



All: Participants and Paula Turner (above opposite), Leverhulme artist in residence project. Photos: Iain Garret www.igdesign.photography

Here you are, are you here?

Leverhulme artist in residence(1) **Paula Turner** has spent the last 10 months in the department of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University exploring movement and embodiment through space, drawing on geographical metaphors concerning internal weather, the landscapes of the body and the spatialities of awareness

As an independent dance artist I chose to base myself within the geography department as I am interested in the politics of space and the broader social implications of movement and change.

The residency gave me an opportunity to consider the place of movement in a wider civic dialogue. I had direct, regular contact with researchers, academics and students who work conceptually and empirically

with issues of space, movement, and embodiment.

I began my research by being immersed in the daily departmental tickings, the quotidian rituals and movements that shaped the particularities of the space. I termed these immersive experiences, 'work with, walk with' practices, where I walked alongside various individuals within the department: students, professors, lab technicians, cleaners,

lecturers. Alongside this I ran a series of exploratory movement workshops inviting a consideration of embodiment and movement as a means of thinking about learning, teaching and research.

I wanted to encourage thinking about the fundamental but often unacknowledged significance of movement in daily educational practice. Perceptual change can be invited by attending to movement and physical sensation as they arise

moment to moment. What I set out to do was to utilise participatory movement-based practices to develop new ways of disseminating ideas to wider, different audiences.

Throughout the residency I created/co-curated a series of haptic happenings (involving touch) which sought to draw attention to space and place. I see this work as a way of inhabiting the dialogical realm via the potency of movement. This in itself can be an interesting provocation within academic circles where the written and spoken word dominate. How might we contemplate and experience the body of knowledge through a sensing, feeling realm?

Gentle, yet artful happenings in and around departmental spaces gave rise to a wide variety of responses. Occupying public spaces with impromptu picnics, sit downs and the invitation to play proved to be amusing, bemusing, disconcerting and even troubling for some. I was surprised how crossing over/threshold spaces are filled with both possibilities and problems. Playing in and around the edges of public spaces meant that the security staff were called out on three different occasions, all prompted by the spatially unexpected, the presence of something 'other' in the space. The haptic happenings were incredibly effective at considering expectations about familiarity, about hierarchical assumptions and about conventions and compliance in space. In these Brexit-laden times boundaries and ideas of who belongs where have seldom been so present or pertinent. Through activating spaces with my movement research I prodded at the soft spot of discomfort we all carry when our expectations and assumptions of where people 'should' be are tested or questioned.

There are many ways of thinking, being and doing with regard to the concept of being a physical human being. I gained valuable insights by tagging along on field trips with physical geographers, immersing myself in measuring, mapping and observing the land. Everyday choreographies emerged as students processed up down and along contour lines (curved, straight or a mixture of both lines on a map describing the intersection of a real or hypothetical >>

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surface), signaling measurements with all the formality of a courtly dance, their gestures conveying data. What the ever-pragmatic physical geographers saw as rational and science driven research spoke to me of how we assemble, create and tell ourselves stories about space and place. Whilst they moved to measure and map I moved in order to listen and respond. Both approaches are valid and the delight for me was in the conversation, the sharing of our knowledge and the visceral thrill of finding commonality and the energy of enthusiasm when dots connect.

Common ground conversations evolved with Dr Maarten Van Hardenbroek. Our collaboration began during a field trip where he introduced me to my first ever experience of coring. The term itself, 'coring', immediately connected with me, physically and emotionally. Every dancer has heightened core awareness; a sense of movement spiralling out from a pliable, vibrant, energetic core; the same sense of being centred is common in martial arts and meditation practices. The metaphor of core imbues itself into life itself; we speak of core values, core components. So to find myself physically coring, digging into the land was rather exciting and as ever pulled me into the contemplation of inner/outer landscape and a felt sense of time.

Geography is a wide-ranging and all-encompassing academic discipline and is increasingly attuned to ideas about movement and embodiment in and through space. I had some incredible and moving ideas about the connections between geography and dance through attending Professor Rachel Woodward's lectures about the physicality of soldiering, the embodied experiences of war and ways in which the language of the body is central to discourses about war and the military experience for all involved. Rachel is an expert in military geography and I gained invaluable insights into ways of considering the significance of space, physicality and memory within a military context. As an experienced academic and one well versed in pastoral care it was fantastic to have someone like Rachel to pose critical



Participant, Leverhulme artist in residence project. Photo: Iain Garret. www.igdesign.photography

and searching questions.

The bringing together of different generations pervades all of my work. The Leverhulme residency offered many opportunities to expand the possibilities of what learning together via the 'geography of generations' might look and feel like. It is the doing of research that compels me and the palpable immediacy of knowing in body and mind that something is changing and something new is becoming. The Performance of research, critical questions, interventions and spatial provocations have all been part of my residency, with the generations occupying various spaces within the university prompting a surprising amount of consternation in some quarters. This has provided much thinking material, particularly with regard to issues around accessibility and exposed some prejudicial attitudes toward age.

I have developed a reciprocal research relationship with Dr Matt Jenkins who researches official statistics as social processes. We have developed a mutually challenging yet supportive partnership considering official representations of emotion and ways of being. As a result we are now

working on a project entitled *Near and Far*, in and around the Woodbine estate in South Tyneside, that explores emotional geographies, thanks to a grant from the Catherine Cookson Foundation. This intergenerational project uses embodied/experimental research methods to ask important questions about the ways in which we sense, feel and experience a sense of being 'at home'.

I have particularly enjoyed hearing how my work reflects various aspects of critical theories and it has afforded me a voice and a platform to bring other more embedded, embodied and above all playful ways of researching to the attention of academics and students in a reciprocal exchange. The writings of the French philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault had particular resonance in relation to presentations and trainings I have undertaken with regard to the civil liberties of people living with dementia. Although my reading is still minimal I relish the rush of recognition and being on the same page, albeit in very different ways but essentially there is connection, movement and energy in that recognition. From my perspective, academic research and theory only have life when they connect and speak to the 'real world', when they can play out on the stage of life as it is lived.

The residency has meant that I have had and continue to have incredibly rich, challenging and expanding conversations about what I do and the various research contexts that my work speaks to or reflects. I hope that in turn I have been able to demonstrate that practice happens and uncovers, endorses or opposes, is in tune with or rejects all kinds of academic research and theories. The delight has been in the invitation to embrace different ways of knowing, to dance the data, to expand and contribute to the body of knowledge and to make the research move.

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References

1. www.paulaturner.org/leverhulme