

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund  
c/o: Iris Tomlinson

Louise Tanoto  
25 July 2015

[louisetanoto@gmail.com](mailto:louisetanoto@gmail.com)

Dear LUTSF,

Thank you.

With the support of the Lisa Ullmann travelling scholarship I made my way across the Atlantic and across vast plains of land, unreal to my European eyes, to participate in the research project 'This Land is Your Land'. Here I share with you my report and though my writing supports the end to the residency it marks the beginning of a larger process of reflection and digestion. Creating a future for the contents of the research.

In May this year the project began with a two-week residency, facilitated by Ritual & Research, in California. The studio time provided a base of interests and a moment for my collaborator, Brooke Smiley, and I to come together. From here it had been our original plan to travel to South Dakota to continue our work site-specifically and in the land. However, after some consideration we decided that the scale of the journey would limit the time spent in research and take a larger physical and emotional toll than was perhaps necessary. The drive from California to South Dakota covers roughly 1500 miles. Instead we decided to halve the trip and travel within the National Parks that Utah and Arizona had to offer, which were plentiful and varied.

What followed was two weeks on the road, integrating practice into the land and the land into practice; literally taking our research into these new and natural spaces. In discourse and physical exploration we developed what potential and form these ideas could have to our dance practices. As the trip continued I/we realised that whilst the origin of intent and content began from a place of shared interest our current professional interests and careers were in very different places and moments. These differences grew and it was with sadness that we were unable to reconcile and come together to a shared path and our project concluded earlier than expected with me returning from the 30-day project 5 days early. During the time and in processing the content there was great richness and the ideas remain to me very potent and full of potential. Equally, in the time since, I have been focusing on deconstructing the difficulties that are also lessons rich, potent and full of potential in how to proceed.

From this project I have experienced that there are 'points of emergence' that occur in a creative life, and that these times of change are fragile. I discovered that even when the desires, intents and hard work that go into any creative project are present collaboration is a delicate balance of dynamic, timing and clarity. This is not the first collaboration to struggle and neither will it be the last. In my own professional development, in this letter and in this report, I believe there is validity in taking the space to recognise and admit that creative endeavours are beautiful and worthwhile because they are difficult, that they require artists to risk both personally and professionally.

Trying to process the development of my own independent practice 'This Land is Your Land' has highlighted many of the realities of what this is and what it

means to me: both in my aesthetic choices and in creating the right environment for these to exist.

This project bounced between the sublime and absolute, the unknown and ugly, it was a processing of proportions that have indelibly marked my professional and personal development for the positive. And will affect how I continue my practice and my future in dance. In 2007 I was a member of Transitions Dance Company, it was a significant moment in my life, offering a bridge that supported the transformation between being a dancer in training and a dancer working professionally. I recognise that this project bears similarities, as an experience enabling another transition.

In terms of disseminating the content of this project, in dance our bodies are the containers of our experiences and the creative processes we share are our modes of revealing and developing that which is contained. I will share my experiences as a LUTSF recipient amongst the dance community and in any future documents and research that follow directly from here. The desire to draw together the dance/performance/movement world and the natural world is a growing community and I look forward to connecting to others within these ideas in the UK and Europe.

For future awardees or applicants I cannot recommend LUTSF enough, the opportunities they make possible for professional development through travel are rewarding and not only to the recipients but extend through the practitioners into the community. The seeds of these projects grow through our continued work in dance.

These moments are invaluable, our most difficult experiences can be the most rewarding and confronting and I want to thank LUTSF again for facilitating this opportunity, this transition, and this place of creative development.

With warmest wishes to all at LUTSF,

Louise Tanoto

## **This Land Is Your Land: Research.**

Research made in California and Utah through the generosity of LUTSF (UK) and Ritual and Research (USA).

Report - July 2015

---

Some say it takes ten years to truly master something but as a practitioner in the arts mastery is not an end goal. Instead time and experience is more of a launch pad into the ever-expanding space of knowledge and process. Especially when considering that the subject of my ongoing training is the body and dance. I have been fortunate so far to predominately work as a dancer, freelance, enjoying that this requires a multitude of different investments and a versatility that is far from only physical. I have not mastered what it is to be a performer and will continue my learning in this role but I am ready to look more broadly at a continuing career in dance. I think it is natural to search for more independence. And my understanding of dance, my body and the 'contemporary' in dance performance is shifting. My questions are stronger and not always best situated in the process of another artist who has their own questions and positioning.

Whilst this project began as a broadening of my future aims in dance it also surfaced from a question considering what dance meant in wider schematics, the wider considerations of contemporary culture and society; from a place where I desired our natural lands to be incorporated into these discussions of culture and society. Where society (though I can only speak from my western European experience) is in a moment of denial or acceptance of where to place value, most potently when considering the earth and its natural resources.

Working with dancers I saw a natural sensitivity to environments that extended beyond the studio, beyond the cities in which we often work, to a respect and need for the natural environment. It made sense that dance and nature could co-exist more. And though there are artists following these interests I had only encountered a few but knew from these experiences I wanted to create more. With Brooke, both dance and land were central to our interests and so after Brooke made an initial call for collaborators we embarked on planning this project as a way to begin integrating dance and our natural lands. Some of the central ideas and catalysts included:

- Rediscovering mutuality in the existence of bodies on land.
- Modern migration, what it is to relocate and what of identity we carry with us.
- Healing body and land both past and future.
- The memory held in the body and in the land. Memory that connects generations, this memory that could also be dances.
- How identity can be more than just us in this one lifetime and how this idea can liberate us and connect us?
- Framing the body/landscapes in film, applying our aesthetic framing to the content.
- Bringing the practice into the land and the land into practice.

These were beginning ideas. But 'This Land is Your Land' became about asking big questions in big landscapes. As we explored the ideas there was a focus on the intimacy of individual practice and it seemed to me the work became relative to anyone curious about identity, memory and collective history within dance. Anyone interested in the development of the sustainable arts. Anyone conscious about sustainable living and an outlook where indigenous relationships to the land aren't viewed as a way of looking back but a way of looking forward.

We were discussing how body memory can be passed generation to generation and how lands also hold memory. How we could work directly from the bodies and

lands to access places of acceptance and release? From within our small framework as dancers, here was a beginning to look at something seemingly insurmountable and intimately relevant.

What is it to consider the generations of hurt or the generations of guilt? And as borders shift and people migrate, the world becomes evermore interconnected, so how do we all move forward? Healing generations of hurt. Healing generations of guilt. These thoughts, without even scratching the surface, are raw and the project had hugely personal implications.

The initiation of the project to make a film in the Black Hills of South Dakota focused on heritage and healing in the lands of Brooke's family. Yet as we began, our natural instinct was that before we could look at the larger implications of these questions we had to first invest our ideas into our own bodies and practice, to begin at the source. That our research would benefit from more neutral spaces.

If we really want to open up this healing how can we build this into our lives, build it into our dance practices and identify it's importance through our work. It has been a personal and professional look at reframing and understanding.

“Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from it's life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result - eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly - in you.”

(Bill Bryson, A Short History Of Nearly Everything)



Muley Point, Utah

## Studio Time

In the studio we looked at . . .

- Mapping generations of knowledge, areas of stored history in the body, and at bodily awareness practices to unlock these.
- Shutting off filters to access deeper understanding through incessant movement and fatigue.
- Meditation scores to create inner landscapes.
- Mapping through sound and frequency and resonances.
- Brooke also led some Body/Mind/Centring exercises.
- How to frame the body in landscapes using the DSLR camera and go-pro camera. Wanting to achieve an intimate perspective that linked to the experiential work in the studio and the relationship of bodies immersed in the landscape. Something that was also in contrast to the scale of the epic landscapes, environments that are both unforgiving and enabling.



An ongoing question for me has been how to explore these ideas within more contemporary aesthetics, possibly considering semiotics and psychology, which are frames that I am attracted to. A next step is to develop the contents of this opportunity in my own project, as well as within somatic/experiential practices. I am already implementing some of the practices and relevant ideas into my current performing.

In mapping memory we . . .

invite memories past-present-future beyond our single lifetime into the cells, organs, fascia, muscles, into the whole body.

consider our history is held in our bodies and we can work physically to unlock, release and come to terms with what we no longer need or doesn't belong to us.

have an inner landscape and our body is the border at which our inner landscape meets the outer landscape.

follow a physical exploration that can take us closer to our history and hopefully the physical land that forms part of this and will be part of this in the future; ever changing, that we are integral and reliant on these changes.

Open ourselves to the idea that our past is as unknown as our future.

can go for a walk in our inner landscape and in our memory, not as we understand it but as we feel it physiologically.

## On the road and in place.

Taking to the road we (Brooke, her truck and I) followed a rough route but left ourselves open to change. Flexibility in our travels allowed us to be responsive to geography, to the people and their local knowledge and also to the weather.

We lived and discovered from the one invariable . . . the truck. We encountered Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, Escalante petrified forest, Capitol Reef National Park, Fry Canyon, Natural Bridges National Monument, Muley Point and the Navajo Reservation. These were significant landscapes/environments in which we explored our ideas but the in between places, the roads, the stops, the small towns and sleeping each night in a new place were just as integral to the process.

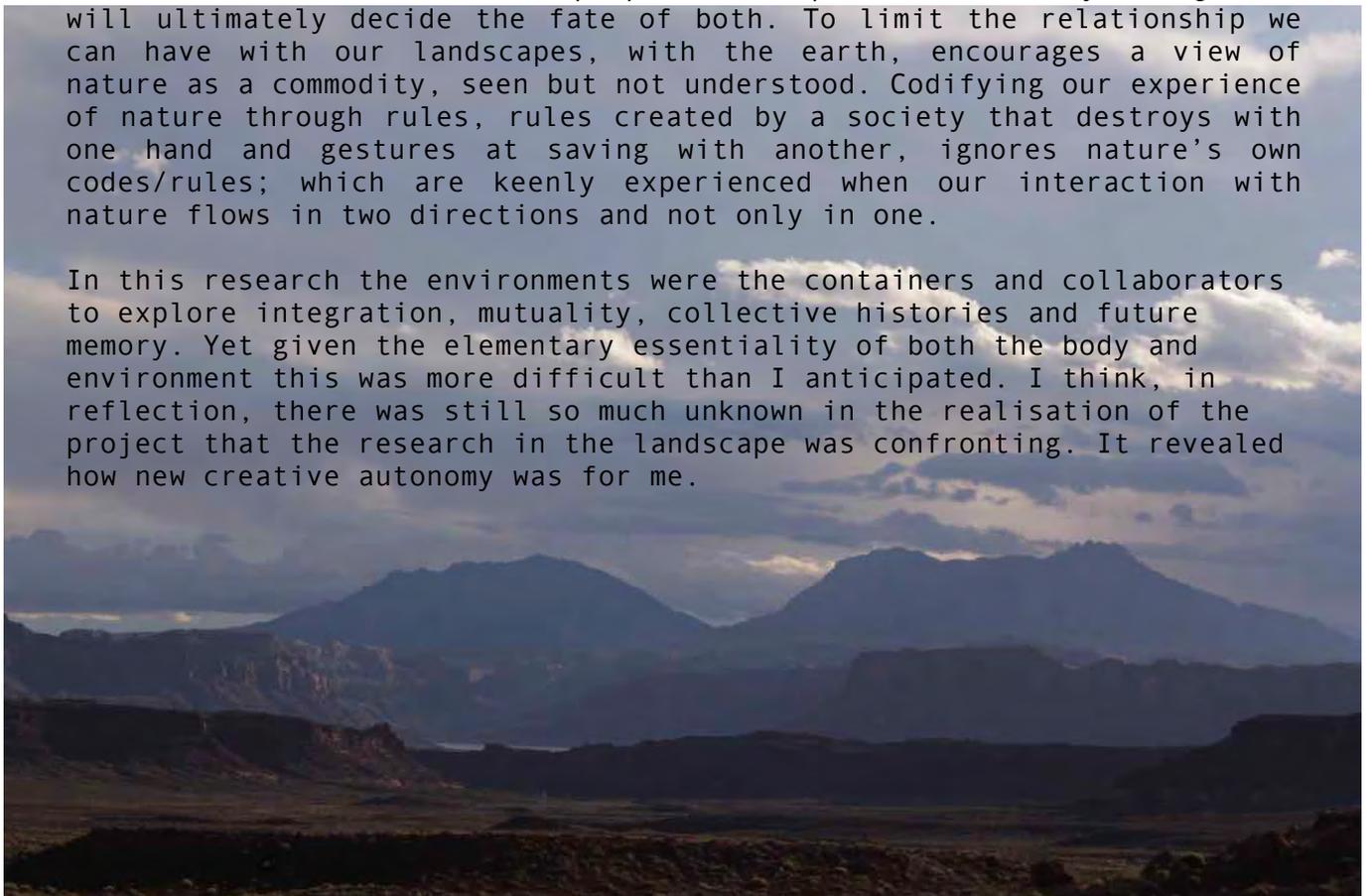
The constant displacement was a theme to understand identity and what fundamental relationship we can have to nature as we pass through? What of our natural world is with us when we seem so far from it, in the dense cities and concrete buildings? How removed from or how quickly we can relate with our natural environment, not as one looking in/on but as part of it and in harmony with it?

Visiting the national parks and seeing how strictly controlled they are made me realise how limited our experience of nature is becoming. I was witness to an interaction with the land neatly framed as a beautiful attraction, a passing glance and a photo opportunity. Though the parks are managed with the best intentions I couldn't help feeling that the barriers between nature and people could prevent the very thing that will ultimately decide the fate of both. To limit the relationship we can have with our landscapes, with the earth, encourages a view of nature as a commodity, seen but not understood. Codifying our experience of nature through rules, rules created by a society that destroys with one hand and gestures at saving with another, ignores nature's own codes/rules; which are keenly experienced when our interaction with nature flows in two directions and not only in one.

In this research the environments were the containers and collaborators to explore integration, mutuality, collective histories and future memory. Yet given the elementary essentiality of both the body and environment this was more difficult than I anticipated. I think, in reflection, there was still so much unknown in the realisation of the project that the research in the landscape was confronting. It revealed how new creative autonomy was for me.



Zion, Utah



The 95, Utah

Walking, breathing, sitting, standing and physical/somatic work such as meditation and yoga all came into the landscapes instinctually. But to find a freedom of release in dance and play, where the rigour and interrogation of a creative dance process I understand and love could exist, was more difficult and perhaps more a personal desire in the collaboration.

To find the right content and the right landscape.

Studios provide safe and controlled environments that protect the vulnerability of a creative practice. We no longer had this but found that with a little searching the land provides; privacy, space, sheltered areas and challenges. Texture, gravity and weather were teachers in letting the body be available and adaptable.



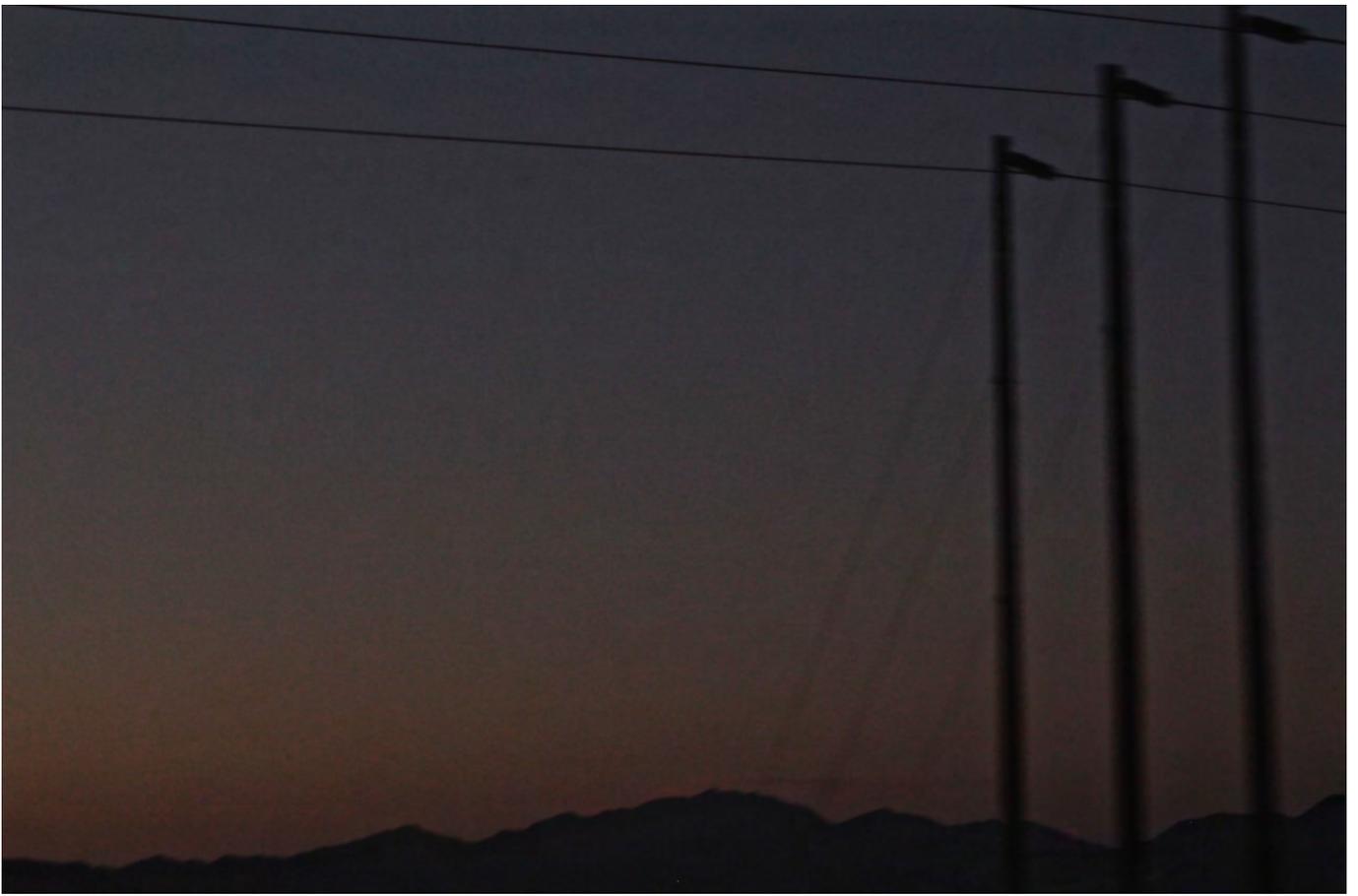
In the time spent in these locations new body memories were created. Immersion brought about a new processing from the visible traces of the history in the landscape. Here at Bryce Canyon the rock formation is made from the pulling back of layers to reveal something that is already there.

Two of the most striking things I experienced throughout the journey were the dramatic and rapid changes in landscape from park to park and the scale. The colour, rock formation and atmospheres were all unique and specific to each area. And being canyon land I was always aware of upper, middle and inner worlds/realms in each location. Traversing what it was to exist in each territory and in each realm.

What was special to me was that I was framing my experience of nature within dance, practice and art. Being absorbed and being engaging critically with these ideas.



Bryce Canyon, Utah



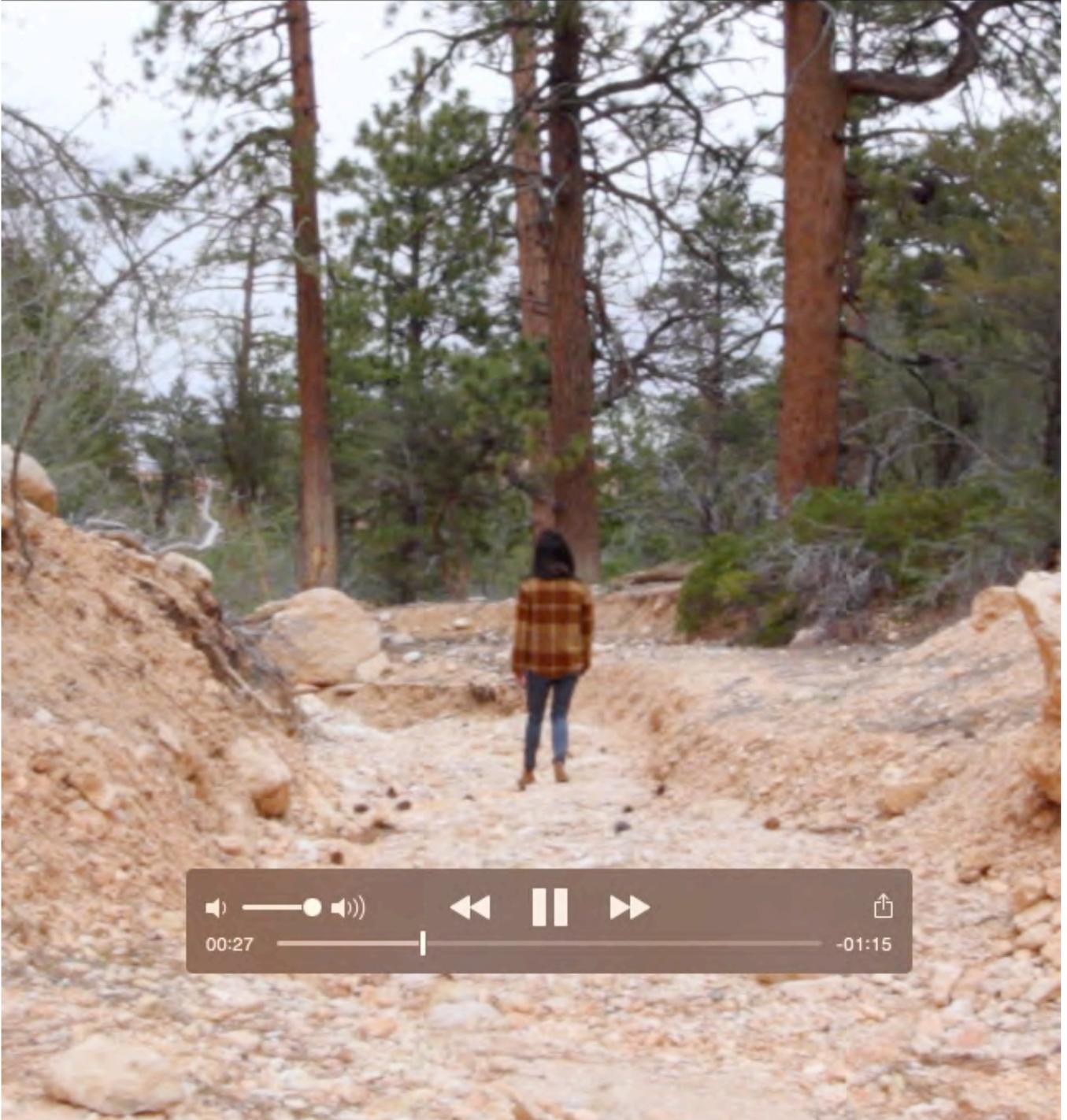
Sunset on the Mojave, California

During both the studio and immersive stages of the project I found the ideas and discourse fruitful, but when I tried to consider form, to follow a physical frame more deeply or to follow a way of framing through film I was aware of how much at the beginning of this process we were. In this way 'This Land is Your Land' was a research phase in what it is to know my own personal and professional direction; to unearth and understand my creative desires and to follow this instinct. Realising that a part of my creative life is drawn into the natural environment and believing in the significance of the questions and applications of the content we were discovering. I am now hoping to take even more creative autonomy and apply these frames to my own work.

The framing and documentation in photography and film played an important role, piquing my interest and confirming an affinity I have with these mediums.

My next questions are how to develop the work within my thinking of modern contemporary concerns, modern contemporary aesthetics on migration, somatic healing, generations of knowledge and body memory. Already this report forms part of larger sketch that in its chaos exposes little by little, pulling back to reveal what we already know. (From Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Bryce Canyon)





With huge thanks to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund, Ritual & Research, The Los Osos Community Centre, Brooke Smiley, Linda and Gary Smiley, Jake Ingram-Dodd and the many generous souls I encountered along the way.