

“Mundane” Performance: Theatre Outdoors and Earthly Pleasures

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Abstract

This paper seeks to reclaim the literal meaning of the word “mundane,” to propose a “mundane” theatre, which, rather than being “humdrum or dull,” is more positively “belonging to the earthly world.” Rather than the theatrum mundi that imagines the world as a stage or that aspires to present the earth or cosmos in its entirety on stage, it seeks a form that engages audiences with belonging to the earthly realm as its substantive material affect. It draws on a United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded project, “Outside the Box: Open-Air Performance as a Pandemic Response,” which commissioned a season of curated, outdoor performance works for Exeter in July and August 2021. Grounded in the authors’ experiences of five performance commissions, audience evaluation and wider interviews with artists and local authorities, we identify the ways in which the practical programme of case study works produced what we describe, positively, as “mundane” performance, thereby prompting pleasure in ecologically sensitive practices, grounded by earth and rediscovering of place, expressive of corporeal interconnectedness, engaged with materiality and revealing earth as that which remains paradoxically concealed. In their openness to the world, these performances remain a map of interconnected drafts, rather than finished or reproducible works. These kinds of mundane performance, for which we advocate, answer and react to what they find in and about nonhuman nature in the moment but also have the capacity to bring earthly concerns to light within those responses. Glimpses of another—extraordinary, perhaps—life quality emerge as possible in mundane performance.

Keywords: mundane, theatre, outdoors, pleasure, performance, open-air, earthly

Consideration of the current environmental crisis can understandably provoke anxiety and despair. Indeed, for many across the world the catastrophes caused by centuries of environmental injustice have already taken place. However, constant emphasis on necessary action in terms of deprivation, loss and hopelessness can lead to disengagement and disempowerment. Kate Soper has persuasively argued for a rethinking of the conditions for human flourishing, prosperity and the good life, advocating for radically altered models of post-growth consumption. What she calls an “alternative hedonism” proposes that a slower “post-growth” life—not premised on the acquisition of stuff and dependent on fossil fuels—might also prove a happier and more pleasurable one. How, then, might theatre promote the possibility that treading more lightly on the earth could be a source of pleasure?

We seek to reclaim the literal meaning of the word “mundane,” to propose a “mundane” theatre, which, rather than being “humdrum or dull,” is more positively, “belonging to the earthly world.”^[1] Rather than the *theatrum mundi* that imagines the world as a stage or that aspires to present the earth or cosmos in its entirety *on* stage, we are seeking a form that engages audiences with belonging to the earthly realm—the mundane specifically—as its substantive material affect.^[2] As literary humanist Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and planetary scientist Linda T. Elkins-Tanton articulate it, “Our imaginations are earthbound: we can only think about life within the parameters of what we know from Earth’s biological flourishing” (9). We are less interested in age-old yearnings to know the earth comprehensively from afar, inevitably failing to grasp its scale, than we are in the possibilities of affirming ourselves as earthlings, implicated in how we can live better with others on this planet.^[3] What qualities might such a mundane theatre require?

This paper draws on our United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded project “Outside the Box: Open-Air Performance as a Pandemic Response,” which commissioned a season of curated, outdoor performance works for Exeter in July and August 2021, inspired by these questions (see O’Malley and Turner).^[4] In the context of the ongoing pandemic, and as the airborne transmission of the COVID-19 virus made outdoor space “safe” than indoor space—if only in terms of exposure to contagion—we wondered whether models of dispersed and physically-distanced audiences enabling in-person gatherings outdoors could point us towards Soper’s alternative hedonism. Grounded in our own experiences of five performance commissions, audience evaluation and wider interviews with artists and local authorities, this article seeks to identify the ways in which the practical programme of case study works produced what we describe, positively, as “mundane” performance, thereby prompting pleasure in ecologically sensitive practices.^[5]

“All the world’s a stage” is a familiar notion, routinely evoked through this Shakespearean phrase, but Jacques’ speech from *As You Like It* engages with the seven ages of man, in which the rest of the living world features only metaphorically, excepting only the capon in the justice’s belly (Shakespeare 77). A more comprehensive model is Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo’s sixteenth-century “memory theatre,” brought to scholarly attention by Frances Yates’ 1966 work, *The Art of Memory*.

Camillo’s memory theatre attempts a representation of all elements of the cosmos on its ranked levels (with the viewer positioned on the stage, looking up), but it is a hierarchical, anthropocentric structure that offers little to any attempt at a more integrated, ecologically-minded practice. It is apparent that both these Renaissance conceptions of the worldly theatre reflect human exceptionalism in different ways: either as protagonist in a world that is merely background, or as omniscient viewer of a world of which they are not a part. In the twenty-first century, Elinor Fuchs’ conceptualisation of a play as a “Small Planet” has the virtue of taking us imaginatively into the material and sensory stuff of the dramatic text and representation, but it still positions the reader outside it, as if looking into a Victorian terrarium: “Mould the play into a medium-sized ball, set it before you in the

middle distance, and squint your eyes” (6). The conflation of stage and world is closely related to human impulses to transcend, categorise, produce and consume: cause rather than recognition of environmental crisis.

If *hubris* got us into the ecological crisis, what more modest kinds of approaches to “better weathering” could there be (Hamilton, Zettel and Neimanis)? And can they be simultaneously ambitious? Rather than considering the *teatrum mundi* as exclusively human, placing the human at its centre as spectator, as “player” or both, can a theatre place itself and its participants within and open to earth? While this would imply a certain porosity of structure, such an architectural metaphor also tends to set it apart from what is “earthly.”^[6] Instead, we could simply see it as “mundane” performance: literally of this earthly world.

Drawing on Kate Rigby’s discussions of the ways in which a work of art might “bring forth” the earth, we argue that a “mundane” theatre must be more than a framing device or pretext for outdoor leisure but, rather, might make significant connections tangible, allowing not only a sensory but also a conceptual transformation of terraqueous, tropospheric life in performance. Rigby offers four principles whereby the earth is brought forth and made palpable by the work of art, becoming apparent in its world. These principles derive from Martin Heidegger but are re-interpreted to politicize the role of the human and to move away from essentialist ideas of earth as inheritance. We can draw on Rigby to hypothesize a “mundane” performance, then, in which these principles for foregrounding the earth are present:

1. Earth is the ground for the work—it grows from and rediscovers place.
2. Corporeal interconnectedness is expressed in the work.
3. Materiality is part of the work.
4. Earth emerges, paradoxically, as that which remains concealed.

Adapted from Rigby 436

For Rigby, this last concern is paramount, and she positions earth as that which exceeds the text. Furthermore, she concludes by affirming “that there is, in the end, no substitute for our own embodied involvement with the more-than-human natural world” (440). Rigby, however, is concerned with poetry and language. The “texts” we consider, the live weave of open-air performance works, actively involve such embodied encounters with the earth, rather than pre-empt them. They are not intended to be “read” in isolation from the sites that provoke their content. All include the materiality of the earth, plants, air, weather, beings. Nevertheless, it is also possible for such work to stimulate the imagination to reach beyond the event, to what exceeds performance. While there are phenomenological aspects to the immediate experience of all performance works in place, some may also direct us towards networks of geographical and temporal connections that cannot be experienced in place alone, only thought. All enable an encounter that brings forth an earthly sense of place, but some also succeed in invoking a

sense of planet beyond the phenomenological experience of the mundane (Heise). The paradox is that the more the earth emerges, the more the partial nature of our understanding is disclosed.

At the End of the Day

Our first performance, *At the End of the Day*, led by Emma Welton for A Quiet Night In, opened itself to the outdoor context, to what is usually unheard. This was a listening piece, where the audience joined the performers in an orchard next to the river Exe. Musicians responded to the sounds of place in the first half, following a written score that set principles for improvisation. In the second half, the audience was invited to join in with the musicians doing the same. We sat on blankets and in the grass, the evening broken by a spatter of rain. It passed, and clouds allowed the setting sun to leak through.



At the End of the Day, by A Quiet Night In. Photo: Jenny Steer

Audience comments responding to the piece were interesting in that some wanted the music to assert itself more obviously:

The music, whilst I understood the players' wanting to commune and react with the sounds of nature (thank God for the train horns), was too sporadic, quiet and without tune for me to appreciate. I was surprised that it was termed a performance, perhaps an "exploration" would have been better.^[7]

Others, however, appreciated the ways in which the piece opened them up to their surroundings. A teenager commented that: "It made me appreciate having to listen. Made me think about music differently, normally I play, this time I had to listen. A lovely experience." A woman reflected that: "I thought it was wonderful . . . being in a field and

having to listen. Really sustaining.” Yet another woman commented that: “I felt very present. In the moment tonight”; while another referred to it as “a lovely environmental experience,” and many observed the turn towards attentiveness. This event did what Rigby hopes for when she says that “we need poets not so much to draw things into Being through their song, but rather to draw us forth into the polyphonic song of our nonhuman earth others” (434).

The pleasures of *At the End of the Day* are evident in the audience responses, alongside a less dominant counter-current of mild frustration. The fragility of the event relied on both the external environment as stimulus and on audience participation. We, too, found ourselves grappling with desire for the music to draw the different threads of place together in some final way. Is it necessary for a work to be self-effacing in order to give the environment space?



Musicians from *At the End of the Day* by A Quiet Night In. Photo: Jenny Steer

There is no doubt that we found ourselves “in the moment,” as the audience member put it, nor that this was generally found to be enjoyable. The phenomenological experience of the field and the company of performers and audience were a source of delight. Despite this, it might be that we need the more vividly worked human response to point us towards what we are missing for a sense of planet to accompany our sense of place, even though for many the meditative experience was itself profound.

Swan and the Same

There are some conditions, however, that can overwhelm even a more assertive work. *Swan and the Same* by Running Dog Theatre, led by Josh Lucas, was a family performance held on the water of the Exeter Canal. Despite its narrative drive, on this occasion we became keenly aware of the materiality of water and weather. Audience members were in canoes, with performers either in a canoe or on the bank, all moving downstream. The playful motif was a get-together for swans and canoeists on the Canal. The performers, dressed as swans, sang songs about the imagined “bloody” history between canoeists and birds, and they played interactive games with the audience, culminating in a humorously absurd truce.



Swan and the Same, by Running Dog Theatre. Photo: Rhodri Cooper

This was a challenging piece for the creative team to manage, given the need for safety precautions encompassing the audience’s presence on the water. The involvement of the canoe club was an efficient way of minimising risks and providing experienced personnel to assist in case of need.

That said, when Cathy and Evelyn found themselves inexplicably struggling as a canoeing team, there was minimal assistance on hand. Wrestling to catch up, they careered from one bank to the other, painfully unhooked clothing from brambles, broke free, only to loutishly hurtle past the poor swans to become caught in weeds on the other side. As they continued to zig-zag, they wondered, sporadically, where the performance had got to. It began to rain, hard, and they were soon soaked. By the time they reached the performance, a mile away, at Salmon Pool Bridge, they were exhausted but

victorious, finally proceeding in a slow but dignified straight line. If they hoped for congratulations upon arrival, they were disappointed. Instead, they were briskly told to tie up the canoe and witness the work from the bank as the party continued to splash on.

Giselle, who managed to keep in her canoe, found the work fun, quirky and family-friendly in concept, but despite being prepared for the weather, she became extremely cold and tired by the end, the conditions making it quite challenging to engage and participate. For her, the invitation was a dare to brave the water above and below and to become fully immersed in its unpredictability. Running Dog's narrative and audience interactions were a welcome break from focusing on how the body experienced the elements, listening through her rain jacket hood and playing games through droplets of water between her eyelashes. And for that moment, she just enjoyed living in the present, experiencing Exeter from a different angle, even if, at the back of her mind, she was already wondering why she had not packed an extra change of clothes.



An exuberant moment from *Swan and the Same* by Running Dog Theatre. Photo: Rhodri Cooper

For all of us, in the occurrence of inclement weather, it remained a moment of post-pandemic aliveness, mirth and a truly corporeal, if all too literal, immersion in site. We should give credit to Running Dog's ambition to work on the water and Lucas's determination in dealing with multiple obstacles to doing so. Probably, the performers should have taken better care of their audience, but *Swan and the Same*, nevertheless, created a space in which the sterility of lockdown might be replaced with something both more elemental and more companionable. As with *At the End of the Day*, the performance engaged us phenomenologically and materially in the mundane. For

different reasons, it was again more successful in invoking a sense of place than a sense of planet. Our corporeal interconnection with processes, lives and systems beyond the immediate experience of the event was, almost literally, drowned out by its conditions.

Ears to the Ground

Ears to the Ground by Sarah Sharp and Florrie Taylor (One Step Theatre), co-created with a group of teenagers, was experienced simultaneously on headphones in a copse in Belle Isle Park, near to the river Exe as it winds its way out of the city. Refracting *Swan and the Same's* impulse to reach the edge of the city via waterways, *Ears to the Ground* brought its audience into the experience of these teenagers, recruited from local state schools, ISCA Academy and Queen Elizabeth School, Crediton. These teenagers (three fourteen-year-olds and one seventeen-year-old) joined the project on the recommendation of their drama teachers, parents or friends. ISCA pupils are often found in the riverside park, on the city's edges, the area between the school and the city centre, and a threshold between Exeter's built environment and the river's journey towards the sea alongside the managed wildlife of the flood plain. Stepping under this not-very-bucolic group of trees—whose interior is not immediately enticing to passers-by headed to the river paths—the audience encountered the teenagers moving and dancing in the space while listening to the soundtrack they had created in response to the site during a previous week's workshops. The audience stepped under the trees together, suddenly hidden from the paths outside and sharing the interior with the performers. Who lingers or loiters in an unromantic copse and why? Teenagers are typically criticised for occupying such spaces, the suspicion being that their idleness there will lead to trouble.



Ears to the Ground by One Step Theatre. Photo: Rhodri Cooper

Responding to the performance, one young person commented that they felt encouraged to slow down: “Getting to see a whole space—normally I wouldn’t look that intently—I’d rush through without looking.” Another remarked that they derived pleasure from: “Being out in nature. It made me really appreciate the environment.” Connecting this sense of pleasure to environmental awareness, someone else responded:

It made me look again at the environment in a fresh light—about not killing creatures under our feet. I looked at things differently. I heard a bee and kept looking for it but I am not sure if it was in the trees or on the audio. I’ve always been interested about being outdoors and this re-engaged me with the environment.

This sort of pleasure derived from slowing down and taking more care was evident in many of the responses. A further audience member commented that the work: “Made me look at the trees in a new way. I know the area and have been through it many times, but this time I stopped and looked.” Someone else reflected that the performance had: “made me feel calm and peaceful and made me think about the environment. Even in a small space which is so little, humans still have the power to destroy it from just being there. Trampling on things.”



Two performers from *Ears to the Ground* by One Step Theatre. Photo: Rhodri Cooper

Asked what she wanted the audience to feel at the end of the performance, one of the participant performance-makers responded, “Welcome to our reality,” as their work gently and generously explored the thresholds between childhood and adulthood, urban and rural spaces, wildness and domesticity, waste and conservation, human and nonhuman creativity—scaling the perspective of a woodlouse, a teenager, a tree. Earth emerged unforced in this piece, and palpably mundane. Some sense of planet was at play in the

soundtrack, as the performers commented on environmental concerns or cited a wider literature; more significantly, it also allowed the adult audience members to respond imaginatively to what it might mean to be a teenager, emplaced in Belle Isle Park, Exeter, and in the overwhelm of pandemic and climate crisis.

GPS Embroidery

Lizzie Philips's *Acts of (In)Visible Repair* connected GPS navigation technologies and walking performances that embroidered the landscape, seeking to repair environmental, political and personal aspects of place by stitching them back together. The work drew on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traditions of ornamental, embroidered "samplers" stitched by women as records of attainment, as well as more utilitarian acts of darning. *Acts of (In)Visible Repair*, thus, linked the use of military technologies with those of mending and embellishment. The analogy between stitching and the virtual lines made from point to point by the GPS positioning device proposed a dialogue between domestic and planetary scales and drew attention to the gendering of technologies, spaces and acts of restoration, decoration and walking. It also pulled invisible threads between the specific imperative to Build Back Better beyond the pandemic with the responsibility often placed on people who mother to care, to "better" humans and environments.

Philps's participants included several different groups of women and girls. Dispersed workshops leading up to a day of concluding performances included those where young adult dancers embellished Northernhay gardens, a group of "Mothers Who Make" stitched a future family tree into Heavitree's Higher Cemetery and residents spun a web of connections at St Thomas Pleasure Grounds.



GPS "Embroidery" created in Northernhay Gardens by Chhaya Dance Collective Youth Group. Photo: Lizzie Philips

These workshops informed the final performances at Riverside Valley Park, a green expanse flanked by the river Exe and the canal, where—on an opaquely wet-grey morning breaking a hot spell—the damp air, through which we moved and which we inhaled, rested in drops on long grass and seeped into our shoes. Small audiences clasped tracking devices and followed the audio instructions that guided our walking embroidery in the landscape. Integrated into these recorded instructions were extracts of workshop conversations, artist provocations and silences intended to allow the morning's sounds to intervene.



Acts of (In)Visible Repair by Lizzie Philps. Photo: Anna Haydock Wilson

Pins marked a virtual map as soggy trudging left imprints in the long grass. We were encouraged to imagine the connections between the unseen reinforcements and environmental work needed to keep the flood-prone river in place. Somewhere deep beneath the paths, we sewed by walking back and forth between the waterways were the minerals mined for the GPS devices held in our hands. The satellite was regular, but the ground was uneven, the recorded voices noted. As Philps pointed out on the audio track, “*your stitch may alter because you falter.*” Invisible, unheard earthly connections were made tangible, and the intangible became visible and audible. Metaphors were made material and the work gathered materials to embroider metaphors. Occasionally, we were invited to stop and congregate at a distance to acknowledge the walking efforts of our fellow embroiderers as a collective. These moments of human connection were pleasurable, as we smiled across distances, celebrating the capacity to share physical space after the first U.K. pandemic lockdown. Our bodies responded to the terrain, minded that “[s]ome things can’t be unpicked. Just patched up, reinforced” (Philps). If an invitation to embroider independently incited some individual hubris towards the end of

the piece, the creative act also potentially nudged bodies and minds back to a humility that was playful and repairing. One workshop participant—a former marine biologist—commented that it had been:

So good to connect—thinking about migration, space—trying to make tracks between us and those who live in the park . . . Tracking using GPS was really interesting . . . Thinking about what else leaves tracks. I will continue to connect and think about what we have done today. I feel as if my brain has been switched on . . . stimulated.

Many others emphasised connection, with one explicitly referencing the restorative connections between people as well as the landscape:

The whole day, the whole experience felt a lot about connection to me . . . and the repair, we talked about the visible and invisible repair, and there is obviously the repair of the landscape, which was on our minds, but I also felt there was a repair in (emphasised) *US* and our connections to each other.

The work's experience lay, firstly, in the embodied encounter with terrain, resisting marked routes or predicted responses to negotiate the grasshoppers and wildflowers, and even the graves of those returned to the earth; yet, at the same time, the imagination reached beyond to the unreadable tracks recorded and later viewed in print, their meanings entwined with those of wider connective systems, from the military to parenting. The work was grounded in the materiality of place and in corporeal interconnection, both in the moment and with other bodies: what exceeded the work, earth's ungraspable entirety, was imaginatively invoked in this ambitious, mundane performance.

Tell It to the Bees

Tell It to the Bees was a walking performance by Louise Ann Wilson, beginning in Princesshay Shopping Centre with a visit to the rooftop beehives and continuing through the city, taking in various “bee stations” where we heard about bees and contemplated their resonance. At the end of the walk, we were invited to offer written reflections on our experiences of the pandemic, to be filed in a wooden “beehive” structure. We were, then, offered gifts in return. It was a piece premised on the corporeal interconnectedness of bees and humans.

Tell It to the Bees unfolded in a controlled structure, scripted and tightly planned, drawing on the expertise of the artist in engaging an audience. Josephine Machon includes an example of Wilson's work in *Immersive Theatres* (2013), referring to the intensity of experience where interior and exterior landscapes become entwined (238). This intensity was certainly experienced by many attendees for this performance (though not all), with many reporting that they were moved by it and that the structure led them to reflect on their experiences in relation to those of the bees and the natural world. On the other hand, we wonder whether the word “immersion” suggests a containment that is never intentionally part of Wilson's work. Indeed, arguably it achieves its effect by allowing images to cohere, rather than by insisting that they do. As Wilson describes her work in

Machon's book, and as we witnessed, "the place and the people of that place are embedded within the very bones and fabric of each piece, which grows from the site" (231). *Tell It to the Bees* was rooted in Exeter places and their wider geographies. For example, as part of Wilson's process, Turner took her to hear a talk on bees at Exeter Growers Co-Operative, where we all sat in a circle on the grass, accompanied by a dog and a crow (almost equally tame). Here, Wilson made connections, thought about the structure of hives, chatted and made notes. Some of these thoughts, and some of these people, made their way into the work later.



Tell It to the Bees, by Louise Ann Wilson. Photo: Lizzie Coombes

The gentlest of thematic lines linked the "bee stations," exploring the desire for light and warmth, health and healing and the telling of stories—each of these themes was referenced in the final gifting of a candle ("for light and warmth"), honey ("for health and healing") and a printed map, with its implicit stories. Assisted by the warmth of the summer day, the various stops referenced death or recovery from the trauma of war or disease; the uses of wax and honey as votives and preserves; stories of the city and of bees themselves. The urban route reconnected the human and non-human world. The cathedral was seen as a hive by one participant, while another was delighted to see actual hives in Princesshay Shopping Centre. Yet, the performance could also be interrupted. Above the catacombs, two tiny kittens appealed to us to retrieve them from a branch and threatened to derail the show. The work was open to such leakage of city life and, at the same time, invited us to make new sense of it. Perhaps, the kittens also made the demands of the non-human palpable. Perhaps, they spoke to our own sense of helplessness.

Wilson's work made both corporeal and mental interconnectedness its primary concern, prompting further connections to be made by audiences:

It gave me time to reflect on what you'd seen. The journey was interesting . . . At first, I felt I was on a usual walking tour and then as the stops progressed I became increasingly more emotional- particularly when the wreath was laid at the memorial. When I came into the gardens and started to tell my thoughts to the bees, I felt very moved . . . I didn't expect that. It was quite an emotional journey.

Another individual remarked upon the careful approach to environmental responsibility as a human concern, emerging from their encounter with the work:

As we walked, I heard about the plague and swine flu and the diseases of bees. I didn't want the performance to be related to this pandemic, but it built up slowly in a safe way. My brain made me think—"Who owes what to who?" It made me think about the relationship between bees and humans. I started to appreciate the sounds, smells and the environment more.

As with Philips' work, the pleasure expressed in the encounter with the performance has an emotional charge, an intensity of response to a shared experience. Again, the work meets the criteria for a mundane performance, as what exceeds the work includes the magnitude of the pandemic and biodiversity crisis, held in imaginative connection with the intricate cells of Exeter bees, empathetically encountered, and the emplaced experience of collective reminiscence. The phenomenological opened onto the conceptual and imagined earth, that which cannot be grasped, that which is always partially concealed, but which can be intuited.



Entry into Northernhay Gardens, *Tell It to the Bees*, by Louise Ann Wilson. Photo: Lizzie Coombes

Mundane Performance

All this work demonstrates some, if not all, of the four principles offered by Rigby, which we propose might characterise “mundane” performance, grounded by earth and rediscovering of place, expressive of corporeal interconnectedness, engaged with materiality and revealing earth as that which remains paradoxically concealed. For performance taking place within mild weather, the expression of our interconnectedness, as well as the implication of what exceeds us, is variably experienced, but usually pleurably. The many resonances of the works lie not only in the direct encounter with the earthly world, which is both beyond the work and materially present in it, but also in the degree to which the work is, firstly, grown out of that close engagement with the earth and, following this, the extent to which it responds by articulating the interconnection of beings, materials and experiences, making them meaningful. The intensity of emotion seems heightened by the degree to which the work evokes what lies beyond itself, although the opportunity to share a sensory and reflective response to a specific place is also a source of pleasure that we might term alternative hedonism.

The five Outside the Box pieces tend to suggest that our experience of the mundane does not rely on the simple creation of a space for contemplation—though it can be prompted by that. Nor is it just about the physical circumstances of the place, experienced phenomenologically, although these too have their effect. In their openness to the world, these performances remain a map of interconnected drafts rather than finished or reproducible works. The mundane invites gentle participation from both audience and place. However, the work of the artist is both most apparent, and most integrated, where the lines of connection are scratchily drawn, whether with GPS

embroidery threads or beelines. The ambitions of such work, while significant, do not include any attempt at comprehensive representation of the earth, which always remains partially concealed or missing. We are helpfully minded of its partiality, however, in the serious and creative effort to sketch the connections. In a sentence that we encounter with some relief, Rigby suggests:

Perhaps, then, it might be more helpful to seek in the work of ecopoiesis, not so much a voicing of the more-than-human natural world, but, more humbly, simply a response.

These kinds of mundane performance, for which we advocate, answer and react to what they find in and about nonhuman nature in the moment but also have the capacity to bring earthly concerns to light within those responses.

There is pleasure experienced by audiences across the range of works that aligns with Soper's alternative hedonism. This sense of pleasure, reaching beyond the immediacy of the space, surpasses a sense of nature appreciation in local environments, although the encounter with performance in local green spaces does appear to increase an appreciation of nonhuman nature and has the material benefit of being less carbon-heavy than more substantive counterparts. The intensity of some of the responses reflects experiences of community, where human and non-human coincide, in ways that do not render nature as resource, or respond to the drive for economic growth. Glimpses of another—extraordinary, perhaps—life quality emerge as possible in mundane performance.

Endnotes

[1] "Mundane" *OED*. Accessed 10 Apr. 2022.

[2] When we speak about "earth," we also mean to invoke water and the changes wrought by weather. Across these five commissioned performance pieces, earth is lived, virtual, material and metaphor. It alters bodies and directs performances of weathering.

[3] For an extensive discussion of various historical, contemporary, real and imagined endeavours and aspirations to see the earth as a whole, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Linda T. Elkins-Tanton's *Earth* (2017) in the Object Lessons series.

[4] The wider project looks at implications for city centre management, working with Exeter Culture and Exeter City Council, as well as drawing on interviews and surveys with artists and local authorities.

[5] A sixth commission *Exeter at Sea* by Sue Palmer and Sheila Ghelani happened online only, due to a COVID close contact notification. *Exeter at Sea* sought to signal the city's tangible geography and a storyweb of hidden or forgotten connections, as well as stretching to wider environmental-political histories and futures.

[6] Architecture has often been invoked as that which sets the human apart from other species, albeit neuroscience now questions some of these underlying assumptions. For example, Karl Marx uses architecture as an exemplar of the way that products are conceived by human beings prior to their manufacture and as control of nature: “We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality” (116).

[7] All audience citations are taken from audience research undertaken and compiled by Elaine Faull, commissioned by Outside the Box.

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