

PASSING THROUGH FRAGMENTED SCRIBBLES: MOVING TOWARDS MOVEMENT, DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY GROUNDED IN THE EMBODIED ECOSOMATIC PARADIGM

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This paper explores the artistic creation and embodied practice-led research in the context of creating an ensemble screendance titled "Fragmented Scribbles." The work explores the embodied scribbles of knowledge that exist within conversations among intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, creative, and spiritual realms. The research prioritizes the whole being as a site of artistic exploration, using Passing Through as a pedagogical method. The ecological perception and ecosomatic paradigm are employed to cultivate mindfulness, perceive relationships, develop conceptual flexibility, re-perceive depth, and intentionally use the imagination. The study also examines the unique narratives and associations between internal and physical ecologies of the performers and their sites of performance.

There is an embodied language that cannot be articulated in words nor whispered in the deepest, wildest thoughts. These are brief scribbles... Fragmented Scribbles capture moments of endless embodied conversations in one's body, mind and spirit.

The process of artistic creation forms sediments of fertile soil to be excavated by embodied practice-led research. This can result in creative work or can be documented through reflections, writings, and sometimes illegible scribbles of thoughts to be explored yet further in practice. The process of creating an ensemble version of a screendance titled "Fragmented Scribbles" became a point of departure for unearthing and bringing to the fore embodied scribbles of knowledge that exist in the endless conversations among intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, creative and spiritual realms that culminate in the body of the mover/dancer/choreographer/creative (Sööt & Viskus 2014, 291). This knowledge resides in the personal ecologies of the six interns – Fezidingo Kibi, Sinenhlanhla Sihlangu, Vuyo Ndawonde, Muhle Mahlangu, Zanoxolo Nkosi and Ayanda Mshengu – as well as of myself and Nicholas Aphane, as facilitators of the creative and technical training processes. The approach prioritises the whole being as a site of artistic research by using Passing Through as a pedagogical method. The method applies Sewall's ecological perception and the ecosomatic paradigm to "allow students to focus on their bodies not as objects to be trained, but rather as subjects of their world" (Shapiro 2002, 349). It also prioritises disseminating artistic research by expanding the work from a solo to an ensemble screendance.

Beginning the Scribble

"Fragmented Scribbles" (2020) was initiated during Covid-19 following an intensive period of lockdown in which I, holistically (see below the seven "petals" of a holistic being), had numerous embodied conversations, languages and events brewing inside me that could only be articulated through the language of movement, dance and physicality. It has now evolved into an ensemble work performed by six interns from the Forgotten Angle Collaborative Theatre (FATC).

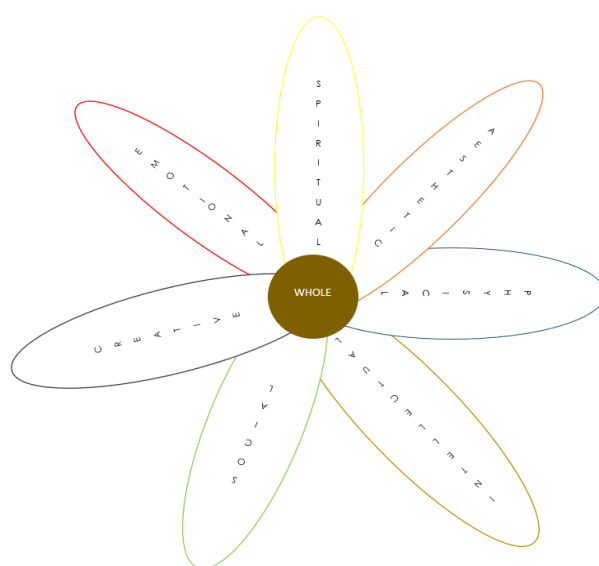
FATC was founded in 1995 and has since evolved into one of South Africa's leading dance organisations based at the Ebhudlweni Arts Centre in rural Mpumalanga. It prioritises forgotten spaces, narratives, methodologies and wholistic beings as nodes, hubs and homes of greatness, according to the motto "From forgotten spaces, comes greatness." In the 27 years of its existence, FATC has collaborated with performers, choreographers, educators, performance



Fragmented Scribbles (2022) From left to right: Ayanda Mshengu, Fezidingo Kibi, Zanoxolo Nkosi, Vuyo Ndawonde, Muhle Mahlangu and Sinenhlanhla Sihlangu. Visually documented by Smangalisso Ngwenya.



"Fragmented Scribbles" (2020). Visually documented by Smangalisso Ngwenya



Diagrammatic representation of components contributing to the whole person and holistic artistic practice. Smangalisso Ngwenya conceptualised this diagram inspired by the natural shape of the flower. Here, all the petals meet to create the whole person.

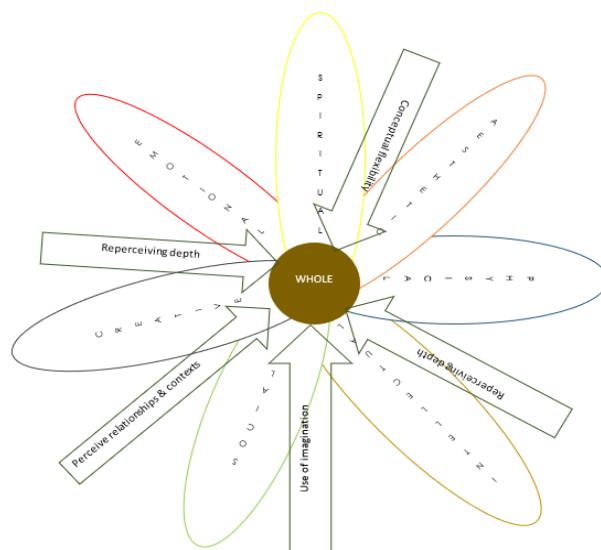
practitioners and creative sector allies to present probing, reflective, participant-focused performance, education, and training programmes nationally and internationally. Under the artistic directorship of founder P. J. Sabbagha, it has been a vehicle for social transformation, activism and sustainable growth, equipping individuals with 21st-century skills and bringing opportunities for social healing to communities.

The intention of “Fragmented Scribbles” in 2020 remains the same in 2022 – to bring to light/recover/recognise embodied scribbles of knowledge that exist in the endless conversations between the whole being and the ecologies it encounters. Conventionally and scientifically, ecology “directly refers to interrelationships – those of organisms and their environment. Specifically, it is the study of one’s home” (Enghauser 2007, 81). The first home is the internal home of each intern – where the physical body shells the social, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, creative and aesthetic components of the whole being. Each intern had a unique ecology within themselves, which emerged in their movement vocabulary, site and interactions. The linearity of writing in a formalised, academic space sometimes diffracts and does not clearly articulate the true depth of artistic processes and research. Below is a collage of words that, alongside one another, attempt to provide a written description of this process that is an embodied experience:

There is a fragment of something, someone, somewhere, somehow
 It exists here – there –
 In this organ
 In this spirit
 In this space
 To move
 To whisper
 To hum
 To disrupt the depths of a place unknown to you and me but the body, mind, soul, ecology,
 spirit and beyond.
 The living and breathing body, eco body and ecology knows
 In it, it homes a thought
 A nagging thought that develops into a catalyst expressed through and with the knowing body
 as an ecology.
 Utterances sometimes visit its expression – from a simple rhythm of breathing to the
 complexity of a shout/ scream that comes from a pitch and tone that resonate beyond your
 expectations and conscious manifestations.
 Placed in a vacuumed, focused moment of awareness – a distinct scribble writes, rewrites,
 curves, straightens, utters, stops, runs and spirals into pronounced fragments of scribbles
 embodied and projected through and with the eco-body.

“Fragmented Scribbles” prioritised the awareness of the ecology in the self and in relation to the Ebhudlwani Arts Centre, particularly its surrounding natural and agricultural ecologies. The Ebhudlwani Arts Centre is on a cattle and trout farm outside Machadodorp. “Fragmented Scribbles” prioritised this natural landscape and its features, such as a vast grassland, a forest of trees, two dams and a waterfall near the outskirts of the farm. Automatically, reconnecting self with the natural ecology ignited an awareness that “the advancement of industrial and technological cultures has separated us more and more from the earth and the free movement of our bodies. Most people today perform within a minimal range of the movements their bodies can do. This can cause gradual energy stagnation and loss of expression, vitality and awareness” (Hartley 1995, 304). This is where it became essential to unpack each intern’s internal and physical ecologies or sites, revealing unique narratives and associ-

ations between the two ecologies (self and the natural ecology). First, the dancer/mover's body is their home as well as the destination and the vehicle for the navigation of self to "address others and the world, both in the art of dance and beyond" (Enghauser 2007, 81). Each performer thus registered this reconnection with self, as well as embracing a process that echoes Toni Morrison's "memory" through embodying the past and its manifestations, using "one's imaginative power to realise a latent, abiding connection to the past" (Rody 1995, 101). In addition, there is the refusal of structure and the concrete jungle, the embrace of water as an element of cleansing and reconnection, and certain interactions and experiences that cannot be articulated in words but only through the embodied process of each intern. Each site and reasoning will be elaborated in conjunction with unpacking the conceptual ecologies of this practice-led research.



The contributions of the ecological perception toward a holistic artistic practice and whole person

Unpacking Conceptual Ecologies

This practice-based research is affected and infected by a paradigm – the Ecosomatic Paradigm – that enfold two methodologies: a dance technique by David Zambrano called Passing Through, and the FATC way, which prioritises participant-centred, learner-centred and experiential learning. Before delving into the ecosomatic paradigm, it is crucial to acknowledge Laura Sewall's ecological perception, which is the foundation of the ecosomatic paradigm. Ecological perception prioritises mindfulness over individualised and narrowed perceptions and experiences of self, and extends it towards conscientising the body to "sensuality, intimacy, and identification with the external world" (Sewall 1995, 204). In addition to Sööt and Viskus's notion of the whole being (2014), Sewall (1995) emphasises the role of mindfulness in perceiving the web of interrelations in the world that make up a whole ecology. There are five components of ecological perception (Enghauser 2007, 81):

1. Learning to attend – the holistic presence of each intern
2. Learning to perceive relationships, contexts and interfaces
3. Developing conceptual flexibility
4. Learning to re-perceive depth
5. Making intentional use of the imagination.

These components made up Sewall's proposition for debunking Western mind-body ideologies and opening one's perception to alternative ecologies around one's immediate body. She regrets the gap between humans and their environment and calls for a return to our essential animal selves (Sewall 1995, 203).

Sewall initiates her ecological perception by learning to attend, which speaks directly to each intern's total and mindful attendance in rehearsal and the Passing Through technical training process. Enghauser notes that mindfulness in dance is "when one's entire being is fully present both in dance class and in performance" (2007, 83). These notions of mindfulness and whole attendance will be further unpacked in the Passing Through section of this paper. Secondly, learning to perceive relationships, contexts, and interfaces manifested as immersing each intern in the process. This required some probing, to ascertain each of their relationships to one another, to the spaces they found themselves in during the Passing Through

technical training and, more importantly, to establish the awareness demanded by the process of transposing and improvising their solos at different sites. The process involved holistic investigation, using each site's ecological perception and each intern's somatic vocabulary (developed through workshoping and Passing Through). These made them more vigilant to the ecological components of their respective spaces, such as "the scale, size, location" and "topography of the site, whether it be an urban or landscape or architectural enclosure" (Serra 1989, ctd. in Kwon 2004, 12). They were learning to perceive ecologies so that each solo becomes part of the site that commands a restructuring of both the ecology of the body and that of the site "conceptually and perceptually" (Serra 1989, ctd. in Kwon 2004, 12). This process of site-specific solos required perceptual flexibility, which provoked imaginative thinking throughout the training in Passing Through and encouraged them to "vacate the norm and take on unfamiliar" methods (Enghauser 2007, 86) to achieve embodiment. Zanoxolo Nkosi (2022) shared her experience with the rehearsal process and her site:

Doing "Fragmented Scribbles" was great – I got to explore my body and experience other dancers doing the same, which was inspiring. I have learnt that something in your mind can help you choreograph something unique. The site in which you dance also tells a story.

Zanoxolo Nkosi chose a wooden shed which houses all the agricultural equipment for FATC's organic farm. When she started moving, there was an element of feeling confined by the industrialised structure placed on the vast natural landscape. Her interaction revealed frustration with the structure and resistance to conforming to its built and static nature, depicted in the curved, circular pathways she traced through the square structure. Her dance superseded the structure of the building and attempts to reach beyond its confines.

Angel Mahlangu chose a forest-like site with trees which, for her, symbolised people who were surrounding her mother. The trees are family members, friends and bystanders who can see her mother's pain and struggles but cannot assist; only prayer can assist her mother. Mahlangu chose the site as she had always wanted to do traditional dance in a natural landscape. In Mahlangu's unpacking, all five components of ecological perception become evident.

Vuyo Ndawonde chose a dilapidated corrugated iron structure for its symbolism that resonated with his upbringing. He claims that it reminds him of the informal rural settlement he grew up in, surrounded by mud huts, noting that he "felt comfortable and accepted in that space," compared to that which the farm symbolises – wealth. In the site, a personal story and somatic response are revealed in how he uses gestures to ask questions.

Fezidingo Kibi and Sinenhlanhla Sihlangu's sites were mainly chosen to satisfy the spiritual aspect of their holistic being. Kibi stated that he had always been fascinated by cleansing himself in a river/waterfall, saying, "with that site, it was more of cleansing and developing a deeper understanding and relationship with



Zanoxolo Nkosi is dancing on a wooden shed which contains all the agricultural equipment for FATC's organic farm. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.



Angel Mahlangu chose a dry, dusty forest site where she embodies and becomes her mother. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.

water spiritually” (Kibi 2023). Sihlangu chose her site because of her love for water. However, she also identifies the depth of the Ebhudlweni Arts Centre as a space to find herself and the journey of her ancestors. She identifies as spiritually gifted, wanting to utilise water to explore and understand her spiritual journey.

“I chose that site because it symbolises life generally from the green grass to the worn-out trees that are dry” (Tshabalala 2023). Ayanda Tshabalala particularly homed in on the polar ends of life in her site choice. At one end, one can be full of life or, at the other, a worn-out, dry, uprooted tree. Her solo plays between the poles of this dichotomy.

There are blurred boundaries in Sewall’s five components of ecological perception, and there is a tangible weaving in the application of the ecological perspective on the ecosomatic paradigm. The remaining two components of ecological perception are re-perceiving depth and the intentional use of the imagination. Enghauser (2007, 85) emphasises that “acknowledging the whole person within the dancer, as an ecosomatic view does, necessitates that self-body is uniquely constructed and of the world.” Developing perceptual flexibility across spatial and temporal planes demands a constant flux, morphing and adjusting how we perceive ecologies.

This paper focuses on the somatic approach in respect of dance only. The somatic approach exists in dancing “when awareness, reflection, experiential investigation and even acknowledgement of feelings are engaged in a holistic context” (Eddy 2002, 119–127). In addition, “somatics is part of a larger paradigm characterised by emphasis on a whole system perspective, ecology, decentralisation of decision making, and a shift from outside authority to self-responsibility” (Fortin 2002, 134). The focus on the somatic also facilitates a re-perception of the wholeness of the human body/home/ecology as soma. It acknowledges the depths of interrelations in and around it. It is also an awareness of “how our bodies and somatic experiences are inscribed by the culture in which we live” (Green 2002, 114). Thus, our ecologies do not exist in isolation from others in the world: “bodily knowledge may be seen as the ways we understand ourselves and our environments through the body; it is also the ways we make meaning of the world through our bodily experiences” (Green 2002, 114). Lastly, being sensitive to the inner messages of the body and its states also affects the ability to re-perceive depth and apply the ecosomatic paradigm. The ecosomatic paradigm will be unpacked in the methodology section alongside a discussion of the Passing Through technique that prepared us all



Vuyo Ndawonde placed himself in a corrugated iron structure that symbolises informal settlements in South Africa. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.



Fezidingo Kibi explores the spiritual significance of water. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.



Sinenhlanhla Sihlangu immerses herself in the waterfall as a process of cleansing, reconnection and discovering her ancestral-spiritual path. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.



Ayanda Tshabalala improvises between the polar ends of green grass, worn-out grassland, and an uprooted tree. Visually documented by Smangaliso Ngwenya.

considering the leading prompt. This prompt immediately awakened a sociocultural awareness of the construction of the whole being. In conversation, Aphane recalls his experiences with *Passing Through*, particularly the pedestrian act of walking as a door into passing through in his first year while studying at P.A.R.T.S:

It became an exciting concept – it went against what I was previously exposed to in dance workshops. We walk every day, but we never practice walking. You begin to spot interesting habits or somatic responses in the group and get influenced by different stylised walks. It removes the immediate perception of walking as being a metronome.

The classes progressed into an “improvisation structure exploring the infinite possibilities of moving within a group in a set time-space” (Parts@work#2, 2023). In the process of improvisation “as a way of thinking and playing, and as a world view ... lies a key to another way of being with one another, one that encourages spontaneity, challenge, discovery, and the expansion of creativity” (Kaplan 1995, 16, cited in Kuhlman 2004, 2). The room became filled with pathways, awareness, and a perception of depth, as infinite pathways passing through the walls, the floor, and even the different ecologies began to form. These pathways rise and descend in any direction and are filled with curves and spirals, large and small, resonating in spaces. The participants are enabled to adapt and locate themselves within different sites. The pathways became unpredictable scribbles, with human ecologies drawing them throughout the space. Zambrano was asked to reflect on the applications of structured and unstructured improvisation, and responded:

I like both [structured and unstructured improvisation] very much, depending on the circumstance and the day, because sometimes I go open and nothing happens. That’s the risk of improvisation, and sometimes with a structure – you have the structure, nothing happens but you still have the structure, somehow the structure works. It’s hard to say because there are magic moments when you feel you have control over all the forces. You have this direction, that direction of force; you have control over them, you feel very aligned with the space. You feel you know very well what’s behind you or in front. Also you know the relationship of parts of your body through the centre, you find a game of interaction with each part and the space. When I find a game, when I find a playfulness, then it is happening, but when I feel I have to force it to make it happen, then it is hard, and sometimes that happens because.... It is hard to say, but it is really inspirational. Most of the time, I am very inspired, but when it does not happen, it is awful for me and for the audience. (David Zambrano, cited in Benoit 1995, 179)

The process of improvisation in *Passing Through* made evident the multiple components of the ecosomatic paradigm by facilitating each of our journeys of locating our individual creative, artistic presence through dance. This happened through the participants’ constantly moving, making their environment their own and facilitating an awareness of one another and of the ensemble, activating their creativity, imagination, and problem-solving ability through manoeuvring and passing through one another. Perceiving relationships, contexts and interfaces prompted us to recognise that we were all highly integral to the somatic/movement/dance ecology. *Passing Through* resulted in a more profound emphasis on the interrelationship between different ecologies (internal and external) – the interns, myself, Nicholas Aphane and the different ecologies or “homes” in which we danced. The first home would be that of each whole body/ecology, consisting of the interrelationship between the ecology of self and the environment in which the holistic person has an embodied experience. In this context, the body as an ecology and home can be viewed as a whole ecology/ home/ person (these terms can be used interchangeably). One of the interns, Muhle Mahlangu (2022), gave insight into her process of *Passing Through*:

Passing Through made me realise I need to be more aware of other people and be able to protect myself from protecting others in space. In addition, I was unaware that

we could share energies as a group and be at the same understanding in space. The use of eye contact also contributed to my growth. Lastly, having agency and freedom to walk, run and stand without feeling confined to one temporal awareness. (Muhle Mahlangu 2022)

Conclusion

I draw my inspiration from human behaviour, which includes pedestrian walks. As a creator, I look more in the now – at how we live as human beings and how nature connects to us. Using the pedestrian action of walking and from it advancing, dance became more about looking into self. It was not that hard, but it became challenging as a professional dancer, looking outside of myself and the technique. It was a matter of going into the basics – walking is something we see and do every day. It was much easier for me to continue advancing and creating from what we see. (Fezidingo Kibi 2022)

Through the movement of walking, we all perceived the depth of movement and the interrelations with self, interfaces and contexts (sites). The use of the pedestrian impacted us, helping us debunk and unlearn the “attitudes and habits that later impede [our] capacity of sensing, perceiving and changing” (Fortin 2002, 133). Fezidingo Kibi emphasises the importance of the sociocultural construction of the pedestrian and the “discipline of dance as intrinsically motivated mindful practice that stems from the empowerment and somatic authority” (Enghauser 2007, 89). The process of “Fragmented Scribbles” built on the pedestrian as a choreographic base, and through it, there were solos with an improvised ecological perception resulting from seeing the site as an (inter)textual space rather than just a source of spatial orientation (Kwon 2004, 29). Each site chosen by each intern provoked interactions and conversations with the imagination that reached beyond what was visible to the naked eye. In the collage of sites exists a place of cleansing; a space to converse with the textures and sounds of water; a shed of confinement; one of the structured dilapidated boundaries; a draught-filled, heavy, dusty, sandy pit and an open landscape to imprint thoughts upon in the breeze which passes through you and dances with you. The thorough application of ecological perception and the ecosomatic paradigm facilitated several nomadic narratives whose path was articulated by the passage of each of the interns (Kwon 2004, 29). There needs to be further investigation into the depth of conversations and collaborations between the two ecologies of the whole person and the site.



Fezidingo Kibi focused and immersed in a stance. Visually documented by Zanoxolo Nkosi.

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