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**‘...wind in my hair, I feel a part of everywhere...’:  
Creating dance for young audiences narrates emplacement.**

**Abstract:** This article is a reflection from a moment during the tour of my performance work for young audiences - ‘*Found*’. I explore how the meaningfulness shared in the moments dancing together captures much broader narratives about the transformative connections of Being-in-Place: emplacement. I respond to Pink’s call to explore embodied experiences through emplacement (Pink, 2010). Therefore, I use emplacement as a lens to theorize experiences during the practical performance work of ‘*Found*’, beyond the visual aesthetic of seeing live dance. This articulating and valuing the significance of where Self begins, or ends or is continuous in environment shares inquiry with colleagues in architecture (Pallasmaa, 2005, Rasmussen, 1959), social sciences (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1987), and geography (Lefebvre, 2004). I suggest ramifications on how dance offers somatic dialogue that can empower children to take part in, and become aware of, their own presence in the co-created *reality* of Place.

**Keywords:** emplacement, embodiment, Place, Being-in-Place, choreography, dance, children.

This paper is a reflection from a moment when I danced with a young girl during a recent tour of my performance work for young audiences – ‘*Found*’. I will be exploring how the meaningfulness I felt in the moments dancing with her captures much broader narratives about the transformative connections of Being-in-Place: emplacement. This is the now-ness that dance offers as part of a kind of somatic literacy for being present in Place. I also start to respond to Pink’s call to explore embodied experiences through emplacement (Pink, 2011). Therefore, in this paper I use emplacement as a lens to theorize experiences during the practical performance work of ‘*Found*’ beyond the visual aesthetic of seeing live dance.

“*Found*” is an interactive contemporary dance and music performance piece that I created for young audiences (4+ year olds). My company was on tour performing it in small theatres, libraries and school halls in Southern England. ‘*Found*’ is performed in the round with two dance-performers and a musician (playing an electric cello). At the start of the work each artist is in their own ‘world’ noted by the specific colour and textures of their costume, materials on the floor around them which they dance with,

and the sounds and movements of their choreography. The performers first explore their own spaces and then travel to each other's to gradually adventure beyond the edges of the circle into the middle of the space. Penultimately, there is a coming together in the centre of the circle as artists and audience all dance together with paper aeroplane-letters flying and connecting across the circle. 'Found' ends with the performers leaving the audience dancing with each other in the centre of the circle. Choreographically, the movement is set but involves improvised sections that respond to each unique setting with moments of audience participation and interaction throughout. 'Found' is choreographed to progressively invite the audience to move together by the end of the event.

*I tip my body past the perpendicular of my leg, arabesque-ing my weight beyond my hip as I follow the trajectory of the small paper plane in my hand. Waiting for the moment when gravity will take my limbs and I will fall-recover into the journey I am making for the paper plane through the Hall space. A jump propels me across the room, my body the paper plane's trail. I stop abruptly, redirecting my hand so that the plane jets across me spinning me round to cascade into the space that was behind me. This is a part of the performance where we are inviting children to dance with us so on my next turn I slow my flight and offer the plane in my hand to a boy sitting near me. He looks at my hand and then into my eyes, taking my unspoken invitation by seizing the plane and stepping into the maze of people dancing, guiding their planes in and out of each other in the centre of the performance space. I go to retrieve another paper plane from the props, for me to dance with again, and in doing so pass a girl who is making small tentative circular movements with her plane. I stop near her and copy her movement. As she makes circles I make circles and there comes a spark in her movement when she realizes we are doing the same thing – I see she has registered we are dancing together. In realising this she starts to follow me copying her! We are standing firmly on two legs opposite each other circling our arms like two big water-wheels. For moments of the music we are exchanging the felt-visual of copying movement together. I want to push the interconnectedness of the moment so I very carefully shift my weight slowly but purposefully so my leg can lift to one side. For a moment, I sense the girl is not sure what is happening; she was in the felt of her body through seeing my body but now I am changing the shape of that. I wonder if she will move with me or if we will lose the dance-connection. As like a tremble through her muscles, I see a rush of recognition of the betweenness of 'us' dancing in the Hall and she lifts her leg too. Then she tries a movement for me to follow and I do, then I bend my knees in a slow swoop down to take the lead again and she follows. For a few moments, we create ourselves joyously dancing together in the music.*

I contemplate that the moment of dancing together brought the girl and I to the somatic of being, here, now, in this *Place*, together. This is something about being fully aware, connected to world-around; simultaneously creating and exploring world around through the somatic-transaction of movement within it. This and other moments of connection across the tour of 'Found' are part of my artistic reasoning for making work for young people: I feel there is a great importance to creating spaces for the wordless conversation of dance.

Here, by *wording* the feeling of dancing together (in *Place*) through writing a paper, I hope to contribute to larger discussions across subject areas. For instance, to describe the fabric of the dance experience I use words such as, rhythm, flow, sensation. These words are shared vocabulary about being in place beyond dance, words whose meanings differ only slightly but inform each other across subject areas. This articulating and valuing the significance of where Self begins, or ends or is continuous in environment shares inquiry with colleagues in architecture (see Pallasmaa, 2005, Rasmussen, 1959), social sciences (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1987), and geography (see Lefebvre, 2004). I hope by reaching beyond the isolating notion of 'subject areas' we might find shared areas of inquiry into the inter-connectedness of *Place*. Of which as Pink suggests (Pink, 2011), emplacement becomes a key word in the lexicon of these somatic Being-in-Place practices. Therefore, this paper is about emplacement from the perspective of choreographing and presenting 'Found'

### **Framework**

Within my practice, the practical 'doing' of dance underpins a theoretical framework that attempts to account for the experience of connectedness with world that I feel dancing illustrates. My theoretical framework draws heavily on John Dewey's work which sees the lived experience as a transactional matrix of, corporeality [body], reflective action [mind], and environment [space/time] (Hildebrand, 2008). I see dance movement as the reflective response to the design of the *Place* of the event of dancing (dancing responds to the rhythm and relationships around). Dance happens in, and through, and beyond 'body', moving us to become aware of being a part of the matrix of body-mind-environment that Dewey describes. Dance offers a process of noticing being shaped by the material world as we interact with floor, air on skin, vibration of music/sound, other dancers and musicians. As one interacts with environment it is not possible to have only a theoretical view, *Being* becomes conceived of through the practicality of sensation and interaction. Sensation becomes the knowledge of Being-in-Place (Casey, 2009).

My practice includes many years of choreographing work for young audiences because I feel it is important to create *Places* of dance, to offer young people affirmation and

demonstration of the valuing of the somatic connection dance engages with. Dance advances multiple points of entry into the now of the Place of the performance. Each sensorial entry point offering a different view within the immediate empiricism of the somatic. These moments could be called moments of awareness of emplacement.

Howes (2005) calls for a move within the paradigm of the somatic away from the concept of *embodiment* to *emplacement* in order to underline the importance of Place in the matrix of experiencing-Self (Pink, 2011). I am interested in how emplacement underlines the neglect of environment when we discuss experience as *embodied*. Howes (2005) gives context to embodiment/emplacement when he suggests the opposite to embodiment is disembodiment, the opposite to emplacement is displacement. I ruminate that in the past I have felt out of my body (disembodied). Sometimes this has been because I have been like the girl, I danced with when we first started to move together, so involved with watching someone else's body I feel it is my own. I am on the movement journey with them. This feeling of empathy is something I *do* want to happen at points when people see me dance or my choreography. However, when I have felt *displaced* I have felt as if I was not connected to the world around – this has never been a pleasant feeling – I feel lost. So, emplacement make sense to me as a word to capture the whole of the concept of connectedness of *mind-body-environment* that I also mean when I casually use the word embodied (or somatic).

### **Emplacement: the Now-ness of dancing Place**

Children file into the School Hall, an activity made familiar to them by school assembly and/or school lunchtimes but this time *We* are there. We have placed tiles and fabric and other props on the floor, rearranged the seating areas so that children are sitting in the round and placed our electric cello (an odd-looking instrument) along the edge of the circle we have created. Although we may have stacked-up school chairs and taken them out of the Hall, removed lost cardigans from the corners of the area, we cannot completely re-design or re-claim the School Hall: the notice boards, gym equipment, dinner trays all still sit in the room with us. We cannot instigate a complete aesthetic change, however through the experience of watching and doing dance, our presentation of '*Found*' seems to start a transformation by foregrounding the somatic of Self in Place. The Hall starts to change into the Place where dance is happening. This is the impact of what Dewey (1989) would call the 'situation' and Casey (2009) and Massey (2005) would call the 'event' of the performance. That is the event or situation of the performance creates moments of awareness of inter-connectedness through the experience of watching and doing dance that is transformative, moving Hall and those within it through the emplacement of the inter-connection of body-mind-environment of dancing.



Figure 1



Figure 2

This is not to suggest 'Found' offers children a unique awareness of their own bodies (to which I would suggest at times children are more acutely aware than an adult) Neither would I suggest that the children for whom we are performing do not have awareness of emplacement (just witness them playing in the school playground). But rather by giving the situation a quality through the music, choreography, colours textures of the show the dance performance seems to offer the children an acknowledgement of the felt of somatic-as-knowledge, an acknowledgement of Being-in-Place. An awareness, which is so often shrouded by a lack of attention to the sensing body in the daily routine of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western society the children are being 'educated' into. It is the recognition of, and language for the bodily (the somatic) of now-ness that the event of the dance performance offers.

*Now I tip my body past the perpendicular of my leg, arabesque-ing my weight beyond my hip...leaving the present of what was balance for a moment and falling into the 'now' that gravity conjures for me. Ground and air conspire with my muscles and I am jump, propelling across the room. Landing, Now is redirecting me, spinning me round to cascade into the space that was behind me...* The dancing me is more than a wordless body in space. The awake-ness of being in 'now' gives an experience a quality. As we would move around each other in dance it seems we are part of a moment that is distinct and remembered by the nature of it awakening us into the *felt* 'of what now is'

The School Hall becomes a different Place when it is dinnertime than when it holds the performance. The logic and meaning of the Hall has changed. The children are emplaced differently than at lunch time or assembly. In the matrix of mind-body-

environment this change of relationship with environment is a change of the Self as much as it is a change of the environment. 'Found' creates a Place of dance and therefore a place for the children to be of dance, of the moving body, through the emplacement of being there in that moment. The idea of the blurred edges of self in environment uniting time and space in the emplacement experience is familiar in Contemporary dance.

*'Space became more than just a hole in which to kick or spin about; it evolved into an architecturally fluid companion.'* (Nikolais and Louis, 2005, p.11)

The idea that environment is given its quality through the emplacement of interaction, making it *Place* is proposed by Casey. The distinction is made that *space* is a concept of geographic measure, whereas *Place* involves interaction.

*'the experience of perceiving ...requires a corporeal subject who lives in a place through perception...Thus place integrates with body as much as body with place.'* (Casey, 2009, p.325)

Following Casey, I am not suggesting that as we dance across the Hall we are changing the Hall 'space' into a meaningful 'Place' through using dance. Space and Place do not bare the relationship of empty = space / filled = Place. This would misleadingly mean space pre-existed waiting for meaning-fulness to turn it into Place (see Casey's chapter in Feld and Basso, 1996, Casey, 2009). Place is not space made meaningful. Place is the response of Being in the now of sensation. Place is not a location (a geographic measure that space is often distilled to) it is an equation of all the processes within physical literacy, visual literacy, sensual literacy, verbal literacy, reflective responsiveness, memory and anticipation. Dance awakens 'your' body to this equation of Place: emplacement – for the young children moving with the paper-aeroplanes flying in what was their Dinner Hall we could see them come into their *reflective sensing body*. A reflective sensing body being the felt sum of the *equation that is Place*. Echoing Dewey's notion of the transaction of situation, Massey describes Place as the coming together of processes.

*"This is the event of place...This is the event of place in part in the simple sense of coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing. This is place as open and as internally multiple.'* (Massey, 2005, p.140-141)

The idea that one blurs with one's environment can be given a further interesting perspective by Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987, Dunbar, 2004). Deleuze and Guattari

pose the question of where the body ends or begins. Deleuze and Guattari's *body as machine* (and *Body without organs*) resonates with descriptions dancers have made of the experience of dance, where the body is an extension into the 'elements' around. Dance is experienced at the points of interaction, the edges of self that are blurred in distinction with environment.



Figure 3



Figure 4

### **Emplacement: questions about children as participants in their world-making**

As I have suggested earlier the performances of 'Found' are attempting to draw on the experience of the dance performance to offer a situation of Being-in-Place. There is an importance to individuals developing a *Physical Literacy* for acknowledging, communicating, recognising, real-ising *Being-in-Place* (Whitehead, 2010). Kenneth Fox (2010) explores the links between physical literacy and the perception of the 'body' in constructions of identity, constructs of Self the four-year olds at our performances are already grappling with. Fox suggests anxieties that are developed about our bodies often alienate people from acknowledging somatic experiences and embed behaviours that are detrimental to developing physical literacy. He points particularly to negative experiences at school-age which he suggests is when people start to form constructions about what they are good at and what they cannot do.

There is an indication here that the ability of children to meaningfully engage with the corporeal directly affects their perceived self-identity through creating a kind of imbalance in the mind-body-environment matrix. Fluidity of engagement with the environment impacts on the possibility for what Self is (Burkitt, 1999, Shilling, 2003, Synnott, 1993, Whitehead, 2010). This would appear to suggest that if there is a limited sense of the possibility of body, (Being-in-response) the possibility of what a Place can be and how it can be interacted with is also limited. Emplacement and the ability to *be* actively aware of transacting with Place impacts how active the child can be in their own world-making. Children are largely expected to fit into an adult social world that sees

itself as pre-existing them not co-created with them. In *Melting Geography: purity, disorder, childhood and space* Jones (2006) leads me to ask if the notion of 'childhood' is fundamentally about who has permission to create their world. Without acknowledgement of emplacement 'objects' and 'occurrences' can appear to the child as being fixed *things* they must fit into, rather than part of the assemblage of transaction between (them)Self and world around, the situation of the Place. Consider the impact if the acknowledgement of the event of Place, the 'constellation of processes' (Massey, 2005 p.141), has to wait for children to accrue enough verbal language to describe the somatic. Whose narratives of Being are acknowledged until then? Whose sense of Place is recognized? This is partly about asking at what age we are able to consider our somatic experiences as 'real'. By this I am suggesting the importance of seeing/recognising somatic experiences as 'real' from an early age. In the years before verbal language is completely developed how are the felt, sensed somatic transactions with the world acknowledged, validated or communicated for young people? Dance seems to offer children (and adults) languages for non-verbal conversations to be exchanged, languages for the somatic: emplacement narratives to be acknowledged such as dance-conversations like the collaboration of communication the girl and I had in the paper aeroplane dance and numerous others across the tour.

### **In conclusion**

As an artist-scholar my practice sometimes engages with attempts to re-connect the verbal with the felt. The notion of *emplacement* goes beyond the articulation of being present in a space: emplacement conceives of the ecology of transaction that is Place. When I dance, I am aware of the transaction of my emplacement: in community with that around me. Dance narrates the somatic experience of emplacement, the sense of being a part of everywhere. Inherent in watching the professional dancers' and musicians' performance of 'Found' is the notion that dance would offer the young audience languages where responses to the experienced are bodily – moving away from the verbal of words to the expression of the somatic. The professional dancers and musicians model moving *in, through, and being* a part of Place. The children watching are drawn into the *situation* of the dancing through the visual of watching dance, the auditory of the music and the felt choreography that orientates them in the round with performers moving in and out of where they are sitting. This is designed to give the audience permission to move, by means of making them aware of being in relationship with... being *emplaced*; 'a process through which he/she comes to *know* in relation to the other elements of the environment' (Pink, 2011 p.348). Thus, the somatic conversation of the performance *event* is designed to give permission to the young audiences to express their narratives of emplacement that is their dance.



*The moments when the boy, inspired, seized the aeroplane and started to move, when the girl zoomed her arms in a gigantic circle opposite me are compelling...the rush of recognition of the between-ness, of us-ness, of everything-ness of connection as she/we lift our legs in mirror together. On the beat, on the music of Place, in breath exhaled in balance together. She tries on a movement for me to follow and I am a part of that too, then I bend my knees for a few moments we create and re-create ourselves joyously dancing of this Place. I am, We are, a part of everywhere...*

*“wind in my hair, I feel a part of everywhere” – lyric Eddie Vedder from Into the Wild*

Mitakuye-Oyasin

About Figures: As part of my ethical approach to documenting my work I use a photo to watercolour system. This ‘watercolouring’ of photos means I can capture/document the movement and intent, shape of the person in the photo but the image remains largely anonymous. The watercolour becoming the ‘pseudonym’ body for the participant where the shape and presence of the body is so important to my research.

Figure 1 – image from performance of ‘Found’ – Anton Califano & Adesola Akinleye

Figure 2 - image from performance of ‘Found’ – Agnieska Dolata & Adesola Akinleye

Figure 3 - image from performance of ‘Found’ - Kevin Blanzky & Adesola Akinleye

Figure 4 - image from performance of ‘Found’ - Kevin Blanzky & Adesola Akinleye

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