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Bring me a Souvenir: Performing Herstory on Ayr beach

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This article employs Massey’s conceptualisation of gendered space to explore the ways in which the unrepresented narratives of women in heritage sites can be promoted through site-specific performance practice. It focuses on the development and creation of Souvenir, a site-specific play performed at Ayr beach in South Ayrshire, Scotland in 2017. The project involved the development of a public performance work inspired by stories shared by local women at reminiscence workshops. Implementing a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology, this performance was created to celebrate the narratives of ‘ordinary’ women so often unrepresented in heritage spaces. The aim of this study was to extrapolate principles of feminist performance practice that can be used to respond to the lack of women’s stories, termed ‘Herstory’, in such sites. This article delineates the development process of Souvenir, noting the particular frameworks and methods employed to foreground Herstory. The performance process drew upon Smith’s mythogeography and Berger’s hydrological dramaturgy in order to explore how creative practice could highlight the feminist possibilities of the space. The combination of practice and theory serves to interrogate the performance methods used in representing marginalised narratives of women, while simultaneously exploring how personal conceptualisations of space can be altered through such work.

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Introduction

*She wasn't an angel, she was much stronger than that. She was the ocean. She was the sea on a warm summer day, and we were all contained within her. We'd play and swim and be pulled in different directions but the currents she created held us all together. I was never the same after she went. It's the mother that holds everybody together.*

(Souvenir, Ayr Beach, 2017)

Metaphorical links between women and nature, water and the sea have persistently drifted into art and mythology, from the Arthurian Lady of the Lake to Scandinavian sirens, from captured selkie brides of Orcadian mythology to river goddesses of the Xiang (see Westwood & Kingshill, 2009). Indeed, contemporary theorists and performance makers have drawn from these metaphors in their practice (Young, 2012 and Berger, 2016). Inspired by these artistic depictions of women-as-water, beginning in 2016 I designed and led a performance project developed with women living in South Ayrshire, a region in the West of Scotland comprised of rural and seaside towns. This was the final project as part of a three year writer-in-residence post with South Ayrshire Arts Partnership, during which time my practice and research focused on marginalised narratives of women in spaces of heritage, henceforth termed Herstory (Morgan, 1970). In this work, the primary aim was to explore and perform the lives of ‘ordinary’ women so often sidelined in traditional heritage sites (Smith, 2008). The project took place in two stages: first, a series of reminiscence sessions with residents of Ayr and its environs. At these sessions participants were invited to contribute their memories of growing up and/or living near the beach. This was followed by the creation of public performance, which took place on-site at Ayr beach in May 2017. This article explores this process in order draw out the specific techniques and principles used to develop contemporary Herstories into a feminist, sited practice.

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¹The term was originally used by Morgan (1970) and was subsequently defined by Miller and Swift (1976:135) as a practice which underlines ‘that women’s lives, deeds, and participation in human affairs have been neglected or undervalued in standard histories’. 
Souvenir was inspired by the stories that were told to us by the participants, in addition to local myth and folk songs. The development and rehearsal process took place almost entirely on Ayr beach (with a few days at Ayr Gaiety studios when the rain and wind became too formidable). The site, once a popular holiday destination for those living in the West of Scotland, has suffered similarly to other British seaside destinations and is no longer a hub of activity and leisure for the town. It was therefore chosen due to the importance it once held for local people, with a particular focus on exploring how local women have interacted with it in the recent past through reminiscence work. The final performance work incorporated elements of tour guiding, performance, movement and storytelling. The fragmented structure was chosen to reflect the site itself, alluding to its status as an ecotone or liminal space between two ecologies (land and sea) littered with ideological and material flotsam and jetsam (Kershaw, 2007). Seaweed and driftwood; abandoned buckets and spades; and closed-down shops served as markers of the natural world, a contemporary community space and a once-vibrant holiday destination.

The construction of this article draws upon the bricolage method by combining the performance text and reflections from the performers involved with theoretical lenses of three academic disciplines that have informed the study as a whole: human geography, performance studies and heritage studies. Rather than using a single framework, combining these areas allowed for a form of theoretical bricolage that permitted me to explore the performance works from a variety of angles. The bricolage method advocates interdisciplinary study and, while still engaging with the structures of specific disciplines on a profound level, embraces the use of perspectives drawn from different academic fields (Kincheloe, 2001). Key concepts and arguments in this study include that of Herstory, Massey’s (1994) theories of human geography and gendered space, Laurajane Smith’s (2008) exploration of women in heritage sites, Phil Smith’s (2010) mythogeography and Berger’s (2016) hydrological dramaturgy. Each of these concepts will be delineated and explored in relation to different themes of the study throughout this article. It is this process of piecing together theories
and ideas in order to create performance and, in turn, for analysis and interpretation that is the cornerstone of this project.

Following artist-researchers such as Smith (2010) and Pearson (2006), this article primarily explores the personal experience(s) of the performer in the creation process and is rooted in the thematic structures of both the rehearsal and performance process. In developing the work, I drew from the aforementioned methods and ideas posited by performance studies theorists Smith (2010) and Berger (2016) in order to create a new work underpinned by these performance frameworks; these works were, in turn, used in the analysis of the themes of the work. What follows here is a discussion of both the performance and rehearsal process with particular attention to the landscape and how natural, uncontrollable space impacts upon site-specific performance. The article begins with a summary of the methodology used, followed by an exploration of the key themes of the study: natural space, mobility, and care. In exploring these themes, this article can be understood as an exegesis of critically-informed performance practice, and therefore concludes by offering principles for the development and creation of feminist performance work in spaces of natural and built heritage.

**Methodology**

This project was conducted using Practice-as-Research as the primary methodological framework, whereby the development process, artistic output and written account are all understood as a component of the research (see Sullivan, 2011). In order to develop my own specific method of employing PaR, I drew from Smith’s concept of mythogeography (2010) which can be broadly understood as an ambulatory approach to exploring space by prioritising myth and obscure narratives. Smith (2010, 9) gives particular examples of how he applies creative ‘anti-wayfinding’ in practice. This approach involves exploring site by moving against the populist current, looking for hidden or uncelebrated spaces and seeking out unrepresented narratives. For example, during
the rehearsal process for *Souvenir*, solo walking, similar to that described by Smith (2010), was used as a tool to explore the rhythms and ostensibly unremarkable features of the space. In addition to this, the conceptualisations of key theorists were present through the development and performance process. By foregrounding stories of women in the site, we brought into question the problematic lack of Herstorical narratives in spaces of heritage raised by Massey (1994) and Smith (2008).

A qualitative approach was used to gather data from the performance, and from myself and my collaborator, Poppy Lironi. After the performances, I facilitated a conversation with Lironi that was supported by a reflective performance journal and ancillary questionnaires from audience members. I use the term conversation rather than interview to reflect the egalitarian, dialogical nature of the session (see Stern, 2016). That analysis of art, particularly art created by the researcher, can be subjective is not to be understood as necessarily problematic (Barrett, 2007). The subjectivity of my analysis brings with it a profoundly personal account of the creation of the performance. However, the use of reflective accounts from performers provided an additional perspective on the work, offering a fuller understanding of the performance events. I employed semantic thematic analysis in order to code the data derived from the questionnaires, reflective journals and conversation. This approach advocates that ‘the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:13). This can be understood in relation to latent thematic analysis, which explores the underlying reasons for the responses given (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used this form of analysis due to the nature of the enquiry; I was not looking to analyse the participants themselves, but rather to allow them to report their experiences. I employed the accounts given as an accurate representation of how each individual had perceived the performance discussed. Key words and phrases continued to appear in the transcripts and, when

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2 It should be noted here that, as this was my final project in South Ayrshire, I had found that the most effective way of gaining audience feedback was through short questionnaires. While the questionnaires gave some insights into the reception of the work, they did not offer the same profound level of reflection as the reflective journals and conversation.
related to the theoretical framework of the study, I found that the primary themes were performance in a natural space, mobility and care. The following sections of this article explore each of these themes, drawing upon the different data sets analysed in addition to the performance process itself.

Nature, heritage and performance

The motivation to create a performance work on Ayr beach was borne of the understanding that collecting and sharing testimonies of or about women from the community was imperative in promoting local Herstory, as such narratives are so often lacking in spaces of heritage (Smith, 2008). It is important to note here that while Ayr beach is not, perhaps, a bounded, preserved heritage site, it was chosen for this project as it was identified as being significant to the past identity of the town (its popularity having dwindled with the advent of inexpensive flights and package holidays). During the reminiscence sessions, sharing memories of visits to the sea allowed us to gain an understanding of the living Herstories of Ayr, by which I mean stories of those still living within the area. This was only made possible by choosing a site such as this; one that is open to the public and is therefore linked closely to personal experiences of the local community.

The reminiscence sessions also provided an insight into how these women feel about the site today. The beachfront provided a facilitative environment to explore past and present narratives of a locally significant site. At these sessions participants were invited to share their memories of growing up and/or living near the beach. The participants of the reminiscence sessions were not research subjects, rather artistic collaborators who offered to share their stories for the process. I did not, therefore, collect specific information on age range or gender. However, I can state that there were around 20 participants in total, men and women. They were all older adults (65 and above) who had experienced the beach at its peak as a tourist attraction. Six one-hour sessions took place in

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3 While the focus was placed upon Herstory, these were open access sessions and therefore open to all genders. The stories shared by men focused upon the women in their lives.
total, and were facilitated in October 2016 and January 2017. Many of the participants spoke of the beach in the 1960s/70s as a lively site with high levels of tourism, and lamented its current state:

    Ayr seafront in its vibrant heyday – an experience not to be missed and one that has sadly disappeared into the mists of time!14

At the beginning of the development process we found ourselves in something of a quandary. While wary of re-presenting the site as a ‘nostalgic utopia’, we wanted to convey the Herstorical narratives shared within the reminiscence sessions (Smith, 2013, 103). Our focus was not necessarily placed upon the historical use of the beach, but what it meant to the older women still living in the area. This being said, many of our participants voiced a longing for the ‘heyday’ of the beach. In order to reconcile a celebration of the Herstory of the space with its current identity, we decided to begin our process by setting aside the human narratives of the space (as far as possible) and focusing upon its physiographical features.

The physical identity of the space itself was a key influence within our working process. The space is by no means free from human intervention: there is a vast esplanade running along the beachfront, punctuated with play parks and shops and constantly lined with cars. However, once on the sand, the site is permeated with a sense of wildness. The beach is human made, and yet performs itself as a natural landscape. It is something of a hybrid, materially speaking, which aligns it with mythogeographical practice where ‘hybridity’ across spaces and narratives is understood as key (Smith, 2010). Particularly on wet, cold days, which were numerous during our rehearsals, the beach is largely unpeopled, with only the sounds of the waves and the cries of birds to be heard.

Our rehearsal period began on a particularly rainy day and, once on the beach, there was nowhere to shelter. Approaching the space without any specific rehearsal plans, we went to the beach with two buckets and spades. In doing this, we prompted a connection to our own childhoods, engaging in a

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14 This extract from the script of Souvenir comes directly from a piece written by one of the reminiscence group participants
practice that Philo (2003, 16) has termed ‘daydreaming’, which involves developing an interpretive connection between adult and childhood ‘reveries’. We discussed how, as children, trips to the beach would take place regardless of weather conditions. This first rehearsal in the site can be understood as a mobilisation of Smith’s (2010, 116) argument for ‘foregrounding the mythogeographer’s autobiographical and non-rational associations’. We had both visited the site throughout our childhood, and play allowed us to reconnect with these experiences. In approaching the space through play, we were attempting to escape from the ‘treadmill of theory, evidence and analysis’ that can so often inhibit spatialised acts of memory (Jones, 2005, 206). We wanted to exist within the site, to connect with our own past experiences of inhabiting such spaces, and to put ourselves back into a playful, childlike frame of mind. Our aim in carrying out such work was to explore the different ways we could interact with the space in order to foster new connections with it.

The following is an extract from the reflective journal kept during the process:

The torrential Scottish rain had abated and we wanted to play. Poppy had £6 in her purse, which was just enough to buy two flimsy bucket and spade play sets. I started by making a sandcastle while Poppy kicked a ball around. Then, I was overcome with a strong desire to dig a hole. I kept digging, pushing deeper into the sand, thrusting the spade into the hard-packed grains. I thought about women, about the women who had worked here. I thought about the repetitive, physical labour of those working in the traditional industries. Picking cockles, gutting fish. Pushing and pulling. My movements took on the rhythm of the sea. I fell into a trance-like state until I was hit on the head by Poppy’s ball.

She was bored, I could tell. I asked her what she would have done here when she was 7. She said go for a swim. So we did.

She ran in first. I followed.

It was hard to breathe when the water hit our lungs, but the longer we were in the more this abated. The one other beachgoer tried to seem like he wasn’t staring.

When we eventually came out everyone wanted to talk to us.

‘Isn’t it freezing?!’

‘I’m a swimming teacher and I’d never go in there today. Good on you!’
Although we began our work aiming primarily to explore the physical features of the space, this extract clearly illustrates how our own Herstories impacted upon this rehearsal. Our understanding of the space was rooted in Soja’s (1980) socio-spatial dialectic, which proffers that the relationship between space and society is multidirectional; that space and society form and are formed by each other. Allowing our social history to permeate the work meant that it was difficult to entirely set aside human narratives when interacting with this natural space. Indeed, as our process continued we allowed more of ourselves and the Herstories we’d found or heard to influence our work. However, by playing and interacting with the sand and the sea we began to appropriate elements of nature into our work. The rhythms of the waves, for example, were incorporated into my digging. My movements began to create a new identity of the space; an identity formed of the sand, the waves, my research and my memories. In this moment, I was physically creating something ephemeral within the space, moving the sand into a pattern that, like the waves, would eventually vanish ‘in a disappearing flickering of reality’ (Sleigh-Johnson, 2016, 7). In subsequently running into the water, we used the space in a childlike manner, breaking the rules of adult conduct on a rainy beach. Each of these moments spoke to the temporal identity of the piece we wanted to create; one with room for nostalgia and critique, embedded in the past and present conceptualisations of the space.

Ayr beach is constituted of water and sand, as is the case with most beachfronts. In developing the work we found that both of these elements – here I borrow from the classical understanding of the term – physically and thematically affected the rehearsal process. I will now explore the ways in which our relationship with these physical, natural elements impacted upon the work. In order to reflect what is generally the experience of any beach-goer, I will traverse the sand before venturing into the water. In analysing the conversation with Lironi, sand appeared to impact particularly upon the physical elements of the performance work. In the first instance, Lironi felt it was an inconvenience:
We became good at being on the beach, but it took us, it took me certainly two weeks to get to being good at being on the beach. It was like a constant coming home, ridding yourself of sand, putting stuff in the wash, thinking about what you can wear the next day that’s going to survive the sand, so you’re not going to get sand in your trousers (...) it was just constant.

I also recalled in this conversation that, after the final performance, it was necessary to fill buckets with sand from my bath at home, so great was the volume I had brought home. Our interactions with the sand at Ayr beach calls to mind Massey’s (1994, 7) assertion that ‘localities can in a sense be present in one another, both inside and outside at the same time’. In one sense, the beach was present in our homes because, as Lironi stated, we had to practically and mentally prepare before going there. Furthermore, in a more material sense, both of us brought sand home with us on our clothes and props every day.

As our work developed, a sense of sandiness began to permeate the ways in which we created *Souvenir*. One of the earliest exercises we carried out was a walk from either side of the beach towards one another. I created a movement to reflect the wave-like patterns that had been left in the sand by the sea; we wrote words and numbers in the sand; and we found that our bodies reacted to the shifting nature of the grains as we moved. The words that were written in the sand can be understood in terms of Smith’s (2010, 89) notion of ‘decaying art’ that is ‘released to perform its disappearance’. As with many of Smith’s mythogeographical interventions, our work was imbued with a sense of ephemerality; everything physical we created would disappear with the movement of the sand or the erasure of the waves. In order to move within the space, Lironi noted that extra physical effort was required:

I feel like a lot of the movement stuff that we did just completely came out of the fact that we were on the sand. (...) [It] never felt the same in the studio. Because it didn’t have the weight of the sand that you were hitting against.

During our conversation, both Lironi and myself noted the sense of exertion we felt working on the sand, and the fatigue that came with it. The sand became a formative aspect of our process, in a manner that sprung floors of a rehearsal studio could not.
While sand only became central to the work once rehearsals began, water seemed to inform the development of *Souvenir* from the very beginning (by which I mean October 2016, when reminiscence sessions began). The Scottish folk songs chosen for the reminiscence sessions primarily centred around water; *The Dark Island, The Song of the Clyde, Ye Banks and Braes o’ Bonnie Doon*. Water became a metaphorical vessel for the creation of new connections and ideas, and in time it became something of a third collaborator in our work. There exists an analogous relationship between this conceptualisation of water as a creative vessel and the notion of community; in order for individuals to thrive, there must exist an environment of support and collectivist activity. This could clearly be seen in the community groups we worked with during the reminiscence sessions, as the meetings offered a chance for creative and personal connection.

Furthermore, Lironi created a document filled with stories, myths and quotations about the sea as a stimulus for our work. She also noted that swimming in the sea on our first day of rehearsals (see Fig. 3) was important in the formation of the piece:

VB: What (…) is particularly memorable or formational?

(...)  
PL: The first time we went into the sea.

The movement and presence of the water shaped Lironi’s experience, and the development of the project as a whole.

While ideas of water and the sea continually drifted in and out of my creative consciousness, I felt the project lacked a sense of theoretical grounding for this connection between women and the sea. Stories shared by and about women in the reminiscence sessions, and myths about Selkie women all strengthened this connection, yet I continued to struggle in theorising it. While still approaching the space with a mythogeographical lens, I found a more specific conceptualisation of women and the sea in arguments put forward by Berger (2016, 22), in particular her notion of ‘hydrological dramaturgy’. Hydrological dramaturgy can be understood as reproducing the form and rhythm of the sea through repetition, improvisation and collectivism. Berger (22) contends that it ‘may
perform such a feminine symbolic function by emulating the facilitative environment associated with the mother and the sea’. A significant number of the stories we had collected in the reminiscence session discussed familial and, in particular, maternal relationships. These stories, along with my personal position as a mother, allowed for this sea-as-mother metaphor to have a useful place within the development of the work. It should be noted here that our use of hydrological dramaturgy was an artistic and theoretical vessel, and connected to Massey’s (1994) arguments that women have classically been associated with nature, and men society. These binaries have traditionally been used to suppress Herstorical narratives and, in creating Souvenir, we were able to instead use them to represent and celebrate untold Herstories. The metaphor became an artistic means of empowering us, as women, to share Herstorical narratives, rather than an essentialist fact accepted without question.

Moving forward from this idea, in Souvenir the sea itself provided a backdrop, soundscape and rhythmic structure for the development of the piece. Ideas of hydrological dramaturgy, which will be discussed further in following sections, were used throughout our rehearsal process. In addition to this, the rhythms of the sea were key in forming the final performance script, as noted in my reflective journal:

The text flows. It has a constant, rhythmic undercurrent that sustains it. And then there are interjections, interruptions that disturb the pace. They are rogue waves, out of sync with the others. You didn’t see them coming as they splash up against you. They have their own rhythm that is simultaneously part of and separate to the meta-current.

Throughout the development and performances of Souvenir, water remained a powerful presence, materially and metaphorically. In engaging with ideas of water, and finding links between the sea and the feminine, we developed a work that embodied both the natural qualities of the space and the feminist aims of this study (see Berger, 2016; Sleigh-Johnson, 2016).

**Mobility: wind and waves**
Questions of how we move through space were purposefully part of this process from the outset in order to further explore the links established between mobility and feminist site-specific performance in my previous work (Bianchi, 2016). Furthermore, the site of Ayr seafront was particularly suited to exploring mobility within performance. This is due to its size and the constant movement that occurs in such a space; shifting sands beneath one’s feet, the continual movement of the water, and the flow of humans moving along the esplanade and on the beach. Given that the central impetus of this project was to explore the potential for reconceptualising space through performance, the ever-shifting environment of the seafront was understood to be relevant from the beginning of the Souvenir project.

That the site continued to be physically formed and reformed by tidal patterns presented a unique opportunity to explore spatial mobilities and dynamism. To move through such a space permitted us to leave only an ephemeral mark, unlike the more permanent lines that can be made by continually following one route on firmer ground (see Ingold, 2007). By incorporating mobility into the process and the performance we did not follow one course again and again, but made, and then lost, multiple pathways. We aimed to underline the conceptualisation of the sea as a space of ‘multiple beginnings and departures instead of designating origins while affecting no closure’ (Berger, 2016, 22). Our trajectories, both physical and conceptual, marked a variety of possible paths that, within the beach environment, were ultimately as ephemeral as live performance itself. Therefore, in order to imbue our process with mobility, the rehearsal period started with Smith’s (2010) principal mythogeographical strategy: walking.

The alignment of mobility with male privilege (Heddon & Turner, 2012), underpinned the task I set for myself and Lironi on the second day of rehearsals for Souvenir: to walk the length of the beach. In his description of mythogeographical practice, Smith (2010, 112) highlights moving through space as key in uncovering ‘a set of uneven and inconsistent ‘anywheres’, partly experienced, partly
imagined’. To move through space while employing a mythogeographical lens is to be open to the possibilities of that space: not just consuming what is there, but making room for what might have been or could be. In order to re-discover and reconceptualise space, walking practice is vital (Smith, 2010). So, too, is a hyper-sensitivity to spatial features, in this case the wind, the wave rhythms, the beach walkers and the grains of sand. I would note that, during my preparations for this work, my attention was drawn to Smith’s (2010, 31) potentially unremarkable statement that, in his walking practice, he ‘has left his family for a while’. There is a strong stigma attached to mothers leaving their families, which is perhaps why women are the ‘exception to an unstated norm’ within discourses surrounding walking (Heddon & Turner, 2012, 225). In order to reclaim walking as a free, universal practice, it was consciously placed at the centre of our development process.

It was with the aforementioned gendered implications of mobility in mind that I proposed Lironi and I walk from each end of the beach and meet in the middle (see Massey, 1994; Heddon & Turner, 2012). The walk undertaken by Lironi and myself lasted two hours in total, during which I made an audio recording of my thoughts and acts in order that I might use them as text in the final performances (see Fig. 4). Reflecting upon this in the conversation, I noted that,

I remember having this moment of being like, of walking and thinking, how privileged we are to be able to do that and to do it as part of a creative process. (…) It’s something that for so long, for so many people, in the past, it wasn’t an option for them to wander off. But also even throughout the world, just to be able to walk somewhere for two hours just with your own thoughts, and how much of a privilege that is and how- I think, for me, having that sense of privilege to what we were doing kind of drove me on as well, it was like… I said that in the [recording], I was like ‘I feel like I’m doing this for the women who were never able to’.

This walking exercise was underwritten by my gender throughout, particularly the knowledge of the stark contrast between my ability to undertake this walk and the traditional domestic constraints placed upon women. Furthermore, the act was one of reclaiming the landscape, where the threat of

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3 This exercise was inspired by Abramović’s 1988 work The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk. This performance involved two artists (Abramović and Ulay) walking towards one another from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China to end their romantic relationship.
danger felt minimal, and highlighted that walking within a natural landscape can be understood as allowing women the freedom from ‘cultural norms that constrain’ (Heddon & Turner, 2012, 236).

During much of this walk I was entirely alone, and therefore felt comfortable in making creative interventions in the space, including a movement sequence developed along the way (a task I had set for Lironi and myself to carry out during the walk). Although this was a beach on the edge of a busy town, the space felt neutral, at least in terms of gender. In my perception the beach was not aligned with gender power systems, as can be the case with even the most unremarkable of landscapes (Massey, 1994). The further along the beach I walked, the more natural the landscape became and the fewer people I encountered. In this manner, I argue that the use of mobility as a feminist strategy within the rehearsal process can be particularly effective within a natural rather than urban landscape. It was my experience on this particular, isolated route that the detachment from the male gaze, which pervades much of urban life, is effective in offering walking women a heightened sense of creative freedom and agency (Mulvey, 1998).

My conversation with Lironi afforded me the space to discuss my own experiences of the development process for Souvenir. In this way, Lironi and I were able to compare our views on the work we had done, and the beach walk was a particular focus in our discussion. Other forms of mobility were employed as a catalyst for creating material throughout the development period; for example, we swam in the sea on eight of the ten rehearsal days. The amount of time dedicated to the beach walk in the conversation, however, suggests that it was particularly significant in our process. Whilst there were parallels between Lironi’s experience and my own, she described a sense of harshness in her account:

I felt like there was a direct purpose for me to get to you. But I was going against the wind so it wasn’t a kind of, like, pleasurable, let’s look at the view and feel the sun and wander along. Like, it was very purpose driven, like I was fighting to get somewhere.
Lironi’s experience, here, can be understood as a performance within itself; the ‘purpose’ she felt was aligned with the performance task I had set and the sense of ‘fighting’ was borne of this (Schechner, 2003). The process of a female body moving through difficult conditions shouldn’t be understood as apolitical. Her words in the conversation brought to mind Massey’s assertions of mobility as ‘gender-disturbing’ (1994, 11), and my own conceptualisation of walking theatre as a form of feminist protest (Bianchi, 2016). While Lironi was not walking along the beach in protest, her movement was imbued with the gendered implications of a woman walking alone.

It should be noted that the above argument could be interpreted as positing an essentialist binary between the capabilities of the bodies of women and the bodies of men, particularly in terms of walking in wild landscapes. Indeed, the conceptualisation of men as society (powerful, forward-thinking) and women as nature (wild, emotional) must be problematised as it can constrain the potential of those across the gender spectrum (see Massey, 1994). It is, therefore, important that women’s mobility is not conceptualised as more difficult or exceptional:

Rather than suggesting a greater scale of heroism for the female walker, it may well be more useful politically to draw attention to the many women who do undertake walking on this scale and emerge unscathed. This might generate reassurance that the wild is neither more nor less dangerous to women than it is to men, which in turn may serve to rewrite the inscriptions of space and gender, as well as presumed walking competencies (Heddon & Turner, 2012, 229)

Once again, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the beach walk was a relatively low-risk undertaking. While I do not suggest that it was on the same scale as some of the walks discussed by Heddon and Turner, the argument proposed here informed our practice. By moving through the space, in particular the more isolated, difficult sections, we were making a statement about the possibilities of mobility for women. We were underlining that women have the ability to explore space with the same freedom and sense of safety that is afforded to men. Furthermore, several sections of movement and text that were developed from this were used in the final performance meaning that, even in the sections where the audience was static, the mobility of our process was present throughout.
Myths, Mis-guiding and Mobility

The public performance of *Souvenir* drew on the form of guided tours as an opening for the work. Due to the Gaiety Theatre’s brochure deadlines, I had to decide upon the audience meeting point several months before the devising process began. Therefore, we knew we had to begin at the old Ayr Pavilion. The building itself is a testimony to the rewriting of space, the Victorian-style building now housing a pirate-themed family restaurant. In creating this section of the work, we wanted to reveal the histories of the space that we had discovered, or had been recounted by those participating in the reminiscence sessions. We aimed to be ‘sensitive to the ways that the land and the cities are managed, owned, controlled and exploited’ and also to the ‘flows of power’ permeating the space (Smith, 2014, 12). In dramatising the site, we became active agents in reconceptualising its identity. The opening of the performance can be understood as a meeting point of the stories we were told and what they became when they overlaid or were overlaid with the physical identity of the space. Walking and re-walking our route became an essential part of the development of this section, as our attention was drawn to different elements of the space each time we followed our performance path.

In response to these spatial features, Lironi and I both created tours for one another in rehearsal. These were primarily improvised, a method that Berger (2016, 22) conceptualises as aligned with feminism and the maternal as it offers a ‘gestational milieu’ where performance can grow and develop in a collaborative rather than controlled environment. In our process, improvisation combined with our knowledge of the site, and with myths and fictional Herstories. We drew from the Wrights & Sites’ concept of mis-guiding which can be employed to reframe space and eschew the ‘closure of historic interpretation’ (Smith, 2009, 160). This approach, which is one of the key tools of mythogeography, allowed us to find ‘holey spaces’ (Smith, 2014, 12) where we could insert Herstorical narratives into the site. In the final performance, the walk from the Pavilion down to the
beach included factual, fictional and entirely fabricated narratives for the audience to consume. We renamed Arran, known locally as the Sleeping Warrior, so it became the Sleeping Goddess; we told the audience that Mary, Queen of Scots liked to visit Ayr beach; and we shared a story of siren women saving Ayr from a tyrannical pirate. This process allowed us to represent the true stories we had gathered, while also using the creative process to imagine unrecorded Herstories, or those that have been deliberately erased. In explicitly foregrounding Herstorical narratives along our walk, we posed a challenge to the space in order to reconfigure it; in a material sense we offered a ‘bodily act of reading and writing coastlines’ (Carpenter, 2016, 16).

We, audience and performers, moved as a collective, disrupting the space with this unexpected performance work, therefore setting ourselves as a challenge to the ‘rules’ of the site (Wilkie, 2002, 246). Taking the time to draw attention to the possibilities of the space allowed our journey to be the focus, rather than our destination. Through our walking ‘tour’, Lironi and I implored the audience to consider the Herstories that may have taken place. We alluded to the links between the sea and the maternal in order to prioritise women’s stories. We shared movement works based on the experiences of mothers and daughters. During the performance work we, the performers and the audience, reconfigured the site as a space of Herstory. I argue, then, that whether or not mobility is directly aligned with politics through text, it remains a vital element of feminist site-specific performance.

Care

From the very earliest stages of this work it was clear that care and, in particular, familial relationships would play an important role in whatever the final performance of Souvenir would become. Our primary source for the performance was the stories shared at the reminiscence sessions and frequently the stories shared pertained to spending time on the beach with family. In one of the earliest sessions, the one participant who attended offered her observation that ‘it’s the mother that
holds everyone together”6. She discussed being taken to the beach by her mother, and, in turn, taking her own children there. It was during this session that the concept of care started to become present within the work. The conceptualisation of the sea as a ‘benevolent’ (Berger, 2016, 17) rather than a harsh or particularly violent entity aligns it with classical views of the maternal, which in turn aligned with the stories shared in the reminiscence sessions. Berger’s argument, in turn, leads to the sea being understood as a space of care where myriad life forms are held and nurtured. It was with this conceptualisation of sea and care in mind that Lironi and I decided to place care and the dynamics of the mother/child relationship at the centre of our process.

*Souvenir* was the second time I had collaborated with Lironi, therefore a professional foundation to our relationship already existed. I argue that this was due to a developing sense of care and comfort that we shared, and a sense of ‘interdependence’ upon each others’ contributions and observations (Hughes et al, 2005, 259). The following extract from a conversation between us, for example, demonstrates the humour and trust that was involved in our work:

**PL:** I feel like you asked for my opinion quite a lot on things, which was nice.  
**VB:** Even about whether my milk was going to be alright in my fridge.  
**PL:** Yeah or, like, if you were going to be too cold without a jumper on.

Here we are both referring to my tendency to ask Lironi quotidian questions throughout our time working together, including regarding the lifespan of milk. In this way, I was seeking care and reassurance within our relationship and instead of being in charge I sought a ‘reciprocally dependent’ relationship where we each took on the roles of ‘the one-caring and the cared-for’ (Noddings, 1984, 58). I would argue that this sense of connection strengthened not only our personal but also our professional relationship (see Fig. 5). This can be understood as aligning with MacDonald’s (2010, n.p.) conceptualisation of artistic friendship as ‘a generative, poetic exchange’. As I noted in our conversation about the process: ‘that level of trust that you have creatively maybe spills over a bit’.

6 These words were written into in the final scene of *Souvenir*
The link between familial and working relationships was clearly demarcated by Lironi’s observation in our conversation that,

I realised through uni that all I’ve really wanted is a sister, like, all I- I’ve found, like, I feel like I’ve found sisters in all my female friends (…) so to sit there that day and, like, see you write us as sisters and the, like, to actually do it was just, like, it was such a weird, weird thing as well because we wrote ourselves into it (…) Like we weren’t- we were characters but we weren’t, em, so like the bits of, like information about your life and about my life just made it, like, seem more real.

Here Lironi, refers to the final scene, where we performed a duologue as two sisters who lost their mother, based partially on a story shared at a reminiscence session. This blurring of our real and imagined personas within our performance process not only heightened the sense of connection and care, by casting us as sisters, but also spoke to the liminality of the work itself. Our process was physically sited within an ecotone – by definition a liminal space where two biological communities meet – and through it we continually explored the ‘homologies between the real material conditions and the imaginary world of the production’ (Kershaw, 2007, 7). We used fragments from our lives, alongside other women’s Herstories and local myth to perform local Herstory and the care that was present in our lives and working process.

In exploring care within our process and in the performance of Souvenir, familial and, in particular, maternal relationships were a central concern. Two specific stories shared during the reminiscence sessions heavily influenced our performance and were incorporated into the work in different forms: a written story of visiting the beach while pregnant and another story, shared during a discussion, of a participant losing her mother at a young age. It was from these stories, and our own experiences, that our focus upon the maternal evolved. The maternal was not just a thematic feature within the work, but also a metaphor for the creative, feminist process. In our work, the sea was understood as a creative, life-giving force with the potential for creating and shaping the world. These links between the sea and the maternal have the potential to challenge the problematic conceptualisation of ‘proper’ production being linked to patriarchy and capitalism (Berger,
While it is not the case that all women choose to become mothers, it is widely accepted in feminist discourse that emotional, familial labour is undervalued (see Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Harman, 2017). Our aim was not to present care as an essentialist aspect of the feminine experience, but to acknowledge the persisting gap between caregiving across genders, in our lives and in the lives of our reminiscence participants. *Souvenir*, then, used local and personal Herstories, along with the particular rhythms of the sea, to explore methods of creation that foreground family and the maternal.

One of the clearest examples of this was a section in *Souvenir* where Lironi performed a movement piece while I read a poem. Both of these fragments, created over the course of the first week, developed in response to the rhythms of the tidal flows and the notion of maternal care. The movement piece performed in the final iteration of this section was first developed during Lironi’s beach walk, combining the five movements she had made during this time. The fluidity in her movement, which she attributed to the wind on that day, can also be understood as a manifestation of the constant oceanic underscore created by the waves. Waves in themselves can be conceptualised, similarly to the pregnant body, as present within the present but also as a harbinger of future life: ‘an ever-repeated movement to come’ (Sleigh-Johnson, 2016, 8). The sea, then, is understood as intrinsically linked with the future; waves breaking constantly upon the shore, foretelling the others that will follow and follow.

The role of the mother has been frequently conceptualised as static within the home (Massey, 1994). Throughout the development of this work, my own identity as a mother was constantly present, as noted in my reflective journal:

The weekend was not as refreshing and restful as I had hoped – it never is when you have a two-year-old at home. I start the day feeling fatigued and lazy. Life spills into the process. (...) I need to get home for 5.30pm to see my daughter. Life spills in.
It was, perhaps, due to my role as a caregiver that the section of text I developed during my walk centred around this idea of mothers being fixed within the home. The development process of *Souvenir* was particularly impacted by the schedules I needed to keep as a mother, and the care I needed to provide beyond our working hours. I argue that making space for the personal within the professional is a particularly useful method of grounding care within the working process. In walking practice, as in all rehearsal time, ‘human needs, feelings and cognitions’ should be understood as integral to the process, rather than an inconvenience (Noddings, 1984, 27). Care for the mind and body should be prioritised, lest the performing body be ‘destroyed’ in the process (Smith, 2010, 33). Within *Souvenir*, this impacted in a practical sense as our working days were often shorter due to physical fatigue or the necessity to return home to my daughter. Care also became thematically central to the work as we explored mothering and, during the beach walk and resulting text, took space for reflection upon this particular form of caregiving.

The poem, which developed from the voice recording I made during the beach walk, made explicit links between care and inhibited mobility:

> And I have a home to go to. And I have little faces to wash and hands to clean. And I have food to make. I have things to get back to.
> But not now.

Both this section of text and Lironi’s movement piece used repetition as a framework. The use of repetition strengthened the affinity between the performance work and the constant movement of the waves, while also making links with the repetition of rituals of care that continue throughout motherhood (Noddings, 1984). Throughout the development and performance process we placed care and interdependent relationships at the centre of our process. Care was conceptualised as a source of power and strength rather than a burden. As the text and the movement formed and reformed in repetitious waves, so the performance work made and remade itself. Our words and bodies brought to mind feminine/maternal care, and the use of repetition foregrounded the links between the maternal and the sea.
Lironi and I found that the daily rituals of care were an important part of the process. During our conversation, Lironi noted that drinking coffee and singing in the car on the way to Ayr ‘was what tea was the last time’. It was during this time that we would catch up on the previous day/evening, make plans for our rehearsals, and discuss how we were feeling that day. The understanding of and providing for each other’s needs can be understood as integral to a process. Franks (2012), for example, argues that without effective communication even the act of sharing coffee can become a potential strain on a working relationship. It was this understanding of the necessary care that each collaborator required in order to work effectively that resulted in a productive and enjoyable process (Noddings, 1984). Furthermore, there was a sense of shared history from our previous work together; we knew which drinks one another liked and which songs we both enjoyed. It was with this in mind that we decided to represent both of these elements in the public performance.

One of the first decisions Lironi and I made when planning the reminiscence groups was to use music during the sessions. Singing has been found to have positive effects on participants in reminiscence groups (see Lee, 2002; Lesta & Petocz, 2006). Before the sessions began, I consulted with a practitioner from the Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow who specialises in reminiscence work. After discussing the project, she recommended songs that might work well with older adults. We felt that, by choosing songs that were popular among this specific age group, we could present an opportunity for interaction within the sessions and offer a sense of shared experience, particularly by using folk songs known across generations. During the first week of rehearsals, we discussed using these songs in the performance in order to maintain a link with the reminiscence groups, but also to re-establish the connections we found in these groups. Furthermore, in asking the audience to sing with us during the performance, we were signposting a part of our process that

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7 Here ‘the last time’ refers to the creation and development of our previous work, *In Hidden Spaces*, during which the group took turns making tea for one another.
had been instrumental in developing our working relationship. These songs were a marker of shared pasts, an ephemeral and ‘shifting landmark along paths of observation and cultural encounter’ (Smith, 2009, 164). The use of folk songs within the performance can be understood as an indication of a shared culture, but furthermore as an expression of music as a key element in developing a connected, care-full working process.

Another section to the performance inspired by care, mothering and the stories shared in the reminiscence groups was the picnic provided for the audience. This took place after Lironi returned from the sea, at which point we provided home made sandwiches on Mother’s Pride bread. Some spread with cheese, some with jam, which was noted by one of our reminiscence participants as a childhood favourite. We used these sandwiches as Herstorical markers, using the same bread and fillings that our reminiscence participants had related to their childhood. In preparing and distributing these sandwiches, we took on the traditional maternal role (Giles, 2014). In asking each audience their preference in turn, we took time out of the scripted text to tend to their needs.

The repetition of this offer of food drew the performance once more towards the rhythms of the sea and the ‘multiple beginnings’ it represents, in particular those associated with early motherhood (Berger, 2016, 22). Furthermore, the ecotonal status of the site as a liminal space between land and sea was highlighted, as we provided food suggested at the reminiscence sessions, fore-fronting the performance as an in-between space rooted in both the past and the present (Kershaw, 2007). Our identities also became liminal, as it intimated the role of both performer and caregiver. This picnic was followed almost immediately by an account of my daughter’s birth, thereby connecting the provision of food to ‘facilitative environment associated with the mother and the sea’ (Berger, 2016, 22). In offering food to our audience, we carried out a tangible act of care while also signposting the work towards themes of Herstory and motherhood.
Conclusion

In delineating the principles of this study, it is essential to acknowledge the place-based nature of the *Souvenir* project; the development and performance of the work were entirely specific to the culture and Herstory of a seaside town on the West coast of Scotland, and indeed to the experiences of the performance team. There are, however, some themes and principles that can be drawn from the work that are generalisable to those working within the spheres of site-specific and feminist heritage performance.

*Nature, heritage and performance*

During the development of *Souvenir*, the specific and diverse attributes of Ayr beachfront were integral to the form and rhythm of the work. Our work explored the human and geographical aspects of the site; collecting women’s stories, moving in time with the waves and responding to the topography of the site. In choosing to work near and in the sea, we were able to draw upon the maternal metaphors present in folk culture (Berger, 2016). Furthermore, by creating a work in an open space, surrounded by members of the public, we explored and challenged theorisations of heritage, women and mobility (see below for further). While feminist heritage performance can be created in more conventional spaces of heritage, it was the specific identity of the beachfront as ecotonal and fragmented that allowed for the layering of Herstorical narratives; the exploration of metaphorical links between women and water; and a greater potential to explore feminism and mobility. In this respect, outdoor and natural spaces such as this can be understood as a beneficial lens through which to explore questions of feminism and heritage.

*Mobility*

Mobility was a central concern in the development of *Souvenir*. Rather than creating a specifically mobile performance, the process focused instead upon how women move through space and the possibilities this offers when creating performance in heritage sites. The arguments regarding
traditional inhibition of women’s mobility posed by Massey (1994) and Heddon and Turner (2012) provided us with a theoretical catalyst to explore how this can be challenged in heritage performance. Through solo walks, swimming and movement work, the Souvenir project offered new insights into how women can interact with spaces of heritage, both natural and human made. Therefore, mobility should be understood not only as a component of a final feminist performance work, but vital within a site-based feminist working process.

Care

Souvenir used the audible rhythms of the space in order to explore the relationship between the female body and the sea. This can be understood as building upon Berger’s (2016:23) practice-as-research work, which she describes as ‘suggesting ’the links between the sea and the maternal. Motherhood and care became central themes of the work. Furthermore, a caring relationship developed between us as performers and collaborators, resulting in increased levels of professional and personal trust. While acknowledging that care has problematic ties to oppressive views of womanhood, this performance project is demonstrative of its potential as a positive tool within feminist, site-based heritage performance. Including care thematically within such performances allows performers to explore the narratives of ‘ordinary’ women that are often sidelined. Additionally, integrating tangible exchanges of care into the artistic process allows for an increased sense of trust and shared experience within the performance team.

Within the Souvenir project, creative practice was understood to be a new lens through which to explore marginalised narratives of women in heritage sites. The principles outlined above were integral to the Souvenir process. While acknowledging that this study was specific by its very nature, the findings suggest that incorporating the principles of mobility, natural rhythms and care into performance processes are key elements of a feminist framework for developing site-specific performance in heritage spaces.
References


Figures

Fig. 1. Rehearsing on Ayr beach
Fig. 2: Lironi setting up on the first performance day
Fig. 3: Lironi after our first swim in the sea
Fig. 4: Walking on the beach
Fig. 5: Laughing during rehearsals