
Book review

Reconfiguring Spatial Practices Through Dance: Collaborative Processes of Being-With in Dance, Architecture and Engineering by Adesola Akinleye

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ABSTRACT

Review of the book, *Dance, Architecture and Engineering*, by Adesola Akinleye.

Keywords: dance, philosophy, being-in-place, interdisciplinary collaboration, feminist spatial practices

Interdisciplinary artist and scholar Adesola Akinleye examines feminist spatial practices through a series of embodied inquiries that dance in relationship with the environment, functioning as an emergent dialogical experience of becoming. As an engaged transdisciplinary conversation, Akinleye's text, *Dance, Architecture and Engineering*, is written as a rhizomatic structural weave containing a hypertext of essays, poems, movement investigations, and interviews. Grounded in Practice as Research and John Dewey's pragmatism, while drawing upon feminist, decolonial, and queer theories, Akinleye proposes a 'Being-in-Place' methodological framework to discuss how bodies and environments co-constitute one another through transactional exchanges. This holistic framework as praxis demonstrates how a reframing of the grammar and syntax of both verbal and movement languages can contribute to collaborators in dance, architecture, and engineering to think together and reconstitute the flow of capitalist-based urban design.

Akinleye's choreography for this text is a rhizome of chapters containing poems, links to performance videos, photographs, and interviews that guide the reader through a meandering and at times non-linear path across the text. This multimodal strategy highlights a relational and movement-based approach to meaning-making and knowledge production through the dancing body, which serves as an onto-epistemological embodiment of what Emeritus Professor Robin Nelson regards as the interrelationship between 'being-doing-knowing' (Nelson, 2022, p. 46). An opening glossary frames the subsequent chapters, allowing readers to engage with the specific usage of terminology, including the integration of Dewey's philosophical language. The terminology addresses identity and choreographic considerations, such as space, time, place, and rhythm, as integral elements in meaning-making processes. Part One is an in-depth description of the 'Being-in-Place' framework, utilizing Dewey's concepts in dialogue with Akinleye's prism of dancing with the environment. Part Two chronicles themes arising from Akinleye's investigations during *Choreographing the City: as/ at the city limits* (2019-2020) projects and highlights two primary areas of inquiry: *Chasing Stillness* and *Lingering in Dwelling/Residing in Wandering*. Part Three includes interviews with creative researcher John Bingham-Hall, choreographer Liz Lerman, sociologist Richard Sennett, and choreographer Dianne McIntyre. They propose an art of infrastructure and advocate for designing responsive environments that support becoming, through meaningful relational interactions.

Arising from an awareness of being in relationship with bodily, conversational, and environmental exchanges, the heterogeneity of Akinleye's lexicon, as introduced in the glossary, cultivates a holistic approach to feminist spatial practices as an emergent collaborative process. Akinleye's key terminology offers alternative rhythms while traversing built environments that privilege the ease of movement for specific raced, classed, and gendered individuals. To destabilize the economy of movement steeped in the built environment, Akinleye develops in Part One the 'Being-in-Place' methodological framework. 'Being-in-Place' is an embodied 'world in a transactional relationship' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 67) of emplacement which consists of place-making practices that arise due to an agentic attunement to the collaborative and relational interactivity of somatic, cultural, social, and environmental systems, including humans' sensorial relationships with the built and natural environments. By linking choreographic concepts from the glossary within the framework, Akinleye acknowledges how weight, as one example, can function as a practice of mutual bearing, discussing how bodies and structures meet and adjust. Consequently, rhythm becomes a negotiated field of temporal affordances, operating as an emergent terrain for pace-making. Drawing upon examples from personal choreographic inquiries, Akinleye excavates inclusive approaches to dance as an interaction that anyone can engage in to create meaning and understanding during a dance experience. To further reinforce this point, Akinleye proposes 'choreo-thinking,' a movement-based mind-body dialogue that helps make meaning and develop what Margaret Whitehead calls 'physical literacy' through dance. These techniques, approaches, and perspectives provided generative pathways during Akinleye's conversations and workshops with engineers and architects.

Part Two describes *Chasing Stillness* and *Lingering in Dwelling/Residing in Wandering* as themes arising from the *Choreographing the City: as/at the city limits* projects. According to Akinleye, *Chasing Stillness* is a collaborative experience that allows individuals to tread outside the normative rhythmic structure of a place, thereby renewing a personal sensorial relationship with the environment. An example from the text includes a description of when Akinleye performs a sunrise dance on the London Bridge, intervening with the cadence of morning commuters to test how stillness functions as a relational presence that redefines the conventional definition of it as an absence of movement. While engaging in stillness, Akinleye incorporates Black Studies Professor McKittrick's (2006) discussion of tactical embodiments of Black women's geographies to resist the 'un-rhythmic and therefore relationship-less' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 71) subjugation of Black women's epistemological perspectives. Further supporting the 'Being-in-Place' framework, *Lingering in Dwelling/Residing in Wandering* acknowledges the polyrhythmic vibrations of movement and place in dialogue, attending to the tensions created by contrasting rhythmic variations. 'Hyper-invisible' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 93) people are a vivid example that appears in this section as a QR code link featuring a series of short videos titled *Five Films of Research and Development*. This tapestry of poetry, Akinleye's slow dancing manipulated by the Isadora program, and other short works featuring bodies in various forms of digital manipulation, offers viewers and readers an opportunity to experience an immersive dialogue between dance, theories of corporeality, and the environment. Using animation, dancers fade in and out of focus, creating slippage between the (il)legibility of non-normative bodies and the built environment. Developing an awareness of this 'hyper-invisibility' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 91) offers Akinleye a chance to recreate 'landscapes of opportunity' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 83) by engaging with the generative 'Being-in-Place' framework.

Part Three contains four interviews that unpack how choreographers and researchers aim to rethink the limitations imposed on the built environment by economic pressures and sociopolitical norms. The first interview with John Bingham-Hall proposes how urbanism can cultivate 'infrastructures for engagement' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 99), where environmental flow can support the integration of various rhythmic responses. Liz Lerman reframes collaboration as 'bridging social capital' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 109) by naming boundary-crossing work where consent, attention, and care are choreographic as well as civic opportunities for reshaping social structures. Richard Sennett argues for crafting methods that stay open to adjustment and maintenance. Sennett's sentiments connect with Part Two's insistence on lingering and stillness as vibrant horizons for creating variations in design tempos. Dianne McIntyre offers 'spontaneous composition' (Akinleye, 2021, p. 120) to reinforce the collaborative responsiveness of emplacement, integrated with the 'Being-in-Place' framework, which treats the environment, body, and experience as transactional, rejecting mind-body dualisms and emphasizing situated, embodied knowing. Together, the interviews crystallize the book's focus, where choreography serves as a method for fostering collaborative relations, inviting artists, designers, engineers, and communities to engage in place-making efforts that can thrive together in polyrhythms that disrupt the speed of economic legibility.

This text is a valuable resource for artists, scholars, and individuals interested in transdisciplinary research methods and feminist spatial practices for investigating their relationships with the built and natural environments. Akinleye offers approaches to emplacement that emphasize the environment's role in shaping the texture of an embodied experience and provides perspectives to reconsider how urban plans, language, and movement structures/systems influence perception. This collaboration moves with New Materialist perspectives

and the concept of ‘intra-action’ described by philosopher Karen Barad, who claims ‘time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, and are iteratively reconfigured’ (Barad, 2007, p. IX). Dancing is a method for meaning-making, and Akinleye draws upon theories of corporeality to locate our bodies and understand how attention to embodied experience can shape alternative pathways of navigating the convergent cartographic terrain of body, identity, place, and design.

Swimming with this book's rhythms presents an opportunity to experience how dance-making practices and a philosophical unpacking of movement can offer an epistemic investigation of embodied inquiry as a contemplative process for navigating ideas, knowledge, and sensations through various forms of multimodal communication. Akinleye's investigation and scholarship contribute to the discourse on spatial practices by providing nuanced approaches to place-making that interweave feminist theory, Indigenous wisdom, and the pragmatists' philosophies. During this in-depth investigation of language's influence on perception, this text aligns with what Potawatomi botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer articulates as a ‘grammar of animacy’ (Kimmerer, 2017, p. 134), which, when revealed, can inspire a sense of belonging by deepening relationships during the co-emergence of place. Akinleye's deliberate approach to language, philosophical inquiry, and practice disrupts the negative impacts of derisive identity rhetoric, human exceptionalism, and the pervasiveness of dualistic thinking that attempts to devalue the body as a vibrant site of knowledge production and meaning-making.

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Biographical sketch

Jeremy M. Hahn is a scholar, dance educator, choreographer, and performer based in Los Angeles, California. His current research examines critical approaches to contemplative pedagogy by investigating how these pedagogical styles manifest across performance and educational contexts as ecologies of praxis that integrate embodied presence, reflexive inquiry, and multimodal art practices. He has an MFA in Dance from California State University, Long Beach, is a Ph.D. candidate in Dance at Texas Woman's University, and is a full-time lecturer in the Department of Theatre and New Dance at Cal Poly Pomona.

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