

James Weeks

## The wind is its blowing

for a large group of people, outside

open duration

2021

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### Introduction

In his 2007 article “Earth, Sky Wind, and Weather”<sup>1</sup>, the anthropologist Tim Ingold describes our relationship with the world around us as a continuous flux, our perceptions and being constantly shaped and reshaped by the natural forces in which we are immersed. We are ‘caught up in the transformations of the weather-world’:

*To inhabit the open is not to be stranded on a closed surface but to be immersed in the fluxes of the medium, in the incessant movements of wind and weather. Life is borne on these fluxes which, felt rather than touched, permeate the inhabitant’s entire being. In this weather-world there is no distinct surface separating earth and sky. Life is rather lived in a zone in which substance and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings which, in their activity, bind the weather-world into the textures of the land.*

Wind is the essential flux of the medium: ‘To feel the wind is not to make external, tactile contact with our surroundings but to mingle with them.’ Breathing itself is part of this mingling:

*Breathing in and out, one alternately takes in the medium and surrenders to it. Inspiration is wind becoming breath, expiration is breath becoming wind. The alternation of coming and going, in respiration, is essential to life...*

*...To feel the wind and breathe the air is...to ride on the wave of the world’s ongoing formation – to be forever present at the ‘continued birth’, as Merleau-Ponty called it, of both persons and things. It is as though every breath was one’s first, drawn at the very moment when the world is about to disclose itself for what it is. In this, it is not so much the wind that is embodied as the body, in breathing, that is enwinded.*

This work seeks to bring its participants into an awareness of the profoundly immersed relationship with the world described by Ingold. As such, it is primarily a work for those taking part, a group activity or ritual, though an audience may also be present. Participants need no musical knowledge or training.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingold, Tim: “Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2007, Vol.13, Wind, Life, Health: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives (2007), pp.S19-S38

## Performance Instructions

### General

The piece may be performed by any number of participants, as long as there is sufficient space.

The performance must take place outside, in a large space in the open air such as a field, a hillside or open plaza; preferably on a day with some wind. (If there is no perceptible wind at all the piece is still performable but will be less effective, as it is substantially 'wind-generated'.) An elevated site is desirable but not obligatory.

The performance may last any length of time, typically 5-10 minutes but potentially longer.

### Preparation

Participants should arrange themselves in a grid or lattice formation, several metres apart in each direction, as if a human wind-farm, each participant an individual wind turbine. They should all face the same direction, into the wind (unless it is so strong as to be uncomfortable). They do not need to be able to hear each other clearly – this may be impossible in very windy weather.

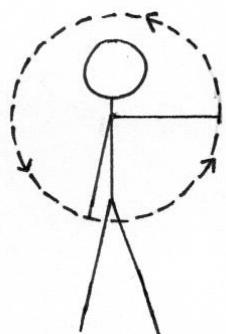
When all participants are in position, the piece is ready to begin. Each participant begins and ends entirely in their own time, and performs completely independently at all times.

### Activities

There are three activities which constitute the actions of the piece: Breathing, Circling, Voicing (Wind-tracing). All three involve a close attention to the wind.

**Breathing:** Become aware of the wind, feeling its movement on your skin, hearing it moving through leaves or past other obstacles, and against your eardrum. Become aware of your breath, and of its mingling with the wind.

**Circling:** Make a straight blade with your hand and begin to circle your arm in front of your body (not by the side of the body: see diagram below) in whichever direction is most comfortable. Keep arm straight and make movements as smooth and slow as possible, like the sail of a wind turbine, feeling the connection of this movement with the breath and with the wind. Maintain a constant speed of circling at all times. When beginning Circling again after a break, or when you get tired, swap arms; or, alternate arms constantly, both of them moving in the same direction (clockwise or anticlockwise), one after the other.



**Voicing (Wind-tracing):** Softly vocalise some or all of your out-breaths. As you vocalise, listen in closely to the wind and try to replicate its rise and fall with your voice. You are not mimicking the wind but tracing the intensity of its blowing, in rough outline: your sound does not have to be identical to it, but analogous. Do this in one of three ways:

- a) on an unvoiced 'fff' sound, getting louder and softer as the wind rises and falls
- b) on a voiced 'vvv' sound, at any comfortable pitch, keeping the same pitch from one breath to another, getting louder and softer as the wind rises and falls
- c) on a voiced 'vvv' sound as b), but now sliding a little way upwards and downwards in pitch, as well as getting louder and softer, as the wind rises and falls

Keep the changes of volume and pitch quite subtle, never exaggerated, so your performance is for yourself. Continue to listen closely to the wind and feel it on your skin at all times.

When performing **Voicing** for the first time, begin with a) and then move to b) and then (if desired) to c). After this you are free to move between them as you wish, but spend at least 6 breaths on each one before changing.

You can also create a hybrid sound with 'vvv' and 'fff' both present.

#### Order of performance

The performance begins with all participants standing still, upright and relaxed, and closing their eyes.

Start with **Breathing**.

Then add in **Circling** (each participant independently, when ready).

After a while, begin **Voicing** (each participant independently, when ready) while continuing with **Circling**.

After this point, each participant is free to move among the activities at will; however, there must always be one of Voicing and Circling in progress. For example, from this point you could continue with Voicing but stop Circling for a while, then add Circling back in and stop Voicing; etc.

The Breathing activity (which is no more than a focused attention to the breath and the wind together) should be present whenever Voicing is absent.

To end, move from Voicing to **Breathing** and cease any remaining Circling. After a while, open eyes.

### Experiencing the piece

*The wind is its blowing* is primarily a group activity undertaken for the participants, rather than a work to be performed to an audience. Each participant should take their own time over each activity to allow the mingling of breath or voice with wind to be experienced. This is a state of expanded awareness, requiring time for the necessary concentration to be achieved and maintained. Gradually they may widen their awareness to include other performers as well as other sounds (planes, trees, birds, machines) in the sonic environment, revealing a richly-textured field of predominantly very soft, highly varied sounds.

In spite of the focus on participants' experience, an audience may also appreciate this group ritual from outside the performance space, both in its complex sound-texture and in the visual spectacle of the quietly humming, human wind-farm.