

CHOREOGRAPHING *THE SITE*, EXCAVATING THE DANCE

Rosemary Butcher and the convergence of archaeology with dance performance

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In 1983, British contemporary choreographer Rosemary Butcher created and premiered her dance work *The Site* inspired by images and ideas from archaeology. Although previous works by Butcher had been concerned with time, space and, tangentially, memory, it was *The Site* that crystallised these themes of interest, framing them, in the conception of this work, in archaeological terms. *The Site* develops a complex interrogation of human beings' relation with land and history, an exploration that proceeds through the body and remains rooted in the physical, while also elaborating metaphysical concerns. Such themes have continued to preoccupy Butcher in subsequent works like *Touch the Earth* (1987), *Body as Site* (1993) and *Fractured Landscapes, Fragmented Narratives* (1997), extending also into her present interest in the choreographic potential of geographical thinking (Butcher 2003). *The Site* also embodied a shift in the kind of impact made by Butcher's choreography: Meisner (1997) notes how its "palpable humanistic charge" created an emotional resonance that would previously have been deliberately damped by the choreographer in her search for minimalist abstraction (23). This essay will examine both the process of *The Site*'s creation, its impact on the viewer and the themes that emerge from the work, exploring its significance for our understanding of the common ground between dance performance and archaeology.

Dance Analysis and its Materials: Reconstructing Performance through Writing

The reconstruction through writing of dance events like *The Site* is a process fraught with hesitations, although these uncertainties tend to be masked by the assertoric force of the statements (like those in my introductory paragraph) that finally make it onto the page. The dance writer's tentativeness derives partly from the awareness that any description, discussion or analysis will be more a question of juggling fragmentary traces than simply recovering and recording past performance. In the case of *The Site*, I did not even see the work when it was first performed, indeed have not seen it in live performance at all, so cannot say I know or know about it in any direct or unmediated way. And yet I do know something of it, glimpsing this through the prism of scraps of conversation, writing and video records. I have heard Butcher talk about the work, seen it listed and discussed in accounts of her choreographic career, read reviews of the premier and of reconstructions, perused analyses of their significance, seen photos and watched what the video camera could capture of particular performances in particular places. All this contributes to my sense of what this work is, or might be. Such traces provide the substance of my necessarily fragmentary knowledge of the dance and what it is about. But even as I admit that such knowledge is necessarily incomplete, the spectre of ideal understanding hovers - as if it were possible wholly to recover the work and its resonance in performance, rendering them present again. To some extent, this illusion drives dance writing, which pursues the living moving human body in all the fullness of its presence despite the sometimes painful awareness that it remains irrecoverable, if indeed it was ever fully present at all.

As Lopez y Royo (2002) suggests, the parallels between the tasks of dance analyst and archaeologist are striking. Both seek in some way to recover the past on the basis of

the material traces that subsist. Both labour in pursuit of a vanished event, or set of events, or social practice which can be glimpsed and partially reconstructed via a painstaking sifting of its remains. Those remains and the field of investigation may not be of the same order: the dance writer generally focuses on works from early modern, modern or contemporary history, from periods in which written records are relatively copious (although written records specifically about dance may be notoriously scarce); the archaeologist, in the popular imagination at least, has been more preoccupied with ancient and prehistory and with interpreting material remains rather than (or alongside) verbal accounts. For some, the focus on material culture or verbal documentation marks the difference between two incommensurate interpretative practices:

“the material the archaeologist finds does not tell us directly what to think. Historical records make statements, offer opinions, pass judgements (even if those statements and judgements themselves need to be interpreted). The objects that archaeologists discover, on the other hand, tell us nothing directly in themselves. It is *we* today who have to make sense of these things.” (Renfrew & Bahn 2000, 12)

And it is true that the dance analyst sees through the lens of others’ interpretations - those of dance critics reviewing the work, those of the camera operatives and editors who create the video records of performances, those of other analysts and historians who have already commented on the dance in question. It is also the case that archaeological interpretations are not formed in a vacuum or hermeneutically neutral space: past understandings of this and other material cultures create a horizon of expectations and concepts against which current interpretations take shape, as recent developments in archaeological theory have been keen to stress (Hodder et al. 1995, Tilley Ed. 1993, Bapty & Yates Eds. 1990). These developments have also

problematised the traditional distinction between the historian and the archaeologist: “[w]hereas more traditional historians would be more inclined to work with written texts and disregard material culture which was the domain of erstwhile antiquarians (the ‘ancestors’ of modern archaeologists), cultural historians tend to go beyond these boundaries and so do interpretive archaeologists” (Lopez y Royo 2002, 146).

The nature of dance as a live performance art - and one which, according to some, it is impossible to capture fully in language – can also place past works far out of reach despite their apparent temporal proximity. Even a dance writer like myself who is largely concerned with contemporary dance, with works in a post-modern idiom performed in the last two or three decades, often finds herself in the position of the archaeologist – trying to weave a coherent interpretation through piecemeal, discontinuous remnants. And, even though these remnants may offer verbal or visual interpretations of the dance, they also have a material dimension; the labour of uncovering, sifting and piecing together these remains gets occluded by the veneer of words, but this physical activity is still a condition of the analysis happening at all. The material remains of Butcher’s *The Site* were dispersed around a number of locations. The choreographer suggested, in conversation (Butcher 2003), that they could be best recovered by my accompanying her as she moved her belongings and archives from one office to another thirty miles away. We spent a day collecting up, sifting through, boxing up, lifting, moving and stacking videos in plastic cases, files stuffed with paper, the occasional portfolio of photographs, books – a flood of debris from which would occasionally surface an object, a document or a file related to *The Site*. The physical experience of the dust, the toil involved in unearthing these remains might easily be forgotten as their significance (the meanings of the words making up the documents, the images on the video cassettes) begins to obscure their material reality (black marks on

yellowing paper, plastic casings over reels of magnetic tape). Yet that physical experience too – like the labour of archaeological excavation work – has helped determine the interpretative shape this writing now assumes.

Indeed, part of the interest of *The Site*, Butcher's work and, perhaps, dance in general from the perspective of archaeology is the way in which they foreground embodied experience as a bedrock of understanding. Recent archaeological theory has emphasised the value of thinking through the body, through the sensorium, in the effort to understand “society felt and suffered as well as rationally thought” (Pearson & Shanks 2001, 10). Lopez y Royo discusses the relationship between dance and archaeology partly in the effort “to remind fellow archaeologists that archaeology needs to deal with living bodies and human beings, people who experience a range of emotions, who think with their bodies and are engaged in actions (2002, 148). In what follows, I shall try to explore the different ways in which *The Site* and its analysis engage with embodied experience in relation to other archaeological and conceptual concerns.

Making and viewing *The Site*

Rosemary Butcher's choreography develops many of the concerns of American post-modern dance (see Banes 1987), which she experienced at first hand during time spent in New York in the early 1970s¹. American dance postmodernism, in its first wave at least, was based on a rejection of the codified techniques, overt expressionism and

¹ Butcher also studied dance at Dartington College in Devon and at the University of Maryland.

For further discussion of Butcher's background and the significance of her experience in the US, see Meisner (1987) and Jordan (1992).

linear narrative structures of its modern forebear. The early work of artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Anna Halprin explored the choreographic potential of pedestrian movement and improvisatory structures, concerning itself more with movement as such than as a vehicle for a pre-defined narrative or emotional content. In its abstraction and minimalism, Butcher's own practice has adopted a similar approach, exploiting and expanding the resources of the relaxed body of everyday movement behaviour: the result is an "economy of action and rigorous attention to detail", which often "parses down movement to a daring simplicity" and a "clean and focused motility" (Dodds 1997, 7). In the process of both stripping movement bare and constructing a new vocabulary for each work, Butcher's dancers play an active role:

"The structure evolves through continual development at rehearsals, through information given to the dancers, through ideas that to a large extent [are] thrown out at random and are worked through the performers' thinking processes to emerge as possible movement ideas. I then incorporate, or else reject, these into the completed work. It is this working process that is fundamental to my creative process, but it does require intelligent and creative dancers" (Butcher 1992, 21)

The movement is thus often generated by the performers on the basis of verbal instructions offered by Butcher, who then experiments with its substance by altering the character of the instruction, selecting and discarding elements according to their formal or conceptual interest. Although this process sometimes (indeed increasingly) culminates in setting material for performance, works such as *The Site* have an improvisatory structure that allows the dancers also to make decisions in the moment of

presenting works to their audience. This autonomy is framed by the parameters relating to range and quality of movement identified in advance by the choreographer.

Butcher's mode of working and conceptual concerns have many affinities with forms of visual art practice, particularly in respect of her interest in space and form. She has often chosen to present her work in galleries rather than traditional theatre spaces, in the attempt avoid the linear structure imposed by the temporality of story-based theatre dance: "I'm trying to evoke a situation where you go in and look at, something which is already there" (Butcher cited in Meisner 1997, 25). Connections with the visual arts have also been forged through Butcher's numerous collaborations with designers, sculptors, installation artists and architects, geared towards the construction of specific environments for the dance material. These environments are partly the products of the collaborating artists' quasi-autonomous creative processes, but also evolve in relation to Butcher's governing ideas for the works in question. The choreographic interrogation of space and place has intensified with the possibilities thrown up by these collaborations.

Butcher experimented in the late 1970s with site-specific performance, creating works such as *Dances for Different Spaces* (1978), to which choreographic changes were made to suit each the performance location. *Passage North East* (1976) was made in and for the space outside the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol. Here, the givens of the environment helped to structure the dance and determine the character of the movement material: the site afforded different perspectives on the action, which began on the far side of the river, gradually drawing closer to conclude on the landing stage (see Jordan 1992, 173; Meisner 1987, 18). But with subsequent installation works, such as *Spaces 4* (1981) and *Imprints* (1983), there was a shift to a different kind of interrogation of site. Experiences of outside environments were embodied in sets created for inside

performance spaces. With *Imprints*, for example, the decision by Butcher and Hans Dieter Pietsch (her collaborator also on *Spaces 4*, the 1982 work *Traces* and *The Site*) to carve up the performance space with two large partitions was born of watching dancers improvise around two sheets of corrugated iron in Wapping (Meisner 1987, 19). In such installation pieces, Butcher and her collaborators are not interested in representing the surface reality or appearance of outdoor locations; rather, the *idea* of an environment is abstracted from the surface detail and reconstructed as a performance location. A similar economy of means, a stripping away of superfluties, is evident here as in Butcher's pared down movement vocabulary. And the formal and conceptual dimensions of the installations, like those of the movement, are thus accentuated. This abstraction does not, however, necessarily entail a cool elimination of more human concerns. Indeed, in cases like that of *The Site* (and as will be argued below), it actually intensifies the sensuous and emotive force of the choreography.

The Site was first conceived in response to the experience of visiting the remains of a hill fort near Castle Drogo in Devon, which provoked a feeling of "exhilaration at the bleakness and vastness of things" (Butcher 2003). This embodied experience of a particular place furnished the ground for investigating choreographically the very idea of site. In this sense, Butcher's process parallels that of archaeologists whose research, as Pearson & Shanks (2001) point out, develops out of a prior embodied engagement with the environment: "[a]rchaeologists walk the land, observing, recording, drawing, telling [... and] primacy should be given to this general attention to land [... which] comes before, and subsumes, interventions in the land – excavations, so often considered the defining archaeological activity" (37). Butcher's reaction to the charged atmosphere of the hill fort site inspired a period of book-based research into archaeology as a discipline, its associated concepts and activities. This research in turn

informed Butcher's work in the studio. The terminology of archaeological digs in particular was then used as a starting point for the generation of movement by Butcher's three dancers². Performers and choreographer experimented with embodying the actions both described and implied by particular words: "dragging, post-holing (making a landmark), scraping away, pinning [...], underpinning, tunnelling, invading someone else's territory, interfering with others at work on the site" (Butcher, cited in Jordan 1992, 175). The movement produced refers – sometimes explicitly, sometimes obliquely - to the original excavatory activity that the word describes.

Pietsch's design for *The Site* also embodied references to archaeological excavation. The installation for the original 1983 production consisted of roughly cut fragments of half-inch thick *papier maché* floor covering, arranged in a rectangle open at the side facing and closest to the public. Four fluorescent light tubes were positioned on top of the paper pulp, also marking the sides of the rectangle, a territory clearly delineated as a site of special interest. While the fluorescent strips illuminated the detail of the movement happening above, they were also placed at ground level to give a sense of the depths below (Butcher 2003). The 1997 reconstruction of *The Site* replaced paper pulp with soil, but retained the stark contrast between this substance and the strip lighting, as well as the rectilinear shape of the space. In both versions, the dancers' movement happens both inside and on the boundaries of this rectangle. The performers' relation to the rough "ground" of Pietsch's installation shifts with the level of their movement: at times, they walk slowly backwards, dragging their feet in order to feel the texture of the

² The three dancers in the original 1983 production were Gaby Agis, Denis Greenwood and Helen Roswell. In the 1997 reconstruction, a videoed performance of which forms the basis for much of the analysis that follows here, Agis and Roswell were replaced by Fin Walker and Gill Clarke.

uneven surface; or they will crouch close to the floor, trace a circle over it with a light touch of the fingers or feet, beat the ground with the side of the hand the ground in a sharp, rhythmic action. Sometimes they double over above the glowing lights, which harshly illuminate a section of an arm or the side of a face. These relationships to the environment subtly shift and evolve as the surrounding lighting and the glow from the fluorescent strips brightens and dims. Their evolution gives a sense of moving through a landscape - of the spectator's gaze panning across a wide horizon - even though the action is closely confined around the territory marked out in the centre of the space. The movement and the lighting also create a sense of this site's vertical dimension, the viewer's attention being directed to what is below the earth as well as to the action happening above ground.

The Site as a work thus bears the trace of Butcher's corporeal experience of a particular place, the archaeological site of the Devon hill fort. The installation transmutes that experience, embodying it in a new abstract form. The movement of *The Site* bears the traces of the actions described in the archaeological terminology used to generate the dance vocabulary, a terminology which itself bears the traces of the embodied actions it denotes and through which the gesture is refracted. The movement transforms while still carrying the imprint of the mundane gestures: "for example, I'd ask [the dancers] to pin to the ground; then I would transfer that to the body and ask them to pin to each other, so we got these very odd angles" (Butcher in Meisner 1997, 22). A number of movement motifs cluster around these ideas of dragging, scraping, pinning and marking out a territory. For example, at the beginning of the taped performance of the 1997 re-construction, the dancers lower their gaze to focus on the ground in front, as they walk slowly backwards. Their steps drag as though the earth is reluctant to release their feet from prolonged, sensuous contact. One dancer (Fin

Walker) steps forwards more deliberately, then stops pulling her right leg sharply back, her foot swishing the floor and her arms swinging to a standstill in counterbalance, her gaze still directed downwards. Another (Gill Clarke) drops suddenly and, partly supporting her weight on hands and feet, remains poised, ear to the ground as if listening intently. She then forms a fist with her left hand and uses it to mark a series of points on the floor in front of her face, her arm progressively straightening. Walker sinks slowly to all fours, very deliberately placing each hand in front, transferring her weight into her arms as she straightens each leg to the side; she carefully places each foot before giving in to gravity, twisting, then turning the upper torso (now parallel to the ground) to mark a fifth point in the sequence with her elbow. She then repeatedly traces a short line (as long as her position will allow) with her elbow on the floor, continuing to map out a complex pattern, or territory within a territory, by lifting her torso sufficiently to place forearm, then feet again, with obsessive precision. Clarke sits sweeping with her forearm and staring intently at a patch of ground before her.

But the movement also develops its own organic logic, moving beyond these actions to explore other corporeal states and spatial ideas that register with the viewer. Walker's upright body angles over to the side, the arm stretched above the head in a wide arc. Or Clarke's torso leans forwards, head tilted as if straining to catch the sounds emanating from the ground, one arm in front, its line broken at the wrist, the other reaching out behind. Denis Greenwood stands at the edge of the space, arms not quite fully extended into the surrounding atmosphere. Another recurring motif, to which each of the three dancers returns numerous times, is the body rolling down through the spine until bent double, arms and upper torso dangling, swinging gently from side to side. There are few moments of direct contact between the performers, who appear essentially as isolated figures who occupy the same landscape but make little concession to the others'

presence. At one point, Greenwood and Clarke crouch down to grasp the elbow of Walker who is lying contorted in the rectangle. Lifting her elbow gently off the floor, Clarke rolls Walker out of the space she has been occupying in order to take her place. Walker's response is to return to repetitively and obsessively tracing a line with her elbow. Another moment sees Clarke reaching down to grasp a standing Walker's foot and lifting it repeatedly, very slightly, to shuffle it forwards. Several minutes later, Walker reciprocates by shunting round in a circle the straightened arm of a supine Clarke.

The formal properties of the movement generated guided the selection of material in the process of the choreography's assemblage: "I would sift the images, keeping, discarding, and draw up rules for the improvisation in performance" (Butcher in Meisner 1997). But the metaphorical resonance of the actions - as of the archaeological terms highlighted by Butcher - is potentially much wider, moving their significance beyond the purely formal. The connotations of words such as "dragging", "post-holing", "pinning" and "scraping away" already suggest predicaments, or physicalised responses to a predicament - an obscure narrative or set of poetic associations which runs deep below the surface of the words' ordinariness. And Butcher's movement vocabulary too, despite its veneer of everydayness and the dancers' matter-of-fact manner, allows glimpses of a similar undercurrent which gathers force as the repetition of the ordinary intensifies. This undercurrent has the potential to disturb, indeed powerfully disrupts the calm monotony into which the work seems to settle. The choreographic images' cumulative effect is to reinforce the potentially sinister implications of movements that might initially have seemed strange but innocuous. For example, the image of a dancer lying ear to the ground, with body still alert and eyes open is repeated and multiplied, prompting unsettling questions about why there is no respite from wariness, what

ominous rumblings the dancers are straining to hear, why no comfort is found in the presence of others. As the work proceeds, one has this lurking sense of a drama unfolding, even erupting - a drama quite out of proportion with what is superficially apparent and, in fact, all the more alarming because it remains half submerged.

This undercurrent makes its presence felt through the dynamics of the work. There are frequent stillnesses, or quasi-stillnesses, where the only movement is that of one dancer's gently swinging arms. The pacing overall is slow, but occasionally a swift gesture with a stronger dynamic thrust breaks the monotony: such as Clarke's run backwards, feet dragging the floor in a sudden flurry of sound and activity; or Walker's turn initiated by a sharp cut inwards of the forearm, whose momentum the body then follows, twisting around and unfolding to stand upright arms suspended above the head. But even if the pace seems to quicken slightly towards the middle and end of the work, the movement often has a laboured quality – as though the pull of the earth is such that the dancers' gestures are enmeshed, unable to wrench themselves free. Sometimes this is tempered by the sudden straightening of a body or the reaching of an arm up and out into the space. But the attraction of the earth soon reasserts itself along with the viscosity of this world's atmosphere. The naturalness of an ordinary walk becomes awkwardness and discomfort as the knees bend, pulling the body's centre of gravity downwards and compromising the freedom and speed of its movement.

This sense of the dancers as enmeshed in their environment is particularly prominent in the 1997 reconstruction, where soil replaces Pietsch's original paper pulp. The dancers' engagement with the world of the installation becomes more visceral. The ground literally shifts beneath them and the patterns of their sweeping and tracing gestures leave traces of earth, at least until wiped out by other actions. The soil also

sticks to their costumes and bodies, and is visible particularly on the soles of their feet. And as the work progresses, the neatness of the rectilinear territory's boundaries is compromised, the soil spilling both into the empty space in the centre and out into the area beyond. The texture and associations of the soil with primitive naturalness are in sharp contrast with the uncompromising modernity and harshly artificial light of the fluorescent tubes. According to Meisner (1987), this bizarre juxtaposition was also striking in the original production: there, the paper pulp formed an "uneven ground, barren and primitive", alongside the neons in "a clashing combination of the modern and the ancient which becomes a metaphor for the meeting in archaeology of past and present" (19). The soundscape too dislocates time and space, combining and alternating between various forms of industrial noise and sounds that seem to amplify those of the natural world. The rush of sound that dominates the work's opening could be industrial roar or a loud wind blowing across a plain. In either case, it suggests a bleak landscape, to which the dark figures of the dancers belong in spite of its alienating hostility. A throbbing weaves its way at moments into the soundscape and could be a heartbeat, the pulsating of the earth or of an external force. More melodic notes begin to sound towards the middle and at the end of the performance, lending a poignancy to the human figures caught in this uncompromising territory to which they are nonetheless tied.

The improvised nature of the performance also lends a peculiar quality to the work and a complexity to the dancers' interaction – with one another and the environment. The work stages these relationships in a peculiarly immediate fashion, particular surroundings – this time, those of the performance itself - again making their physical imprint through the bodily action they inspire. A gesture may be sparked by another's movement, by the shifting lightscape, by the soundscore or the noises generated by the

performers: the swishing and scraping of arms and feet against the ground, as well as the dancers' breathing and the air movement resulting from their action, contribute to the dense layering of the atmosphere within which the performance happens. Appropriate physical response on the part of the performers depends on an acute sensory awareness of these surroundings. And this awareness is visible through the way the dancers hold themselves, their intense concentration contributing to the image of wariness that they project.

This wariness is not that of creatures who are simply "out of their element". Instead the dancers are both immersed in and attuned to their surroundings. And yet the intimacy of that relationship is neither naively harmonious nor comforting, but carries with it a dim yet potent threat. A few minutes before the end of the 1997 recorded performance, the camera pulls back to reveal virtually the whole of the rectangle: Clarke is standing in the upstage right corner, illuminated from below by one of the neon strips, her arm raised, torso inclined to her right, face angled down; Walker half crouches, half lies downstage left, the right hand side of her face glued to the ground; and Greenwood too is lying ear to the floor, his hand gently stroking the ground in front of his face. Such gestures and groupings, like their description, seem neutral and harmless enough. But towards the end of *The Site*, they have hardened into pictures of isolation, even desolation, although it remains difficult to identify how and why. In staging the idea of site and corporeal beings' interaction with the land through time, the work seems to touch on themes which extend way beyond the particularities of performance and archaeology. *The Site* seems to be tackling metaphysical concerns about the predicament of human being, thrown into the world and entangled in history and place. And the dance does so in a manner all the more troubling for its understatement.

Embodiment and Interpretation

This account of *The Site* is inevitably a partial one. It reflects only some aspects of the work. It is based on a personal response to the video record of one reconstructed performance, seen against the backdrop of other writings, the choreographer's own comments and photographic images of the dance. In some ways, that response – particularly my claims about *The Site*'s metaphysical resonance – seems out of proportion with the practical reality of what remains of the dance itself. Like Davis (1984), I am conscious of a “bewildering disparity between what the dances were actually doing and the considerable impact of the work” (37). When watching dance there is a balance to be struck between attending to the minute detail, the material reality of the event's remains and spinning a story, or developing a reflection, which bridges the gaps between traces. Arguably, the dance spectator is always active, constructing meaning in the light of present concerns rather than passively receiving a pre-constituted message already embedded, whole, in the performance (Pakes 2001). But in Butcher's work, the activity of spectatorship is intensified: the deliberately unspectacular, non-narrative, subtly expressive mode of her choreography does not impose a preferred interpretation so much as gradually elicit an imaginative reaction which muses on themes at the heart also of archaeological investigation: “the body (and its dilation in performance, warfare, death); space and place (site, locale, field); architecture (monument, enclosure, ruin); time; object; trace; memory [...]” (Pearson & Shanks 2001, 1).

Analysis of *The Site* points up numerous parallels between archaeological and dance activities. The choreographer excavates an idea, working down through the strata of human physicality to reveal the movement's core. The dance spectator develops a

reflection on the basis of the work's dense layering of movement material, installation, lightscape and soundscore; she endeavours to build a coherent interpretation from the abundance of semiotic fragments. And although the dance analyst also relies on verbal accounts, she too is wrestling with bodily, sculptural, visual and sonic forms of signification (albeit mediated by the video camera). Like the signifiers of material culture, this seem to mean in a manner "less logical and more immediate, use-bound and contextual" than that of discursive language (Hodder 1989, 72). Dance movement – and, perhaps, particularly movement like that of Butcher, which carries a reference to ordinary bodily action – is often neither "obviously representational" nor "immediately concerned with abstract meanings" but "depend[s] more on context [...] than on abstract grammars" (*ibid.*). In works like *The Site*, a new context for meaning is elaborated in relation to the guiding idea of the dance, and the movement takes on a new significance as part of a language woven around that idea: "my work should be the expression of a language of movement that is linked directly to an original concept" (Butcher 1992, 21). Butcher's *The Site* can be considered an excavation of the very idea of place and of present human beings' relationship to a landscape that harks back to a prehistoric past. But the conceptual reflection around this concept is grounded in the choreographer's physical and sensorial experience of a particular place. This experience is staged and rendered more general and abstract through its choreographic elaboration, so that it can impinge also on the sensorial awareness of dancers and spectators. In a process parallel to that of the choreographer, the archaeologist too stages the site, even as s/he moves beyond particularity to interpretations and explanations of more general significance.

Butcher's choreography restores a vivid sense (literally and metaphorically) of the texture of embodiment. In this, her work also evokes the physical dimension of human experience that can become submerged in floods of words. *The Site* thus stages not only

the idea of site but also the human sensorium in its response and relation to its environment. In this, *The Site*'s reflection on themes of interest to archaeologists delves far below the surface of its title's and its movement vocabulary's references to site excavation. The work shows how particular physical experiences and their material traces can imply – indeed are bound up with – metaphysical reflection on the temporal and spatial conditions of human being.

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