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Locator

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Essai

Locator

Simon Whitehead

*I come home and get lost
I get lost to come home
Home to body
Home to the here-now
Home to the holding of community (all the beings)*

*Locator is its own time, its own place
Locator is here, now, resonant in me*

Rachel Gomme. Dance Artist. September 2020

The locator series is a suite of residential workshops that happen annually, each in a different season. Beginning in autumn 1994 on the Llyn peninsula in north Wales locator has since largely played out in Tycanol, a sessile oak woodland and SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in north Pembrokeshire. An independent workshop created by movement artist Simon Whitehead locator is an ongoing forum to share ecological ideas through movement practice. These workshops offer a means through which we might experience and learn from the complex materiality of a location through a weave of walks, bodywork and prepared movement scores within the intensities of collective experimentation and living.

Location

Llyn



I arrive on Pen Llyn, north Wales in autumn 1993, moving from London. The migration is an instinctive one and having learned the tools of my postmodern dance practice in London and New York I am ready to take a leap and to engage with something other than the metropolitan orientation to studio practice. I want to be outdoors, outlying, out of place...somewhere I can reclaim a certain naivete and cultivate an openness to learn from the particular material conditions of this rural edge and to experience its affect on the ways I behave, move and think. Living in the small coastal village of Clynog Fawr, I am initially unhinged from any kind of familiar pattern of living and working. Later, I find a rhythm; I walk each morning, I visit the Neuadd (village hall) in the afternoon. Walking here, is a way for me to absorb the rhythmic topology of the place and to allow its beat to move through me, it is also a way to arrive. I gather objects and materials to work with, I make field recordings and I move amongst this eclectic assemblage. I become absorbed in the different atmospheres of this place as newcomer, it is as if the land is entering me and guiding me in a practice, a practice predicated on being alive to the affect of weather, topology and the forces of a more than human landscape. Opened up by this manoeuvre to the western edge and a relative solitary existence I can only witness and follow what streams through me. The modes of work emerge from something close to play and I feel a certain child-like excitement at what becomes revealed through the materials and the repeated discovery of these new places.

'I would say that the work on the Llyn used rhythm to create an embodied and musicalised sense of place. Through walking the landscape, I allowed it to

express itself through me in a way. The repetition of walking creates a rhythmic force-field or energy that produces a sense of immersion through the beat of the body. Every time you go for a walk, you allow the place to enter you differently ... touching and being touched by the landscape and what's in it.' (Lavery and Whitehead, *Bringing it all Back Home: towards an Ecology of Place. Performance Research. 2013: 114*)

In August 1994 I participated in Marina Abramovic's 5 day Clean the House workshop, a part of the Connected Bodies symposium in Amsterdam at SNDO. The workshop was to be a radical catalyst for reframing my work and an embodied realisation of the political power of sharing practice. The workshop was to allow me to reflect on how an artist's practice can be a powerful agent in opening experience and dialogue with others, whilst creating a particular kind of energised community and an antidote to the tyranny of arts production. *locator* grew out of this thinking and emerged out of living and working in the relative isolation of the Llyn Peninsula. Here, I began to experience an understanding of the need for creative community, a community in which to share and experiment with some of the emergent practices and ideas that were developing from this place. Practices that opened bodies up to the material affects of these particular surroundings and allowed them to move through what Bruno Latour, in his Actor Network Theory, calls a distributed agency. In this context, this agency was to implicate bodies, materials and the other than human within the continuous effect of movements on the mesh of relations in which they were located. As with any transient community, *locator* also proposes ways to be together in the making of home, a place to rest, to eat, to commune and somewhere to return to and, here, home is not simply a human thing. The residential nature of the workshop within its wider location allows an intensification of lived experience through a series of repetitive manoeuvres and the slow building of an ontology based in communal self-regulation and co-operation (cooking, caring for the space and clean-up is done collectively).

Tycanol

Since 1995 *Locator* has largely taken place in Tycanol, north Pembrokeshire (with a few forays elsewhere). Partly due to familiarity (my family and I now live close by) and based on practical considerations; the existence of a residential centre on the edge of these ancient woods facilitates an immediacy and unrestricted access to the landscape. With oak trees over 800 years old, Tycanol is a remnant of the woodland cover that emerged out of the past ice age and is part of the largest extent of ancient forest in West Wales. It extends through wet lowlands, rocky outcrops and towards the uplands of the Preseli hills. As well as its tree cover and clearings Tycanol is a major international site for lichens and over 400 species grow here. The site is managed as rare wood pasture, using seasonal grazing by ponies and sheep to maintain a balance of clearings and woodland cover that create the ideal conditions for lichen growth. The continuity of this management over time along with the

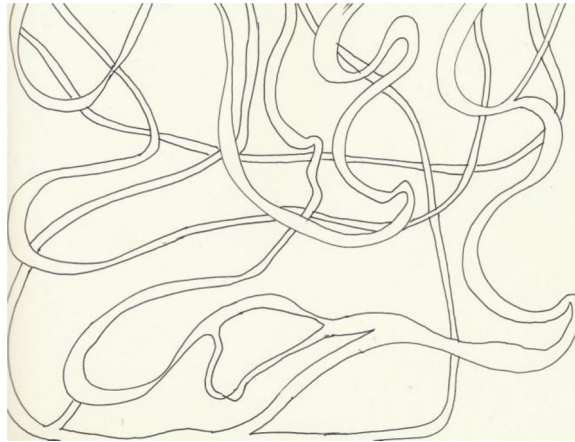
presence of neolithic structures engenders a rarefied experience of an ancient ecosystem along with its mixed up seasonal temporalities and spatial patternings. Over time, the woodland itself, the streams, outcrops, bird and animal life have infiltrated the practices and become a rich, shimmering actant in the experiences of participants. The age of the woodland, its relative quietude and benign power are important constituents and collaborators in the experiences of the workshop. Tycanol has become the home, the ecos of this work and is a generous agent in an attunement to the materiality of this other- than -human world. The woodland itself in its alterity, has engendered many of the practices and has become the terrestrial mnemonic of locator's traces.

Practice/assemblage

'The role of the refrain has often been emphasised: it is territorial, a territorial assemblage. Bird songs; the bird sings to mark its territory. (Deleuze and Guattari. *The Refrain. 1000 Plateaus*. (1987:363)

Typically locator follows a rhythmic refrain of leaving and returning from a locus -a kind of transformative sylvan exile, where the enactment of the refrain assembles the terrain itself, something that enfolds and vibrates within the body .

We begin the day with bodywork in small groups. Oriented in the field of biodynamic craniosacral touch and with movement scores rooted in authentic movement practice, this corporeal sensitisation is foundational to opening a field of receptivity and reciprocity to the place, ourselves and each other; an accumulating terrain of embodied experience. The expeditions into Tycanol follow on from these attunements, navigated through a series of walking and movement scores written for and from this place; usually happening in partnership with another person, small groups or occasionally alone. Over 4 or 5 days these processes repeat at different times of day and night. The woods are experienced intensively in a range of their nocturnal and diurnal conditions and of course, their seasonal variations. The last 24 hours is usually spent in fast, meals are replaced with rest, collective drawings or gentle movement and on the morning of the last day we walk to a point above the woods to watch the sunrise. Followed by a porridge breakfast, each participant is given half a day to make a performative response to, through or within a location. This is then shared later as part of a final walk through the woods to witness each other's work. The work is focussed on an accumulation of experience of the place in different conditions, shared within the community of practitioners and as an offering to the place. The repetition of these practices throughout the duration of locator provides a rhythm that opens each dancer to the touch of trees, lichens, bird life, weather and streams of Tycanol, allowing them to reside within and move through the body and reciprocally, for the place to be touched and imprinted by the dancer's movements.



Each Locator begins with a welcoming meal. The meal is usually preceded with a walk of the terrain. On the way out participants talk, share their journeys here, make conversation. On the turn, the invite is to return together in silence often through a darkening landscape (this is a circular pattern that is repeated throughout the coming days). On arrival back at the centre we eat soup, a soup that was prepared as the participants were journeying from their homes earlier in the day. (Locator soup; carrots, onions, leeks, cauliflower or greens, red lentils, barley, potatoes, garlic, vegetable stock, lovage, thyme or seasonal herbs + fresh rye bread, salad, cheese and nuts.)

Haze

Each workshop emerges from current practice, explored with participants. Rooted in developing an ecological consciousness through movement practice, ideas are woven into relationship within the fuzzy haze of located experience. The title locator was chosen at its inception because it seemed to emphasise the process of discovery that I was involved in. That is, an attempt to develop systems from which to learn from a place through immersion and a repeated refrain of walking, gathering and moving. However, locator has always been an ambivalent term. The practices reveal a haze of location- the work is never actually located in any essentialist way, it is a device to get into movement, to open a body towards a place; its motile situation and dislocations, and vice versa. Interesting things emerge from this opposition, my premise is that we always move from a position of displacement towards a disclosure of one's existence as part of an expanded weave. Being lost, in this sense, engenders a realisation that we are always passing through a world predicated on movement and flow and as the body opens to a place, the place in turn, opens to the body. The body is always haunted by these potentials, imprints are always left in both the body and the place, both revealed to the other. locator lives in this reciprocity, it has become a process of performing location in an infinite and embodied sense. The body is a motile location

in itself, a locus for letting the world in and this body is encouraged, through a system of sensate scores and tuning exercises, to open to the other than human forces of a woodland and to move and become lost within them, in a process of mutual becoming. The workshops create a perceptual framework in which the human is not the only actor. The practice attempts to engender the conditions in which a mover may experience a world in which she/he/they are enveloped by sensate materials and beings and continue to move in relationship with them. *'Simon attempts to produce location through sensation- training the pathic channels of the body to touch and be touched at the same time. The body that Simon is interested in forging is one that is slowed down, intensified, made receptive ...'*

(The Logic of Sensation. Carl Lavery. Glasgow. 2014:40)

Scores

Scores as embodied practices, are immanent with the possibility of expanded material experience, of a reorganising politics that proposes ways of being together, and of imagining ecologically identified movements and relationships that bind us to a terrestrial earth. These are affective systems for inculcating movement engendered through assemblages of ideas, images and materialities, often indeterminate in form, but repeatable. In locator, I make scores in order to think through the world in movement and to open up to encounters with other beings and materials. These orientations for dance can be methods to animate the ecological imagination and to experiment with mixed up materialities and identities. Currently I am proposing that the dance score, having evolved through a particular postmodern lineage, is implicit with the resources for, what Donna Haraway proposes (in her book of the same name) 'staying with the trouble' of the current epoch. The score, read as text, mark, being or object can offer us stories and practices that reimagine the dominant Anthropocene narrative and reconnect us to each other and with our surroundings with loving care. In locator, the repeated rhythm and weave of body-work, walking, rest, fasting and scoring at all times of day and night creates a field of intensity that attempts to slow everything down and attune the body-mind to the continual occurrence of location and to our capacity to be affected and implicated in its complexities.



Current

This June, Locator 30 was to orient to and attempt to make physical some of the ideas of post human philosopher Bruno Latour in his recent book 'Down to Earth' (2018) (it will now happen in June 2021). In his ecology of the late capitalist present, Latour identifies the ground, the soil as being on the move and animistic agents in the new order of things. Here the very foundations of land and placement have become destabilised and it is towards these conditions that we are called to reorient, and to land in a place. The implications of this earthly mobilisation foreground the imperative to learn anew ways to think through the chaos of the Anthropocene and to imagine alternative ways of being together as humans with the Earth. locator has always operated within what cultural theorists and the ecological sciences now refer to as the 'critical zone' of the Earth's biosphere and the physical, earthbound practices it proposes are commensurate with Latour's ideas for 'landing' together. It seems that relational dance practices have the capacity to remind us of our place as living beings on the earth as a political project. This relational proposal emphasises James Lovelock's Gaian thinking that living beings are always involved in a reciprocal process of fashioning the earth and everything we experience is an effect of this process; a world of agents in correspondence with each other.

Locator 30- Preparations for Landing

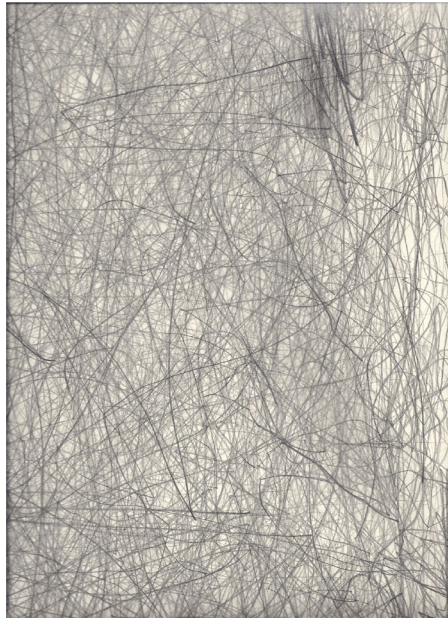
'There's nothing more innovative, nothing more present, subtle, technical and artificial ... nothing more creative, nothing more contemporary than to negotiate landing on some ground.' (Latour. 2018:18)



It is 25 years since Locator began on the Llyn Peninsula, so this year we return to the scene and landscapes of north Llyn to locate ourselves where this all began, as a way to orient to where we find ourselves now; living in a fundamentally different geo-political age and in a place of 'mixed up uncertainties. So, leaning into Bruno Latour's proposal to negotiate 'landing', we will ground ourselves in this place- walking, moving, drifting, eating, fasting, swimming, drawing and thinking; led by the patterns of weather, land, sea, atmosphere and the other beings we encounter. A time of gentle resistance to productivity and a time to land within the inspired fellowship of others.

Collection of scores

Collective drawing score (evening of the fast)



one large sheet of paper covers the dining table,
 each person has a pencil and situates them selves somewhere on the
 edge of the table.
 Hold the pencil in the non-dominant hand,
 on a cue, place the pencil on the paper, the pencil continues to move,
 follow its course for one hour in silence,
 the pencil does not leave the paper, one must negotiate its course
 with the others present
 at the end, remove the pencil and try to remember your trace
 amongst the others

Drift/materials score



(Hunters in the Snow. Locator 28

Wednesday evening. 20 December.2018)

Walk back in pairs through the dusk ... drift, no particular destination, One person finds a place where they are drawn to move- your partner witnesses. On completion gather an object or materials from this place, carry them with you. Continue to walk together, eventually the other person finds a place to move within, the other witnesses. On completion, more materials are gathered.

On return to the studio the materials are placed in the space, composed within an assemblage of many others.

SUPPER

After supper the group enters the darkened space.

Working with one's own gathered materials within a field of others.

Placing the body in relation to the materials,

Placing the materials on the body and moving in relationship.

Moving the materials and allowing the materials to move the body

Finding balance points of materials with materials and bodies, allow the materials to lead.

Notice the relationships between bodies and materials in the space

Taking time to observe the emerging landscape

Score for blanket and 2 people

(Locator 24: rest and resilience. 30 September 2014)



Take a walk in the woods with your blanket,
find somewhere to rest.
Decide who will move, the other observes.

Mover: take time to find a place for your blanket, fold it, arrange it in a way that it meets the scale of the place you are in and your body, lie down or rest somehow on the blanket, feel its warmth, its texture against your skin, fold it over you, give your weight to the ground through its layers, feel the ground meet your weight.

Close your eyes

REST HERE, whilst your partner watches and describes what they see in the immediacy of your environment and beyond- a composite description of the objects, scale, colours, views, details, movements and sensations that are observed, add pauses, so that the mover may hear.

The mover on the blanket listens and notices how this information begins to affect their sense of location.

The partner ends their spoken accompaniment after 5 minutes.

The mover begins to move, move from the scene that has been described and what you sense through your body, notice how moving here alters the scene and your felt sense of place.

The blanket may accompany you ...

The partner observes, keeps time,
let the mover know when 15 minutes have passed

End as the mover opens their eyes, if you can, make eye contact

Write/draw from the residue of the experience- 5 minutes

Repeat and exchange roles

Return to base and take time to reflect together on what happened, what remains

Nighttime score



2 people leave the building together in silence, one leads, drift into a relationship with the falling darkness within the woodland.

After a while, when the lead person finds a place they would like to settle into, stop and sit, joined by your partner, sitting back to back.

Registering the contact and feeling the relative warmth of touch through your vertical spines, tune to the constant flow of the cerebrospinal fluid within the dural tube of your spine. Slowly take your attention outwards from this contact towards and beyond the perceived horizon. Notice what you encounter in this experience.

At a point, the person who led here will begin to move. Leaving the support of your partner, proceed to move in relation to the changing conditions. Your partner observes, witnessing the event in fading light.

When complete, the mover returns to sit back to back. Both return to the contact and warmth between spines.

When the second partner is ready, separate and the cycle continues, walk and repeat into the falling darkness.

Eventually, return to the studio to write, draw and take time to reflect together.

Drawings:

Locator 24: The Beat

Locator 29: Everywhere

Locator 27: Tender is the Night

Locator 30: Preparations for Landing

Simon Whitehead is a movement artist and craniosacral therapist living in west Wales. Simon hosts the *Locator* workshop series and is a member of *Maynard*, an interdisciplinary artist collective that collaborate on a programme of engaged dance activity in the village of Abercych, working through on-going residencies, the village dance, workshops, local and international partnerships. As part of an AHRC-funded PhD(PaR), based at the University of Glasgow, he is currently exploring what posthuman ecology means with reference to an expanded choreography of touch.