



# Site, Dance and Body Movement, Materials and Corporeal Engagement

Victoria Hunter



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# Introduction

Across a wide range of site dance practices both past and present, material bodies engage with, respond to and converse with the material world in a mobile and responsive manner.<sup>1</sup> Through practice and theory, this book presents suggestions and ideas for exploring how site dance and movement practice might instigate corporeal dialogues between bodies and sites. Drawing on ideas from phenomenology, new materialism, experiential anatomy, dance studies and somatics, these suggestions and ideas are informed by a theoretical framework to develop practical exploration and reflective analysis.

In urban locations, opportunities for fostering human-world connectivity are often overlooked by contemporary urban planners in favour of strategies driven by economic productivity and mobility. Such drivers recurrently lead to planning and architectural design that regenerate spaces and produce scenarios in which human-site connectivity is severed and synergistic relations to space and place are obscured. Similarly, engagements with non-urban sites and ‘nature spaces’ in many areas of the Global North are often highly regulated through systems such as National Park initiatives, land ownership and access rights, and mediated through technologies of navigation and cartographic representation. Opportunities to engage with non-urban environments or ‘wildernesses’ in an unfettered and uncensored manner (both through socio-cultural or self-monitoring constraints) are hard to find. Furthermore, traditional, academic dialectical discourses of nature-culture, human-object, organic-manufactured

perpetuate theoretical and imaginary constraints between body and world, human and nonhuman.

In a basic form, mobile body-world engagement can be witnessed in the movement of bodies in, around and within the world through everyday traversing of cityscapes and leisurely wanderings in rural places and nature-scapes. Across these contexts, bodies, sites and materials interact and produce corporeal responses that manifest in representational, expressive and empathetically resonant, conscious and subconscious ways. In the hyper-modern world, however, it is often easy to lose sight of such connections. This book explores how site-based dance and movement practice might provide a ‘way in’ to exploring and engaging with lived environments through corporeal means. It explores a number of synergies between bodily structures and systems and those of the environments in which we live, work and pass through, and illustrates how a choreographic disposition towards observing, intuiting and conversing with the material world might be fostered. The material world in this research is conceived as a physical world made up of substances, materials, elements, plants and creatures and immaterial components such as densities, atmospheres and affordances. It is also a material world shaped and controlled by socio-political conditions and regimes, economic systems of production, power and inequality and globalized networks that affect and inform environmental, humanitarian and ecological events and conditions. Exploring how bodies, sites, materials and material conditions might ‘dialogue’ with one another through the medium of sited dance and movement practice the following questions are addressed:

- How is the body’s design and function reflected in the environments in which it engages—what synergies of form and function exist?
- How might the materials of the body engage with the material and nonhuman world?
- How might body-world synergies be explored through sited dance practices?
- What might embodied site dance perspectives reveal regarding human-material engagements—what knowledge is revealed and where might it be situated?
- How might this knowledge inform wider discourses of human-environment engagement?

Specifically, in this the book I explore what happens when moving bodies meet moving sites through the medium of sited dance and movement practice. The research design draws on perspectives and practices from the field of site dance performance and from my own practice-led, exploratory movement inquiry. Site dance in this context is variously employed as an illustrative practice, an exploratory tool or method of inquiry defined as ‘site-based body practice’, and a conceptual lens through which human engagement with real-world locations (as opposed to the imaginary or fictional world of the theatre) might be perceived from mobile and corporeal perspectives. Through this tripartite approach I explore and consider what sited dance practice(s) might reveal regarding human-world interactions and relatedness. A number of practice-led projects inform this research and discussions of various findings or observations of the movement explorations are woven throughout. These investigations map across time and space and have, on various occasions, encompassed explorations of basements, bridges, historic buildings, beaches, caves, wide open spaces and domestic dwellings.

Throughout the discussions I draw on the body’s anatomical and physiological structures and processes to expose and explore corporeal relationships with particular environments. This is not, however, a book about anatomy and physiology, rather this approach is used to develop a form of site-based body practice in which analogies between bodies, structures and materials can be initially explored and subsequently developed beyond the analogous into an embodied realm. The notion of environment refers here to the material and immaterial components of site encountered through the moving body; this might encompass physical and organic features, built and natural settings, weather conditions, sonic components, atmospheres and affects but does not solely infer an environmentalist or activist stance (but might encompass those orientations if required). In this work the structural, upright stance of the tower block becomes aligned with skeletal systems, urban facades and heart-centres align with anatomical features, intimate, cloistered spaces resonate viscerally with organs and corporeal cavities, and watery systems align with tides and sways. This approach aims to expose the body’s in-built structures and processes as a device through which intrinsic synergies between bodies, sites and the materials and structures present within environments might be illuminated and explored. It does not attempt to anthropomorphize particular nonhuman elements, material components or architectural constructions. What it does propose is that parallels can be drawn and that such

alignments and synergies might be worthy of closer inspection. Through this approach the discourse travels through or dwells with a number of body-site contexts or scenarios that focus on particular entanglements in generically grouped sites. The resulting chapters address the following themes:

- Chapter 2: Material Structures: Bodies and Sites
- Chapter 3: Arterial Routes: Cityscapes and Urban Flows
- Chapter 4: Sites of Impermanence and Endurance: Weathering, Ageing and Decay
- Chapter 5: Home: Interiority and Intimacy
- Chapter 6: Subterranean Spaces: Embodiment, Excavation and Deep Time
- Chapter 7: Wide Open Spaces: Expansion, Projection and Slow Progress
- Chapter 8: Watery Bodies and Watery Sites: Immersion and Porosity
- Chapter 9: Conclusion: Enmeshment and Imaginaries

These categories or groupings of spaces are by no means exhaustive. In this publication they facilitate a discussion of site dance and body-material relations from a number of angles. Through this approach a holistic conception of body-site entanglement is set in motion from which, subsequent exploration, movement practice and creative wonderings evolve. Each chapter presents a discrete argument or perspective on practice-led body-material engagements explored in each type of site. The ideas and theories presented in this introductory section lay the foundation for the key arguments and perspectives employed throughout. This design enables each chapter to be read as a distinct entity, and this might be one approach to reading this book. However, to read each chapter in isolation is, in many ways, counter-intuitive to the key themes of entanglement and enmeshment central to the arguments developed here and various threads of connectivity weave across and through, into and out of these pages. How to capture and connect these threads and to compose them in a meaningful manner becomes the job of the reader and is open to improvisation and interpretation.

## SITE DANCE AND PERFORMANCE

The field of site-based or site-specific dance and performance engages practitioners with non-theatre spaces often in a quest to engage audiences in encounters in which the physical presence of site, performer(s), audience and the unfolding event combine to convey or reveal something in particular. The specificity of such events is contingent on the physical presence of bodies in sites and the convergence of artistic and aesthetic agendas or concerns that drive the performance event forward. Often, this culminates in an ephemerally located exchange between site, performance and audience in which something meaningful is conveyed. There is a purpose to this work, site-based performance requires planning and effort, it is often uncomfortable, inconvenient and costly to make. Yet, the many artists featured throughout this publication pursue this form of practice as a means of exploring and revealing *something* in particular about being *somewhere* in particular through arts-based enquiry. Commenting on what site dance performance can do and what it might communicate to audiences, the choreographer Carol Brown observes:

The way I move is an ongoing response to what is around me. I feel, we feel the force of movement take form in the thresholds of choreographic thinking. Knowing the world means paying attention to it, its reverberations, its textures, its colours and its patterns. *Worlding* this knowing through the choreography of encounter means inviting others to pay attention too. (Whatley et al. 2015, p. 22)

Brown constructs here a picture of a worlding process emerging from choreographic thinking and the presentation of dancing bodies in particular spaces. Through paying attention to human-environment connections in this way, site dance creates a space-time of encounter in which the audience's attention is directed towards a particular form of commentary on human-material, human-environment relations through 'performative moments' (Brown in Whatley et al. 2015, p. 22).

Approaches to this type of work vary, however, and a number of scholars and practitioners have presented models for making and theorizing site-specific dance and performance. Notable examples include Roberts Smithson's early observations of site and 'non site' installation art in the nineteen sixties (in Kaye 2000), Fiona Wilkie's discussion of Wrights and Sites model of specificity (2002), Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlick's

modelling of site dance practice (2009) and my own site dance ‘model of influence’ (2015). Related to this modelling are discussions of what constitutes a ‘site’ in this work and what a site might be or comprise. Again, a number of approaches can be gleaned from the literature including Mike Pearson and Michael Shank’s ‘archaeological’ approach to unearthing site histories, pasts and associative layers through performance (2002), Phil Smith’s multiplicitous and speculative consideration of site in which fixed notions of specificity *per se* are challenged (2018), Laura Levin’s explorations of ‘camouflage’ and ‘performing ground’ (2014) and Cathy Turner’s discussion of dramaturgy-architecture relations in site-based work ‘where architecture refuses to congeal into a fixed location, but participates in performance’ (2015, p. 189).

Over the past fifteen years in particular, scholarship and practice in site-based dance research has developed to consider the performative, choreographic, political and representational significance of sited movement practice (Brown 2015; Barbour 2019; Lawrence 2019; Kloetzel 2019; Stewart 2017; Satin 2019). This publication contributes to a growing field of site dance literature and practice (Kloetzel and Pavlick 2009; Stewart 2005; Hunter 2015; Barbour 2019) that encompasses discourses of body-architecture (Sara 2015; Lieberman 2019), ecological and environmental movement practices (Nóbrega et al. 2018; Sweeney 2011; Reeve 2015) new materialism and creative arts practices (Kramer 2012; Hunter 2019a) and somatically informed body-landscape movement exploration (East 2018; Olsen 2002; Halprin 1995). Whilst sharing a similar interest in experiential anatomical and physiological perspectives encompassed within environmental movement practice, this publication develops discussion in the field of site dance more broadly. It does so by exploring environment-anatomy synergies and material entanglements as a means of investigating body-site relationships through a theoretically engaged perspective informed by discourses of urban and environmental design, spatial flows, body-environment permeability, porosity and materiality.<sup>2</sup>

This book is not a manual or guidebook for making site-based or site-specific dance performance *per se*. Rather, it introduces a range of ideas regarding how specific environments and the body-site synergies they present might be explored through site-based body practice as a mode of site-scoping or corporeal inquiry, and as such it is primarily concerned with methodology. This might subsequently lead practitioners into further processes of forming and honing movement responses into more formalized choreographic material for performance, but this is not the primary aim of

this text. Readers interested in developing site-based dance and performance work are well served by recent contributions to the field (e.g. Barbour 2019; Taylor 2010, 2017; Smith 2018) and might consider this publication as a companion text to these sources. The various chapters in this publication explore synergistic body-site relations through the articulation of processes of embodied noticing, and observation and through description of focused movement inquiry, combined with commentary on professional site dance work. Allegiances and alliances between bodily design, anatomical and physiological systems, real-world environments and their numerous components are encouraged through a focusing of attention on often overlooked, undervalued or easily dismissed points of contact.

### SITING AND SHAPING THE DISCOURSE

The book's research design stems from an acknowledgement that intrinsic body-site connections form a central component of contemporary site-specific dance performance. This can be witnessed in the work of many established site dance artists (i.e. Joanna Haigood, Martha Bowers, Carol Brown, Katie Green, Stephan Koplowitz, Rosemary Lee, Melanie Kloetzel, Karen Barbour, Simon Birch and Olive Bieringa). References to professional site-based dance work in certain chapters provide tangible examples of body-site interactions articulated through dance acts sited in real-world locations. Whilst new materialist or anatomical/physiological perspectives might not be the key concern explored by the choreographers and dance artists mentioned, there is nevertheless a curiosity or an interest in the body in site and its relation to the lived environment evident in the examples cited throughout the book. The term lived environment is one I use here and across my research to describe a relationship to site, through an individual's lived engagement with space and place. It infers an embodied approach that prioritizes knowing a site through spending time and dwelling with its spatial, atmospheric and affective complexities through first-person experience as opposed to encountering or imagining a site from afar—through description or abstracted visual representation or the remote lens of a webcam or computer screen.

The examples of site dance practice I draw on in this research provide tangible illustrations of site-based works in which dance, body and site materials interact, both those of the performers and those of audience members or observers. Specific chapters, therefore, incorporate contextual research that identifies body-site thematic connections in existing site

dance performance work prior to expanding discussions to encompass more exploratory examples of site-based body practice. The book combines discussion of the wider field of site-specific dance performance to provide contextual reference and evidence of body-site relationships explored in a thematic and narrative sense alongside practice-led articulations of body-site relationships unearthed through focused exploration of human-nonhuman, anatomical and physiological perspectives and experiences. Site dance is thereby positioned as theory and practice through references to exemplar performance works and as a method of practice-based inquiry through the articulation of tasks, scores and their physicalized outcomes.

Drawing on practical examples and incorporating ‘scores’, tasks and suggestions for practice-based research, the book can be conceived as an assemblage of ideas, viewpoints and practices. Through new materialist perspectives and phenomenological movement inquiry ‘site-based body practice’ emerges from this inquiry as a mode that encompasses a broad range of movement and body ‘utterances’ (Haraway 1991). The scores presented in each chapter are not intended to be employed as prescriptive or restrictive. Instead, they offer a form of ‘proposition’ (Springgay 2015) offered as a mode of doing research that avoids a didactic or hierarchical model of methodology and invites a more porous framework in which to house movement investigations. In this sense, the scores gesture to how they could ‘potentialize’ (Truman and Springgay 2016, p. 259) the experiencer’s possible range of movement responses, lines of inquiry, spatial trajectories and moments of noticing. The outcomes of this practice might include less codified or recognizable ‘dance-like’ movement than aestheticized site dance formats. It might include pedestrian, organic and somatically informed modes of moving and responding to tasks, scores and provocations encompassed within sited movement explorations. Site-based body practice infers, therefore, a more personalized, organic and somatic approach to movement exploration as opposed to performance-led site dance practices concerned with placing bodies in sites to produce particular spectacular or aestheticized affects (Hunter 2015). In this sense, the book is intended for both experienced movers/dancers and those less familiar with this type of practice as it introduces a mode of considering body-site relationships from particular material, anatomical/physiological perspectives and invites the reader to engage with the propositions, tasks and discussions from their own perspective, and to take from them whatever appears as useful, informative or relevant.

The practice-based methodologies employed in this research enmesh knowing-through-doing and theoretically informed critical reflection in an iterative relationship (Nelson 2013). The discussions of the body and its processes and the articulation of relationships between and across various materialities encapsulate and illustrate the coming together of theory and practice. They are informed by feminist perspectives that acknowledge and champion the fleshy materiality of the body as interlocutor with the material world and its material conditions (Longhurst 2001; Neimanis 2019; Grosz 1994; Colman 2020). In this research, the body is positioned as a corporeal, porous and fleshy entity that houses and encompasses the self that, through its intra-actions and immersions within the world, forges a sense of relational identity.

Fundamentally, this approach questions what this form of inquiry might do and where it might lead in terms of a conceptual re-positioning of sited movement practice. Through a consideration of material constructions, human-nonhuman matter and the enmeshment of body and world existing in tandem in a dialogue of becoming, how might we come to know the world differently through site-based body practice?

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Theoretically, various ‘turns’ emerging within contemporary arts and humanities scholarship and practice have produced opportunities for exploring and considering how human-world engagements might be re-considered or explored from embodied perspectives. Spatial, affective and material ‘turns’ enacted within the field of human geography, dance and performance theory, critical geography and the environmental humanities, for example, inform the discursive turning, re-turning and spiralling acts and the emergence of discursive threads played out throughout this book. Situated within this context, the turning towards, turning within and around various concepts and ideas constitutes an inherent part of exploring how site-based dance and movement inquiry might contribute novel perspectives on human-world relations. In particular, ideas from the field of new materialism help to facilitate these discussions, for example, Jane Bennet’s notion of ‘vibrant matter’ in which she proposes a form of ‘vital materialism’ to ‘counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world’ (2010, p. xvi). Articulating ‘the call from things’ she invites us to consider what might emerge if we acknowledge the power of material entities to engage us with their affective and affecting properties. Bennet considers

herself an ‘eco-materialist’ and, following Deleuzian thought, is concerned with ‘the active power of things to draw other bodies near and enter into assemblages’ (2010, p. 2).<sup>3</sup> The notion of assemblage is expanded in the work of Manuel DeLanda (2016) and is employed throughout this book to facilitate reflection on what such assemblages might reveal regarding human-material engagements.

Reflections on the epistemological and ontological implications of site dance and movement inquiry are further woven into each chapter informed by a theoretical framework drawn from Experiential Anatomy (Olsen 2002; Fraleigh 2015), Phenomenology (Sheets-Johnstone 1966; Fraleigh 1987; Merleau-Ponty 1962), Human Geography (Massey 2005; Longhurst 2001), and Spatial and Architectural theory (Sennett 1994; Gins and Arakawa 2002; Bloomer and Moore 1978; Lefebvre 2004) through which interdisciplinary dialogues emerge. These reflective and analytical discussions are employed to reflect on the potential for sited movement practices to expose and explore fundamental associations and alignments between bodies and sites. Through these reflections, the affective nature of the form and of particular strategies to employ the moving body in explorations of physical, structural, associative and imaginary body-site relationships is assessed.

This book is therefore not only about doings, but also about thinking and developing a sensibility to practical-theoretical synergies through practice-based research. This approach stems from my own dual perspective of researcher and movement practitioner/maker concerned with the manner in which practice and theory interact. The embodied perspective employed throughout this book encompasses a *choreographic* perspective on body-world relations. It offers a conceptualization of choreographic inquiry that extends beyond solely body-based endeavour into a praxis that engages researchers with the intellect, felt sensibility, and a nuanced orientation to space, place and its material entities. Therefore, whilst some of the theoretical examples or body-site relations explored might not be solely concerned with dance or movement practice *per se*, the perspective I view such examples from is kinetically or choreographically informed. In other words, the types of practical examples or theoretical arguments that might catch my eye or resonate from a practitioner-researcher perspective are often concerned with mobile practices, corporeal relations, material synergies and relations of dimensional proportionality that resonate with and through the sensate body.

This re-positioning or expansion of the choreographic as a mode of thinking and doing or a perceptual framework through which we might come to know the mobile world differently is echoed through recent dance scholarship that looks beyond studio-based or proscenium arch practices concerned with generating aestheticized movement content or the subsequent arrangement of bodies in space (Cvejic 2015; Joy 2014; Gotman 2018). Of particular relevance to this line of thinking is Sarah Rubidge and Gretchen Schiller's work on place-based performance and mobile experiences in their publication *Choreographic Dwellings* in which they propose:

the choreographic is considered as a relational net or architecture made up of the behaviours of the public, performers and place, and also as paying close attention to the inhabitation of movement repertoires in and through place(s). We therefore understand the choreographic to take form as an intricate manifold of sensation, action and environment, a reciprocal and differential and dynamic matrix. (Rubidge and Schiller 2014, p. 3)

For the majority of my research and practice I have been interested in how site dance might bring individuals 'closer' to real-world sites and phenomena through which broader conceptions of human-world relations might be considered (see Hunter 2015). To do this I have primarily explored phenomenological theory as a means of exploring this perspective and instigating practical movement inquiry. In more recent projects, however (Hunter 2019b), I have been increasingly interested in exploring how some of the symbiotic experiences and body-world enmeshments encountered might be interrogated further. The emergence of new materialist theory and practical arts-based inquiry (Barrett and Bolt 2013; Tiainen 2017; Kramer 2012) and my engagement with some of the ideas in practice has given rise to new lines of inquiry that suggest strategies for moving beyond conceptions of the bounded body to engage physically and conceptually with the material world beyond subjective, kinaesthetic and physical borders. Precedents for working in this manner have emerged over the past five years in particular and can be witnessed across a number of interdisciplinary projects in which arts-based research methods combine with theoretical and scientific methods to investigate human-world engagements.<sup>4</sup> The work of feminist theorist Natasha Myers and the dancer and artist Ayelen Liberona and their ongoing project *Becoming Sensor* provide a pertinent example.<sup>5</sup> Through a process of 'kinesthetic

imaging’ they explore the presence of their moving bodies in and with environments to capture a particular mode of being in nature spaces. These experiments present ways of ‘tuning into what matters to these lands. To reach toward the unknown and unknowable of more-than-human worlds, our images open up speculative modes of attention suggestive of the speeds and slownesses of the light, color, and vibration that a plant or tree might perceive of the urban world racing around it’ (2017, p. 13). An interest in challenging hierarchies of knowledge and decolonizing scientific modes of knowledge production is central to their approach. Through this lens they consider how environments listen, observe and respond to human activity and how notions of mutual regard and co-existence between humans and nonhumans might reshape understandings of ecology and environmentalism.

These examples and approaches have encouraged my explorations of being-in-the-world to move beyond phenomenological, auto-poietic construction into a more enmeshed, entangled and messy form of real-world material engagement. Central to these ideas is a consideration of the body operating in the world beyond its own skin conceived as an evolving body encompassing cellular organisms and bacterial activities that function, evolve, pulsate and mutate in relation to and alongside symbiotic material world systems encountered in particular sites. Put simply, we are not sealed off from *the world*, we are in the world and, quite literally, the world is in us. The most literal example of this might be illustrated by considering practices of consumption and waste production; the food we eat, medications we ingest and liquids we consume are shaped and infused with the imprints of their chemical, organic and manufactured production. In turn, the wider environment and the earth’s ecosystem is contaminated by modes of food production, human waste and excretion; antibiotic residues flow through water treatment systems into streams and rivers; and floating islands of plastic waste drift across the Indian Ocean. Illustrating this perspective further, in her writing on new materialism and ‘trans-corporeality’ Stacy Alaimo challenges us to consider the ethical implications arising from enmeshed relations of ‘toxicity’ emerging across, through and between human-nonhuman bodies of matter in twenty-first-century contexts:

As a particularly vivid example of trans-corporeal space, toxic bodies insist that environmentalism, human health and social justice cannot be severed. They encourage us to imagine ourselves in constant interchange with the

environment and, paradoxically perhaps, to imagine an epistemological space that allows for both the unpredictable becomings of other creatures and the limits of human knowledge. Toxic bodies may provoke material, trans-corporeal ethics that turn from the disembodied values and ideals of bounded individuals towards an attention to situated, evolving practices that have far-reaching and often unforeseen consequences for multiple people, species and ecologies. (2010, p. 22)

The writing and the practice-based explorations referred to throughout this book does not purport to tackle broader issues of climate change, environmental justice or urban planning in any overt or pragmatic sense. It does, however, hold the potential to raise awareness of human-world engagement and foster a sense of shared engagement with others both human and nonhuman thereby opening up a space of thinking and doing in which we might ‘surround ourselves with the possibilities of being otherwise’ (Grosz 2011, p. 14).

Alaimo’s writing, however, seems particularly pertinent and in many ways, prophetic as, the final stages of writing this book have coincided with the emergence of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The irony of writing a book that encourages practices of messy exchange between bodies and materials, and prioritizes enmeshed approaches to doing and thinking bring ideas of trans-corporeal ethics into sharp focus. As people across the globe retreat from engagements with the exterior world and with other bodies, both human and nonhuman, opportunities to touch, feel and intra-act with the world and its material actants are increasingly limited. The world beyond the perceived safety of quarantined and internalized environments is now framed by daily news coverage as toxic and contagious, and digital engagements with a world ‘out there’ are proving vital for many. The world and its inhabitants are entering a period of uncertainty and travelling through uncharted territory from which future engagements with the world and attitudes, practices and intra-active behaviours will be reset. There is much speculation regarding what the ‘new normal’ following this devastating period might look and feel like and how previously assumed freedoms and practices might be reconfigured. Whilst positions of retreat and closing off from the world are a required and necessary part of global responses to the pandemic, the championing of embodied, first-person and first-hand intra-actions with sites and materials discussed throughout this book remain a central component of the practices and discussions contained here. The opportunity

for putting some of this work into practice in a tangible sense might be temporarily postponed. However, it is offered as a mode of thinking and doing that can be applied when restrictions relax and re-emergence and reconnection with the world ‘out there’ recommences through which ‘being otherwise’ might emerge as a possible reality.

### PHENOMENO-MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVES

Across geographical, ecological, economic and cultural discourses, it is widely argued that we are living in the epoch of the ‘Anthropocene’, described by Steffen et al. (2007) as ‘the current epoch in which humans and our societies have become a global geophysical force’ (p. 614). Stemming from increased global industrialization and its demand for fossil fuels, the Anthropocene posits an implicit causal effect between human actions and the Earth’s worsening ecological condition caused by such factors as increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, nuclear testing, resource depletion through oil, gas and mineral extraction, and industrial farming techniques. These factors present ‘significant consequences for Earth System functioning’ (ibid., p. 614). Arising from concerns regarding the consideration of the Earth as an asset for human consumption and in response to destructive Anthropocentric practices, new materialist thought ‘derives its urgency from the ethical, ecological and political imperatives that loom as a consequence of this view of the world’ (Bolt 2013, p. 3). As a mode of researching it is influenced by the work of scholars such as Karen Barad (2003), Donna Haraway (2016) and Rosi Braidotti (2019), and can be seen as an umbrella term (as opposed to a distinct or defined school of thought) that encompasses a particular orientation towards questions and explorations of matter and materiality encountered in a range of practices and disciplinary areas.<sup>6</sup> Female academic pioneers in this field employ feminist informed arguments and positions from which hierarchical and dualistic rhetorics of male-female, subject-object, nature-culture, human-nonhuman are problematized. Its discourses explore processes of entanglement (Alaimo 2010; Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010), assemblage (Coole and Frost 2010; DeLanda 2016), networks (Latour 2017, Colman 2020) and social justice (Hickey-Moody 2017; Yusoff 2018), and propose co-constitutive alliances of ‘becoming’ involving a range of phenomena and materials operating within a posthuman milieu (Braidotti 2019; Tiainen 2017).

New materialism asserts an inseparable link between agential actors both human and nonhuman and positions us within the world in an

enmeshed manner. Through this implication, human-environment interventions and their ecological affects impact not only the planet's environment in its broadest sense, but also the myriad species, human and nonhuman, that inhabit it. In the era of the Anthropocene, acts of destruction, pollution and contamination alongside acts of conservation and preservation, impact all human and nonhuman actors and material components as we participate in a reciprocal relationship with the world around and within us. In Karen Barad's pivotal writing on new materialist thinking *Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter comes to Matter* (2003) she challenges dominant discourses of semiotics and representation that might distance us from real-world engagements. She alternatively champions an ontology of performativity that enables a new materialism to emerge and offers

an elaboration of performativity—a materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist elaboration that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing “intra-activity”. It is vitally important that we understand how matter matters. (p. 803)

Barad employs the term intra-action as a neologism that signifies ‘*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*’ (2007, p. 33, italics in the original). The term moves beyond a customary conception of interaction which ‘assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action’ (Barad 2007, p. 33). Any discussion of Anthropocene politics, however, requires a careful and considered caveat that acknowledges differences of position and power and does not assume a universal ‘we’ that experiences climate change and climate injustice in the same way. Across the globe, imbalances of power and dominant geo-political systems perpetuate environmentally and ecologically damaging practices such as deforestation, mineral and resource extraction that disadvantage certain groups (largely indigenous and global majority populations, women and the poor) whilst advantaging others (largely white Western and male). Theorists applying indigenous perspectives and intersectional thinking to Anthropocene and climate justice discourses, such as Kathryn Yusoff (2018), Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018), argue that such destructive practices have been perpetuated for significant periods of time. They further argue that the naming of this epoch and the seismic call to action it has invoked has only

arisen due to the acknowledgement of climate change and its affect on the West as ‘now the colonizers are as threatened as the worlds they displaced and destroyed when they took over what they called *terra nullius*’ (Cadena and Blaser 2018, p. 3, italics in the original).

New materialist perspectives and inclusive discourses challenge us to consider the active nature of all people and all matter in the world both human and nonhuman as processual, unfixed and engaged in constant processes of becoming. This assertion challenges human actors to engage with different modes of knowing the world that contribute to and extend traditional and existing modes of knowledge production. Illustrating this perspective the feminist and cultural theory scholar Nikki Sullivan presents a brief introduction to new materialism in which she observes:

Much recent work that identifies with what it refers to as ‘new materialism’ begins from the premise that over the last couple of decades feminism and/or social constructionism has focussed on ‘culture’, ‘discourse’, ‘language’, ‘the semiotic’ and so on, to the detriment of ‘matter’. (2012, p. 300)

I would also add to this definition by acknowledging that new materialist discourse also decries how corporeality and embodied perspectives have been previously overlooked, or, at best, afforded less primacy in the types of dominant analytical discourses Sullivan outlines. Dance and movement knowledge is, therefore, positioned in this book as a vital and important contributor to new materialist discourse as the dancing, moving body not only unearths and explores human-nonhuman entanglements but also illustrates, expresses and articulates the outcomes of such intra-actions through non-verbal means. Significantly, in the introduction to Bruno Latour’s work *Facing Gaia* (2017) on nature and anthropology in the era of the Anthropocene, he describes the arresting impact of a dance image that, for him, sums up the horrors of the current ecological crisis:

It all began with the idea of a dance movement that captured my attention, some ten years ago. I couldn’t shake it off. A dancer is rushing backwards to get away from something she must have found frightening; as she runs, she keeps glancing back more and more anxiously, as if her flight is accumulating obstacles behind her that increasingly impede her movements, until she is forced to turn around. And there she stands, suspended, frozen, her arms hanging loosely, looking at something coming towards her, something even more terrifying than what she was first seeking to escape—until she is forced

to recoil. Fleeing from one horror, she has met another, partly created by her flight. (2017, p. 1)

The metaphor of the dancer turning-around spatio-temporal axes, turning-around and turning-over problematics plays throughout Latour's publication. It illustrates, in both a physical and metaphysical manner, the ability for dance praxis to not only convey complex ideas but also to enact and embody corporeal and sensorial affects arising from such engagements. Through the articulation of methodology that prioritizes embodied knowledge or bodily doing/knowing as the primary form of inquiry, I consider in this research how human-world engagements might be probed and revealed. The embodied state invoked through dancing and moving is conceived here as an ontology, as a mode of being, temporarily defined in which fluidity and mobility comprise key elements producing an ontology of flux in which the experiencer becomes *with* the world in motion. This state of being or becoming is problematized through the movement practices and perspectives discussed throughout this book that seek to probe what might be incorporated and encountered within intra-active 'dances of agency' (Pickering 2017).

New materialist perspectives on researching real-world entanglements share similarities of purpose with some phenomenological approaches, in particular the later work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and his notions of becoming and reversibility in which body and world engage in a co-constitutive relationship. However, new materialist thinking extends discussions of body-world relations beyond phenomenological realms that, at times, can infer a mode of inquiry that seeks to get to the heart of 'things in particular'. In doing so, phenomenological perspectives can position the object or phenomena in question as a singular, definable entity and infer an essentialist perspective. As opposed to engaging with subject-object dialectics that perpetuate differentiated positions between humans and Others, new materialism's similarity of purpose with phenomenological inquiry lies with its quest to explore phenomena and relationships between the world's materials and its actors, both human and nonhuman. However, its fundamental stance or mode of approaching such ontological and epistemological enquiry is through notions of entanglement, intra-action and performativity. As Barad observes:

All bodies, not merely 'human' bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative inter activity—its performativity ...

Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are materialist-discursive phenomena. (2003, p. 823)

In this book I am interested in working with bodies that matter and exploring how human-nonhuman ‘matterings’ occur through site-based movement research. Starting from considerations of the body’s physiological and anatomical matter, the material body is positioned in dialogue with a range of physical-material contexts through site-based body practice. The practice itself encompasses *all* bodies of matter entangled within lived environments conceived as *bodies of matter* and *bodies that matter* rendering themselves as significant within mobile, intra-active encounters.

In positing this approach I am not suggesting however an ‘anybody’ or ‘any site’ universal perspective and endeavour, where possible, to acknowledge the complexity and diverse nature of body-site relations encompassed within this type of work. This book explores a range of practice, both my own and the work of others working in a variety of contexts and in different parts of the world. It does, however, only present a partial view of broader site dance and movement practices and invites readers to seek out further work that engages moving bodies with mobile sites and materials in wider, global contexts. The selection of works cited reflects my own situated perspective as a white, European academic with access to resources and performance opportunities afforded through a set of freedoms and privileges. Whilst attempts have been made through the research to include a range of examples from different voices and communities there is still much more work to be done here and across the wider field of site dance studies to document, communicate and celebrate site dance work from across the globe. Acknowledging my situatedness in this research inevitably involves an acknowledgement of body-site entanglement experienced from my own (privileged) perspective. In offering this perspective I do not therefore (and cannot) propose Universalist claims about site and body relations. I can invite others to engage with the discourse and practice on their terms and acknowledge that those terms, experiences, exclusions and privileges encountered in a range of sites will be very different from my own. The tasks and exercises offered throughout offer a way in to site-based body practice that, through their application by a range of bodies in a variety of sites will be adapted, modified and managed in ways that elide any authority I might have as an author and I therefore place the materials with the reader/practitioner to shape and work with as appropriate and viable.

Making this observation, I am mindful that not all bodies experience or have access to the types of sites I explore in this book in the same way. At the time of writing, the voices and practices of dance and movement artists and scholars from black, indigenous and global majority backgrounds are often elided and less prominent or visible within this particular area of dance studies and practice. The work of site dance artists and scholars such as Joanna Haigood (US), Minerva Tapia (US/Mexico), Shinjita Roy (Kolkata), Ayrin Ersoz (Turkey) and dance artists of colour who engage with outdoor performance or site dance film presentational formats such as Oscar Buthelezi (South Africa), Shobana Jeyasingh (UK), Germaine Acogny (Senegal) and Jade Montserrat (UK) present both established and emerging contributions to the field. Work from disabled artists and practitioners exploring themes of physical accessibility and differently abled bodies in sites are also afforded less prominence and, in the UK, artists such as Robbie Synge and Julie Cleaves, Maiya Leake, Claire Cunningham, Laura Jones and companies such as Stopgap and Candoco are notable contributors to the field. However, as in other areas of dance studies there is much work to be done here to present an inclusive and balanced perspective, to address the presence and participation of underrepresented groups more broadly within site dance scholarship and practice and to explore how this work informs broader, related disciplinary discourses such as inclusivity, social and environmental justice, care and environmentalism.

In *Staying With the Trouble* Donna Haraway suggests that in turbulent ecological and geo-political times our task as human beings is to ‘make trouble’ and ‘stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places’ (2016, p. 1). Her suggested approach for doing so is to engage with the complexity of relations and events, networks and alliances that, collectively, converge to comprise a ‘thick present’. From this enmeshed position she advises us to ‘stay with the trouble’ and live with, live through and dwell alongside and amongst such troubled complexity:

In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot