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10. PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

INTRODUCTION

Sensory encounters with place, site and landscape have the potential to stimulate new and deeply felt engagements with local places, and to prompt discussion about the relationships between place, culture and identity. Such sensory encounters may also offer opportunities for critical, reflexive theorising and practice (Pink, 2008, 2009; Stevenson, 2014; Warren, 2012). Within the myriad of potentialities offered in research, a focus on sensory and embodied encounters with local places prompts me to articulate intersections between local issues of social justice and environmental activism and feminist choreography. As a dance artist and researcher, ethnographic research has led me to autoethnographic performance as a specific means to articulate my encounters with place through embodied expression and textual representation.

Site-specific dance practices utilizing sensory encounters provide methods that support slowing down and paying attention through participatory observation, acclimatization and acculturation, and the development of movement repertoires (Barbour, 2010; East, 2012; Hunter, 2015). These methods potentially evoke a sense of belonging, connectedness and responsibility for specific places. Such work has been a focus for my choreographic expressions and written publications for some time (Barbour, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). However, in a dance research project called *Whenua* (to which I refer in this chapter), what began as a site-specific dance in local campus places at my university, expanded beyond sensory encounter. While the research process spiralled inwards to encompass a sense of belonging to and responsibility for local place, my processes also spiralled outwards to political engagement with issues of land contestation and spiritual, cultural, economic and environmental concerns. This spiralling process aligns easily with the focus of autoethnography in moving between self and culture: writing the 'auto' and the 'ethno' (Ellis, 2004). The site-specific dance thus became a form of critical autoethnographic performance and place-responsive activism (Denzin, 2003; Gruenewald, 2008; Madison, 2005; Madison & Hamera, 2006; Spry, 2011).

In both my autoethnographic writing in this chapter and the actual performances of *Whenua*, I embody creative connections across the disciplines and advocate for arts-based, feminist, place-responsive, critical ethnographic and embodied research (Gruenewald, 2008; Rinehart, Barbour, & Pope, 2014). The narrative of

K. BARBOUR

this chapter thus represents aspects of my research and contextualises both the performance and writing within autoethnography (Denzin, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). As a consequence, each section of writing begins with narratives of place, incorporates key texts used in the research process and in the autoethnographic performances, descriptive and phenomenological writing about the choreographic research and dancing (Fraleigh, 1987; Shapiro, 1999), and photographs of performance.

SENSORY ENCOUNTER WITH PLACE

As a beginning, I recognise that each of us is always located in specific places because we are embodied in the world. Embodiment necessitates location—we are each always somewhere, in some place. Being in some place offers a grounding in everyday experiences of geographic location, and also the potential to develop a sense of place that embraces the imaginative, affective, poetic, aesthetic, political and sensory ways in which each of us are some place (Crouch, 2000; MacDonald, 2003; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). We are each affected by place and we each engage with and change place. As Mary MacDonald (2003, 3) commented, ‘We bring places to play in building meaningful worlds and communities and invest them with cultural and religious meanings.’

Over my lifetime, my own sense of place and reflexivity about place has grown in relation to multiple homes (Barbour, 2011, 2012, in press). More recently, I have begun considering my relationship to the land around and on which the University of Waikato has risen in Hamilton city, in the Waikato region of Aotearoa New Zealand. The university, surrounding suburbs and farmland stand on tribal land of Waikato-Tainui indigenous Māori peoples. The land of the university and wider area is thus deeply invested with many rich and contested cultural and spiritual meanings with which different communities engage in different ways.

MacDonald (2003, 6) describes how the ‘sensory events of our daily lives trigger memories of the places in which we have dwelt and thus help us to remember whence we have come and how we have been shaped.’ After more than ten years of teaching site-specific dance with undergraduate students, there are remembered traces and even movement repertoires from former students that drop into my consciousness as I walk past certain park benches, through landscaping and public foyers on campus. For me, training in the weights room at the Recreation Centre on campus triggers specific memories of undergraduate orientation week parties, student union meetings and awards ceremonies once held in the same building. The smell of books and empty stairwells recalls childhood hours wandering the half lit library with my father, searching for his geography textbooks. Walking around the campus lakes now, particular paths bring back the quiet rhythm of my grandmother’s steps and the clasp of her hand around my small one as we circled the newly sculpted lakes together, pausing to crumble bread to feed the ducks. So for me, this place is intimately layered with memories of people, and while there is nostalgia for me in

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

remembering as I move around the campus, there is also an embodied experience of belonging, love and care for this place.

As my own sense of place deepens, and I continue to choreograph and to teach site-specific dance, I develop embodied activities to stimulate participation in and awareness of local places. I aim to activate somatic attention, encourage acclimatization, and provoke reflection about our movement in and relationships to local places (Barbour, 2012, 2013; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). These embodied activities support a personal, experiential relationship to place and may also support spiritual experiences of place (Barbour in press; Crouch, 2000; Raffan, 1992; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

Researching my local place and desiring to see my familiar environment anew, walking the campus, photographing details, quietly contemplating the colours of the trees and improvising movement outside were initial embodied research methods. Adding choreographic practices to these methods, I generated choreographic material for use in autoethnographic performance. For example, tuning in to the audible presence of Tūi (native bellbird) on the campus grounds and paying attention to the richly textured campus landscaping on fertile Waikato land, offered many sensory images of birds and nests, seeds, moss and dark wet soil, dense green undergrowth, lake water and weed, busy insect life and oxygen-saturated air. Paying attention to these details reminded me that our islands were once populated only by birds in a lush, sub-tropical ecosystem uninterrupted by animals hunting and human agendas.

I recall the work of ecological feminists who articulated the ways in which women and land have been equated in Western thinking, often in destructive ways as both have been perceived as objects for colonization and subjugation by white male conquerors (Warren, 1994). However, during my initial research process for this choreographic project *Whenua*, forms of affective spiritual encounter arose for me. My sense of spirituality arises through my relationship with the land as a life force. The land offers nurturing to inhabitants—birds, insects, plant life and humans—and responds to our care or neglect. For me, land is connected through ‘gut responses’ that are closely aligned with embodied experiences of nurturing my child from womb to world and to a sense of the sacred in providing nourishment for others. These connections reveal to me that my spiritual relationship with this land is experienced in my belly, womb and sacral area. However, I also recall hearing local Māori land activist Eva Rickard’s statements in my childhood, in which she articulated her worldview and connected women and land as sacred and life-giving. Eva explains the word *Whenua*, (the name I chose for this autoethnographic performance), as the word for both ‘land’ and for ‘placenta’ in *te reo Māori* (Māori language). In locating an interview clip of Eva Rickard (1975) in a documentary about land issues, I reflect now that even my partial understanding the meanings of the word *whenua*, resonates with my sense of a spiritual connection to land. Perhaps I had unconsciously experienced, absorbed or internalised a spiritual relationship between women and land even in my childhood.

K. BARBOUR

Whenua

Firstly, whenua is land. Secondly, whenua is the placenta within the mother that feeds the child before birth. And when it is born, this whenua is treated with respect, dignity, and taken to a place in the earth, and dedicated to Papatuanuku, the earth mother of the Māori people. And there it will nurture the child—you know our food and our living comes from the earth. And there also, this whenua of the child stays and says this is your little bit of land. No matter where you wander in the world, I will be here. And at the end of your days, you can come back and this is your papa kainga, in this I will receive you in death. This is the spiritual significance, I believe, of the land to the Māori people. (Rickard, 1975)

Initially, movement material was generated by me through this process of sensory encounter and somatic engagement, and then enhanced through focused activities with the dancers I invited as research participants—Helene Burgstaller, Lucy-Margaux Marinkovich and Sophie Williams. Using all our movement ideas, I choreographed the opening sections of the dance, representing our immersion in and responses to the campus place as we experienced it now, and as we imagined it might once have been: an ecological island system of biodiversity, unharmed by the enactment of human agendas. Images of the Tūi, birds, nests, insect life and fertility were embodied in the choreographic motifs and also woven through the sound score composed by Jeremy Mayall.

In the dance: Wrapped in black cloaks with feathery neckpieces, the dancers huddle as though birds sharing a nest, their small sharp head movements and ruffling of feathers evoking the movement of birds. As Sophie (see Photo 1 below) shifts out from the group, her gestures suggest seeds being spread by birds, dripping water and new growth, and her ritualistic focus and gentle movement quality suggests care and nurturing for both the land and the other dancers. Each dancer's movements evoke different images of insects and bird life, predominantly low to the ground initially and eventually progressing towards more human vertical and recognizable movement. In becoming more human, the movement evolves into duet and group work that expresses relationships of care and nurturing through touch, support and human gestures of communication. Specific movement motifs include embraces and lifts in which one of the dancers carries the other, sharing responsibility for weight and remaining connected to each other as roles change within the small choreographic ecosystem.

In considering a relationship between land as the nurturing source for community, placenta as the nurturing source for each child, and land as our place of return in death, I affirm my personal sensory and spiritual response to the land of this place. In discussion with the dancers, we identified a range of personal responses to land as a nurturing life force and we each improvised with embodying and expressing

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM



*Figure 10.1. Whenua (2014) featuring Sophie Williams (foreground).
Photo by Chloe Palmer*

our personal spiritual insights. Thus, in the opening section of the dance described above, and woven throughout the performance work, there are specific movement motifs that reflect our personal experiences of spiritual as well as more broadly sensory, somatic encounter with the place of the campus and the local lands of Waikato.

NARRATIVES OF PLACE

Broadening my sensory encounter with this local place to include the suburbs between campus and the Waikato River that have been ‘home’ for me for over twenty five years, further relationships and understandings arose as I researched multiple narratives of this place. Walking home from my office, I remembered the once green fields and sheep grazing near campus in my undergraduate days: mere ghosts beneath the brick homes now accommodating new generations of students. I walk through local suburbs following Peachgrove Road and I wonder, passing a small stone with a plaque that states ‘This stone marks the site of Peach trees planted by local Māori,’ about those who once owned this land. I know that before I was born, the highly landscaped campus was deliberately created out of land that

K. BARBOUR

had been intensively farmed. And further back in time, this intensive farming and the subdivision of land for private sale was based on draining of the swamps in the 1920s (Puke, 2011). Thinking even further back, I imagine this central Peachgrove Road not as linking the suburbs around campus today, but instead as the much earlier Te Ara Rewarewa track: the pathways of local *hapu* (sub-tribes) through swampy wetlands between *Pa* (fortified villages) and garden areas. As reported by Wiremu Puke (2011), these lands were marked by many different pathways.

Although the overall topography of this area was relatively flat, the wetlands, hill ridges, streams and shallow gullies had tribal significance as boundary markers or food sources. Several of these natural features were given names to commemorate a chief, tribal deity or an historic event, such as a battle, that occurred in the area. There were several significant *Pa* and cultivation grounds that belonged to Ngati Wairere and their sub-tribes located in present day suburbs (Puke, 2011, 7)

In the 1850s, the sub-tribe Ngati Parekirangi, lived at Waipahihi *Pa* in this area (Puke, 2011). The confiscation of Ngati Parekirangi lands by British Crown forces led to the division of the land for sale and the altering of the landscape for farming. It is recorded that respected descendent Te Pirihi Tomonui 'was deeply aggrieved at having Ngati Parekirangi lands confiscated by the Crown after the land wars' (Puke, 2011, 9). Subsequent to the seizing of Waikato-Tainui lands, the Crown created further subdivisions for sale to immigrants. Thus in the 1920s, land was sold to private owners and houses were built, including the cozy wooden home near Peachgrove Road that my partner and I bought to raise our family in. It was an uncomfortable realization to trace the direct history of the place we call home. Underneath most homes in Aotearoa New Zealand today, there are buried or forgotten narratives like this one, part of the historical amnesia of non-Māori New Zealanders (Bell, 2006).

These are just some of the many narratives and stories behind place names that I discover as I move beyond my sensory encounter with my local place, as it appears to me now. This excavation of narratives is a process that reveals contestation and conflict, injustice and colonisation, power and oppression. It prompts in me a desire to know more, to uncover many paths leading to an appreciation of multiple narratives of responsibility and care for this place so that I increase my own awareness of these histories.

Understanding land confiscation issues through reading of parliamentary Acts, I also read the documentation of our government recognition of these historical injustices and the more recent attempts at processes of redress. From the 1995 Waikato-Tainui Deed of Settlement, I identify the recorded apology by the Crown to Waikato-Tainui peoples for 'sending imperial forces across the Mangataawhiri [River], for the loss of life and devastation of property that ensued, for the confiscation of Waikato-Tainui lands and for the crippling effects of *raupatu* on Waikato-Tainui' (New Zealand Government, 1995, 6). (*Raupatu* is a Māori word meaning

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

confiscation or land taken by force) The apology acknowledges that Waikato people were unfairly labelled as rebels, that 1.2 million acres of land were confiscated, that the war resulted in the loss of lives, suffering and devastation of property and that this had a 'crippling impact on the welfare, economy and development of Waikato' (New Zealand Government, 1995, 6). Subsequently, local Waikato-Tainui sub-tribes for whom this land was home have experienced generations of deprivation, anguish and heartache as a result of *raupatu*—the forceful seizure of their lands by colonial forces. In my lifetime, we peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand have been collectively working through historic land grievances to gain recognition and seek compensation, not only in Waikato but across our country. In the last twenty years, Waikato-Tainui peoples have sought and successfully gained some redress through government processes.

In relation to the land on which The University of Waikato stands, the 1995 Waikato-Tainui Deed of Settlement resulted in the signing of a lease agreement between the university and Waikato-Tainui, thus taking a step towards local sub-tribes sharing in the decision-making, economic benefit and cultural potential of the university. In 2014, the university celebrated 50 years, and the Hamilton City Council controversially 'celebrated' 150 years since the founding of the city. In contrast, Waikato-Tainui peoples commemorated *raupatu*—the day Crown forces invaded their homes and confiscated their lands. The simultaneous timing of these three events reveals the contested nature of our histories and the complexity of our relationships to land. Once tribal homelands, this place is now a suburb home to many immigrants. Once the site of violent wars, this place is now a centre for the dairy industry, for elite sport, education, Māori research and academic inquiry. Once illegally stolen lands, this place is now a site of careful re-negotiation of responsibilities and guardianship.

Listening to the Right Honorable Nanaia Mahutu (2005) contributing to the final parliamentary reading of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims Settlement Act, we dancers discuss these ongoing processes of redress.

Raupatu

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to contribute to this the third and final reading of the Waikato River Settlement Bill. I acknowledge the many who have gone before us: those old people who carried the burden of *raupatu* until such a time that history might be corrected, resolution reached and redress made to the peoples of Waikato ... The settlement should be understood in conjunction with the 1995 Waikato Raupatu Lands Claim settlement, which went some way to reconciling the confiscation of over 1.25 million acres of Waikato land including the Waikato River. The settlement should be understood against the backdrop of several outstanding claims yet to be resolved, namely Maioro, Wairoa, and the west coast harbours of Manukau, Whāingaroa, Aotea and Kawhia. Once the remainder of those claims have been settled, then the Crown will have fulfilled a long-standing, fiduciary obligation to Waikato

K. BARBOUR

for the unjust and illegal confiscation suffered by Waikato in the 1860s. (Mahuta, 2005)

In the dance: slowly walking forward, solidarity and unified purpose in sure steps, a-rhythmic gestures of remembered pain, loss, anger and violence. Staring direct, hands raking face and throat, clutching at the belly, clenching into fists and grasping desperately at meaning. Breathy wooden flutes screaming protest, pitch building, echoing tides of grief, tearing at our hearts. Recalling long marches across our lands, dramatic intensity building, moving to centre front, confronting, challenging—remember, remember, remember! Here is a place and a time for remembering.



Figure 10.2. *Whenua* (2014) featuring Lucy-Margaux Marinkovich, Sophie Williams and Helene Burgstaller. Photo by Chloe Palmer

As the creative process deepens, Nanaia Mahuta's voice echoes through our improvisations. We move in response to words that have embodied resonance—burden, redress, unjust, suffering, illegal, settlement and obligation. Drawing on personal experiences (Shapiro, 1999), each of the dancers also share their own local stories and we discuss our concerns about the destruction of land through mining, the sale of land to foreign and non-resident owners, and the loss of significant tribal lands across our country. Our discussions support the embodiment of these ideas in very personalised ways that reveal gestures of protest and allow emotion to arise. In Photo 2 above, such moments of protest and intense emotions experienced by the dancers are captured. While a sensory engagement offers a beginning in deepening a sense of place and in creating a place-responsive choreography, raising awareness about issues of social justice and environmental concern requires remembering, understanding histories and the willingness to face the past so that action can be taken in the future.

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

Thus, in this section of the dance *Whenua*, a narrative sense of place was derived from researching and telling of stories of how the place came to be, considering moments of cultural significance in 150 years of conflict, and from embodied responses to stories of place (Raffan, 1992, 1993). And further, we also developed a toponymic sense of place based on an understanding of the origin, significance and the very processes of naming itself (Raffan, 1992, 1993; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

Experiential, spiritual, narrative and toponymic sense of place all contribute to a deepening of sense of place over time for local residents. This deepening sense of place providing an experience of security and rootedness conceptualized as 'topophilia': dwelling in and love of specific places (Anderson & Erskine, 2014, 131; Barbour, in press; Tuan, 1974). This kind of affective bond between peoples and places encompasses the changes that occur over centuries and across generations, as well as the kind of permeability of such experiences of place (Massey, 1994). Places are thus much more than locations: 'they are sites of lived experience and meaning making' (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, 67).

While the concept of topophilia may resonate for some people, especially for those for whom forming an affective bond with place is possible, understandings about place also depend on cultural and political contexts. Not all peoples develop a deep sense of place, and for some, a sense of place may be accompanied by generations of grief and loss. For others, journeys away from place provide the opportunity to recognize the significance of relationship to familiar places and the way in which place clearly shapes personal and cultural identity (Barbour, 2011, in press; Gegeo, 2001; hooks, 2009; Tuan, 1974). Anderson and Erskine suggest that the concept of 'tropophilia'—a love of movement, 'mobility, change and transformation in the person-place relation,' is also important in understanding the range of ways people experience relationships with place (Anderson & Erskine, 2014, 142; Barbour, in press).

Whether developing a relationship to place based in security and habitual dwelling, entangled with grief and loss, or in movement and transformation across multiple places, place effects our engagement with, our embodiment, and our action in the world. Embodiment implicates us in place and place affects our embodiment. I suggest that sensory encounter may lead to experiential, spiritual, narrative and toponymic sense of place. Further, such a sense of place, whether topophilic or tropophilic, supports the potential for awareness of issues relating to social justice, care and responsibility, as well as the potential for activism.

PLACE-RESPONSIVE ACTIVISM

Initially, our sensory encounter and embodied responses focused on representing the place as it appeared and as we experienced it at the time. However, as I uncovered multiple narratives of this local place, I began to consider what the place might be teaching me personally about feminist activism and how I might share this with the

K. BARBOUR

dancers as research participants. Issues of justice, care, responsibility and activism related to place became key within the research and creation of this autoethnographic performance of *Whemua*. Already the voices of land activist Eva Rickard who I remembered from my childhood, and current local Minister of Parliament Nanaia Mahuta, informed the creative process. All around me in the community, and well as in local academic research, were voices prompting reflection, raising awareness and driving activism. While I point to some of this academic research (for examples see chapters in Rinehart, Barbour, & Pope, 2014; Smith, 1999), one community example to describe is the Waikato Regional Council *Halo* conservation and sustainability project relating to native birds. This project supports the return of the beautiful Tūi to the region through planting flowering native species that attract the birds and controlling pests in their breeding areas. Planting on campus and nearby suburbs has resulted in the welcome and audible presence of the highly articulate and multi-vocal Tūi. A common Māori saying about Tūi: 'he korokoro Tūi' likens great orators to the Tūi. The Tūi are, in a sense, voices of the land, of this place and these voices are now being heard more and more in our region.

When I reflected on the voices of feminist activists from Waikato, two more strong women stood out as leaders for change. Firstly, I thought of the Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, current Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Chair of the United Nations Development Group. Secondly, I thought of the Right Honourable Dr Marilyn Waring, economist and former Minister of Parliament, and currently Professor of Public Policy. Both Waikato women speak to New Zealanders and well beyond our islands through their contributions as feminist and political leaders in the international community. Listening to key speeches from these women (for example see Clark, 2007, 2013 & Waring, 2011, 2014) was part of the research process for me and became an improvisational stimulus for the dancers in the studio. These four women leaders—Eva, Nanaia, Helen and Marilyn—independently informed my understanding of relationships between issues for women and land from cultural, spiritual, environmental, political and economic perspectives. What also emerged from working with the speeches in the dance studio was my decision to integrate the speeches into the sound score for performance. Thus, these texts were both informative in the research process and explicit in the performance.

Further, I began to wonder whether there was something unique about growing up in Waikato that had attuned these women towards activism locally, nationally and internationally. How was this place affecting and teaching me about justice, care and responsibility for place? I wondered how I might share these concerns with audiences through the performances of *Whemua*.

My personal, sensory encounter with place, and with voices of this place led me further to embrace issues of personal and cultural identity and to consider national identity. I also wanted to integrate the rich discussion of these issues with the dancers during the creative process of *Whemua*. However, the texts from Helen Clark (2007, 2013) and Marilyn Waring (2011, 2014) focussed on national nuclear-free and

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

sustainability agendas, and critical commentary on the consequences of economic models as applied to the work of women in the home and to the commodification of ecological systems. The concepts and words used in these speeches by Helen and Marilyn were challenging texts to embody.

Sustainability

I do believe that in the years to come, the pride we take in our quest for sustainability and carbon neutrality will define our nation, as our quest for a nuclear free world has over the past 23 years. More than any other developed nation, New Zealand needs to go the extra mile to lower greenhouse gas emissions and increase sustainability. In our high-value markets in Europe, we face increasing pressure on our trade and tourism from competitors who are all too ready to use against us, the distance our goods must travel to market and the distance tourists must travel to us. (Clark 2007)

Commodification

What's the cost, or what price do we pay, to give visibility to non-market activities in a patently pathological value system? Do we really want the environment to be commodified into an economic model, and must there be only one model, and must economics be at the centre? Can we really think of valuing a 2000-year old tropical rainforest, without accounting for 20 plus ecosystems, sixty reptile species—What are we going to do? What's the zoo trade on something these days?—hundreds of endangered bird and plant varieties, with the same tools that value the production and use of weapons and armaments which kill civilian populations and destroy their environments every day. (Waring, 2011)

Working in the studio, these texts were challenging to improvise with because they did not resonate in my body, or those of the dancers, in the same ways that the words from Eva's and Nanaia's speeches did. Listening to the speeches with the dancers, I instead suggested we identify a few words that we heard clearly and we discussed how we understood these concepts, struggling to find resonance in our bodies. What does it mean to embody the concepts of 'sustainability,' 'carbon neutrality' or 'commodification,' and then to represent and communicate these concepts to an audience through movement? I understood, as did the dancers each to differing degrees, sustainability concerns in creative processes (Barbour, 2008), and we appreciated sustainability in relation to our career development. We each knew how it felt to have our dancing bodies objectified as sexual objects and commodified—recalling uncomfortable experiences in which photos of our dancing had been appropriated for marketing unrelated 'products' or used without our permission. These experiences were at least a beginning point.

We did understand sustainable practices as those in which people act without depleting or damaging, and in which we consider nurturing and enabling people,

K. BARBOUR

now and for the future, to provide for social, economic and cultural wellbeing, health and safety (Collin, 2004; Earth Charter Aotearoa, 2006). Sustainability is integral to developing respect and care, protection, conservation and restoration of diverse communities of life, and to social and economic justice, tolerance and peace. However, 'sustainability can only be addressed in practice, at site- and species-specific levels,' and 'sustainability must also take into account the fact that natural species, ecosystems and processes are always in a state of flux' (New Zealand Conservation Authority, 1997, 132). Given that places are sites of meaning making, and are dynamic and changing, any understanding of sustainability in terms of maintaining balance over time would seem to be entirely specific to the place, human process or other system (Earth Charter Aotearoa, 2006; UNESCO, 2002). How we dancers experience sustainability is thus uniquely related to our dancing cultures and the places in which we are located—as unique as the sustainable projects set up by our Waikato Regional Council to support the Tūi.

While we had some personal connection to the concept of sustainability and commodification, beyond general considerations it seemed that other concepts were just out of reach in our usual processes for sensory encounter. This embodied experience reflected our partial understandings of critical global economics, particularly in terms of market forces and agendas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the aim towards carbon neutrality and the arguably valuable practice of carbon trading.

Improvising in the dance studio, I focused on these concepts myself and then invited the dancers to do the same, imagining the words placed around each of us in the space—some concepts above and in front of us, others behind or below, and near or far—depending on our personal and partial understandings of the ideas. Movement material was born in the experience of trying to create connections between these concepts through our bodies, rather than embodied expression of the concepts.

For example, I had useful understandings of nurturing, ecological relationships and even sustainability as these concepts related to practices I experienced. However, when I reached to outwards into the distance striving make connections with the notions of 'critical global economics' I struggled to develop movement motifs that expressed my partial understandings. But I could generate a movement pathway from my reaching to something abstract and returning back to my own experience and movement gestures. What assisted creating connections were the arguments of Marilyn Waring (1988, 1989) about the value of the everyday work I undertake in managing my home. Through this connection I then discovered other movement pathways between understanding the devaluing of the work of women in predominantly patriarchal western societies and the devaluing and destruction of the environment as our home (Warren, 1994). These movement pathways were not necessarily direct or linear connections from one place to the next (like following a well worn path from office to car park), but instead sometime convoluted and circuitous connections (rather like a leisurely walk in the park with family). Thus

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

improvisations led to solo movement motifs and phrases that then could be crafted choreographically, in some cases deliberately synchronising the performance of motifs with the timing of the words in the text and at others, allowing our embodied ways of knowing to reveal connections we might not otherwise have discovered.

In the dance: Slicing through the air, her arm traces a horizontal line before hands return to belly and then to throat, neck stretched before her hand releases her jaw suddenly. Stepping with care, hands now reaching to the earth, she offers her question, opening sternum and heart in a moment of grace and clarity. Then, wrenched from this moment of grace, she is turning through space, limbs twisting and arms wrapping as she is caught in a web of her own oppositional forces, finally breaking through, toe tracing a wild arc through the space. Bird-like delicacy again, a dance of shifting positions from empathetic care for endangered species, to human agendas to commodify, wiping hands of the business of capitalism. Despair in the face of loss, she arches to the ground, arms spread wide to lie face down.



Figure 10.3. *Whenua* (2014) featuring Helene Burgstaller.
Photo by Chloe Palmer

K. BARBOUR

Reflecting upon her contribution to critical global economics, Marilyn Waring (2011) effectively asked what happens when we attempt to commodify a very localised, and entirely specific human process or ecological system through the application of global or economic models. In accordance, I question too what happens when we ignore our local places in our global activism, focusing for example on issues of sustainability and carbon trading in global terms without reference to the narratives of this place. I consider too what happens when we ignore our embodied experience in local places in our striving to participate in the international political or research communities. We remain embodied in a specific place in the world. We must care first for our own place. Sensory encounter over time supports the emergence of a sense of place.

In this autoethnographic performance, each of us add our 'voices'—our embodiment, our 'weight' in our dancerly ways—to previous activism. As we 'stand up' in front of others, yet more questions arise for me: how do we share these performances of *Whenua* to continue to prompt our friends, family, colleagues and communities to debate these issues? In what small ways can we join with the voices of this place?

EMBODIED ACTIVISM

Each time I immerse myself in a creative process, as I did for *Whenua*, I am acutely reminded that it is to my embodied ways of knowing that I turn to understand myself, my relationships with others and with the world around me (Barbour, 2011). As dancers immersed in improvisational and choreographic activities in the dance studio, we were able to utilise our embodied ways of knowing to discover new connections with and between understandings, and to develop movement representations of our knowledge in autoethnographic performance. The questions Marilyn Waring asked (2014) apply to us as dancers working in our local community and equally to our international research community. For me, the creative process in dance making returns me to questions of knowledge, knowing and knowers.

Knowledge

How do we know what we know? Who do we learn from and what do we do with it? Do we see ourselves as curious enquirers all of our lives? Or do we become lazy and think that the media and Wikipedia are reliable teachers? Are we even conscious of how differently people know what they know? (Waring, 2014)

Thus, drawing these many disparate concepts, questions, narratives and sensory responses to place together, a final text emerged from me for this autoethnographic performance. This is my voice and I choose to speak this text aloud, allowing my words as a dancer to interact in the moment of performance with the speeches of Waikato activists. I wondered how this dancerly embodied activism would be experienced.

PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

In my heart: ecological feminism, whether we talk of whenua as land or whenua as placenta, we are all sustained by land.

In this land: Waikato, we remember and we seek redress, for attack, confiscation, violation; we must lift the burden of raupatu.

In these voices: he korokoro tūi, fiduciary responsibility, spirituality, critical global economics; women participating, women leading.



*Figure 10.4. Whenua (2014) featuring Karen Barbour.
Photo by Chloe Palmer*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the creative process of this research project *Whenua* revealed traces of our movement between embodied experiences in sensory encounter, local place-responsive activism and partial understandings of global environmental and economic concerns. Some of the embodied ways of knowing I returned to drew on sensory somatic encounters in which I located myself in a specific place, to generate movement motifs and phrases that allowed me to express my sensory and

K. BARBOUR

spiritual experience. Sharing these methods with dancers, we then worked together to create pathways between ideas and represented these experiences, drawing on our crucial knowledge of choreographic crafting and live performance. Beginning from sensory encounter myself, I chose embodied experience to represent this research, trusting in the affective potential of dance to evoke kinaesthetic and emotional responses in audiences. In this affective epistemological work we were not interpreting a text, nor creating a new performance text exactly either. We were representing ourselves as knowers, engaging in embodied ways of knowing and embodying knowledge that we wished to share with our communities of researchers, artists and residents.

Thus I conclude that process as a whole spiralled both inwards and outwards for me and the dancing research participants: from sensory encounter outwards to questions of epistemology—of what counts as knowledge, how we know and who can be a knower. Spiralling inwards, dancing becomes an embodied way of knowing. Embodying creative connections across the disciplines through the autoethnographic performance of *Whenua*, we have together developed new engagements with our local place, and new relationships between place, identity and feminist activism. Embodied ways of knowing offered methods of sensory encounter and participatory observation with places that evoked a sense of belonging, connectedness and responsibility. I offer a challenge to other ethnographers and autoethnographers, to other artists and community members, to deepen sensory encounter and embodied engagement with specific places, to raise awareness of social and environmental issues and to reflect upon what your own place may teach you about activism.

Finally, my challenge to researchers in general is to be receptive to performative and artistic representational methods that are not necessarily textual, and to recognise that critical ethnographic research and autoethnographic performance does offer new insights in affective, sensory and embodied ways to extend understandings of self, culture and place.

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PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

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K. BARBOUR

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PLACE-RESPONSIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTIVISM

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