

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Perecquian Perspectives: Dialogues with Site-Dance (Or, 'On being *here* and *there*')

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### Abstract:

This paper explores the influence and application of Perec's work within site-specific dance practice. It considers how Perec's methods and prose might encourage creative dance approaches engaging with and reflecting on subjective encounters with space and place. It questions how approaches articulated in *Species of Spaces* (1974) and *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975) may inform site-dance artists reflecting on what we might learn from Perec's (1989) techniques of recording the 'infra ordinary' in a new context. Discourses of embodiment and multiplicity that approach subjective processes of being-in-the world from holistic and immersive perspectives inform the discussion. Through doing so, it aligns with Deleuzian-informed, non-representational theories that prioritise the 'event-ness' of human-nonhuman interactions in real-world environments (Greenhough 2010). In revealing the infra ordinary Perec invites us to ponder further the extraordinary nature of human-spatial interactions and associated journeyings between the real, imagined and associated landscapes they invoke. For site-dance practitioners, Perecquian geographies inform understandings of holistic site responses in which the interrelated body-self and the site world event phenomenon is identified as the locus of site-subject relations. Through a discussion of Perecquian informed movement scores site-body entwinements implicating the experiencer and the spatial species under investigation in a co-constitutive dance of knowing and unknowing, fixing and unfixing, advancing and retreating are articulated. This is conceptualized as a dance of 'being here and there' - a duet between body-self and site-world in which these elements move along and emerge in relation to one another leading to enhanced awareness and developed understandings of being-in-the-world.

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On a visit to New York in August 2012 I was introduced to a local volunteer tour guide who led me on a personalised walking tour of the city. On hearing of my interest in space, place and architecture she led me enthusiastically to Grand Central Station a place that, by her own admission she was 'obsessed with'. As she proceeded to bombard me with a wealth of factual and anecdotal information regarding the history, architecture and fabrication of the building I began to feel my engagement with the developing commentary drift. It was only when I was led down to the unmarked and often considered 'secret' whispering gallery below the main concourse where I was encouraged to 'play' and interact with the building and its acoustic promise of 'magic' that I felt a sense of engagement with the site begin to develop. In the act of whispering my 'secret' message into the corner of the archway I pressed my body into the curve of the building, craned my neck and waited for a response. As I walked back to the hotel in Times Square I was reminded of a similar encounter experienced in 2007 when participating in a site-dance movement workshop in London's Tate Modern gallery where a task focussed on guiding the body through space resulted in rolling my body down the ramp in the turbine hall, an act that engaged me both physically and kinetically with the site. I then jumped forwards in time to 2012 to the memory of a subsequent experience also encountered in the turbine hall when, through encountering Tino Sehgal's installation work *These Associations* I joined in running and 'swarming' through the space, guided and permitted to do so by the moving bodies of Seghall's dancers. These meditations on the body, site and corporeal engagement converged whilst on the journey from Grand Central Station to Times Square, connections between associated events in similar places, spanning a six year period united through embodied memories of space and place-based encounters.

This article explores the influence and application of Georges Perec's work within an interdisciplinary context, specifically within the field of site-specific dance practice. Through a discussion of particular site-dance explorations it considers how Perec's methods and his prose might encourage creative dance approaches to engage with and reflect on subjective encounters with space and place. In particular, I question how approaches articulated in *Species of Spaces* (1974) and *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975) may inform site-dance artists and reflect on what we might learn from Perec's (1989) techniques of recording the 'infra ordinary' in a new context. It is perhaps important to state at the outset that I am not a Perec scholar and that this article does not engage with Perec's broader body of extensive work. However, as a practitioner-academic engaged in site-based exploration I have found these two key texts useful in expanding techniques for observing and engaging with site and developing experimental, 'Perecquian' approaches to site-based movement inquiry.

Site-specific dance is performed and created in response to a particular site or location, it encompasses engagements with urban, rural and virtual environments and incorporates a range of themes from the socio-political to the romantic, historical, ecological and factual. Key choreographers working in this field include, in the U.S,

Stephan Koplowitz and Martha Bowers, and in the U.K., Susanne Thomas, Rosemary Lee and Nigel Stewart. The dance form sits within a wider field and lineage of live art and performance practice in which companies and artists such as Robert Smithson and the Living Theatre's work in the nineteen sixties, Brith Gof's work in the late eighties, Wrights and Sites and Lone Twin's work from the early nineties to the present day paved the way for both artistic and academic research in this area. In recent years site-dance scholarship has expanded (see Stock 2007; Barbour 2011; Kloetzel and Pavlick 2011) and body-site knowledges emerging from this form of practice have been employed within inter-disciplinary discourses concerned with human-world engagements more broadly (see Edensor and Bowdler 2015; McCormack 2015).

My practice-based research explores how site-dance exposes human relationships to space and place and, in turn, how this work informs phenomenological understandings of being-in-the-world. This perspective is informed by discourses of embodiment and multiplicity drawn from cultural geography, non-representational theory, dance and performance studies and phenomenology that approach subjective processes of being-in-the world from holistic and immersive perspectives. Through doing so, it aligns with Deleuzian-informed, non-representational theories that prioritise the 'event-ness' of human-nonhuman interactions in real-world environment articulated here by human geographer Beth Greenhough;

Deleuze develops from Bergson's notion of duration new ways of understanding and thinking the world as itself only emerging – or being actualised – in the moment of perceptual encounters between living agents, what he terms an event. (2010: 40)

Notions of emergence and event-ness inform my own movement-research practice which acknowledges the ever-mobile nature of space and place experienced subjectively as a complex interrelation of both situated and imagined experiences, associations and remembered events. The dancing-subject located within this practice is considered from a multiplicitous perspective as a becoming-subject in the world, a perspective aligned with cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's consideration of selfhood as 'a convergence of many forces, affects and histories' (2015). As such, the research embraces a non-dualistic epistemological perspective that prioritises embodied knowledge arising from the dancing body-self considered as 'a minded body not a mind in command of something called body' (Fraleigh 1987: 9). This coexistent relationship between moving and thinking or a thinking-through the body is articulated by dance-scholar Erin Manning as 'not a thinking that is outside, beyond movement-moving, but a thinking that composes-with movement, with body-in-the-making' (2013: 14). Manning further asserts that becoming-bodies are always bodies in relation to the world and to the environments with which they interact in a Deleuzian process of assemblage:

It happens across strata, both actual and virtual. A looking becomes a touching, a feeling becomes a hearing. But not *on* the skin or *in* the body. Across strata, both concrete and abstract, that constitute an assemblage. This assemblage is a sensing body in movement, a body-world that is always tending, attending to the world. (2013: 2, emphasis in the original)

From this perspective, sited human-environment interactions can be construed as processual, as places of becoming in which the participatory presence of the researcher within the event is essential and ‘fieldwork is more than a process of data collection; it is an event through which the researcher and researched are resituated or repositioned in the world, and thereby are engaged in remaking the world through the process of their encounters’ (Greenhough 2010: 48).

Synergies with the work of Georges Perec begin to arise when considering this position further, in particular his attempts to capture and list myriad site details, events and through his invitation to consider the ever-expanding nature, function and associative meanings of mundane, everyday spaces.

When introduced to Perec’s work in 2013, I became intrigued by his methods of exploring space and place and his articulation of specific relationships experienced with some of the places both real and imaginary he encountered. For the site-dance practitioner Perec’s work presents intriguing methodologies for negotiating and navigating the specifics of a particular site combined with articulations of subjective wanderings and processual, associative imaginings invoked by site-specific interventions. These methodologies manifest themselves in the form of various ‘listing’ processes encompassed within *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975) and in Perec’s efforts to capture and identify the many quotidian yet critical components: the ‘stuff’ of life explored in *Species of Spaces* (1974). Cultural theorists Wilken and McCosker (2012) observe that, through this detailed, creative approach Perec’s account of the everyday emerges ‘as an “invent-ory” of the rich texture and disjunctures that populated his everyday spaces, personal encounters and memories’. As opposed to a reductive act therefore, for the site-dance practitioner such listing processes allude to the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of space and place and, considered as a form of ethnographic practice, Perec’s technique ‘points to the generative power of lists as both *of* the everyday and as an analytical tool of discovery for *understanding* the everyday’ (emphasis in original text).

Perec describes the everyday environment in pedantic and often, monotonous detail, through which he captures a sense of the urban quotidian materiality. From the make-up of a street to the design of a gutter he successfully captures the functional, everyday repetitive forms and functions of the planned, the uniform and the replicated. In doing so however, he draws attention to the design and detail of the urban environment and, highlights the particularities of the textures, forms and materials that combine and make up the urban landscapes in which we participate. For the site-dance practitioner, the key word here is participation, the process of engaging with the world as

an unfolding event through action and interaction, and this position of reciprocity between body and world informs my own movement practice greatly.

From his seemingly ocular-centric approach to recording, ‘scoring’ and capturing space to the more poetic and expressive modes of writing contained in these works, I became interested in Perec’s methods and processes of observation and was curious to see how these approaches might translate in a practical and theoretical manner. The subsequent mapping-across of these approaches to inform processes of site-based movement inquiry became the focus of the ensuing practical projects discussed here.

Both *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* and *Species of Spaces* provide the site-dance researcher with specific ‘ways in’ to developing site-specific exploration: for example, methods employed in *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* could be aligned to processes of focussing or zooming in to the minutiae and detail of place equitable to notions of phenomenological reduction enacted as a bracketing off of things-in-particular to consciousness. The reduction in this sense invokes a perceptual process that (temporarily) places ‘the [wider] world’s existence out of play and does so only to seek a better understanding of it’ (Low 2013: 205). In addition however, the more associative and discursive methods employed in *Species of Spaces* that move beyond the specificity of a given site produce a reading of Perec’s work in which he ponders the character, nature and affective qualities of spaces and suggests a different form of space-place inquiry. In this sense, Perec’s work guides the site-dance practitioner towards both specific and associative, imaginative approaches to interpreting site.

Informed by Perec’s work, this article articulates how my own Perecquian-informed site-dance explorations fostered a process of experiential knowing through which the intuiting body-self explores and responds to expanded notions of more illusive site components such as kinetic rhythms, spatial flows and embodied attunements.

### **Interdisciplinary perspectives**

Perec’s work usefully intersects with interdisciplinary discourses on space and place and perhaps reflects a continuation of his own interest with interdisciplinary arts experimentation with which he engaged in the 1960s and 1970s. In her essay ‘Georges Perec and the avant-garde in the visual arts’, Tania Ørum notes:

Some of his works balance between genres like urban studies, descriptions of everyday life and autobiography. Some consist of puzzles, mathematical and linguistic systems. He collaborated on research projects and archives, films, radio programmes, exhibitions as well as music and opera. (2006: 321)

In much of his interdisciplinary work Perec was concerned with method, techniques and structures, with approaches to developing creative and exploratory practices through learning from other disciplines and applying them within his own literary experiments;

Perec's own statements about his collaborative projects with visual artists, stress that what he aims to do in his work with an artist is 'to look at how he works' and 'then try to transfer to my own work something which will stick to what he does, but which is not a comment'. (Ørum 2006: 320)

This notion of transferring ideas and approaches from one discipline to the other in order to try out particular techniques within a new context mirrors my approach to working with Perec's practices of engaging with everyday, real-world sites and locations discussed here. His methods of listing, observing and associated processes of abstraction and detachment from narration prove fruitful in extending and developing existing strategies for engaging with the everyday in site-dance work.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Perec's attention to the quotidian aspects of particular spaces highlights the detail and density of specific sites and proposes another way of considering and valorising commonplace site facets and actions;

As you read Perec's descriptions, you increasingly succumb to the feeling (at least I do and I think others do as well) that this is important, though you can't say how. If we don't have ideas and theories about it we ought to. A very large layer of such stuff – buses going by, people putting umbrellas up, pigeons flying, letters on the side of trucks – surrounds us all the time. (Becker 2001: 71)

In his discussion of Perec's work and his experiments in social description Howard Becker's commentary reflects on the purpose of Perec's methods. He observes that, whilst the work draws our attention to specific infra-ordinary site elements it does not present any explicit commentary on them in an ethnographic sense (Becker 2001: 72). Instead, the job of ascertaining the import of these everyday elements and actions and assessing their value and impact on human processes of being-in-the world falls to the reader.

Interdisciplinary approaches employed within my own site-dance research developed from a concern for purely choreographic exploration towards a more interdisciplinary approach following an introduction to the work of Marxist human-geographer Doreen Massey in 2005.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Massey's seminal work *For Space* (2005) resonated with my approach to site-dance making as she challenges conventional geographic tropes of fixity and permanence and alternatively promotes notions of a multiplicitous consideration of space and place. Massey elaborates further on notions of coevalness and proposes a geography of becoming in which space and place are both mobile constructs informed by intersecting human and non-human agency and a reconsidering of space 'as the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories so far' (24). Massey's work and the work of other human and cultural geographers (i.e. N. Thrift, J.D. Dewsbury, S. Pile and C.Nash, T. Ingold and C.Tilley), continues to inform the design of my practice-led research and frequently presents theoretical lenses that

enable me to further articulate a range of tacit knowledge contained within this type of spatialised movement practice.

Aligned with Massey's notions, Perec also alludes to the multiplicity of space in the forward to *Species of Spaces* and captures poetically the manner in which our spatial environments have evolved, causing us to constantly navigate between spaces both real and imagined. He observes that

In short, spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself. (2012: 6)

Perec's advises us here to take care, slow down and attend to place, as he draws us towards the infra-ordinary and challenges us to make of it what we will, free from analysis or commentary. When applied to site-dance exploration, this approach offers up a creative opportunity to engage with real-world locations in a pre-reflective manner inviting a phenomenological approach facilitated through body-based exploration.

Phenomenological approaches prioritising the body-self as the primary way of knowing a place through corporeal means facilitate the development of embodied processes that enable movement practitioners to remain open and responsive to site-phenomena free from a priori expectations. The subsequent articulation of these acts and experiences through non-representational theoretical perspectives provides a lens through which to valorise the emerging movement outcomes and exploratory processes as site-specific 'enactments', a concept articulated by Anderson and Harrison:

Thus certain embodied gestures and action sequences, certain turns of phrase and idiomatic expression, certain organisations of objects in space, *do not* 'express' or 'stand for' certain cultural meanings, values and models; they are not 'vehicles for symbolic elaboration' (Ingold 2000: 283). Rather they are *enactments*; if there is elaboration it is conducted and composed in the on-going practical movements and actions of which the symbolic is a part, but only a part. (2010: 9, emphasis in the original)

In this sense, the notion of enactment can be viewed as a constituent feature of the site's event-ness as body, space and place operate and emerge in a co-constitutive manner. This perspective then precludes any anthropocentric attempts to colonise, analyse or dominate a site in a quest for monolithic meaning or interpretive accounts. The site in this sense is not perceived as an extant 'thing' to be conquered by the all-knowing human subject; alternatively it is conceived as a place of becoming, evolving alongside subjective experiences of becoming and (momentarily) belonging, a process aligned with Ingold's notions of 'moving along with' (2000: 56-7) landscape as we evolve with it.

### Scoping and Scoring: Approaching the Site

This interest in interdisciplinary research practices that seek to explore and articulate human experiences of space, place and temporality has led me to explore the work of a number of dance-architecture, movement and performance artists/researchers who employ methods of abstraction and ‘scoring’. Artists such as Anna and Lawrence Halprin, Trisha Brown, Mike Pearson, Rachel and Alice Sara and Anna McDonald employ scores as devices through which an individual’s process of attending to and engaging with pragmatic and temporal dimensions of place are foregrounded. For many of these practitioners the method of research begins with site-based investigation, involving noting, observing and site ‘scoping’ prior to embarking on more embodied and experiential approaches. When first introduced to Perec’s *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, the potential for his prose to operate as both an example of ‘scoping’ and recording the activities of a site and to subsequently develop this material into a sequence of scored instructions for improvised dance proved intriguing.

Within broader contemporary dance practice, movement scores often include a simple set of instructions or directives that facilitate the mover’s exploration of a particular theme or idea through improvised movement explorations. Throughout both *Species of Spaces* and *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, Perec often interrupts his descriptive prose or listing of site features to directly address the reader and instruct them to attend to specific elements within their own lived environment:

In apartment buildings in general:  
 look closely at them;  
 look upwards;  
 look for the name of the architect, the name of the contractor, the date it was built;  
 ask yourself why it often says ‘gas on every floor’;  
 in the case of a new building, try to remember what was there before;  
 etc.

(Perec 2012: 44)

Perec’s instructions range from the physical to the imaginative and challenge the reader to consider a multi-layered approach to experiencing and engaging with the built environment and city-scapes. This approach chimes with many performance-based practices that utilise scores as a way in to knowing and cataloguing a site and bringing subjective spatial and habitual processes of engaging with known sites to consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

For example, performance theorist Carl Lavery draws on psychogeographic approaches to provide an open score in his essay ‘25 instructions for performance in cities’. Designed as a teaching resource for undergraduate students it includes instructions such as:

- List ten things you saw, heard and smelt on your way to class over a period of a week.
  - Return to the same spot every day for a week and witness what happens there.
  - Deliberately get lost in the city.
  - Ask a friend to guide you through the city via instructions given on a mobile phone.
  - Negotiate the city by bus, car, bike and on foot and document your impressions.
  - Collect lost or abandoned objects in the city streets and try to imagine narratives about them.
- (2005: 233)

Lavery's approach here suggests a concern for the everyday materiality of the urban landscape as a rich source of potential performance stimuli whilst simultaneously challenging individuals to consider the innate performativity of urban city-scapes. Site-based performance practitioners can also draw on more open and suggestive scores from which individuals are free to respond to their own interpretation of more illusive site atmosphere's and qualia. Movement practitioner and researcher Katrinka Somdahl-Sands provides an account of working with the U.S based site-dance artist Jennifer Monson in 2002 for a performance entitled the *Osprey Tour* in which the notion of exploring a subjective sense of location provided the basis for this type of exploration:

Exploring one's location was actually the foundational score for the *Osprey Tour*. Location in this context, as a score, refers to the process of keying into your sensory awareness of a site, triggering a unique response to that 'location'. This deep awareness of the place is the spark inspiring movement. (Somdahl-Sands 2014: 179)

Through such methods our attention is brought to the affect of the designed and organised urban environment and the socio-economic forces, performative occurrences and affective qualities that present cities in a certain light and shape our everyday interactions with them. As opposed to a restrictive or prescriptive set of rules or instructions however, scores can be perceived as guiding devices, enabling the mover to navigate their own experiential journey at their own pace:

Moving through a place by one's own power facilitates being involved with the place through all of the senses, sight, hearing, touch, smell, kinetic, movement/work of muscles and taste, so the sense of place developed is based on these senses.

As the surroundings unfold all around the mover it is not a dominating vision, rather it is a multi-sensory experience intertwining person and place.

(Somdahl-Sands 2014: 179)

Within my own site-dance practice in urban locations scores are often employed as a series of instructions for attending to place through embodied movement inquiry.<sup>4</sup> The resulting improvised movement phrases arising from this approach literally ‘take place’ and take up a place from which a moment of performed time emerges that requires both audience and performer to attend to themselves and their actions within the unfolding space-time event.

### **Exhausting Place: Practical Applications**

Perec’s description and ‘capturing’ of information during his attempts to ‘exhaust’ the Place St Sulpice in Paris provides a useful starting point for site-specific movement exploration:

- Stone: the curbs, a fountain, a church, buildings.....
  - Asphalt
  - Trees (leafy, many yellowing)
  - A rather big chunk of sky (maybe one-sixth of my field of vision)
  - A cloud of pigeons that suddenly swoops down on the central plaza, between the church and fountain.
- (2010: 6)

The attentive process of recording, observing and attending to physical and material site components and everyday site occurrences maps fruitfully across to a movement-based context invoking a form of site ‘inventorying’ in the first instance. Alongside Perec’s process of quantification however runs an additional layer of commentary that alludes to the site’s ‘event-ness’ by perfectly exemplifying the rhythms, energies and spatio-temporal ‘textures’ of the site:

- Conversations between two people, conversations between three people, conversations between several people: the movement of lips, gestures, gesticulations
  - means of locomotion: walking, two-wheeled vehicles (with and without motor), automobiles (private cars, company cars, rented cars, driving school cars) commercial vehicles, public services, public transport, tourist buses
- (2010:10)

In his study, Perec creates a sense of the ever-evolving site phenomenon and captures these elements from different vantage points including various cafes and a street bench; throughout his enquiry he is situated simultaneously inside and outside the scene of action. Perec’s writing is therefore embodied and embedded within the environment in

which he writes as he takes account of the many physical, aural, sensory, and haptic elements he encounters, as observed by French literary scholar Michael Sheringham:

We never lose sight of the flesh-and-blood participant, whose physical needs and sensations are conveyed through details of what he eats and drinks...the atmospheric conditions, the changes of light and temperature. (2013: 271)

However, within his methodology a tension can be perceived between practices of mobility and sessility as Perec's process relies on observation from fixed points in which he remains weighted in one position yet engaged vicariously with the rhythms, actions and enactments played out in the lived world surrounding him. Perec's embodied approach in this sense lends itself to further expansion and application within a site-dance context that prioritises corporeal exploration as the primary mode of site engagement and exploration. To explore how Perec's ideas and approaches might work in practice, I decided to exhaust a place in Chichester through an initial dance film experiment.<sup>5</sup> Preparation for the exploration involved spending time in a corridor space at the University of Chichester, sitting, dwelling and simply 'being' in the space (see Figure 1). The scoring process in this instance included a focussed cataloguing of site-elements including the site's walls, floor covering, glass balustrade and steel hand-rails. This simple score developed into a physical form of cataloguing through the body involving moving over, under and between the site components as I began to develop movement explorations that engaged me physically through touch and direct contact of my body, hands and feet on the site's surfaces, materials and textures. Akin to Perec's approach, as the observation period developed I gradually shifted my attention from the site's material components instead becoming attuned to the rhythms and energies of the space. This opened my awareness to possible movement responses elicited through more abstract processes of bodily 'listening', the following process diary extract captures my thoughts and reflections on the practice:

The corridor space is situated within a place of work, a place of study, through the practice it becomes a place of textures, materials, surfaces and atmospheres. Usually a place of transition, a place between here and there it becomes (momentarily) a place of stasis as I sit, observe, feel and begin to embody the site. I begin to move yet I don't really feel like 'dancing' in any codified or stylised sense of the word. I want to move imperceptibly, through small weight shifts, slight rotations, brushes of the hand, feet and face. I become aware of and present to the atmosphere of the site thick with stasis, warmed by the welcome early January sunlight streaming in through the window, the skylight frames clouds passing overhead, I pause, observe and dwell in this moment. (Hunter, V. Movement Research Diary, Jan 2014)

This prose incorporates description of my physical practice and reflection on its enactment with simultaneous analysis of both my sense of being in the site and contemplations on how the movement interventions affected my perception and site experiences. A subsequent exercise (captured in the prose below) involved an exploration of a walled expanse in the corridor site:

My forehead rests against the wall, gently, slowly I begin to roll, my whole body weight balanced between my feet on the floor and my head on the wall.

As I slowly pivot round, my forehead, cheek, ear, the back of my neck connect with the smooth surface of the wall. The flat, unyielding texture feels cool to the touch, solid, stable - surface.

I roll, rest and repeat. I am curious, playfully exploring this extra-daily act, playing with, moving over and around the wall structure, the wall as support, as a stable partner in an emerging body-site duet.

(Hunter, V. Movement Research Diary, Jan 2014)



Figure 1. V. Hunter, *Exhausting Place* (corridor exploration 2014).

Through these processes I was reminded of Perec's prose and his ability to wonderfully combine personal and pragmatic details whilst attempting to exhaust the Place Saint-Sulpice pertaining to both the scenes he observes and his own personal situation as he eats, smokes, observes, responds to and comments on the world around and within him. In doing so, Perec simultaneously reveals his process within the scripted product reflecting on the difficulties he encounters along the way including moments of boredom, fatigue and increasingly, exhaustion. Through Perec's immersion within the site's life-world a sense of osmosis emerges in his writing between person and place and

the subject / object reflections contained within the meditative prose become difficult to appropriate. By day three of his project, the observation of ‘moments of emptiness’ (2010: 42) refers in part to both the street scene observed and the growing sense of melancholia conveyed by Perec as his project nears conclusion.

Similarly, as the corridor explorations developed my frustration with the project also increased along with the understanding that any attempt to capture and ‘exhaust’ a place is, essentially futile and at odds with broader phenomenological perspectives that assert:

The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xvii)

This sense of frustration with attempts to exhaust the inexhaustible nature of place is reflected in Lowenthal’s rather gloomy translator’s afterword to the 2010 edition of Perec’s experimental essay, in which he observes:

The attempt to communicate everything, to describe everything – to exhaust everything – is always a sympathetic effort, however doomed to failure it might be. What always remains after such an effort, what remains uncommunicated is misery (2010: 50)

In my own (brief) attempts to explore and exhaust the corridor place I can empathise with Perec’s sense of futility, comparable to my own sense of feeling overwhelmed by the task. Where to begin? What to observe, when to move on and, from moving on, how to let go of the previous object of attention whilst knowingly accepting that there was more to be discovered there? Perec’s project then, its ambition and scope to capture and exhaust the inexhaustible phenomena of site is at once frustrating and illuminating as Becker observes in his assessment of Perec’s exhaustive account of the Place St Sulpice:

It is not an even-handed systematic account of anything. Buses appear often in these pages, but only now and then, not comprehensively. Sometimes there are long lists of which bus just passed and whether it was full or not. But then he gets tired of that and turns away from the street, or just stops mentioning buses for a while. He gets interested in the pigeons and what sets off their sudden collective departures from the *mairie* gutters. But that does not hold his attention for long either. In fact, the book is, in a way, a lesson in the impossibility of the kind of aimless description Perec aimed at, and so it is a lesson in how and why investigators have to focus their attention on something. (2001: 72)

However flawed the method, there is nevertheless something compelling about Perec's attempts to capture and 'hold' place through quantifying, listing and capturing something of the site's formal and informal data that are counter-intuitive to notions of the environment as event in which 'the world in the present tense is always other than its representation, of what we know of it; it is always in excess and outside of its representation and all horizons of calculability' (Dewsbury 2010: 150). Perec's methods can be seen as an attempt to freeze a place in time and create a snapshot of the ephemeral place-world, a task that is essentially futile yet compelling in its illumination of this futility. Mapped across into site-dance exploration, through such efforts to capture and exhaust place a sense of constantly reaching beyond oneself is evoked as attempts to develop authentic engagements with the world constantly shift out of reach; the temporal present marches on leaving us only with fleeting impressions and outlines of being here and there. The challenge of this movement practice then becomes concerned with notions of event, presence and what being present *to* and *with* the ever-evolving site phenomenon might involve.

### Expanded Perspectives

Through acknowledging this state of frustration associated with attempts to capture and 'hold' spatio-temporal moments, the associated understanding that site-based experiences can never truly be fixed, processed and quantified enables a freeing-up of the exploratory movement process in which (to return to Ingold's proposition) the experiencer 'moves along with' the unfolding site event (2000). This perspective enables the mover to expand their consideration of what might constitute site-based experience and engage with multi-focal and multi-temporal perspectives in which a range of embodied experiences and associations play an active part in composing a sense of site in which multiple trajectories of 'becoming' intersect. Erin Manning skilfully articulates such a process through her discussion of the 'complex interrelational matrix of being and worlding' in which she observes:

...being and worlding depend on the activity of reaching-toward. Reaching-toward foregrounds the relationality inherent in experience, a kind of feeling-with the world. (2013: 2)

This position aligns itself more closely perhaps with the more imaginative musings and reflective discourse espoused by Perec in *Species of Spaces*. In this work Perec is concerned with the differentiation and articulation of space animated through human interaction with meaningful places such as streets, apartments, places of work and leisure. In many of the essays his thoughts turn to a more embodied and experiential perspective concerned with the evocative and often suggestive nature of spaces informed by a range of affective and ineffable site affordances and qualities. Perec's beautifully crafted essay in which he reflects on the bed as a place of refuge, repose, escape and invention

illustrates this point. He describes the bed as a touchstone to memory or a portal to past experience and observes that, for him, the physical act of lying on a bed conjures up sensations and embodied memories of previous beds and bedrooms he has inhabited, a perspective that chimes with Massey's notions of simultaneity and positions the bed-space phenomenon as a site of historicised memory invoking resonances of many other bed-spaces he has encountered:

For the others, all I need to do, once I'm in bed is to close my eyes and to think with a minimum of application of a given place for the bedroom to come instantly back into my memory in every detail – the position of the doors and windows, the arrangement of the furniture – for me to feel, more precisely still, the almost physical sensation of being once again in bed in that room. (2012: 20)

This process is further exemplified through Perec's recounting his experience of visiting the coastal village of Rock in Cornwall. This develops into a narrative that combines holistic and sensorial details in which remembers qualities of touch and taste combine with recalled physical experiences of the bed's narrow dimensions and the room's temperature in which an embodied and visceral impression is painted:

The resurrected space of the bedroom is enough to bring back to life, to recall, to revive memories, the most fleeting and anodyne along with the most essential. The coenesthetic certainty of my body in the bed, the topographical certainty of the bed in the room, these alone reactivate my memory, and give it an acuity and a precision it hardly ever has otherwise. (2012: 23)

For the site-dance artist this writing is immediately resonant with notions and practices of bodily knowing and corporeal engagement with real-world locations that valorise and assert the pre-eminence of the body as our primary means of engaging with the life-world.

In his essay on 'The Apartment' Perec takes the reader into a more speculative, surrealist realm where he begins with some seemingly straightforward observations on the form and function of an apartment and the daily routines and activities housed within. However, as the chapter evolves he challenges and questions the normalisation of these functions, layouts and behaviours and invites the reader to 'picture an apartment based on the functioning of the senses' (2012: 31). From there the essay expands into absurdist speculation in which Perec seeks to deconstruct the habitual apartment form through questioning 'How to expel functions, rhythms, habits, how to expel necessity?' (34). This form of questioning illustrates an underlying interest in abstraction and 'making strange' that runs throughout *Species of Spaces* in which he invites the reader to consider a rising scale of abstraction from the street, to the apartment and to the wider world around us.

These notions of spatial form, affect and abstraction employed within *Species of Spaces* informed a subsequent site-dance project entitled *Hidden Dip* created in January 2014.<sup>6</sup> During this project I developed my previous explorations outside the relatively safe corridor environment and undertook an exploration of Chichester town centre to develop dance-film material that was later developed into an installation performance work in collaboration with choreographer Leslie Satin from the Gallatin School, New York University. The project aimed to explore space and place in a more abstract and less prescriptive manner than the corridor experiment and explored the spatial nature of a public space through attending to the lived event-ness of site. This project was informed by contemporary discourses of urban rhythms and place-based refrains<sup>7</sup> and in particular by Henri Lefebvre's notion of urban performativity and his concept of 'Rhythmanalysis' as an approach to researching rhythmic aspects of everyday life. For Lefebvre, the rhythm analyst is immersed both within his body, and within the wider world in which he/she operates:

He listens - and first to his body; he learns rhythms from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms. His body serves him as a metronome. A difficult task and situation: to perceive distinct rhythms distinctly, without disrupting them, without dislocating time. This preparatory discipline for the perception of the outside world borders on pathology yet avoids it because it is methodical.(2004: 20)

Taking this passage as the inspiration for an open score I became interested in observing the ambulatory flow, the motion and pattern of human traffic as it ebbed and flowed through the street. Through this approach I became aware of my bodily responses in relation and in response to the rhythms of this particular place.

Observing the affect of the place on my body in a phenomenological sense I asked myself some very simple and basic questions; *What is this affect? And what does it feel like here?* Due to the design of the street and the alignment of the buildings a predictably linear sense of flow pervaded in which pedestrians either walked laterally or traversed the busy shopping street. I became interested in this sense of uniformity and, perhaps quite perversely wondered what would happen if my movement went against the flow of traffic. I explored an alternative pedestrian approach by walking in a diagonal pattern through the street with sudden shifts of direction and subsequently explored stillness by standing in the middle of the street. Questions arose: *What happens when we are still? What happens when we work against predominant rhythms?*

Significantly, I didn't feel any compulsion to 'dance' here in an overtly codified sense of the word, my aesthetic sensibility turned to impressions of Trisha Brown and the Judson Church postmodernists' experiments with pedestrianism in the early 1960's and their attempts to embrace and incorporate the quotidian within their movement practice. Through this open 'score' I played with deceleration, doing less and operating in an almost subversive manner, slowing down the pace of life, watching, observing and

corporeally recording everyday flows and rhythms of unsuspecting passers by. In a sense, my process began to challenge and question some of Lefebvre's rhythmic propositions in which he suggests a fully immersive process dictated by the rhythmic flow:

...to grasp a rhythm, it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must *let oneself go*, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration. (Lefebvre 2004: 26, emphasis in original)

As the process developed however my actions became entirely 'out of place', deliberately removed from the rhythmic conventions and expectations of that place in order perhaps in phenomenological terms to expose and explore an *ecart*, a divergence between the habitual, functional and automatic processes of passing through and passing over a place, to attend to and experience place in a very present and intentional manner.

I move along with the everyday pace of others watching their feet on the cobbled stones as they flow through, across and over the street. As I move, flock with and track the spatial patterning I am reminded of the difference in pace and tempo between this ambulatory flow compared with the pace of rush-hour London experienced on the previous Friday night.

I begin to stop and pause, re-trace my steps and play with in-between rhythms, loitering in doorways, walking in straight lines from fixed points, walking backwards, gradually, eventually slowing down, longer pauses, observing and taking stock.

Where is this place and how did I find myself here? My thoughts drift to similar places further away, in the North of England, Georgian architecture, cobbled streets, different voices and associations.

I move off, attending back again to this place, it ebbs and flows and moves on gently, a soft rhythm, gently progressing, people at leisure.

Diagonally, to my right, a woman circles and returns to the same spot, her actions and her pace at odds with those of other pedestrians, she has lost someone, her partner, she walks, returns, surveys the area standing on the spot, scanning the scene trying to locate him. She eyes me suspiciously, woman in a red coat acting oddly, her partner returns, an animated conversation ensues, who lost who, who wasn't where they should have been, who was out of place, un-located and un-locatable?

She moves on, I return to the task.

(V. Hunter, Project diary, Jan 2014)

This diary extract illustrates how webs of connectivity between individual and place are exposed through the practice, echoing Massey's (2005) notions of spatial simultaneity in which subjective pasts, present and futures collide. The conceptualisation of where the

present place or moment of movement is located in this practice reflects existential phenomenological perspectives that suggest we exist in a constant state of becoming informed by a sense of present-ness in which ‘the present does not cancel its past, nor will the future cancel its present’ (Merleau Ponty 1962: 82). Lefebvre also positions the observation of everyday rhythms, refrains and their associative affects as central to subjective experiences of presence implicated in the event-ness of space and place:

No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart. A memory? Yes, in order to grasp this present otherwise than in an instantaneous moment, to restore it in its moments, in the movement of diverse rhythms.

The recollection of other moments and of all hours is indispensable, not as a simple point of reference, but in order to *live* it in all its diversity, made up of *subjects* and *objects*, subjective states and objective figures.

(2004: 36, emphasis in original)

Therefore, as I project myself forward in space I am also embroiled in a present that contains fragments and associations of past encounters, places and memories that inform my experience of and relationship to the present (albeit temporary) moment. The site-based experience of ‘being here’ is, therefore necessarily informed by embodied memories and resonances of also being there (historicised past), there (present/past moment) and there (future moments). In this sense, time and embodied memory operate in an existential manner in this practice. Through connecting with this place I am also connecting with every other comparable (and incomparable?) place I have ever encountered and will encounter thereby invoking physical and emotional responses that entwine at the nexus of interaction between past associations present, real-time experiences of the site and future, anticipated and imagined potentialities. However, throughout this process of (potential) disorientation the constant that remains is the body-self and the individual’s phenomenological experience in which the only thing we can become certain of is our subjective, sensorial experience of and response to the evolving site phenomenon. In effect, we may ground ourselves within this sensorially challenging place by retreating into our body-self as the body-soma becomes the bedrock of experience and the sole haven in an increasingly chaotic and disorientating, ever-mobile world.

### **Framing and Re-framing**

As a starting point for site-based analysis and exploration, Perec’s work helps the experiencer to identify the site-specific frame of play by bringing the spatial scene forward to consciousness and enabling us to situate ourselves within and outside of it. It enables us to step back and engage in an analytical stance thereby placing us outside the

frame of play, a process also evocative of Lefebvre's scene from a window in which he captures the rhythmic qualities, actions and components of a Parisian street scene:

Towards the right, below, a traffic light. On red, cars at a standstill. The pedestrians cross, feeble murmurings, footsteps confused voices. One does not chatter while crossing a dangerous junction under the threat of wild cats and elephants ready to charge forward, taxis, buses, lorries, various cars. Hence the relative silence in this crowd. A kind of soft murmuring, sometimes a cry, a call. (2004: 28)

Lefebvre's framing of the road-crossing event is enhanced both through his physical location in which he views the scene from above and through his perceptual positioning in which he casts himself in the role of witness / observer from which his poetic observations and animalistic references emerge.

These notions of objective framing led me to question within my own practice whether this positioning of oneself outside the frame of play might effectively function as a situating strategy that might well enable site-based movement practitioners to get closer to the thing itself – the essential qualities of the spatial 'species' we are trying to research. This notion of placing oneself outside the frame of play might, on first inspection, appear contradictory and at odds with a research methodology that purports to embrace a phenomenological perspective concerned with an interrelated conception of immersion within a specific life-world event. However, Perec and Lefebvre's presentation of the outsider enables us to retreat and withdraw from the often overwhelming cacophony of space, place and people and the many spatial, affective, kinetic and auditory components of specific spaces and places. This withdrawn position of attuned engagement enables us to then identify specific phenomena or site aspects with which to engage in a discrete manner as opposed to becoming submerged and subsumed within the totality of the multi-layered site-phenomenon and its associated risk of becoming overwhelmed and exhausted. This proposition therefore opens up new perspectives on site-based movement exploration in which practitioners might consider further processes of cessation equitable to a stepping outside of the frame to evaluate, take stock, process and reflect. This position aligns with Lauren Berlant's discussion of the 'too much-ness' of the world, in which she considers how individuals might negotiate the many structures, affects, objects and 'things' of the world without becoming subsumed by them or succumbing to their many demands and pressures, a process she describes as 'being without submitting to the other' (2015).

Once this stage of data gathering, observing and site-based 'scoping' has been processed the experiencer can then engage with more immersive practices in a process that I define here as 'calculated immersion' in which the experiencer remains mindful of the exploratory task in hand and resists the temptation to become lost in the moment.

Informed by Perec's work and the associated theoretical concerns discussed here, both the corridor project and the city centre street exploration led to the development of my own perceptual positioning as a process in which I situated myself both inside and outside the everyday 'frame of play' both methodologically and philosophically. This process of calculated immersion, observation, reflection and description operated in a process of ebb and flow combining both ocular and embodied perspectives. These perspectives operated as cognisant structures positioned at opposing ends of a methodological continuum that encompassed varying degrees of each approach. Through doing so both site-based experiments acknowledged the interstitial territory between these perspectives and employed them in an interchangeable and dialogical manner akin to a process of zooming in and out of the unfolding site event.

These Perecquian perspectives served to develop a newly informed understanding of subjective encounters with place and associated processes of being-in-the-moment through which the potential to be here and be somewhere else at the same time, somewhere strange or somewhere associated by memory perhaps began to emerge as a key theme that informed the site-dance work.

On first inspection Perec's seemingly ocular-centric approaches might lend the site-dance practitioner a set of tools through which he/she might list, quantify and account for the various 'stuff' of site, leading to an inventory from which a site-dance work can emerge. On closer inspection however, Perec's work reveals itself as a commentary on the illusive and mobile nature of space and place existing beyond the grasp of quantitative knowing and analytical ordering. In revealing the infra ordinary Perec in fact invites us to ponder further the extraordinary nature of human-spatial interactions and the associated journeyings between the real, imagined and associated landscapes they invoke. For the site-dance practitioner, the acknowledgement of Perec's approaches and subsequent implementation of a methodology that incorporates their combined usage helps to facilitate a holistic site response in which the interrelationship of the becoming body-self and the event-ness of the site world phenomenon becomes prioritised as the locus of site-subject relations.

This ever-evolving process of entwinement implicates the experiencer and the particular spatial species under investigation in a co-constitutive dance of knowing and unknowing, fixing and unfixing, advancing and retreating. This process can be conceptualised as a dance of being here and there through which a duet between body-self and site-world develops in which these elements move along and emerge in relation to one another leading to enhanced awareness and, potentially, a developed understanding of being-in-the-world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Hunter (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Through Massey's conference presentation at the RESCEN symposium, 'making Space', RIBA, 12th Jan 2005. RESCEN is the Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts hosted and curated by Middlesex University.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of score-based practice see Hunter (2017).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of this practice in built environments see Hunter (2016).

<sup>5</sup> A discussion of this project in relation to notions of institutionalized space can be found in Hunter (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Performed at the *Species of Spaces* conference, University of Teesside, March 2014.

<sup>7</sup> For expanded discussions of place, site and rhythm see Wunderlich (2014) and Simpson (2011).

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