much less rich and rewarding life. I have a lot to thank them for. But isn’t often that I am asked to pursue them in an academic context, I have re-written myself. Sometimes I miss them.*

I continue to long for a more imaginative approach to our own lived experience of being a woman, and particularly of being a woman involved in practice as research in performance. I sense the valorizing of the ‘body’ I discovered in belly dancing still exists in many areas of research and practice – in many of the body based psychotherapeutic practices (see Bacon, 2016), in many somatic practitioners working in the field of dance and psychotherapy. This has been a long journey toward personal clarity in relation to Goddess Feminism.

As you sit reading this chapter, remember the first task of finding a place to sit in relation to your past, present and future research. Where are you in that spatial configuration now? Perhaps you feel moved to allow past, present and future a new configuration. Perhaps there is a ‘something’ that marks the spot where you once resided. Perhaps these ‘somethings’ will become some thing, your thing.

Searching for Self is often a fundamental part of a practice-as-research in dance and performance process. Perhaps this is a longing that propels our research interest, a longing that is a life force. This is not research predicated on data and evidence and yet cannot separate itself from current academic requirements for context and justification. Perhaps this post-Jungian Goddess feminism will celebrate my ‘longing’ and offer a possible theoretical and contextual frame that can embrace feeling, intuition and a symbolic approach. But according to Rowland, “Goddess feminism is not fashionable in today’s capitalist, materialist, non-religious culture” (2002, p.68) but the developments in postmodernism brought into conversation with earlier Jungian goddess feminism offer

A Jungian feminism influenced by both deconstruction and post-Freudian feminism is able to imagine more ‘feminine’ forms of theorizing. It offers connections to transcendence derived from the maternal body (Irigaray), ecriture feminine and performing gender (Cixous), the semiotic as maternal realm and non-linear women’s time (Kristeva)’ (Rowland, 2002, p.159).

*If I am cut adrift from the life’s meaning or asked to find language for what I do not yet have words for, then I need more than the zeitgeist, the majority rules, the main event.*

Morgan, an academic writing about Goddess worship (as distinct from feminism), believes that many women in contemporary society are searching for an inner strength and they often look to Goddess worship.[[6]](#endnote-6) It seems Goddess worship can have a profound effect on a woman’s psyche, (Morgan, 1996, p.94) by allowing a conscious assessment of our role within relationships and of the societal pressure “to encourage inner strength and private suffering” (Simes, 1999, p.179) as positive personality traits. According to Morgan, images of the goddess give the possibility of self-belief, provide a level of awareness that can facilitate change and can bring value into our lives by studying the significance of being female (Morgan, 1996, p.94). “Some women may be drawn to goddess figures as empowering models for today and help form the basis of a feminist witchcraft rooted in the significant stories of Classical culture and beyond” (Rees, 1999, p.20). Many women turn to Goddess worship for spirituality and affirmation of life today (King, 1993, p.148) and as an empowering model. This may be the case for some women in contemporary society, and the writings above give us a good critique of this social and cultural phenomenon, but women may or may not identify as feminists. I would argue that the development of an academically rigorous methodological approach based on the principles of the ‘goddess myth’ need a feminist approach to ensure we are not only looking into the light but can hold the dark side of experiences. If we fall, you and I, into the dangerous territory already outlined in this chapter it will take time and patience to look around in the darkness to find the light within. This is a ‘doing thing’, a “pragmatic rather than theoretical feminism in providing fictions of subjectivity that lead into notions of gender and personality as ‘performative’” (Rowland, 2002, p.69). This is a goddess feminism for everyone, not only women.

In my Jungian feminist fantasy of a practice-as-research methodology, time has no linear evolution. It is no longer important to begin at the beginning, to be true to the process, to find the main narrative. It is important to imagine your writing process as a creative journey, a visual engagement; a playful encounter with form and structure, content and meaning.

*It is years later and I am a lecturer in Dance and Performance Studies. It is the late 1990s. Young women on the undergraduate degree programme tell me that they are not feminists, that they do not need feminism, or do not know why they would need it. They say there are no more battles to fight so no need for feminism. And then a young woman says ‘if I need shelves putting up I just ask a man’. Another tells of being raped on her way home from a club. Yet another speaks of the pleasure she feels in being able to do what she likes with her body, to dress as she likes. What use do these women have for a goddess feminism? What use do I have for it at this point in my life? Life is concrete, finite, easily placed for me in categories of past, present and future. Sadness fills dark corners. Pain and suffering wear the clothes of liberation. But to dream is to live. To imagine is to know more. Keep dreaming.*

Lift your eyes from the page. Take a breath. Take a moment. Remember a time of great creative and academic fulfilment, let your eyes move around the room as you cast your mind back through time. Take another breath. Enjoy this moment as you sit here reading. When you are ready steady your gaze on a point in the room where you feel and sense your memory most strongly.

*Lift my hands in front of my face. I cannot move, cannot sit up, cannot move from this familiar place. And yet, something arrives. A dark energetic quality somewhere both deep within and between my hands and face. It is akin to that feeling out in the field or on a walk by the sea where sky and skin are one. It lifts me up. The first move is the hardest. My head and hands vibrate, shudder and finally I begin to rise, begin to emerge from sitting. And the rest is easy. It is not at all what I expected, not at all the forward future motion I had in mind and yet I know nothing about this ‘something’ that has arrived between my hands and head. It is unknown and yet has its own knowledge and forward trajectory that appears to move me from the stuck place I have found myself in, to a new place, as yet unknown.*

*But in this version ‘who is here’ is harder to discern than was previously thought. She begins to feel the cloud resume its usual position, covering the sun, keeping out the light, the clarity of thought. I see her walking away from me. She looks stiff, upright, mature and yet stern, perhaps unhappy. Her efficiency frightens others away. It frightens her. It is not her true nature. She doesn’t really know that yet. It will be some years before she is able to find the ‘other’ inside herself. For now, she welcomes the responsibility, the accolade for having achieved so much in her career, yet it seems there is always more to achieve, some sense inside that she has not achieved enough. Will it ever be ‘enough’?*

*This is the molecular level. I notice it as I walk, the way the air passes through me or her. The temperature, the quality of the air, all serve to support or deplete her and me. I am drawn to notice what is not when I am in a place that is not my own. And what is not in this place and time is a rigidity in my physicality manifest in the clothes I wear, the roles I take, the car I drive, the roads I drive on, the boots I wear, and the way I walk in those boots, the haircut I choose, the glasses that frame my face. All these and more attempt to disguise the external choices made with a bias toward the physical body perhaps at the expense of my energy body. And yet I sense these choices are relational. As though, at some deep energetic level, my body knows it must attempt to fit in to survive. Who is here?*

*As I see and experience I am trying to map out my space, articulate my boundaries, my centres, and also be open to the experience of you in your spaces, traces, performances, performatives, musings and mutterings. Perhaps I imagine this is what all of us interested in practice-as-research processes are doing. But maybe not. In seeing you, will I see myself? Or/and see the spaces in-between. In knowing more about myself will I be able to really hear, see, feel, experience, know you more fully? I ask myself how can I be in relation to you, allow for a dialogue with you without foregrounding my/self, allow you to be you/other whilst we both attempt a conscious articulation/performance of selfhood?*

*I want you to know, to feel, that I try to re-imagine these early habits of perception and yet I can only give undivided attention to what comes forwards. If I pause just for a moment might I resist the imposition of sense or meaning? Or might I see differently just with the blink of an eye, the lift of an arm, a turn to the left? As I settle into this moment perhaps I will notice the particularity of the glasses I am wearing, the lens through which I look. Working to suspend what Husserl calls the rule of the vertical, ordering in hierarchies, for the rule of the horizontal where things are allowed equal weight. To witness, to view, is to be a natural phenomenologist. I surrender to complexity. I surrender to the other.*

Return your attention to that point in the room you found previously. Now move your attention from that point in the room toward an internal felt sense of how you are right now, right here. Attempt to move your gaze back and forth between these two points - internal and external - noticing differences and similarities. Once you have established the rhythm of back and forth eye movements and you have a steady and deep breathing pattern, continue with these eye movements and allow your mind to freely imagine whilst keeping your breath rhythmically steady.

 *A student recently asked me what it was like to be popular, or did she ask me about the popular genre, I forget. Either way, I thought about so many things all at once. Being popular at school when being ‘in’ or ‘out’ felt more like life or death. The choice not to be popular when I realised what you had to do to be popular – in that deep southern state of Alabama where cheerleaders and football players were the only game in town - unless you didn’t want to be popular. Which, it seemed, I didn’t. Luckily it was the early 70s so I could be a hippie and a feminist. Being popular, like belly dancing, really means to be populist and is not proper academic dance research. Where is the experimental improvisatory cutting edge dance work? Where is the highbrow, high art, high, high, high…And finally, being popular as an academic might be like finding yourself writing about or making work that is part of the zeitgeist, you ride the crest of the wave, thinking it is of your own doing but really the wave carries you for as long as the wave lasts. Then, when the weather changes, the sea calms, you find yourself adrift on a raft or a book or an exhibition or a performance, that won’t sell, is no longer wanted. It won’t get you where you need to be.*

So, I have been following my nose, rather than following a group, a form, a genre, a discipline or whatever and in following my nose I find my tail. There was a woman who came to see me to do some Authentic Movement. She had a dream of a small, ill dog without a tail. She closed her eyes and began to move with the dream image and found herself on all fours ‘chasing her tail’. Afterward she told me she was so sad as she realized and felt she really had no tail. What would she do without her tail? She was not sure she knew how to keep her balance without a tail. I get it, how will I keep my balance without my tail?

When I attend to what we might call my embodied self, I have potential access to a ‘being’ or a mindful ‘noticing’ of felt experience (Gendlin, 1978). This is not a suggestion that a focus on ‘embodied self’ will provide a unitary self, a knowing self, an undividedness – no, it will provide a frame through which agency and alterity can be embraced, where process is embraced as creative, developmental and performative, where writing performing is also performing writing. This is a place where we *are* and we can work *with* both self and other – all present and available within a space where we embrace observing/witnessing self/other.

*I am the other woman who looks at her from a distance. I see this younger one dancing in the opposite direction. I see her back and feel sadness. I long for her to be able to look ahead, to have insight, to be insightful. She dances amongst the dresses and anguish. But what is available is my own ability to look behind, to what is no longer, what has passed but is remembered. I look. I see her dancing with purpose and intent. But as I watch her dance I feel no sense of belonging, only know myself to be dancing inside. Looking behind in another way might simply mean re-membering.*

*Now the body is different - less able, less willing, less, just less. And there is something there that wasn’t there before, perhaps it is the sitting, the intimate setting of you and me together with just enough light for us to see one another. You will hear me as I speak softly of my experience in this moment. A new performative way of being together. No longer dancing outside but dancing inside, this is the landscape. She feels different to me. The processes of invocation are different now. No longer dancing but speaking or writing in the studio, with you, with the goddess. Can you see me?[[7]](#endnote-7)*

Time…there is never enough of it. Give yourself the time you need. Stand up and walk to your future moment and look back, over, toward your present and past. Walk to your past and look back, over, toward your present and future. Notice what arises. Take a breath and give time for words to arise before you return to your reading.

*I am interested in the space between me and you, in giving time to feel and experience that which does not yet have language. It is relational, it is dialogic, dialectic; it is you and me, self and other but it is also self and my internal other. I am drawn to the spaces between the atoms, to the field between, to that which has no words (yet). And we sit together until words arrive. I know I do this, we do this. I know this. I do this.*

Once we begin to notice, to be mindful of this self, this energy body, then we are offered a choice. Consciousness, the gift and curse of humanity, offers up what it often cannot deliver. Might I find language to explain this better? I lift my head and look out of the window, the sea is in the distance; at closer range I see a fir tree, its branches gently undulating in the breeze that signals the remains of a passing storm. Pay attention, can you feel the connection to the moving branches. Can I find my moving branch and tree within? Can I find the language to articulate what I feel in this moment? To be connected, to be alive in the world. This is my goddess fantasy fiction. This is my performance practice. I am living in and through it. Be open to possibilities, flights of fancy, the impossible and improbable can and do happen.

I long for you to evoke the process of finding words to tell me about this or any experience, this felt sense of who you are and how you are who you are. They will reveal, they will not conceal. As Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart reminds us ‘moving forces are immanent in scenes, subjects and encounters, or in blocked opportunities or the banality of the built environment’ (Stewart, 2007, p.128) and our noticing of this is not a good or bad thing but it is a thing, as movement through life is a thing. My work, like Stewart’s work on the everyday, is an attempt to stay with ‘human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water’ (Stewart, 2007, p.128) and to find language that might communicate something of each moment of my experience. Like a clearing in the forest, a circular open space where you lay on the soft grass looking up at the sky, the sun shines and the trees encircle. There may be a deep feeling of distance between you and what you perceive to be the sky and yet you may discover a deep knowing in your body that we are all one; that you and the sky are merged in molecular, energetic ways that cannot be fully articulated (unless you are scientist, which I am not). I wonder how a ‘deep embodied knowing’ that embraces more than intellect and objective reality might be key parts of a goddess fantasy, and in turn how these might inform your practice-as-research? I close with a quote from some dear friends and colleagues, Joanne ‘Bob’ Whalley and Lee Miller. Their book *Between Us, Audience, Affect and the In-between* (2016) is an excellent way to consider much that I have been pondering in this writing: “And here we are again. Back at the beginning, smiling and holding out a hand” (2016, p.48).

Take a breath, take some time. Put down the book and breathe. Allowing images, emotions, sensations and thoughts to arise as they choose. Not clinging to this or that. And when you are ready, choose a place to stand in relation to your past projects as you finish reading this chapter. I see you standing. I see you. Reach out and begin your own research journey.

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**Biography**

Bacon is Professor in Dance, Performance and Somatics at the University of Chichester and has a private practice as a Jungian Analyst, Focusing Trainer and Authentic Movement practitioner. She has studied Authentic Movement with Janet Adler, Tina Stromsted and Helen Payne; and is also a member of teaching staff for Janet Adler’s *Circles of Four,* a preparation for teachers of Authentic Movement. She is a practitioner/scholar, Co-Director of *The Choreographic Lab* and Co-Editor of *Choreographic Practices Journal*. Her key interest and commitment is to creative research processes, artistic, academic, psychological and spiritual; and ways in which we might ‘articulate something’ *from* experience drawing on psychological and spiritual approaches such as ‘focusing’, ‘active imagination’ and ‘mindfulness’. A selection of recent publications include ‘Authentic Movement as wellbeing practice’, in *Dance and Movement for Wellbeing: Kaleidoscopic Views of a Diverse Field* (2017); ‘Authentic Movement: a field of practices’ in *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices (*7.2, 2015); ‘Creative Articulations Process’(*Choreographic Practices* Journal, 2014, with Vida Midgelow), ‘Embodied and Direct Experience in Performance Studies’, in *Contemporary Ethnography and Performance Studies*, 2013), ‘Her body finds a voice in an imaginal world’ *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy Journal*, 2012), ‘Psyche Moving: ‘Active Imagination’ and ‘Focusing’ in movement-based performance and psychotherapy’ (*Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy Journal*, 2007). A selection of practice as research includes *scratch: a choreographic conversation (*2016,with Vida Midgelow*),* *skript* (2013,with Vida Midgelow), *Sitting / Walking / Practice (2010-11)*, *Psyche’s Witness (2009-10),**Myths and Stories by Her* (2007-09).

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1. My research career has been concerned with methodological approaches to practice-as-research in dance and performance and the interface of the somatic and psychological with dance and movement. For example, see Bacon, J. (2015) ‘Authentic Movement: a field of practices’ Introduction to guest edited special issue of *journal of Dance and Somatic Practices,* vol. 7.2, 2015, pp.205-216; Bacon, J. (2017). ‘Authentic Movement as wellbeing practice’, in *Dance and Movement for Wellbeing: Kaleidoscopic Views of a Diverse Field* (eds. Karkou, Oliver and Lycouris), Oxford University Press; Bacon, J.(2013). ‘Embodied and Direct Experience in Performance Studies’, in *Contemporary Ethnography and Performance Studies* (Harrop and Njaradi, eds.*).* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, pp.113-130; Bacon, J.(2012). ‘Her body finds a voice in an imaginal world’ in *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy journal*, Palgrave; Bacon, J. (2010a). ‘Sitting Practice: Reflections on a Woman’s Creative Process’ in *Gender Forum*, *Women and Performance*, Issue 31. Anna Furse (ed.) <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/gender-and-performance/sitting-walking-practice/>, pp.1-5; Bacon, J. (2010b). ‘The voice of her body: somatic practices as a basis for creative research methodology’ in *Dance and Somatics journal,* Intellect, vol. 2:1,2010, pp.63-74, ISSN 1757-1871; Bacon, J. (2007). ‘Psyche Moving: ‘Active Imagination’ and ‘Focusing’ in movement-based performance and psychotherapy’ in *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy,* London: Routledge,2 (1). pp.17-28; Bacon, J. and Midgelow, V. (2014). Creative Articulations Process, *(*with Midgelow, V.). In *Articulations,* Choreographic Practices special issue, Vol 5.1. Bristol: Intellect. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For more about my approach to practice-as-research in dance and performance employing Authentic Movement as a methodological approach, see Bacon (2010). For more information about Authentic Movement see \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Offering from the Conscious Body, The Discipline of Authentic Movement.* Rochester, Vermont:Inner Traditions. 2002; [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For some interesting and innovative approaches to the development of a unique writing style, see Graziella Tonfoni (2000). *Writing as a Visual Art*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press; Bacon, J. and Midgelow, V. (2014). Creative Articulations Process, *(*with Midgelow, V.). In *Articulations,* Choreographic Practices special issue, Vol 5.1. Bristol: Intellect; additionally there are many texts by academics about creative writing or using process or reflective writing and from anthropologists and ethnographers. Rather than giving you a full list I encourage you to seek out texts that help you to re-imagine your own approach to writing and research as an academic-practitioner. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. #  The discipline known as Practice-as-Research in Performance and Dance has many books the topic which offer an array of theoretical and methodological approaches. For example, see the following detailed in the references list: Nelson, R. (2013); Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (2010); Smith, H. and Dean, R.T. (eds.). (2009); Kershaw, B. and Nicholson, H. (2009); Freeman, J. (2010); Allegue, L., Jones, S., and Kershaw, B. (eds.). (2008).

 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Although there are many meanings for the terms feeling, intuition and the symbolic, I am specifically referring here to the way these are defined by Jungian and post-Jungians. For an introduction to Jungian terminology see Samuels, A., Shorter, B. and Plaut, F. (1986). *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*. London: Routledge. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For an overview of recent research on the Goddess see King, originally published in 1989, reprinted in 1993 pp. 140-148. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. In this passage I am specifically referring to *script* (2013) created with Vida Midgelow, Arts Council England funded and performed at venues throughout the East Midlands as well as *scratch* (2016) also created with Vida Midgelow and performed at Nottingham Contemporary in Dec 2016. *skript* is also the subject of an article by myself and Midgelow ‘Closer to the Body: Reflections on *skript’, (*Bacon, J. and Midgelow, V.). In *Articulations,* Choreographic Practices special issue, Vol 5.1., pp.73-94, Bristol:Intellect. 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)