

environmentally-based site-dance and corporeal-wisdoms can be evaluated. Through the application of phenomenological theory combined with personal reflection on the construction and performance of his site-dance and live artwork *Jack Scout* (2010) he provides the reader with an account from both inside and outside of the practice and challenges us to consider potential ways and means of categorising and evaluating subjective and affective experiences.

16 Dancing the beach

In between land, sea and sky

Victoria Hunter

This chapter¹ explores notions of how borders and boundaries between body and environment are explored by choreographers and movement practitioners engaging with coastally-located site-specific dance performance. The chapter considers the beach and coastal locations as liminal, hybridised sites comprising elements of fluidity and stability, permanence and impermanence, the wild and the urban, and discusses site-dance work located within these sites as a form of hybridised dance practice comprising elements of pedestrianism, dance and extra-daily movement.

In this chapter I explore a form of practice that engages with perhaps the most unpredictable and illusive of environments: the coastal landscape. This particular landscape has appealed to a number of choreographers in recent years including Anna Halprin, Rosemary Lee, Stephan Koplowitz and Lea Anderson all of whom have engaged with coastal locations through a variety of creative approaches. My own interest in this area stems from my experience as a practitioner-researcher exploring relationships between the site and the creative process within site-specific choreography.² As I began to move away from working in the built environment and prepared for a site-dance project within a coastal location³ in Summer 2011, I explored a range of site-dance practice, both live and recorded that engaged with coastal locations.⁴ I am personally intrigued by this particular form of 'liminal' dance work, existing physically on the borders between land and sea, comprising artistically hybridised components of pedestrianism, gestural, stylised and non-stylised dance and movement practice, situated on the threshold between choreographed dance performance and environmental movement practice. Some forms of this work markedly shifts towards one form of practice in particular, whilst others navigate a precarious pathway on the limen with occasional stumbles and forays into territories on either side. Both practices share commonalities of choreographic and corporeal curiosity and a fascination with the relationship between body and environment, flesh, sea and sky. The nature of both types of work often involves material being developed *in situ* enabling a significant relationship to develop between choreographer and

site-stimuli. Through this process the site actively informs the form and content of the work in a manner unpredictable prior to the choreographer's engagement with the site. Through working in this manner the choreographer effectively enters into a cyclical form of 'dialogue' with the site as each choreographic development presents an intervention within the site which in turn effects the practitioner's experience of the site, which then informs the following stage of the choreographic process. In this sense the choreographer's relationship with the site develops through a process of constant referral and co-existence through which the emerging work develops.

The beach

Q Why do choreographers choose to engage with this most unpredictable of locations? What appeals?

In order to explore questions regarding the beach's appeal for dance practitioners it is perhaps useful to reflect more broadly on the opportunities and potential for human interaction offered by beach and coastal locations. In his essay *Reading the Beach*, John Fiske (1989: 43) comments on the beach as a signifying 'text':

The beach is an anomalous category between land and sea that is neither one nor the other but has characteristics of both. This means that it has simply too much meaning, an excess of meaning potential, that derives from its status as anomalous.



Figure 16.1 Site-dance exploration, Flamborough, Yorkshire 2011.
Photo: V. Hunter

It is, perhaps, the anomalous nature of the beach which, when 'read' as an experiential text through the body (as opposed to Fiske's reading of the beach as a social construct) which appeals to the site-specific choreographer and movement practitioner. The prodigious surfeit of sensorial information and corporeal 'meaning' afforded through the body's interaction with coastal locations offers an alternative approach to experiencing this location than proposed in Fiske's reading of the beach. Fiske's essay is pertinent to this discussion, however, as he provides a useful distinction between 'the wild beach and the suburban beach' (p. 57), each of which are governed by their own set of culturally determined codes and conventions. He continues to explore how, despite their (often rural) locations, beaches are subject to processes of control, construction and regulation similar to those employed in urban locations. For example, Fiske observes how, even in rural beach locations individuals are frequently subject to rules governing where and when to swim dependent on sea conditions and often social and cultural norms determine where, when and how individuals behave in this location (i.e. removing clothing and 'covering up').

In her paper *Beaches and Bodies* (2000), creative writer Jen Webb also acknowledges the beach as a cultural construct governed by 'erratically enforced social rules' (p. 1) but, through an exploration of the body as a primary form of experiential navigator in the landscape, she also identifies the beach as 'a place where the body (temporarily) wins the struggle between nature and culture, between social constraints and unspoken desires' (p. 1). Webb explores how the coastal environment invites the individual into an immersive experience not offered by other, everyday interactions with the world. The potential to dig into the landscape, run sand between the fingers, swim and take the site 'in' to the body is an experience not afforded in quite the same physical and experiential way by parks, rural landscapes or cityscapes.

The potential for freedom and the freeing up of habitual behaviours presented by beaches and coastal locations is an aspect also identified by Australian geographers Collins and Kearns (2010: 437) who refer to beaches as: 'places at which it is possible for predominantly urban peoples to experience ("reconnect with") natural elements and processes.'

The dance-film work *Tides*⁶ (1982) by film-maker Amy Greenfield provides a useful illustration of this type of bodily interaction and environmental 'reconnection' presented by the beach location. In this work, the performer's body rolls slowly from the shoreline into crashing waves and becomes immersed within the sea-water. The dancer performs a series of rolling and rising actions, and non-stylised movements that appear to parallel the rhythms of the ocean and express the performer's sensual enjoyment of the environment. This sense of re-connecting with 'natural elements' (ibid.) of landscape and environment afforded at the beach potentially reminds us of our own organic relationship to the world and brings us back to more fundamental, bodily processes of engaging with the

world through a range of sensory, visceral and kinaesthetic processes. Jen Webb encapsulates this notion when describing her own experience of the beach: 'Absorbed by salty wind, deafened by the roar of water on rocks, overcome by rolling waves, disturbed by the plangent cry of gulls' (2000: 3).

Here, Webb captures the multi-sensory nature of the body-beach interaction, one in which our bodies are placed alongside expanded planes and horizons, vertiginous cliff edges, undulating sand dunes, topographies created (often) by natural phenomena of wind, rain and tides, occurring in stark contrast to the man-made regulated environments which we inhabit on a daily basis.

The beach as a liminal place of encounter is described by dance theorist Valerie Briginshaw: 'Beaches also exist between land and sea. As shorelines, they form borders and boundaries. They are particular liminoid or in-between spaces' (2001: 60).

A consideration of the beach as an 'in-between', liminal site offers up a degree of uncertainty and opportunity for those engaging with it. The unpredictability and precarious nature of this liminal place holds the potential to present the individual with new ways of experiencing and engaging with the world and, through so doing, invoke new-found experiences of self-awareness and potential ways of being-in-the-world, Webb observes:

Think, for instance, of the peculiarly evocative relationship between the water and the edge of the land: the uncertainty and indeed the mutability of that edge's location metaphorises the uncertainty about where the body ends and the rest of the world begins.

(2000: 3)

The exploration of this relationship founded the basis for my own, preliminary movement explorations conducted in a coastal location in North Norfolk (May 2010). The movement interactions engaged me in a walking exploration of the water's edge during which the balance point of my body was tested as I fell into and was supported by the stiff coastal wind. Through this exercise I began to physically explore the sensation of being suspended in the air, grounded by gravity whilst moving on the precarious dual limen between sea and shore, land and air. This precarious positioning called into question both physically and conceptually notions of locatedness, problematising where the body was situated in this exchange in a process that constantly shifted and changed with each movement and adjustment of the body.

This level of uncertainty encapsulates and amplifies the uncertainty of location, potentially leading to a questioning of the individual's locational 'fixity' and assuredness of the stability of place. Webb observes how this perceived lack of stability and associated problematising of location 'can be read as a metaphor for the insecurity always attached to ontological

questions – what am I? Who am I?' (2000: 3). Webb's observation helps to position the beach as a contentious and paradoxical place, offering up opportunities for pleasure, danger, escape and disappearance. Through the body's immersion into the sand and sea, rain and wind and, through the projection of oneself imaginatively and viscerally through the landscape into the vistas, planes and horizons beyond, the beach presents the opportunity to metaphorically escape from oneself and, in particular, the form of self practiced and performed (see Goffman, 1959) in everyday life situations. Leading to a sense of absence from the habitual social self and self-norms through entering into a state of limbo where everyday life, behaviours and actions are suspended. Paradoxically, however, when engaging with the beach we are also entering a physically unstable, dangerous place where self-preservation dictates that we *do* attend to ourselves to prevent sinking, drowning, stumbling and colliding with the environment. Through this process we are made very aware of our physical presence and its management within and negotiation of the site-interaction during which, any attempt to escape from attending to our physical self is prevented.

The potentially dangerous and unsettling nature of beaches and coastal locations can, perhaps, be linked to the very nature of their mobility that in turn highlights the impermanence of place. The changing tides and shifting sands of coastal locations embody and exemplify, in a very tangible sense, broader tectonic and environmental shifts. For example, geographer and spatial theorist Doreen Massey observes that the South West corner of England and its coast provide a pertinent example of landscape instability:

This corner of the country is sinking back down over the millennia since the last ice age. And, bouncing gently a couple of times a day, as the tide goes in and out, Cornwall to the West goes up and down by 10 centimetres with each tide. There is no stable point.

(2005: 138)

This lack of stability within an explicitly kinetic landscape perhaps explains why choreographers and movement practitioners are drawn to explore making work in beach and coastal locations. These liminal sites are themselves unstable in nature therefore offering up a wealth of opportunity for interaction and exchange between body and environment. UK-based movement practitioner Sandra Reeve encapsulates the essence of the site-body relationship encountered within these locations in her description of the 'ecological body', defined as:

An immanent co-creating body: a body constantly becoming within a changing environment, where the body and the spaces in-between and around bodies are considered equally dynamic.

(www.moveintolife.co.uk)

The dynamic interplay of body and environment as co-creators within the movement exploration and dance-making process is both exciting and challenging for practitioners as they navigate their way through the liminal landscape in which both the body and the art work exist in a process of becoming.

Choreographer Rosemary Lee highlights her own, personal experience of dancing and moving through the liminal beach environment and (referencing Massey, 2005) alludes to a sense of danger elicited by the untamed coastal environment:

The coastline, for me, is the edge: it is the threshold; it's death; it's ever-changing. So, in terms of the rocks, the sea, every wave, is ever-changing. So, it's something about being at the beach. For me, as a child, that was about instability. There is never a stable point. Maybe dancing gives me a security in a very unstable world and that security is to be present in dancing.

(Online, 2005)

Lee also identifies here a key point regarding the dichotomous relationship between the unstable, ever-changing beach location and the dancer's heightened sense of 'present-ness' elicited through the site-body interaction, expressed as a process of retreating back 'in' to oneself and experiencing a sense of centred-ness with the body-self acting as the central, stable point within this unstable location.

For the choreographer then, this particular site is already densely 'populated' with rhythms and kinetic and organic components with which the emerging choreographed and composed movement material has to relate and merge in order to produce a sense of 'fit' (Wilkie, 2002) between movement and site. The boundaries of the body in this process become fluid and permeable, through processes of engagement and immersion within the beach location and the 'messy materiality' (Longhurst, 2001: 23) of the body and its 'insecure boundaries' (ibid.) become exposed. Human geographer Robyn Longhurst (2001) explores theories of 'corporeo-geography' in considering the body's relationship to the world. In particular, she presents notions of the body's 'fluid boundaries' (2001: 23) as a challenge to ideas of fixity and impermeability between body and world, and through doing so, challenges us to consider the 'runny, gaseous, flowing, watery nature of bodies' (2001: 23). Longhurst's positioning of a porous, open body is exemplified particularly well through dance works that explore the 'messy' materiality of bodies in 'messy' coastal locations in which water, sand, mud and slime become enmeshed, embedded and *sited* within both physical entities of body and environment.⁶ Coastal landscapes and, in particular, beaches, may therefore also appeal to choreographers because they provide an opportunity to get 'messy', to break out of the sanitised, enclosed world of the dance studio and engage with untidy

explorations with bodies in real-world locations. In this process, the idealised dancing body is afforded a set of freedoms in the coastal environment which, potentially, enable the body's 'messy materiality' (Longhurst, 2001: 23) to spill forth.

This open-ended liminality of coastal locations combined with an awareness of a porous and open body, pushes choreographers and movement practitioners to explore potential limits, boundaries and possibilities of the body in this particular type of landscape. The range of movement possibilities arising from the beach and coastal landscape interaction can appear endless, freeing up the choreographer from using codified movement vocabulary which may appear inappropriate or redundant in this context. More basic and simplified actions involving whole-body actions and reverting to processes of movement exploration that incorporate basic rolling, running and walking actions (see: *Tides*, Greenfield 1982) might appear most appropriate and relevant in this context. From my own experience of working with movement practitioner Helen Poynor on Charmouth beach, Dorset,⁷ processes enabling the body to pause, 'listen' and respond to the environmental rhythms of sand, sea, wind and tides produced a form of 'organic' movement response with simple gestures, shifts of weight, reaching and rolling actions emerging from an internal impetus to move in harmony with the landscape as opposed to imposing oneself and one's actions upon it.

The practice

- Q What occurs when, through movement practice, we introduce the body as the primary explorative mediator in this environment? What type of practice emerges?

When considering these questions it is, perhaps, useful to identify two categories or types of site-specific dance practice in order to explore differing site-dance approaches and their implications and effects in this context. Here, I distinguish between work that presents site-dance performance 'about' the place in which it is situated, and work that tells 'of' the site and location. The first type of work perhaps most resembles a 'choreographed' site work resulting from a creative approach in which the choreographer 'excavates' historical, thematic, visual and factual data from the site and feeds this information through a choreographic process and sequenced movement responses occur facilitated by the modified application of choreographic devices. The second type of work engages the choreographer and performer in a more holistic, environmentally responsive dance-movement practice that tends to focus on the exploration of improvised, organic movement responses, resulting in an immediate unfolding of process and product, a form of choreography-in-the-moment. Australian dancer-researcher Gretel Taylor (2010) describes this distinction

from a performer's perspective as: 'dancing in the place' as opposed to 'dancing the place' (p. 72).

Processes inherent in the second category of work may necessarily involve a form of solo practice as an immersive form of site exploration that is never intended for presentation in front of an audience member.⁸ Equally, this approach may result in the presentation of a performed, structured improvisation sharing or may contribute towards the generation of movement content which may be formed into a fully performed work at a later stage.

In the first category of work, when creating dances 'about' the site, choreographers engage in a range of creative approaches aimed at amplifying and reflecting the site through the performance work and through the dancer's body and its movement. Approaches to designing and constructing movement material within this process can be defined as 'amplification' techniques, a term which I have applied to my own site-dance work (see Chapter 1). The process involves the devising of creative tasks that require the choreographer to observe and respond to the site's formal features informed by a knowledge and awareness of the site's historical, factual and cultural context. These tasks require the choreographer and performers to respond to the site as seen and to produce material that draws attention to the form and function of the site and the human behaviours existing within it.

Lea Anderson's work *Out on the Windy Beach*, performed in Brighton, UK (1998) provides a pertinent example of the first category of work and is well documented by dance theorist Valerie Briginshaw.⁹ In the work, Anderson explored the theme of the beach and the social construct of the English 'seaside' experience and wove the work's content and narrative through a range of associated themes (myth, folklore, eroticism etc.) accordingly. In this work, 'the beach' was explored as a catalyst and a vehicle through which a range of political and artistic issues were explored. The focus of the work therefore, was not solely on the relationship of the body to its environment through processes of immersion, but instead it explored the beach as a backdrop, a scene for action and touched upon notions of liminality present within the location by exposing 'the range of borderlines and boundaries of bodies and space that can be explored in this coastal environment' (Briginshaw, 2001: 68).

Amplified notions of freedom, joy and a return to child-like experiences of play associated with the beach are explored in Rosemary Lee's site-dance film *Boy* (1995). This site-specific dance-film follows the actions of a young boy running on and rolling through sand dunes and captures the essence of child-like joy and 'wild delight' (Webb, 2000) experienced through his interaction with the beach environment of the UK's North Norfolk coast. Stephan Koplowitz's Liquid Landscape Project (Plymouth 2009 and touring) equally amplified and explored notions of playfulness invoked by the individual's encounter with the coastal environment. The project's

work located at the Tinside Lido site¹⁰ presents a playfully choreographed response to the site through movement content that clearly references swimming, diving and water-play actions in a humorous and engaging manner. Busby Barclay-esque movement sequences and group formations reflect the vintage architecture and design of the lido site, creating a spectacle that extended the physical site into group action. Koplowitz's creative process here effectively 'activates' the site, embellishes and adds additional layers of meaning to the site by extracting hidden, dormant themes and making them visible to the audience through choreographed dance material. Themes of play, leisure, decoration and display are amplified and 'played back' to the site through a combination of pedestrian movement, gestural material and codified dance vocabulary.

Whilst this type of work serves to excavate site information, themes and histories and 'amplifies' the many layers of the site to the audience, it is, perhaps, the practice of those choreographers and movement practitioners who explore a phenomenological engagement with the beach and coastal landscapes as their primary source of movement inspiration and generation who can reveal, in more depth, essential processes of being and dwelling specific to this type of location through their practice.

Central to this second category of work are processes of immersion and embodied engagement with the site. This type of work is approached by practitioners in a number of ways, referencing her environmental site-dance practice, Gretel Taylor (2010: 73) discusses her own method of 'locating', stemming from a process of 'multi-sensorial listening' through which movement responses to the landscape begin to emerge: 'The locating dance is the relationship between my body and the place: it is simultaneously the seeking of relationship and the expression, enactment or illustration of it.'

This process of illustration and enactment differs from illustrative processes present within the category of work 'about' the site (discussed here in relation to Koplowitz's and Anderson's work). The 'locating' process described here by Taylor draws parallels with my own definition of site-specific dance 'abstraction' processes where the body's movement gives form to a range of phenomenological responses experienced through an embodied interaction with the environment. Abstraction approaches might involve improvisation or structured tasks that require movement practitioners to immerse themselves within and respond corporeally to the lived-experience of the site and in so doing, give form to those experiences through the creation of abstract movement material. Movement material resulting from abstraction tasks therefore tends to contain a more fluid sense of form unique to each individual dancer emerging from sensation and lived experience and is more personalised and less externally referential than movement resulting from amplification tasks. Barbara Collins, a participant in one of movement practitioner Sandra Reeve's *Move into Life* workshops provides an example of abstraction as she describes her

experiences of exploring the coastal location of Dunmorán Head in County Sligo, Ireland:

I could feel my energy rise with the sea. My arms were drawn into the movement and at times, it felt as if I was conducting the cacophony of sounds and the energy of the sea and the wind. At other times I was imitating the movements of the sea. Then I found myself absorbed by the sea and also found my breathing was deepening and was in harmony with the rhythms of the sea.

(2006: 3)

Nigel Stewart's site-dance work *Jack Scout* situated in Morecambe Bay on the UK's northwest coast (September 2010) provides a further example of this type of work¹¹. The performance explored a liminal world existing between beauty and death, the wild and the urban presented through the device of a narrated 'tour' led by a guide who directed the audience on a journey through coastal woodland followed by a cliff-top walk during which the audience encountered moments of solo dance performance.

The initial solos (choreographed and performed by Nigel Stewart) combined a series of abstract, undulating movements that contracted, expanded and flowed through the body echoing the performer's phenomenological processes of encountering and engaging with the landscape in which he was immersed. The final section of the work was performed by a female dancer who danced an abstract solo through the sands and mud flats of the surrounding Morecambe Bay. The solo contained a series of gestural movements combined with rolling, reaching and sliding actions that, with each iteration immersed the performer deeper in the mud and slime and post-tidal residue. As an audience member myself, resonances of danger and discomfort were immediately experienced through processes of kinaesthetic and visceral empathy as an affect on my own body encountered through processes of sensorial communication transferred from the dancer's body to my own. This particular beach site movement sequence exemplifies Longhurst's (2001) and Briginshaw's (2001) observations regarding notions of bodily boundaries and body-landscape permeability as, with each roll, turn and dive into the muddy and slimy surface, the viscous and unstable body became enfolded within an equally unstable and impermanent landscape. In this type of movement practice and performance work then, notions of the body as a 'container' are challenged as the 'otherness' of the landscape becomes enfolded within the body-self, essentially creating a unity of subject/object, body/landscape.

Phenomenological considerations

The site-specific choreographer's process when creating work that immerses the body within the beach and tells 'of' the site can be equated to human

geographer Christopher Tilley's (2008) discussion of phenomenology and impressionist painting, namely Cézanne's use of colour through which, he observes, the artist presented 'an echo of the world' (p. 24) as experienced through embodied perception. The resulting movement content emerging through phenomenological inquiry is not therefore, empirically representational of the environment but instead, expresses the mover's phenomenological response to the world in abstract form 'coloured' and 'flavoured' by their lived-experience of site.

The process involves an opening up of one's body to the environment, equitable to Tilley's notion of the 'phenomenological walk', described as:

An attempt to walk from the inside, a participatory understanding produced by taking one's own body into places and landscapes and an opening up of one's perceptual sensibilities and experiences.

(2008: 269)

Our interactions in the landscape therefore, not only leave a physical imprint, but also a perceptual imprint for the experiencer. One way of accessing this type of interaction is through the use of 'scoring', a process employed most notably by the American choreographer and movement artist Anna Halprin. Scores can comprise a simple set of instructions that guide the dancer/mover towards things in particular; in a site-specific context this might involve a focusing of attention and awareness towards particular site elements and components, atmospheres and energies. An example of a score employed during my own site-dance exploration of the Flamborough South Landing site encouraged participants to focus on their body's relationship with the horizon-line perceived through embodied awareness and to engage in an improvised exploration of their response to the phenomena encountered.

Through this type of process, I argue that a form of phenomenological 'reversibility' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) ensues as, I affect the landscape through my movement interactions and it, in turn affects me, I then return to the interaction with a deepened sense of understanding and 'knowing' and the process of reversibility and reciprocity then deepens and develops in a spiralling format. During this process of experiential spiralling, reversing back and forth between body-self and site, I am proposing here that the experiencer enters into an experiential, interstitial territory in which both body-self and landscape are co-perceived. This territory can be illuminated through the application of Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'Le Chiasme' (1968) as a theoretical lens with which to explore the nature of the site-body-self interaction. Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'Le Chiasme' (1968) enables us to identify, in this context, an intertwining between body and world through an engagement within an interstitial territory in which body-self and site become entwined, overlap and engage in a 'messy' exchange facilitated by a process of reversibility. Merleau-Ponty in *The*

Visible and Invisible (1968: 136) describes this process: 'Once a body-world relationship is recognised, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside.'

This mode of movement inquiry, telling 'of' the site, foregrounds the body and the corporeal as the primary mode of engaging with the world and reveals a form of 'being-in-the-world' in which body and world entwine. Choreographer Nigel Stewart describes this as a process of dancing 'the fabric of the world into which I am woven' (2005: 370). This form of practice requires the mover to remain open, present and aware of the body in site and to respond instinctively through a form of pre-reflective practice in which the individual's sense of self is nevertheless present, Taylor observes:

By becoming grounded and attentive to one's body's perceptual processes one is present in the moment, operating from what may be considered intuition or the instinctual aspects of self, without the need for any violent (or otherwise) abandonment of identity.

(2010: 85)

Here, Taylor acknowledges the need for the practitioner to retain a sense of self within the moment of encounter, equitable to a process of 'embodied reflexivity' (Hunter, 2009) describing an individual's embodied process of noticing, processing and responding to their interaction with phenomena. As such, the subject remains present and aware of themselves in the site and encounters an embodied and conscious experience of the world and of themselves in the world unique to their body-self. Through this process of embodied reflexivity, the experiencer avoids becoming 'lost' within the interstitial, chiasmic encounter between body-self and environment. The exchange is experienced in the present, in the here-and-now, which, whilst inevitably containing resonances of the previous past moment, exists in a constant process of becoming facilitated by the body's action. Merleau-Ponty observes that, this process of overlapping and over-layering of spatio-temporal action creates: 'a link between a here and a yonder, a now and a future which the remainder of the instants will merely develop' (1968: 162).

This overlapping of past, present and future experienced at the beach and in the coastal site, amplified, abstracted and mobilised through the dancer's engagement and action perhaps illuminates the appeal of these particular sites for choreographers and movement practitioners. The physical act of walking in the sand, for example, is an act that, through the creation of footprints in the sand, at once lays bare evidence of the body's past, present and future actions. In this act, the temporality of action and its impermanence becomes immediately visible as traces of human interaction with the environment appear instantaneously only to crumble, wash away then re-appear moments later in a different yet recognisable form.

In this sense, coastal and beach locations appear as kinetic sites, sites of mobility and motility, paralleling human action whilst simultaneously operating as a metaphor for human processes of presence, absence and being-in-the-world.

Conclusion

Through creating work and dancing in coastal locations, this type of work enables choreographers and movement practitioners to explore and experiment, to escape from habitual creative approaches and to engage with an illusive and challenging stimuli and working environment. The illusive nature of the liminal coastal site can be viewed as a prodigious and liberating opportunity for site-dance practitioners as they are forced to engage with an ill-defined site existing in a constant process of becoming. The opportunities for discovering new creative approaches and working methods within this liminal landscape are, therefore, many and varied as the choreographer's aesthetic and artistic desires combine with some very basic and fundamental approaches to engaging with and surviving in this (often) exposed and wild landscape.

These basic forms of engaging with the beach (falling, slipping, walking, swimming etc.) necessarily require the individual to attend to the functional body in the moment in a manner which (in contrast to 'concert' dance forms) is very basic, unsophisticated and un-modified by outwardly imposed aesthetic or stylistic concerns. This organic form of movement practice therefore holds the potential to free up the individual's self-conscious and self-censoring mechanisms, essentially affording us a 'holiday' from our socially constructed sense of self and instead, enables the body to respond functionally to the demands of the environment and expressively to the corporeal and sensorial affect of the site-body interaction. During this process we effectively become immersed in the encounter with the environment, folding and enfolding into a state of 'being-in-the-beach' (Webb, 2000: 1). In this type of immersive encounter, the individual experiences a temporary cessation of a socially constructed, urban influenced 'self' as we re-engage with precarious terrain and re-connect with a form of self-awareness and self-knowledge encountered whilst being present in the moment of interaction.

This type of work potentially offers up other modes and ways of 'knowing' and experiencing landscape, providing additional layers of information and bodily knowledge with which to consider landscape and 'map' beaches and coastal places. Tilley (2008) explains how the embodied, phenomenological approach challenges representational modes of landscape research mediated by 'various representations and abstracted technologies' such as 'texts, photographs, paintings, sketches, maps, etc.' (p. 266). He observes that these modes of representation essentially remove the subject from the experience of landscape, the knower from the known,

the mover from the moved: 'This is never a lived landscape but it is forever fixed in the words or the images, something that becomes dead, silent, and inert, devoid of love and life' (2008: 266).

Through entering and engaging with landscape, however, we inevitably capture and absorb something of its essence and re-connect with an essential mode of being-in-the-world experienced through the body, a process amplified and abstracted through the creative process.

Site-specific dance practice occurring in coastal locations therefore serves to draw our attention to a familiar landscape and challenges movement practitioners, performers and audiences to engage with the site in an unfamiliar way. Through moving, extending and abstracting our everyday, habitual modes of interacting with the beach and amplifying these actions through extra-daily expressive actions and gestures, the individual learns to experience the site in a new-found manner. This practice then places the familiar alongside the unfamiliar, challenging our pre-conceived notions of the beach as a fixed and familiar entity, presenting new modes of physical and perceptual engagement to individual movement practitioners and audience members.

Furthermore, for the individuals who physically explore and engage with this type of work, the practice holds the potential to invoke a heightened sense of presence as, through the body-site intervention we engage in a process which identifies the body as the centre-point, the stable location from which we can act in this very unstable environment. Whilst this interaction necessarily blurs the boundaries between body and site, requiring a receptive, porous interaction between the two, the individual is still required to be present in the interaction, assured of their body's centrality, stability and sense of gravity. In this sense, the body operates as the site of interaction and the coastal location operates as a catalyst for both physical and self-exploration through which the body itself becomes a site for investigation and new-found discoveries relating to processes of presence and modes of being-in-the-world.

Notes

- 1 Ideas in this chapter are developed further in relation to theories of human geography and non-representational theory in: Hunter, V. 'Dancing-Worlding the Beach: Revealing Connections through Phenomenological Movement Inquiry' in Berberich, C. (2015) *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life*, Farnham, Ashgate Press.
- 2 Productions include work in a disused basement site (*Beneath*, 2004), a public library (*The Library Dances*, 2006) and *Project 3* (2007), a durational dance installation and *x3* (2010) a site-specific dance film.
- 3 This work took place on the East Yorkshire coast as part of the *Wingbeats* project, an interdisciplinary arts project directed by Adam Strickson, commissioned as part of the Cultural Olympiad.
- 4 This work includes Nigel Stewart's *Jack Scout* (Morecambe Bay 2010), Stephan Koplowitz's *Liquid Landscapes* project (Plymouth 2009 and touring), Rosemary

Lee's site-dance film, *Boy* (1995), Lea Anderson's *Out on the Windy Beach* (1998) and dance film *Tides* by Amy Greenfield (1982) and the environmental dance practice of Sandra Reeve and Helen Poynor.

- 5 *Tides* can be viewed at: <http://vimeo.com/8371967> and via the Hayward Gallery archive, London.
- 6 See dance film *Tides* (1982).
- 7 See Helen Poynor 'Walk of Life' workshops: www.walkoflife.co.uk/helen.htm
- 8 See movement practitioner Helen Poynor's work (above).
- 9 See Briginshaw, V. 2001. *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*, London: Palgrave.
- 10 See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nic6dpU0jag
- 11 A detailed discussion of this work is presented in Chapter 20 of this volume.

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