

Sap Dance and Louise Ann Wilson Company

JACK SCOUT

FOUR GREEN THEMES

This document explains the aims of *Jack Scout* in terms of the wider context and relevance of the production. This can be expressed in terms of four “green themes” of national and international significance that implicate, but extend beyond, the arts.

(1) WATCHING NATURE: NEW WAYS OF MEDIATING THE NATURAL WORLD

Most obviously, *Jack Scout* can be understood in relation to the ever-increasing interest in filming and photographing the natural world represented by *Life* (with viewing figures of up to 6.5 million per episode) and other nationally-networked TV series fronted by David Attenborough; a host of other wildlife series (*Countryfile*, *Autumnwatch*, *Springwatch*, etc.); and programmes focusing on more specialized subjects, such as survival, gardening and bird-watching. No longer just a pastime for boffins or retired persons, bird-watching in particular has never been so popular. Over six million Britons watch birds every other week, membership of the RSPB has doubled within a decade to one million, and a number of public figures, varied in age and ethnicity, now testify to the fascination exerted by birds and the different ways in which bird-life can be mediated (e.g. film, photography, painting, poetry, mythology, taxonomy, etc.).¹

→ *Jack Scout* can, then, be partly understood in terms of this growing fascination with filming wildlife and the measures that photographers go to capture it. However, whilst our engagement with *Jack Scout* will be documented through photography and film, we are principally interested in how this single site can be mediated in many other ways, in particular through dance and movement, and dialogic art (involving installation, poetry, scientific explanation and demonstration, community participation, and impromptu conversation).

(2) EXERCISING NATURE: HUMAN WELLBEING AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Outdoor rural leisure pursuits (from rock climbing to rambling) offer varied and often cheap means of attaining a happy and healthy lifestyle. Recent research commissioned by the RSPB emphasises this link between, on the one hand, the appreciation, enjoyment, protection and sustainable development of the natural world and, on the other, the development of physical and mental human wellbeing – and thus a means of addressing health problems, caused by

¹ Kellaway, Kate (2009) “Meet the New Recruits to the Birdwatching Flock”, *The Observer*, 22 November: 4–5.

physical inactivity, which currently costs the UK economy about £8 billion per year. As Dr. William Bird, the (aptly named!) author of the RSPB report, states: “The countryside can be seen as a great outpatient department whose therapeutic value is yet to be fully realised”.

→ *Jack Scout* can thus also be understood as an innovative attempt to realize the therapeutic value of one particular location by designing on-site creative processes through which different user groups can actively explore the link between their own sense of wellbeing and their engagement with that location’s eco-system. Moreover, the involvement of school pupils in one of the ‘Dialogues’ was a response to a concern arising from the aforementioned report that children might suffer, in the words of RSPB President Kate Humble, from “nature starvation”.²

(3) VALUING NATURE: RECOGNIZING THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Creative human involvement with the other-than-human world doesn’t stop with what nature can offer us but can extend to fundamental changes in our attitudes towards nature and the environment. This is a crucial point that relates to probably the most pressing matter facing the world today: climate change, global warming and pollution. As the Copenhagen summit indicates, there is now a world-wide concern about our

current relationship with the natural environment. [But t]he problems go beyond those posed by specific initiatives (new power plants, industries, housing, roads, etc.) to *the pervasive and routine ways in which environmental features are perceived, that is, as a problem to be dealt with or as an exploitable resource*. All too often this leads to insensitive, even damaging relationships and developments, which ironically neglect the very features that may be vital to cultural and economic regeneration.³

So, if we don’t change the way in which we perceive nature in the first place it is unlikely that we will develop long-lasting and shared solutions to the problems of environmental damage and degradation. If we are serious about protecting nature then we need to develop “approaches in which values in nature or our being a part of nature undergirds the demand that nature be protected” (Marietta 2003: 130). One of the ways in which this can be done is through re-enchantment – that is, events (including artistic and scientifically-informed actions and events) that question the inevitability of disenchantment and instrumentality and that develop a love of place through intimate perception and reverie.

² Gray, Louise (2010) “Children not getting enough access to nature warns Kate Humble”, Online: Telegraph.co.uk.

³ Stewart, Nigel (forthcoming) “Introduction”, *Re-enchantment & Reclamation: New Perceptions of Morecambe Bay Through Dance, Film and Sound*, Online [available soon]: www.re-enchantment.org.uk.

→ *Jack Scout* can thus be understood as one such approach which attempts to re-enchant audiences with a keen sense of the intrinsic value of the natural world, the degree to which we belong to it, and our consequent need to protect it. The point here is the same as the sentiment expressed in the Littoral Arts Trust in their report on rural arts for the Arts Council:

Even for those of us that live in towns it is the land that sustains us, that makes us what we are. Equally it is our separation from the land, uniquely in Europe, which contributes so much to our feelings of isolation. We need to re-establish our stake in the land [...]. We need to rediscover our spiritual ownership of the countryside, its landscapes and wildlife.⁴

(4) PERFORMING NATURE: DEVELOPING THE ARTS THROUGH THE NATURAL WORLD

Our work is innovative, but it does not sit in a vacuum. We identify two main influences on our own work.

Environmental Dance

Environmental Dance refers to the plethora of dance and somatic practices concerned with the human body's relationship to the environment and the other-than-human world of animals and plants. This includes outdoor performances, ranging from sixteenth-century Elizabethan pastimes, through the mid-twentieth century movement choirs of Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, to the late twentieth-century work of a host of Butoh performers, including Atsushi Takenouchi, Tanaka Min and companies associated with Tanaka's Body Weather Work.⁵ Other examples include the actions and events of Welsh-based movement artist Simon Whitehead; and Jennifer Monson's iLAND projects, most notably her multi-year Birdbrain Migrations in which Monson's company dance at locations plotted by the migratory pathways

⁴ Littoral Arts Trust (2005) *New Rural Arts Strategy*, Arts Council England.

⁵ Relevant Elizabethan pastimes include the prearranged dances and choreographed combats between mythical figures which surprised Queen Elizabeth I as she walked through the woods of Kenilworth and Woodstock in 1575 (Philippa Berry, 1994, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 98). A film of Wigman's 'Wandering', the second section from her 1924 work *Scenes from a Dance Drama*, shows Wigman dancing across a rural setting with her pack of acolytes (Susan A Manning, 1993, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press). Anderson's *Out on the Windy Beach* (1998) was located at a number of seaside locations where a sextet of dancers, costumed in luminous lime green body suits, performed dances derived from mermaid poses, beauty contests and films of reptilian aliens (Valerie Briginshaw, 2001, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 59–62). Atsushi committed himself to dancing over places where large numbers of people have died, such as the killing fields of Cambodia, Poland, Japan (Sondra Fraleigh, 2005, 'Spacetime and Mud in Butoh', in Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart (eds) *Performing Nature*, Bern: Peter Lang, p. 336).

Tanaka's *Dream Island* was performed over a rubbish tip in Tokyo Bay. Exponents of Body Weather Work include Tess De Quincey's De Quincey Co, Stuart Lynch's Perfume Collective and Frank van de Ven's Body Weather Amsterdam.

of different species of birds up and down North America.⁶ Environmental Dance also includes approaches to movement education that provide, in effect, a training in the perception of nature equal to a training in landscape painting or botanical illustration (e.g. Whitehead's Locator courses, the Body Weather Work training system, and Grotowski's paratheatre workshops).

Dialogic Art

The second influence is visual art and live art in which an upfront critical dialogue between the artist and audience about our collective relationship to the environment does not merely *augment* the art work (as in a post-performance discussion) but is actually *incorporated* within, or entirely constitutes, that art work. Examples include the Social Sculpture of Joseph Beuys⁷ and PLATFORM;⁸ the exhibitions and communal processes of Shelly Sacks and Basia Irland's Social Practice Art;⁹ the actions, meetings and dialogues of Bruce Barber's Littoral Art;¹⁰ the provocative site-specific Dialogic Art of artists and collectives such as The Art of Change, Helen and Newton Harrison, Stephen Willats, and WochenKlausur;¹¹ and the installations of Suzanne Lacy's New Genre Public Art which facilitate community involvement.¹² Other important influences include the environmental activism of Ana Halprin's processions in the 1960s¹³ and Monson's birdbrain project; the Barters of Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret;¹⁴ the soundwalks of Hildegard Westerkamp and Andrea McCartney;¹⁵ and the "mythogeography" of Writes and Sites which uses walking as "performance, [...] as meditation, as post-tourism, as dissident mapping, as subversion of and rejoicing in the everyday".¹⁶

⁶ Monson, Jennifer (2010) *Birdbrain Dance: A Navigational Dance Project*, Online: <http://www.birdbraindance.org> (accessed: 12 April 2010).

⁷ Tisdall, Caroline (1979) *Joseph Beuys*, London: Thames and Hudson.

⁸ PLATFORM (2005) Online: www.platformlondon.org (accessed: 19 January 2005).

⁹ Heim, Wallace (2005) "Navigating Voices" in Giannachi, Gabriella and Stewart, Nigel (eds.) *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, Berne: Peter Lang, pp. 199–216.

¹⁰ Barber, Bruce (2005) *Novel Squat*, Online: <http://novelsquat.com> (accessed: 19 January 2005).

¹¹ Kester, Grant (2004) *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹² Lacy, Suzanne (1995) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle: Bay Press.

¹³ Ross Janice (2007) *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁴ Barba, Eugenio (1995) *The Paper Canoe*, tr. Richard Fowler, London and New York: Routledge.

¹⁵ McCartney, Andra (2005) "Performing Soundwalks for *Journées sonores, canal de Lachine*", in Giannachi, Gabriella and Stewart, Nigel (eds.) *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, Berne: Peter Lang, pp. 217–33.

¹⁶ Smith, Phil (2010) *Mythogeography: A Wayfinder to Walking Sideways*, Axminster: Triarchy Press.