EDN Atelier Dancing on the Edge: Peripheral Practices
Report by Alexandra Baybutt

[Dance Limerick](#) and [Dance Ireland](#), members of the European Dancehouse Network hosted a 2-day Atelier workshop during the *[What Next Dance Festival](#)* in Limerick between 9 and 10 February 2023.

Entitled **"Dancing on the Edge: Peripheral Practices",** the Atelier intended to explore what it means to be on the periphery; geographically, culturally and socially through the lens of creative, community and curatorial dance practices. Two days together included discussions, presentations and embodied practice. **Artists**, **programmers**, **curators** and **cultural policy makers were invited** to join in exchanging knowledge and models of practice. The questions posed by hosts Dance Limerick and Dance Ireland included: asking how the periphery can become the centre; how this could inform creative dialogue with communities and artists; and how we can produce and present work that is rooted locally and connected internationally.

Thursday, 9 February at Belltable Theatre, Limerick

Rural presentation & practice, Hierarchies in place and practice by artist and curator Mary Wycherley https://marywycherley.com/mary-wycherley

Mary presented a personal impression of professional working life, impacted upon by impressions of words such as 'rural' and 'urban'. Questioning definitions of the 'rural', acknowledging its loaded implications as well as artificiality and provocative qualities, Mary nevertheless finds the term to be vital if addressing asymmetries in provision for arts more broadly and dance more specifically is to be made. Sharing a powerful film by Rosalind Crisp concerning durations of practice and devastation in the context of what Crisp and others refer to as the forest wars in Australia, highlighted the specificity of place, and connections between sustainability and equity. There is, Mary argued, a need for artists to be successful outside cities. Mary mentioned several relevant resources and studies at the foot of this paragraph, then shared the urgent observation to keep

investing in artist in residence schemes. These have existed across the Republic of Ireland for decades and this model needs to grow in order to support artists – those visiting and those hosting – in tandem with what such residency periods mean to the places in which they are taking place. Mary is less interested in 'bridging gaps' than seeing the range of practices and their potential as a constellation. By this she means that the differences between people, practices, things, and places require different things to flourish. Location matters. Her argument is that without considering this, marginalisation happens without the presence of support structures.

Some resources and references:

Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991)
Remapping the Centre and Periphery: asymmetrical encounters in Europe and Global Contexts, Edited by Tessa Hauswedell, Axel Körner and Ulrich Tiedau (2019)
https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10070455/1/Re-Mapping-Centre-and-Periphery.pdf

Place, Space & People The Arts Council of Ireland (2022)
https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Local,-Place-and-Public-Art/Place,-Space-_-People/
Developing a Sense of Place: The Role of the Arts in Regenerating Communities, Edited by Tamara Ashley and Alexis Weedon (2020)
https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/152829

Hierarchies of place in practice and performance, *by dance artist Dylan Quinn*
https://www.dylanquinndance.com/

Dylan shared impressions of living and working in Northern Ireland, acknowledging its post-conflict context. Experiencing no shared or agreed upon value of creative practice, dance remains peripheral and requires individuals like him, who sought education elsewhere (in the north of England and Spain), to push for improvement and build infrastructure. Dylan insists upon self-reflexivity on action and inaction, and has experience of the complexity of different rural artists' needs in Northern Ireland. Deeply valuing artistic work of quality and integrity, he gave a vivid picture of others' unjust assumptions that removing oneself from a centre (for dance, or an urban centre) you are lowering relationship to quality and that you're less dedicated to your practice. Echoing across this Atelier was the comment that sustainable work is necessary to sustain the

responsibilities of life. The challenges Dylan summarised are economic, emotional and artistic. Each requires time, here presented as durations of unknowable length but with the precedent of commitment. He concluded by emphasising that supporting people 'in place' requires caring, and demonstrating what caring looks like in time and over time.

Practice of place: improvisation/embodied session *artist and curator Catherine Young,* http://www.catherineyoungdance.com/

Catherine led a sample of her extensive work in choreography, youth dance and socially engaged practice. She stressed that in this session and in her work more broadly dance cannot be separated from music (in this case, live drums, flute, fiddle). We experienced an extract of the Afro-Dabke-Céilí-Ukrainian dance nights Catherine hosts (West African dance, Palestinian folk dance, Irish dance, Ukrainian folk dance), informed by work with refugees in Ireland. *In a circle, we copied moves and repeated steps that invited relating to each other across the circle, to each side, to her, and to hearing the musicians.* We travelled towards each other, we spread back out, we staggered ourselves so limbs could stretch wide. Some people were sitting on the side; participation was not mandatory. Elevated, hot and sweaty, we then sat to hear more about Catherine's practices of movement, exchange and travel. The evolution of this models both the need for travel ('if you don't have access to classes or training as a young person, how are you going to develop?') and the grounding of practices in place. Catherine makes work outside of urban centres and noted that there is a hunger in rural theatres to support others. Nevertheless, she was clear about the limits of this: 'no one comes from Dublin to see or review your work', and so 'if you want any level of recognition you have to take your work elsewhere'. With a shrewd smile, she offered 'the secret to living in Kerry is to get out often' and stated that she travels a lot. Catherine found that she was not influenced by other practices and styles by being in Dublin. It left her in a crucible of isolation to develop what wanted to say and how to work. 'I'm not much of a talker', emphasising the importance of the work itself instead.

Moving from Ireland to San Francisco and New York, and back to Ireland, Catherine sought out refugee centres to work with people in 'direct provision', a controversial system of asylum seeker accommodation in Ireland. In such spaces where joy is absent, dance and sharing dances became a language of

connection. Catherine explained that it was important to work with the stories of asylum seekers in ways that would not compromise their cases. Through re-staging them, stories could be presented with care. An invitation to the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival in 2017 was an unanticipated outcome of Catherine's work, with the astonishment of taking Dabke back to Palestine. When leaving Jerusalem through the process of checkpoints and waiting, Catherine asked the dancers, what can we do? Simply, they replied, tell people. Catherine hadn't expected to work in socially engaged dance practice, and articulated her position: 'I make work', and 'there isn't a separation between professional and community work'. Everyone is treated with care. Dance is already niche, she observes, so questions of who are you making dance with, who is in the room, and what are your reasons for making become the more important considerations.

Following this, **a walk and talk in pairs** to discuss the provocations of the morning. We were invited to discuss anything of interest; consider what models could work; when you see work do you think about the maker's biographies; what are the issues arising in your place(s)? We then returned indoors and introduced our partners and summarised what was discussed. This frame offered a chance to reflect, reconnect, meet new and familiar people, practise a different ethics of responsibility in introducing someone, hear more voices, hear about contexts different to one's own, and share ideas.

Artist perspective on bringing urban and under-represented genres to the centre of contemporary performance, *by multidisciplinary movement artist Tobi Balogun* https://www.tobi-tobe.com/

Tobi shared a performance lecture. First a poem was read aloud and projected. It shared statements of experiences about identities. Tobi observed that he doesn't like the term 'under-represented', as it notes the previous devaluation of forms. Nevertheless, he spoke of a rootedness in hip hop culture as a space of belonging, hinting at the complexities of the different generations of hip hop. For Tobi, it is 'the bounce', as a back and forth, up and down recurring motif that itself is sustaining, freeing and containing. Deliberately meandering observations of personal biography, including arriving from a capital city of Lagos to rural Ireland aged 9, are joined by comments upon the movement of dance moves in and out of different spaces such as TikTok, parties, music videos, studios and stages.

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Re-framing and copying moves can, he argued, decontextualize them in ways that can be alienating, but can also enrich other new possible connections. Tobi remarked that 'there is a place for colloquial language in the arts and in the applications', a point that recognises linguistic gate-keeping. He presented the different pillars of hip hop, and how these, such as 'the battle' have evolved and changed but are still hip hop. He shared a video from Ivan Blackstock https://www.crxssplatfxrm.com/about/ivan-michael-blackstock as part of the inspirations of his work and the presence of mentors. Tobi mentioned his interest in the use of repetition as research, and as a method of observation of the world as well as movement. The audience then were invited to reconfigure themselves into a circle, and Tobi guided dancing together drawing on the method from hip hop of 'ciphering' and embodying 'the bounce'. We made short movement motifs in response to instructions and intentions. These physical gestures are mobilised, repeated and transformed in different ways, such as on counts, or at different speeds. Each of us developed a short sequence for the phrase 'I love you', and this is used to interact in a circle, relating with those next to and opposite, with some travelling at the end.

In the evening, there were performances in the *What Next Festival at Dance Limerick Performance Space.*

Friday, 10 February at Dance Limerick Studio

The day began with ***Inclusive practice: improvisation/embodied session,*** *led by artist Sander Verbeek, with Sho Shibata, Executive Producer of UK-based Stopgap Dance Company.* Sander Verbeek (SAND-R) presented and facilitated 'Boombox', an audio-choreographic experience.

https://www.stopgapdance.com/production/dance-tapes/boombox/

'Boombox' was created during the UK's lockdown, produced by Stopgap. It is part of a collection of pieces made by several artists working in pairs to develop immersive experiences from the perspectives of artists with disabilities. Sander included different kinds of description of its content and created an accessibility pack available here https://www.sand-r.com/boombox.html

Sander and Sho introduced themselves using a self-description model for blind/visually impaired people, part of the inclusive practices Stopgap pioneer. https://vocaleyes.co.uk/services/resources/digital-accessibility-and-inclusion/self-description-for-inclusive-meetings/

Following this, Dance Ireland Director *Sheila Creevey chaired a* **round table discussion/presentation on The Art of Co-Curation**. Jenny Traynor (Director of Dance Limerick) and Catherine Young, co-curators of the What Next Festival, spoke about how they balance the needs of the festival to support local, national and international artists and audiences, and the importance of having a residency within the festival to support artists. Discussions in small groups on the following questions followed this: How could co-curation support inclusive practices? Where is the leadership in co-curation? How can co-curation build legacy?

Next was another pair walk and talk session outside to reflect together. The last presentations of the day were on the *Politics of Inclusion, by Dr Dalia Ferri, and Stopgap co-artistic director Laura Jones.* Dalia spoke from the perspective of laws on disability and inclusion, and introduced a five-year European Research Council-funded project https://ercdancing.maynoothuniversity.ie/ that is working with Stopgap. Then Laura presented the company's work and methods, finishing with advocacy for the social model of disability. A short discussion followed this, then a brief plenary of the Atelier was led by Louise Costelloe, Programme Manager from Dance Ireland. There were more performances that evening in the *What Next Festival*.

About the author

Alexandra Baybutt (PhD, RSME, CMA) works in dance professionally since 2004, and engages freelance in postdoctoral research, somatic movement education, and artistic practice in the UK and Europe. In 2023, EDN commissioned Alexandra to map and highlight equitable practices in contemporary dance in Europe: https://www.ednetwork.eu/news/equityreport2023

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