

An Intuitive Walk – a thread to play along

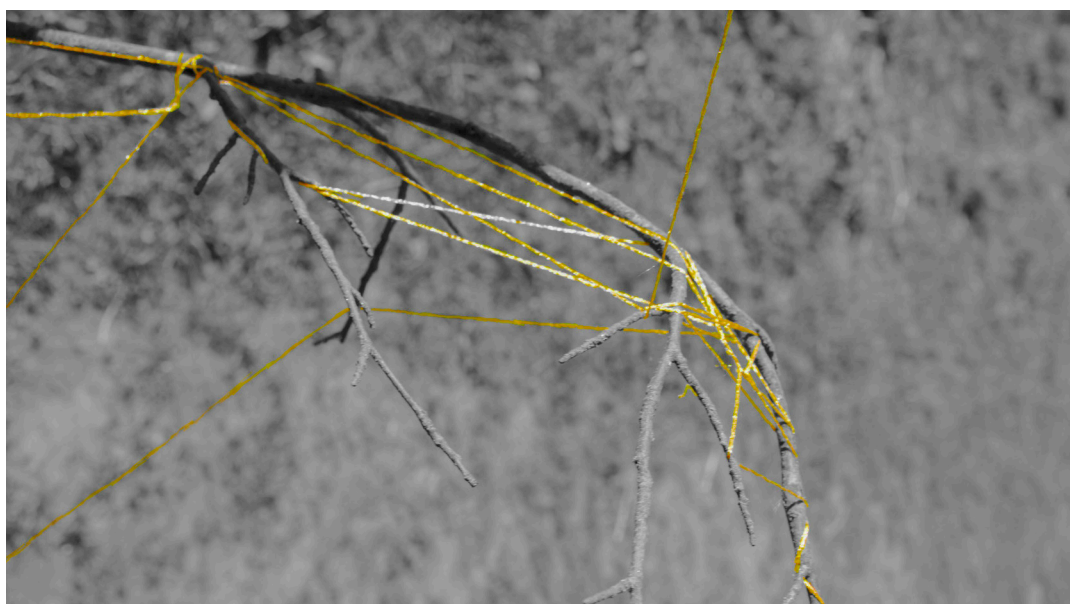


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GEY PIN ANG



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The *Performance reflexivity, intentionality and collaboration: A Sourcing Within worksession* that took place in Aberdeen, March 2014, was planned for anthropology researchers and students. Having had a few previous firsthand experiences of the workshop, Caroline Gatt, a Research Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, invited me to lead a workshop over three days consisting of three half-day sessions. I am an actress/pedagogue currently pursuing a Drama: Practice-as-Research PhD, School of Arts, University of Kent, Canterbury. Since 2006, I have been conducting *Sourcing Within* worksessions mainly for performing practitioners. Gatt proposed the workshop in Aberdeen to be tied into the *Knowing From The Inside* project (KFI), under the auspices of her department, in which she leads a sub project on *Performing collaboration: The challenges of difference in sustainable knowledge-artefact making*. Alongside the worksession, there were presentations by some anthropology researchers cum performing practitioners including Valeria Lembo, Brian Schultis and Paola Esposito.

In the following pages I will share with you some of my observations of the *Walking Thread Initiative* from a performative perspective. I will also highlight some fundamental difference between a researcher and a practitioner, which I have experienced through this worksession in Aberdeen.

A Necessary Discourse

Halfway through the second day of the Aberdeen worksession, sadly Gatt had to leave. This, however, made the session into a spontaneous and alive situation whereby each participant had to respond to and improvise around the logistical arrangements. This seemingly communal response did not hide our differences in terms of our fields of studies, disciplines and rigors as in anthropology and in theatre. During a session on vocal work, some researchers began to observe instead of participating. When I asked them for the reason, the answer was: “We do not understand.” Perhaps without Gatt’s intervention, there was an increased unfamiliarity in terms of working approaches and terminologies used in our respective disciplines. Faced with something incomprehensible our instinct is to withdraw from the unknown. To take the role of an observer might seem natural for these Anthropology researchers. However, for me as a practitioner it is so essential to experience from inside, actually doing it. In the absence of Gatt, we developed a discourse revolving around the concern of “knowing” versus “doing”. The discussion surrounded the objectives of the workshop and the issue of not having a verbal explanation prior to doing, in this case, on the vocal work. Fortunately, this incident did not impede us from finding our meeting point the next day, which was the last session. Surprisingly the session went very well through a mode of mutual attention, spontaneous participation, and thus, understanding. There was a receptive atmosphere with “active listening” (see below) among the group, in the end, which was in accord with the aim of the workshop.

Beyond the Workshop – The Walk

The above account merely hint at and set out The *Walking Thread Initiative*, a collective act by Esposito, Freng Dale, Lembo, Loovers and Schultis. They went for a walk that afternoon after the completion of the workshop. It was an independent and unplanned act by these five individuals after brief days of communal working, sharing and exchanging. It spontaneously happened when Lembo threw out the thread to the others during their walk. As we have seen in the different reflections of the walk in this issue the others immediately responded to this. The entire walk, which lasted quite some time, emerged beyond the workshop setting, still, the boundaries might not be that clearly defined, as can be seen in Lembo’s conscious effort of holding on to and attitude of exploration and wonder cultivated in the previous worksessions.

Active Listening – Awareness Of Self

Observing the video documentation of their walk in Seaton Park, Aberdeen, my impression was that they did this with intuitive listening, reacting and adjusting to each other and to the changes of the threads flying in the wind, as well as through their constant mobility in the changing environment. During the act of walking, each of them was immersed in what they were doing yet continuously weaving, spreading and passing the thread amongst themselves. In many ways, it resembled what Gatt wrote regarding the workshop content:

What makes listening *active* not passive is a type of *awareness of self* that makes it possible to pay *attention* to the changes happening *in oneself* while *simultaneously responding*, thereby offering actions for the ensemble to listen to, to pay attention to (2014).

It is only after their impromptu walk that the team of five sought to continue their interaction via the *Walking Thread Initiative*, which one-year later, for instance, became a participatory event involving others in a similar walk at a conference in Cardiff. In certain aspect, it is an active listening in oneself that brings one's attention from outside to what is inside, and then finds its awareness to what exists outside. Though an anthropology researcher, Gatt's previous experiences of attending these *Sourcing Within* worksessions might have brought her closer to the above testimony, her embodied practice, possibly, has further enhanced her knowing.

Personal Reaction and Association: The Golden Thread

In the usual *Sourcing Within* worksessions with performing practitioners, I often ask participants to bring their choice of an object; either a daily object or something related to childhood memories. Each would then be encouraged to begin an active search – linking the object with their own inner stream of thoughts, to their intention when using the object, their reactions, with whom, for whom, in what tempo-rhythm they were using the object, and so on. It is an exercise to cultivate one's organic and instinctive reactions and associations.

As in the case of Lembo, a performer who has attended several worksessions prior to Aberdeen, the thread she brought to the workshop had a personal calling for her. Through the thread, she has developed the remembrance of her grandmother who had taught her embroidery. However, this only became visible in a subsequent *Sourcing Within* workshop, which she attended in Tuscany in April 2014. It was while working alone that Lembo further discovered her creative potential within and incorporate the thread into her acting proposition – the action of her grandmother came alive along with her speaking, singing and playing the accordion – re-connecting her to her heritage and tradition.

A Thread To Play Along

In the past, our workshop participants have often found like-minded and potential collaborators afterwards. Some collaboration may take the form of an impromptu act, while others may flourish into various modes according to the individuals' needs and callings. What then, might one ask, is the aspiration of this initiative?

This particular *Walking Thread Initiative* has a mode of playfulness that might have some possible link to our workshop. "Playing" is one of the essential and primary approaches in our work, be it physical, vocal, or performative. The participant's intuitive self begins to activate and mobilize again and again in the workshop. The playfulness engages the person who is being opened and becoming responsive to what is within and around her. This led, in this instance, to the unknown trajectory of the thread initiated by Lembo (see Lembo, this volume). From a silent and unintentional impulse, the thread had triggered layers of creative possibilities, weaving and passing from person to person, flowing in/with nature (the wind); later on to find resonance and meaning via their personal associations and reflections.

While research has demonstrated a "significant link between walking and creative thinking" (Jones 2015), this intuitive walking holds the potential of being an *active* walk; "following the intuition, 'seeing' and 'hearing' from within, attuning to our heart...[it can] engage us within our vital life, leading us to a liberating and creative being." (*Sourcing Within* content /Gatt 2014) I wonder whether this walk can be disseminated not only in print, but if it can, and should, be constantly expanded through practice and play.

Play is always a matter of context. It is not what we do, but how we do it...In play, we manifest fresh, interactive ways of relating with people, animals, things, ideas, images, ourselves...To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility...Play is an attitude, a spirit, a way of doing things (Nachmanovitch 1990: 43).

Perhaps only when the *Walking Thread Initiative* becomes an intentional act, comprising of bodily imprints of individual histories, memories and responses, can it be expanded into a communal shared experience. It is my hope that the team of *Walking Thread* delve further into the spirit of "play" and that the thread will continue to be unfurled unceasingly.

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