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# Sanctuary on the fault line: environmental dance practice as liminal critique and refuge

Andrew Sanger 

*This article argues that the COVID-19 pandemic engendered a sort of global, yet unequal, liminal phenomenon. Further, ritual and performance may occur as responses to such liminal crises and act as a form of Turnerian social drama, whereby mankind attempts to ‘relive, re-create, retell, and reconstruct their culture’ (St John 2008, 6). Confronted with such a socio-environmental crisis, London-based dancer Hayley Matthews attempted to harness this inchoate potentiality, as well as her own vulnerability, to critique the structures under which she lived before. First, I introduce Matthews’ work and the network of women performing outdoors she founded, ‘Sanctuary on the Fault Line’. Ethnographic descriptions of Matthew’s performance provide contextual illustrations of her motivations and ambitions as she seeks to ‘rewild dance’. The article demonstrates how communities of practice and liminality act as useful frameworks to examine green training methodologies which attempt to critique some of the economic, social, and environmental barriers dance artists face in the UK. Examining Sanctuary as an anti-structural case-study developed during a liminal re-examination of social structure provides a significant glimpse into the complicated tension between the ideals of egalitarian eco-narratives and the regimented structures they attempt to circumvent.*

**Keywords:** dance, environment, community, liminality, COVID-19

## Introduction: COVID-19 and sanctuary

This article suggests that the depth of the pandemic, with the repeated series of lockdowns and massive deviations from a previously accepted standard way of daily life, acted as a sort of global liminal phenomenon. Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the limen as (Figure 1).

an interval, however brief, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of



**Figure 1.** Sign notifying a Sanctuary on the Fault Line performance. Photo by author.

pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance (1979, 41).

Conversation during this suspended period of lockdowns and isolations contained shared language; anxious attempts to conceive an image of a 'new normal'. While there may have been little agreement on what had changed, what might be reclaimable, or what needed to be abandoned, there was a tenuous consensus that we could not return to the past and the future was terrifyingly uncertain. Turner also argued that ritual or performative events may occur as responses to such crises and act as a form of social drama, whereby humankind attempts to 'relive, re-create, retell, and reconstruct their culture' (St John 2008, 6). For many in the UK, ritual events, identified by Turner to include performance, music, film, sports, and literature, became refuges which provided purpose and connection to those traumatised and isolated by the pandemic. One such refuge birthed during this period was the work of London-based dancer Hayley Matthews. Hayley attempted to dwell within this potentiality, and her own vulnerability, to critique the structures under which she lived before and find a home in the newly deepened social cracks. The network that was born of this liminal moment sought to create a sustainable community of practice, but like many liminal movements, its form was both revolutionary and ephemeral.

In the telling of this story, I first introduce the work of Hayley Matthews and the organisation she founded, Sanctuary on the Fault Line (Sanctuary) as well as outline some of the impacts of COVID-19 on dance in the United Kingdom to illustrate the gravity of economic and existential loss Hayley and others encountered. Next, I provide ethnographic descriptions of Hayley's performances to provide contextual evidence to further expound her motivations and ambitions. Etienne Wenger's concept of 'communities of practice',<sup>1</sup> alongside Turnerian liminality, provides an additional framework to understand the goals, outcomes, and limitations of Sanctuary. Ultimately this article evaluates the liminal potentiality of Sanctuary itself and its confrontation with wider structural resistance which complicated its revolutionary dreamings. Examining Sanctuary as an attempt to develop an anti-structural project during a liminal re-examination of social structure provides a significant glimpse of the complicated tension between the egalitarian eco-narratives present in some forms of green training, or environmental dance practices,<sup>2</sup> and the regimented structures they critique.

1 Wenger's model acts as an analytical framework, not a comparative tool or standard to be measured against.

2 I use the term 'environmental dance' here to describe movement practices that not only occur outdoors, but also feature human-landscape relationships as essential to their artistic method and investigations.

3 Roling is a type of bodywork therapy that focuses on realignment of fascia and connective tissue to alleviate pain and discomfort. It was created by Dr Ida P. Rolf. More information about Roling can be found at <https://www.rolf.org>.

4 Additional information about Hayley and ENSEMBLE can be found on her website <https://www.ensembledance.org/about>.

### Sanctuary on the fault line, COVID-19 and dance

Hayley Matthews is a British freelance contemporary dancer and Rolfer.<sup>3</sup> She works primarily between London and Norwich where she offers one-to-one Roling sessions as a somatic therapist. Hayley provides Roling sessions to assist individuals suffering from chronic pain, trauma, or stress through analysing postural alignment and the promotion of easeful movement. Her performance work, both solos and collaborations, are housed under the moniker *Ensemble Dans-Tank*.<sup>4</sup> Following her early studies in fine art and material culture, in 2006 Hayley studied at the Noyam African Contemporary Dance Institute in Ghana before independently continuing her dance training across Europe. She now primarily teaches and performs across the UK. Hayley is also the initiator and caretaker of Sanctuary on the Fault Line. Sanctuary was a global network of professional dancing women which Hayley formed during the summer of 2020. While its purpose and form shifted continually, Sanctuary was a primarily digital network for female-identifying artists to share skills and support each other in the creation and promotion of outdoor dance performances. It also provided a space for Hayley and others to discuss, develop, and debate their individual movement practices physically and philosophically. Membership size shifted but was usually under a dozen artists who met online monthly, at annual hybrid 'lab' events, or attended each other's performance work. I attended many of these meetings, labs, and performances with the permission of Hayley and the other network members. My positions both as a movement practitioner interested in outdoor dance work and as a social science researcher were recognised and welcomed by the group despite not identifying as female. This article examines Hayley's motivations and practice which supported the development of the network as well as the moments of conflict and structural resistance which led to the formal network's eventual closure.

Earlier that spring, Hayley, and many in the performing arts community, were hit exceptionally hard by the sudden and absolute loss of all work and related income with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the UK 55% of jobs in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation were furloughed, second only to Accommodation and Food at 56%; whereas the national industry average was only 16% (Chamberlain and Morris 2021). Furthermore, these record numbers of layoffs fail to account for the high prevalence of self-employed individuals working in the arts, where much needed support was both delayed and more complicated than for those who were furloughed by an employer. Only 54% of 181,000 self-employed people in the arts were deemed eligible, and only 62% of those eligible in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation made claims on the Self-Employment Income Support Stream (SEISS). A report completed by the University of Sheffield argued that this percentage is much lower than expected given the impact on the industry and that the complexity of the eligibility requirements not only deterred some individuals from applying, but also left many ineligible individuals who ‘fell through the cracks’ and didn’t qualify for either the SEISS or Furlough schemes. The report noted that ‘Many creatives move between employment and self-employment or do both at the same time’ (ibid 2021). The ‘dynamism and versatility’ that the sector demands of artists ended up disqualifying many of them from both SEISS or Furlough or left them ‘only been able to claim small amounts of support.’ The actor’s union, Equity, wrote that ‘Most creative workers are self-employed with no recourse to the furlough scheme, yet 40% were excluded from the SEISS. Of those that were able to access the scheme, 59% did not find it sufficient to meet their basic needs’<sup>5</sup> (Equity 2021). As a freelance artist Hayley was one of the individuals who struggled to receive any governmental support during the coronavirus pandemic while the precarious foundations and funding streams that she and many other artists relied on were ripped apart. Sanctuary was Hayley’s attempt to survive, and flourish, within these social cracks.

In the depths of this loss, Hayley devoted her daily allotted outdoor exercise time to developing and maintaining her performance practice through running and other physical training methods. Unable to access studio space, she was now limited to Hampstead Heath which she was fortunate to have available just outside her home. While Hayley was eventually able to secure support through Universal Credit, there was a period of six weeks where her Universal Credit got pulled and she had nothing. Recounting the experience to me in her flat, she described how during one of her runs through the heath she felt herself begin to cry and was overwhelmed not by self-pity, but out of concern for her place in society. She recited wondering: ‘What if I can’t give the thing that I need to give? And what if I can’t rest either?’. For Hayley, dance is a gift that dancers give to the world. She strongly believes that dancers provide a vital service to society. She argues that dancers can ‘remind people what true power is, which is our bodies moving in the world’ through watching their performances and that these experiences play an important role in ‘the tapestry of our emotional lives ... which have an effect on our physical health’. Hayley was mourning an attack on her sense of self-worth, ‘all these voices were telling me I had nothing

5 “Open letter to Chancellor” Equity | BBC news report 26 Jan 2021.

that was worth anything.’ Prior to this loss, she had just received the Thea Barnes Legacy award for leadership in dance in the US and UK and was overcome with a felt calling to respond and act.

So, amid the self-doubt and introspection of the summer of 2020, Hayley performed in her neighbour’s garden while they watched from their balconies. The performances later moved to a wooded part of Hampstead Heath under an isolated grove of beech trees. At first, she could only invite five people to stay within the ‘rule of six’ set during the pandemic. During these performances she witnessed her neighbours and friends being moved to tears watching her perform and she recognised the potential for her dancing to heal and connect. This is one aspect of ‘the gift’ Hayley feels dancers share with their audiences. Instead of allowing herself to fall deeper into despair, she continued to host these intimate, local performances. The performances and their effects enabled Hayley to recognise she was touching ‘the bottom of the well of a very deep thing’ that had long been troubling her: the agency, or lack thereof, of dancers and their craft. Sanctuary was ultimately about recapturing and advocating for the agency of women dancers; providing them with structure and community to support themselves, develop their art, and provide opportunities to share their gifts. Hayley described Sanctuary as a ‘Global Fugitive Network’ of professional women dancers making ‘wild dances’. For Hayley, Sanctuary was a way to share and empower other women dancers with what she learned during this period, to create a wide community of dancers performing outdoors for local audiences and supporting themselves *via* a gift economy rather than the unending cycle of grant applications and fickle whims of funding bodies.<sup>6</sup> Hayley, while grateful, also felt restrained by the repetitive cycle of grant applications that fund many independent artists. She felt that the arcane process of churning out huge grant applications along with the requirements and parameters tied to successful projects made her feel like a ‘dance machine’ or a ‘dance factory’ just to receive the financial support to create her work and obtain basic subsistence.

Hayley credits her work as a Rolfer, helping people to uncover and ‘move through whatever inhibits them from moving through life pain-free’, in assisting her to realise that these funding structures were inhibiting her and her fellow dancers. Rolfing taught Hayley how to observe and critique structural alignment to support easeful movement, which in turn cultivated a sensitivity to noticing other forms of seen or felt structure which might be inhibiting movement from a place of freedom and grace. Living in a permanent sense of precarity made her feel that she was never able to truly express her work authentically. The lack of authenticity therefore limited her ability to demonstrate feelings of extension, lift, and freedom that she felt audience members needed to experience. Only a liberated dancer could authentically move with grace and transmit this quality to her audiences. Ultimately, the pandemic intensified the lack of foundation Haley felt as a professional artist in the UK and felt that she needed to step up as a leader to cultivate a

6 The concept of the gift economy is well documented in dance studies (cf Franko 2004; Bench 2020). In this case study, dancers would perform and accept donations or ‘gifts’ in lieu of ticket sales. As will be discussed later, the viability of this method as a form of sustenance was a point of contention for the group. It is interesting to note that similarly in the summer of 2021, dance artists Katye Coe and Thomas Goodwin ran their annual series of ecologically focused movement workshops through a gift economy but later abandoned that model as unsustainable in later years. There is much to be written about the nuances and complexities of running a gift economy but is beyond the scope of this article. Further research and analysis of this recurring phenomenon would be welcome.

7 Hayley describes Sanctuary as a 'feminist movement' because it 'makes space for the feminine' as defined by Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992). This definition of feminism may diverge from other discourses of feminism focused on equal civil rights and instead seeks to elevate a wild, instinctual, passionate, and creative force that author describes as the feminine.

8 A trailer of the work can be watched here: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/sotffilms>

feminist<sup>7</sup> approach for how dance is produced and shared. Hayley's particular feminist approach sought to liberate dance from structures of ownership which meant a dancer had to 'ask' to perform. Instead, Sanctuary artists produced 'wild dances' which could happen anywhere and anytime. In these wild dances, dancers would go outside and perform locally to circumvent the need for funding bodies through eschewing formal theatre spaces and asking the public to support individual dancers financially through gifts rather than through ticket sales. Additionally, Hayley felt passionately that Sanctuary members would be made stronger and more resilient through organising as a community to share resources, skills, and audiences.

During its peak, Sanctuary on the Fault Line hosted gift economy links and support for eleven dancers in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Greece. Sanctuary ran three week-long conferences/residential training in Norfolk to woman-identifying dancers each January. The first of which was free to attend and funded through National Lottery Community Fund, the second was minimal cost and funded through Arts Council England, whereas the third ran entirely off participant fees. Sanctuary also secured Arts Council funding for the core group of organisers to create films of their performance work.<sup>8</sup> Hayley periodically organised monthly digital meetings for Sanctuary members to share best practices, discuss challenges, and support each other's work. Hayley's personal performance philosophy and the development of Sanctuary act as a case study to examine how when structures of support collapse, communities may be imagined and developed in response to that collapse, making homes, uncovering questions, and provoking thought in the cracks. It is important to recognize that communal practice is also a standard essential component in many of the environmental dance trainings in the UK such as Thomas Goodwin and Katy Coe's *Kinship Workshops*, Sandra Reeve's *Move into Life*, and Simon Whitehead's *Locator* workshops. However, Sanctuary must be understood as a product of a particular moment in time and is representative of attempts to seek community and connection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This timing provides particular insight into the liminal function of fleeting communities of practice and the structures they both evade and engender.

### *Lakes of Anima*

The first performance I saw of Hayley's took place on Hampstead Heath, nestled inside a cloistered beech grove. The performance, titled *Lakes of Anima*, began at dusk. Start time of the performance would shift slightly as the months went by to stay in line with the fading of twilight into early night; this way Hayley's performance would gradually shepherd us into darkness. When I arrived at the grove the wind carried an encroaching autumnal chill. The bare ground characteristic of beech groves lacked a soft herbaceous underlayer to cushion the hard earth, so I huddled against the back of one of the beeches. There were only a few people at this performance, attended mostly by Hayley's neighbours and friends from Qigong or Tai Chi. Her husband had set up a single theatre light



**Figure 2.** Hayley Matthews preparing to begin *Lakes of Anima* in Hampstead Heath. Photo by author.

illuminating part of the forest floor; the contrast of light and dark creating a shadowy curtain obscuring the underbrush behind her. The performance began with two of early modern dancer Isadora Duncan's solos, the *Mother's Etude* (1921), and *The Revolutionary* (1923) (Figure 2).

The two Duncan solos that open *Lakes of Anima* are about loss and rage respectively, demonstrating a transformation of deep grief into a force for change. The work then shifts to Hayley's own choreography showcasing her creative force as an artist. Utilising repetitive gestures and strong use of directed focus, this section was emotive and hopeful. Despite being stationary for most of this section, the use of both subtle and direct changes in gaze illustrated shifts between internal and external stimuli. Nearing the end of the work, Hayley's gestures increase in speed and complexity, crafting a rising sense of effort and tension. Eventually the repetition slows, and she gently raises her gaze up towards the bare canopy.

I reflexively felt my own gaze lift in response. The gradual onset of darkness had escaped my notice, as my focus on Hayley as a solo performer had slowly shrunk my experience of space onto the small patch of disturbed earth and partly covered roots she danced on. As I mirrored her shift of focus upwards, I noticed the lower branches of the beeches illuminated by the powerful light below and was suddenly shaken with an extraordinary sense of awe at the vastness of the trees and the night sky. There was a dramatic shift in the sense of scale: Hayley's body was abruptly dwarfed, and the audience by extension, by the giants we sheltered underneath. Hayley's gaze had taken me out of the sheltered grove and flung into the capacious night sky.

Following the performance, I spoke with a few of the people in the audience before they began to wander home in the dark. One described Hayley's movement as 'not animalistic but reminds me that we are animals. It is sensual and ecstatic; it is a gift that she shares with us' echoing Hayley's own stance. Another audience member said, 'Her energy resonates beyond the performance and helps me feel connected – especially during the pandemic.' Each of the audience members I spoke with repeatedly attended the same performance as it developed over time. Renate, one of the Qigong practitioners, had already attended six of Hayley's dances in Hampstead when we spoke later in November 2020. When I asked why she returned, Renate said that Hayley's dancing had a very profound effect on her, that it was a visceral, arresting experience. Hayley's embodied emotional presence affected her deeply, and it continued to do so each time she returned. She felt that the location played an important role in that efficacy. Renate recounted 'there's a particular kind of presence here on the heath that she connects to ... sometimes it's almost as though there's no separation with her and her environment. She's so at one with it. There's no boundary almost.' She pauses and perhaps acknowledging the phantastic nature of her claims asks, 'Does that make any sense to you?'

Hayley's performances on Hampstead Heath drew together a local community of Qigong practitioners, neighbours, and dance appreciators. It provided opportunities to meet, gather, and talk during a time when it was difficult, potentially even dangerous, to do so. The opportunities to perform helped Hayley hang on to her sense of self-worth; while also inspiring her to draw together other artists struggling with the same uncertainties and precarity she was contending with. Imperfect and improvisational, Sanctuary is one example of how dancing outdoors in natural spaces can draw together liminal forms of community, inhabiting cracks in contemporary structures described by Bayo Akomolafe to contain 'possibilities for renewal and repetition'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Hayley Matthews.

### **Sanctuary as a community of practice**

Practicing 'in community' is a common theme amongst environmental dance practitioners. However, what it means to be 'in community' is not so easily defined. Hayley described the community she felt within Sanctuary was a sort of 'many-hearted oneness'. G. A. Hillery contends that 'beyond the concept that people are involved in community, there is no complete agreement as to the nature of community' (Hillery 1955, 119). The concept of community continues to remain slippery and ambiguous, yet abundant in popular rhetoric and politics. In *Community, Solidarity and Belonging* Andrew Mason (2000, 18) argues that community is a term that is so widely used and so disputed that it classifies as an 'essentially contested concept'. However, rather than seeking to demystify community, this article leans into its mutability and changing nature and suggests that a particularly useful way to examine what communities *are* is look at what they *do*. Therefore, I refer to the work of Etienne Wenger and 'communities of practice' to better grasp the work



**Figure 3.** Dancers during January lab performing Isadora Duncan's *The Revolutionary* (1921). Photo by author.

of groups like Sanctuary on the Faultline, and other environmental dance artists working communally in the UK (Figure 3).

Wenger defines communities of practice as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Wenger also noted that while learning may occur inside of a community of practice, it is not always the principal intention and may occur alongside other aims of the community. We could examine environmental movement practice in the UK as a broad community of practice, but there are many disparate actors, approaches and philosophies that do not always align. Instead, communities of practice acts as a useful framework to examine Sanctuary as a particular movement and moment in time.

Sanctuary's organisational structure was both emergent and plastic. Hayley described her role as caretaker rather than executive or leader. She regularly consulted the group for advice on how to move the organization forward, what 'forward' might look like, and what each member wished to contribute to or receive from membership in the collective. There is a complex relationship between hierarchy and egalitarianism in attempting to create a radical global collective but also needing to make choices quickly and efficiently. While Hayley primarily organised the online gatherings and annual conferences, each member was given access to a group Instagram account and could advertise their performances through a shared social media presence. Although it was expected that members will perform and contribute to the growing online presence, it is not enforced. Members chose where, when, and how often they

performed or advertised on the platform. In this way although basic structure and resources are provided it was essentially a self-organised practice. The boundaries of the group were porous and went through cycles of opening out and closing in. Wenger clarifies that not all communities are communities of practice and sets out three clear features to set them apart: domain, community, and practice (2015).

The domain of a community of practice is described by Wenger as a 'collective competence' or 'expertise'. The expertise is not necessarily recognised by others outside of the community, but membership to the community carries with it the expectation of a commitment to this shared interest or skillset. For Sanctuary we could understand the domain to be 'rewilding dance' and 'rewilding woman'.<sup>10</sup> This rather opaque yet vibrant claim includes reclaiming agency for woman-identifying dancers on multiple levels. For Hayley, rewilding dance begins with freeing it from the 'capitalised and monetised structures that inhibit it'. One way of doing this is through circumventing standard funding processes and requirements by performing outdoors, negating most of the need to pay for rehearsal and performance spaces. This also often, yet indirectly, means not asking for permission before performing in outdoor spaces inferring a sort of guerrilla performance practice. Hayley's version of rewilding dance still attempts to advertise and monetise the work of the artists involved but shifted some agency back to the artists. Membership to the network was exclusive to professional dancers, and it was expected that individuals performed movement outdoors for others as a part of their profession and have done so previously. It was a collaborative collective of professionals refining a practice, not an educational group aimed towards novices. Members must be interested in exploring and navigating womanhood and the choice of language used in advertising meant that although Hayley is open to the idea of men joining the collective, aside from myself it remained exclusively female.

The community element of a community of practice is defined through how 'members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information' (Wenger 2015, 2). A website on its own does not necessarily create community and neither does simply sharing a similar profession or skillset. What is essential to community for Wenger is that members 'interact and learn together' in pursuit of their common domain or interest. The bi-monthly or monthly gatherings and the annual January lab in Great Yarmouth were the primary methods through which Sanctuary members shared information and learned together. Additionally, the monthly meetings included a shared ritual practice of opening and closing circles. Shared ritual was an important part of defining communal time and space. After opening a circle, members would share 'what's arising'; discussion on difficulties members were facing, ideas for artistic creation, recounting recent performances, or general thoughts on the topics of dance, nature, and womanhood. Other topics might include generating ideas for new funding bids, discussing upcoming labs, the development of films of members work, or how to welcome new members. Follow ups on important topics took place over email and shared promotion of events through social media.

10 Rewilding is a popular concept in contemporary environmentalist discussion. For a popular view on British Rewilding as an ecological movement, and an introduction to the term for many, see (Monbiot 2014).

Wenger defines the final element, practice, loosely by arguing that members do not simply share an interest in a thing, but that they are practitioners themselves. They have a shared 'repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, [and] ways of addressing shared problems' (2015, 2). The practice is tied intimately to the domain; Sanctuary members were not just enthusiastic and knowledgeable about dance, performance, feminism, and outdoor movement practice, but as demonstrated above, had shared accumulated lived experiences which they discussed to cultivate their craft and sustain their professional development.

Sanctuary was an attempt to establish an emergent community of practice during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the collapse of already precarious foundations. In its early period Sanctuary provided a deep and meaningful momentary community of like-minded artists developing a wild feminist, sustainable, and environmentally minded movement practice. However, the full development of a community of practice was never fully achieved due to felt unequal membership commitments and disagreements. Despite this, Sanctuary's emergence was characterised by a liminal desire to critique what was through the nurturing of methods to dwell in the cracks of social structure.

### **Sanctuary and liminality**

Turnerian theory provides a useful starting point when analysing Sanctuary as a liminal movement. Turner popularised the term liminality in his 1967 analysis of Ndembu ritual following the English translation of Arnold van Gennep's work in 1960 (Wels et al. 2011). Liminality was traditionally used to denote the middle phase of rites of passage when 'the individuals involved are understood to be "no longer" and simultaneously "not yet"' (ibid, 1). Turner described liminal individuals as persons 'betwixt and between' various social, legal, or ceremonial positions (1969). The term was also expanded beyond the individual to include any, generally brief, period whereby previous custom and hierarchy has been upended and a potential for previous power structures to be upended. Harry Wels (2011) has critiqued this understanding of liminality as being too *laissez-faire* and ambiguous to be useful, however this same ambiguity has contributed to its flexible adaptation by scores of anthropologists (cf Beech 2011; St John 2008; Yang 2000).

Expanding upon liminal theory, Turner uses fluctuation between periods of 'structure' and 'anti-structure' to illustrate how society critiques itself and generates change. Structure for Turner described 'daily life' and anti-structure was the ritual process whereby change might occur. Lewis (2008) critiques this dynamic as an overly 'objectivist or systematic view of culture as structure' (42). He demonstrates that a rigid distinction between structure and anti-structure may ignore the potential of innovative facets of daily life and the normative role of 'state ceremonies such as coronations, memorial days, independence days, and the like' (ibid). Whether daily life or special events contain normative or revolutionary potential needs to be carefully examined, not assumed, and Sanctuary provides a rich case study. Special events, represented by the whole spectrum of performative genres, engendered during a liminal phase are Turner argues, 'the eye by

which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting “designs for living” (1987, 24). However, Turner warns that extreme anti-structure – or the special events described by Lewis – are just as likely to lead towards despotism as they are to greater collegiality (1969).

A student of Turner’s, Sherry Turkle writes that during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic some societies entered a collective state of liminality (2022, 487) Turkle describes a ‘permanent threshold’ of experience when Americans faced ‘a virus that plays by one set of rules, politicians who play by another, and a professional life that proceeds independently of each’ (ibid, 487). Many countries in the world imposed various forms of counter-measures to inhibit the virus including lockdowns and quarantines. At the time, the US and the UK were led by bombastic conservative ideologues whose politics directly conflicted with the limitations they enacted which resulted in significant public resistance to the measures. While these countries’ experiences are not analogous, I argue that Turkle’s analysis of the American experience contains relevant parallels to the British experience of mass disruption. Turkle argues that this liminal period contained inchoate potentiality that remains indeterminate. The disruption caused by COVID-19 highlighted for many the importance of family even over great distances, the miracles of human generosity, and the essential nature of access to green spaces; however it also accentuated the systemic inequality, often along class and racial lines, of living conditions, access to food and medicine, ability for remote working, and further stressed underfunded public services like the NHS. Liminality may have been a common experience, but it was not equal in its severity or consequences.

Turkle’s analysis is supported by Turner’s claim that liminal movements typically ‘arise in times of radical social transition, when society itself seems to be moving from one fixed state to another’ (1969, 133). It is during this emergent yet unsteady potentiality that Hayley shaped Sanctuary on the Fault Line. Hayley fell into the forgotten and unsupported cracks. Following the work of her friend and collaborator Bayo Akomolafe, she discovered that when things fall apart, you might find ‘deep abundance in those ruptured places’.<sup>11</sup> Sanctuary began as an attempt to enable dancing artists to harness their critical and creative faculties from a place of levity and freedom, despite dwelling in cracked liminality. This would, in theory, grant them greater capacity to criticise and reflect on society and its structure. However, it is important to note that the egalitarian dreams populated in these interstitial gaps do not always neatly fit into the fault lines left by societal ruptures easily or gracefully. They may not even aspire to, Akomolafe warns that ‘flattening’ the cracks deprives them of some their critical potential. Despite this, communities and networks can inadvertently brush against societal hierarchy and fragmentation, reminders that these spaces, no matter how visionary, how natural, or how wild, remain ensconced in a greater social framework.

## The ephemeral nature of liminal practice

Hayley’s liminal critique sought to rewild both womanhood and dance through a recapturing of agency. For Hayley, this recapturing of agency was tied to a felt

11 From Akomolafe current project, *We Will Dance With Mountains*. <https://forthewild.world/we-will-dance-with-mountains-course>

sense of the wild, anti-capitalist and creative force of the feminine. Alternatively, Jack Halberstam describes the wild as a space that is unpredictable and resists taxonomy (2020). For Halberstam, the wild is an inherently queer space from which we can critique modernity's liberal subject and ordered impulses. The wild has long been a place of Euro-American romanticist attraction since the nineteenth century; the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter to name a few. It is unsurprising that the wild continues to be a source for contemporary inspiration when the human structures which we rely upon fail. However, whether or not wildness inherently begets more sustainable forms of living and working is beyond the limited scope of this essay. Nevertheless, we can examine Sanctuary's attempts to rewild practice and livelihood, noticing the ripples engendered from the practice, revolutionary or reinforcing.

In developing her global fugitive network Hayley unintentionally found herself once again making huge grant applications and having to hire grant writers to place bids to fund January labs or the making of films by network members, finding herself pulled once again into funding systems she tried to escape. While Hayley was able to generate a recurring local audience that made occasional donations to herself, network members in the monthly meeting repeatedly mentioned having trouble generating income *via* the gift economy. Amid these tensions, Hayley had to grapple with integrating Sanctuary on the Faultline into a world emerging from the pandemic and reverting to its shocked, yet reforming economy. In the beginning the support she received through Universal Credit created a new financial reality which made the development of Sanctuary possible, and the gift economy topped up her needs, enabling a felt sense of personal reciprocity between her and her audience members. Eventually this financial reality shifted, and choices had to be made. Hayley called me in December of 2022 to say she had to close down the formal network. On the call, she shared her experience of a recent conversation she had with the network members. Hayley had come to realise that two years on she was spending hours of unpaid labour trying to build the network and after two unsuccessful funding rounds it was becoming unsustainable.<sup>12</sup> So, she asked for the other members to pay a nominal monthly fee to be part of Sanctuary, receive monthly classes, attend meetings, and access online resources. The other network members argued that they too, were independent artists struggling and couldn't afford to pay for membership. Hayley and the others had inadvertently stumbled into yet another facet of the neoliberal gig economy as the previously crippled structures reconquered their territory and closed doors of financial support.

Lewis (2008) warns that liminal phases are just as likely to create 'obfuscation, mystification, confusion, sensational excess, or rampant escapism' and that the liberatory essence of Turner's liminality needs to be 'tempered by the equally strong tendency toward destruction of the self and the environment' (45, 55). Maxwell and NED-New (2008) also argues that too optimistic a view on liminality omits the capacity for performance and ritual to effect 'radically dystopian change'. While I do not feel that any of the outcomes described in this chapter approach anything near the dystopian or destructive, Sanctuary in particular faced practical difficulty when faced with the return to daily life. As this article has shown periods of anti-structure, while rich for the genesis of new

12 It is noteworthy that as mentioned earlier, Sanctuary was devised as an attempt to circumnavigate contemporary funding structures but was ultimately unable to do so when upscaled from an individual to a group. The funding bids that were secured went towards developing group work, paying for the first annual lab, and helping artists develop their practices but funds quickly ran out and according to Hayley new expectations for ACE funding meant Sanctuary was unlikely to receive more support.

performative modes and perspectives, are just as often likely to 'to undergo what most people see as a 'decline and fall' into structure and law' (Turner 1969, 132). For Turner, social life is a dialectical process oscillating between states and positions, between structure and anti-structure. However, in the liminal haze of the coronavirus pandemic Hayley dreamt ways to thrive in this uncertainty, producing and creating performance work. One might argue her collectivist goals were muddled by an entrepreneurial reality, transforming a critique of the gig economy into a slightly greener doppelganger.

Though even this may be too critical a picture. While Sanctuary didn't achieve exactly what it set out to do, the organisation accomplished plenty in its momentary blaze.

Hayley developed a personal performance practice that sustained her during an extremely difficult period and continues to produce new work through this method. Her latest work-in-progress just finished a research and creation period with support from Norwich Theatre. Her performances, as evidenced by the interviews with audience members, were crucial opportunities for connection and reflection when these qualities were scarce yet essential. The January labs evidenced by interviews with attendees were rife for critical reflection of their own womanhood, performance practices, and relationships to nature. Sanctuary and the January labs has since led to new collaborations between Hayley and other writers, scholars, teachers and artists and it remains to be seen what will unfold in the long term. Sanctuary as an organisation may not exist in the form it once did, but as a performance and training philosophy it endures, sprouting new buds of resistance, wild practice, and fruitful collaboration. Hayley argues that Sanctuary was less an attempt to produce something entirely new, and instead a way to pose questions about the way things were. Even if its communal form was temporary, Sanctuary continues to inform and influence Hayley's personal artistic practice and undoubtedly affected the lives of those who partook in the network. While the *formal* network may have closed, the friendships and connections remain and Hayley and her collaborators continue to produce performative and facilitatory work in the same spirit

Post-pandemic, support and interest for environmental movement practices appear to be growing with more organisations offering educational and artistic opportunities such as the organisation Intercultural Roots and their growing programs of artist support, alongside the work of educational institutions like Schumacher College with the development of a new MA in Movement, Mind and Ecology and Black Mountain College in Wales. This ethnography supports Turner's theory that liminal phases generate anti-structural critique, eventually moving towards some kind of structure, which may in turn lead towards desire for anti-structure once more. However, the ethnography also demonstrates how despite their ephemeral nature these periods are rich opportunities for reflection and imagination with lasting consequences for the individuals whose lives are touched by them. These qualities of critical reflection, curious imagination, and communal practice are essential to life on a changing planet.

## Conclusion

The simultaneously generative and mournfully destructive early period of the COVID-19 pandemic was a tender, yet life-threatening experience of co-liminality. Liminal experiences of cracks or anti-structure often thicken back into structure, making their brief temporality that much more exceptional. As demonstrated, movements such as Sanctuary often struggle to fully extricate themselves from the societal hierarchies and fragmentations that lurk beneath gleaming ideals. This essay has shown that an environmental approach to movement and dance, like the myth of the rugged entrepreneur, is nigh unachievable without community. Sanctuary has demonstrated that even temporary communities, or sudden villages birthed from crisis, can have lasting and monumental effects on those who participate in their creation. In the face of swift and constant change it is helpful to be reminded that we are not alone and that we have never truly been individuals (Gilbert et al. 2012).

## Disclosure statement

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