

## Ospitare/Hosting Others: Looking for Traces of Transformation in Adults Through Somatic and Artistic Relational Work



Gaia Del Negro<sup>1</sup> 

Silvia Luraschi<sup>2</sup> 

Cinzia Delorenzi<sup>3</sup> 

Dalia El Saadany<sup>4</sup> 

### Abstract

We are two researchers, an artist, and a social worker. The article presents two stories from an international research project on experiential translation. Our local contribution in the project consisted of two workshops of multimodal translation (Campbell & Vidal, 2019) of a performance and two poetic texts in a public park; and a final piece of art for a collective public exhibition with all other local teams of researchers and artists.

The reflections and creative response produced by two participants - a man, a writer/editor; and a woman, a writer/editor and an architect/performer - particularly struck us. The man was not used to somatic practice in groups, and the woman seemed less used to using words in writing and more used to creating things with others in a relationship. In response to our invitation they produced autobiographical texts, photos of an installation in a natural setting, and an audio of an informal conversation with one of us. We found traces in their material of transformation (Dirkx et al., 2006) in the use of creative languages as a possibility

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Human Sciences for Education - University of Milano Bicocca, Italy, [gaia.delnegro@unimib.it](mailto:gaia.delnegro@unimib.it), <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7863-5450>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Human Sciences for Education - University of Milano Bicocca, Italy, [silvia.luraschi@unimib.it](mailto:silvia.luraschi@unimib.it), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8761-9134>

<sup>3</sup> Freelance artist, [cinziadelorenzi@gmail.com](mailto:cinziadelorenzi@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup> Social worker, [dalia.elsaadany80@gmail.com](mailto:dalia.elsaadany80@gmail.com)

to encounter the others deeply with words, body, gesture, positioning, and movement in space.

We present the results of a creative compositional analysis (Formenti, 2018) conducted by meeting in a group and going through moments of individual reflexivity and auto/biographical writing as inquiry (Richardson, 1997) to produce connected knowledge about transformation in adult education. The game we want to play, after a long period of social isolation, is one of mirrors to give us the space to reflect on the desire for a collective human flourishing.

Others live in us and enable us to see from those other perspectives (Formenti & West, 2018).

### **Key words**

somatic artistic work, transformation, writing as inquiry, otherness, collective flourishing

## **Introduction**

In today's complex societies where multiple languages and modalities are simultaneously used for communication and learning, the question arises of how we can develop enhanced literacies that can support individuals and communities to meet each other and dialogue across diversity.

This article presents an experience of performance-based research and the use of *métissage* (Bishop et al., 2019) as a tool for analysing the materials collected during the research. Our aim was to look for traces of learning and transformation (Dirkx et al., 2006) in the materials of two participants with two very different backgrounds and biographies, in order to investigate how translation between different art forms could construct new meanings for a diverse group of people. This experience is part of *Experiential Translation: Meaning-making Across Languages and the Arts*, a study funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council<sup>1</sup> to investigate translation between languages (interlingual) and between media (intersemiotic) as a method of creation and communication (Campbell & Vidal, 2019; Del Negro, 2019). The study developed a practice-based method for participatory workshops that took place from April 2021 to July 2022 in network countries (UK, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Italy, and Hong Kong) and conducted by network participants working in scholar-artist teams.

---

<sup>1</sup> AHRC is a British research council, established in 1998, supporting research and postgraduate study in the arts and humanities <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/>.

The participants were invited to explore intersemiotic translation via creative methods (e.g., writing, performance, artmaking) in different settings. The aims of the project were to understand how translation can be experienced in groups as a mode that contributes to meaning making in cross-cultural communication and to foster individual imagination, somatic playfulness, and vital creativity in education and arts institutions.

Our research draws on a framework of feminism, auto/biography, and post-qualitative theories. For the analysis of the materials, we use a compositional method (Formenti, 2018) and *métissage* with a particular interest in poetic language. In the first section, we present our theoretical and critical friends. In the second, we describe the methodological aspects with the biographies of the authors. Then we talk about the context of the research Ospitare/Hosting others and give an account of the experiences of two participants in the research. The fourth section offers our compositional analysis of the materials through a poetic creation of text and image. In the conclusions we discuss what our method does and what it does not do, namely its potential and limitations, in terms of transformation of adult lives in adult learning settings.

## Our theoretical and critical friends<sup>2</sup>

We write as an emerging collective mind with different competences and experiences. Silvia and Gaia have a shared story as academic researchers. They have given support to the theoretical backup of the project in relation to adult education research.

Besides our (Silvia and Gaia) training in somatic practice, we draw on theories that we have encountered over the years through physical meetings with different groups of scholars. Our three main strands of theoretical reference are: feminism, (auto)biography, and post-qualitative research. We present them now together with descriptions of the people that inspired us through vital conversations.

### *Feminism*

Darlene Clover, Kathy Sanford, and the international Connections grant research group on feminism were introduced to us by Laura Formenti, a critical friend at the University of Milano Bicocca (Sanford et al., 2020; Clover et al., 2013; Formenti et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2022). The group organised a series of seminars on feminist critique in museums, both in person and online with feminist scholars and artists/activists. What we shared taught us that as women and different others

---

<sup>2</sup> This Section is written by Gaia Del Negro and Silvia Luraschi.

we have agency, and places of culture are still colonised by cultural limitations that we can challenge and subvert with creativity and imagination in collective ways.

From the feminist strand in the context of museum education where patriarchal ideologies hide behind illusions of neutrality and impartiality, we understand that:

“Collectively we take up ‘feminism’ as a theory, a practice and a social movement that fights for the rights of women and others who have been marginalised and oppressed. Feminisms are concerned with questions of power... They are also concerned with knowledge, its construction and reconstruction.” (Sanford et al., 2020, p. 2).

From them we learned *métissage* – a composition of voices to counter the monologic voice in academic research. We will come back to this practice in the methodological section.

### **Auto/biography**

The Life History and Biography Network of ESREA – European Society for Research on the Education of Adults<sup>3</sup> – is the research network we are most familiar with. The conferences have enriched our understanding of human life and learning in a psycho-social approach, and of dialogue as being vital to democratic life in fragmented and unequal societies.

From an auto/biography strand reflecting on culture, narrative, and subjectivity from a psychoanalytic perspective, we understand that:

- From a psychosocial perspective, selves are continuously “created and transformed in relationships with others and within the matrices of culture” (Sclater, 2004, p. 326).
- In narrative, biographical, and autobiographical research, telling stories of self to others has the potential to support self-construction and agency: “higher education [and education in general] is potentially a space in which to manage and transcend feelings of marginalisation, meaninglessness and inauthenticity in interaction with others; in which it is possible, given their support and encouragement, to compose a new life, a different story and a more cohesive self” (West, 1996, p. 10).
- In critical research, “The desire to do research differently and conduct critical research *with* rather than *about* people demands theoretical and methodological creativity. It calls for a willingness to rupture hierarchical relations in order to create new collaborative spaces for learning and research” (Grummell & Finnegan, 2020, pp. 2-3).

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://esrea.org/networks/life-history-and-biography/>.

Research is complex, relational, and multi-layered so we need to take care of the complexity of processes and the multidiversity that participants bring on to it. This can limit participation even if we are careful.

### **Post-qualitative**

The online posthuman/post-qualitative reading group led by Luise Fischer and Karen Kaufman at the University of Edinburgh meets every two weeks to discuss articles selected to help the participants make sense of their own research through ideas of nomadism, diffraction, space, and place. The reading group is helpful to sustain a theoretical reflection based on our research experience and the sharing of epistemological/ontological doubts and resonances with the authors we read together (reminiscences, feelings, thoughts).

From a post-qualitative strand that draws attention to epistemological critiques on knowing in a more-than-human world, we understand that:

- In ontological terms, St. Pierre suggests that “[...] this distinction between self and other, a legacy of the Cartesian cogito, pushes toward destructive hierarchies” (St. Pierre, 2014, 2016, as cited in Carter, 2022, p. 36).
- In methodological terms, this means an inspiration for playing with methods and subjectivities in a rhizomatic way. The post-qualitative methodologies entangle and perform what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) refer to as a rhizome. According to Irwin and Springgay who used this concept in their research in *a/r/tography*, “a rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum. The rhizome operates by variation, preserves mutation, and flows of intensities that penetrate meanings” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, XX). This is a vague definition that attracts us as we do not fully grasp its meaning, the same way as we do not fully grasp what happens during research, or life. Furthermore, Cinzia uses this idea as a guiding concept in her artistic and teaching practice, that is not directive, but generative, combining elements of difference in unpredictable ways.

We now turn to the methodological section where we present our research workshop.

### **Methodological aspects**

Our research is based on practices of translation between media, fostering collaboration and participation within multilingual, multicultural, and

multimodal settings<sup>4</sup> (Campbell & Vidal, 2019; Del Negro, 2019). In the words of the two researchers who lead the international project:

“Intersemiotic translation (e.g., the translation of a poem into dance, or a short story into an olfactory experience, or a film into a painting) opens a myriad of possibilities to carry form and sense from one culture into another beyond the limitations of words. At the same time, such processes impact on the original culture and source artefact, enriching them with new layers of understanding” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. XXVI).

According to Ros i Solé, Fenoulhet, and Quist (2020), researchers of languages and translation, trans-cultural meaning outside of words needs a new definition of identity “that thrives in chaos rather than in order” (Ros i Solé, 2020, p. 2) to think about the encounter between cultures and subjects. An understanding of “vibrant identities... gives primacy to the materiality and force of life rather than man-made language and culture... by focusing on perceptual and pre-verbal aspects of languages and cultures... forces us to focus on the material and sensual aspects of our make-up” (ibid.).

Translation across media therefore operates to create transitional space of self- and other- making (Del Negro, 2019). We consider playing an exploration of staying in contact with the possibility of not knowing. Therefore, we found a way to experiment with bodily and artistic practices that we are fond of, but often are kept at the margin (or on the surface) in adult and higher education. In these years, in fact, Silvia trained as a Feldenkrais practitioner to teach awareness through movement (Feldenkrais, 1985, 1990, 2010), and Gaia trained in somatic practice in natural space. Cinzia, a dancer, choreographer, and trainer, directs a three-year training in somatic movement education with an ecosomatic and artistic orientation (in which Gaia trained). Dalia, a social worker in child protection with Italian-Egyptian origins, practices African dance and yoga.

In this project we are interested in exploring the composition of differences (Bateson, 1972) at two levels: during the field work and during the ‘data’ analysis. By composition we mean bringing together different subjects in a space, by listening and connecting the patterns among voices and texts.

In the research workshop, we used somatic practice and poetic therapy (Cupane, 2009). For Leonora Cupane: “We treat words in a poetic way when we expand them, we welcome their innovative potential, the ability to tell us things that we ourselves do not know, ‘to make’ truth (poetry by *poiein*, make) well beyond the logical order and code already established” (Cupane, 2009, pp. 50-51).

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://experientialtranslation.net>.

By positioning poetic words and bodies in the natural landscape we experiment with intersemiotic translation with movement and poetic landscape (Perteghella, 2019), combining different languages in a creative endeavour: “Here the translation of poetry in motion is not therefore a random exercise, but an intervention borne out of a dialogic engagement with both source text writer and poetic text, but also with the contemporary, post-modern contexts of meaning making, which emphasise the interconnectedness of translation and artistic practice” (Perteghella, 2019, p. 83).

In order to analyse what happened during the workshop, in line with these principles we decided to experiment with a practice used in feminist adult education called *métissage* (Bishop et al., 2019). This method of creative engagement blurs texts and identities drawing on storytelling, theatre, and (symbolically) the act of weaving or braiding (Chambers et al., 2008; Etmanski et al., 2013). It constructs a panoply of voices that explores liminality and contradiction. Doing *métissage* is a strategy to explore differences. For us, it was an attempt to engage four of us (two scholars, one artist and one social worker) emotionally and in an accessible way to generate a new text with the narratives collected during and after the workshop. The practice of writing a new performative text for analysis bears resemblance to the post-qualitative method of writing as inquiry (Richardson, 1997) in social research. Laurel Richardson speaks of the difficulty to embrace uncertainty and offers the image of the reflecting and refracting crystal to access the phenomenon under study, including the researcher(s). Writing as inquiry allows the researcher to become playful and try out different textual forms “casting off in different directions” (p. 92) interpretations that are dependent upon situated viewpoints. The analysis brings to light the process at work and the learning of the researcher, making space for the reader to position themselves in the text.

In the following sections, we are going to present: the *Ospitare/Hosting Others* project and workshop, the narratives chosen for analysis, the analysis with the *métissage*, and our conclusions.

### ***Ospitare/Hosting Others* project**

Our project, titled “*Ospitare/Hosting Others*”, engages us from different positions: Gaia and Silvia as researchers, Cinzia as the artist/performer, and Dalia as a participant in the workshops. In our case, the translation takes place between verbal and non-verbal communication, in order to explore relationships in education, health, care, and artistic professions, but also in lived lives “without the obsession of understanding” (Candiani, 2021, p. 11).

Last year in July 2021, we organised a workshop (Figure 1) with eight participants (six women and two men<sup>5</sup>) in Parco di Trenno, a public park in the city of Milan, with Cinzia and a photographer. We worked to translate two kinds of objects:

- Object n. 1 Performance: *Ospitare / lavoro in divenire, di e con Cinzia Delorenzi*, in residence, from 24 to 31 May 2019, open rehearsal on 3 June 2019.
- Object n. 2 Poem: two poems from Antonella Anedda, *Notti di pace occidentale* (Donzelli Editore, Roma 1999).



Figure 1 – Workshop *Incontrare l'altro attraverso il corpo e le parole/Meeting the other through body and words*, Milan, July 2021, Image: Gaia Bonanomi

The participants chosen through an opportunistic sampling (Merrill & West, 2009), met at the park on a Sunday morning. Only a few knew each other. They defined themselves as: a teacher of Italian as a second language, two social workers – one with a migratory background – a cultural worker, an editor and creative writing teacher, a researcher and lecturer of cinema and visual arts, an architect, and an actor. The photographer participated as an inside observer.

To prepare ourselves for translating, Cinzia (Figure 2) guided us with voice (about 40 minutes) in perceiving our body (immune system/border, from the skin

<sup>5</sup> All participants have given their permission to use their materials and images for the research.

to the digestive system) with the aim to explore coexistence inside our own bodies, in relation to the space, and open ourselves to translation. During her life, Cinzia has developed somatic practice with movement, for listening, transmission, and artistic creation, with different people and the environment and their relationship with each other and the environment.



Figure 2 – Cinzia during the workshop, Milan, July 2021, Image: Gaia Bononomi

The somatic listening in the environment (for example, we heard a summer camp of school children playing loudly) prepared us to perform a translation from Cinzia's performance (object 1). We constructed a personal safe space with unrolling wool strings and small personal objects – taken from home – and then positioned and walked across the space. After translating object no. 1, we introduced object no. 2, the first two poems of Antonella Anedda's *Notti di pace occidentale* (Donzelli Editore, Roma 1999), a book that questions the destinies of our world starting from memory of the bloody history of the West: *Vedo dal buio*<sup>6</sup> and *Non volevo nomi per morti sconosciuti*<sup>7</sup>. The book was used by Cinzia as an inspiration for the performance, and some poems were present on stage, although invisible to the audience.

<sup>6</sup> Read the poem *Vedo dal buio* (in Italian): <https://poesiainrete.com/2019/01/02/vedo-dal-buio-antonella-anedda/>.

<sup>7</sup> Read the poem *Non volevo nomi per morti sconosciuti* (in Italian): <https://formavera.com/2014/01/17/antonella-anedda-notti-di-pace-occidentale/>.

The participants read the poems aloud, then we individually chose a line of one poem that attracted us in that moment and wrote it on a piece of cardboard with a coloured pencil, with the idea to draw attention to the quality of the bodily gesture of writing and the shape of the letters. The cardboards were then circulated in the group to read and “touch” the translations (Barad, 2012). Then the participants (and Silvia and Gaia) walked to locate their translation card/object. We stopped and read the line to the others twice, listening to create a multivocal composition in which new combinations of sound and words are created in improvisation, revealing further layers of meaning in the original poems.



Figure 3 – Luciano and Maddalena from behind during the workshop, Milan, July 2021, Image: Gaia Bonanomi

At the end of the workshop, the participants wrote a few lines about the day. After the workshop, we asked them to translate one of the two Anedda poems of their choice. During a later meeting between the four of us, we read the writings and looked at the visual translations produced (photos of home, photos, and videos of performances). We noticed two stories that spoke to us, and a photo taken at the park. What connected these two participants?

### **Two stories: A writer/editor and an architect/performer**

*“I liked being aware of my body without the anxiety of translating it into well-constructed words.”*

(Luciano Sartirana, our translation from a fragment of written reflections after the workshop)

*“The sense of self starts from the mouth. Kissing. Can you live without it?”*

(Maddalena Ferraresi, our translation from a fragment of written reflections after the workshop)

These words were written by Luciano (Figure 3) and Maddalena (Figure 3 and 4) after the workshop. They are a man and a woman, a writer/editor, and an architect/performer, which particularly struck us because we felt some traces of transformation. In fact, he is not used to somatic practice in groups, and she seems less used to using words in writing and more used to creating things with others in a relationship. Furthermore, Luciano is always the first to reply to our emails with enthusiasm – maybe the relationship is spontaneous since he is friends with Gaia – despite our approach being different from (what we understand to be) his usual engagement with writing. Maddalena is a friend of Gaia. On a Saturday, Maddalena and Gaia had a conversation at the street market that they decided to record before they started it, which is part of the material produced. We are now going to analyse their materials together. Before recounting their stories, we would like to share some biographical information that we found online<sup>8</sup>, since we did not ask for personal details in the research. On the website of his networks called “*Edizioni del Gattaccio*”, Luciano introduces himself:

He was born in Milan on 6 November 1957.

He has been working in publishing since the 1980s as a reader for Feltrinelli, series director for Demetra, editor and consultant for associations, institutions, and individual authors. Screenplay writer, director, creator, and host of creative writing, dramaturgy, and cinema workshops in Milan and Venice.

Dramatic turn in 2008: the *Edizioni del Gattaccio* opens.

He saw things live on TV that today is difficult even to imagine: the funeral of John Kennedy, the first landing on the moon, Italy 4 – Germany 3 at Mexico ‘70.

And – of course – the C-beams flash at the gates of Tannhäuser.

(Luciano, our translation from “*Edizioni del Gattaccio*” website)

Maddalena presents herself with a video on a website for sustainable architecture<sup>10</sup> – the video is dated 2015, however we liked the personal touch of it:

“I am an architect and I deal with sustainable architectural design, and I am currently a guest with the Geological Collective at Green Utopia, where we have

---

<sup>8</sup> With their permission to publish, see below.

<sup>9</sup> *Edizioni del Gattaccio*: <http://edizionidelgattaccio.it/autori/luciano-sartirana/>

<sup>10</sup> Design artigianale: <https://www.designartigianale.it/maddalena-ferraresi/>

built a house made of earth-straw and chestnut wood. In my work on sustainable design, I am also involved in participation, and I believe that self-production is important because people must have the awareness and the possibility to build with their own hands, to create their own space with their own hands, with natural materials, those that are part of nature, using earth, wood, and grass. A house must be everything, it must be the production of food, it must be the projection of oneself, it must be something that you can touch with your own hands, that you can do, that you can get to know, it must not be something extraneous. This is what sustainability in construction is all about, this is why self-production in architecture is important, this is why it is important to make your own homes with your own hands or with technologies whose nature you understand, and which are connected to nature, which are not extraneous.”

(Maddalena, our translation from “*Design artigianale*” website)



Figure 4 – Maddalena constructing a door with strings during the workshop, Milan, July 2021, Image: Gaia Bonanomi.

When we shared the article with the two participants, Maddalena gave her consent upon trust since she was unable to read the document from Senegal, where she was on a work trip. When she returned to Milan, we had a conversation and she confirmed that the exploration of the mouth, conducted by Cinzia, was important since it is a ‘door’ that connects ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, us and others in

complex ways (nutrition, language, sexuality...). The metaphor of the door identifies her profession as an architect and her research as a performer celebrating material connections of body, nature, and the city. Luciano sent an email saying that in facilitating creative writing workshops he tries to bring with lightness an exercise of awareness about how history and the lived stories of people intertwine in unique ways. He said he feels more attentive now to the sensation that words evoke in our bodies when we read or listen or write.

We are now going to offer our analysis of their materials with a creative reflection based on an online performance of reading and making sense together of the process.

### A play of mirrors: Compositional analysis

Creative compositional analysis (Formenti, 2018) using *métissage* (Bishop et al., 2019; Clover & Sanford, 2016) entails engaging with the research material first individually and then in conversation, drawing on personal resonance, curiosity, and surprise. Usually, *métissage* starts from a prompt to write around a theme, and the collective work on autobiographical texts. The steps for at least two participants are to write about a topic after a prompt, then to break up the text or pick parts of it, and then to recombine these in a new text that includes more than one voice, following pleasure and curiosity. In our analysis we worked on texts, written and spoken, by Luciano and Maddalena in relation to the research on *Ospitare/* Hosting others. Performing a collective *métissage* with the participants' voices, and not our own, limited the space for ourselves (which is originally a feature of *métissage*); however, as other researchers using this technique have said before:

“*métissage* is not bound simply by words. In *métissage* it all belongs silence, phrases, gesture, imagery, and song. It has the potential to transcend dialect, language, class, and generation. For one moment, we all stand in the same field, diverse, yet connected by the thread of one prompt, one invitation. It is an invitation to reveal that which is unique to one and connected to many” (Bishop et al., 2019, p. 13).

We decided to analyse all the materials produced by the two participants that made us curious:

- Two written reflections after the workshop by Luciano and Maddalena.
- A written translation of the poem *Non volevo nomi per morti sconosciuti* (Anedda, 1999), by Luciano.
- A document with photos and captions translating the same poem, by Maddalena.

- A recorded conversation between Maddalena and Gaia.

We worked in two phases. First, we read individually the material in our own time and selected chunks of text that resonated as traces of transformation (Dirkx et al., 2006). They consider transformation as a largely embodied and unconscious process:

“As we tune into the inner world and how it relates to and interacts with our outer worlds, through our sensitivity and responsiveness to these feelings and images, we also become aware of more powerful forces and dynamics at work in our lives, forces and feel beyond us, as if we are living out parts of a larger script, one in which we are player but not the whole play, one in which we seem to be part of a larger whole. Learning that is transformative is in part directed to deepening our understanding of and work with these dynamics and relationships.” (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 128).

Secondly, we met online to read aloud the material selected one by one. After the first reading, we read them aloud again, selecting the sentences that we felt more strongly in resonance or contraposition with what others had just read. From a systemic point of view, taking together assonances and oppositions generates tension that is potentially transformative (Bateson, 1972; Formenti & West, 2018). Thus, we created a *métissage* by improvisation reading aloud. In the end, with the multi-voice text that we had formed and copied on a page, we attended to the visual aspect of the text, changing the font and inserting an image that we had selected from one of the original materials. The photo was sent to us by Maddalena as part of her translation of the poem. We chose to insert that image as a deliberate creation of a word and text artefact. The image felt to us during our performative act of analysis as entangled with the text, with nature, with the human hand of Maddalena that created the structure with threads. We decided to keep the initials of our names (Dalia, Silvia, Gaia and Cinzia, in the order they appear in the *métissage*) to emphasise the idea of a playscript and multivocality. We present the text in Italian and a translation in English below:

D: materiali e spazio hanno dato significato agli oggetti

S: è bello sentire vicinanza con persone quasi del tutto sconosciute

D: coesistenza anche invidia

G: la promessa che qualcosa succederà

C: ci mostriamo, ci segnaliamo

S: ...per questo non siamo salvi e non salviamo

D: non ci sono che luoghi da cui scrutare

G: baciarsi: si può vivere senza?  
 D: il senso del sé parte dalla bocca  
 C: vivere insieme e in ciascuno di noi  
 S: coesistere, accogliere la presenza dell'altro per essere in due nello stesso luogo, nello stesso tempo  
 C: stare insieme non in eterno, non uguali ma aspettando cose  
 G: infilarsi in mezzo ai fili  
 D: tradurre è portare da un luogo all'altro  
 G: sì, mi aiuta un confine rotondo verso gli altri  
 S: questo incontro che ha dentro una casualità, un'interpretazione libera  
 C: vedere un dentro "illuminato" ... mi fa trovare un confine  
 S: con un gesto di minima luce

D: materials and space have given meaning to objects

S: it is nice to feel closeness with people almost completely unknown

D: coexistence also envy

G: the promise that something will happen

C: we show ourselves; we give a sign

S: ... for this we are not saved, and we do not save

D: there are only places from which to view

G: kissing: can you live without it?

D: the sense of self starts from the mouth

C: living together and in each of us

S: coexist, welcome the presence of the other to be two in the same place, at the same time

C: being together not forever, not equal but waiting for things

G: slip between the threads

D: translating is carrying from one place to another

G: yes, a round border helps me towards others

S: this encounter that has a chance, a free interpretation



C: seeing an inside “illuminated”...makes me find a border

S: with a gesture of minimum light

(Milan, Wednesday evening at the computer, 9 February 2022, *métissage*, our translation, Image: Maddalena Ferraresi)

The photo of Maddalena was originally in a vertical position, but during the visual work on the text we decided to turn it in this way as it made us happier. Silvia and Gaia had an occasion to read aloud the *métissage* during the Life History and Biography network conference in March 2022 with the collaboration of two Italian speaking colleagues, Donata Puntil and Rob Evans. Reading aloud continues to give life to these words because:

“It broadens the breath and implies an ethical dimension, i.e., an authentic tension towards listening to the other, bearer of an irreducible otherness” (Cupane, 2009, p. 50, our translation).

In keeping with a feminist and systemic framework, after some shared reflections we chose to offer an interpretation and discussion of the data from our four perspectives, as often articles by many authors seem to have one voice.

At the level of the participants’ engagement in our research, we noticed two movements. Luciano speaks about being bodies without the necessity to explain by word this experience. This for us is a sign that he experienced embodiment during the workshop. Maddalena speaks about how the arts talk to each other and we don’t know what another person encounters when we communicate. These reflections suggested to us the possibility to include more languages and media for engaging people in research, learning, teaching, and community development, in order to increase the possibility to communicate and interact, adding more levels, senses, and languages for self-other making. A newly created ‘attempt’ to communicate across barriers of understanding, of sentiment, of intellect and time, can take the form of a re-creation. It is not what was uttered. It is an attempt to make something experienceable to another, that may be beyond words. It has been transformed. It can be a further space for exploring otherness and connection, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. For this reason, we include in this article two languages (English and Italian), two types of writing (prose and poetry), word and image, different fonts, and the authors come from different backgrounds and approaches (academia, social work, art).

At the level of our engagement in compositional analysis, we noticed how poetry can emerge between people of differences working together and offering their voices to be in touch through reading aloud in an informal setting of companionship (on a Wednesday evening at the computer). During the meeting, Dalia read to us in the Italian translation a fragment by French poet and writer

Christian Bobin known for a metaphysical and meditative quality revealing fundamental aspects of everyday existence:

“Poetry enters the world as in a friendly house, reveals the object, leads it to reveal itself, does not force it ... it seems to me that things come more easily to us if we give them the time they require.” (Bobin, 2019, p. 49, our translation)

For Dalia poetry is a form of transcendence. In fact, she describes her experience in the whole project as a disorienting experience of transcendence that gave her the opportunity to explore and express/translate in a language that went beyond words which, although important, are hardly capable of expressing such invisible and intangible yet fundamental dimensions. From her point of view, as a participant, starting from the body and thanks to this confined body of ours, it was possible to go beyond its boundaries to understand/feel and taste for a moment that one is part of a greater and more mysterious whole. Mysterious because inexplicable but translatable through less confined languages than the word and written language other than the poetic word. For her, there are moments in life, sometimes just a few moments, when the invisible threads between things become visible. Sometimes this happens by chance, other times it can be achieved through research work such as this, provided the ‘good’ disposition is there. In any case, these threads are there! In search of words to describe this profound texture of reality, Dalia introduced in our analysis the words of the theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli who tells the theories of general relativity and quantum mechanics with a look capable of wonder:

“Light is but a rapid vibration of the web of Faraday lines, which ripple like a lake when the wind blows. So, it is actually not true that ‘we do not see’ Faraday lines. We only see the Faraday lines vibrating. To “see” is to perceive light, and light is the movement of the Faraday lines. Nothing jumps from one place to another in space without something to transport it. If we see a child playing on the beach, it is only because there is this lake of vibrating lines between him and us. Isn’t the world wonderful?” (Rovelli, 2014, pp. 54-55, our translation)

Cinzia shared with the group some of the somatic experiences she used during the process of creating the materials for her performance ‘host’.

It was a chance for her to take the exploration further by moving from the one to the multiple without necessarily imposing the lines of meaning suggested by the performance.

The participants experienced a new process of learning and creation through their own experiences, leading to a new performance practice that enhanced the

title (Host) even more by hosting a co-creation of new spaces and meanings. A question that guided her was: how can I construct an experience to explore concepts of boundary and coexistence by integrating qualities such as permeability and porosity? How can I create my personal space (understood as the innate sense of self of an immune cell) in a collective creation?

Another step was to share the poetic material selected from a book by Antonella Anedda that was hidden from the audience in her performance, hidden in the set design. This material, which had been part of a ‘not knowing’ for her, a creative engine from which she had drawn energy by translating it differently into gestures, movement, and song, was handed over to the creative action of the group. Through Gaia’s and Silvia’s proposals participants could read, select, assemble, and through her proposal return to the body and the practice of presence by positioning themselves with these words in the space of threads, expressing them with the voice. This practice finally led to the identification, among many, of an undefined space, created by Maddalena, which summed up the concept of coexistence and the permeability of boundaries, in which we played together with new people who were present as witnesses and who had not participated in the whole process. It was not simply the summation of different experiences but a layering of planes and connections, which remained open and in progress.

The idea of threads as vibrant lines is something that continues to question us. In fact, the practice of performance, that we practised three times (in the workshop, in the analysis and in the LHBN conference) is the practice of presence, a gesture of minimal light (“*con un gesto di minima luce*”, see the *métissage*), through which we show ourselves, we signal ourselves (“*ci mostriamo, ci segnaliamo*”, see the *métissage*), it shows life that continuously is a field of potential action and transformation, that happens every day if we nurture the capacity to perceive it. Both during the workshop and the analysis we were present because we were creating something together (Formenti & West, 2018). Maybe, to encounter the Other we need to create with the Other and the less we know, the more we experiment (Candiani, 2021):

“*Stare insieme non in eterno, non uguali ma aspettando cose...*”

“*Staying together not in eternity, not the same but awaiting things...*” (see the *métissage*).

### Ongoing conclusions

We think that our research promotes the connection of people with the territory they inhabit and aims to reconstruct the trust necessary to live in their own skin

and in an open relationship with others, during a pandemic that was still not over and in a historical period characterised by deep fragmentation, fear, anger, and inequality (West, 2016). Polymodal engagement with a text emphasises the “psycho-physiological and kinaesthetic responses” (Scott 2012, as cited in Fenoulhet, 2020, p. 499) when reading a text. This process can be more accessible for some people at some moment in time and space, than others. Not all the participants in the first workshop came back to the other two workshops. It was difficult for us to engage teachers of second languages as it is unusual in Italy to do multimodal, embodied, and theatrical practice in language pedagogy with adults. We have not invited persons studying Italian as a foreign or second language (students, migrants, refugees, etc.) because the project was directed to teachers, artists, and adult educators. Only one participant was not an Italian speaker (one had Italian as a second language), so we are cautious to claim linguistic accessibility of the methodology.

As an analytical tool of analysis, *métissage* allowed the four of us to write together across differences, trusting each other to bring Cinzia (a dancer) and Dalia (a social worker) to respect each other’s voice without hierarchical order. It also made our analysis more creative, free of a rationalising thinking, and spacious, hosting multiple traces of what might be at stake, “dreams, desires, imaginations and memories, and our body materialities” (Ros i Solé et al., 2020, p. 398) in our languages and in our communication. Furthermore, *métissage* can be used as an idea, not just an activity, to experiment “translation as an assemblage” (Fenoulhet, 2020, p. 497) between different art forms, and people, for constructing and promoting new meanings and relationality.

What the method does, we claim, given its limitations mentioned above, is that researchers and participants alike may encounter experiences of transformation, in the sense of coexistence or awareness of, paraphrasing John Dirkx (Dirkx et al., 2006), different forces and wider webs of interaction at work in our lives... a dynamic composition in which “we” are a multidimensional element but not the whole circuit. These experiences are difficult to trace and speak about, they are vibrant, pulsing, and alive. Our approach to somatic and artistic relational work fosters imagination beyond the individual, toward co-individuality. It may be usefully applied in community development and arts institutions to explore multiplicity and messiness.

We hope this way of doing research contributes to reducing fragmentation by offering trust in staying with experimentation in an ongoing process that systemics like Gregory Bateson (1972) call “collective mind”.

## Acknowledgements

Gaia and Silvia would like to deeply thank our colleagues and friends Rob Evans and Linden West for reading this text and giving advice and encouragement when it was still very messy.

## References

- Anedda, A. (1999). *Notti di pace occidentale*. Donzelli Editore.
- Barad, K. (2012). On touching: The inhuman that therefore I am. *differences*, 23(3), 206-223.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Ballantine Books.
- Bishop, K., Etmanski, C., Page, M. B., Dominguez, B., & Heykoop, C. (2019). Narrative métissage as an innovative engagement practice. *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning*, 5(2) 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v5i2.68331>
- Bobin, C. (2019). *Abitare poeticamente il mondo. Le plâtrier siffleur*. Animamundi Edizioni.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Sage.
- Campbell, M., & Vidal, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Translating across sensory and linguistic borders: Intersemiotic journeys between media*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Candiani, C. (2021). *Questo immenso non sapere. Conversazioni con alberi, animali e il cuore umano*. Einaudi.
- Carter, S. P. (2022). Nomadic ethics: Attending to the ghosts we cite. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 7(1), 29–46. <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29632>
- Chambers, C., Hasebe-Ludt, E., Donald, D., Hurren, W., Leggo, C., & Oberg, A. (2008). Métissage: A research praxis. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 142–155). Sage.
- Clover, D. E., & Sanford, K. (2016). *Lifelong learning, the arts and community cultural engagement in the contemporary university: International perspectives*. Manchester University Press.
- Clover, D. E., Sanford, K., & Butterwick, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Aesthetic practice and adult education*. Taylor & Francis.
- Cupane, L. (2009). Il corpo parlante: la scrittura poetica come pratica di cura autobiografica. In L. Formenti (Ed.), *Attraversare la cura. Relazioni, contesti e pratiche della scrittura di sé* (pp. 49-70). Erickson.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Del Negro, G. (2019). Transitional/translational spaces: Evocative objects as triggers for self-negotiation. In M. Campbell & R. Vidal (Eds.), *Translating across sensory and linguistic borders: Intersemiotic journeys between media* (pp. 311-334). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123-139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344606287>

- Etmanski, C., Weigler, W., & Wong Sneddon, G. (2013). Weaving tales of hope and challenge: Exploring diversity through narrative métissage. In D. E. Clover & K. Sanford (Eds.), *Arts-based education, research and community cultural development in the contemporary university: International perspectives* (pp. 123–134). Manchester University.
- Feldenkrais, M. (1985). *The potent self: A Study of spontaneity and compulsion*. Harper and Row.
- Feldenkrais, M. (1990). *Awareness through movement: Health exercises for personal growth*. Harper Collins.
- Feldenkrais, M. (2010). *Embodied wisdom: The collected papers of Moshe Feldenkrais* (E. Berringer, Ed.) Somatic Resources; North Atlantic Books.
- Fenoulhet, J. (2020). The relational identity of the translator. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 20(5), 497-505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1776722>
- Formenti, L. (2018). Complexity, adult biographies and co-operative transformation. In M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning* (pp. 191–209). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Formenti, L., Luraschi, S., & Del Negro, G. (2019). Relational aesthetics: A duoethnographic research on feminism. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Rearing of Adults*, 10(2), 123-141. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9144>
- Formenti, L., Luraschi, S., & Del Negro, G. (2020a). Signs, images, words from 1968: From duoethnographic enquiry to a dialogic pedagogy. In Sanford K., Clover D. E., Taber N., & Williamson S. (Eds.), *Feminist critique and the museum. educating for a critical consciousness* (pp. 115-134). Brill Sense.
- Formenti, L., Luraschi, S., & Del Negro, G. (2020b). Connective cards to interrogate the museum. In D. E. Clover, S. Dzulkifli, H. Gelderman, & K. Sanford (Eds.), *Feminist adult educators' guide: To aesthetic, creative, and disruptive strategies in museums and community* (pp. 41-91). University of Victoria Gender Justice, Creative Pedagogies and Arts-Based Research Group.
- Formenti, L., Luraschi, S., & Del Negro, G. (2022). Bringing research into life: An experience of feminist practice with artists. In D. E. Clover, K. Harman, & K. Sanford (Eds.), *Feminism, adult education and creative possibility. imaginative responses* (pp. 115-128). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Formenti, L., & West, L. (2018). *Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: A dialogue*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grummell, B., & Finnegan, F. (Eds.). (2020) *Doing critical and creative research in adult education*. Brill Sense Publishing.
- Irwin, R. L., & Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as practice-based research. In S. Springgay, R. L. Irwin, C. Leggo, & P. Gouzouasis (Eds.), *Being with a/r/tography* (pp. XIX-XXXIII). Sense Publishers.
- Merrill, B., & West, L. (2009). *Using biographical methods in social research*. SAGE.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Perteghella, M. (2019). The case of the poem in motion: Translation, movement and the poetic landscape. In M. Campbell & R. Vidal (Eds.), *Translating across sensory and linguistic borders: Intersemiotic journeys between media* (pp. 63-85). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Richardson, L. (1997). Skirting a pleated text: De-disciplining an academic life. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 295-303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300303>
- Ros i Solé, C., Fenoulhet, J, & Quist. G. (2020). Vibrant identities and finding joy in difference. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 20(5), 397-407, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1784633>
- Rovelli, C. (2014). *La realtà non è come ci appare. La struttura elementare delle cose* [Reality is not what it seems: The journey to quantum gravity]. Raffaello Cortina.
- Sanford, K., Clover, D., Taber, N., & Williamson, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Feminist critique and the Museum: Educating for a critical consciousness*. Brill Sense.
- Scott, C. (2012). *Literary translation and the rediscovery of reading*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Sclater, S. D. (2004). What is the subject? *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 317-330.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2014). A brief and personal history of post qualitative research: Toward “post inquiry.” *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30(2), 2-19.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2016). The empirical and the new empiricisms. *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies*, 16(2), 111–124.
- West, L. (1996). *Beyond fragments: Adults, motivation and higher education*. Taylor and Francis.
- West, L. (2016). *Distress in the city: Racism, fundamentalism, and a democratic education*. Trentham Books.