Choreographies of Place: Dancing the Vancouver Sublime from Dusk to Dawn

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Introduction[1]

Against the backdrop of the north shore mountains, and with the last of the sun's rays glistening off Burrard Inlet, the Flaming Lips' "What Is the Light?" issues from jerry-rigged speakers as first one body, then another, and then another manifests on the horizon. Each seems to have emerged directly from the sea, and now advancing up the beach and onto the grass where ranks of onlookers are gathered – some of us purposefully and expectant, others accidentally and merely perplexed – these strangers pause to hail their audience. But who exactly is that? Despite the warmth of the evening, I feel a shiver down my spine and wonder if this is due to my excitement at the "destination experience" I am having in my own city, or a suppressed anxiety about who else in this park is being excluded from the eventfulness of this event.

  Over successive weekends in July 2013 I attended four different performances of outdoor, site-based dance in Vancouver, each yielding moments that were similarly sublime – in the dual Burkean sense of inspiring aesthetic awe *and* inducing uncertainty, sensory confusion, even fleeting terror.[2] These moments occurred as part of Dancing on the Edge Festival's (DOTE) presentation of the Ontario-based series Dusk Dances, from which my opening description derives, and staged for the first time in 2013 at CRAB/Portside Park; New Works' All Over the Map midday program of "global" dance and music on Granville Island; and Kokoro Dance's eighteenth annual Wreck Beach Butoh, held at low tide every summer on Vancouver's famous clothing-optional beach. In this chapter I suggest that these performances help to map a kinesthetics of place

particular to the city's urban geography, and to the cultural, economic, and social asymmetries historically embedded in Vancouver's performance of publicness. As Lance Berelowitz has argued, that performance owes much to Vancouver's waterfront setting, with the consequence that much of "Vancouver's constructed public realm" takes place "at the edge," especially along its sprawling seawall and in its many beachfront parks, spaces of leisure that "substitute for the more traditional centrifugal public spaces of older cities."[3] However, according to Berelowitz, far from being "theatres for vital, legitimate political expression," these apparently "natural" and "socially neutral" amenities mask a "highly contrived, ideologically controlled and commodified reality, in which the city's beaches can be understood as a series of discrete public spaces, in terms not only of built environment but also in social formation, use, and regulation."[4]

Contributing to the "artifice" of publicness produced by these spaces are the increasingly choreographed and spectacularized events that take place within them, of which the annual Celebration of Light fireworks festival at English Bay is paradigmatic for Berelowitz.[5] The sited dances I discuss in this chapter are in many ways the antithesis of the Celebration of Light's commercialized ethos. At the same time, each also displays social and environmental awareness and solicits community participation. This attentiveness to the civic dimensions of public ritual is more or less acute, I argue, depending on the extent to which the dances take advantage of their sites in order to either strategically uphold or tactically resist the normative placed-based discourses that adhere to those sites. I suggest, in turn, that these discourses can be articulated as three versions of a distinctive "Vancouver sublime," producing a cognitive map of the city that moves – east to west – from the bio-political to the touristic to the natur(al)ist.

But first I should explain my use of the term *sublime* and how I link it to outdoor dance environments to make a specifically Canadian, and more particularly Vancouver, intervention into what Laura Levin notes is "the bourgeoning literature on space and site-specificity in performance studies."[6] I follow from Edmund Burke in understanding the sublime as an aesthetic category that is distinct from the beautiful, both in the kinds and intensities of feelings each produces *and* the differences in scale and perspective between subject and object accompanying them. Whereas for Burke beauty derives from the pleasure we take in our love of small and delicately formed things (the exquisite china teacup or the

finely embroidered silk handkerchief), sublimity results when we fear being overwhelmed or obliterated by the vastness, infinity, or sheer magnificence of what we are contemplating (be it a looming mountain range or a towering skyscraper).[7] Crucially, for Burke, the sublime produces not just psychological, but also physiological distress (nervous tension, eye strain). And while this physical pain might eventually be overcome, the "delight" that Burke suggests replaces it is the opposite of the "pure" or "positive" pleasure that accompanies beauty; it is, rather, a "negative pain," a trace sensation that reminds us of the perceived threat to the self that has been removed.[8]

Immanuel Kant would subsequently reject Burke's observations on the sublime as an empirical measure of the subject's bodily limits relative to natural objects, arguing instead that in attuning the spirit to "reflective judgement," the sublime "*evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses.*"[9] However, the physically "unsettling" feelings Burke ascribes to the sublime are worth holding onto for my purposes, and not just for asking how an audience's kinesthetic response to dance might be magnified in a spectacular outdoor setting. The Burkean sublime also resonates with the performative myth of conquering a terrifying natural landscape that accompanies the dominant narrative of colonial settlement in Canada, and especially with the prior historical claims made upon that landscape in British Columbia and Vancouver. To put it simply, to walk anywhere in this city is to be disquieted by the fact that one traverses the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including traditional lands belonging to the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. I will return at the end of the next section to how Indigenous title complicates even further the "delight" Vancouverites take in their experience of public and private spaces in the city. For now, I want to note two additional points related to my use of the sublime in this chapter. The first is that the three subcategories I develop below derive directly from eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy's theorization of the term within the context of the Grand Tour; that is, not only were Romantic notions of spectacularized nature a product of cultural tourism but, as importantly, a product of the labouring bodies that physically enabled visitors to be transported to *and by* sites of local wonder. My second point is that my focus on the sublime in relation to *local* movement aesthetics reflects a desire to trouble the discourse of "universal beauty" that frequently frames discussions of "the essence of place" in relevant criticism on site dance.[10] To this end, I follow Levin, who in formulating her concept of the "environmental un-

conscious," notes how place animates performance – in locally material ways – rather than merely awaiting animation *by performance*.[11] As such, my analysis contests the "model of influence" between site and choreographic product recently outlined by Victoria Hunter, who argues that in site-specific dance "the type of 'place' created is the 'place' of performance, transforming the accepted and conventional properties ascribed to a particular space."[12] I am as interested in how different and already emplaced spaces in Vancouver might resist such transformations as I am with how they themselves alter the composition, performance, and reception of the dances staged within them. This idea of place as active and agential in its own right is echoed in the recent spatial turn to performance ethnography in Canadian dance studies, particularly as the method is applied to urban dance communities and movement practices – of which MJ Thompson's reading of Louise Lecavalier's dance career in Montreal in this volume is exemplary.[13]

I see my work participating in this turn and thus include in the following analysis transcriptions of some of the thoughts and observations I recorded on three separate walks I took in April 2014 in an attempt to map, both cognitively and kinesthetically, the physical distances and affective connections between my sites of research. This methodology derives from the sensory and performance anthropologist Andrew Irving, who has pioneered a kind of ethnography of interiority, taking a page from modernist writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf by recording the stop-and-start narratives of his subject-informants' inner lifeworlds as they wander the streets of Kampala or New York City.[14] The narratives of my walks are an attempt at approximating the "itinerant practices" of "emplaced writing" modelled by Brian Rusted in his contribution to this volume (345), and at resituating the visual, along with Rusted and Pam Hall, within a sensuous material world. However, because my walks were task-oriented and tied to routes between fixed points, the dialogues I conducted with myself (when I remembered to speak into my smartphone) end up reproducing aspects of the coercive visuality of Vancouver's grid system, my remarks often tied to strategic markers of recent urban development. At the same time, I have taken abundant liberties with the performative transcription of my autoethnography, tactically editing, reordering, interpolating, and even inventing in order to interrupt prescribed circuits of movement and excavate their sedimented layers of history through discursive perambulations that derail the logical flow of my argument. As Naila Keleta-Mae suggests in her chapter, autoethnography may be especially suited

to such remixing because its focus on the positionality of storyteller requires a concomitant attention to audience. Thus, in the narratives of my walks, I am also seeking to superimpose another kind of map of the city, one that constellates the landscape of performance and performance studies research in and of Vancouver by putting my interior monologue in dialogue with the voices of other scholars and artists.

In so doing, I draw on not only Michel de Certeau's characterization of city walking as an enunciative act similar to writing and speech, but also his distinction between the strategic as what represents the "*triumph of place over time*" and the tactical as a mobile nowhere "that must accept the chance offerings of the moment."[15] Thinking about site-specific dance in relation to the social choreography of cities thus means paying attention not just to the (pan)optics of where that dance takes place, but to the more fluid kinesthetics of *when*, a movement in time between past and present that can produce surprising situational confluence or juxtaposition. As Susan Leigh Foster argues in the context of American site-based dance in the 1970s, "Tacticians seeking insights into the kinds of resistive action pertinent to their moment will find that their responses can only be formulated while in motion, in response to the movement that their situation creates."[16] Applying this principle of kinetic intersection to the aesthetic and identity formations produced through dance communities in Los Angeles, Judith Hamera has similarly argued for contextualizing dance technique as part of a larger archive of the social work of bodies in "practices of everyday urban life," one in which "movement with and around other bodies" produces a "relational infrastructure" that binds bodies "together in socialities with strategic ambitions" and produces "modes of reflexivity" that "tactically limit or engender forms of solidarity and subjectivity."[17]

I am similarly interested in what social, aesthetic, community, and civic relationships get mobilized in outdoor site dance in Vancouver, as well as both the physical and metaphysical limits placed on these relationships by the political horizons through which they are constituted. "Such horizons," according to Randy Martin, often "promise to enlarge the sense of what is possible," but can also get "lost in daily experience to the enormous scale of society,"[18] a terror in the infiniteness of our local obligations to each other as residents of the global city that I am calling "the urban sublime." For Martin, the bodily mobilizations of dance, especially as they "contest a given space," can "condense" and make "palpable" what otherwise remains immensely obscure about political mobilization. While Martin resists idealizing dance as "the so-

lution in formal terms to absences in other domains of social practice," he does suggest that an analysis of the "politics of form" in dance can generate "concepts that are available to theoretical appropriation," including for critiques of different "forms of politics."[19] This is the method I am attempting here, using recent examples of site dance in Vancouver to advance a theory about the sublime experience of the city, and its politics of place.

Walk 1

Test, test, this is a test. Clear skies, so I can forgo the umbrella. A nod to Our Lady of the Lanes, doing her daily sweep of blue boxes. No light at Columbia, so over to Manitoba, following the grade downward all the way to South False Creek. Once a light industrial wasteland. And now, look, a post-Olympics residential playground rises and sprawls, turning salt into craft beer, making lemons into Lululemonade. Thank God for Myfanwy's birds, oversized and slightly creepy, reminding us how unreal this all is, like the set of a Hitchcock film.[20] Now, swiftly, down to the seawall, around a rebranded Science World golf ball, spruced up sentinel from Expo. Concord Pacific's stalled on the park, but at least we've got slick new Carrall Street greenway. Just keep to the marked path. Don't veer off into Chinatown. Don't pause to feed the pigeons at Hastings. As Dara would say, there's nothing to see here anyway.[21] At Gassy Jack's statue take a right on Alexander and follow the cobblestones east, temporarily reversing the tide of settlement: showroom, sawmill, swampland. A left over the train tracks at the foot of Main Street and we're here: a beach at once ersatz and indigenous.

Site 1: CRAB/Portside Park, Early Evening

In her important research on the history of Vancouver site dance, Alana Gerecke notes that the slippage in terms around the form (site-specific, site-based, sited, environmental) points to striking variations in the material and/or conceptual role played by place in animating or hosting movement work relocated from the traditional concert stage. For example, Gerecke examines the documentary traces of works like Karen Jamieson's *River* (1998), a one-time roving piece that was choreographed in response to the literal grade of vanished and vanishing ground in Vancouver's Mount Pleasant neighbourhood. As Gerecke has carefully established, *The River* remains crucial to the historical archive of site-specific choreography in Vancouver – not least because of its early and

manifestly material engagement with already accelerated gentrification in this part of the city, and also because of Jamieson's creative collaborations with both First Nations and community performers.[22] Together with Jennifer Mascall and Kokoro Dance's Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi (all founding members, in 1982, of EDAM Dance in Vancouver, which continues today under the artistic leadership of Peter Bingham), Jamieson has made site work central to her practice. Moreover, as we shall see with the example of Kokoro later, many of these artists remain committed to research into the movement possibilities afforded by a single site.

However, as Gerecke's research has shown, it is also possible for the locations that support certain kinds of site-based dance to be more or less interchangeable. In this context, she discusses Paul-André Fortier's *Solo 30 x 30* (2006), a piece that has toured the world, and in which Fortier, for thirty minutes over the course of thirty consecutive days, restricts his movements to the confines of a taped-off square. As Gerecke suggests, in *Solo 30 x 30* the exact location of the dance (it unfolded in front of the Vancouver Public Library's downtown central branch as part of the 2009 DOTE Festival) is secondary and potentially even superfluous to the performance, with the theatrical proscenium very much still *in place* and mediating the audience's reception of the movement. I would argue that this is also the framework governing Dusk Dances, at least the version of the annual summer festival that tours beyond Toronto – where festival director Sylvie Bouchard originated the concept in Trinity-Bellwoods Park ravine in 1993. Dances inspired by the diverse natural environments of Toronto's many parks become geographically, socially, and even aesthetically decontextualized when licensed to other regional districts and festivals. Add to this the Dusk Dances conceit of "a theatrical host" leading audiences from piece to piece in different areas of a given park and one can see why a traditional – if invisible – performance proscenium is part of the baggage of this road show. Back for the third time as Vancouver host in 2013 was Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg, in character as the gothic undertaker Mr Stone from *Highgate* (2013), her meditation on Victorian funerary culture. Friedenberg told me that her host characters decide themselves less on the specifics of site than on her recent performance repertoire.[23] Nevertheless, the spectral presence of Mr Stone, magically transported from nineteenth-century London to twenty-first-century Vancouver, did raise for me the issue of what other, much older ghosts haunted this space.

The official green Vancouver Parks Board sign erected within this 3.31 hectare sliver of green space and shale beach carved out of the city's bustling inner harbour designates the area as CRAB Park at Portside. In the 1980s a group of Downtown Eastside (DTES) activists called Create a Real Available Beach began lobbying the city to set aside land for a neighbourhood waterfront park of the sort that dots the city's western shoreline from Stanley Park to the University of British Columbia. However, the property they sought for conversion was owned by the Vancouver Port Authority (VPA, now Port Metro Vancouver), whose massive orange loading cranes intrude upon the "natural" beauty of the park's eastern sightlines to truly sublime effect. And so in 1987 the VPA agreed to lease to the city, under a forty-year maintenance agreement, this outdoor public amenity with two names. However, following Friedenberg's Mr. Stone from dance to dance in July 2013, spectators might also have glimpsed another plaque, listing an older name for the area. Installed a year before CRAB/Portside officially opened to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the city's incorporation, the weathered yellow sign tells us that the local Indigenous population used to call this place "Luckylucky," meaning "Grove of Beautiful Trees." Likely the name referred to the rows of cedars that once lined the waterfront, back when the marshland served as "a natural portage through the swamp between False Creek and Burrard Inlet," as the sign dutifully informs us. Regardless, this palimpsest of signs and place names demonstrates how thoroughly Indigenous memory has been overwritten by settler-colonial history in BC, a subject Heather Davis-Fisch explores further in her chapter.

In the more than twenty-five years since its opening, the city Parks Board has planted several dozen red cedar trees in CRAB/Portside Park, no doubt seeking to ameliorate its otherwise industrialized, "inner-city" feel. But the fact that this project has coincided with the steady gentrification of the surrounding residential neighbourhood, and that one is now as likely to find hip young couples pushing baby strollers or walking their dogs in the park, as one is to encounter street homeless sleeping, attests to the bio-politics of place that accrue to this "exceptional" bit of Vancouver waterfront. We can read this park as a synecdoche of the larger originary exclusion built into Vancouver's DTES, a space of *bios* (bare life) that, in Giorgio Agamben's take on Michel Foucault, remains at once outside the proper civic body of Vancouver and absolutely central to that body's constitution and the *zoë* (good life) it

enjoys.[24] Telling in this regard is the fact that in the years since its creation by DTES community activists, CRAB/Portside Park has twice been threatened by, and successfully resisted, commercial development: in 1994, when the VPA announced plans to build a casino in conjunction with a consortium of Las Vegas and Vancouver developers;[25] and in 2006, when Vancouver City Council endorsed studies for a new Vancouver Whitecaps soccer stadium in the area. Notwithstanding its value to developers, the park's social marginality is reinforced by its geographical isolation. Bounded by the port, the CPR railyards, and the Sea Bus terminal, CRAB/Portside is the only one of Vancouver's urban beaches not connected to its celebrated seawall.

It is perhaps for this reason that Stanley Park was chosen, in 2000, as the site of the first Vancouver edition of Dusk Dances. In 2009, the series decamped to Queen Elizabeth Park, where its 2011 version was also hosted by Friedenberg. For DOTE's twenty-fifth anniversary in 2013, Artistic Director Donna Spencer decided to move the festival closer to the Firehall Arts Centre, on whose stage many of the festival's indoor performances unfold. According to Friedenberg, this resulted in some interesting place-based interactions between the performance's dual "destination" and "resident" audiences. Several in the former group – including families with young children who would have consciously travelled to the venue to take in the performances – expressed unease with the shift in location. At the same time, some of those who became part of the proceedings simply by virtue of their prior or coincident presence in the park "emancipated" themselves as spectators[26] by showing a tactical lack of regard for the place-based protocols of the invisible theatrical proscenium. As Friedenberg put it to me, the moment during the dress rehearsal when a blissfully intoxicated park-goer decided to join in the action of Julie Aplin's *Onward Ho, My Love* – a comic love duet burlesquing ballet partnering and danced along a plastic slip-n'-slide that becomes increasingly wet (see figure 3.1) – she knew she wasn't in Queen Elizabeth Park anymore.[27]

While the artificial surface used in Aplin's piece would not necessarily be out of place in a park filled with children on a warm summer's evening, the wooden planks laid down for Carmen Romero's *May I Join You?*, an improvised flamenco solo to the live jazz piano of accompanist Scott Metcalfe, is symptomatic of the general choreographic placelessness of the works on the program from Ontario. The urban geography and material social history of CRAB/Portside Park is largely ancillary to the conceptual focus and formal execution of each piece. Only Vancouver-

Figure 3.1
Yvonne Ng and Brendan Wyatt in Julia Aplin's *Onward Ho, My Love*, part of Dancing on the Edge Festival's 2013 presentation of Dusk Dances in Vancouver's CRAB/Portside Park.

based Eury Chang's *Watermark: lost at sea* referenced our Western Canadian maritime setting, although in ways that paradoxically decontextualized the place of its performance. Combining a prologue and epilogue spoken by "Captain George Vancouver" (David Geary) with a recitation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (by actor David Beauchesne), a physical score emphasizing the shipboard life of an eighteenth-century sailor (dancer Kyle Toy), and a mysterious Homeric Siren (singer Janice Valdez), the work offers a highly poeticized and historically deracinated take on the settlement of Vancouver. At the same time, in the central solo that Toy performs with his mop – which begins as a pantomime of mundane deckhand labour and gradually builds to an increasingly acrobatic and gravity-defying series of jumps and pirouettes and cartwheels – Chang does succeed in folding time in relation to space by using the contemporary port setting to remind spectators that narratives of physical transport (of goods and migrants) have always been raced and classed.

It is affective transport that I believe we are meant to experience when watching *Incandescent*, the opening of which I described at the outset of this chapter, and set by choreographers Kate Franklin and Meredith Thompson on a local cast of professional and community dancers of mixed ages. With its repertoire of individual gestures alongside more complexly choreographed partnering sequences and moments of simple group unison, the work begins with members of the ensemble, each identified by an item of yellow clothing, advancing from the foreshore singly or in pairs. At a certain point one of the women stops and extends her right arm, palm facing out and fingers pointing to the ground. A man raises his arm above his head, while the woman to his right closes her eyes and presses her thumbs to her fingers. Another man sinks to the ground on one knee and lifts a young girl onto it. And so the cumulative repertoire of everyday gestures continues, with the assembled group eventually massing around the first woman with the outstretched palm, forming a jigsaw-like huddle by having each performer place a hand on another's shoulder and then all tilting their heads to the sky (see figure 3.2). The constellating and breaking up of bodily clusters is a repeated motif in *Incandescent*, the static stillness of group poses and arrangements frequently giving way to exuberant bursts of running, often in trios leading to a lift. But always Franklin and Thompson bring the ensemble back to some held connection, as when the dancers, staggered in pairs about the grass of the park, bend at the waist and touch foreheads, letting their arms dangle in the space between each other's bodies, the human arches mirrored in and dwarfed by the loading cranes of the port behind them. In providing spectators the space to contemplate – and potentially reorient – this paradox of scale between background and foreground, human and non-human, the choreographers are clearly engaging with the material and cultural politics of the park site. However, the final section of the piece very much reasserts the *place of performance*, in Hunter's understanding of the relationship between site and dance product. Here, after gathering in a circle and raising their arms to the sky, the dancers retrieve small white candles lined along – and, in retrospect it now seems, physically demarcating – the "stage left" and "stage right" borders of the performance area. From "upstage," they then begin running towards the audience, fanning out to the left or the right to encircle spectators. The piece ends with the dancers extending their candles to the audience, again raising their chests skyward, as if making an offering or saying a prayer. Given the stunning natural backdrop, it is hard to resist the image's simple and

seductive beauty. And yet perhaps we should resist it, or at least pause to consider who might be left outside of its collective embrace.

In this respect, I am drawn to Mark Canuel's recent distinction between the bio-politics of beauty and the bio-politics of the sublime as they relate to aesthetic theory's grappling with ethics and social justice. Referencing Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) and Wendy Steiner's *Venus in Exile* (2001), Canuel suggests that the quest to identify and replicate what is beautiful "has troubling implications in that beauty continues to sponsor notions of ideal political community that severely restrict membership to those who symmetrically replicate and share the same heritage, looks, or attitudes."[28] Instead, Canuel argues,

Figure 3.2
Performers in Kate Franklin and Meredith Thompson's *Incandescent* at Dancing on the Edge Festival's 2013 presentation of Dusk Dances in Vancouver's CRAB/Portside Park.

"The sublime leads toward a more conflictual mode of configuring the relations between persons; it provides an aesthetic vantage point that highlights complaint, dissent, and disagreement in the midst of a larger scheme of social cooperation."[29] This, in turn, recalls Kant's statement, in his *Critique of Judgement*, that "the mind feels itself *set in motion* in the representation of the sublime in nature; whereas in the aesthetic judgement upon what is beautiful therein it is in *restful* contemplation."[30]

At the same time, I want to resist Kant's contention that the sublime, because formless, is unrepresentable, both in the physical world and in art. This is to perpetuate additional representational violence in the Vancouver context by whiting out the history of Indigenous oral and embodied performances of placemaking, and by refusing to see – and account as remarkable – the Indigenous bodies living and toiling beside us in the city. To this end, one of the sublime disturbances to our aesthetic and ideological field of vision in CRAB/Portside Park must surely be the memorial boulder to the missing and murdered Aboriginal women of the DTES that was installed in 1997.[31] On the one hand, as was made abundantly clear by the boulder's *failure* to impede any of the Dusk Dances performances themselves or, indeed, the audience's aesthetic enjoyment of them, its strategic placement ends up consigning the lives it is meant to commemorate to a past whose spaces of sublime bio-political terror become measurable only in their distance from this place's present beautification. Here, as Nicholas Blomley notes in his own reading of CRAB/Portside, Kantian perspectivalism divides space by transforming a landscape into "the visual property of the detached observer."[32] However, as Blomley goes on to remark, DTES anti-poverty activists and First Nations groups have also been very successful at producing alternative "community landscapes," in which the neighbourhood's network of social relations is enacted through expressly kinetic "countermaps" that result in what we might call a sublime sovereignty – one that insists on a different way of seeing and being seen in this space.[33] Indeed, the annual Valentine's Day Memorial March that wends its way through Vancouver's DTES as a performative commemoration of BC's and Canada's murdered and missing Aboriginal women is a powerful example of how bodies can mobilize to take up space and demand a sublime rereading of the politics of location. Such site-based actions, as Julie Nagam points out in the following chapter, also remind us of the need in Canada to indigenize our performance archives, which in the history of site dance in Vancouver and BC means attending to the fact that Coastal First Nations dance is always already about territory.[34]

Walk 2

David, surely you understand this. Especially about this place, where you live and work. And walk. By yourself, with others, once with me. No room for alibis then. Not with all the lives that were around us. I'm actually retracing some of our route, past the No. 5 Orange, past the alley behind the Vancouver Police Museum. But I'm also thinking of another walk I took with you, when your voice played inside my ear, and when you directed me west instead of south from Portside. At first I didn't think there was anywhere I could go, but you urged me forward along Waterfront Road, showing me the sublime underside of the beautiful seawall that begins at Canada Place: a service road I didn't even know existed. And trafficked by all those unseen under-classes who maintain and staff our tourist amenities. Like the place I'm off to now, from the opposite shore of downtown. Waiting for a boat that will ferry me, like von Aschenbach, to the Lido side of Vancouver – and to its biggest playground.[35]

Site 2: Granville Island, Early Afternoon

Granville Island is one of the most visited outdoor attractions in Vancouver. It is especially popular with cruise ship passengers, who can wander between and partake of galleries and artist studios; shops selling a range of wares; restaurants and cafes with waterfront views; a toy market and outdoor water park; and a public market displaying fresh fish, produce, and prepared specialty foods, all packaged for shipboard consumption. The island is also home to a cement-mixing factory (a remnant of its light-industrial past), the Emily Carr University of Art and Design (moving to Great Northern Way in 2017), and the largest concentration of live theatre and performance spaces in the city, making it a crucial part of the city's public performance ecology, or what, following Susan Bennett, we might also call its "cultural topography" (43). This role is vaunted on its official website: "Just think of Granville Island as Vancouver's Town Square. Where locals and visitors come together to be inspired, to be entertained or simply to breathe in some of its unique atmosphere."[36]

And yet, as Berelowitz notes, Granville Island is also "the closest thing Vancouver has to a theme park," a place where "even the buskers are programmed," and where its magic kingdom of strictly controlled building forms is designed "to achieve a careful balance of attractions for the consumer and profit for the vendor."[37] Perhaps this is why, like many Vancouverites, I invariably experience such a sublime mix of

dread and stupefaction whenever I visit the island: frustrated by all the car and foot traffic, and by my own inability to remember yet again where I'm going; at once exasperated by all the gawking patrons blocking access to the market stalls, and paralyzed with indecision once I get to the counter. It is the terrifying realization that, as part of the "experience economy," I have been turned into a tourist in my own city.[38]

In this respect, All Over the Map's free outdoor summer dance series is arguably more attuned to the dynamics of site than DOTE's staging of Dusk Dances at CRAB/Portside Park. Produced by New Works, All Over the Map's local presentation of global dance and music is designed to provide audiences with a feast for the senses of a piece with the aesthetically exceptional display and economically assimilable sale of exotic foodstuffs in the public market, where one's fascination at a stacked tower of star fruit or one's terror at having to choose between so many different kinds of olives is rendered safely banal by a sales clerk's assistance, including with payment. Following Rob Horning, I want to suggest that both sensory experiences are versions of the "tourist sublime," whose local/global interfaces have the paradoxical effect of inducing one to seek out simulated novelty in one's own city (tickets for Cirque de Soleil's latest touring show), while simultaneously gravitating to the safely familiar when one travels to a different city (Starbucks for one's morning coffee).[39] Such endlessly reproducible acts of cultural, economic, and affective investment turn hitherto particularized spaces into what Marc Augé has termed "non-places," those familiar beacons of supermodernity (airports, supermarkets, hotels, highways) that we travel through rather than immerse ourselves in.[40]

Melanie Kloetzel has recently taken up Augé's term in the context of her investigations into dances sited within both "sublime" and "mundane" corporate landscapes, suggesting that the "perception of anonymity" that attends such non-places allows one to indulge in fantasy and role-playing.[41] Within the already Disneyfied space of Granville Island, All Over the Map's aesthetic thus makes it easier to imagine we're in Spain or China. Karen Flamenco, led by Artistic Director Karen Pitkethly, is perhaps the city's leading flamenco company and dance school. On this particular afternoon nine women (including Pitkethly) and one man squeezed onto the tiny wooden stage outside of Performance Works. Accompanied by three musicians (guitar, percussion, and vocals), the group treated us to a succession of object lessons in flamenco technique: the importance of rhythm; precision of movement; verticality of bodily alignment; tightness and speed in turns. And yet while fla-

menco, with its music's complicated time signatures, its virtuosic staccato footwork, and its boneless, blooming *floreo*, is as codified and ethereal as ballet, its popularity among audiences has largely to do with its theatrical – and mostly non-traditional – embellishments: the frilly, voluminous dresses; the shawls and fans; the castanets. Unlike Robredo's Dusk Dances performance, there were no castanets among Pitkethly's troupe. But most of the other visual signifiers were firmly in place and unlike Pitkethly's longer and expressly narrative works for the concert stage (including evening-length pieces based on *Snow White* and *Alice in Wonderland*), the vignettes presented at All Over the Map were designed to showcase power rather than polish. Combined with the location of the performance on Granville Island, this solicits a tourist gaze, in which the fantasy temporality of performance coincides with a fantasy space of urbanism to produce a momentary image of romantic transport: a taste of Andalusia in Vancouver. And the idea of global dance as a neatly packaged comestible was certainly reinforced by the number of audience members snacking on treats purchased from the market.

A similar *dis*placed visual aesthetic was at play in the following week's presentation of dancer Wen Wei Wang, who in his improvisations to the music of the Silk Road Trio relied heavily on props, including an oversized pair of chopsticks, eight peacock feathers, and a bright green fan. At the same time, the musical score worked in counterpoint to any homogenous reading of Wang's movement as "ethnic dance." Featuring Qiu Xia He on pipa (a Chinese lute) and vocals, husband André Thibault on guitar, oud, and a variety of wind instruments, and Liam MacDonald on percussion, Silk Road took the audience through an eclectic repertoire of Chinese folk songs, Brazilian samba, and even Memphis-inspired blues. In the last of his improvisations, Wang incorporated some of Silk Road's deconstructive approach to Western and Eastern musical styles into his movement vocabulary, his flowing arms and legs at one point segueing into a version of popping and locking. And, alone among the All Over the Map performers, Wang made canny use of the site-specificity of the series, beginning his peacock dance, for example, upon the hill where the audience was seated, and slowly wending his way to the stage, tickling a few faces along the way.

The hill I refer to is the highest peak on Granville Island, its gently rolling slopes and built-in wooden benches making it a natural amphitheatre for outdoor events adjacent to Performance Works. It forms part of Ron Basford Park, named after the federal Liberal Cabinet minister who spearheaded the redevelopment of Granville Island in the

1970s and who also scuttled a planned expressway through Vancouver's downtown that would have levelled much of historic Gastown and Chinatown. Of what importance is knowing this in watching the site dance included in All Over the Map? Or, equally, of the earlier history of territorial use, reclamation, and exploitation that attaches itself to this place – a series of tidal flats and sandbars used for fishing by local First Nations before being dredged and filled in to make way for sawmills and ship-building factories? For Boris Groys, who in theorizing the contemporary global city in what he has called "the age of touristic reproduction" reminds us that "it was Kant – in his theory of the sublime in *Critique of Judgement* – who first philosophically assessed the figure of the globally roaming tourist in search of aesthetic experiences," mobility between cities has largely obviated the politics of location, turning places near and far, strange and familiar into pre-packaged experiences of strategic similitude.[42] But perhaps mobility *in* the city can tactically intervene against this, prompting sublime moments of self-awareness in which one is able to apprehend not the distance but the continuity between past and present. In the case of Granville Island, if not Vancouver as a whole, such a realization must involve the natural limits of shoreline: both as an impediment *and* an incentive to keep building.

Walk 3

I have to pace myself. It's the longest walk. But also the prettiest. A quick pit stop for some provisions from the market, and then underneath the Burrard Bridge and into Vanier Park, once the stomping ground of Chief Khatsahlano – the real bard of this beach, as Steven might say.[43] I continue westward from beach to beach: five in total. First up: Kitsilano, with its gym bodies and Filipina nannies. Unequal exchange of leisure and labour that could be a scene from Gerri's play.[44] Next, it's leafy Jericho, followed by windswept Locarno, and finally the bluffs of Spanish Banks; the activities get looser as the landscapes grow more untamed. But it's the loosest and wildest beach of all I'm after, a mythic, utopian place of the body whose natural pleasures might be as illusory as the manufactured wants of the city to which it turns its back(side).

Site 3: Wreck Beach, Early Morning

In summer, it's hard to resist the charms of Wreck Beach, a peninsular oasis that wraps around the westernmost tip of Pacific Spirit Regional Park: old growth trees jut out of the cliffside, bald eagles soar through the sky, the sun dapples the waters of Howe Sound, and bodies in var-

ious states of undress lounge in the sand. At sunset, as the last rays of daylight slip below the horizon, visitors routinely burst into applause. And yet this picturesque confluence of nature and naturism is not without its sublime disturbances. In exploring Wreck's importance as a site of homoerotic placemaking in Vancouver, Gordon Brent Ingram acknowledges the highly racialized links between desire, community, and environment mobilized among gay patrons of the beach, in part by walking his readers through the history of Coast Salish place names for the area.[45] Then there are the tensions that regularly surface between the Wreck Beach Preservation Society (WBPS), formed in 1988 to defend the beach's nudist traditions and its natural habitat, and the University of British Columbia (UBC), whose residential development of the western edge of its campus includes plans for several condos overlooking the beach. If one adds to this the fact that the beach is technically outside the jurisdiction of metro Vancouver (and so policed by the RCMP and the Greater Vancouver Regional District), *and* that the whole area sits on traditional Musqueam land, one can see just how choreographically complex is the public performance of place in this part of the city.

However, for Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi, co-artistic directors of Kokoro Dance, negotiating the different social groups, civic structures, and political ideologies laying claim to Wreck has been relatively smooth. In the twenty-one years they have been staging their Wreck Beach Butoh (WBB) – initially for invited guests only, but now a permitted and widely advertised public event – they have developed an excellent working relationship with the WBPS, and with police patrolling the area, who often do a pre-performance sweep of the beach for glass and other hazards. Most of those hazards turn out to be natural ones, including one year a swarm of jellyfish blanketing the sand. According to Bourget and Hirabayashi, who have performed many outdoor works with Kokoro over the years – including in the DTES – part of what makes WBB unique is that the site (in their case, the northern "Tower Beach" section of Wreck) is never the same twice. Indeed, the only constants are the time of the performance (low tide); the fact that the piece is always built on an ensemble (ranging from six to more than twenty); that they always go into the water (see figure 3.3); and that the group's movement covers as much of the beach as possible.[46]

Then, too, the performers are always naked. Notwithstanding the white body paint, the *sight* of a dozen or so men and women of various ages, backgrounds, and physicality moving together without clothes in ritual fashion between sand and surf might almost register as a visual cliché of this particular *site*. And yet, on the basis of my conversations

Figure 3.3
Performers in Kokoro Dance's 2013 presentation of Wreck Beach
Butoh enter the Pacific Ocean.

with Bourget and Hirabayashi, the experience of watching the 2013
piece that they created, and my subsequent participation in both the
2015 and 2016 iterations of WBB, I am convinced this version of place-
based community dance is doing a kind of kinesthetic and social work
different from the other examples discussed in this chapter. First, butoh
is a dance form – at least as developed by Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno
Kazuo – that is as much image-based as technique-based. This means
that the performer draws upon different word or sense images to in-
spire a particular dance and "animate its metamorphosis,"[47] building
to a state in which she feels her body "being moved" rather than moving
mechanically in relation to a set score.[48] The cat/cow back that comes
from undulating one's spine and tucking and untucking one's pelvis;

Figure 3.4
The Wreck Beach site imprints itself on Kokoro's 2013 dancers.

mad chef hands chopping vegetables to make a soup in the water; stand-
ing on one leg and flapping your arms like a bird; and the repertoire of
visual signifiers used to perfect the butoh walk (from the swamp in one's
belly to the forest of trees growing from one's shoulders): all of these
metaphors are key to WBB's movement vocabulary. But they are more
than metaphors. Developed in response to the site, the movement se-
quences created from this vocabulary (a pitched battle of squawking
seagulls was my favourite to watch in 2013, a box-stepping canon of
monkeys my least favourite to perform in 2016) encourage a deeper feel
for one's material environment, both in the literal support one is receiv-
ing from the space, and also in how one's movement might reciprocally
enrich or comment upon that space. The site-based contingencies of the

beach – wind, slippery rocks and spongy sand, cold water – arguably compound the sublime effects upon the performer, whose experience of time *and* bodily vulnerability can be measured only in relation to the "awesomeness" of the natural elements.[49] While Bourget and Hiraba-yashi, who build each new work in a studio, do their best to prepare their dancers for the experience of moving on the beach,[50] I can attest to how much the material site acts upon and changes each performance and, as crucially, to how the site's residue lingers upon performers' bod-ies (see figure 3.4).

In this respect, WBB also differs from the outdoor dance performances previously discussed in that it unfolds in an almost completely non-pre-sentational style. While this is true of much butoh dance performed on stage, it was striking to me, in watching WBB 2013, just how resolutely the proscenium was *not* in place in this instance. Clearly company mem-bers were playing to each other, and to the site, rather than to the audi-ence, who are often required to locomote as much as the dancers to take in the work. Experiencing this from the inside, as a performer in 2015 and 2016, gave me added insight into how the site always mediates the relationship between WBB performers and spectators. This raises two final points that bring us back to the "place" site dance might strategi-cally occupy in Vancouver's aesthetic and civic imaginary, and to what additional mobile intimacies it might tactically engender. On the first point, each WBB is built through a similar workshop process. Anyone can join in the creation for a one-time fee that enables subsequent yearly participation free of charge. Through this facet of Kokoro's mandate, Bourget and Hirabayashi contribute to accessible dance training in the city, with site-based performance offering a way for many pre-profes-sional participants in the Kokoro workshops to test their readiness to make the leap from studio to stage. Reciprocally, Bourget and Hiraba-yashi take advantage of the workshops to research movement ideas that might develop into an indoor, ticketed performance.[51]

These professional and personal exchanges of choreographic inti-macy are complemented by the kinesthetic labour of the audience in watching its performance. By that I mean that part of our experience of a roving site work such as this is that we must move along with it, ne-gotiating in the moment – and in the absence of traditional spectating protocols – not just the distance we maintain from the performers but also our closeness to each other. Gerecke maintains this is one of the most productive and distinctive aspects of site-based dance, namely its capacity to choreograph audiences – and in ways that ideally encour-

age more complex considerations of our relationships with each other and the spaces we inhabit and move through.[52] With or without clothes, on a beach or in the city, that's a sublime calculation of boundedness worth contemplating.

Conclusion

Needless to say, I took the bus home from Wreck. However, the ambulatory performance ethnography I conducted as an adjunct to my research on site dance in the city was instructive. For one thing, it taught me how consistently walking in Vancouver, as a tactic to speak place otherwise, comes up against strategies to manage and regulate bodily flows. Time and again I encountered barriers of access, or mechanisms to redirect my chosen route: fences; pathways that suddenly cut out; sidewalks that insisted this way instead of that. Blomley notes that this kind of "administrative pedestrianism" is designed not to promote public citizenship through the spontaneous occupation of civic space, but rather to govern what kinds of activities can be trafficked in, where, and by whom.[53]

In my own travels to my waterfront research sites, it was not sidewalk but seawall that I mostly had underfoot. Encircling Stanley Park, bounding the north and south sides of False Creek (including Granville Island), and stretching all the way to UBC, Vancouver's seawall is a defining feature of the city's performance of place. And yet in connecting our urban beaches, the seawall cuts out at two points. I have already noted one of these points, between CRAB/Portside Park and Canada Place. The other occurs between Kitsilano and Jericho Beaches, when through the tony enclave of Point Grey one is forced to make a detour around the priciest real estate in the city. What might be revealed by a tactical breaching of these enforced reroutings – by, for example, walking underneath Waterfront Station to Canada Place (which I have done), or hopping the private security fences along Point Grey Road and swimming from backyard pool to backyard pool (which I have not as yet attempted)?

Among other things, one comes to understand how even the right to a vista is ideologically fraught in Vancouver: publicly contained on the one hand, privately annexed on the other. My aim in analyzing site dance alongside other forms of social choreography through an explicitly local reading of the sublime has thus been partly to expose our too easy thrall to the distant view. Instead I have tried to suggest why, when exploring a kinesthetics of place, it is important to pay attention to what Levin has termed the "politics of ground," including the (in)visibility of different

bodies as they move on and through that ground.[54] In so doing, I am also advocating for the "place" of kinesis within performance studies scholarship in Canada, especially as it helps to connect, as I have attempted here, the field's different strands of aesthetic, ethnographic, and social analysis.[55]

NOTES

1 In writing this chapter, I have benefited immensely from conversations with Dara Culhane and Alana Gerecke, whose research on Vancouver site dance covers far more important ground – materially and theoretically – than what is offered here.
2 See Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 57.
3 Berelowitz, *Dream City*, 128.
4 Ibid., 245.
5 Ibid., 257–8.
6 Levin, *Performing Ground*, 6.
7 Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 113.
8 Ibid., 34.
9 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 81, emphasis in original.
10 See, in particular, Kloetzel and Pavlik, *Site Dance*, 177–8.
11 Levin, *Performing Ground*, 105–10.
12 Hunter, "Experiencing Space," 38.
13 See, as well, Patrick Alcedo's work in documenting the affective, embodied, and religious bonds at play among members of Toronto's Filipino community in their local celebrations – including through street dancing – of the annual Ati-Atihan Festival (Alcedo, "Emotional and Religious Landscapes"); and Alana Gerecke's interviews with both local and non-local site dance artists in Vancouver (Gerecke, "Moving Publics").
14 See Irving, "Strange Distance."
15 de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 36–7, emphasis in original.
16 Foster, "Walking," 144.
17 Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, 3, 22.
18 Martin, *Critical Moves*, 14.
19 Ibid., 14–15.
20 Vancouver-based visual artist Myfanwy MacLeod installed *The Birds* (2010), two 16.5-foot tall sparrows in polyurea and bronze, at the Olympic Village Plaza as part of a Cultural Olympiad public art commission.
21 On the paradoxes of (in)visibility for Aboriginal women in Vancouver's DTES, see Culhane, "Their Spirits Live."

22 Gerecke, "Moving Publics."

23 See Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg, interview by author, Vancouver, 25 March 2014.

24 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9.

25 Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 46–7.

26 I am alluding here to Jacques Rancière's *Emancipated Spectator*.

27 Friedenberg, interview.

28 Canuel, *Justice, Dissent and the Sublime*, 28.

29 Ibid., 97.

30 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 88, emphasis in original.

31 The installation of the memorial was also overseen by Don Larson, but without significant consultation of or collaboration with Aboriginal women's groups from the DTES; see Cultural Memory Group, *Remembering Women*, 45–8.

32 Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 55.

33 Ibid., 65.

34 See, on this latter point, Dangeli, "Dancing Sovereignty."

35 David McIntosh, co-artistic director of battery opera, has created a number of site-specific walking performances focused on the DTES, including *Lives Were around Me* (2009) and *Portside Walk* (2011).

36 See Granville Island, "Visitor's Guide."

37 Berelowitz, *City of Dreams*, 256, 255. Worth noting in the context of my previous discussion of CRAB/Portside Park is that in July 2014 it was announced that Port Metro Vancouver would take over management of Granville Island from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

38 See Pine and Gilmore, *Experience Economy*.

39 Horning, "Tourist Sublime."

40 Augé, *Non-Places*.

41 Kloetzel, "Site-Specific Dance," 240, 249.

42 Groys, "City in the Age." See also Kant, *Critique of Judgement*.

43 In Leaky Heaven's *To Wear a Heart So White* (2014), director Steven Hill and his collaborators take as their fictional starting point the idea that shortly after "discovering" the city that now bears his name, Captain George Vancouver and his crew staged *Macbeth* for Indigenous locals.

44 As part of her research on Filipino overseas workers in Canada, geographer Geraldine Pratt collaborated with the Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia and theatre artist-scholars Caleb Johnston and Alex Lazaridis Ferguson to create the testimonial play *Nanay*, based on interviews with Filipina migrant domestic workers and their Canadian employers. See Pratt, "Creating New Spaces."

45 Ingram, "Redesigning Wreck," 190, 191–2.
46 Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi, interview by author, Vancouver, 8 April 2014.
47 Fraleigh and Nakamura, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo*, 52.
48 Hijikata eventually compiled "sixteen scrapbooks of verbal and visual images for dance" – his *butoh-fu* – that function as a kind of dance notation; ibid., 54–7.
49 Fraleigh and Nakamura note that butoh, with its mud- and chalk-covered bodies, and often unfolding in spaces of physical extremity, has a "somatic intimacy with nature" and comprises "a unique type of performed ecological knowledge"; ibid., 11.
50 Bourget and Hirabayashi, interview.
51 Ibid.
52 Gerecke, "Moving Publics."
53 Blomley, *Rights of Passage*, 29–34.
54 Levin, *Performing Ground*, 17–25.
55 See Conquergood, "Of Caravans and Carnivals," 138.