

On Dance and Phenomenology **An Essay Interview with Professor Sondra Fraleigh**

Amanda: Can you tell us how and when phenomenological traditions started to integrate into Dance Studies?

Sondra: It happened gradually in my understanding—beginning with Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's book, *Phenomenology of Dance*, first published in 1966. My book, *Dance and the Lived Body* came along in 1987. I didn't know about Sheets-Johnstone's work until I began to write my book in earnest in about 1977. I studied the concept of the lived body in philosophy classes on phenomenology and existentialism, and I wrote my first exploratory article in 1970. It finally expanded seventeen years later in the finished book. The intensive writing of *Dance and the Lived Body* was about a five-year project. I wrote it in long hand first. Computers were around, but not integrated into the skills of everyone. I took the hand written manuscript to my typewriter, and eventually it found its way into computer-ease. Now my family finds it difficult to tear me away from my computer.

As you know, the process of publication is quite involved. It took a long time for phenomenology as such to be recognized as a way to research dance in graduate studies. I thought my book would just gather dust on some library shelf, but a year after the first publication of *Dance and the Lived Body*, I taught two summer workshops dedicated to dance and phenomenology for PhD students at Texas Woman's University through the invitation of Dr. Penelope Hanstein.

Later I taught a pre-conference full day workshop at a CORD Conference (Congress for Research in Dance, 1990). It was very well attended by students and professors—so I assumed that phenomenology had attained some recognition in dance studies. If I take the entire trajectory from the time of Maxine's first publication in 1966, my subsequent publications, and my international workshop in 1990, I see a long curve of twenty-four years. Of course there were others who contributed along the way, and it took even longer for phenomenology to gather adherents in academic dance departments. I don't think anyone writes from this perspective for fun, rather it is a way to place your topic in an intellectual and historical framework. This can be enjoyable when you make discoveries. By now, it's like riding a bicycle for me, even when I sometimes I fall off!

Amanda: How about phenomenology in dance today?

Sondra: Now we have a fuller story, from 1966 to 2016, and quite a wonderful half-century-story, I would say. Many graduate students take up phenomenology in their dissertations and theses. Professors like Dr. Karen Bond at Temple University specialize in the perspectives of phenomenology. Others like Dr. Joanna McNamara include hermeneutics relative to phenomenology in their university teaching. She wrote an influential article in this regard (McNamara, 1999). As a professor of dance,

I taught phenomenology as part of dance studies and published two invited articles on phenomenology for *Dance Research Journal* (Spring 1991, Summer 2000).

And this is just from the American side. As for recent work, many Europeans, Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians, Africans, Asians, and Israelis are working from phenomenological perspectives in dance and theater studies. Hillel Braude, born in Africa and now living in Israel, is a medical doctor and ethicist who writes about dance, movement, and somatic practices from the perspective of phenomenology (Braude 2015). He is certified in Feldenkrais, and also studies my work, Shin Somatics. New Zealander Karen Barbour is inspired by phenomenology and feminism in *Dancing Across the Page: Embodied Ways of Knowing* (2011). Performance Studies draws upon phenomenology, sometimes through practice as research (PAR)—for instance in the dance and somatics films of Ruth Way and Russell Frampton at Plymouth University in the UK. Concerning spirituality and dance, I know that phenomenology also influences your work, Amanda. I see phenomenology as a large tent for furthering reflective knowledge in a variety of ways.

Influences from Asia have entered into dance phenomenology. I often cite the philosophy of Shigenori Nagatomo and his Japanese phenomenology, as it intersects with Buddhism. Nagatomo is available to English speakers via his book *Attunement through the Body* (1992). Phenomenology and Buddhism have a great deal in common in their trust of groundlessness. ‘Not knowing’, not needing to fix or find absolutes, is part of the existentialist narrative that sustains them both. ‘The abyss’ and ‘nothingness’ are spiritual images for letting go. Such radical release of controlling instincts can be scary, but we learn throughout life that not getting attached to things, whether material or conceptual, is part of transformative change. Control is not always the best solution; doing nothing sometimes is. Heidegger calls this ‘letting beings be’, as I take up in my article, ‘Butoh Translations and the Suffering of Nature’, now in press with Routledge Performance Research series.

The story of dance and phenomenology is vast and still unfolding; others could fill in what I’m missing. I have been aware of the influential work of Susan Kozel and her book, *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* (2007). I feature her work in my recent article on dance and technology, ‘Enacting Embodiment and Blue Muffins’, just now being published with *Choreographic Practices* (2016). I do have a sense of humor, but the article is also serious. Susan was one of the students in my 1990 seminar mentioned above. Now she has a new book in the works, she tells me. In a turn toward transcendental phenomenology, Anna Pakes in the UK explores how Edmund Husserl’s work can be applied to ontology of dance in *Dance Research Journal* (2011). In the same issue, Edward Warburton, in his article on dance, phenomenology, and cognition, explains how cognitive theories of enaction are relevant to contexts of dancer action and performance (2011).

For students who feel intimidated by dense or highly intellectual texts, I like to simplify by teasing out a few main themes of phenomenology, such as nonjudgment

and intersubjectivity. The latter is an important concept for dancers and teachers, since it is about how meaning is created contextually between people. Meaning doesn't arise in a vacuum. It arrives as shared at some point, or else it remains private and eventually vanishes. When meanings are shared they double in significance. Intersubjectivity is the lifeblood of dance. Just think of it, whenever we dance together we share lived bodyscapes, and we do it wordlessly. We enter special ineffable states together. These could be states of joy, rhythm, or dream, to name a few. We might not say anything about what meanings arise in the dancing, but we could if we wanted to.

Amanda: Can you say more about the difference between you and Sheets-Johnstone?

Sondra: Maxine and I are still writing about dance from perspectives of phenomenology, but not in the same vein. I have appreciated her contributions, and reviewed her work for *Dance Research Journal* (Summer 2002). I felt it important for dancers to understand her contributions, and to know about her extensive studies of phenomenology related to movement and dance. I see her voluminous work as foundational, and have anticipated each new phase. Philosophical phenomenology is not easy to understand for those who don't study it, and even for those who do. But close reading of phenomenology is well worth the time. It can change your life. It can certainly reveal what it means to suspend judgment and question assumptions. Attention directs perception. How we attune grounds perceptual processes and eventual discoveries.

Sheets-Johnstone is tied more closely to Husserlian phenomenology than I have been, and she has also integrated her study of zoology. Her work on feminist themes has inspired writers in wider fields of philosophy. Maxine has been a long-time friend and very supportive of my work, which has depended on the confluence of phenomenology and existentialism. I am informed by philosophers in this school of thought beginning with Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, not to forget Martin Heidegger, Husserl's student and the primary revisionist of his phenomenology. Heidegger's phenomenology and post metaphysics assists my work thematically (Heidegger 1999), as does his aesthetic treatise on origins (1971). Merleau-Ponty's conceptualizations of the lived body are particularly important to my vision (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964a, 1964b). Sheets-Johnstone has been critical of Merleau-Ponty's outlook.

It is difficult to see one's own work, but if I look broadly, I think it could be classified as applied phenomenology and transdisciplinary. Cross-disciplinary isn't the same, since this is more about working within disciplines and crossing over. I like to dissolve boundaries in transcending territorial turf. I draw on whatever helps to clarify or enrich my project, from neuroscience to mythology. I soften boundaries between philosophy and poetry quite often, trusting that this will peak the reader's attention and their ability to shift focus. Poetry can space out thicker texts with imagery and still be on topic. If I'm describing a dance, I make sure to reference the

music, since perception is strongly shaped by music. Dance is infused with musical rhythms and colors in the sounds of various performances. It also matters a great deal whether the music is recorded or live. We know that silence also figures in performance. When dance moves with silence, the silence speaks volumes.

I often veer back to Husserl and sometimes forward to heuristics, represented well in the psychology of Carl Moustakas (1990). I like Merleau-Ponty for his psychological emphasis on the lived body as intrinsically expressive. I also make Simone de Beauvoir the hero of my book, *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (2004). This book updated my first efforts, taking up feminist themes and writing from a personal angle by integrating ecological life stories with phenomenology. Beauvoir is the first feminist to write a phenomenology with existentialist themes, also incorporating ethics. More recently, we have the example of Judith Butler, a feminist, linguist, and phenomenologist who relates to theater and performativity. In *Dancing Identity*, I create a textual dance as theatrical dialogue between Beauvoir, Butler, and Merleau-Ponty.

Amanda: Can you say something about how aesthetics has informed your phenomenology?

Sondra: Aesthetic theory is for the most part neglected in phenomenology, but has entered into my preview at every turn. I carry this forward through what I identify as 'a descriptive aesthetics', but I also take the history of aesthetics seriously. Aesthetics has been an important strain of philosophy from Plato to Heidegger and beyond. It infuses my work historically in *Dance and the Lived Body*. I studied aesthetic theory intensively in the large collection of the University of London library for six months on sabbatical leave, finding common tones between aesthetics, phenomenology, and somatic studies. The aesthetic is the affective; as such, it inheres in somatic movement arts. I bring this up where I can, and hope to be able to say more about it—in the future. 'Witnessing the Frog Pond,' is my dance-specific study of aesthetic theory in *Researching Dance* (1999). I tried to make it reader friendly for university students, and to include phenomenology.

Regarding dance as art, I have described the work of many artists, by now more than a hundred. I've lost count. These would be choreographers and dancers I have experienced in live performance. Butoh and Japanese aesthetic concepts, particularly *shibui* and *wabi-sabi*, enter into these descriptions and analyses. I've interviewed many of the artists I write about, and taken dance classes and workshops from or with many of them. Most recently, I wrote 'Images of Love and Power in Butoh, Bausch, and Streb' for the *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater* (2015), describing dances from these highly contrasting styles. I weave these with conceptions of love and will in the aesthetic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer from the early 1800s, the existential psychology of Rollo May, and the social activist views of Martin Luther King Jr.

In describing a dance, I look at time and space as lived attributes, attempting to capture the poetry of movement and possible meanings of the whole. I don't believe there are discrete meanings to be gathered in dance works. Rather do audiences interact with performances from their own experience. We attribute meaning through interpretation and share the dance this way. I like to interact as one witness to the dance, and I don't think of myself as a critic. I aim to bring abstract concepts to life through dance descriptions, and take this as a phenomenological challenge.

Philosophers, unless they are also arts practitioners, examine the arts from the outside. Their objective aesthetic outlook has value of itself, but also limitations. Artists who study philosophy have a ringside seat, especially through aesthetics and phenomenology, and they can use this to advantage. I have felt a responsibility to describe dance from the dancer's point of view. If dancers don't do this, then who will? When I'm writing, I always ask myself if I can give concrete examples of what I'm talking about, either from my experience or through describing a dance I've seen or been part of. It is easy enough to write theoretically without giving any examples, but theory can be dry, when it is never applied to some concrete instance of performance or self-evidence. Concrete examples also serve as checks to theory. Examples of actual dances or experiences of dance might contradict theory and send one back to the drawing board.

When I'm considering dance as a phenomenon, asking 'what is this thing', or writing about a particular dance I have in mind, I ask myself who I am in the picture. Am I speaking from the dancer's point of view, that of the audience, or the choreographer? Am I speaking broadly beyond concrete manifestations and envisioning metaphysical essence? Is my voice coming more locally or intimately from the aura of an event? Am I defining a term in order to communicate a general principle? Just what is my perspective?

Phenomenologically, I speak to an ideal reader who can understand what I'm saying. I trust the intelligence of my readers, but I won't be able to communicate what appears to me as significant unless I say who I am in the process of my writing. I need to show my standpoint: Am I dancing, witnessing, learning, or teaching? What part of me am I channeling?

Amanda: It seems that phenomenology has gradually enlarged in your understanding of dance, Sondra.

Sondra: Yes, and writing 'Phenomenologies' for this issue has been part of that, providing me the opportunity to identify various phenomenological currents. Readers will be able to see where various authors fall in this collection of styles. Some authors and practitioners may even overlap phenomenologies. I was elated when I began to see a wide field of phenomenological practice, and to grasp this field as flexible. The idea that there is no single phenomenological method makes me breathe more deeply, fully, and with a sigh. Methods need to remain open and amendable in phenomenology, and likewise in somatic practices and approaches to

performance. Regarding practice as research (PAR), I'm beginning to see how the *tenets* of phenomenology might also be expressed in media other than words: in dance, music, and visual art, not to mention theater, poetry, and somatic movement arts. Those who enter pathways of phenomenologies in comprehending dance will find their own way through the thicket. I say, 'just wade in'. Then find out how a particular perspective supports your interests, or challenges and changes them. State the parameters of your study. Spiral in and out of your topic from different angles to see if your original intuitions hold water. Good definitions well researched, always help, even if you finally discard them. Phenomenology does not throw reason out the window. Indeed, it wants reason on its side. This said, meaning in the arts often arrives through irrational substrata.

Amanda: I am interested in the intersection of the somatics movement with phenomenology, both historically and in terms of theoretical and methodological meeting points. Can you share your observations and experience with us in relation to the intersection of these academic movements?

Sondra: First a personal reflection on the nervous system: Like many people in the arts, I soak up a lot of perceptual information. Sometimes I'm on overload. Add to that the stressful enjoyments of teaching, and I could go overboard (on overload). I've noticed through the years that something magical occurs when I think I'll burst. My instinctive body comes to my aid. At a critical point, everything just shuts down. *My nervous system is smarter than I am!* This realization keeps me interested in 'dance somatics', which I think of as studying and performing dance through a somatic looking glass.

I have written more technically and logically about dance and somatics in my new book: *Moving Consciously* (2015). I see somatics as 'phenomenology in action', or one could say 'phenomenology come alive in movement', or 'experiential awareness explored in dance'. Somatics is an approach to personal and professional development, and it can be applied widely in movement arts, pedagogy, and psychology. Antonio Damasio's, *Self Comes to Mind* (2012), extends my theme of consciousness in context of neurobiology. I use Damasio because his science is consistent with phenomenology. Much earlier, I wrote an essay for the journal *Somatics* called 'Freedom, Gravity, and Grace' (1999), that speaks to your question, and also includes Damasio (1994). This article is an early attempt on my part to bridge between dance, phenomenology, somatics, and science.

Amanda: Can you be more specific about phenomenological approaches relative to somatics?

Sondra: In its approach, phenomenology asks one to think from a clean slate, to erase presuppositions, and a somatic practice asks for the same clarity. It may be difficult to visualize what a clean slate would mean in thinking and movement. Most generally, it means that we don't know in advance what outcomes will be. It means that we dance and write without expectations. In movement, *improvisation* is a way

to clear thought processes and unsettle habits; at least this might be one of the goals. In phenomenology, *bracketing* is a way of looking at what is taken for granted, and preparing for new insight. Both encourage practices that aim toward life-giving renewal and stem from *tabula rasa consciousness*. Phenomenologists are happy to be surprised by new ideas or insights. Somatic detectives in movement are happy to be surprised when they can now perform (do) what was seemingly impossible and previously hidden from them.

'What am I not seeing that is right in front of me?' This question arises in somatic contexts and in phenomenology as an approach toward dance and life. As complementary fields of study, both phenomenology and somatics look beneath surface understandings, not accepting first impressions while still respecting intuition. In their methods, phenomenology and somatics both seek what Husserl called 'the flowing live present'. They seek present centered awareness in other words. I find daring and trust in phenomenology and somatic movement processes, since they seek truth in movement, or *the kinetic truth underlying consciousness*. Something hidden in the known but unplumbed is unearthed in their searches: learning, healing, or meaning personally validated.

Dance is a natural ally to phenomenology, since philosophies of the body are at the core of both. Dance is immediately embodied on a nonverbal level, while phenomenology as a philosophy of the body rises to the task of language. I am fascinated by the intersection of nonverbal experience with verbal discourses of embodiment, especially with the addition of somatics.

Amanda: Inspired by Edmund Husserl's somatology, Thomas Hanna popularized the noun 'somatics' in order to highlight the subjective, first-person viewpoint, a distinguishing feature of movement somatics. Can you say more about this connection?

Sondra: In somatic movement studies, we may have over-simplified the term *soma* as indicating first-person perspectives. Certainly, we want to be able to say something about our immediate perceptions in terms of self. But through phenomenology, especially Husserl, I am careful in speaking from the first person position, since it is somewhat of a fiction.

The body with its kinaesthetic systems shapes the ways in which we perceive others and the world. Husserl distinguishes this embodied fullness as *leib* (in German), or *the lived body*. This is an active state and inclusive, both *immanent* as inward looking through reflection, and *transcendent* in perception of the external world (Fink and Husserl 1995: 158-159). Husserl's mature work moved further away from the mental character of experience to his growing recognition of the *intersubjective* world of life, the *lebenswelt*, or 'life world'. It is not a private but a collective world, even as our situation in it grounds our participation. Body is important in Husserl's discussions of self-awareness, other-awareness, and awareness of the world. Self is

not just for itself alone, but appears in relation. ‘Human life is we life’ in a cultural and environing world constantly in motion (Husserl 1995: 192).

Soma, from Greek, is simply the word for body, even the dead body. What we mean in somatic studies by soma incorporates psyche as living essence, and is therefore complex and pervasive, very close to Husserl’s use. What Husserl posited as soma is wholly embodied, accounting not only for human perceptual abilities, but also the ability to commit to an action. *Will and action are somatic phenomena*. Our experiences are complex in passive and active perceptual phases that weave together. *Moving Consciously*, the book I just completed with others, creates a large frame in which to consider *soma*. We also build on past understandings. Our field has a history, and will continue to evolve meanings of somatic phenomena. My own sense is that we should not depend heavily on single definitions of soma, because there are many.

What you find if you look up ‘somatology’ today are studies of the body as a branch of anthropology, and it is also seen as the physiological and anatomical study of the body. Husserl’s view of the body is all-encompassing, including soul; he states that soul is innately of body and movement. Here is Husserl:

Each movement of the body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc. Likewise, so is every human performance, every human production (Edmund Husserl 1989: 252).

Amanda: What are some common misunderstandings about phenomenology?

Sondra: There is misunderstanding in some ‘pick up’ uses of phenomenology. Those who take it as a quick fix for a study because they come across it as ‘description of experience’ don’t understand the history of phenomenology through philosophy. It isn’t just description of personal experience. Who cares about the purely personal? Well novelists and fiction writers do (sometimes), but phenomenologists as non-fiction detectives don’t. Phenomenologists care about exhuming personal experience in relation to the experience of others. They care about conscience and sociality, nature and community. The tendency of phenomenology is to finally move past the personal and toward shared values. Experiential study in phenomenology is supported by an intellectual history that has branched out into various bodies of knowledge.

Phenomenology is not easy; it is ‘mindboggling’. A nondualistic view of embodiment arises through phenomenology. Bodymind unity is a principle that runs throughout. In many ways, writers in phenomenology explain that body and mind cannot be integrated—as is sometimes claimed in dance and somatic studies—because they are not separate to begin with. This is a hard study, but it is an important one for dance. It will take a long time, I think, to erase the dualistic language of body and mind, body/mind, or even body-mind in the literature on dance and somatics. I am sure many don’t think it is important. I do, and will continue to write about the

problems of dualism. We humans are embodied as one with the world, minded and spirited all at once. We only know ourselves in context of others, embedded in a human and more-than-human world. Perhaps we are too precious about self in the self-focused processes of somatic studies. Our aim should be more comprehensive.

In everyday discourse, we might speak of body, or of mind, but as scholars of the body in motion we understand that mind is embodied in human movement. We do have words that help tease apart and explain some aspects of embodiment. I don't want to beat anyone up on topics of nondualism, since I surprise myself a lot in speaking about the body and the mind as though they were two different things. But at least I catch myself in the act! I know better, and immediately consider what I might say that would convey the same thing without using body/mind cliché. I don't want to reinforce the dualism of a rational mind in control of an obedient body—especially as mind represents the male, and body represents the female in the mythical dualisms underlying everyday language.

We have separate words for body, mind, spirit, and soul in order to voice certain aspects of experience, but that doesn't mean that the mind is the engineer of the body, or that the world of nature and spirit is separate from you and me. Soul may simply be a way to speak about depth of personality and feeling. Being in the world is all-inclusive. Take away the world, and we humans disappear with it. In Japan and China, *ki* is the invisible energy that permeates all things and unites them as one.

Amanda: But people do experience emotional and physical splits, sometimes feeling that the mind or spirit is not in sync with the physical body.

Sondra: Yes, people experience all kinds of attentional splits and feelings of separation. Existence philosophy (existentialism) accounts for experiences that eschew unification. Confusion and separateness are real in felt life. These lived realities are explained by phenomenology as *lived dualisms*, not metaphysical or discrete ones. If we say our 'mind is scattered', or our 'soul is lost', this doesn't mean that separate entities are floating in the air as scattered or lost. Feeling fuzzy, scattered, or lonely is common. In the extreme, lived dualisms may be disorders of the nervous system, such as schizophrenia, or even depressive states. The mind as mental capacity cannot separate from the body, and it cannot control it, because the body has a head, and the minded brain extends throughout the physical body. The brain-mind manifests throughout the body's nervous system that begins with the skin. In a wide sense, the skin touches the skin and breath of everything beyond it.

The mind is not an invisible ghost companion; it is part and parcel of who we are materially, and how we are spiritually. People in mental hospitals have not 'lost their minds'; most likely, they are experiencing illness and loneliness, as physical and mental at once. Phenomenologists, like somatic practitioners, look at people as a whole, not as pathologies. In practicing somatic movement arts (through intuitive dance, somatic yoga, experiential anatomy, and hands-on repatterning), we look toward what is right and how to access this through the whole person.

Amanda: What drew you to passionately and prolifically write about phenomenological traditions in Dance Studies?

Sondra: What a great question. I seldom stop to ask it, and here I am still being drawn in the same direction from my first simple article in 1970. Its thesis still permeates my writing concerning the dialogue between humans and their creative works. We are works in process, shaped by the creative processes we undertake. Or conversely, we may be shaped by fears of failing, and never risk. Failure is just a step along the way toward transformative growth. I still believe that we are incomplete beings in process, as I notice how much my students change in their creative endeavors. Nothing is ever wasted. I like recognizing that spark glowing in everyone that wants to realize more of itself. The way we spend our time, move our thoughts, and dance our dances into being eventually settles into the way we walk and the way we live.

My study and writing takes an existentialist tact in phenomenology because, as a dancer, I'm interested in the psychic, unpredictable edges of experience, and in the poiesis of it all. I continue to learn from all the manifestations of phenomenology however, and I marvel how as a seed, it keeps on accruing more meaning for those who engage it. Phenomenology is such a great gift for dancer-scholars for all the reasons I have mentioned.

Amanda: What are the ethical ramifications for students when phenomenology is taught and becomes a central research paradigm for dance studies students?

Sondra: Another good question, because the study of experience comes into question in academe, although less and less today. The thematic of academe is 'objectivity'. But there is increasingly room for the subjective as well. Otherwise, the arts would be excluded, as would many aspects of the social sciences. How would education proceed at all without acknowledgement of subjective life? Phenomenology is a research paradigm in many fields, as I point out in this issue. Qualitative research includes a variety of phenomenologies as research models or ways of knowing. Unfortunately, 'phenomenology' and 'somatics' are often buzzwords. I think they need to be defined, and writers might locate their particular orientation within the fields of phenomenology, performance, and dance studies.

Writers of qualitative research need to be clear in the design of their study, and to state what can be claimed as outcomes. Is truth a possible outcome in phenomenology? Well, I would say yes, if one is stating the truth of one's experience, and if the truth one claims comes from an intensive search. In the case of dance, I would want to know about what has been discovered through the dance itself and how this connects to wider knowledge beyond the confines of self.

Knowledge comes from varied sources, and we learn in different ways. Some of us are verbally gifted, and some of us learn directly through kinesthetic experience.

Some are musical, and others are scientists. We in dance and somatic studies cross over the arts and move into the physical sciences as well. Some of us like to discern meaning in our work. I'm one of the latter. I never want to forget the beauty of movement fully embodied in great swoops and dives, as also fine flings and shaking. My truth is discovered in movement and dance.

Quantitative research in science held the day for a long time, but quantification through employment of statistics in the physical and social domains is now considered just one way of looking at knowledge, and not the only way. *Researching Dance* (1999), the book I edited on with Penelope Hanstein, takes up both qualitative and quantitative methods. Phenomenology, to be clear, might declare its orientation and admit its limits. But this is the imperative of other research paradigms as well.

I would even say that phenomenology takes a special talent supported through interest in the personal and intrapersonal world, also looking toward the ecological body. We celebrate the study of experience, not narcissistically, but with whole bodies of knowledge to support our searches. I don't think phenomenology is simply inward looking. Human experience occurs in a world of others, and in a more-than-human world that becomes more important all the time. Phenomenology is not navel gazing. Phenomenologists care about the constitution of self relative to others, for example, and they study how community arises in the larger world of nature.

Amanda: Is there a pure phenomenology?

Sondra: Well, if so, that would be the work of Husserl himself. Later phenomenology draws upon him, finally finding its own unique way forward. In psychology, we have examples from the existential psychology of Rollo May to that of Clark Moustakas. In dance, we have those who use Husserl, but interpret him through the lens of movement, aesthetics, and ontology. Sheets Johnstone adds zoology to this. Phenomenology is applied to many fields of inquiry today. Husserl is the root of it all, and to my mind the only purist, but phenomenology would die on the vine if in every effort it tried to replicate his method, which he himself said was never completed.

Amanda: Who are the great phenomenologists who appreciated spirituality and integrated these appreciations into their reflections?

Sondra: Most immediately, I think of Soren Kierkegaard and his brooding but inspiring spirituality, expressed in all of his writing. In *Soul and Form*, George Lucas says of Kierkegaard that his whole life was lived under the sign of one unmistakable gesture (1974: 28-41). I have also loved the mystical Christianity of Gabriel Marcel in *Metaphysical Journal* (1952). From American pragmatic approaches, Paul Tillich wrote his spiritual phenomenology, *The Courage to Be* (1952). Martin Buber, a Jewish existentialist and mystic wrote the classic, *I and Thou* (1958). I return to it often in my understandings of self, other, nature, and spirit.

Questions of spirituality, good and evil, and nobility of the body remained urgent for Nietzsche, especially in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1966). He was the lyrical and poetic philosopher in the background of existentialism, and one of the first literary deconstructionists. Nietzsche is accused of ‘the death of God’, but we cannot forget that in *Joyful Wisdom*, he was lamenting the disintegration of nineteenth century foundational values. God was a symbol of these. Nietzsche was actually lamenting the death of God when he said: ‘Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon?’ (1924: Section 125). He was forerunner of the depth psychology of Carl Jung, and underscored the advent of modern dance via Isadora Duncan and other pioneers. Jung’s work resonates still today in Authentic Movement Practice.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell appreciated Nietzsche. It is so interesting to me how philosophy, mythology, poetry, therapy, and art develop out of many streams that make one river over time. I had the good fortune to take a few seminars with Campbell. He provided me the opportunity to revisit my previous reading of Nietzsche and Jung through his unique mythic vision, and he introduced me to the ‘Great Goddess’ as a transcendent all-embracing feminine divinity of pre-historic cultures. Inspired by Campbell, I write of the return of the Great Goddess in the female authorship and themes of early modern dance (*Dance and the Lived Body*, 1987).

Amanda: Tell us a little about eco-phenomenology and how it supports research into movement somatics?

Sondra: I have been reading an anthology on eco-phenomenology that explains several positions: *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (Brown and Toadvine 2003). Husserl presented ‘back to the things themselves’, as the clarion call of phenomenology. His philosophy of ‘things’ needs explanation. When we define or describe ‘anything’, we look into its ‘thingness’, or that which makes it tick, so to speak. We ask, ‘What is this thing’, as though we didn’t already know. This allows us to explore it for the very first time, even if we already know a lot about it. We therefore suspend our presuppositions about the phenomenon (anything that appears to consciousness). What if the thing I inquire into is teaching, more specifically ‘teaching dance somatically’. I have often inquired into teaching as an unknown phenomenon, because I don’t want to assume in advance that I know how to teach dance somatically.

Amanda: Can you explain more about this Sondra? Then we can move back into the topic of eco-phenomenology.

Sondra: My recent book, *Moving Consciously* (2015), evolved out of phenomenological inquiry into teaching somatically. If I can grasp somatic approaches to teaching dance, yoga, and touch in *tabula rasa thinking*, then I will also be speaking about a somatic style of learning. Moreover, I will be required to define the things I’m speaking of without resorting to extant work. I can’t just talk

about what prominent practitioners teach. At the same time, I want to acknowledge the entire field of somatic movement studies, or what I now call 'Somatic Movement Arts'. Somatics exists in contexts of art when taught with aesthetic outcomes in mind. Somatic narratives and principles remain and overlap, or they wouldn't be 'somatic'. Phenomenology keeps us curious about somatic principles and pedagogy.

It is very interesting to me how one arrives at somatic principles by looking widely past one's own practice. Seeking a clearing, I ask what common threads define anything called somatics? I can't go back to the definition of Thomas Hanna, as many do, or I will just repeat the past. If after digging beneath his definition, I come to agree with it, then I have enriched the search and the definition. If in my search I find something new, I can still build newness in reference to the past, or make a clean break. In editing, *Moving Consciously*, I define somatics in a spiral path throughout in the first three chapters. Other authors add their own discoveries in the subsequent chapters. The layering of perspectives and practices builds an understanding of somatic movement arts that no one of us could achieve alone.

Amanda: Now back to eco-phenomenology.

Sondra: Phenomenology has heart. Why wouldn't it, coming as it does out of a concern for embodiment and human experience? The study of ecology also has heart. But how and why, and how does ecology then connect to somatics and phenomenology? This would effect a connection of ecological science to concerns for intersubjective attunement, a not so far-fetched connection. Objectivity is not the culprit in contemporary concerns for human and more-than-human environments; it is actually the hero. Science shows how we are hurting ourselves in ignoring the environment and separating ourselves from non-human nature. Deep ecology is based on science. In tandem with philosophy and the arts, it shows that we need to proceed with heartfelt connectivity to nature. Then we will want to do something about humanity's heartless exploitation of it, which ultimately hurts human nature in the process. Yes, we are natural animals who share the earth and heavens with all other animals and life forms. We all breathe the same air. Trees are friends of air and earth. They are our friends.

It doesn't take rocket science to understand how somatic principles of paying attention and attuning to nature draws the dancing body close to organic life sources. What if it served dance as an art and dance in educational settings to give up 'mastery' of form in favor of 'discovery' of form? This is a phenomenological question that relates us to 'discovery' as a concept and at the same time accounts for the aspect of form in dance. Soma (psyche-soma) is formless until it is discovered in commitment to actions and experienced as able. Dance somatics as a way of attending to ecological concerns is fascinating. Whole theater works might emerge: dances with wonderful surprising forms, and dances with themes that respect our connections to all of nature. We are part of the life world, and our dances can reflect this. I predict that artists, and dancers as artists, will paint us back into nature as source, envisioning dance and embodiment in the Anthropocene, the epoch that

some geologists say characterize our present state, especially the effect of humans on the environment. Human's in having veered off course, need to turn the ship around. Rescue of nature has been a concern for butoh artists, and remains so, especially through the lead of Atsushi Takenouchi.

Through butoh, as through the ecological phenomenology of philosophers Bruce Wilshire, and David Abrams, I return the earth its due. Abrams' work, *Spell of the Sensuous*, illuminates the affective in nature, including our own (1996). In his book, *Wild Hunger* (1999), Wilshire, studies addictions through his conviction that addictive dependencies stem from emotional deprivation and an inability to access the regenerative sources inherent in nature. He has also written about theater and acting as routes toward human development. We met at a conference on phenomenology, and have remained friends. Part of my growth as a writer has been through meeting like-minded scholars at conferences on philosophy, aesthetics, and phenomenology, not to mention dance, music, and theater.

Amanda: Do you think phenomenology has a spiritual lilt? If so, what would be the debates on spirituality and phenomenology? Where do they meet, diverge...

Sondra: Let me speak first of the human drive for power and security. These figure strongly in Heidegger's existential philosophy, which is very critical of technology and the use of earth as 'resource' for human consumption. It seems we humans need to feel secure. Of course we do. I get this, but should this need drive us to seek power over others and dominion over the earth? I am beginning to move away from the word 'empowerment', even as I know feminism needed it initially. Let us feel confident as women, but also let us live in harmony with others and with the earth. Let us seek to know ethnic diversity. Let us live with love as ethic. Failure to love is not ethical, which doesn't mean we can't separate from destructive relationships. The trick is not to live with hate and resentment. Love is life-giving.

Love is spiritual work that requires self-examination, and sometimes forgiveness of self and others. Let our dances come from an open space of love, in loving movement and each other. Dance is prayer and meditation, not competition. Dance is also fun—ecstatic, dramatic, eidetic, and whatever else we make of it. Phenomenology lends us the perspective of intention. If we carry spiritual intentions into our dances, then they are spiritual.

Phenomenology looks deeply into human involvements with the world and into the limits of ego, seeking the large picture. Heidegger shows the importance of allowing all things to be what they are in essence. *Seinlassen* (letting be) was one of his themes in *Being and Time*, almost a hundred years ago. Now it returns in the guise of allowing all beings in nature their place in nature. Let the natural world flourish by not interfering. Touch with care. Pick up trash. Recycle. This is spiritual work, and it is somatic work.

In somatic dance contexts, similar concepts appear, like teaching people from where they are, and asking noninvasive questions of movers like 'what is available to you now'. For students in movement somatics, not going beyond what is given would be another way of letting be. 'Doing less to feel more' also allows a perceptual shift away from chronic overdrive. Paying attention, as becoming aware of others and ones surroundings in an allowing frame of mind, expresses a similar idea. This is spiritual work.

No everyone is called to work with ideas in philosophical discourse or through the lens of soma-psyche (the underpinnings of perception and kinesis). I understand this. But for those of us who are, the good news is that we have opportunities to explore aspects of human dignity, and to assist the development of dance studies and performance in this regard, shifting previously marginalized environmental concerns to center stage and blazing trails for new collaborations between science and art. This is spiritual work, and it is alive in the work of dancers. In our Eastwest Somatics Winter Conference in Zion, Utah (2015), several dancers presented their ecologically inspired projects and dance works.

As to the other part of your question, I seldom encounter debates between phenomenology and spirituality. Some phenomenologists may ignore spirituality simply because they don't understand it, or their questions don't include it. I don't go directly into questions of spirituality, either. Rather I discover spiritual sensibilities by looking underneath cultural cliché concerning dance and embodiment. Early on in my work this morphed into what I called 'body-of-earth and body-of-culture' in *Dance and the Lived Body*. I didn't think my exploration of dance and body would be complete without explaining nature and culture as complementary aspects of embodiment. Admittedly, there is a spiritual component inherent in the concept of the lived body, which holds that the body is not something we have, but who we are. Body, movement, and dance shine in this view, and along with this, the body of the earth.

Phenomenology sees earth as 'the living earth,' not dead or inert matter. Linguistically, matter comes from *mater, mother*. Of course the earth is alive; it lives in geology and in breath as the entity that bears fruit and holds us. It lives in the wonder of landscape and in the support of our every step and leap. Every microbe of the earth is alive and active in the full orchestra of worlding. Heidegger used this term 'worlding' a lot, and I like it. Everything in the world is part of the worlding of the world. Let our part be supportive of all life, not degrading, heedless, or greedy. Meeting the vibrancy and love of matter is spiritual work. It requires us to make friends with mud and to see the shining beauty of time in the not-so-opulent parts of aging.

Amanda: You are currently publishing a new book on phenomenological traditions within Dance Studies: can you share your book's themes and the perspectives you hope to offer?

Sondra: My article in this Intellect issue inspires the new book. I discovered several kinds of phenomenologies in writing it, and there are more than I'm able to explain now. In anticipation of the new book, I have engaged several authors to write from the various perspectives I articulate in this issue, authors who have already contributed to the development of phenomenology and dance, and some who are emerging into the field. The book's themes are declared, but they could shift because phenomenology is about discovery.

We have a chapter on dance improvisation as phenomenological method, and one on Husserl and dance. Dance, phenomenology, and epistemology come to the fore in one contribution. Another author takes up place, body, dance and film in urban renewal. Eco-improvisation leads another chapter forward. Ecstatic dance and phenomenology of religion appears as a theme. Body, dance, and language are explored in a unique chapter, which is supported by experiential descriptions of dancers. Phenomenology beyond the ordinary makes a pivot toward the super-ordinary in a chapter on dance experiences. So far, my chapter is about living phenomenology. This is not a new theme, but I hope to reinvent it. This perspective opens a clearing where I can learn how to dance all over again, and what this means in my life now.

I hope to write about moving into life and finding center, even when we are off-balance. Enter somatic processes: We can be in the flow of doing and dancing, not seeming to intend anything when our attention is present centered. We carry aims lightly in what we have learned how to do well; these are the learned abilities that transform how we move into life. Life is not always quite so rational and neat, however. In life as in dreams, we sometimes don't get resolution. Dreams teach us how to live with strangeness and difficulty, as does dancing.

Lateral intentionality and mindfulness occur to me as worth exploring, somatically. I don't actually know where I'll land, however. That's phenomenology.

Amanda: You are an American woman in a new century writing in the wake of French and German philosophers from the last century. Most of them were men. You are also a dancer and somatics professor and mentor. How is your work different from the original phenomenologists and from existential philosophy?

Sondra: I could write an article on this, but I'll be brief. I have been aware since the publication of *Dance and the Lived Body* that I would be in uncharted territory in existentialism. I had the feminist example of Simone de Beauvoir, of course, but my voice was going to come through dance, a marginalized art in existentialism and philosophy overall. In phenomenology, I eventually discovered Sheets-Johnstone's work, but my orientation was entirely different.

There was madness in me in the beginning. I wanted to see how a woman in dance could write from experience and give new meaning to the concept of 'the lived body'. In *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, I took other chances, expanding

into ecological themes, and erasing boundaries between philosophy, poetry, and storytelling. Matter, from *mater or mother*, became a new thematic.

My teacher in existential philosophy during my graduate work was Professor Arturo Fallico, author of *Art and Existentialism* (1962). When we studied 'the lived body' through Merleau-Ponty and others in the existentialist movement, I said to Dr. Fallico: 'philosophers use lived body concepts in the other arts, but no one writes about dance'. I still remember what he said to me: 'That's your job Sondra'. Little did I know how seriously I would take his challenge to me.

Unlike existential phenomenology of the last century, my themes are feminist, womanist, aesthetic, and now somatic and ecological. I began to write a body-based philosophy through dance. As I continue to update it with current examples and insights, I realize how it has shaped me, and that I am created in my own voice. The body is the fascinating home for all our dispositions. Spiritual qualities are embodied. We dance and sing them into being.

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