Site-specific dance performance is a response by a choreographer to a particular location. That location, environmental or architectural, is the stimulus for performance. Though types of site (or location) and choreography will vary widely, two components remain common – the use of the site and its space. There is a specific interdependence between the site and the performance. Move the performance from the location and its significance will be either lost completely or weakened dramatically. The relationship between the spatial/experiential components and the choreographer and the consequent creative process leading to performance is the subject of this investigation.

Drawing upon the work of architectural and philosophical theorists concerned with the experiencing of space including: Henri Lefebvre (1974, 1991), Brian Lawson (2001), Yi Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) and Gaston Bachelard (1958), initial questions of how we experience, perceive, and interact with space are explored. These theories of space and spatial interaction are placed alongside those drawn from choreographic and performance theory offered by Valerie Briginshaw (2001) and Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1998) in an attempt to begin to draw parallels between the philosophical and practical areas of dance and space theory. Concepts of social and personal space, ways of constructing, experiencing, perceiving, and reading them and the implications for site-specific dance performance are considered. This exploration will focus on architectural and constructed spaces and will not concern itself with landscaped or geographical environments. Though
the existence of dance specific spatial components (Hunter 2007) implicit in
choreographic creation is acknowledged it is not scrutinized.
Finally a ‘model of influence’ is presented as an illustration of how the various
approaches upon the creative and interpretive process can be of influence.

**Perceiving, Constructing and Experiencing Space**

For the purposes of this discussion, the process of perceiving space can be defined as a
form of absorbing and ordering information gained whilst experiencing and interacting
with space. Perception can be seen as a process of ‘making sense’ of this information, a
process which is particular to each individual. Further definitions are provided by Brian
Lawson (2001) and Christian Norberg-Schulz (1963),

> Perception is an active process through which we make sense of the world around
us. To do this of course we rely upon sensation but we normally integrate the
experience of all our senses without conscious analysis.
> (Lawson 2001: 85)

> Our immediate awareness of the phenomenal world is given through perception.
> (Norberg-Schulz 1963: 27)

These definitions imply that perception is distinct from analysis and is an active process,
occuring subconsciously, almost instantaneously. The act of perception is a personal one,
subject to many variables; space and spaces therefore can be experienced and perceived
in many different ways by many individuals. Towns, cities, and buildings however are
constructed spaces, ‘concrete’ in dimensions and form, so how can such ‘closed’
structures produce a variety of responses and interpretations?

Lefebvre (1991) and Lawson (2001) suggest that environments and spaces are
‘constructed’ in a variety of ways. Lefebvre considers concepts of ‘socially’ and
‘personally’ constructed space, as ‘mental’ or ‘real’ space. Linked to this is the practice of
architecture itself. Whilst many architects are assigned or assign themselves to a
particular architectural ‘school’ and or movement, few provide a concise, generic
definition of the term ‘architecture’. For the purposes of this discussion therefore, an
appropriate definition of architecture is provided by the dance scholar and architectural
user and ‘consumer’ Valerie Briginshaw:

… spaces that are structured actually or conceptually according to ideas associated
with building design. (2001: 183)

On first inspection, this definition appears straightforward enough. On closer inspection
however, it begins to raise questions regarding authorship and construction. Buildings do
not simply appear; they are subject to complex processes of planning, designing, and re-
designing, eventually culminating in construction and realization. Likewise, towns and
cities evolve according to a number of factors including history, economic growth, social
migration, and national and international policy. Buildings, towns and cities largely
speaking are subject to rules and regulations regarding planning. They are constructed
environments and, as such, dictate and influence how we experience and ultimately
interpret them.
An examination of the use of scale in construction can serve to illustrate this point. Bryan Lawson (2001: 29) observes: ‘Scale is one of the most important elements in the social language of space’. He then cites the example of the city of Prague dominated by the grand Hradčany castle built at the top of a hill overlooking the city. He describes how housing built at the foot of the hill is small and increases in size and stature towards the top of the hill nearest the castle, reflecting the social hierarchy in existence at the time of construction (Lawson 2001: 50-51). This use of scale indicating wealth and status is still prevalent in Western society today. Large houses are deemed ‘grand’ and ‘imposing’ deferring social and economic status upon the occupants. Similarly, the size and scale of many civic buildings reflects the importance of the activities taking place within. Notions of power and control can also be associated with large civic and corporate buildings.

As a social construct space is not transparent and innocent, it is imbued with power of different kinds.

(Briginshaw 2001: 30)

Briginshaw’s observation highlights how particular elements of location, scale, construction, and design can be interpreted and imbued with meaning according to the dominant ideology of a particular society. Historically, in the U.K. for example, we associated the term ‘inner city’ with notions of poverty and deprivation, whilst ‘the countryside’ carried with it images of peace and tranquility. Social construction of space can be seen therefore to develop through associations and connotations assigned to particular environments and spaces. Through common usage these associations become part of the common psyche. Thus cities, spaces, and environments can be seen to be
‘constructed’ on a number of levels including physical and social as influenced by ideology.

Such social and ideological factors can influence the way in which we interact with and experience spaces. However, the physical construction and design of spaces and buildings directly dictate the manner in which we physically engage with space. Road systems and one-way traffic management schemes dictate how we enter cities and towns. Entrances and corridors determine how we navigate our journey through buildings. Lawson describes architectural and urban spaces as:

Containers to accommodate, separate, structure and organize, facilitate, heighten, and even celebrate human spatial behaviour. (2001: 4)

Here, Lawson is referring to a degree of architectural ‘control’ examined later. Constructed environments inevitably provide us with a wealth of formal and informal spatial information. Whilst we may not consciously be aware of their impact upon our perception of space, Lawson explains how our brains prioritise these elements over others when later attempting to recreate a space in our ‘mind’s eye’. He identifies these elements as:

Verticality
Symmetry
Colour
Number (of windows, columns, doors etc.)
Meaning (i.e. ‘labels’ church, gallery, etc.)
Context (our context when entering a space)  

(Lawson 2001: 62-68)

The first four elements listed here refer to an interaction with the more formal and structural elements with space, leading perhaps to an aesthetic response. The remaining two elements, meaning and context, both relate to the social and personal construction of space and require further examination.

The dominant ideology of any given society attaches labels of meaning to particular buildings and environments. These meanings are often constructed externally via architectural design and internally through conventions of use. This type of functional inside/outside interface is also facilitated via the internal design of the building serving to orchestrate and engineer the individual’s interaction with the space and ultimately the institution it houses or represents. Lawson provides a pertinent illustration of this process when describing the conventions surrounding the construction of and interaction with church buildings:

The Christian church not only organizes space for ritual, but also uniquely locates each of the roles in the special society of worship. The chair, the congregation, and the clergy each have their own place, and a Christian visiting a strange church will have little difficulty in knowing to go and how to behave.

(Lawson 2001: 26)

Lawson implies that the ‘meaning’ of the space refers not only to its external façade, but also indicates the building’s function and the social norms employed when interacting
with the space. These meanings and social norms attached to certain buildings can be culturally determined and are often identifiable only to those familiar with the conventions of usage. For example, an individual well versed in the conventions and social norms of a church building may be unfamiliar with the conventions employed within other places of worship. The individual’s subjectivity and the context in which they experience a particular building or site may also impact upon their experience and perception of the space.

Personal, social, time-based, environmental, cultural, geographical, and political contexts can influence and impact upon our experience of place, to quote the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck:

       Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion.
       (Van Eyck in Lawson 2001: 23)

Again, using the example of a church space, we can see how our experience and interaction with the space can be radically altered according to the context of the occasion occurring within the space. Weddings, funerals, and christenings all elicit differing responses to and prescribe differing interactions with the space, whilst the internal and external architectural make up remains essentially the same. Choreographers engaging in the creation of site-specific work need therefore to experientially research the site on a number of occasions and from a range of social, cultural and contextual perspectives prior to embarking upon the creative process (see Hunter 2007).
Whilst ‘external’ factors focus the experience of space, therefore, ‘internal’ elements add contextual meaning. Erving Goffman (1969) highlights how the ‘performance of self’ affects the way in which we interact with any given space and Gaston Bachelard (1964) emphasizes the psychological associations we make with spaces, suggesting that attics, for example, relate to the ‘super ego’ (p.19) whilst basements connect to ‘the dark id’ (p.19); the home remains a haven, an ‘ideal’ space. Lefebvre however, urges that both external and internal spatial factors operate upon our experience and perception of space.

In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other.

(Lefebvre 1991: 14)

Thus both external and internal ‘contexts’ influence and inform our experiencing of space inferring a two-way interaction between individual/space and space/individual.

Notions of a passive, arbitrary interaction with spaces are further challenged when exploring Lawson’s earlier reference to architectural ‘control’ He argues that our experience of space is managed by architects, designers, and town planners in particular ways. In this sense, space is both ‘product and producer’ (Lefebvre 1991: 142). It is both produced by the architect and planner and produces certain patterns of behaviour:

Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes, and distances to be covered.

(Lefebvre 1991: 143)
Lawson’s example describes a pathway and a series of gates leading to a private house:

[As an architectural system which] symbolizes and controls the transition from public through semi-public and semi-private areas to the private domain. It signals changes of possession, of control, and of behaviour.

(2001: 12)

Architectural ‘control’ can be experienced in a vast number of buildings in the constructed environment. For example, when entering a hospital building we may walk down a directed footpath, through an external covered entrance porch, through automated sliding doors, into a reception area with signs indicating a stated direction. This process again indicates and controls a transition and change in status from the autonomous to the institutional. Equally, site-specific dance performance by its very nature has the potential to challenge and disrupt the site’s conventional norms of usage, a factor which can effectively operate as a choreographic ‘device’ in its own right as the choreographer explores alternative approaches to moving through, on and around the site.

Whilst recognizing the concept of the ‘architect as author’ it is also important to avoid the intentionalist assumption that a ‘closed’ or ‘fixed’ reading of any particular space is achievable or indeed desirable. Lefebvre argues that spaces themselves construct meanings (albeit influenced by the intentions of the architect / planner):

… a space is not a thing, but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).

(Lefebvre 1991: 83)
This suggests that constructed environments are not simply empty, passive spaces; instead they actively engage with their contents, users, contexts, and environments to construct meanings. Through this process of interaction, according to Michel de Certeau, place (stable, positional) becomes space (mobile, temporal):

In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.

(de Certeau 1984: 117)

The meanings and associations encountered in sites and places then are not absolute but are open to the further processes of individual interaction and interpretation resulting in multi- ‘readings’.

**Internal and External Space**

As the concern of this chapter is with the concepts of experiencing and perceiving space, the notion of ‘architect as author’ is limiting, as observed by Mildred and Edward T. Hall,

Far from being passive, environment actually enters into a transaction with humans. (1975: 9)

This ‘transaction’ is key, as acknowledged by Hall and Lefebvre: both place the individual at the core. Lefebvre refers to the concept of ‘internal and external space’ (p.82). In geographical terms this could relate to indoor and outdoor spaces. In human
terms however, this can refer to ‘internal’ mental, cognitive space, and ‘external’ physical and sensory space occupied by the individual. He adds:

… each living body is space and has its space; it produces itself in space and also it produces that space.

(Lefebvre 1991: 170)

According to Lefebvre therefore, the body is space – we consist of both internal (mental) and external (physical) space, we produce ourselves in the world whilst also physically constructing spaces and environments. This third stage, the production of space, can occur in several ways, the most literal of which is the architectural construction of towns, cities, and buildings. We can also produce space through our external physical interactions with space. For example, the process of travelling from point A to point B is constructed conceptually as ‘a journey’. ‘Journeys’ can vary in size and duration including movements from room to room or from country to country, consisting of both micro- and macro-forms connecting through both time and space. Accordingly, site-specific choreography presents a unique form of spatial production emerging from the dancer’s movement interventions in the site, described by choreographer Carol Brown (2003) as a form of ‘ephemeral architecture’.

The inside/outside interface perhaps becomes more complex when considering our ‘internal’ (mental/cognitive) construction of space. This internal construction of space is also influenced by external factors and combines with elements such as our sensory, kinaesthetic, and emotional responses to create a personal ‘construction’ of a particular
space. In this sense we are referring to different ways of ‘knowing’ and experiencing a space, acknowledging the influence of sensory and ‘other’ forms of knowing upon the personal construction of space, in addition to the more formalized processes of experiencing such as the physical, visual and aural. Personal construction of space can be located as occurring at the point of interaction with environments and implies both an epistemological and physical approach to experiencing space.

Bloomer and Moore (1977) develop the discussion of ‘inside’ space by focusing on the more physical and anatomical elements of the experiencing process. They argue that our sense of internal space is created by a physical sense of space within the body. For example, in the common perception of the heart as the ‘centre’ of the body, referring to the heart and other major organs as ‘landmarks’:

The heart, with its’ auditory and rhythmic presence, exemplifies the phenomenon of an internal landmark acquiring a universal spatial meaning in adult life.

(Bloomer and Moore 1977: 30)

They discuss this type of ‘knowing’ in conjunction with the type of ‘knowing’ developed by the awareness of touch, the ‘haptic’ sense,

To sense haptically is to experience objects in the environment by actually touching them (by climbing a mountain rather than staring at it)… and thus it includes all those aspects of sensual detection which involve physical contact both inside and outside the body.

(Bloomer and Moore 1977: 34-5)
This suggests that the inside/outside interface becomes permeable, with the boundaries between body and space becoming ‘fluid’ (Briginshaw, 2001); sensations experienced on the outside of the body via the skin receptors are also experienced simultaneously on the inside of the body, often in a physical/sensorial manner such as shivering, excitement, or revulsion. This further haptic information enables us then, as sensory beings, to locate and orient ourselves within general space. An internal ‘grounding’ provided by ‘haptically perceived landmarks’ (Bloomer and Moore 1977: 39) can serve to inform us of our own sense of internal space whilst processing ‘external’ spatial information. When combined with our ‘internal’ mental creation of space, these physical and ‘haptic’ influences can begin to contribute towards our perception of space.

Further to the methods of experiencing space already identified, perhaps the most illusive concept to examine and identify is the sensory experiencing of space. Upon entering a space our senses are immediately challenged and engaged; amongst many elements we react to sight, sound, smell, taste, temperature, and touch (our ‘haptic’ sense referred to previously). This notion of bodily ‘knowing’ and experiencing in relation to space is a concept, according to Lefebvre, which is often overlooked:

When ‘Ego’ arrives in an unknown country or city, he first experiences it through every part of his body – through his senses of smell and taste, as (providing he does not limit this by remaining in his car) through his legs and feet.

(Lefebvre 1991: 162)
Certainly, these sensory experiences can be seen to combine with those spatial, aesthetic, and contextual images identified by Lawson when later attempting to re-create a mental image of a space. Similarly, certain smells and sounds can instantly evoke a recollection of place, highlighting the power of the senses. In addition, certain theorists have identified a link between space and the kinaesthetic sense, whereby an internal physical sense of motion and engagement is created whilst interacting with a space. Violet Paget, speaking of landscape in *The Beautiful* (1931) observes,

> You always, in contemplating objects, especially systems of lines and shapes, experience bodily tensions and impulses relative to the forms you apprehend, the rising and sinking, rushing, colliding, reciprocal checking … of shapes. (Paget 1931: 61)

This sense of motion can be linked to the physical aspects of scale and the participation of the body in the appreciation of size. For example, the kinaesthetic feeling induced when standing at the base of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, looking up through the steel structure to its summit. A sense of motion and bodily awareness is invoked, allowing comparison of the scale of the structure with our own human form. Yi Fu Tuan in *Topophilia* (1974) argues that the very words we use to describe certain spaces and environments imply a kinaesthetic relationship:

> The existence of a kinaesthetic relationship between certain physical forms and human feelings is implied in the verbs we use to describe them. For example, mountain peaks and man-made spires 'soar', ocean waves as well as architectural domes 'swell'.
Tuan’s and Paget’s acknowledgement of this type of kinaesthetic relationship is important as it serves to underline the existence of these types of ‘knowing’ with their reliance upon sensation and bodily awareness that challenge the dominance of visual and formal factors. The kinaesthetic experience therefore can be added to the list of elements (sensory, cognitive, spatial, ideological and psychological) that combine and contribute towards our experiencing of space and explain why individuals perceive spaces differently through a ‘process of experiencing’.

How all these contextual elements combine is the concern of the site-specific chorographer.

Site-Specific Dance Performance

Site-specific dance performance is defined here as dance performance created in response to and performed within a particular site or location. Examples of this type of work include Tim Rubidge’s *Footfalls Echo@Belsay* (2008) performed at Belsay Castle, Northumberland, Motionhouse’s *Dreams and Ruins* (2005) performed at Witley Court, Worcestershire; *Genesis Canyon* (1996) choreographed by Stephan Koplowitz, performed at the Natural History Museum; and *Double Take* (2000) created by Suzanne Thomas for Seven Sisters dance group, performed in Selfridges department store, London. This work is inspired by and dependent upon its location, and differs from site-adaptive work whereby a pre-conceived work may tour to a variety of unconventional spaces, such as
Siobhan Davies’ *Plant and Ghosts* (2002). Whilst these spaces share similarities in their unorthodoxy as performance venues, such works cannot be deemed ‘site-specific’ in the true sense of the word as the essence of the work remains constant from location to location.

Site-specific choreography is influenced by the choreographer’s response to a particular space and or location, which presupposes an implied awareness from the choreographer when selecting spaces for site-specific performance. The choreographer ‘tunes-in’ to this awareness on a conscious level, whilst simultaneously reacting to the ‘processes of experiencing’ operating at a subconscious level. Tangible elements will have an immediate impact on the conscious level. These include formal and structural elements of the site, architectural design, historical and contextual information and also the practicalities of staging including site-lines and health and safety obstacles. At the same time, however, the other ‘processes of experiencing’, including personal aesthetic and artistic preferences will be informing the choreographer’s choices and decisions. As Stephan Koplowitz observes:

> When creating a site-specific performance one is dealing with multiple levels at once: the architecture of the site, its history, its use, its accessibility. I’m interested in becoming a part of the design and rhythm of the site and amplifying that. This kind of work is not necessarily about big extensions and triple turns, but what is most appropriate for the site. The most virtuosic movements might simply be everyone raising their arms together.

Koplowitz captures here the essence of successful site-specific work, the creation of a carefully constructed balance between the performance and the site. The final performance outcome is at once a reflection of the site and its architecture and the choreographer’s personal and artistic response to the site.

For the choreographer, the processes of experiencing and perceiving space and the subsequent interpretation of these responses combine with aesthetic and artistic concerns to inform the creative process by providing stimuli both conscious and subconscious for movement content and creation. This process can operate on a number of levels and is dependent upon the choreographer’s working methods and experience. On a simplistic level, the choreographer may be inspired by the function or the architectural design of a space, the shape, form and number of columns and arches, for example. These formal elements may directly relate to the number of sections of a dance work, or may provide a starting point for an improvisational task, improvising around the theme of ‘planes’ or on the theme of reaching and dropping. An example of such an exercise is described here following the choreographer’s observation of a devising task in which dancers were required to respond to the architecture and form of a basement wine-cellar:

Twisting, touching the body, touching the walls. High-arch movements beginning to appear, arms raised to the ceiling whilst body curves over. Sinking, curved body, curved arms. Sliding of feet, turning and dropping, suspending and dropping, delicate.

(Hunter, Beneath choreographic diary entry 9 September 2004)\(^2\)
In addition to formal and structural site-related components, the individual’s kinaesthetic empathy with a space can also influence the dynamic content of the choreography. In *Architecture, Form, Space and Order*, Francis Ching (1996) describes how ‘rows of columns can provide a rhythmic measure of space’ (p.16); this ‘rhythmic’ information could be interpreted to produce rhythmic, repetitive movements. In addition, the sheer size and scale of a building may influence both the content and the form of a work, causing the choreographer to investigate and explore the concept of size and scale in a choreographic sense, moving from experimenting with large to small movements and gestures. Even the practical concerns of staging can act as a stimulus for creative solutions leading to further performance development. The intangible ‘processes of experiencing’ and the phenomenological resonances of ‘place’ also influence the creation of movement material. For example, the subterranean location of a basement or cellar may influence the choreographer’s ‘processes of experiencing’ and trigger contextual associations, to produce a work with an air of mystery or foreboding. Therefore processes involved in the outside/inside interface combined with other sensory influences can combine and contribute to the underlying mood and ‘feel’ of a piece.

What then are the implications for the site? How does the site itself feature in such an interaction? Is its purpose merely to provide a stimulus and setting for a performance or does the interaction between the space and the performance develop further?

Whilst the site > performance relationship is perhaps relatively easy to visualize, the performance > site relationship could be viewed as more complex. Essentially, the creative process can be viewed as collaboration between site, choreographer and
performer. Choreographer Carol Brown alludes to this process of interaction when discussing a dance-architecture workshop:

In responding to the architecture of the site, the performers uncovered layers of embedded history and new trace-forms. The centre became an ear for the body, listening to the movements of the dancers. Architecture and anatomy traded places. We passed messages between them. The walls spoke.
(Brown 2003: 2)

Drawing upon theories offered in this discussion and considering the relationship or interface between site and choreographer as one which combines a socially constructed space with a personally constructed one, we can begin to see how the dance performance can serve to ‘re-inscribe’ the space (Briginshaw 2001: 57), thus challenging the context, dominant ideology, and perception of a particular space or site. Site-specific dance performance situated within a church space, for example, can serve to challenge preconceptions concerning the form and function of the building as the audience use and view the building and its content from a different viewpoint, challenging the codes and conventions of usage. A pertinent example of which is Gerry Turvey’s site-specific dance work Fallen Angels (2004) performed in Holy Trinity church, Leeds (www.turveyworld.co.uk.). In addition, the codes and conventions of performance spectatorship are also challenged. Gay McCauley discusses the conventions adopted in a traditional theatre setting:

The behaviour of actors is marked; spectators know that it is to be interpreted differently from apparently identical behaviours occurring in other places.
Spectators in the theatre both believe and disbelieve, they play a game in which they permit themselves to believe to a certain extent what is occurring.

(McCauley 2001 :4)

This participation by the audience in a theatrical ‘game’ is challenged and heightened in site-specific performance as the rules are no longer defined according to the accepted conventions of theatre going; they become fluid and ill-defined, opening up the interpretive possibilities.

Pioneered by the post-modernists in the sixties and seventies, site-specific art and performance provided the ideal genre for the challenging of artistic convention:

The conceptual focuses of sixties artists on the avant-garde use of site specific performance spaces which stretched audience perception, on a particular urban sensibility and on blurring boundaries, such as inside/outside, private/public, and art/everyday life, paved the way for what was to follow.

(Briginshaw 2001: 44)

Not only is the art form challenged and presented in a different format, but the nature and definition of the performance site itself is questioned, presented, and transformed. Site-specific performance, with its lack of proscenium arch and auditoria seating, actively encourages the audience’s participation both with the site and the performance. The audience becomes actively engaged in the construction of meanings and interpretation; they have a greater sense of participation and ownership over the performance as they are often responsible for placing themselves physically in the space as observers. Similarly,
they are required to be more proactive in the interpretation of the work, as the conventions of the traditional theatre venue are abandoned, leaving the observer to respond to the work independently. In this sense, site-specific performance, with its frequent inclusion of elements such as promenade, can be seen to challenge traditional Euclidean theory implying 'a single viewpoint in space from which all points converge' (Briginshaw 2001: 89). Instead, a multitude of viewpoints is created, effectively ‘de-centering’ the performance space and fundamentally challenging notions of performance and spectatorship.

Therefore, we can begin to see how the site influences the dance, which in turn influences the site, each component informing and defining the other; the choreographer essentially enters into a ‘dialogue’ with the space whereby the performance works with the site as opposed to becoming imposed upon it. In this sense, both the concept and definition of the dance and the space is constantly shifting, becoming a fluid entity with no ‘fixed’ meaning. During the site-specific dance performance, both the site and the performance piece exist in a state of ‘becoming-ness’; the readings are never fixed. Clifford McLucas, co-artistic director of Welsh performance company Brith Goff observes,

> The real site-specific works that we do, are the ones where we create a piece of work which is a hybrid of the place, the public, and the performance.

(McLucas in Kaye 2000: 55)

In a sense, this interaction between site, performance, and observer results in the creation of a new ‘space’, the conceptual space of performance that exists only temporarily yet brings a new dimension to the architectural location.
Conclusion – ‘Model of Influence’

(N.B to view the model visit the full publication)

When considering the various elements involved in the creation of site-specific dance performance it is possible to identify a number of influencing factors involved in the production of a performance work. These factors are perhaps best illustrated via the presentation of a suggested ‘model of influence’, highlighting in linear form the relationship and interaction between the various components. This initial model focuses on the ‘site to product’ relationship, following the creative journey from the individual choreographer’s interaction with the space/site to the creation of a final product/performance presented to an audience. When constructing this model, the various stages of spatial interaction were considered and the ‘processes of experiencing’ contained within these stages included. In this sense the ‘through line’ of influence from space to choreographer becomes affected and embellished by the various sensory, formal, psychological, and artistic elements collectively referred to here as ‘processes of experiencing’. The interplay between these processes may vary from space to space and from site to site. In some spaces, for example, formal and thematic elements may serve to influence the choreographer predominantly; in other spaces the sensory and personal construction of space may dominate. Whilst recognizing the existence and influence of these processes, the model does not suggest that all of these processes operate to influence the creative process at any one time. Whilst this *may* occur, it is more likely that the various processes of experience will serve to influence the choreographer in a process of ebb and flow. Some processes will be more dominant at certain stages of the
experiencing and creative process, whilst other factors will influence at other times. It is also necessary to acknowledge that the creative and devising process operates in a cyclical manner informed by the site-choreographer and site-performer relationship which develops and informs the creation of the final work. We recognize the existence of the choreographer and performers as living, breathing, and creative individuals, susceptible to a variety of factors that, in turn, will affect the processes of experiencing, perceiving, and interacting with space and spaces.

In this model a continuous through-line of influence can be witnessed, from the physical and social construction of space to the creation of a performance, and the audience’s interaction with the performance. Prior to the presentation of the final performance product however, a complex and creatively rich devising and creative exchange between the choreographer/performer and the space must occur; a process during which a temporary, new space of ‘process’ exists, inhabited by creative ideas and explorations which may or may not feature in the final performance outcome. Influencing factors, such as the various ‘processes of experiencing’ and the interpretive process together with aesthetic and artistic concerns, combine to contribute to the creation of performance material by the choreographer. This particular model reflects a devised approach to the creative process, thereby acknowledging the artistic and creative input of the performer. The active role played by the audience in the reading and interpretive process is also acknowledged in the model, a process which can carry resonances of the performance forward after the event, in turn serving to ‘re-inscribe’ the original space with a variety of meanings. Finally, the creative potential presented by this type of interface between performance and space is alluded to via a reiteration of the suggestion that this type of
interaction serves in itself to create a new type of ‘space’. Preston-Dunlop captures the essence of this type of interaction;

The body-in-space
is the basic sculptural element of choreography.
Bodies enter and move through, in and with a space
turning the void into a place.
(1998, p.121)

In site-specific terms, the type of ‘place’ created is the ‘place’ of performance, transforming the accepted and conventional properties ascribed to a particular space, whilst simultaneously creating a temporary place of performance. This interaction between the spatial and the performative is ephemeral in nature, existing only in the moment of performance, and can be identified perhaps as the ‘true’ and desired outcome of site-specific performance, a perfect synthesis between space, performance, and audience. In this sense, the role of choreographer can be viewed as that of an intermediary, providing a creative channel of communication between site and performance, informed and influenced by many varying factors that serve to enrich and enlighten the final performance outcome.

References


Tuan, Yi-Fu (1979) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

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1 The idealized view of the countryside may be slowly eroding however following the wide scale-reporting of countryside flooding, erosion of farming traditions etc.


2 Choreographic journal notes, the *Beneath* project, a site-specific dance performance performed in the basement of the Bretton Hall mansion building, September 2004. The mansion building dates back to the 18th century and housed the University of Leeds School of Performance and Cultural Industries.
3 In communication theory this concept is equitable to the concept of ‘noise’, the influencing or effecting factors at play during a communicative interaction between sender and receiver. See Fiske, J. (1982) *Introduction To Communication Studies*. 