Tracing the Horizon: iLANDing as Radical Archive Practice and Pedagogy

by Christopher Kennedy and Ann Holt
Tracing the Horizon

We sit together in the foothills of the Taconic Mountains as dusk descends. The sounds of summer surround: cicadas, crickets and owls. Within the hour, the moon rises like a torch, bright and full of possibility.

Jennifer begins to walk toward a small ravine to the east and, instinctively, we all follow behind. Together, we enter the edge of the forest. The moon’s light begins to fade and it’s difficult to find sure footing.

We continue through a bramble and I can feel prickers catch my legs, spreading their seed, entering my skin. We emerge on a recently plowed cornfield. The earth is soft and supple. I’ve never seen the moon this bright before. Our shadows are suddenly noticeable and we begin to dance and move along each earthen ridge with laughter and excitement. A shadow theater of the land.

Soon the quiet of the eve deepens and Jennifer points to the horizon. All four of us intuitively form a line. She signals for us to begin a score: a transect or eye tracing score. Focus on a point on the horizon furthest from you. Slowly trace a line from that point towards you touching every surface as if your eyes were a magic marker.

We all trace the horizon with our eyes and I feel a deep calm extend through my body. We stand transfixed for what seems like an hour, noticing, observing, being in place together. As we enter back into the forest we whisper to each other, speculating on the sounds of insects and nocturnal routines taking place all around us.

While we had walked many of the same trail paths before, there was something about the eye tracing score that brought the land and all of its rich layers into sharp focus. The score had enabled us to be fully present in our bodies, opening a space for dialogue, for ecstatic encounter, and improvised movement—all with little or no verbal communication.

Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance (iLAND)

The purpose of this paper is to highlight an example of how a group of artists/educators/researchers involved in the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance (iLAND) conceptualize their practice as both users and producers of archives. iLAND is a dance research organization based in New York City. For over ten years, iLAND has brought together movement artists and scientists, visual artists and designers for intensive arts-based research and performance residencies. While each iLAND residency is unique, collaborative groups submit a proposal that identifies an area of research and a project that will use movement, dance or practices from other disciplines such as architecture, urban planning or biology to be used for understanding and responding to ecological phenomena in and around NYC. The duration of each project varies, but typically lasts 3-6 months, and includes some form of public engagement such as a workshop, happening, or culminating performance. The output of each residency are scores (Score.1), which the organization describes as a set of instructions that tune one’s observational senses to a particular aspect of an environment, which we might not otherwise notice, or be attuned to. Walking tours of lower Manhattan that trace original waterways; dancing with street trees in Harlem; foraging for mushrooms in Chinatown; dancing alongside migratory routes of birds in Corona Park are just a few examples.

Score 1. Listening and Movement Score

With a partner, speaking in whispers, walk around the room facing each other trying to maintain the edge of being able to hear each other.

Conceptualizing the iLAND archive

With a decade of transdisciplinary knowledge-making that foregrounds somatic, kinesthetic and choreographic approaches in relationship to a variety of disciplines, the residencies have generated a robust collection of choreographic artifacts and materials that respond to changing environments. This documentation is particularly significant in light of our descent into the “Anthropocene,” a geologic time period in which the earth’s systems are significantly altered by human activity.

Recognizing the archival value in these materials and approaches, iLAND founders have decided to preserve and share this documentation for its research and pedagogical value in the form of an archive called iLANDing. The process of developing the archive has sparked an interesting discussion amongst iLANDers about the fragility of ephemeral, site-specific, and time-based movement data generated by iLAND participants. Figuring out how the...
By definition, an archive is a site for housing unique materials (primary source or original documents and artifacts) to be preserved in perpetuity for continued use (Society of American Archivists, 2008). The iLAND archive consists mainly of scores from a decade of participatory performance projects, documentation and reflections, images, and narrative descriptions of projects. An open access physical field guide and website (iLAND, 2016) is in the process of being created to both contain, share and dialogue about the content with a diverse set of users interested in it for research, teaching, learning and art-making.

Score 2. Bone Tracing Score

(In pairs) One partner holds still, while the other, using their fingers, traces the bones in the hand, arm or body of their partner.

Let it be said that we are non-archivists. We are two artist-educators, teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses in art and design education. One of us is an artist involved in iLAND, and the other’s research has long been focused on questions of the possibilities and potentialities for using and accessing archival materials for art and pedagogy. We do not intend to appropriate the term “archive” (Theimer, 2012). Rather, we seek to suggest ways for artists and teachers to engage and use an archive representing embodied and transdisciplinary approaches to situated places of learning, particularly ways that invite and provoke new interpretations, ideas, and responses (Ellsworth, 2005).

It is only through user engagement and interpretation that archival materials can be activated. Therefore, we are cognizant of the fact that archives are increasingly being defined in more expansive terms within the archival profession, in terms of how they grow (Krause and Yakel, 2007; Greene, 2002) as well as in context to the relationship between user, producer and archivist.

Understanding that archives are deeply embedded in social relations in that they function in terms of how records are created, used, and shared, the aim of this article is to examine the process of creating and using an archive comprised of embodied data (Scores 2 and 3), and the potential of how the archive itself might operate as radical pedagogy (Scores 4, 5, 6).

Score 3. Sound/Listening Score

Noticing the textures and materials of the surfaces around you, use your body to make the softest sound you can, gradually increasing to the loudest sound, then back to the softest sound. Repeat twice.

iLAND as radical pedagogy

The potential role of iLAND’s archive and process plays out in the K-12 school setting or spaces of higher learning through setting an example for inspiring methods for learning about place, critically engaging the implications of human/non-human relationships in the built environment, and in collaboration. First, iLAND residencies, and more broadly the iLANDing “method” offer interesting examples of place-based education that attend to multiple learning styles and recognize the socio-political implications of relationships. The emphasis of iLANDing on process and in finding ways to collaborate through shared inquiry emerges in relationship to changing environments through and with the body. Learning unfolds through research-based practices, shared experience and sensory engagement that embraces a level of uncertainty, risk and serendipitous discovery, factors typically absent or avoided in the K-12 or university classroom.

One can consider an iLAND residency, such as Strataspore in 2009, to imagine possibilities in how the iLAND archive might operate pedagogically. Strataspore is a Collective, consisting of a mycologist, architect, choreographer, educator, and artist. The group explores NYC’s hidden infrastructure through the lens of fungi, using mushrooms as a metaphor and material for research, movement and public projects. Their process began by foraging for mushrooms in various parks around New York City. They gradually learned the basic science of mycology, and used mushrooms as an opportunity to bring people together through public workshops exploring issues such as soil contamination, ailing urban infrastructure, affordable housing, and cheap, sustainable food sources. Over time the mushroom emerged as both a metaphor and lens for understanding NYC’s hidden infrastructure and ecological systems, inspiring conversation, collaborations and engagements with landscapes around the 5 boroughs.

Strataspore created two dances, one at the Judson Church and the other at the Flea Theater. Choreographer Athena Kokoronis developed scores for each dance inspired by weather patterns, John Cage, and movements interpreted through previous mushroom hunts. The act of slowly leaning down to pluck a mushroom, wandering off trail paths, and scanning the forest floor became a source material for the two works. As the group’s collaboration deepened, the two pieces evolved alongside regular outings led by Gary Lincoff, the resident mycologist, who was also interviewed live during one of the dances to provide an intimate and improvised soundtrack.

Like many iLAND projects, the public was able to participate by joining the collective through workshops or...
culminating public events. What’s interesting here is that the practices of both research and movement occur in public spaces, allowing for spontaneous and unscripted encounters that inspire dialogue about a particular ecology, landscape or socio-cultural issue. Learning occurs rhizomatically and horizontally, transmitted through the group’s internalized network and then circulates through the public sphere.

Score 4. Latent Potential
Wait until it rains. The next morning, find a park or green area near you. Walk slowly, scanning the ground. Look carefully for emerging fruiting bodies (mushrooms). Visualize the mycelial network below your feet. Walking through the city, take note of the evidence of the infrastructural network below your feet (fire hydrants, street lights, manhole covers).

Score 5. Foraging
Choose one square foot of ground. Examine that square for an hour.

Go foraging for mushrooms in Chinatown.

Score 6. Oyster/Oyster Dinner
Acquire discarded oyster shells from a restaurant in the West Village. Fill them with oyster mushrooms. Feed to guests. Contemplate the connection between oyster mushrooms and oysters from the sea.

Strataspor, in this sense, is a platform for collective knowledge initiated by the group’s engagement with local ecologies, and the science and metaphor of fungi (Score 4). A community of practice emerges through this process, allowing both the collective and public to learn through movement (the mushroom hunt) and shared experience (Score 5). The concept of movement-research offers a flexible container to structure this process, which aims to understand ecological phenomena through kinetic and somatic engagement (Score 7). As the group’s investigation deepens, new knowledge and meaning begins to circulate (Score 8).

Score 7. Diagramming Score
Draw a diagram of how you got here.

Draw a diagram of your journey here this morning.

Draw a diagram of what supports you.

Score 8. Movement Score
Watch the water for 5 - 8 minutes.

Score 9. Listening Score
Begin by listening to whatever sound catches your attention. When you have listened to it completely, let another sound catch your attention. Try to hold on to that sound until you have listened to it completely.

Many of the same structures and pedagogical processes unfold through other projects. In a 2013 project for instance, Through Body, Through Earth, Through Speech, the collective Fantastic Futures collaborated with environmental scientist Jason Munshi South and artist Sonia Finley to engage with the general public in the neighborhood of Queens Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Their project explored questions of difference, biodiversity, proximity, and intervention, connecting to Munshi South’s research on the evolutionary implications of urbanization for wildlife in New York City. Over the course of the summer, they engaged Corona Park through a series of movement and listening workshops, collecting field recordings and data on animals used for a performance at Eyebeam’s Art+Technology Center.

Another project called PARK explored the evolving ecology of Fresh Kills, New York, one of the world’s largest urban landfills. Existing as both process and performance, PARK members describe the project as a “form of making and unmaking that engage wilderness, post-industrial spaces, and everyday landscapes to locate a convergence of nature, industry, and individual experience.” Through

BELOW AT THE MIDDLE (2009), PERFORMED LIVE AT JUDSON CHURCH IN NEW YORK, NY. PERFORMERS: YUKO MITSUISHI, JACKIE DODD, CAROLINE WOOLARD, MONIQUE MILLESON, SHINOHARA KENSAKU, CHRISOPHER KENNEDY, CASSIE THORTON, ATHENA KOKORONIS, JULIETTE MARCHINA
improvised movement and field studies the group documented evidence of the site's ongoing evolution from urban landfill to park site.

Similarly, River to Creek: A Roving Natural History was a project initiated in 2010 engaging the North Brooklyn waterfront and areas along the Newtown Creek, a superfund site and the most polluted waterway in New York City. Described as both participatory research and an art action, the project was a collaboration between marine scientist/dancer Carolyn Hall, ecologist/visual artist Kathleen McCarthy and Clarinda Mac Low and Paul Benney, and members of TRYST. The group led a walking tour, kayak convoy and bike ride, each guided by dancers and a different expert who shared their knowledge of botany, history or water ecology. The final research including recorded conversations, image and video, was translated into a sound collage transmitted by radio along the route.

Although each collaboration varies, the iLAND model offers a unique framework for educators to rethink our individual and collective relationships with/in the places we live, work and play. The examples highlighted here focus on process, and the use of the body as a tool for collecting data, encouraging dialogue and direct participation with natural and built environments. As a transdisciplinary practice, iLANDing inspires a transformative understanding of human relationships to ecology, and creative modes of practice that are not based in one specific discipline but rather form new methodologies and knowledge.

What is radical here, is the way iLAND methodology resists neo positivist claims for how and why knowledge is created, circulated, and legitimized especially within the field of science education or ecology studies. iLANDing does not prescribe or assume a particular kind of empirical evidence through each residency, but instead encourages the pursuit of open-ended inquiries and interpretations of everyday phenomena that leave room for complexity and uncertainty. What’s more, iLAND projects are typically open-ended, leaving behind traces of understanding in the form of scores. These scores are a curricular framework to take up anew, re-adapt and re-translate through accessing the iLANDing archive. iLAND data (archived and made accessible) is open access and inviting to be re-activated through re-enactment and re-modification (Lepecki, 2010). The ideas explored through each residency become enmeshed in the very environments to which they seek to respond becoming a continuous and ongoing learning event for both iLAND residents and the publics they encounter or engage directly in the present, and future visitors to the archive through the interpretations that are generated.

iLANDing as a living archive

In the case of iLANDing, what is in the making here is a set of materials that blur boundaries between time, space, art and archive. The iLANDing archive serves as a repository for ephemera connected to each project, and the organization has made a decision to foreground the scores developed as one of the primary ways the user will engage and interpret the archive. iLAND has also invited each residency group to support selected scores with other materials like images, maps, and other artifacts.

While the scores are specific to the project, they are also open to interpretation. In this way, the scores become a source material that are meant to invoke some of the larger ideas explored through each residency, while inviting users of the archive to interpret and remix each score in different ways. The production of a feedback loop, enables the archive to be living, responsive and ever-evolving. In foregrounding a kinetic and indeterminate relationship to changing living systems, the work of creating scores and capturing moments is born from the archive, mediated temporally through the body as archive and then folded back, reframed, and refigured, into the archive. The "archive" encompasses a site, a body/memory, and an action.

The idea of a living archive is predicated on a notion of continuous growth (through its users) in a participatory archival environment where users generate new content from the collection, which then becomes part of the growing archive—with new possibilities (Holt & Esposito, 2013). As such, a living archive is dynamic. The collection
lives and grows through generative use, and will continue to grow as users engage, repurpose, teach, and share the collection and their teaching processes inspired by the scores. This type of approach to archives is indeed part of an increasing trend inside and outside of traditional archival practice to re-imagine archives. These approaches see archives as interdisciplinary social resources being both produced and interpreted simultaneously (Kozel, 2013) and archiving processes enhanced by digital networked technologies (Kozel, n.d.) which encourage a diversity of users and creative interpretations, particularly pertinent to the performing arts ("Future Histories", 2005; Motion Bank, 2010).

Considering both the challenges and opportunities of this kind of archival practice, how can the archive reflect iLAND as a living, participatory, and open organization that honors the complexity of living systems? Can this archive capture the multisensory experience of iLAND projects (i.e. dancing along the shores of Dead Horse Bay in the late spring)? How can we imagine the future user amongst our materials of what an archive is, and can be, in this instance?

iLANDing as a radical archive practice

What makes the iLAND archive uniquely radical is in designing the central focus on the user/producer engagement within a social framework of making. For example, the web platform is slated to be a dynamic and responsive archival device, using a poetic “taxonomical logic” to allow users access to past scores, while also inviting re-interpretations and adaptations. What this means is that user engagement with the archive is encouraged as both a using and producing activity. Hence, the archive unfolds as something in-the-making, allowing new relationships and contexts to emerge.

The radical archives practice of iLANDing shifts the focus to a participatory one emphasizing the social and creative practice of iLAND residencies. In participatory archives, the institution supports multi-directional content experiences. The institution serves as a “platform” that connects different users who act as content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators. This means the institution cannot guarantee the consistency of user experiences. Instead, the institution provides opportunities for diverse co-produced collections (Simon, 2010). The notion of participation also situates the archive as open, democratic, and inclusive. For instance, scores are developed through shared practice and language as an invitation for both novice and experts to generate and recreate both new and old responses—extending not only the artwork but also the archive.

Moreover, while some argue that digital repositories lessen opportunities for tactile experiences (Latham, 2010), these virtual galleries can actually afford more possibilities for participatory projects and pedagogy that are inclusive, democratic, and open. As a digital repository, iLAND can be accessed from anywhere. For instance, a New York City teacher, regardless of budget restrictions on field trips, can incorporate it into their curricula and virtually bring it directly into their classrooms. As a virtual space, iLAND scores are essentially available to everybody to engage, translate, and modify. Mindful of who really has access to the archive as a social and pedagogic space, including the ability and confidence to participate in it, the iLAND archive serves as a container and support for focus/practice while relating to a location, community, or site. It is thus a social mode of research, teaching, learning and art-making.

How can a radical archive practice reflect a radical pedagogy?

The radical pedagogy of the iLANDING archive is then located in how it reflects the users and producers of the data it generates and the possibilities and potentialities inherent in using the archive. First of all, the emphasis of the materials is on process. Scientists, dancers and artists collaborate to investigate a
local ecology—and respond in turn through collaborative forms of inquiry. The output or “byproducts” of each project range from dance scores, photographic documentation, videos, websites, publications, and other written works. For instance, considering again the Strataspore residency, over the course of six months the group developed a series of dances and public engagements, which generated a set of data including photographs, videos, movement scores, a multi-user blog (http://strataspore.ning.com), and a small publication.

The richness of these materials lie in their potential for public pedagogy, provoking radical relationships to natural systems based on an informed and embodied understanding of the environment built on new conceptions of ecology that are science and arts-based. iLAND allows for untested and emergent practices to develop in relation to a particular place, a group of people, and the wider public sphere of NYC. This involves a pedagogy of reciprocity and replicability, and multiple ways of knowing.

The question becomes how to bring a diverse user/producer audience to the archive. This is a key concern particularly in targeting audiences less familiar with using or even entering archives; how to make one aware that the archive exists for everyone and not just the lone historian or researcher, but also for artists, teachers, and students of all kinds to encounter and engage with it.

In/Continuum: iLANDing futures

iLAND is a community of people from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds who come together around shared interests in urban ecology, interdisciplinary collaboration and movement as a research practice. This paper set in motion the idea of iLANDing as an archive and evolving artwork. The challenges are twofold: First, creating a system that is authentic and will reflect the score (i.e. the set of loose instructions that allow one to translate and adapt). Second, to create the conditions for attracting a diverse range of user/producers, particularly those not necessarily familiar with using an archive. This requires an attitude that embraces and necessitates a level of ambiguity, a zero-control of any one artist, an acceptance and willingness to be okay with precariousness. With this paper, we describe the iLAND archive within the realm of possibility, as pedagogical tool or departure point, a system of call and response inviting disruptions of conventional understandings of archives and an explicit inclusion of participation, of intersubjective relations with self, others, and ecology.

While the architecture to house the iLANDing archive is still in nascent stages, its intention as an open access, participatory and dynamic archive of transdisciplinary exchange and somatic understanding offers a salient context to consider alternative and perhaps radical approaches to archival process and practice. In positioning the body as both a pedagogical and archival device, we open the possibility for new conceptions of archives as living systems in the making.

![URBAN MIGRATIONS (2001-2005), TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK, NY, (PHOTO COURTESY ILAND)](Image 242x470 to 562x684)

**Works cited**


**URBAN MIGRATIONS (2001-2005), TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK, NY, (PHOTO COURTESY ILAND)**


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