

WEAVING VOICES AS THREADS OF COMMUNITIES

*Two years of artistic educational collaboration
between seven partner organisations*





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Erasmus Project

Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education
2022 – 2024

Partners:

Centre Artistique International Roy Hart | Colaborative Reichenow e.V. | Leeds Beckett University | Sinum Theatre Laboratory Association | Soharóza Nonprofit Association | Solsidans Kulturförening | TuYo Foundation

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PREFACE

What have we got...?¹

...We've got our bodies.

We've got songs.

We have trust.

We have voices.

We've got a soft, open space for allowing a lot of experiments, allowing the space to be brave, and we've got 'being held' by others.

We've got time.

We've got frames.

We've got creativity.

We've got a community.

We've got fears.

We have got quite a lot of languages.

And shared experiences.

We've got colours.

We have got new-learned skills.

We have got natural objects.

We have small weaves and big weaves.

We have recordings.

We have got new and differing viewpoints of colours, shapes, and nature.

We've got loads of unexpected outcomes!

...and benefits!

We have a number of forests.

We've got questions.

We've got struggles.

We have got desire.

We've got enthusiasm.

¹ "What have we got..." was a collective attempt – initiated by Hannah Butterfield, one of the project partners from Leeds Beckett University – to gather all the values, questions and challenges that had been accumulated during the first phase of the Weaving Voices project. The text was generated in the frame of an oral improvisation at the end of the one week-long workshop in the forest next to Unnaryd (Sweden, June 2023) with the participation of partner members. This event was the closure of the first part of the project with the focus on exchanging knowledge and good practices amongst the partner organisations. The improvisation aimed to verbally articulate the experience of this period – those rich and sometimes intimate experiences that often happened beyond words – and to create a shift in the mindset of the group as they prepared to approach the next part, when the partners would meet and work with local communities.

*We've got listening.
We have got curiosity.
We've got intergenerational experience.
We have places behind us – we all come from somewhere and we are bringing this here.
We've got intersections.
And encounters.
Overlap.
We have got many different kinds of expertise and competencies.
We've got openness.
We have a wish to make people feel like they are welcome and belong.
We've got work to do.
We have ideas.
We've got opinions.
We have dreams.
We've got stories to tell.
We've got lots of responsibility
and lots of ideas.
We have fun.
We've got inspiration.
We've got introductions to traditions and arts practices.
And we have the possibility to look at them from a different viewpoint and mix them together.
We have got opportunities for failure.
We've got assumptions and expectations.
We have legacies to refer to.
We have villages and cities.
We've got many leaders who can also be participants and followers and move between the two.
We've got flexibility.
We have a lot of words.
We have inner spaces.
We also have moments when some of us didn't understand the languages of others, and
moments when words were incomprehensible, so we figure out or imagine what was said in a different way.
We've got not-knowing.
We have a commitment to learning what the others can teach.
We have moments to touch each other, to be touched, to share intimate*

thoughts.
We have community.
We have the privilege to be here.
We have got both closeness and distance.
We've got the rest of our lives.
We have choice.
We've got passports.
We have places to belong to.
We have appreciation,
Acknowledgement,
Gratitude.
We've got support from those who aren't here now but made it possible
for us to be here – We have a whole web behind each of us.
We have an urge to express ourselves,
And an urge to make space for others to express themselves.
A lot of heritage, to understand our place in the 21st century.
We have problems we can't solve.
We've got a much bigger picture that we are part of.
We have the possibility to pause...
We have a desire to connect with natural spaces.
We have doubts.
We've got a desire to care.
We have got the echo of the lake.
We've got opportunities to care.
We've got ourselves.
We have technology that's here and recording us right now.
We've got education.
We've got health, and healthcare.
We've got the opportunity to make a stand.
We've got a need to be loved.
We've got the right to speak.
We've got loads of new information.
We've got reflection time.
We've got senses of humour.
We've got the ground beneath our feet.
We've got roots.
We've got silence.
We have the capacity to do very, very beautiful things and sounds, and
trust and interest in doing very dark and scary things and sounds.



*We've got fear.
We've got a chorus of birds accompanying us right now.
We have risks to take.
We've got a blanket.²
We've got time travel.
We've got freedom.
We've got feminism.
We've got possessions.
We've got baggage!
We've got welly boots.
We've got jokes and humour.
We have got personal struggles.
We have each other.
We have sharing.
We've got the bookmaker.³
We've got... a desire to take a short break?
(Yes. We do.)
We've got gentle applause.*

2 The community of the Weaving Voices partner members collectively created a botanically dyed blanket, with the guidance of Nina van Hartskamp, as part of the project workshop in Amsterdam, April 2023. During the workshop in Unnaryd (Sweden), June 2023, each participant took this blanket for a night to sleep in it and note down a dream from that night.

3 The Weaving Voices family adopted Michał Jurys, the graphic designer of this book after he led a book-making workshop for us during the Amsterdam training (April 2023). His work in helping us to shape and find creative forms for our words in both this online publication and our respective dissemination events has been invaluable.

INTRODUCTION

VERBALISING THE NON-VERBAL

Nikolett Pintér-Németh

We have *Weaving Voices as Threads of Communities* (2022–2024), an Erasmus+ Partnership Project for cooperation and exchanges of practices in the field of adult learning. The partnership was initiated and is coordinated by Sinum Theatre Laboratory Association (Szalatnak, Hungary) and consists of six other organisations: Centre Artistique International Roy Hart (Malérargues, France); Colaborative Reichenow e.V. (Reichenow, Germany); Leeds Beckett University (Leeds, UK); Soharóza Nonprofit Association (Budapest, Hungary); Solsidans Kulturförening (Unnaryd, Sweden) and TuYo Foundation (Amsterdam, Netherlands). Some of these partners have been collaborating with each other over a longer time,⁴ while others, newly joined, added new directions to the shared practices.

The project is partly based on the archaic connection between handicraft – especially weaving or spinning – and singing or storytelling, activities that were essential to smaller communities and fostered intergenerational relationships, *learning by doing* and *playing while working*. This form of spontaneous, communal learning and knowledge transmission has now been largely relegated to the background in Western culture. But the longing for these forms of connection, as well as the joyful celebration and shared creative expressions they engender are strongly present in many of the participants who agreed to come with us on this journey. The practices that the partners introduce and share, are located at the intersection between artistic and therapeutic work. Examples include the vocal and theatrical heritage of Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart; weaving on collective frames; botanical dyeing which raises awareness of the colours and shapes in our surroundings; community composing and choir games; Georgian polyphonic singing; the Scandinavian tradition of *kulning* and the somatic movement practice of the Feldenkrais Method. All these long-standing and carefully developed practices open possibilities for intelligent, psychosomatic cooperation, and sensual, bodily engagements that happen for instance, when a group of people joyfully sing or make handicrafts together.

4 There were two other Erasmus+ projects which preceded the current partnership: [*ATIPIA – Applied Theatre in Practising Integrated Approaches*](#), and [*VoiceWell – Improving Competences of Listening for and Giving Voices in the Communities*](#).

When placed in contemporary contexts, *intangible cultural heritage* offers a wealth of opportunities for experimentation, for finding or developing new intercultural connections and for better understanding our living and built environments. The setting up and holding of spaces with the aim of safe co-creation in both suburban and rural environments are indispensable conditions for all that to happen. If our project is successful, when one joins these spaces of co-creation, the primary experience would be to feel the support of the community through non-daily personal encounters (which come across more like a celebration), the appreciation of one's creative inputs, and the diminishing fear of making mistakes. During these occasions of knowledge exchange, participants can develop competences that are either directly or indirectly linked to the actual activities: verbal and non-verbal communication, social skills and cooperation, entrepreneurship, auditory and visual skills, bodily and environmental awareness etc.

One of the purposes of the community events, organised in the frame of this project, is to move individuals out of the loneliness and isolation that can characterise contemporary society. After working on a collective carpet together or sharing voices in a group improvisation, people start to see each other differently. In the game of creation, as they forget about their social roles and hierarchical positions, participants reveal something of themselves that is closer to childlike sincerity. One of the most important aims of Weaving Voices is to support groups of people in coming to this state through the different channels of expression (audible, tactile, visual). All in all, it can be said that the occasions for joint creativity and extended sensual awareness – whether it happens amongst the colleagues of partners or with the involvement of local communities – not only help to build caring human relationships, but they also have a highly beneficial effect on mental and physical health.

The idea of Weaving Voices came as a reaction to the need to build stronger local communities, to raise awareness about environmental issues, and to appreciate cultural differences, alongside the realisation of universal human emotions and hopes, namely, our desire to express ourselves and be heard. The possibility or lack thereof defines our societies and the ways that people see their own communities and homes. The project has a special focus on rural and isolated urban areas – e.g. a suburb of Amsterdam, the small village of Szalatnak in Hungary, or the

temporary homes for people seeking sanctuary in Leeds – where people have more difficult access to cultural events because of geographical, financial, or political constraints.

The individual members of the Weaving Voices partnership – as well as the multiple authors and contributors to this book – are coming from different backgrounds, and are all dedicated artists, educators, and facilitators in their various practices. The fertile diversity which they embody within the project characterises their collaboration and the creative educational ‘package’ they offer. The professional group consists of performing, visual and mixed-media artists; musicians; educators; academic researchers; therapeutically informed movement and voice practitioners; choir leaders; community art facilitators and cultural organisers. Some of the practitioners are more experienced in participatory artistic projects, while others are more focused on in-depth studio work. Both are appreciated in this project as we look for fertile dialogue and combinations of these different skillsets.

The backbone organisations are mostly nonprofit associations or foundations, as well as one higher education institution. They also represent this diversity as some have decades of history behind them, while others were established as rather new initiatives. Some have the background of a complex operational system and extensive networks, while others work more locally with fewer staff. [Centre Artistique International Roy Hart](#) (CAIRH France) – a centre dedicated to vocal research and to its application in life and art in the Alfred Wolfsohn,⁵ Roy Hart and Roy Hart Theatre⁶ traditions. Some of the practitioners from the permanent artistic residency of [Colaborative Reichenow](#) (Germany) are also active in somatic, vocal research and as accredited Roy Hart voice teachers, regularly hold workshops in Malérargues (France) among other locations. Both organisations are based in rural environments and were built on strong communities. [Solsidans Kulturförening](#) (Sweden), [TuYo Foundation](#) (Netherlands) and [Sinum Theatre Association](#) (Hungary) are rather young organisations and all of them have a special focus on rural community life. The former is an association which holds together artists and creators from various fields with the aim of linking environmental

5 See for example: Braggins, S. (2011) *The Mystery Behind the Voice*. Troubador Publishing.

6 See: Magilton, I. (2018) *Roy Hart Theatre at Malérargues*. Mondial Livre; www.roy-hart.com. (n.d.) *The Only Original Roy Hart Theatre of the Voice*. [online] Available at: <http://www.roy-hart.com/> [Accessed 19 May 2024].

sustainability with cultural activities. TuYo Foundation pays particular attention to traditional textile cultures, their preservation, and the creation of viable conditions for the small communities that produce them. Sinum Theatre, the coordinator of the present project, aims to promote intercultural, non-verbal performing techniques and to establish a rural network of theatre and community arts in the county of Baranya. [Soharóza Nonprofit Association](#) (Hungary) and [Leeds Beckett University](#) (UK), both in different ways, play important roles in urban life. Soharóza is the name of an experimental choir based in Budapest. Its members are not only musicians, but dedicated adults with various professions. They are collective composers of music theatre pieces and some of them are educators of choir improvisation techniques. The School of Arts at Leeds Beckett University, has 170 years of history. This institution actively promotes the idea of life-long learning and diversity in innovative research and arts practice. Although coming from rather different backgrounds with variety in their structure, what the seven partner organisations share throughout their collaboration are their visions in the field of informal adult education through artistic means.

During the personal visits to each other's places, studios and neighbourhoods, the individual colleagues of the partners had dived into and sought for connections between their practices. Often touched by personal experience, memorable moments of openness and surprising shifts of focus, I saw this group hungry for human and nonhuman encounters, attentive creativity and building trustful relationships through playing and improvising together. Many of them are devoted to facilitating events and activities where inclusion and the curiosity for each other are central aspects. Together they established *common playgrounds* with ethical rules, regarding the actual situations and the people involved. As a result of this partnership, they extended their profiles, and together offered a new participatory program that aimed to follow the needs of specific local communities.

The project touches upon traditions rooted in the past and actively explores their relevance today. Working with deep respect for the immense knowledge inherent in these traditions, we, the Weaving Voices team, enter into open ended improvisation with them and allow ourselves to be surprised by unforeseen outcomes. In this way pre-existing content – e.g. songs or visual patterns – seem to emerge in a new way in a variety

of shapes and forms. Our broad question then, is how can we use the practices of voice and weaving to engage with cultural heritage and be inspired by the threads of different traditions in the present context of space and time?

Thus, the scope of our attention on this project is both on building cross-border networks of artists and facilitators and engagement with local participants. The joint events which have been organised in the frame of Weaving Voices can be divided into two phases. During these periods each of the seven partner organisations from Europe hosted a week-long workshop activity which was visited by the others. The focus of the first phase was the active research and training of staff members, through which we searched for ways to link our different practices. During these workshops in Malérargues (France, October–November 2022), Reichenow (Germany, January 2023), Amsterdam (the Netherlands, April 2023) and Unnaryd (Sweden, June 2023), a strong cross-border community of colleagues and friends was formed. Sharing our fields of interest and expertise as well as our inevitable differences, due to specific social, political and geographical characteristics, we refreshed our motivation, found new inspiration, and broadened the set of questions and horizons regarding our professions.

The second phase of the project was centred around the invitation of local groups to participate in the activities, which were a composite of the different practices. During this part, the workshop weeks were held in Leeds (UK, August 2023), Budapest–Komló (Hungary, October 2023), and Szalatnak (Hungary, June 2024). Alongside these events, two one-week craft residencies were hosted by Sinum Theatre (May 2024) as preparations for the workshop week in Szalatnak, a geographically isolated village. The purposes of both residencies were community building, learning about the village and meeting its inhabitants:⁷ a communal weaving activity was led by Rosa Smits, and a botanical dyeing workshop was guided by Nina van Hartskamp (both artists are representatives from ToYo Foundation).

The biggest challenge of this latter stage of the project was/is to open up the intimate circle which the partnership had developed during the first

⁷ Sinum Theatre Laboratory Association has replaced its seat from the city of Pécs to the village of Szalatnak in 2023. In the meantime, two founders of the association and the initiators of the current project also started the reconstruction of an old house and barn in the village. Their plan, as new residents, is to become active members of the small local community, and to host cultural events in the renovated barn.

stage. The aim was/is to maintain the trustful character of the gatherings when the focus shifts from participation towards facilitation and to include people in the activities for whom free improvisation, the engagement with unfixed forms of movement, sound and image might feel unfamiliar and sometimes even scary. Creative craftwork which explores our relationship with materials brought visible and tangible feedback – and proved to be a crucial element in this shift. Many questions were raised by the partners following the organising and hosting of these community events. For instance:

1. How can we share our enthusiasm and build the trust needed for the magic of liberated co-creation in a limited period of time, with groups of people whose daily lives are often dominated by existential difficulties or health problems?
2. How can we address vulnerabilities and differences when the cultural facilitators work outside of their familiar surroundings and social milieu?
3. How can we plan and schedule programmes with sufficient flexibility to be able to follow the unforeseen needs of a community?
4. As artists, practitioners, and facilitators, how can we open up spaces for mutual learning situations?
5. Although the activities we offer are not primarily based on languages, how can we overcome language barriers to make sure that no one feels excluded because of not understanding ongoing conversations?

We can learn this most of all by acknowledging the open-hearted people who give us their trust and take part in our sessions without knowing exactly what will happen: the communities in transition; the group of male inhabitants of the Leo Amici Rehabilitation Institute in Komló; people seeking sanctuary in Leeds; some of the inhabitants of Geuzenveld, a suburb of Amsterdam, who are currently threatened by eviction, and the culturally mixed population of Szalatnak.

One of our main questions in this project, given our belief in the importance of communal learning as outlined above, is how to find seeds/ways to reestablish shared creative spaces in a globalised 21st century, intercultural environment, characterised by the threat of loneliness; burnout; impatience; political division; exclusion; and loss of motivation. On a more philosophical level, Weaving Voices was conceived by the metaphor of the *thread* – tangible and audible – through its ability to

connect people and objects, and to form networks and interrelated webs. The 'thread' is both the yarn and the voice, the paths that our bodies draw when moving through spaces or the writing that the pen leaves on the paper. The 'thread' can be a chain of childhood memories that emerges consciously or unconsciously. Memories are carried by people who are looking for a new home out of their own choice or compulsion, or people who find themselves surrounded by a transforming environment which seems to have lost its familiarity. The 'thread' can therefore be seen as our belonging to places – either physical or imaginary – of important life events or historical moments. Can we track, through the networks of the thread, how these places, the geographical and built environments constantly leave their imprints on our bodies? How do these places, from our past or present, where we belong, guide our imagination and the ways we connect to others?

Weaving Voices is also inspired by the potential reciprocity and uniqueness that is inherent in the voice of each person.⁸ The voice that channels the singularity of one's body, the current physical, mental and emotional state, but that can never be conceived as self-contained, as it fundamentally links us to others:

*"As if the voice were the very epitome of a society that we carry with us and cannot get away from. We are social beings by the voice and through the voice; it seems that the voice stands at the axis of our social bonds, and that voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity."*⁹

Generally speaking, these two continuous ways of creation – the weaving of colours and materials together, and the emergence of vocal textures (or 'sound carpets')¹⁰ – can be considered as an analogous process that unfolds through different but interconnected channels of expression. Through imagination and curious attention in the project activities, our team aims to connect tactile, visible, and audible manifestations as open doors for personal encounters with others, as well as with our environment. How do the atmosphere and soundscape of a busy city square (e.g. in

8 Cavarero, A. (2005) *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, pp. 173–182.

9 Dolar, M. (2006) *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 14.

10 During the workshops that focused on vocal expression and listening, the project team often used this term, which means a form of vocal improvisation in a group. If the improvisation is successful, the voices of the individuals dynamically merge as if a powerful woven texture had been created.

Leeds) or the churchyard of a small village (e.g. in Szalatnak) impact the communal weaves? And how can we transform the visual patterns into sound when we try to sing them? How does the creation by the hands and the singing of polyphonic songs encourage each other and lead to establishing social bonds?

This book is thus an attempt to put lived experience into words and verbalise the nonverbal learnings of the innumerable rich moments of the Weaving Voices workshops. It also means to capture the diversity of experiences that individuals and groups representing different performance and textile traditions have had over the seven workshop weeks, the two community art residencies, several local encounters and virtual meetings of the partners. All this comprises an experience that has found life through the bodies, movements, voices, materials, and images of a specific constellation of people in particular geographic contexts.

Reflections by the authors that make up the chapters in this book come in a variety of writing registers. Some are highly informative or descriptive, while others are rather personal or poetic, and others were shaped by experimenting with the idea of 'text as weaving'. All parts of this spectrum are relevant and potentially give you, the reader, an insight into our artistic as well as educational approaches and findings.

In the piece *Extension of the Senses, Resonating Bodies and Spaces* by Walli Höfinger and Christiane Hommelsheim, two paths are drawn out and intertwined along some resonant thoughts and philosophies. The artists and voice teachers, who have been working in partnership for decades, invite the reader to travel along the lines then stop for a moment and through guided exercises, listen simply but carefully inwards and outwards at the same time. *Collective Composing as a Form of Musical Weaving*, the chapter collectively written by five members of the Soharóza choir – Judit Biksz, Sarolta Eörsi, Dóra Halas, Vera Jónás and Endre Kertész – gives an insight into the working method of the choir based on collective composing, including examples of concrete improvisation exercises. They also give an account of their work with the male community of the rehabilitation centre in Komló. By respecting the rather strict daily rules of this institute, they held a series of fruitful workshops, and with the involvement of the project partners, the participatory work was eventually composed into a theatre performance. More of the pieces in this book

reflect on the connection and parallel processes of creation and learning of weaving and singing in a broad sense, both in improvised manners. Textile artist, Rosa Smits, titles her chapter *Weaving Together to Mend Our Collective Wellbeing*. She introduces some of the basic characteristics of the craft of weaving, especially through her meeting with the Moroccan Amazigh community. By reflecting on the Weaving Voices project week in Leeds, she focuses on the advantages of communal weaving in a public space as a *low-threshold* creative activity. More generally, she also addresses contemporary issues of craft and design, its ethical questions and environmental impact. The study by Laurent Stéphan *The Educational Value of Traditional Georgian Songs* focuses on the various aspects of the rich vocal tradition of Georgian culture which accompanied the stages of the present project. A special connection has been found here between singing and weaving or craft activity that explores the issue of authenticity when it comes to the learning and applying these songs interculturally. Similar questions arose about the relevance of the Scandinavian herding call, *kulning* in the pedagogical insight titled *Creative Space in a Natural Setting* by Wendela Löfquist. She summarises the experience and challenges of the project week in Sweden, highlighting the positive effects of being in close proximity to nature. Nina van Hartkamp, from the field of mixed media and textile art, reflects on the conditions and outcomes of community art in her piece *Interwoven Stories of Connection: Methodologies for Weaving a Community with and from Many Voices*. She gives the example of the botanical dyeing and printing sessions that she led during the project in Komló (Hungary) with the participation of the inhabitants of the Leo Amici Rehabilitation Institute. She also touches upon questions regarding the dynamic relationship between structured (e.g. the loom) and unknown (e.g. improvisatory) spaces when it comes to collective creation. The writing by Géza Pintér-Németh *Threads of Memories, Carpet of Voices* reveals some strategically important and memorable project activities involving the rural community of Szalatnak (Hungary) in June 2024. The experimental text by Teresa Brayshaw and Hannah Butterfield *Weaving Voices as Threads of Community* opens several doors to different aspects of the project including their own practices in the fields of Feldenkrais Method (a somatic movement practice) and co-creation arts facilitation with people seeking sanctuary in the UK. The authors also reflect on key terms, ideas and questions that have been crucial to the partnership during this project as well as with an eye to its future.

The current publication is complemented by a [digital library](#), a collection of sounds, songs, images, and videos which have been an important part of our project and offer a broader view of our research in practice alongside the texts. We also invite you on a corporeal journey, to open a shared virtual space, by guiding you through and offering ideas and some exercises. Even if some of them might seem rather simple, they can potentially transform your actual bodily and mental state, the way of perceiving your environment and yourself. In this way they may affect how you connect to the human and non-human beings around you.

For short biographies of the authors, as well as more information about the partner organisations of Weaving Voices, please have a look at the end of this book. If you would like to share your thoughts or questions with our team, we encourage you to get in touch with us to open further dialogues. You can contact the project team via the coordinator's email: sinumszinhaz@gmail.com.













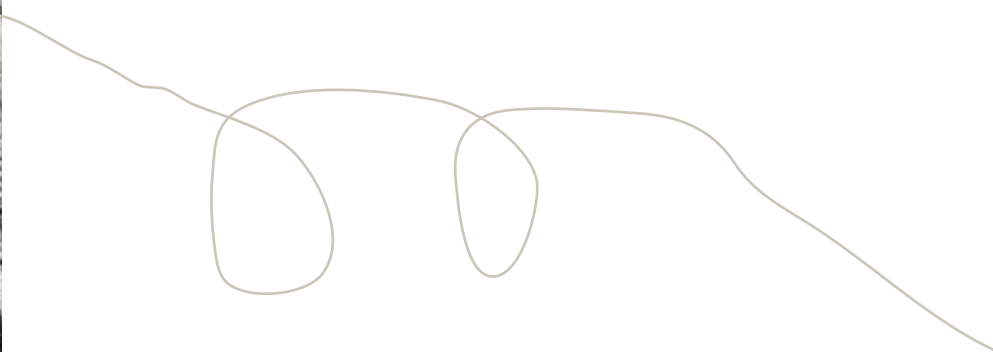






RETHINKING HERITAGE:

*Threading
Through*



*So it is certainly round with a fireplace in the middle
and it goes up to the top of the sky in the middle.
For some reason the water is like an ally, the old water.
It really helps me to cleanse, clarify, and widen my vision.
It is like the wind that touches, caresses my skin.
It's like the smell of the fresh air, the sound of the wind in the trees.
The warm sensation of the sun on my skin, the birdsong around.
And what I really enjoy is that we shift roles.
I think if I weren't that rooted and supported
by those roots I would live differently.
So I might have to let go of things."*

IPoem, Walli Höfinger (Weaving Voices, Leeds, 2024)

EXTENSION OF THE SENSES, RESONATING BODIES AND SPACES

Walli Höfing and Christiane Hommelsheim

We were invited to the Weaving Voices Project in our capacities as freelance artists and voice teachers. We are both based close to Berlin and also accredited teachers of the Roy Hart Centre in Malérargues, France. Next to hosting a voice workshop at Gutshof Reichenow, near Berlin, we travelled to most legs of the project to participate.

It has been most helpful for our own practice and artistic horizons to have the opportunity to learn and experience the other partners' worlds and skills. Participating was a rare opportunity to be taken into communities and meet people whom one would probably never meet, if not facilitated by projects like this. Weaving Voices is an inter-cultural and inter-generational project, as is the context of the Roy Hart Centre voice work. We have many years of experience of bringing people from different backgrounds, ages and countries together and open the space for voice work and singing. But we rarely meet vulnerable groups, like the people 'seeking sanctuary' in Leeds, UK, or the groups in a recovery from addiction process in Kómló, Hungary. This is where the social and artistic aspects overlap.

Touched by the power of personal story and experience, we would like to share our own personal journeys with the voice and what the voice, in our view, is a symptom of, alongside giving some general information about our approach to working with people and their voices. Interspersed you will find exercises you are invited to do on your own. There are countless different perspectives from which one can look at the complex phenomena of the human voice. In our workshops we invite participants to explore all the colours and expressive possibilities of the voice, regardless of aesthetic norms. We look at the relationship between voice and body as well as that between voice and consciousness, and adventure beyond the accustomed patterns of how the voice is habitually perceived and used. In the words of Margaret Cameron:

“We seek insight through the voice’s and body’s visceral capacities to perceive and to transform experience into material realities, which then become the substance of art.”¹¹

We explore how perception through different sense doors resonates information into consciousness. We care a lot about conveying an ethical, humanistic approach to the whole voice and the whole person. We cultivate a trust in our own intuition through listening, questioning, reflecting and describing our experience. Through this process we gain a greater understanding of the vocal landscape, for which we begin to create a personal map. By gaining experience of the voice, the map enlarges and by setting landmarks in the places we visited, we can later find our way back to different places in our voices. Timbres, textures and emotional qualities become accessible and applicable to the form of expression desired.

The voice work we offer has an innate community building aspect, through the fact of being together in a held space. We move, sound, listen, witness each other and reflect together. The fact that we are working in groups augments the possibility for social and artistic intelligence. Even in the individual sessions, the whole group listens, being present and following a lesson of somebody else with full attention is what we call ‘listening work,’ the group becomes a listening environment. The act of listening attentively brings tuning and shared humanity in the space. We mirror each other, we start to resonate with each other. Ian Magilton describes it as follows:

“Connection needs the presence of people with their bodies in the same place. A deep experience of being connected is pretty hard to find through the internet etc. although these devices help very often to stay in contact with each other. But the form of connection that we mean and can give to the world can only grow and be nurtured in situations with people sharing the same space – as a voice- and soundscape.”¹²

11 Cameron, M. (2016) *I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy*. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 1.

12 Magilton, I. (n.d.) *Welcome - Centre Artistique International Roy Hart, Centre Artistique International Roy Hart*. Available at: <https://roy-hart-theatre.com/> [Accessed 31 Aug. 2024].

As groups work together they don't only contribute and combine individual ideas, but sometimes mutual support can unlock expression and musical form. When there is a supportive contribution by the other, one's own individual perception is enriched. The borders between 'self' and 'other' are intentionally blurred. This blurring encourages new shapes to emerge, with shared authorship.



Cracking the caramel

My story of **it** – what is it I'm looking for?

Christiane Hommelsheim

“A Question of it – methodology is whatever generates possibilities and delays closure.”

Margaret Cameron¹³

Crème Caramel is a French dessert where on a delicious sweet pudding there is a crusty top surface of caramel. When you begin to eat, your spoon has to crack through the caramel to sink into the pudding.

In my story it became a symbol of cracking though paradigms or assumptions. You thought this was a firm surface one could trust and build on, but no, in a split second you crack through it and your whole world changes.

Age 22 I started studying art and my professor, Ulrike Rosenbach (video and performance artist) flipped through my portfolio and asked me:

–WHY do you paint these pictures?

In a blink of an eye I knew that I painted these pictures because I had fallen in love with the painting teacher in the small art school I had gone to, to prepare the portfolio.

I knew that **it** (the paintings) didn't mean anything. But I knew that **it** had to be Art, since acting had shown up as too dangerous for me in terms of male directors potentially objectifying me, or using me, my body, my voice, my psyche on stage for their own purposes, for their Art. How would my true voice ever be heard?

¹³ Cameron, M. (2016) I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 11.

*“Connection is the
in the present tense
whatever occupies
attention to the de
Characterised by an
minuteness in the s
feeling of being abso
here. Regardless of
here' is agitated o
pain,
Kae Te*

*“It is not in my cont
it, when the experien
learn fr
Walli Ho*

³¹ Tempest, K. (2020) On Conn
don: Faber & Faber, p. 8.

³² Höfinger, W. personal notes

Voicing **it**

Stories of connecting through voice

Walli Höfinger

As a human being I am voice-centred and voice-gifted. I am naturally curious and also emphatic. I seek connection because without connection I cannot survive. I seek communication and relationship, because I depend on them. And like many other species, I need to express to relate.

As a voice practitioner, I am fascinated by the complex phenomenon of the human voice. In my experience the voice is an organ with a multifaceted capacity for connection. In my practice I often witness that voice has an impact on many levels: physical, mental, emotional, musical, imaginative, artistic and spiritual.

In my own voice practice the word 'connection' functions as a code word for an experience that carries many different states and meanings. In the sense that I am talking about, it is a placeholder for a specific experience that is hard to name or pin down, as any experience is fleeting.

The moment when the experience of 'connection' arrives is clearly perceptible to me. I cannot hold it or keep **it**. **It** is not in my control, but I can notice **it**, when the experience of **it** arrives, and I can learn from it.

I cannot 'make' connection, but I can create an environment and build a practice where connection can find me. My job then is to notice **it**, when **it** happens. And this leads me to be present in the moment, being perceptive from moment to moment.

*feeling of landing
. Fully immersed in
you, paying close
tails of experience.
n awareness of your
scheme of things. A
lutely located. Right
whether that 'right
or calm, joyous or
ful."
mpest³¹*

*rol, but I can notice
ce of it arrives, and
om it."
öfinger³²*

“In essence it is a quest to gain space and time.”

*Margaret Cameron*¹⁴

I was on a quest for space and time and ultimately freedom from something I couldn't name, but it was incredibly important. It became ME. I returned from the talk with Rosenbach, deeply sunken into the pudding of the unknown, scared but determined to find something. I sat in front of the video camera and filmed my face, opening and closing my eyes. I was silent, but there was a desperate voice behind the quiet face.

*“[...] a blink is a curtain
both sides
Margaret*

“[...] a blink is a curtain with a stage on both sides.”

*Margaret Cameron*¹⁵

Rosenbach challenged us with the question, what if your (generations) reason for art is inside yourself again. We (her generation) had to fight the establishment, break the rules and be innovative, but your generation has all the information available and everything has already been done. You need to look inside. So we looked inside: self-experience, emotions, movement, experiments with visiting artist Ulay...

It became something I had to find inside of me. The path of getting a glimpse of it, losing it as soon as I had a sense of finding it, was painful. It was never in the final result. It showed up in the studio, sometimes in performance, but never when I tried it.

Next Caramel: I produced a video, which I thought was very close to it, and showed it to Ritsaert ten Cate, when I was a lucky guest student of DasArts Amsterdam for one term.

*“The sounds that we
manifestation of o
of being,’ and are t
emotional and hi
Richard A*

14 Ibid. .

15 Ibid. p. 39.

33 Armstrong, R. – paraphrased f

Experience – voice workshop 1#:

"...All the other participants are singing to the harmonies of the piano; while my throat is tight. I can't make a sound. I feel paralyzed. 'These harmonies are disgusting' I think, 'these false chants, as if there were harmony where there is none'.

*ertain with a stage on
ides."
Cameron*

It reminds me of my childhood in church, where all the people sang together sanctimoniously, and they would talk poorly about each other afterwards. 'I thought this was a voice workshop, not a singing workshop. I don't give a shit about singing!' it rings in my head. I stand frozen in space while others move about singing.

The teacher: 'And whatever you do, be engaged physically.' 'Engaged physically?' rumbles my head. 'I can't stand this music and I certainly can't stand these voices and then I'm supposed to move to it?' It is unbearable. 'If you stand there like you're rooted to the spot, it won't do you any good. Go into motion and see what happens.' My heart races and I start to jump, a wild stomping dance, that doesn't fit into the atmosphere at all. It's hard for me to dance out of line and I'm embarrassed, too, but I can't help it. I dance, bouncing, stomping, snorting, breathing heavily.

*make are the audible
ur various 'states
the symptom of our
storical identity."
rmstrong³³*

And whatever it is, let it come into your voice' I hear the teacher from far away. I try to stay with it and open my mouth and gurgling, broken, bruised sounds are coming out of my throat. It does me good to hear them. 'Yes, I'm angry and I'm not putting up with all this sanctimonious harmony' I growl inwardly.

rom memory by Walli Höfinger.

*“You’re using the codes.
I know the codes.
I’m not interested in the codes.”
Ritsaert ten Cate¹⁶*

In a blink of an eye I understood exactly what he meant and knew that I also wasn’t interested in the codes. From then on I only filmed with a fixed camera, and singing, my voice became the way of the search. My voice became the enchantment of my actions, knowing that the action itself also was never **it**.

*“[...] the work is what it does.”
Margaret Cameron¹⁷*

For about four years I was part of the Performance group Magdalena Inc+, together with Walli Höfinger, my sister Ruth and Christopher Dell. **It** was a deep investigation into the principles of Improvisation. The Caramel of one day finding **it** as a form was cracked, and a painful but excitingly fun process of un-doing **it** began. In this collaborative investigation and questioning of form and performance we took an experimental leap into the nothing.

*“We believe in Nothing and in Not Yet. In Nothing, Not Yet is forming.”
Christopher Dell¹⁸*

Third Caramel: In the first workshop I attended in the Roy Hart Voice Centre in Malérargues, France, there was a young woman, who had, what I at the time would have called a small piping voice. She said she had the wish to become an opera singer. My cynical self said: “Good luck!” The teacher had her sing a micro opera to an imaginary bird in her hand, and slowly increased the

*“I realize that I am
music, in all the rage
realize that these sou
I choose to hear
Walli Höfinger*

*“Why try to cram s
Pandora’s box that h
inevitably go
Walli Höfinger*

*“We believe in Nothi
Nothing, Not Y
Christoph*

¹⁶ Personal memory of Christiane Hommelsheim.

¹⁷ Cameron, M. (2016) I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 12.

¹⁸ Dell, C. (2002) Prinzip Improvisation. Cologne: Walther König, p. 94.

*n connected to the
and all the despair. I
nds are also music, if
them that way.”
Höfing*

My dance becomes a kind of exorcism. I can feel myself taking up space and others dodge intimidated, but I keep going, because I can't help it.

'And whatever you follow, allow yourself to hear the music and at the same time follow your own music, wherever your voice wants to go.' Now my voice is getting louder. Sounds are coming, making their way up from the depths, sounding less like a human and more like a wild animal that wants to break free. And yet at the same time I hear the piano, and I realize that I am connected to the music, in all the rage and all the despair. I realize that these sounds are also music, if I choose to hear them that way.

*something back into
as broken free and is
ing its way?”
Höfing*

I perceive everything around me as far away, like a dream, my body trembling, my voice roaring, my legs trampling on the wooden floor like a drumbeat, but then I realize it's probably time to stop. It's hard to stop, now that this rage has made its way and I'm able to follow it. Why try to cram something back into Pandora's box that has broken free and is inevitably going its way?”⁴³

*ng and in Not Yet. In
et is forming.”
her Dell*

I often see in my classes that when the word 'music' is used, the person I am working with immediately stiffens the body and when improvising vocally, uses certain intervals. It seems that unconscious patterns of what the person thinks music is, immediately come into effect. The intervals that come into the voice with the mention of the word music are a third or a fifth.

43 Höfing, W. – memoir writing from 2020, inspired by a voice workshop held in Malérargues in 2007.

space between her and the bird, until she finally sang to me all the way across the room, with great presence and volume. I was humbled by her voice and being the recipient of her presence. From then on I never ever heard a 'wrong note' again. It was the moment when singing became a phenomenon, not a form. It became the manifestation of a transient state of being, a symptom of life, the muscle of the soul...

"The voice is the muscle of the soul."

*Roy Hart*¹⁹

A path in itself. In the many years since I have been teaching voice work I consequently have had **it** in front of me hundreds of times in the studio. I lived with **it** in its ephemeral nature. What a pleasure to hold space for **it**.

My next Caramel was cracked when I met the actor and playwright Margaret Cameron and choreographer Deborah Hay.

I was part of a research week around the question of how to teach dance. Deborah had been invited to lead the research together with Margaret. She started moving in space saying:

"What if the perception is the dance?

What if where I am is what I need? And what if it is not about what I need but about asking the question? What if where I am is what I need?

*What if every cell in my body has the potential to get what it needs right now? Here and gone. No big deal..."*²⁰

*"Singing: The opening
of the individual's
singing, in connecting
awareness of the
Here and. Now.
intensity, e.
Alfred W*

*"So how did I get b
that is actually inhe
voic
Walli H*

19 Hart, R. Roy Hart Theatre Archives – Roy Hart created this paraphrase, inspired by a quote from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Hyperion: "O how wonder is the human voice! It is indeed the organ of the soul."

20 Personal memory of Christiane Hommelsheim.

34 Wolfsohn, A., Roy Hart Theatre
quotes from Sheila Braggins, one

*...ing and liberation
...potential through
...g with the conscious
...e moment in the
Concentration,
...expression.”
Wolfsohn³⁴*

Not only are these intervals the most common intervals in western music, but also dominant in folk and children songs. Many people I met still sang children’s folk songs in primary school but wouldn’t continue singing afterwards.

My own courage to ‘voice’ was buried under cultural and musical expectations of how I should sound and how my voice should behave. In school I was encouraged to shut up rather than to speak out loud and freely. And like many people I was intimidated to use my voice freely except for to speak.

*...back to the mobility
...rent in my (and any)
...e?”
Töfinger*

Whether I wanted to sound like my favourite pop singer, whether I heard my voice on a sound recording, I couldn’t sing in key, and felt repelled from it. Whether I didn’t like my voice because it sounded too weak, loud, high, low, nasal... or I had to sing in front of others and was ridiculed about it. Whatever my disappointment around my voice was, it kept me from listening to how it actually sounded, kept me from exploring the qualities that were already there.

Once I gradually learned to listen to my voice with an open mind and curiosity, a hidden potential was unlocked. So how did I get back to the mobility that is actually inherent in my (and any) voice? Amongst the steps to work with my voice was to learn how to listen. Once I started to listen differently, I could learn to work with what is there and step into my own experience and authority of my unique voice.

Once I learned to be curious about all the nuances and qualities that could actually be heard in the voice, the usual evaluations slowly moved into the background, I

Without further instruction available I assumed to be invited to ask questions myself or do something, that would be my research that day.

I loved it. What terrifying freedom to commit to a question without answering it but actively asking it. And defending the space of that as dance. A whole world of shaping crumbled right there.

“...there is no way this looks!”

*Deborah Hay*²¹

The next day Margaret Cameron opened her session with the words:

“The elephant said to the mouse, You are very small. The mouse said to the elephant, I have been sick.”

*Margaret Cameron*²²

In a blink of an eye I knew that a new dimension of what used to be **it** was about to enter my world. **It** already loved abstraction in the ever shifting non fixation of form we pursued in the improvisation study and performance work with Magdalena Inc+. Yet **it** was never there when I needed it.

Margaret (and Deborah) seemed to suggest that the asking of the question was **it**. **It** is not the preparation of form, **it** is the form itself. **It** is always there when you need **it**!

“What if alignment is everywhere? So therefore to bring that back to the field of dance – are you kidding? What if alignment is everywhere? The permission, the joy, the power just to undo that fixity of behavior... using my body as a site of experimentation. My body being this cellular body...”

21 Hay, D. – paraphrased from memory by Christiane Hommelsheim – practice instructions, SPCP, 2007, Findhorn, Schottland.

22 Cameron, M. (2016) *I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy*. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 184.

*“When I refer to ‘the
referring to a writer
also to the author of
of you that creates t
existence and that is
find any thread stron
through the blank p
the n
Kae Te*

*“Learning how to sin
lov
Alfred W*

*“The elephant said
are very small. The
elephant, I ha
Margaret*

35 Tempest, K. (2020) *On Conn*
London: Faber & Faber, p. 9.

36 Wolfsohn, A., Roy Hart Theat
of quotes from Sheila Braggins,

the writer,' I may be
of text or music, but
experience. The part
the narrative of your
constantly trying to
ing enough to pull you
ages of one day into
ext."
mpest³⁵

ing is learning how to
e."
olfsohn³⁶

l to the mouse, You
e mouse said to the
ve been sick."
Cameron

became more sensitive towards what was there instead
of fixating my perception on what I thought should be
there.

This is when I started listening for qualities, for shifts
and other levels of information in the voice, that
connect within me or others. Then it was a natural step
to authorise myself to be touched and moved by the
sound of my own or another voice, to become resonant
and responsive.

Going into resonance with myself through my voice
can inform and awake different levels of perception.
Things that were 'sleeping' come into consciousness.
The voice opens the space towards depth and towards
darkness. In moments when a new sound arises from a
vocal journey, it can feel like 'Was this me?'. Then I am
ready to 'meet the stranger' in my voice, the 'spirit of
the depth.'

*"In the Red Book, Jung explores at length his idea that a
person is governed by two spirits: the spirit of the times and
the spirit of the depths. [...]*

*The spirit of the depths is the ancient part of you. The part
that responds to the invisible world. The part that makes
no sense and speaks in heavy symbols. Your madness, your
dreams, your visions. The spirit of the depths communicates
through archetypes, masks, animal shapes. It is drawn to
nature and wilderness."*

Kae Tempest ⁴⁴

ection. Kindle Edition ed.

re Archives – from a collection
one of his students.

⁴⁴ Tempest, K. (2020) On Connection. Kindle Edition ed. London:
Faber & Faber, p. 28.

blowing to pieces this idea of a singular coherent one who perceives..."

Deborah Hay²³

There is a way in which diving into perception as being 'the dance/music' and therefore giving up the search for **it** altogether, seemed like a spiritual path without a religion.

"I experience breathing as a dialogue with all there is. I believe that my cellular body knows dialogue in a way that I rarely experience in ordinary life."

Deborah Hay²⁴

A new era of formless practice began, where "...art became what made life more interesting than art."
Margaret Cameron

A lot of reasons to do art fell away. Life and art were not separate entities anymore and the practices suggested by Deborah Hay were full of discovery and deconstruction of fixation. Everything became movement, like breathing.

"I place the hands of my voice on words, on you who listen, and touch a touch that is also within me. Exhalation becomes inhalation; inhalation becomes exhalation. They are lovers."

Margaret Cameron²⁵

I thought I had stopped asking what **it** was that I was doing, when I found myself in a Hotel Bar in Amsterdam with Teresa, Walli and Dora, during the Weaving Voices session in Amsterdam asking exactly that question: "What is **it** that we are doing here in the Weaving Voices Project?"

23 Humble P. and Young, D. (2019) *Alignment is Everywhere*. [Film]

24 Hay, D., Leigh Foster S., Monni K. and Pichaud L. (2019) *RE-Perspective Deborah Hay: Works from 1968 to the Present*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz.

25 Cameron, M. (2016) *I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy*. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 41.

*There is a crack, a crack
That's how the world
Leonard*

*"My work can be true
it poses and the answer
Deborah*

*"I experience breathing
with all there is
Deborah*

*"...art became what
interesting
Margaret*

37 Cohen, L. (1992) *Anthem*. So

38 Hay, D., Leigh Foster S., Monni K. and Pichaud L. (2019) *RE-Perspective Deborah Hay: Works from 1968 to the Present*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz.

39 Cameron, M. – paraphrased Höfner.

Experience voice workshop 2#

*crack in everything /
light gets in.”*
Cohen³⁷

“...I feel my whole back, which can move, which warms up and comes alive, the spine in the middle like a snake awakening from a long winter’s sleep. The warmth also flows into my arms and legs and I start to move more and more. Now my voice spontaneously joins in. I feel the need to sing long deep notes, notes that reach deep down into my legs, that ground and root me, notes that give me strength and fill me completely.

*uced to the questions
vers it rejects. [...] “*
h Hay³⁸

My partner is working my lower back now, firmly and steadily and I feel like roaring now, going even deeper to feel my legs. Yes, my legs want to roar like a wild animal that has been caged for too long, simply out of the desire to roar, out of the desire to manifest my own power and presence.

*thing as a dialogue
there is.”*
ah Hay

I hesitate for a moment, because I am afraid of being too loud, too striking, but the desire is stronger. So I take a deep breath, a growling sound escapes my throat, a vibration in my throat that makes its way down my windpipe into my body, I inhale and growl again, then I open the voice channel and harsh broken sounds make their way out of my throat, now I feel my diaphragm and stomach.

*at made life more
than art.”*
Cameron³⁹

I continue to follow the wild energy that is now manifesting in my voice. The sounds are getting louder and louder, rubbing and vibrating in my throat and chest, making me hot, and I support myself with my arms on my knees, which gives me even more strength.

ny. [Song]
nni K. and Pichaud L. (2019)
Works from 1968 to the Present.

from memory by Walli

“This is an experiment in conversation. [...]

The idea of the Mbari isn’t to arrive summarily to a notion of truth. We’re not looking for truth here. As important as that designation is, we’re not looking for a way to arrive at consensus or agreement, as useful as those are strategically as well. The idea here is to listen with each other, to listen defractively, to create art, with words and textures and memory and feeling that allows us to see each other, including you, listening as gestures, minor gestures, instead of stabilized points in space-time. So we are not atomic entities trying to finalize our positions. We are touching each other, so to speak, and creating art with our conversation that we allow to be composted by the Earth. Nothing that is said here needs to be grasped, as some final principle of fundamental reality. We give it back to the earth [...].”
Bayo Akomolafe²⁶

Weaving and singing together with perfect strangers on a square in Leeds is what we did. We created little pop-up communities for a few hours in which we listened together to our reciprocal relationship as fellow human beings.

“And if art is a verb, we – you and I and it – are in reciprocal relationship. Open to the eye (I) of the other. [...] Where I am not you but we are not apart.”
Margaret Cameron²⁷

Weaving and singing together half the night is what we did, experiencing structure and freedom. We laughed about ourselves, discovering our conditionings and assumptions. We played so seriously that we got upset at times.

26 Ekrem, E. et al. (eds.) (2023) *Transcript: The edges in the middle, III: Báyo Akómóláfé and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, For the Wild*. Available at: <https://forthewild.world/podcast-transcripts/the-edges-in-the-middle-bayo-and-keeanga> [Accessed 16 September 2024].

27 Cameron, M. (2016) *I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy*. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, p. 64.

*“Art enables us to find
ourselves at the heart of
Thomas Merton*

*“...to draw from life
lived, hot and cold
life, the painful and
life from all fibers, the
bloody
Walli H*

*“Art is a
Margaret Cameron*

*“The unfolding of
becomes the energy
You discover how
exploration with
You feel strangely at
can’t define. You a
Michell Cassou and*

40 Merton, T. (1955) *No Man is an Island*. New York: Random House Books.

41 Cameron, M. (2016) *I Shudder to Think: Performance as Philosophy*. Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press.

42 Cassou, M. and Cubley, S. (2016) *Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Performance*. Perigee.

and ourselves and lose
the same time.”

Merton⁴⁰

Now the screams come from deep in my chest, they go from a low tone to a very high tone, all shades of broken tones can be heard, it really sounds like a wild animal, now I go on all fours, it really seems like tones in my legs want to free themselves.

for the artwork, the
and funny and sad
and the humorous, the
the life from flesh and
blood.”

Höfinger

I now start to move with my legs, crawling around the room, letting my spine twitch, twist and turn in relation to my legs so that I can feel it better. My partner just goes with it, now I feel her hands on my feet, as if she is talking to one foot and saying, ‘Yes, go ahead! Everything is allowed now...’”

verb...”

Cameron⁴¹

It was curiosity that brought me to the voice work. The curiosity to try something that almost scared me. With the whole body, with the whole soul, with all the feelings and states that show up on the way.

of the unexpected
that drives you.
thirsty you are for
without analysis.
home in a place you
are truly creating.”
and Stewart Cubley⁴²

And then to let all that motion impact the artistic process, not to keep life out of the artwork. No, on the contrary, to draw from life for the artwork, the lived, hot and cold and funny and sad life, the painful and the humorous, the life from all fibres, the life from flesh and blood. Singing flows through all realms, exploring the voices that are potentially always there, even when they are silent.

Experience of a creation process 1#

an Island. Veghel: Image

er to Think: Performance as
r Press, p. 29.

(1996) *Life, Paint and Passion:*
aneous. New York: Tarcher/

“...I gather all my courage. My collaborator is sitting next to me, looking at his thighs. ‘Just try what it is going to do. You don’t need to know how it is going to sound. Try to go with the energy and follow it. The spirit

*“[...] the View of Our Perception
And the perception of Our View is Our Stage.”
Margaret Cameron²⁸*

We sat in the forest, we journeyed with our voices, we
sang in, and listened to, languages foreign to most of
us, and we were grateful to be taken places by whoever
was creating the container for who-knows-what to
emerge.

*“To receive one’s own experience (or breath) as knowledge is
transformative (it performs).”
Margaret Cameron²⁹*

We created conditions for something to show up as
important.

*“Rubbing between Perception and Experience
Is becoming palpable, palpable,
Engendering Our Pearl against
The drying Wind of all that is Known.”
Margaret Cameron³⁰*

*“Rubbing between
and Experience
Is becoming palpable,
Engendering Our Pearl
The drying Wind of all that is Known.”
Margaret Cameron*

28 Ibid. p. 110.

29 Ibid. p. 70.

30 Ibid. p. 106.

of it.' My heart is racing, my fingers are cold and wet and I touch the keys. 'Ok' I say to myself, and close my eyes to feel the sensation in my sternum area. Again, the cliff feeling, about to parachute, but only without a parachute. I breathe in and release my voice and fingers into a wild dance, an uncontrolled movement...

*...between Perception
Experience
palpable, palpable,
our Pearl against
all that is Known."*
Cameron

...They are singing to and with each other, not according to the laws of music, but to the laws of motion. A wild irresistible sound emerges. New Music again! I've never heard anything like it, and the feeling of letting go makes me laugh. In this very moment I realize that this is crazy unique music that puts everything I've ever understood as music to the shade. 'Ok!' he exclaims and we burst into laughter.

'This is great!' exclaims my colleague. 'It feels like Anti Music' I say. It goes against everything I would normally do. But I love the sound of it..."

EXERCISES

1. Sit quietly. Slowly close your eyes and observe what you see behind closed eyes. Relax your eyes and allow them to lay comfortably in the globe of your eye socket. Then imagine your eye could look into your head, backwards, while you open your eyes and let the images touch your eyes. Breathe comfortably, then repeat until you stop.
2. Think of something that could create a container for human interaction. Try it!
3. Be silent. Breathe with all there is around you. Listen to the silence behind all the little noises. Observe how the silence becomes presence. Gently begin to sing without disturbing the silence. Weave yourself into the space like a little enchantment of the ordinary.
4. Go into nature. Find a spot that appeals to you to sit comfortably. Do nothing. Then adjust your position to even more comfort. Then decide to not move anymore. Listen. Wait. Notice how your immobility creates a sense of silence. Listen to all the little sounds that are there. Imagine, they are all there for you. Like a concert or performance. All is arranged exactly like this for you. Hear the music. The film music. Notice the feedback from the body. Listen. Wait for at least 10 minutes. Then decide to move again. Take your notebook and write for 6 minutes without stopping. Read your writing and underline words you like. Create a short text or poem out of the words you liked.

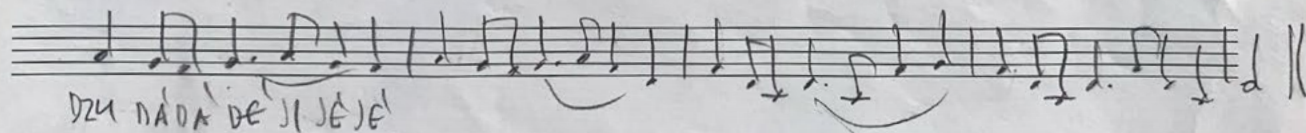
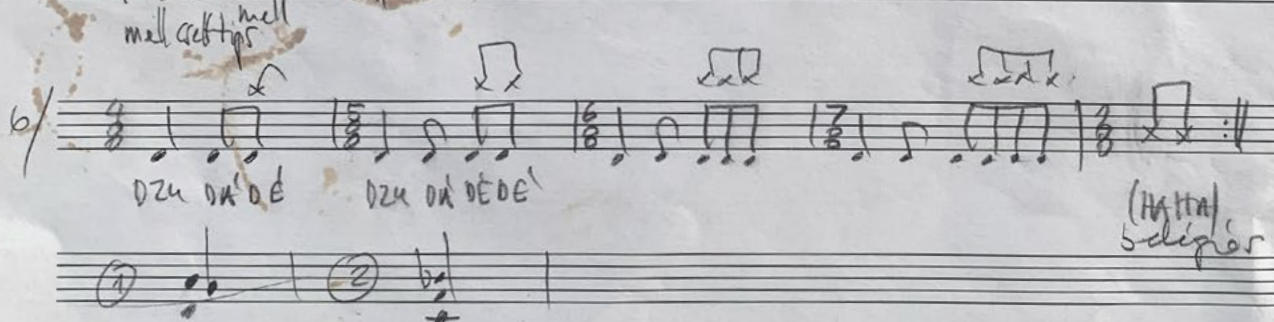
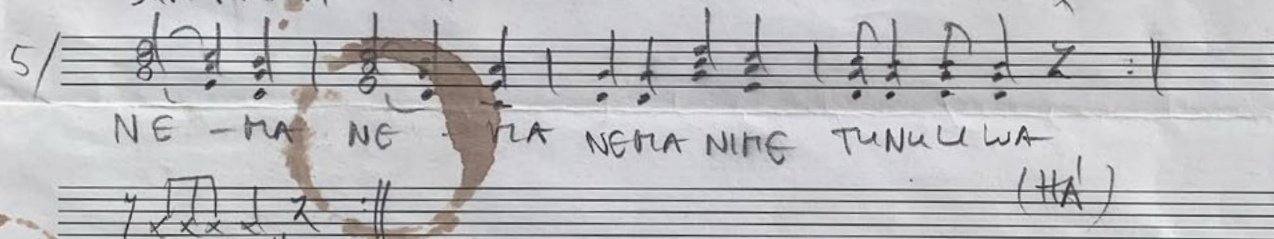
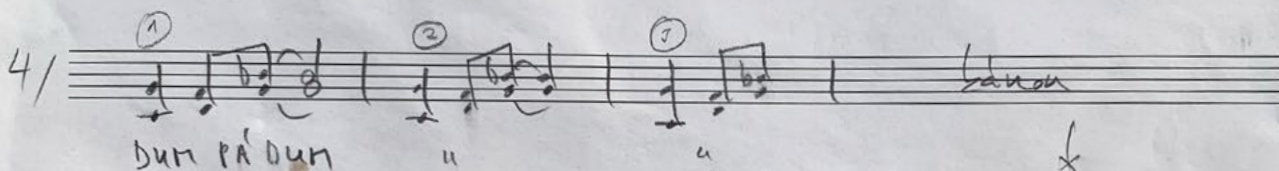
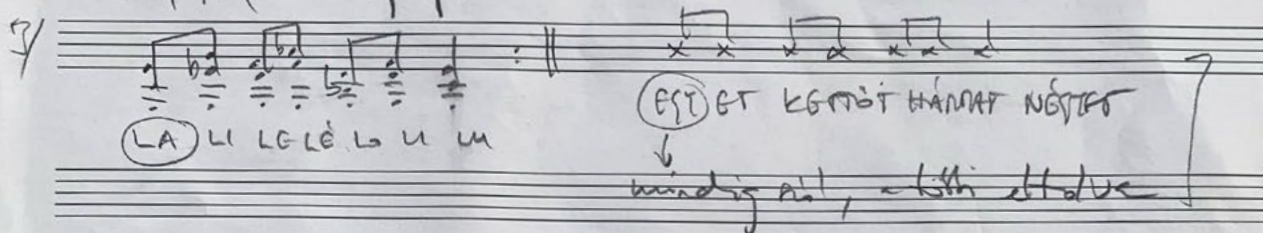
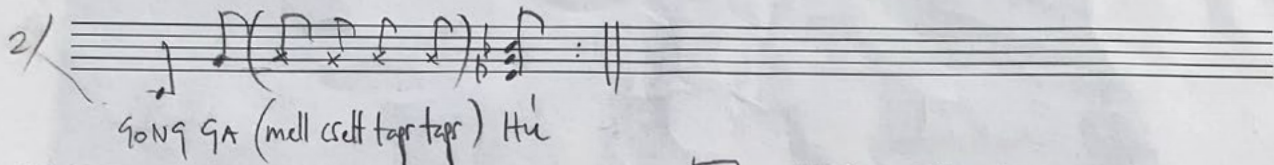
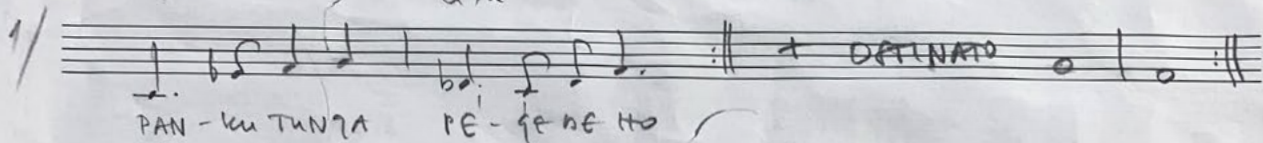
That's **it**! Thanks for listening



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COLLECTIVE COMPOSING AS A FORM OF MUSICAL WEAVING

Judit Biksz, Sarolta Eörsi, Dóra Halas, Vera Jónás, Endre Kertész
(members of Soharóza)

Together we are a monster

A group of 20 or so amateur singers are stacked in a close bundle in a vacant, run-down apartment. They are standing tightly in a knot, quietly breathing. Then their breathing starts to get heavier and louder, each person inhaling and exhaling in their own tempo. It now sounds like there is an enormous sleeping monster in the room. Then some of the singers begin to give voice to their breath and slowly musical tones appear in the air as others follow their lead, taking up their pitches or adding new ones. It is a slow and unnoticeable transition from simple breath to music. As the sound evolves, so does the movement: the participants begin to shift their body parts first, and then change their position to the point where everyone is wandering around the room like molecules of melting ice and evaporating water, with their majestic musical tones freely intertwining as they pass one another during their walk. There is a peak in the process, both in sound and movement, after which the members eventually step out to the wall and allow their voices to die down. The monster has vanished into thin air.

This was an example of collective composing, which we like to call the KOMP method, one of our very first experiences, originating from choral improvisation practices. Dóra Halas, founder of experimental choir Soharóza (based in Budapest, Hungary) has been developing the KOMP method for the past 20 years, since her first meeting with Swedish conductor Gunnar Eriksson, all the way to her DLA (Doctor of Liberal Arts) dissertation topic on choral improvisation, and further on to her experimental work with Soharóza, in both performative art and music education.⁴⁵ All of Soharóza's performances are based on this method, creating the music and all other segments of the piece together

45 The KOMP method has been developed partly from the following inspirations: *Kör ad lib* by Swedish conductor Gunnar Eriksson; *Soundpainting* by American composer Walter Thompson; *The Kokas Method* by Hungarian music pedagogue Klára Kokas; *Creative Musical Games* by Hungarian composer László Sáy; *The Intelligent Choir* and *Vocal Painting* by Danish professor Jim Daus Hjernø; further voicework and extended vocal techniques from courses by Katalin Ladik, Meredith Monk, David Moss, Ernő Zoltán Rubik, Jean-Michel Van Schouwborg and many more.

with the whole choir community during the rehearsals through collective brainstorming, improvisation and musical games.

In this chapter, we will try to explain a little bit more about our KOMP method. We'll also try to unfold the process in which we applied KOMP in a rehabilitation centre for addicts: for in 2023 we started working with the patients of Leo Amici 2002 Foundation of Komló, Southern Hungary.⁴⁶

Rules and agreements of collective composing

In the beginning of our workshops we always lay down a few ground rules in order to support our participants in a safe and playful environment throughout the session.⁴⁷ The first and most important principle is that there is no wrong or right way of using the voice, as long as it does not cause any pain or harm. There are no wrong notes either. All in all, we can say with utmost certainty that it is impossible to make a mistake in our games. If participants do defer from the rules of a game, we encourage them to emphasise this difference and turn it into a deliberate musical statement instead of trying to hide it as a mistake. Our games are never played the same way, as participants are always different, and the voice is always in flux. One day it may run smoothly, the next day it might get rough, so each time it is our quest to acknowledge and work with what we have on that day without judgement.

Another important request we have is that there should be no ruining of the game. It is important to take the games seriously, making it enjoyable and safe for everyone involved. It is also worth mentioning the obvious: our games have no winners. There is no competition, only the joy and bliss of being absorbed in play.

Five examples from the Soharóza's collection of KOMP games

SOUND FOREST

Description: *Sound Forest* (also known as *Atmospheres*, which is a general form of the *Monster Game* described above) might be the simplest KOMP

⁴⁶ Website: *Leo Amici 2002 Alapítvány* (n.d.) Leo Amici. Available at: <https://leoamici.hu/> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

⁴⁷ As members of Soharóza we utilise KOMP in our own rehearsals, but we also hold workshops for groups of kids, adults and mixed groups – e.g. families – as well. Summer camps, temporary homes for less-than-fortunate families also get in our focus from time to time. The workshops don't take place regularly, rather when we're invited to do so. Sometimes we use KOMP as a tool to introduce a new project to our audience because we always prefer to do our thing in an interactive, inclusive way.

game. The members walk around the room, holding long musical tones. One exhale = one tone. When you finish one breath, stop and decide on the next note. Always listen carefully before you start singing to make sure that you are adding the best possible tone to what is already sounding in the air. You have time. There is no rush. Silence is also music. Wait for your moment.

Aha! moment: As you walk amongst the group members and make your sound within this huge cluster of notes, you feel the power of dissolving into some monumental harmony. Practising a sustained note over a long breath, using movement of the arms and body, is also a perfect way to strengthen your intonation and voice. Finally, if you do manage to stay silent and listen until there is space for you to sing, you will understand the importance of the collective over the individual and allow this notion to lead you in your spontaneous composition.

Examples:

- DLA Doctorate Concert of Dóra Halas 2013: [EPITAPH FOR TIME](#) – rephrase of the *Seikilos epitaph*, the oldest surviving complete musical composition⁴⁸
- Soharóza's Improvisation Studio Recording 2011: [FURROWS](#) – *distant song of three women engraved in the furrows of time*⁴⁹
- Soharóza's Improvisation Studio Recording 2011: [ATMOSPHERES](#) – rephrase of Petrarca's text and Monteverdi's music from *Hor che'l ciel e la terra*.⁵⁰

WORD IMPROV

Description: Choose a word – any word in any language – and create a 4/4 loop out of it in any way you want. You can break up the word into sounds or syllables, you can make small repetitions, you can give it melody or just chant it or make funny effects with it. There is no limit. The other members do the same with other words, simultaneously, making a choral piece out of word-based loops. Variations may include creating loops together

48 01 - DLA - epitaph - for - time - szeikilosz - sirfelirata (2014) SoundCloud. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/soharoza/01-dla-epitaph-for-time-szeikilosz-sirfelirata?in=soharoza%2Fsets%2Fdla-koncert> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

49 Furrows – distant song of three women engraved in the furrows of time, by Soharóza (2017) Soharóza Bandcamp. Available at: <https://soharoza.bandcamp.com/track/furrows-distant-song-of-three-women-engraved-in-the-furrows-of-time> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

50 Atmospheres – rephrase of Petrarca's text and Monteverdi's music from 'hor che'l ciel e la terra', by Soharóza (2017) Soharóza Bandcamp. Available at: <https://soharoza.bandcamp.com/track/atmospheres-rephrase-of-petrarcas-text-and-monteverdis-music-from-hor-chel-ciel-e-la-terra> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].





in groups; making space for conductor games; creating two versions of your loop (e.g. a theme and a solo variation); establishing a common key or scale for the piece to make it more harmonic; choosing words from a specific topic (e.g. your names, favourite food, slang words and so on).

Aha! moment: You do not need real singing in order to get into a groove – playing around with words and rhythm in a really simple way is perfectly enough to create a cool and enjoyable atmosphere.

CIRCLE SONG

Description: Choose a well-known song – this could be anything from a Mozart aria to a nursery rhyme to *Poker Face* – or any melody you like (or make up) and sing the tune over and over. The choir voices spontaneously create new parts/background vocals to go with the tune while listening to it repeatedly. The new composed parts may not necessarily be melodious in nature – they can be percussive or atmospheric too.

Aha! moment: What can be more glorious than singing a simple tune round and round again and experiencing the change that happens along the way?

See also [Circlesongs by Bobby McFerrin](https://bobbymcferrin.com/circlesongs/).⁵¹

CONDUCTOR GAME

Description: This is a free improvisational game, where everything is completely left to the individual imagination. You will need a ‘conductor’ to direct the choir (anyone is capable of doing this), using any kind of movement or gesture. The choir members will try to translate the movements of the conductor into sound as accurately as possible. Interpretation is completely individual and free, just make sure you react as quickly as possible to the changes in movement. The choir can be divided into smaller groups during the game and a ‘sub-conductor’ can be assigned to them. The conductor can hand over the directing to someone else at any point, allowing everyone to have a go at leading.

Aha! moment: As a conductor, you will have the chance to experience a solo role, even if it means pushing your own limits – when directing is passed on to you, you must accept and give it a try. When you do and the choir follows your movements, the experience of their full attention and your freedom to do whatever you like can feel empowering. As a member of the choir, the wonder is in the 100% focus on the person in front of you, tuning in to every small move they

⁵¹ *Circlesongs* - Bobby McFerrin (2023) Bobby McFerrin. Available at: <https://bobbymcferrin.com/circlesongs/> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].



make, giving in to their will with sounds or silence. There is no bad or ugly, there is only the expression of what you see in the movements. It is truly liberating.

Example: [Conductor Game by Soharóza and Bélaműhely](#).⁵²

(It is also possible to develop a toolbox of signs alongside the abstract conductor moves: consensual signs that can be used for more specific choral improvisation exercises. See also [Soundpainting](#)⁵³ by Walter Thompson or [Vocal Painting](#)⁵⁴ by Jim Daus Hjernøe.)

FOREST DIVE

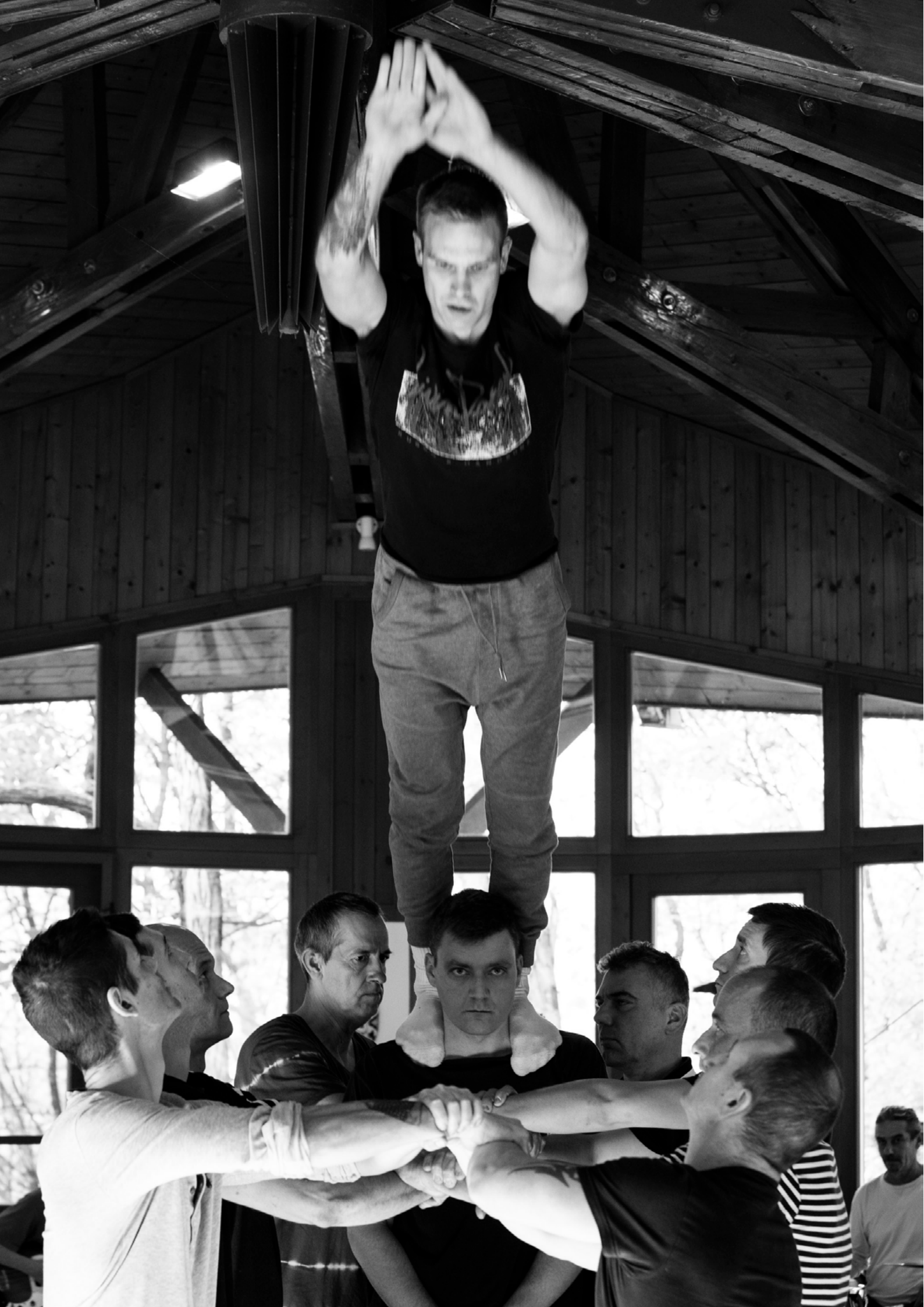
Description: This is a perfect exercise for focusing on the internal sounds of participants if you have access to a natural environment nearby. We ask the group not to speak or make any sound at the beginning. We silently leave the room with the guidance of a leader (the only person allowed to speak), who may stop at some point and ask participants to start listening to, and feeling the environment. Use the eyes, ears and skin to deeply connect to the outer world. We slowly walk into a designated space in the forest in silence at a slow pace and form a circle. The leader needs to soften the tone of their voice, since all senses are refined now. The task is to take a good 10 to 30 minutes (depending on the available time of the group) to go and find a spot in the forest alone, and to observe something as closely as possible. It can be a tree trunk, a spot on the soil or movements of animals. Note every little detail, become an expert of that space. After the given time, the leader puts participants in small groups (3-4 people) and asks them to create a short performance of their experiences, but without speaking. No verbal sharing is allowed. When the groups are ready, we gather in a circle in silence, and the groups show their performance (if consented to by each member). When they share, the audience can choose to collaborate by copying the movement and sound. After the sharing, we all return back to the room, slowly, silently and mindfully.

Aha! moment: This game is a perfect tool for grounding a group of people individually and as a whole as well. It requires a great deal of self-discipline and trust, but with that in hand, it can make a lifelong impact on participants. Experiencing collective silence can build a deeper understanding of unspoken connection and offer a new way to perceive music in general.

⁵² Bélaműhely Soharóza Karmesterjáték 2015 (2016) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bd8fruG34iE> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

⁵³ Soundpainting - The Art of Live Composition (n.d.) Soundpainting. Available at: <http://www.soundpainting.com/> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

⁵⁴ The Intelligent Choir (n.d.) The Intelligent Choir. Available at: <https://theintelligentchoir.com/> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].



Field work at the rehabilitation centre for addicts in Komló, Hungary

Down at the bottom of a steep valley, hidden among trees is a small one-storey building, originally a sport and recreation centre, now functioning as a rehabilitation centre for male addicts. The institution was recommended to us when we were looking for a pre-existing group, whose work we could join. What we were offering was a series of workshops involving the following: using and freeing the voice, tuning in to each other, non-verbal/abstract self-expression, improving cooperation and concentration, paying attention to oneself and to each other, building a strong community experience as well as the joy of making music together. The greatest advantage of the Komló rehab was that drama therapy sessions were already being implemented at the institution and the leaders of the place were more than open to expanding their field to our musical work and also to the textile-related activities of our international partners.

Since we had had no previous experience of working with addicts, the institution's professional support was of utmost necessity to us. In the introductory phase, building the trust of the men in therapy was particularly important for us. There are risks with such a vulnerable group: if the challenge we put to them is overwhelming or if we push their boundaries too far, we lose the possibility of creating an atmosphere for them to play and experiment freely. We were not even sure how open the participants would be to singing in general, let alone making funny noises. So for these reasons we decided to start with games that have very specific rules and frameworks, observing their reactions and gradually introducing games that require more courage, openness and creativity.

Our preparation was also overshadowed by some concerns and worries within our group. How could we – as non-professionals in addictology – ensure that we did not cause any harm to the people in therapy? How could we deal with attachment issues, especially since they are all men and the majority of us are women? Would the atmosphere of the rehab bear down on us with emotional heaviness? Such were the questions circling in our prejudgemental minds.

Over the course of the few months we spent at the rehab, visiting multiple times, our involvement with the men in therapy turned out to be an amazing experience, full of learning and valuable insight. As we adjusted

to the very special everyday rules of the community, so different from our ordinary lives, so respectful and supportive, yet at the same time immensely strict and hard, we came to know a very well-socialised group, where everyone's participation was already an ingrained norm, and where honesty, acceptance and responsiveness were the baseline. One example of the many strict rules was when one of the authors of this chapter, Endre, took his sandals off just before our first workshop in the rehab. Pazó (nickname of Zoltán Pataki), the leader of the institute asked him whether the workshop would be held barefoot. He said "no". Pazó then asked Endre to put his sandals back on, because, as he explained, "either everyone stays barefoot or no one". This looked like a somewhat harsh form of limiting our freedom but at the same time we understood at once that these rules also serve for the community, to keep it together.

Either way, our worries vanished completely during our first session and soon turned into enthusiasm and motivation. It was rather easy for us to involve the members within all our activities and even singing was not a problem. At the end of each session, we held a quick round of feedback and were surprised to see the men opening up and easing into our presence and activities so fast.

A therapeutic performance by the men of Komló

Each year the rehabilitation centre of Komló holds a drama performance, created and performed by the men, who are at that time residents of the centre, engaged in therapy. The theatre piece – directed by the leader of the rehab – consists of several short scenes, each depicting one of the men and his situation, based on their personal stories, using drama therapy tools. The performances take place outside the institution in several different locations.

This year, with our presence contributing to their ongoing therapy, it was the request of the rehab workers to enrich their current performance with musical and vocal features. We received the script and a rehearsal video in advance with some suggestions, so when our international partners of the Erasmus+ project joined us in Budapest in the autumn of 2023, we were able to analyse the scenes and come up with musical ideas together, some of which included atmospheric vocal presence, pre-composed chord structures and verbal rhythm exercises. Our aim was to invent games

based on our previous collective composition methods for the theme of each scene, so instead of just adding our choir to their performance as an outside element, we could play the games together with them. As a result, the original performance in prose was enhanced with short vocal compositions, some of which were performed by the choir of Soharóza standing in the background, and some by the joint forces of the singers and the men in therapy.

We are proud and happy to say that the outcome of this whole process was of enormous value to the people in therapy, their leaders and therapists, as well as ourselves. The use of the human voice in a musical and abstract way added a great deal. Feedback from the residents of the rehab proves that the power of these games and our presence far exceeded their expectations. We hope to continue to work with this institution over the long term.⁵⁵

Musical improvisation is weaving in time

During the long months of our Erasmus+ project, as we grew familiar with the expertise of each partner and indulged in endless philosophical discussions of our practices and their confluence with one another, we went through a slow, but steady eye-opening process. The breakthrough moment came in Amsterdam in April 2023, when the textile artist partners, Rosa Smits and Nina van Hartskamp, hosted us in their workshop space for a week, and led us through a series of weaving and other textile-related activities. As the ten of us worked incessantly on a communal weaving (we could not even stop for the night) and taught songs to each other in the meantime, the musical and the visual forms and patterns became one.

Music-making in an improvised manner or in the way Soharóza uses it to create performances and work with different groups is analogous and connected to weaving on two levels: a practical and a philosophical one. Pragmatically speaking, the dimensions and components of a weave (warp, weft, patterns, colours, material, etc.) can perfectly correspond to that of a musical composition (pitch, melody, tempo, rhythm, volume, timbre, etc.) and as such can be used as notation for music, either in an improvised, free form or constrained by strict interpretation guidelines. The composition

⁵⁵ For a video recording of the performance held in Budapest in November 2023, please [contact us](#). We can also share a detailed description of the musical games and short compositions that appear in the performance.

of a weave thus becomes a musical composition – requiring a musical leader (or the group collectively) to set the rules in advance. This can be a game, like the ones mentioned before as illustrations of the KOMP method, but it can also become a performance piece. On the metaphorical level, the more weaving we did, the more we realised that the way the horizontal and vertical threads join together in space to make a strong and firm piece of textile, is perfectly in sync with how collective composition methods work, with the singers and their input being the individual threads, joining their voices together in the many different possible ways to create a compact, solid sound and musical form.

Community weaving and collective composing are therefore both perfect measures for the process of joining individual inventiveness and imagination to form a new piece of art. They go hand in hand, in the same way that women used to sing together in the spinnery and in the same way that we continued to compose new lyrics for a repetitive Georgian song, as we wove into the night on our community loom.

"We are all artists" (Joseph Beuys)

Throughout our two-year journey, engaging with each other and with different communities, the same questions kept arising: Where does art begin? And, when can we consider a work or piece as artistically valuable? Essentially, our principle is to understand art as basic human expression. How we perceive it afterwards – as an outside audience – complicates the entire picture. When any kind of context appears (or disappears), or where the piece is put in different perspectives, or the (art)work becomes functional (and vice versa: the functional becomes an act of artistic expression), that is when questions and debates arise.

As creators we concentrate on the story and the experience we live through, during the weaving and/or the voice work. Labelling artists as amateur, professional, civilian or people in therapy misses the point, as well as obeying the capitalist and consumerist view of whatever kind of situation is acceptable as art or even 'good art'. In other words, we consider art to be highly subjective, and as long as there are debates, fruitful conversations that allow us to pay attention to each other and grow together, we are on the right track.















WELLBEING

Rosa Smits

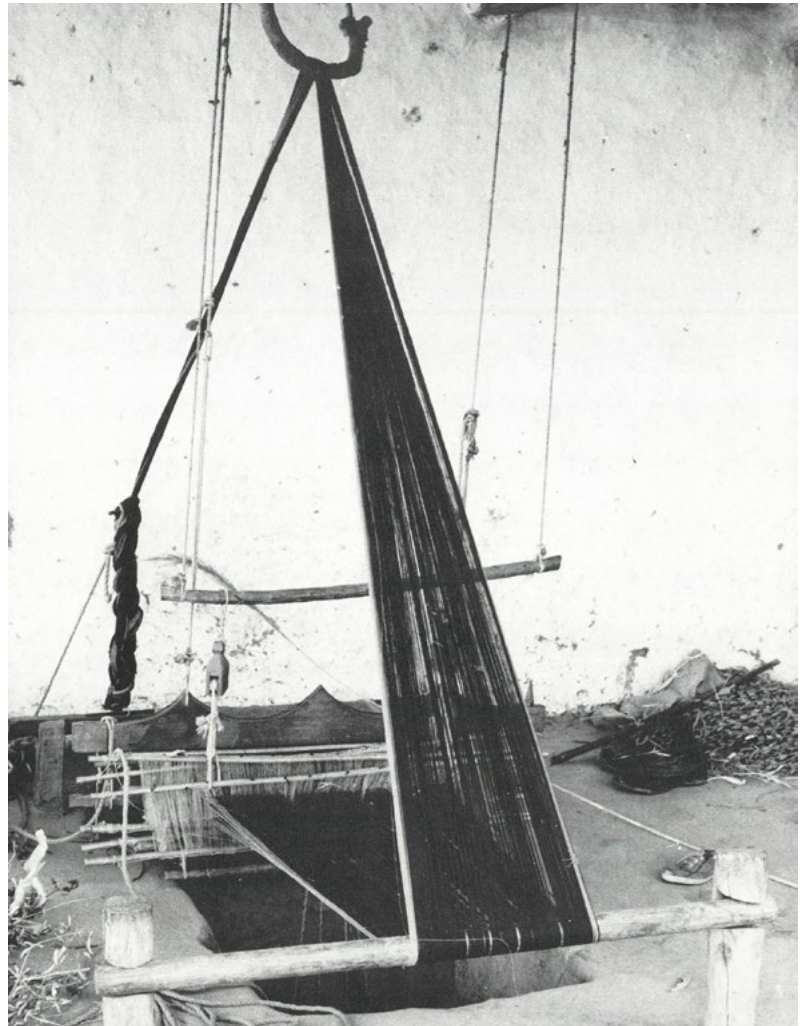
Introduction to communal weaving

Six years ago, I spent a week alongside my fellow textile students and a handful of teachers in a rural Amazigh community of traditional weavers in Morocco. One of my most vivid memories from that week was observing the Amazigh women collaboratively preparing a warp and setting it on their vertical tapestry loom. Their combined effort, requiring minimal words, deeply moved me. They toiled in silence, their minds focused, executing repetitive movements. Laughter echoed at the slightest misstep or a well-placed joke. Their expressive faces revealed the physical toll – back pain from bending over and weariness from the heat. Occasionally, the women would spontaneously involve a student in a task. Most of us stood around, observing the women at work in an unfinished space that neither had a roof nor a floor. Various building details protruded from the walls at random places. The space housed several tapestry looms, their side beams firmly embedded in the earth. The vertical looms were supported by the earth's force and sturdy wires well-knotted to the protruding details of the unfinished walls. The level of skill these women possessed and the ease and humane way in which they worked together, including the space itself and some of us, was breathtaking. That moment for me, unveiled the profound power and significance of weaving together.



that there may be some collective weaving communities left in the remote rural landscapes of Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the fading popularity of passing down this ancient craft is a common disheartening trend. As weavers age, their offspring show a diminishing interest in taking up their threads, indicating a gradual loss of this skill from one generation to the next.

Weaving is a meticulous and skillful craft typically performed on a loom, but it can also be practised without one. Examples include basket weaving or fence weaving using branches, where the hands directly shape the material. In my experience in teaching weaving, I've noticed that beginners often find the loom fascinating and also intimidating. The process of preparing a loom can take days. It requires accuracy, patience, materials and more than two hands. The intricate steps involved in preparing a loom highlight how weaving has historically been, and in some places still is, a craft practised collaboratively within communities worldwide.





In the first Weaving Voices project weeks, at the Roy Hart Centre in France (October 2022) and Reichenow in Germany (January 2023), our group members trained together, focussing on getting to know each other and exploring the Roy Hart approach. Bonding through experimental voicework, we delved into exercises linking sound and movement to visual elements such as colour. Voice teacher Laurent Stéphan introduced the Georgian call-and-response song *Khert'lis Naduri* about women spinning together, which became a very important song for the merging of weaving and singing later on. Evening sessions of weaving on small frames, led by me, offered a basic understanding of weaving. During a dynamic group session on the last day at the Roy Hart Centre, our small weaves – finished and still in the making – became the foundation for sound and movement experimentation. I would describe this period metaphorically as 'touching upon each other's threads and getting familiar with them'.

As a weaver navigating the realm of voice without formal singing training, I've discovered several tactile entry points in the vocal training. Voice teacher Carol Mendelsohn urged me to employ my hand in guiding my voice, emphasising "you are such a hand person". In Reichenow, drawing inspiration from Teresa Brayshaw's Feldenkrais practice, I delved into an exploration of the connection between my voice and my skin — the organ which is in my view the most closely linked to textiles. Inviting others to participate, we created a sound bath of interconnected voices. Unlike traditional blending in group exercises, our voices intertwined without losing their distinct leading threads – the connection to the self.

In an attempt to process the intense voice training, I often reflected by weaving on a small frame in the evenings, as a form of abstract journaling. Other members seemed to adopt this practice too, using weaving as a means to express thoughts, emotions, discoveries or obstacles. Much like a personal diary, the significance of these weaves typically remained private. Beyond mere expression, weaving after a full day, emerged as a deliberate act of self-care, a space for decompression and unwinding. It was remarkable how swiftly, even in the initial stages of our journey, weaving evolved into a means of self-nurturing.



between weaving and singing, is that both voice and weaving practices have extensive technical, cultural and historical backgrounds. Both practices can be approached more systematically, following established systems of information leaning on experience and discoveries of previous times. Also, they can have an intuitive, experimental approach. And there's the possibility of a mixture or a 'dance' in between these approaches or perspectives. The introduction of the voicework and the weaving applied in the Weaving Voices training appeared to me as a blend of intuitive and experimental work based on the knowledge and experience of a teacher, merged with the input of an individual practitioner or the group. As we extended and re-enacted our work in various European environments, sometimes involving the public in it, its repetitive, experimental and extensive character deepened and revealed its impact: contributing much to the development of each practitioner and the group. When I mention 'the group' I refer to the members of Weaving Voices – a selected network with open borders, as various places brought new members and professionals with whom we would collaborate, and who also gave new input and shape to the project.

Other than singing, weaving as a craft or artform in contemporary Europe is not a practice that everyone has encountered. Some people feel a connection to the craft through memories of older family members, folklore stories or cultural history (as until about 1970-1980, the textile industry was huge in Europe). In our group, Teresa Brayshaw shared feelings of ancestral connection to her fellow countrywomen who engaged in the art of weaving in centuries past. A resembling meaning can be found in the etymology of the word *heirloom* which consists of the word *heir*: "one who inherits or has right of inheritance in, the property of another" (c. 1300, from Anglo-French *heir*);⁵⁶ and the word *loom*: "weaving machine, originally implemented as a tool of any kind" (early 13c. shortening of Old English *geloma*).⁵⁷

Introducing the basics of weaving to a group

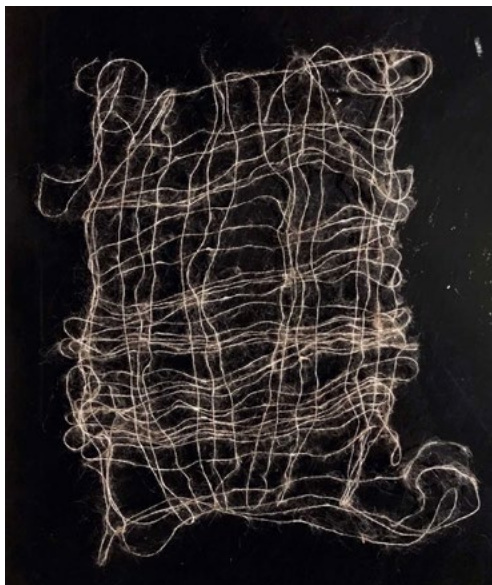
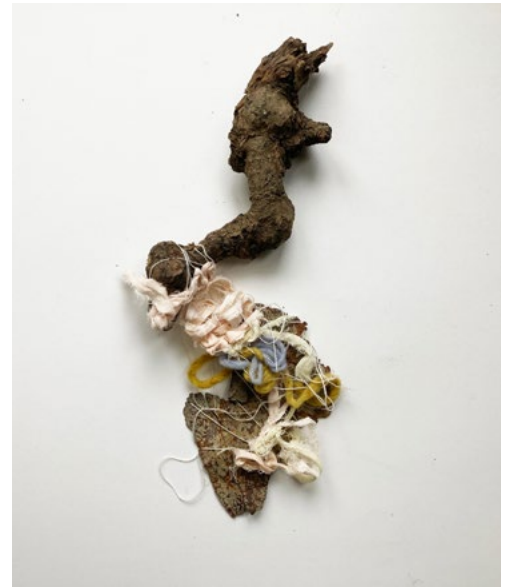
56 *Heir*: Search online etymology dictionary (n.d.) Etymonline. Available at: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=heir> [Accessed 21 Jun. 2024].

57 *Loom*: Search online etymology dictionary (n.d.) Etymonline. Available at: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=loom> [Accessed 21 Jun. 2024].

Teaching weaving unfolds as a gradual process. Firstly, a safe and inviting space needs to be established: physically through light, tables/chairs, tools, threads, etc.; and mentally, as one must feel invited and attracted to want to explore and learn. A group may benefit from a sharing round to listen to each other's motivation to delve into weaving. The presence of some tangible weaving samples (rather than illustrations of it) will motivate students by offering a glimpse into the possibilities that weaving can be. It also encourages making a tactile connection with the material. As I strongly believe in the philosophy of learning by doing, I prefer not to spend much time talking in the beginning of a workshop. Rather, I introduce students to a weaving frame or loom and demonstrate how to create a warp on it and how to weave the first basic lines of a flat binding: one over, one under. (If by now, you've grown very curious, please use the [weave tutorial](#) in this book to try it out yourself!) After that, each learner embarks on their individual journey. Each person moves forward at their own speed, naturally generating questions and ideas along the way. The role of a teacher, in my view, involves guiding students in their creative ideas, helping them with challenges, inspiring them to explore new possibilities and supporting the development of their unique artistic expression. Challenges that come along can include doubt in expression and finding a unique artistic language, technique, focus – endurance – and physical issues, for instance with the hands, sight or with posture and back pain. Weavers exhibit diverse approaches – some constantly experiment with self-taught stitches, knots, or found materials, while others prefer working more figuratively or graphically. Students often come with a personal interest in weaving or discover it along the way, evident when they begin to share their individual connections – be it a picture, a memory, historical fact, story, or tradition from their cultural heritage. A person with weaving expertise typically possesses a broader understanding than the average person regarding the historical and diverse impacts that weaving has had on society. This extends beyond the evident applications in interior design, fashion, art, and theatre, encompassing connections to economy, language and expressions, oppression of women, migration, trade, anthropology, and more. Sharing such insights with students can broaden their perspective and potentially spark

excitement by revealing the extensive social, economic, and environmental influences that weaving has had on the world.

The approach of my Dutch Weaving Voices colleague Nina van Hartskamp also deserves acknowledgement as it diverges from mine, and brought new colours and ideas to the table, both figuratively and literally. Her use of naturally dyed yarns and cloths left a significant impression on the Weaving Voices group. The environmental and communal practice of printing and colouring with plants, became an integral part of the Weaving Voices 'toolkit' and was actively practised in Amsterdam, Sweden and Hungary. Nina van Hartskamps' weavings, incorporating materials ranging from dried sticks to found metal parts of bed frames, were showcased in our shared living spaces for everyone to appreciate. Her method influenced other members, particularly in Sweden, where a strong connection to nature was encouraged by the outdoor environment.



It wasn't until the third Weaving Voices project week in Amsterdam (April 2023), which Nina van Hartskamp and I organised, and centred around visual, tactile, and storytelling practices, that the integration of singing and weaving truly came together organically, mutually reinforcing and empowering each other. The prelude involved a pattern singing workshop led by guest teacher and Dutch artist Liza Prins, who created for the occasion small books with weaving patterns: a language that resembles musical scores. Led by Liza Prins, the group explored different methods of vocalising these patterns and conducted vocal experiments based on a piece of fabric I had woven in the past. Prior to the workshop, I presented a just published 10-minute summary of the documentary [The Woven Sounds by Mehdi Aminian](#)⁵⁸ (2023), showcasing Iranian weavers who communicate the arrangement of colour of their patterns to each other through 'singing dialogues' in a call-and-response style.

Both experiences served as a crucial foundation for the subsequent weaving and singing, which wasn't initially planned but evolved organically. As we collectively worked on a standing frame with a warp on both sides, one side of the loom was dedicated to a 'freestyle weave' where creativity knew no bounds (with the agreement of being mindful and respectful of others' work). On the other side, we committed to a tapestry weave — a more systematic approach involving flat weaving of four lines (one under, one over), followed by knotting two rows. This technique is reminiscent of the handwoven process seen in many carpets, including the well-known Amazigh (also known as Berber) carpets. Inspired by the Iranian singers, our endeavours in pattern singing, the inviting space, the naturally coloured wool yarns, and, of course, the collective weaving process, we drew from the melody of the Georgian song *Khert'lis Naduri* that Laurent Stéphan had previously taught us. Instead of chanting the Georgian words, we improvised our own lyrics on the melody, based on what was happening in the moment, often in relation to the weaving.

58 'The Woven Sounds' - Demo - A Documentary by Mehdi Aminian (2018) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iS1GixOCL4> [Accessed 17 September 2024].





Oi nani da nanaa, khertalma kheli damgala *Oi, nani da nana, the spindle has rubbed my hand sore*
Oi nani da nana, khertalma kheli dangala *Oi, nani da nana, the spindle has rubbed my hand sore*
Oi nani da nanaa, khertalgasatekhelmao *Oi, nani da nana, if only the spindle would break*
Oi nani da nana, khertalgasatekhelmao *Oi, nani da nana, if only the spindle would break*

During the weaving and singing,
the lyrics would change, for example to this:

Oi nani da-nanaa, I will weave a tree in green
Oi nani da-nana, she will weave a tree in green

Oi nani da-naanaa, how do I make the knot again?
Oi nani da-naana, how does he make the knot again?

Exercise in collective singing and weaving

This exercise can be applied to any work song with a call-and-response structure. It is essential for everyone in the group to be familiar with the structure of the song and the melody. A repetitive introduction allows any participant to signal to the group that it is their turn, encouraging everyone to listen attentively. Following the intro, the person improvises a new sentence based on the song's melody, maintaining a similar number of syllables. The group then repeatedly chants the introduction and the improvised sentence. While there is room for creative freedom to modify the syllable count by one, more or less to fit the melody, it will be a greater challenge for the group to repeat the improvised sentence in perfect unison.

The call-and-response structure of work songs is not only empowering but also mentally stimulating for each participant. Actively listening to the sung instructions and repeating them while simultaneously continuing with the weaving process keeps the mind and hands engaged. The singing encourages individuals to take the initiative in crafting new sentences within the structure and melody of the song. This call-and-response dynamic strengthens the collective spirit of a group as participants listen and repeat together, all the while carrying out the weaving, in unison. It creates a way of working together in which no one leads or directs. Instead, each individual has the opportunity to briefly step into the conductor's role by introducing their improvised sentence during the singing. This playful exchange of roles among participants alleviates the weight of responsibility typically associated with being a leader or conductor. It also can bring a sense of enlightened joy to the process of weaving.

Collaborating without crossing borders

The collective weaving, in combination with using the voice, again played a big role in our project week in Leeds, as a part of Leeds City of Culture 2023. The weaving took place within the installation *Making a Stand* on Leeds City Square (historically, the geographical place of the old Forest of Leodis, to which the architectural installation related with a grid of large wooden planks). For the organisers of the week, Teresa Brayshaw and Hannah Butterfield,

and myself, the groundwork had begun long before, as I assisted my UK based colleagues with the preparations. This involved gathering materials for weaving and designing two looms. One loom was dedicated to weaving with participants in Leeds City Square – an activity spanning three days, led by Teresa Brayshaw, which included half of our group. The other loom was designated for installing our unfinished tapestry weave, started in Amsterdam. This frame was placed in a non-public room at the Leeds City Museum, where an interaction occurred between a group of sanctuary seekers and the remaining members of our Weaving Voices group, led by Hannah Butterfield.

Designing something for public use in a public space seemed and felt abstract, especially since I lacked familiarity with the space, the audience, or the creators involved. It brought me back to meetings I attended as a young intern at the design department of a Dutch fashion brand. During these meetings, samples – which I saw as clothes – sewn in a factory in Bangladesh, would be fitted and discussed. The Dutch designers often expressed dissatisfaction with the execution of their designs, feeling they were misinterpreted. These meetings made me want to trace these misunderstandings to their origin. I pondered how the technical drawings of the clothes were interpreted by factory workers in Bangladesh, who may not have had formal education or understood our alphabet. This memory offers a glimpse into the fashion and textile industry's transformation after the massive shift in the 1970s and 1980s to relocate production to low-labour-cost countries. This dispersed industry, where western designers have their work produced by people on the other side of the world, in poor conditions, likely results in disconnection, miscommunication and ideas being lost in translation.

Reflecting on my own challenges in designing looms intended to be used by the public within a public art installation overseas, I recognise the importance of communication and trust. This was exemplified by instances such as a spontaneous video call where Teresa shared her first experience of being in the art installation with me. Additionally, formerly working together in person and Teresa's previous experience with a loom in Amsterdam further solidified our trust. Knowing that we all are accustomed to improvising and making

do with whatever outcome appears, also fostered the confidence in our collaboration. Working alongside the Leeds City of Culture 2023 organisation and the community-focused Mill Hill Chapel, located near the square, brought new dimensions to the collaboration. Despite the complexity this introduced, the opportunities it presented far outweighed the challenges. These included increased exposure for our activities, enhanced engagement with the local community (including the diverse groups associated with Mill Hill Chapel), volunteer assistance, and a space to gather, prepare materials, and safeguard our collective weave overnight.

The difference between our approach and the example of the Dutch fashion brand lies not in the nature of the products, but in the process itself. While the products themselves may not be directly comparable, there are valuable insights to be gathered from analysing the processes involved. These insights, particularly those related to humanising aspects, can be applied and integrated into any collaborative effort conducted overseas. One significant aspect, in my opinion, lies in the time we dedicated to establishing our collaborative framework. Virtual meetings played a crucial role in facilitating communication among all involved partners, enabling us to listen to each other's wishes and concerns, and to comprehend the respective choices, boundaries, and opportunities of each partner. Additionally, the prior in-person collaboration between Teresa and myself facilitated a more integrated approach to our work. Our familiarity with each other's capabilities, and time commitments, amidst our individual responsibilities, allowed us to better understand each other's efforts and gauge when sufficient input had been gathered to achieve a tangible outcome. This resulted in the successful creation of two looms for weaving new carpets and the progression of an unfinished carpet.

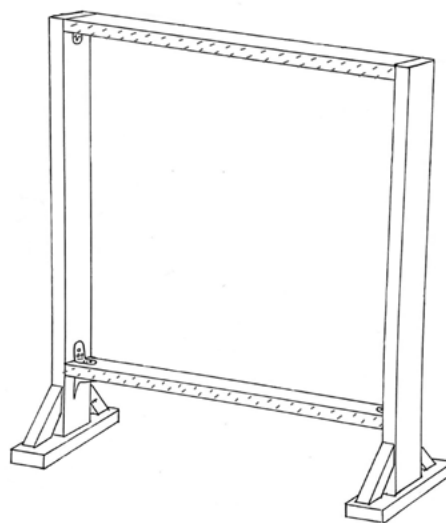


Weaving together to mend our collective wellbeing









Our activity at Leeds City Square offered me a fresh and profound experience of weaving together, as the responsibility of inviting and instructing participants to weave alongside us was no longer solely mine, but was shared among other members of Weaving Voices. This allowed me to take a step back and observe the activity from a distance, rather than being in the midst of it. Additionally, a novel aspect was introduced by Dóra Halas and Christiane Hommelsheim, who actively encouraged weaving participants or passersby in the square to share songs with them or with the group. This resulted in touching moments where individuals willingly shared their voices with strangers or with the group, which shed light on the diverse backgrounds of the people from Leeds we connected with. Our group also sang often in various languages, while weaving or standing close to the weave, which appeared to intrigue some passengers of the square (and it may have scared others away). The incorporation of singing alongside weaving brought joy and maintained our high spirits over three days. I would even venture to say that it played a role in our ability to complete not just one, but two weaves! It also paved the way for the public to participate in the vocal exercises at 5 pm, with the entire Weaving Voices group in the installation. Participants joined alongside other collaborators such as the director of the Mill Hill Chapel and the Harmony Choir.

Reflecting on my notes and observations from this week, two things particularly stand out. Firstly, the incorporation of singing during, alongside, or in alternation with weaving significantly enhances the spirit and interconnectedness of the group. This, in turn, strengthens the endurance of the collective weaving process. As the group of volunteers and participants underwent constant change, this shared activity served as a very welcoming glue that newcomers could flow into quite easily. The second point revolves around a central question: Can the act of weaving together in Europe today serve as a practice of mending our collective wellbeing? This question aims to capture the significance of weaving together in relation to the historical and evolving role of weaving and the textile industry in Europe, as well as our endeavours with Weaving Voices in diverse European communities.

Conclusion

Engaging in collective voice work together has heightened the awareness of our own sounds and bodies and of other bodies and sounds around us. The added handcraft practices of weaving together, repairing clothes, colouring threads, printing with plants on cloth and paper and bookmaking, has broadened the circle of relations around us. It connected us to things, settings and environments, objects, stories and material matter. It also linked us to other times, cultural heritage and history, to our hands, our senses of sight and touch, to colours and textures and our own and collective expressive style.

By combining these two joint perspectives in carefully constructed exercises, a more inclusive and wholesome practice of awareness appears, which can form a baseline of creative low-threshold explorations for individuals or groups seeking to engage in comprehensive creative and compassionate practices. The sound- and material tapestries that result from this work, contain rich documentation of each particular group and setting, who explored, learned and created collectively. While simultaneously, the journey of the work may have influenced each actor independently, leading to personal development. No journey or result of collective work will ever be the same. In addition to Weaving Voices, we celebrate numerous other creative projects, approaches, and wholesome practices with a similar goal: fostering awareness and building positive connections that enhance our collective wellbeing.



The low, influential voice of the person

In the act of weaving together, a central yet silent actor takes centre stage: the loom. Other elements also become more present in the space where the work unfolds, such as light, temperature, the floor, chairs or cushions on which the weavers sit or stand, teacups, threads, colours, and smells. Practicing handcraft activates the senses and heightens awareness of the tools involved and the environment in which the work occurs. These elements, typically originating from mass production nowadays, were once originally designed and hand crafted too, in earlier times. The following text, written by Anni Albers in 1943, emphasises the significance of design, its evolution, and consequently, the central and transformed roles of the craftsperson, the designer and the artist.

“If in art work we venture to follow nature by learning from her rich variety of form, at the other pole of our work, the developing of tools, we reduce form to its barest essentials. Usefulness is the dominant principle in tools. They do not exist, like works of art, for their own sake but are means to further ends. Even though tools appear to express usefulness most truly in their form, we also find fitness to purpose in unobtrusive objects of our environments. So much do we take them for granted that we are rarely aware of their design. They vary from the anonymous works of engineering to the modest things of our daily life - roads and light bulbs, sheets and milk bottles. In their silent and unassuming existence, they do not call for much of our attention nor do they demand too much time to be spent on their care; neither do they challenge our pride in possessing them.

Although we like some things to be restrained, in others we ask for an additional quality of provocative beauty. We strive for beauty by adding qualities like colour, texture, proportions or ornamentation; yet beauty is not an appendage. When it unfolds free of considerations of

usefulness, it surpasses, as art, all the other work we do. In works of art our characteristic uniformity, obviousness, and regularity are lost in the search for a synonym: in terms of form, for an inner relation. It is easy to detect the human mind behind it, but like nature, it remains in the end impenetrable.

Concerned with form, the craftsman, designer, or artist affects through their work the general trend of style for better or for worse. The craftsman is today outside of the great process of industrial production; the designer belongs to it. But whether inside or outside, directly or indirectly, the craftsman and the artist influences the shaping of things. That many imaginative minds find in art and crafts a wider basis for their work than in the more immediately vital setting of industrial planning, is explained perhaps by the more narrow specialisation of industry. Unless we propagate handwork as a political means, like Gandhi, the craftsman as producer plays only a minor part today. However, as the one who makes something from beginning to end and has it actually in hand, he is close enough to the material and to the process of working it to be sensitive to the influences coming from these sources. His role today is that of the expounder of the interplay between them. He may also play the part of the conscience for the producer at large. It is a low voice, but one admonishing and directly rightly. For the craftsman, if he is a good listener, is told what to do by the material, and the material does not err.

The responsibility of the craftsman or artist may even go further, to that of attempting to classify the general attitude toward things that already exist. Since production as a whole is ordinarily directed today by economic interest, it may take the disinterestedness of the outsider, the craftsman or

artist, to make us critical of the consequences. We are used to seeing new needs stimulated and new forms emerging for their satisfaction. Our urge for possessing is constantly nourished; again and again throughout history it has been an underlying cause for war. We will have to be more sensitive to the effect of things on us and to be aware of the implications that come with possessions. For things such as tools call for action; objects of art, for meditation. Things of our more passive existence, those which protect and serve us, give us rest and ease; others may burden and annoy us. We shall have to choose between those bringing distraction or those leading to contemplation; between those accentuating anonymous service or self-centered individualism; between the emphasis on being or having.

Very few of us can own things without being corrupted by them, without having pride involved in possessing them, gaining thereby a false security. Very few of us can resist being distracted by things. We need to learn to choose the simple and lasting instead of the new and individual; the objective and inclusive form in things in place of the extravagantly individualistic. This means reducing instead of adding, the reversal of our habitual thinking. Our households are overburdened with objects of only occasional usefulness. Created for special demands and temporary moods, they should have no more than a temporary existence. But they cling to us as we cling to them, and thus they hamper our freedom. Possessing can degrade us.

Having fewer things sets for the designer or craftsman a fundamentally new task, as it implies designing things for more inclusive use. Their attitude will have to be changed from exhibiting personal taste and the exaggeration of personal inclinations in designing to being quietly helpful.

They will have the focus on the general instead on the specific, on the more permanent instead of on the merely temporary. Giving up continuous change does not necessarily mean that we reach a state of stagnation or boredom; it does mean overlooking moods and modes. Designing in a manner to hold our interest beyond the moment. Instead of adjusting our work to the public demand of the moment, so often misinterpreted and underestimated by our industry, which is concerned with fast-moving mass consumption, let us direct into this true sense of value underlying public demand.”⁵⁹

Written in 1942, this text now appears almost prophetic in its anticipation of the future design landscape, where the spotlight is on the economy and its current production priorities, rather than on considerations of care, wellbeing, and sustainable, long-term existence. The slanted worlds carry obvious references to our work in Weaving Voices. However, I find a deeper connection to the lower voice, more than the collective ‘us’ as crafts(wo)men, resonating with the loom — the central, silent protagonist, and in the act of weaving, serving as an underlying bass note during our singing. The text suggests a dichotomy: a choice between an emphasis on being or having. Remarkably, this choice seems to have already unfolded, 80 years later. However, the leading focus on possession and on mass production does not diminish the efforts of smaller-scale inclusive and participatory art projects and other collective initiatives. On the contrary, it appears to emphasise how crucial this work is in today’s context.

⁵⁹ Albers, A. and Danilowitz, B. (2000) *Anni Albers: Selected Writings on Design*. Hanover: University Press of New England, pp. 17-21.

ქართული ტრადიციული სიმღერის აღმწერდებლობითი დირებულება

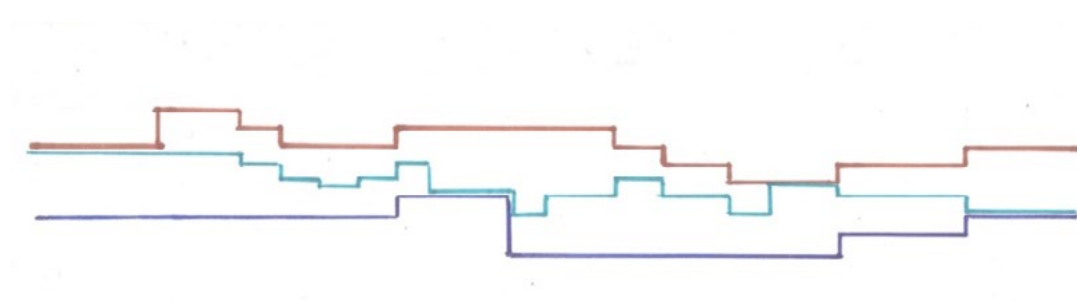


GEORGIAN SONGS

Laurent Stéphan

Thousands of three-part songs have been handed down from generation to generation in Georgia, to the extent that it has been said that these songs are the backbone of Georgian culture and identity. From time immemorial, Georgian traditional and liturgical songs have been intimately and exclusively linked to the land and people of this country in the Caucasus region. A new phenomenon emerged in the 1990s, following the end of the USSR and the advent of globalisation: the practice of this music has gradually developed outside Georgia. Although not a massive phenomenon, foreigners are becoming passionate about this music, listening to it and singing it. In Europe and the rest of the world, there are now ensembles that perform exclusively Georgian songs (France, United Kingdom, Sweden, United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc.). It is notable that amateur and professional ensembles dedicated to Georgian songs, outside Georgia are for the most part composed of non-Georgian singers. This phenomenon of dissemination has probably been facilitated by the political and economic emigration of Georgians outside their country and by the technical means that make it possible to listen to almost any music from any point on the globe.

The development of Georgian polyphonic repertoire is not only due to the creation of groups devoted exclusively to Georgian song. These songs are also taught during workshops and many choirs integrate one or more Georgian songs into their repertoire among other songs from around the world. Based on our experience of singing six Georgian songs from 2022 to 2024 as part of the Erasmus+ Weaving Voices project, we will now take a look at this practice and suggest a few points of interest that non-Georgians might find in this repertoire.



The Roy Hart International Arts Centre was represented in the Weaving Voices project by Carol Mendelsohn, Saule Ryan and Laurent Stéphan, all singing teachers. From the outset we thought of using Georgian vocal music, which is all about weaving voices: this three-voice polyphony being the perfect sonic illustration of what a three-strand braid is. It's also a music that Laurent knows well, having sung it for 30 years in various groups (Marani, Mze Shina, Djamata and Madlobeli ensembles). He adores sharing this repertoire, which he considers to be a treasure (UNESCO declared Georgian polyphonic singing to be an [*Intangible Heritage of Humanity*](#) in 2008),⁶⁰ and was delighted to be able to teach some of these songs as part of the Weaving Voices project. From the first time the participants met in November 2022 in the south of France, we learnt several types of Georgian songs and have been able to repeat them in each of our subsequent work sessions:

- ancient ritual healing songs, now used as lullabies: [*lavnana Bat'onebo and la Patonepi*](#)⁶¹
- chants from the Orthodox liturgy: *Upali Supevs* and *Shen Upalo*
- a song which accompanies a round dance: *Abkhazuri Perkhuli*
- a work song related to our theme (in this case, a song for spinning): *Khert'lis Naduri*.

It is this last song that holds particular significance for our Weaving Voices project and this will be explained in more detail later. There is no doubt that the interest in Georgian singing around the world is due above all, to the intrinsic strength and beauty of this music. Rather than appeal to subjective and aesthetic notions, we invite you to follow the links in the footnotes to form your own opinion of the richness of this vocal music by listening to a few extracts. It is undeniable that Georgian music arouses interest beyond the geographical borders of this small country. Igor Stravinsky confided at the end of his life, in the 1960s, that he often listened to recordings of these songs and that he considered this music to be "a wonderful finding [which] can give to the performance much more than all the modern music can...".⁶² More recently, Billy Joel has sung

⁶⁰ UNESCO - Georgian polyphonic singing (n.d.) ICH UNESCO. Available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/georgian-polyphonic-singing-00008?RL=00008> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

⁶¹ *la Patonepi* - Imke McMurtrie, Nana Mzhavanadze & Tamar Buadze (2018) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGN3W5TJWOY> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

⁶² Igor Stravinsky – Quotes (n.d.) GoodReads. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/928605-recordings-of-georgia0n-folk-polyphonic-songs-makes-a-great-musical> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

several times on stage with Georgian groups⁶³ and the Cohen Brothers used Georgian backing vocals in their film *The Big Lebowski*, to name but a few examples.

For those unfamiliar with Georgian songs, let us start by saying that they are made up of three different melodies sung simultaneously, and that it is in *the weaving of the three voices* together that all the musical interest lies. Often, there may also be more than three people singing, in which case several people are singing the same melody.⁶⁴ The three voices are so intertwined and blend so well together that it is often very complicated and sometimes quite impossible to distinguish the melody of each voice. As well as the musical aspect, this music has a relational dimension, because it only exists when it is sung by several people, at least three. It is a collective work. In the West, individuality is a highly developed value. Georgian singing requires us to relate to others, to listen attentively, to seek a balance in which everyone can be heard and no one overwhelms the others. We are going to be working together, and this moment of singing will therefore be a moment of sharing and meeting, and at the same time a moment of extreme dependence on others, with all the fragility and risk-taking that this implies.

Georgian singing is intrinsically about encounters: the pleasure of holding onto one's melodic line whilst one's neighbours sing something else, and the pleasure of hearing the different voices intersect and complement each other. Those taking part in a Georgian song no longer hear their own voice as they sing, but the tapestry made up of their own voice and those of others. This polyphonic repertoire represents a means of accessing another dimension of one's own voice by merging it with others. For those who sing bass, it's all about blending in with the voices of other singers in the same section, so that you get the feeling that there is only one person singing that voice. The singers who sing the bass are looking for a common colour and their individuality disappears in favour of the voice they serve. The weaving together of three voices sung simultaneously produces a much more sonorous sound and has a very different impact on the listener

63 BILLY JOEL in TBILISI, GEORGIA - 1987 (2021) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM1n9oKut1E> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024] – at 4:23 from the beginning of the video.

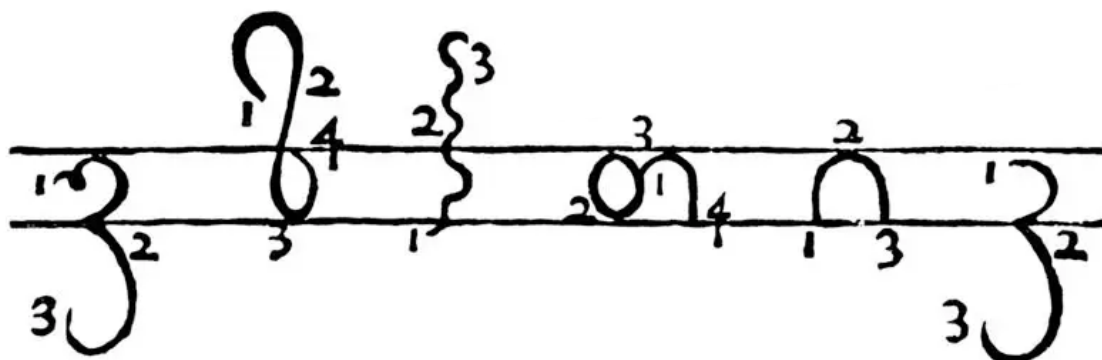
64 In Georgia, it is exclusively the bass voice (the lowest of the three voices) that is sung by several people, while the highest voice (called the 'First Voice') and the middle voice (the 'Second Voice') are both sung by soloists. Abroad, it is not uncommon for groups to decide to entrust the first and second voices to several singers, for reasons of balance between the different sections.

than a solo voice.⁶⁵

Oral transmission

Another fundamental thing about Georgian vocal music is that most of it is still transmitted orally. These songs can very easily be taught without the use of sheet music, and that is what we did in this Erasmus+ project. This is an interesting aspect for those of us who want to deal here with the use of Georgian songs for educational purposes, since learning by oral transmission makes this music accessible to as many people as possible. A Georgian song can be learned by impregnation, voice by voice. A melody is repeated until it is memorised (for those with a visual memory, having the text written down on paper can make things much easier). You learn the second voice separately and successively (this middle voice usually has the role of launching the song with a call), the first voice (the highest), then the bass (this voice, which is the lowest, often has fewer movements than the other two, and is more stable because it serves as a foundation for the two voices above). Then you sing two, then three voices simultaneously and the miracle happens!

This popular repertoire does not require specially trained voices, in the sense that one would hear in classical Western singing, for example in the lyrical style used in operas, which requires many years of training. All voices are suitable for singing Georgian songs, as long as they are full and generous. This music is popular music in the best sense of the word: it is the expression of the people.



65 Aketuri Alilo - Adilei (2018) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqmlfr1gdws> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

Our Erasmus+ project is at the crossroads of various fields (movement, singing, weaving, writing, to name but a few) which fertilise each other. An educational benefit that can be found in Georgian songs lies in the bodily engagement that comes with these songs. We have often used techniques to awaken body awareness and physical and vocal warm-up techniques applied in the 'Roy Hart' approach, among others. In addition to these approaches inherited from the legacy of Alfred Wolfsohn⁶⁶ (pioneer of this work), Roy Hart⁶⁷ and the Roy Hart Theatre,⁶⁸ we have also benefited from the contribution of techniques from other fields of research (theatre, dance and mind-body techniques, in particular the Feldenkrais method) at our various international meetings. It was invaluable for our group to be able to build bridges between the physical warm-ups and a physical way of singing that involves the whole body. The Georgian's special ability to integrate heightened movement awareness whilst singing is worthy of special note. Even if most of the time they sing while remaining still, their way of using resonators and their strong rooting, means that their way of singing involves the whole of their body from head to toe.

If this physicality is one of the attractions of traditional Georgian songs, it is of course not the prerogative of this repertoire alone to feel the whole of one's body involved in a sound and to sing at the top of one's voice. It was the same pleasure that participants in the Weaving Voices project were able to experience by singing traditional Swedish songs in a natural world environment, on the banks of a lake, and a few weeks later in the centre of Leeds! It was one of the highlights of this Erasmus+ project to sing together not only Georgian, but also Austrian, English, Swedish, Hungarian songs, and to appreciate their differences and singularities. Thanks to funding from the European Community for this project, we have also been on a musical tour of Europe over the last two years. Moreover, the very strong European feeling among Georgians and their oft-expressed desire to join the European Union is another good reason for including Georgian songs in this Erasmus+ project.⁶⁹

Non-tempered scale

66 Centre Artistique International Roy Hart - Alfred Wolfsohn (n.d.) Roy Hart Theatre. Available at: <https://roy-hart-theatre.com/legacy/#alfred-wolfsohn> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

67 Centre Artistique International Roy Hart - Roy Hart (n.d.) Roy Hart Theatre. Available at: <https://roy-hart-theatre.com/legacy/#roy-hart> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

68 Centre Artistique International Roy Hart - Roy Hart Theatre (n.d.) Roy Hart Theatre. Available at: <https://roy-hart-theatre.com/legacy/#the-roy-hart-theatre> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

69 Accession of Georgia to the European Union (2024) Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accession_of_Georgia_to_the_European_Union [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

In traditional Georgian singing, we do not always use the exact piano scale, i.e. the tempered scale that has governed our Western music for two centuries. There are micro-differences. To give two examples, Georgian singers often sing the fifth interval slightly larger than that of the piano and look for a 'neutral' third that lies between the minor third and the major third.⁷⁰ By listening and practising, foreign singers can also manage to reproduce these chosen dissonances, which give this music a very special flavour.⁷¹

Singing songs from the different traditional musical cultures of Europe has enabled us to come into contact with sound materials that predate the standardisation brought about by the mass distribution of sound recordings: as we immersed ourselves in listening carefully to the ancient recordings of *kulning* in Sweden, we were able to observe that the shepherdesses of that country also used a non-tempered scale (different from that heard in early Georgian recordings) for their calls to the flocks and their songs.⁷²

Overtones

Another fascinating acoustic phenomenon is overtones. Scientific research proves that in every sound there is a fundamental note (the one we hear most) and overtones, i.e. higher frequencies, other notes present in the sound but a little less easily audible.⁷³ However, we can hear them if we focus our attention on them, and we can also choose to amplify some of them as we sing, in particular by pronouncing exactly the same vowels when singing in several voices. This seems to be an unconscious and empirical skill among Georgian singers, who use this phenomenon but don't talk about it.

To explain briefly what happens in this repertoire, the second voice (which, as we said earlier, initiates the song) generates overtones above

70 Here is a rather extreme example. The recording dates from the 1930s, and the sound quality is noticeable. But you can hear that some of the notes are not what you would expect.

Harira - Maquli (2008) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItEZxmtAC9w> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

71 See also the notion of 'authenticity' below.

72 *Kulning - The Ancient Scandinavian Herding Calls* (2021) YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTjIM8_KLwk [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

73 Documentary film produced by Hugo Zemp and Trân Quang Hai for the French Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (1989):

Chant des harmoniques (extrait) (2013) CC.Webcast. Available at: https://webcast.in2p3.fr/video/chant_harmoniques [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

the melody line it is singing. If the bass and first voice singers choose their notes and vowels wisely, they will position themselves according to the notes and overtones already present in the second voice and will reinforce some of them. As each voice generates overtones, the three voices come together one or more octaves above the main melodies. When each voice reinforces the other with these very high common notes, a so-called ‘cathedral’ effect is produced: the group’s sound becomes more powerful and richer, and it gives the impression that there are more people singing than there really are. Non-Georgian singers can take pleasure in tuning themselves in a non-tempered way and singing in a very supportive overtones relationship. A number of physical sensations are linked to these two acoustic aspects: for example, you can feel the sounds spinning or beating around you.

Musicality of language

Singing in a foreign language potentially gives you the opportunity to enjoy the pleasure of being unencumbered by the meaning of the words. As non-Georgian singers are generally not fluent in Georgian, with a few notable exceptions, the words of the songs do not make direct sense to those singing them.⁷⁴ A word is also a series of sounds – phonemes – that have their own musicality. It is easier to rediscover this musicality through a foreign language, because our own language has become too familiar to us: meaning usually takes precedence over listening to the sound. Some foreign singers who sing in Georgian will rediscover a very old pleasure, that of the child they were who grasped the sound of words before their meaning. We are talking here about the pleasure of uttering phonemes without them making complete sense, or even the pleasure of stammering and losing control of one’s diction. During the first work sessions on the work song *Khert’lis Naduri*, one of our Leeds University partners, Teresa Brayshaw broke into a long, unquenchable fit of giggles when trying to pronounce the Georgian words of this song. It is true that some of the words contain trains of consonants (up to 4 consonants in a row before a vowel) as well as glottalised consonants that are quite challenging to produce!⁷⁵

74 The highly complex verbal system that governs Georgian makes it one of the most difficult languages in the world to learn. If you don’t believe us, take a look at this 645-page pdf on the following link, which covers just a few Georgian verbs!

Makharoblidze, T. (n.d.) *The Georgian Verb*. [online] Available at: <https://eprints.iliauni.edu.ge/3038/1/TheGeorgianVerb.pdf> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

75 To listen, not to Teresa’s laugh (which unfortunately we didn’t record!) but to the version we used as a reference for this song, sung by the Georgian women of the Mzetamze Ensemble:

Banquet

The Georgian songs served as a catalyst for the members of the group to get together for a *supra* or traditional banquet. We were not just interested in the songs, but also in the culture behind them, which is why we programmed a 'Georgian-style' banquet in the first week of the Weaving Voices project, held at the Roy Hart Centre. It was an opportunity for participants to experience a banquet where we listen to each other, a concept dear to Georgians.⁷⁶ In so doing, we combined the pleasures of the palate and the ears, the celebration of the present moment and the start of an adventure that would take us to six European countries. For the occasion, a Georgian chef had prepared dishes typical of his country and Laurent had taken on the role of *tamada*: the master of ceremonies during a *supra*. Inspired by Georgian tradition, the meal was punctuated by songs and speeches of remarkable intensity. All the guests were invited to express themselves on personal subjects, the inescapable rule being that only positive words should be spoken at the Georgian table. It was an unforgettable evening that brought us together in a very cohesive way. We hope that everyone will experience this special banquet at least once in their lives, where listening and giving go hand in hand: *"That which we give makes us richer, that which is hoarded is lost"* – as Shota Rustaveli, the 12th century Georgian poet, put it.⁷⁷

Songs that have a special connection for us

Among the Georgian songs we have worked with in our Weaving Voices group, there are two in particular that have had a strong impact on us. The first is the song *lavnana Bat'onebo*, which has a special place in the Georgian repertoire because unlike almost all the pieces of this repertoire, it is a two-voice rather than three-voice song. It is one of those songs whose context has evolved to the point where its use and meaning have changed over time. It belongs to the category of healing songs, which includes hundreds of songs and many regional variations. It has therefore been used for centuries in a therapeutic context.⁷⁸ The text of *lavnana*

Khertlis Naduri - Mzetamze Ensemble (2022) YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH-Jfn_mznHM [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

76 In Georgia today, the *supra* is the main place to hear traditional songs, much more so than a concert.

77 Manuscript of 'The Knight in Panther's Skin' (2021) United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/un-gifts/content/manuscript-of-the-knight-in-panther-skin> [Accessed 22 Jun. 2024].

78 Ethnomusicological studies prove that Georgian songs in several voices already existed in ancient times.

Bat'onebo clearly addresses the spirits of illness (the *Bat'onebi*) and gently invites them to leave the patient's body. Traditionally, this song was sung only by women. It has two voices so that it can be performed in the event that there are only two women present at the bedside. In the past, Georgians believed that when someone was ill, it was because they were visited by a 'spirit of illness'. Now that this belief has faded, this song (like others in the same category) is used as a lullaby, because of its extreme gentleness.

Let us mention two personal examples of how our colleagues have used the song in their daily lives. The nephew of Rosa Smits (partner from Tuyo Foundation, Amsterdam), who is now six months old, is a very calm and happy baby most of the time, but recently, during a walk in the forest, he started to panic and wouldn't stop crying. It was not until Rosa sang *lavnana Bat'onebo* to him that he finally calmed down. Since then, Rosa's sister sometimes calls her to sing "The Song" to her nephew again! The two sisters are convinced that this song, even sung in monody (one voice only), can still ward off certain evil spirits...

Nikolett and Géza Pintér-Németh (partners from Sinum Association, Hungary), who became parents in September 2023, i.e. during our Erasmus+ project, have also found that *lavnana Bat'onebo* works wonders for calming their daughter down and putting her to sleep, whether in a single or two-part version. As a result, they too have adopted this melody as a reference song, which they sing very frequently to their newborn. When he is alone singing *lavnana Bat'onebo* while rocking his daughter, Géza has noticed that the soothing and soporific effect is accentuated when he slows down the singing to an extreme and amplifies the resonance of his chest in direct contact with the child's body, combining this sound production with a little dance from one foot to the other. The result is that these moments of falling asleep are beneficial for both the child and the adult, as Géza finds in this practice, a way of gaining presence by concentrating and working on his voice.

Weaving Voices in the literal sense: weaving while singing

The first references to these songs date back to the 8th and 4th centuries BC. They were work songs and war songs, which fact supports the idea that the music had a very strong social role.

The strongest moment of encounter between a Georgian song and our Weaving Voices project occurred when we were working on *Khert'lis Naduri*. This moment has already been mentioned by Rosa Smits in the chapter she wrote for this book, but we'd like to come back to it to shed some light on it from another angle.⁷⁹ As a reminder, we learned the *Khert'lis Naduri* spinning song during our first work session in Malérargues (France) in November 2022. This song comes from Adjara, a region in south-west Georgia, not far from Turkey.

In Malérargues, we tried to sing it in Georgian, with the lyrics used by the singers of the group Mzetamze. Other versions circulate in Georgia, sometimes with completely different lyrics. The group Mzetamze, have recorded different versions of this work song. In the first version recorded in the studio, the group that responds to the soloist does not sing the same words as she does.⁸⁰ By comparison is a recording made by the same group in concert some years later, they do.⁸¹ To facilitate our learning process, Laurent decided to use this second recording, in which each verse is sung twice as a reference, rather than the version recorded in 1996 which included different questions and answers.

In the versions performed by Mzetamze and other Georgian groups, the text is clearly a compilation of fragments of different origins: some verses relate directly to the activity of weaving, while others are borrowed from love songs. The whole is not very coherent, and the words come from several protagonists: it is easy to see that this is a collage. Here, as in many other Georgian songs where it is common to find the same fragments of text in different songs, the sung text is a patchwork of borrowings and improvisations.

*The spindle has hurt my hand sore.
I'd like the spindle to break.
He was my promise, he cheated on me.
I hope he breaks his neck!
There's still yarn on the flax-comb.
I still have respect for you.
I drove the oxen to the well,*

79 For the other mention of this song, see the chapter: *Weaving together to mend our collective wellbeing*, p. 77, 80–81.

80 CD Ensemble Mzetamze – Vol.1: Ensemble Mzetamze (1996) *Khert'lis Naduri*. Thalwil: Face Music Switzerland.

81 CD Ensemble Mzetamze – Concert recordings 2002-2007 (2009) Ensemble Mzetamze.

The red-horned ones.
The girl I'm meeting has hair down to her ankles.
The spindle hurt my hands.
I'd like the spindle to break.

If we go back to the original context of this song, we can say that the text is not the most important thing: the women sang this song during long evenings when they spun for several hours in a row. If the different verses do not unfold a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, it is simply because the singers used any verse they could remember, as long as it had the right number of syllables. More than the text, what is important is to hold on for the duration and keep the rhythm, so that the work is effective. This song is in 12-8, or 4 ternary beats. The verses are 8 syllables long. However, a small margin of freedom is allowed in the number of syllables in the verses: for those that have only 7, a final 'o' is added, which counts as a beat and allows the metre to be respected.



In November 2
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lyrics in Georgian. At our second meeting in Reichenow (Germany), in January 2023, we sang the song again and Laurent introduced the idea of keeping the melody and structure of the song, but allowing us to improvise our own words. The lingua franca of our group, the one that allows us to communicate despite our eight different nationalities, is English. The idea was to improvise in English so that the group could repeat what the soloist was saying.

Singing *Khert'lis Naduri* while we were weaving and improvising the lyrics in English made us understand and feel the song in a very different way. Or perhaps it would be better to say: the perfection of the structure of this song to serve this purpose imposed itself on us. The way in which this song is conceived allows each weaver to participate and to be listened to and valued by the others, who repeat the words they have just heard. Of course, it was difficult to improvise in English, which was not the mother tongue of the participants in this session in Amsterdam, with the exception of Teresa Brayshaw. No doubt it would have been easier for us to count the syllables in our own language before launching our solos to the group, but that would have made things too difficult for those who had to repeat the phrases in Swedish, Hungarian etc. And it was clearly part of the fun of immediately understanding what the partner was saying, before repeating it, as we were also talking about the activity we were doing:

*“Do you think I can continue with this colour on the next row?
Show me again how to tie this knot!”*

It was also striking how pleasant and stimulating it was to engage in this double activity. The moment was so magical that time seemed to stand still: the exercise lasted almost two hours, but it didn't feel long at all! The challenge spread to everyone present, and even the photographer who was there to document our afternoon was able to sing some of the solos with the weaving group answering her. This is probably another aspect of these traditional activities accompanied by songs: working and singing together makes the work lighter because you are constantly in contact with others. We are not just working as our hands grasp the strands of wool to weave them, but also weaving bonds of connivance between ourselves. Without going so far as to say that the work gets done better when it's done while singing, we can say that our work progressed very well that day! It is likely that doing these two activities (singing and weaving) at the same

time enabled us to develop a range of complementary skills: listening, improvising, having a tactile relationship with the materials, being aware of each other and each other's work, keeping an overview of the collective work being created, taking into account colours and patterns in particular... Isn't it incredible to be able to do all this at the same time? Another question is whether the singing influenced the weaving, and if so, in what way?

These work songs were of course present in all regions of the world before labour was industrialised. It might be interesting to examine this question of the reciprocal influence of song on work and work on song by looking at what was happening in other countries. To take just one example, in the Italian film *Riso amaro*, directed by Giuseppe de Santis in Italy in the 1950s, there is a passage in which we see a very large group of *mondine*, the women who worked in the rice fields. They plant rice shoots while singing, with their feet in the water. It is clear that singing helps with this eminently repetitive work, but it also provides a space for these women to say things to each other, some of them personal attacks in this case.⁸² Singing proves to be a formidable meeting place for collective and individual issues.

The freedom to change the text of a traditional song while singing raises a very important question. Namely, there is an extensive debate among traditional music fans about the issue of authenticity. The fact is that music is constantly evolving, constantly incorporating new influences. It is impossible to get everyone to agree on an absolute point of reference, a precise era that needs to be copied to be 'authentic'. As far as Georgian songs are concerned, the very first sound recordings date back to 1902 and we can assume that the country was much more sheltered from outside influences at that time, since neither radio nor television had yet penetrated homes. When we listen to these recordings from the early 20th century, our ears perceive dissonances.⁸³ These are not errors on the part of singers who are singing out of pitch since the same intervals are always sung by the different groups recorded at that time. This means that tuning and aesthetic criteria have changed considerably in 120 years. So what era

82 *Bitter Rice (1949) Full Movie - Vittorio Gassman, Doris Dowling, Silvana Mangano | Italian - English subs* (2023) Dailymotion. Available at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8naz2l> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024]. If you follow this link to watch the whole film, the scene in question takes place 20 min 40 sec after the start of the film.

83 *Tsamokruli registered in 1909: Tsamokruli - Choir of Guria Province* (2014) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZurEF5bSjoi> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

should we refer to in order to sing Georgian songs in an 'authentic' way? Some of today's groups are trying to adopt the style of tuning heard on the earliest recordings (e.g. the Basiani Patriarch's Choir in Georgia, the Kavkazia Trio in the United States and the Marani ensemble in France). Most groups are satisfied with a tuning between the three voices that is less 'spicy' and more consensual for the ears of 21st-century listeners. Other groups, in Georgia and abroad, are opting for an interpretation that is open to 'fusion' and a variety of influences, for example by combining traditional songs, jazz and Western instruments (electric bass, drums, synthesisers, etc.), which completely changes the colour of this music, but makes it more up to date and accessible for other types of audience.⁸⁴

By keeping the intention of the song, but allowing ourselves to use lyrics that made sense to our Weaving Voices community context, weren't we getting closer to the essence of the song, or at least to its function? Could what some would consider a betrayal, or at the very least an unbearable adaptation, be seen by others as an attempt to get as close as possible to the truth of these songs? In Georgia, traditional songs had a purpose and a function. They all corresponded to a specific context. They have gradually been cut off from their original context. Nowadays, their main function is aesthetic, when performed in concert, or celebratory, when used in *supra*. These two functions are sometimes coupled with a reference to identity, when the songs are called to the rescue with the aim of building a nationalist feeling, but this aspect does not operate in the case we are dealing with today, that of foreign singers performing songs from a culture outside their own.

Without falling into the trap of nostalgia and the desire to go back in time, we can ask ourselves what would be the contribution to the performers' intimate understanding of these songs if they had the experience of putting them back into their original context? Let us take the example of the songs that accompanied hoeing. These songs, which used to last several hours, have been transformed into virtuoso concert versions in which the various stages of the work are condensed into a few minutes⁸⁵.

84 A revisited version of the traditional *Gandagana* song by the group The Shin: *The Shin - Potato Story* - აჭარული კარტოფილის ისტორია (2015) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hS-grdg0aL4M> [Accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

85 *Guruli Naduri* sung on a TV set by the Basiani Ensemble (2012): *Naduri, Shemokmedura - Gurian work song* (2012) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MzUgNh7XKM> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024]; *Mtis Naduri* sung in concert by the Shavnabada Ensemble (2023): *მთის ნადური - გურული* (2023) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-r5P6RzFgk> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024].

We're betting that the singers who take part in the experience of singing them while clearing a field with a hoe in hand will understand something in their bodies, maybe indescribable, and that by doing so they will not be wasting their time.⁸⁶

ხერტლის ნადური

(*Khert'lis Naduri*, spinning song from Adjara region, Georgia)

Top voice:

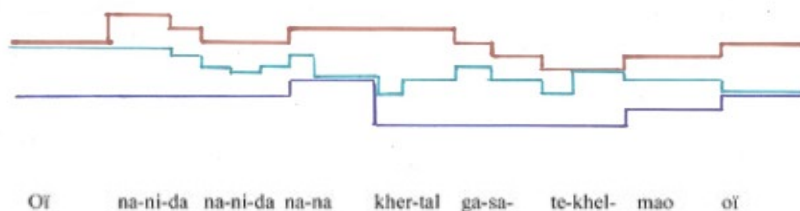
ოი ნანი და ნანა, ხერტალ გასატეხელმაო, ოი

Middle voice:

ოი ნანი და ნანი და ნანა, ხერტალ გასატეხელმაო, ოი

Bass voice:

ოი ნანი და ნანა, ხერტალ გასატეხელმაო, ოი

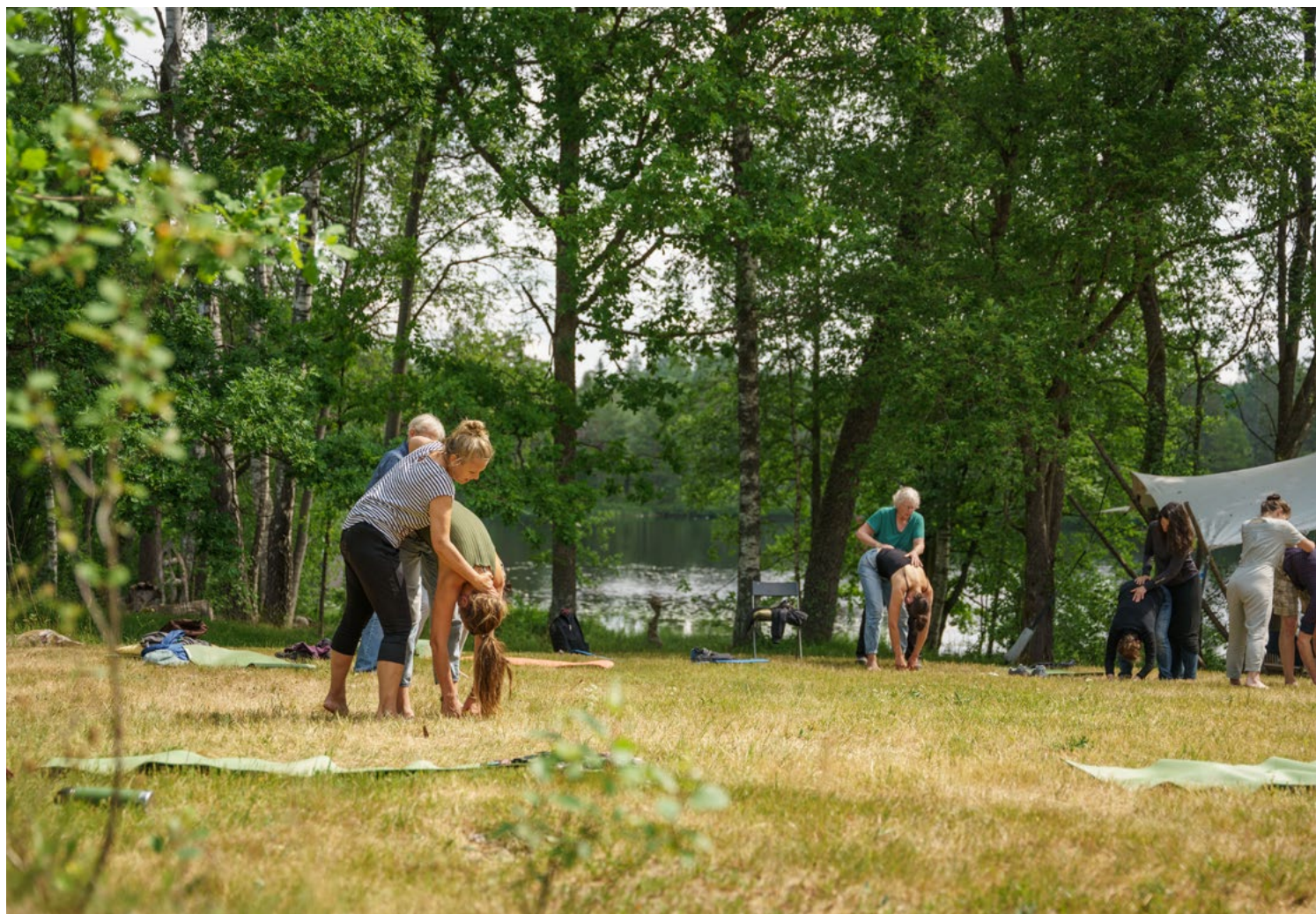


Here is an example of how the three voices weave on one sentence of the song *Khert'lis Naduri*.

The first three lines (text written in Georgian) show the upward and downward movements of the melodic lines, on each syllable. The lower graph shows the movements of the three voices in relation to each other (the text is transcribed in Latin alphabet, the syllable durations are respected, as are the pitches to the nearest ½ tone).

CREATIVE SPACE IN A NATURAL SETTING

⁸⁶ In the following videos there are examples of collective weeding and hoeing accompanied by singing. A report shot in 1988: "Kumuris Naduri" - Georgian folk song - (Imereti region) (2018) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVcHeMF7WT0> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024]. A reconstruction filmed in the 2000s: [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBhoyqnLMBw). (n.d.) *Qobuleturi naduri - mtas khokhobi aprenila. Gurian-Acharian folklore* (2010) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBhoyqnLMBw> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024].



Introduction

The workshop *Kulning Heritage* took place in the woods of Unnaryd, Sweden, in June 2023. It was hosted by Marika Wittmar and Wendela Löfquist, both singers and musicians representing the local cultural organisation Solsidans Kulturförening. The main intention of the week was to guide the Weaving Voices participants in exploring the cultural heritage and the practice of *kulning*, a Scandinavian herding call technique.

Though the focus of our week was for participants to learn the basics of a specific voice technique, we found that our workshop's main contribution to the project was in fact something else. In both the preparation and the actual execution of the workshop, the aspect that we as hosts gave the most thought to, was how to facilitate a learning environment where participants could dare to experiment with herding calls. This technique, new to the participants, with its unusual and expressive character can make one feel quite vulnerable. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to discuss how one can create a space for learning where people feel comfortable exploring their boundaries related to voice. We will also reflect on how working outside in natural habitats contributed to the learning process and wellbeing of the group, as we found that the natural setting for our workshop contributed to its value as a whole. Furthermore, the chapter provides a brief historical context of the kulning tradition, historical sound and image samples, as well as examples of exercises you can use to approach this specific vocal form.





[Vallkulla with vallhorn](#) (Winbergh, 1904)⁸⁷

[Fäbod](#) (Sundberg)⁸⁸ (previous page)

The historical context of kulning

Key concepts:

Fäbod (sing), fäbodar (plur): chalet

Vallkulla (sing), vallkullor (plur): herding woman

Valllåt/locklåt (sing), vallåtar/locklåtar (plur): short herding song/tune with lyrics

Kulning: high pitched call intended to reach over a long distance

Lockrop: animal imitating sounds, to gather the animals on a closer proximity

Fäbod culture

87 Winbergh, P. (1904) *Vallkulla blåsande på lur bakom mjölkstuga på Baltsars fäbod i Älvdalen* [Photography] Available at: <https://digitaltmuseum.se/021017754179/vallkulla-blasande-pa-lur-bakom-mjolkstuga-pa-baltsars-fabod-i-aelv-dale> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

88 Sundberg, F. (n.d.) *Fäbod* [Photography] Kringla. Available at: <https://www.kringla.nu/kringla/objekt?text=f%C3%A4bod&sida=3&referens=jlm/item/122635> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

The *fäbod* culture existed in several countries across Scandinavia. In Sweden, it was mainly concentrated around the provinces/regions of Dalarna, Uppland, Bohuslän, Värmland, Gästrikland and was fully developed in the Middle Ages. At this time, the land that people owned was not large enough for both cultivating crops and providing pasture for the animals. Because of this the *vallkullor* spent the whole summer away from home, bringing the animals to more distant pastures in the wild. Whilst they were away, they and the animals spent the nights in simple chalets, called *fäbodar*.

Sweden is one of the few countries in the world where shepherd culture and animal husbandry was a traditionally female occupation. One of the theories explaining why women acquired this responsibility is that there was a fear of bestiality had this task fallen upon the men. Sources even say that there was an edict from the king in the 17th century, forbidding men from being alone with animals.⁸⁹

Kulning, lockrop, locklåtar and vallåtar

Vallkullor lived with a very close connection to nature and their animals. Herding was a big responsibility and it was an important and sometimes dangerous job. The women were exposed to the dangers of both the natural environment and malicious people. In order to communicate with the animals, other *vallkullor* and sometimes the village, the practice of *kulning* was developed. *Kulning* is a high-pitched call that can travel over vast distances and it was used to gather animals, warn others of predators, or to signal that an animal had been lost or found.

[Example kulning](#) (Svenskt Visarkiv)⁹⁰

Lockrop are sounds imitating animals and were used to gather and herd the animals within a smaller distance. *Locklåtar* are songs with lyrics often telling the story of life in the *fäbod*, nature, animals and the hardships related to this life. The songs were sung while herding the animals. Many of these sounds, songs and melodies were made

⁸⁹ *Fäbodens kvinnor - den svenska folkmusikens ursprung* (2015) Sveriges Radio. Available at: <https://sveriges-radio.se/artikel/6108486> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

⁹⁰ *Inspelningar i Svenskt visarkiv* (n.d.) Katalog Visarkiv. Available at: <https://katalog.visarkiv.se/lib/views/rec/ShowRecord.aspx?id=706521> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

up individually by the vallkullor, and some were passed on and learned by ear.

Fäbod culture and Swedish folk music

Fäbod music is the oldest and most traditional form of work music of the Nordic countries. The modality of the fäbod music, called **vallåtsmodus**, originated from the **säljflöjt** and the **vallhorn**, two simple wind instruments common in this time period. Many say that there is a strong connection between this tone modality and the latter development of Swedish folk music, and that you can hear the heritage of kulning in Swedish folk melodies.⁹¹ Swedish folk music and folk singing was taught and learned by ear, and thus the songs that are known to this day, have been passed down through generations and eventually written down.

Kulning today

[Kulning – Ancient Swedish Herding Call](#) (Jinton, 2016)⁹²

In the last few decades there has been a growing interest in fäbod music and kulning. The songs and melodies that were once used more as a work tool have become a form of artistic expression in modern Sweden. Kulning and fäbod music has had an upswing in part due to the feminist movement within Swedish folk music. Much of this tradition is normally accredited to male fiddlers and troubadours as they were the ones who normally performed, and eventually wrote down the Swedish folk songs. However, as many of these songs and melodies were deeply influenced by the fäbod music and its tone modality, this interpretation of the music's origin is flawed.⁹³ Thus, making the fäbod music heritage visible has been an important part in bringing female contribution to Swedish folk music to light. Some relevant names in this context are modern folk musicians Sara Parkman, Samantha Olander, musicology professor Anna Ivarsdotter and folksinger and university teacher Susanna Rosenberg. The book *Kulning – Musiken och tekniken* (*Kulning – Music and technology*) was written by the latter and is one of the

91 Ibid.

92 Jinton, J. (2016) *Kulning - Ancient Swedish Herding Call*. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvtT3UyhibQ> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

93 Ibid.

sources we used when preparing exercises for the workshop.⁹⁴

Videolink:

[Sara Parkman – Björnen](#)⁹⁵

Challenges

In preparation for our workshop we anticipated that giving our participants the historical context above would be the easy part. There were, however, a number of anticipated challenges that we believe workshops relating to voice, theatre or other performative practices may have in common. We knew from the start that learning kulning is something that requires courage. This voice technique is simply not possible while holding back. Therefore, we knew that one of our greatest challenges would be to help the group let go of their self-consciousness and throw themselves and their voices out. Our group of participants was quite mixed in terms of field and experience, which we anticipated would add to the challenge. Some of the participants had a background in music and singing. This can be an advantage in terms of understanding the musical theory and feeling confident in how to control one's voice, but can also be a disadvantage in terms of having bigger expectations of 'succeeding' and sounding a certain way. On the contrary, less experienced singers may be less concerned about succeeding right away, but may also have a harder time learning the technique. However, kulning was never intended to be art or music, but was simply a tool used in the daily lives of herding women across Scandinavia. It was not a practice limited to people with certain skills, but a method passed down from one generation to the next, something anyone can learn. Therefore, our quest was to create a learning environment where participants felt comfortable exploring new ways to use their voices, regardless of background and experience.

Another question we tackled before the group arrived was: Who owns a cultural tradition? By extension another question is formed – for whom is there value in learning a cultural tradition? Is it only for the people who share the same cultural heritage? Our participants

94 Rosenberg, S (2007) *Kulning - Musiken och tekniken*. Stockholm: Udda Toner.

95 Parkman, S. (2023) *Sara Parkman - Björnen*. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BS47-c4p9g0> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

were from five different countries, none of them Scandinavian, and we knew that at a later stage of the project we would work with more people from even more diverse cultural backgrounds. What would make kulning relevant to them? As we pondered, we came to the conclusion that cultural traditions are as valuable and accessible as we make them. Kulning is de facto a *European* cultural heritage, or if you want to take it even further a *human* cultural heritage, and as such can be conceived as something we and our participants share. Therefore, sharing the historical context of kulning as well as the meaning or usage of the call or songs became an important part of the workshop.

A playful and creative learning environment

One of the sources we drew inspiration from when thinking about how to create the non-judgemental, playful learning environment we were aiming for is John Cleese's famous speech about creativity.⁹⁶ He points out that creativity is not a skill, but a way of operating. He refers to research by psychologist DW MacKinnon on the subject and talks about two different types of modes: *the open mode* where we can be playful and creative, and *the closed mode* where we habitually live most of our lives as adults, hurrying to get as much done as quickly as possible. The open mode is where we can come up with ideas and the closed mode is where we can execute them. He then goes on to describe the five elements needed to find yourself in a playful, creative oasis:

- Space: a physical space where you will not be disturbed in your playfulness and creativeness.
- Time: there should be a specific moment when the space starts and ends.
- Time (again): there should be enough time for you to play around with ideas and try them out.
- Confidence: Cleese mentions that being creative is easier when you've got other people to play with, but that your space needs to be free from the fear of making a mistake. Playing is an experiment and the best atmosphere for finding the confidence to experiment is one where whatever happens is okay.
- Humour: humour is essential to creativity and playfulness. Cleese notes that humour does not take away from the seriousness of the work.

⁹⁶ Cleese, J. (2017) *John Cleese on Creativity in Management*. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb5oIIPO62g> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

One of the challenges we attempted to explore with humour was the Swedish phonetics, which is one of the bases of Swedish kulning, as well as lockrop and locklåtar. This of course could pose a difficulty as the participants were not Swedish. Rather than putting a huge weight on each word being pronounced correctly, we invited the participants to get familiar with the vowels and sounds. We played around with these in different ways, through song, gibberish conversations and improvised storytelling.

We wanted the learning process to be playful, un-prestigious and to awaken our inner child in order to get away from our adult inner self-critics. One of our goals was to keep our teaching informal and to keep the tradition of learning the technique by ear. Therefore, we limited the use of sheet music and lyrics as much as possible. Instead the majority of the teaching took the shape of games and exercises. The Roy Hart vocal practitioners in the group made very important daily contributions to the workshop by guiding us in ways to wake up our bodies, voices and our playfulness. These practices helped create both the element of confidence and the element of humour that Cleese mentions.



Vallhorn (Eriksson, 1983)⁹⁷ – Vallåtsmodus

97 Eriksson, P. (1983) *Vallhorn av kohorn* [Photography] Kringla. Available at: <https://www.kringla.nu/kringla/objekt?referens=S-DM/object/DM22958> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

The impact of Nature

Our workshop took place in the middle of the Swedish woods right at the start of summer. For a full week the majority of the participants ate, slept and had their classes under an open sky, in the shade of the spruce trees next to the peaceful lake. The fact that we spent our workshop week *in and with* nature was not a coincidence, but a conscious choice. The practice of kulning was intended for that very arena, allowing messages to travel over vast distances through forests, over hills and across lakes and open spaces. We wanted the participants to get a real sense of the life of a 'kulla'. What does it feel like to be at the mercy of nature and its forces; to need to light a fire to cook or keep the bugs away; to strip away the sounds created by people and tune in to the sounds created by the forest? After all, this way of living is a heritage we all carry with us. We kept in mind this wish to help the participants tune into nature and their heritage, when we created our program for the week. The result was a mix of voice training, singing, body work, meditation and free time. Our intention was to create moments, teacher-led or not, that would inspire the participants to let go of the buzz of their busy everyday lives and allow themselves to exist in a simpler context.

Though our proximity to nature was a conscious choice, we were still surprised to see the extent of its impact on the group. Pretty soon we were all running on what we named 'forest time', allowing things to happen at a slower, less organised pace. When participants shared their thoughts, texts and contemplations they often mentioned how this slower pace helped them notice little details around them: a bird singing, the breeze on their skin, their own breathing. It seems that our senses sharpen when we are not subject to the many distractions of our modern lives. A quote from Cleese's speech is fitting here. He talks about how easy it is to get stuck in the closed mode and says:

*"Because, as we all know, it's easier to do trivial things that are urgent than it is to do important things that are not urgent, like thinking."*⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Ibid.



It seems that in the forest many of us were spending a larger part of our day in the open mode. Not surprisingly, the day that the group collectively seemed to be in a sleepier, less positive mood, was the only day with rain. The impact of nature, of course, affected us workshop hosts as well as the participants. We also had the benefit of being in the safe environment we consider our home, with a group that had become very familiar to us. The forest cleared our minds, calmed us and inspired us. We found ourselves leading the group in an organic way, less concerned about sticking to a strict schedule and an exact format and rather following the natural flow of things.

So how can nature contribute to a positive learning environment? Our conclusions are, of course, empirical. But our experience is that rather than the workshop being successful *in spite of* it taking place in the woods, it was successful in big part thanks to it taking place there. The participants were, in large part, separated from their regular lives and routines. The power of this, in 2023, should not be underestimated: no screens, no wifi, no traffic. The constant over stimulation of our modern society had been replaced by the silence of nature. Our never-ending urge to get a million things done was replaced by the simplicity of fulfilling our most basic needs – food, sleep and community. Instead of grey asphalt and cement, there were lush greens below a blue sky. The northern summer gifted us, not only with natural light for many hours a day, but also with a blazing sun that kept us warm and urged us to jump in the lake. Does it sound idyllic? It was. The forest helped us create the element of space that Cleese talks about as a necessity for playfulness and creativity.

But this wasn't a vacation, it was a workshop. Our participants were there to learn a new practice, not just to wind down in the woods. Somehow we found that this slow pace of nature inspired a presence that aided the group in their learning. This presence was further heightened by the conscious choice to observe and interact with nature through games, meditation and collecting plants for dyeing and printing. We wanted our participants to draw inspiration from this presence to give life to the kulning, writing and singing, in the same way the kullor did when they were wandering the pastures for months on end. All of this in combination with the community living created an atmosphere that was safe and non-judgemental, which contributed further to the creative confidence that Cleese mentions as one of the creative elements.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from our experience is that the existence of open, non-judgmental space allows people to go further than they thought they could, while confident that they would be validated for their courage. It was clear to us that the dynamic of the group played a big part here, and that the playful activities in combination with the community living contributed to building support within the group as well as a safe learning environment. Another conclusion is that nature can be a significant factor in helping people slow down and get in contact with themselves and their voices. There is a power in using the soil beneath our feet as it was intended, as a solid foundation for our existence.

Exercises

Kulning is a quite specific practice, and there is a cultural value in passing on this technique and tradition. However, we also believe that experimenting with kulning is a great way to explore the possibilities of one's voice and can therefore be a valuable tool for anyone working with voice through for example singing or theatre. Below we have summarised some information about how we approached the kulning technique, as well as some examples of exercises.

Practising kulning requires a particular voice technique and can be quite straining on the vocal chords. We started each day with voice and body warm-ups provided by our project partners from the Roy Hart Centre. We found these an important factor in helping participants relax, get comfortable and allow their voices to come naturally rather than overworking their vocal chords. The exercises also contributed to creating a playful and non-judgemental atmosphere where participants could feel more comfortable in taking risks with their voices. After the warm-ups we moved on to exercises more specifically connected to kulning. These had several intentions:

- to help participants find the right placement in the mouth for the typical kulning sound
- to help participants get familiar with the typical tone modality of kulning

- to allow participants to play around with the ‘voice break’ which often features in kulning melodies and Scandinavian folk singing
- to teach participants some kulning-melodies
- to teach participants some examples of typical lockrop used to herd the animals
- to inspire participants to be playful with their voices and experiment with the tools, sounds and melodies they were being taught.

Below are some examples of exercises we used repeatedly during the week. Several of these exercises and kulning melodies come from the book *Kulning – Musiken och tekniken (Kulning – Music and technology)*.⁹⁹

Warm-ups

Here are some examples of warm-up exercises to find the placement and sound typical to kulning.

[Link to audio](#)

Vallåtsmodus

In this exercise the melody moves between the fixed notes which make up the vallåtsmodus, the modality typical to kulning.

[Image sheet music](#)

[Link to audio](#)

Tulleritova

This is an exercise in moving across the voice break, which is a voice practice typical to kulning and Scandinavian folk music.

[Image sheet music](#)

[Link to audio](#)

Lockrop

Here are some examples of lockrop participants learned during the week.

[Link to audio and words](#)

Kulning melodies

Here are some examples of kulning melodies participants learned during the week.

[Link to audio](#)

⁹⁹ Rosenberg, S (2007) *Kulning - Musiken och tekniken*. Stockholm: Udda Toner.





The knotted carpet (in progress) we worked on together during the Weaving Voices workshop week in Bureau Postjesweg, Amsterdam, April 2023.



Collective weaving during the Weaving Voices workshop week in Amsterdam, Bureau Postjesweg, April 2023

INTERWOVEN STORIES OF CONNECTION METHODOLOGIES FOR WEAVING A COMMUNITY WITH AND FROM MANY VOICES¹⁰⁰

Nina van Hartskamp

“A carpet is a story in which many stories live. Come here, do you see the patterns?”

‘I’m looking at the colourful decorations on the red background.’

‘Those are all separate threads. Each thread is a separate story, do you understand?’

I nodded attentively, though I wasn’t sure I understood her.

‘You are a thread. I am a thread. And together we form a small decoration. With many other threads we form a pattern. The threads are all different in thickness and colour. The patterns are difficult to recognize on their own, but when you look at them together you discover wonderful things. Carpets are woven from stories.’”¹⁰¹

Introduction

As a conceptual multidisciplinary artist who often works with textiles and personal stories in various community contexts, I find it fascinating to observe the intersections between textile weaving and community building. In the world of textiles, a carpet is more than a mere floor covering – it is a narrative woven from individual threads. Each single thread already contains many stories; from the hands and machines that twisted the thread, to the places, plants and animals from which material originated, to the pigments that coloured the threads. When brought together in a tapestry, these threads build on and create new stories.

Similarly, the essence of the Weaving Voices project lies in the interwoven stories of its participants. The metaphorical parallels between textile weaving and community building become apparent

100 I would like to express my gratitude to all the participants of the Weaving Voices project for their invaluable contributions to this chapter. Special thanks to my dear friend and artist Claire Wymer for her insightful conversations and co-editing support during the creation of this text.

101 Haratischwili, N., Schippers, E. and Post, J. (2024) *Het achtste Leven (voor Brilka)*. Amsterdam: Meridiaan Uitgevers, p. 45. (Translated by N. van Hartskamp.)

as individual stories intertwine, creating a rich, intricate narrative. Just as each thread in a carpet is distinct, we, the participants of Weaving Voices, brought our own unique experiences, ideas, and practices to the loom – or what we could call the structure facilitated by the project.

I devote this chapter to exploring the notion that, to create effective methodologies for communal artistic research, we, the Weaving Voices participants first had to become a community ourselves. Furthermore, I will analyse what elements we discovered as valuable in this process. Curiously, the essential ingredients I identified are not so different from those necessary for weaving. To weave a carpet, one needs the following:

- 1) a loom, or in other words a working structure
- 2) a cosy space in which to place the loom – a comfortable space to get to know each other and work
- 3) weavers and threads – individuals and their practices.

I will further elaborate on each of these aspects in the hope that some of the elements can be applied to other community art endeavours and discourses.

The loom

a working structure for collaborative artistic research

Artistic research carries inherent ambiguity, especially in collaboration. The need for structure and the freedom to explore the unknown go hand in hand. When working with many voices, a clear framework becomes all the more crucial, as it allows people to know how to work together and what to expect from each other. However, for research, a balancing act between structure and freedom is essential, as it creates space for the emergence of unexpected creation, methodologies, perspectives, and concepts that may alter the initial framework. All creative disciplines come to life within a given structure: a painter needs a canvas; a singer needs their voice and a weaver needs a loom. In collective community art projects, metaphorically speaking, when the woven materials are the diverse stories of participants instead of physical threads, the 'loom' becomes the working structure itself.

I then wonder: What characteristics does this specific frame need?¹⁰² The Weaving Voices research and outcome would ultimately be defined by what would come into existence through a communal sharing of activities over a period of two and a half years. The project provided us with the structure for shared moments of embodied experimentation to occur, and only through the act of experiencing that undefined space would the research – ‘our final carpet’ – become clear. Through the examples of our project, I emphasise two important aspects necessary in a structure that intends to develop communities capable of shared creative activity: an open space and attitude to allow unknown actions and informed, deliberate decisions to explore this ‘not-yet’ known space together.¹⁰³



Christiane is working on ‘the freestyle weave’ on a vertical loom, Amsterdam, April 2023.

102 In the second workshop week in Reichenow, Teresa Brayshaw brought in two statements to initiate a dialogue around the communal understanding of our research. The first quote attributed to Einstein states: “If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn’t be called research, would it?” The second quote by Moshe Feldenkrais instead proposes that “Only when you know what you are doing can you do what you want.” The juxtaposition of the two quotes underscores the dynamic tension between exploration and structure in creative endeavours. The conversation that followed during the workshop was an open-ended tapestry of different perspectives. What became evident was the necessity for the structural frame to be empty, for a space where exploration and experimentation are allowed. (See Teresa Brayshaw’s relevant thoughts in the chapter *Weaving Voices as Threads of Community*, [p. 175](#).)

103 The ‘not-yet’ is a term used by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk who aims to ‘radicalise the local’ by facilitating the creation of dynamic and diversified public spaces. In the collaborative book *Toward the Not-Yet: Art as Public Practice* the writers imagine and enact alternative ways of being together. Van Heeswijk, J., Hlavajova, M. and Rakes, R. (2021) *Toward the Not-Yet: Art as Public Practice*. London, England: MIT Press.

When examining physical weaving looms, we find various types, from vertical tapestry looms to simple hand frames, to the intricate Jacquard looms¹⁰⁴ (which utilised punch cards that later served as inspiration for early computing hardware). Despite their differences, they all operate using two sets of threads, one vertical and one horizontal, intersecting at a 90-degree angle. The threads stretched on the loom are called the warp, and they require tension to facilitate weaving the threads called the weft. The loom's structure dictates the maximum width and length of the woven fabric from the outset. During the Weaving Voices project, we primarily worked with 'simple' looms – straightforward frames without shafts or beams that can be used to start at any given point within the frame, often for artistic purposes. In contrast, industrial woven fabrics follow a more linear trajectory with clear starting and ending points, often involving precisely calculated and complex patterns.

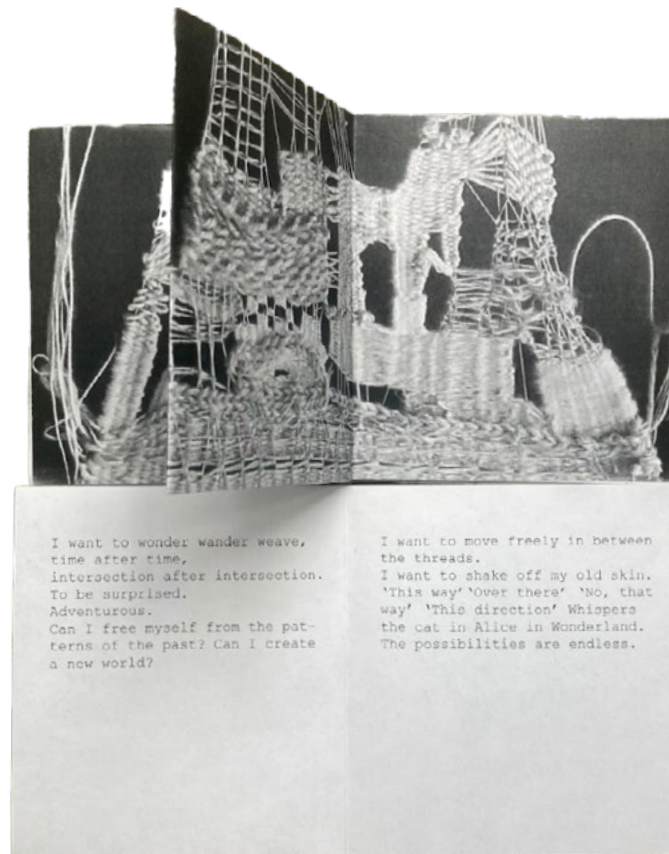


A personal weave in progress on a 'simple' hand loom in the train from Amsterdam to Reichenow, January 2023. In an attempt to visualise the beginning of our journey with threads dyed with onion skins and privet berries.

104 *Jacquard machine* (2019) Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacquard_machine [Accessed 30 Jun. 2024].

Among various textile techniques for fabric creation – such as crocheting, knitting, felting, quilting, and knotting – one could argue that weaving stands out as the most structured, because the loom's structure determines the maximum size of the fabric. In contrast, felting and crocheting, for example, allow fabric to expand infinitely in all directions.

In the book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by philosophers G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, weaving is used as a model to describe a 'striated space,' and felting as a model of a 'smooth space'.¹⁰⁵ A striated space, in their definition, is a controlled, sedentary, and measured space, while a smooth space is, in principle, a nomadic space. The latter is infinite, open, and unlimited. Both are two sides of the same coin and, in fact, only exist in mixture.



Growing a weave as if it were a *rhizome* (2017), 'A work I made in art school as an attempt to explore and escape the structured paradigm of weaving.'

105 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2005) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by B. Massumi. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 474–477.

This idea is similar to the previous juxtaposition of the dynamic tension needed between exploration and structure in research. To explore unknown possibilities, one needs both freedom as well as structure. In "Chapter 1440: The Smooth and the Striated," Deleuze and Guattari mention that Plato used the model of weaving as the paradigm for the art of governing people, because this technique requires a clear frame and calculated control. To become a well-functioning community, one needs a structure for communal understanding and mutual ethics, and guidelines to co-exist and work together effectively. However, too many predetermined rules eliminate the needs of individuals to express themselves freely and the space for exploring the unknown that allows new insights and communal transformation.

Considering the metaphorical loom as a working structure for collective artistic research, we can question how closely our approaches resemble an actual loom. Our frame involved agreements to meet multiple times over a period of two and a half years, sharing our practices and workspaces, to provide a structure for experimentation. However, the experiment itself resembles more of a felting or knotting practice – an entanglement of practices and stories rather than following a clear predetermined pattern. Or perhaps we can say that we took on a freer weave approach, leaving the ultimate pattern of our carpet open for play.

There is another element to our structure; due to the nomadic nature of our project, exploring each other's spaces, our loom needed to fit in a suitcase. Instead of a singular fixed classroom space, we moved within each other's personal work and living spaces. Allowing both unknown and informed actions shifted the more traditional hierarchical teaching system based on the principle that 'I know, and you learn' to a more round table approach designed to open up discussion and facilitate shared experience. For us, this round table was set-up in multiple places across Europe – often dressed with cookies and tea –, where different voices sat beside each other and facilitated 'I know and don't know, you know and don't know, therefore, we all learn'.

The cosy space in which to place the loom

a comfortable setting to get to know each other

If the aim of a structure in community-art endeavours is to nurture co-creation, it's imperative to shift from traditional knowledge-producing classrooms to communal work and living spaces. It is through mundane activities that we foster familiarity towards each other and create a comfortable place in which we can get to know and learn from each other. This proved essential. Sharing ordinary tasks like cooking, eating, and cleaning with strangers cultivates a relaxed interaction, providing shared time where there's no 'special' agenda, and no need for individuals to prove themselves. These interactions, in turn, foster trust – a vital thread in our communal carpet – laying the foundation for individuals to feel safe. Since personal stories, *threads*, aren't always easy and colourful, a space where we can express and receive each other's insecurities, vulnerabilities and questions becomes crucial. To weave our stories together successfully, a cosy space for the loom is needed, as exploring unknown territories requires trust and bravery.

Rosa Smits and I initiated a community-art project called Weaving Voices: Slotervaart in Transition.¹⁰⁶ This project took shape during a one-and-a-half-month residency at Bureau Postjesweg, an art space dedicated to community-art projects in Slotervaart, a suburb of Amsterdam, serving as the location for our Weaving Voices workshop week. Throughout the residency, we collected stories documenting the impact of gentrification on both new and long-term residents of the neighbourhood. This was achieved through communal weaving sessions and story-sharing events called Voices of Slotervaart, which were recorded on audio. Later we implemented the audio stories in a weave we collectively made with residents on a construction fence. Throughout the course of the project, we explored the significance of creating comfortable spaces within community-art endeavours. Our approach involved transforming Bureau Postjesweg into a warm and inviting weave and dye studio, essentially functioning as a community living room for the neighbourhood. The atmosphere of the space played a pivotal role in facilitating the sharing of stories.

¹⁰⁶ *Weaving Voices Slotervaart in Transitie* (2023) Nina van Hartskamp. Available at: <https://ninavanhartskamp.com/weaving-voices-slotervaart-in-transitie/> [Accessed 2 Jul. 2024].

Purposefully designed for a comfortable sharing of time, the space attracted a community of friends and unfamiliar neighbours who found their way to our working–living room. Many stories were spoken into microphones, yet even more were exchanged over cups of tea.



Voices of Slotervaart, Bureau Postjesweg, Amsterdam, 24 April 2023.

During the workshop week at our work–living space in Amsterdam, we had the pleasure of inviting the Feministische Handwerk Partij (FHP, Feminist Needlework Party) to lead a communal activity.¹⁰⁷ The FHP is a political feminist artist group that orchestrates gatherings where needlework and study intertwine, aiming to cultivate a higher appreciation for care, maintenance, and repair. In this particular activity, they encouraged us to gather in a comfortable circle, adorned in bathrobes, sipping tea, as we mended our own clothes. Simultaneously, they read their manifesto on *invisible care* and

¹⁰⁷ The Feminist Needlework Party is an initiative of artist Emmeline de Mooij and director Margreet Sweerts. Their manifest is available online: *Manifesto* (n.d.) Feministische Handwerk Partij. Available at: <https://feministischehandwerkpartij.org/> [Accessed 7th July 2024].

prompted participants to share stories from the perspective of their garments. Through this gathering, they too emphasised the relevance of establishing cosy spaces where communal rituals of sharing and embodied learning could unfold.



The mending circle with the Feminist Needlework Party at Bureau Postjesweg, Amsterdam, April 2023.

The loom provided by the Weaving Voices programme gave us the opportunity to convene in each other's living and workspaces – the Roy Hart Centre in France; a community of artists near Berlin; a suburb in Amsterdam; a Swedish forest; a city square in Leeds, and a rehabilitation centre and village in rural Hungary. For a week at a time, we shared conviviality and work, created turns in routines for each other or adhered to the provided routine. This involved going to bed and waking up in a communal place, as well as sharing food and domestic chores. These shared experiences have immensely contributed to our group bonding. Undertaking these routine and creative activities facilitated by *the weavers*, in a spirit of trust enabled the growth of communal memories which in turn created an essential foundation for our community to form.

Weavers and threads

individuals and their practices, weaving together

The weavers and the threads they bring to the loom are undoubtedly essential in the weaving of a tapestry. While we have the loom and the cosy space in which to place it, our threads consist of a colourful blend of creative practices, personal discoveries, dreams, and concepts. We are a diverse group of weavers: individual artists, voice workers, pedagogical trainers, coaches, movement practitioners, and musicians. It is worth reflecting on the ways we shared these different practices, which allowed for the creation of unforeseen formations and patterns in our communal carpet.

The Weaving Voices project facilitated a structure where participants would take turns guiding workshops, sharing their creative practices while others learned by following instructions. Surrendering to someone else's practice is as valuable as guiding, and alternating these roles is a powerful tool for community building. It allows participants to metaphorically stand in each other's shoes, fostering deeper connections and understanding. When guiding, we get the opportunity to explore our own practice through the perspectives of others. Conversely, following instructions within a new practice allows us to playfully explore and re-contextualise ourselves. This process creates a communal space for sharing, leading to new insights and ideas that inspire new works for everyone involved. Artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher highlight the significance of following instructions beautifully in their introductory words from their book and online community art project [Learning to Love You More](#):

“Sometimes it is a relief to be told what to do... our most joyful and profound experiences often come when we are following other people's instructions... Sometimes it seems like the moment we let go of trying to be original, we actually feel something new”.¹⁰⁸

108 *Learning to Love You More* is a seven-year community project initiated by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, which began in 2002. The project consisted of a website featuring assignments. The formula they developed yielded rich, captivating, and meaningful content. More than 8000 people worldwide responded, forming an online community that shared personal stories. In 2007 they created a book from the gathered content:

Fletcher, H. et al. (2007) *Learning to Love You More*. Munich: Prestel.

See also: *Learning to Love You More* (2010) *Learning to Love You More*. Available at: <http://learningtoloveyou-more.com/> [Accessed 2 Jul. 2024].



This is what I was wearing on the morning of July 18th, when I left home to submit to a surgery.



I wore this the day I lost my virginity to a guy who hurt me pretty badly in the end. That's life. But I still miss him.



What I was wearing when he saw me from the ferris wheel (and my heart beat a million miles an hour and I blew a kiss to him).



This is what I was wearing when I found out that my mom was remarried.

Learning to Love You More. Assignment 55: Photograph a significant outfit.



Voice exercise in a group with Carol Mendelsohn during the Weaving Voices workshop week at the Roy Hart Centre, France, October 2022.



Throughout the Weaving Voices project we shared our rich palette of practices, ranging from voice work; Feldenkrais; movement sessions; vision quests; weaving; botanical dying and printing; bookmaking; Georgian singing; creative writing; mending etc. Within these practices I would like to identify two types: *body practices* and *material practices*. I will address both types of practices through examples of activities we shared during the Weaving Voices workshops.

During the first two workshop weeks in France and Germany, we were introduced by Laurent Stéphan, Carol Mendelsohn, Saule Ryan, Walli Höfinger, and Christiane Hommelsheim, members of the Roy Hart community, to the Roy Hart Centre's work. Through this method, the voice becomes a guide for fostering connections between one's body, imagination, emotions, and personal stories. It facilitates an embodied and non-verbal space for narration, personal reflection, and for allowing vulnerabilities and strengths to surface. Sharing this activity in a group served as a powerful vessel for expressing and exchanging personal stories through our bodies. The intimacy shared through this work formed the bedrock of our trust and collective cohesion.

Material practices, on the other hand, involve a craft; they require external materials and techniques to establish connections with ourselves, each other and our environment. While body practices, such as the Roy Hart Centre's vocal work, facilitate immediate and intimate storytelling through voice and body movement, material practices operate less directly. Workshops like weaving or natural dyeing don't immediately prompt the revelation of personal stories. Instead, they focus on following instructions and mastering hands-on techniques, leading to tangible outcomes without the pressure to immediately 'reveal' oneself. This often lowers the threshold for participation, making these activities often more easily accessible to a wider audience. However, like body practices, material practices do hold a great potential to enable the sharing and exploring of intimate aspects of ourselves, which in turn contributes significantly to community-building. For instance, the repetitive act of weaving, within group settings, allows space for conversations, reflections, and shared experiences. During a workshop week in Amsterdam,

the Weaving Voices participants worked late into the night on the communal loom, chatting as they worked. Engaging in manual tasks together creates a comfortable atmosphere, similar to sharing everyday activities like cooking, enabling us to express ourselves freely. Moreover, as the Weaving Voices group became more accustomed to weaving, we started to incorporate singing into the practice, blending our different skills seamlessly.



Collective weaving & singing during the Weaving Voices workshop week in Amsterdam, Bureau Postjesweg, April 2023.

To further unravel the impact that material practices bring to the weaving of our communal carpet, I will focus on my personal contribution: the practice of botanical dyeing and printing. This practice was shared during the workshop weeks in Amsterdam, Sweden, and Hungary.

My personal thread

Printing and dyeing with plants on textile and paper is an experimental practice that requires surrendering to the unpredictability of nature and chemical reactions. Especially in initial attempts, one must surrender to forces beyond their control and embrace experimentation.



During the botanical print workshop with plants from the local surrounding at Bureau Postjesweg, April 2023.

This type of activity is accessible and enjoyable for diverse participants and locations due to its lack of strict control over the outcome, while it fosters a direct connection between participants and their natural environments.

In Amsterdam, I introduced this practice to the Weaving Voices group for the first time. To familiarise ourselves with the process and the local environment, we began with a neighbourhood walk to collect plants. This activity allowed for a physical connection with the natural environment in novel ways, opening up opportunities to explore various aspects of plant stories – such as their medicinal uses, distributions, cultivation worldwide and colonial histories. For instance, participants on urban walks are often surprised by the abundance of accessible plants. The diversity of cultivated plants in cities often makes it easier to find a wide variety suitable for printing compared to what can be found in European forests. Human histories and futures are deeply intertwined with plants for reasons as fundamental as our reliance on them for oxygen, food and medicine. In my practice, I enjoy exploring these plant relationships with participants, as they reflect our connections with the world around us.

As we worked collectively on our own pieces in Amsterdam, it became apparent that each individual outcome carried a distinct personal touch, despite everyone following the exact same instructions and using the same plants. This highlights another dimension that material practices bring to communal endeavours. Creating a design as simple as arranging plants on paper involves making decisions, often unconscious, that reflect our individual handwriting. By engaging in material practices collectively, we can become aware of our unique differences, providing the opportunity to consciously combine our unique styles across multiple areas within collective research.

In Sweden we continued the exploration of possibilities of dyeing and printing with plants from the forests and started to include moments of singing while collecting plants and stirring the dye pots. This created a playful blend of practices inspired by our unfolding relationship with the Swedish forest.



The first individual botanical printing experiments on paper by the Weaving Voices group, Bureau Postjesweg, in Amsterdam, April 2023.



Dye pot with bundles to create prints with Swedish forest plants on second-hand clothes, Unnaryd, June 2023.

When approached by Soharóza to lead a botanical print workshop for a group of men at a rehabilitation centre in Hungary, I seized the opportunity to align the workshop conceptually with the rehab centre's environment. The workshop aimed to resonate with the men on their journey of redefining addiction patterns. Drawing parallels with the Japanese tradition of Kintsugi, the art of repairing broken things with gold, it encouraged participants to embrace the 'stains in life' as part of the healing process. Participants purposefully made stains (prints) on t-shirts using plants from the natural surroundings of the rehabilitation centre. By sharing this narrative at the outset, storytelling became a guiding framework, infusing meaning into the material-making process. Towards the end, an unintentional yet powerful ritual ceremony unfolded. We printed a communal fabric with the leftover plants, and as rain fell on the parking lot, I asked the participants: "What do you wish for yourself?" Standing together, each participant contributed their personal wishes by laying out the plants one by one onto the textile, transforming the action into a special ceremony with the material outcome infused with personal meaning.



When we unwrapped the textile and t-shirts collectively, Tara Khozein conducted a meditative voice exercise. This created a heightened energy field of collective concentration and demonstrated again how well body and material practices can complement each other in collective endeavours, bringing both inner and outer worlds together in a moment of sharing. Following this, we cut the textile into small pieces to create individual notebooks for each participant. These served as personal objects intertwined with communal wishes, providing an intimate space for each person to write their own story again.

While facilitating craft techniques may not immediately lead to personal story-sharing, the narratives and actions embedded in workshops, such as the ritual ceremony in Komló, foster a profound sense of personal connection to communal activities and outcomes. As an artist, I find the process of collective making, infused with meaning that bridges the outside world and the inner worlds of

The ceremonial textile, Komló, Hungary, October 2023.



participants, to be most rewarding. When we create this space, we connect more deeply with ourselves, each other, and our environment, allowing transformation and significant memories to be made. This, for me, is the greatest potential of collective art practices, as it weaves material outcomes with intangible personal and communal stories, created through connections.

The carpet

conclusion

Throughout the Weaving Voices project and its experimental structure, it became apparent that both material and body practices positively complement each other in the weaving of our communal carpet, both metaphorical and literal. It was fascinating to observe how, by engaging in both types of activities for a prolonged period, the group began weaving together new patterns in which outward and inward, material and embodied, meet. For us, this took the shape of a collective practice where weaving, dyeing, singing, moving and living together intertwined as methods to facilitate the weaving of individual and communal stories.

Yet, I find myself wondering, after days spent weaving and singing, threads and stories, how do we conceptually frame the finished carpet? The need for tangible outcomes is deeply ingrained in our culture. Across all disciplines, we seek physical and quantifiable proof of our efforts, and community art projects are no exception. Perhaps pondering the nature of outcomes in this type of project encourages us to question this paradigm. Alternatively, this question may inspire a meaningful reflection on the outcomes of all community art projects.

We have at hand both immaterial and material carpets as outcomes of our community art project. How do we evaluate material outcomes when the matter we are weaving is mostly immaterial? How do we frame and share a carpet made of moments lived together; of singing while weaving, of dinners and walks, of experiencing natural environments through botanical dyeing and sound baths, of online meetings and physical warm-ups, and sharing our combined creative activities with other communities? Perhaps the outcome, or the

artwork, is this intangible space of human interactions, expressions and transformations. The shared memories and personal relations that bridge both physical and metaphorical borders, and allowed us to become a community ourselves. And perhaps we can say that a community in itself, with all its layers, patterns and interconnected stories, can be considered one of humanity's most rich and interesting works of creation – an artwork in its own right.



Interactive exhibition organised by Nina van Hartkamp, at Lola Luid, Amsterdam, 2024.



THREADS OF MEMORIES, CARPET OF SOUNDS

Géza Pintér-Németh

The text below summarises a creative, community development process within the Weaving Voices as Threads of Communities project, which took place between 7th May and 8th June in 2024, in Szalatnak, a village situated in Southwest Hungary, in Baranya County. Szalatnak has about two hundred inhabitants, whose average age is around sixty. It is a geographically disadvantaged rural settlement, from which a large number of the population left in recent decades to find jobs in bigger cities or abroad. Most of the remaining population are pensioners or labourers who are working for the few landowners in the area. Alcohol addiction is very common among members of the local community. The local social values in general are in a decreasing tendency like the demography, the economic power, the availability of cultural and social services, etc.

The base of Sinum Theatre is a barn in Szalatnak, where the Weaving Voices project activities took place during the springtime of 2024. This consisted of two artistic residencies with delegated artists from Tuyo Foundation, and a further week when all the partners came together to conclude the artistic and pedagogical research of the project. Before the initiation of the final project activities, the host organisation drew up the outlines of the programmes. The key terms of our approach were: intercultural theatre event, collective memory, and woven patterns as musical score.

The Rural as a place for intercultural encounters

Interculturalism is a key concept of the present chapter. Marco de Marinis an Italian researcher in the field of Interculturalism, points out that intercultural and transcultural characteristics are potentially always present in modern Western theatre performances. He defines intercultural experience as “the encounter and comparison of personal, professional and socio-anthropologically different identities, be they author, actor, director or audience”. Furthermore, a transcultural characteristic has been described by Marinis as one which

*“[...] tends to transcend the initial cultural condition, so therefore it is leading to a real, authentic experience, and to question codified identities, whether individual or collective, and to aspire to some kind of pre- and post-cultural objectivity, to ‘something third’, which is neither universal nor cultural”.*¹⁰⁹

Ric Knowles, Canadian scholar, dramaturg and author of *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010), describes his preference for the term ‘Interculturalism’ instead of all variations and subcategories of the theme (like cross-cultural, intracultural, transcultural, etc.), because it “evokes the possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings, avoiding binary coding”.¹¹⁰ As we see the development of the concept over a few decades, it reaches a level where we can analyse the intercultural aspect of any kind of theatre event because necessary differences in cultural positioning stands not only in national differences, but also in any artistic encounter between individuals. One of Weaving Voices project’s priorities is the focus on geographically disadvantaged rural localities. In these contexts, observation of intercultural characteristics helps us to understand the challenges of social interaction using a wider perspective, and especially helps to leave behind any stereotypes about rural life.

Artistic residency – Weaving

Rosa Smits arrived in Szalatnak from the Netherlands to lead a week-long community weaving laboratory with local inhabitants from 7th May 2024. One of the main aims of the workshop was to teach the basic methods of weaving on a large loom, (one meter high by two meters wide). The work took place in two venues: inside the *cultural house* during the mornings and on the green outside the Szalatnak Catholic church, in the afternoons. This workshop proved essential to lay the foundations for the community work. There was a clear idea of what to do, why to do it, for whom, and how, etc. At the same time, the activity was completely environmentally specific, in the sense that it was meant to be accessible and understandable to people who live in this village.

109 De Marinis, M. (2012) *Il teatro dell’altro: Interculturalismo e transculturalismo nella scena contemporanea*. Firenze: La casa Usher, p. 9. (Translated by G. Pintér-Németh.)

110 Knowles, R. (2010) *Theatre & Interculturalism*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 4.

Artistic residency – Botanical Dyeing

Nina van Hartskamp, also from the Netherlands (Amsterdam), arrived at the village on the 22nd of May 2024. This was another week-long workshop, using a more complex approach, which included research on dyeing plants in the environment; garden preparation; creating a library of colours by mixing the surrounding plants with different mineral mordants; and finally, the observation of shapes and colours from nature for further creative inspiration. I would like to emphasise the connection that was made to the natural environment, as this feels no longer so common. Observing plants and flowers in company brings a forgotten joy.

The Weaving Voices week in Szalatnak and the preparation of the *Walking Act by the threads of destiny*

The 'art of remembering' or as Cicero calls it the *Ars memoriae* is an individual and collective practice existing for centuries in human civilization.¹¹¹ Now this ancient practice also appears as a curious justification in our complex research in Szalatnak from 7th May to 8th June. In the beginning of June, another one week-long event started with the active participation of each partner organisation, when all the threads from the project were supposed to come together. During that week, each partner brought their individual artistic practices together in Szalatnak, as well as their collective materials, which included several songs and vocal techniques that the company had been rehearsing together for two years. During this final week the partnership had two main objectives: A) researching acts of weaving as complementary to vocal practice and B) preparing an outdoor performance for the village which summarised the local stories and narratives of the place in one performative act.

From 11th May a side project supporting the artistic research in Szalatnak, aimed to produce a documentary film about our working process with a special focus on interviewing a representative sample of local community members. The interviewees were asked about their memories connected to the village or their own histories about

111 Assmann, J. (2016) *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 15.

arriving in Szalatnak. The common thread of the interviews was the remembering of personal and historical narratives connected to the village Szalatnak. This also resulted in *metaphors of destiny threads* where various life-stories based on different social, ethnical or economic backgrounds find connection and are woven into one textile or carpet. This woven carpet then becomes a physical representation of the community who belong to the place. The final textile, in this way, results in a collective pattern of the local micro-society, and offers a different perspective towards the actual conflicts, tragedies and personal struggles. The extract of the documentary which summarises the interviews, the weaving and the plant dyeing workshops, and the walking performance, is available on [this link](#).¹¹²

Sounding carpet

Attempting to produce a methodological approach, which addresses the question of how acts of weaving and singing eventually complement each other in an adult educational toolkit, has been a main focus of my research. The aim of the research is to find potential connections between daily or *extra-daily*¹¹³ vocal/oral expressions and weaving, which could result in a symbiotic relationship in four main ways:

1. There is a metaphorical link between weaving and singing in a group. The way yarns are used to create texture could be considered similar to how collective sounds are created by the connecting of individual voices. This analogy can be liberating regarding our relationship to singing, because in allowing us to think about group singing in a variety of compositions, it can encourage us to let go of our worries and overcome our shyness and preconceptions about singing.
2. Weaving and community singing or storytelling can coexist as parallel activities in which manual work is also liberating and community members can express themselves orally in a more spontaneous way while they are working with their hands. This can

112 *Hangfonalak a közösség szövetében [Weaving Voices as Threads of Community]* (2024) Available at: <https://www.sinumtheatre.eu/erasmus-2/> [Accessed 20 September 2024].

113 Extra-daily in the sense of Theatre Anthropology used by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese: Barba, E. and Savarese, N. (2006) *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. New York: Routledge.

allow people to be more open when they share their emotions and stories (often humorous) in a narrative or singing form. Keeping people's hands occupied reduces the sense of stress, which might be caused when engaged in direct self-expression. It also facilitates personal openness within the community, while the parallel 'useful action,' the work being done, gives a sense of 'community of fate' the sweet bitter joyful feeling when hard workers share the same struggle which then has a concrete result.

3. Another possibility is to interpret the pattern of the woven textile as a musical score, or a 'partitura' (a written piece of music showing all the parts for instruments and voices), in this case, the community decodes the pattern of a textile as if it were a system of musical notes or vocal indications. The conductor's task is to guide the journey of the choir in front of the 'carpet'.
4. Finally, there is a traditional practice in the Persian textile tradition still in existence today, where the craft of weaving involves singing.¹¹⁴ Persian workers communicate with each other with a continuous 'sprechgesang' (singing speech), while reminding themselves of the order and rhythm of different colours. This form of continuous, even 'mantric' communication helps the Persian workers cooperate and concentrate for long-periods of monotonous work.

I would like to pay special attention to the third of these four possibilities, where the decoding of the woven pattern results in a musical score. In this case the participants, as a choir (ideally the same group of people who created the carpet), guided by a conductor, create a vocal score based on the pattern of the carpet. This results in a repertory of vocal expressions: each gesture of the conductor can be applied to the patterns of the carpet as the equivalent of a choral sound. This collaborative research, results in collective action between the choir leader and choir, where they all know which pattern motif of the carpet corresponds to which vocal sound. This consensus enables the choir leader to conduct using individual carpet motifs towards the creation of a musical improvisation. This process of *decoding* can be carried out in different ways according to the given time, space and interest of

114 Rosa Smits brought this tradition to our attention and a shared documentary about it with the project partners during the Weaving Voices workshop in Amsterdam. [See also: p. 79.](#)

the choir and choir leader. I propose that the relationship between the motifs of the carpet and the specific sounds resulting in the musical improvisation are influenced by the natural environment, and by the collective consciousness of the creative group.¹¹⁵

This experiment in creating a musical improvisation which responded to the actual woven carpet, was proposed, and guided by the founder and former conductor of Soharóza choir, Dóra Halas. The 'sounding carpet' improvisation was therefore also an outcome of the weaving workshop, since the wall carpet was created by dozens of participants from the village of Szalatnak. The musical interpretation of the carpet by Dóra and the participants, in this way might then be thought about as the sound de-codification of the village carpet. The result was an improvisatory musical interpretation of the carpet that we could use and perform as a choral piece.

Beyond the traditions

When a select group of people are creating the de-codification of a textile pattern, the question of 'why' might arise in one who observes the working process. Why might the participants choose to do one thing instead of another in this kind of vocal improvisation? This type of vocal improvisational activity actively encourages playfulness. Not the playfulness of winner and loser in the context of competition, but the playfulness of an infant who is still in a pre-verbal phase of childhood. I am left wondering just how much the *attitude* of the participants, might potentially reconnect to the state of mind of the pre-verbal communication of an infant.

The same question can be seen from a different perspective when we think about the analogy between the infant and the member of a tribal culture, (termed 'a primitive') by the French anthropologist Lucien Levy- Bruhl in the early twentieth century. Lévy-Bruhl states:

“The symbols of the primitives are not generally based on a relation established in the mind, between a symbol and what it represents, but rather

¹¹⁵ An extract of the mentioned improvisation can be seen and listened to in a short documentary about the Weaving Voices project events in Szalatnak: *Hangfonalak a közösség szövetében* [Weaving Voices as Threads of Community] (2024) Available at: <https://www.sinumtheatre.eu/erasmus-2/> [Accessed 20 September 2024].

in a participation that frequently becomes consubstantiation. [...] By virtue of the participation, to act on the symbol of a being or object is to act on the being or object itself.”¹¹⁶

The main intention of such an activity is to re-experience the relationship between objects and the natural environment, enabling a reconnectedness to language as a lived experience through a pre-conceptual observation of the environment. This state of mind has something to do with a childlike approach of discovering the world, like an artist who immerses themselves in the first reception of a material context. In this pre-conceptual perception, lights, shapes, sounds, touches, smells, and all the senses are more freely interpenetrated: tastes can take shape, or lights can sound. As Géza Balázs, a Hungarian linguist states:

“The general opinion among folklorists about the beginnings of folk poetry is that in the world of ancient and primitive societies, thought and consciousness were indivisible [...] ancient (primitive) language was closely related to ancient forms of consciousness, including art. [...] In all aspects, we can speak of a total art that was fluid, undivided, initially not permanently established, but then living in very solidified forms.”¹¹⁷



116 Lévy-Bruhl, L. (1938) *L'expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitives*. Paris: Alcan, p. 225. See also: Czertok, H. (2016) *Theatre of exile*. Translated by R. Elliot. London, New York: Routledge, p. 81.

117 Balázs G. *A művészet és a nyelv születése - Szemiotika, művészetelmélet, antropológiai nyelvészet*. (2021) Budapest: MNYKNT–IKU, p. 140. (Translated by G. Pintér-Németh.)

The textile, in this sense, could play an important role in the development of the literacy in several cultures:

“In Peru, where no written language in the generally understood sense had developed even by the time of the Conquest in the sixteenth century, we find – to my mind not in spite of this but because of it – one of the highest textile cultures we have come to know.”¹¹⁸

The quotation above suggests that weaving in some traditions may have served as a recording of semi-verbal codes, like musical, poetic or other codified systems. Textile, as its name implies, can also be seen as a materialised form of ‘text’ as language, and so become capable of capturing linguistic forms when transmitted through rhythm formula or symbolic content.

One of my observations about the ‘sounding carpet’ experiment, was that the participants albeit unintentionally, drifted towards the rediscovery of a pre-cultural and pre-traditional layer of individual and/or collective mind. The main sources of inspiration for the vocal improvisation were invited from the perception and observation of colours and shapes without literal interpretation. This way the participants were letting the carpet – as an object of observation – become a real information medium in its original sense:

in-forma-tion-is. Something that leaves a trace in somebody so that it forms/moves inwards, can then be expressed in a participatory improvisation in order to permit people to let something find form/move outwards, as the etymological meaning of emotion: *e-motus*, moving outwards.

Performative walk

On the 8th of June the Weaving Voices partners realised their final performative act, which was an interactive walk through the village with singing. The main idea of this walk was to make visible and audible some of the autobiographical narratives told to us by the people who live in Szalatnak. This included episodes that were

¹¹⁸ Albers, A. *On Weaving* (2017) Princeton: Princeton University Press. See also: Capone, F. *Weaving Language - Language is Image, Paper, Code and Cloth* (2019) New York: Studio Hudson, p. 25.

heavily impacted by historical tragedies as well as lighter stories from newcomers to the village. The material used on the performance walk included some of the common songs and *kulning* gestures learned earlier by the partnership.¹¹⁹ At particular chosen locations the walk came to a stop and village participants shared something about their life stories. The walk started from the train station and ended in the park of the local Catholic church, where the main, final event took place: the inauguration of the 'carpet of the village', symbolically received by the local mayor. In this way the carpet represented a network of the different destiny yarns, which came together in a single texture, as a symbol of the community.

This Performance Walk, which resembled a carnival-like participatory promenade, enabled the seventeen visiting artists from six different countries to interact meaningfully in an extraordinary complex intercultural 'moment' with the local village inhabitants. On the one hand, there was an obvious intercultural aspect to the multilingual performance with performers from several nationalities. On the other hand, the action itself, its message to the village and its historical layers had another intercultural aspect: the creation of opportunity to collectively reflect and connect to the identity of the village. This has less to do with people coming from different countries and representing different nationalities, and more to do with individuals who are, nowadays disconnected from their own 'original' national traditions and are therefore living their identity in a more dynamic way. The performance walk enabled reflection on the sense of belonging by the individuals who live in this little village, and also revealed that whilst these neighbours might speak the same



language, they often interact with each other and their village from different socio-political and cultural positions. This fact often remains hidden in our society, and expressing it through a communal event like the Performance Walk, might bring greater awareness to people, helping them to better understand their own sense of belonging.

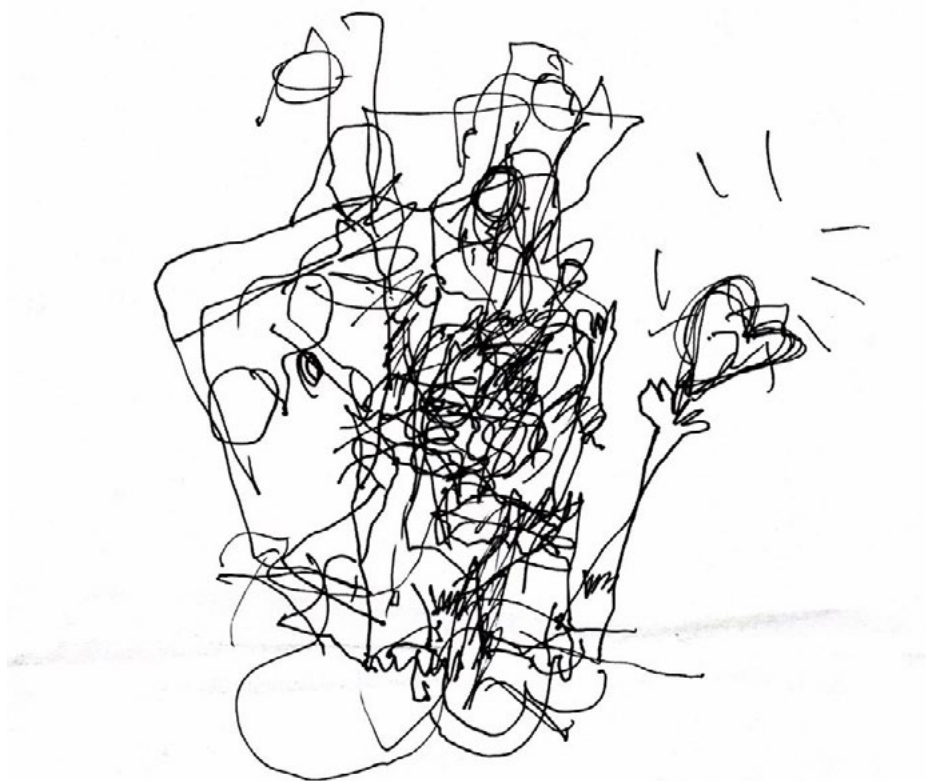
Summary

The creation of intercultural social interaction in a theatre event can contribute to the general wellbeing of a community, as the level of communication between individuals can be heightened. Isolation and solitude are emerging challenges in rural living all over in Europe. If our intention is to support (intercultural) social interaction between individuals in order to reach a more vibrant community, it is important to foster the conditions to enable a sense of natural curiosity towards difference and diversity and support the education of reciprocal tolerance.

One of the traditional characteristics of rural festivity was always linked to the sense of collective memory and to the art of remembering. One of our agendas as the lead artists is to research contemporary ways for the expression of collective memory (as many traditional forms are lost already) by the community. Our research into developing acts of remembering is also a recoding process of the local identity, which can open dynamic and reciprocal understanding about collective and individual sense of belongings. A successful recoding process of the sense of belonging, is a potential moment of inclusion: inclusion of the present moment, inclusion of the eventual new settlers in the village, inclusion of the marginalized members of the community, inclusion of a common future perspective.

Finally, the research of a carpet's pattern as potential musical score facilitated by Dóra Halas can lead us to the recognition of a pre-civilized level of creativity, beyond those traditional art forms. This pre-civilized level can often be seen in young children who experiment with shapes and colours of the environment seemingly without conceptional cognitive mind-process. Experimenting

with the de-codification of a carpet's pattern might also open a wider dialogue with the natural environment and provide a larger overview on the complexity of the development of local traditions and their specific historical contexts. Thus improvising a sounding carpet can be an immersive way of both learning about traditional weaving methods *and* about the sources of weaving as a traditional community artwork through relatively simple acts of observation and embodiment of shapes, colours, perfumes of the living environment.



WEAVING VOICES AS THREADS OF COMMUNITY

Teresa Brayshaw (TB) and Hannah Butterfield (HB)

This chapter, entitled WEAVING VOICES AS THREADS OF COMMUNITY has been created by Teresa Brayshaw and Hannah Butterfield, the two academics, facilitators, and theatre makers who worked at Leeds Beckett University, the UK partner of the Weaving Voices project. Teresa is a trained Feldenkrais Method practitioner and training as a Clean Language facilitator and uses many of the underlying principles from these professional practices in her artistic work. Hannah is a Community Arts Practitioner currently undertaking a practice led PhD exploring *Cultures of Welcome and Socially-Responsive Facilitation*.

The following chapter might be considered many things: a dialogue between the two authors; think-pieces on some of the words and language we use to describe our experience; a collection of miniature stories and narrative threads; an exercise in weaving micro-reflections. Think of it as a partial lexicon that is woven to enable you, the reader, to explore some of the emergent knowledge which has surfaced for us throughout this project. With this in mind we encourage you to approach this writing with playful curiosity and to “...start anywhere, stop anywhere. Don’t worry about reaching the end.”¹¹⁹

The entries in this lexicon have emerged from numerous thought-threads. They vary in length and texture and are expressed in different writing registers. They reference the voices of thinkers outside of this textual weave, which in turn point to further resources, which we hope you might follow.

W WHEN

When considering the question of how to begin any new artistic project, it can be useful to think about the idea of beginning as a point of departure, rather than the start of a completely new project.

119 Goulish, M. (2000) 39 Microlectures: *In Proximity of Performance*. London, New York: Routledge.

A consideration of moving away from a place or idea or practice rather than towards an outcome or final resting place, can give a sense of lineage – of the work coming from somewhere, of there being a history/herstory, a moment in time and place. When Samuel Beckett said “...Try again, fail again, fail better”¹²⁰ he is reminding us of the cyclical nature of creativity – that beginnings can happen many times. **When** working on complex projects the idea of beginning again or having multiple beginnings can serve to remind us that we can stop or pause – and make new decisions – and this points to the need to be flexible. One of the key components of our work as practitioners in all creative projects but especially those which engage with communities is the need to balance stability with flexibility. (TB)

When considering the question of when or where to begin, perhaps you already have begun? The [Weaving Voices](#) mission statement stated: “We believe that *when people connect through the different practices of voice; weaving; movement; writing and environmental work; people can meet, see, and hear each other in new and extraordinary ways. When safer and braver spaces are created, trust can be built beyond languages.*”¹²¹ (HB)

E ON EARS AND EARWORMS

Ears are the mechanism through which we listen. Listening involves complex affective, cognitive, and behavioural processes. How we listen depends upon our ability to tune in. If we are in a noisy environment, with many voices and opinions, we have to make choices about the kind of listening we wish to do. There are many different kinds of listening. There is a listening that includes non-verbal cues; a listening without judgement or jumping to conclusions; a listening that stays focussed upon the speaker rather than planning what to say next. One of the key practitioners who has influenced our thinking over the last decade is Nancy Klein. Author of several books and trainings promoting the importance of taking time to think, she promotes the idea of a listening space which takes the practice of

120 Full quotation: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”, from Beckett, S. (1984) *Worstward Ho* - Beckett Shorts Vol 4. London: Calder Publications.

121 Weaving Voices as Threads of Communities- About the project (2022) Weaving Voices. Available at: <https://www.sinumtheatre.eu/weaving-voices/> [Accessed 21 Sept. 2024].

not interrupting as critical to developing a thinking environment.¹²² (TB) Also, the term '**Earworm**' denotes a melody or lyric (or both) that gets 'stuck in your head'. I think every language has a version of this term: **πιασάρικο** (Greek meaning 'catching song'), **ohrwurm** (German, the origin for the English term), **fülbemászó** (Hungarian for earwig but also relates to the simplicity of the melody which becomes repetitive in the mind) ...Within the context of working in multiple languages, the **earworm** can be a welcome friend for developing a shared vocabulary and sometimes even act as a guide for transcending language barriers. (HB)

A ATTENTION

Attention to asking the right kind of questions. What does this mean? Aren't all questions valid if they come from a place of enquiry and curiosity? Well maybe not! Let us consider the body of work known as Clean Language.¹²³ Clean Language is a questioning and discussion technique used especially for discovering, exploring, and working with people's own personal metaphors. It is a system of communication that calls for the questioner to keep their own thoughts, assumptions, and metaphors out of the conversation as much as possible. During the Weaving Voices project Hannah and I conducted a series of interviews with the participants in order to capture their individual experiences of having taken part in the project. We used clean questions to stimulate the participants to tune into their own personal responses and used a voice recorder to capture the responses. Later in the project participants were invited to look at the transcripts of these interviews and create i-poems based on what they had said during the clean language conversations. There are examples of these poems in our [digital library](#)

¹²² For more information on this practice see:

Hartley, T. (2020) *The Listening Space: A New Path to Personal Discovery*. UK: The Listening Space.

Pole, N. (2017) *Words That Touch: How to Ask Questions Your Body Can Answer - 12 Essential 'Clean Questions' for Mind/Body Therapists*. London: Singing Dragon.

Klein, N. (2015) *More Time to Think: The power of independent thinking*. London: Cassell.

Klein, N. (2020) *The Promise That Changes Everything: I Won't Interrupt You*. New York: Penguin Life.

¹²³ For a more detailed understanding of the work see: *Introducing Clean Language* (2023) Clean Language. Available at: <https://cleanlanguage.com/introducing-clean-language/> [Accessed 21 Sept. 2024].

Getting good at learning how to shift **attention** around the self, between the self and another is the basis of a practice of exploring group dynamics and interpersonal relationships without the need for words. How do different verbs alter your understanding of the meaning of attention? Consider your embodied responses to the following questions: What does it mean to hold attention, to pay attention, to give attention, to receive attention, to seek attention? **Attention** from the Latin *tendo* also brings with it ideas of stretching, striving and reaching for. **Attending to**, also suggests care. Taking care to ensure that all members of the community are included. Taking care to provide enough leadership to guide and hold the direction of travel but not too much to create a stranglehold on the participants. (TB)

V VOCALISING

Part of the agenda for facilitating our week in Leeds was to share the rich history of weaving songs originating from the workers in the cotton mills around Lancashire and Yorkshire (two UK regions with rich histories of cotton weaving) and to do so by **vocalising** them. One of our academic colleagues Dr. Tenley Martin is a musicologist with a particular expertise in folk songs. Prior to the arrival of the Weaving Voices participants in Leeds, she created a [Weaving Songs Playlist](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/44eyerBNf1eKykyBZzYugo?si=469d82e86c98460e&nd=1&dlsi=afe8ed11c5e34989) of weaving songs which we sent to the group in advance of their arrival.¹²⁴ This action simultaneously acted as a shared point of collective reference for the group but also an invitation for individuals to prepare for the week ahead of them and acculturate by listening to a range of Northern English and Scottish accents. (HB)

I IMPROVISING

Improvising sometimes defined in the secular, as an act of 'making it up as you go along', recognises the importance of process and keeps you planted firmly in the present. Learning to trust and know how to be in the moment requires experience, confidence and a belief in the power of organic learning and emergent knowledge.

¹²⁴ Weaving - Tenley Martin (2023) Open Spotify. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/44eyerBNf1eKykyBZzYugo?si=469d82e86c98460e&nd=1&dlsi=afe8ed11c5e34989> [Accessed 21 Sept. 2024].

Emergent Knowledge developed by David J Grove, is a methodology for eliciting and utilising a person's inner intelligence.¹²⁵ Participants engage in discovering their own ideas, solutions or actions. The facilitator respects that each individual has their own solutions. There are no critiques, judgements, comments or rationalisations to analyse any of their process or content. *"It is about the profound trust we can have in the truth of each individual's own knowing"* (Jennifer de Gandt).¹²⁶ Hannah and I applied emergent knowledge techniques in our planning for and structuring of the Leeds week which enabled us to develop more complex understandings of the needs and wishes of the communities with whom we were working. This process led us to create multiple spaces where our visiting weaving and voice artists could practise various modes of improvisation in contributing to or leading workshops with for example, church congregations ([Mill Hill Chapel](#)),¹²⁷ refugee groups ([Soap Box Leeds](#))²⁸, people with dementia¹²⁹ and people with neurological conditions ([Giving Voice Leeds](#)).¹³⁰ (TB)

N NOVELTY

There's a region in our midbrain called the substantia nigra/ventral segmental area. This is essentially the major 'novelty centre' of the brain, which responds to novel stimuli. When one encounters a novel stimulus this sets off a cascade of brain responses, activating several neuromodulatory systems. As a consequence novelty has a wide range of effects on cognition; improving perception and action, increasing motivation, eliciting exploratory behaviour, and promoting learning. The Feldenkrais Method¹³¹ facilitates 'learning how to

125 What is Emergent Knowledge? (n.d.) Clean Learning. Available at: <https://cleanlearning.co.uk/about/faq/what-is-emergent-knowledge> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

126 Harland, P. (2014) *The Power of Six: A Six Part Guide to Self-Knowledge*. London: Wayfinder, p. 4.

127 Mill Hill Chapel (n.d.) Mill Hill Chapel. Available at: <https://millhillchapel.org/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

128 Soap Box Leeds is an initiative developed by SBC Theatre: Soap Box - Leeds (2023) SBC Theatre. Available at: <https://www.sbctheatre.co.uk/events/soap-box-leeds> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

129 A cross community choir based in Leeds: Forget Me Not Chorus (n.d.) Forget Me Not Chorus. Available at: <https://www.forgetmenotchorus.com/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

130 Giving Voice Choir Leeds is a choir run by Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust, which is for people with neurological conditions and their carers: Giving Voice Leeds (n.d.) FaceBook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/givingvoicelleeds/?locale=en_GB [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

131 For more explanation of material related to the Feldenkrais Method see: Move through Life More Easily (2024) Feldenkrais UK. Available at: <https://www.feldenkrais.co.uk/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024]. What is Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement? (2021) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

learn': the easeful adaptation of the nervous system to the unknown. [Awareness Through Movement®](#) (ATM®) lessons¹³² work intimately with the prefrontal cortex – the curious part of the brain that seeks **novelty**. (TB)

G GALVANISING AND GROUNDWORK

We often use the buzz word engagement in relation to evaluating the success of socially engaged practice. But the term **galvanising** (to cause people to take action, by making them feel very excited, afraid, or angry) feels more appropriate to the work we do with communities. Synonyms of the term **galvanise** include stimulate, encourage, inspire, prompt. (HB)

Theatre director Tadashi Suzuki once stated, '*cultural exchange is impossible therefore we must try*'.¹³³ This statement feels critical to me in terms of my work with marginalised communities and individuals many of whom are actively seeking sanctuary in the UK. **Groundwork** is the best way to describe my work. **Groundwork** is about meeting and listening to people, it's about developing networks and creating the conditions and environments where people can feel seen and heard. Recently, in Wakefield – a small city in the North of England, I spent six months developing a network of facilitators and finding out why people attend various existing community arts and/or wellbeing groups. The learning that emerged from this **groundwork** informed the development of a new programme, which connected existing groups together, and bridged the gaps in the city's current 'offer' for families seeking sanctuary and children living in temporary accommodation. One of my favourite workshops which I facilitate, *Wakey Wakey*, is a creative music and play activity for children, which takes place weekly at the local theatre. **Groundwork** for this project included figuring out how to get the children safely from the temporary accommodation to the local theatre whilst negotiating

[youtube.com/watch?v=NQjBXunhOVQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQjBXunhOVQ) [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

Rolling - Feldenkrais with Baby Liv (2010) YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ko7U1pLlg> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

132 Feldenkrais Method (n.d.) Feldenkrais. Available at: <https://feldenkrais.com/about-the-feldenkrais-method/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

133 Quoted by Bogart, A. (2007) *And Then You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World*. New York: Routledge, p. 16.

the changing regulations imposed on people seeking asylum. Every Saturday morning I now arrive at the temporary accommodation centre, make an announcement on the tannoy system, gather a group of 40 or so children and their parents in the foyer and walk them to the local theatre for the *Wakey Wakey* workshop.¹³⁴ The workshop begins on the walk, with call-and-response songs and games to play as we make our short 10-minute journey together. **Groundwork** in this instance created the idea of the Walking Bus. (HB)

V VOICE AND VOICES

Voice has been used and explored in various ways throughout the project. We've listened to it, we've located it, we've expressed it, we've played with it, and we have seen and felt the impact of our **voices**, in our lived individual and shared experiences. Sometimes we hear our **voices**, noticing them changing and adapting as they come into contact with other **voices**. Sometimes we don't hear them, but we feel them. We know that by our actions and where we place our intention and attention we are also finding and using our **voices** without necessarily hearing them. **Voicing** is also a literal and metaphorical activity. See also: entry on Understanding. (TB)

O ORIENTATION

Some years ago, as a younger lecturer, I found myself at a Performance Research Conference called *Here Be Dragons* which refers to a popular belief that mediaeval maps used this legendary phrase and images of beasts as a way of pointing towards undiscovered territory. At this conference, in a session on orientation a cartographer said something that has stayed with me: "*maps lie and that's why people get lost*". We all feel safer when we know where we're going but creative processes also require us to let ourselves get lost, to force ourselves into leaving the safety of the map behind so that we can surprise ourselves with what we find. In her book *'A Field Guide to Getting Lost'*, Rebecca Solnit invites us to consider how

¹³⁴ Wakey Wakey is a weekly storytelling and music workshop for families who are seeking sanctuary in the UK and living in a Temporary Accommodation Centre. More information can be found here: Wakey Wakey (2024) Theatre Royal Wakefield. Available at: <https://www.theatreroyalwakefield.co.uk/take-part/wakey-wakey> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

we each find our physical and intellectual bearings and **orient** both to ourselves and the world around us. She explores the territory of losing something we care about, losing ourselves, losing control. Losing anything is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing. Either way, there is a loss of control. *“The question then is how to get lost. Never to get lost is not to live, not to know how to get lost brings you to destruction, and somewhere in the terra incognita in between lies a life of discovery.”*¹³⁵ (TB)

INTEGRATION AND FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION

The Central Nervous system is responsible for integrating sensory information and responding accordingly. It helps individuals to feel and sense the world around them. As Feldenkrais teachers, when we work with people in a one-to-one context it's called a lesson in **Functional Integration**¹³⁶ (or FI for short). See also: entry on **Feldenkrais Method**. It's where the teacher guides an individual student using gentle, non-invasive touch as the primary means of communication, and where the teacher's touch reflects to the student how they currently organise their body and action. When applying these principles to our artistic work with communities, we are mindful to create environments in which participants can have positive thoughts and sense their innate capacity for improvement in whatever task or action they are engaged with. We ask ourselves, how can I improve the quality of my attention, interest, orientation, and the specificity of my questions in order to model new ways of thinking and feeling for others in the group? How can I recognise opportunities for functional connection and new options for taking action? Feldenkrais states, *“Functional **integration** turns to the oldest elements of our sensory system – touch, the feeling of pull and pressure; the warmth of the hand, its caressing stroke.”*¹³⁷ (TB)

135 Solnit, R. (2006) *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. London: Penguin, p. 31.

136 Individual sessions - Functional Integration (2024) Feldenkrais UK. Available at: <https://www.feldenkrais.co.uk/about-feldenkrais/individual-sessions/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

137 Feldenkrais, M. (1981) *The Elusive Obvious*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

C CHOIR AND COMMUNITY

Harmony **Choir** is a **community** group that consists of around 45 people from across the city of Leeds who come together and sing for 90 minutes each week. The **choir** was originally formed by Frances Bernstein who wondered: Is it possible to form a choir that reflects the multi-racial makeup of its community including refugees and asylum seekers? Could singing help bring people from very diverse backgrounds together? Frances says: *“I see people’s physical demeanour and facial expressions change. Smiles appear, eyes light up, bodies relax, people loosen up and move to the music and crucially they start to engage with other choir members”*.¹³⁸

One of the unintended consequences of the groundwork we undertook for the Leeds leg of the Weaving Voices project, was that I have been invited by Frances to take over the leadership of this **community choir**. Leading Harmony **Choir** makes me feel like I have something useful to offer people. It’s straightforward. I offer my skills and facilitate singing. I feel a rush of endorphins because I feel part of something bigger than myself. I feel more freedom in these spaces. It doesn’t feel as ‘heavy’ as some of my other work. I also didn’t set this group up; I am an invited visitor. I wonder if the ‘heaviness’ I feel on other projects involving people from diverse and marginalised communities, is because the agendas I have to work within are established by people outside of the group? It can often feel more complicated and complex. In Harmony **Choir** the weight of the work is collectively held. Individual members of the group bring in and share songs from their own cultures and histories. I wonder if the ‘lightness’ I feel in this context is because as long as we sing together, we have done what we set out to do and there is a certain level of gratification. We’ve also got into good ethical habits. We don’t sing lyrics unless we know what they mean, we work to avoid explicit religious references and we only sing in other languages if we know how to pronounce the words. Yesterday B taught us Jambo, a song that the Kenyan people created to help people speak their language. Other songs in the repertoire are sung in Swahili, Spanish, Congolese. It’s a mixed group with a wide range of languages and a long line of lineages. (HB)

138 Forget Me Not Chorus (n.d.) Forget Me Not Chorus. Available at: <https://www.forgetmenotchorus.com/> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

E ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES AND CROSSING THRESHOLDS

In different stages of the Weaving Voices journey in learning new vocal and weaving practices, I have been invited to consider my relationship with **boundaries** and **thresholds**.

Much Sociological research supports the importance of establishing personal and professional **boundaries** as a way to maintain health and function, to practise empathy and compassion. “According to Professor Brené Brown’s research, compassionate people ‘*assume other people are doing the best they can, but they also ask for what they need and don’t put up with a lot of crap*’.” The traits of the most compassionate people are that they: Ask for what they need, say ‘no’ when they need, and when they say ‘yes’, they really mean it.¹³⁹

Poet John O’Donohue says: “A **threshold** is not a simple **boundary**; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres. At this **threshold** a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope”.¹⁴⁰ O’Donohue suggests that in order to recognise, acknowledge and differentiate between Boundaries and Thresholds it feels important to take time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen inward with complete attention until the inner voice can be heard. (TB)

- What beliefs or association do you have with boundaries?
- At which threshold are you now standing?
- How do you feel and behave when one of your boundaries has been crossed?
- What is preventing you from crossing your next threshold?
- How do you feel when someone communicates their boundaries to you?
- What are the boundaries you sense you need but haven’t yet been able to communicate?

139 Setting Boundaries (2020) KimAllenYoga. Available at: <https://kimallenyoga.squarespace.com/blog/setting-boundaries> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

140 O’Donohue, J. (2008) To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings. New York: Convergent Books.

S SAFE SPACES, SAFER SPACES, BRAVE SPACES

Safe spaces is a term we are hearing everywhere in our various contexts, particularly when working with vulnerable people. It's 9 am on a sunny august morning in Leeds. I am setting up a space in a museum for Weaving Voices collaborators and local people who have sought sanctuary in this city, who will all be arriving soon. Today, we are going to work creatively to 'activate' our museum exhibition. We're going to co-create this creative action, rooted in our lived experience and interests. I'm not exactly sure how many people will arrive, or which languages they speak, or what access needs they might have. I have completed a risk assessment. Drawing on over a decade of experience, I am imagining the ways in which I can facilitate learning and meaningful experience in this space. I am thinking about what I can do to make people feel comfortable. I think that comfort is important. I know that I hold responsibility for the people in the room, to some extent, at least whilst they are in the room. But can this literal room (or figurative space) be deemed '**safe**'? **Safe** for everyone, at all times? Part of taking responsibility is about acknowledging limitations and the impossibility of striving for **safe spaces**. Let's make them **safer**. This can be achieved by continuously evaluating the notion of safety in spaces we cultivate: by asking individuals what they want and need, by making explicit the trouble with safety and accessibility, and acknowledging that these environments can be challenging.¹⁴¹ (HB)

A ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Active Citizenship is an increasingly used term within the field of Community Arts Practice and Co-Creation. The British Council's Active Citizens Social Leadership Training Programme has launched over 18000 Social Action Projects across 80 countries. In the healthcare sector in Scotland, the term is used to highlight the ways in which inequality leads to health inequality; poverty causes poor health; and climate change is a public health emergency. Community Arts practices bolstering wellbeing will be part of the UK's National Health Service: Social Prescribing from 2024 onwards. This marks

141 Martin, B. and Mohanty, C.T. (1986) 'Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?', in T. de Lauretis (ed.) *Feminist Studies / Critical Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 293–310.

a radical shift in the discourse surrounding how community arts practice is funded, valued, delivered, evaluated and characterised in the UK. (HB)

S STOP AND START AND SPACE

Make **Space** for the unexpected
Take a break from reading.
Stop doing. Breathe. **Start** being
a human being
*'The Way to do is to be'*¹⁴² (TB)

T THE 5 O'CLOCK MOMENT

The 5 O'clock Moment refers to a shared event at the end of each day of the Leeds workshops, where audience members, passers-by and Weaving Voices community participants gathered in the *Leeds 2023 Making A Stand*¹⁴³ outdoor site, as an extended collective, to sing and to weave together. **The 5 O'clock Moment** included sharings from partner organisations including *The Forest of Songs* led by Dora Halas from Shoharóza and *kulning* calls led by Marika Wittmar and Wendela Löfquist from Solsidans Kulturförening. The *kulning* that we had first learned from Marika and Wendela in the forest of Sweden was translated to sound out over a noisy city centre in a public artwork on the site of what once was the forest of Leodis from which our city took its name Leeds. (HB)

H HANDS AND HOMUNCULUS

The sensory homunculus is a topographic representation of the sensory distribution of the body found in the cerebral cortex. A cortical **homunculus is a distorted representation of the human body**, based on a neurological 'map' of the areas and proportions of the human brain. Take the **hands**, for example. They are the most dexterous parts of the human body, with large representation in

¹⁴² A quotation often attributed to Lao Tsu.

¹⁴³ Making A Stand (2023) Studio Bark. Available at: <https://studiobark.co.uk/projects/making-a-stand> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

the brain. We sense and manipulate a great deal through them. Therefore, they are extremely exaggerated in sensory and motor **homunculus**. The action of weaving calls for a complex blend of manual and cognitive interactions. Bilateral movement patterns involve complex integration in the brain that helps to develop and maintain neuromuscular control and fine motor skills in addition to calling for values of care, sustainability and creativity. (TB)

Also look/listen to *These Are the Hands* after Michael Rosen by the Commoners Choir.¹⁴⁴ (HB)

R READING THE ROOM

Reading the room – is an idea rooted in working with the people who are present in the space at the point of engagement. It's about the application of knowledge, not the blind repetition of tried and tested methods. (HB)

An Exercise for 'Reading the room'

Option 1 (if there is a shared spoken language):

I call this one 'the web of connectivity'. It's important to present this without too much explanation, to allow people to lead the conversation without worrying about the rules of the game.

- I take a very large ball of yarn and take the loose end in my hand.
- I begin sharing an anecdote about something related to our reason for being in the room together. Perhaps it's a story about meeting people for the first time.
- As I tell the story, I am slowly unravelling the yarn, I look out for a moment of 'connection'. This might be someone nodding, laughing, or even jumping in to share a similar anecdote.
- I keep hold of my end and pass the yarn to this person.
- We wait. I avoid giving instructions.
- They begin to share something, and they are encouraged to look around the room and find the next moment of connection with someone else.

144 *These Are the Hands* (after Michael Rosen) by Commoners Choir (2020) YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__356aRXVuc [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

- The game continues until it ends, or until we run out of yarn. By which point, there is a web of connection that helps us to visualise the various moments of connection we have witnessed.
- Then we place the 'web' on the floor, and discuss our experience of the task, before deciding what to do with the web together (for example photograph it, cut it up and keep a piece each, draw it, use it for something else later on...).

Option 2 (if there is not a shared language or I don't yet know if there is)

I call this one 'here I am'. It might be useful to invite everyone to wear a name sticker before we begin.

- Standing in a circle, I introduce myself. I can only say my name (in as many ways as I like), before adding some form of gesture or showing an object or expression. For example, I say "Hannah" numerous times, in different ways. I point to the sunflower on my t-shirt, I perform a cooking-related gesture, I close my eyes, I imagine listening to a favourite song.
- When I am done, I turn my attention to the person next to me and invite them (non-verbally) to do the same.
- The game ends when each person has taken some time to introduce themselves. If the first round was fast, we might go round again for more detailed introductions. This should feel light, gentle and non-confrontational. People are encouraged to take their time. They can 'pass it on' whenever they choose.
- A variation of this task is to walk to someone across the circle when you are done, rather than going round in sequence. This can help minimise the fear of "I'm next!".

E EATING AND EINSTEIN

Eating together is one of the most simple and useful ways of developing a connection with others I can think of. In the early days of delivering arts workshops to support refugees develop conversational English, this became one of the core components of any workshop. Sharing food, recipes, stories and preferences, and fertile groundwork for creative exploration and collaboration. (HB)

Einstein connected the disciplines of science and art, recognised the importance of staying curious and not attaching to what he already knew. *“I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”*¹⁴⁵

A ACADEMIC ARTISTS

Academic artists (those working within the university or Higher Education sector at least in the UK context) have a dual role to both teach and engage in research and scholarly activity. The **Academic** community has a shared set of values, and those of us working here are encouraged in the pursuit and discovery of new knowledge, and with a duty to push the boundaries of knowledge. The testing of received knowledge and wisdom is a large part of the job here and collaborating with **academic artists** can open pathways towards understanding how to creatively, responsibly, and effectively disseminate and effectively apply that knowledge. Additional benefits afforded **academic artists** are access to a student body who can often make important contributions to creative projects. Our student volunteers in Leeds supported us as project leaders in a wide variety of ambassadorial and production roles. They gained essential and valuable real-world experience as well as developing their professional networks. (TB)

D DIVERSITY

It's August 2023 and we are in Leeds City Museum in Leeds, UK. Weaving Voices partners and participants have gathered in a room to explore the notion of finding and using our voices. We have a wide range of reasons for being in this room today. Between us, we speak seventeen languages. We were born in fourteen different countries, on four different continents. Some of us were born in the UK. Many of us have different legal status here. Some of us are European Economic Area Citizens. Some of us have been granted *Leave to Remain* in the UK. Some of us are *Undocumented Migrants*.

¹⁴⁵ What Life Means to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck - The Saturday Evening Post - October 26, 1929 (n.d.) Saturday Evening Post. Available at: https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/wp-content/uploads/satevepost/what_life_means_to_einstein.pdf [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

Some of us have *Settled Status*. Some of us have *Pre-Settled Status*. Some of us have *Limited Leave to Remain Status*. Some of us have *Indefinite Leave to Remain Status*. Some of us are visitors. Two of us are children... (HB)

Participant feedback:

"I learned about connection in the form of weaving. I learned new words. I felt a positive energy. There was laughter."

"I was able to communicate better with people. I now understand the music in different languages."

"I learned the value of diversity: embracing difference and learning from them. Everyone has a voice."

"I experienced inclusion and engagement in a multilingual environment."

"I had a lovely time. I got a lot of energy from the people here."

"I will take with me the faces and the stories of the people I met. There is more that connects us than divides us."

"I escaped the stress and chaos I cannot control and joined in. It has been really, really good to be playful these few days."

"When I met these people, they could understand me like I could understand them."

S SEEKING SANCTUARY

Communities of people who have '*refugee legal status*' in the UK, or are in the process of seeking asylum, are often referred to in writing by the abbreviation '*R/AS*' in the community arts and socially engaged practices sector. These communities are frequently considered to be '*hard to reach*' in the Arts Council England's terminology. Use of the term '*people **seeking sanctuary***' can describe a range of communities without defining groups of people

by their legal status. This is particularly important because much of the work challenges and problematises current legislation regarding migration and refuge in the UK. (HB)



“ONLY WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING CAN YOU DO WHAT YOU WANT”

“Only when you know what you are doing can you do what you want” is a common phrase attributed to Moshe Feldenkrais and used in the professional Feldenkrais trainings. (See next entry ‘F’ below). Contrast this idea with Einstein’s (attributed) *“If we knew what we were doing it wouldn’t be called research would it?”*¹⁴⁶ Collectively these statements infer important relationships between knowledge and desire, and knowledge and research. Both ideas seem very relevant to me on this project. Often in knowledge exchange workshops, I found myself working alongside practitioners who were super strict about the importance of, for example, singing in the correct key in order to honour the traditions that we were learning, or following particular colour lines whilst weaving. The values and beliefs of these collaborators informed by experiential knowledge appeared to privilege a focus upon higher quality outputs. Other practitioners with a more exploratory sensibility to learning seemed to privilege curiosity and process over higher quality technical or aesthetic concerns. (TB)

F FELDENKRAIS METHOD

Feldenkrais is a method of creating the conditions for every-body to tune into the process of learning about how to pay *attention* to themselves through moving. Bringing one’s attention to the question of noticing in the pursuit of making conscious choices about how to be in the world. The cultivation of the ability to pause and find presence, and choose your reaction to the world around you, rather than reflexively acting out of habitual programming, is truly what this work is about. How do you create vitality amidst challenging times? Do your habits run you, or can you sit with the discomfort

¹⁴⁶ Attributed to Einstein and quoted in the foyer of the Royal Observatory Greenwich, the home of Greenwich Mean Time, London.

of not knowing what's going to happen next? Can you embrace the confusion in order to have a choice of moving in a different direction, towards a more peaceful existence? Moshe **Feldenkrais'** aim was to put your nervous system in a safe environment, focusing on going slowly and moving less than the extreme range in order to do something with clearer initiation and greater organisation. **See also the following entries: Novelty; Integration & Functional Integration; Neurons that fire together wire together.** (TB)

C CONSIDERING CO-CREATION

'**Considering Co-Creation**'¹⁴⁷ is the title of a publication from Arts Council England in 2021 which offers the reader an opportunity to consider how co-creation can 'help you actively listen to and collaborate with the local community and form new partnerships as well as helpful insight on putting it into practice. [Considering Co-Creation](#) It is rooted in discourse on cultural democracy and marks a shift towards a more nuanced understanding of equity to 'co-create versions of culture'. For us, **Co-Creation** is about the relationship between holistic and artistic practice, and a shared desire/objective/agenda. **Co-creation** marks a shift in which a 'participant' has more autonomy and agency within the process of making/doing/creating. (HB)

O ONLY A DOOR

"It is **only a door.**" – the final line in Adrienne Rich's poem [Prospective Immigrants Please Note](#).¹⁴⁸ During the Reichenow training our Weaving Voices community had the opportunity to work with Susanna Field on a one-day vision quest activity.¹⁴⁹ This one-day trek into a local forest involved individuals spending time alone and in silence as an exercise in communing with nature and connecting more deeply with themselves. At the end of the day, we were invited to reflect upon Rich's poem and share our reflections. (TB)

147 Considering Co-Creation (2021) Arts Council. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/considering-co-creation> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

148 Prospective Immigrants Please Note (n.d.) All Poetry. Available at: <https://allpoetry.com/-Prospective-Immigrants-Please-Note-> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

149 Vision quests are rites of passage that have been carried out in Native American cultures for centuries. The traveller, in short, journeys off into nature, marking an important transition in their life—a turning point. Typically, vision quests are inspired by some kind of novel situation, rite of passage, challenge, or change. This can include birth or death (real and symbolic), career changes, marriage, divorce, menopause, or other major life events.

M MOVING AND MAKING A STAND

Moving between the roles of *leader, participant, project manager, space holder, maker, co-author, teacher* is a leadership strategy. When this is modelled, others can also access and contribute to the work in these ways, and in new ways. This is also a strategy for safeguarding the sustainability of the work – particularly when a new community has been established through the work. Perhaps ‘good leadership’ results in aspects of the work being able to continue without the presence of the initial leader. Part of the agenda for the Weaving Voices workshops in Leeds was to develop the possibilities for initiatives to continue beyond the ‘end’ of this particular project. Building robust partnerships is probably the most important work towards this aim. The ‘leader’ proposes a way of working, a way of moving between roles, a way of sharing responsibility for the continuation of a community group. They don’t own it, it is not fixed in terms of specific skill set, it isn’t ‘taught’ but rather shared. (HB)

Making a Stand was a large-scale public Artwork by Michael Pinsky and Studio Bark commissioned by Leeds 2023 Year of Culture [Making A Stand](#) and became one of three main sites we occupied to activate our engagement with the Leeds community of passersby.¹⁵⁰ (TB)

M MISUNDERSTANDING

Misunderstanding happens a lot when working interculturally. How we manage the ‘lost in translation’ and the ‘not exactly knowing’ is part of a developing skillset. The Weaving Voices project has had to embrace the generative power of **misunderstanding** and some of the most interesting ideas I have thought stemmed from misunderstandings! There is something to be said for the potential insight and self-reflection that can come out of reading something out of context and connecting it to the reader’s own context. On our Weaving Voices project, we have all had to cultivate an approach to communication and skills and knowledge exchange that is generous and hold’s space for difference and the potential of new meanings.

¹⁵⁰ Making A Stand (2023) Studio Bark. Available at: <https://studiobark.co.uk/projects/making-a-stand> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

Performance theorist Peggy Phelan, writes at length around the value of a pedagogy for **misunderstanding**, as a strategy for embracing cultural difference. *“Misunderstanding as a political and pedagogical telos can be a dangerous proposition, or it invites the belligerent refusal to learn or move at all. This is not what I am arguing for. It is an attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other, and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other, that we discover real hope.”*¹⁵¹ (TB)

U UNDERSTANDING

Understanding weaving as both a real felt experience of using our hands and eyes to create weaves with yarn and materials, and also as a metaphor for a way of working together, a collective act of creating. When we sit or stand and weave together, we can often see the results of our labour, the weave comes into view, it is there before us, growing and changing before our eyes. And when we sit or stand and weave together, we sometimes can't see it, but we can feel it – a shift in our perception; a new way of connecting with each other; growing and changing; feeling how our thread connects to and is an integrated part of the whole. Weaving as an activity is both visible and invisible, it is both a literal and a metaphorical action. Both of these actions can be felt experiences. Both can be embodied.¹⁵² (TB)

N NEURONS THAT FIRE TOGETHER...

“Neurons that fire together, wire together” is a common saying in the field of neuroscience. This tells us that the more you fire the same habit, the stronger the wire connection is in your brain, whether or not it's in sync with your greatest intention. Everyone picks up habits that may not be as useful as other potential and available options, whether we realise it or not. For example, your brain does not decide to tell you that moving in one certain direction will cause more wear and tear over time than will a different movement. Even if it does, you have the choice not to listen to it. The only ways in which you can know the difference are by either studying it, or by

151 Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, p. 174.

152 Brayshaw, T. (2023) Open welcome letter to Weaving Voices participants at Leeds launch day.

having a really clear, direct somatic understanding of yourself as you go through your life. Feldenkrais lessons have themes and variations, and the variations have different constraints and invitations. We often have our participants/students explore a habitual movement, whether they perceive it as habitual or not, then introduce non-habitual movements in relation to it. This causes confusion in the habitual organisation and gives your nervous system more options to **'fire together'** with new 'wiring'. That's why we say that you cannot do a lesson incorrectly unless you are causing yourself pain. It's also why it is not necessary to do all of the variations if you find that the confusion passes beyond being interesting into the realm of frustration. Stay within the boundary of what gives you joy and curiosity! (TB)

ISLAND (AFTER BREXIT)

*No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less. (John Donne)¹⁵³*

T TERESA, WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU RIGHT NOW AS YOU COMPOSE YOUR ANSWER?

Teresa, what's important to you right now? (HB)

How we build upon the partnerships we've established during the project. Understanding how to appropriately assess and evaluate the legacy of the work we create and facilitate with the multiple communities. Finding ways to disseminate the 'insider knowledge' we have accumulated throughout this project to individuals and collectives in the field. (TB)

And you Hannah, **what's important to you right now?** (TB)

The tyranny of language, wondering about how you might read this,

¹⁵³ Donne, J. (n.d.) No Man Is an Island [online] Available at: <https://allpoetry.com/No-man-is-an-island> [Accessed 22 Sept. 2024].

not giving up, re-grouping, re-thinking, finding alternatives, sharing the workload, finding boundaries to protect myself. (HB)

Y YOU...

*“**You** will not always be able to solve all the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage is contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own” (Michelle Obama).*¹⁵⁴

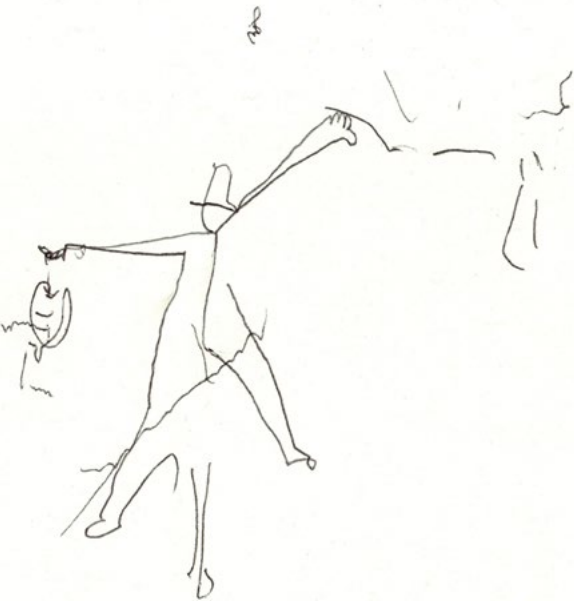
*“**You** cannot create results. You can only create conditions in which something might happen” (Anne Bogart).*¹⁵⁵

You, who is reading this text. Perhaps **you** work with communities. Perhaps **you** found your way to this text because **you** are looking for information, or ideas. Perhaps **you** found some, perhaps **you** did not. (HB)



154 First Lady Keynote Address at Young African Women Leaders Forum 2011.

155 Bogart, A. (2003) A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre. London: Routledge, p. 124.



The self-portrait drawings were made by the individuals from our project team, as part of a Blind Drawing exercise led by Teresa Brayshaw. You can create your own self-portrait drawing by following the 15-minute audio instructions [here](#).



LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Judit Biksz (Soharóza Nonprofit Association) is a Hungarian psychologist and coach. She works with children and adults as well focusing mainly on stress management and wellbeing. She has more than 10 years experience working with children in different fields as a ballet dance teacher, summer camp organiser and workshop leader. As part of Soharóza she is both interested in performing and spreading experimental choir singing and collective music creation.

Teresa Brayshaw (Leeds Beckett University) is a theatre artist, researcher, creativity coach and Feldenkrais practitioner. She has lectured extensively in the UK University and European Theatre School sectors over the last 35 years. In addition to her 'pure practice' as a Feldenkrais teacher, she applies her interests in neuroplasticity and creativity to her teaching, writing and professional theatre work. She co-edited *Training Grounds* in the International Journal of *Theatre Dance and Performance Training* (2010-2014) and two of Routledge's best-selling Performance Readers: *The Twenty-First Century Performance Reader* (2020) & *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (2013). She is co-curator of *Cultural Conversations* at the Sibiu International Festival of Theatre Romania and has published three volumes of interviews. She is currently collaborating on *Project 10-11-12* with fellow Weaving Voices artist Walli Höfinger, and a research project exploring *Musical Touch and Vicarious Perception* with UK musician Catherine Laws.

Hannah Butterfield (Leeds Beckett University) is a facilitator, theatre maker, performer and part-time Lecturer in Performing Arts at Leeds School of Arts, Leeds Beckett University. Her PhD research is rooted in *Co-Creation to Cultivate a Culture of 'Welcome' for People Seeking Sanctuary in the UK*. She is currently a Speak Up Artist for The National Theatre and Associate Director for Stand and Be Counted Theatre: who became UK's First Theatre Company of Sanctuary in 2016. Their work campaigns for safer routes for people seeking sanctuary and advocates for the rights of people who have been displaced. She has recently been appointed Director of Harmony Choir in Leeds, an integrated group of local people: many

of whom have sought safety and sanctuary in West Yorkshire. Her professional performance work is immersive and uses live music and storytelling.

Sarolta Eörsi (Soharóza Nonprofit Association) is a Hungarian music pedagogue based in Budapest and Vác, Hungary. She has been working as a teacher in a Steiner–Waldorf school for 3 years. As a founding member of Soharóza, in the last 15+ years she has been participating actively in many artistic projects, performing on the stages of Budapest, Prague, Vienna, etc. She has led musical workshops with children and adults for several years now. Her last work was in Freeszfe, an independent Hungarian school for Theatre and Film, where she taught singing and choir improvisation. She also works as a literary translator. This is the second Erasmus+ project she has participated in with Sinum Theatre and Roy Hart Centre.

Dóra Halas (Soharóza Nonprofit Association) is a pioneer of experimental choral singing, who as the founding conductor of several choirs in Budapest – Soharóza being the most renowned – has created new genres at the border of theatre and different musical styles, as well as creative and performing arts. Together with Fruzsina Nagy, she is the co-creator of Catwalk Concerts, an extreme artistic form involving choral singers in a thematic fashion show. She works with both civilians and professionals, her main focus being on community work and collective creation, experimenting with sound, movement, expression and self-development. She is also a pedagogue of music and English as a second language, further expanding her innovative concepts and methods into teaching both children and adults. She is currently based in Berlin and her most recent artistic and pedagogical research and learning involves natural and extended vocal studies, Mindfulness, Qi Gong and Tai Ji. She is the founder of the Naked Snail Movement, which is based on a holistic approach to teaching and learning in general.

Nina van Hartskamp (TuYo Foundation) is a multidisciplinary artist, sensuous storyteller and botanical dyer. She studied conceptual textile design at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and Drama at the Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp, Belgium. Her work revolves around the interdependent relationship between humans and the



environment. At the core of her practice lies the question: 'How can we live together on Earth in a sustainable, just, joyful, and thriving manner?' While she doesn't offer straightforward answers, she aims to create communal spaces to explore multiple local responses to this big question through research, installations, workshops, and performances. Her approach often integrates organic materials and processes, and other-than-humans (like plants and microbes) with personal human narratives, crafting immersive, site-specific installations and experiences. Through this blend of elements, Nina seeks to open up dialogues. She asks, "Do you want to weave stories with me, and practise collective wellbeing? Imagine what worlds we would create."

Walli Höfinger (Colaborative Reichenow) is a performance artist, voice performer and voice teacher. Her recent artistic work focuses on voice, writing and composition. She originally studied New Artistic Media with a focus on performance art with Prof. Ulrike Rosenbach at the HBK Saarbrücken, followed by a lateral entry into contemporary dance and performance making. Since 1996, she has been developing her own performances with movement, aerial acrobatics, video installations, sound, writing, voice and piano. Over time she collaborated in experimental improvisation/ instant composition context. She created and performed several original voice performances. Recently she concentrates on writing and creating experimental voice and piano compositions. Walli works and has worked both solo and in various formations with artists from other disciplines, amongst them Teresa Brayshaw (UK), Christiane Hommelsheim (D), Jonathan Hart-Makwaia (US), Deborah Hay (US), Biliانا Voutchkova (D), Ingo Reulecke (D), Christopher Dell (D) and others. She has been a recognised Roy Hart Centre voice teacher (Malérargues, France) since 2009 and regularly teaches voice workshops in Germany and throughout Europe. She speaks German, English and French. She lives and works near Berlin.

Christiane Hommelsheim (Colaborative Reichenow) studied video and performance art with Prof. Ulrike Rosenbach at the HBK Saar in Saarbrücken, and spent a semester at DASARTS in Amsterdam. She is a certified voice teacher of the Roy Hart Voice Centre. Furthermore she is certified in Perceptive Pedagogy/

Fascia Treatment (Methode Dani Bois). She was part of the SPCP *The Runner* (solo performance commissioning project) by Deborah Hay. Perception as a performative practice is a central topic in her artistic and teaching work. Since 2010 she has been collaborating with the composer Ralf Haarmann as Duo haarmannhommelsheim with whom she founded the label Klangmöbel and released the CDs *Shadows, Fairies and Me* (2011) and *Die Umrandung des Nichts* (The Edges of Nothing, 2018). In 2020, together with Australian composer and Alexander Technique teacher David Young she created the performance *Sarah Bellam in Christiane's very own Truck Show* and installation *Sarah Bellam in Animal Documentaries*. In 2021 she created the installation *Since when are you in this state?* (64 reel to reel tapes of psychiatric conversations) for Museum St. Wendel, Germany. In 2022, she released the video series *Random beauty* with music by Duo haarmannhommelsheim.

Vera Jonas (Soharóza Nonprofit Association) is a Hungarian singer-songwriter, voice teacher and Expressive Arts facilitator, based in Berlin. She has been working as a full time musician for the last 15 years, playing and touring with her band as well as other projects around the world. She's been a collaborator all her life, that's how she met Soharóza, with whom they had several projects together. Since moving to Berlin, she has focused on her studies and practice of Expressive Arts. The latter is an intermodal approach that utilises a variety of methods including writing, music, visual arts, drama and dance to help people achieve personal growth using their own resources.

Endre Kertész (Soharóza Nonprofit Association) is a Hungarian cellist. He finished his studies in Vienna and tried himself in all sorts of musical genres, such as in Budapest Anarchist Theater, Lajkó Félix Band, FrenAk Company, jNosnach, More von dir, a Gecó és a Fa, Budapest Improvisers Orchestra, By Heart Quartet, Free Style Chamber Orchestra, Szirtes Edina Mókus Quintet, Juhász Kata Company, Pataki Klári Company, Willany Leó, and Blue Canarro Group.

Wendela Löfquist (Solsidans Kulturförening) is a singer and songwriter, settled in the lush Swedish forest. She is a teacher, health practitioner, and cultural event coordinator, currently organising the music and crafts festival Into the Woods. She is also a member of, and writes music for, the band Fågelvägen. Her experience includes participation in numerous choirs and vocal projects, such as the project Gränsland, with Ann-Louise Liljedahl's music based on the works of Swedish poet Albert Olsson, and the choir Carolinae. Wendela loves the playfulness of exploring the voice and is passionate about music and culture as means of bringing people together. Singing and teaching are two of her biggest passions, as well as organizing events that foster community and connection.

Géza Pintér-Németh (Sinum Theatre Laboratory Association) studied at the University of Pécs, in Hungary, at the department of Italian Literature and Film Studies from 2003 and graduated in 2010. He worked with several street theatre companies in Germany and in Italy between 2008 and 2016. He is a theoretical and practical researcher of the intercultural aspect of theatre events in rural areas. In this field he has managed Erasmus+ and Creative Europe projects since 2016 (RIOTE, ATIPIA, Weaving Voices, SPARSE). He has been doing a DLA program at the University of Film and Theatre in Budapest (SZFE) since 2023.

Nikolett Pintér-Németh (Sinum Theatre Laboratory Association) is a PhD candidate at the University of Pécs – Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies. In her research she engages with Voice Studies, the performative voice in relation to subjectivity, and the constructing/deconstructing of meaning in a broad theatrical context. She completed her former studies in Cultural Analysis (MA) at the University of Amsterdam. Empirical research is central to her work. She collaborated as a performer, voice trainer and project writer with independent theatre groups (e.g. Shoshin Theatre, UtcaSzAK) and was the project manager of the European Partnership and Mobility Projects ATIPIA (2018-2019), and VoiceWell (2019-2020). She is a co-founder of Sinum Theatre and the initiator of the present project.

She co-translated the books: *Why Don't We Do It in the Road* (2021) by Vida Cerkenvenik Bren, and *The Five Continents of Theatre* by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese. Her papers have been published e.g. in the periodicals *Theatron* (2023), and *Imágó Budapest* (2022).

Rosa Smits (TuYo Foundation) is a textile and participative artist based in Amsterdam. She is captivated by the social, tactile, and procedural nature of weaving. Inspired by communities living harmoniously with each other and their environment, her work explores the fundamental question of how to live and work together. Rosa extends her creative vision by involving local residents in the collaborative process of weaving tapestries, fostering a new collective language. This collaborative approach strengthens social and tactile bonds, uniting people from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and professional backgrounds. Her projects have created contemporary collectives in rural areas, from working with Amazigh women in Morocco to engaging her suburban neighbours. Additionally, Rosa conducts workshops, collaborates on various projects, and develops and exhibits her own textile art. Her work demonstrates the richness of textile art by emphasising the process over the final result, enabling multiple hands to freely create new surfaces of connection.

Laurent Stéphan (Centre Artistique International Roy Hart) is a body-oriented voice teacher who holds a National Diploma for Teaching Theatre. He is living and working in the Roy Hart Voice Centre, in France. He is highly interested in understanding what expands presence in a person and in a performer. His unique approach and perspective is informed by his professional expertise as a theatre performer, a massage practitioner and singer, specialising in traditional polyphony of Georgia (4 CDs and over 250 concerts in three decades). To enhance his goal of inviting each person and voice to arise and sound freely, he is a facilitating teacher who uses playfulness and spontaneity and then combines this non-judgmental approach with a rigorous teaching of three-part harmonies from Georgia, to develop musical and rhythmic accuracy in his students.



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The Weaving Voices partner organisations, have worked over a period of 24 months to plan, deliver and evaluate the project under the guidance of our lead partners Sinum Theatre Association. As this extraordinary journey comes towards its end, we recognise and appreciate the contribution of many hundreds of people who have participated and been impacted by the activities and new knowledge the work has facilitated. From our early exchange of artistic practices in France, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden, to the application of the knowledge exchange and creation of performances, exhibitions and community engagement in the UK and Hungary, we have travelled far and wide.

Our various European identities, languages, modes of operation and practices have been explored, played out, challenged and entangled through contact with those communities of people from 'the innumerable centres of culture'¹⁵⁶ which we have encountered on our journeys. As a result we have become richer, fuller and more acutely aware of the importance of embracing difference, supporting inclusivity and growing communities through socially engaged and artistic practices – all key Erasmus+ values. We have all learned so much and truly appreciate every single person we have crossed paths with – we dedicate this book to you all.

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Gracias. Go raibh maith agat. Shukran (ارکش).
Madloba (მადლობა)...

¹⁵⁶ Barthes, R. (1977) *The Death of the Author*. Translated by S. Heath. In: *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana, p. 146.

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Christiane is working on 'the freestyle weave' on a vertical loom, WV workshop week in Amsterdam, April 2023; photo by Nina van Hartskamp. (Same photo appears on p. 4.)

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A personal weave in progress made by Nina van Hartskamp, on a 'simple' hand loom in the train from Amsterdam to Reichenow, January 2023; in an attempt to visualise the beginning of our journey with threads dyed with onion skins and privet berries; photo by Nina van Hartskamp.

Figure p. 129

Growing a weave as if it were a *rhizome* (2017), made by Nina van Hartskamp in art school, as an attempt to explore and escape the structured paradigm of weaving; photo by Nina van Hartskamp.

Figure p. 132

Voices of Slotervaart, Bureau Postjesweg, Amsterdam, 24 April 2023; photo by Slow Moving Collective.

Figure p. 133

The mending circle with the Feminist Needlework Party at Bureau Postjesweg, during the workshop week in Amsterdam, April 2023; photo by Olga Ganzha.

Figures p. 135

Top: *Learning to Love You More*, Assignment 55: Photograph a significant outfit. For the full reference see footnote 108 (p. 134).

Bottom: voice exercise in a group with Carol Mendelsohn during the WV workshop week at the Roy Hart Centre, France, October 2022; photo by Yvan Prat.

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Top: voice and movement improvisation in a group with Laurent Stéphan during the WV workshop week at the Roy Hart Centre, France, October 2022; photo by Yvan Prat.

Bottom: 'throwing sound' exercise, WV workshop week in Unnaryd, June 2023.

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Collective weaving and singing during the WV workshop week in Amsterdam, Bureau Postjesweg, April 2023; photo by Olga Ganzha.

Figure p. 139

Botanical print workshop with plants from the local surrounding at Bureau Postjesweg, April 2023; photo by Nina van Hartkamp.

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Top: the first individual botanical printing experiments on paper by the WV group, at Bureau Postjesweg, Amsterdam, April 2023; photo by Walli Höfinger.

Bottom: dye pot with bundles to create prints with Swedish forest plants on second-hand clothes, Unnaryd, June 2023; photo by Nina van Hartkamp.

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The ceremonial textile in the Leo Amici Rehabilitation Institute in Komló, workshop week organised by Soharóza, October 2023; photo by Gábor Rumann.

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An interactive exhibition organised by Nina van Hartskamp, at Lola Luid, Amsterdam, 2024.

Threads of memories, carpet of voices**Figures p. 146**

Top: botanical dyeing workshop as part of the residency of Nina van Hartskamp in Szalatnak, May 2024; photo by Molvay Norbert.

Bottom: the communal carpet of Szalatnak (concept by Rosa Smits) was handed over to the mayor of the village for public presentation, June 2024; photo by Molvay Norbert.

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Weaving in public space as part of the residency of Rosa Smits in Szalatnak, May 2024; photo by Molvay Norbert.

Figure p. 155

Singing improvisation led by Dóra Halas, based on the communal carpet (concept by Rosa Smits), June 2024; photo by Molvay Norbert.

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Self-portrait drawing by Christiane Hommelsheim, result of a Blind Drawing exercise lead by Teresa Brayshaw.

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Self-portrait drawing by Hannah Butterfield, result of a Blind Drawing exercise lead by Teresa Brayshaw.

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Self-portrait drawing by Nina van Hartskamp, result of a Blind Drawing exercise lead by Teresa Brayshaw.

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