

# I touch-I breathe-I move-I voice-I speak: Somatic logos toward social care

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## Abstract - I touch-I breathe-I move-I voice-I speak: Somatic logos toward social care

This article advances the author's concept of *somatic logos* as an inter-embodied *praxical* framework that facilitates interrelations between individual and collective voices. It draws from her Practice-as-Research (PaR) project *From Haptic Deprivation to Haptic Possibilities* and uses the project's *Are We Still in Touch?* group workshops as a case study. The workshops investigate how self-directed touch (initiated and managed by oneself) can support one's sense of care, wellbeing, and creative expression amidst societal shifts catalyzed by the pandemic. Research findings suggest that somatic listening to the self extends to an inter-embodied sense of care with potentials for broader societal impact.

**Keywords:** Somatic logos. Somatic Listening. Social care. Inter-embodiment. Practice-as-Research.

## Resumo - Eu toco-Eu respiro-Eu movo-Eu vocalizo-Eu falo: Logos somático rumo à assistência social

Este artigo desenvolve o conceito da autora de logos somático como um enquadramento prático intercorporalizado que facilita as inter-relações entre vozes individuais e coletivas. A autora se baseia em seu projeto de Prática como Pesquisa (PaR), *From Haptic Deprivation to Haptic Possibilities*, e utiliza as oficinas em grupo do projeto *Are We Still in Touch?* como estudo de caso. As oficinas investigam como o toque autodirigido (iniciado e gerido pela própria pessoa) pode apoiar o senso de cuidado, bem-estar e expressão criativa em meio às mudanças sociais catalisadas pela pandemia. Os resultados da investigação sugerem que a escuta somática a si próprio se estende a um sentido intercorporalizado de cuidado com potencial para um impacto social mais amplo.

**Palavras-chave:** Práticas somáticas. Logos somático. Assistência Social. Intercorporalização. Prática como Pesquisa.

## Resumen - Toco-respiro-me nuevo-vocalizo-hablo: logos somáticos hacia la atención social

Este artículo desarrolla el concepto de la autora de logos somático como un marco práctico intercorporalizado que facilita las interrelaciones entre voces individuales y colectivas. La autora se basa en su proyecto de Práctica como Investigación (PaR), *From Haptic Deprivation to Haptic Possibilities*, y utiliza los talleres grupales de *¿Are We Still in Touch?* como estudio de caso. Los talleres investigan cómo el contacto autodirigido (iniciado y gestionado por la propia persona) puede fomentar una sensación de cuidado, bienestar y expresión creativa en medio de los cambios sociales catalizados por la pandemia. Los hallazgos de la investigación sugieren que la escucha somática a uno mismo se extiende a un sentido intercorporalizado de cuidado con el potencial de un impacto social más amplio.

**Palabras clave:** Prácticas somáticas. Logos somático. Asistencia social. Intercorporalización. Práctica como Investigación.

## Introduction

*This sharing on somatic listening through the sense of touch is intentionally a solo practice designed to be part of your reading experience. You could always use the same steps and principles to advance the following study into partnering within your professional setting.*

*For now, find a comfortable position wherever you are and as you receive these words, whether sitting, lying, or standing; you may not have to change anything. When you find comfort and support, my invitation is for you to notice that organically and in whichever physical shape you have chosen, you are in physical contact with the space around you and your own body.*

*To unpack this, first move your attention to the points of contact between your body and the space, including furniture and objects you may be in contact with. Allow yourself to change your position whenever you need to and release your weight to the unfolding points of contact. The invitation is to develop an active dialogue with the space without collapsing. Ask yourself: Can I actively release my weight to the holding of the space? Can I breathe through the body-to-space points of contact as if the space is also breathing with me? How do I receive this as physical and visual invitation? The space as a breathing partner that holds me. Do I notice any shift in my breathing? Try to focus on the simplicity of it. From the rising and falling, opening and closing movement of your lungs to the wholeness of your body as a breathing organism using as anchors of attention the points of contact with the space. Observe. Take your time, this is an experiential study, not an exercise.*

*When ready, move your attention to the points of contact with your own physicality. Let's call these body-to-body points of contact. They can be hand to hand, hands to body, or other surfaces coming into relation. For instance, the back of your lower arm with the top of your thigh; your inner thighs or your feet meeting each other. Once again, the invitation is to witness how you come into contact with your physical self, noticing qualities and materials as you may as well observe the dialogue with the skins of your clothes. Ask yourself: how does it feel to be held by myself? Can I also breathe through these points of contact as my skin is breathing? You are breathing from your lungs and you are breathing from your skin. When attuned to one or more points of contact, allow them to move you into a form of sequencing that is guided by unfolding body-to-body points of contact. The sequence is: I touch-I breathe-I move. When available, add the awareness of body-to-space points of contact too and notice where the movement wants to arise from.*

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Eventually, you may observe that voicing naturally emerges as you breathe or move more actively. You can consciously work with the qualities of this voicing by allowing yourself to sound through the points of contact that move you. This is an integrated cycle that now goes: I touch-I breathe-I move-I voice. In principle, there is no hierarchy between each step and they manifest together. But because this is a study, feel free to give yourself as much time as you need before producing sound. I recommend you begin with a subtle humming bringing your lips softly together while widening the inner space of your mouth cavity, before expanding to more open sounding such as vowels. Play with the qualities, the volume, the pitch, and the depth of your voice as if you can actually mold it through touch like a sculptor, as if you can touch your voice. Try not to have expectations for the sound you produce. Instead, focus on the sensations that have been activated and observe how this may affect your voicing and listening as full-body and multisensory acts.

You can unpack this study further by unpacking principles in your touch and how they converse with your voicing and listening using the following questions:

- From where is the physical contact activated? What is the actual source of touch? My hands or other surfaces of my skin body such as my back or my feet? Can this full-body awareness help me move my vocal attention to the wholeness of my body as well, instead of overfocusing on my vocal system as a separate entity?
- What happens when I travel my attention from small to larger points of contact? For instance, from the tips of my fingers to lying on my side body. Can I also voice through this tactile choreography noticing different sound responses?
- What happens if I focus on pressure? I recommend you begin with zero pressure, as if you do not want to make any change, before playing with different levels of pressure and witness how this might further inform your voicing through body-to-body and body-to-space points of contact.
- What happens if I focus on tactile movement? It can be rubbing, brushing, tapping, patting, stroking, stamping, sliding, rolling. It can also be active stillness. There is always stillness in movement and movement in stillness. How does my movement affect my voicing and vice versa?
- What if I now bring everything together releasing my attention into a form of voicing-through-touch improvisation? How do I sense my own voice? How do I listen to myself?

When ready, you can start speaking through your present attention while moving, during transitions, or moments of active stillness. You can start by saying “I touch and...”. Keep listening to yourself through the wholeness of your skin body and your tactile relation to the space. Allow rest to arise when you feel that your



*study is complete. What do you want to say now? You may wish to take this further into writing. Do you sense some form of continuity?*

This brief practice, serving as an experiential opening to this discussion, is inspired by my research methodology as a theatre and somatic practitioner-researcher, which I have introduced as Somatic Acting Process. It draws from the way I use touch as a research method in my work within and outside performance contexts, including the embodiment of text in acting. More specifically, this solo study is informed by my Practice-as-Research (PaR) project *From Haptic Deprivation to Haptic Possibilities*. The project began as a response to COVID-19 physical-distancing guidelines in actor training and theatre environments and has grown to a wider research investigation on the impact of personal or self-directed touch on care, wellbeing, and creative expression in communities. It involves the in-person group workshops *Are We Still in Touch?* that have been taking place in different formats since November 2022 at various community, arts, and health hubs such as the artist-led Siobhan Davies Studios in South London, The LightHouse and Gardens community center and in collaboration with Women's Health's Café in East London.

As part of the workshops, participants voice creative writing, invited as a reflective expression of the offered touch-based practice with the suggested opening "I touch and..."<sup>1</sup> The objective is not for the participants to perform their writing but, as proposed in the opening study, to experience the interconnectedness of their listening and speaking as inextricable components of their integrated and diverse somatic experiences within the group. Thus, even when not physically in touch with others, touch in this project and article serves as a lens for investigating speaking that goes beyond the production of individual cognitive thoughts. Instead, in conjunction with an expanded form of listening, both listening and speaking become an interconnected, inter-embodied, and multisensory experience.

The exploration of voicing, speaking, and listening as embodied phenomena is not new in somatic or somatically inspired practices. In 2020, I introduced a comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> You can watch one such section from the workshop offered at the Siobhan Davies Studios on Sunday July 2, 2023 clicking on the following link: <https://bit.ly/45GRw7y>. The link is set to start in the beginning of the specific part of the workshop (1:02:47-1:11:42). Two of the creative reflections shared as part of the specific event are used in the section *Somatic logos as inter-embodied methodology* of this article. Please note that the sound quality of the space is not the best but hopefully you should be able to follow. The link also covers the full length of the specific workshop that combined the formats of an interactive group workshop and a participatory performance.

account of how somatic methodologies interact with voice studies and practice research in the edited collection *Somatic Voices in Performance Research and Beyond* (Kapadocha, 2021a) and the new field of Somatic Voice Studies. Throughout the collection, voicing is approached as an innate part of somatic inquiry that cannot be disconnected from breathing, imagery, movement, each voicer's interaction with their environment (physical and sociopolitical), and others. In my understanding and professional experience of various performance-oriented approaches to voice, speaking, and singing, what distinguishes somatic methodologies to voicing, as discussed in the *Somatic Voices* volume, is an overall different approach to voice expertise. This approach can allow space for individual and multivocal awareness, reflection and generation of embodied knowledge toward multidisciplinary research that advances performance studies but also expands beyond them. Diverse somatic voicing is also discussed as being in constant flux with somatic listening without problematically separating the experiencing of voicing and listening, voicers and listeners.

In this article, I expand upon these dynamics by discussing somatic listening, voicing, and speaking as one concept through the prism of touch in the Haptic Possibilities project and the concept of *somatic logos*. To do so I use as a case study the *Are We Still in Touch?* workshops and the research insights gathered from the activities up to now. I situate the practice offered in the workshops in relation to my Integrative Bodywork and Movement Therapy (IBMT) somatic training and the use of touch in other somatic methodologies. The theoretical ideas emanating through this praxis, according to Robin Nelson's definition of praxis as "theory imbricated within practice" (Nelson, 2013, p. 5), are primarily analyzed in this article based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" in embodied phenomenology, Sara Ahmed's and Jackie Stacey's definition of inter-embodiment in feminist theories, Ben Macpherson's somaesthetic analysis and Anita Chari's somatic resonance in voice studies.

I further develop the concept of *somatic logos*, introduced in my contribution to the *Somatic Voices* project, by examining self-directed somatic attention, intention, and self-listening in contexts beyond training and performance as part of the Haptic Possibilities project.<sup>2</sup> This application of *somatic logos* not only deepens the theoretical framework but also provides empirical evidence of its potential social impact, particularly in relation to broader educational, wellbeing, and therapeutic contexts. Through this examination, it becomes

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the project in actor training, see my article *Tactile renegotiations in actor training: what the pandemic taught us about touch* (Kapadocha, 2023, pp. 201-215).

evident that *somatic logos* within formal somatic inquiry, even when experienced with attention to the self, is an innately inter-embodied experience that can foster care and inclusivity in diverse communities, leading to wider societal impact. As a result, this article contributes to voice, performance, and somatic studies as well as to urgent social discussions on diversity, inclusivity, and discourses on embodiment, care, and wellbeing, especially in the wake of societal shifts driven by the pandemic.

## Somatic voicing and listening through touch

The somatic field of study, otherwise known as somatics or Somatics, was first introduced by the practitioner and scholar Thomas Hanna (1928-1990) toward the end of the twentieth century (1976). As Don Hanlon Johnson points out, somatics as an umbrella term was “designed to coax together a fragmented community of innovative and revolutionary teachers who had managed to craft methods of sensory awareness, touch, breathing, sounding, and moving” (2018, p. 23), including the work of F.M Alexander (1869-1955), Irmgard Bartenieff (1900-1982), Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984), and Ida Rolf (1896-1979). Martha Eddy also points out the common “somatic tools of touch, movement (including the movement of the breath), vocalization and language to further awareness” (2016, p. 15, original emphasis), while mapping the evolution of somatic practices through three generations and incorporating European, Asian, and African influences. Theoretically, the discourse of somatics is underpinned by Hanna’s redefinition of the Greek word *soma* as one’s experienced instead of objectified bodymind (1970), challenging philosophical problematics of body-mind dualism in western philosophy. This foundational understanding of somatics sets the stage for exploring how these principles are applied and expanded in contemporary practices.

Building upon the somatics discourse through critical perspectives of polyvocality, the Somatic Voices project aimed at bringing together approaches that are traditionally situated in the somatic field with practices beyond commonly recognized somatics. Focusing on the in-between of touching, voicing, and listening for the purpose of this article, touch stands out as a throughline and method of investigation in various practices such as Alexander Technique, Body-Mind Centering<sup>SM</sup> (BMC<sup>SM</sup>) by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, IBMT by Linda Hartley, Shin Somatics by Sondra Fraleigh, Body and Earth by Andrea Olsen, and



Voice Movement Integration (VMI) by Patricia Bardi. Notably, political theorist and somatic practitioner Anita Chari, as part of the project, refers to how self-directed touch in Emily Conrad's Continuum Movement is used to facilitate the perception of individual vocal resonance and simultaneous perception of somatic resonance as intercorporeal experience that renders the work "a critical vocal-movement practice for conceptualizing embodied democratic practices" (2021, p. 199). Through her research, Chari contributes to the discussion on the continuity between voicing and listening toward sociopolitical change, highlighting the interrelational nature of somatic resonance emanating through individual vocal resonance.

The voicing-listening interconnectedness through touch in my practice research originates in actor training, especially my movement-based classes at East 15 Acting School in London. From the somatics lineage, this ongoing investigation is highly influenced by my IBMT Diploma training as it dialogues with extensive conservatoire training in acting and singing and professional expertise in performing arts and artistic research. Listening through touch in IBMT develops upon BMC<sup>SM</sup> principles of mutuality between the one who touches and the one who is touched. Bainbridge Cohen notices: "When we touch someone, they touch us equally. The subtle interplay between body and mind can be experienced clearly through touching others. The art of touch and repatterning is an exploration of communication through touch" (2011, p.10).

Touch in BMC<sup>SM</sup>, and subsequently IBMT, is practiced through various qualities and pressures in relation to the structures of different body systems such as one's skin, muscles, or bones. It begins with *cellular touch* or contact at a *cellular level*, what I am referring to as *zero pressure* in the opening study. This non-directive touch is intended to allow openness in the communication and forms the basis toward moving and voicing. As a practitioner-researcher working with and through touch, this attention instilled in me a highly critical awareness of how senses overlap and the understanding that there is not a single touch, one way to offer and experience it. Nevertheless, if listening and voicing through touch is an innately intercorporeal process, what happens when we cannot be in physical proximity with others, as happened during the pandemic?

The above question activated my practice research through touch in a different way, leading to the Haptics Possibilities project. The premise of the research is that human bodies can experience own touch leading to the question: what if we dwell more deeply in the

details of touch through self-directed attention? Specifically, the *Are We Still in Touch?* workshops unpack a *reading* of what touch can be and how it can support a sense of self-care, wellbeing, and creativity based on five main principles:

1. The source of physical contact (i.e. focusing on whether the touch is activated through hands or other areas of one's skin body).
2. The actual points of contact prompting an interplay between smaller and larger skin surfaces (i.e. as mentioned in the opening study, from fingertips to one's side body).
3. Pressure and different levels of pressure starting from no pressure at all.
4. Tactile movement such as rubbing, brushing, tapping, patting, stroking.
5. Contact with the space that also integrates all the previous principles (i.e. different levels of pressure with the space can be explored through negotiating weight by either lightening the spatial support, releasing, or balancing weight; tactile movement with the space can manifest as simply walking, sliding, stamping, or rolling).

In comparison to the opening study that summarizes the practice for brevity, in the workshops, the principles are first investigated in the hands as the most common source of touch before moving to the integration of one's whole skin body as the largest source and sense organ for touch. As mentioned above, some form of self-directed touch is already used in other practices, such as Continuum, as a learning and self-listening tool. Moreover, scientific research in behavioral psychology and cognitive neuroscience has shown that self-directed touch modulates body ownership, affect, and bodily self-awareness (Boehme; Olausson, 2022; Bellard *et al.*, 2022). My research adds to these perspectives by: investigating in practice how self-directed touch can be somatically analyzed; foregrounding somatic attention to detail and subtle sensation; shaping a flexible methodology and principles that can be tailored to different sensory needs and environments; making the practice accessible within community-oriented settings; infusing it with and fostering creativity.

Over two years and seven group workshops, insights have been gathered by seventy-two participants from different age groups and sectors, among whom health and specialist care workers, wellbeing advisors, artists, arts/movement trainers, educators, and therapists. Responses to the practice have been collected through questionnaires, including the prompt for creative writing mentioned in the opening of the article, facilitated group sharing and



discussion. The activities have been documented using video or audio recordings. In resonance with the scientific findings mentioned above, the participants, among others, have discovered that their own touch can provide comfort, security, and emotional support, leading to a sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency. They have also shared a re-appreciation for the role of touch in fostering empathy and intimacy with others.

Especially through the participants' verbal sharings and spoken creative writing, it has become obvious that the attention to the self in the practice does not foster at all "hierarchies of capitalist individualism" (Pezzullo, 2020, p. 507). On the contrary, most individuals who have participated in the project thus far have expressed connections to more caring and inclusive social interactions, whether with family members, friends, or with people they encounter in their professional lives. I suggest that this inter-embodied understanding emerges because of the continuity between somatic self-listening and speaking through touch in the work. Moreover, the practice provides a container for verbal expression to emerge from a place of somatic attention and intention that goes beyond theoretical or cognitive formations of thinking. Instead, I suggest that it cultivates knowledge and a sense of logos that is innately somatic.

### Somatic logos as an inter-embodied methodology

I identify *somatic logos* as a holistic concept of perception and communication that integrates embodied and cognitive thinking, senses, and moving-voicing-speaking expression through critical perspectives of inter-embodiment and plurality. Previously, I discussed the concept in relation to touch-based partner work in actor training, framing it as an interrelational and multisensory listening methodology between actors as well as between actors and trainers (Kapadocha, 2021b, p. 155-168). In this article *somatic logos* further challenges distancing issues between voicers and listeners and the separation between voicing-speaking-listening within community-oriented settings. The Haptic Possibilities project offers insights that expand the concept beyond actor training, exploring its potential as an inter-embodied methodology for broader social impact through diverse applications of care. It proposes that caring and subtle attention to the self inherently includes empathic and caring interrelations with others, addressing broader issues of *desomatized* individualism and isolation.

Theoretically, *somatic logos* builds upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeal understanding of "logos as flesh". Flesh in the phenomenologist's discourse is discussed as an "exemplar sensible" that is simultaneously sensible and sensate (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 135-139). In the article *Merleau-Ponty's Logos: The Sens-ing of Flesh*, Gail Stenstad writes: "Flesh is the elemental movement which gives rise to all carnal, dimensional beings. We, too, are dimensional beings, [...] having a 'mind' which is the invisible inside of our visible outside, a fold or hollow in our flesh, in which we open onto the flesh of the world" (Stenstad, 1993, p. 56). Stenstad describes the philosopher's approach to logos as "gathering of flesh, gathering of comprehension, gathering of words in speech" (1993, p. 58).

"Gathering" suggests the in-between of the flesh-world relationship, indicated in Merleau-Ponty's interconnection of flesh and logos, attributing to the term embodied and interrelational perspectives. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's take on flesh as at once sensible and sensate and his concept of the reversibility of touch (1968, p. 142), explain how self-directed touch in the discussed practice can allow a dynamic experience even if not in direct physical contact with others (i.e. I touch and I am touched) and the overlapping in sense perception (i.e. listening through touch). According to a workshop participant's creative sharing: "I touch and I connect. I touch and I remind myself that I am human. I touch and I feel internally. I touch and I understand. I touch and I belong".

The participant's words encapsulate the essence of an inter-embodied and multisensory experience. Building on this, my notion of *somatic logos* extends Merleau-Ponty's concept of *fleshiness* by highlighting interrelational plurality and the significance of difference. This advancement resonates with feminist perspectives on inter-embodiment that acknowledge the philosopher's invaluable contribution to embodied thinking while also criticizing "the universalism of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body" (Ahmed; Stacey, 2004, p. 6). This problematic does not leave space for differentiation, including cultural, social, physical, and vocal. To address this criticism, in the introduction of the edited collection *Thinking Through the Skin* (2004), Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey define inter-embodiment as "a way of thinking through the nearness of other others, but a nearness which involves distanciation and difference" (2004, p. 7).

Ahmed's and Stacey's concept of distanciation highlights a second problematic aspect in Merleau-Ponty's idea of *fleshiness*. This issue relates to body ownership and identity, suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's notion of always being in oneness with others does not

allow for a critical negotiation of distancing. Therefore, there is a significant contribution in the nature of the *Are We Still in Touch?* workshops that creates space for the shaping of one's own *somatic logos* within a broader sense of relationality and what *being with* an environment, including the space and the others, may feel like. In the words of another workshop participant<sup>3</sup>:

I touch and I am restored. I map my body and I paint myself into presence. I come into contact with the space through my skin and I blend with my environment; it's relational and there is only beautiful reciprocity. I paint on the canvas of the space with my living, breathing skin, and I come alive on a deeper level, somatically expanding out into an awakening, a waking up from mind trance. I let my body lead and do what it loves. It loves moving and dancing and coming into contact with, coming into connection with, coming into relationship with, so pure and innocent, this holy, sacred, sweet, loving conversation. I come alive again. Sunlight pours into my skin, hallelujah.

I propose that the *fleshiness* in the participants' words and voices as they digest and express the experiencing of the practice affirms somatic attributes of logos. These attributes relate to what Ben Macpherson identifies as somaesthetic vocality which "is experienced by means of the ontological primacy of somatic sensation over cognitive understanding" (2021, p. 222). The concept of somaesthetic vocality, which prioritizes somatic sensation over cognitive understanding, aligns with the experiential nature of the practice and its *somatic logos*, where words emerge through experiencing rather than merely or primarily cognitive processing. Macpherson adds to his analysis by highlighting the corporeal nature in the voicing-listening continuity stating: "If vocality is corporeal at the point of the production, negotiated by means of the primacy of the body, then listening must also, a posteriori, be a corporeal act" (Macpherson, 2021, p. 222). Somatic sensation and negotiation in the workshops are navigated through specific somatic attention and intention which prompt a different sense of self-listening and a revisited sense of caring.

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<sup>3</sup> I would also recommend witnessing how the participant shares the following writing in the provided video recording of the workshop (1:04:15-1:05:40), particularly noting how she suggests *being with* through her physical-vocal expression.



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## Somatic logos toward a caring *social soma*

Anthropologist Brenda Farnell, in her book *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory* (2012), tracks the modern development of social science based on what she identifies as two “somatic turns”. According to Farnell, the first somatic turn, established in the 1970s, “moves us from disembodied social science to a focus ‘on the body’” (2012, p. 4). It was shaped around “the work of Michael Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, a range of feminist theorists, and an interdisciplinary, postmodern, phenomenological valorization of the sensuous” (Farnell, 2012, p. 4). The second somatic turn, situated in the twenty-first century, “offers a theoretical enrichment of the earlier phase by re-positioning the moving body to a theoretically adequate account of embodied social action” (Farnell, 2012, p. 4).

A turn toward social attention has also taken place within somatics under the theme of “social somatics”. According to Eddy: “Social somatics implies taking context, culture, and relationships into account whenever practicing and applying somatic education. It can also include striving for somatic education models to become embedded in all aspects of life and actively counter inequalities” (2016, p. 233). At the same time, Eddy (2016, p. 236-238) addresses issues in this endeavor such as the cost of somatic practices and access to space. Criticism on the field of somatics adds issues of exclusion and the privilege of whiteness (Drury, 2022). In my somatically inspired work, I address these issues by adopting the critical interrogation of a PaR framework, fostering multidisciplinary and intercultural discussions (in resonance with the nature of this Special Issue) and specifically, as part of the Haptics Possibilities research project, by collaborating with community-oriented contexts and spaces.

To return to somatic voice studies, Chari, discussing social and political possibility in the vocal and somatic practices of Continuum, notes that “such practices open subjects up to a perception of intercorporeal space, decentering the bounded, atomized forms of subjectivity predominant in neoliberal society” (Chari, 2021, p. 209). Through the lens of Romand Coles’ notion of receptive resonance in political theory, Chari talks about “receptive resonance practices” as the ones that “create space for the perception of the possibility of new forms of collective subjectivity” (2021, p. 209). In line with this, and through empirical research instead of theoretical analysis, the Haptic Possibilities practice and its underlying concept of plural *somatic logos* can be situated within the context of receptive resonance. This resonance

“opens and intensifies ‘acknowledgement’ of others - which is as much a condition for agonistic negotiation as it is a condition for more harmonious processes” (Coles *apud* Chari, 2021, p. 208).

The set intention of the project has been the facilitation of self-care, wellbeing, and creative expression, especially amidst the social challenges imposed by the pandemic, including isolation and wellbeing struggles. The new form of collective subjectivity that has come up as part of the research according to the participants’ responses, suggests immediate impact as a shift of individual and collective awareness. It also recommends that the project and its future development can lead to wider societal impact. This broader impact relates to how the insights and changes experienced by participants in the project can potentially shape and benefit larger communities and practices. For instance, the integration of touch awareness and the offered methods into various professional practices can enhance the quality of services provided across fields. As participants incorporate these insights into therapy, education, arts, health, wellbeing, and specialist care, the overall quality of these services could improve.

As indicated in the practice that opens this article, I propose that this new caring possibility has been prompted by shifting somatic attention to the self through touch. The intention is self-care and expression through clear points of contact and a *fleshy* connection to the space. So when the invitation for speaking comes up, it comes from a place of inter-embodied *fleshiness* and a sense of *somatic logos* that connects sensing, thinking, speaking, and listening. To evidence this, I would like at this point to weave in one such moment from my latest workshops (April to June 2024) in East London, in collaboration with The LightHouse and Gardens community center. I use present tense to facilitate the reconnection.

After the practice and a written reflection, I open the space for verbal reflection and, if desirable, the sharing of the participants’ creative writing. A male English teacher of color who works at an adult school speaks about how he felt that he let all his defenses down and how for him “just being who you are worked”. In response, among others, I bring the relation to the present sociopolitical climate and he goes “I wrote a little poem actually”:

I touch and feel  
 I expand and grow  
 Like a petal I push forward  
 I meet the sun of myself  
 Use my hand to push out  
 A stem, a flower, a root  
 I have roots, yet I am mobile

I have many parts, yet I am whole  
I am skin, bone, muscle  
Yet I am none of these

The group is moved and grateful for the sharing. I echo the last two verses. I say that I feel resonance with his words and with how “the speaking is an extension of the experience”. Another participant from China gets teary, she feels seen, she exclaims “it’s such a great poem” and we all laugh with kindness.

I think the moment speaks for itself on many different levels related to a sense of self, race, geographies, and transcultural generations. It also brings cohesively together the theoretical components used in this article through the prism of touch and the concept of *somatic logos*. From Merleau-Ponty’s *fleshy* relation to the self and the world, to Ahmed’s and Stacey’s inter-embodied sense of nearness through distancing and difference, Macpherson’s somaesthetic vocality and listening, and Chari’s somatic resonance toward receptive resonance. The gist is that when individual attention is brought to the self through somatic, critical, and plural awareness, it organically expands to the diverse voices of the *social soma*.

## Closing reflections

In my present critical reflections, I recognize that a key aspect of the immediate impact of the *Are We Still in Touch?* workshops and the future potential of the involved practice comes from the project’s PaR framework. Shaping and sharing the practice within the container of a research project with community orientation allows for the activities to become accessible to people with no previous experience of relevant work as well as to participants who wish to further grow their own practice.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the *Are We Still in Touch?* practice is not offered as a one-off workshop but as a methodology that can grow in the participants’ personal and professional lives. For instance, in relation to the moment described above, I suggested that some elements of the practice could be examined in the participant’s English classes, even if it may feel challenging, as it could strengthen the adult students’ confidence and voices.

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<sup>4</sup> The first year the workshops were financially supported by a University of Essex UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Participatory Research Fund and the second year by East 15 Acting School Research.



In follow-up communication, participants have already shared a shift in decision-making about their wellbeing and how this extends to their professional life as well. A drama teacher in secondary education shared in an email:

I believe without realizing it then, this experience aided some decisions I made later on regarding my health. Revisiting it allowed me to once again pause and connect with what I achieved during this time [of the workshop] and where I am now, a more accepting and loving phase of myself and my journey. One more thing that I believe that I still use in my practice, even with my students, is exploring physical touch and its impact and proxemics when devising theatre or exploring physical theatre.

Moving forward, I envision collaboration with more targeted groups of participants from the fields of arts, technology, health and wellbeing, education, and accessibility practices toward the advancement of inclusive participation within and outside theatre environments. Through public engagement activities such as further workshops and interactive performances inspired by the nature of the project, the recruitment of participants will aim at explicitly facilitating dialogue between artistic research and other disciplines. This will support knowledge exchange, promoting a deeper understanding of the project's potential applications in educational, wellbeing, healthcare, and accessibility contexts. By integrating touch awareness and somatic principles into these domains, I anticipate a ripple effect that could enhance the quality of services and foster a more soma-centered, compassionate and inclusive society.

To bring this article to a close, in this piece of somatically activated writing and somatically intended reading, I discussed how touch-based self-listening and voicing-speaking in my research strengthens a sense of care, wellbeing, and creative expression. Using the *Are We Still in Touch?* workshops as a case study, I presented how this somatic attention and intention is not constrained to the self in an individualistic manner but extends to an inter-embodied and relational awareness with potentials for wider social change. I conceptualized these observations based on an inter-embodied and plural approach to logos, identified as *somatic logos*. Somatic logos does not disconnect voice-speech and listening from sensorimotor perception and allows in-between dynamics with others and one's environment, including the integration of sociopolitical conditions. The notion was analyzed through phenomenological and feminist approaches to embodiment along with perspectives in somatic voice studies.

Ultimately, the Haptic Possibilities project serves as a testament to the potential of somatically inspired critical practices and research methodologies in addressing contemporary social challenges. By fostering a sense of interconnectedness and nurturing diverse voices within the *social soma*, it demonstrates that such approaches can contribute to more caring and inclusive communities. Through interdisciplinary integration and empirical evidence gathered from the workshops, this study reveals new dimensions of *somatic logos*, enhancing its relevance and possible applicability in diverse fields such as education, therapy, and social care. These advancements position *somatic logos* as a valuable praxical tool for considering and supporting care and inclusivity in various community settings. The ongoing development of this project will continue to explore and expand its possibilities, driving forward the integration of the devised methods into diverse disciplines and wider applications.

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