

The Color of Breath

As you, the reader, begins to read, I invite you to place your hand on your sternum and feel the movement of your breath.

Breath intermingles all time and space. Breath connects all humanity and our earth-ocean planet.

Every movement begins with a breath. Breath, made audible, is sound.

As your hand tracks how breath affects your tissue, enlivening, softening, mobilizing, melting – whatever it inspires, exhale. And let your exhale be sound. A sigh, a song.

Breath inspires the ecstasy of drummed rhythm and expressive dancing; sacred chanting; the cries of a distraught parent mourning a child's death; the shouts of voices raised against institutionalized violence, fighting for freedom; the exclaimed joy of young children playing, free.

As you inhale, accepting the gift of all time and space, dream the journey these oxygen molecules have undertaken to arrive to your nose. Inhale in every possibility these tiny particles have offered every place they have been breathed through. How many bodies before have breathed this breath? Black body, brown body, white body, golden body, all bodies. The color of breath is every skin whose pores provided passage for the breath you intake now. Breathing, we exchange stories. We touch all skins.

Breath is the wave we ride in, and ride out, of life. To be in the presence of a first and last breath is to witness the sacred portal connecting or releasing a life from the universal thread to the ancestral twine that weaves all of us.

Notice the bone moving under your hand; the sternal shield for the heart. Sense its rhythm as it rides this breath-wave of life.

In Continuum, breath is a guide to our internal *unseen space of knowing*. We breathe, sound, listen, follow, sound, move, pause, move. We listen, see, taste, sense with our breath. This is the rhythm of our breath into movement practice.

This year, 2020, is the year breath opened our eyes to the unseen. *Sa nu pa we*. “The ever present unseen”. This space is the beauty of our ancestors trail of inhales and exhales, the portal to our own unique embodiment. The ever present unseen is also the act of looking away from the truth of suffering in our world: genocide, racism, violence, every meanness or judgment that still separates and objectifies the other. The unseen is also the silent struggle that 2020, “perfect vision”, begs us to witness. *Do not look away. Do not hold your breath.*

Sa nu pa we is Kreyol, the mother tongue of Haiti, or Ayiti, Continuum's birth place. The word Ayiti means land of many mountains; its deeper meaning is the land that will teach you to look at yourself so that you come to know yourself.

In *Life on Land*, Emilie Conrad writes of her arrival to Haiti in 1955:

"I am in the land of bougainvillea. All around me I smell the perfume and the wetness. Dark bodies move slowly through the thick wet heat. "

The dark bodies, all descendants of the cruel practice of slavery that ripped their ancestors' bodies from their land and forced them onto this island to labor and suffer under the oppression of colonialism. In her book, Emilie describes the moments she first witnessed the wave that incited Continuum, her life's work, as she watched black bodies dance in ceremony. Continuum emerged from earth's breath and heartbeat, pulsing the earth's water-wave into the dancers' black feet, and into her own feet. Her feet dancing the shared rhythm as drummed, sung and danced by black bodies for hundreds of years. Her feet recognizing the wave, the undulate, that salutes these ancient spirits and that connects all humans, all colors, through breath and movement, always.

As the world rises up to stand with, support, embrace Black Life Matters, may we recall the black origins of this practice many of us hold so dear and have agreed to carry, reflect and teach through our bodies. If we believe that our lives matter, all lives matter, and that this work matters, we implicitly embody Black Lives Matter.

Pause. Breathe into how much each life matters. Follow your breath, your thread to this life.

2020 is also the year of the global lung. With your hand still echoing your breath, reflect on the privilege of breathing freely, if you do. And if you don't, appreciate breath's willingness to still visit your body vessel, offering oxygen even when it's a struggle.

Of breath, Emilie writes:

The body can be seen as a resonating chamber in which the play of breath becomes a kind of music. The versatility of breath invites ranges of new sensations, responses—new awarenesses develop, new relationships are formed. The versatility of breath allows our organism to become more diverse, increasing its options to interact in new ways. Breath enlivens our internal functioning, allowing more to exist. Those with breathing disorders will know the feeling of incarceration, immobilization. Responses become limited, atrophied, deadened to impulse. (Conrad, Emilie. *Life on Land* (p. 141). North Atlantic Books. Kindle Edition.)

Breath is birthright. Every inhale a gift, every exhale an offering. Every death rides on the exhales descent. And every uprising begins its rise with an inhale.

With your hand on your sternum, uprising and descending, step into the field of humanity and breathe with the global lung 2020.

The global lung inhales: Wildfires ravaged Australia, suffocating over a billion of that lands iconic wildlife and burying the land herself in ash.

The global lung exhales: Lungs across the planet struggle to breathe, gasping for air as they face death; 489,000 people died, alone.

The global lung inhales: On May 25, 2020 George Floyd pleads for his breath, his birthright. The color of his black skin the reason his breath was stolen from him through brute hateful force.

He said it: I can't breathe.

As your sternum rises and falls, find your next Exhale. Consider making it an offering, RIGHT NOW, to anyone, any place, struggling to breathe. Commit your next 3 breaths to this struggle for the birthright of breath. To ease, to fuel, to support the struggle for someone who can't breathe.

Breath is a plethora of potent possibility. It can become anything. It can fight, it can stand, it can lay down and die. It can uproar and uprising, it can slow and settle. Breath is biodiversity and species inclusivity. The lesson of breath is the woven possibility of every breathing body in reciprocal exchange in a field of respect. Breath is the force that nourishes and connects humanity, the earth and cosmos, as a diverse field of love. The color of breath is all of us.

