

Research paper

Tentacular-Feminine-Body as City Archivist: An Interdisciplinary Methodology Across Dance and Urban Planning

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the *tentacular-feminine-body* as an embodied methodology for exploring archives as relational constituted in the encounters between citizen and city. Rooted in Black/endarkened feminist thought and developed through an interdisciplinary research partnership in dance and urban studies, *tentacular-feminine-body* resists hegemonic framings of place-making that erase or distort marginalized perspectives. Rather than treating archive as a static repository, we conceive of it as a living process of sensation, memory, and encounter, in which the city is forever entangled with the bodies that move through it and the grammars that shape it. Drawing on dance choreographic practices as a tool of sensorial and situated inquiry, we position the *tentacular-feminine-body* as a threshold through which research questions arise. Our findings articulate three areas of inquiry: the grammar of the city, the feminine of the city, and the city archivist. By emphasizing dynamism, plurality, and interconnectedness, we suggest that the *tentacular-feminine-body* provides a methodology through which design can be informed by collaborative, relational archives of citizen–city life.

Keywords: archives, relational, dance, tentacular, urban encounters

I breathe in the cool March air of North West London as I step through the train tube doors onto a quiet platform. I have been away from the city for a few months. Since the veins of the insular tubes of the airplane and glass-lined hallways that took me from the plane to the terrazzo tiles of large arrival lobbies, and back to the tubes of the railways into London, this moment is the first when my body seems to fully drink in my presence, here, back in the city. The hairs on my arms quiver at a growing breeze, a particular tinge of damp cold that bathes the pores of my brown skin with recognition. I struggle with the weight of my bags as I ascend the stairs from the platform. Someone almost runs into me, transfixed on the train about to leave. The street tickles my nose follicles with the aroma of past memories: the traffic of thousands of roads crossed, the smell of chips eaten late at night, concrete-encased Buddleia flowering in the cracks of the city walls, and the early morning scent of commuters pushing past me to the train system with damp hair and hot coffee. As they push past me with my heavy case, ascending into London morning, my muscles remember myself here, I remember my place.

We identify as Black and brown female scholars in Dance and Urban Studies respectively, exploring the ramifications of material and relational encounters between citizen and city. We are interested in developing methods for examinations of encounter with the city that do not fix others as ‘already constituted subjects’ and

in doing so archive 'regimes of difference' (Ahmed, 2000, p. 8). We suggest such methods might also offer the potential to unsettle readings of the urban landscape and in doing so generate alternative, collaborative archives of encounter. In this paper, we reflect on the development of an emerging methodology drawn from our interdisciplinary, ethnographic research into urban structures that exist across the physical, social, and political. The goal of our work together is to look at how the city can be engaged and designed in ways that lay foundations, change, bridge, and recognise non-mainstream bodies such as our own. We are interested in the touchpoint of human-citizens meeting the city in a union of the felt, memoried, multiplicity of presences. We explore how these encounters shape city/citizen bodies into partnerships coerced and/or enriched by the urban planner.

Although we share conceptual experiences derived from autoethnographic reflections of being in Western cities, we come from different scholarly disciplines, these being Dance and Urban Studies. At this point, our collaboration has been primarily focused on developing a shared methodology. We are committed to developing a framework that authentically emerges from the interdisciplinary nature of our collaboration and the Afro/endarkened feminist ontology our lived experiences have pointed us toward. We began from the position that interdisciplinary research must first be grounded in a shared methodological framework. Accordingly, the findings we present here are not yet the outcomes of the main research, but the framework itself, developed through a reflective, interdisciplinary process that we view as an essential contribution in its own right. In keeping with Black and brown indigenous epistemologies (Deloria Jr. & Wildcat, 2001; Māhina et al., 2021; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), where ways of knowing often precede ways of being, we understand methodology as the creation of context rather than a set of procedures. Building a shared methodological framework was therefore not preparation for inquiry but inquiry itself, an act that both revealed the limits of familiar questions and brought new questions into being.

We drew on existing literature to contextualize our approach. Our generative work of building a methodological framework is informed by notions of dialogue, joy, and challenging body politics that critique mainstream architecture and urban design practices (Schalk et al., 2017). Alongside literature that acknowledges the impositions of looking and being looked at in urban space, such as bell hooks' discussion of oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992), and being re-oriented in space or misaligned with spatial expectations (Ahmed, 2006). We identify with Black/endarkened feminism accounts (Dillard, 2012), which reflect our own lived experiences as women of colour encountering urban spaces. These scholars help us contextualise our own lived experiences in the city, offering ways to understand and digest urban narratives while also exposing the biases embedded in dominant accounts of city making (Storper & Scott, 2016; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy, 2009; Robinson, 2006). Resonances with the discussions in the literature through referencing our lived experiences, lead us to recognize our bodies activate the archival, as sites of embodied memory in the physicality of our lived experience. Gestures, habits, scars, rhythms are records of how we have moved through and been moved by the city. Therefore, using the somatic framing of dance (Cruz-Banks, 2023; Fraleigh & Riley, 2024), we see the ethnographic¹ turn we draw on as an archive of sensations, muscle memory, and embodied knowing that recall, resist, and reimagine urban narratives beyond dominant accounts. While urban planning often treats the city as a fixed archive of structures and histories (Rao, 2009), we shift the paradigm by mobilizing archives as encounters between living, embodied records, the mutual traces through which citizen and city continually constitute one another. Many of these traces, however, are routinely excluded from or erased within official, dominant narratives, leaving absences that our work seeks to notice and re-inscribe. These exclusions from the cannon archives often privilege dominant standpoints and erase the perspectives of Black and brown women, deemed in place by being out of place (Ahmed, 2000; McKittrick, 2006, p. xv), and leave us struggling with discourses that erase and despatialize their [our] sense of place. (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiii).

We turn to Black feminist literature, which grounds our understanding of how lived experience in the city can be both contextualized and critiqued. These writings help us recognize the ways dominant narratives of place-making often erase or distort our marginalized perspectives, while also affirming the value of embodied knowledge. Building on this grounding, we apply dance methods to gather information about the city's rhythms, flows, and choreographies, treating movement as both analytic and generative. We draw on dance as a method (Akinleye, 2023) because dance can be an embodied practice of the relational: a way of knowing that makes visible how our bodies carry and respond to ideas. Dance unfolds over time-space as recognizable patterns of relationship between, for instance, dancer, music, gravity, and other dancers. Dance practice understands movement itself as knowledge and knowledge-making. Dance methods allow us to perceive the city as

¹ We intentionally avoid the use of autoethnography. Autoethnography centers on the individual self-narrating their own lived experience. The notion of archive we are engaging is not just personal memory, it is a relational archive formed at the edge where your body meets other bodies, environments, infrastructures, and narratives. In this sense, the body-as-archive is not a personal record but a collective, relational one.

choreographed (Bingham-Hall & Cosgrave, 2019), a space of embodied experiences where rhythms, flows, and encounters are orchestrated through design and improvisation. Therefore, dance offers apparatus to explore how the city is experienced and felt. We have used dance to concentrate and express the felt experience of being present in the city. ‘This is not idle fantasy, but a disciplined attention to the true meaning of “it feels right to me.” We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared.’ (Lorde, 1984, p. 42). From this prioritization of the sensation, we use the somatics of being-in-the-city, the felt experience (Akinleye, 2021), as the movement poetics of navigating the city. We suggest dance is to urban journeying, as poetry is to text. As we look for new framing and languaging for Urban Planners to tackle city-making. ‘*And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry [/dance] which helps to fashion it. Poetry [/dance] is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.*’ (Lorde, 1984, p. 42). This allows us to acknowledge the multiplicity of sensations of everyday life, and the openness of cities (Sennett, 2018).

Given that the city holds traces of its past in the materiality of the built environment, we understand how the city can be conceived as an archive (Sheringham & Wentworth, 2016); however, our relational and embodied approach to the city challenges us to explore what we can learn through a focus on a somatic relationship with the city. This, we hope, could lead to new epistemologies and inclusive practices of city-making. If the city is understood as relational and embodied, then the ways we remember, record, and transmit its stories must also be rethought. Within this perspective, we recognize archives as a category that marks how memory and history are preserved, but we also ask where and how such archives are constituted. Our intention is not to critique why or how mainstream city archives are produced, but rather to question the notion of city archives as objects. Thus, we problematize when and where archives come into existence by suggesting that archives are constantly manifested through the relational encounters of the everyday. We suggest that there are multiple relationships that historicize the encounters between citizen and city on the physical bodies and structures of both. We describe this theoretical and philosophical framework as tentacular-feminine-body, that allows for this relational approach to the notion of archives, constituted through multiple encounters of citizen and city. This proposal of the tentacular-feminine-body as a methodology is the key finding we reflect upon in this paper. Through this methodological lens, we have come to understand the bodies of citizen/city as archive: a living site where the city’s choreographies are inscribed, remembered, and reimaged.

BUILDING METHODOLOGY: THE TENTACULAR-FEMININE-BODY

In introducing a methodological approach that we call the *tentacular-feminine-body*, we first offer a commentary on each of the capacities within the whole approach. Our emphasis on the relational means that ‘tentacular’, ‘feminine’, and ‘body’ function together as an interwoven matrix. Accordingly, below, we define the capacity of each term in reference to the interwoven whole. This ensures that ‘tentacular’, ‘feminine’, and ‘body’ are understood through their relational function rather than as three complete notions in themselves. In this way, we trace how the methodology gains meaning only through the larger weave they compose together.

Tentacular

We suggest the self is tentacular, in dialogue with the city through somatics, memories, social shifts, and proximities. The capacity tentacular indicates the complexity and multiplicity of connections a citizen makes within the city (Haraway, 2016; Ostendorf-Rodriguez, 2023). We suggest these connections inform the perception and experiences of movement around the city and where or where not a person is able to be present, feels safe, or feels they belong. These connections are the bridges of awareness that create the means of one’s presence.

The physical body of tentacularity is composed of nerve endings, and small hairs, for instance extending into the environment around reading temperature, texture: the somatic sensation of the environment in which one is present. The physicality of sensation is derived from the body’s extensions into the city. In the tentacular, we also acknowledge memory as another kind of tentacle: memories-creating bridges of meaning between the city and self. Memory is housed in how the body responds and moves (Van der Kolk, 2014). A third category of tentacles are the buffer spaces, the psychological extension of self in which *sensory shifts* (Hall, 1988) and meaning making are derived. All these types of tentacles construct the intimacy of the personal and the public experiences of the city: layered spatial relationships between self and the *things* of the city. *Tentacular-feminine-body* raises a self that extends into the city through nerve endings, hairs, memories, and psychic proximities; a body whose multiplicity of connections composes bridges of sensation and meaning between personal intimacy and the public architectures of belonging.

Feminine

We begin by constructing 'female' as a self-determined identity which is suspended across Western social constructs and binaries of women/man, weak/strong, body/mind, and unnatural/natural, all of which have historically been used to uphold cis-sexism and oppositional-misogyny (Serano, 2024). To avoid falling into a trap of oppositional-sexism and binaries, we acknowledge the action and processes of the feminine rather than suggesting feminine behaviour is biological. We are considering the *tentacular-feminine-body* to acknowledge that this work is about the action of exchange rather than about a biological subject.

We are led by Black feminists' thought, for instance, bell hooks' (hooks, 2000) emphasis on love as an ethic of care, attention, and relationality. Listening and nurturing are central to hooks' rethinking of what creates belonging (hooks, 2009). We follow Audre Lorde's framing of the erotic and the poetic as sources of power: receptive, relational, and life-affirming rather than controlling, valuing actions of listening, care, and holding multiplicity. Patrica Hill Collins describes the politics of care and the ethic of personal accountability (Hill Collins, 2009), both resonant with feminine action, rooted in lived experience and interconnection. We conceive of feminine actions as ways of being present in the city that emphasize connection, care, and openness rather than control or dominance. Therefore, feminine in the city is in actions such as stopping to listen to or understand another person. The temperament of weaving together different ideas or experiences so that they coexist rather than compete, in the construction of temporary hybrid spaces such as the multifunctional use of pushchair as a hybrid mobile home space, and a site of comfort or gentle touch caress a building wall to notice small details in the environment. These are ways of moving and relating that citizens can enact. We call them *feminine* because they affirm complexity, relation, and care as sources of strength. Often in the city, these actions can manifest a sense of vulnerability or openness, which can be misread or exploited within patriarchal logics as a kind of *asking for it*, revealing how feminine actions of care and receptivity are made precarious by structures of violence and misinterpretation (Serano, 2024). The *tentacular-feminine-body* describes the way reaching outward is lived as both choice and imposition, balancing vulnerability, uncertainty, strength, refusal, and presence; *tentacular-feminine-body* foregrounds the action of digestion of conditions into relational gestures.

Body

We conceive of the body as a part of the environment through the thinking processing of 'mind' and the sensation of surroundings. As we reject binary ideologies, we come from the ontological view that mind-body-environment are prismatic contours of meaning-making. The contour of 'the body' manifests as a sensor of space-time, mind-full, informed, shaped, and blended by environment. This is how we conceptualise the body as embodied, better phrased as emplaced (Casey, 2009; Howes, 2005; Pink, 2011), which 'suggests the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment' (Howes, 2005, p.7). Too often, urban planning and design have treated bodies as passive figures rather than bodies as the processes for embodied, emplaced knowledge. This limits the environment to a codified space with pre-determined life, without acknowledging the substantive, emplaced differentiations archived in multiple encounters between city and citizens' bodies. The body in the '*tentacular-feminine-body*', is not a passive body. Rather, the body is an emplaced thinking sensor, a component of the larger citizenship that is a city: an emplaced sensor of space-time, where mind, soma, and environment are textures of the experience of the moment. Approaching the notion of citizens through the methodology of the *tentacular-feminine-body* allows us to look for emergent epistemologies from the body's prismatic contours, bearing multiple bodies in motion: of sensation, public life, and belonging. Thus, the *tentacular-feminine-body* is an emplaced, thinking sensor that resists reduction to fixed codes, instead they lived reciprocity of mind-body-environment, through which differentiated knowledges of the city are continually generated.

This methodological lens frames the citizen in layered fields of perception, memory, and imagination, folding past and future into presence. This lens calls for reflection on citizens as extended through the environment, tentacular and entangled, reaching to meet the world around them to co-create the meanings of their presence. The citizen is emplaced: experiencing felt meaning derived from being situated. This methodology addresses meaning as formed where body and city meet in mutual sensing. These edges extend, seek contact, shape meaning while being shaped back. Therefore, as we build this methodology, we understand the citizen as qualified by a tentacular process of presence. The *tentacular-feminine-body* conceptually recasts the boundary between the physical and socio-psychological dimensions and rejects the persistence gendered determination of needs and belongings in the city. By emphasising the dynamic and interconnectedness as well as the plurality of meanings and memories, *tentacular-feminine-body* acknowledges the possibility of archive as encounters within which collective perceptions of city can emerge.

USING DANCE AS METHOD

The process that has helped us manifest this shared methodological approach is using dance and choreography to concentrate on meaning through moving in the city. This is a practice-as/ research approach, suggesting that physically urban-journeying through the city reveals knowledge about the city. As our methodology emerges, dance continues to be a complementary method for the generation of ‘data’. Dance offers an extended vocabulary of movements. Traditionally, the role of dance in a research project is to demonstrate a finding. This leads to a dance in a city site as an end product, an idea a choreographer has illustrated through a dance-performance. In our collaboration, rather than using dance to illustrate an existing idea, we use dance as a collecting tool for generating experiences and thus meanings within the city. Dance for us becomes a method of engaging with the city through moving around it. Dance highlights the methodological approach of emplacement (Akinleye, 2023), in which the felt experience is situated and becomes comprehensible through processes of intra-action: through time-space as motion (Nail, 2024). Thus, we use the activity of dance as a tool for being physically and sensorially engaged with city: as a tool to become aware of our situatedness. That being so we are not using engaging, intricate, or complicated dance sequences. For the most part, our dances could appear to be ‘augmented’ walking. The method of dance involves the following principles for defining dance (Akinleye, 2021 p. 14). Dance is understood as movement for movement’s sake (Movement as an end in itself). Dance is understood as a reflective biological sensation. Dance is understood as multiple configurations (movement that moves from and to any possible configuration of itself). Using these definitions of dance, dance becomes a tool for relational noticing. It renders sense-ible and physically felt the existing rhythms and relationships of the city. In doing so, the dynamic web of the city can begin to be revealed. Our presence dancing becomes entangled in that web, and the dance becomes a visible trace of our attunement to it. In the case of this research, dance was moving around the city for the purpose of moving (rather than having to get to somewhere specific, for instance). This method engaged the sensorial affordances of dance through the somatic sensation of being present in the environment of the city.

Lastly, dancing moving around the city was led by engagement and exchange with the structures we encountered. We made use of movement scores² to give parameters to the dance. In our case, a movement score might be to move through an area asking *where do I tear the fabric of the city, and where does the fabric of the city tear me?* In this score for a dance, we paid attention to touch places, we saw steps or corners of buildings worn by human traffic. We also noticed sites that were rough to our skin. In dance, we looked for meaning by engaging with these places seeing how many ways we could move on them, give the weight of our body to them, take material weight from them, and read the marks that other people had left to understand what logics of engagement seem to be demonstrated through those marks. This method required us to keep reflective diaries, collected and practiced physical movements and shapes we experienced when engaging in the dances. We took photographs, created images (see [Figure 1 & 2](#)), and wrote thick descriptions as aide-memoires for the sensation of being present with city objects.

Figure 1

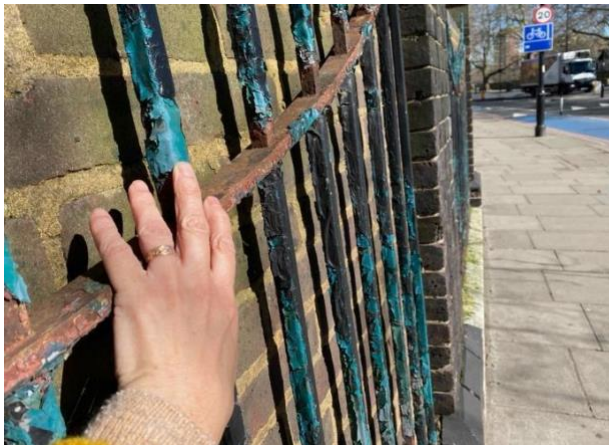
Image generated from the reflection of the authors in discussion with AI. 10/04/2025



² “A score is a guide for action, with varying degrees of prescriptiveness. A score is knowledge encoded in media – a guide for making music conceived by a composer in one context, read by a performer, and used by them as a prompt to do something that makes sense in their own context.” (Bingham-Hall, 2019)

Figure 2

Encountering the city. 15/04/2025. Credit: Akinleye



DISCUSSION: THREE QUESTION AREAS

Our interdisciplinary lens has created complications, such as finding funding. This led us to realise that a part of the research itself is articulating our interdisciplinary methodology, and the questions we seek to investigate (which we begin to do through this journal article). By developing a shared methodology, *tentacular-feminine-body*, we are at an exciting point in this interdisciplinary research. Thus, we have found the initial research process revealed itself, in part, through our explorations of how to articulate our shared questions of the city. These are questions we have in common yet have come about through our respective disciplines of urban studies and dance: which we see as two disciplines within a cluster of subjects engaged with spatial practices. Our goal as researchers in the humanities is to better understand the questions that drive a research project. We aim to research in order to better understand the nuances of our questions and to be led towards further inquiry. Within the creativity of urban design and dance, it is the process revealed by questions, not the product offered by answers, that illuminates the depth of our subjects: questions move us; answers settle us.

We write this paper to mark a point in our research. The “point” we have arrived at feels less like a milestone of completion and more like a threshold, a moment when the shape of the research, its identity, its gravity, and its direction begin to root themselves in the cross-pollination of urban studies and dance. It is a moment of emergence of methodology that leads to horizons that no longer appear scattered through being borrowed horizons from distinct disciplines. This is a moment of epistemic rooting: moving beyond the need to *justify* the interdisciplinary nature of the work and instead *inhabiting* it fully. A point where what was once “interdisciplinary” is now intra-disciplinary³, a relational subject that emerges through our shared questions, not external categories. Therefore, further ‘findings’ in this paper are *three areas of questions* that offer clarity through orientation rather than closure. They signal a threshold: from disciplinary navigation to embodied methodology. At this threshold, we recognise the notion of the *tentacular-feminine-body* as a concept for methodological encounter. This carries the research across disciplines, across bodies, across city, and self, threading the tactile with the conceptual. *Tentacular-feminine-body* is a figurative notion, not symbolic but sensorial, through which the boundary between subject and method dissolves. *Tentacular-feminine-body*, is a temporary conception for thinking and feeling through, existing between gesture and reflection. Thus, *tentacular-feminine-body* is the medium through which our research of the city breathes and reaches. *Tentacular-feminine-body* contextualises the conditions under which further questions of citizen/city arise. From this rooted threshold, we offer three questions that now guide the progression of our research.

Question of the grammar of the city

Through the intention of urban design, the city already offers a kind of spatial grammar (Hillier & Hanson, 1984; McKittrick, 2021; Sennett, 2018): a set of spatial, visual, and experiential rules that guide how the city is structured, perceived, and inhabited. Through this, underlying structures and intentions citizens’ movement is directed. Urban designs suggest syntax, a language of space, where choices create meaning, patterns, and possibilities for experiencing space. For instance, directing people past coffee shops in train station walkways gives the walkway a kind of syntax: a meaning for the movement that is carried out in it. To stop and stare at the

³ The use of the word intra-disciplinary is informed by Karen Barad, and the use of the term intra-action, to signify ‘the mutual constitution’ (Barad, 2007. p. 33)

ceiling in the walkway seems meaningless because it goes against the syntax of train/station/coffee movement. If we arrive in the station to carry out some dance choreography, a new syntax is overlaid on the walkway. For the period of the dance-choreography the logic of train/station/coffee is temporarily suspended, and the artistic rendering of the choreography brings different aspects of the design to the fore. Dance within urban design reveals a temporary new meaning arrangement that highlights certain aspects of the grammar of the design, while downplaying other aspects. This choreographic syntax responds to reframes and momentarily reshapes how we understand and engage with the environment (Akinleye, 2025). It raises questions about how the ontology of the city is crafted through its grammar and thus how the citizen is cast within that ontological paradigm. The cultural lens through which the city is experienced also nuances the syntax of the urban landscape. How we experience a city is given syntax by our Black and brown bodies every day. This includes the social anticipation of what our everyday presence means, and our learnt responses to how and when we can move within that social context as well as our own cultural meaning-making.

Our cultural lens and the lens society projects on how we are culturally identified are a part of the semantics of the city. Semantics are given syntax by movement. *Tentacular-feminine-body* begins to focus us on a sensorial web that ultimately navigates and connects geographies and materialities of the city while also responding to these multiple layers of syntax. In a sense, *tentacular-feminine-body* responds to and expands into memories and meanings as the city is traversed. Urban grammar can be resisted, adaptive, and contested. Through dance, new spatial imaginaries can emerge that resist hierarchical and rigid urban settings. *Tentacular-feminine-body* affords attention to an affective and atmospheric urban grammar which has an agency to mobilise. In our early explorations, urban grammar appears to be shaped and reshaped via multiple sensations, a construct between the body's materiality, ecology of the city, and citizen/city threshold of encounters. Leading us to these questions of the city as a dynamic porous threshold, space-time relations with cultural and political connotations. Questions that suggest city do not contain bodies, but relationships that activate or provoke tentacles. These questions of the grammar of the city examine how urban landscape is read and archived culturally and politically through movement. In our early investigations of the grammar of the city, we find our histories and notion of 'self' consciously rewritten, challenging the mainstream archives of our presence in the city.

Question of the feminine of the city

This question area begins with highlighting for us well researched existing issues of the daily experiences of feminine movement and presence in the city (Beebejaun, 2017; Criado Perez, 2019; Kern, 2020). These are questions activated by the persistence of injustices such as lack of cultural recognition, just distribution of resources, and equal participation in the decisions that shape the built environment (Fraser, 2013). This is rendered further by oppositional sexism that locks experience into a binary where the masculine is sought after and the feminine is defined by how it is not masculine (Serano, 2024). As a methodology, *tentacular-feminine-body* sustains the development of questions that highlight routes for noticing and foregrounding the relational and the receptive as generative forces through which the city itself is constituted. City then, is conceived of and interacted with as it meets, responds, and reaches, especially in how its grammar interacts with human movement. This generates questions that assume and mirror qualities often ascribed to the feminine in philosophical and ecological thought: receptivity as active and relational. The city does not simply hold or contain; it senses, shapes, and is shaped. This dynamic reciprocity aligns with epistemology often associated with the feminine, of care, touch, and co-creation. Our questions in this area lead us to consider how femininities' unspoken negotiations are archived as assertions, and reclamations that take place through multiple spatial encounters across different roles. *Tentacular-feminine-body* curates and mediates city as always being undone, reinterpreted, *danced* with, and continually archived. City through the lens of *tentacular-feminine-body* has the capacity to hold multiplicity, engage in reciprocity, and function as a site of encounter and transformation.

Our methodology acknowledges the possibility of exploring the city as dynamic, layered, porous, and situated in the relational. This methodological framework can offer allowances for recognising the city as engaged and present as an entity that receives, responds, refracts, and reaches. Moreover, questions of the feminine city emerge as a threshold space given shape by tentacle encounters. The spatial syntax of the city could be understood as both materially inscribed, through architecture and infrastructure, as well as culturally mediated, through social anticipation, racialized experience, and embodied memory. In this context, questions of the feminine city are critical orientations, a way of theorizing and practicing the city as a responsive ecology of relations, attentive to difference and the politics of presence.

Question of city archivist

In this research, bodies (human, architecture, and civic) in relation to each generate archival witnessing of their own presence. This archive is ephemeral, relational, and continuously reconstituted through movement,

encounter, and affect. City-body, public-body, and/or dancing-body store and express histories, temporalities, and social inscription through gesture, rhythm, posture, and refusal. This framing resonates with scholarship that treats the bodily as a mode of historical transmission, where bodies become sites of remembering, sensing, and re-inscribing lived experience (McKittrick, 2021). The human body, particularly racialized and female-gendered (such as our own), carries social anticipation and structural inscription, while also enacting modes of resistance and reconfiguration through tentacular responses and reaches. City-body, likewise, is an architectural archive of movement patterns, exclusions, migrations, and spatial grammar. To dance within the city is to activate these archives. Dance becomes a method of archival engagement, reading, reinterpreting, and sometimes rewriting the embodied memory held by the urban landscape. *Tentacular-feminine-body* methodology enters into dialogue with layers of history, power, and presence, raising the felt, which might otherwise shape but remain inarticulate as a responsive cue. Then the archival is not understood as a bounded past but as a living, moving, and co-created present, continuously shaped by the interrelation of bodies, structures, and atmospheric cues.

We conceive of the city as responsive, framed through the methodology of *tentacular-feminine-body*. In this, all bodies are archival, created through the archiving of the sensorial and of responses to the sensorial: tentacularly reaching, remembering, and reforming through entangled relations, movements, and perceptions. City echoes, conducts, reflects, and co-creates the archive that forms citizens: each encounter, each architectural texture, each movement across them, citizen/city becomes part of a sensorial memory, a response woven into form. The city is forever entangled in the bodies that move through it and the grammar that shape it. The urban archive is the living relationship between citizen and city, where encounters, textures, and movements leave embodied traces. *Tentacular-feminine-body* archivist advances the relational as a design resource composed of sensation, memory, and proximity. The methodological *tentacular-feminine-body* allows us to consider how design might be informed by collaborative archives of the continual relational weave of citizen/city.

CONCLUSION

Exhale into the city now, no longer only place but moving within it, tentacular, responsive, entangled. Our research offers a way to trace and to respond. Through breath, gesture, and proximity, the syntax of design overlays a temporary arrangement of meaning onto the site of *tentacularity*. This meaning arises from the entanglements of the material and the ephemeral, the human and the more-than-human, the built and the sensed. City's grammar reconfiguring us, but our tentacular-feminine-body is not a metaphor, it is a method—an epistemic vehicle through which sensation becomes knowledge. It becomes a way to know and to remember Place. Our questions remain open, stretching forward, like tentacles shaping the possibilities of belonging through motion. However, our interest now is in how we create from within the spaces our questions illuminate.

I breathe in the cool March air of North West London as I step through the train tube doors onto a quiet platform. After months away, this moment is the first when my body reaches into fully drinks in my presence here, back in London. The hair on my arms quiver at a growing breeze—a particular tinge of damp cold that bathes the pores of my brown skin in recognition. My body, an archive of the sensorial, responds instinctively to the city's atmospheric cues: a familiarity I relax into. I struggle with the weight of my bags as I ascend the stairs from the platform. Someone almost runs into me, transfixed on the train about to leave, a choreography of urban movement that underscores the station's spatial grammar. The street tickles my nose follicles, an archive of aroma: past memories of traffic on thousands of roads crossed, chips eaten late at night, Buddleia flowering in the cracks of city walls, and the early morning scent of commuters that have pushed past me to the tube system with damp hair and hot coffee. These scents and sensations are tentacular extensions of the city's body, reaching into mine, entwining our shared histories. As people push past me, with my heavy case, ascending into the London morning, I remember myself here. I remember my Place: my presence, fragilities, refusals, joys: sensations contribute to an ever-evolving archive, a testament to the unfolding process of tentacular potentiality.

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Biographical sketch

Dr. Adesola Akinleye is an interdisciplinary artist-scholar and choreographer. They began their career as a dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem Workshop Ensemble (USA) and later worked with UK companies including Green Candle and the Carol Straker Dance Company. Their work spans film, installations, texts, and live performances, often site-specific and developed with diverse communities. Akinleye's practice explores lived experiences through creative moving portraiture and draws on Afro-Indigenous worldviews that value community, relationality, and polyrhythm. They are founder and co-artistic director of Dancing Strong Movement Lab and Associate Professor of Dance at Texas Woman's University, where they direct the PhD in Dance Program.

Dr Elabe Karimnia is an interdisciplinary urban scholar working at the intersection of spatial practice, social justice, and design. Her work explores the value and quality of publicness in cities as it is shaped, contested, and reimagined. Karimnia has worked as an architect and urban designer in Tehran and taught across a range of urban design studios and theory modules at KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Stockholm) and Central Saint Martins (London). Karimnia is a Senior Lecturer in Critical Urban Practice at the School of Architecture and Environment, University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol.

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