

Performance, place and allotments: *Feast* or famine?

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Interrogations into ‘place’ have been undertaken in performance theory in tandem with an increasing transdisciplinary positioning and interest in the concept[i]. There is still a lack of clarity about the *particularity* of place-based performance however. How is it differentiated from, say, site-specific performance? Can place be distinguished from site as a focus for performance projects?

Pearson and Shanks describe site-specific performances as ‘conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused ... They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible’[ii]. Place-based performance, I am suggesting, assumes a strongly specific site but expects more from its participants. Place is a contested concept; I am reading it, following Escobar, ‘in an empirical and analytical sense – that is, as a category of thought and as a constructed reality’[iii]. Here, place is interpreted as a perceived environment or geographical area with which individuals (or groups) believe they have a personal relationship; there is a psychological interaction between person and location. It follows, then, that a performance of place would *demonstrate* the materiality and psychological construction of that place. I am suggesting *Feast* as an example of such a demonstration where there is evidence that participants’ responses to the combination of site and performance were intrinsically connected with their subjective locus and where the impact of the event affected their understanding and experience of that place.

This article uses *Feast*, then, to articulate an emerging theory of the performance of place asking how performance can impact upon participants’ understandings of place and what function performance can have in demonstrating place. *Feast* was set on a London allotment as part of a major theatre ‘Enquiry’ by LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre). In moving towards a theory of the performance of place therefore, the article engages briefly with LIFT, the Enquiry, ecology and allotments[iv].

LIFT, Enquiry and Ecology

LIFT is a highly respected performance based organisation, responsible for introducing to London and the UK over 4000 eclectic international artists in a two-week, biennial festival, 1981-2001. This endeavour had an impact upon the non-commercial (and possibly commercial) theatre

in the UK. As one of the UK's more arts-aware Sunday newspapers put it: 'Over the past 20 years LIFT has radically – and sometimes roguishly – redefined what we define as theatre and much of the experimentation in this country can be traced to its influence.'[v] LIFT is core funded by the UK's Arts Council and raises additional funds through a variety of trusts, foundations and corporate sponsorship. Its original mission was to bring into London arts from around the world; more recently it has provided opportunities for artists in and near London to articulate 'what makes the world tick'[vi]. LIFT's current focus, the 'New Parliament', is: 'a new concept in performance space where artists from around the world and the people of London can gather together to share stories, exchange knowledge and imagine and rehearse new futures'[vii]. LIFT is a deeply intelligent organisation with a notable reputation for curating innovative theatre in the UK. Conversing with key figures at LIFT is intellectually stimulating; thoughts on theatrical horizons seem unhampered by boundaries and borders.

Prior to the New Parliament, LIFT's 20-year biennial festival of unlocking parochial theatre and challenging convention evolved into an Enquiry, 2001-2005, comprising the 'unframing of one format, the biennial festival, and the creation of another'. It asked the meta-questions 'What is theatre? Where does theatre take place? Who is making it?'[viii] In a rolling programme of work, the Enquiry comprised a heterogenous range of projects, conversations and research, ranging from 'testimonies' by a 100 LIFT Enquirers, to Indoor Fireworks (a mini festival in 2004 including Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess*), to collaboration in the Sultan's Elephant Project, 2006, a spectacle that travelled the streets of London. The Enquiry was seen as 'a way of building discussion and dissent into the very fabric of the Festival' and was intended to move work more into the 'public realm'[ix].

As part of this broad-based interrogation of performance, *Feast* was one of an Enquiry project series commissioned specifically to 'investigate and celebrate the poetics and politics of London's urban landscape'[x]. In the first of these 'urban poetic', *Dilston Grove* (October 2003), artists Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey grew several million grass seedlings throughout the interior of a deconsecrated church in Southwark, London. Questions arising from this soundscaped (by Graeme Miller) installation included 'How do the natural forces of growth and decay affect our perceptions of the landscape within the urban space?'[xi] *Feast* was the second 'urban poetics' asking similar questions of performance, the city and landscape. Comprising a year-long performance event, it was created on two adjacent allotments in south London with artists and members of the local community. With the first sods dug in the autumn of 2003, activities over the year included planting seeds, making pottery plates, baking bread, collating/archiving biographic recipes, harvesting, cooking, costuming the site and rehearsing for the final event. Four specific events were performed and celebrated during the project: the launch, spring equinox, summer solstice and, as a finale, the autumn equinox when the allotments were transformed into a performance site and 400 people shared a 'placeevent', a performed feast, over two nights [xii]. There was a strong emphasis throughout the project on working within the rhythms of the year - as the selection of the celebration dates signify - and a desire to engage all the participants in this ancient cycle. (In a session at the local primary school, 'equinox' was

explained as equal day and night, times of the year in March and September that determined critical shifts in the growing seasons; thus the relevance of celebrating those times in this project which centred around growing food. None of the pupils had understood the relevance of these times or known the meaning of equinox.)



Final event: autumn equinox

Photograph: Tim Mitchell

With its emphasis on abiding by and celebrating the earth cycle, *Feast* might be viewed as an example of ecological theatre. There has been an increasing interest in theatre of ecology, if some confusion about what this actually means. Chaudhuri engages with ecology as a trope within twentieth century theatre but also suggests that ‘theatre ecology’: ‘will call for a turn towards the literal, a programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor’ and that theatre can now ‘become the site of [ecology’s] revelation’[xiii]. Marranca weaves performance closely with nature and landscape in her articulation of ecological theatre although there is still a lack of detailed *practice* in evidence. Her chapter ‘Garden/Theater’ is a metaphorical elision that does at least suggest the performative of ecological spaces, however: ‘Really it is not so difficult to move from a theatre to a garden. Each creates a world in a space that celebrates pure presence, and the fabulous confusion of nature and artifice, which is to say, reality and illusion.’[xiv] In more forthright mode, Kershaw has condemned contemporary theatre as the equivalent of Biosphere II (the geographical/human-inhabited glass ark in the South Arizona desert); it is removed from culture and therefore doubly removed from nature. He seeks to find a way for theatre to engage more profoundly with ecology.[xv] Kershaw has since followed his own plea with praxis at Bristol Zoo (2005/6) where he has been particularly interested in the network of gazes that constitute the ecology of the zoo and the ‘opening up of spaces’ and ‘individuation’ that can take place in this process.[xvi]

Feast can be viewed as a deeply ecological performance, of course; it certainly merits

attention as such. It was an event that celebrated the seasons, communicated a valuing of the earth as a resource for cultivating foodstuffs and, determinedly, remained closely embedded in matters of the 'natural' world. One of the wider issues that Claire Patey and Cathy Wren, curators of the project, wished to explore was 'London as a growing space, exploring the relationship between city dwellers and the natural environment', as they stated in their application. In wishing to identify the 'patial'[xvii] of this performance project, as I do, the ecological imprint of *Feast* is clearly present. The emphasis in this article, however, is to analyse *Feast* as a project that can help construct a further conceptual field of practice - the performance of place. Landscape, nature and ecology may have a role to play in this although, whilst significant in this instance, a performance of place might not always be immanently concerned with these matters. These conceits do, however, weave through the three thematic areas that raise interesting possibilities for a theory of performing place arising from the *Feast* project: *site emplacement*, *diverse matter* and *endogamous event/s*.

Site emplacement

Reflecting on *Feast* suggests that a performance of place makes use of a highly specific site that is firmly 'emplaced' through its use by the participants outside the performance event.

The political and paradoxical allotment

The 50 applications for LIFT's 'urban poetics' commission offered a variety of potential sites including the London streets, one of London's largest parks, and a single bench. Patey and Wren chose to utilise allotments. Allotments have a fierce social history that must impact upon a response to the choice of such a venue for a performance project. They are only ten generations on from the last of the Enclosures in Britain in the nineteenth century[xviii]. This shift from common land to enclosed land took place across the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in the UK, as those with power, money and authority privatised vast swathes of previously communal property. Allotted strips of land were made available to some now unable to graze cattle and grow food. A move into cities in the nineteenth century industrial revolution increased the demand for such strips of land on the periphery and in the neglected corners of the towns. Finally, in 1908 an Allotment Act was passed that laid down the legal requirement for the provision of allotments by local authorities. During both world wars, with the need to supplement foodstuffs, the popularity of allotments increased although there has been a steady decline in the use of allotments since the 1950s - with some recently revived interest.[xix] Historically, allotments are places that are deeply contested, then. Apparent gentrification gives them an aura of hegemonic acceptance today, perhaps, but a hotly contested political background underlies their existence. They are a reminder of one of the most radical political shifts in the last four hundred years: from communal to private land.

Today, increasing recent interest in urban allotment holding in the UK may arise from

excessive garden and cookery television programmes or even as a response to concerns about obesity and unhealthy diets. A UK Allotment Regeneration Initiative was formed in 2004 and local authorities are still obliged to provide allotments if there is a demand for them; there are extensive waiting lists (up to 6 years at some, London allotment-holder-rumour suggests). With 18 acres and, it is claimed, the largest allotment site in London, there are approximately 400 allotments and 300 holders at Rosendale, the site for *Feast*. In today's economic city-scapes, it is a privileged use of space: with its location and excellent views over London, building developers would suggest a summary change of use. Despite its popularity and waiting list, such a site is contested, therefore; its existence is fragile and rests on the precarious balance of a local government's profit and loss accounts.[xx]

It is not only their political history and current vulnerability that suggests an instability about urban allotments. They can be read as paradoxical and liminal, hovering between city and country[xxi], habitat and leisure ground, sanctuary and physical burden, private place and public space. They hold a lure of the local and a fascination of the different.[xxii] The *Feast* allotments at Rosendale amplify these dualities and paradoxes. They are 'open plan', agricultural and even rural, yet sit behind firmly locked gates, surrounded by densely packed urban houses. The anonymity of the city street outside the locked gate contrasts starkly with the comradely greetings and - vegetable-based - conversations that take place a metre inside. Allotment-holders use their square metres as a place of work-orientated, physical burden yet also as occasional habitation and secluded leisure ground. Tools are imported for tough physical labour together with battered armchairs and makeshift barbecues for quiet summer evening relaxation. Each plot has a sense of privacy within the public landscape. (Of the allotment holders interviewed, all knew by sight or name their immediate neighbour but few others.) They are distinct, bounded places yet paradoxical in their position and use.

The artistic allotment

Implicit and explicit artistic potential has been the subject of allotment ethnographic and geographical research already[xxiii]. *Feast* was not the first UK allotment performance. Interventionist artist Harry Bloom orchestrated the eco-art project *Bloom '98* on Britain's largest set of allotments near Birmingham, for example, with several installations and performances across the site (e.g. 'Umbrella Garden' with umbrellas planted in the earth above lights and accompanied by a soundscape of rain). Palmer wanted to convey what he felt allotments expressed: 'a quintessential British activity which crosses boundaries, transcending monetary and class values despite the pressures for its alternative use seen as "more suitable", "more worthwhile" and "better for the economy", echoes of which are voiced from above.'[xxiv] More recently, the exuberant young UK physical company Cartoon de Salva adopted two allotments for a year in the north and south of England (Newark and Farnham), devising a promenade piece, *The Sunflower Plot* (summer 2005). A conventional devised theatre piece, this was built around assorted fictitious allotment characters fighting the onslaught of a powerful development consortium who had bought the land. The cooperative working methods of Palmer[xxv] were not

evident but, again, there was a clear political undercurrent in the piece.

Emplacement

Feast, then, utilised a rare performance venue in its choice of allotments, yet not a unique one, and a site that might appear to be placidly everyday yet is underscored by historical and contemporary political tension. The Rosendale allotments can be read as an eccentric and paradoxical performance site: highly specific, liminal, contested, quotidian and observed. This alone might have left *Feast* somewhere towards the edge of the much-used - if, now, more tautly deconstructed - category of site-based performance where a performance event is initiated by the site.

Feast was inhabited and performed by those closely connected to that site, however, alongside professional artists. Some of the participants were regular users or visitors to the allotments; others passed its gates daily. The site was known and 'performed' beyond *Feast* by the participants, therefore. It is this that suggests a particular aspect of performing place: the use of a strongly identifiable, materially located site, adopted for a performance event that is *combined* with participants who also 'perform' it as part of their habitual, everyday behaviours. This is Lefebvre and Soja's 'lived/thirdspace' where the producers of place are those who performatively engage with it as part of their daily lives[xxvi]. Site has already been transformed into known place, through repeated patterns of actions.

In much site-specific performance, there is a disjunction between the performers and longer-term inhabitants of the site. (By 'inhabitants', I am referring to the temporary, if recurring, inhabitation by those who use, or live in/on, the site.) In Gerry Pilgrim's *Deep End*, for example, an evocative and aesthetically powerful site-specific performance in the disused Marshall Street Baths, Soho, (2005), the work was rooted in the stories of Baths-users of the latter half of the twentieth century. The performers were students who interpreted, mediated and culled other people's memories and *presence* whilst those autochthonous community members were noticeably *absent*. My point is not about identifying a hierarchy of authenticity. Rather, it could be suggested from the experience of *Feast* that a performance of place is articulated most effectively by those who are inhabitants of the site, before and beyond the performance project. Is a performance of place best situated in applied theatre contexts then, where those with additional investment in a site are both performer and audience? It is the community members, inhabitants, who may gain from a thorough engagement with place through performance.

I am suggesting that it is in a combination that we begin to see a shift from site- to place-based performance. A framed, aesthetic performance is built around a highly specific site which has deep historical and contemporary resonances. Added to this, however, is that the site is frequently 'performed' by the inhabitants of the area, and not just for one 'placeevent'. The site is deeply emplaced, both as a material location and as part of people's everyday lives.

Diverse matter

The matter of the project was complex and sometimes opaque, founded as it was in multidisciplinary, pluralistic practices and participants. At a simple level, *Feast* could be seen as a year-long, intermittent, performance-related project about food, comprising: several small-scale community ‘happenings’; commissioned works by individual artists (sculptures that doubled up as kilns for baking plates and bread, for example); a year-long, extensive gardening task; ongoing site presentation (the beds bore wood-carved titles and willow archways were built); a high profile, yet local, arts event commissioned by a high profile arts organisation; an outdoor ‘performed’ banquet for nearly 400 people across two nights. Beyond this, an intricate process of immersion and weaving emerged, however, that gave the project its rich, complex and diverse matter tilting it, I suggest, towards place-based performance. Two instances of such immersion and weaving are useful examples: the meshing of site and performance and the coming together of participants’ diverse inputs and practices.

Firstly, the meshing of site and performance through the practices of *Feast* was extreme. At the core of the project was the intention that food would be grown, art would be created and the harvest would be eaten on site, in a celebratory, performed feast. The specificity of the site not only inspired the performance therefore (as for the majority of site-specific performance), but it was harnessed to *grow* the material for the finale. Not only did the project offer an interpretation and portrayal of the site through, for example, art works and the feast presentation but the performative event privileged a ‘consumption’ of the site through the swallowing and digesting of food grown there. The meshing of site and performance was comprehensive: the performance fed off the site in a rare immersion of site/performance. Many participants commented on the ‘bizarre’ situation of sitting on the earth where their food had been grown. (Some remained in the earth. One participant wrote: ‘Strangest of all was putting our feet on the spinach which grew under Table 6 as we ate.’) Close interaction between person and environment is recognised as central to concepts of place; Watson identifies place ‘as an emergent effect of the engagement between a human subject and the materiality of a site’, for example[xxvii]. At *Feast*, this engagement was taken to profound levels as large parts of the site were eaten suggesting more than ‘upsetting’ the boundaries of performance and site as Kaye says of ‘placeevent’ (see note 12); here was an immersion of the two.

Secondly, the diversity and weaving of the participants’ input led to some eccentric cross-fertilisations, providing a polyphonic celebration of the everyday. Gardeners, teachers, chefs, painters, potters, children, designers, dancers, musicians, printers, photographers, storytellers, textile designers and technicians took part in the project - in addition to the visitor/participants at the final feast. A diversity of practices resulted in a multivalent arts event, as had been anticipated by the project leaders. Such diversity and juxtapositions led to fascinating temporal and spatial disruptions, however. Boundaries between day and night, childhood and adulthood, work and leisure space were transgressed as dancers planned pieces for vegetable gardens at night,

allotment holders worked with schoolchildren to grow quantities of food, a chef shared creative space with a textile designer and the school's lollipop person ushered adults across a road by torchlight, rather than daytime schoolchildren.[xxviii] These disruptions seemed to facilitate a subversion of the familiar and of 'habitual perceptions' such that the environment was, for the participants, 'the object of renewed attentiveness'[xxix]. I am suggesting here that the disparate 'matter' of practices engendered a set of unexpected performance disruptions. The pragmatic, taken-for-granted place was re-envisioned and seen anew by the participants: the familiar was destabilised. Through such performance disruptions, this reviewing of a known and tended place appeared to change the assumptions and perceptions of those usually inhabiting the space. This re-envisioning of the everyday stands as one part of an unfolding assemblage of performing place that I am suggesting: to perform place is to reframe the familiar tangentially.

The imbrication present in *Feast* that led to what I have called 'diverse matter' is rare. In *Bloom '98* and *The Sunflower Plot*, for example, the 'matter' was distinct and clear[xxx]. It could be described as: a final theatrical display created by artists with author-inscribed meanings driven by the site (whether political comment or unfolding narrative) for a relatively passive receiving audience – a description that would be appropriate for much site-specific performance. The matter of *Feast* was less conventional and even indistinct at times. The 'theatrical display' was ongoing, frequently unrehearsed and woven by artists *and* non-artists and meanings were spontaneously found by participants because they were non-inscribed by the 'authors'. ('Participants' comprised erratic combinations of individuals: visitors/audience, growers/performers and so on. Some participants saw only an allotment growing food. Others saw a symbolic attempt to shift our everyday living back to one that is more attuned to the 'natural' rhythms of the earth.) A weaving of input and activities led to matter that was barely even visible at times. Such dispersal and diversity offers something to platial performance. In addition to encouraging a reframing of the familiar tangentially, it suggests, perhaps, that a performance of place encourages a multiplicity in the role, function and practices of the participants whereby, in the absence of prescribed 'authors', meanings are self determined.

Endogamous event/s

In this section, I am suggesting that it is the *range and conjunction* of the events of *Feast* that can be perceived as contributing particularly to a performance of place.



Summer solstice at Rosendale

Photograph: Tim Mitchell

Feast's explicit performance events were the launch, the spring equinox, the summer solstice and the autumn equinox. All these were celebrated on site with small-scale performances *within* the events and iterated performative behaviours evolving simultaneously. As part of the launch, for example, dancers welcomed us on the bare allotments with burning torches, *a capella* singing and mud-grounded movement. At the spring equinox, in an event reminiscent of aspects of Fiona Templeton's *You*, artist Sophie Herxheimer greeted audiences of one or two in the allotment shed, creating food drawings from her audience's imagination subsequently displayed across the site on a washing line. More spontaneous minor 'performances' across the year included guided tours of the allotments, a ceremonial firing of the sculpture-kilns and even planting the first seeds.

Despite this range, some were hesitant about accepting *Feast* as performance, particularly in the early stages. In an initial interview with the headteacher of the school, she was puzzled about the 'lack of drama' in the project. This confusion was evident even afterwards. In a national radio item on *Feast* there was coverage of the preparation and cooking of the food, interviews with the children and some recording of the final feast, but no reference to the project as a performance. It was mediated as an anachronistic meal-event. Theatre critic Lyn Gardner's report appeared in the *education* section of a daily newspaper not the theatre pages[xxxi]. In contrast, the participant audience were demonstrably eclectic in their understanding of the performance after the final event: 'The feast itself *was* a performance. ... It had a narrative that had been carefully

structured’ and ‘[It] brought together a community of people in a shared, sensory experience. Durational – organised into ‘Acts’ of entertainment and food’. A significant number commented, too, on the conjunction of audience and participant-performer; it seemed to be accepted that you had a role to play. Tony Fegan, LIFT’s Director of Learning, suggested: ‘You weren’t and were in a performance’ and one allotment holder in interview after the event commented on a shared willingness (at least on her table) to enter into that duality.



Serving at the final event
Mitchell

Photograph: Tim

Interaction between performer and audience is an accepted trait of performance, of course, but there were interesting variations of this in *Feast*. Two examples from the final event are useful and start to build towards the idea of an endogamous event, one where the event is ‘self-pollinating’ between participants, and across processes and conclusion. Firstly, there was a constant and accepted fluidity between person-as-audience and person-as-performer at any given moment. You entered *into* the performer-role as you accepted soup from a costumed, performing waiter/child, yet became audience a second later when that character engaged your neighbour in practised banter as soup-delivery moved on. This self-acknowledged, vacillating role continued throughout the evening creating a pleasurable tension between observed and observer. Secondly, many of the key players from the project team (curators, artists, LIFT personnel) became

onlookers at this final event, standing around the edge of the ‘visitor/performers’ who were dining. (This was partly because the event was heavily subscribed and tables were full). The spontaneous switch of roles led to a further, alternative tension in the dynamic of observer and observed, performer and audience. Former key ‘players’ were liminal in the finale; the *visitors* took central positions.

In reflecting on *Feast* as endogamous performance event, it is not just the fluidity between performer and observer that is of interest. The finale, the feast itself, was grounded in a deeply embedded range of supplementary, prior and often aleatory performances/performativities; this offers an extension of the now-familiar metaphor of performance as palimpsest[xxxii]. At *Feast*, the under writing was wholly immanent in the summative event, not just translucently glimpsed as layers or fragments contributing to it. At a simple level, the prior and supplementary performance moments – the under writing - (e.g. the first digging of the sods) were evidenced in a visual photographic display at the entrance to the allotments on the nights of the final event. The visitors were made immediately aware that the evening’s event was only a portion of the whole. In addition, the ritual planting, tending and harvesting of crops were explicit in the final event, of course; this ancient seasonal cycle was self-evident in the food presented. At a more complex level, there was an allotropic presence of previous performances infusing the final event. This was perhaps most noticeable in a core group of 30 youngsters, in role as the MCs/waiters, who had worked on the project once a week for nine months. Repeated performative behaviours, earlier learning activities and ongoing minor performances provided the substance for their roles in the final event. Their deep, ingrained familiarity with the patterns of the space was integral to the smooth flow of welcoming people to the site, seating and serving them. Knowledge of the previous events and all stages of the growing cycle enabled them to reframe these within their improvised role-play at the tables for their audience. They performed the role of empirical mystagogues: the visitor/participants were initiated into the qualities of the site and event/s through the youngsters’ experiences. These central players were critical to the project and many adults commented on their sense of agency. One allotment holder stated: ‘The children knew more about the evening than the adults’; another participant relished ‘being told how to mop the juice on my plate by an 8 year old’; another suggested that ‘by having [the] pupils ... the event felt democratic, non-centralised, non-adult and, crucially, involving’. These assured performances resulted from an extensive range of prior performative behaviours and minor performances across the year’s project.

What can be taken from this for a developing understanding of a performance of place? Previous performances at a simple and complex level were explicit across the events, particularly at the final, summative event, and it was this *endogamy*, the making explicit and absolute reliance on overt and immanent prior processes, that provided the rich texture and complexity to the event. Not only, then, did the fluid shift between performer and observer contribute to the self-pollination of the performance event but, in addition, the integrated processes and previous performances were highly visible at the finale, the autumn equinox. This suggests a circle of activities where performance and processes blur and elide. Performing place is suggested,

therefore, as an ongoing, evolving, endogamous practice, one that is very different from the singular performance of site.

A performance of place

How does *Feast* contribute to an understanding of performing place? ‘Performance’ (the cultural discipline) is currently positioned in decades of performance theory and a range of concepts with postmodernist axes. A contemporary lexicon for performance might read: resistance (to dominant ideologies), transgression (of norms e.g. gender, race), the liminal/liminoid, pluralism (form, content, performers), anti-hagiographic, non-linear, fusion (of, for example, performer and audience or high and low culture), praxis, performativity, embodiment, liveness, mediation, spatial eclecticism, contingency, introspection and the culturally political[xxxiii]. Clearly *Feast* can be mapped against much of this performance lexicon: the liminal and transgressive site[xxxiv], the pluralism of participants, the contingency of the performance event and the embodiment of the project by the key youngsters involved.

It is within this context that an emergent understanding of the performance of place arises. The deconstruction of *Feast* through *site emplacement*, *diverse matters* and *endogamous event/s* yields further detail, however, contributing to a more precise embryonic framework for the performance of place:

- . performance in a highly specific location, inhabited and ‘performed’ by the participants outside the performance event;
- . an immersion of site and performance arising from an extensive and excessive engagement with the site;
- . a deeply complex fusion of audience/participant and diverse practices by multiple participants leading to a subsequent reframing of a familiar site and the facilitation of non-inscribed meanings;
- . a wealth and conjunction of richly textured events that comprise an endogamous performance.

Speaking of *Feast* in a retrospective interview and questionnaire, one allotment holder adds a personal response, reflecting some of these points. She had walked along the paths next to the *Feast* allotments frequently during the year and attended the final event. An evocation of memory affected her: rags attached to a ‘wishing tree’ and woodsmoke brought back memories of her time at the Women’s Peace Camp at Greenham Common in the 1980s. She reviewed the allotments through that memory. Implying a performance ontology reminiscent of Phelan’s evanescent lack, mourning and remembering[xxxv], she acknowledged the uniqueness of the moment of the final

event at the autumn equinox, of coming together on that site at that time, followed by ‘dispersal’. She described the power of ‘people being their own theatre’ and the sense of being in something ‘important’ and ‘unique’, partly because of it ‘passing away’, so quickly. She spoke of the ‘amazing transformation’ of the walkways for the final event (‘The lighted pathway up to the *Feast* area made it feel like walking into a fantasy space – more surreal because I know the path and plots so well’) and that she felt ‘terribly sad’ the following day when she saw it dismantled. In addition, she spoke of her ‘pride that the allotments are seen as worth having such an event’ with the wry coda, ‘bemused, but proud’. The project had made her re-view the allotments, literally and metaphysically, providing her with a shifted and differently-felt relationship to, and awareness of, that place.

For some, *Feast* was a bewildering event – more performance famine than performance feast. For others, it shifted edges of thinking about contemporary performance practices and acted as an ‘urban poetic’, adding to the archives of LIFT’s heterogenous Enquiry. For a few, *Feast* was a unique event on and of a familiar location that encouraged a reviewing of that place and, by implication, a reframing of the relationship between self and environment: it contributes to seeing place-based performance as a distinct practice.

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References

“View” > “Footnotes”. These are formatted as ‘endnotes’.

 [i] For example, Michael Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, (Eds.) *Land/Scape/Theater* (University of Michigan Press, 2002); Alan Read et al in www.e-state.org.uk; Fiona Wilkie, ‘Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour’, *NTQ* 18: 3 (2002), pp. 243 – 260; Cathy Turner, ‘Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance’, *NTQ* 20: 4 (2004), p. 373-389; Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, (Eds.) *Performance and Place*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

[ii] Pearson and Shanks, 2001, p.23

[iii] Arturo Escobar (2001) ‘Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization’, *Political Geography* 20, pp. 139-174: 140. For a detailed extension of debates about place, see Sally Mackey and Nicolas Whybrow, N. (2007) ‘Taking Place: some reflections on site, performance and community’, *Research in Drama Education* 12.1, forthcoming.

[iv] ‘Allotment’ derives from a legal term referring to a small part or a portion. An allotment is a small strip of land

usually leased by the person who works it. It is used for growing vegetables and, occasionally, flowers.

[v] Benedict, D. *The Observer*, December, 2000 cited in *The Lift Enquiry 2001-2006: When the play ends, what begins?* LIFT, 2001.

[vi] Tony Fegan, LIFT, in conversation, 28.7.06

[vii] <http://www.liftfest.org.uk/newparliament/> (accessed 31.8.06)

[viii] Both citations from *The Lift Enquiry 2001-2006: When the play ends, what begins?* LIFT, 2001.

[ix] <http://www.liftfest.org.uk/lift03/about/interviews.html> (accessed 20.7.06). The Enquirers providing the 'testimonies' were people interested in theatre from a professional or personal perspective who between them, in early summer, 2004, created '26 new performances, 7 video films, 7 workshops, 8 installations, 20 talks, 5 lectures, 6 papers. 2 multimedia events. 2 actions and 7 presentations' across a heterogenous range of venues in London. (*LIFT News*, Autumn 2004, p. 4.)

[x] LIFT, *Feast* documentation, 2004, p.3.

I use 'performance' rather than LIFT's choice of 'theatre'. Lucy Neale (until recently one of the two artistic directors of LIFT) says of the choice of 'theatre' in LIFT's meta-questions: 'There has been much debate about this over the years at LIFT. I think Rose [Fenton] and I believe that there is an ancestry to theatron (albeit a European one possibly) about 'a way of seeing' that we really like. It conjures so much about the space, the place of the spectator, the business of witnessing, and the sense of an innate story that involves us all in a timeless way. The discourse is almost limitless.' (E-mail conversation, November, 2004).

[xi] LIFT 'Dilston Grove' documentation, 2003, p.5

[xii] A 'placeevent' is described by Cliff McLucas as where 'a place and what is built there bleed into each other and constitute another order of existence'; cited in Nick Kaye, *Site Specifics: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 56. Kaye suggests that this 'is a strategy which aims at an upsetting of the boundaries of performance and site' *ibid.* As I suggest later in the article, *Feast* perhaps exceeded this.

[xiii] Una Chaudhuri, 'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater' *Theatre (USA)*, (1994) Vol 25, Spring, pp.23-31: 28,29

[xiv] Bonnie Marranca, *Ecologies of Theater* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996)

[xv] Baz Kershaw 'The Theatrical Biosphere and Ecologies of Performance', *NTQ* 62, Vol XVI Part 2, (2000), pp. 122-130.

[xvi] Baz Kershaw, 'Being in Between: Zoological Performance for the Ecological Era', *Movement, Mapping and Mobility* symposium, University of Bristol, 20.5.06

[xvii] Chaudhuri coined 'platiality': 'This other spatiality is actually (to apply a neologism) a new platiality, a recognition of the signifying power and political potential of specific places.' Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place* (University of Michigan Press, 1997) p. 5

[xviii] David Crouch, *The Art of Allotments*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves Press, 2003a), p.4

[xix] For further information on the allotment movement, see David Crouch and Colin Ward, *The Allotment: its Landscape and Culture*, 2nd Ed. (Nottingham, Muchroom Bookshop, 1994); <http://www.kitchengardens.dial.pipex.com/history.htm> (accessed, 1.9.06); Jeremy Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (London, Royal Historical Society, 2002); <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmenvtra/560/56007.htm> (accessed 31.8.06). The conflict between landowner and those seeking to live by growing food on strips of leftover land is matched elsewhere e.g. the USA, where this was likely to be a habit imported from Europe. The current 'Community Gardens' of the USA (formerly Freedom Gardens and Victory Gardens during the wars) struggle with similar threats from building developers.

[xx] In a 1998 Government Select Committee report on allotments in the UK, building development was cited as a key threat to allotments nationally.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmenvtra/560/56009.htm#a12> (accessed 1.5.06)

[xxi] On that fusion, for example: 'Loss of habitat has led to catastrophic loss of wildlife in the countryside. Ironically, by contrast, town gardens, city parks and urban open space have become far richer in birds, butterflies, amphibians and many other creatures.' Chris Baines, 'Town and Country', *RSA Journal* 3,4 (2004), pp. 26-29.(29) Or, 'If the metropolis is still a place, a geographic site, it no longer has anything to do with the classical oppositions of

city/country nor center/periphery.’ Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension* Trans. Daniel Moshenberg, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) p. 12

[xxii] Sic Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, (New York: The New Press, 1997). On difference, one claim made by allotment holders interviewed by Crouch is that different nationalities teach each other about growing different kinds of food and how to cook them. That ‘difference’ was welcomed by those interviewed. (David Crouch, ‘Performances and constitutions of natures: a consideration of the performance of lay geographies’, in Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, and Claire Waterton, eds., *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003b), pp.17-30.)

[xxiii] See, for example, Michael Hyde, *City Fields, Country Gardens: allotment essays*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves Press, 1998); Crouch (2003a); David Crouch ‘Performances and constitutions of natures: a consideration of the performance of lay geographies’, in Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, and Claire Waterton, eds., *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003b), pp.17-30.

[xxiv] Crouch, 2003a, p. 14. I would argue against Bloom that they are a venue for ‘a quintessential British activity’, partly because of the assumption that ‘Britishness’ reducibly exists, partly because allotment equivalents do, in fact, exist worldwide, and partly because urban allotments are often culturally diverse with a range of different growing traditions in place.

[xxv] ‘The Bloom 98 example attempts to develop “new working relationships between like thinking artists”. As Harry Palmer suggests “it is hoped this project will celebrate the adversities, break down the solitary conventions and demonstrate new ways of collaboration.”’ Bruce Barber, <http://www.novelsquat.com/gift.htm> (accessed 20.6.04).

[xxvi] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). Tim Cresswell points to the confusion that has arisen between place and social space since the 1970s and suggests that Lefebvre’s socially produced space, his ‘lived space’, ‘in many ways, plays the same role as place’ *Place: a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 10. Without conscribing, I have used ‘performative’ in the sense of the presentation of the self through repeated behaviours (pace Butler) rather than performative being something framed that is performed theatrically and with a sense of spectacle.

[xxvii] Martin Watson, ‘Performing Place in Nature Reserves’ in Szerszynski et al, 2003, p. 149

[xxviii] To explain this more fully: as part of the launch event, two dancers performed on the bare earth of the yet-to-be-planted allotments and the mainly adult visitors were shuttled across a road to the allotments by the school’s ‘lollipop’ lady holding the sign that enabled young people to cross. I was struck by the outcomes from the chef and the textile designer – pizza bases and a huge tapestry - being housed in the same classroom one week, literally sitting side by side. Growers and children working together may not appear unusual but a number of allotment holders in interviews commented on the fact that their own children did not like the site and were reluctant to join their parents there. Growing vegetables held little appeal. In all my visits, I did not see a child on the site apart from the Rosendale pupils.

[xxix] Bennett, T. (1979) *Formalism and Marxism*, London: Methuen, p. 20.

[xxx] These are not intended to represent the comprehensive genre of site-specific performance; they are just useful comparators.

[xxxi] BBC, Radio 4, *Woman’s Hour* (5 November, 2004); Lyn Gardner, ‘A Feast of Learning’, *Education Guardian*, (19 October, 2004), p. 10.

[xxxii] On palimpsest, see, for example, Kaye, 2000, p. 32; Pearson and Shanks, 2001, p.139; Turner, 2004.

[xxxiii] This lexicon is a collation and, as a list for a fluid concept, doubtless it excludes.

[xxxiv] ‘The allotment is seen to break the rules; it transgresses patterns of behaviour and makes landscapes that don’t fit. The allotment threatens media models of behaviour and what places should be like.’ (Crouch and Ward, 1994, p. xiv)

[xxxv] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).