



## The Cove / Vertical.Nature.Base.

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# Vertical. Nature. Base.

A collaborative project by Echo Echo's Steve Batts and artist Dan Shipsides. Based at a Donegal coastal climbing location and a city exhibition base, V.N.B. is a residential experimental climbing / art / dance project that investigates the contrasting and comparable notions of climbing as sport and climbing as creative engagement. Interested people can join the camp in September (details tba) for various activities and camping. This blog is an insight into V.N.B.'s creative development.

Wednesday, 1 December 2010

## THE DAY SNOW CAME - Dec 2010

8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2010

Hi Steve,

I recorded my effort on HD and then exported it as a tiny mp4 so i could email it to you. It's very pixelated - so watch it small...

I went outside before the heavy snow came.

It's kind of interesting - I really like some aspects - tho there are some very clumsy movements and some too much like mime

I could probably edit into something - but I'm not sure if that's appropriate yet.

It's 11min long - which seemed way to short to do the process - but far to long to have as a video - at least in terms of holding attention in it's current format.

11min - I didn't spend much time low down - horizontal (vertical levels 0-3) - and getting into the mind zone (it was very cold) - but i felt in it at times when into vertical levels above 3 - but not always.

The static camera is a bit dull as the focus is so fixed - i think similar to the ability to embody scales in your process - micro and macro - it might be nice to try this with the camera filming the embodier...

see what you think,

best,

dan

9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2010

Hi Dan,

Update Aug 2011

VNB project flyer

Background info

Background info

Blog Archive

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enjoyed watching that. I agree that it isn't time for editing stuff.... I think we can spend more time focusing this process so each move is really fully engaged and specific. It would be great to video each other I think.... in different locations... and referencing same or different routes. I reckon the key to getting away from mime is to get the movement into the torso independently of the hand gestures.... almost beginning with the torso... so the torso is the resonant chamber of the experience... this can be mixed with the more gestural, mimetic demonstrative hand stuff... which had a reference to modelling or carving that I also like. I use the system from Reflexology to engage the body with the hands....

<http://www.dorlingkindersley-uk.co.uk/static/cs/uk/11/features/reflexology/handchart.html>

this is more detailed than I use but it gives an idea of how the torso can be related to parts of and movements of the hands....

I wasn't as brave as you. I went to the warm studio... here it was so snowy on Monday that I couldn't get anywhere as the town came to a standstill. I did the process Tuesday instead. My video is longer than yours so I'll try to load it up to Vimeo tomorrow and send you the link so you can stream it. I don't think it is as interesting as yours but there are some similarities....  
<http://vimeo.com/17622482>

I am getting keen on doing this process with more people.... It would be interesting to get several people to embody the same climbing route as a basis of material for a live performance... (should this be dancers or climbers or a mix... do we have the resources.... anyway that is just an idea for now....

We need to give a bit more thought to location for the "event".... and more dates to meet up...

Steve

30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2010

Hi Steve,

Hope you having a bit of a break and the xmas festivities were fun.

I'm back in the studio - tho i've been editing a lot of video at home in between mince pies and turkey stuffing. We had a nice quiet time - luckily just one burst pipe. and our water is still on.

just watching your embodying landscape video again in more detail. I'm really enjoying it.

I like the slow speed of the start - slow motion-esque and small range of movements - then growing.

I also like the more erratic movements - funnily the ones which are actually less climbing orientated.

The space for me is a bit difficult - I know this wasn't the point of that exercise but it resurfaces something we've discussed before and remains a key problem for me. The space abstracts it so

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much to render it less interesting. I know your argument will be that I'm not entering enough into the language of pure movement and the "abstraction" isn't abstraction it's real movement. But i guess it's that concern of functional movement being more exciting and powerfully to me in terms of "art".

That said I can really imagine this working well in specific sites or/and in relation to objects, images or video.

Your suggestion to develop this with more focus and video each other would be useful - certainly the non-static camera might be good to explore if pre-recorded video become a big element.

Thanks for the torso feedback - that's interesting.

Suggest some date thru jan/feb/mar and we'll try to make some arrangements. Weather might beat us for getting outside - but you never know. But studio would be useful. Also are we able to make site visits to prehen house? it might be useful to make more visits to keep it going - at least we need to get some thinking and experimentation going around this before we commit to it.

best wishes,

dan

Posted by Dan at 17:23 0 comments 

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Wednesday, 1 September 2010

EMBODYING LANDSCAPE AND VERTICAL LEVELS – Sep 2010

3<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2010

Hi Dan,

Great day for me yesterday. Thanks.

I probably (definitely) talk too much! But what we do is exciting and stimulating for me. I appreciate your tempo as a balance to mine. . . I was happy we got in the studio for a while though it

was a bit rushed I'd like to do more moving with you and particularly to introduce you to the "embodying landscape" process that I have been developing. It relates very strongly to the topophilia/phobia concept you introduced me to. Maybe we could organize to do it together with some of the other dancers from Echo Echo. I was considering inviting four of them (maximum number for my car) to begin exploring this idea with me... some location visits and some time in the studio... maybe from this some of them might be the other movers in our project...

Steve

11<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010

Hi Steve,

What's the latest?

Did you get the images from Shroove I sent?

I used some of your levels of vertical movement in a section of a walk I did for our students and the public. It was looking at the defensive (was it level 4?) stance and movement - but trying to reduce fluidity so it became a quite stiff movement (walking through east belfast).

How are things looking from your side?

Dan

13<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010

Hi Dan,

I got the photo's.... I liked their lack of artiness.... but the sea looks great... I loved climbing those two gentle slopes.... and being outdoors in the sunshine.... I'm drawn more and more to the theme of the "real" reasons people do sport or watch sport and how the competitive aspects are often just excuses for certain forms of pleasure and that some activities don't need the excuse... sailing, climbing, hiking, but then some people feel the need to import the excuse..... or let pleasure get hi-jacked by other interests... On the other hand .... I always liked to play competitively.... something about the way it sometimes helps me to pay attention to details.... but then sometimes it actually distracts me.... the element of fear in the climbing perhaps echoes this... the need to control the natural apprehension

associated with being high up demands that you focus the attention on something concrete and specific. It brings out a sort of ultra-practicality which actually can become very poetic.

When I was in Altai I was playing with this idea that when I am really practical... trying to be efficient when hiking or climbing I realise that my own practicality is attached to my history, tastes, values so where I choose to put my foot is both functional and expressive because at this level of attention the two are inseparable... I suppose that is the style of a great footballer... the art... in George Best, Maradona, Ed Moses. At this level it is quite clear that the competition is really only a very small part of the driving force.... the focus on winning retains it's importance only as a means towards engaged attention.

... so I was walking up and down the mountain with the attention on my rhythm, balance, the choices of where to pace my feet from an aesthetic point of view... my movement poem interpreting the path (the partiture or score)... my way of playing this composition. The frustration of being a crap climber is that this feeling is very very fleeting in between longer phrases of clumsy mind.

Great that you played with level 4....! I'd love to have time to introduce some more of my approaches.... particularly my "embodying landscape" practice. ...

I am attracted to the idea of building the "outcome" work around a short intense expedition of some kind which would involve a special place, elements of climbing, recording, and the embodiment process and the post experience processing of this through the filters of ideas related to sport, the "Olympic ideal", function and beauty.... topophilia....

... I swing back and forth between inclination towards keeping the work between the two of us and opening it up to some of the Echo ECho dancers..... Having more people involved will give new opportunities but might be more difficult to go deeper because resources will have to go to them... I am going to get some of the group to do an "embodiment" process with me to see how it goes and if they are interested...

It would be good to get some time in studio, on the wall, outdoors.... and time to talk a bit more.

Steve

5<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010

Hi Steve,

Just a quick follow up after Culdaff climbing:

### **Vertical levels**

Is this your system? or whose? where does it come from? Are there other descriptors of these or similar stages. I like the concept of the border - a threshold state between each stage. Also resonates with climbing and the rhythms of climbing - the flow and pauses - quick quick slow. That phrasing was interesting to explore and think about.

### **Embodying landscape**

Also did you develop this technique?

It was very interesting and brought up many ideas. The technological mimicry or way of understanding having the power to scale zoom in out, the overview, macro and mirco - however not about assuming power over something - it's a more intimate loving relation with the imagined place, location or thing.

and sculpting - imaginary power of holding this landscape in your hands (a little like model making)

and google sketch up (where you can 3d plan) - able to maneuver the 3d image (also 3d animation software today like Maya)

It reminded me of fractals also.

Also interesting in relation to some climbing writing from the 70's where climber on big routes write in detail about observations of tiny details - insects, flowers, crystals. Also Jonny dawes on a deadly climb where after he talks about crying because he had to step on a butterfly or something - because this is where his foot needed to go - or he would have fell and probably died.

At parts it was similar to climbers - visualising and performing the moves on the ground - looking up at the climb.

As the landscape is in the mind and body of the performer - I guess the question is to what extent does it translate externally? - in terms of people viewing or relating to the actions made. and what is the nature, quality, power and value of this?

Would some sort of visual aid develop this possibility?

### **Prehen House**

I liked it and there are some possibilities in the cellars (esp video), and maybe the barn. Outside also a possibility - but weather would obviously be the issue.

making the cellars more than just rooms would be interesting -

finding a structure to link them - scaffold and walkways maybe. I could imagine landscape back projected so when you enter the cellar spaces there is a feeling of expanse. This could be done well by constructing a viewing space (imagine a cabin type space) within the cellar - with the end wall of that space acting as a back projection screen.

The issue is the context - how do we make it site specific - what elements do we develop to do this?

For me it links to europe - the alps, (baron.....) big house culture. Ireland in europe. old or aristocratic Europe

This then also links to **Donegal** - the frontiers/edges of europe. I think this could be something quite interesting in terms of context / subject matter.

For this reason i think we could make all our climbing in Donegal - how about that? there could be a couple of expeditionary possibilities - Bluestacks and Poison glen and Glenveigh etc.

The quarry has a possibiltiy too - if we use prehen then I think we should definately make a new route in the quarry - up that ridge. Looked quite easy - but that's ok. even just for fun...

### **The big slab / architecture:**

this has possibilities - but i wouldn't want to make it too much like a stage - where the "audience" sat at the bottom and watched - that seems a dead dynamic

Also how to structure other activies around it.

I kind of still like the idea of it relating to the architecture somehow. this might be tricky with colin? But making this structure relate somehow to the building / location

**Scritping** - including performed and social aspects. Durational. Live choreographed and real open-ended activity - climbing which isn't certain.

Dan

6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010

Hi Dan,

### **Vertical levels:**

Yes this is my system. I developed it from knowledge about the (pretty much universal) reflex developmental journey from birth to walking and on to jumping (running) and upright squatting (which are higher more complex levels of reflex integration than standing. I was interested in finding a way of dealing with the "vertical journey" from a poetic/theatrical point of view while keeping the system based on scientific material. The particular divisions are my attempt to describe what a watcher resonates with, and they are based on years of observation and

experimentation with students and colleagues as well as myself. The system works really well as a teaching method, getting people to be more aware of the detailed distinctions of the human journey through vertical space, and also as a compositional tool. The idea of the "borders" between the levels as locations of "poetic tension" is a relatively new addition to the system. I want to find out if there might be measurable endocrine changes when these "borders" are crossed.... (but that means finding an interested physiologist to explore with). The vertical journey of reflex development is mirrored somewhat in some versions of the evolutionary hierarchy of vertebrates .... from fish through reptiles to mammals and on to primates with human beings as the most upright, finely balanced vertebrate.

Looking at anything about human muscular-skeletal-neurological-reflex development in children would give an idea of the way in which this journey is described in detail. Most of what I know comes from Raymond Dart (Dart procedures) and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (Body Mind Centering). There seem to be lots of people dealing with learning and development problems (e.g. dyslexia) through therapeutic systems based on the patterns of reflex development.....

### **Embodying Landscape:**

Yes, this is my technique although it has been influenced by several people I have worked with in the past. The specific use of the hands and the systematic relation of the the hand (and foot) to the torso and head as found in Foot Reflexology Massage is my way of moving from the externally perceived to the internally resonated in a way which avoids simple representation (mime).... and towards movement itself being the poetic material rather than movement serving an idea or a concept or a mental image or picture. My feeling is that the evaluation of the movement developed through this approach is finally through the question "is it a good dance?".(But I suppose that could be just begging the question really. ) I have a sort of faith that the originating experience of the landscape is embedded there somewhere. I have no problem, in principle with, framing the movement with guiding images, text, title, music..... things which give door to "seeing" and resonating the movement... but I don't want to excuse or explain the movement or use it to "illustrate" the image or the idea. I am happy to help a watcher be drawn into the question of what the dance has to do with a theme... or what the dance "means"... but to be able to give too definitive an answer to that question implies that the whole choreographic process is pointless.

I really like the things you say about the process... they all resonate strongly with me.

### **Prehen House:**

I have mixed feelings... but tend to be mostly interested in your responses to the space (abdicating responsibility maybe). For me I can imagine using the indoor and outdoor spaces for movement based work. The cellars are definitely appealing for the possibility of creating magic boxes through sound and projection.... big place

in a small space.... camera obscura come to mind... I have really no ideas concerning a larger installation piece.

I need to really mull on the historical, social, architectural etc implications of using Prehen House. I'm sure there are plenty of interesting resonances..... practically speaking.... it is in Derry so accomodation/access costs are kept low. The idea of focusing the climbing in Donegal could be nice but I don't quite see the association with the big house culture, europe/alps.... Convince me!

Nice idea to make a new route in the quarry.

### **The Big Slab:**

I really got excited by the idea but the only way to discover it's true potential is to create a small version of it and try it out at different angles. I like the way it relates the movement levels work to the climbing practice.... it alsI relates to the old fashioned theatres where there were raked stages so people at the back of the stage could be seen. There are still lots of those in Russia. I performed Contact Improvisation on a fairly extreme one in Kiev and it was quite an amazing experience to finish every phrase by almost falling into the orchestra pit.

Really enjoying the stimulation. Loved doing those climbs. . . wish I had more time and that it was better weather.... still....

let me know about possible dates and send an invoice or bring one with you when you come and you can get a cheque.

best wishes

Steve

Posted by Dan at 11:20 0 comments 

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Tuesday, 1 June 2010

## TEXTURES IMPRINTS FRAMEWORKS – JUNE 2010



9 June

Hi Steve,

Attached some images of the Cioch (meaning "breast"...). In image "Cioch mist" - the ledge is obvious about 2 thirds of the way up.

"Cioch 360" is a still from the video I mentioned. There's a link to more of these 360 works here:

<http://www.danshipides.com/DshipsidesWeb/Pan%20360.html>

This was in fantastic weather - but it's not so much fun in anything less - wind, rain etc - a little worrying - but fun...

It could be a great place to visit. I'm not sure about the naked part of your projecting ideas....but there's a lot of potential in terms of thinking about this space. My feelings about nakedness - aside from bashfulness - are it's clichedness at least in performance art and I imagine a little in dance too..?..no?

I would be interested in thinking and exploring about the space in terms of what it does to your movement - not just as it being a stage but as it being an object. The danger of it - literally is that it invites dare-devilness as a response - something I'm not so interested in as it's pretty dumb and we might get hurt - in a bad way.. but there certainly are ways of exploring this territory - both the real and as a studio based idea.

One thing you said which i'm responding to in my mind and think it should be examined - but i think you almost said this too - I really don't see the "neutral" space of the studio / dance theatre as neutral. I think it's similar to the white gallery space for contemporary art - it's so loaded that for me it becomes difficult to escape the aesthetic frame that brings. i realise there's possibilities of these spaces - and they are valuable - but I could never say they offer a neutral setting. When I use the gallery space i usual approach it with the intention of bringing a different set of aesthetics too it (climbing and the trappings of a life in climbing). This then offers the potential to foreground both the framing devices and conventions of the gallery and the aesthetic qualities of climbing - without reducing climbing to the point where it is no longer climbing...

I suppose I'm still suspicious of "art". I work towards an understanding where it is not separated or neutralised from everyday life.

This is where my uncomfortableness with this project ending up wholly as a dance framed "dance" work. For me - as much of my

work does - it has to lie outside or at least across "art" or "dance" or "climbing".

I like the idea then of looking at how this project might fit across a number of fields and "scenes". You mentioned site specific - well actually it could be more useful for me to think about context specific possibilities too.

Enjoyed the climb yesterday - was important to fit it in - otherwise I'd be afraid of drifting.

bye for now,

dan

15<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Hi Dan,

finally get around to responding..... from an internet cafe in Moscow....

The cioch pics look great... I can imagine this place being inspiring...

Nakedness.... I wasn't so much thinking about a "naked event" or performance... actually I was more interested in the effect of the texture of the rock on the bare skin... more a close-up imprint as a

visible reference to the way in which an engagement with a landscape

"moves" the inner self... the heart beat, the chemistry (cortisol, adrenaline, endorphins), the butterflies in the belly..... I actually agree with you about the clichedness and the boringness of most approaches to being unclothed in both fine art and in dance/theatre....

I am very "unbashful" about naked people so it doesn't in itself hold

any power of transgression or exposure so detailed purpose or irony are

the only attractions.

I imagined a close up photographic or video recording of the gradually

disappearing imprint of the rock texture on my back or sole of the foot

after lying or standing on one leg.

Other idea is to record a stream of consciousness during the climb and

on the "platform" and use this as a "score" or "template" for a movement

work (set or improvised)... and maybe as a soundtrack for its performance... and attempt to revisit and to transform the experience in

another context.

Galleries, studios, theatres.... well... obviously they aren't neutral... but I quite enjoy the strange filtering history that they bring... the framing of expectations and the more and less conscious

filtering of experience that they trigger. I suppose I'm currently more

on the side of getting more of the attention to detail that I sometimes

find in art practice (mine and others) into everyday life rather than

being concerned with making my artistic practice relevant to everyday

life..... but I suppose that perspective comes from a deep and long held

suspicion, despair and rejection of the aesthetics, training methods,

conceptual apparatus and language of pretty much the whole of mainstream

dance.... It is as if I have been so concerned with re-forging the relation of poetic-movement-art to the vernacular movement experience of

people (including me) that I now find myself at a place where I'm not

fighting that battle any more... I just do my art work with that background view and practice totally integrated in it.

I don't want to frame our project in a purely "dance" way. I want to

meet the different rhythms and purposes, language and process that you

bring from your fine art context... specifically to have light shone on

to my particular way of valuing objects, events, and processes by seeing

them alongside yours. I mean... .... in movement we tend to a sort of

kinetic diaorrea... like verbal .... we want to cram more in to "do"

more.... the idea of one word on a hillside or a series of 1min30secd

spinning videos (or even a painting in a frame) as worthy is an alternative which counterbalances the tendency to an entertainment

aesthetic... I accept this difference in "scale" as someone who engages

with and loves a lot of fine art stuff but in my own practice it is challenging and deeply interesting to be in the process of being concerned more and more with detail, editing, refinement... leaving

stuff out....

... and.... I have been enjoying the experience of a very pulled/torn/twisted shoulder and upper arm since we climbed.... I have

really had to pay good attention to get through the Chess Piece and only

now it starts to feel better again..... I liked the feeling that my determination was greater than my reproducible strength, forcing myself

beyond my "limit" ... rather than underestimating my power or ability..... BUT.... I am pretty sure that liking that is a symptom of some deeply unhealthy psychological traits!.... Anyway...

Moscow is sunny and humid.... and the festival beginning is enjoyable...

lots of colleagues and friends.... it feels like part of a long term ongoing process...

what about August? I have time and flexibility after 23rd. Could we plan

something. Outdoors. Dance Studio. And think about beginning a more

organised and conscious form of documentation of what we are up too?

..... though the emails... at two ends of a digital rope... are neither

too slack nor too tight... but just right for me ... so far...

One question..... relating to the differing contexts of fine art and performance/dance (though they are crossing over of course)..... What is

the status of an object for you in your work? ... a final piece... a video... a collection of small objects spelling out "sorry" on a hillside.... In movement art there is no "real" material.... the object

is a sort of conception of framed time... a memory... so even the "final" work is a process.... maybe this is a limit and a liberation....

I miss the idea of a "thing" but on the other hand I also feel the lightness of not having to conceive of process and product as in conflict.... I ask this question because it seems that it might be an exchange which helps to focus on how to record what we are doing and

what importance we attach to the recordings as objects or archives or

sources for further processes.

enjoy summer time

Steve

Posted by Dan at 21:18 0 comments 

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