



# FOSTERING RESILIENCE THROUGH EARTHED MOVEMENT PRACTICE







Type of output:  
Performance

by  
Liz Pavey

Left: Earthed. Grand Gestures  
Dance Collective (GGDC)  
and university students  
experimenting in performance  
at *Take Your Seats*.

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# SUMMARY

This body of research by Pavey encompasses projects *Take Your Seats* and *Green Grass* which investigated how movement practice with furniture, artificial grass and architectural environments can foster resilience. Together these works explored human fragilities, capabilities and potentials through investigating moving beyond habitual patterns of embodiment. Creating space to reflect on our ontology and interconnectedness with the wider ecology, the PaR probed questions concerning our lived relationship to the earth by fostering understandings of how we are affected by our immediate environment.

Situated within the fields of improvised and sited dance/performance and informed by phenomenology, somatics, theories of place/space and discourses of liveliness and thing-ness in the world, the research drew on developments in ergonomics (Opsvik 2009, RAAAF 2014) that encourage movement in sitting and reclining.

Playful dance improvisations and participatory experiences were used to investigate manners of sitting, reclining, rolling and resting in order to reveal and challenge established norms of behaviours and embodied memories. Key was a methodology of lively play and processes which allowed for slowness and stillness, being and contemplation.

Pavey curated and performed in an event *Take Your Seats* (Shipley Art Gallery 2016), delivered workshops for d.i.n.e. (2014) and Interlude (2017), and created and participated in further performances of *Take Your Seats on Campus* (at 'Transformations' medical humanities symposium, 2016) and *Take a Pew* (INHABIT Performance Art Week, Hexham Abbey 2017). She performed in *Same Difference: Equinox to Equinox* (Sele Park, Hexham 2016), and she conceived and realized *Green Grass*, a longitudinal public practice with culminating performance (Great Exhibition of the North FRINGE 2018).

## INTRODUCTION

The ground seemed a long way away, another domain that sometimes we can habit for instance when camping, on the beach or perhaps on a summer's day in the park with friends but not alone in the evening.

*Will it be safe?... Will it be dirty?... Will I just look crazy?...*

The struggle to get down... then lying right down... watching the swallows darting across the sky.

Walking home feeling grounded...

Coming indoors and immediately wanting to lie down on the floor in my bay window to look up at the sky.

*Sinking into the experience.*

Pavey, L. (2018) 'Green Grass DAY 1 Friday 22nd June' artists journal.

# TIMELINE

2014	2016	2017	2018
<p>JULY Workshop for d.i.n.e. (dance improvisation north east) a collective of independent dance artists. <a href="https://danceimprovnorth-east.wordpress.com/">https://danceimprovnorth-east.wordpress.com/</a></p>	<p>FEBRUARY <i>Take Your Seats</i> event, Shipley Art Gallery.</p> <p>JUNE <i>Take Your Seats</i> on Campus performance as part of 'Transformations' medical humanities symposium.</p> <p>SEPTEMBER Pavey performed in <i>Same Difference: Equinox to Equinox</i>.</p>	<p>FEBRUARY <i>Take a Pew</i> two-day durational performance, Hexham Abbey.</p> <p>Workshop for <i>Interlude</i>, a student/artist ran space. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Interlude.Northumbria/">https://www.facebook.com/Interlude.Northumbria/</a></p>	<p>JULY - SEPTEMBER <i>Green Grass</i> ongoing public practice and culminating performance, Great Exhibition of the North FRINGE.</p>



# RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Pavey's research sought to investigate the generation of personal and collective resilience through bringing attention to the reciprocal relationship between body/self and environment. The PaR explored of the manifold possibilities of human bodies in motion and repose working beyond familiar and normalised embodied patterns of behaviour.

## The project asked:

How can improvised movement practice foster awareness of, and reflect upon, personal habits and choices in relation to everyday activities of sitting and resting?

What can playfulness, slowness and stillness contribute to promoting exploration beyond established personal and culturally shared patterns of behaviour?

What insights can such practices bring forward to positively impact on our wellbeing?



Above: Motion and Repose. Liz Pavey, Claire Pençak and Karen Rann investigating embodiment in relation to the artificial grass slope in *Green Grass*.

# CONTEXT

It is now recognised that there is convincing evidence that “sitting down too much is a risk to health” (NHS 2020), while “before the chair spread across the world, humanity had the greatest repertory of postures of any species” (Tenner 2003). Technologies including chairs constrain human behaviour and disconnect people from the ground establishing “a technological foundation for the separation of thought from action and of mind from body” (Ingold 2011: 39). Pavey’s work counters this situation not through attempting to remove sitting affordances but through entering into physical dialogues with them, creating performances and workshop environments in which the participant can “encounter things only from [their] own thingly position in the midst of them” (Abram 2010: 45).

In the progressive ergonomic of designer Peter Opsvik sitting affordances promote motion in which the chair should “work as an intermediary between the dynamic body and our static architectural surroundings” (Opsvik 2009). A key underlying premise of the research is that in oscillating between the everyday (‘simply’ sitting) and the extraordinary (playful creative practice, expressive dance) there lies the potential for a thoroughgoing reassessment of personal habits of embodiment and an opening up to alternative physical potentials.

The research has involved working in partnership with many individuals and organisations, and engaging people of different ages and backgrounds as performers, workshop participants and event attendees/audience. Collaborating with Paula Turner’s Grand Gestures Dance Collective (GGDC) enabled the inclusion of mature performers alongside, and interacting with, younger university students.



Left: Habits of embodiment.  
An audience member sits watching at *Take Your Seats*.



Below: Playful practice.  
Exploring thingness and the extraordinary in joyful performance at *Take Your Seats*.

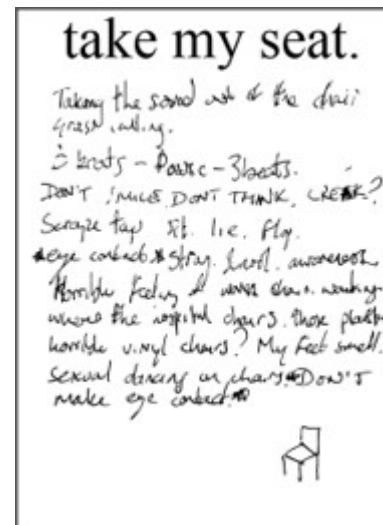


# METHODS AND PROCESSES

Pavey facilitated workshops for dancers (d.i.n.e.), fine artists (Interlude), and the general public (*Take Your Seats*). Through verbally-guided discovery, participants worked with their eyes closed, exploring chairs through stillness and slowness. Opening awareness and attention to felt sensations (chairs' texture, shape, density, support/ stability) and to noticing triggered recollections of memories of sitting experiences, workshops offered participants new perspectives upon habitual practice.

Far Right: Awareness of body-chair relationships. Drawings created by participant dancer/artist Angela Kennedy during the d.i.n.e. workshop.

Right: Workshop notes by Interlude participant Ed Lawrenson subsequently used in a poster for a Gallery North Project Space archive.



Pavey's event *Take Your Seats* centred on performances where a multi-generational ensemble dialogued with chairs primarily sourced from a theatre props store. Designer Morehead's verbal introduction drew attention to embodiment and somatic memory. Through rigorous playfulness the improvisations presented extraordinary possibilities of how to rest, perch, slump, and be seated. Strategies included investigation of body organisation and intention in sitting, and echo or contrast of sitting postures observed in other performers, watchers, and figures in gallery artworks. Other elements of *Take Your Seats* offered perspectives on chairs as things to be used or observed, as a disconnect from the ground, or as intermediary between body and earth.



Top right: **Alternative possibilities.**  
a performer crouches on a chair  
while artist Angela Kennedy sketches  
sitting low to the floor at  
*Take Your Seats*.

**Sitting in life and in art,**  
at *Take Your Seats*.

Bottom right: **Alternative possibilities.** Liz Pavey wears a chair  
in performance at *Take Your Seats*.

**Chair as intermediary,**  
improvisation at *Take Your Seats*.





**Take Your Seats**  
Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016

How much of your life do you spend sitting? What do you choose to sit on? What does your favourite chair say about you? What is your experience of the seats life gives us – at work, on transport, in social settings....? Could you live without chairs?

Welcome to *Take Your Seats*, a day of movement, stillness, music, art and design: a chance to reflect on the everyday act of sitting and to enjoy the Shipley Art Gallery.

*Before the chair spread across the world, humanity had the greatest repertory of postures of any species.*  
Edward Tenner 'Our Own Devices'

**Programme of Events:** (please turn over for details)

11.00 Welcome by Liz Pavey, Talk by Sarah Morehead

11.15 Dance Performance

11.45 Storiella vocal trio

12.30 Workshop with Liz Pavey (in the Lounge)

1.15 Talk by Sarah Morehead

1.30 Dance Performance

2.00 Storiella vocal trio

2.45 Performance/Talk by Jane Arnfield

3.15 Talk by Sarah Morehead

3.30 Dance Performance

**Throughout the day:**

- Exhibition of chairs and other sitting devices by Northumbria School of Design (Gallery D)
- Live installation: a performance of the human body sitting in quiet contemplation. Observe, reflect, or pull up a chair and join the sitters for a while. Sitters will include David Atkinson, Solomon Lennox, Tim Rubidge, Lucy Pagliaro, and Kira Street. (Gallery E)
- Screening of short films showing the work of innovative chair designer Peter Opsvik and research by Dr. Erik Rietveld and collaborators on 'The End of Sitting' (The Lounge)
- Sitting and... sketching by Angela Kennedy.... quilting by Denise Kerr



*The chair should... work as an intermediary between the dynamic body and our static architectural surroundings. If our clothes are our second skin, we could say that chairs have now become our third skin...* Peter Opsvik 'Rethinking Sitting'

**Talk by Sarah Morehead:** *How our bodies know our minds, sitting and the chair* Sarah Morehead, Programme Leader for Performance Product Design at Northumbria University, will talk about the relationship between our bodies and the environment reflecting on our physical encounters with chairs and how these shape our somatic bodily knowledge. (Talk given three times during the day.)

**Dance performance:** three improvisations by Grand Gestures Dance Collective and Northumbria University performing arts students led by dance artists Liz Pavey and Paula Turner with live improvised music by John Kefala-Kerr (11.15am), Karen Rann (1.30pm), and Caroline Hoile and Martin Hoile (3.30pm). Using simple everyday actions of sitting, shifting within chairs, arriving into and leaving chairs, the performance explore the body's relationship to seating, inviting the audience to reconsider the everyday. Come and go as you please, or settle down and watch the whole improvisation.

**Storiella vocal trio:** open rehearsal of contemporary folk singing by this group of singers who usually rehearse in a living room, where they stand or enjoy a comfy seat or carpet to sing from. Their material is inspired by artists such as The Wailin' Jennys, Silly Sisters, Sting, and the Poozies, singer-songwriter Judie Tzuke, and US-based alternative rock outfit Sleeping At Last. Enjoy refreshments while you watch.

**Workshop:** a guided discovery of sitting with Liz Pavey, Senior Lecturer in Dance at Northumbria University. This is an opportunity to participate in an informal workshop experiencing sitting through movement and relaxation. No prior experience needed. Speak to a member of staff to reserve a place.

**Performance/Talk by Jane Arnfield:** actor & Reader in Arts at Northumbria University Jane Arnfield will talk about the significance of the chair in her solo show 'The Tin Ring' by Zdenka Fantlova and performing excerpts of movement from the play.

*Where the boot, in reducing the activity of walking to the activity of a stepping machine, deprives wearers of the possibility of thinking with their feet, the chair enables sitters to think without involving the feet at all. Between them, the boot and the chair establish a technological foundation for the separation of thought from action and of mind from body.*  
Tim Ingold 'Being Alive'

With thanks to Hannah Mackay-Jackson and the Shipley Art Gallery, Elisa Adams, Northumbria University, and everyone involved.



Above: *Take Your Seats* programme.



Above: **Sitting to craft.** Denise Kerr sitting to quilt at *Take Your Seats*.

Above: **Embodying extraordinary possibilities,** actor Jane Arnfield performing at *Take Your Seats*.



Above: **Performance of the human body sitting in quiet contemplation.** Tim Rubidge, Solomon Lenox and David Atkinson in live installation at *Take Your Seats*, inviting visitors to observe, reflect, or pull up a chair and join the sitters for a while.



Above: **Child-like playfulness.** A young audience member joins in the improvised performance.



Methods were further honed through ensemble performances with ancient and modern sitting affordances found within academic and religious contexts. In *Take Your Seats on Campus* at Medical Humanities symposium ‘Transformations’ and *Take a Pew*, Hexham Abbey, playful and contemplative practice extended beyond normalised modes of being in these locations.



Right: **Manifold possibilities of bodies in motion and repose.**  
Liz Pavey, Paula Turner and GGDC  
in [\*Take Your Seats on Campus\*](#).  
(Video by Frances Anderson).



Below: **Earthed.** Audience members  
at *Take Your Seats on Campus*.





Top and middle left: **Sitting in Church.** Liz Pavey performing with members of GGDC in *Take a Pew*.

Bottom left: **Beyond the norm.** Liz Pavey and Paula Turner in *Take a Pew*.

Above left: Inhabit publicity.

Above right: **Beyond the norm.** Liz Pavey and Paula Turner in *Take a Pew*.

Joining 11 other artists each working with one chair in performance art event *Same Difference: Equinox to Equinox* enabled Pavey to extend exploration of thingness, stability and instability.



ne  
on  
neon arts



Above: Liz Pavey performing with a folding chair in Neon Arts' performance for Bbeyond's global event *Same Difference: Equinox to Equinox* (<https://vimeo.com/185720107>).



In *Green Grass* Pavey developed a regular practice of resting and rolling along an artificial grass slope in a public square - alone or with others - challenging expectations of behaviour within a civic location. Focusing on somatic process over progression, practice fostered the intelligence of the body to respond in the moment sensing changes in environment and personal wellbeing.



Above: *Green Grass* Publicity image, close up of the artificial grass slope.



Above: **Challenging expectations.**  
Liz Pavey, Claire Pençak and Karen Rann  
rolling and resting in *Green Grass*.



# DISSEMINATION

d.i.n.e. workshop <https://danceimprovnortheast.wordpress.com/past-workshops/>

*Take Your Seats* <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/news/2016/02/ladies-and-gentlemen-take-your-seats/>

*Take Your Seats on Campus* [vimeo link](#)

<https://www.centreformedicalhumanities.org/transformations-sharing-knowledge-territories-practices-medical-humanities-conference-northumbria-university-28th-june-2016/>

*Same Difference: Equinox to Equinox*  
<https://vimeo.com/185720107>

*Take a Pew* 'Inhabit: Performance Art Project Week'  
<http://www.hexham-courant.co.uk/news/16618736.performance-art-ists-inhabit-the-town-centre/>

Interlude workshop <https://www.facebook.com/Interlude.Northumbria/>

*Green Grass* <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/events/2018/06/green-grass/>

<https://lizpaveydance.wordpress.com/green-grass/>

## Sample responses from attendees to Take Your Seats:

The people involved in the performance when the chairs were brought in and moved were so diverse... a variety of ages and movement skills. I could relate to how they moved and what they were doing because some were as unskilled or skilled in movement as I am. I remember I enjoyed the quiet meditation of sitting by ones self, observing others, or even closing your eyes and feeling the seat, the floor giving support to your legs the buzz of what was happening around you. **It is not often you can do these things in a public place.**

Amanda Goreham

Seeing such fascinating and arresting activity and movement around chairs, and so many sitting and standing postures around such every-day fixtures, encouraged me to be more mindful in the way that I used them. It made me think more about how I sat, as well as how often, and the way I placed myself into seated postures. This is a daily activity normally done without thought so I found this to be a valuable moment to bring awareness where normally there is little or none. In turn, this helps with better posture and therefore makes a contribution toward well being.

Jennifer Hinves, Independent Creative Producer

Feedback from Hannah Mackay Jackson, Project Co-ordinator, The Shipley Art Gallery:

Take Your Seats was a well-received public event. It enabled visitors to experience different artforms from the usual exhibition programme. The event was a unique and stimulating addition to the gallery's events programme. It helped the gallery to develop new audiences, and offered an appealing and interesting event which regular visitors happened upon. The combination of performance, workshops, installations, talks and film screening created a diverse and multifaceted event. As a result, participants, passersby and even gallery staff were prompted to reconsider the act of sitting and engage in stimulating discussion.

# REFERENCES

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Hannah MacKay-Jackson and the Shipley Art Gallery.

Sarah Morehead, Jane Arnfield, David Atkinson, Dr. Solomon Lennox, Tim Rubidge, Storiella, Elisa Adams, Lucy Pagliaro, Kira Street, Denise Kerr, John Kefala-Kerr, Caroline Hoile, Martin Hoile, Dr. Erik Rietveld, Bethany Bratby, Amelia Eatough, Evy Kirtley.

Neon Arts and Helen Collard, Grace Denton, David Fudge, Richard James Hall, Joanna Hutton, Sandra Johnston, Simon Raven, Sarah Riseborough, James Routledge, Francesca Steele, and James Watts.

Hexham Abbey

Georgia Bates and Interlude participants



Above: Interacting with chairs.  
GGDC and university students at  
*Take Your Seats*.

