

**Title:** *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*: affective choreography emphasising touch within community storytelling performances

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author utilises her engagement as an artist/researcher within three productions of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* - a play by Ann Coburn that tells the story of the Eyemouth Fishing Disaster of 1881 – as a case study through which to investigate questions relating to the affective potential of choreography emphasising sentient touch. Reflecting the visceral, tactile embodied lives of 19<sup>th</sup> Century herring lassies, the choreography explored performance with things both material and imaginary. Analysis of specific moments within the performances reveals their potential as felt encounters activating touch as a way of knowing for both performers and, through affective processes including haptic touch and kinaesthetic empathy, for audiences. Giving attention to the personal and the collective within cultural memory re/construction, the article argues for the potential of choreography as a re/membering of shared cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Affect, Touch, Heritage, Choreography, Gesture

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**Biographical Note:** Liz Pavey is a dance artist/researcher (improviser, choreographer, and teacher) who has lectured in performance at Northumbria University since 2004. She holds an MA The Body & Representation, Reading University. Her work is often site-specific or gallery-based and is informed by somatic movement practices and theories of embodiment. Working with Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, Liz is current leading *Living Stone*, a practice-research project investigating how durational improvised dance can help us make sense of geological time through developing an embodied sense that we carry deep time within us. Liz is also a Shiatsu practitioner and business coach.

## Case Study Introduction

The case study explored in this article is a series of three productions of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers*, a play by Ann Coburn that tells the story of the Eyemouth Fishing Disaster of 1881 in which a violent storm took the lives of 189 men and boys leaving 93 widows and 267 fatherless children. I have been an artist/researcher within these productions bringing my expertise in dance and somatic (body-mind) practices to creating choreography and contributing movement direction and, through this, investigating the affective potential of emphasising of sentient touching of things within these community storytelling performances.

Coburn's play utilises the changing seasons of a single year as a structure for exploring how the before, during and aftermath of the storm of 1881 touched human lives. The narrative focuses on women's experience within the nineteenth century British fishing industry. In the play, Eyemouth folk young Molly, her mother Jean and friend Janet work together as herring lassies. 'Herring lassies' were teams of women who performed vital, demanding work in harbours the length of the east coast of Britain gutting the fish, then salting and packing them into barrels as soon as the fishing boats brought in the catch. Working the seasonal migratory herring offered women employment and opportunity to 'travel-the-herring' moving from port to port down the coast as the shoals of herring progressed south. Reviewer Peter Lathan has described the play as a story of loss and hardship "but also of the survival of the human spirit, of courage in the face of adversity, and, ultimately, of hope" (Lathan 2014). Ending in the Spring following the storm, the play concludes in an atmosphere of resilience, and renewal as new babies are born to widows and Jean decides to throw off old home-bound habits and travel-the-herring for the first time, inviting Molly and Janet to go with her.

With its themes of living with the sea, of loss and of resilience, the play has potential to resonate with people in contemporary coastal communities who have experienced 'loss' of an industry and 'resilience' as a community in a post-industrial context. The production also offers an opportunity for these people to re-connect with their shared heritage in the fishing industry. Analysing their inter-disciplinary collaboration within the production *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers Eyemouth*, theatre director Fiona MacPherson and sociologist Carol Stephenson (2020) have discussed the effects of loss of industry on post-industrial (PI) coastal communities in the UK; impacts identified include increasing social breakdown. They consider both the problems and potentials of representations of shared heritage within this context. Acknowledging issues of authenticity, accuracy, community cohesion and inclusion/exclusion within such retellings of the past, they assert that "celebration of industrial heritage can enable PI communities to hold on to a sense of who they are" (Stephenson & MacPherson 2020: 5).

The three productions of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* I have worked on were all directed by Fiona MacPherson. A beautifully evocative contemporary a cappella score composed by Karen Wimhurst in creative response to Coburn's script was interwoven into these productions. One reviewer describes how, with the inclusion of the vocal score for female voices, "it has become something more than a play; it turns into a lyrical, almost elegiac poem" (Lathan 2005). The score was performed by local choirs specific to each venue. The songs tell of the fishing boats, of the herring lassies' work, and of the travelling women's delight at seeing the aurora borealis. The score also incorporates *Ballerma*, a traditional fisherman's hymn.

A 2005 North East England tour<sup>i</sup> produced by The Guild of Lilians Theatre Company led to a national tour in 2014, *Follow The Herring*<sup>ii</sup>, co-produced with the Customs House and working with coastal communities in a dozen locations down the East Coast of Great Britain all of which had a heritage in

the herring industry. This was a touring production with a large theatrical stage set, not a site-specific work, yet the resonance of the work will have echoed a little differently with/within each performance setting. Venues included theatres and village halls as well as Grimsby Minster and outdoor performances at The Stade in Hastings where the cries of seagulls and other ambient seashore noises added to the soundscape. For these productions, my movement direction and choreography encompassed working with the professional actors on the storm scene and contributing movement elements to some of the songs performed by both the actors and the chorus of local participants.

A letter of complaint from Eyemouth County Council expressing their disappointment that the 2014 production had not gone to Eyemouth was an invitation to take the story home (Pavey & MacPherson 2022) so in 2015, Fiona MacPherson and I started working with the people of Eyemouth to create a new production with and for their local community. Eyemouth is a small coastal town in the Scottish Borders that has been impacted significantly by the decline in the fishing industry. The history of the 1881 disaster is still very much a part of the identity of Eyemouth, many people tracing their ancestry back to those directly affected by this tragic event. The story of the storm belongs to the town and the reason the 2014 tour had gone close but not actually to Eyemouth was purely practical: the perceived lack of a venue large enough to take on a production of such size. The open invitation to be involved in the new production was advertised widely and the process commenced with a community meeting allowing everyone to express their views regarding the potential direction of the production. It was decided that that the piece would not just tell the story of the disaster but also reflect how the town had coped with the aftermath. A steering group was established, and an extensive development period commenced.

According to Veysel Apaydin, cultural memory is a “performance of resilience; heritage is a reservoir of memory that allows for the survival of collective identity” (Apaydin, 2020, p. 17). Drawing attention to ethical issues of political power and ownership of cultural heritage, Apaydin argues that heritage is an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction that “needs to be decided at grassroots level by relevant communities” (Apaydin 2020, p. 15). The new production, initiated by people of Eyemouth, utilised a methodology which investigated innovative ways to involve them as co-producers of the work (Pavey & MacPherson 2022). As such, the creation of the work was a collective act of cultural memory re/construction. Under the guidance and direction of experienced professionals (MacPherson, Pavey and musician Eleanor Logan), around fifty members of the community of all ages from across Eyemouth and the surrounds worked together to create, produce, and perform *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers Eyemouth*. Ann Coburn condensed her full-length play into a shorter storytelling delivered by ten local people taking the role of narrators with no professional actors involved. This provided the opportunity to explore the authentic nature of storytelling. The Hyemoothian voice incorporated more than just the local dialect and accent; this was embodied heritage of the community’s memory (see Pavey & MacPherson 2022). Karen Wimhurst added harmonies for male voices to her score which had previously been for all-female choirs. The cast included both men and women of all ages, and my choreographic work was mostly with a group comprised of local Brownies and Guides who for the purpose of this article I will refer to as the young girls. Their movement sections and dance sequences were interwoven into the production.

The company gave three performances of the new production in the Eyemouth parish church in 2016. Later that year, we reworked elements of the production for outdoor performance as part of the unveiling ceremony for the new Widow and Bairns sculpture which took place on the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster. This sculpture, one of a collection of four by artist Jill Watson, is located on Eyemouth Bantry and features the widows and fatherless children left in Eyemouth after the

1881 storm (Berwickshire News, 2016). We were then commissioned by the Scottish Storytelling Centre to take the production to Tradfest in Edinburgh the following year. Tradfest is produced by TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland). Our production resonates strongly with the perspective of TRACS Chair, Gary West, when he describes tradition as “a story learned from the past, told in the present, but looking to the future” (TRACS, 2020).

### **Shared and Embodied Heritage**

In their discussion of contemporary heritage, Holtorf and Högberg (2015) promote an understanding of the importance of historical consciousness (a term they see as synchronous with future consciousness) which chimes with West’s description of tradition cited above: “the underlying thought structures that generate meaning making when a historical perspective is given significance and filled with content in the present with consequences for the future” (Holtorf & Högberg, 2015, p. 519). In investigating the affective potential of emphasising sentient touching of things within these community storytelling performances of shared heritage, I draw on an understanding of heritage as dynamic and emergent in living, not pre-figured or ready-made, but rather “gathered through our contemporary performativities.... recovering heritage into the present” (Crouch, 2015, p. 184).

Focus groups conducted with Eyemouth participants in 2016 highlighted the complexity of people’s perspectives on their relationship to the town’s industrial heritage (see Stephenson & MacPherson 2020). Individuals spoke about the degree to which they felt they belonged within the community and shared in its heritage in relation to how long they (and past generations of their family) had been resident within the area. The majority of the participants had family connections to the fishing industry, most were lifelong residents of Eyemouth, and some could trace their families back to the time of the disaster while others were relatively new to the area (Stephenson & MacPherson 2020). As heritage is drawing on the past but performed, re-membered in the present, and as Helaine Silverman says, “a process that gives meaning to people, places and events” (Silverman, 2015, p. 70), then all participants in the Eyemouth productions are stakeholders in a shared process of this heritage re/construction.

All three productions under investigation offered participants embodied experiences and opportunities for reflection and dialogue through which to foster their personal and collective heritage in relation to the fishing industry and histories intertwined with lives lost at sea. In these productions, people engaged in performance through a number of practices including singing, speaking, embodying dramatic gestures or full-body actions, moving as an ensemble, working with material things, and dancing. Each individual brings to this their personal embodied history manifested in their habitual ways of vocalising, moving, and organising their body. This personal physicality is influenced by many factors such as their sociocultural background, the geography of where they have lived, their lifestyle, any previous experience they have had with vocal, physical and/or performance forms, and past events affecting their health and wellbeing. I describe this as their individual embodied heritage coming from the past while, like all heritage, constantly in flux as it is lived out in the present and flows into the future. This personal heritage forms part of the complexity of the collaborative emergent process of share heritage regeneration.

My movement work within *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* primarily focused not on the visual, or on the auditory, but rather on the felt sense, on touching and being touched by material or imaginary things. In origin, the word ‘theatre’ means a ‘seeing place’ (Bay, no date). In 2010 Waterson and Watson asserted that the “processes that constitute meaning, that frame, reveal and construct the past that we see around us, are essentially visual” (2010, p. 2) while in 2015 Crouch observed that

“[i]t is still fairly routine to think that heritage is prefigured and conveyed in ways that privilege vision” (Crouch, 2015, p. 178). Recent work on cultural heritage has given attention to how embodied, affective, multisensory/synesthetic processes create understanding of cultural heritage. For example, Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson assert that:

...*feeling the past*, through embodied presencing of geological/environmental space-time is core to understanding identity, difference and alterity at heritage sites.... The politics of affective memory... attends to the power of memory, not to *translate* cultural objects, but to acknowledge their power to articulate pasts, identities, events and create atmospheres of experience and creative heritage.

Tolia-Kelly, Waterton & Watson, 2017, p. 3.

In these productions, I sought by my chosen choreographic methods to foster embodied knowledge of qualities of touch and touching as a sentient and affective action and through this to feel something of the power of cultural objects of which Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson speak. First, I now discuss the choreographic work with actual things, fishing-related objects, before moving on to analyse my use of expressive gestures, actions which explored touching imaginary things.

### **Affect and Touch in Performance with Real Things**

Choreography for the 2014 national tour focused on the use of weighty things including cumbersome fishing nets, rough lengths of rope and large barrels (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). These unwieldy things had liveliness and motion of their own enabling performers to experience, and audience to sense, physical, mental and/or emotional effort involved in working with them. The objects used were theatrical properties sourced by the set designer Alison Ashton not museum pieces but still cultural objects with stories to tell. Their typical usages and implied historical references, together with their kinetic qualities and evocative sensory properties, made these fishing-related things stimulating to work. They easily inspired choreographic material that I felt had strong potential to affect audience members through haptic touch and kinaesthetic empathy as viewers instinctively imagined handling or otherwise coming into contact with the objects.

MacPherson and I have written elsewhere about embodied listening, sensing inwards to one's own body and out to the environment, and the synergistic nature of sensory perception, continuous and in motion (Pavey & MacPherson 2022). To be sentient is to be sensing and feeling, conscious of and responsive to information received through our senses. Touch has a reciprocal capacity; as we touch, we are also touched. In his seminal text *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, Ashley Montagu explains how touch is actually several tactile senses and that “the haptic is an acquired sense of touch in that it applies to seen objects that have been touched and acted upon” (Montagu, 1986, p. 17) connecting present looking with past feeling. Julia Petrov has referred to this participation as “feeling through seeing” (Petrov 2012, p. 240). She discusses how visitors to an exhibition of dresses will draw on cultural understandings and personal narratives as well as “their experiential knowledge of physical objects in the mundane reality of their everyday lives” to instinctively imagine being the wearer of the dress (Petrov 2012, p. 230). Petrov believes that “engaging with an object, one can participate in the past, thereby making it present through an act of imagination” (Petrov, 2012, p. 240) while, according to Ying Yan Vivian Ting, “the object is not a ‘dead body’ of materials but a living extension of human beings from different times and cultures” (Ting, 2012, p. 180).

A distinction between living and non-living matter predominates in Western thinking while many Eastern understandings see everything as a manifestation of Ki wherein nothing is inert and

everything is in motion and interaction, lively and creative. Drawing on the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2012) promotes a distinction between perceiving materials either as *objects* (considered inert and complete) or as *things* (moving and leaky). Utilising this distinction, Ingold argues for materials (including environments and human beings) as things not objects. For Ingold, properties of materials are histories not attributes, active not objectified: “To understand materials is to be able to tell their histories – of what they do and what happens to them when treated in particular ways – in the very practice of working with them” (Ingold, 2012, p. 434).

Discussing audience’s engagement with dance performance, Dee Reynolds (2012) describes affect as a stage of bodily activation coming before emotional and cognitive responses. Affect, she argues, is particularly resonant when multiple sense modalities are enlivened such as in the haptic sense of touch. Choreographic practices can be affective in that they excite a kinaesthetic response, the witness sensing in their own body the process of the movement they see, a process known as kinaesthetic empathy. There is a mingling of what is observed in another and what is sensed in oneself. Dance artist Elise Nuding (2015) has written in relation to her own choreographic work with lengths of rope. Nuding explains how the multi-sensory nature of spectatorship of choreographic work utilising material things contributes to a complication of self/other (Nuding, 2015, pp. 187-189). She shares how the performative things:

have a habit of leaving traces: wispy fibres, tar residue, impressions of the rope on my skin, sense memories of the ropes’ tactility, smells and sounds. This heightened sensory awareness of material things highlights the complex relationship between self and other, between soma and environment, between human and thing, which resists comfortable binaries.

Nuding, 2015, p. 193.

When we observe a performer working with a material thing, we are affected not just by the motion but also by the sensations of touch, smell, sound, or other sense modalities drawn from our previous experience of being in contact with similar things. This pulls us into the experience of the performer.

Feminist philosopher and psychoanalytic theorist Teresa Brennan has examined entrainment, the mechanisms of the transmission of affect. She argues that affect transmission is a process social or psychological in origin yet physical in its biochemical and neurological responses. Affect highlights the porous nature of our bodies as it can be transmitted through smell and touch (through pheromones) and through sound vibrations as well as through sight. Seeing also involves movement; images, Brennan explains, “are matters of vibration” (Brennan, 2004, p. 71), transmitted, not simply registered. Therefore, affect challenges the dominance of the primary of sight within much Western thinking as it exposes the myth of the self-contained individual and counters the subject/object distinction sustained by an understanding of sight as registering things at a distance. Rather, affect is as a complex process occurring across perceived boundaries of person, group, and environment.

Tolia-Kelly, Waterson and Watson argue that “theories of emotion and affect need to engage with the historical, and be situated within matrices of power, so the affective logics of history and heritage are sensitive to differently positioned narratives, memories, emotions and, indeed, material cultures” (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton & Watson, 2017, p. 4). Processes of affect were at work in the storm scene of the 2014 national touring production when one of the lead actors (Sian Mannifield playing Janet) worked with a huge, hefty fishing net. Holding tightly to one side of the net, she would throw it out as if to sea and then haul it back in repeating this action several times before hugging it to

herself as one might hold a body (see Figure 3) then slowly letting it slip through her arms to land heavily on the stage floor. The net was bulky and awkward to move. A spectator could recognise the struggle and sense the change in body tone and quality of touch as the actor shifted from working with the net to clutching its textured mass to her and then feeling the emptiness and sense of loss as it slid from her grasp. This action had potential to communicate on a physical level something of the demanding nature of life in traditional fishing industries and convey feelings of loss experienced by women bereaved of husbands and sons by storms at sea.

We are being affected and affecting constantly but choosing to participate in a performance or attend a production, we are perhaps inviting affects that may lead to conscious feelings and thoughts through opening our awareness and giving attention. Sondra Fraleigh, scholar of phenomenology and somatics, states that “attentive perception is not passive but alive with intentionality, motility and receptive phases” (Fraleigh, 2018, p. 100). While affect may be common to a group of people, meaning is individualised as the person develops a personal interpretation in relation to the associations the affects hold for them (Brennan, 2004, p. 7). Of course, audiences can affect a performance as well as being affected by it. Performance is a dynamic and slippery phenomenon not a static and objectified entity.

My movement direction for the storm scene of the 2014 production, had one of the lead actors (Samantha Foley in the role of Molly) bound up in, and then uncoiled from, a length of coarse rope as if launching herself into the stormy sea in an attempt to save lives (see Figure 3). This conveyed physical discomfort, a strong image of body and breath trapped by and rubbing against the scratchy, harsh rope. Potentially activating embodied memories of similar discomfort, the action offered viewers a visceral, affective moving image suggesting themes of courage, endeavour, and despair. My direction here differed from the 2005 production where a similar image had been realised with a length of silk instead of a rope.

My choreographic choice to use actual rope and a heavy net, requiring performers to experience this discomfort at every performance, asked a lot of the actors physically and emotionally. Witnessing this discomfort was also demanding for the audience. This use of such objects, in this instance ones intended as set dressing, is perhaps more aligned with practices in contemporary performance where performer agency operates somewhat differently, artists often performing their own work and negotiating their own limits. Such choreographic choices were made in dialogue with and the agreement of the director and actors. Using the coarse rope offered potential for creating affect through kinaesthetic empathy and haptic touch. Performance scholar Anna Fenemore has argued that “greater physical discomfort in the performing body allows for a greater awareness of the body and an increased presence in the space” (Fenemore, 2011, p. 42). Whether the already evocative theatrical representation of this harrowing storm scene needed such strong performances of discomfort remained a question for reflection.

For the 2016 Eyemouth production, the movement of the young girls enlivened the storm scene so instead of working with harsh materials we explored the tactile and kinetic qualities and physical potentials of lengths of light, silky soft fabric that has been part of the backcloth for the previous production (see Figure 4). Choreography with the large pieces of blue/green cloth created dynamic images of tenderness and strength, of freedom and resilience. The fabric looked fragile yet proved to be capable of supporting a person’s weight. Feeling the fabric moving in dialogue with the dynamic actions of our arms and spines was a chance to sense how the material was (to echo Ting’s words cited above) “a living extension” (Ting, 2012, p. 180) of our own bodies.

A fundamental principle informing the choreography with the young girls involved in the Eyemouth production was to invest the movement work with a valuing of a love of moving. I wanted to offer an enjoyable experience that fostered feelings of freedom and exuberant expression in moving through space, to encourage childlike vitality and individuality rather than requiring conformity to particular body aesthetics.

My work is often site-specific or site-sensitive, created in relationship with and performed within specific locations such as landscaped urban environments, civic buildings, or rural settings. Moving beyond the somewhat sterile environment of the dance studio can provide opportunity to move in relationship with varied sights, sounds and smells, and touch and taste stimuli affecting powerful embodied memories.

One early movement workshop with the young girls took place on the beach on a windy, cloudy evening. We experimented with the silks, and with woollen shawls and heavy boots that loosely echoed typical clothing of 19<sup>th</sup> century herring lassies. Working with these things, feeling their physical properties and their interaction with the windswept environment, and playing with how we could help the objects to dance with us, offered opportunity to develop greater sensory awareness as well as potentially some sense of connection to past lives. Victoria Hunter has analysed how “dancing in coastal locations... enables choreographers and movement practitioners to... escape from habitual creative approaches...as the choreographer’s aesthetic and artistic desires combine with some very basic and fundamental approaches to engaging with and surviving in this (often) exposed and wild landscape” (Hunter, 2015, p. 307). Dance and ecology practitioner Andrea Olsen has spoken about how, when working in a site, it gradually “moves inside us, affecting the rhythms of breath, pulse, and the weaving patterns of our footsteps” (Olsen, 2002, p. 225). Through this one rehearsal on the beach, we perhaps ‘dipped our toes’ into the kind of experience that ecological dance practice offers. Expert in that field Sandra Reeve, explains that:

By the rediscovery of the flow of the environment as a succession of places, and by challenging our addiction to ‘doing’, at the expense of our experience of ‘being’ in the world, there is a chance that we can give value to our selves and to our life stories as part of a profoundly interrelated network of beings.

Reeve, 2011, p. 51

Our experience of moving on the beach informed our ongoing work in the church, hopefully reflecting ecological dance artist Ali East’s description of how “moving with each other on stage, in the studio, or on the beach, our attitude is one of being *with* and *part of* our environment” (East, 2015, p. 168). The windswept beach was a challenging environment in which to develop movement material, yet it offered a memorable experience; the sound, smell and energy of the sea and the wind stayed with us, and the smell of the salty air remained with the silks. This approach has value and potential for more substantial integration into similar future projects.

In our theatrical portrayal of the storm within the Eyemouth production, a momentary hush and stillness was broken by a sound effect of a thunderclap, the cue for the young girls to spring into action rushing through the space with the large stretches of silk fabric billowing high above their heads. In the church at Eyemouth the girls ran down the available side aisle while in the Netherbow Theatre (Tradfest, Edinburgh) they descended both stairways whilst passing a long piece of silk high over the heads of the whole audience. These actions of disturbing the air with the soft, salty silks added to the multi-sensory nature of the audiences’ affective experience.



My choreography had the young girls working with the silks in numerous ways such as holding a long length of the cloth between them and billowing it into the air as a narrator gave the line “the sea is running mountains high”. Some girls danced with the silks creating images of wild and crashing waves and whipping the silk through the air to make a cracking sound before gathering the fabric protectively to their chest, a gesture through which the delicacy of the silk seems to speak of the fragility of life. Other girls revealed the strength of the material using the silks like ropes held taut between them or as a safety line, as if casting themselves into the sea to try to reach those in danger. A viewer seeing a girl cradle the cloth to herself might sense the softness of the cloth as if it was touching them and feel a softening seeping into their own body.

Young girls participating in the Eyemouth production also worked with rattling metal hurricane lamps holding these high as if to illuminate their way across the performance space. In rehearsals, we focused on feeling the sensory properties of the lamps, their weight, texture, and shape, as well as the sensations of lifting, holding, and handing on the lamps to each other. Whether working with silks, hurricane lamps, ropes, nets or other things, these moments of exploration, rehearsal and performance offered opportunities to focus on how one was touching and being touched by the thing experiencing the sentient and affective nature of touch. Choreography that included engagement with a range of props offered embodied and emplaced opportunities to attend to feelings of being with or one with things, and through this, re-membering resonances of lives lived in relationship to the sea.

### **Sentience in Expressive Gesture - Touching the Imaginary**

My choreography for *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* has utilised expressive and mimetic gestures, some gestures more representational, for instance an arm action suggesting a wave on the sea, and some more abstract. Representational use of gesture is common in many cultural forms including shared, learnt actions to accompany children’s songs, and a focus on expressive gesture is a key feature of the work of contemporary choreographers such as Lea Anderson whose work I have studied and performed. Crouch states that “[g]estures are acts of expression rather than merely formulaic, and are thus potentially an expressive poetics; the act of affect” (Crouch, 2015, p. 182). Within this case study, touching the imaginary has been a strategy for fostering sensitivity to self, others, and environment, enhancing awareness of touch sensations, and creating performance material with potential to resonate with the cultural heritage of coastal communities.

I am a white British middle-aged woman who has lectured in dance and performance in UK universities since 1997. The embodied knowledges I bring to my artistic practice come with living histories and epistemologies. Influenced by my expertise in somatic movement practices, my movement work within *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* sort to foreground gesture as sensation enlivening the felt sense to encourage embodied emergent generation of personal meaning and connection to shared heritage. According to Fraleigh (2015, p. 4), somatics can be viewed as a concept, a practice, and a field of knowledge. She explains that “[a]s a practice, movement-based somatics refers to approaches that cultivate experiences of the lived body, sensory appreciation (aesthesis and aesthetics), and awareness through movement” (Fraleigh 2015, p. 5). Acknowledging the difficulty of defining the edges of the field of somatics, Nuding articulates how generally “somatics advocates for holistic understandings of human somas as dynamic, living systems-in-process in relational exchange with their environment” (Nuding, 2021, p. 31). Nuding draws attention to how “as a diverse set of practices and discourse that emerged and developed in twentieth-century Europe and United States, somatics is inherently implicated in structures and epistemologies of modernity-coloniality” (Nuding, 2021, p31).

My practice includes Contact Improvisation (CI), a dance form emerging from 1970s America in which participants give attention to sensation as they give and take weight with other dancers. Here touch is the primary sense modality. According to Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull “Contact Improvisation seeks to create a sensitivity to touch and to inner sensation, and the sense of self becomes located in the body” (Bull, 1997, p. 283). Leading scholar of dance and new interculturalism Royona Mitra has critiqued “the long-standing mythologizing of CI as democratic movement language” (Mitra 2021, p. 7). She articulates the need for “Global North dominant Dance Studies to re-consider choreographic touch in intercultural, inter-epistemic, and intersectional ways (Mitra 2021, p. 21). Mitra brings attention to “white ways of thinking about touch... as healing and generative” (Mitra 2021, p. 10) highlighting “the potential social and bodily harm” (Mitra 2021, p. 10) that might be generated by the physical intimacy involved CI. Drawing on the work on philosopher Sundra Sarukkai, Mitra utilises distinctions between touch or *sparsha* and contact or *samyoga* to address the conflation of touch and contact she identifies in CI. Such distinctions include seeing touch as a unidirectional sensing through the skin but contact as relational involving more than one sense organ and experienced by both toucher and touched. In some situations, the sense of touch maybe neutralized (for instance on a crowded train) while contact through the eyes, looking or being looked at, might be experienced as a deeper touch than physical contact (Mitra, 2021, p. 17).

I know connection of bodily sensations and selfhood, an intermingling of the physical, mental, and emotional, through touch in my practice of Shiatsu, a hands-on healing art originating in Japan in which the giver should try to “use your hand as an extension of your heart.” (Ridolfi & Franzen, 1996, p. 38). Shiatsu expert Pauline Sasaki proposes that “who you are, how you feel about yourself and others, and how you live your life all become a part of the quality of your touch” (Sasaki in Beresford-Cooke, 2003, p. viii). Andrea Olsen describes how “memories, thoughts, and imaginings flood through our touch, creating what is termed subjective experience: the information perceived is as much about the toucher and the toucher’s history, as it is about what he or she is touching” (Olsen, 2002, p. 63). Touching is a manifestation and expression of who we are and our embodied heritage as well as an opportunity for awareness, learning, creativity, and change.

The work of a herring lassie in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was tough. Conditions would have been challenging and smelly, and the women endured working for long periods gutting the fish at an incredibly speed. Working with a sharp gutting knife was dangerous so they would wrap up their fingers in strips of cloth, hence the title of Coburn’s play. Karen Wimhurst’s score for *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* includes an arrangement of a traditional song the *Herrin’s Heid*. This rousing tune has a powerful rhythm suggesting communal endeavour and team synchronicity rather like a sea shanty. The words of this spirited song speak of how the herring are fundamental to the women’s lives. The lively lyrics use local vernacular to verbally take the fish apart dissecting it into heid (head), belly, gills, eyes, and tail. For this song, the 2014 production utilised gestures to convey a sense of the monotonous, physically demanding work of herring lassies. The main action was a forceful cutting gesture intended as a theatrical representation of gutting a herring, a movement that would work with the rhythm and thrust of the song and would read at a distance in the tour’s large performance spaces. The collective performance of this action hopefully conveyed something of the camaraderie and companionship of the work of the herring lassies. Brennan (2004) has articulated how “the rhythmic aspects of behaviour at a gathering are critical to both establishing and enhancing a sense of collective purpose and a common understanding” (Brennan, 2004, p. 70). The combination of singing and motion in the *Herrin’s Heid* resonates with what she has said about how movement and gesture affect nervous entrainment particularly through the imitation of rhythms.

There was no intention in the 2014 choreography for the *Herrin's Heid* to seek an authentic representation of 1890s fishing practices. In this respect the choreography differed from performance work with a methodology of engagement with authentic physical practice; for instance, site artist Nigel Stewart describes research for his work *Jack Scout* in which, through taking part in conservation work, actions "become so ingrained in my neuromuscular memory that it would have been difficult for those *gesten* (or social gestures) to not find their way into the stash of movement material I was steadily stockpiling" (Stewart, 2015, p. 377). The gesture intended to represent the gutting of a herring was one of several gestures used in the 2014 production to suggest preparing the fish and packing them into barrels. These rhythmic gestures required a firm stance and included simple strong actions to indicate sorting and storing the fish and brushing mess from one's clothes. Unlike Vicci Riley's multimedia and dance production *Herring Girls* (2018) which utilised real fish, in my 2014 choreography, while real barrels were used, fish, knives and buckets were imaginary. Participants of the Eyemouth production voiced how authenticity in gestural actions was important to them and the *Herrin's Heid* was performed without gestural actions. A miming of a herring gutting action was performed collectively by the company at the different point in the production when a narrator was describing how the herring lassies would 'hook out the guts in one quick move'.

These productions of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* have incorporated a traditional fishermen's hymn sung to the tune of *Ballerma*. The song speaks of fisherman going out to sea by boat at night as children go to bed praying for their safe return; God watches over the fisherman and brings them "safely home again where they are glad to be". Choreography for the Eyemouth production employed expressive and mimetic gestures loosely related to the words of the hymn as a strategy for supporting the young girls to find fully embodied, meaningful physical expression and connection to these images of the lives of fishing communities. These choreographed actions suggested many things including fish, the sea, family members, work with ropes, and perhaps even abstract concepts/felt emotions such as hope. Gestures of release, of catching and pulling something back to oneself connected hearts, hands and the unseen as the song told of the fisherman's safe return. Rehearsals focused on encouraging the girls to sense the kinaesthetic and tactile qualities of the gestures they were embodying, and through this to allow the emotional resonance of the gestures to reverberate. I propose that to engage memory and imagination to feeling something which isn't actually there has as much if not more potential to impact us deeply as does giving attention to a physical object. Fiona Bannon & Duncan Holt have asserted that "'not touching' can be as much a felt experience as touching" (Bannon & Holt, 2011, p. 219). Seeking to feel features such as the texture, weight, and momentum of something imaginary can help the performer to connect movement and intent supporting others to sense, perceive and empathise with the mover's experience. Making imaginative leaps, people connected emotionally to the actions. Of course, the poignance of the song is particularly resonant in the context of a production about a historic event in which so many fishermen and boys did not return safely. Was the gestural sensate choreography overly sentimental when coupled with the childlike simplicity of the hymn? Hopefully, not. The young girls' performance of this was certainly emotionally stirring and will have been received by the critical mass of the Eyemouth audience in the context of a song and story that is part of their collective embodied knowledge, the hymn an event that resonates with the history of children's involvement in the 1881 storm and rescue attempts.

## Conclusions

I have argued for the potential of choreographed movement within community storytelling music theatre productions of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* to operate as an activity of re/membering shared cultural heritage. Exploring endurance and resilience, the choreography celebrated the visceral,

tactile nature of the lives of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Eyemouth fishing folk with a particular emphasis on women's embodied lives. The critical focus has been engaged with physical labour as an evocative behaviour, an effective part of the storytelling. This analysis has made apparent a contrast between the work of the herring lassies and my intentions within this performance work. It seems likely that these 19<sup>th</sup> century women would largely have become somewhat anaesthetized to the physical sensations of their relentless work and would have sought to ignore feelings of pain and discomfort within the work. In contrast, my movement work has sought to foster sentience through attention to felt experience. An ambition in the writing has been to acknowledge the personal within the process of shared cultural memory and heritage re/construction; each individual employing an emergent embodiment, reflecting both past experiences as well as what the choreography is asking of them, and manifest in the qualities of their touch. While my intention as a movement director was to cultivate sensitivity, imagination, and joy in movement and collective action, it is important to remember that the practices informing my methods are not universal or apolitical but rather have histories and embody particular philosophies.

The case study analysis has focused on the felt, synesthetic and affective nature of dynamic gestural actions and interaction with things. Recognising that "our meaning of things, experiences, materialities can adjust through our encountering them" (Crouch, 2015, p. 183), things are acknowledged as not merely inert objects for translation but rather lively things with stories to tell through our engagement with them. Things can be othered or identified with as extensions or continuations of ourselves. Embodied and emplaced actions with things are felt by performers and affect audiences through haptic touch and kinaesthetic empathy leaving traces in our embodied memory.

My analysis has considered both personal and collective aspects of audiences' affective engagement with the production. The storm scene, with its hastened pace and gestures of desperation and vulnerability, has potential to engender embodied responses such as quickening one's breathing. Past experiences in running, reaching, handling ropes and nets or silky soft fabric will trigger kinaesthetic empathic responses. Perhaps audience members with significant life experience of stormy seas may have stronger affective physical responses. As people's emotional state heightens, pheromones circulate among those present adding to the spiral of affect. Each individual's embodied response can support a cognitive appreciation of the history of the Eyemouth fishing disaster, and of fishing cultures more generally, as sensory responses enhance or shift each individual's existing cultural understandings and personal narratives relating to the performance themes.

Within this case study, affective choreography with things has sought to support historical consciousness in relation to lives entwined with fishing and the Eyemouth storm of 1881. Through drawing attention to touch sensations, the work has encouraged feeling into present bodily sensations and feeling out into connection to the wider environment as well as a feeling back to the experiences of people in the past and feeling forward into a hopeful future.

(Word Count 6,960)

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<sup>i</sup> In the 2005 North East tour the role of Jean was played by Jan Birkett, Molly by Chloe Lang and Janet by Carol McGuigan.

<sup>ii</sup> The 2014 national tour *Follow the Herring* (FTH) was a co-production by The Customs House and Guild of Lillians comprised of performances of *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* and *The Coat for a Boat!* visual art exhibition. In these performances role of Jean was played by Barbara Marten, Molly by Samantha Foley and Janet by Sian Mannifield. FTH was funded by the Arts Council England's (ACE) Strategic Touring Programme. The Customs House commissioned Northumbria University's Centre for Public Policy to undertake an evaluation of the project": unpublished report (2015) 'Follow the Herring: Project Evaluation of a Strategic National Tour'. The comprehensive report includes analysis of feedback gathered for many sources including feedback from women who participated in the performances through the involved of local choirs summarised: "Participants made comments about the impact of their participation on themselves; ideas about gaining new (and stretching old) skills, improvements in self-confidence and a thirst for knowledge about local history were routinely expressed. Participants also wrote about how they perceived the project affected their local communities and the groups they were singing or crafting with; ideas about belonging and local resonance. Lastly they commented on the professionalism of the FTH cast and crew, and how they welcomed 'amateurs' to each stage of the performance" (2015, p. 34).