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## MIND MATTERS

### Mind as Portal and Precarity in Somatic Experience

#### Abstract

This essay explains mind and consciousness as somatically embodied in felt states. It further delineates somatic movement experience through breath and uncertainty, arrival, and precarity. *Mind Matters* rejects the notion that body and mind are bridged or somehow connected in movement. Rather they embody synergistically, constantly emerging in co-creation. It is typically supposed that minds think while bodies feel, but this work holds that minds don't just think; they feel while they think and what they think. *Images* arise subjectively in the process, and they speak to the body, thus to soul and spirit. To write about image as a matter of consciousness is to push the boundaries of mind toward individual character, spirit, or *personae*. Images made of words, sounds, shapes, and senses have the opportunity to linger and grow in conscious modes of movement; consequently, the somatic cultivation of mind in movement and the arrival of ethics.

Key Words: Mind, Body, Soul, Spirit, Consciousness, Spinoza, Damasio, Movement, Somatic Experience, Ecosomatics, Ethics, Dance, Neuroscience, Phenomenology

## INTRODUCTION: MIND AS PORTAL

As a precursor to 'Mind Matters', the essay in your hands, I wrote 'Consciousness Matters' (2000) for the millennial issue of *Dance Research Journal*. Twenty-plus years have passed, and I'm still writing and teaching about consciousness as a birthright, now through the portal of mind.

### *My Body is Mind in Movement*

This is how I know myself when I dance,  
not through bones and nerves.

Moving through dusk encircling a yawn in the open window,  
I breathe with love in mind—on most days.

Curious colors of latency squeeze-in  
when I falter and trip.

Bodies want to believe in themselves  
in minds of stability and certainty,  
'but how', the saboteurs whisper,  
'when troubles just stick'?  
(Be still and don't ask, there's more.)

Gasps of wild imagination hesitate,  
halt, and break—  
bodying through the awful bungling.

Bodies waver and weaken, fade in a stutter—  
Fumble and sway—bumbling through.  
Dance precarity, they say, dance lack and not knowing.  
Isn't your life-spark worth it?

Mind as a topic may seem strange for readers more familiar with the body as a favored theme of somatics. Entangled aspects of mind and body, spirit and soul implicate each other in the unity perspective of this essay. These matters connect somatic movement arts to intellectual history through philosophy and neuroscience. The curious potency of these links appears soon, mainly as applied to somatic methods of movement and performance. These links are a matter of mind and an ethical matter for somatic movement arts, as we move and dance with mindful awareness to become more conscious of self in relation to others and alive to the social and environmental world we seek to transform. It is increasingly clear that the embodied mind is bound up in our ethical engagements, as we will explore.

This study of *Mind Matters* builds a generative picture of mind, moving back historically to the unity philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) while inviting the future in the current neuroscience and philosophy of Antonio Damasio (born 1944). The unity perspective of philosophy can be traced in a direct line of thought from the early-modern philosophy of Spinoza in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the current neuroscience and philosophy of Damasio. Unity philosophy holds that unity in the identity of differences is a lived reality. *Mind and feeling belong to each other*, and as embodied through

movement, cannot be separated. However, this doesn't mean that disruptions of consciousness are not real or that corporeality is not precarious.

*Unity* is also a matter of consciousness. It represents oneness in Zen mindfulness and meditation. In Western contexts, unity philosophy is more active, and it conveys nondualism through intra-active complementarities, stabilities, and interruptions. A single cell can divide and multiply into a plurality of possibilities. This study focuses on Damasio's perspective because of his practice-based neuroscience, study of philosophy and psychology, and concerted development of Spinoza's foundational contributions to mind-body unity theories. Damasio's investigation of Spinoza's work unfolds in *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Damasio 2003). Conceptions of emotion and feeling as qualities of mind are unlikely in much Western thought, but not for these researchers. Their significant findings are crucial to somatic studies.

I encounter issues of mind and body in dualist juxtaposition, often in the language of my students and colleagues. A unity perspective holds that body and mind are lived as inseparable attributes of experience. We are not integrating the body and the mind in somatic processes because they are entwined aspects of a single substance, sometimes experienced in stability and often in precarity. We commonly identify the body as physical and mind as mental, but the physical and mental are mutually involved features of embodiment and not juxtaposed. The controlling mind/body trope of 'mind over matter', often used about willpower, results from dualism. This essay envisions the mind as evolving in somatics, not opposite the body, outside, transcendent, or in control. It rejects assumptions of mastery and developmental growth

in movement as an onward march toward power and empowerment. Somatic learning is complex, and life itself moves toward weakness and death. Where is the weak body in somatic studies?<sup>1</sup>

### ***Feelings in Mind***

Alongside Spinoza and Damasio's work, this essay recognizes the unity perspective in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness and imagery early in the twentieth century (1925/2005). Husserl's lifeworld philosophy envisions a lived convergence of body and nature. In *Back to the Dance Itself*, several authors expand lifeworld values and somatic perspectives (Fraleigh (ed.) 2018: 12-26). Lived body concepts of Husserl also spur Maurice Merleau-Ponty's oft-cited books on perception (1962) and perceptual entwinement (1968). *Chiasm (entwinement)* points to the space of perception in the later work of Merleau-Ponty, where the seer is seen, and the knower becomes known, or 'doubled' (1968: 264). The symbiotic play of *chiasm* animates presence, differentiation, and oneness (1968: 214-215). More recently, phenomenology benefits from the example of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's influential work, particularly her article on mind in movement: *Thinking in Movement* (1981).

Through the extensive work of phenomenology and neuroscience, we learn that minds don't just think; they feel while they think as they think in movement. Somatic educators work and play with the connective momentum of mindful embodiment. If this impetus sounds smooth and fluid, it seldom is. As this essay explains, minds develop and potentially flourish in movement and dance, but challenges can reorient any

experience, no matter how well-intended. Thinking and feeling are entangled precariously.

*How can minds feel anything?* As a matter of consciousness and sense, feelings activate movement and awareness and have various thresholds of affectivity and emotional tones, as we explore later with Damasio. Anxious feelings might be the basis for emotions such as fear or shame. Feelings also spur aesthetic expressions and can be opaque and not easy to describe. In somatic education, where individual perception is vital, feeling and emotion exist on sliding scales and ruptures in participants' experiences. Those who have been in a classroom (most of us) might remember the varied and vulnerable atmospheres. What is felt and understood and what it means to individuals is part of the art and fascination of somatic learning.

Most recently, we understand the value of somatic learning for social justice, racial and gender equality, and issues of abuse.<sup>2</sup> Somatic pedagogies can be powerful equalizers as reminders of what humans share, while cultural forces and divisions are also matters of mind and feeling. Struggles for being seen, heard, and belonging fuel minds. Feelings, both positive and negative, guide human awareness and behavior as fundamental to mind and experiences of consciousness.

Indeed, an ethic arises concerning this. Somatic pedagogies ought to advocate for inclusiveness while featuring a variety of cultural perspectives and teachers. Somatic movement and dance practices can be designed and taught for everyone, not just a privileged few. Pedagogies that work across differences of race and cultures suggest practices that cultivate basic human movement, not highly stylized dance forms; still more, they require a shift of consciousness toward the good of everyone, which is an

inherent ethos of unity philosophy. Unity through equality doesn't imply sameness, however. The somatics field faces the challenge of diversifying its topics while providing opportunities for individual development and group work in tandem.

Movement evokes every human emotion. Thus, learning how to attune constructively is important. Corporeal listening can be taught and practiced with patience. Voice and dance improvisations, movement meditations, painting, poetry, and dreamwork are somatic vehicles for a range of emotional expressions. These can engage a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. Group movement in environmental nature is also healing and builds community.

I write for the journal in your hands because I am a long-time teacher, practitioner, and researcher of somatic movement methods and philosophy. In this essay, I seek to connect with somatics-identified readers in delineating mind as embodied and felt in movement. I hope to say more about the implications of this. We don't often define mind in terms of feeling and emotion, but Spinoza and Damasio do, and I do. I appeal to phenomenology for similar reasons. Soon, we take a closer look at these choices.<sup>3</sup>

Spinoza might seem a remote choice, but his work fastens my thesis to a three-hundred-year-old history in the West and recalls even deeper classical roots. Looking back in Greek philosophy, Plato might be a candidate for consideration because of his classical exposition of the tripartite unification of mind, spirit, and soul. Likewise, Aristotle saw *psyche* (soul) as part of the aliveness in everything.<sup>4</sup> Spinoza stands out for his work's somatic ethos, bond with nature, and in-depth elucidation of mindbody unity.

## **PART 1. UNITY PHILOSOPHY AND SOMATICS**

Baruch Spinoza is a philosopher of unity in breaking with his day's theology and Descartes' dualism. Spinoza's lifetime (1632-1677) overlapped that of René Descartes (1596-1650). Spinoza spent most of his short life as an outcast Jew living in The Hague in the Netherlands, while Descartes was one of the most notable intellectual figures of the Dutch Golden Age.

### **After Spinoza**

Following Spinoza's lead, Damasio also refutes Descartes' dualism but updates this through science, explaining through neuroscience and in granular fashion how nervous systems create minds and bodies in tandem. Minds are not invisible entities, and bodies not just material substance (Damasio 2003: 183-217). Damasio's search for crucial elements of consciousness, mind, and feeling led him to Spinoza and the implications of his philosophy for science and psychology in *Looking for Spinoza* (Damasio 2003). Spinoza's earlier discoveries of body-mind unity foreground Damasio's neuroscience and inform his study of psychology and affectivity.

Bodily minded generation of emotions and feelings is the somatic scaffolding for these innovators. They both explain mind and body as *parallel attributes* of the same substance, constantly interacting through movement. Our organism contains a body, a nervous system, and a mind that derives from both (2018: 103). The very plastic brain extends into the nervous system and exists throughout bodily substance as vital to



conscious movement and the life of the mind. Or, we could assert with Damasio: '*No body, never mind*'.

In opposition to Descartes' substance dualism, Spinoza saw movement as a quality of nature and all things human, including the mind. His philosophy posited mind as part of an embodied expression and is consistent with today's discoveries in neuroscience and somatics. Somatic practices have a deep interest in tangible manifestations of mind since mind is qualitatively expressed in movement and dance, through dance in nature, and not least in somatic educational styles.

If you want to see my mind, see how I dance; If you want to read my mind, consider what I write and how I teach. The mind of somatics appears in teaching methods that diminish competition, encourage wellbeing, and support choice and diversity. Rather than teaching movement through command, I often ask students, 'what is available to you now'? Verbs of permission such as wait, play, allow, and breathe foster ease of mind and emotion in movement and are crucial to somatic pedagogy. Hold back, fall, and stumble, provide more texture and opportunities to disrupt habits, and promote unexpected stability (balance) through precarity.

Varieties of emotion permeate the philosophy of Spinoza—one of the first to challenge the mind/body hierarchy and body/soul dualism of Descartes. Spinoza has influenced the history of biblical criticism, literature, and such different twentieth-century thinkers as Freud, Einstein, and Damasio. Contemporary physicists have viewed his monism as a harbinger of twentieth-century field metaphysics. The *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* calls him a leading intellectual forebear of twentieth-century mind-body identity theory (Audi 1995: 759-763).

As concerns somatic studies, Spinoza identifies mind and body as continuous, and the emotions as part of this unity. Could he live in our time, he would encounter the post-metaphysics of Giles Deleuze and others who write of a necessary corporeal precarity inherent to an understanding of human nature(s). Spinoza's contribution seized upon the importance of intrinsic connection, how the whole supersedes its parts. Deleuze's rhizome philosophy viewed such connectivity through PoC, planes of continuity/consistency that spread out, not only with upward momentum but more like vines (1987). The propositions of Part III of Spinoza's *Ethics* contain forty-eight definitions of feelings and emotions: pleasure, pain, desire, love, benevolence, hatred, fear, joy, sorrow, hope, disappointment, humility, anger, pride, shame, cruelty, and further on into the psychological terrain that propels his work.

Spinoza's emphasis on emotion represents a departure from much of philosophy in the West, arising almost exclusively through white male texts, which have had difficulty admitting body, feeling, and emotion as serious subjects. Such texts focus on the primacy of mind through the intellect—setting mind and reasoning apart from body and feeling while degrading the latter. We are not supposed to have bodies and feelings; they are bad actors, animals, untrustworthy, nonrational, and too emotional, as are women and non-whites. Issues of equality are entwined with the diminishment of body and emotion.

The *yin/yang* bifurcations of Asian philosophy also represent the *body is yin*, as female, earthly, fleshy, and dark, while the mind is light and *yang*, masculine, and intellectual. Issues of gender and race relative to body and nature are prejudicial and consequential in myths across cultures, as I study in works revaluing darkness (1999,

2004, 2010). In a similar vein, Williamson and Sellers-Young rescue woman's positive relationship to nature through dance in *Spiritual Herstories* (2020).

Spinoza's unity views run counter to metaphysical and mythological dichotomies. Human feeling is part of the flowing seamlessness of life for Spinoza. And to be a body—to have life—is to be a part of God. Spinoza saw God, nature, and humans inclusively (*Spinoza: Selections*, 1958: 384-385), which alienated him from both the synagogue and the church. To view the sacred as immanent and inmost rather than most other in Spinoza's day was heresy. In his articulation of the emotional core of life, we might say Spinoza has a great deal to teach about *soma*—our human and historical body—including his concern for affective life—why feeling minds and consciousness matter.

### **Toward Damasio and Extended Consciousness**

Damasio extends Spinoza's accounts of emotion toward narratives of consciousness and self, delineating autobiographical levels of self in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (Damasio 1999). Unlike the primordial account of soma, or the simple representation of organic states involved in self-perception, the autobiographical self can narrate complex structures. This is the fully conscious self we usually address in somatic practices, developmentally and therapeutically. The autobiographical self elaborates implicit memory and changes continuously with new life experiences and complexities of feeling.

Consciousness is not a small book in the head. It is the birthright of living things. Consciousness exists throughout the body in movement and related feelings, especially

keen in purposefully directed movement. Motor functions, speech, and consciousness relate to movement and its felt basis in tactility. Bones are immersed in feelings of movement, always, and thus have both an organic and cultural history; how our ancestors lived modeled our bones and the neural structures of our present brains. We learn through somatic education that movement is mapped in consciousness and is developmental; how we feel when we dance matters; ways of practicing all of the arts matter. Practices influence aesthetic (affective and felt) consciousness. Indeed, we expand consciousness through use, and we activate awareness when we move consciously. Consciousness can signal wakefulness and marks deliberateness, intentionality, mindfulness, feeling, learning, and emotion.

How we feel when we move is developmentally potent, potentially positive or negative, or somewhere in between. Damasio explains that we build perceptual complexity in layers of feeling, self-knowing and subject-object relations that arise somatically from a 'proto-self' toward a core self and finally develop into extended consciousness and memory. He creates a ladder, but not one of surety. One can fall off. Self-knowing and subject-object relations implicate soma: 'Often the notion that *soma* conjures up is narrower than it should be' (1999: 149). Damasio teaches about soma through the 'proto-self'. This somatic biologic layer of life is not available to consciousness or capable of control. It is, however, the basis for feeling and thus of consciousness (1999:172). Damasio explains that consciousness is not localized in the brain; it is global and organismic. *We are conscious throughout the body, not in one part*. Phenomenology, like Damasio, teaches that consciousness has content. We can be aware of pain and notice it; we feel joy and relief and name them. We make choices

and can improvise in risky terrain to notice difficulty and give it form. Learning often happens in nonlinear paths. We split and seam experiences in memory and imagination.

Damasio further argues in a recent work (2018) that feelings are nature's evolutionary processes for preserving life and making human cultures. Feelings tell us what we care about and motivate human creativity in all walks of life. Conscious awareness of feeling connects us to the objective, tangible world. This is the world of touch that also touches us. Change in subject-object relations activates *somatosensory* felt life (2018: 80,169). *This is through movement and touch*. Movement and touch are necessarily part and party to consciousness; however, we can be more or less conscious of our movements and generally take touch for granted. We practice somatic modes of movement and touch to become more aware of self and alive to the social and environmental world we hope to transform together. Moving/dancing consciously and developing tactile, kinesthetic awareness are vital purposes of somatic movement education (Fraleigh, ed. 2015).

Consciousness is a great synthesizer, and the psychophysical mind energizes it. Motor adjustments and felt emotional responses to these 'are all coregistered in memory' (1999: 148-149). The '*felt* core self' renews and learns through outside influences and the brain's memory stores. The result of this learning, Damasio writes, is the development of autobiographical memory, an accumulative memory of who we are and can be (1999: 172-173). *Extended consciousness* (1999, 2010, 2018) is at the apex of Damasio's account. This highly discriminating level develops close interaction among feelings and outside happenings.

In the somatosensory feelings of work, art, therapy, and play, extended consciousness responds to practice, particularly in somatic movement arts. Repatterning classes bring awareness to movement structures; experiential anatomy focuses on organic function; somatic yoga and somatically conceived dance improvisations encourage curiosity and precarity as they flow and stutter in consciousness. Ecological site-specific performances draw upon oxygen and nature's healing properties. Tactile-kinesthetic awareness through fine-tuned touch techniques extends corporeality toward others and the world, admitting feelings of pain and trauma. Values of care sustain such extensions of attention. These practices develop the embodied mind and extended affective consciousness.

## **PART 2. MIND SPACE**

Philosophies of mind fill library shelves, but they seldom speak of mind as embodied (existing throughout an intra-active whole). One of my students asked me to define mind in my way, and I believed it worth a try, having spent my career defining body and in love with mind, first in *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987) and later in more personal work, *Dancing identity* (2004). Writing quickly into mind space, I connected to my studies of nondualism (unity) in philosophy, neuroscience, and phenomenology. My first thought was to link mind and consciousness. My second was to seek an escape from the snares of mind through what Giles Deleuze calls 'lines of flight'.<sup>5</sup>

*Mind takes flight from consciousness. At the same time, it lingers and grows, or else it fades and sometimes falters. Mind is mental, physical, and psychical by way of feeling, change, and imagination. Consciousness is a synthesizer, and the mind is its*

music. Minds couldn't exist without consciousness and feelings. I feel good, glad, sad, gloomy, or grumpy because I can interpret my feelings and say what possible meanings they hold for me. I can do this through the integrative faculty of wakeful embodied consciousness and the boundless realizations and interpretations of the mind. To my mind, the mind is big—bigger than the head—even as it changes shapes and timings, morphing through felt qualities and emotions in tandem with the ever-malleable conscious body.

Movement shifts the mind and, therefore, the 'self'. Would this be the separate self we assume is ours alone? I notice that the self is an obsession in somatics and not a good one. As I noted earlier, Somatics inherited its self-focus from Hanna, and I want to decenter this outmoded definition of soma. A phenomenologist would say there is no such thing as the self, since we are always incorporating others from birth on, and we are part of the world around us. Any way of speaking about our relationship to the environment would have to account for our being a part of it. The tendency to put ourselves at the center is a problem I have been aware of since my study of *butoh*. As a form of dance theater and therapy beginning in Japan after World War II, *butoh* decenters the self. The morphing nature of *butoh* makes it difficult to locate a solid bodyself. Instead *butoh* dancers dissolve the self and enter into a state of *ma* or 'the space between' in Japanese. In the West, we call this space 'liminality'.

Psychophysical felt states move the mind, but minds carry on past the moment of movement—both in general and specifically. The human mind connects to the past and carries the present into a precarious future. Minds have memories quelled or fueled through bodily states—uplifting states sometimes, or states of fear and loss. Minds also

carry intuitive faculties; they can see past what is in front of them, partly through broad experiential associations and informed guesses. Hopefully, they motivate their owners to care for others. Feeling minds can do this. Feelings imbue minds with a conscience. When hurt, guilt and anxiety cross our minds, would we not spare others the same?

## **Matching**

Because minds can feel hurt, they know other minds can also hurt. In many ways, minds match each other. Minds agree somatically through feelings, both empathetic and aesthetic. *Somatic matching* provides perceptual opportunities for attuning with others in nature: walking and dancing together, witnessing, observing, and feeling with others—breathing with trees, matching their minds, and perhaps even changing our own minds.

As one of its primary methods, phenomenology asks into the content and workings of consciousness. Minds couldn't exist without consciousness and feelings, nor could bodies, nor could the minded body exist in isolation from the world. Minds and bodies interact with the world's curiosities; minds and bodies match and tango as one—sometimes in staccato, seldom with stability, and often trembling. I feel glad or sad, gloomy or troubled because I can interpret my feelings and say what meanings they hold for me, and I can do this through the faculty of wakeful embodied consciousness and the boundless realizations of mind.

*Minds match selves to others and environments* unconsciously and naturally. Minds can associate and notice subtle nonverbal attunements through conscious practice. Through the associative faculty of mind, consciousness also roams—as Carl Jung showed in his work with Active Imagination. Damasio helps me understand how



matching happens. I learn through his work that *consciousness is global, organismic, and connective*, existing throughout the body and connecting us to the world writ large. Consciousness is a birthright we all possess, a global capacity for awareness, association, and assimilation in reciprocity with the mind.<sup>6</sup> When I attempt to match the mind of others, I listen through movement, gesture, and words; assimilate them, and expand my consciousness through empathy and association.

## **Images**

What is being assimilated and associated in consciousness? What is the content? In Damasio's schema, *images* are the subject matter of consciousness. Like a graphic artist or somatic witness, Damasio understands that images narrate conscious content, the things we perceive and assemble in thought and expression. Consciousness first arises through perception, as phenomenology teaches, and thus is alive with imagistic sensate content. Perceptual processes seed vivid impressions, or images of sense experience and knowledge. Such images accrue further corporeal content through somatic approaches and have a lot to say and activate. In assimilation of felt sense and image, minds can roam and ruminate like horses grazing in meadows. Minds flow through dreams, defining their owners to themselves and perhaps influencing others—the narrations of the mind flow in mutuality with bodily lived consciousness.

Embodied minds outlive their constantly discarded skins, but they carry visible fleshiness and the weight of bone and time as manifested. Imaginative minds have hands and feet to take them onto the stage and fingers to touch virtual powers of computer interfaces. Minds listen to many images constituted through sense perception

and sentient powers of embodiment. Thus, minds hear and see in parts and wholes. They can also extend outward through consciously performed movement, art, and smart technologies, primal and electronic. People are sometimes characterized through mind as dull or sharp, laid back, fun or practical, angry, cruel, calm, compassionate, spiritual, soulful, and much more. And minds learn. Minds learn to identify: listen, match, and absorb. In desperation, they might even dissociate. Would mindful association as a form of matching be helpful then?

When I dance in ensemble or concert with others, I sense their presence in qualities of movement and character. How we dance together is the goal as we listen through movement. This involves matching the moment of movement in continuity with place, whether in a studio, on stage, or in windy desert sands. These conditions of environment and place all produce impressions or images of their own that remain in mind after the dance is gone. When activations wane, memory replaces the present with more images in association.

### **Seemingly Beautiful Bodies**

That said, what is a body? For one thing, a body is a visible entity, and bodies can also see outside themselves because they have eyes and senses. Minds are also visual in myriad expressions, including dance and games; they have eyes and are capable of intuition through the proverbial mind's eye and in visions. Minds have a presence—expressed in the tenor and tone of the body. Minds are in the likeness of bodies, even as beautiful minds don't require typically beautiful, able bodies, whatever the style or standard. Somewhere there is a beautiful mending likeness. Bodies and minds need

each other; one cannot exist without the other. The body is not merely a visible container. It thinks in gestures and feelings and is alive with mind.

Body and mind are co-present, thinking and feeling together in movement and sense. In the flow of dance, they move as one, even when faltering. Movement becomes intelligent when polished with attention in everyday activities or aesthetic events. Witnesses might notice that dance moves from intelligence to stumbling in the blink of an eye, as does everyday movement. I like to watch people walk, not to judge, but to appreciate the many ways of walking. There is mind at play in walking—motor intelligence, the beauty and pathos of emergent steps, and perchance dogged determination, or shyness glancing off.

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Body and mind are two different words in our language, so we ought to be able to differentiate. On the surface and most commonly, we do; but I identify them somatically as entwined and study how through sway and involvement, they create each other. We often attribute qualities separately, however, and cite them knowing they are mere words. Minds, we say, can think; they have cognitive abilities, as they accrue knowledge. But they can't do any of this without embodied nervous systems, brains, and the gifts and cultivations of lively consciousness.

The body has a brain and head, and there is no barrier or seam between the body and the head, the body and the mind. Typical dual views hold that the body is physical material and the mind is psychological, invisible, and transcendent. I hear that minds are in space and bodies are physically present material objects; that we have bodies, and we have minds, and they need to be bridged, connected, or integrated. But

do thoughts and thinking not have a bodily-lived physical basis, and the material and mental not reveal each other? Yes, they do. Experientially, however, we speak of ruptures, being distracted or even distant—of not being 'in' our bodies. This would be a phenomenological or *lived dualism* and not a metaphysical split. For instance, this morning I was easily transported by a pot of crimson pansies fluttering face up on my back porch. I didn't leave my body, my mind, or the porch, though I did speed my gaze toward the flowers and the feeling of dew on my eyelids.

### **Losing my body**

I can never lose my body, even when I lose my way, nor can I leave my body. How can I not be 'in my body'? To be 'out of body' is a handy expression for personal loss. Something seems missing—maybe concentration and meaningful connection to others or one's environment. Perhaps this seeming loss of body indicates pain and numbness. Somatic memes speak about disembodied people. No one alive is disembodied. No one can lose their body or be out of their body, except metaphorically. In any case, aliveness is not about *having* a body. With phenomenology, I say, 'I am my body'. I can have a loss of feeling, but this is not disembodiment. It is a loss of sensation or meaningful relationship and can be understood and addressed as such. Therapists and teachers might address someone's 'out of body' experience, or understand out-of-body as an altered state. The approach of phenomenology would be hermeneutic in detecting meanings of experience and describing them. Somatic teachers and therapists might ask into the sense of leaving or losing the body as expressions of existential loss or traumatic numbness.

### **Do thoughts get beyond the body?**

Or how do thoughts get beyond the skin? Perhaps in being expressed, thoughts of individuals move out toward others and the outside world. My thoughts or yours might linger on in the lives of others: in written work, in learning together, in music and dance, or anything communicative by nature. Such thought forms are the express extension of the mind. The ability to think animates communication and creativity. This doesn't imply that minds exist in space and need to be integrated with bodies. In action, the physical and mental are co-present. Dance and writing, math, sculpture, cooking, and other material things exercise the human mind. The creative, communicative capacities of the mind represent its effulgent powers and embodied source. The mind does not live in an invisible space outside the body, and body is more than mute physical substance. If the mind transcends, it doesn't escape the convergence of body and world; it moves with the inmost body and catches up with the world. World and earth are already far beyond us, but not outside our felt existence. The human body thinks as the mind does, atonally sometimes and upside down at others, worlding precariously.

### **Losing my mind**

Can I split into pieces? Does my mind exist outside of my body, rendering me physical substance and minded distance? A phenomenologist would turn these questions toward experience, since human beings have experiential disconnects and dualisms of all kinds. Sometimes people say, 'I feel split', which is an expression of experience not a split of material substance.

Moreover, separating is essential to science, where objective contrasts in consciousness can be a good thing. Dualisms are not all the same. To see oneself as two or more selves is not so uncommon. I know I have selves that show up differently according to circumstance, and I'm not speaking about being dishonest or the pathology of multiple personalities. I know whatever self appears will change and morph and that underneath circumstantial appearance, I am a continuous self. I can divide in consciousness, image, and experience because I am one and a plurality.

### **Do I have a soul?**

Soul is a word that moves me. I understand it as a variable, poetic and remarkable quality of being that we all have if we claim it. For today, intensity of feeling is soul for me, and dancing is soul-singing. Soul is generative; it reveals character and expressivity. I experience this especially in longing for something larger than my 'self'. Might this longing be what I most want to develop in my nature? An intrinsic unnamable quality? A snare? A habit?

Special places and people connect me to soul as homecoming and belonging. For today, my soul is here where I am. Here where you are. Aretha Franklin was crowned the "queen of soul." Her voice was her soul-home and crowning glory. Might we consider the soul an inborn talent or even a sense of morality and gift? I have a soul and soulful doings and longings that I sometimes claim. These are mine and cannot be permanently lost. My soul can never be lost, except I cease to care for myself, and in this case, it is simply in hiding, not split off from my body.

Soul never leaves me, but I can be more or less aware of soulful emotions and influences in my life. *My soul* is mine and is as constant as my mind. Soul is a quality of my nature and character. As belonging to my nature, my soul is individual, just as yours is. Yet, it connects me far beyond what I call 'self'. It connects me to those I love, to special places, and cannot be separated or stolen from me. I think it can be touched, however, especially in dancing: dancing is soul work.

Nature and soul are qualifiers, words in the English language that have attained meaning in many contexts. They are full of meaning for me. I further know that my little dog has a soul. With her and others I love, my soul calms down. We communicate through our eyes and the feeling tones of our compatible natures.

### **Do I have a spirit?**

*Spirit* never leaves me, and when I dance, it rises. If I don't always call spirituality to attention, it is nevertheless present, reminding me of more significant matters than meet the eye. As my mentor, Ohno Kazuo-sensei, taught, 'you are not the be-all and end-all of life'. Thus, I see myself as simply a dancer participant living with hope. Like Kazuo-sensei, I keep dancing into old age to summon spirit as moral strength. Responsibility for others doesn't diminish with old age. Duties seem to pile up, and the strength I need to meet the challenge is not simply physical—it is spiritual. There are religious traditions that teach spirit as a precious essence, but my experience of spirit is more actively personal. I don't sense or understand spirit as a spectral essence, something separate hovering around my body or inside that can be tarnished by guilt and shame.

Imagination is powerful in experience. I imagine spirit as a shining quality of experience and see that all kinds of beings shine—including more-than-human beings—shining even in their dimming, dying, and regeneration.

### **Does a Body Listen?**

Doing somatic phenomenology is about listening wordlessly to the body through the body. This almost impossible feat entails listening to experience in all its precarity of mind, feeling, and image. Phenomenology further asks experience to speak underneath habit and bias. Perhaps experience speaks through felt images of sense perception, as Damasio teaches. Damasio's work shows that images narrate directly to the human organism, while an all-inclusive body consciousness maps and reads imagistic events relative to mind and feeling (Damasio 2018: Chapter 5). Phenomenology through Merleau-Ponty and others teaches that we *entwine* self and world through embodied listening and understanding. Eventually, we might find words for such understanding. Glen Mazis writes about this from various perspectives in *Merleau-Ponty and the Face of the World* (2016).

Listening to embodied images is an attractive idea for somatic work. Mapping/reading images is essential for dance/art relational processes in somatic work. We who work with somatic paradigms know that the body thinks, speaks, and listens to experience. Sheets-Johnstone writes brilliantly about how the body thinks in movement (1981), not in words but nonverbally. Language is just one medium of thought. In my attempts to bring movement to language, I find they don't always match.



## **How Touch Listens**

Images can narrate in nonverbal ways, *directly through dance, movement, and tactile-kinesthetic contact*. For instance, through touch, tactile-kinesthetic images in somatic hands-on education narrate directly to the organism (the nervous system and whole-body consciousness). When I use contact through finely-tuned touch techniques in restorative somatic work, I invite and listen to the other's body. This mindful process opens a space between myself and another as movement and sense images build a story or impression. Sometimes the outcome is literal and verbal, and sometimes it remains unstated. I trust that paths of listening and activation will arise between us.

My hands have learned how to listen to body narratives, and these don't come in the form of words, even if they are telling. I listen to what images say in their narrations of experience and feeling. Good and hurtful feelings both find their way out. Somatic touch (restorative touch through movement) is a mindful conversation without words. Listening is paramount as a nonjudgmental part of tactile conversations. Accordingly, I practice not advising in verbal summaries of hands-on sessions with clients. Instead, as a somatic teacher and guide, I find it better to discuss options. Students and clients can find their own solutions when they are heard.

## **Homeostasis**

Homeostasis is originally a term from physical sciences, but lately, it takes on affective psycho-somatic significance in neuroscience and somatic movement modalities. When I teach yoga somatically, I orient homeward. This means that I assist others in experiencing the power of moving consciously and without stress to find the ease of

relaxed at-homeness, and we model this for each other in our easy yoga. Lowering tensions of overwork and achievement, evaluating and transforming feelings of hate and anger, developing feelings of ease in relationships, and expressing strength and power with love: all engender homeostasis (hom-e-o-stasis).

In a fit of inspiration, I composed a piece of music dedicated to Damasio through his somatic view of homeostasis. I call the work *Tonic Flow for Damasio* because homeostasis suggests the tensional arrival of music back to its tonic key. This would be C in the key of C, or D (for Damasio) in D, a home base of resolution and comfort. These are lived qualities of embodied sound and movement, and we can match them in consciousness.

Qualia of friendliness, trust, and generosity tend toward homing, grounding directions. Optimally, homeostasis expresses itself in wellbeing and joy. Damasio's work describes homeostasis as a state of 'health'. Also, it presents the negative: 'The stress associated with sadness is caused by calling into action the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland and releasing molecules whose consequence is reducing homeostasis and actually damaging countless body parts such as blood vessels muscular structures' (2018: 198). Are we to avoid sadness then? That would certainly be a tall order. Sad moments and times are inevitable in life, and paradoxically they also implicate homeostasis. Would we deny the right to be sad or to grieve? Or dismiss human potentials for transformative change? In hopes of flourishing, somatic processes are trustful; they breathe easily and can flutter and wait.

## **The Arrival of Ethics**

In the introduction, we said that somatic experience emerges through the interaction of the cultural mind with ethical/ecological potentials. The embodied mind is already bound up in our affective feelings and ethical engagements. By definition, somatic movement arts develop an ethos of care at their moral center. Such care begins with the body and extends toward community. In global terms, *soma writ large* intersects with science, including the science of climate change and its planetary implications. Looking toward governing policies, ecological ethics, and our part in these, we observe that autocratic regimes care more about power than protecting human lives and environmental nature. Our somatic part is to witness, warn, and work toward the good of all.

Somatic processes carry affective dialogue and hold implicit ecosomatic politics. We can pay attention (listen) to these and advocate for ethical-political actions that affect social and environmental change. Audrey Ellis puts this well: “Dancing does not bracket the body from social, cultural, and ideological forces, but rather registers these forces as corporeal and experiments with the tensions and pressures they create.” (2021: 112). As elicited in dance, feelings are powerful motivators; we have only begun to learn how to harness such innate sources toward social transformation. An intrinsic (felt) somatic ethic appeals to fairness in regard to race, age, and ability.<sup>7</sup> We know suffering because we feel it somatically in our bones and minds. Our responsibility to each other and the earth appeals to collective matters of mind.

*Ethics are mind matters of life and breath: possibilities of healing arriving through homeostasis amid precarity.* These are somatic issues of experience already charged with meaning. As concerns our present actions, the future is already here. The flourishing of all people and planetary health is a somatic issue. Merleau-Ponty says this

is what it means to be in a field: a 'belonging' defines the field for us (1945/1962: 4). The somatic field is defined in our human belong to the earth, each other, and all life. Its ethos is not built in major or minor modes but in music that spreads laterally out and spirals beyond the limits of self.

*Mind is Here*

matching the body's example,  
 not an insignificant stitch  
 in the social fabric.  
 Thru hands for touch  
 eyes for distance  
 and lungs for breath,  
 say yes to your exceptional body,  
 perchance in consent with paradox...  
 yes to the flourishing of earth  
 in the earth of every soma.  
 Yes, through and through.

**STORYBOARD**

The following storyboard is not exhaustive. It includes process ideas that arose in the writing. Readers might add their insights since this essay aims to stimulate further work and not to suggest closure.

### ***About Consciousness and Images***

Consciousness has content. Consciousness is integrative.

Images energize consciousness.

Images narrate, push and seize

Images are both nonverbal and verbal. Images move and change.

Images arise through sense and perception.

Images are sometimes visual, but not always.

Consciousness integrates and maps images.

Consciousness matters and expands through use.

### ***About Unity***

Movement and feeling are inseparable.

Somatic arts work creatively with images. Somatic arts work with images through restorative touch.

Feelings have positive and negative valences.

Good feelings tend toward states of wellbeing.

Good feelings can elicit states of flourishing. Feelings are tidal.

Bad and good feelings are subject to change.

Movement and body are inseparable.

Body and mind are inseparable.

Soma and psyche are inseparable.

Movement is a quality of nature. Feelings motivate movement.

Qualities of mind are felt and moved in dance.

### ***About Intention and Awareness***

Intention makes a difference in life and learning.

Presence with awareness can be cultivated.

Mindful consciousness is more potent than willfulness. Thoughts are just thoughts until we examine them.

Movement is just movement until we become conscious of it.

### ***About Healing***

Healing is possible. Healing is ubiquitous.

Intention aids healing.

Healing is rich with imagery. We can heal through intrinsically motivated dance.

### ***About Homeostasis***

The body self-regulates toward homeostasis.

In health, the embodied mind wants the best for itself.

Feeling states aid or hinder homeostasis in healing.  
Happiness and sadness are valences of movement.

Happiness and sadness are bodily-lived states of being.  
Somatic states of being affect wellbeing.

### ***About Movement and Embodiment***

Movement can be a source of knowledge and healing.

Moving from deep states of awareness can excavate painful memories.

In admitting pain, the body can listen and allow pain a way out.

We can detoxify painful memories through dance and movement.

We can transform painful memories through somatic bodywork.

We can chart metamorphic paths of change through movement.

Somatic movement practices can link self to others and the world.

### ***About Nature***

Humans are part of nature and change.

Attitudes to the body and movement impact nature and culture, or call this natureculture.

Bonding with nature through dance and movement can be healing.

### ***About the Brain and Nervous System***

The nervous system influences the whole body.

The human nervous system is marvelously complex.

The brain is adaptive and part of the body.

The brain relates mental and physical capacities. Non-human animals also have marvelous nervous systems.

### ***About Hands-on Therapies***

Somatic bodywork is a conversation without words  
Imagistic content of touch has somatic valence.

Good and hurtful feelings both converse.

### ***About Choice, Change, and Culture***

We can exercise our powers of choice in movement. We can exercise powers of choice in somatic practices.

Emotions are not bad actors but guides to the future.  
Feeling and emotion motivate cultural creativity.

Somatic processes can reframe cultural conditions for wellbeing.

The flourishing of all people is a somatic issue.

*After Spinoza*

through Damasio

to mind space

where no movement is never feeling

somatic processes can flutter and wait...

while images narrate to the organism

through the mind as portal... the body listens.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The founder of Butoh, Hijikata Tatsumi, danced what he called 'the weak body'. Butoh arose in Japan in the aftermath of World War II as a protest form of dance with empathic antiwar undercurrents.

<sup>2</sup> Social Justice was a major theme of ISMETA's international conference of 2021: 'Engaging Embodiment: Somatic Applications for Health, Education and Social Justice'.

<sup>3</sup> I concentrate much of this essay on the unity philosophy and neuroscience of Damasio. I might have chosen other leading experts on neuroscience. For instance, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (2015) writes about the implication of affective neuroscience for education, also a somatic theme I engage, and Howard Gardner studies educational virtues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2011). *The Embodied Mind* (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1993) presents work closely related to my topic of *consciousness*, but I follow Damasio for his pragmatic synthesis of science, psychology, and philosophy. His work also develops a philosophy consistent with somatic studies and phenomenology. Neurophenomenology arises in his concentration on experience and feeling and his refutation of body-mind dualism.

<sup>4</sup> See Catherine E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Aesthetics*, 1972, pp. 62-64.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Lines of flight' is developed as a major poststructural theme of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Damasio argues that we are conscious throughout the body, not in one part, and he speaks of this unity metaphorically as the 'hidden orchestra'. See, *The Strange Order of Things*, 2018, pp. 79-80, 174-189.

<sup>7</sup> I write extensively about ethics of fairness in a recent article, 'What are Feelings For? Toward a Somatic Ethos of Fairness' in *Somatics Magazine/Journal of the Mind Body Arts and Sciences*, in press.