Melanie Kloetzel

# Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape

Site-specific performance relies on the terms *space* and *place* as markers for discussing a performance's engagement with a site. However, practitioners and researchers are often disgruntled by the limitations such terms impose upon site-specific performance – as was Melanie Kloetzel, in the creation of *The Sanitastics*, a site-specific dance film created in the Calgary Walkway System. In this article, Kloetzel examines how theorists have struggled with space and place in the last four decades and how bringing in the perspective of the body allows us to reassess our assumptions about these terms. As she analyzes her creative process, she discovers the restrictions as well as possibilities in *space* and *place*, but she also notes the need for Marc Augé's idea of *non-place* to clarify her site-specific efforts in the homogenized, corporate landscape of the Walkway System. Kloetzel is an associate professor at the University of Calgary and the artistic director of kloetzel&co, a dance company founded in New York City in 1997 that has presented work across North America. Her site-specific films have been shown in Brazil, Belgium, Canada, and the United States, and her anthology with Carolyn Pavlik, *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*, was published by the University Press of Florida in 2009.

*For me, place contains the entire history of the location we are working with, in every sense. The space, however, is the tuning, the key that the place is singing in. For us,* that *is what we tap into.*

Sara Pearson,
PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER

WHEN EXPLORING site-specific performances through research and practice, it is difficult to get around the terms *space* and *place*. Indeed, for years, those of us in the site-specific performance field have been wrestling with these terms, critical as they are for understanding performance that takes site as the basis of inspiration. Contested among practitioners of site-specific performance – as well as among theorists in fields from geography to architecture – space and place can leave our analytical efforts in a muddle. Of course, we know meanings are slippery, but sprinkling these terms about haphazardly can too often undermine our attempts to examine the goals, actions, feats, and foibles of site-specific performance.

So, is it possible to come to an interpretation of the terms 'space' and 'place' that can enhance our practice and study of site-specific performance? Where, or to whom, should we look for guidance? These were some questions that I began to explore as I embarked on a site-specific dance project set in the Calgary Walkway System. This project, *The Sanitastics*, brought together the dance company kloetzel&co and American filmmaker Jeff Curtis to examine the Walkway System through the creation of a dance film. By mining the fields of dance, video, and site-specific performance, we reconsidered our assumptions about space and place and, dissatisfied, finally incorporated Marc Augé's theories of *non-place* to help us contend with the homogenized corporate culture we uncovered. Yet, such discoveries did not come lightly and, in order to understand our creative process, it helps to step back and look at the theoretical frame that undergirded our physical and performative adventures.

Many philosophers, geographers, and cultural theorists have weighed in on the discussion of space and place, and their views have directly impacted and/or been influenced by site-specific art in the past four decades. While certain site-specific perfor-

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mers have dipped into such theories to situate their work, site-specific choreographers have come to the discussion rather belatedly. Luckily, recent publications have begun to amend this absence, and the choreographic entrance suggests the need for a greater scrutiny of the body and its relationship to space and place, as well as a reassessing of the established trajectory of site-specific art.[1]

**From Space into Place**

As performers whose medium is the body, many site-specific choreographers invariably turn to the body as the first arena of analysis. 'As choreographers, perhaps the first "site" is the body,' explains Ann Carlson, a site choreographer with over twenty years of experience, 'and all the visual, cultural, and behavioural signs ingrained in the body that impact the work. It circles out . . . from the site of the body to the context of where the body stands.'[2] As we created *The Sanitastics*, we too began with the site of the body and the body in context, a method of analysis that led us to phenomenology and, in particular, to Edward Casey, the premier phenomenologist of space and place, to start our theoretical journey.

Casey agrees that we must allow the experience of the body to act as a guide. Looking to Merleau-Ponty for support, he takes bodily experience back to its fundamentals: if a body exists, then it does so in a *place*. For Casey, body and place are inextricably connected; human sensation and knowledge come from the places we encounter just as places are vivified and acculturated by the human bodies that inhabit them. As he states, 'Bodies and places are connatural terms. They interanimate each other.'[3]

Casey does not see this intimate connection between humans and *space*, however. Space, along with time, is merely an abstract concept that cannot be embodied. Casey argues that 'the phenomenological fact of the matter is that *space and time come together in place*'.[4] Space, like time, is only one axis of lived bodily experience and one that cannot be accessed on its own. But place is something with which we directly and intimately engage, something that can be physically experienced and valued.[5]

As site-specific art began to establish itself as a genre in the 1960s, this understanding of place became paramount. Phenomenological priorities stood out as the basis for creating, presenting, and viewing the work. A site's physical realities – design, dimensions, textures, and so on – were of utmost importance for both artist and viewer. Miwon Kwon, an art historian at UCLA, points to artists such as Robert Barry and Richard Serra as visual artists of the 1960s who adopted this stance, and we could include Trisha Brown's performance pieces of the early 1970s (particularly her equipment pieces) as falling into this category for site-specific dance.[6] As Kwon notes, such artists wanted their artwork to move beyond the entrenched Cartesian frame and into a phenomenological one by focusing on the lived bodily experience of place.[7]

But as site-specific art carried on into the 1970s, more focus came to rest on the connections between place and culture. Just as Casey notes that places are infused with culture by virtue of the bodies that experience them, artists also began to pay more attention to place as a location laden with cultural baggage.

Kwon sees the site-specific visual art created at this time as falling into a new category, one where an art piece critiques its own institutional and cultural framework and where multiple interpretations of the work and its site flourish based on individual viewers and their cultural backgrounds. Kwon sees work by Robert Smithson and others as challenging the 'presumption of a universal viewing subject (albeit one in possession of a corporeal body) as espoused in the phenomenological model'.[8]

Jeff Kelley, an American art critic, agrees with Kwon that site art in the 1970s offered a new and challenging view of site; yet, he characterizes this development not as a move past phenomenology and into culture, but rather as a trajectory from site to place. 'At some moment in the late seventies, we crossed an important threshold: we moved beyond sites and into places,' claims Kelley in Suzanne Lacy's tome on public art,



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*Mapping the Terrain*.[9] This shift was noteworthy, asserts Kelly, because it helped place-based public art move past site as an exploitative concept. 'A place is useful, and a site is used,' opines Kelley, and he cheers the inclination of such artists to create a true 'art of place'.[10]

Lucy Lippard also enters the discussion of space, place, and site in her *The Lure of the Local*. For Lippard, place is where culture and space merge, and this demands that art on location needs to be separated into two categories: site-specific and place-specific.[11] Site-specific art is influenced by topography alone, while place-specific art factors in a location's cultural, social, and political dimensions.[12]

This understanding of place-specific art is exemplified in much of the on-site performance work of the past four decades. Site performances have provoked people to experience sites not only sensually, but also as cultural locations that boast wide-ranging personal histories and interpretations. As posited by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, site performances offer an archaeological reading of a site, exposing audiences to a rich layering of cultural knowledge.[13]

As early as 1967, Meredith Monk was wondering about archaeological layers on site. In pieces such as *Blueprint* (1967), *Juice* (1969), *Vessel* (1971), and the later *American Archaeology* (1994), Monk investigated such layers through her use of vast distances, disparate scales, and cultural myths; as performers examined sites around New York City from the grandiose to the intimate, a consistent questioning of the frame made any simplistic perceptive model of place moot.[14]

In the 1990s, site choreographers such as Martha Bowers and Tamar Rogoff continued to explore the historical strata on site. For example, in Bowers's 1993 piece, *On the Waterfront*, performed in Red Hook in Brooklyn, New York, audiences traipsed through different stages in Red Hook history as depicted through movement, text, and song by various local community groups in separate shipping warehouses along the Red Hook piers. Rogoff's *The Ivye Project* (1994), which was performed in a forest in Belarus, delved into the layers of past and present as she examined the site of a mass grave where the Nazis murdered and buried most of the Jews in the town of Ivye in 1942. In this work, audiences wandered among the trees discovering scenes of Jewish home life from the 1940s as well as the deep and pointed silence of the grave itself.[15]

Audiences of site work see these historical layers of a site and note that they feel more deeply connected to the places they see performed. In this interpretation of site work, in other words, performance turns everyday, and often overlooked, spaces into *places* replete with rich histories and memories.

### Turning from Place to Space

So, has space been relegated to the dustbin of useless abstraction? Has the purview of site work been delineated as either providing a sensory experience of place or offering a lens into the memories and narratives of place? Actually, few scholars and practitioners in the site-specific realm seem satisfied with these fixed objectives. They dislike being pinned down by the implications of site work as only a sensual partner to place or a place magnifier. In the creation of *The Sanitastics*, I too felt fettered by these limited aims and needed to move onto other theoretical ground.

I turned to a different batch of geographers and theorists, who hypothesized new directions for space and place. Writing in 1977, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, for example, examined the distinctions between space and place in detail, and, in his analysis, *space* morphed from a disembodied, abstract term into one of possibility. To condense his findings to a mantra: space is freedom, place is culture. Or, in more detail: 'Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action,' while place is a 'calm centre of established values';[16] place is characterized and bounded by fixed definitions.

Like Tuan, scholars of site-specific and public art Nick Kaye, Jane Rendell, and Miwon Kwon began to see place as a limiting concept as they analyzed site work from the mid-1970s to the present. In their view, place



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starts to figure as a concept that constrains or confines site art; while it may speak of phenomenological possibilities or historical layers, place did not offer the conceptual framework necessary to explicate the variety of site work created after the early 1970s.

In order to discuss such work, these scholars turned to another figure curious about the significance of space and place – Michel de Certeau. In his 1980 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau offered such scholars ample reasoning to justify their angst concerning place. For de Certeau, space connotes possibility and movement, while place is restrictive, inert, dead. As de Certeau describes, 'The law of the "proper" rules in the place. . . . [Place] implies an indication of stability.'[17] This is in contrast to space, which de Certeau characterizes as place transformed by movement. Unlike the limitations of place, space offers endless possibilities based on the various operations performed within it. Thus, de Certeau observes that '*space is a practised place*', where the notion of practice refers to the physical activities and experiences performed by human bodies in a place.[18]

Nick Kaye finds de Certeau promising for analyzing the feats of site-specific art and, especially, site-specific performance. Since human action is the basis of performance, performance stands out as one of those transformative practices that turns place into space; thus, Kaye claims, spaces inevitably spring up in the moment of site performance, erasing inert places and leaving only a *representation* of the place in its stead.[19] According to Kaye, performers and viewers of site work constantly experience such an erasure of places due to mobility, and this provides new avenues for the production and characterization of the places that surround us. Kaye goes on to champion the possibilities inherent in site work's rupture and re-articulation of place:

> Defined in these relationships between spaces and spatial practices, this site-specific work tests the stability and limits of the very places it *acts out*, at once relying on the order of the sites it so frequently seeks to question or disrupt. In this sense, site-specific art is defined precisely in these ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning, through which the artwork and its place may be momentarily articulated in one another.[20]

## Space and Critical Engagement

Similarly drawn by de Certeau's reading of space and place, Jane Rendell remarks on the possibility for transgression in the move from place to space. Rendell, who is concerned with our tendency to essentialize *place* as a romantic ideal from which we have become dissociated, prefers the idea of 'unfixing' a place (that is, turning place into space), as it allows site art not only to access a place's potential for change, but also to cast place into the network of larger social relations.[21] From this perspective, Rendell enjoys the vector of place into space because it allows for 'a "space" of critical engagement in the "place" of commodity consumption'.[22]

In Kwon's view too, site art, dating from the mid-1970s but growing more prominent today, has made such a leap towards space and critical engagement. For Kwon, site work in this category has entered the social realm more actively. In doing so, it has become critically engaged in sites that resonate with relevant issues of the day, from global warming to racism to homophobia. 'In this sense,' notes Kwon, 'the chance to conceive the site as something *more than* a place – as repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group – is an important conceptual leap in redefining the public role of art and artists.'[23]

Such distinctions hold promise for those of us in the site-specific dance realm. Site choreographers today frequently look to sites that either promote dialogue for a community or offer the possibility of a larger critical discussion. In much of the work in the past two decades, place becomes a jumping-off point for considerations of social economies and relations.

Jo Kreiter, artistic director of Flyaway Productions, notes that she purposely searches for sites where communities are grappling with larger issues of social or economic inequity (such as an industrial crane that a San Francisco neighbourhood was trying to



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preserve as a labour landmark). As she explains, 'The site itself lends validity to the artistic inquiry, because the site holds a quandary in its "hands", or in the bricks or steel I-beams or concrete walls, etc.'[24]

Joanna Haigood, another site choreographer based in San Francisco, claims that she, too, looks for sites where an issue that she is already exploring can resonate.[25] In her work *Invisible Wings* (1998), for example, Haigood was interested in delving more deeply into the legacy of racism and was able to do so in performance due to her access to a portion of the underground railroad in Massachusetts.

By turning to sites that bolster critical discussion, these choreographers are embracing *space* as characterized by Kaye and Rendell. This is particularly true in light of the fact that, not surprisingly, choreographers turn to movement as their discursive medium. In her analysis, Kwon points to the radical potential of site work that employs gesture and movement; she notes that movement-based site work, due to its focus on process and impermanence, can critically engage audiences in ways that question the commodification of art and place.[26] Kwon's understanding of movement as a radical step pairs well with the sentiments of de Certeau and Tuan, who both look to the freedom of movement to establish space. In this theoretical dialogue, space is invariably linked to action. The liberty associated with space emanates from active bodies and performing gestures.

## Which Trajectory and Why?

For all this theoretical talk, can site work actually invoke this freedom of *space*, even though in so many instances it revels in the history and/or sensual experience of *place*? After all, site work is about being informed by the smallest details of the sites in which it exists; it celebrates, and sometimes interrogates, a site, but it purposefully avoids the decontextualization of blank theatre space.[27] So, can we really summon the spectre of space while remaining in the realm of the site-specific?

Such issues have not been at the forefront of my own work for very long. I've been content with revelling in the place-ness of the old hotels, bridges, or museums that I have explored through site performance. In past papers, I have discussed the depth of understanding of place that site work can provide, commenting on the layers of history that can be accessed through site work and the satisfaction inherent in the dig.[28] But a recent move across a national border, inciting a new (and increasingly discouraging) search for sites to perform has jolted my own sensibilities about what site work does or can do.

Relocating to a city such as Calgary in Canada – a city with a history that barely goes back a century, a city that cannot keep up with the boom of oil, where workers pour in to snap up oil-related jobs and where new condos and skyscrapers of glass and steel replace lovely brick and sandstone structures every day – raises the question: what can we do in a setting of newness and corporate windfall? Is there still a way to move across the cement perfection and unmarked glass, to explore such a site both physically and performatively? Or, as site performers, do we just bemoan these spots and move on?

In cities like Calgary, where homogenization has made its claim and global economic flows have carved precise channels, I begin to understand the angst linked to place: it feels restrictive, *too* calm in its established values and fixed associations. I feel the need to uncover a new relation to site, and I find myself reaching for the space of Tuan and de Certeau.

But what kind of site work would allow for that space of invitation? What tactics could incite action and a sense of freedom in a place of restriction? After an initial exploration of sites for performance, I turned to film to facilitate my leap into space. In 2008, work began on the site film, *The Sanitastics*, with filmmaker Jeff Curtis, in the Calgary Walkway System.

## Creating *The Sanitastics* in the Walkway

The Walkway System is a dominant and intriguing feature of Calgary's urban plan. It



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The superheroes on the hunt: Deanna Witwer with Caileen Bennett, Naomi Brand, and Kirsten Wiren in *The Sanitastics*.

consists of a series of pedestrian bridges that pass over busy city streets in the downtown core of Calgary. These 'Plus 15' bridges – so-called because they hang fifteen feet above ground – can be found in many cities in North America, although no Plus 15 system is as extensive as that of Calgary. Since 1970, when the first bridge opened, the Plus 15 system has grown to ten miles and fifty-nine pedestrian overpasses. It effectively links much of the downtown.

Due to this 'boon' to the city, which was designed by architect Harold Hanen, pedestrians are free to jaunt around downtown with no need to venture outside; today, a person can walk from 9th Avenue to 2nd Avenue or 8th Street SW to Centre Street without ever putting his or her feet on the city streets. Identical signage throughout the system (all with a little white figure in a cowboy hat set against a blue backdrop) directs travellers at every critical juncture, and food courts, nail salons, coffee shops, shoeshine stands, and investment advisers entice pedestrians with their wares. The fluorescent lights that illuminate the endless stream of consumerism together with the temperature control throughout the system give an eerie sense that seasons, time of day, or street sounds all belong to some other world, one which is no longer necessary.

The Walkway has inspired a number of artistic efforts, including public art displays, performance walks, installations, and even a film, *waydowntown*, by Gary Burns, a filmmaker born in Calgary. This final salute to the Plus 15 system, a cult sleeper, presents a comedic take on corporate culture, which quite effectively jabs at the almost-claustrophobic sensibilities of the Plus 15 walkways.

As I mused over Burns's film as well as the installations and public art offerings erected in the system, I found that while some of them successfully captured the corporate and restrictive nature of the Plus 15s, my own understanding of the Walkway System as an overly clean, cultivated, and surveilled environment begged for further exploration. Thus began the creation of *The Sanitastics*, a dance film that follows four surveillance superheroes through the Plus 15 system as they attempt to eradicate contam-



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ination (in this case, a flower-creature or being of the 'natural' world) that has been mysteriously introduced to the system. Using powerful, angular, travelling movement, cleaning metaphors, and film techniques that vault the plot into the surreal, *The Sanitastics* ironically skewers the underbelly of the Walkway culture – the oil corporations – in its ridiculous disinfecting feats. The press summary of the film reads as follows:

> A sci-fi dance spoof on the security system of the Calgary Skyway, *The Sanitastics* scours the system, removing any oddities, invasive species, and problematic beings. With fantastic creatures and hygienic superheroes, *The Sanitastics* offers a site-specific adventure of the endlessly electrifying non-place.

While creating this film, I found myself wondering about space and place and the limitations of these terms. Initially, I was enamoured of the plot line that turned the geometric and heavily mapped grid (place) into a space of freedom with room for critical commentary. But I found difficulties with such a trajectory. Place and its historical nuances and archaeological possibilities kept creeping into our thoughts as we passed through the storeyed Palliser Hotel, *circa* 1920, and the decaying sandstone City Hall, *circa* 1911. But how could place also fit the much more prevalent existence of gleaming marble corridors, chain stores, and shiny plate-glass windows? Could *place* aptly characterize the homogenized hallways of corporate consumerism as well as the sites of ghosts and grit? On the other hand, could we discover a freedom within *splace* while avoiding that dangerous decontextualization that could vault us out of the site-specific?

## Neither Place nor Space

Disappointed by this lack of clarity within the concepts of both space and place, I turned to Marc Augé and his theories regarding non-place. For Augé, these same queries helped him to create two definitions of place: anthropological place and non-place.

Anthropological place encompasses those locales where there is an established knowledge of the site, where locals come together in a social network that defines and distinguishes the site. But instead of looking to *space* to activate such places as de Certeau might, Augé looks at our obsession with space with a suspicious eye. In contrast to de Certeau, Augé does not see anthropological place as inert or confining. Instead, he views our obsession with space as indicative of the prejudices of supermodernity:[29]

> The craze for the word 'space' . . . expresses not only the themes that haunt the contemporary era (advertising, image, leisure, freedom, travel) but also the abstraction that corrodes and threatens them.[30]

Disenchanted by what *space* offers, Augé turns to *non-place* as a more fruitful concept for understanding our current surroundings. Non-places are the architectural realization of supermodernity: they are sites through which the main mode of experience is travel. Airports, shopping malls, hotels, and superhighways (whether for information or vehicles) are the epitome of the non-place, but these sites merely push the travel metaphor into a whole catalogue of sites that we hurry past, allowing signs and tourist guides to tell us the features of the landscape without needing to stop.[31]

Such theories prove ripe for our artistic efforts in the Plus 15s. The Walkway System is, by definition, a site of travel, a non-place, as it were. The bridges exist for pedestrians to pass through on their way to somewhere else, whether their office, a colleague's office, the food court, the bank, and so on. In fact, those who are not travelling are immediately suspect. On our first ventures through the system, we felt the continuous need to move on. Our first pause in the system (merely as investigative spectators) incited three pointed queries about whether we were lost and needed assistance.

During filming, other Walkway travellers would register annoyance or downright anger at the impediment that we created, even though we were only constricting one 'lane of traffic' on the 'pedestrian highway'. Many times a day, security personnel would pester us because of our stillness or our unusual



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movement in the designated walking area. I had to be able to name-drop an entire list of security bigwigs to prove our legitimacy. In one instance, we were strictly prohibited from experimenting on site and were chased out of three consecutive bridges.

Added to the behavioural restrictions and sense of surveillance, this non-place – with its identical signage naming the buildings or 'sights' to be witnessed if we were to turn left or right and head off on another route – brought up multiple questions of identity. Who were we in such a place of conformity? Among the business suits and random shoppers, who stuck out? The 'in-between', travelling nature of the Plus 15 bridges, as well as their position in mid-air, made us ponder our own role in the city.

Should we vary our choices about how to present ourselves in these in-between non-places? Could the perception of anonymity in the Walkway System enable us to try on new personas? Augé sees such questions as part and parcel of the experience of non-place. As he notes, people using the non-place taste 'the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing'.[32]

Certainly this identity play informed *The Sanitastics* to a large degree. Freed from the need to wrestle with role-playing of a more conventional nature, I wallowed in the possibilities of futurism for both the choreography and the concept. In previous site works, I would have explored who *had* passed through the place, who *might have* lived and loved and died at a particular site. But here, in the anonymity of the non-place, I could fantasize and play with characters and creatures that had no semblance to reality. I could dabble in *what might be* – hence the play with superheroes and the flower-creature to symbolize some era outside of a real time or place. Like our culture's current investment in sci-fi movies and games – an endless list of comic-book characters or figures from another world all pieced together with remarkable special effects – we too could find that escape into the *splace* of quests and adventures. Yet, all these attempts to escape to the freedom of space had an ironic foil: the everyday headaches and the subtle policing that curbed our escapist fancies; the checks and double-

Identity-play in *The Sanitastics*: Chalie Livingston as the flower-creature.





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The surveillance superheroes provide a performative cleaning to the expanses of glass in the Calgary skyway.

checks of paperwork and insurance permits; the calls to such-and-such municipal institution; the arguments about the public space of the Walkway bridges and the discovery of each bridge's private ownership by Shell or Nexen or Husky Oil.

Then there were the endless interruptions of filming as we were 'caught on tape' by the surveillance cameras and forced to explain ourselves. Even during our moves from one filming site to another (toting our supplies in plastic bags and looking like an itinerant circus or perhaps a homeless troupe), we received those uncomfortable glances or angry stares, the understated community policing to curb any perceived difference.

For, in reality, we were not really escaping, nor would we be allowed to. While we may have experienced that initial sense of freedom that de Certeau links to space, we quickly discovered the conundrums associated with anonymity in an overly controlled site. As Augé explains of airports, supermarkets, and other non-places, we were always being questioned about our identity in such environs. Although we may have experienced moments of perceived liberation after passing through a checkpoint, these were fleeting and marked by yet another round of authoritative questioning. 'The user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence.'[33]

Does this mean that we gave in to the sensation of control, that we bowed to the strictures of the non-place? Or were our creative labours able to provide some questioning or critique of the Walkway System? As our endeavours continued, we realized that for all the playful identities and fantastic narratives we explored, our main role seemed to be an 'irritant to the powers that be'. The constant frustration that we brought to the overseers of the system – even when we got the appropriate permissions – forced our efforts into a realm of critical engagement, planned or otherwise. As the flower-creature tripped her way through overly cultivated planters or scrambled up into the metal rafters of the Plus 15s, the true powers of surveillance chafed at our insolence. The



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non-place is not a site to be trifled with, they seemed to say, forcing me to make another series of phone calls to the higher-ups.

As the surveilling superheroes mercilessly hunt down the flower-creature, *The Sanitastics* stresses the strategies of authorities – in this case the sovereigns of oil and their municipal partners – to forbid any upset of the system's order. Any provocation of the worker bees must be looked upon as a threat and all semblance of organic matter, unless directly under the control of the authorities, must be immediately eradicated. Both on-screen and off, we upset the balance of the clean, orderly site that exists for the white-collar personnel to sustain their consumer culture throughout the day.

By playing in the pseudo-garden spaces, we underscored the separation from the natural elements enforced by the Walkway. By interrupting the flow of traffic, we highlighted the incessant and uniform movements of the non-place. By introducing bizarre characters and organic detritus, as well as by giving the site a performative cleaning, we pointed to the strangely antiseptic, unnatural landscape into which the corporate workers insert themselves daily. And, in the end, we questioned the innocence of our culture's urban planning and how it circumscribes our daily lives.

## Mingling Trajectories

In these efforts, Augé does see some light in the darkness, and so do we. Augé notes that the non-place can never be absolute, that anthropological place can make inroads into these sites of travel. Non-place 'never exists in pure form; places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it,' he acknowledges. 'Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed.'[34] In our experience of the non-place, we discover the truth of such a statement. For, while our voyage through the system unearthed clear instances of place, non-place, and even the space of de Certeau or Tuan, it also exposed the intermingling of these concepts.

As we travel through the Walkway System – as well as linger, impede, cajole, and investigate – we see a myriad of small tableaux that check our assumption of the system as merely a non-place. A mother and child dawdle at the window enjoying the warmth of the sun through glass; a woman pushes a cart with all her valuables through the system, food containers and family photos all threatening to tumble at any moment; a young couple find a nook to neck (three whole minutes before someone intervenes). In each of these moments, we witness *place* insert itself into non-place. We observe the efforts to reclaim the travellers' setting for the daily activities of enjoyment, relaxation, breakdown.

And, in our small way, we also initiate instances of escape, creative flights of fancy that expose and critique the character of the non-place, operations that turn it into a *space* of freedom as well as of critical engagement. A Brazilian couple tearfully approach the flower-creature (Chalie Livingston) and tell her how much she reminds them of a journey home; instead of stopping us and asking for paperwork, a security officer (dressed in the identical blue shirt and black tie of the superheroes) mimics a dance movement he witnesses; a businessman hoots in surprise at our offhand comment that it is casual Friday; a group of teenagers with prohibited skateboards shows off for us and asks to be in the film.

As the experiences add up, I perceive the leakage of place, non-place, and space into and through one another. In our creative work on site, we come across methods and/or events that promote one or another of these conceptions of our environment. I notice the blurred boundaries of the terms, but also the real potential for analysis in these concepts. Site work enables space, place, and non-place to come to life in a way that fosters scrutiny of the human–environment relation. It introduces radical movements and critical commentary that conjure thoughts of *space*; it offers up layers of history as well as sensory experiences of *place*; and it exposes our culture's fascination with the travel and speed of *non-place*.



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Instigating moments of escape: The flower-creature attempts to break out of the confines of the non-place.

In other words, site-specific performances spark a fuller dialogue about our terminology for our surroundings. In doing so, such performances allow us not only to probe site-specific art in all its particulars, but also to examine our urban planning, cultural mapping, architectural choices, and environmental treatment.[35]

## Notes and References

1. See articles by Victoria Hunter in *New Theatre Quarterly*, articles by Camille LeFevre in *Dance Magazine*; also Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik, ed., *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009).

2. Melanie Kloetzel, 'An Interview with Ann Carlson', in Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik, ed., op. cit., p. 140.

3. Edward S. Casey, 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena', in Steven Feld and Keith R. Basso, ed., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1997), p. 24.

4. Casey, op cit., p. 36; author's emphasis.

5. In Casey's other texts, he builds at length on this concept, arguing that society needs to reconnect to place for the good of humans and the planet. See Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-world* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), and Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

6. Trisha Brown's early apparatus work, such as *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), exemplifies this understanding of site work. For such pieces, Brown used the physical properties and details of a site to delineate the structure of her pieces. For example, for *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, she made sure that the length of the piece would be determined purely by the height of the building and the length of time it took for the performer, rigged in climbing gear, to walk from roof to ground.

7. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 12.

8. Kwon, p. 13. Kwon's curious parenthetical commentary begs the question: do corporeal bodies, which clearly cannot be clumped under the 'universal' banner, fundamentally undermine the very argument she is trying to make?

9. Jeff Kelley, 'Common Work', in Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), p. 141.

10. Ibid.

11. Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 10.

12. Ibid., p. 274



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13. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 2001).

14. For more information on Monk and the question of framing, see Meredith Monk, 'Meredith Monk as Site Pioneer, 1969–71', in *Site Dance*, op. cit., p. 59–67, or Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 203–14.

15. See interviews with Martha Bowers, Tamar Rogoff, Joanna Haigood, Olive Bieringa, Marylee Hardenbergh, and others in *Site Dance*, op. cit.

16. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; reprint, 2001), p. 54.

17. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

18. De Certeau, p. 117; author's emphasis.

19. Kaye, *Site-Specific Art*, p. 6–7.

20. Ibid., p. 57.

21. Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: a Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 18–20.

22. Rendell, p. 60.

23. Kwon, p. 30; my emphasis. Although Kwon does not consciously employ the term 'space' to characterize this move away from the physical characteristics of a site to larger social implications, her connotations about 'places' versus 'discursive sites' are akin to the arguments about place and space made by Kaye and Rendell.

24. Carolyn Pavlik, 'An Interview with Jo Kreiter', in Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik, ed., *Site Dance,* op. cit., p. 313.

25. Melanie Kloetzel, 'An Interview with Joanna Haigood', in Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik, ed., *Site Dance,* op. cit., p. 70.

26. Kwon, p. 24.

27. Note that one would never say 'blank theatre *place*'; rather, space is a key indicator of emptiness or *tabula rasa*.

28. In an article about a piece I created at the California Museum of Photography, I explored possibilities inherent in the connection between site performance and archaeology as theorized by Pearson and Shanks in *Theatre/Archaeology*. See Melanie Kloetzel, 'Site Dance: a Deconstruction/Reconstruction of Community and Place', in Ninotchka Bennahum and Tresa M. Randall, ed., *Dance and Community: Congress on Research in Dance* (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 2005), p. 130–7.

29. Augé views supermodernity from the viewpoint of anthropological analysis. He defines it as the contemporary era of late capitalism marked by an excess of space, time, and information. Of particular interest to this analysis is Augé's statement: 'Supermodernity . . . makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity.' See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 30–8, 110.

30. Ibid., p. 83. Interestingly, Augé finds that space enters our experience more as a rushing past of a multitude of places than as a thing unto itself; we are unable to grasp the place-ness of place in our overzealous and superficial efforts to see a string of tourist-worthy sites. Instead, we register a list of places barely seen and insufficiently experienced, or, as Augé describes, *space*.

31. Ibid., p. 84–6, 94–8.

32. Ibid., p. 103.

33. Ibid., p. 102.

34. Ibid., p. 78–9.

35. *The Sanitastics*, now a twelve-minute film, has just come out of post-production and is currently being sent off to dance film festivals internationally.



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