

Memorials for Lost Environments: Participatory performance and minimal ethics.

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Abstract

Participatory performance can respond to differing temporal and spatial perspectives of Anthropogenic climate change as an embodied practice of ‘minimal ethics’ (Zylinska, 2014). By taking up the theme of ‘survival’, performatively I explore questions of survival in relation to the individual and larger society through the *survival of being-with* as a ‘new’ modality for living *on this earth and* beyond our selves (Heidegger, 1996). I draw the Poetics of Failure (Bailes, 2011) and Schneider (2011) in the creation of performance rituals that activate presence through absence. This paper discusses the performance walk, *Be for barefoot*—A survival walk on Ocean Beach in Dunedin, Otago, as a mobile community enacting a memorial emerging from the remains of personal and environmental tragedy. The walking and sharing of stories of survival contributes to rituals of wellbeing as a way to create hope in the face of environmental uncertainty.

Survival is life beyond life, life more than life, and the discourse I undertake is not death-oriented, just the opposite, it is the affirmation of someone living who prefers living, and therefore survival, to death; because survival is not simply what remains, it is the most intense life possible. (Derrida, *The last Interview*, 2004)

Introduction: What is it to survive?

The temporal nature of live performance and its tendency for disappearance suggests *living on*ⁱ and beyond oneself might be discovered in everyday rituals of remembering. Memorials that lie in the remains of performance respond to the failure of everyday survival and the tragedy of personal loss, yet enable the hope of living on beyond oneself. Performance as ritual could, in fact, be considered even more relevant in today’s times as we plan our monuments in the face of human extinction. Furthermore, in creating performance as ‘memorials for lost environments’ aims to give individual agency to face the reality that we are about to lose what we hold most dearly to our survival—‘the world with which we live’.

This paper draws from performance research exploring a Poetics of Survival. The premise of this research is that participating bodies can become agents for

action, engaging in political acts through sensory experiences that lie beyond what artists on their own can produce; thus creating agential enfoldings of different scales through another as a minimal ethical gesture (Manning, 2016; Zylinska, 2014). The performance, *Be for barefoot*—A survival walk along St Kilda and St Claire Beach (Ocean Beach) in Dunedin, New Zealand was inspired by the *B Project* (2002) that involved the late dancer/writer Caroline Plummer and her essay *Boost* (Plummer, 2002 and the subsequent published article Buck, Fortin, & Plummer, 2004) and was performed as part of the reunion for the Caroline Plummer Fellowship in Community Dance (Otago University, November 2015). In conjunction with the Moving Communities Dance Symposium, the conference event aimed to celebrate and share the work of the 10 research fellows who had contributed to the fellowship over the previous 10 years. It was also a reunion for the beginnings of this fellowship that had emerged in the wake of the tragic passing of Caroline Plummer to lung cancer in 2003. In relation to Ocean Beach, there has been a long struggle in the last 140 years to manage the coastal issues of St Claire and St Kilda sand dunes. Following extensive mining of the sand dunes during the settlement of Dunedin, constant erosion has threatened the survival of the sand dunes and the beach itself.



Figure 1: Coastal sign
Photo: Christina Houghton

Recently, the stonewall along the esplanade collapsed during a storm, raising fears that have brought attention to historic failures in protection of this area (Dunedin Amenities Society, 2015). *Be for barefoot* invited friends of Caroline and Ocean Beach to walk together as a participatory performance event.

The performance walk, guided by myself, was a participatory performance that followed an instructional score requiring the audience to participate as walkers, attendees or members of the congregation. Described as a memorial walk for lost environments, it was an accumulation of multiple walks: a walk for the environment, a walk to remember, a walk to forget, a walk towards somatic wellbeing, a survival walk. *Be for barefoot* (2015)

traces cartographies of those who have gone before and those who follow. Negotiate shifting sands underfoot peeling back the layers to the basics of who we are, animal, human, material. Feel the sand of Ocean Beach between our toes and take care into our soles encouraging a slowing down, noticing textures of terrain, and noticing where we place our feet. (Performance Map)

This research emerged from a series of survival tours (performance walks and boat trips) performed in a range of locations both near and on waterⁱⁱ. Following the themes of survival and disaster, previous performance tours evoked states of emergency where the uncertain and the unknown created potentialities that required action, participation and co-operation. In order to meet safety protocols of an evacuation or survival drill, I developed performance instructions and props based on survival technologies (safety codes and equipment) that enabled the survival of each performance event. In developing my practice of minimal ethics, actions were based on somatic actions, sensory encounters and storytelling that aimed to evoke care and recuperation towards each other and the environment. Survival Tours were entwined with my own personal narrative of survival in the recall of childhood memories of sailing on our family boat *Desperado* in the 1980s. *Desperado* was a 36-foot (11 metre) yacht built by my father in the late 1970s in our backyard. *Desperado*, as a performance narrative, works within the realms of ‘boat mastery’ that draws on the protocols of survival that are intrinsic within the operation and navigation of the boat: This is due to the technical complexities of being on water and the required self-sufficiency that is needed while being away from land. The narrative is based on ‘survival tips’ learned from my father and becomes a personal and critical act of survival in response to his passing away to cancer in 2011. I refer to my own experiences as a way to locate concepts of survival in relation to ocean-going adventures and my own subjectivity in relation to water. As I retell stories of his presence in his absence I become aware of my own relationship with patriarchy and a colonised planet. *Desperado’s* narrative lives on through multiple performances through storytelling, actions and the

wearing of survival gear borrowed from what we used to wear while sailing (yellow PVC jacket and hats and sunglasses). The performance archives aimed to encourage reciprocal survival stories from participants and became a strategy for exploring a sensory experience of survival or states of emergency. In *Be for barefoot* the underlying narrative of my experience of *Desperado* was revealed as a commemoration and memorial through the transformation of sailing gear into that which represents a state of emergency.



Figure 2: Christina Houghton
Photo: Sean Curham

I wear my yellow PVC sailing jacket that has a silver lining made from survival blankets (that acts as a sail shelter when hoisted). Participants were asked to wear an item of survival gear (silver survival blankets and disposable raincoats from previous survival walks) as protection from the extremes such as oncoming storms and sea level rise. As the guide, I invited the participants to carry a handful of sand along the length of the beach over the course of an hour as well as engage in somatic actions (lying together and listening to the sea). This walk, as primarily pedestrian in aesthetic, aimed to be *choreographic* in the movement of bodies through space, *ritualistic* in the attention given to the tasks and *memorialised* through the intention of the community action and storytelling. The instruction was printed on a fold-out map as well as historic information about the environmental issue of St

Kilda and St Claire sand dunes. Alongside was the poetry of the late Caroline Plummer.



Figure 3: Performance walk participants
Photo: Sean Curham

Take a walk along the beach in bare feet
See different scales, under foot, looking out, as you walk,
you float, drift.
This is your island, in your hands, as you walk let the sands of
time tell your story, it disappears, it may last the whole length
of the beach or part of it, it will become part of all the stories
of this beach.
Join me in my actions as I enact a ritual towards the eroding
and disappearing dunes, while remembering all those who
have walked this place.
(*Be for Barefoot*, 2015, Performance Map).

Tonight I walked the lengths
of St Kilda and St Claire,
those two beneficent, oceanic sisters
whose sands have long grounded and caressed my feet,
whose hazy pastel light and eternal fluid breathing
have long felt like home.

Tonight, as I walked
 I gathered my cloaks of determination and of faith
 and wrapped them tightly around myself
 against which no wind, no matter how cold nor cruel,
 could stop me in my march.
 St Kilda and St Clare let forth their waves,
 pounding a rhythmic battle song
 that now sings in my heart.
 When I stood
 energized and exhilarated
 on a sand hill and saluted my leave
 I knew that I was ready.
 (Caroline in Boost, 2003: Performance Map).

The performance walk as a ritual for remembering and a reenactment of those who had walked before draws on Rebecca Schneider's discourse on *Performing Remains* (Schneider, 2011) where "the monumental and the passing live co-constitute each other in a relationship that can be as much about forgetting (bypassing) as commemorating (monumentalising)" (p. 7). As mobile and commemorative, this performance aimed to activate a temporary community through a minimal ethic of being-with. Drawing on the narrative of the somatic embodied story of Caroline Plummer's *Boost* (2003)ⁱⁱⁱ, my survival story of *Desperado* and the environmental status of the beach, this survival walk re-begins in the afterlife^{iv} of previous survival tours as an act of recovery. The individual agency and experience of each of the participants contributes to the survival of the performance as they translate their experience into other language and other bodies as archive (Lepecki, 2016)^v. The particular survival, the afterlife of a performance event, is "not a liveness that is considered in advance of death, nor in some after death ... rather it is more a constant (re) turn of, to, from and between states in animation—an inter-(in)animation (Schneider p. 7, 2011, as cited in Lepecki, 2016). The agency of *Be for barefoot* as participatory might therefore be in the afterlife of the performance through the translation of the work beyond the works' original limits as bodies reflect back changing the original forever (described by Lepecki and Schneider in Lepecki, 2016). Furthermore, forgetting and commemorating, sensing and moving through place, could, in fact, mobilise thought on being-with-care as a 'collective thinking' through action; thus contribute to a minimal ethical gesture for environmental well-being.

Survival and minor gestures

Performance ecologies that entwine ecological philosophy, place making and modes of performance as an ongoing dialogue between creative practice and philosophy can lead to “the invention of modes of thought in an event-based ecology of experience” (Manning & Massumi, 2012). Thus, creative practice becomes a thought-felt experience, involving event formation, activism, dance and everyday perception (2012). These ecologies of experience contribute to an everyday minimal ethic or an ‘ethics of life’ to an expansion of obligations and responsibility of the individual as thickening of the universe, across various scales and tangled relations of everyday activities (Zylinska, 2014). Within Zylinska’s proposed minimal ethics, poetics through narrative creates a sensibility that is ethical in nature (2014), recognising the processual and unstable nature of human locatedness not just being in the world but *being-with* (Heidegger, 1996).



Figure 4: Performance walk participant
Photo: Sean Curham

These performance encounters as social temporary communities bring people together as participants engaging in conversation and storytelling; performing place as a being-with and moving through or towards. In making parallels between performance and risk management, *safety protocols* become performance structures. Where *risk* is the experience as encounter (the event) and *survival* is the performance outcome (the aftermath). Embracing risk has political connotations in performance that promotes mobility through improvisation,

uncertainty and the unknown. I asked, could we enact survival actions in everyday life that could be considered democratic and social? How might such actions be considered in the context of *participatory art*? “that aims to de-authorize the artist to create work that contributes to social change as an ethical artistic practice” (Bishop, 2014). Investigating modes of choreographic thinking through participatory, sensory walks and actions aims to destabilise conventional forms of audience-performer relationships creating new possibilities for engagement. The rationale here is to create performance environments where non-hierarchical situations enable us to survive together, cooperatively within a processual model of co-existence—a co-existence that works within and across the co-constitution modalities of monumentality (as commemorative acts) and passing on or by-passing.

In focusing on concepts of risk and survival, I pose the question: how might performance respond to the dramatic theatrical effects of the Anthropocene? Concerns about extreme events, natural disasters and states of emergency require those, in the Western World, to consider what it might be like to lose lives of comfort, to be forced from homes through evacuations, to camps (where they would be faced with limited water, food and shelter) for unknown periods of time, is a frightening (yet at times an exciting prospect) for those in times of stability. However, homelessness and poverty is already a reality for some people both here in New Zealand and in the rest of the world. This is also the reality for the increasing numbers of refugees in Europe due to the conflict in Syria and those affected by cyclones and inevitable sea level rise in the Pacific region. Yet often those not affected view this through a media telescope that creates distance between the viewer and the actual event, where there is a risk of aligning such events alongside Hollywood movies and dramatised misfortunes of the less fortunate. This dramatisation of the instability of the world we live in has led to obsessive behaviour and ‘the culture of fear’ that neo-liberalism propagates in order to keep our closest even closer than before and risk to a minimum. Worst-case scenarios are played out again and again, perhaps contributing to what Erin Manning, writer, philosopher and creative practitioner describes as a “disembodied political climate” (Manning, 2016, p. xi) where we are immobilised by *risk management* and *safety protocols*.

Manning suggests that bodies in motion can become agents for action engaging in political acts. In participatory performance small gestures and sensory experiences of a collective body lie beyond what the artist on their own can

produce. These tactics contribute to a sense of agency and transformation within participatory performance events that consist of the everyday ‘minor gestures’ towards the constantly shifting sites of being-with.

In its movement, the minor gesture creates sites of dissonance, staging disturbances that open experience to new modes of expression. In making felt the event’s limit, the operational interval where the event exceeds the sum of its parts, the minor gesture punctually reorients experience. (Manning, 2016, p. 2)

In her previous book *Politics of touch* (2007), Manning foregrounds a processual body as one that potentially influences the ways in which we articulate and live the political. The “senses prosthetically alter the dimensions of the body, inciting the body to move in excess of its-self toward the world ... a worlding that reorganizes the conceptions of space and time” (Manning, p. xiii). She goes on to say that an awareness of the senses of the body can respond to what she calls a ‘disembodied political climate’ where political philosophy, disinterested in the senses, requires a re-articulation of the body politic that is somewhat still gendered and codified. Thus, she poses the question ‘what can a sensing moving body do?’ in opposition to bodies stabilised within national imaginaries in preordained categories, such as citizen, refugee, man women, homed and homeless (2007). Manning describes this sensing body, as

a body becoming that is always in some sense, unreachable, both biologically and conceptually. If the body is no longer defined as such is it possible to secure such a body. If the body is always in excess of itself, what body is there for the state to secure? (p. xix)

She describes politics as an extension of this body, “Body sense and their sensing movements reach towards relations of emergence, expressions always already incorporated into political texts. Accepting postvital incorporations of post humanity, we envisage a thinking of a future anterior in which democracies remain to come” (p. 122). Thus, she promotes a renegotiation of a politics of time and space within the changing narratives of democracy that are occurring in relation to the increasing acceleration of corporate colonisation of new spaces (p. 122). Democracy being recognised as no longer a secure space but a space of potentialities.

Claire Bishop in *Artificial hells* suggests that participation in performance has a tenuous connection with real democracy (2012, p. 5). She describes the recent development of participatory practices in the art world reflects the desire to re-configure the capitalist consumption of aesthetic experiences and formulate critique of the spectacle through de-authorising the artist into collaborative activities. These activities are suggested to create social bonds and develop social change. Often the documentation tells us nothing about the processes in motion. Thus, efficacy of such works is becoming less about the aesthetic and more about the ethics of the artist as socially collaborative art. However, she suggests that the priority of the ethic of non-authoritarianism or consensual collaboration is at the risk of losing the ability for artists to provoke disrupt or create interventions or over-identify (p. 25). On the other hand, if participants as individuals transform a performance into a personalised ritual of everyday life “art enters a realm of ameliorative and ultimately modest gestures, rather than the creation of singular acts that leave behind them” (Bishop, 2012, p.23).

Somatic rituals

In relation to the story of Caroline living with cancer, *Boost* discusses the role of dance and somatics in promoting a wider sense of health and wellbeing in fostering communities (Buck et al., 2003). It suggests that the sharing of personal narratives create possibilities to learn about self and other. It also makes the link between fields of anthropology and psychiatry where “talking about the lived experience of illness, and the consequent ordering of that experience, can be of therapeutic value” (Kleinman, 1988, as cited in Buck et al., 2003). In seeing a common link in how we might respond to personal illness and the state of the environment, the tragedy of Caroline’s illness and the environmental degradation of the Ocean Beach sand dunes holds a dramatic sense of loss that most people have either experienced or can relate to. It also reveals cultural taboos around talking about death or the end of the world.

It is ironic that Caroline is dying, while her experiences told in this paper talk of healing and hope. I write to Sylvie in Montreal. We feel powerless ... But we know that this is what must remain—the focus on living, healing and hope even in the saddest moments; and such stories of courage and compassion must be told for that is how we learn as individuals and grow as communities. (Plummer et al., 2003)

Schechner (2009) describes of the dramatic affects of Greek tragedy as a problem that cannot be solved due to the fact that the problem is existence. He goes on to say that every utopian movement is but a temporary liberation, just like our own individual life is a temporary life. This temporality being, in fact, what inspires the creation of art: an act of capturing the ephemeral temporality of life (2009). Might it be in the space of temporary liberation that there could be a place for hope? Schechner, in his more recent book *Performed imaginaries* (2015), reveals his concern with what

‘performance’ is and what ‘performing’ can do, exclaims, I teeter between the optimism in my belly and the pessimism of my brain. Around me ecological catastrophe, wilful human ignorance, deprivation, oppression. Enacted daily, Kurt’s “The Horror! The Horror!” in our own hearts of darkness. And yet, surging moon-driven tides of lunatic hope, (p. 7)



Figure 5: Performance walk participants
Photo: Sean Curham

Caroline’s personal story reveals how the experience of disaster might change the way one sees the world, suggesting that actions of care and wellbeing on a personal level might also extend to the wider environment. Sharing the personal is also part of a way of being that suggests we are all in this together although each person’s story will be specific to their own experience. In relation to climate change,

when stories become personal perhaps that is when we will take action. In Dunedin there are risks of flooding and homes are threatened by future sea level rise in the St Claire suburb (Wright, 2015). This is an area of land originally reclaimed from Kaituna Wetland and ironically filled with sand from Ocean Beach removed by householders to level their sections in the 1800s. People’s stories of remembering the dunes as they once were and what they mean to them are part raising the question of what can we really do? These lie alongside the futile attempts of locals to pressure council into preventative strategies (such as replacing damaged sand-sausages along the dunes) as part of the ongoing discussions surrounding the disappearance of the dunes (both online and in the Otago media). I, personally, along with many locals, have noticed a vast change since the time I lived in Dunedin prior to 2004, and this becomes part of my survival story that becomes part of the memorial walk.

I know that Caroline walked this beach often, and I am reminded of this by the poem she wrote in her *Boost* journal, that is now on the performance map. The survival of Caroline’s poem, the publishing of the *Boost* paper after her passing and the subsequent development of the Caroline Plummer Fellowship inspire others to follow in her footsteps. Rebecca Schneider (2011) discusses the value in looking back, creating a re-vision that allows a re-seeing from a fresh direction, a different critical point of view coupled with re-enacting a re-gesturing and re-affect. Drawing on Adrienne Rich, American poet, essayist and radical feminist, Schneider suggests that in the same sense of “re-vision”—if coupled with re-gesture, re-affect, re-sensation—it might be applicable to performances or enactments (p. 19). As Rich suggests, for women, re-vision is “more than a chapter in cultural history” it is an act of survival, of keeping alive as passing on (in multiple senses of the phrase ‘to pass’. p. 19).

For “survival,” to use Rich’s word, may be a critical mode of remaining, as well as a mode of remaining critical: passing on, staying alive, in order to pass on the past as past, not, indeed, as (only) present. Never (only) present. (Schneider, 2011, p. 22)

Despite the tragic circumstance of Caroline’s illness, her ongoing survival is through her story. Caroline Plummer evokes hope through her story in developing a legacy that would live beyond her short years. As we read her poem while walking down Ocean Beach, we re-enact her ritual of preparation, responding through multiple sensory responses, performing a somatic ritual that blurs everyday life and artistic practice.

Performance as ritual has been described by Richard Schechner (founder of Environmental Theatre and Performance Studies International) as dramatic and ritualistic practices that share the same basic temporal spatial processes. In his book *The future of ritual* (1993) he draws on the connection between anthropological studies and theatre, describing ritual and its focus on transformation or transformative efficacy, as the future of theatre. Ritual in theatre is most evident in rehearsal as part of the preparation process. Training gives a performer an attitudinal readiness—rehearsal creates exact procedures to be repeated (Schechner, 1993). Inspired by postmodern theatres influenced by Asian theatre, a focus on the preparation enables for transformation to be part of the theatre experience. The idea that you can't rehearse transformation only prepare for it, is integral to this, as is the audiences relaxed attention (Schechner, 1993). Schechner describes the audience as part of the process of making the performance, breaking down the process of theatre into preparation, rehearsal, event and aftermath; all parts of the performance that involve the audience and the performers (1993). As an act, a ritual that is to be survived, enacted, processed and responded to. Performance preparation is also a major part of the ritualistic dance form of Butoh (generally accredited to Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno), described by Sondra Fraleigh in her book *Butoh: Metamorphic dance and global alchemy* (2010). Butoh is of the body of the flesh, driven by mystical philosophy, developing feeling states that move through objects, images and materials. It is both material and immaterial; it is illusive, strange and transformative (2010). With both a distinctive practice and aesthetic, Butoh is a clear example of the process of ritual influencing the aesthetic of the dance form with themes of birth, death and renewal, creating a 'community body' that extends beyond the human community to all living entities. The period of time from which it emerged (post WWII Japan) suggests that qualities of ritual, transformation and community emerge in response to coping with destruction and death. Sondra Fraleigh's development of 'Shin Somatics' is an example of an embodied research as a practice of health and wellbeing through dance and performance. Influenced by contemporary dance/movement practice and Metamorphic Dance (Butoh influenced) it encourages movement of the body through everyday rituals of preparation. Somatic practices are often used as preparation for performance that require a range of performance states and embodied improvised responses.

Such practices as ritualistic and preparatory contribute to the re-thinking of western traditions of both medical health and mastery towards the planet. In this context embodied narratives (as performative story telling) can become a ritualistic act of preparation for survival and death, and the sharing of them contributes to a minimal ethics of being with others and being with care. In this research I use the term rituals not necessarily in terms of Schechner and Fraleigh, who consider rituals as transformative, but rituals that are everyday practices that we undertake in a systematic way that allows us to prepare for futures either unimagined or imagined. Drawing on ritual drama and play as being aspects of performance that share similar spatial and temporal processes (Schechner, 2009), theories of transformation and ritual allow for me to reflect on my use of the autobiographical in my performance work. ‘Memorials for lost environments’ in response to the temporality of life itself conjures a space for an act of remembering as I tell stories of my childhood or at times not tell them fully. I recognise that although actions are re-enacted from actual experiences, they come from a place of forgetting (the uncomfortable, challenging and unenjoyable) and remembering (as nostalgia). In developing the choreographic structures of the survival walk that exist as a map with a series of instructions that can be followed (or not), I attempted to create a temporal in-attention or non-performance as a way to shift attention from the performing body to *other* within the location of Ocean Beach. I draw on Situationist ideas of *derive*, an aimless drifting with instructions that become less of a record but more a trigger for us to ponder our own sensitivities (Bishop, 2012). Thus, somatic practices and the autobiographical sensing of everyday experiences brings this performance practice close to both Caroline’s outlook on life and illness and becomes part of my preparation for the walk as a memorial.

Half way along the beach, I lay down in the hope that the group will join me. There is something about the group action of lying down side by side that I find interesting, experiential and choreographic. A community rest in times of struggle? Might this be the response I am advocating for when times get tough? Recuperating our energies in face of uncertainty. Most of the group join me and we spend a moment looking up at the blue sky, listening to the sea and the rustling of silver survival blankets.

Poetics of survival

I remember when Caroline came back after one of her trips to the Gawler Foundation^{vi} which she mentioned in her *Boost* paper. She had a bright *orange* pashmina that she wore around her shoulders and her head was shaved. I think of this colour as I plan the barefoot walk along St Kilda and St Claire as both a warning sign for storms coming and the colour of our Storm Jib^{vii} we used on *Desperado*. I also have some bright orange survival blankets to go with the usual silver ones I have used in other performances that I give participants to wear around their shoulders as they walk. These items create the aesthetic of an evacuation or a survival drill and bring attention to the many evacuations and states of emergency that are occurring around the globe at any one time. I also reflect on the fact that orange represents compassion, acceptance and generosity and the Gawler Foundation's connection to Buddhist meditation.

In the walk along Ocean Beach, I become the voice of the beach. I am eroding layers of my surface that slide away in the event of storms. As participants remember those who have walked here before and bring attention to the disappearing sands of Ocean Beach, the walk becomes a re-enactment of previous performances. Caroline's walk, others who had walked this beach before and the reoccurring somatic actions from this performance research compose a re-enactment aimed at critically engaging with difference (between each other and environment) and the ever-shifting tides of time. Participants brought their own memories to walk with, most of who had been witness to Caroline's somatic journey through being present or through her writing. Others who had experienced personal loss or had a strong connection to this place shared stories with each other in conversation as they walked. Consequently, the experiences of the walk were multiple, the residues of which I may or may not ever discover.



Figure 6: Performance walk participants
Photo: Sean Curham

Re-telling worlding narratives gives the concept of survival a subjectivity that allows the embodiment of issues surrounding the health and wellbeing of the environment. Thus, creating a mode for being with others and other as a strategy for coping and recuperation. Zylinska (2014) suggests that finding a link between ethics and poetics is a sensibility borrowed from the Greeks, “that products of human creative activity under the umbrella ‘art’ perform a *poetic* function: they bring forth realities, concepts and values” (p. 107). In Polynesian culture oral traditions have, in the past, been the only way that ways of living have been passed on. Polynesian oral traditions can tell us about the migrations of ancestors and culture across the Pacific and span an entire philosophy describing creation, migration and the present combining customary and natural world lore (Taonui, 2006).

As we encounter ethics via stories and images, art can be seen as world-making rather than just representational. Zylinska points out that humans have been producing narratives about various forms of apocalypse since they developed the ability to write stories and record them. Considering that many believe that the planet may not be interested in the stories of humans, the fact is that “stories have a performative nature: they can enact and not just describe things—even if there are course limits to what they are describing” (p. 11). Zylinska goes on to describe a way of telling a new story, one that provides an ethics of “living a good

life when life itself is under a unique threat” at this precarious geo-historical moment (p. 11).

Survival frills and failure drills

What are the everyday practices, preparations and rituals that enable us to survive, be well, connect with others and become agential individuals within communities that care? The emergency apple I put in my daughter’s lunch box everyday or my daily practices that might range from dropping the kids at school, running, walking, yoga or writing. Most of these activities require some kind of movement or mapping of the mind and body within a home-range territory. I break these down to rituals for sickness, rituals for wellness and rituals for states of emergency, each of which have a different set of parameters, territories and actions requiring a different set of instructions and kits of essential items that go with each.

Choreographically, a focus on everyday actions, such as walking, pedestrian tasks or non-performed movements, activates presence through absence as described by Emylin Claid, performer writer and lecturer, in her book *Yes? No! Maybe ... Seductive ambiguity in dance* (2006). She describes pedestrian movement in the context of a dance performance as the displacement of recognisable dance conventions, yet the memories of the spectacle remain as an echo (2006). There is the potential critique of modernity and subjectivity in relation to historic modes of dance and performance through a ‘slower ontology’ described by Lepecki (2006) where acts of the pedestrian and stillness provide a critique of presence in the absence of the ‘kinetic excess’ of the modernist subject (mobility). In context of the Moving Communities dance conference, I refer to my own dance history and the spectacle through everyday, minimal gestures, activating an empty space where dance once was. In the context of *Be for barefoot*, this presence in absence is also heightened by enacting a memorial to those who have walked Ocean Beach before and those ecologies that are no longer present.

As we walk along the beach, individuals choose their own temporality, some walking quickly ahead while others lag behind. The instruction for holding sand is quickly modified through different tactics. Some let the sand fall through their fingers and place their piles along the beach, others diligently hold on to it, waiting for the next instruction. It quickly becomes apparent to those ahead that we can no longer walk through to the St Claire end of the beach due to erosion and construction work around the sea wall. The exit from the beach thus becomes an

epic unexpected adventure through the sand dunes, and we are left feeling disappointed that we couldn't complete the journey. Those of us left on the beach drop our sand into the oncoming waves and evoke a ritual of return to the sea while looking out at White Island. Some of us return the sand to the dunes.



Figure 7: Performance walk participants
Photo: Sean Curham

I question how performance might address the use of pedestrian and participatory performance (in the context of choreographic practices) and how it can contribute to non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian as a way of being in the world through Sara Jane Bailes' *Poetics of failure* (2011). Bailes (2011, p.2) describes an artistic practice that provides “a vibrant counter culture challenging virtuosity and methods of practice” as part of a shift in theatre and performance during the 20th century, in particular the 1960s, redrawing terms of engagement between audience and performer. More specifically, “failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture and imagine the world” (Bailes, 2011, p. 2). I consider ideas such as the ‘democratic’ and ‘failure of the spectacle’, and ask what might happen in the absence of spectacle? Or what might be left when we have lost everything? Bailes suggests the fall of modernism is “to accept the conditions of within which we live. Humans all to human” (p. 2011). In response to this I ask, what is it to enact a ‘performance disaster’ celebrating in a ‘poetics of failure’? One that does not live up to the spectacle of theatre or the drama of survival but follows pathways that lean towards the uncertain, the misrepresented and the unexpected. In facing the ultimate failure of the environment,

‘performance disasters’ do not intend to evoke dread and fear and hopelessness, yet play a part in the transformation of hopelessness into hope as an alternate strategy to preaching environmental disaster to the converted. Such ‘performance disasters’ might require ‘small acts of repair’ described by Bottoms and Goulsh (2007) in their book by the same name, through action that enfolds everyday life into performance practice. This practice holds an ethic of accumulation, slowness and improvisation in the everyday, drawing attention to sensation and relations between other and environment (2007). A ‘performance disaster’ might also require participants to engage as ‘witness’ rather than ‘spectator’, drawing on André Lepecki’s *Four notes on witnessing performance in the age of dis-experience* (Blanga-Gubbay, 2016). In offering ‘testimony’ through the telling of survival stories and lost environments, we might offer an alternative to the ‘forensic devices’ of the contemporary sociability of Instagrams and images that implicate our participation as silent accomplices in the vast crime scene of modernity (2016).



Figure 8: Performance walk participants
Photo: Sean Curham

The rejection of the spectacle draws from early participatory performance that also encompassed an ethical turn towards efficacy and sustainability (Bishop, 2012). The Dada season (1916 Zurich and wider Europe) and Situationist psycho-geographical maps (1957-72 France, influenced by Guy Debord’s seminal text *The society of the spectacle*, 1967)^{viii} created political activist actions investigating art that meets everyday life and the everyday becoming art (2012). Such was the case for participatory performance that occurred under socialist regimes in the Czech

Republic. Artist and musician Milan Knížák staged a number of ceremonies and demonstrations between 1960-1970 in Prague and New York believing that his work was “more natural and closer to the reality of human life” (than the Fluxus Artists in the United States: Monoskop, 2016). These works included *Lying down ceremony* (1966-68) and *A walk around Nový Svět (A demonstration for all the senses)*. Knížák states his disinterest in the political with his work tending towards generating new territories of free expression within an oppressive state, changing one’s everyday life into art. His reflexive subjective experiences that privatised spectatorship are of interest to this research. There may be a similar response by artists today to the oppressive reality and disillusion from the enormity of the Anthropocene. Performance responding to the Anthropocene might therefore find its tendency towards minimal gesture as small rituals in everyday life due to the large scales and distance between everyday actions and affects. These might follow the Situationist’s *Derive* or the Dada ideas of life becoming art or becoming a ceremony as a memorial to a live performance unseen. On the other hand, everyday repetitive task-based actions could be considered ritualistic in the everyday practice of toppling the spectacle.

An important part of this genealogy is the postmodern dance movement, specifically the Judson Dance Theatre in New York 1960s, that also aimed to reject the spectacle through task-based choreography with pedestrian movements as well as non-dancers performing in the city streets. These performances were informed by the emergence of somatic practices, such as Contact Improvisation (initiated by American Choreographer Steve Paxton) and Body Mind Centering (developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen), that focused on touch and the senses as a way to give agency to the dancer and thus create new democracies of practice. Furthermore, these performances gave way to specific practices that engaged with preparation as mind body connections through sensations, as well as relational practices that embodied the notion of audience as embodied witness rather than spectator.

At the end of the walk, I engage in the re-enactment of *The Last Sailing of Desperado*, an action I have repeated in previous survival walks as a memorial to my father. I hoist the silver sail from the lining of my survival jacket along to the recording of the song my father used to play on *Desperado* (the instrumental of the Rod Stewart song *Sailing*)^{ix}. This usually is a theatrical moment where the wind grabs the sail and creates a dramatic spectacle of silver and sail crinkling loudly and flapping. Today the sail is somewhat deflated due to the lack of breeze. The hot still air heats up my body inside the yellow PVC jacket and the speaker doesn’t

work. I gather everyone under the sail as a kind of protection and start singing the song instead. Everyone joins in but I feel somehow that I should have mentioned the story behind the song to give a deeper context. I do, however, remember that Caroline's family have a sailing boat so I see the connection, for her family, is there in this song. The unexpected failure of the hoisted sail reminds me of the methodology of failure that embraces uncertainty, unknown outcomes and the sense of deflation when performance doesn't live up to expectations.

In taking charge as the captain of the mythical sailing of *Desperado*, I evaluate the nature of the captain as authoritarian. I now take the role of captain in the place of my father (who always maintained control of our family sailings yet at the same time existed within his own contradictions). As I embark on this journey, I question my own relationship with my father as authoritarian as a metaphor for a patriarchal system that I now subvert as a post-masculine sailing. I also use the term boat master in relation to the mastering of sailing and technology as a place from which the performance can evoke utopian and dystopian hopes for the future. The metaphorical link between *Desperado*, the survival walks and somatic actions aim to develop a critique of the mastery of survival and situate our true survival within the space between our individual experiences, actions and our perception of survival.



Figure 9: Sail
Photo: Sean Curham

Performance that becomes ritualistic or ceremonial in response to the Anthropocene exists in the spaces away from the spectacle of theatre. However, the memorial or the monument has a certain amount of spectacle associated with it. In this context, the experiential aesthetics of a memorial might in fact be related to the spectacle of failure, where a celebration of life through loss exists as the dualism of hope and despair and the tragedy of human existence. These small rituals of failure are the minor gestures that contribute to the practice of minimal ethics that my performance work engages with. Through engaging with failure as a methodology performance, actions activate the impossible. This may be a way of engaging with people on a level that activates agency. Enacting of ‘failure as ritual’ or ‘ritual as failure’ creates what I term ‘the impossible ritual’ and thus brings attention to the ludicrous way we treat the planet we live on and the futility of our everyday actions.

The ‘poetics of failure’ (Bailes, 2011) and Zylinska’s ‘poetics through narrative’ provide the performative space for encountering ethics via stories of survival and loss. The sharing of survival stories as both ritual and performance disaster can thus be seen as a survival tactic for being-with others and the environment the face of catastrophic events that are out of our control. Furthermore, performance encounters that draw on everyday practices of somatics, health and wellbeing could, in fact, be a way to cope with the perceived futility of everyday actions and the spectacle of disaster predictions. Performance rituals or performance as memorial that encourage a minor gesture or minimal action of participating could result in a democratic moment promoting agency as a minimal ethic in performance and everyday life. Suggesting that the remains of performance, without spectacle, moves beyond memorials as static monuments but, through forgetting (bypassing) as commemorating (monumentalising), lives on through the remaining memories of moving bodies in the afterlife of performance.



Figure 10: Performance walk participant
Photo: Sean Curham

Reflections on walking and dancing

Be for barefoot highlighted the expectations that surround ideas of performance and spectatorship within the context of a community dance performance event. In response to Schechner's earlier provocation, what can performance do? I ask myself what is the role of performance as an agent for change and what are we trying to change? My practice in participatory performance as a choreographer aims to reduce the space in between audience and performer. Part of this is making the experience less about me as the performer and more about the entire experience of the performance encounter. Drawing on participatory performance from dance and theatre, the blurring between performer and audience moves towards a non-hierarchical experience. Attempts to shift the authorship of the performance towards a democratic and social experience meant participants shifted between performer, guide, storyteller and witness in unpredictable ways. Furthermore, the choreography was revealed through the movement of bodies through place and the transformative ritual that occurred as a result. In the absence of dance, a 'slow ontology', as described by Lepecki (2006), unfolded and uncertain and unknown worlds occurred. In making a spectacle of the participants, they appeared to engage in a ritual procession in hope for the environment and their own survival.

The memorial walk evoked a coexistence of hope and despair, spectacle and failure, as we walked along shifting sands of disappearing dunes exposed to the impending storms that never arrived. These factors allowed for this performance to tread the shoreline between performance and ritual where the everyday becomes performance and performance becomes a meaningful action. Furthermore, in the attempt to ground ourselves through walking, standing or lying down, perhaps perspectives can shift from an anthropocentric view of the performing body towards noticing the movement in the non-human world, such as the gentle breeze, the rolling waves of the ocean and the shifting sands beneath our feet that may yet carry us out to sea. Thus, our performative actions would leave but a temporary memorial of imprinted footsteps only to be washed away by the rising tides to come.



Figure 11: Performance walk
Photo: Sean Curham

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ⁱ The term Living on draws from Jacques Derrida’s discourse on *Survivre* “living on” and the ambiguity between “living on” and “on living” that might suggest “life after life” or “life after death” (Derrida, 1979). Also referring to “who is talking about living?” in that I am talking about “living on” from the perspective of “the one who survived” a survivor.

ⁱⁱ Previous performances as part of the survival tour series: *Going Bush/Survival Strategies* -Action Delay Symposium AUT, Auckland (May 2014); *Actions For Living*—St Pauls St Gallery Three. AUT, Auckland (Aug 2014); *Sharing Waters- Guided boat tour and Island adventure to Holmön island* in Umeå Sweden; *Weathering the Whau-Whau Arts Festival*, Avondale, Auckland. Oct (2015); *Other Waters/Survival Tour* - Art on the Manukau, Mangere Bridge Auckland (Nov 2015); *Still Sailing* - Guided tour on the Vltava River. NZPQ15, Prague, Czech Republic (June 2015). *In Between Future Islands* - Sheraton Site, Rarotonga Cook Islands. Oceanic Performance Biennial July 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱ Boost was Caroline Plummer’s paper written as part the B-Project a Post Graduate somatic research paper led by Sylive Fortin at Otago University in 2002 which I took part in. It resulted in an unpublished book *B-Book*. Caroline’s paper *Boost* was later published as *Boost: A Healing narrative through Somatics and Dance* by Buck, Plummer, Fortin, 2003.

^{iv} André Lepecki discusses the afterlife of Art and Performance in relation to Walter Benjamin’s *Translations* that carries art works across times and places of yet un-lived lives and Aby Warburg’s view on the temporality of art work as “*Nachleben*”—survival or more literally meaning afterlife (Lepecki, 2016, p.115).

^v See *The Body as Archive in Singularities. Dance in the age of Performance*. by André Lepecki (2016).

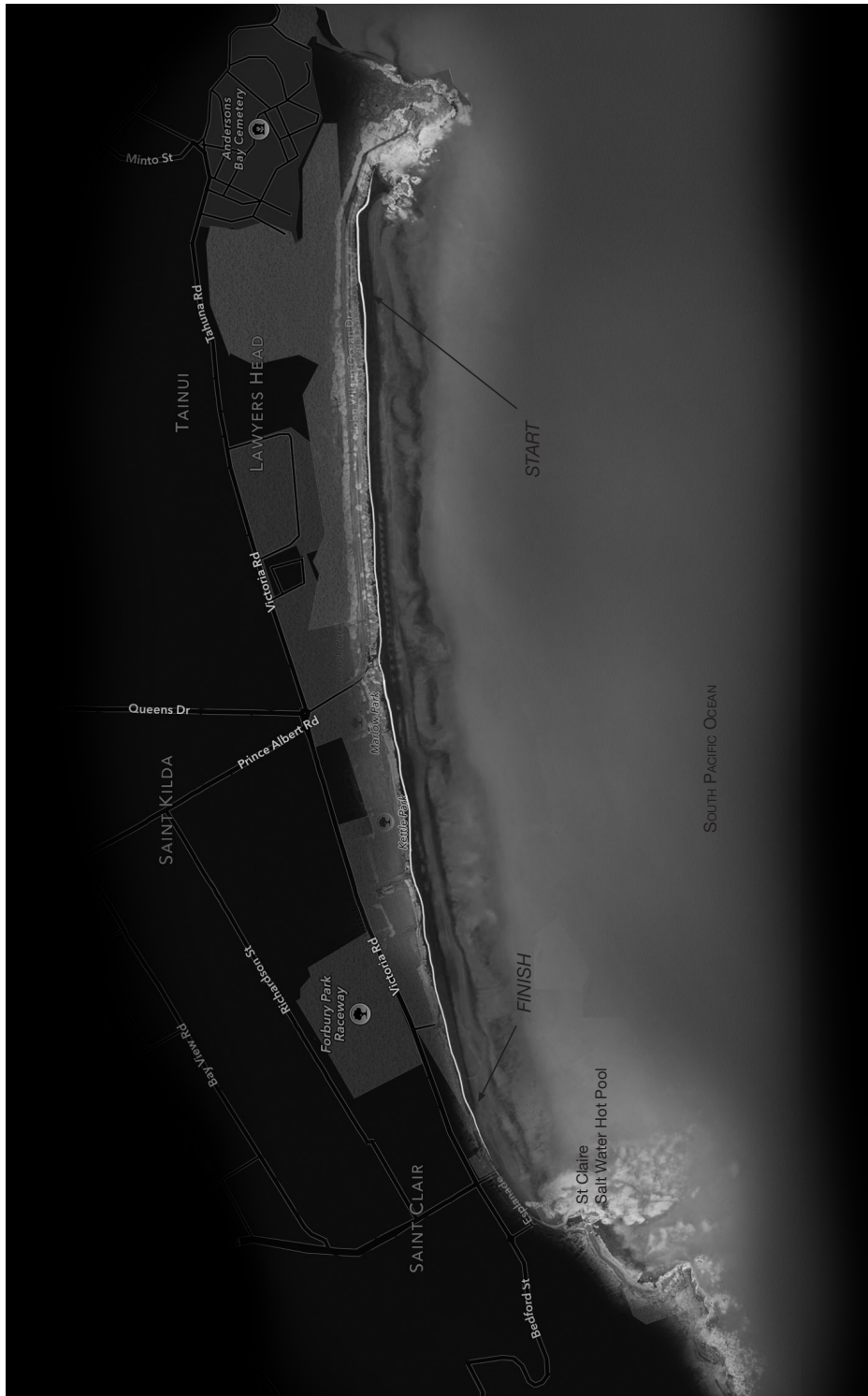
^{vi} The Gawler Cancer Foundation is an integrative healing foundation located at the The Yarra Valley Living Centre in Australia. Based on the healing experience of Dr. Gawler.

^{vii} A small orange sail hoisted at the front of the boat that stabilises the vessel in strong winds usually used in storm conditions.

^{viii} Debord, G. (1967) *The Society of the Spectacle*. Originally published in France as *La société, t., du spectacle* in 1967 by Buchet-Chastel. Translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith. This edition designed by Bruce Mau with Greg VanAlstyne. Published by ZoneBooks, 1994

^{ix} The last sailing of *Desperado*—When playing this song I usually tell the story of the day we scattered my father’s ashes and reveal that the song was played at my father’s funeral. It gives the song a loaded performativity that I find participants connect with. However, in *Be for Barefoot* I resolve to keep this information to myself and allow the song and the sail to speak its own physical narrative.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Be for bareFoot Survival walk on Ocean Beach Dunedin

Thursday Nov 26th 2015 Duration: 1 Hour
(Finish with a swim at the salt water pool optional).
Performed by Christina Houghton and participants.

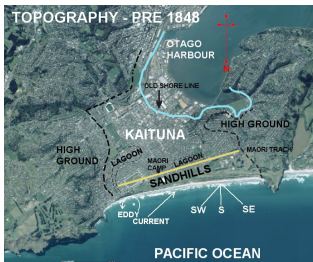
Take a walk along the beach in bare feet

See different scales, under foot, looking out, as you walk, you float, drift.

this is your island, in your hands, as you walk let the sands of time tell your story, it disappears, it may last the whole length of the beach or part of it, it will become part of all the stories of this beach.

Join me in my actions as I enact a ritual towards the eroding and disappearing dunes, while remembering all those who have walked this place.

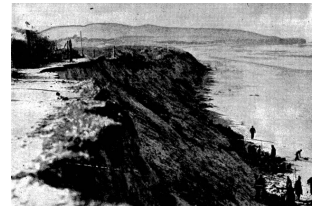
Be for barefoot is a performance event that brings people together in a barefoot walk along Ocean Beach from St Kilda to St Claire in Dunedin. It is inspired by the B project (2002) that involved Caroline Plummer marking this special occasion of the reunion of the Caroline Plummer dance fellowship. Friends of Caroline and Ocean Beach invite others to take a walk with us as a participatory performance event. Performance Ecologies and performance tactics enable us to survive in today's ever shifting and changing world. Negotiating shifting sands underfoot we need tactics and strategies to navigate through uncertain times. The only certain thing about the future is change. How can we live today with a minimal ethics that brings us together. *Be for Barefoot* traces cartographies of those who have gone before and those who follow, peeling back the layers of the physical world we are, animal, human, material. We feel the sand of Ocean Beach between our toes and take care into our soles. *Be for Barefoot* encourages a slowing down, noticing textures of terrain, encouraging us to notice where we place our feet. This performance aims to be an accumulation of multiple walks: a walk for the environment, a walk to remember, a walk to forget, a walk towards somatic well-being, a survival walk. Bring your own motivation for walking as we all walk bare foot to bring us closer to Earth to feel our soles with our soles and inspire fluid ways of being together and bringing-forth a moving community.



Kaituna – Ocean Beach is a highly modified environment. The normal activity and movability of sand has been replaced and stabilised. The former back dune areas have been extensively mined and became recreation areas. The coastline still stretches from the St Clair cliffs in the west to Lawyer's Head in the east, but the sand dunes have become much thinner and steeper. In 1848 in the west around St Clair the sand hills were much smaller and lower, the mouth of a lagoon ran through these dunes. The dunes accumulated and grew as you moved east towards Lawyer's head. High ground was in the west at the St Clair hills and in the east at the beginning of the Otago Peninsula and beyond them Otago Harbour and its extended tidal areas. Between these features was a low-lying wetland named Kaituna. It was covered with silver tussock, rushes and flax and was an area of traditional food gathering for Maori who sought tuna (eel), pukeko and weka. There is also evidence that the Kaituna area was once thick with trees, probably Kahikates. They lay buried under the surface of the wetland and were often dug up and used as firewood by early settlers. A significant feature was the track along the inner edge of the sand hills which provided easy access to Kaituna.

(Armed for the fray – The Mining of St Kilda, dunedin-amenities-society.org.nz, July 16th, 2015)

Earthing or Grounding (described by Ober, Sinatra & Zucker, 2010) is where walking in bare feet allows the soles of the feet to absorb negative ions from the earth. In cultures around the world such as the Native American Indians and Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine it is considered a healing practice that connects humans to the soil of the earth. Furthermore, it is considered that sand beside water is the ideal location for walking barefoot as sea-water is a great conductor for good connections to the body that contains mostly water.



St Claire 1939

Dunedin's various local authorities have struggled for the last 140 years to manage the coastal issues at St Clair and St Kilda. Sadly, it is a historical record of failure to understand the natural processes of the dune and coastal environment that affects the coastline that we perilously live beside. Perhaps this latest failure is an opportunity to rectify that understanding and restore the coastal environment to ensure its long term functionality as an ecological asset that provides both protection and pleasure for our city. The problems with the wall and the wider erosion issues of Ocean Beach Domain cannot be dealt with in isolation, but must be integrated into a programme that deals with the coastal environment as a living entity rather than as an engineered solution. That may also mean making changes to our thinking and use of this area in the long term. History has shown our failures let's hope that we don't continue that trend.

(When History Repeats dunedin-amenities-society.org.nz, May 29 2015)



St Claire 1880's

The recent damage of the sea wall at St Clair Esplanade is a pertinent reminder of the power and ferocity of the ocean and the continuation of an issue that has been prominent in Dunedin since the beginnings of colonial settlement. The extension of physical occupation of coastal areas by people and the development of infrastructure around that occupation has been fraught with problems. Worse still has been the undermining of the important protection afforded to the city by the St Clair and St Kilda beach areas.

(When History Repeats dunedin-amenities-society.org.nz, May 29 2015)

Otago Daily Times

Rising sea levels: Thousands of homes at risk

Created 19/11/15

A new report on rising sea levels claims 9000 homes are at risk nationally, including 2600 in Dunedin.

The report, from Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Jan Wright, also says the Government needs to start preparing for the huge potential cost of rising oceans driven by climate change, which could lead to the "managed retreat" of coastal communities to higher ground. "Continuing sea level rise is not something that might happen - it is already happening, will accelerate, and will continue for the indefinite future," Dr Wright wrote in her report. "Homes, businesses and infrastructure worth billions of dollars have been built on low-lying land close to the coast," she said. A total of 9000 homes nationally were less than 50cm above spring high tides, Dr Wright's report said, 2600 of which were in Dunedin. Thousands more were within a metre of this threshold.

"Rising sea levels will have major impacts in many places. In time, coastal land will become uninhabitable." Published on [Otago Daily Times Online News](http://www.odt.co.nz) (<http://www.odt.co.nz>)



By 1876 the urban growth of Dunedin had pushed housing to the edge of the sand hills at Ocean Beach. Sand was being removed constantly by the householders to raise the level of their sections. Occasional floods are reported in the 1870s, but mostly from the harbour, into South Dunedin. On one occasion a Mrs Rae and her two daughters were rescued by a gasworks boat crew from Rankiehor Street. The dog was reportedly left behind! The coach-builder for Cobb & Co in Reid Road built a flat-bottomed boat in which he used to paddle to the nearest dry land in times of flood. There was once reported nine inches of water in the Hillside Railway Workshops wagon shop that stopped work for several days.

Tonight I walked the lengths of St Kilda and St Claire, those two beneficent, oceanic sisters whose sands have long grounded and caressed my feet, whose hazy pastel light and eternal fluid breathing have long felt like home. Tonight, as I walked I gathered my cloaks of determination and of faith and wrapped them tightly around myself against which no wind, no matter how cold nor cruel, could stop me in my march. St Kilda and St Clare let forth their waves, pounding a rhythmic battle song that now sings in my heart. When I stood energised and exhilarated on a sand hill and saluted my leave I knew that I was ready.

Caroline

(Boost 2003– A Healing Narrative through Somatics and Dance, Caroline Plummer Ralph Buck Sylvie Fortin)