



ENCOUNTERING ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH THE ARTS

Interdisciplinary Embodiments, Politics, and Imaginaries

Edited by Victoria Hunter and Shirley Chubb

ENCOUNTERING ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH THE ARTS

This edited collection of essays and artist reflections presents perspectives from arts and humanities researchers exploring how individuals and collectives engage with, relate to and experience environments. The term environment is broadly conceived in this volume and encompasses rural landscapes and nature spaces, urban and architectural sites, institutional, workplace and organisational spaces, domestic environments and public and private realms.

Exploring what it means to encounter environments through embodied, artistic and reflexive practices, the essays and reflections draw on theoretical fields of feminist posthuman discourse, new materialism, anthropology, human geography, queer studies, performing and fine arts, art and health, psychology and ecological perspectives. Drawing on dialogues emerging from discursive border crossings between disciplines, *Encountering Environments through the Arts* includes contributions from the fields of dance, walking practice, sonic arts, visual art, cultural and human geography, somatic movement practice, poetry and architecture. This collection offers insights and reflections on environment and experience from a range of voices – established and emerging scholars, independent researchers and practitioner-researchers within and beyond the academy.

Providing a truly interdisciplinary range of research that centres on notions of site-specific practice and experience, this is an invaluable contribution to performance studies and the wider field of arts and humanities. The reflective accounts and articulation of research methods and approaches make this volume ideal for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as scholars and researchers of performance studies, dance and choreography studies, cultural studies, environmental humanities, arts and social sciences.

Victoria Hunter is Professor of Site Dance at Bath Spa University, UK. Her research explores site-based dance, new materialism and performance, and examines the body's engagement with space and place through corporeal, spatial and kinetic engagements with lived environments.

Shirley Chubb is Emerita Reader in Interdisciplinary Art at the University of Chichester, UK, and held a Creative Physiotherapy Scholarship at Auckland University of Technology, NZ, working within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences. Her research focuses on broadening the reach, impact and collaborative potential of the visual arts and involves the use of artefacts, film and digital technologies.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Callum Anderson is an independent artist-researcher whose work is influenced by site and screen-based dance practices. His research interests include screendance, site dance and representations of queer masculinities in dance and on film. Working across live and digital performance, he has made work for large-scale screens, portable devices and installations. His research has previously been published in the *International Journal of Screendance* and his film *fragments* was deposited to Screen Archive South East (University of Brighton, UK) for long-term preservation as part of ‘Our Screen Heritage’.

Sandie Bourne is a consultant for Black dancers in British Ballet. Her Black British Ballet project documents the history and experiences of Black dancers and choreographers in British ballet in the last century. Sandie studied performing arts at London Studio Centre, UK, and has a BA in performing arts, major in dance from Middlesex University, an MA in dance Studies (University of Surrey) and a PhD in dance studies (University of Roehampton, 2017). Her published chapters include: ‘Tracing the Evolution of Black Representation in Ballet and the Impact on Black British Dancers Today’ (Akinleye, 2018), ‘Looking Through the Keyhole’ (Brookes, 2018) and ‘Portrayals of Black People in Western Narrative Ballets’ (Akinleye, 2021), and a book review of Halifu Osumare, *Dancing in Blackness: A Memoir in Dance Research*, Vol. 37.1 (2019).

Caroline Broadhead’s interdisciplinary practice explores objects that come into contact with and interact with the body. Her work is exhibited widely and represented in many international collections, including Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; Museum of Art and Design, New York; and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. A retrospective exhibition was shown in the Netherlands in 2017 and in the UK in 2018. She is Professor Emerita at Central Saint Martins, UK.

Shirley Chubb is Emerita Reader in Interdisciplinary Art at the University of Chichester, UK, and held a Creative Physiotherapy Scholarship at Auckland University of Technology, NZ, working within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences. Often working collaboratively, she was research lead on the *Significant Walks* project and co-lead of the *Posthuman Walking Project*. Her publications include *Significant Walks in Mobilities of Wellbeing: Migration, the State and Medical Knowledge* (2021) and *Aesthetics of Healing: Working with the Senses in Therapeutic Contexts* (Curare, 2019). Her work has been funded by Arts Council England, the Arts & Humanities Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and the Landscape Research Group.

Rachel Coleman (they/them) is an award-winning artist-activist and researcher, working at the intersections of ecology, embodiment and performance. Dancing across live art, writing, teaching and textile art, they use their creative practice to think playfully and critically about how we live in the world to generate imaginative and interwoven futures. Rachel has shared performance work across the UK, including at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Camden People's Theatre and Royal & Derngate Northampton. They hold a master's degree in the inaugural Movement, Mind and Ecology programme from Schumacher College, and is a Lecturer in Performance Art at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, UK.

Virginia Farman is an artist-researcher and a Senior Lecturer in Choreography and Dance at the University of Chichester, UK. Her work explores site dance choreography engaging with investigations into how dance might be employed to negotiate human/environment relations in urban and rural settings. She works across a diverse range of situations, people and places, including with disabled and inter-generational groups, and professional and untrained dancers and performers. She completed a practice-led PhD by publication in 2024 that investigated interior/exterior landscape dialogues in site-situated choreographic practice.

Jodie Hawkes and **Pete Phillips** are artist researchers and Senior Lecturers based at the University of Chichester, UK. Collaborating since 2005 as live art duo Search Party, they have created durational, site-specific, interactive and studio-based work for theatres, galleries, public squares, 24-hour parties, high streets, village fetes, parks, shopping centres, across rivers, between bridges and along seafronts. Their work has been performed in venues and festivals in the UK and internationally. Jodie's research focuses on maternal performance, feminism, class politics and activist practice. Pete's research includes the performativity of sport, collaborative duos and ecological thinking. Jodie and Pete's ongoing collaborative research project examines the performance and politics of care-making.

Janice Howard is an artist and academic and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Oxford Brookes University, UK. She studied at the Ruskin School of Drawing, Oxford University and the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London.

Her primary research interests are in finding ways to engage with embodied subjectivity through art practice. Currently she is exploring the image of the ‘other’ we recognise as growing within us as we age and reimagining vulnerable bodies that are slowed, disintegrating and dying. She works mainly with the moving image, drawing on her lived experience to explore and imagine that which is not seen.

Phil Hubbard is Professor of Urban Studies, King’s College London, UK. His work spans social and cultural geography, socio-legal studies and social policy, and he has long-standing interests in mobile methods and psychogeography. His books include *Borderland: Identity and Belonging at the Edge of England* (Manchester University Press, 2022).

Polly Hudson is a Reader in Dance, and Head of Movement at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University, UK. She has published widely on EcoSomatics, which she defines as being of the body-mind-ecology, as well as on embodiment, creativity, and SRT. She is an artist-scholar curious about at what point a practice, or an activity becomes art, and what is beyond and underneath discourses around ‘well-being’. She is certified teacher of Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), the principles of which underpin her approach to teaching, making art and daily activities characterised by the notion of inhabiting our inner and outer landscapes simultaneously.

Victoria Hunter is Professor of Site Dance at Bath Spa University, UK. Her research explores site-based dance, new materialism and performance, and examines the body’s engagement with space and place through corporeal, spatial and kinetic engagements with lived environments. She is co-author of *(Re) Positioning Site Dance: Local Acts, Global Themes* (2019) with Melanie Kloetzel and Karen Barbour. Her edited volume *Moving Sites: Investigating Site-Specific Dance Performance* (2015) is available through Routledge. Her monograph *Site, Dance and Body: Movement, Materials and Corporeal Engagement* was published by Palgrave in February 2021.

Beatrice Jarvis is a Senior Lecturer in Dance at Kingston School of Art, London, UK, certified Bikram yoga instructor and training to be a certified TRE[®] practitioner. She is a creative facilitator, choreographer and researcher, and founder of the Urban Research Forum and The Living Collective. She holds a practice-based PhD from the University of Ulster (NI), exploring somatic movement as a medium to explore spatial and social conflict. Beatrice undertook her BA (Hons) at Dartington College of Arts in choreography and visual arts practices and was then awarded AHRC funding to undertake an MA in research architecture at CUCR Goldsmiths. Interdisciplinary practices remain the root of her evolving arts practice and current consultancy work.

Oren Lieberman is Professor of Architecture at the University of Portsmouth, UK. He has developed a wide-ranging practice, as an architect, teacher, maker, writer, publisher and initiator and curator of events and exhibitions. He has taught widely in the UK and in Europe and practised as an architect in Germany. His research focuses on *performative* practices which entangle knowledge, methodologies and techniques from various disciplines, including architecture, performance, fine arts, geography, anthropology, and sociology. He is interested in the role architecture and its processes of production play in the construction of political practices and the establishment of the ‘common’; in critical pedagogies inhering in embodied practices; and in research as intraventional.

Belinda Mitchell is a visual/artist-researcher and Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture, University of Portsmouth, UK. Her research refigures the production of interiors through an expanded drawing practice. Situated in posthuman feminist phenomenology, she engages with alternative modes of knowing through drawing, moving, caring, connecting and relatively new technologies such as LiDAR scans. Her practice engages with historic sites and the representation of emotion and affect to open out new spatial imaginaries for the architectural interior. She collaborates with architects, dancers and fine artists to question the gendered practices through which interiors are produced.

Andrew Novell is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University of East Anglia (UEA), UK, under the supervision of Dr Rebecca Tillett. He holds a BA in theatre directing from Rose Bruford College (2001), and an MA in theatre directing from UEA (2003). He has worked as an actor in England and the USA. Since 2016, he has focused on his academic and teaching career, and before entering UEA as a research student, gained a PGCLTHE from Rose Bruford College.

Siobhan O’Neill is a performance-maker producer and researcher who works with and in response to individuals and communities, creating participatory encounters as an investigation in to lived experience. As a Teaching Fellow at the University of Portsmouth School of Architecture (UK). She has taught across the Schools of Architecture and Drama, Music and Performing Arts. Her practice engages with the commons, coevally exploring shared experiences of urban space and how methods of collaborative performance can embody the dynamics of co-reliance, openness and negotiation that are characteristic of commons. Working at the intersections of performance, ecology and oral history, she is interested in the relationships between somatic experience, memory, and the enmeshment of narrative and embodied modes of theatre-making.

Phil Smith is a performance-maker, writer and academic researcher, specialising in work around walking, site-specificity, eco-gothic fictioning and mythogeographies. He is Associate Professor (Reader) at the University of Plymouth (UK) and

company dramaturg of TNT Theatre (Munich). With visual artist Helen Billinghurst, he is one half of Crab & Bee; their projects include the 2018–2019 ‘Plymouth Labyrinth’ project, publishing ‘The Pattern’ (2020, Triarchy Press), ‘Nets, Webs & Carrier Bag’ (2021) at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and ‘Missing: A Seance for Stonehouse’ (2023) at RAAY Gallery, Plymouth. He has authored *Living in the Magical Mode* (Triarchy Press, 2022), *Making Site-Specific Theatre and Performance* (Bloomsbury, 2020), with Tony Whitehead and photographer John Schott, *Guidebook for An Armchair Pilgrimage* (Triarchy Press, 2019) and the related novel *Bonelines* (Triarchy Press, 2020).

Andrea Vassallo is based in the UK and Italy. He is a visual artist and a PhD candidate and a former Associate Lecturer and Art Technician at the University of Chichester, West Sussex. His practice-based research explores ephemeral relations between subject and object using the perpetual activity of long-distance walking as the main facilitator. He employs traditional philosophical notions to create a theoretical framework of ideas used as *phenomenological propulsor* for the consequent action of making installation work. His artistic practice focuses on the participatory quality of the work, producing environments where visitors create direct relations with the objects presented.

Rob Warwick is Professor of Management and Organisational Learning at the University of Chichester, UK. His fields of research include organisation development, ethics, action learning, leadership and education; topics that he is always keen to bring back to the classroom and share. Rob is always keen that learning and teaching move beyond the traditions of set-piece lectures to include walking in the outdoors, artful and creative practice and the power of deeper conversations. He encourages people to see their world slightly differently, often through the eyes of others, so they can realise their own agency to bring about real-world change and improvement.

Angela Woodhouse is a choreographer based in the UK. Their work is interdisciplinary and collaborative, and shown widely (including Sadler’s Wells, ROH, Yorkshire Sculpture Park), many with long-term collaborator artist Caroline Broadhead. Angela has also developed work with artist Nathaniel Rackowe including *(Un)touched* (2016–2020) and *(De)figured* (2017) touring to Belgrade, Oslo and Dubai. Their work *Expanded Landscapes* was shown as part of ‘Summer Lights’ Festival 2022, Canary Wharf, London. Angela studied with Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis (NYC) and worked with Reinhild Hoffmann (Berlin) and Sara Pearson (USA).

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INTRODUCTION

Shirley Chubb and Victoria Hunter

This collection is driven by the editors' shared interest in the potential of interdisciplinary approaches to explore and articulate encounters with environments. The range of contributions celebrates the knowledge enabled by practice-based enquiries that embrace the multi-faceted nature of human-nonhuman encounters.

The curated essays and artist reflections present perspectives from arts and humanities researchers exploring how individuals and collectives engage with, relate to and experience environments. The term 'environment' is broadly conceived here and encompasses rural landscapes and nature spaces, urban and architectural sites, institutional, workplace and organisational spaces, and public and private realms. This edited collection draws on dialogues emerging from the 'Encountering Environments' interdisciplinary symposium held at the University of Chichester in October 2022. The symposium invited discursive border crossings between scholars and artists working across the disciplines of dance, walking practices, theatre and performance, cultural and human geography, eco-somatic movement practice, organisational management, and architecture. This broad spectrum enabled varied explorations of theoretical and practical territories and cross-disciplinary exchanges to flourish through which the contributors probed the complexities of subject-object relations and human-nonhuman entanglements.

The notion of encounter applied here refers to a process in which we produce and negotiate difference through human presence and interventions in space and place. To encounter an environment often involves 'surprise and conflict...similarities and difference, processes of inclusion and exclusion or incorporation and expulsion that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities' (Simonsen and Koefoed 2020: 49). Encounters engage human and nonhuman actors in embodied processes that stir up and trouble the ongoingness of everyday life; they bring us into present engagements with the immediacy of situations and ecologies

and demand ethico-ontological responses that leave traces on and in bodies and environments. The etymology of the word ‘encounter’ reveals its origins as a transitive verb pertaining to situations of conflict, to enter a face-to face dispute for example or to be suddenly met with an unexpected situation. The intransitive sense of the word alludes to chance meetings and the naming of exchanges with others as adversarial, violent or transcendent.¹ Alongside these definitions, we can also turn to the Latin routes of the term in which a sense of being ‘with-together’ is inferred and from which encounters can be conceived as being hard or soft-edged, or somewhere in-between – a meeting place where we meld and mould into spatio-temporal becomings. Accordingly, the title of this collection invites reflection on encounters with environments as complex and multi-layered in which the adversarial sits alongside and softens into relational and discursive exchanges. This in turn presents a deliberate provocation to think beyond subjective, dominant or normative narratives of cause and effect, in which getting outside, going to work or for a walk, spending time in nature spaces, travelling and journeying are often framed in binary terms that deny the complexity of preparation, navigation, negotiation and possible confrontation enacted in environment encounters.

Placing creative experimentation, listening with care and a genuine inquisitiveness to look beyond disciplinary domains to see and learn from others across academic divides are central to this endeavour. As a result, this collection includes views and perspectives that respond to the socio-political, personal and regulatory frameworks that inform and frame encounters with the world around us. The collection coheres around three main research questions posed in the symposium call for papers that crossed borders between theoretical and practical territories, subject and object relations, and human-nonhuman entanglements:

- *Time and tempo*: What thinking assists us in understanding the political, personal, social or cultural associations between environments, time and tempo? What are the political and personal implications arising from processes of acceleration and slowing down? How do notions of deep time, immanence and transience inform understandings of environment encounters?
- *Poetics, imagination, inner and outer landscape dialogues*: How do we imagine and provoke poetic dialogues between environments and human / nonhumans? How do imagined or projected landscapes interact with physical encounters with sites and specific spaces? What are the poetics of multiple realities, materials (both human and nonhuman) converging in environments and places?
- *Access and permissions – inclusions and exclusions*: How do socio-cultural, political, physical and environment conventions, exclude and include? How do practices and understandings of trespass, wandering, loitering, rambling and meandering invite or restrict practices of engagement and participation? Who goes where?

Drawing on a model of interdisciplinarity that opens up dialogues between multiple and (at first glance) disparate disciplines offers insights and reflections on

environment and experience from a range of voices including established and emerging scholars, independent researchers and practitioner-researchers within and beyond the academy. The majority of chapters deal directly with UK-based contexts and examples, and attest to the situatedness of the researchers attending the conference event and the post-lockdown restrictions (whilst easing in the UK) that still affected global scholars. The directive to prioritise an in-person symposium in this regard shaped participation and, relatedly, representation and diversity, as such, the views presented here are partial, privileged and situated within a white western, neoliberal milieu that facilitates a form of academic endeavour and the related circulation of ideas. Contributions reflect a range of research concerns and endeavours that emerged at a particular post-pandemic, post-Brexit, moment in time, and as such the majority of contributions offer commentary and reflection from a largely Euro-centric perspective. Exploring and addressing the nature of encounters with environments from a localised, regional and national perspective is therefore a key thread that plays out and connects each chapter. The collection reflects the concerns and interests of the researchers as their creative approaches and theoretical ideas emerged alongside pragmatic, professional and personal processes of navigating the ‘new normal’ in redefined environments. This moment in time was further informed by a wider socio-political context shaped by the Black Lives Matter and MeToo global movements and increased environmental activism and protests by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and 350.org that brought heightened attention to global geopolitical inequity, social injustice and climate change inequalities shaped by the legacies of colonial violence and capitalist extractivist policies and practices.

Presenting this collection, we recognise that encounters with environments are experienced differently by people in a myriad of ways subject to a range of personal, social, political, economic and historical contexts. Power relations, colonial legacies, gender imbalances, ableist, heteronormative and institutionally racist systems of inclusion and exclusion shape individual and collective encounters with environments in markedly different ways. We therefore do not propose to speak for a universal ‘we’ in a manner that ameliorates spatial and placed-based experiences, and our curation is shaped by a sensibility that aims to acknowledge, expose and critique these normative and exclusionary practices and systems, and propose alternative, more inclusive and open ways of operating in the world.

On a meta level, the essays and artistic accounts included here are disparate in their reach across locations, environments and contexts. Whilst situated locally, the concerns and themes running through some chapters speak to more global themes such as climate crisis, social justice, geopolitics, representation and repression. A number of chapters directly engage with institutional racism, land access, class-based inequality, marginalisation and gender disparity. Others respond to and employ ideas drawn from feminist new materialisms to articulate intra-action through ideas of entanglement, assemblage and horizontality, proposing attentive, de-hierarchised modes of considering more-than human relations (Barad 2007,

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Haraway 2016, Braidotti 2019). These ideas are central to Anthropocene discourses and broader, post-pandemic infused reflections on the ecological emergency of the climate crisis, cohering around and informing the *Encountering Environments* activities and events (Steffen et al. 2007, Latour 2017). Reflections on social and racial justice, imbalances of power, poverty and the validity of outdated modes of legal, regulatory and public order legislation globally, and in the UK, further inform the context from which this collection emerged. Aligning with proposed moves towards fashioning a more ecologically just, and socially responsible, world exposed by new materialist and post-qualitative feminist researchers (Barad 2007, Bennett 2010, Haraway 2016, Braidotti 2019), the collection gathers together a range of voices including early career researchers, established academics, PhD students, alongside artists and researchers working beyond established institutions. Acknowledging these voices and the research spaces and practices, they draw from accumulates into a diffracted constellation of contributions that employ pertinent lenses, approaches and articulations that probe and grapple with the problematics of positionality in relation to the authors' research and artistic concerns, and the contexts in which they are situated. The range of voices also affords an acknowledgement of the omissions and exclusions inherent in the endeavour from which this collection has evolved with voices from the global South not present here. As such, the editors and collected authors have been mindful to acknowledge the particular spatio-temporal contexts from which this volume emerged and to mitigate against universal claims to truth or assumptions of a collective we that negates difference and differently situated power dynamics at play on a global scale. Therefore, considerations of the ethics of care emerge through chapters that variously consider attentiveness, responsibility and responsiveness in relation to encounters with particular environments and landscapes. Relatedly, through the curation of these chapters, the editors also recognise emerging seams of research that reflect the growing awareness and significance of ancient and pre-existing knowledge making systems as fore-runners to new materialist and animist modes of research.

The methodological framework informing this collection prioritises research that shifts perceptions and challenges habitual modes of thinking and doing by embracing fluid spaces of combined understanding (Lury 2022). In this methodological 'spacetime' of exchange, creative modes of thinking are prioritised, articulating novel, innovative perspectives on human-environment engagement and encounters (Manning 2011: 43). Research methods employed by contributors include individual and collaborative approaches to practice-based research, historical analysis and reflection on institutional and artistic processes in specific locations, and autoethnographic accounts of environmental encounters. Research processes and outcomes arising from these approaches are documented and articulated throughout the various chapters via modes of established academic writing, poetic and creative prose alongside the presentation of photo-essays as a mode of discursive practice.

The publication is shaped by an emergent methodology that recognises and celebrates the various research journeys and discussions in which environment encounters are acknowledged as complex, tangled, unruly and at times uncomfortable. This is not a collection of essays that neatly fits together to form a smooth whole in a conventional sense. Rather, we are presented with a series of provocations, ideas, accounts, reflections, witnessings and observations that, when combined and contained within the space of a single publication, reflect the messy materiality of the complex world(s) in which we live. In curating this collection, we are informed by a commitment to, and valorisation of, the creative act in which things are ‘thrown together’ (Massey 2005: 151) to produce novel responses, new alignments and relations between and across disciplines and disciplinary silos. Through research engagements in real-world locations via activities such as field work, site-based performance making and ‘going visiting’ (Arendt 2005), the contributors draw on the value of lived experiences and first-hand accounts of environment encounters to provoke new ways of considering human-world relations. This approach aligns with Iain Biggs and Mary Modeen’s acknowledgement that ‘the value of creative or arts-led research lies primarily in its ability to generate expertise, confidence, understanding and new orientations to issues, problems, concerns and opportunities – including the production of new conceptual tools and practical abilities’ (2021: 3).

In many of the contributions, the political implications of material relations are considered from an embodied perspective in which the dynamics of spatial and environmental encounters are experienced viscerally and physically through the lived body-self (Fraleigh 1987). This understanding of an embodied politics occurs through frictions and tensions encountered as a consequence of perceptual awareness and critical reflexivity and aligns with the writing of dance theorist Gabrielle Klein who asserts that politics is ‘created out of difference. It emerges where sensual perception and experience rub up against the traditional order’ (2011: 26). Underpinning and uniting the various chapters is an underlying concern for grappling with the complexities of environments through previously unexplored and sometimes challenging processes of interdisciplinary exchange. These approaches require careful listening to and with one another, recognising that disciplinary conventions, canons, protocols and methodologies can obscure pathways to new discoveries, blocking rather than revealing the new and novel avenues of enquiry that enabled these researchers to articulate new vocabularies for the often ineffable, complex and elusive nature of human-environment encounters.

The editorial shaping of this collection is further informed by perspectives from the arts and humanities that champion the multiplicity of space and place and the assemblage of relations that operate in and around environments (Massey 2005, Manning 2011, DeLanda 2017). These perspectives champion embodied spatial encounters and pluriversal ontologies (Haraway 2016, De la Cadena and Blaser 2018, Mignolo 2018, Braidotti, 2019) in which multiple worlds and worldings (Stewart 2017, Yusoff 2018) coexist and, at times, cohere through lived experiences

and intra-actions (Barad 2007) with the environments and related worlds in which we dwell, intervene, protect, honour, destroy and celebrate.

The interdisciplinary ethos underpinning the research conference from which these writings emerged aligns with post-qualitative, post-disciplinary approaches to rebellious research that challenges established western approaches to academic and disciplinary divisions. The resulting cross fertilisation of methods, ideas and conversations between researchers and across institutions challenge hierarchical disciplinary conventions and manifest what Deleuze and Guattari's define as 'lines of flight' (1987), where provocations construct and inform rebellious research where, as Burnard et al. (2022) assert:

There is no beginning or end to the process or phenomenon of thinking; that is, knowledge making is not static and separable from the living and non-living world, but instead occurs in the form of assemblages made-up of groups, ideas, elements or systems that are continually intertwining to do something, to produce something rebellious. Inquiry does not follow a linear path made of consequential steps, but is rather more like the shape of a rhizome (or tuber, such as say, ginger), which spreads out in an unruly fashion. As it ruptures in unpredictable directions it throws us off onto different paths, allowing us to break with old habits and form new ones, making the familiar unfamiliar and offering the space to make the unfamiliar familiar in turn.

(19–20)

The collection therefore offers a series of lenses, tools and critical approaches through which readers are invited to devise their own methods and approaches and, consequently, develop their own critique and expression, potentially leading to further critical and divergent modes of thinking, doing and being in place(s) and space(s).

Sections and Chapters

This collection combines conventional academic essays with shorter texts in the form of artist reflections on and responses to particular projects in specific spaces. The contributions are organised into four parts that explore the following themes and ideas:

- Part 1: Encounters and Imaginaries
- Part 2: Access and Permissions: Inclusions and Exclusions
- Part 3: Poetic Encounters: Inner and Outer Dialogues
- Part 4: Ecologies, Care and Immersion

The organisation of the contributions begins with explorations of what it means to encounter a specific environment, space or place and the physical and imaginary

affects produced through lived encounters. In Part 2, the focus shifts to a consideration of power relations inherent within human-environment engagements and the exclusions and permissions enacted in certain places and organisational / institutional spaces. The discussions then turns towards more poetic and expressive territories in Part 3, where the somatically encountered and embodied affects of environments are explored through artistic techniques such as drawing, dance and design. This phenomenological and somatically based focus is further articulated and applied in the fourth and final section, in which lived experiences of care and immersion that redefine ecologies of space and place are articulated. The design of this collection and the organisation of materials into these sections present an assemblage of ideas that cohere around the contributor's shared interest in unpacking and articulating the qualities of each encounter-in-hand in relation to the specificity of environments, such as pathways, cliff edges, design studios, performance venues, institutional and workplaces and healthcare environments. Readers are invited to navigate the collection's terrain in a manner that seems fitting and appropriate to their own research interests and intellectual and artistic curiosities. Diving into sections and ideas or skimming across surfaces to make connections between and across ideas and disciplines might also be the order of the day, and the manner in which this engagement manifests and evolves will differ according to the order (or disorder) of the day or moment in which the engagement with the texts occurs. Creative approaches to reading and responding to these texts and the provocations they propose are openly invited and welcomed by the artists and scholars who present their work here.

The value of creative, interdisciplinary approaches to researching encounters with environments and modes of knowing, doing and being 'otherwise' (Grosz 2011) seems particularly pertinent at a time of escalating global conflict that increasingly promotes individualism and decreases practices of empathy, care and collectivity. In this light, this publication offers a prompt to action – to gather, discuss and think together, to move towards modes of researching and collective exchange that celebrate difference and invoke curiosity and learning through doing and working together. In a time of complex global environmental, geopolitical and humanitarian challenges, complex and entangled modes of thinking and doing, that invite seeing from different and diffracted perspectives, and the co-devising of solutions across disciplinary, institutional and organisational domains, can offer insights and new modes of thinking from which we can move forward in dialogue with and in relation to the environments in which we live, work and operate. Moving, thinking, doing and being-in-relation to other human and nonhuman entities through such open-ended processes and relationalities invites reflection on what imaginaries and forms of future thinking might emerge and how we might collectively navigate their entangled complexity.

Note

- 1 See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/encounter#h1>.

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PART 1

Encounters and Imaginaries

Victoria Hunter

In this section, authors from the fields of human geography, performance studies, site dance and fine art explore encounters with environments and the imaginaries they provoke. Through formats that include analytical and documentary accounts, photo essay, reflective and creative writing and autoethnography, they articulate encounters with landscapes, sites and situations that invite reflection on broader socio-political and personal themes and issues covering topics such as identity, illness, social division, marginalisation and nationalist rhetoric. Themes of land, illness, expression, identity and belonging rub up against the materiality of rocks, stone, surfaces and terrain that run throughout these poetic and analytical discourses. The various chapters articulate modes of capturing experiences in environments through a range of methods, including digital outcomes and live documentation captured in the moment, the representation of spatial experiences through photography, writing, walking and running, screen dance, scriptwriting and experimental film making and environment interpretation through place-specific performance.

This section begins with a photo essay from Phil Hubbard in which he reflects on his week-long walk on the English Coastal Path in Kent in March 2019 through mobile methods and psychogeography. Through a combination of text, images and the presentation of geographical coordinates he articulates how an alertness to the geology, geomorphology and biogeography of the coastline peels away political and cultural differences and hints at shared identities rooted in geological time. Through his discussion and reflection of the landscape in which he conducted his walk through the Kent coastline, he presents the notion of ‘deep topography’ as a strategy to facilitate reflection on socio-political themes, contentions and associations with spaces and places that are deeply rooted in cultural imaginaries and national narratives. In this opening chapter, Hubbard poses questions about the way

we encounter environments in relation to contemporary geopolitical events and rhetorics and argues for the value of subjective, personal and psychic explorations of the landscape as a means of exploring sites of national significance and symbolism up close and in-person.

The following chapter presents an articulation of Janice Howard's experimental film-making process in which she discusses forms of 'unmooring' linked to experiences of illness and ageing explored through her creative practice as an experimental filmmaker and runner. In the chapter, she describes how she employs strategies of running through both rural environments and imagined landscapes along with the development of poetic texts. This creative practice is characterised by doubt and uncertainty relating to her own embodied experience and physicality informed by witnessing her mother's slow decline with Parkinson's disease. Drawing on autoethnographic research methods, she discusses her approach to this work as a creative act of poesis and a form of 'out running', focussing on relationships between running, writing, filmmaking and terrain in the making of two short films. Notions of bodily doubt and illness frame the creative accounts and articulations of physicalised practices discussed throughout the chapter to convey a sense of vulnerable corporeality central to the environmental encounters captured therein.

This chapter is followed by Andrew Novell's exploration of the work of the Los Angeles based Cornerstone Theatre Company and its production of site-specific performance work by the playwright Larissa FastHorse. Using archival material of the rehearsal process and interviews with producers, artists, directors and designers, he explores how the company has successfully developed a programme of innovative Native American site-specific productions, tailored to serving the diverse indigenous communities of Los Angeles, Arizona and South Dakota. His analysis and commentary on the work focuses on the processes by which FastHorse and those at Cornerstone have worked with each community involved to create a unique dramatic theatre piece that bears witness to each community's contemporary concerns while maintaining respect and dignity for its cultural heritage.

This section concludes with Virginia Farman's critical commentary on her site-situated dance for camera project, *Souvenir*, a work created during the 2020 lockdown via the use of audio-recordings that directed 12 dancers, located across Europe, into a specific body/site encounter. In her account of the creative process, she articulates how the work was directed via the use of choreographic scores that directed the dancer's attention towards specific site components to elicit phenomenologically informed movement responses. In her critical commentary on the work, she frames some of her creative approach through the lense of 'correspondances' (after Ingold 2013) described as an aesthetic system that enabled her to develop methods for remotely exploring ideas of wildness in association with both geographical places and human behaviour. Specifically, she articulates her interest in ideas of wildness and unconditioned action enacted in specific spaces, aligned with her intention to compose a view of bodies and sites as entangled in a coequal and reciprocal relationship.

As a collective whole the chapters curated together in this part illustrate how personal, collective and subjective perspectives and modes of engaging with space and place influence encounters with environments. First-hand reflection and personalised responses are woven throughout the chapters gathered here and evaluated and analysed through theoretical frameworks from the fields of psychogeography, political critique, decolonial theory, anthropology and autoethnography, animism and feminist (new) materialisms. Through these frameworks, the authors articulate their encounters with environments and develop discourses informed by notions of performativity, wildness, deep topography nostalgia and nationalism, haptic visibility and tactile ways of looking, sensing and feeling the world in motion that guide us towards expanded modes of environment perception.

1

WALKING WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRY

Phil Hubbard

28 MARCH 2019 WALKING ITINERARY, ENGLISH COASTAL PATH, KENT (DAY 4)

0830 Leave hotel, Deal.

1100 National Trust South Foreland Lighthouse (coffee and tiffin).

1230 Dover Castle.

1300 Dover St. James Retail Park (can of IPA and M&S Sandwich).

1330 Abbotts Cliff WW2 Intercepting Station.

1500 Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel le Ferne.

1630 Ship Inn, Folkestone Harbour (pint of bitter).

1730 Road of Remembrance, Folkestone.

1830 Arrive hotel, Cheriton.

Total: 18.1 Miles

In this chapter, I reflect on my experience of a week-long walk on the English Coastal Path in Kent in March 2019. Through the writing and reflection, I note how an alertness to the geology, geomorphology and biogeography of the coastline peels away the layers of recent memory, and the constant celebration of exclusionary nationalism and military valour, hinting instead at shared identities rooted in geological time. Arguing for a “deep topography”, this chapter poses questions about the way we encounter environments in the Anthropocene, and argues for the value of subjective, personal and psychic explorations of the landscape.

The dark art of psychogeography famously fermented in 1950s Paris in the work of the Lettrists and Situationists,¹ the playful radical art groups founded by Marxist