



Tree Time

Tree Time was part of Perspectives on Practice 2021: People Dancing's online programme of artist-led events and learning opportunities, discussion and debate, networks and spaces to gather, (re)connect and share.

It was an invitation to dancers to experience their relationship with trees in a new way, guided by a written score provided by Helen Poynor.

The score emerged out of Helen's own work with movement in natural environments and dancers were invited to engage with the score outside, on their own, either at the same time as other dancers or at a time of their own choosing.

This was a non-digital activity with the aim of encouraging dancers to get in touch with nature, to explore new ways of moving, thinking and feeling, to dance at the same time as others in different geographical locations and settings, and to share their experiences (if they chose to do so) in any medium they preferred.



Photo: Yanaëlle Thiran, solo site dance practice, Leicester (2021).

From score to site: shaping a solo practice

Eastbourne-based dance artist and teacher **Yanaëlle Thiran's** mental blocks and fears disappear as she discovers new possibilities for meaning and connectedness through her improvised exploration outdoors

Often, I dance alone, with no partner or audience other than some sand, shadows or stones. On Sundays or in my spare time, I explore, observe and tune into outdoor spaces until movements arise. Then, I let the shapes, sounds and atmosphere of the surroundings lead me. I recently realised that this habit of improvising outside could be much more than a hobby. What I have been doing spontaneously can also be called a creative practice in site-specific choreography.

Last autumn, I signed up for Tree Time, an event offered by Helen Poynor as part of People Dancing's >>

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Photos: Yanaëlle Thiran, Tree Time. (2021).

“I felt light and available, my dark green hoodie creating a good sense of fit between my body and the trees.”

Perspectives on Practice programme. Having a deadline and knowing that practitioners across the country would engage in the same activity helped me schedule and value my own experience. I walked to the park on an October Sunday and, unusually, that time was framed as a professional development opportunity. Camera in bag to capture proof of my presence on site, I was ready to record and maybe one day share some of my improvised exploration.

Before I began, I sat on a bench to re-read the score carefully. I enjoyed being instructed to put the notes aside and experience the practice as one uninterrupted journey. Freed from the piece of paper, bag dropped on the grass, I felt light and available, my dark green hoodie creating a good sense of fit between my body and the trees. The activity didn't require earphones or anything that would pull my attention away. So, I soon found a flow of movement inspired by what I could feel and see. Part of me was tempted to stay on the surface, execute the suggested actions comfortably, and simply get the score done. I had even planned to skip the invitation to lie down under a tree. Unable to picture myself doing it in this park, I had

Photo: Yanaëlle Thiran, spontaneous solo improvisation, Eastbourne Beach (2021).





Yanaëlle Thiran, 'Surfaces' (2021). Photo (still from dance film): Harry Laundon.

anticipated feeling self-conscious and uneasy about people's gaze on me. But I did lie down eventually. Hood over head, I experienced a peaceful moment of awe, resting on the ground below 'my' tree, eyes up towards the sky so far and high above me. Taking time and trusting the process had allowed my moving self to ease into a state where new possibilities emerged, and mental blocks and fears disappeared.

While self-directed solo site dancing can sometimes feel idle or isolated, following someone else's score filled this session with meaning and connectedness. It was almost like hearing a dance teacher's voice inside my head, guiding my practice. A theory of wellbeing called the PERMA model suggests that finding meaning and a sense of achievement in our activities contributes to our psychological wellbeing. And for me, meaning mainly arises from connections with people. Though the trees, gusts of wind and words on the score had been pleasant companions, this experience did lack a sense of completion because it didn't provide direct human interactions.

A few weeks later, I called Helen Poynor about her Walk of Life workshops. Next spring, hopefully, I will travel to the source of her practice and experience similar scores with a group of peers.

From a practitioner to a page, to another practitioner's personal experience, which produces new pages like the one you are reading now, Tree Time rolls through cycles of written words and embodied enactments. The score reached over 130 people, some of whom left a trace by writing, drawing or videoing a glimpse of their time amongst trees.

Feel free to take this article away to feed your own explorations. That way, the cycle will carry on.

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