

“DANCING THROUGH THE HARD STUFF”

Repetition, resilience, and female solidarity in
the landscape—Rosemary Lee’s *Passage for Par*

Rosemary Lee and Ruth Pethybridge

Introduction

This is a chapter of conversations, thoughts, and images that have arisen from within the choreographic process that became *Passage for Par*—a site-specific performance by Rosemary Lee performed in the summer of 2018. *Passage for Par* was commissioned by the Cornubian Arts and Science Trust (CAST) for the Groundwork program that bought international art to Cornwall in the South West of the UK.

As with many embodied processes, attempting to articulate the rich and varied experiences that came about through the intensive rehearsal process and long period of research and development is a somewhat daunting task. This is not to subscribe to a paradigm in which dance is a metaphysical language that cannot be understood in other terms but to acknowledge that representing a live process through writing is distinct from the original form and should not be viewed as equivalent to it. Embodied experience is a starting point for further reflections here; it values the knowledge generated by the practice itself rather than producing interpretations through particular analytical frameworks. Voices from the dancers who performed in the work are included not only to avoid the reductive voice of the singular author but also to contribute to a growing body of work that makes the dancer’s voice and experience central to any inquiry. The image of the mute dancer “silently executing steps and manipulating the body” (Lunn as quoted in Carter 1998, 53), as choreographer Jonathan Lunn once put it, is a dominant model in dance studies in which the scholarly position is one that is exterior to the dancing, a paradigm that is shifting as practice as research is more frequently included in academic studies of dance.

The pronoun “we” used throughout this chapter refers to me, Ruth Pethybridge—a dance researcher and also the assistant choreographer for *Passage for Par*—and Rosemary Lee—the choreographer and director of the work. Although I provide the framing in this written dialogue, it is always informed by our mutuality in the process of understanding the

reverberations of the practice. Rosemary's words are indicated by the initials RL and are quotations from our conversations, and the chapter ends with a section of our dialogue.

Passage for Par was an outdoor performance event with a cast of thirty women that took place three times over three days in June 2018 at the turn of the tide. Each performance time varied according to the tide, and took place both in the evening at dusk and in the early morning June 22, 7.15–9.15 pm; June 23, 8.15–10.15 pm; June 24, 9.15–11.15 am (sunset: 21.33) (Illustration 33.1).

The dancers inched their way in a snaking line across the expansive wet sand for two hours in an interconnected line, winding their way toward the distant shoreline where they faced the sea and the horizon, their backs to the far-away audience. Their journey then meandered back toward the higher ground with lilting, rolling steps, coming so close to the audience that their breathing was audible, and the salt on their clothes and in their hair was visible. The performance ended with this creature like structure of female bodies vanishing into the landscape from where they had emerged. The vocabulary of steps they shared was predominantly based on very simple Breton/Cornish folk dance steps where the dancers are joined shoulder to shoulder and by the link of curled little fingers or grasped hands.

A description of the performance from a review featured in the *Financial Times* reads:

[Par Beach]—A lip of sand wedged between the fume-wreathed cylinders of a working china clay factory and the ivy-dark slopes of Gribbin Head, the lizard-green shoreline glitters thanks to its natural quota of quartz and mica.

Here, as the tide turned under a *brûlée* rich sunset, Lee's performers—30 women dressed in dark navy, their arms interlinked—moved across the reptilian pelt [ridged sand] with tiny, impeccable gestures that married minimalism to folk dancing. For two hours, the audience, who ranged from art students to picnicking families,



Illustration 33.1 *Passage for Par*, at the start of the performance. Image taken from a drone, dress rehearsal June 21, 2018. Photo: Graham Gaunt© CAST (Cornubian Arts and Science Trust.)

remained mesmerised by the collective display of inner and outer unity—not a foot could falter or all would collapse like dominoes. Lee’s only injunction to viewers was to stay at a distance as the troupe’s fluid calligraphies were best appreciated from afar. (Spence 2018)

What Rachel Spence identifies here as the “inner and outer” unity that was necessary to sustain the work is an observation of what was also the methodology of the piece—a conceptual and practical device in which the women remained interdependent and in contact throughout. This constant physical connection contributed to an experience of solidarity in rehearsing and performing this two-hour work, not least because the techniques it used were a physical challenge requiring concentration and discipline. The constant repetition of the steps allowed the dancers to enter different states and meant that the audience was not only seeing the overall choreographic form, but also the very practical physical labor and work necessary to execute it. The challenge and environment of the landscape, the repetitive nature of the steps, and the physical connection of the women throughout this performance are all key factors in contributing to the sense of resilience and female solidarity.

Experiencing landscape

Cornwall is a large coastal county in the UK, well known for its scenic beaches and cliffs, and as a holiday destination. Lesser known is the fact that it is one of the poorest regions in Northern Europe due to the decline of its industries, predominantly mining, which had brought prosperity in previous eras.

The coast of Par has a specific context and was chosen over and above other popular tourist sites in Cornwall¹ for its reminders of the county’s industrial past: the Kaolin refinery overlooks the beach and is part of its sedimented history in the glittering sand. As we experienced, many people arriving on the beach considered it an eye-sore; however, for the choreography the refinery functioned as a *basso continuo* via the constant hum of its engines, and a reminder of the Cornwall that exists in parallel—and beyond—its identity as a tourist destination:

RL: ... the beach felt like it was pulsing; there was a different aliveness to it that was a kind of vibration. I think that was because of the kaolin refinery, emitting a low sort of growl, a boiler room hum that we weren’t really consciously aware of but it was affecting us ... (Illustration 33.2)

Once the decision about the site was made, during the rehearsal process it became clear that while what we were doing there was not always clear to the local residents and beach users, there was a sense that they were grateful that we had chosen “their” beach. The ownership that locals felt for Par beach came in part from their understanding that it was not a renowned beauty spot. For Rosemary, it was important to honor people’s love for this site and not intrude on their relationship to it. Part of the research involved meeting people—local naturalists, the “friends of Par beach” group, dog walkers, and families—and discussing our intentions alongside their understandings of this unique place:

RL: ... for me the work has to have an intimate partnership with the site that is showing the site in the best possible way. Not in a “chocolate box” sort of way at all, but I am trying to reveal the potential of the site so that people see what I am seeing. Equally I am trying to do the same with the dancers—making visible the radiance, potential, power, and



Illustration 33.2 *Passage for Par*, by Rosemary Lee Commissioned by CAST for Groundwork, Par Sands Beach, Cornwall 2018, Taken from the coastal path on the headland with the backdrop of the factory, evening performance June 22, 2001. Photo by Steve Tanner.

subtlety I see in them. It's not that I physically do anything to the site; it's more that I try to change how people experience it, and what they are noticing ...

The site also informed, dictated even, a lot about the work. Because Rosemary was clear that *Passage for Par* needed to largely be viewed from a distance, and that the dancers needed to be seen to reach the distant edge of the waves, this required a large expanse of beach, exposed only when the tide was at its lowest (or so we thought). Rosemary spent months studying the tide timetables a year in advance. The actual height in meters of the low tide made a real difference to the timing of the performance itself and indeed the movement material. As Rosemary put it:

RL: Each low and high tide has a different height of water, and we needed a specific height to reveal the optimal expanse of wet sand; too low a tide and the beach was too big and too high the beach was too small. I think I spent nine months hoping something would shift, but actually I was dealing with the cosmos—of course it wasn't going to shift!

This reliance on the tide and the weather became a reminder to reflect on the relationship between human and the environment—as many of the performers did in evocative, poetic writing, and reflections during and after the performances. As performer Nicola Visser reflected:

The tide is turning. Inward of its watery heart it changes the pump setting and forces the suck to spit. I can hear it in the folded angle of the waves. So subtle I don't know it and I do. I would run if I were a mother holding my child's hands, I would watch out, check the cliffs for navigation, I would not be the statistic of bodies caught in coves. My eyes would be everywhere.

Instead I am holding your hand left and right.

We pulse and call. We raise our arms and stay stay stay to face the turning and provoke the water to do its worst, to rush and return, while our feet stay dry for the while. (Nicola Visser, personal communication, July 12, 2018)

Dealing with the very real issues of the site—the ever-shifting deep lagoons, the rivulets that changed course, how the wind radically changed the texture of the sand overnight so that the dancers' footing was less sure, the banks of seaweed that appeared and disappeared, even the sand flies—affected the structure of our final two-week intensive rehearsal period.

RL: Just through the practicalities of the actual schedule—moving the start times of our rehearsals half an hour every two days—made us become so at one with the site that is so beautiful. You could have drawn a wave across the schedule. That's amazing; when do you ever get the opportunity to work like that, so symbiotically?

The dancers were getting to know the place through their work—a practice that is very rooted in the ways that people working in those kind of environments in practical, industrious ways would recognize.

RL: I found the physical and metaphysical link of our bodies with the landscape very moving; perhaps there are parallels with the way a dry stone waller, a cockle picker, or a fisherman reads their surroundings. We were reading and sensing the landscape for our dance. It constantly changed us, and we changed it.

Visser also described the practice of the piece as feeling like her place of work had become the beach. The ritual of arriving every day in these different states and at different times to meet the landscape:

The weather is changeable from one sand dune to the next and thinking it is warm while having tea on the sand dune's dip [while] it is a howling gale out on the wet tidal flat ... so it was a wonderful thing to practice every day on the beach to become accustomed to nothing being the same. (Nicola Visser, personal communication, July 12, 2018)

Speaking of interactions between organism and environment in 1980, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela refer to "a mutually dependent co-creation of any moment between the living system and its environment. A particular kind of terrain may trigger a certain kind of walk as a recurrent interaction, because of its physical characteristics and potential dangers ..." (Maturana and Varela as quoted in Reeve 2011, 34). They propose this as "a way of seeing cognition not as a representation of the world 'out there' but rather as an on-going bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself" (Reeve 2011, 34). In the same way, experiencing the landscape of Par beach every day, the dancers began to understand it through and with their bodies ([Illustration 33.3](#)).

Similarly, social anthropologist Tim Ingold (1993) conceives of the notion of "dwelling" as "a way to overcome the entrenched division between 'two worlds' of nature and society, and to re-embed human being and becoming within the continuum of the lifeworld" (Ingold 2011, 4).



Illustration 33.3 *Passage for Par*, Reflections in the shallow waters of the tidal flats, dress rehearsal, June 21, 2018. Photo: Graham Gaunt© CAST (Cornubian Arts and Science Trust.)

In this view, human beings are constantly involved in the remembering and remaking of history through experiences and impressions, as the dancers were through the process of making and remembering and treading *Passage for Par* within the landscape:

The beach for me felt like a playground, it wasn't easy to resist running into the sea or rolling about in the sand. I have so many fond memories of the beach; for me it is family, it is friends, and it is the community, this is what it felt like every day, a family with a routine. I never buried my excitement being on the beach. I invested it into my body particularly for the performance and in my swirling thoughts each day, a 360-degree connection became embedded into my thoughts through discussions and trying out new movements on the beach, I felt wider, stronger, and more radiant than I've ever felt before. Even on days where I felt ill and sore, the surroundings were like support, the air was there to relieve any stress, the blowing grass was there to distract my mind from thinking about my aches and pains, and finally the hands behind and in front of me were there to emotionally support me through the day. These surroundings didn't know how much they helped me through the tough times but I am sure they felt my connection too. (Performer Ayesha Fayzal, personal communication, August 27, 2018)

As this reflection demonstrates, the dancers came to know the landscape and connect to it and their memories through their embodied experience. Not only did it provide support as Fayzal articulates, but it also gave detailed feedback about how to adapt the choreography—the techniques the dancers used to move together depending on the lay of the land, down to where the weight of the feet needed to be to manage the bumpy sand below and maintain their rhythm.

Furthermore, through creating stories, images, memories, and impressions, they were creating the landscape as much as they were moving within it; perhaps in Erin Manning's (2009, 13) terms they were "body-worlding," in which the moving body creates space rather than merely populating it. Or, in phenomenological terms, Maurice Merleau Ponty ([1962] 1974) posits that the body provides a central perspective from which to respond to the world. Although not adopting a phenomenological method per se, it is useful to consider how this writing draws from such an approach that "foregrounds the body as a site for investigation, knowledge and perception" (Frleigh 1987, 3). Sara Ahmed also suggests that "phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to our bodies; instead spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body" (2006, 9). The perceptions and reflections from the dancers during the process for *Passage for Par* confirm the process of becoming between body and landscape, which Fazal described as a reciprocal connection. Ingold also makes the point that "landscape" is something "qualitative and heterogenous" (1993, 154) as opposed to the idea of "land" as something objectifiable or "space" as a phenomenon that can be represented by a cartographer. For Ingold, "To perceive the landscape is an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past" (1993, 152). This idea of landscape resonates with the experiences of the dancers in *Passage for Par* that was an embodied act of engagement with the physical site and its stories and associations.

Repetition and remembering

Many of the performers referred to their memories of people and place as they moved within the landscape. The beach at Par was at once singular and also a window onto shared experiences of womanhood, sea, and sand: "There she is my grandmother, weaving in across the horizon. I feel her wrap and spool into my heart and then beat it strong again" (Nicola Visser, personal communication, July 12, 2018). The duration of the work allowed these memories and images to surface for the dancers of landscapes from their past and from their imaginations. Similarly, Ingold's "dwelling perspective" proposes that the landscape is "an enduring record of—and testimony to—the lives of past generations who have dwelt within it" (152). Like phenomenology, Ingold advocates for knowledge derived from people's lived experience in the world. The dancers at Par experienced a sensation of having danced in the footsteps of previous generations of women that became part of the narrative of the piece and informed the folk-derived movement material.

As with much folk dance, repetition of simple steps was a central choreographic device as the dancers meandered across the sand flats for two hours. Having explored more linear forms and flocking with loose traveling clusters of dancers in other coastal sites, the movement material at Par became refined and simplified, "the marrying of minimalism and folk dancing" that Spence (2018) referred to in her review, as Rosemary recounts:

RL: ... after a couple of hours experimenting at Par with a small team of dancers, there was quite suddenly an overwhelming feeling that I needed them to be pulsing together with this bounce from the step. It was like, "this is the concept," I've found it. I've got to the heart of it. And now I must hold onto it and not let it dilute. Sometimes you don't get there that quickly (although it wasn't that quick because I'd been to lots of other sites). But something about pinning the folk dance and specifically the bounce to that site, the pulsing of the factory, stitching those two things together—that gave me the very kernel of the work, the truth of the work in some way ...

This “truth” translated to the use of a lot of movement material that came from Breton and Cornish social dancing, a rhythmic step and gentle bouncing or “double bounce” as we came to refer to it. Taking the foundation from these steps and repeating them over and over, the women wove their way toward the sea with moments of pause in alive stillness in diagonal lines—or they rocked, swayed, and pulled as they strode together, invoking the gentle rhythm and quality of the waves while the group unison echoed the sea-faring labors of hauling ropes or pulling oars.

Rosemary and I were sensitive to the fact that we were taking movement material out of its original context and to an extent changing its form and function. We had some anxiety around how this might be received. However, Rosemary was also clear how collective memory functioned for her in these simple patterns of movement:

RL: I feel like that is not me, it’s me following in the footsteps of humans moving together, borrowing (I hope respectfully) a known form.

While in Breton and Cornish dance there are many variations and indeed divides in different communities of practice in relation to how particular steps or arm holds might function, in general, the audience members directly involved in the social dancing saw their practice being valued through the inclusion of this movement vocabulary.

Joanna Tagney, a long-time member of the Cornish *Nos Lowen*² social dance scene, after watching the dance commented that for her “these dances are like making a cup of tea,” and to see someone making her daily cup of tea into a work of art was “absolutely beautiful” (2018). Her belief is that what defines social dance is it being, fundamentally, for everyone, “open source” in the same way that much documented folk music is.

RL: In 2002, Poet Michael Donaghy (1954–2004) once helpfully described traditional folk forms to me as like baskets holding the content loosely or tightly. You have to find the right basket for what you want to communicate, find the right weave, and the right shape to hold and convey the particular content. I have an utter respect for these tried and tested forms, and somehow the performers inching across the beach started to produce images of ancient nomadic pathways and treading into the footsteps of other people. Remembering.

Repetition can have negative connotations of lacking originality in some way, yet in *Passage for Par* it was reclaimed from that idea to be valued in its own right as a methodological device with a particular purpose—not only through the repetition of the steps but also through the repetition of certain forms, like the spiraling “snail’s creep” that exists, with variations, in many different cultures. Dancers are led into a tight spiral until the leader turns back on herself to pass the incoming line of dancers, tracing her footsteps corkscrewing back and out of the spiral with the dancers following. It is the one moment in *Passage for Par* where the dancers are face to face, and at a midway point in the work, many of them spoke of this as giving them the energy they needed, the resilience, to continue to complete the performance. Both the snail’s creep and the rhythmic steps were, as Rosemary identifies, borrowing from known forms and in a way acknowledging the strength that those forms have, rather than a concern with not being “new” or “original,” and by that same token then producing something that was original in another sense of it being conceived of and for a very specific place and time.

As the line of dancers made their way across the sand flats over the course of the two hours, the pace remained the same throughout even as the rhythms and qualities changed. Erini

Kartsaki, writing about repetition in postmodern choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer's work, comments that it is:

... not about theme and development... It does not have a climax, or go any place, but it possesses a different quality, a force perhaps ... it is an invitation to engage with it in a different way ... it makes possible an attention to detail, a focus on careful nuances of movement, allowing the spectator to lean in, to experience the shape of the movement and its texture, almost like an object.... It makes the dance, but also its structure, visible and it reveals something about its methodology. (Kartsaki 2017, 37)

Audience members of *Passage for Par* watched the performance with a specific mode of attention that led them to consider and indeed comment on how the dance functioned, for example "it's led from the back I think" or "how are they keeping the rhythm?" or the like, rather than looking at it solely as choreographic form. Similarly, as Kartsaki notes of the attention to detail in watching Rainer's work, the duration and repetition allowed *Passage for Par* to exist in its space and time, rather than to be "performed" as such and therefore to be observed in the same way that one might watch a sunset or a slow change as the tide turns. Incidental audiences, as they walked their dogs or searched for metal under the sand, or paddled in the pools left behind by the tide, watched the landscape change and the dancers became part of that changing landscape rather than something additional to it.

RL: I would say that if it's predictable, you're really safe, you're given permission to relax. Not be on high alert of what's going to come next, but to relax into "This is going to go on for a while, so let me just be with it." And then you're with it and you look at it in a different way and you see the flux and the change within the repetition that's happening, the minutiae of it. It gives you permission to look, in the same way you ponderingly look into a rock pool. It awakens a pleasurable curiosity within the safety of that predictability.

Rosemary describes her experience of being outside the work and watching it evolve as well as her intention for how it might encourage this very particular experience of watching by allowing the audience "to look and look again" (Kartsaki 2017, 34):

RL: ... here are these women getting smaller and smaller and more and more insignificant in the greater picture, and there are the clouds and, ooh look, the sea's moved in, and that dog has gone, where's the dog, where's the man that was walking the dog? You become very aware of space and time and your place within it in a really different way.

The ongoing repetition of patterned steps and gentle bouncing required a lot of concentration due to fixed pathways, the specific movement qualities, and the rhythm that needed to be synchronized along the entire line of thirty women. However, it also allowed the performers to "sink" into the work—quite literally sometimes as the footsteps dug a hole in the sand—but more so in the sense of being present and entering into a particular state of mind and attending to one another and the landscape around them. As dancer Sarah Alexander commented:

The conflict of rhythms has an emotional effect, just as the harmony of dancing to one rhythm is pleasing and unifying, discord brings frustration. Drawn into the

organism through rhythm, the more complex the task, the less I connect with the wider scene. Rocking and slow stepping are times to notice beyond the organism. Times to connect in with the landscape. The dance, repetitive but ever changing, requires much concentration, because it doesn't ever stop ... the movement is constant. At the end it feels like getting off a boat. You still feel the motion afterwards. (Sarah Alexander, personal communication, July 2, 2018)

As this reflection articulates, absorbing differences in the name of the whole (in a physical and metaphorical sense) is not always a comfortable experience; indeed it can be a very painful one: arms stiffened, backs ached, timing went out and could not be re-found, feet became heavy, and frustrations flared. But these difficulties arguably what led to a feeling of solidarity among the women because through the ongoing repetition and duration, the performers were gathering around a common aim through the adversity of the landscape and challenging aspects of the work. Furthermore, for us the repeated bouncing embodies the human will to survive and to keep moving, or as Rosemary put it to be able to “dance through the hard stuff,” which is exactly what these women did (Illustration 33.4).

It was the physical practice of the work that brought the women together in solidarity, the “powerful humble brave soft salty warriors, women of Par,” as performer Anna Golding referred to them (Anna Golding, personal communication June 12, 2018). But rather than an un-named homogenizing force—or imagined community of shared feminine identity—it was perhaps an embodiment of what Ahmed refers to as the “painstaking labour” of getting closer to each other, working for each other, and speaking to (not for) others in order to find out what, as women “we might yet have in common” (2000, 180). The constant negotiations



Illustration 33.4 *Passage for Par*, one of the elbow and hand holds also used in Breton and Cornish folk dance, allowing the dancers to remain closely connected, dress rehearsal, June 21, 2018. Photo: Graham Gaunt© CAST (Cornubian Arts and Science Trust.)

and adjustments that the work required to make the dance function became a self-organizing system—or organism—as dancer Alexander referred to it. Organisms are found in nature; they are interdependent and dynamic rather than a homogenized fixed totality. As choreographers, we became less and less part of the physical problem solving, which had to be led from within the physical structure the women had created, giving them autonomy as a group to grow and develop as needed to respond to the environment. They relied on each other and their collective memory and understanding. Meanwhile, from without, the images they created resonated with the memories and experiences both of those performing and those watching the work, and again with Ingold's dwelling perspective in which human and nature, past and present coincide in a conception of the landscape. This writing comes from an observer of the process and demonstrates the seemingly 'organic' qualities that the dance produced:

A creature-like being that existed many moons ago when the earth was covered in silky sea. A creature which existed long before we did, and one which has come back to remind us of something we have long forgotten. A story that when told we, perhaps, don't fully understand, but deep down we know is right.

There are other images.

Half closing my eyes turns the sky into deep, dark, cold water. Many miles deep. Together legs become fins and fins become a mass of fish. They are undisturbed by the pulling tide.

I see a centipede, an anemone, soft bodied, strong, fishing through the air with tentacle hands. Carving its path.

I have watched as people walking on the beach pause, suspended in a complete moment, following you with their gaze as you make your way. Perhaps pocketing a picture that may speak for words later. A reminder for a future self of a moment like the tide, lasting for a few short hours. Leaving behind a special memory for the sand, a path imprinted on the land. (Photographer Rosa Shepherd, personal communication, August 31, 2018)

For the outside eye, the dancers became a unified structure, while from within the connections were tangible and constantly in flux.

The most female of all

As we have suggested earlier, one of the experiences that was foregrounded in the feedback for performers from the practice of learning and performing this very specific piece of work was that of female solidarity and resilience. Standing side-by-side, the women found physical and metaphorical connections as expressed in "Ghostprints," a poem by dancer Anna Golding, who was in the very center of the line throughout the performance:

We arrive and arrive
The most female of all
Evolved eel, sand snake
Dark thread spun out
Tread soul to sole

Footstep into yours from mine
A tug knits us in
Concertinas loose
Breath meters us, behind and ahead
We attend into arcs
Settle into bones and shells
Anchor chain of steel will (Anna Golding, personal communication,
June 19, 2018)

RL: The way the women were shoulder to shoulder is very different from face to face, as in most forms of partner dancing. This side-by-side line dancing is different because it's not speaking about courtship or partnership.... It's nothing to do with who your partner is, procreation, sexual attraction, or display.... It's more like a skein of geese in flight. Shoulder to shoulder is about collectivity, or community, isn't it?

In a post-feminist culture with differing oppositional positions on feminism often defined through generational concerns or “waves,” to describe or identify “female solidarity” in the context of a dance work is also somewhat problematic. Not least because for some critics, this very idea will always remain a myth, foregrounding gender over and above many other multiplicities. We also struggle to communicate in words the profundity of the temporary community that became fundamental to *Passage for Par*. Yet to not speak of female solidarity as a defining feature of the project would also be to deny an important aspect of the lived experience that this work engendered for those taking part. This is not to say that such solidarity was easily achieved or without problems—any community rarely is. However, as neoliberal society creates more fractures in the way people live together through travel, work, economies of value, and globalization, contemporary communities are those that we create, construct even, as Zygmunt Bauman writes (2001, 14): “... all homogeneity must be ‘hand-picked’ from a tangled mass of variety through selection, separation and exclusion; all unity needs to be made.” For Bauman, “concord ‘artificially produced’ is the sole form of unity available ...” (14).³ Although this might have negative connotations associated with artificiality, it could be argued that these constructed communities create the conditions of possibility for experiences such as that of female solidarity in *Passage for Par*. These corporeal connections then have the potential to reverberate beyond the microcosm of performance to the macrocosm of social and political life. The women told stories to each other as they waited for the tide to turn or the cue to be given, they held each other to warm up, and they laughed together as things went wrong. They respectfully pointed out things that might be done differently, they asked questions, they struggled through adverse weather conditions and physical discomfort, and they continued for the sake of the work.

Though from the UK, Europe, and beyond, the cast comprised largely middle-class women who already had in common their interest and experience in dance; the “differences” to be overcome were not as great as they might be in other contexts for people with less privileged positions. What is important, however, is that this work generated an alternative way of “being together,” or in phenomenological terms of *Mitgefühl* (feeling-with), through the embodied structures it used.

Feminist philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky (2002) makes a detailed analysis of the different kinds of solidarity that it is possible to experience and conceptualize. She differentiates between the group “infection” of collective action and mob-like experiences and the idea of

"fellow-feeling" in which individuals share precisely the affective experience of a specific situation. In a chapter that addresses women's experience, writers such as Bartky and Ahmed are useful in that they provide much needed critique and contemporary feminist application of ideas from phenomenology, which, like the philosophical canon of which it is part, was largely conceived of and written by men. Due to the scope of this chapter, it is not possible to fully explore Bartky's proposition, but to put it simply *Passage for Par* created a feeling of power (and therefore political potential) and support (emotional and physical) among the women through a combination of these ideas—the infectious potential of communal joy and the fellow-feeling of a very specific set of circumstances.

Bartky also points out that many of the rituals that support and surround "female camaraderie ... and feelings of solidarity with other women are associated with oppressive constructions of beauty and femininity" (2002, 23). She writes that "unless new forms of female solidarity appear, women will be loathe to abandon the forms they know" (23). *Passage for Par* arguably provided an opportunity to create alternative rituals, practices, and feelings of solidarity among women at a time when the old forms that Bartky refers to were being questioned. Golding's poem makes reference to a sense of communication and connection between the women and across their individual life experiences, embodied in the dance:

Standing in line
Lives told to the front
Heard to the side
Sudden love
Sudden death
Loss and hope
Laugh, laugh, cry
Return
Steady, Settle, Gather, Away
Home ("Ghostprints," Anna Golding, personal communication, June 12, 2018)

Passage for Par was created with an all-female cast during a cultural shift when the Me Too (#metoo) movement had come like a wave having crashed, leaving behind it a different landscape in which women's voices were being heard in a new way (albeit a movement that has become a site of contestation). The Me Too movement was originally founded by American community organizer Tarana Burke in 2006 to "spread awareness and understanding about sexual assault in underprivileged communities of colour" (Shugarman 2017). It is most commonly known, however, through a viral social media campaign in 2017 that addressed sexual violence against women more generally. Like many women in the UK, Rosemary was aware of the impact and reach of this campaign and the call for women to work together, and this was influential in her casting decision.

RL: I knew from my own experience of creating one section of *Square Dances* (2011) with one hundred women, how powerful that experience can be for the women in affirming unspoken connections together amidst their diversity. I not only wanted to facilitate that again but also to create an unforgettable and undeniable image for the viewer of a working community of women boldly and collectively moving together, stitching themselves into the landscape.

Furthermore, the landscape also held resonances of communities past that were divided by their gender-identified labors in a way that made the work specifically by and for women:

RL: I was drawn to thinking about women on shorelines, waiting, and also the work they did in those communities to keep the villages going when the men were at sea, at war, or hunting for fish to feed their families; it was that basic. Also, it's said that Cornish women in the Napoleonic wars took off their red flannel petticoats, wrapped them around their shoulders and marched up and down on the cliff tops so that the French soldiers out to sea would think the coast was patrolled by soldiers. How ingenious and how active the women were in protecting the men and their country in a way that is so different from how we think about men and women now and what we as feminists are dealing with right now at the moment with the Me Too movement. There is something about the imagining of that working relationship of women and men then—"We're here holding the fort, you're out there risking your life"—that intrigues me.

We discussed the experience of waiting that these women might have had as being an under-represented aspect of female strength. This aspect is not a passive, resigned waiting of women while their men (in the heteronormative model of domestic life) are busy with the work at sea, but an active hopeful sense of being still here, patient and resilient. Rosemary related this experience to her own at the time of making *Passage for Par* when her own mother was passing away. The piece also became a way to understand and reflect on this experience:

RL: My own personal experience of being cocooned in a house with my mother more and more just before the project was going to happen gave me a profound understanding of the nature of enduring care that mainly falls on women. The role of mother and daughter, of carrying on through caring for your children and for your elderly relatives and having to put one foot in front of the other and just keep going—you can't collapse or give way to grief. You've just got to keep going every day. There is a sense of waiting through it all whilst actively being and staying with your loved one, holding them and the space as their life draws towards its end.

Rosemary's reflections on her own experience created a personal narrative for her that framed the duration of the piece and the need to keep going through the different weather conditions and physical challenges. As women, mothers and daughters, we both saw our own experiences of the resilience and strength that life itself requires:

RP: For me the repeated bouncing perhaps speaks of the human will to survive and to keep moving, or as you put it, to be able to "dance through the hard stuff," because as Kartsaki (2017, 32) writes about the repetitive techniques of Samuel Beckett, sometimes we need "To simply keep going: because in order not to die, you must come and go, come and go..."

RL: That's so apt... the work was about holding oneself and ourselves together literally and metaphorically in order to keep going—the cast held each other, each woman held themselves upright and contained. The work itself was so pared back it had its own held containment, nothing was released or spilled ...

RP: And that's why you didn't want them to separate. It was a metaphor for interdependence and interdependence as a metaphor for life. Yet dance is so much more than a metaphor as it simultaneously embodies this process rather than merely representing it ...

RL: If they split apart I felt it was breaking the strength of the interdependency ... there was something very confining and freeing at the same time. Being imprisoned by mortality.

RP: Yes, it's about recognizing the strength it takes to endure certain things, that "keeping going" that we've been talking about and that resilience. I think it's also one of the strengths of dance practice. This wasn't a "therapeutic" process as such, and yet the women identified something they very much needed within this process.... I keep coming back to this quote by Manning who writes, "When we move the world lives differently" (2009: 14).

RL: How true and beautiful, ... I am thinking about the duality of the work. For all the power and affirmation it gave people participating and symbolized for the viewer, there was also a sadness. It's not a joyous dance; it could be seen as a lament. There is a sense of loss, the tide washes their traces away, the wind takes their breath, they disappear at the end, and there is no bow, and yet hopefully it remains indelibly in their bodies and in the audience's memories ...

RP: Yes, an existential question arose for me and some of the dancers when they stepped out of the organism for one reason or another and watched it from the outside. They had this very strong sense of "It carries on without me, but at the same time I am a hundred percent singularly part of this." In the same way that the world continues without you and the universe exists whether you're there or not, yet that doesn't mean that you are insignificant, you still have to take your place in the universe, and death is the only way out of that, and that's where we're all heading, we just don't know when. So I think the repetition and the duration—those two things operating together—helped us to experience something of that inescapable truth of life and death.

The reverberations of the work continued long after the last performance and still do today. In a messaging group originally set up to be able to communicate practicalities of the project as they arose, and to disseminate urgent information, messages continued to appear long after the last performance (and even as I write this):

I miss those gentle and supportive hands, laughter, slightly damp warm feet, bouncing, all you soft warriors. (Kiki Gale, personal communication, June 28, 2018)

Your beautiful steady hands. (Nicola Visser, personal communication, June 28, 2018)

I keep being visited by you women. Seems each of you in turn visits me through memory. Suddenly one of your faces appears clearly in my mind. Or a voice perfectly remembered and all at once in my consciousness, as if from nowhere! I am remembering you all in turn. (Sarah Fairhall, personal communication, June 27, 2018)

Powerful humble brave soft salty warriors women of Par I feel blessed to have shared this journey with you. Thinking of this important, magical, ordinary and extraordinary time of slowing down, of being with the floor of the sea, of tasting, trusting, responding, following and leading, passing, sharing being under all kinds of floors and skies and winds and moons and suns, passer by snails, crabs, dogs, and walkers.

I send my love your direction and to Par the special place that held and stitched us together (*Illustration 33.5*). (Belinda Papavasileiou, personal communication, June 27, 2018)



Illustration 33.5 *Passage for Par*, by Rosemary Lee Commissioned by CAST for Groundwork, Par Sands Beach, Cornwall 2018, the ending image as the performers leave, evening performance, June 22, 2018. Photo by Steve Tanner.

Conclusion

Passage for Par was a durational performance that invited a mode of witnessing and experiencing that connected all present to the passing of time in the landscape and the changing nature of Par beach. Through the invitation to experience it and watch it slowly evolve, it also allowed for reflections to arise on the relationship between humans and nature, the labor of moving as one organism, and indeed of life, and the resilience it takes to “dance through the hard stuff.” The simple choreographic form of a single, interconnected line and spiral also connected us across cultures and dance practices from places and times beyond the here and now of the event. Similarly, the repetitive techniques provided a function, as they do in social dancing, giving the performers the opportunity to engage in the landscape and to connect to each other as their rhythmic unity provided the engine for movement.

The voices of the dancers included here are only a very partial representation of the thoughts, writings, conversations, and images that were given to us during and after the performance, and we are grateful and indebted to all of the performers for their generosity in what was shared. Penelope Hanstein writes of dance studies that “while we may be engaged in a more reflective mode than physical one when we are researching and writing, our point of reference must always be rooted in the experience of dancing” (1999, 26). By including the performers’ voices alongside our own experiences of *Passage for Par*, we have maintained this “connection to the field,” as Hanstein (26) puts it. Like the performance itself, this writing contributes to a political narrative in which women’s experiences matter and are central to interpretations of the body and the world around us, not least in understanding dance from a variety of perspectives.

Notes

- 1 Research and development for this project began at Godrevy beach, a well-known National Trust beauty spot before Teresa Gleadowe (CAST) suggested a visit to Par in part for its different relationship to the people living there and the tourist economy, and also because of its power visually and the diversity of its flora and fauna due to its industry.
- 2 Nos Lowen is Cornish for "Happy Night" and is a kind of Cornish social dancing that is closely related to Breton dancing and the Fest Noz from Brittany that grew in popularity in the 1960s. Nos Lowen is a mixture of traditional dances and new dances that use traditional steps and formations.
- 3 Rosemary selected the dancers from over 150 applicants for twenty-two places. She selected eight students from Falmouth University Dance and Choreography course and invited Aya Kobayashi and Sophie Arstall to join the creative team as rehearsal directors and as dancers taking the place at either end of the line. The remaining twenty-two women were selected through selection workshops. Rosemary chose women of different ages who had a compelling presence, intelligence in their bodies, and a natural connection to the main vocabulary of the work, particularly the subtle and ever-present bounce in the step. All the women chosen were dance trained. It was an international cast.

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