

Somatic Writing:
a collection of articles, nonfiction and poetry on the body in motion

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Abstract:

This is a PhD by publication based on previously published books and shorter works of poetry, non-fiction, and short fiction. These somatic writings express the relationship between language and the body in ways that encourage readers to reconnect with their own body. My approach to writing is full bodied and draws from an awareness of the many layers of bodily experience, from proprioception, kinaesthesia, interoception, and imaginal and liminal states derived from dance, specifically Contact Improvisation, meditation, Process Work, and other somatic modalities. Working phenomenologically from a lived experience of the body through first-person sensory perception, the central method applied, resulted in breaking with traditional conventions of writing.

Reflections include looking at early influences of scoliosis and asthma; writers such as Gertrude Stein, Charles Olson, Helene Cixous, George Quasha, and Italo Calvino; dancers Carmen Beuchat and Deborah Hay; somatic modalities such as Authentic Movement, Continuum, butoh; and somatic and education theorists such as Don Hanlon Johnson, Sondra Fraleigh, Yuasa Yasuo, Amanda Williamson, Martha Eddy, Arnold Mindell, Howard Gardner, Kazuaki Tanahashi, and others.

Areas of investigation include consciousness, liminality, imagination, and embodied spirituality which position somatic writing techniques as being not only an integrative reflective tool but recognizing language and movement of equal and necessary importance. The notion that deep bodily experience can not be captured in words is challenged by a developed somatic intelligence wrought by a nimble attentiveness to combining the languages of writing and movement.

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I thank my parents for their ongoing support.

I thank my husband, Don, who urged me as always to follow my dream.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed:

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Preface

This section covers some of the early personal, medical, and academic experiences that laid the foundation for my work in writing and movement and reasons for combining them.

Breathing

I arrived into this world asthmatic. The first attack landed me in the hospital at three months old, a second one took place several months later. By the third one in which my skin turned blue and my parents feared losing me, they accepted the doctor's recommendation that I receive weekly shots. Years of injections formed swells and hollows on my arms as if whatever they were putting into my body was also eating my flesh.

I never fought the injections. Writing about my early experience in *Teachers and Writers* (37)¹, I say,

In those early years, glad that no scream or cry erupted from my mouth, the doctor rewarded me with a pick of flavored lollipops. My hand would drive into the pool of sweetly colored candies for my favorite, root beer, and if that were missing, then grape. The licking began immediately, before we got into the car and before the receptionist filled out a card with the date of our next appointment. By far though, my preferred reward was my mom taking me to the library several blocks from the allergist to choose not one, but several books. Every week, my tender arms carried home a prized stack of

¹ When referencing my own work, I will mention page numbers when appropriate and exclude dates. My work will be listed in a section within the body of this thesis and in the Bibliography.

books to sit on my night table and keep me awake late in the evening and in bed on weekend mornings when my brothers had already rushed out the door to play.

Ample reading supported the development of my imagination so when my fourth grade teacher assigned us to write a story, mine poured out, a fictionalized tale of traveling to Austria. I was stunned when fellow students believed my tale and urged me to write and share more. Their reaction contributed to me creating a notebook of stories, poems, and reflections, some of which got published in the school journal.

My active, healthy imagination did not coincide with a healthy body, not that it seemed to matter. A dehumidifier in my bedroom, propped up pillows for sleeping with proper bronchiole drainage, wheezing, chest pain while breathing, pills, and shots were common accouterments like towels, a bed, and eating meals with the family. It's hard to question or complain about what's been with you since as long as you remember. When the worst symptoms of asthma subsided at 15 years old, I suggested stopping the shots altogether. The doctor warned against the idea as too dangerous, but my mom backed me for a trial run. The trial succeeded with no need to resume them in all the years that have passed since.

Spinal Structure

Although asthma impeded some of my activities like running at length through the woods or jumping into a pile of Autumn leaves, its potential to cut my life short never occurred to me since I suffered no attacks since receiving shots. It wasn't until attending my first dance classes in college that I realized how depth and quality of breath impacted movement, investigations that

would be pursued later and feed into my first nonfiction book, *Contact Improvisation: an Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form*. More disruptive was a diagnosis of scoliosis at 13 during a physical exam prior to entering high school. The family doctor noticed my uneven shoulders and curved back, x-rays and a specialist confirming what the initial doctor's eye detected. "Pain will be with you for life," he pronounced before explaining that if the curvature got worse, I would need to wear a metal brace and, worse case scenario, a full torso cast, possibilities I ruled would never take place. He discouraged me from taking gym or dance classes and participating in sports. I received the label of "disabled" which entitled me to certain medical services from the state.

It's one thing to manage the bumps of puberty with wanting to fit in with fellow students, quite another if it includes wearing a hideous metal contraption. The specter of possibly wearing a brace scared me enough to slip my body immediately into an invisible one to insure against ever having to wear the metal version. A physical therapist showed me how to lift a shoulder to even it out to match it to the other and provided exercises to strengthen the muscles in my back. I sat, walked, stood, turned and bent as if metal rods inhibited my movements. Teachers informed about my diagnosis reminded me to straighten and sit up if they caught me slumping at my desk. The pain, which had been mild initially, got worse, as if a hard unforgiving object was pressing into my back.

I considered myself fortunate. Follow up appointments with the doctor over the next few years showed my curvature not getting worse although spasms, momentary paralysis, and pain increased. In my mind this was a success. My rigid posture was working at avoiding the monstrous appliance, but I hadn't realized that there were other forms of entrapment such as

what comes from shutting out movement and preventing the body its natural suppleness. That awareness would come later.

Moving Anew

In college I challenged the doctor's recommendation by signing up for Movement Improvisation with Carmen Beuchat who was involved in the experimental dance scene in downtown New York City. After a mere two weeks of twisting, bending, sprinting, and more, I noticed the pain lessening. In the preface of *Contact Improvisation* (p. 2), I wrote, "The world's shutters opened, ushering in a feast of sensations and emotions connecting me firmly to my body and my surroundings. My rigid body with its limited range of motion reinforced by medical directives softened into the moving poetry of dance....Not surprisingly, I embraced dance as indispensable."

I repeated the Movement Improvisation class for the duration of my college experience and took other dance classes as well. In the audience for an early performance of Contact Improvisation with Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith at New York's St. Mark's Place, a center for innovative dance and poetry that I returned to innumerable times, I left awestruck by the seamless grace of improvisation. It led to me to taking innumerable dance classes, becoming a dancer and avid Contact Improvisation practitioner and teacher, writing about dance and eventually a book on Contact Improvisation several years later.

Dance was dramatically changing my life. Dance classes alerted me to the power of movement. They birthed an awareness of the somatic body, putting me in dialog with the particulars of my flesh and exploring how culture influences how we inhabit ourselves.

Disembodied by an invisible brace, I was undoing the damage and learning to connect to sensations.

I had chosen to major in English to continue exploring voice and imagination through books. I published stories and poems in the college literary journal and secured a job writing at a newspaper. I was unsure what to pursue upon graduation but studying both dance and writing piqued my interest. What struck me as odd was my dance teachers snubbing their nose at learning through books and my literature teachers frowning upon dance classes. Their discouragement didn't dissuade me. Rather it had the opposite effect, challenging me to not only do well in each field but more importantly, find a way to bring them together.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

Finding ways to bring them together got delayed by receiving a full scholarship for graduate school which I accepted. My initial focus, to investigate how narrative in a story shifted when made into an animated film, got detoured by an advisor who came on board late in the semester and said no creative project would be allowed and to focus only on scholarship. Although a few of my teachers and I argued that creativity and scholarship worked hand in hand, my advisor's refusal and an inner department fight prompted me to find a new focus: literary theory, specifically structuralism and semiotics. That thesis led to a few PhD scholarship offers which I declined. Another pull asserted itself. I was wanting to read lyrical texts, not the breathless work of literary theory. I also wanted to write and dance with neither predicated by a grade. Creative expression called.

Soon after, two short stories got accepted for publication. "Handkerchief" got published

in a London journal (*Ambit*, Issue 102) and “Pizza” appeared in a collection published in *Food for Thought*, (1987, William and Morrow). “Handkerchief” was part of collection of fictional etymologies, “Pizza” part of another collection of fabulism, in part inspired by the writing of Italo Calvino. The publication of “Pizza” got the attention of an editor at William and Morrow who asked me for an entire collection of short stories and a novel, both complete and awaiting someone’s interest.

I moved from New York to Virginia where I joined a dance group and created a smaller group where text predominated in many of the performances: me dancing around a sheet of paper dangling from the ceiling, moving responsively to a word or phrase or a group dancing to my recitation; or a fellow dancer and I riffing on the text, changing the order of the lines, replacing words, all supplemented by improvised movement, a method I referred to as intertextuality. I cofounded one of the first Contact Improvisation jams in the U.S., one that continues today, and soon after founded a local one. Performances as well as somatic investigations through techniques such as Process Work, Authentic Movement, Continuum, and more continued to build my understanding of the body. My immersion into practices involving the body, and certainly my involvement with Contact Improvisation were pivotal to writing *Contact Improvisation*.

Writing Loss and Gain

As my involvement in dance soared, my writing suffered. Although more than half the stories of the collections were published and I was writing for a local and international magazine about dance and performance, my enthusiasm for writing paled against the enlivening experience

from dancing. Even though I was writing more poetry than fiction, that, too, felt lifeless, the text flat on the page. My writing changed when I began to apply some of the techniques from Contact Improvisation to writing poetry and created my first poetry collection, *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*, surprised when a press accepted it for publication. I wrote about my emerging somatic writing technique in the Australian dance magazine, *Proximity*, and said,

Repeatedly throughout college, I was told that writing and dancing exist in separate worlds and never the two shall meet. This hasty dismissal set into motion my need to disprove this claim. Since then, I have merged the forms in performance art, performance poetry, ritual, and writing. The latest result of my explorations is *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*, a collection of experimental poetry. I wanted the bliss that often accompanies my dancing Contact Improvisation, my senses heightened from a concentrated awareness of each moment. I wanted writing that was immediate and pliant, not distanced from experience. I did not want to chase thoughts or feelings, which contributes to disembodiment, but to let each word arise from my body like sweat. In the same way that my dancing body directly responds to and reflects its many impulses, I wanted embodied words that leap and bend with a similar visceral spontaneity, to achieve, in effect, an improvisational dance in words. The writing had to be the experience itself.

Typically writing is one step removed from experience. We write about an event or feeling, for instance, from last year or an hour ago. In *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*, the writing is the event itself, rooted in an improvisational awareness of the ever-changing moment. It is not a translation of an experience, but writing arising in alignment to its primal beginning, to our felt and fleeting self.

When dancing improvisationally, I balance between allowing and guiding, being not doing. My aim is to reveal the moment in its becoming and not move the dance to a preconceived

notion. In Contact Improvisation, the bodies of my partner and me press, roll, lift, fly, spiral, at any moment slowing, speeding, or changing direction. The language of *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* moves similarly, playing with patterns of sound, meaning, syntax, and imagery. I write in *Proximity* that

Expected language patterns turn suddenly, embracing spontaneous associations. Meaning may be one thing, or it may be many. Thought may be linear or polyvocal. Words follow their own order, riding on breath, pulse, pause, and play.

This breakthrough technique led to subsequent poetry books and the material foundational to my classes on Writing From the Body, which also led to one of my most recent books, *Writing and the Body in Motion: Awakening Voice through Somatic Practice*. This book, like its nonfiction predecessor, *Contact Improvisation* are intended to be informative, instructive and contain the lyrical rhythms consonant with embodiment. It also led to writing essays for places like *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* and *Dance, Movement, and Spiritualities*.

What continues to this present day, among the reasons for pursuing this PhD and writing this thesis, is the recognition of the importance of the body. A focus on my body led to the alleviation of my physical challenges and revealed how coming to know and increasing understanding of the body has significant consequences. The collection of my work addresses those consequences not just for my personal body but for bodies in general. The intention that permeates all of my writing is the value of expanding upon our experience and understanding of our bodily self.

Introduction

Here I explain the aim of this PhD and how my works coalesce into a coherent body of work with various consistent themes centering on my particular approach to somatic writing.

Focus

This thesis is for a PhD by previous publication of creative and critical work in poetry, nonfiction, and fiction. I have selected works which are most relevant to the topic of this thesis: several nonfiction and poetry books, individual poems, critical and peer reviewed writing, and short fiction. Other poetry books, chapbooks, individual work, and twelve years of writing a dance column for a newspaper will be alluded to but not directly discussed.

My primary interest has been an exploration of embodied consciousness and how writing, movement, meditation, and somatic awareness intersect. This research led to writing in multiple genres, pursuing dance and somatic training, and maintaining a meditation practice. The heart of these investigations has been a thinking through the actively engaged body and looking at how being, knowing, and meaning arise. My preference has been toward improvisational expression, somatic openings, and finding the language for experiences often difficult to put into words.

The following works are included in my submission for PhD by publication:

Nonfiction Books:

2018 *Writing and the Body in Motion: Awakening Voice through Somatic Practice*, NC:

McFarland and Company

2017 *Ginseng Tango*, MA: Big Table Publishing

2006 *Contact Improvisation: an Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form*, NC: McFarland and Company

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles and Chapters:

2020 “Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality,” *Spiritual Herstories*, Williamson, A. ed. UK: Intellect Books, and (2017) *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, UK, Volume 3, Numbers 1 & 2

2020 “Just Saying” dispatchespoetrywars.com/commentary/poetry-saying-on-george-quasha

2016 “Beyond Skin Boundaries in Contact Improvisation and Poetry,” *Dance, Movement, and Spiritualities*, UK, Vol 6, No 2

2009 “Live Writing” and “Improvotext,” *Living Arts Spoken Word Series*, OK, Vol. 2

2009 “Shamanic Heritage of a Korean Mudang” *Shamans Drum* NC, No. 81

2008 “Grammatical Poise,” *Proximity*, Victoria, Australia, Volume 3, Edition 2, June 2000

2007 “Gifting Poems: Getting Students to Read Poetry Closely,” *Teachers and Writers*, Winter, Vol 39, Number 2

1995 “Present Tense: Healing as we Speak: an Application of Process Work to Performance,” *Journal of Process Oriented Psychology*, Winter Vol. 6, No. 2

Poetry Books:

2017 *Her Body Listening*, NY: Blaze VOX Books

- 2012 *Continental Drifts*, NY: Blaze VOX Books
- 2003 *Into Stillness*, NY: Station Hill Press
- 2001 *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*, NY: Station Hill Press

Select Poems:

- 2019 “Cultivating an Empty Field” *Empty Mirror*,
emptymirrorbooks.com/poems/evolutions-cherly-pallant

Short Stories:

- 2020 “Standing,” *Parhelion Magazine*, Summer 2020, parhelionliterary.com/cherly-pallant
- 2015 “Breakthrough,” *Café Irreal*, <http://cafeirreal.alicewhittenburg.com/pallant3.htm>
- 2009 “Til Death Do They Part,” *Gargoyle Magazine*, Issue 53
- 1999 “A Touchy Situation” *Café Irreal*, <http://cafeirreal.alicewhittenburg.com/pallant.htm>

Somatic Writing

Consistent throughout the works is a foundation of somatic awareness and somatic writing. Somatic writing relies on deep listening to a personal body, drawing from various levels of awareness and consciousness, and using preverbal awareness to create a more integrative, resonant form of writing. Somatic writing is body-centric and bypasses usual cognitive structures to focus on both the conscious and unconscious material that shows up when attention turns to the obvious and to the barely noticeable, often overlooked phenomenon of the body. By side-stepping usual structures of mind and approaches to writing, it accesses a bodily awareness

and knowing that is highly personal yet paradoxically universal.

As I wrote in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 98), the writing that results contains resonance, a relationship between the language and the body.

Resonant writing is aligned to the idiosyncratic rhythms, energy, images, sayings, idiolects, and felt presences of our personal body. It supports deep listening. It reaches places where the moving body hints at and may be unable to go alone. It lets us ride the waves of verbal expression in unison with the breath and breadth of our personal body to generate meaning, healing, creativity, and integrative awareness. It helps in the process of embodying.

Central themes in the writing related to somatic writing are presence, perception, embodiment, awareness and states of consciousness. How these aims are approached differ depending on the genre. What I am researching consistently is a depth of experience and understanding of my somatic, sensory, linguistic and imaginal body. My intention has been to uncover my personal body but also the collective body and to reveal the porosity of skin, be it a dermal layer or a cultural and environmental one.

Poetry

My poetry is closely aligned with the experience of my dancing body and the micromovements of the still body. The intention has been not to write about an experience but for the writing itself to be the experience, for me to live meditatively on the line, for expression and meaning to emerge in their moment of arising. Not only was I shifting awareness but I was also working with and from various states of consciousness. For readers, I intended a degree of

disorientation and defamiliarization for the purposes of heightening senses through a more labored process of reading.

I was aware that I was breaking poetry conventions, although it was not my purpose. My interest instead lay with asserting the truth of my own experience and adopting a form that best supported it. In this way I could align it with the understanding gathered from my somatic practices.

Fiction

The fiction drew from imagination, myth, dream, metaphor, and symbol. Using dreams and dream-like states, I purposefully strayed away from realism in favor of stories that mythically and imaginably suggested another perspective or realm, that for the duration of the narrative, a reader enters the time and space presented in the writing. This realm was employed not merely as a tool of fiction but was tied to the dreamlike experiences that take place with a body finely tuned to the somatic events of her body that don't make immediate sense. Metaphorically rich stories allowed me to represent inner worlds without needing to overtly address them as such. The stories promoted a verbal active imagination, or lucid dreaming, for journeying into my unconscious. Fictionalizing provided the liberties to play with definitions of mundane and extraordinary events, to explore and challenge expectations. My intention was to bring attention to areas of perception that may otherwise be ignored and to include enough detail to make the fiction plausible. I wanted the writing to be true on the symbolic level and to move the unconscious a step closer to consciousness.

Nonfiction

The nonfiction relied upon the dance, embodiment, and consciousness primarily, with a special emphasis on informing, explaining, and instructing. The nonfiction was more direct in its presentation yet still contained some of the elements from my poetry such as its lyricism. Despite the reader's experience being less visceral and more direct, it would still present structures that exemplified the ideas while keeping them lively and vibrant. *Contact Improvisation* and *Writing and the Body in Motion* included lessons readers could do on their own while also presenting new material that deepened understanding of the body and what is possible when engaging creativity with somatic awareness.

Ginseng Tango stands apart from these other works in that its story is a personal narrative based on my living and working in S. Korea and excludes any instruction. Chapters on shamanism, acupuncture, tango, and temple visits are consistent with my themes, however, in that they present material on dance, embodiment, awareness, and states of consciousness.

Overall

This PhD examines what drives the themes of presence, perception, embodiment, awareness and states of consciousness in the collection of work and the research which underpinned the collection. The themes in the works come under the umbrella of somatic writing which uses bodily awareness in relation to language to explore expression, expand an understanding of the body, and approaches employed to create texts. To do justice to the collection I am writing about and better reflect its breadth and depth, I have pursued a less linear standard in the style of this thesis.

Underpinnings

This section is a review of the pivotal sources, literature and traditions behind my research and the ways I combine writing with first person perception of the moving body.

Practices with Primary Importance:

Meditation

I conducted extensive research into different forms of meditation through reading and working directly with teachers to synthesize my own unique approach drawn from multiple traditions and bodies of knowledge. My research is sourced in Transcendental Meditation, Tibetan Bon, Soto Zen, Kabbalism, and Integral Meditation. Transcendental Meditation relies on two sitting sessions a day with a mantra to focus and quiet the mind. Tibetan Bon, an early shamanic version of Buddhism, relies on energy channels, chanting, movement, and visualizations to clear and balance the body. Soto Zen relies on sitting with attention to the breath and witnessing the clouds of thought and sensation arise and disappear. Kabbalist practices focus on visualization and verbal permutations to elicit shifts in consciousness. Integral Meditation uses sitting with breath awareness, maintaining a somatic practice, working on self growth, and attending to environmental concerns.

These practices, which I recognize as somatic practices, promote the mind as inseparable from the body and the body as inseparable from spirit. Sometimes misunderstood as mental

preoccupations, these practices are foundational to somatic awareness. In quieting an onslaught of thoughts and honing in on the rise and fall of emotion and sensation, what becomes clear is the distinction between what the culture imposes upon the body and what arises from the body unmediated. Generally, these practices recognize language as a symbolic and artificial system, that actions are best approached with a degree of equanimity, detachment, and presence. For instance, the purpose of Zen koans such as “What is your original face before your parents were born?”, the simplified version of an 11th century sutra attributed to Mumon Ekai, are not intended to be answered but to reveal mental patterns and, in the case of this koan, nonduality. (2004, Yamada)

The ideas that support increasing awareness manifest in my creative and critical work in the backdrop or foreground as an impetus for the writing and sometimes visible in individual phrases or entire works. All of my poetry is meditative. *Sits*, my first collection of writing, drew directly from the process of sitting meditatively and letting inspiration arise of its own, the process refined in each consequent published collection. Individual poems such as “10”² in *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (p.16) point to meditative practice and presence. I express the timelessness of the present moment with concepts unraveled and write,

when we hold ourselves apart from nothing.
when letting go of everything to the stream lands us
in the dream. when
time as time as no time. when
when how is never and always.

²Poems in *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* and *Into Stillness* were provided numbers for titles.

Meditation practices have influenced the works of many American writers. Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Anne Waldman, essentially many of the Beat writers actively practiced meditation. Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa started the Naropa Institute, later called Naropa University, named after the 11th-century Indian Buddhist teacher Naropa. The school, begun in 1974, quickly founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics which welcomed the confluence of innovative writing and meditation. A few years later it offered degrees in Buddhism, contemplative arts, dance, and psychology with an emphasis on somatics, among only a few U.S. schools recognizing the importance of this valuable field.

My attending workshops at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics led me to see I was not alone in bringing meditation to writing. However, I brought both a meditative and embodied kinesthetic to the line. My work was in close alignment with Anne Waldman's poetry and performative texts although she used chanting and the sonic quality of voice whereas my work relied on motion.

Somatics, too, has been heavily influenced by Eastern traditions. Irmgard Bartenieff's work derived from studying Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung (Bartenieff, 1980; Hackney, 2002). Moshe Feldenkrais had a black belt in Judo. Sondra Fraleigh spent years studying butoh and Japanese Zen. Bonnie Brainbridge Cohen practiced Aikido in the U.S. and in Japan and studied a healing technique called setai and katsugen endo with Noguchi Sensai. (Eddy, 2002)

Contact Improvisation

A foundational practice of my research is Contact Improvisation, a partnered,

improvisational dance form that relies on sharing weight, staying in contact, and moving improvisationally. Introduced to this dance in the late 70's while I attended college in New York and devoted to it since, I regard this dance as a seminal somatic practice that has provided innumerable insights into the development of my somatic awareness. I organized the East Coast Contact Improvisation Jam (eventually renamed the Fall East Coast Improvisation Jam) which is the longest consistently running contact improvisation jam; founded the Spring East Coast Improvisation Jam and Richmond Jam; attended jams throughout the U.S., Germany, Hungary, Hong Kong and elsewhere; attended classes; participated in teacher exchanges in Europe and the U.S.; edited the newsletter for *Contact Quarterly*; interviewed teachers and practitioners; wrote articles for *Contact Quarterly* and *Proximity Magazine*; spoke at length with Nancy Stark Smith about the dance's development and spread; experimented with various techniques with peers and students; taught university Contact Improvisation classes; and wrote a book about the dance.

Interestingly, eastern practice is one of the roots for Contact Improvisation. Founder Steve Paxton was trained in aikido which shows up in the dance's rolls and the push/pull dynamic in a duet. Prior to founding Contact Improvisation, he danced with Merce Cunningham who studied Buddhism and used the I-Ching to structure many of his dances.

Witnessing Contact Improvisation's impact on the dance scene and its practitioners, I recognized a significant gap in the literature on the form. *Contact Quarterly* kept abreast of the growing number of jams worldwide and developments pertaining to the practice. The only book devoted to the dance was Cynthia Novak's *Sharing the Dance* (1990), which effectively positioned the dance historically and sociologically, yet I recognized a need for a book devoted to its experience and instruction. It was this hole in scholarship and documentation that motivated

me to interview Paxton, Smith, and more than a hundred practitioners in the U.S. and Europe, to draw from years of extensive notes of mine, and to write *Contact Improvisation*. The book derived from these interviews, my experiences dancing, teaching, newsletter editing, and organizing jams. This book became the go-to book for many studying the form in college, appears in over 300 university libraries worldwide (according to WorldCat) and is cited in 68 texts (according to Google Scholar).

The book contains a brief history of its founding and spread across the world, instruction with key terms, and discussion about embodied cognition, the politics of who gets to dance, the importance of connection, and the value of community. The book positions this touch based improvisational dance as both a personal and collective practice with cultural ramifications. Given that dance is frequently disparaged and overlooked as a superfluous activity performed by a minority, the book positions the dance as a pivotal practice for individual development and collective well-being. The book was intended both to talk about the practice and enable readers to feel the dance through its words, among the reasons it blends elements from creative nonfiction, instruction, and a scholarly work.

Many dancers claim that writing is insufficient at capturing dance, a nonverbal and preverbal activity, languaging doomed to fail. Dance scholar Helen Thomas (2003, p. 88) refers to dancers' inherent difficulty "in translating their experiences of dancing into verbal language." By blending lyrical passages with explication, subjective responses with objective information, I intended the book to uphold a balance that echoes the dance. The book cannot replicate the dance, but its rhythm and voice could suggest it. After a couple concludes a dance, they sometimes sit down to discuss what took place. This book is an extended version of that

conversation with a final chapter devoted to exercises and questions to assist thinking about or partaking in the dance.

The challenge of dance as Thomas (2003) implies is that most practitioners would prefer to dance, not write about it. Yet it's important to write about dance since the western academy tends to privilege the written word and text over performance. Additionally, the shelf life of a live art such as dance is brief, lasting until the dancers part, bow, and the curtain closes, or in the case of Contact Improvisation, leave the dance floor and put on their shoes. The book was intended to articulate with as much clarity as possible to ensure the dance receives its rightful place in history, to elevate the importance of the form, and support the continuation of its practice. The book was also intended to challenge the disembodied writing that is common in academic writing, what Don Hanlon Johnson refers to as "voices that have been silenced by the European Enlightenment which enshrined a disembodied reason" ("Preface," 2017, p. xiii) and demonstrate an embodied text that reflects the landscape of our moving body.

The composite of decades worth of my research with Contact Improvisation has led me to being seen as a leader in the field. What follows are the words of a few professors who wrote impact statements for this PhD: Daniel Deslauriers, Professor of Transformative Studies at California Institute of Integral Studies, refers to the book as "a 'classic' in the field. He says,

It serves as a resource for anyone interested in the history (at the national and global level) of the form, and also provided the seed of many issues that became central to the form such as politics and privilege, and creating as well as maintaining community.

Robbie Kinter, Music Director with the Dance and Choreography Department at Virginia

Commonwealth University, says that the book has been

an important part of my contact improvisation classes.... I use each chapter as a jumping off point for conversation....I've found the writings in Cheryl Pallant's book inspire introspection and I use this to keep the mind working during times of rest in the classroom....Pallant's poetic writing style adds an artistry that takes it to another level from other dance textbooks.

Jayne Bernasconi, Adjunct Lecturer in dance at Towson University, refers to the book as giving "students an opportunity to see improvisation on a much wider and creative scope and has helped them to understand the power of their authentic body on so many different levels." Sarah Whatley, Professor and Director, Centre for Dance Research with Coventry University, regularly recommends the book to her dance students. Cynthia J. Williams, Professor of Dance at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, says her students "remark on the poetic imagery of her descriptions which they find inspiring." (Complete impact statements are provided in the appendix.)

Process Oriented Psychology

To understand what Contact Improvisation stirred in me, I turned to Jungian psychologist Arnold Mindell who created Process-Oriented Psychology, also called Process Work, and Dream Body Work. (For simplicity, I will refer to it hereafter as Process Work.) Process Work is a depth psychology theory and set of techniques associated with somatic psychology and post-Jungian psychology. The work explores the subtle, unconscious, and transpersonal aspects of human experience. This work rooted in body awareness introduced me to somatic psychology and furthered my understanding of how our neuromuscular pathways hold our history.

To implement Process Work techniques, Mindell created specific terms. The focus is on “channels” of awareness. A “channel” involves feelings, visual data, auditory data, movement, relationships, and global feedback, among others. Practitioners track what channel they’re in to determine the state of their awareness, whether it’s a “primary process” or “secondary process.” “Primary process” and “secondary process” are loosely associated with consciousness and unconsciousness.

Process Work technique proposes that we tend to “occupy,” or perceive and interpret, from habitual channels, and ignore valuable information that comes in on others. When we switch to “unoccupied” channels, what often results is disorientation until we establish an ease with the unfamiliar perceptions. The idea is to later integrate the new information.

I studied several of Mindell’s books: *The Quantum Mind and Healing* (2004); *Sitting in the Fire* (1995); *The Shaman's Body* (1993); *Working on Yourself Alone* (1990); *River’s Way* (1985); and *Dreambody* (1982); issues of *The Journal of Process Oriented Psychology*, attended workshops, and met regularly with a practice group. My workshops and group focused primarily on proprioceptive/movement and verbal/sound channels. My involvement generated experiences that challenged and enlarged the frame of what I understood was perceptually possible: visions, waking dreams, and altered consciousness.

My experiences concurred with the shamanistic altered states Mindell wrote about in *Working on Yourself Alone* (1990) and *Dreambody* (1998). But it’s one thing to read about and ponder a transformational experience safely tucked away in the pages of a book, quite another for it to rouse sensation and dramatically shift perceptions, for it to be a lived experience, which is why Process Work writing and practices influenced my work.

Process Work led me to performing a session for the Expose, Express, Exchange Dance Festival and publish “Present Tense: Healing as We Speak: an Application of Process Work to Performance,” an article based on the experience for the *Journal of Process-Oriented Psychology*. I wrote about the structure implemented by a co-performer and myself, an analysis of what took place, and the feedback received from the audience. It was a rare performance in which we performed therapy on stage and reframed therapy as ritual and performance. The article (p. 79) references my visions and says,

A perceptual shift occurred as I, like a lucid dreamer defying spatial and temporal restrictions, entered a concurrent reality previously unseen, a richly symbolic realm that influenced me emotionally, kinesthetically, and proprioceptively.

It marked a furtherance of understanding movement as ritual and performance and raised the idea for writing too. This latter idea was reinforced by anthropologist Victor Turner’s reframing performance as any activity with a marked start and end, that to perform is to complete an action. (Turner, 1982)

My research with Process Work profoundly impacted me by generating somatic openings and deepening awareness on multiple perceptual levels. It led me to understand writing not only as a mental and verbal activity but as a rich somatic event, the impulses of a body finding expression. Though Process Work techniques provoked creative expression, its primary intention for practitioners was as a reflective psychological tool for healing. My interest was in taking the visions, insights, raw writing, and movements and craft them into a finished creative work. Similar to how psychologist Carl Jung used active imagination as a bridge between the conscious

and unconscious, I was building bridges between awareness levels, but wanting to bring them to writing.

A direct impact from this study was attending to the way words bubble to the surface of my attention and onto the page which were welcomed into my poetry. In *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (p. 9), I wrote, “ether your oxygen and ex-ex-ex hale spansively.” Language was teased forth, a portal opening, the tongue loosed, writing still wet with its birth. The writing reinforced presence and awareness of what is known along with what hides in the hinterlands. The further range of my imagination in my fiction resulted too. I used the writing as a shamanic, somatic journeying, much like a vision quest, to generate work, recognizing the narrative as a literary trail, a furtherance and symbolic representation of my mind, and a way to deeply engage with image and story. I write in “Do not ask” in *Continental Drifts* (p. 14),

Whether I started from a place of my choice or placed choice where I began.

Whether I said what I meant or silence delineated the way.....

Let us go together toward the letter.

Improvisational Dance

Carmen Beuchat and Deborah Hay, two of my dance teachers, left an indelible mark upon my approach to dance and the body. They did so not because of their athletic skill but because they blurred the line between ordinary and trained movements. They showed how walking, standing, staring, and turning the head, for instance, not the refined movement of ballet and the carefully patterned choreography of modern dance, were valid material for dance.

My shallow breaths and rigid, pained scoliotic body seized upon the freedoms that Beuchat's instructions encouraged. Continually she pushed my withdrawn inflexible body to edge ever further outward, to increase its range of motion and expand my kinesthetic sphere. Those new movements initiated an embodiment practice for learning the capabilities of my body and to abandon useless and harmful habits. From her classes and performances, I furthered the reach of my body, developed physical pliancy, deeper breath, and questioned the medical dictum that believed rigidity and stasis, not movement, would remedy my abnormal spinal development. In recognizing the correlation between how we dwell in our bodies and how institutional ideals impact us, what my later reading of somatic practitioners like Don Hanlon Johnson, Thomas Hanna, Ida Rolf, Mary Whitehouse, philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and others confirmed, I questioned which institutions and ideals impacted me. A vigorous pursuit of dance and somatic inquiry got launched and shows no sign of slowing any time soon.

Deborah Hay's tendency toward minimal movements, motion that is slow and often altogether halted, invited me to explore a new depth of movement and awareness. From a performance which emphasized vulnerability, her standing while gazing at the audience with only slight, almost imperceptible movement, I witnessed micromovements, a visceral level of startling heightened presence, every slight twitch or blink an event. She reinforced the idea that even the smallest movement is worthy of investigation and performance.

What both dancers demonstrated is how any moment, if framed as such, can be a performance, what Victor Turner's writing reinforced. This meant that something as mundane as a yawn could be a performance. It meant – and this disrupted my previous perspective – that sitting down to write was a performance. This awareness was implemented in the production of

several of my poetry books wherein the writing was elevated to performativity, which included a type of self-consciousness and the anticipation of impact. Seeing the writing as a performance provided it a fresh container. It enabled the writing of *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (p. 14) with lines like “i relinquish respons-a-babblity, this a swatch of express, an unwatched gesture not yet disguised or enrolled in a school of thought. pre-elemental and as found as lost...” It enabled me to play with connotation, grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. It enabled me to redefine my understanding of writer and experiencing the writing room and page as a stage. It gave lines a new vitality.

Interestingly, Hay and Paxton performed with the Judson Dance Theater. Hay, Beuchat, and Charles Olsen, who I will write about later, were all part of an earlier movement that arose out of the small, short-lived Black Mountain College which came to be known for its avant garde and experimental forms by faculty and students. From 1933-1957, dancers, writers, artists, architects, and other creatives gathered to share their work and teach. It’s where Merce Cunningham began his company, where Olsen developed his ground-breaking writer’s manifesto, and where John Cage’s silent music began. Eastern practice also had a significant influence here. Japanese Zen teacher Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, a pivotal figure in spreading Buddhism through western culture, taught at this school, his classes described as “honey to bears among New York artists and poets, who had never met an authentic Zen Buddhist.” (Pearlman, 2012, p. i) Many of my dance and writing roots can be traced back to this small college nestled in the mountains of North Carolina.

What somatic engagement teaches is not to imitate the actions of another, but to commit to an investigation of one’s own personal and subjective experience. Thomas Hanna (1991) sees

it as the way to personal freedom and says,

[T]he prime requisite for being free is to have the internal power and the internal skills, judgment, perception, and intelligence in order to be autonomous, because freedom is essentially self-responsibility and independence....You can't be independent unless you can stand on your own two feet, and it's not a matter of just rebelliously standing on your own two feet, but of knowing who you are, knowing your powers, and being able to be creative and productive on your own.

Other than a cursory experience, I had already rejected jazz and other formalized and structured dances. My invisible brace that locked my body in place led to distrusting forms that reinstated a constraint which I too readily associated with a limiting brace. The liberties that Beuchat and Hay presented were compelling, but the particulars of their aesthetics and process could only go so far for me.

Groundbreaking as their work was, their issues and milieu impacting them were not my mine. My research involved probing the physical, psychological, emotional, and mental constructs embedded in my curved spine and back spasms. Hay's book, *My Body, The Buddhist* (2000) contains a creative and investigative rigor, but her voice is not mine, nor would it ever be. My direction included finding the path to my own somatic awakening and bringing those insights to my writing which would reveal a lyrical and whimsical narrative, a verbally kinesthetic agility, a sensual syntax, and fabulist imagination. It's what contributed to "A Touchy Situation," a Contact Improvisation fable with a group of people waiting on a cue who break into fights until someone initiates touch. It contributed to the opening stanzas of "Periodic excavation" in *Continental Drifts* (p. 41), a performative ritual of words and movement, which says, "They

rummaged for words, broken, ripped, burned, molded, hoping for the chance of a whole or parts repairable with nails or duct tape.” It’s what contributed to reading my poems aloud while a fellow dancer and I riffed on the words through movement and alterations to the text in a technique I called intertextuality where my writing is interwoven with another person’s words, suggestive of a body in continual motion, my text, though set on the page, not static.

Hatha Yoga

My practice of yoga began before the current craze, when there were few practitioners, and it was misconstrued that a practitioner was part of a cult. I studied with a local teacher from Integral Yoga founded by Swami Satchidananda, best known as the Beatles’ guru and speaker at the famous Woodstock 1969 concert. Though I studied Iyengar, Ashtanga, and other forms, I continually returned to Integral Yoga. It was through their yoga studio in the early 80's that I offered my first workshop that combined writing and movement, in this case, yoga. I saw how yoga stirred the body’s energy, opened oneself somatically, and I matched writing prompts to fit with pranic breathing techniques and asanas. I wanted to explore how the body shifted and what articulations might emerge from the altered bodymind. These workshops formed the basis of what I would eventually call Writing From the Body, now offered as a semester-long class and workshops of varying lengths.

The initial impetus for Writing From the Body workshops, to explore a body and mind primed by exercises that alter consciousness, continues to intrigue me. Here, too, were the beginnings of the material developed over the years which ultimately became *Writing and the Body in Motion*. My dedication to yoga continues, but as a much abbreviated practice with a

primary function for keeping my body limber.

Practices and Ideas with Influential Importance:

Phenomenology

Lurking behind the influences above and the ones to follow in this thesis is phenomenology and the importance of the lived moment. Early research took me to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (2008), and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *The Primacy of Movement* (1999). A dancing body such as mine could readily embrace the idea of the body as the primary site of knowing the world, not thinking, mind, nor consciousness. Here was a philosophy of thought that privileged the body and immediate experience. Here were ideas that inadvertently promoted knowing self not through abstraction but through kinesthetics and proprioception. "I move, therefore I am" easily replaced the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am." Following soon after became "I write, therefore I am." Interestingly, Celeste Snowber (1998, p. 134) reached a similar conclusion in her dissertation on embodiment, expanding Descartes' repertoire to include "breathe" and "play" to show how thinking takes place in the body. My ideas of embodiment recalled takeaways from Buddhist practice, particularly the focus on presence and the importance of situating myself in the breath of the moment.

Reading philosophy can put the head into an endless spin. Like myself, Johnson (2014 p. xiii) is a survivor of texts "eviscerated" from a well-educated body and says, "Many of us have suffered the language abuses of the abstract academic conventions." As much as philosopher's

writing points toward life, it easily reinforces disembodiment. There's too much distance between the subject and the object, between the writer and the written. Where is breath in their labored lines? Where is their personal body? Where is the sensuality of language? Where is feeling me between the lines? Yes, their lines were full of erudition and provocation but I yearned for felt experience.

I yearned to connect with my personal body.

I yearned for a text that stirred and awakened me.

Felt experience could be found in Sondra Fraleigh's *Dance and the Lived Body* (1996). Here was a writer, also a dancer, who bridged dance and philosophy while maintaining embodiment. Behind her words is the sense of her personal body and movement, even more apparent in later works like *Dancing Identity* (2014) where she alternates between prose and poetry. Here was a writer capable of articulating the difficult languages of philosophy and dance.

Whereas I left reading phenomenology texts behind, Fraleigh remained immersed in them and recognized as Amanda Williamson (2015, p. 93) notes that "not all phenomenology is the same." My phenomenological research went in the direction of establishing new forms that contained embodied language and poesis.

My prime interest lay in setting up home in my body and embodying language. My intention was to uncover the particulars of my body through movement and writing. The writing had to contain the voice and motion of my body, its history, but also its grounding in the present lived moment. It had to satisfy my thirst and tongue, not a structure imposed from outside me but one that arose from my interoception.

Continuum

Continuum fit with my increasing attention to small phenomena and subtle somatic events, another instance when the particulars of a body point to larger body. I appreciated learning about micromotion, types of breaths, and practices focusing on our undulating watery, embryonic nature. I appreciated Emilie Conrad's healing story and her inspired metaphors and moving autobiography, *Life on Land* (2004). But I'd already studied earth, ether, fire, wood, and water in my dance practices. Yoga and Tibetan meditation had introduced me to pranayama, chants, and the impact of breath on the body and consciousness. I found Continuum's solitary techniques reinforced my well established introversion which, for the purposes of growth, needed to be challenged by interaction. It didn't further my Contact Improvisation investigations of intimate presence and pressure from another body and the many rich heightened sensory provocations that led to questioning my somatic events and endless material for reflection. My stillness studies from mediation had covered much of the material that Continuum pointed toward. I was already relaxed and flexible, aware of breath and mind, among the benefits the technique promised. Continuum revealed that my calm needed more fire, aerobics, and outward focus, among the reasons that practices like 5-Rhythms and Ecstatic Dance held appeal. My well established inward yin tendency required more yang oxygenation.

Authentic Movement

I appreciate how this practice gets practitioners to question the difference and sometimes fine line between natural, authentic movement from movements that may be superficial and contrived. The presence of a witness also can heighten self consciousness. The writing that took

place afterward encouraged a stream of consciousness as did the movement. I found the instruction open ended, my own writing and movement prompts more developed. However, my somatic and writing research needed greater prodding into the layers of language and body. It wanted a more refined approach and focus for my development and research. Essentially the technique repeated terrain already covered by my practices without adding anything new. I found the practice to be a poor fit for me.

I may have reached a different conclusion if it weren't for a somatically illiterate witness and poorly trained facilitator, which constituted my early experiences, who provided inadequate leadership and responses. Had I taken workshops with Joan Chodorow (1991), Linda Hartley (2004), or Tina Stromsted (2014), or encountered their writings, which occurred much later, I would have better appreciated the depth and nuances of the work, especially its connection to the unconscious and dreamlike awareness, but my introduction occurred in the late 80's when the form was relatively unknown and before the founding of the Authentic Movement Institute that credentials teachers.

Tango

In addition to tango being a beautiful dance, I approached this partnered dance somatically. My investigations were more akin to Contact Improvisation except tango is commonly practiced with an obvious leader and follower, despite some practitioners debating its origins and practice as conversational and improvisational with partners more equal. (2009, Cara). On the more subtle levels of the dance however, is the egalitarian nature that is pervasive in Contact Improvisation; tango supports knowing a partner and self through small shifts in

movement and balance, the grace of the dance impossible to perform without it, yet another example of partners' deep somatic mutual listening.

I learned tango while living in S. Korea where the foreignness of being away from the familiar comforts of home were unrattling. The dance supported mutual touch in a culture where it's uncommon among strangers and friends, a reason the dance is considered counter cultural and for some, a clandestine activity. The dance brought into focus cultural norms and contradictions. Tango along with the friction between eastern and western ideals, and other reflections became the basis for the *Ginseng Tango*. In writing about one of my early dances, I say (p. 34),

The tango style here [in S. Korea] is characterized by a close embrace, small steps, and quick, syncopated footwork. If my partner holds his torso firmly yet flexibly, I can maintain my axis and share his easily while sliding or lifting my feet. Couples typically share an open embrace for the first dance and, depending on comfort, the man may pull the woman in closer so that chest or belly or forehead touch for the second and third dances.

Tango became an important embodiment practice, a way to participate in community, and revealed how Korean's handle touch and relationships between a woman and a man.

Bodywork: Traeger Mentastics, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Body-Mind Centering, and Myofascia Release, CranioSacral Therapy

I place these practices together because each is a well developed somatic technique aimed to improve functional balance, to educate (or reeducate) the moving body, and to increase well-

being. I gladly experienced these practices as a student or client to unstick energy, sooth or retrain a strained muscle or release a fascia pattern. Sometimes one's own somatic intelligence needs the support of another's trained eye, hand, and instruction. I refrained from pursuing training in them because their level of hands-on technical skill that excluded a musical flow left me flat. They answered specific investigations about my body but didn't maintain enough interest to warrant further learning. Additionally none of these practices made use of language which was an ongoing driving force of my exploration, although of recent, Body-Mind Centering has begun to look into somatic writing.

Reiki and Healing Touch

Studying these two healing modalities resulted from years of dancing and an awareness of the extended kinesphere, a term from Laban Technique that typically refers to the arm's length space around the body. The understanding of these modalities, which I gathered from classes and studies collected or funded by Wake Forest University School of Medicine and UC San Diego's School of Medicine, is that the body extends beyond the skin, requiring expanding our perceptual range, and that intentional touch by a trained practitioner can help patients struggling with cancer, among other ailments (2004, Weze), the specifics and effectiveness of healing still undergoing research.

During dance, I increasingly found my attention extending outward, the sensors of my skin roving beyond usual surfaces and able to report information with as much accuracy as a hand resting on another's body. My work with Kuem Kwa Kim, the Korean dancer and shaman I wrote about in *Ginseng Tango* and in *Shaman's Drum*, furthered my desire to study the subtleties

of the body and harness some of the abilities tied to inexplicable body events. Some of these early findings created the foundation for *Her Body Listening* and continue to challenge the scope of my understanding of embodiment.

Brush Mind

The founder of a calligraphy technique called Brush Mind, also the name of his book (1990), is Kazuaki Tanahashi, a calligrapher and translator of books by Soto Zen founder, Eihei Dogen. What struck me about Tanahashi was his recognition of presence as an art form. Prior to setting brush to paper, he sits in meditation and waits for the impulse to dip his brush into ink and dash it across the paper without going back to refine his creations.

His focus on presence as art fit with my meditation practice and improvisation background and inspired me to use the technique in writing, to essentially wait for the impulse and write only what arose in the moment without going back to edit. His approach matched mine in *Sits* and contributed to the inspiration for *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* and *Into Stillness*. *Brush Mind* (p. 121) led me to include his words about artistry as presence as an epigraph for *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*:

We usually evaluate creative process in terms of how much feeling or thinking was behind the work or how well the work was done. Isn't there any other way of appreciating the process? What if the standard of excellence was how fully present the artist was during the process?

The idea persisted over the years and contributed to a performance in which I wrote a poem in real time at an art opening. The performative writing, drawn from my observations of a

brief dance performance, attendees peering at paintings and my overhearing parts of their conversations, got projected onto a wall of the gallery. This writing along with “Live Writing,” an essay about the process, was published in *Living Arts Spoken Word Series*.

Butoh

I attended performances by butoh co-founder Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshito Ohno which led to attending additional performances by various butoh artists. What many of these performances shared was a minimizing of movement, sometimes near stillness, movement arriving from a hidden source deep in the body. These performances contrasted with western dances that are frequently outwardly demonstrative athletic displays, performers repeatedly sprinting across the stage along with leaps, rolls, and other exhausting movements. Although there is a range of styles within butoh, the ones with greatest appeal contained a slow and inward earthy meditateness. Also taken by the form, Fraleigh (2006, p. 72) wrote about butoh founder Hijikata Tatsumi and her studies with Ohno and says,

Hijikta and Ohno invert consciousness...sublimating the body while extending its liminal states....one enters into morphing states of awareness through their performances....[B]utoh does not ride on metaphor, but rather on change and an ethos of becoming.

Butoh offers itself as a great example of embodiment, emotion and thought visible on the skin, face, and movement of its practitioners. It provides a great example of the lack of distance between art and artist. A viewer may hang on the slow unfolding of the movement in the same way that I experienced my own words unfolding, the writing edging out in real time, free of

flourish, with its own raw sensuality, willing to go to dark places as well as light.

Similar to Tanahashi, here was a performance based on presence and the unfolding of the moment in real time. Ohno connects with and engages with the spirituality of the moment which he finds healing. Says Ohno, “The body in butoh is already the universe dancing on the borders of life and death.” (Fraleigh, 2006, p. 73)

Although neither my dances nor writing were so precariously positioned, my work was interested in liminality, the space of consciousness tilting toward the next word or movement. I wanted to bring a similar breathless breath to the line, a friction and frisson that fully engages the body, to feel the visceral aliveness of the moment, each word a drip drip drip of consciousness riveted to the emergence of words, a verbal dance, a poesis of writing and becoming, and to get there not through artifice which can dull the senses but through a structure that awakens the senses.

To connect with my personal body and stir the language of being.

To balance in the nature of my body with its breezes, shine, and storm.

To slip between the clouds of unknowing to a word and body in vibrant resonance.

Literature:

Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein is often attributed with creating an American experimental poetics. I stumbled upon “Patriarchal Poetry” (1980, *The Yale Gertrude Stein*), *How to Write* (1975), and *Stanzas in Meditation* (1956) in high school. Stein’s lines of poetry and nonfiction take great

leeway with repetition, elision, rhyme, and associative meaning. She places punctuation where convention would consider it incorrect and sometimes omits punctuation altogether. She frequently wrote in present tense in a form of stream of consciousness and established a signature rhythm. Her witty, political, and playful contrariness marked the first time of reading with my body, not my mind. Her original expressions transmitted an experience for which my words and comprehension failed. In their place arose sensation in my belly and head, a new and wholly unfamiliar type of knowing, a felt, bodily knowing. My lack of comprehension intrigued me enough that during college I returned to her writing with a lens to further understand her work.

Although my intent was not to imitate her style, Stein laid the groundwork for my breaks with convention and gave me permission to punctuate. or. phrase. as. pleases. Says Stein (p. 150) in a chapter on sentences from *How to Write*, “What is a sentence. A sentence is a beginning with when they are at home with a transaction transition transfer and between.” She repatterned grammar with humor that also pointed toward new form and meaning. *Uncomon Grammar Cloth* relied on a stream of consciousness and ignored rules, not capitalizing the first letter of the first word in a line and changing direction mid phrase and mid sentence. A sentence as follows persists throughout the book (p.10),

i'm not
sending myself off and on, switched in the up or
down, following pursuit, wearing jeans, typically
asymptomatically, lustering after that which hovers
on outskirts hemming me in.

Its signature music contains a distinct rhythm and wordplay. The text is consistently presented in blocks of prose poetry. Instead of her percussive, staccato repetitions, my lines are long, lyrical,

and melodic, more akin to wind and string instruments.

As a salon organizer and art collector, Stein was immersed in the art world. *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* draws directly from dance, specifically Contact Improvisation. My focus was to keep it visceral, even sensual without a mention of dance or the body. It is also sound-centric and based on imagined dances. The dances got transposed into a feeling and sound rising up from my body that functioned as a prompt for each poem.

I verbally danced my way into a new form that Grant Jenkins, Associate Professor of English recognized. In his impact statement, he writes,

For many reasons, it's difficult to say when someone is doing something "new" or "original" or even "different," but Cheryl's *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* leaves that impression. What strikes me as unique about this poem is its kinetic poetics that feels more like dance than linguistics. A canny combination of clever, conscious puns and unexpected, ecstatic discovery, like the smooth moves of dancers in couple, Cheryl's para-poem revels in language and gleefully follows her unconscious consciously spinning out in tactile waves.

Charles Olson

Poet, essayist, and Black Mountain College teacher, Charles Olson similarly opened my structure through his chapbook, *Proprioception* (1956) and his essay "Projective Verse" (1950). These works, essentially poetry manifestos, launched an entire poetry movement and influenced work by, among others poets, Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan, and also other artists like performance artist Carolee Schneeman. (2017, Schneeman)

Olson believed that the act of poetic creation should be connected to "the kinetics of the thing" (1950, p. 1) a primordial dimension of human existence, what he referred to as

proprioception, the first time I came upon this word. He was opposed to and mourned the loss of a personal voice in closed forms and metered poems. Instead he favored open forms. He saw the space of a page as a field for poets to compose by aligning their breath and energy to words. In this way, a poet would avoid artificial forms and listen within to connect with their personal voice and how it chose to manifest on the page.

When I encountered his works, I was not writing much poetry, but his ideas stayed with me when poetry became a dominant expression later. With his suggestions, I liberated my lines from the precedent set by predecessors and turned attention to my body. I avoided the sentimental preoccupation that pervades Romantic and Confessional poetry and the disembodiment that permeated Symbolism. My proprioceptive field included a moving, somatically aware body and an intimate resonance between word and movement.

Mostly notably, *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* and *Into Stillness* benefitted from the liberated lines connected to body although the technique showed up in subsequent poetry books too. *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* was as pure an improvisation as possible, an emptying of my mind and expectation, a meditation on emptiness which then welcomed the rise of a sound prompt. *Into Stillness* continued with a stream of consciousness tied to the intimate motion of my body yet focused on the trauma that dwells in a body, in the connective tissue, and what is potentially released through movement. With my background in dance and meditation, I furthered Olson's idea of kinetics and proprioception into an awareness of obvious and subtle motion always taking place with the body. The title *Into Stillness* points to the idea of the motion in stillness, a meditative unfolding, and a heightening awareness of subtleties. Here was writing as presence as art, a nod to Tanahashi. The book cover also is a detail from one of Tanahashi's

Brush Mind paintings, an enso, a brush strokes expressing a moment when the mind is free to let the body create.

George Quasha

George Quasha is the publisher of Station Hill Press that published *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* and *Into Stillness*. His diverse background includes meditation and being active in the avante garde in poetry, music, sculpture, and painting. Well informed about somatics, he published Dean Juhan's *Job's Body* (1986), among the most widely used resource in therapeutic bodywork, and Andrea Olsen's *Body Stories: A Guide to Experiential Anatomy* (1991), a pioneering work that shows how our relationship to our bodies affects our attitudes toward the natural world.

I read much of his poetry and essays, as then unpublished, much of it now in print. His work was influenced by his own form of bodywork tied to his Buddhist practice. Subtleties of language revealing an ever changing awareness of the mind, body, and writing are on full display in much of his poems such as the following stanzas (2012, p. 22):

Here I enter a site where I can negotiate with words for the release of mind.
Explaining the text is like complaining to God.

It hurts to word it.
Everything said has chargeback to the body.

For the online magazine *Poetry Dispatches* (online), I wrote "Poetry Saying," an essay about his series of books he refers to as preverbs. I adopted an academic voice *sans* the disembodied

pretense of academic authority in favor of a lyrical style that echoes his poetry.

What is known shines as true for a moment, the beacon shifting with a consequent breath, word, line, or stanza. Nothing stays or says as so for long. Poems abound in word play not for the sake of trickery, but as a way to highlight shifts in language and being always taking place moment to moment, making what may otherwise go unnoticed noticeable.... Words rise up from the silence, from the dream of a body tuned to the subtleties of proprioception.

His poetics of unknowing and emptiness and interest in consciousness is akin to my own. Preverbs follows the aphoristic style of William Blake and is a play on Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" (Blake, 1994). Preverb's stanzas sticks to repeating an aphoristic declaration of truth, even though a consequent stanza likely contradicts it. Quasha bases much of his poetics on the idea of axiality. Axiality is based on the osteopath's still point, an experience of deep bodily rest that allows the body to restart. His work, like mine, centers on the place where language and mind empty. His essays (2019) about the premise behind his poetry and his other work have given me vocabulary for my own embodied writing experiences and altered states of consciousness.

Like Quasha, my words rise up from a body tuned to presence, the lived moment, and the subtleties of proprioceptive awareness. His poems with their repeating declarative structure come across as masculine. Mine are sinewy and feminine, an improvisational dance with an unrepeatable structure. Our inspirational sources (Buddhism, somatics, performance art, Stein, Olsen and more) overlap and there is deep resonance between our writing but we go in different directions, mine a somatically attuned body frequently dancing subtlety and literally with the waves of motion. We both turn phrases with a tension of meaning, a torsion, words and meaning

continually being modified, even contradicted. We both see the slippery impermanence of language. What I hadn't known until receiving his impact statement was how much of my poetry books he published influenced his own poetry. He says,

I even wonder now, and for the first time, whether I simply didn't see the influence of these two books on my own work in an invented genre I call "preverbs," which I was just beginning around the time we published her books.

Helene Cixous

Philosopher and author of theory, poetry, plays, novels, and hybrid works that explore history, autobiography, and identity, Helene Cixous's (1991) essay "Coming to Writing" pushing for a feminine expression rooted in a feminine body significantly influenced my music. Her work's lyricism, meaning, and structure dance and penetrate my bodymind every time I read a passage, a surefire inspiration frequently used for creating *Into Stillness*, especially if my own music quieted. The clarity and beauty of her language along with their short staccato and lyrical phrases propelled my writing. What's not to like in her embodied, resonant, and compelling language that feels like a body dancing? "Let yourself go, let the writing flow, let yourself steep; bathe, relax, become the river, let everything go, open up, unwind, open the floodgates, let yourself roll." (1991, p. 56) Her words were chosen as an epigraph for *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* and her influence continued in *Into Stillness*. It helped, too, that she was calling for writing that investigated femininity, sexuality, and language and pushed against convention. Her words echo in many of my works including *Writing and Body in Motion* (p. 26) in which I write about

embodiment and the power of connection and say,

Notice. That's all. Our body is communicating. Always. It's up to us to deeply listen and open to each moment.

The body is amazingly intelligent. It continually self regulates, sustains numerous physiological systems, ensuring oxygen, blood, hormones, and cells function as intended. It continually communicates its condition, its wants and needs, its reactions and understanding. The body is a symphony of vital information that welcomes turning our mind, heart, and gut toward what matters. We observe. We attend with curiosity. We say hello to our flesh.

Lynn Hejinian

A founding member of the Language poets, Lynn Hejinian experimental, poetic autobiography, *My Life* (1987), with its linguistic inventions broke grammatical and syntactical boundaries. Her complex book, like my books of poetry, can be hard to read. One enters her formal and procedural poems with their distinctive lyricism best once by suspending our usual way of reading, which is what my books require. Her lines (p. 7) show a disjunctive sequence of ideas, their rhythms of meaning and sentence structure echoed throughout the text:

Somewhere, in the background, rooms share a pattern of small roses. Pretty is as pretty does. In certain families, the meaning of necessity is at one with the sentiment of pre-necessity. The better things were gathering in a pen.

She rejects closure and prefers the writing to mean more than one thing and not be dictated by the author. Her writing brings awareness to the process of writing and reading as does

mine in *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*, *Into Stillness*, and *Continental Drifts*. They include associative leaps in meaning and linguistic play - although *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* includes more humor. My poetry makes use of disruption with its own distinctive music and patterning and is much more closely aligned with the ebbs and flows of my somatic awareness and dancing body.

Italo Calvino

A short story writer and novelist with a vibrant imagination, Italo Calvino masters the art of whimsical fables. Of his work, his short story collections *Cosmicomics* (1965) and *Invisible Cities* (1972) and novels *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979) and *Baron in the Trees* (1957) stand out for the boldness of their vision. His otherworldly visions reveal vividly imagined worlds often accompanied with biting critiques on social structure. Formalized and narrativized, here is Jung's active imagination on steroids. Calvino renders imagination impossible to be considered child's play when for instance in *Cosmic Comics* (1965), he begins each tale with a premise from physics and a narrator named Qfwfq.

The tantalizing scope of Calvino's imagination fanned my imagination and led me to produce several dozen short stories and consider their imaginative ventures as serious symbolic manifestation of thought. "Standing" focuses on a hostile crowd repeatedly pummeling a woman to death and returning to life with the hope of healing the darkness of their hearts. Like *Barron in the Trees* (1957), it satirizes socialization. "Breakthrough" also is imaginatively cast, its protagonist unable to sleep and ends up floating upward with her ankle tethered to her bed breaking through the roof and eventually above the house for the broadened perspective the sky

provides. The intention points to states of consciousness and the vision and visioning possible in shifting circumstances.

Don Hanlon Johnson

Writer, professor, and founder of the Somatic Psychology program at California Institute of Integral Studies, Don Hanlon Johnson has been pivotal to the somatics field. His anthologies like *Bones, Breath and Gesture* (1995) and *The Body in Psychotherapy: Inquiries in Somatic Psychology* (1998) include informative introductions and chapters that bring together the early and current voices of somatic practitioners. He has been in the forefront of somatics for decades, developing the field and investigating its larger ramifications to culture.

Body: Recovering Our Sensual Wisdom (1993) was my introduction to his work which led me to seek out each consecutive book and article of his. In *Body*, he cogently writes about his early years of disembodiment, how being introduced to somatic practitioners changed his bodily awareness and world view, and how cultural ideas manifest in his body. The first person narrative is important in that a reader gets to see the process of coming home to one's body with concrete, personalized, and specific details. His writing fulfills what Amanda Williamson (2020, p. 9) welcomes in writing about the body, that "the post-positivistic bodily experiential realm is reclaimed as a source of integral knowledge," the subjective knowing of the body positioned as valuable. Johnson's writing pointed out that we are not separate from the systems in which we are part until, that is, we engage in a dedicated practice of somatic inquiry to uncover influences and determine what is most authentically oneself.

This book set up a template for me to do the same and look at my body through an

institutional and cultural lens. *Into Stillness* became that study with a focus on the Holocaust - my paternal grandparents were both survivors - and other nation's genocides. My interest was how trauma lives in the body and gets passed on generationally. It also supported how I presented the information in *Contact Improvisation*, my awareness growing about how ideas live in the body. His book and subsequent ones were foundational to *Writing and the Body in Motion* in its emphasis on somatic exploration as essential to self-knowing and creative expression.

More recently, Martha Eddy's *Mindful Movement. The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (2016) also traces the history and geography of somatics, with emphasis on the U.S., and describes many somatic practices. Her books, like the collections by Amanda Williamson and journals such as *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* and *Dance, Movement and Spiritualities* have served the valuable purpose of working toward establishing somatics as a viable field, these works not only chronicling current work but raising important questions about consciousness, feminine agency, pedagogy, spirituality, and much more.

Eddy's view of the somatic landscape is pivotal, especially how it contributes to the role it plays in higher education, yet I returned frequently to Johnson's works for their breadth in understanding the field and his facility in language. His writing is clear and avoids the lofty language of writing that distances a reader from a text. Johnson criticizes academic writing about the body being "etherealized" (2014, p. xvi) and his work provides a welcome alternative and substantiates the claim that knowing one's personal body and writing closer to the bone is a valuable study and resource.

Howard Gardner

Author, psychologist and Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University, Howard Gardner's created the influential theory of multiple intelligences as referred to in *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983). The theory supplanted the idea of one overall intelligence with nine intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. By dividing intelligence in this way, he essentially leveled the playing field which previously privileged those with verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. This division elevated the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence common to dancers. In a culture that tends to disparage dance as too female-centered or as Fraleigh (2004, p. 164) says, "masculinist privileging of sight and mind over movement and touch," I welcomed his repositioning. His theory confirmed what I had already been practicing in my Writing From the Body workshops.

In both *Contact Improvisation* and *Writing and the Body in Motion*, I refer to his discussion of intelligences. In *Writing and the Body in Motion*, I wrote about somatic writing as pivotally blending two intelligences, bodily-kinesthetic and verbal-linguistic, their synergy a potent process creating powerful results. In an email correspondence with Gardner (2020), he explained he found their combination highly unusual and referred to the exercises I teach in Writing From the Body as "ingenious." He invited me to write about my somatic writing for his blog *MI Oasis* (2020) and prefaced the article with his own comments by saying,

When one attempts to order or array the several human intelligences in some fashion, linguistic, bodily, and personal intelligences may seem distant from one another. But in the hands of a skillful educator, these intelligences can be joined; and the resulting whole can be very helpful to students who, in many cases, are struggling with the stresses of contemporary life.

When I first adopted dance as a practice on par with writing, I considered it as relieving my overreliance on my analytical and language oriented brain which reinforced disembodiment and a sluggish heaviness. By embracing dance, I hadn't foreseen the extent that it would provide relief, change my body, and expand my thinking and moving. My newfound neuroplasticity would comply with the findings of Daniel J. Siegel, professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine who studies mind and says, "Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows." (2016, p. 179) My area of research focused on the mutual relationship between language and the body and I was finding their combination to be fertile. Increasing consciousness in one leads to greater consciousness in the other, one building upon the other. Gardner's model reinforced and spurred my findings, my research continuing toward exploring the particulars of the languages of movement and writing.

Research

Here I give details about the phenomenological approach behind my research and unique ways of combining writing and first person perception of the body in motion. Mentioned are the methods in general and how they work differently in the different forms of writing.

Development

A turning point in my writing approach was the unhappy realization that writing no

longer provided me with the joy and insight it once did. The loss was made all the more apparent by comparing it to my dance practice, specifically Contact Improvisation, which consistently enlivened my mind and body and reinforced my life pulse. Contact Improvisation led to recognizing and embodying the power of improvisation, the importance of having little or no expectation in partnering with a fellow dancer once we eyed each other across the room or our bodies touched. Contact Improvisation showed how movement and the press of bodies against each other not only moved me around the dance floor, but stirred emotions, thoughts, memories, awareness, and insights. Activity on the dance floor led to processing the dance through journaling for increased understanding of what was taking place. Journaling got me to reflect, question, and identify experiences, to give fleeting impressions names and verbal phrases. Here was the start of languaging processes that defied easy writing, the felt experience of movement finding its equal in words. The temporary moments of the dance got recorded on the page like a still photograph to be returned to and reflected upon later if wanted. The process furthered my understanding of what was taking place bodily. The process concurs with what Williamson (2020, p. 9) says happens when we connect with the moving body which awakens the realization of new understanding. She says, "[T]he experience of dancing, so deeply connected to the search for human meaning, life-force and vitality, often takes the dancer-researcher into the realms of soulful and inspirited research."

Many practice Contact Improvisation for its social value, its ability to establish connections with another body and offset the social and emotional isolation that many westerners feel. I was well aware that what took place on the dance floor did not necessarily transfer into a friendship. Although friendships were welcome, my primary reason for engaging in the dance

was for somatic inquiry, investigating subjective body events, and building my somatic and touch literacy. The dance provoked too many somatic openings, a disruption in habitual bodily functioning and awareness that led to new understanding, for me to ignore. My interest focused on exploring somatic awareness and consciousness and uncovering hidden realities buried in the flesh, the intent of many somatic practices and therapies. Martha Graham (1991, p. 4) refers to them as bodily truths and says, “Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul's weather to all who can read it.” Celeste Snowber (2016, p. 4) recognizes the body’s wisdom and delights and says,

There is a secret the body holds. How you access your imagination, intuition, and perception lies within the body. Making a practice of listening to your imaginative, intuitive, and perceptive abilities activates the energy that lies dormant within your pulsing body.

Psychiatrist specializing in PTSD, Bessel van der Kolk (2015, p. 3) recognizes the necessity of connecting with the body to overcome trauma “by allowing the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage or collapse that result from trauma.” He sees that those who skip this important step are destined to run their trauma tapes repeatedly.

Although I’ve employed movement for healing with my clients, I was approaching dance as a somatic practice for increasing consciousness, which could only happen if I turned my attention in its direction. Increasing my dance practice increased my enlivened awareness. Philosopher of religion Yuasa Yasuo (1987, p. 18) writes about Japanese practices and the differences between how the east and west approach consciousness and says,

[I]n the East one starts from the experiential assumption that the mind-body modality changes through the training of the mind and body by means of cultivation or training. Only after assuming this experiential ground does one ask what the mind-body relation is. That is, the mind-body issue is not simply a theoretic speculation, but it is originally a practical, lived experience, involving the mustering of one's whole mind and body.

Although there are exceptions, the eastern approach tends to emphasize engaging in practices whereas the western approach tends to emphasize reflection and intellectualization. One is active, the other active passive. My interests lie in the former, in the intelligence of my body arising from practices such as dance, not only thinking which, of course, has its place. My body was source. My flesh in motion with and without language uncovered the worlds for which I yearned, made all the more comprehensible through my embodied approach to writing. Says Yasuo (1987, p. 25),

True knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through 'bodily recognition or realization,' that is, through the utilization of one's total mind and body....to learn with the body, not the brain.

Numerous questions intrigued me: What makes one dance more dynamic than another? What emotional complex may have prompted a pain, quiver, or any other sensation? What was my body communicating? How could a dance impact mood and perception? How could I use the dance to further my somatic and proprioceptive intelligence? What prompted a collision or attraction to a partner, among the instances that Contact Improvisation cofounder Nancy Stark Smith refers to in her Underscore for possible encounters with a partner? What makes touch so potent? My queries were akin to what sociologist Kenneth Liberman (1994, pp 355 - 362)

identifies as a central “phenomenological problem” and an intriguing, pivotal question put forth by philosopher Eugene Gendlin who wrote about the bodily felt sense, “How does felt meaning function in cognition?”

Among the ways, it is achieved through movement and attention to the details of the body in motion. In *Contact Improvisation* (p. 66), I write,

CI brings home unignorable sensations for committing investigations into living – if we choose to do so. The dance immerses us in the voluptuous pulsing moment and gives us an opportunity to move creatively through space. The paths of this activity allow for explorations into the overgrown and neglected, the embryonic and the latent, the bewildering and the captivating – landscapes rarely visited, uninhabited spaces not yet discovered or begging for renewal. CI stirs the body from its slumber.

My study focused on awareness of my personal body, but went further into what is possible when the movement particulars of the moving self in Contact Improvisation are applied to bodies in general. My interest was similar to what Ann Cooper Albright did in her book, *How To Land* (2018), where she applies principles of Contact Improvisation to investigating her grief at the loss of her young nephew and the practice of resilience as an embodied practice. I, too, was investigating the broader applications of the dance, as written about throughout *Contact Improvisation*, and how the template and findings from the dance could be applied elsewhere.

My exploration of awareness and consciousness had begun years earlier with pursuing meditation as a way to experience the breadth of being. Meditation supported me in separating the music and image from the static, authenticity from superficiality, a steadiness of mission from the onslaught of distraction. It showed the difference between concentrated participatory

engagement and passivity. But Contact Improvisation went places that meditation didn't. Contact Improvisation pushes embodiment in one's face - and neck and back and toes, essentially every surface and interior of the body. It showed that in touching one area of the body, the entirety of the body is touched. Recognizing this continuity, Deane Juhan (1987, p. 43) says,

The skin is no more separated from the brain than the surface of a lake is separate from its depths; the two are different locations in a continuous medium...The brain is a single functional unit, from cortex to fingertips to toes. To touch the surface is to stir the depths.

The dance shows what is obvious and points out, to those willing to look, to what may otherwise go overlooked.

The intimacy of two bodies dancing together in close improvised contact distinguishes the activity from other activities. In somatic therapies like Alexander Technique and Traeger Mentastics, the roles are prescribed beforehand, with one person receiving the suggested motion and instruction of the giver. Contact Improvisation involves two - sometimes more - partners with equal input, sliding along the continuum between the poles of leader and follower, among the ways the dance stands apart from other practices. No one is controlling the direction of the dance. Partners equally share responsibility for its direction, oftentimes positioned at the precipice of unknowing, of the mind empty of expectation, each person awaiting an impulse, an incremental start to momentum.

Contact Improvisation is not without guidelines altogether. Most dances maintain a consistent yet moving point of contact with partners respecting physical and psychological boundaries, what I refer to as listening in *Contact Improvisation* (pp 31-32).

Listening, according to CI's metaphorical use of the word, refers to paying attention to all the sensory occurrences arising from touch, from the play of weight as partners move through space, and from the event of one body encountering the presence of another. Listening refers to noticing stimuli not only within oneself but also from another; refining this ability comes through repeated trials. As the complexity of the body reveals its secrets, Contacters eventually discover the existence of worlds upon worlds.

This deep listening is key to the dance. Without it the dance quickly deteriorates into nothing more enjoyable than elevator chit-chat. Instead partners attend to the many subtle and overt phenomenon of the body - the sensations, pressure, lifts, disruptions, flow, and more of the dance - and equally important, attending to another's body. Of great consequence, another's body is beyond one's control. Partners have their own set of principles that get revealed in the moment of the dance, an unpredictability that contributes to the pleasure and risk of the dance. The dance continually challenged me to be present and open to nuances of awareness, to not overlook a momentary sensation which may be the very portal to new awareness and understanding. Deep listening was the fertile territory for my phenomenological research.

My writing intended for publication, in comparison to dancing, felt flat, lifeless, predictable, a burden and unwelcome obligation, akin to a dance partner no longer listening, therefore stalling and impeding how the dance unfolded. The realization that writing, a practice that had nurtured me for years, no longer was vitalizing or full of discovery grieved me. Yet to stop writing altogether was a disagreeable prospect. My body trembled at the possibility of giving up.

The writing needed a jolt of energy, a revised approach, a dramatic makeover. It needed

to feel closer to the bone and flesh of my being. I honed in on a detail from Contact Improvisation that distinguished it from writing: one was communal and the other solitary. That difference became the challenge, to somehow bring the sense of Other from the dance into the writing, to experience the writing as collaborative or, as Quasha (2019, p. 29) would eventually term it, ecoproprioceptive, “an extended self-perceiving, enlarged in scope to the degree that it is non-separate from environment.” He recognizes writing and language itself as influenced by, well, everything, what Buddhism refers to as interdependence or co-origination. He (2019, p. 74) says, “like the body – most dramatically the skin – language by its nature is always already a threshold between mind and word – and in that sense, co-originating.” I was looking for a partner and was beginning to understand the greater complexity of language and that writers, despite sitting alone in our room, are never fully separate from others.

Language is, of course, as etymology shows, a system that innumerable writers have contributed to over centuries through repeating and bending rules. In that sense, language is a living social system undergoing constant change. Every use of language brings it to life. But the absence of visceral immediacy, the weight of a breathing, sweating body left me looking for an element to revive my writing. The writing needed breath, heat, weight, and unpredictability and the search was on for the appropriate Other.

Improvisational dance urges a self reflexive, embodied method for moving, sensing, and making meaning. It is Being in motion. Limitations and boundaries shift. We are forced to pay attention, to inhabit our body, to sense. We may be playful or serious, neither, both, or something else altogether. We may not know what unfolds until we live through the unfolding and even then, we may miss out on details.

Improvisation reinforces heightened sensitivity. A particular method of processing and responding to phenomenon, the activity primordial, akin to an animal on alert for possible prey and predators. With improvisation, habits are relinquished in favor of choice, every moment an intersection with directional options and no directive. Musician and educator Stephen Nachmanovitch understands the power of improvisational awareness to consciousness, be it applied to daily living or art, and says, “For art to appear, we have to disappear....When we “disappear” in this way, everything around us becomes a surprise, new and fresh.”(1991, p. 51)

My challenge was to bring the immediacy of a partner and improvisation onto the line, into writing, to bring the enlivened body to words and to stage the text. The shift had to include embodying the word and fulfill the flesh makes breath makes line makes sense makes flesh. The shift had to awaken the senses artfully opening consciousness to re-self and realign in word and body.

In short, the language needed to be felt. Its sounds and images needed to stir the totality of the body, not only appeal to the mind which has a tendency toward distancing and disembodiment. Rather than approach language as utilitarian, I needed to approach writing as a pliant material like paint or a dancing body. Its pliable elements needed to move. I wanted to employ it for putting me in touch with my lived experience.

I chose to loosen control, to upend my usual habits of writing, to minimize expectation and instead to feel pulse. I chose to yield to an invisible partner while staying in touch with my body. One eye on the page and another on my body. One hand typing or guiding the pen across paper and the other hand attending to the changing terrain of my body. It resulted in passages like the following in *Contact Improvisation* (p. 65) full of rhythmically short sentences and an

obvious repetitive structure, “Surfaces matter. Center matters. Breath matters. Contact matters. Energy matters. Safety in play. Risk with reserve. Two, maybe three or four, dancing as one, a fellowship of selves, the body as an instrument of play.”

In poetry, this meant moving my body first, reconnecting to the felt sense, breath and heart beat shifting, awareness following or coinciding, while sitting before the blank page with all its unpredictability. It meant dancing with words and meaning. It meant getting out of the way of images wanting to arise. It meant connecting to language somatically. In “27” of *Into Stillness* (p.29), I write,

This body closes eyes. Shuts off the usual onuses and incentives of sugar and buy.

This body turns away into the twist of over more. Far expanse closes in the underarm and understood overture. This body is asked to trust. This body trusts none that is essential in the byway apparent from namesakes in closure opening sully.

Moved By Sound

My body swayed. Mind shifted. I imagined a partner approaching. I awaited a connection and the synergy that Paxton refers to as the third partner, the combination of the two dancing. But rather than use the impulse to provoke further movement, to develop the dance as would be the case in Contact Improvisation, I transformed the impulse into the felt experience of a sound, a phoneme, for instance ssss which vibrates the cheek and creates a small vacuum in the lungs.

That singular sound would then provoke a word, sssss becoming ssssingular or ssssimple or sssshush, which sometimes becomes part of the writing itself as in “st-steam release. ac-acument. brrr-ristle. mary has/ little lambs, cramps run down my legs” from *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*. (p. 7) Those sounded words then provoked consequent words, phrases, and entire sentences. The momentum of the writing might end shortly after or take off, the verbal dance continuing phrase after phrase, stanza after stanza leading to familiar and unfamiliar territory, a world within words, here manifesting as new structures and formulations in language that established a balance between the mind that wants to control and the mind that welcomes allowing, the mind that wants artful craft and the one clamoring for visceral truth, a mind that reflects upon self and a mind that is self. What follows (p. 8) the previous stanzas became

hopelessly writing the body, sometimes as my hand
sifting your flesh, willing what i may, will-less as the
sun’s rise and fall and up again. listen to the advice
of wind, rice, and baaaaffles. quietly in their irides-
cent scatter, geckoes enter hut, pose, and transpose.
we are never the same again.

Sound continues through each my works. In *Her Body Listening*, it leads to nonsensical, musical lines such as, “Strings vibrate. Chips chip away. La la lee. La la lo. Cannot winnows can to win” (p 14), the “cannot” and “winnows” with its obvious consonance but also playing with the idea of winning or not winning, the “cannot” blowing toward positivity. In “Let Beyond Through” (p. 16) in the same collection is the brief appearance of sound based personifications, “Miss Ogyney” for misogyny and “Mister Urbable” for disturbed babble. Further playing with

word and sound combinations, I created new words and terms, even discordant combinations such as “neuroruminant,” “neopopletic,” “cytoplasmic electricity,” “tetratongued lipreader” in “Reinforce Vital Pulse” (p. 17) with an intent to disrupt reading habits and encourage forging new synaptic connections.

Moved by Subtle Sensation

Connecting to impulse was critical. It didn’t always translate into sound however. An alternative included image or a specific word. The impulse was essentially translated into one of the languages at my disposal. But in doing this, I realized a consistency throughout the collection of my writing; at the heart of the writing was attention to subtle sensation, the type easily ignored because of its ephemeral nature, but here the very fount of source and resource like the uppermost point of an iceberg barely breaking the water’s surface, risk-free to any boat. Here was a depth of listening to my flesh (that I would later develop through healing training). In some ways, it was the pause that Gendlin would have suggested, that we slow the writing down enough to uncover what is taking place in the body, to connect to sensation, and watch how words arise. Writing about Gendlin’s techniques of focusing, Williamson (2014, p. xvi) says,

[S]low down the rush to verbalize, settling more deeply into our experience of waiting for words to come, just as, in many movement disciplines, we wait for movements to come instead of making up gestures.

Slowing helped, along with deeply listening to the subtlest of sensations to unearth remote felt experience and accompanying words which broke habits of perceiving and writing.

This was more than Proprioception 101 which focused on orienting myself in space. The research for this approach involved interoception and delving into the remote inner space of my body, not obvious sensations like pain or hunger or obvious emotions like sorrow or joy, often the motivation for so much writing. These were the fine hairs of the skin, perhaps the thread-like villi of the intestines or cells vibrating in wonderment. In “Establish Parameters” in *Her Body Listening* (p. 37), I write,

She listens within to shades of body in follow in balance. She
refuses to wait in serfdom and opens the crown to a beyond of
manifest, not nails, not dread, but an interstitial glow likening tides
of supernal moons.

The same approach formed the foundation for the research that led to *Into Stillness* (p. 50) with its focus on trauma hidden in the body.

This body that. That body was. That hastened. That listened.
A which whose unchastening deliberated a touch of imperious
rest in the deep surveillance and lowered lid. Sedentary. The
whose to whom. Flesh drying toward crack, a tumble into birth.

The abbreviated and abrupt lines like “That body was” suggest violence and words that refuse to move beyond the proverbial lump in the throat, disembodiment, even dissociation.

My research led to discovering a level of bodily sensitivity that opened language to new dimensions. It liberated me to bend format rules, for instance not capitalizing the first letter of a sentence, already accomplished with great effect by poet e.e. cummings. In *Into Stillness* (p. 87),

it encouraged using singular words or phonemes as a complete sentence, and developing a new level of word play such as “be head off/despite om despite um” which encourages multiple interpretations, all of them intended. It allowed me to write about little known bodily events whose language was even more undeveloped. It provided access to the stillness between motion and the silence between words. This. Sometimes. Becoming something. Else.

The subtleties of this developing awareness allowed me to see what hadn't been seen, feel what hadn't been felt, and voice the wordless inner space of the body. With somatic and meditative awareness, I entered the wilderness of the body as shown in *Her Body Listening* (p. 12). “Her body wings it, widens at the shoulders, upon the crease/into ease. Can not can. Can not does. Doing does.” The writing provided evidence to what David Abrams (1996, p. 75) writes about as the importance of the sensory world, that language not be divorced from the body. He says,

Linguistic meaning is not some ideal and bodiless essence that we arbitrarily assign to a physical sound or word...Meaning sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation.

Recognizing that language needs to be experienced bodily, I approached writing with Beginner's Mind, with a childlike curiosity in awe of how the words formed, rising up from my body and tumbling off my tongue. A new depth of meeting my body, mind, and language took place with alchemical side effects. Changes were taking place from the process which led to more writing, more movement, and more somatic awareness.

Moved By the Momentum of Unknowing

Precognition dominated the writing. I wrote to write, the writing pulling me along. I lived on the line. The line was me, then not me, then something altogether different, unfamiliar, and Other. Analysis and reflection would have to wait. While writing, write. While typing, type. When sounding, sound. When story and image present themselves, be present. These were the mantras, the directionless directiveness that resembled lines of what a Zen teacher may have written. Give up attachments. Rest in impermanence. Be in being. Be on the line. In forgetting self, I opened and discovered a new self. Through writing, I wrote myself into form and existence, none of it staid, all of it happening on line and in body. Here I was. Here I am. In motion.

Precognition meant that I didn't know, or not fully, what my words meant until I read them. I wasn't beholden to something being said ahead of time. Improvise. Minimal expectation. No plan other than to write. No plan other than to be present with the page, with body, on the page, in words, to breathe on the line as the line. Here was nondualism in action, a metaphysical union between passive and active poles. There was no gap between mind and body. No gap between intention and result. It echoed William Butler Yeats's line (1961, p.183), "How can we know the dancer from the dance," but in this instance, it was the poet from the poem, the writer from the writing, the object from the subject. Zen teacher John Daido Looi (2005, p. 1) sees creative practice as revealing our fundamental nature and is a way to train the mind and the body. He says, "The creative process, like a spiritual journey, is intuitive, nonlinear, and experiential. It points us toward our essential nature, which is a reflection of the boundless creativity of the universe." I was embodying Merleau-Ponty's (1964, p. 162) enigmatic body that he describes as

“simultaneously sees and is seen...it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself.”

I was establishing a somatic poetics, a body on the line, embodiment in process in language. Somatic writing birthing. A type of embodied cognition, a process revealed in real time on the line word by word by phrase by page. My life was on the line, but I also allowed the line to give me life, to switch meaning, replace one word for another, to exercise the malleability of words, the writing to breathe life into me and lead if not the way, then a way. Here was a reflexivity between language and self. To play with the press and pull of language, its denotations and connotations, its associative leaps and falls, its disorientation and reorientation, to use a verb as an adjective, to noun a verb, its alliterative sequences tripping a tongue and shifting a mind. In *Continental Drifts* (p. 87), I write, “Breath seeds a self on the line, eking an existence, peeking into a happenstance of utterance/and grope....Your unsleepy secret seeps and can wake yourself up.”

Embodied flow got reinforced, a yearned for lusciousness and quiet ecstasy blossomed. Recognizing the importance of embodied flow, Williamson and Jill Hayes (2014, p. 15) say,

Life is movement: a dance of potentiality, shifting and changing moment to moment; a stream of present emergence. All living phenomena are in flux, transitory appearances experiencing subtle transformations, invisible to the eye. To feel the flow of emergent life, it is necessary to become embodied.

My flow manifested on the page. The creative output and self in play merged. Being without constraint relaxed into the sensuality of language connected to this body and other bodies.

Everything connected to everything else.

I played with first, second, and third person perspectives. None of it was me. All were a

part of me. They were the universal Us. They were this brain dancing between hemispheres, a neural partnering and repatterning. They were a me engaging in ecoproprioception. They were engaged to keep the line dancing, to roll with mind, to lift sensation, to press against memory, to twist, leap or land without anticipating outcome. Words were the medium mediating the me, you, and us. The lyrical, dreamlike, playful writing delivered me to the core of my being, what literature professor Jonathan Bate (2000, p. 76) would call the natural world, even nature itself.

He says that

poesis in the sense of verse-making may be language's most direct path of return to the *oikos*, of the place of dwelling, because meter itself – a quiet, but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat – is an answering to nature's own rhythms.

The writing was a constant return to the present, its slippage and reinforcement, an obeisance of motion, of constant change.

Of importance was sticking to the momentum of the line. Call it inspiration or muse or partner or chi. What is said in one place may be unsaid elsewhere, a truth in one stanza refuted later. Such is the pliancy of language, that I can write "I am flying" and the reader may or may not believe it, but certainly imagine it. Perhaps "flying" is a metaphor. Or the line pays homage to a pesky bug, a fly. Such is the power of language, to plant a seed in the mind, to provoke thought and stir feeling, to get us to listen more closely to ourselves, to inquire and increase our somatic literacy.

The writing was a poetic stream of consciousness in which mistakes that may have previously been quickly edited out remain on the line, like a hair in front of the eyes or the

stumble of a dancer, impossible to be erased. Modern dance welcomed the sublime and the mundane and my lines did the same, or sane, or sinew. Like Hejiniian rejecting closure and redefining what is possible through the activity of reading, for the reader and writer to share authorial hegemony in the making of meaning, I provided an experience of text without a predetermined conclusion. Instead let the text be open. Come with me, it said, ride the line. See where you or we go.

Aside from some obvious typos, mistakes revealed themselves as openings to the unconsciousness, aligned with Process Work's notion of secondary process, the background information knocking at the door of awareness. Poetry allowed for freedom that needn't adhere to a previous structure. As if doing Authentic Movement or Continuum, the only driving force was to be present. As if doing Feldenkrais or Myofascial Release, tendons and fascia adjusted and loosened. As if lethargy founds its match in flow. As if every utterance held value, a connective tissue of expression and meaning. As if spinal alignment found line. As if writing on one level of awareness pulled other levels with it, comprehensible to those able to perceive them, or requiring subsequent readings, a value of richly layered, resonant literature which, like nature, reveals new details with every experience, somatic and linguistist intelligence increasing.

What is possible in the poetry is a direct experience, the fission in language bypassing logic and usual ways of reading - accessible for those who could do so loosely. To be a direct transmission. For it to get under the skin. For it to hydrate connective tissue. The poetry would perplex the mind but it wasn't meant to be read for its logic or linear sequencing. To use language and be used by it, to embody not distance self. In this way, I echoed Cixous (1991, pp 49-50) who called for a feminine form of writing brought into the body. She says,

As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed in the maps of social constructions....Now, listen to what your body hadn't dared let surface.

Continental Drifts had me further exploring somatically inspired poetic structures, each section following a restraint such as using couplets, erasure, and meditation. I used Daniel C. Matt's (2003) translation of the *Zohar*, a primary Kabbalist text, (volume 1) for its highly complex use and understanding of language that grappled with mind, body, and spirit. "A Directional," the first poem (p. 13) in the series, begins with

Psst, this way.
Was a book. A fire of bon proportions, flames
kicking the sky, every worse, verse
for the verse. Lumen beyond the eye scat
shattering of sparks. History hisses. Hers too.
Lost to a cohesion of the vast.

These phrases full of multiple associations, leads, a few stanzas later, to

Verbs fight for their enactment
and let go from the deep. (p. 13)

Professor of Jewish Literature Arthur Green (2004, p. 8) refers to language butting up against extraordinary or ineffable experiences and failing to find the right words, what many dancer can relate to when trying to write about movement. He says that texts like the *Zohar* are filled with "reflections on the secrets of language and are often characterized by intense and highly detailed

attempts to penetrate inner and hidden languages of speech.” For him it advances the need to stretch “the ordinary discursive vehicle to new poetic heights.” My writing stretched, probed, and listened to voice the body’s silence.

Her Body Listening continued the exploration, except my somatic poetic research involved using writing to document reflections of the third year of my Healing Touch training and to better understand the universal life force and to note how or if it differed from the creative pulse. Here was yet another layer of understanding touch, the body and the inner space that pervades nature. The book speaks to the intelligence of the sensual, energetic body, a challenge to intellectual knowledge that prefers logic and evidence. It echoed Mindell’s (1997) deep democracy ideas, what he refers to as the field, and the importance of healing one as connected to healing all. “Remove All Blocks” (p. 11) begins

Her body listens. Her body listens to the barely audible, a light, a nudge, a dizzying wave. Her body needs to know, needs like a hand slipping into a glove. Like a passage opening and closing before winks open again. Her body gains what it loses and lets gall.

Consistent with my previous books and my somatic practices generally is deep listening, however this time, I was coming up against my own biases which I buttressed with statements like the epigraph by ecofeminist Susan Griffin chosen for the book which reads, “The mind can forget what the body, defined by each breath, subject to the heart beating, does not.” (p. iii) The writing in *Her Body Listening* required letting go of the mind that wants to control for a mind that allows, watches, and learns, which sometimes meant reaching new conclusions. Columbia

University professor of physics and astronomy Janna Levin (Ferris, 2020) refers to deep listening moments which leads to new awareness and conclusions as “visceral poetic beauty,” except she relies on mathematics for them. Sometimes my aim was conclusions but more often my sole intent was to create an experience in words, to live on the line amid the tumult and rest of mechanics, syntax, and grammar.

Structure

Nonfiction came with a few self-imposed constraints. Aiming to reach a wider audience than my poetry meant abandoning some of the kinetically sprawling poetic techniques since the poetry was understood and appreciated by a literate minority. I wanted the nonfiction to be more accessible, informative and instructive which meant adopting a more conventional narrative line and structure. There needed to be a logical sequence, a familiar form that wouldn't disorient readers.

The primary audience for *Contact Improvisation* was dancers who stereotypically prefer to dance, not read about it. Keeping that in mind along with an intention to echo the dance in the writing, I maintained the lyrical, embodied style established in the poetry, but toned it down. I wanted it to be useful in opening the gate of the mind, to hook the reader and keep them reading and alert, to get them to listen to the words in a world constantly distracting our attention. Additionally, I wanted the language to assist the reader's embodiment, not distance them as too often happens in prose with its breathless lines, apparent in encyclopedia entries with their focus on information that pretends to lack bias and embrace Truth, any particulars of a personal body eliminated. In the following passage (p. 66), I incorporate sensual language and rhythm and say,

When the body awakens, the result is savory morsels for a choreographer, painter, engineer, ecologist or anyone who wants to live deeply. Source and resource. Dialog, not lecture. An active, vibrant body welcomes stimuli, knowing when to say yes, and when to say no, when to receive an impetus and when to push an unwanted or oppressive force away.

The body remained, however, by necessity. Consistent in my nonfiction, in fact, an underlying thread in all my somatically informed writing, including the writing of this thesis, is not only an awareness of my moving, somatically alert body, but a regular practice of removing my fingers from the keyboard to scan my body or get up from my chair away from the computer to dance. What is not visible between the type of these pages is the frequency in which I investigated stillness, lay on the floor, twisted, loosened, stretched, or bounded around the room - with and without music - to soften the sutures of thinking to restore the sensual connection to my body.

I can't dance once and be done with embodiment in the same way I can't meditate or eat a meal once and be done with those important activities. As practices, they need be done regularly to keep the bodymindspirit oiled and pliant, thoughts and movement arising in interactive play. Snowber (1998, p. 34), whose exuberance toward writing and moving parallels mine, who also referred to her approach to writing as *Writing From the Body*, the name for my somatic writing class, similarly emphasizes the importance between movement and writing awareness, their mutual relationship essential. She says, "Unless we cultivate a physicality of presence in other aspects of our being, when we come face to face with the keyboard, we cannot manufacture it."

In "Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality," my chapter in *Spiritual Herstories* where I discuss the connection between movement, Zen meditation, and somatic awareness as

overlapping each other, I continually pull back the curtain on my process. At the close of the essay, I write, “The cursor blinks at me repeatedly as if impatient with my slowed typing. My body yearns for motion. It is time to rise from my chair.” (p. 456)

Each chapter of *Contact Improvisation* was devoted to a specific body: the creative body, practicing body, knowing body, entitled body, relating body, and dancing body. The chapters were reminiscent of Bonnie Baninbridge Cohen’s understanding of there being not one mind but multiple minds. Each chapter framed the body with a different focus. Each chapter offered a varied entry of experience of self.

Lessening the polylinearity of the poetry books, *Contact Improvisation*’s narrative and description demanded explanations be as clear as possible. Describing and honoring the dance was already a challenge, yet I wanted to reinforce bodily awareness throughout and not let the book suffer Johnson’s “language abuses of the abstract academic conventions.” (2014, p. xiii) Continually I checked my breath and timing, body tensions and releases; I alternated descriptive, informative and instructional text with lyrical passages. It required distinguishing between weariness in output, the actual act of writing, from the writing itself. If the text bored me, my assumption was that it may have a similar effect on a reader. My body stayed alert, senses tuned to the rhythm of expression. Touch the page and touch self. Move self and words flow. If something went awry or output stalled, I implemented one of the many exercises eventually written up in *Writing and the Body in Motion* such as uncovering resonance with a phrase (p. 110) or moving a written phrase (p. 111), both aimed at fleshing out personal meaning and appropriate language. I was fulfilling what Kimerer Lamothe (2020, p. 410) would find value in given that she, too, sees,

Writing and dancing are united and distinguished by what they, as bodily practices, both share: the ability to create experiential realities that find expression in thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions. As bodily practices both writing and dancing exercise our senses; teach us how and where to put our attention...Both guide our participation in the rhythms of bodily becoming.

My body was communicating to me; it was up to me to pay attention and understand its prompts and deflections, to write what I wanted but also to listen to the words that showed up on the page. This mutual relationship reinforced my role as both active and passive creator, me tending to the page but also my personal body, which led to learning from the combined expression.

In many ways, the poetry was written to satisfy a desire for a lush, complex language that I wasn't encountering in other texts. Here is the first stanza in *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (p. 1) which announces the launch of my newfound direction:

she who hesitates is not necessarily lost but has
found a new way or is looking to get off the one
way ramp leading to the large car lot of carnivorous
pleasures carnivaling senses unlike anything known
before, like something outside her neighborhood,
like some place she would never walk her dog or
garage her park.

Lushness comes across in unraveling of the sentence and in the repetition of "car" as a stand alone word and in "carnivorous" and "carnivaling," the latter word also an example of a noun turned into a verb. "like something outside her neighborhood" suggests moving beyond provincialism into a riskier and unfamiliar place. Lines like those above persist throughout the

collection of my writing with an aim to upend thought and linguistic patterns that allowed me to delve more intimately into language and bodily and cognitive knowing. They reinforce presence that, like performing a complex movement, requires a heightened alertness. The creative process itself becomes the very vehicle for developing awareness and consciousness.

Contact Improvisation was written to inform dancers and to secure through documentation the dance a position in the culture and to foster developing awareness and consciousness in its readers by pointing out the impact of dancing upon a body. Awareness and consciousness is not something you have or don't, but to what degree you have them. My ongoing mission in the entire collection of my work has been to heighten awareness and consciousness. My concerns were akin to those of neurologist Antonio Damasio (2000, p. 5) who says about consciousness that it is

the key to a life examined, for better or for worse, our beginner's permit to knowing all about the hunger, the thirst, the sex, the tears, the laughter, the kicks, the punches, the flow of images we call thought, the feelings, the words, the stories, the beliefs, the music and the poetry, the happiness and the ecstasy....consciousness helps us develop a concern for other selves and improve the art of life.

My interest lie in not only heightening awareness and improving my life - I was a ready, available participant - but, as importantly, all those on the path to embodied awakening.

Yet a book is never one thing. Nor is a line. Or a movement. This is the open attention of Authentic Movement or Continuum, but I was applying it to writing. Writing led me places, an unfolding of knowing, an unfolding, too, of not knowing, of trusting the body, of engaging with flow, of being with presence.

In *Writing and the Body in Motion*, I continued many of the same approaches used in *Contact Improvisation*, but rather than focus on a singular form of movement, it encapsulated decades of somatic exploration through dance, movement and meditation practices, depth psychology, and somatic writing. My intent was for it to be comprehensive and explanatory so as to welcome readers into their own somatic writing and unfolding. Again I used a chapter structure of bodies similar to what was used in *Contact Improvisation*: the subjective body, the perceiving body, the kinesthetic body, the verbal body, the imagining body, the evolutionary body, the practicing body. It provided a firm frame. My intention was to be descriptive, informative and instructional, and to accent the text with lyrical passages. The lyrical passages were meant to light up multiple areas of the brain, to remind readers of the sensuality of reading, to get them to focus on their body, breath, and motion. I kept in mind that the audience may not have the same breadth of bodily and verbal experience as myself and that somatic awareness may be new and foreign, as has been the case with most of my university students encountering somatics for the first time.

To this end, interspersed throughout the text are exercises for readers to test out the ideas themselves. A somatic practice focuses on an individual coming to know their body; somatic writing should do the same. That point is emphasized in the text; the reader is invited into becoming familiar with their body, not mine, a premise repeated throughout the work.

When my own output stalled, I implemented any one of the very techniques I was writing about. Between the lines is a writer who paused on her chair or stepped away from the computer to tease material into the open, and eventually return reinvigorated, the writing stream renewed and flowing again.

It's especially important for writers to reconnect with the body, not just the body of a text. How else can a writer grow, claim an authentic voice, and feel whole? Inversely, it's valuable for somatic practitioners to have language to articulate their experiences. With both writing and dance used as a way for a culture to see itself, how else can a culture grow? Emma Meehan (2015, p. 6) recognizes the value of combining the activities. She says,

The writing engages with the movement, returning to the body, expressing experiences but also unraveling, breaking apart and creating new forms, making something new appear or become clearer. Writing may alter experience but is also a means for experiencing.

It's not an either/or situation but both. To illuminate movement, words, and meaning. In *Writing and the Body in Motion* (pp 30-31), I write,

Combining moving with writing and deep listening engenders neural integration, areas of the brain brought into coherence, strengthening synaptic connections and establishing new pathways. The combination leads to significant increases in somatic and mental intelligence. It leads as well to increasing overall intelligence, connections between experience and ideas newly forming.

One serves and furthers the other. They work well enough separately but their interdisciplinarity grows awareness and leads to unimagined discoveries.

The field of somatics is only a few decades old, its reach extending into dance, athletics, leadership, and psychology. Somatic writing is even younger, with only a few pioneering the field through creative practice. Daria Halpern (2020, personal communication) with the Tamalpa

Life/Art Process is interested in the bridge between movement and writing. Recognizing that many of her clients have “low skill and high sensitivity,” she focuses on words when movement falls short (and movement when words fall short). Tina Stromstead (2020, personal communication), Jungian analyst and primary practitioner with Authentic Movement, uses writing to “access their wholeness” and invites participants to free associate in writing before and after moving.

Respected writing instructors and authors like Natalie Goldberg (*Writing Down the Bones, 1986*) and Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew (*Writing the Sacred Journey, 2005*) recognize the importance of meditation and the body to writing, yet present their work without a dedicated investigatory movement practice. Professor Emeritus of Transpersonal Psychology at Sofia University, Rosemarie Anderson offers a comprehensive use of language in a process she refers to as embodied writing. She recognizes writing’s usefulness for reflection, but also values writing that is based in the senses and the lived experience of the body. Her meditation and transpersonal background provide her with a well nuanced understanding of language that arises from the body and sees both as processes. She (2001, p. 83) says that “embodied writing seeks to reveal the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body and evoking sympathetic resonance in a reader” but also recognizes it can lead to a much broader understanding of self. Despite a well developed understanding of language and its tie to the body, she leaves out the moving body which can heighten senses further, something that only sitting meditatively trails behind.

My approach to somatic writing positions writing and movement as similarly weighted in importance. I consider the writing itself a movement experience and bring to the line a

comparable flexile improvisation as I do in movement.

Consistent in my poetry and nonfiction is investigating embodied cognition, how we experience presence and know what we know. New awareness and conclusions arise regularly through bodily involvement. It places a body in an ever present now, a stream of sensing the many blips and protracted impressions. They rely on movement and writing for articulation, giving them further shape, understanding, and integration.

Awake Dreaming

Given that much of my fiction tends toward fabulism or magical realism, I wanted my language to be linear and straightforward. I wasn't interested in the postmodern tendency to upend the perspective of the author or to question the narrative as is visible in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979) where the point of view and information that accompanies it varies chapter to chapter. My focus was on imagination and the ways images are birthed. Reason and linearity have their limits which is why my fabulist imagination came into play.

What takes place through dance and somatic practices is that movement and focused awareness can unleash a memory or an unfamiliar sensation. Before an insight percolates, its parts may rise up fragmented and dreamlike. With both fleeting and lingering images, I recorded them in a journal or moved with them for further investigation. I have learned not to dismiss my lively and whimsical imagination, however brief or lingering its images. They warrant attention and are often the very doors to new understanding. As dreams surface into awareness, I've used them to access and air the unconscious for eventual integration. Jungian analyst Marian Woodman (1998, p. 48) encourages creative expression and understanding the body's signals,

understanding its importance, and says,

Imagination is the bridge between body and soul. To have healing power an image needs to be taken into our body on our breath. Only then can the image connect with the life force. Only then can things change.

Both Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory and Arnold Mindell's perceptual channel ideas led me to understand how phenomena are received and processed. Imagination, a process of receiving input, comes in on various routes. It shows up as an image for some, a word or musical refrain for another. Process Work, in particular, provided effective techniques for studying the ways the body communicates. Before coming into our sphere of sensing or awareness, phenomena are undifferentiated matter. It may have concrete substance like a blue jay's body or be less material, a sound vibration like its squawk. We may or may not notice the bird or its squawk. But once it enters our field of notice, we go through a process: we note the event upon our senses and identify it. For most of us, this happens very quickly and the process barely registers. Oh, a blue jay, we say before we return to typing or a chatting with a friend. But for more unfamiliar phenomena, the process gets prolonged. Consider an unfamiliar bodily sensation. Huh, what's that, we say. Not quite a burn or heat or itch and so forth. Then we question its cause. Hmm, we weren't cooking with hot oil, gardening near the poison ivy, or eating the bread that provokes allergies. Commonly we come up with inexact categories. The sensation is an irritation, for instance, or a 7 on a scale of 1-10.

Gardner and Mindell put forth the idea that information comes in on developed and undeveloped intelligences or channels. Before cognition and conceptualization, there is, if we're attentive, the inchoate. This is the liminal state, a threshold, or what Buddhism refers to as

emptiness. It's not quite this or that. Meditation has prepared me for resting or bobbing in such a constantly moving place. I sit or move with such experiences in dance and writing, putting off naming and assigning it a word, to hold off on lowering a conceptual anchor. This is because once the naming takes place, it tends to block other perceptual choices and liminality altogether disappears. Language casts spells with its spelling, its writing. Say it long enough with specific words and we believe it so. Such is the power of language influencing perception. Such are the limitations but also the need for language which helps in identifying but can also hinders sensing.

Many of the ideas and exercises in *Writing and the Body in Motion* encourage readers to step back before naming, to hover in the liminal and imaginal realm. The intent is to experience the preverbal, preconceptual body, to remove cognitive blinders to open to a broader view and understanding. Jane Bacon, Emerita Professor in Dance and Somatic Practice (2010, p. 69) recognizes the power of the imaginal realm and the need for it to be teased into the open. She sees her job "is to listen to the spaces between the atoms, to feel into the spaces that others ignore in order to inhabit, and enable them to inhabit, the world of imagination" which Psychologist James Hillman (1976, pp 67-8) defines as being "neither physical and material on the one hand, nor spiritual and abstract on the other, yet bound by them both."

The material written about in *Ginseng Tango*, where I listened between Bacon's atoms, led me to recognizing a cultural blindspot, how a dominant discourse of the West is its emphasis on science, logic and reason, which readily rouses cynicism in regard to practices like ancestor worship and rituals of engaging with spirits of the deceased. Yet a dominant paradigm in S. Korea suggests that those without a connection to spirit are considered misguided, misinformed, and possibly ill. Dualism might prefer we choose one or the other but my lived, first-hand

experience suggests that truth includes some combination of both body and spirit.

A Process of Unfolding

In all my work, I put forth that art is a process. Here is an enlivening process. Art as a path toward being, becoming, balancing, knowing, playing in uncertainty, connecting to the body that best knows the present moment, not the past or tomorrow, just this utterance or bend of the ankle. I haven't put forth a closed system but prefer to invite readers into a greater awareness of their body. I have intended my writing to engage more than thinking but for it to be a visceral experience, to stir plasma and cells, breath, bereavement, and birth, for it to be a full body experience. I include the entire poem, "When in doubt" (p. 68) for its contradictions and twists of phrase.

in the beginning
as is written
begins the beginning
begging the question

of starting the begging
questioning answers
who says
quests in dereliction

as it is
written begins the beg
who slays the guest
is anyone's guess

being in the inn
drinking or sleeping
what have you
gets you in the end

The poem also plays with repeating sounds and elision, such as is seen in going from “beginning” to “beg” which also doubles the meaning.

In dance is the unfolding. My gaze reaches out. Fingers splay. Breath deepens. I am reminded. My body, not thought, asserts itself, catches my attention like a rare bluebird landing on a branch. I re-member flesh, the purity of sensation returns, its shifting shadows and glare. The nerves of my skin awake from their slumber, alert to changing circumstances, to a flow of motion that connects to tree, flight, breath, a desire to move, a desire to write, to understand, to feel myself belonging to the tall grasses of a field, the field part of the wilderness, the wilderness part of Earth. Where we place our attention and where we hold back matters.

Discoveries

Here I share discoveries pertaining to my work. I offer examples of my work that demonstrate key elements in my writing. It includes a critical reflection of my writing and what distinguishes my work.

Beauty

Among the discoveries from my work is the role and importance of beauty. In my hierarchy of needs, beauty comes next in importance after food, water, shelter, and sleep. Beauty is paramount; I need to be around it, to create it, and to participate in it. In *Ginseng Tango* (p. 57), I wrote about beauty as a hunger satisfied through operatic voices:

I am...satisfied attending a Puccini opera at the newly opened theater on campus a week later, those voices well worth sharing....The clarity and timbre of their vocal range vibrate every part of me. The rapture and boldly resonant melodies during selections from “Madame Butterfly,” “La Boheme,” and “Tosca” land upon the torn tissue of my heart like hands of a skilled masseuse....my heart swells in welcome of the influx of sound and quivers of emotion.

Beauty, be it from a walk in the woods or the writing of a poem, is a visceral experience that awakens my body to its fullness, to its resonance and flow. It provides a soulful nourishment and an immersive sensory experience that floods the body with aliveness. It dissolves ego-driven isolationism into awareness of an interconnected world. Other words for this interconnection are what Buddhism refers to as interbeing and interdependence and somatic practitioners call

ecosomatics.

With its power of interconnectivity, beauty has been a prime impetus in my writing. It provides a first hand experience of being in touch fractally. Entry anywhere leads to the whole. A singular motion or line experienced as beauty provides the opening. Although it has many forms, beauty that stirs me incorporates a lush flow of language. It may be alliterative, darting, or consonant. It may be paralogical, visceral, or imaginal. It grounds me in the richly resonant present moment. Always it connects me bodily to motion and language. I share the following recently published poem, “Cultivating the Space Between” (*Empty Mirror*), in its entirety as epitomizing my poetry and showing the flow of its musical phrases.

It’s the light in the sky that conjures the eye that transmits the heart
that foots the thrill where humanity thrives. It’s the glow in the go

that propels the walk that treads the start that upends despair where
lavender grows. It’s the reminder not the remainder, the being with

the doing, the tectonic shift that rocks a county and permits a synaptic
link. In the brain on the land where my family farmed for decades for

neurons for atoms and cells. Along the fence along the quiet along the
stream along the chug along the bottle along the road. In the places

between the spaces for breath in the nerves along the spine. In knowing
the unknowable and nodding to the frame splintered, the road buckling,

the vines bold in their grow. Be careful what you witches forth and how
you minister to need and wonton claims linked to chains linked to garrulous

fecal mounds far from compost. What's near is far and out of sigh may be
close in mind. My body is nobody is everybody our back finds affront by
odors, the least of my worries becoming the heist of yours. Find a way to
befriend warts and rain and an inflated ego losing its hold. Flimsy that or
finesse wine to uncork. When I look toward you I look like love. When
you look untoward I flee until blush returns heart to hara the art of joy,
the call rewilding the tame unwrapping presents everywhere on the floor,
table, and mat because what matters involves the drift, melt, sink hole with
heart on the rise.

The poem encapsulates my somatic writing with its sonic play. "Light," "sky," and "eye"
and "glow" and "go" are intended not only for the rhyme but for the impact of sound resonating
the body. Vowels vibrate the head, throat and chest, consonants focusing on the mouth. Many a
spiritual chants makes use of this for the same reason, the "a" and "o" sounds among the most
potent.

There is constant friction between words like "starts" and "upends." These two words
create a tension between a start and an end which forces the mind to attempt to reconcile and, I
imagine, brain paths to cross wires, a neurological puzzle eventually solved. The play on words
like "reminder" and "remainder" creates another tension as a slant rhyme and echoes overlaps in
meaning.

The phrase "Be careful what you witches forth" plays with the mistake of "witches" for
wishes which conjures allusions to both words. "[O]ut of sigh" similarly conjures "out of sight."
Again, the mind forges new pathways, going two directions simultaneously, an example of

paradox and neuro-ambidexterity. Instances like these, although brief, may edge toward changes in the brain's plasticity as occurs with the acquisition of a second language. (Klein, 2014, pp 20–24) My intention has been to multilayer a line with simultaneous narratives, to forge connections previously experienced as separate. Many of my poems are not only a singular narrative but a weave of polylinear and polylogical threads. They provide mental calisthenics aimed to expand consciousness and a broadened definition of self.

“Cultivating the Space Between” darts back and forth between a subjective self and a collective self, between the world within and the world outside, between what is and isn't perceptible. It demonstrates how a somatic journey into our depths leads not only to oneself but to everyone else. Inner nature and nature itself meet, a vital connection too often overlooked.

The disorientation during the reading of poems of mine like this one awakens the senses. For those looking for an answer or a simple summation, none suffice. It works like a Zen koan which is meant not to be answered but to reveal a process of thinking and oftentimes its very limitations. It is meant to return us to the primordial body, not the abstraction that can take place with language, but to activate the senses and root us in our fleshy self.

Beauty recognizes there are no easy answers - or questions either - and that life shimmers with complexities impossible to capture. Which is why we suspend reason for nuance and immerse ourselves in dancing and writing or any of the arts. We may be creator or witness. What matters is that we give ourselves over fully as participants, that we depart the shore of the familiar for the pull of the unfamiliar, that the field of our senses expands to include minutiae like imperceptible atoms and cell division and horizons with the ocean or night sky. It's why, despite an inclination toward movement and writing, I also welcome stillness and silence.

Wholeness

What a poem such as “Cultivating the Space Between” and much of my writing reveal is the interdependence and interconnection of, well, everything. If it’s not apparent, it’s because we’ve narrowed our focus. This narrowing is essential if we’re to get through the day with its constant chores and obligations. If we’re to log on to the computer with the correct keys, if we’re to cook dinner without burning it, if we’re to get through teaching a class without getting lost in a tangent. Narrowing is essential to functioning.

So is broadening, the lens twisted to the widest angle possible. To not just entertain the idea that we’re a grain of sand but to feel its grit and warmth, for the experience to awaken the senses, for the enigmatic phenomenological lived body to make sense. It fosters touching into our animal body, for the present moment to be all there is without distraction. David Abrams (1997, p. 265) connects meaning to senses and proposes that the best writing connects us sensorially.

The following quote refers to prose, but can readily be adapted to poetry. He says that

'making sense'...is to enliven the senses. A story that makes sense is one that stirs the senses from their slumber, one that opens the eyes and the ears to their real surroundings, tuning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To make sense is to...renew and rejuvenate one's felt awareness of the world.

Far from a conventional sense based narrative, my poetry draws directly from my body without resorting to familiar phrasing that can dull the senses. Instead they subvert the line and easy understanding to awaken a body to its own habits. My prose, too, is a reminder of the importance of the body, that as my lines lurch this way and that, toward description here, a vocal exuberance

there, pointing, suggesting, aligning, slipping and balancing, each utterance together landscapes a mind with a body.

There are always contradictions. The whole puts me in touch with the individual me, I touch into myself, and at the same time, I lose myself. The boundaries of the definition of “self” become more pliant and permeable. What stands out in my writing and sensibility is that I see myself and the world as process, as information in-forming me and everything else, too. I get to interbe. I use writing to remind me. I use movement to remind me. I use and am used by both. Or instead of the word “remind,” is “rebody” a better word?

I write in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 73),

We can not move one part of us without affecting the rest and unrest of us. The focus may be on lifting an arm but doing so requires moving a shoulder blade which is connected to the spine, an energy and nerve superhighway that is connected to delights and sorrows, the ability to lift a book or the decision not to. Every part of the body is connected to every other part of the body. Move one and all moves. Move the skeleton and muscles flinch. Curl the toes and our little building blocks of life, cells, signal fellow cells. Bend and an entire world bends with us.

The quality of the relationship to our body and surroundings, there all along, emerges into the foreground. We shift from experiencing ourselves as a head centered thought machine isolated in a unfeeling container into a moving, breathing, inspiring dynamic fleshy body in soulful alliance with fellow bodies and nearby life. We experience how the amount of pollutants in the air and the freshness of food influences stamina. We experience how the rhythms of the ocean, mountain, suburbs and city influences our heart beat. We experience how the presence of stress and delight activates cytoplasmic processes, the cellular soup of our body.

We embody, which for me means the need to write and to move, activities pivotal to well-being. Both are necessary grounding practices.

Coherence and Nondualism

Other words for this phenomenon of inclusiveness are coherence or nondualism.

Coherence takes place when the rhythm of the heart and brain or the word and its motion synch up. I discussed coherence in *Writing and the Body in Motion* to demonstrate how aligning these rhythms brings about optimal functioning. Quantum physicists (Laszlo, 2014, p. 25) refer to it by explaining that what happens in one place similarly happens somewhere else. Nondualism erases opposition. Binaries melt away. The back and forth become a wave of motion. “Gravity won’t hesitate to spare you the burden of sitting upright awake/until dawn. Plant a tree in your backyard and climb yourself vertebra by vertebra,” I write in *Continental Drifts* (p. 89).

Everything lines up. One footfall follows another. One word on the line follows another. Sequential action. Stick with the rhythm long enough and awareness and consciousness shift for a gentle ecstasy, a standing outside and inside oneself simultaneously. It’s the reason that shamanic ceremonies include repetitive music, to alter the heart beat, to impact the way we show up in our body, thoughts emerging, perceptions moving, worlds opening. It explains the imaginal passages I wrote in *Shaman’s Drum*, *Process-Oriented Psychology*, and *Ginseng Tango*. It explains how I go from one word to the next, a chimerical consciousness within reach once the lens is twisted. It’s what has drawn me to write and move and write and move, to alternate between the narrow and wide angle focus, and to balance however precariously in the dynamic liminal space between known spaces and known meaning. It’s what contributes to somatic

intelligence, a deeply felt bodily knowing, which wouldn't surprise anthropologists Hilary and Bradford Keeney (2014, p. 4). They say,

[B]ody-knowing is awakened and strengthened by dances inspired by spirituality. The opposite is true as well: spirituality...is inspired by dances moved by the longings of their hearts...any scholarship that does not address or inspire dancing movement arguably has little chance of lifting our imagination to its highest realms....they enable revitalized words to speak with a difference voice.

My imagination has indeed been lifted, expanded, colored, and syntaxed, my typing and dancing hands reaching toward the sky as the vastness reaches, in turn, toward my skin and the language I use to define myself.

Point of View

Point of view has shown how “I” is a construct of language. To write I must choose a pronoun. (Current gender and trans politics’ debate over he/she/they is a great reminder about the potency of pronoun choice.) The pronoun most often associated with myself is “me” and “I.” This I presumes a singular body, yet that phrase too is a construct. We tend to believe that this I ends at the dermal layer and anything beyond it is You or Another, perhaps a person or a tree.

The definition for body is limited with its predilection toward Newtonian physics (body as object). Using the word elsewhere such as “body politic” or “body of the text” is a metaphorical use of the word. My writing and somatic practice demonstrate that the body is a site where multiple bodies converge. Found within the body associated as me are: my parent’s bodies, my ancestor’s body, the immediate and less immediate environment of trees, grass, and

dogs; local, state, and federal politics; social institutions; and ideas on every level of culture.

There is the body that loves, works, dreams, grows, ages, and walks. All these bodies meet in this body also referred to as Cheryl.

The many uses of “body” may render it useless given that there is not one definition of body in the same way there is not one definition of love. Loving a child and loving a chocolate chip cookie are very different. As it is with “body” which I regard as a process, a verb. “We cannot step into the same river of our body twice,” I write in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 25). We are continually bodying.

A worthy investigation is how we body which is where somatic writing comes in. Somatic writing, like most somatic practices, furthers embodiment. Somatic writing helps us know how we dwell within our body. It establishes a relationship beyond superficiality and somatic illiteracy, a minimal understanding of the many bodily signals, into sensing, articulating, and understanding its signals. It places us in touch with twitches, tensions, and elation, images and memories, the phrases of movement and writing twined with articulation and awareness which reinforces being in touch with heightened sensitivity to all that our flesh encounters.

Writing From the Body, Not only About

It’s common to write *about* the body. Innumerable stories have been told and narratives applied as writing that circumnavigates the body, be it for analysis, reflection, or expression. One writes *about* banging a knee or *about* the burst appendix that led to an appendectomy. The past event requires the writer’s recollection, a distancing of time. Additionally, the body is regarded as an object, the writer sitting at her writing table apart from her body, another distancing. The

distance is helpful in enabling objectivity and reflection, especially when it comes to healing. Psycholinguist James Pennebaker (2013) writes extensively about using writing for healing and determined that those who wrote expressively about trauma for twenty minutes four days in a row experienced relief from debilitating symptoms. Phenomenologist Max Von Manen (1990, p. 125) recognizes how the externalization of writing which “fixes thought on paper” distances us from what we know yet allows us to reflect upon ourselves “to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable.”

My interest focused on the propositional shift of writing *from* the body. This relationship between writer and written makes a significant difference by collapsing the distance between the writer and the object written about. It could be argued that many a writer in flow, even without a somatic background, achieves the same. The writing pours out, an inspiration, a welcome construction on the page. But a somatically inclined writer is continually connecting body with language as inseparable and nondualistic. Writing *from* the body takes place in the unfolding moment of being. It welcomes emerging. It vitalizes language as a living system.

In writing from the synergy of the imagined dance duets from Contact Improvisation in my poetry, I evolved quickly from imagining dancing with specific people to dancing with various bodies and degrees of me that could be defined as an emotion, identity, or an energetic pattern. It was not merely a point of view shift as a common literary device. I’m referring to writing from blood, from the jaw, from hormones, from sadness found in the pelvis, or from an unfamiliar sensation without ready words. The type of writing that resulted from this approach differed from the usual output. What differed was the voice, structure, imagery, stories, syntax, and, insights. The expression of one’s blood may vary greatly from the expression of one’s eyes.

The heart may share secrets that the tongue otherwise twists. “Honestly, I tell no lines – so the lines say. Speak not another word or sentence me to doubt. You may want to come closure,” I write in *Continental Drifts* (p. 70), purposefully slanting word choice, connotation everywhere. What resulted, too, was a shift in consciousness. The technique was reminiscent of the “minds” of Body-Mind Centering, but it also led to new understanding in the play of words of “closer” and “closure,” both true, both accurate. Or said another way, which did I mean? Yes.

A finely tuned awareness toward specific sites of the body reveal very different insights, energy, and rhythm. It leads where the conscious controlling mind may prefer not to go. It taps into the unconscious, primordial, and preverbal body and ultimately gives it voice and form. Before following it up with an exercise for the reader, I write in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 31),

At every turn of phrase and rise of sensation, the technique activates awareness and reminds us about the nature of our flesh....We develop great facility in knowing and being, an expanded somatic epistemology placing a more colorful palette of experience and invention at our fingers.

Impact statement writer, poet, and recent dancer Sarah Rosenthal recognizes the *from* in my poetry. She writes,

[H]er poetry enacts body awareness not only by conveying the sensuality and movement of bodies through description, but by showing language itself to be something alive and sensual, emanating from the body.

Those of us who dance and bring that awareness to writing are continually delighted by

what the body reveals. How can we not keep our attention focused on its constant unfolding? How can we not be amazed by the beauty of its mysteries? Our engagement upends culturally imposed restraints and leads to liberation. The creative practice disrupts what Dance Professor at University of Waikato Karen Barbour (2011, p. 32) says is “Western culture’s denial and repression of the body, and of experience as a source of knowledge.” We reclaim ourselves and rebirth. Language touches and alters us. We voice the unvoiced. Each moment births us.

Rhythm

A distinguishing characteristic of dancers is their ability to attune to rhythm. Dancers synch with the flows of their body and that of fellow performers. Somatic practitioners also tap into rhythm. A Cranial Sacral Therapy practitioner feels for a client’s ease of motion and the rhythm of cerebrospinal fluid to free the central nervous system toward optimal health. Acupuncturists detect the strength and flow of the main body pulses, or rhythms, for diagnostic purposes.

Bodily rhythm is highly personal like a signature or a walk. The same holds true for writing. Listening deeply to the proprioceptive and kinesthetic cues and attending to the flows of the body and the unique stream of being reveals who a person is at any given moment. Here lies the coming to know oneself. We get to know ourselves by letting ourselves be known, by revealing ourselves in words and/or movement, by loosening usual habits and constrictions and instead welcoming flow. My signature kinetic rhythm is apparent in the following stanza from *Into Stillness* (p. 49),

Where does this body grow by light in the drunk? Where does this body go at night when all tuck in their weary lines after a day of crimp and strain? Where the groan glows as a glib statement under the bride alongside the homeless. In the reach of this body blown to the highest cable and deepest concrete. None answers suffice to say it isn't sewing up what seams one but leads to two in a refracted phrase by moon or the splash of a wink.

Novelist and poet Paul Auster's writing changed from watching dancers on stage and feeling their depth of bodily engagement. He writes in his autobiographical work, *Winter's Journal* (2012, pp 222-223), that

the mere sight of their bodies in motion seemed to be carrying you to some unexplored place within yourself, and little by little you felt something lift inside you, felt joy rising through your body and up into your head, a physical joy that was also of the mind, and continued to spread to every part of you....you found yourself falling through the rift between world and word.

And a few paragraphs later, he says (p. 224), "Writing begins in the body, it is the music of the body, and even if the words have meaning, can sometimes have meaning, the music of the words is where meaning begins."

Information and explanation tend to get privileged over rhythm. Rhythm is tied to a personal body, the phenomenological, subjective body, the fleshy sensual self, this me in this moment that may be weary or excited or getting to a point, connecting to nature, myself, a fellow dancer, a client, or the page. Touching deeply into self is where the heart beats, cells vibrate, the body finds home and essence, and the body enlivens. So much else pales in comparison to self

rooting in relational resonance. It's the door into ourselves and another. It's why I dance, why I engage in a somatic process, and why I write: to embody, to unite with the moment, to experience the present as the only place worth inhabiting and worth sensing. "inner dwell, inner swell. Thy cup runneth/out swell outsmart I dance with thee as three fortuitously," I write in *Into Stillness* (p. 80), the me connecting with another.

Embodied Imagination

Imagination is a type of thinking, of forming ideas, images or concepts that seems apart from the usual method of sensing. I have found it useful as a reflexive tool.

My visual imagination is strongest in my short fiction. It has created stories about a wife returning from her grave to reassume domestic duties and her marriage; it has personified common household items like a pizza who questions its existence and uncommon items like elements from the periodic table concerned by Radium's reactivity; and it normalized a woman encased in ice at a dinner party serving a souffle. In these and other stories, the reel of my visual imagination is recorded verbally. Early on, I assumed these visions a function of a literary imagination, a mental function, inherently yet intriguingly disembodied. It's how Calvino birthed *Cosmic Comics* and his other marvelous fictions.

My understanding of imagination got overhauled from doing Authentic Movement and Process Work. Authentic Movement brought up a fragment of an impression that initially I couldn't identify. In probing the fragment through writing and consequent movement, I uncovered a memory from my early preverbal years which I wouldn't have thought retrievable. With Process Work, too, images as well as elaborate visions appeared, which I developed

through a type of active imagination. Initially it was unclear if these visuals were concocted and had any connection to me other than a fleeting fanciful thought. I was used to imagining for writing but without a literary purpose and page to catch it, these visions came across as something wholly other. Theologian Henri Corbin (1998, p. 78) elevates the importance of visions and imagination and says, “The organ of this universe is the active imagination; it is the place of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories appear in their true reality.”

My reflections ended up in the article, “Present Tense: Healing as We Speak: an Application of Process Work to Performance” (p. 79) in which I wrote

when mental images surface, they are immediately directed into a construct of language such as a metaphor or scene....I experience them as separate from myself. Without the activity of writing, the energetic impact of these visual images hit me fully and directly. A perceptual shift occurred as I, like a lucid dreamer defying spatial and temporal restrictions, entered a concurrent reality previously unseen, a richly symbolic realm that influenced me emotionally, kinesthetically and proprioceptively.

Mindell writes extensively about the dream body, or wakeful dreaming, our perceptual habits getting us to see some parts and not others. His work encourages blurring the differences between day and night consciousness, between night dreams and an altered awareness of the day, concurring with ideas of Tibetan teacher, Tenzin Wangyal, whose book *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep* (1998) I reviewed for a newspaper. Both encourage integration. Their practices deepen awareness by recognizing how waking and sleeping are similar and how cultural bias gets us perceiving and concluding otherwise.

I came to understand the particulars of my visions symbolically, my imagination working with dreamlike patterns that only part of me understood. It was a way that my body was communicating and sharing somatic wisdom - if I could suspend my usual perceptual frames which I accomplished through hypnagogic states. During meditation and prior to falling asleep, I witnessed how thoughts dispersed and assumed a new shape, like clay molded to look like a tulip later remolding into a star. The shell and shape of the images differed, but their essence remained unchanged.

Imagination was not apart from me but among my body's expressive capabilities, and claiming this unfamiliar side of myself reinforced embodiment. Here was embodied imagination quite unlike conceptual imagination wherein an idea flashes into mind and remains a mental event apart from the totality of my body. Here was a full body experience with visceral immediacy that included proprioceptive and kinesthetic information. Awareness altered as if my attention switched channels or I was suddenly speaking Arabic instead of English.

My understanding changed in how I used short fiction, as entries into the unconscious, as voice to the unvoiced and sightings into the dark, as vision quests, shamanic explorations, and lucid dreams. They contained ruminations and insights, a thinking mind using the tools of imagination. "Breakthrough" (*Café Irreal*) shows a woman floating above her bed, breaking through the ceiling, then the roof top, all the time tethered to her bed. Here the widening of my lens became visible as a story to be received figuratively.

My body elevates above the house, high enough for me to see the flag at my mailbox, the crooked line of bushes, and the walkway to the front door winding around to the back and to the shed, patterns there all along only now perceived.

As the main character floats above her city, she speculates.

I bend over and grab the sheet with both hands and pull myself down to the bed although the difference between down and up, cardinal points, and other usual direction takes on new meaning in the vast space of the sky. Isn't up and down contextual? Am I, for instance, above Earth or below?

Imagination became a tool and metaphorical play for new understanding. It raised questions about how perceptions and impressions are processed, first as unmoored impressions and fragments of information, eventually pieced together as a story, narrative, or conclusion that may or may not accord with familiar reality. It raised questions about how truth and the jargon *du jour* are regarded as consensus reality which marginalizes differing perspectives, among the reasons, too, that somatics is not well regarded. Somatics reveals subcortaneous information and the subjective stories and fragments embedded in the flesh. This type of information doesn't fit neatly with science and its methods of repeatable measurable studies. Here was subjective, personal body wisdom, somatic knowing, a post-positivist perspective that aligns to an indigenous and feminine way of knowing, approaches sidelined by dominant cultural narratives.

Embodied imagination is conceptualization in process, an active technique for self-reflection rooted in the body. The body doesn't lie, but it frequently speaks in ways not readily understood because most of us haven't been trained in deep somatic listening. It doesn't use direct language. Sometimes it speaks through parables, dreams, symbols, metaphors, fleeting images, sounds, and familiar and odd sensations. I referred to these ideas and associated techniques throughout *Writing and the Body in Motion*, which is geared toward creativity,

healing, and insight, and promotes using embodied imagination to dislodge the literal mind toward a more oceanic knowing. It encourages using symbols and other manifestations of imagination to enter the hidden parts of the body, to dwell with the entirety of our body and remove cultural blinders. The book (p. 132) provides “an investigative path, a somatic journey for entering the body that take us where we might not have access otherwise.”

Embodied imagination was pivotal to accessing the body and integrating its information into self-knowing. A type of active imagination, it allowed me to engage the material and myself which is exactly what Jung (1997, p.5) would have recognized, seeing it as play - serious verbal play I'd add. He says, “Every good idea and all creative work are the result of imagination....The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.”

Mistakes

It is this same reason that I keep written mistakes on the line. They may be the unconscious knocking on the door of awareness, disowned parts seeking a way to be integrated consciously, a Freudian slip showing me what I may prefer to not know. Even something as obvious as a typo may hold hidden information. The same may hold true for a reader who encounters my poetic “mistakes,” a reason I purposefully keep some of these phrases as is, to trip a reader into perceiving anew.

In improvisational movement, all movement is considered part and parcel to the process, no movement considered nonessential. It is our judgements that determine whether a movement is graceful or awkward, weak or strong, well-articulated or ill-defined. Judgement is debilitating in witness consciousness as practices like Authentic Movement make clear. In allowing

movement (or words) to emerge, permission is granted to the typically side-lined material to emerge, the marginalized granted the opportunity to peek out from the corners and be integrated consciously with the whole.

Embodied Spirituality

What arises from embodied imagination and from my approach to somatic writing in general, is embodied spirituality, a topic featured in “Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality” where I discussed how my Zen practice merged with my movement practice, that practicing mindful awareness coincided with somatic awareness and work hand in hand. I could have easily said the same about writing. In probing the definition of body, I concluded it a continuum, that body may very well be the same as spirit. The limits of habit, western culture, dualism, and the construct of language lead us to conclude otherwise. My research with writing and movement show them entwined. I think through moving and writing. I exercise being through moving and writing. Being, probing, flowing, setting into place and stepping out of place all come forth. As a result, shifts of the world appear, density appears less dense, nouns becomes verbs, and static definitions reveal their malleability. Perched in the front row of my body, I co-create with all that is.

A dominant discourse in western culture posits the idea of difference, that we end at our skin. We applaud individuality as a cultural hallmark. Many Americans proudly boast a rugged individualism. Yet even a cursory somatic experience shows our interconnections, how one body influences other bodies, what Thích Nhat Hanh (1992) refers to as interbeing, what Sondra Fraleigh (2004, p. 25) refers to as relational embodiment, what Martha Eddy (2002), Susan Bauers (2008) and others refer to as ecosomatics, and Mindell (1992) refers to as deep

democracy. We are entwined with each other, not isolated beings, but interconnected through land, air, atoms, ideas, and flesh.

“I” is communal as well as personal. The health and creative expression of my body influences another and another influences me as well. We are in a metaphysical dance in body, words, and actions. As writer and dancer, I sit in the front row at the computer in the woods on the stage. My body explores words and motion to explore another’s body. In finding me, I find you and find us. My body is your body is our body. The creative expression associated with bodily awareness is a pivotal process toward individuation and, once the frame is enlarged, is equally important to interindividuation.

Many a religion aims to distance, control, or devalue the body as untrustworthy, shameful, a site of sin and that it’s better to be heaven oriented and deny the body its base needs. Restrain it, especially feminine bodies and feminine forms of expression. Although the violence of her language is disconcerting, Cixious (1976, p. 878) is actively promoting feminine expression and says, “We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing.” Dance is considered dangerous to those who promote restraint because dance - perhaps somatic writing, too - shows the limitations and fallacies of such conclusions. It demonstrates with every breath the importance of planting feet on the ground, in touch with nature and Earth, in touch with flesh as a site of inquiry and creative expression. It is the source of a broad range of experiences and insight. Dance and somatic writing encourage expansion, not restriction, wonderment, not narrow-mindedness. Jorge Ferrer, Chair of East West Psychology at California Institute of Integral Studies (2008, p. 2) sees connection beyond an individual ego as essential and says,

A fully embodied spirituality, I suggest, emerges from the creative interplay of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies in complete individuals who embrace the fullness of human experience while remaining firmly grounded in body and earth.

Coming home to the body, as happens in somatic practices, reveals to what extent we've been disembodied and shows, too, the power of showing up in the flesh with all our faculties, a body revealed as a microcosm of the universe. The collection of my work involves me embracing the fullness of this perspective and probing the extent of the definition of what is humanly possible.

Mirror Neurons

Although I wouldn't claim him as having come home to his body, when Goethe published *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (2013) in the late 1700's, his novel about Werther's inability to let go of the woman he loved which led him to suicide, the story inspired readers to kill themselves. Such is the power of well written literature. Another way of understanding this effect is through mirror neurons, that the emotion conveyed in writing elicits a sympathetic response in a reader. Medical researchers Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla (2012, p. 118) describe

a distinctive class of neurons that discharge both when an individual executes a motor act and when he observes another individual performing the same or a similar motor act....found in the premotor cortex, the supplementary motor area, the primary somatosensory cortex, and the inferior parietal cortex.

Dance Professor Emerita at California State University, Cynthia Berrol (2006, p. 302) sees the

same activity taking place in dance, that

the identical sets of neurons can be activated in an individual who is simply witnessing another person performing a movement as the one actually engaged in the action or the expression of some emotion or behavior.

With this mirroring in mind, to conjure a similar experience in my reader, I have repeatedly shared the openness of my experiential body with readers. In “Come Through Imaginally” in *Her Body Listening* (p. 50), I write,

Enter the earth, sky, and intention, and deep
beyond a dunda delight, round without rotund
she lights herself as you step
into embrace of who you didn't run over awakening
deeds of inhumanity as if it all matters if does if
does and do.

In connecting into the depths of my body and expression through words, I invite readers into finding the same in themselves. My hope is to stir readers to wipe the sleep from their senses and surpass easy understanding to break into unfamiliar regions.

My writing likely does not contain the same emotional intensity of Goethe nor in most cases is it as potent as watching live action such as what takes place on stage, but my work can stir a body toward a new awareness, to shake a structure loose, to form new synaptic bridges and plant the possibility that our conclusions may contain cracks and be more or less than what they seem. Such is the power of presence. Details present all along suddenly – or slowly – appear on

the screen of our attention. This is key to somatic awakening where body sensation asserts itself, initiating a somatic inquiry and, hopefully, a revision toward greater integration.

Liminality

What's so exquisite about writing and dancing from bodily felt presence is the opportunity to be positioned upon the threshold between knowing and unknowing. To be fully present in the moment without knowing where it may lead. To linger as long as possible in liminality and appreciate the importance of this state of consciousness. To be in time and out of time. To recognize that uncertainty is valuable, a concept not yet fixed, the movement unresolved, our phrasing ongoing.

The liminal space requires a balance with dynamic motion. I write about such a place in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 49) by saying,

Flesh matters. Life happens. Focus comes and goes. Awareness flickers off and on. Consciousness embraces unconsciousness, giving both a stage, alerting us to pain, joy, pleasure, and choice, pointing the way to expression, knowing, well-being, truth, and beauty. We open to the depth and expansiveness of being present. We resonate with What Is.

I write from such a place in poetry and similarly situate stories in such a place. In writing as well as movement, I am one breath away from the next breath. This place of unknowing reinforces I be present, my phenomenological awareness on high alert. "My body comes to mind," says Fraleigh (2004, p. 57). Another possible term for this liminal space is "imaginal realm" which Episcopal priest and writer Cynthia Bourgeault (2018, p. 24) defines as a

confluence or “meeting ground, a place of active exchange between two bandwidths of reality.” She sees it separating the visible world from “realms invisible but still perceivable through the eye of the heart.” She recognizes the subjectivity but also the universality of such a place.

Liminality is the place before place, the word not yet written, the movement not yet moved, an ongoing awakening of mindbodyspirit. It’s words on the move and movement that refuses to still. Residing in such a placeless space means constant impermanence, freedom, and expansion. It means that creative engagement provides an infinite source of material to work with.

We avoid such places because most of us likely prefer certainty which provides a type of security. We prefer to know how long it takes to travel from here to there, what we’re getting into, and how to plan accordingly. Entering a liminal realm isn’t the same as strapping on a bungee cord and leaping adrenalized off a bridge, yet it can be ungrounding by revealing the dynamically complex, impermanent world and, that nothing is fully what it seems, our knowing always limited. Incremental truths of this moment will shift with the next moment which is why breath awareness as a primary meditative technique is important and why my word choice, especially in my poetry, continually shifts.

Reginald Ray (2014, pp 86-7), Tibetan teacher and somatic practitioner who, similar to what I wrote about in “Dance Evolutionary Spirituality,” also sees somatic practice and Buddhist practice with ample overlaps, one embedded in the other. He refers to entering the liminal space

as letting go of a fixed sense of being that is both physical and psychological and requires a type of leap. He says,

When we let go, then, it is thus not just a physical letting go but... a letting go of our fixed sense of being. This represents a leap into the unknown....in that instant, we can't take our thinking mind –the mind that objectifies our experience and knows conceptually – with us. When we leap, we just find ourselves there, naked and stripped of any way to conceptualize the body – or anything else – at all....we feel completely in and at one with our body while at the same time empty of any solidity and objectifiable reality.

The liminal realm, vastly underutilized, is connected to what I refer to in “Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality” (p.61) as “a dreamlike ethereal field rich with information.” Hard to provide it a specific term which is why it's best represented by multiple terms. I write in the same essay (p.61),

Call this the realm of spirit. Or the space where atoms mingle, where chi flows, where electromagnetic particles bump. Call it my space, your space, no one's space, everyone's space, a space meetings take place beyond usual awareness and understanding. Call it a field of potential, a field full of subtle presences awaiting form, awaiting attention and cultivation.

Consciousness

What both somatic writing and moving support is increasing consciousness. Senses heighten and seemingly disparate ideas connect. Both disciplines support a somatic inquiry and investigation. Both practices reveal who we are and the ways in which parts of us are hidden. All of my writings and research have been devoted to the mission of furthering self-knowing,

exploring and increasing consciousness, and contributing to the greater good. I say in “Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality” (p.62),

My interest lies in exploring and expanding upon the phenomenon of the body as gateway to understand the world and to experiencing the fullness of embodiment, both the part of the body we associate as self and the part we do not, the part we consider physical and the part considered less so. What is possible?

Because it is so directly rooted in the flesh, movement encourages mining our preverbal body. Writing somatically performs a similar function. Consciousness is not inherited like the color of our hair. Instead it must be cultivated, played with, called upon, exercised, questioned, and trained. Says Don Hanlon Johnson (2000, p. 41), it

grows more articulate and expansive from experiences of seeing, hearing, feeling, walking, talking, giggling, as a person comes slowly to a sense of where he or she is.

Consciousness is like a muscle that requires stretching and strengthening in order to develop. Many an activity support its expansion but movement and writing are particularly potent, especially when combined, one furthering the articulation of the other. Moving and writing for being, to flesh out, to arrive at knowing, to shape and reshape consciousness.

Body-Mind Centering practitioner Pat Etheridge (2019, p. 5) has been exploring the use of somatic writing and recognizes its potential in integrating expression and reflection. Based on the collection of my writing and witnessing the impact on my students, I would apply a stronger word, potency. In an article in Body-Mind Centering’s journal, she hones into its strength and

says,

We can set aside the notion of writing as reflecting a purely cerebral or psychological exercises, one that views the body and its nature as separate from the mental activity of writing itself....we intend, in somatic writing, to infuse our text with the felt actuality and comprehended truths of our personal existence...we reveal the universality of the particular and the tender humanity embedded in our day-to-day living.

What takes place for me in dance and somatic writing is bringing the unconscious to consciousness by naming, and equally important, by recognizing its existence and bringing it to awareness. Ray (2008, p. 12) urges embracing full body awareness. He says,

I am speaking not of the body we think we have, the body we conceptualize as part of our “me” or my self-image. Rather, I am talking about the body that we meet when we are willing to descent into it, to surrender into its darkness and its mysteries, and to explore it with our awareness.

The knowing that takes place is not distant nor academic, a separating of self from object. Instead it is an immersive experience, an awareness of the constant stream of awareness, of being with the life pulse. In *Writing and the Body in Motion* (pp 75-76), I write about the importance of following the life pulse for the purpose of being, knowing, and integration and later in the text write,

We don't question flow, don't conceptualize. The body has its reasons and we abide by its currents. The unconscious lets down its guard. The ego puts down its pretenses. No type of motion or pattern reign supreme. All movements are welcome. All impulses.

Specific direction or expectation is relaxed. Judgement is relaxed. The only rule is to keep moving and ride the tides.

There is no right or wrong, only motion, subtle and large, extending and contracting, scattered and orderly, athletic and meditative, awkward and graceful. Any combination rooted in the body. Connect to breath or heat or an object across the room or a moment's thought. Here is the body engaging in spontaneity, unplanned, uncoordinated, and gracing surprise.

Radiant Awareness

Radiant awareness, a term I refer to in *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 144), is defined as

the embodiment of the liberating energy that underlies our psychological and cultural biology. It is us in harmony with the splendor and misery of every circumstance, each greeted as an opportunity for being and growth. It is us in harmony with whatever arises in this moment....It is marked by a free flow of me with you with other with knowing and feeling and relaxing and standing against or in favor of wind and words and the heat of an idea meeting matter. This moment, then the next. This feeling, thought, movement, then the next. This moment with us present and awake.

When in such a place, there's no other place I'd rather be. It's not that the circumstance is necessarily considered positive (a vacation) or negative (a flat tire). Rather, the lack of distance between myself and my actions, me being in flow, produces a scintillating levity, which shows up repeatedly in my texts.

The liberating energy frees me to go this way or that and shows the fluidity of circumstances, most of which are beyond my control, and my responses to them, more of which are within my control. Radiant awareness shows all life dancing, us in grace – and fumbling too.

The idea is connected to the Buddhist idea of the Middle Way which is the middle ground between attachment and aversion, between being and non-being, between form and emptiness, and that if we attach to seeking happiness, we are not free. Radiant awareness aligns with improvisation, a welcome reminder of there being a multitude of approaches to a circumstance and that the circumstance itself is the *prima materia* which is neither positive or negative. In *Four Quartets*, poet T.S. Eliot (1943, p. 15) calls it the “still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor/ fleshless;/Neither from nor towards;....But neither arrest nor movement.” Quasha (2020) positions himself on this dynamic place as well. With his paradoxical statements reflective of ongoing change and writing about one of his poetic principles referred to as axiality, he says,

The axial, a state of happy improbability, occurs in such a moment: a moment intimate with its own limitations and yet taking up infinitesimal residence right there at the breaking point, the final crest of the wave at its point of disappearance, the mathematical (non)point of unrepresentability—an optimal instability. Yet the axial shows, without revealing, what holds close to the heart of limitation, what is fatally bounded by time—what lives the unlimited possible, right there (where there is no there).

His axial is a stillness, a Middle Way. Writers like Quasha and myself reach for words for their ability to define, yet know they can only go so far. What is said can be easily unsaid. Every truth on a line contains a lie. But we say and write anyway. After all, there is always a followup essay, an updated preface, or in the case of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (2005), multiple versions.³

³ The 150th anniversary edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin Classics) contains a preface by Harold Bloom. He remarks that the edition is a reprint of Whitman’s 1855 original which Bloom sees as superior to what followed. Though I’ve read only four of the versions and not

Admittedly, embodying radiant awareness, not attaching to process and outcome, isn't easy, especially with circumstances that on first appearances are less than ideal. It's a precarious balancing act; too much focus throws us off as does a laissez faire approach. Both generate imbalance. Too much thinking or shallow breaths both throw us off kilter.

A practice of somatic writing promotes riding (and writing) the waves of being without attachment, welcoming all material, the crafted and artless, the conscious and unconscious fragments and phrases, flow unimpeded. We are in a constant state of arrival in sensation and linguistic creation, this followed by that. Eventually a comfortable rhythm sets in for resting in the midpoint mid-expression, the formless taking form, awareness rising up followed by a consequent thought and impulse that bumps it into oblivion or onto the page.

Writing and Movement as Poesis

Writing moves us into being as does dancing. They provide shape, a point for focus, and container. These formative activities help us rise up from partial awareness into something more targeted or expansive. In silence and alone, every glimpse is a view, every sound orchestral, the slightest touch sensational. These activities allow me to make and watch myself in the making. They lead to new thinking and new being, my body continually on the remake, on the one hand no different from the next breath, but with the potential for substantial reflectivity and expression. Somatic writing can be ecopoetic, ecolingual, cosmocentric, an echo and root, the sound of one hand clapping and a heart rippling its waveform, particularly potent when there is a pathway opening mind, tension softening, a synaptic route summoning travel, an arm scratching

studied them closely, my preference also is for the original version.

the back, a word itching for relief, and a brightening of form and the formless.

How do we perceive ourselves? How can dancing or writing lead us to ourselves or the universe? By connecting to action connected to being, not doing, not undoing, but resting in the transition point, that improvisational moment that is earth axis and body grounding. Merrily we gerund our way. We saying, we moving, writing, bending, blending, borrowing and being.

Kimmer Lamothe (2020, p. 410) recognizing their foundational qualities says,

Both writing and dancing tap and release the constitutive power of bodily movement – our inherent kinetic creativity. Both guide our participation in the rhythms of bodily becoming.

Instantaneous awareness, somatic opening, a perspectival shift, a peering inwardly and out. When the body releases a tension, respirating with respite and intrigue, the in breath in accordance with the out, a glide through time – here is poesis, something emerging which hadn't existed before or our awareness such that what was hidden is now revealed.

These modalities, languages, and channels are ways to see our ourselves and ways to be. They are how we perform humanity, how we live with earth in our body and live upon the Earth, how we care, and where we place the fence of consciousness.

The language of my body is the body of my language. The dance of my words is how words dance. I am moved and deliberate movement. I may lead with bones, the foot knowing place. I may lead with words, language placing me on the line. Words take me places and spaces, conditions, and movement words me.

Something emerges. I follow. I allow movement to arise. I welcome words. We partner in

the freedom of this moment, this movement, this articulation. I go. I cannot not go. Presence pulls me along.

Features of my Somatic Writing Approach

In his impact statement, Don Hanlon Johnson says,

There is a bias among people highly trained in sensory awareness, intricate touch, expressive movement, and a range of breathing practices that words diminish non-verbal experiences.

Dance researcher Emma Meehan (2015, p. 2) has observed the same and refers to it as a “distrust of language which might erase experience.” My aim has been to bridge the gap between writing and moving and show how their combination, regardless of skill level of the practitioners, increases embodiment and self knowing. Somatic practitioners focus on body practices for revealing what the mind eclipses and to touch more deeply into the flesh of our being. Such practices are unmistakably powerful.

Writers who voice the silent understandings of the flesh claim writing powerful as well. To argue about which discipline is more powerful is a moot point. The argument echoes the Cartesian battle between the mind versus the body and western religions privileging the text over the body, and patriarchy over feminism. Such divisions are limiting and an impediment to realizing greater potential. Their unity includes not only honoring our fleshy body but the well-being of the body of the of the planet.

There are areas of overlap between writing and movement. Importantly both go places

that the other doesn't, often dependent upon a practitioner's comfort and ability, which need not be regarded as a handicap. This is a path toward the evolution of awareness and consciousness. It can not be given, but must be earned through experience. Write, move, and watch what takes place. No judgement, only flow.

What stands out in my approach is combining the disciplines, positioning them both as pivotal to embodiment. One furthers the available articulation in the other. They work synergistically to reveal the previously stilled and latent bodily phenomenon shifting to increase consciousness. Their interactivity promotes establishing pivotal bridges between the known and unknown, the sensed and the unsensed, the imaginal and the inconceivable. The power of somatic writing lies in the collaborative interdisciplinary field between writing and movement, expanded, too, to incorporate the larger field of infinite awareness.

I write to move. I move to write. I write and move for being as a process which promotes conscious embodiment, creativity, healing, and transformation that is personal and collective. In *Writing and the Body in Motion* (p. 101), I say,

Somatic writing is a process of witnessing and expressing the coalescence of the inner and outer worlds and articulating them as an embodied, vitalized and sustainable verbal knowing. This creative expression enlivens how we dwell in our body, how we show up, feel presence and present ourselves on the line. The words carry weight, energy, and awareness rooted in the listening, moving body. The words carry our knowing and unknowing, furthering understanding, our being in the process of becoming.

My experience as writer and mover have led to developing a high level of somatic literacy and fluency with words. An otherwise ignorable fleeting body event may be the incipient moment of an epiphany. A noun used as an adjective, or any other way I purposefully displace

grammar and syntax, supports articulating and hearing what a conventional language pattern may not reveal. Beginner's Mind and improvisational play as exploratory is primary for sidestepping usual habits that may be limiting and unearthing new patterns that coincide with the creative pulse of the body that ties in, too, to a terrestrial and cosmic pulse.

Ecowriting Or Something Else

In referring to my approach to writing, I have relied on the term somatic writing and Writing From the Body. Neither do the approach justice, yet I've used them until I happen upon a better name. Somatic writing is too general and could easily be attributed solely to writing *about* any number of somatic techniques. Writing From the Body is clunky although the intrigue of its name has garnered inquiries from students who want to learn more. Other terms fall short as well. Ecosomatics implies connection to the natural world, an essential inclusion, but can overlook the importance of the individual body doing the observing. Ecopoetics also includes the natural world but similarly doesn't emphasize the body. Ecolinguistics, an intriguing term, explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment (About, 2020) but leaves out the creative process. Richard Shusterman (2012) uses somaesthetics, careful to avoid using "body" because he believes bodies imply death and he prefers to emphasize living. What's implied in Quasha's ecoproprioception, nature within and out, body as material and less than material, holds great appeal, but its multisyllables may corner it as too academic. The same could be said about Charles Olson's projective verse, even when Black Mountain College poet Robert Duncan (1997, p. 33) attempted to bring it closer to the body in "The Beginning of Writing" and writes "Beginning to write. Continuing finally to

write. Writing finally to continue beginning” which easily might have been lines of my own.

Writing From the Body, and my use of somatic writing, is a singular approach to writing. The approach relies on somatic awareness, a deep experience of the lived interdependent body, and transferring that awareness to writing which then works reflexively on understanding the bodymind. Writing and the movement are both open, highly dynamic systems, interconnected and in play with all that is. The body is highly complex, a blend of elements on the continuum of dense to ephemeral matter, recognizable as such when we pivot our focus away from a myopic self. Often, attempts to define the body fall short which is why there’s poetry, dance and the arts in general, to provide form, to reveal the illusion of stasis and a place to rest our attention.

We are connected whether we sense those connections or not. In “Dancing Evolutionary Spirituality” (2016, p. 63), I write

Our isolated egocentric being is an optical illusion. Nothing exists that isn’t influenced by something else. Slow down and watch the emergence of frames, how, for example, a passing car jostles my nervous system, how my jostled nervous system interrupts my writing flow, how my interrupted writing flow causes me to dance more vigorously in the studio, how the vigorous pounding of my feet influences the painter in the studio next door who puts down the yellow brush and picks up the red one, and ad infinitum.

Those interconnections are becoming more apparent as we realize that what enters upstream flows down or that one person’s viral diagnosis not only can spread to another but impact an entire economy. It’s been my ongoing choice to engage with writing and movement for the sake of beauty and sustainability. I say in “Beyond Skin Boundaries in Contact Improvisation and Poetry” (2014, p. 141),

My dance of language can be as breathful, fleshy and unpredictable as contact improvisation. This visceral approach to writing requires a facile tongue and flexible mind that is inclusive of the body.

But not only the body that ends with my skin. To body has come to mean my partner's body, those of fellow creatures as well as a stream, air, and dirt. In recognizing my boundaries, I experience, too, my boundlessness.

Impact

What follows are highlights from the impact statements received, central themes, and how their feedback relate to my goals. I reached out to peers in dance, somatics, and poetry and asked them to write about how they perceive my books contributed to the field and how those books may have influenced their thinking and/or the thinking of their students.

Articulate and Clear

In reviewing the comments by colleagues who wrote impact statements which can be read in full in the Appendix, I find that many of the aims of my work have been met. My work inspires and instructs, is accessible but also provocative, opens the mind and the body, and furthers the language of both. My work builds a bridge between unlikely alliances, writing and somatic practice (also dance) which deepens understanding of each discipline. Johnson confirms this by saying, “There is a bias among people highly trained in sensory awareness, intricate touch, expressive movement, and a range of breathing practices that words diminish non-verbal experiences”... and “when such people do speak, it is often indeed diminishing their work.” When somatic practitioners and dancers write, they typically do a poor job. He goes on to say that he’s been on the lookout for “intelligent language to help bridge this gap” and my work was able to do. Whatley, Bernasconi, Kinter, and Williams wrote similarly, mentioning as well that my writing got them and their students to reflect upon movement in greater detail. Delsauiers says this is especially important in helping “readers connect fields that are often seen as disparate

and apart.”

Among my primary aims has been to write about experiences for which there is no easy language. It requires a pliancy with language and an ear finely tuned to the body. It gets expressed one way in nonfiction, another in poetry, and in fictional prose.

Language Goes Beyond Utility

Clear communicating is tricky. Writing for the purpose of utility helps with getting daily needs met like reading ingredients, traffic signs, washing instructions, and documents to name several. My aim has been to go further, toward defining bodily experiences and states and to goad readers and practitioners toward increasing their somatic and spiritual literacy. Buck said the impact of reading my work was getting “the synapses of my brain to dance in unfamiliar worlds.” I have wanted my writing to disrupt usual processes of reading and understanding in the same way that a good somatic practice does. It shakes us up. It shakes us open. We sense or see or feel anew, our conclusions, possibly entire belief systems altered from the process. Somatic practitioners frequently focused on unearthing layers of awareness of the body but my interest has been to not only help the somatic process along but to also do so in language that, by necessity, often must be poetic, to show how poetic expression, like dance, move awareness and understanding into greater depth.

Syntactic Movement

Linearity and common syntax has its limits and is especially inappropriate when it comes to writing about the subtle events and sensations that take place during deep somatic engagement.

Listening deeply to the hum of cells, muscles shifting ever so slightly, an imaginal vision rising up from the fog of our body prompts a somatic opening. We feel something significant - we don't know what - has just taken place. Noting my visceral writing, Rosenthal says, “[B]y showing language itself to be something alive and sensual, emanating from the body.” I have wanted to show how writing is alive, each stroke of the pen or tap at the computer a breath or pulse. The page may suggest permanence – it is, after all, an object – but both writing and reading are processes that are not static but show a dynamic bodymind in play with self and other and self as other. Despite Rosenthal’s own writing expertise, my work has taken her to new places. She says,

Continental Drifts enriches me through its deep integration of creativity, intellect, and somatic attunement. Similarly I find in Pallant’s other books not just inspiration but support for and articulation of principles I agree with yet had not found language for. Reading across Pallant’s oeuvre strengthens my determination to pursue somatic awareness as a source for renewing and strengthening my own creativity and well-being and gives me ideas for how to support others through my work as a writer, teacher, critic, and life coach.

Presence and Liminality

When we are grounded in presence, when each shift in the connective tissue or softening of a joint feels pivotal, how do we write about such an event? Jenkins, Rosenthal, and Quasha recognize my kinesthetic dance. Jenkins writes that my “kinetic poetics feels more like dance than linguistics.” It is both a dance and a poem and I approach them with a meditative focus on the moment as also happens with somatic practices. There’s a structure and plan to the writing, but significantly, I also let the writing guide the line. Quasha aptly writes that my poetry is a

syntactic process [that] holds open a frame for the unthought and the unrealized. This shows up in embodied syntax, the process of which transmits the very opening of mind.

I have wanted to know what I don't know, to use the subtle awareness of body to subtleties of language. It has meant taking some liberties in prose, welcoming lyricism, and taking great liberties in poetry. Prevallet recognizes my writing reinforces embodiment and says, "Pallant teaches us how to actually live in our bodies as fertile, nourishing, and movements of energy and thought."

Somatic Intelligence

Prevallet comes up with questions that she sees my writing answering. She says,

What is the body's role in intelligence? What is language's role in the body's intelligence? Pallant's work both asks the questions and answers them with the skill of a shamanic guide.

My quest has been to increase somatic literacy and somatic intelligence with the aim that some will "hear" in prose, others poetry, and some only through movement. The ultimate goal has been to increase awareness and consciousness, the role of the body too long exiled, welcomed back into the conversation.

Language is pivotal to intelligence, both the language of writing and movement.

Generally, a creative practice performed with awareness can increase intelligence if approached as such. Indeed that has been core to my writing, to open eyes, mind, body and spirit. Opening

the senses and awareness isn't as easy as opening a door. It requires attentiveness to subtle events such as a skipped heart beat or a typing an unintended word. It welcomes investigating these and many more bodily events for what they reveal and keep hidden. It welcomes recognizing how we rub against the skin of culture the and environment.

Establishing New Ground

In his impact statement, Quasha sees how my touch literacy derived from Contact Improvisation and other body-centered modalities play out in writing. There is a depth of listening that occurs for both the person touching and the one being touched. He says,

Perhaps only a practitioner of body arts—ranging from dance and performance to healing touch/ bodywork—could develop the particular order of insight that her writing embodies...Work of this nature is vital for the “evolution” of human psyche, species mind. It works at the foundation of what can be thought, lived, known. It exposes the limitation of viewing work only within consensual literary values.

Jenkins, who uses my books in several of his courses, says, “Cheryl is uncannily intuitive about the relation of language, the self, and the world.” He has used *Into Stillness* as a book that “speaks better than most about the horrors of the early part of this century.” Referring to how *Into Stillness* reveals how trauma lives in the body, he says

Music, movies, painting, and even sculpture have been used to describe poetry of the 20th century. Perhaps Cheryl's dance has given us a new repertoire for the 21st. Moving through her corpus, *Into Stillness*, is a much more solemn piece that deals with how the human mind can meditate on and come to terms with the atrocities of the modern world,

from torture to terrorism. Begun prior to and reaching its fruition during the events of September 11th, this poem is perhaps one of the most timely and relevant experimental poems yet produced on this subject matter.

Deslauriers recognizes the important position of the body in all of my work. He says,

Taking as a whole, the main thrust of Cheryl's theoretical and applied work reveals a through line: conceiving and developing a complex applied vision of the body at the evolutionary intersection between self, world and cosmos. I can surmise that, at this time in her career, *Writing and the body in Motion* counts as a legacy book: it distills decades of work and teaching into well-crafted creative invitations to engage embodied writing. It is written such that it can be used in writing departments, choreographic departments, psychology departments and beyond. It is accessible, well-researched, and most of all, intends to bring the body at the center of the practice of writing.

It's a challenge to determine if I'm doing anything new or different although admittedly it's hard to find work similar to mine. Writing about the body is common, writing from the body less so. Quasha's writing comes closest to mine in its source, however, the particulars of our expression go in different directions.

Until recently I hadn't realized the extent of my somatic sensitivity. You can't feel that, I say in disbelief to a student? You don't know where or how the feeling arises? Sometimes what comes easily hasn't warranted much attention; I have taken my ability for granted. From teaching and working with clients, I've realized the sizeable gap that exists between my ability to read bodies and their inability to do so.

Receiving feedback from my writing is a rarity. My books, essays, poems, and stories go out into the world and rarely does a reader reach out, but those who do contact me mention their

uncommonness, inspirations, and somatic insights. Reading the impact statements for this PhD has reinforced that notion.

Conclusion

What follows are reasons my collection of work is significant, coherent, and original. I also mention its limitations and my directions for the future.

Consistency

Visible throughout the work in each genre is a alert body somatically attuning to the word and an imaginal sensibility. Each work presents itself as an exploration into a sensitively aware lived body in the present moment. My research questions body, movement, consciousness and demonstrates writing as a process of thinking and being, its guidelines often generated in the moment of their creation.

The majority of my work is not meant to be conceptual. Instead my work grounds itself in the body, breath, and becoming. Words tumble off my tongue onto a page as an arm lifts or any other movement arises. Be present to sensation, to a somatic impulse, to a felt or fleeting sense, to the emergence of impressions, images, feelings, and a coalescing of thought. It requires a depth of listening honed through the listening that took place from years of dance, awareness aware of itself, body being body, play in play, me being right where I am, always right here, as

stable as constant, perceptible and imperceptible changes. Here is this word which becomes world or whirl. My eyelids lift, the belly contracts, finger tips tap the keyboard, and thoughts roam the drift of my mind and graze Earth.

Playfully serious presence are the words that come to mind when I think about the reach and character of my work across each of the genres. Seriousness, overrated and aligned with reason, grabs onto linearity and refuses to acknowledge breath and the horizon beyond its own focus. Seriousness is necessary for making statements and explicating. It makes its point without excuse and obviously performs a necessary function.

A lack of playful humor suggests imbalance and leaves me suspicious about source. A lack of humor suggests attachment to a perspective, perhaps to the point of dysfunction. A body needs the relief that playful humor provides. Play can say things that a more somber expression cannot. It is willing to dare and be dared. It slips between the cracks, less concerned about appearances than its serious sibling. Play is the way to try on new forms of expression, to reach and perhaps touch the ineffable. Norms are helpful as is breaking them, a lesson I've drawn directly from Contact Improvisation and from poetry. Know what's come before, test the limits, and build upon them.

Presence and improvisation both reinforce the importance of positioning awareness upon the breath, this moment, free of conceptualization, rooted into sensing and feeling. The culture reinforces distraction and disembodiment: We walk while texting; we drive while listening to music and eating a sandwich; we eat without tasting; dance without feeling; read without thinking, and so forth. Refining presence has been a consistent focus of my research throughout my work. It has enabled me to see, feel, move, think, and know beyond what I was told I could

see, feel, move, think, and know. It's revealed the uselessness and usefulness of limitations.

Tied to presence is being centered and grounded, practices very much part of dance and meditation. I've applied them to serious play to generate work which has reinforced a wide breadth of expression and to release the shackles of mind and body introduced to me through the invisible brace placed upon my scoliotic body. Presence, like improvisation, encourages choice and freedom. My work has not rebelled against or conformed to authority; instead it consistently practices the deep listening required for revealing an authentic voice, curiosity, and expression.

Significance

Significant is the degree of clarity and facility in language, the awareness brought to the moving body, and how both are presented as inseparable and integrative. I write and I dance. Sometimes these activities occur separately but often, especially in my approach to writing, they take place concurrently. One discipline informs and furthers the other, a confluence or hybrid making easy division difficult. The synergy of these practices as a practitioner crossing between and integrating them distinguishes my work. Few practitioners deftly bridge the gap between the disciplines. Years of research in somatic and writing practices have established a fluid lingual somatic awareness. This interdisciplinary fluency permeates my personal practices, my writing in multiple genres, and my teaching.

My research points toward a greater integration of mindbodyspirit than is generally considered. I'd like to think that my work inspires others to engage in a somatic exploration and come to a new understanding of what is possible. I'd like to think that my writing opens bodyminds, that it contains enough familiar and unfamiliar elements to invite new form,

expression, and reminds readers of the importance of residing within their body, to embody and use their residency with artful candor, levity, seriousness, and integrity.

If we suspect writing or dancing, we do ourselves a great disservice by limiting how we abide with ourselves. It's a worthy practice to locate ourselves in space and time, and movement and somatic writing assist in these ways. We witness ourselves participating in our own making, never a done deal, always in process.

My research has included writing, dancing, and a meditation practice. Each of these practices have helped hone the other and contributed to a mindbodyspirit that crosses disciplines with ease and recognizes boundaries as unfixed, that there is much to be gained in interdisciplinarity. My research has persisted for decades, creating an ample storehouse of experiences. Many of my initial curiosities were pursued, questions answered, new investigations taking their place.

When I first taught *Writing From the Body*, talked about my writing, or explained my background in dance, writing, and meditation, the reaction from most people was confusion. Publishers who rejected my work early on said it was "too unusual" and didn't know how to categorize it, a bane to publicity departments and book stores. In the last decade or so, with the popularity of yoga, the prevalence of meditation, and more and more books and articles on embodiment, mindfulness, breath, and so forth, the befuddled reactions are many fewer. Obviously my involvement in these areas is not new nor have I been following a trend. I'm not the first to bend rules in writing, to incorporate mindfulness into creative expression, or listen closely to what the body reveals. My path involves investigating my own lived experience and creative expression and reliance on them to sustain me, having discovered early on that the

benefits of well-being and pliancy in body and mind far outweigh any naysayers preferring I follow a pre-established idea that omits the specifics of my life. There is a place for studying objective information but my research shows it's as pivotal to study subjective experience, especially one that is somatically based.

Originality

For the same reasons as mentioned above, my work can be seen as original. It is based on decades worth of research involving my first person perspective and the authority of my consistently developing embodied subjectivity. This authority comes from embracing multiple ways of knowing and is reflected in the multiple genres I write in. More than a superficial array of styles, they instead represent different paradigms of understanding and ways of experiencing the self and the world, the forms dictating what can be expressed and understood.

In some of my work, I write about the experience of being present in bodymindspirit. Elsewhere, the work itself is an example of the very process, a continuous aligning with the creative impulse, an aesthetic of somatic homeostasis which, by its very nature, undergoes continual micro- and macro-movements. The subjective and objective world is complex, perhaps more so than many of us may find comfortable. My works reflects complexity yet avoids needless simplification and complication.

My voice and style is distinctive, not so much in what I've said but in how I say it. I can try to repeat myself but I can't repeat myself - although echoes and resonance suggest otherwise - nor can another finesse an imitation. I am myself myself.

That said, I am among the voices recognizing the importance of ecosomatics/

ecoproprioception/ somatic poetics and pressing for greater embodiment. There are now many writing about the value of embracing the totality of the body, that our wholeness, creative expression, and healing depend on noting and accepting all of who we are, changes ongoing.

Me and not me and you and not you are in this together. Questions and inquiry welcome and necessary. Restore the body to an honorary noun and verb. My work focuses on this moment, balancing on imbalances. Boundaries are illusory and we maintain them well. My writing shows contradictions, hums along, and hopefully illuminates the route to an awakening for more than a few.

My somatic literacy and facility with language have meant that I've been able to define experiences of the body that may have evaded other's ability as is apparent in Johnson's and Meehan's words and dancer's general aversion to writing. Yet there's no better person to know one's body than oneself, a worthwhile study, and yet many of us opt out of connecting to our felt lived experience. Each of my writings provides some blend of sound, image, rhythm, and somatic attuning that emphasizes the value of maintaining an intimate connection.

Freedom in body translates into freedom of mind and openness of thinking correlates to an openness on the page. Like Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 163), I am unmoved by experiencing the body as "an assemblage of parts," preferring instead "when the spark is lit between the sense and sensible." By being open to my body somatically, I have discovered the paradoxical nature of language. It's how we represent and misrepresent ourselves, how we lie and tell the truth, how we unravel doing for being and be to do, and how we move into ourselves and into another. Deep listening requires not only hearing what's already been said but hearing what has yet to be said. In many ways, the activity is as ordinary as brushing one's teeth, but can lead to extraordinary

experiences, not because the experience itself is unusual, but because a honed awareness expands perceptions and encounters with what we hadn't thought possible.

Limitations

Being an independent artist and adjunct instructor for the duration of my professional life has rewarded me with great freedom in that I've not needed to be beholden to any school of thought or institutional policy. My academic and creative freedom has allowed me to follow my curiosity as it meandered among disciplines and interests. The flip side is the lack of professional support that has limited my access to research, conferences, grants, and work with an assistant. As a result, my research is not as broad, comprehensive, and rigorous as I might have liked. I've had to delay and put on hold many pursuits, some abandoned altogether for practicality.

My creative expression is insistent, constant, and lively. I often work on multiple writing projects at the same time with many more impatiently awaiting their turn. I pursue writing that fits between semesters or sustains my attention between teaching and other jobs.

Art and creative expression is neither practical nor utilitarian, hallmarks of American culture. Yet my research shows that creative expression is intimately tied to well-being and to omit such practices from the week is like cutting back on sleep or water, its shortages deleterious over time. Writing and dancing have strengthened my body from its early asthmatic and scoliotic disturbances. No one need convince me of the merits of a creative and somatic practice. Ease and liberation are rewards enough.

Early on I was encouraged to specialize, not dancing *and* writing, not fiction *and* poetry *and* nonfiction. Specializing, I was told, would enable me to progress in the chosen discipline.

Obviously I didn't follow that advice. I saw how skipping from one discipline and genre to another meant progressing slowly but the flip side meant revealing how they're connected and benefitting from the combination. Not following the advice led to creating *Writing From the Body*, developing my approach to somatic writing, and forming an understanding of the body that likely wouldn't have been available otherwise.

The breadth and depth of my approach to writing has led to a challenge in presenting this thesis in a more linear standard in terms of methodology and findings or in portraying the work in a greater lyrical, poetic, imaginal, and proprioceptive style. To best represent my work and the requirements of this PhD, which includes conveying specific information to the examiners, I aimed for balance: a discussion of writing along with a discussion of somatics; lyrical passages along with linear ones; and personal narrative along with more formal abstract knowledge. All the while, the focus remained on my selected texts and the subtle felt bodily truths of somatic writing.

These selected texts, especially referenced sections of my poetry and critical writing like "Just Saying," veer away from convention and demonstrate experiences of language in full embrace of embodied flow unrestricted by common rules of poetry and prose. This flow embraces the lived experience of the totality of my body and an embodied nondual consciousness. The balance aimed for in this PhD, or variation of the standard, reinforces both the idea and experience of embodiment, which can be considered among its strengths and as a source of originality.

New Directions

Given my track record thus far, I can safely assume that pursuing an exploration of my body as a site and process of inquiry will continue. In addition to developing work based on creative expression, my interests have been consistent with several of the areas explored in Arts-Based Research: using art for contemplation (Franklin, 2018), for knowing (LaMothe, 2015), for transformation (Halprin, 1995), and for therapy (McNiff, 1992).

I'm glad to encounter work that addresses using art for purposes not only creative but also educational (Leavy, 2019; Eddy, 2016; Barbezat, 2013; McNiff, 1998), that the role and function of art is far reaching with numerous repercussions worthy of study. At the heart of any of my consequent investigations is embodiment, which comes about for me at the intersection of moving and writing, and can readily lead to new work, new form, and insight. Bodying, especially a listening body alert to the nuances of its being and becoming, is an ongoing activity.

As for writing, I continually make the difficult decision as to which project to pursue. Another poetry collection is likely which includes integrative and evolutionary language and I'm nearing completion of another nonfiction book. I'm interested in furthering exploration into the collective (interdependent, intersubjective) body because like ecosomaticists and ecolinguists, I believe the best, and perhaps the only way to generate a habitable and sustainable future for ourselves is through honoring our subjective and collective body and the entire ecology of bodies, human and nonhuman.

Though I will continue to pursue publications for current work, perhaps gathering some of my fiction into a collection and writing more nonfiction, it's hard to say which genre or subject will be the focus of my next project. Once I make the decision, it seizes my attention and forces me to suspend other activities. That said, the collective body intrigues me. In the same way

that somatic practitioners come to know the subjective body, how can we know the collective body? What is its definition(s)? What avenues of perception and sensing, feeling, and/or imagining provide the best route to its investigation? What practices can be developed that enable accessing it?

As to teaching Writing From the Body, written about in *Writing and the Body in Motion*, I look toward better defining the approach, possibly renaming it, and developing it as somatic education method. Students benefit from taking a single session or a series as is happening currently, but I want to structure the teaching for systematically guiding students through a pointed experiential journey that aids them effectively in their development. Since Covid-19, I'm teaching my workshops online and devoted one to Writing From the Collective Body which provided students experiences for connecting with bodies other than their own.

Given that humanity is undergoing epic change, I would like to be among those who usher in a better version of itself, one that is embodied, creative, empathetic, and integrative. This means continuing to listen to and exploring my personal body and assisting others in their somatic journey. As long as there is breath in my body, undoubtedly dancing and writing will continue. They reinforce the value and vibrancy of living embodied and integrated in the present moment. My research will continue to focus on the body, creative expression, levels of consciousness, healing, being whole, and experiencing this breath and the next.

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Appendix: Impact Statements

Don Hanlon Johnson

PhD, Professor of Somatics, California Institute of Integral Studies

April 2, 2020

For The University of Gloucestershire

Re: Cheryl Pallant

I am happy to write in support of Ms Pallant's proposal to pursue her doctorate through publication. I have known her for several years through her writing and our correspondence about that. I myself am a writer and also the founder of the first accredited graduate program in the United States focused on bodily experience. I am presently a professor in the new doctoral program at CIIS in Integral and Transpersonal Psychologies with a Somatics emphasis.

One of the core challenges I have attempted to meet in my half-century of work at the intersections between body practices, writing, and scholarly research is the enormous gap between skillful experiential work and intelligent language. There is a bias among people highly trained in sensory awareness, intricate touch, expressive movement, and a range of breathing practices that words diminish non-verbal experiences. As you might expect, when such people do speak, it is often indeed diminishing their work. I have long had my antennae

out for colleagues to help bridge this gap, and surely Ms Pallant's work has been a great help, particularly *Writing the Body in Motion: Awakening Voice through Somatic Practice*, which I have used in my teaching.

The importance of this work consists in the fact that there is an enormous potential among the many people skilled in these practices throughout the world for contributing to the healing of various physical dysfunctions and emotional problems, improving communication skills in groups, and contributing to developing more effective pedagogies. The problem is that it takes careful articulation to be able to participate in any of the dialogues that would bring these efforts to fruition. Ms Pallant is uniquely suited to help in this important work.

Don Hanlon Johnson, PhD (signed electronically)

Daniel Deslauriers

PhD., Professor, Transformative Studies, California Institute of Integral Studies

Impact Statement for Cheryl Pallant

Date: May 1, 2020

Written by Daniel Deslauriers, PhD.

Professor, Transformative Studies Doctorate,

California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA.

Cheryl Pallant's written work spans at least two decades and is written in different modes and styles, including historical and context setting book (e.g., *Contact Improvisation: An Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form*, 2006), theoretical exposition (e.g., *Dancing evolutionary spirituality*, 2019), practice-oriented works (e.g., *Writing and the Body in Motion. Awakening Voice through Somatic Practice*, 2018), autobiographical work (*Ginseng Tango*), and poetry (e.g. *Her Body Listening*, 2018) to name the most prevalent ones. I note this to illustrate Cheryl's place in the somatic world: someone who bridges practice with theory, theory with spiritual development, and spiritual with movement and dance. There is a harmonious and beneficent circularity in her oeuvre that helps the readers connect fields that are often seen as disparate and apart. Her work has a broad appeal reaching out to dancers, somatic practitioners, teachers, writers, women in general (as some of her work focuses on women's experience).

As a practitioner and writer of Contact Improvisation (CI), I consider Cheryl's book *Contact Improvisation: An Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form* a 'classic' in the field. It serves as a resource for anyone interested in the history (at the national and global level) of the form, and also provided the seed of many issues that became central to the form such as politics and privilege, and creating as well as maintaining community. True to the democratic spirit of CI, it samples some of the historical writers of CI.

Taking as a whole, the main thrust of Cheryl's theoretical and applied work reveals a through line: conceiving and developing a complex applied vision of the body at the evolutionary intersection between self, world and cosmos. I can surmise that, at this time in her career, *Writing and the body in Motion* counts as a legacy book: it distills decades of work and teaching into well-crafted creative invitations to engage embodied writing. It is written such that it can be used in writing departments, choreographic departments, psychology departments and beyond. It is accessible, well-researched, and most of all, intends to bring the body at the center of the practice of writing.

Sondra Fraleigh

PhD, Professor Emeritus, State University of New York

April 6, 2020

To whom it may concern

Regarding: Impact Statement for Cheryl Pallant

From: Sondra Fraleigh, Professor of Dance, State University of New York, Founding Director,
Eastwest Somatics Institute

I first encountered the writing of Cheryl Pallant many years ago when I was asked to evaluate her proposed book on contact improvisation, which I found engaging, useful, and unique in its perspective. It details how she became an avid improviser. This is no surprise in light of her amazing poetry, its rhythms, reasons, and unexpected rhymes. Its *poiesis* gallops, pauses, and moves like water, drifts, then melts like snow on roses. I am a poet myself, not a very accomplished one, but good enough to know good poetry when I read it. Cheryl's poetry is very accomplished. It has been developing over many years, its images mellowing, deep in muscle and bone.

Cheryl's unusual teaching on "writing the body" guides writers and dancers to forgotten parts of themselves, healing and awakening the psychophysical imagination. Cheryl's recent book, *Writing and the Body in Motion: Awakening Voice through Somatic Practice* (2018), stems from

the same motivation, as does *Flesh Matters: Somatic Practice through Movement & Writing*, which is her personal vision of somatic practice through movement, dance, and writing. Writing, it seems, has always been Cheryl's medium, especially as it flows from the body listening and in motion.

The full list of Cheryl Pallant's poetry, nonfiction writing, and scholarship on dance and improvisation is impressive, a stunning body of work. Reading her creative writing and qualitative scholarship would be a pleasure for anyone. Its somatic impact is especially engrossing for this dancer-writer-teacher.

Sarah Rosenthal

MFA, Lecturer, University of San Francisco

Statement in support of Cheryl Pallant's PhD Candidacy at the University of Gloucestershire – April 18, 2020 – Sarah Rosenthal

Cheryl Pallant's rare combination of writerly prowess, teaching expertise, and skill in multiple body-awareness modes such as Contact Improvisation and Reiki has allowed her to generate a series of texts each of which make the case, from within the specific terms of their genres (poetry and nonfiction), for the numerous, powerful benefits of somatic awareness. Her nonfiction books combine memoir, research, and guidance on practices designed to increase body awareness, approaching the reader through direct education and supportive training. Complementing this approach, her poetry enacts body awareness not only by conveying the sensuality and movement of bodies through description, but by showing language itself to be something alive and sensual, emanating from the body.

For example, the long lines in Pallant's *Continental Drifts* dash, dip, twist, double back and leap ahead, enacting simultaneously the groundedness gravity demands and the instability wrought by the law of constant change. "Adrift I am sands to shore, fire to ice, bones tendonizing tendencies," she writes. Pallant's background in dance feels evident here; these poems are ready for a session of seasoned, rough-and-tumble contact improv between a constantly filling

and emptying “I” and “you”: “Who follows whom can or may situate her or himself. Together or alone lifts cup to drink. We or I romp in a field or flatter yet, a pain.” A heightened awareness of limits—“After this there is no other”—leads to a fearlessness that invigorates: “Space opens like a book yet to be written.”

Continental Drifts enriches me through its deep integration of creativity, intellect, and somatic attunement. Similarly I find in Pallant’s other books not just inspiration but support for and articulation of principles I agree with yet had not found language for. Reading across Pallant’s oeuvre strengthens my determination to pursue somatic awareness as a source for renewing and strengthening my own creativity and well-being and gives me ideas for how to support others through my work as a writer, teacher, critic, and life coach.

I may be an outlier in my interest in a broad range of genres including experimental poetry, memoir, and self-help texts. My observation is that many readers divide themselves into somewhat narrower camps and types. Pallant’s gift for writing in various genres allows her to disseminate her ideas effectively to diverse audiences, while also enacting the fluidity, flexibility, and inclusiveness that she writes about so persuasively.

Kristin Prevallet

MFA, Adjunct Instructor, Westchester Community College

In the 16th century, Rene Descartes declared that the mind and the body are distinct. His belief that that the quality of the mind (thinking and non-extended) is completely different from the quality of the body (non thinking and extended) has taken 500 years to clarify. During this time, the body has been put through the mill of a dualistic lens that carves out symptoms and administers drugs to target specific parts. Likewise, in the past 500 years, pandemics, wars, and cultural oppression have caused inordinate suffering to the bodies and minds of humans. Of course there were many along the way — William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer and Carl Jung, to name a few of the masters— who challenged Cartesian logic and did their best to repair systemic damage, but their theories were considered fringe and remained outside of systems that were dependent on the body and mind being inexorably separate. It is only now, in the 21st century, that these traumas are surfacing as a collective response—one that demands an integrated understanding of the mindbody connection. Fields within somatic awareness are rising as an intelligence that has the capacity to heal far beyond what the mind alone can imagine.

I am a poet and holistic practitioner; I have two books that are deeply in conversation with Pallant's work: *Visualize Comfort: Healing and the Unconscious Mind* and *Trance Poetics: Body, Mind, Writing*. I have come at these questions via poetics, and Pallant through dance; but

through our respective lenses, we both have written on the importance of metaphor and prepositions that serve as language's portals of direct communication to the body. With the current rupture in the healthcare system that is simply not equipped to steer humans through viral pandemics (which are sure to keep coming), the field of somatic healing is poised as an immediate intervention. Pallant's careful and attuned work is poised to enter into a much larger conversation.

Over her long career, Cheryl Pallant has remained steadfast in her deep engagement (both as a dancer and a writer) with the body's intelligent modes of communication. She writes, "The somatic body is an informed body that leads to embodied cognition, creativity, and the path to its own freedom." There are many ways to talk "about" the body, but reading Pallant's work we are able to uncover in ourselves the understanding that, "behind every movement and every word is a motivation." Pallant's teachings are immediately experienced, rooted in daily exercises and self-care rituals that draw us to "to embody yourself and become informed about your flesh." Her exercises for somatic writing have helped to define and mobilize a movement of somatic practitioners, with conferences and associations all devoted to these practices.

In this way, Pallant's work plants deep seeds into philosophy's fertile soil by contributing provocative solutions to problems that philosophers themselves were unable to grapple with: what is the body's role in intelligence? What is language's role in the body's intelligence? Pallant's work both asks the questions and answers them with the skill of a shamanic guide. The body, she assures us, is "a safe container or structure with specific guidelines...It creates a

welcome space for raw, unprocessed material to emerge for the expansion and focus of new breath, expression, and understanding.” And as we open into our own flesh-and-blood container, Pallant teaches us how to actually live in our bodies as fertile, nourishing, and movements of energy and thought.

Robbie Kinter

Music Director, Virginia Commonwealth University

The book *Contact Improvisation, An Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form* has been an important part of my contact improvisation classes at VCU for over a decade. To deepen our practice and give us a chance to breath, I use each chapter as a jumping off point for conversation. Contact improvisation itself is a catalyst for bringing people together in a thoughtful, spontaneous and often vigorous movement experience. I've found the writings in Cheryl Pallant's book inspire introspection and I use this to keep the mind working during times of rest in the classroom. The seven chapters work well over the 15 weeks of class using a chapter every other week. I use the final chapter as a guide for the first part of the student's final exam where they become the teachers. The diversity and inclusion in the photography throughout the book has been beneficial over the years for the different populations I've had in my classes. Pallant's poetic writing style adds an artistry that takes it to another level from other dance textbooks.

Jayne Bernasconi

MFA, Adjunct Instructor in Dance, Towson University

Contact Improvisation: an Introduction to a Vitalizing Dance Form has been used as a resource in my composition classes at Towson University. It has given students an opportunity to see improvisation on a much wider and creative scope and has helped them to understand the power of their authentic body on so many different levels. They were able to view themselves in their “home” body as Pallant discusses in her book. And by understanding their “home” they were able to not only have more clarity in their movement but also to understand and ask more thought provoking questions that led to greater creativity and satisfaction with both themselves and their colleagues.

This book has also inspired discussion on the word “vitalizing.” Students have come to understand and appreciate this word and the basis for the book. Some ideas that helped bring more understanding into their movement ideas revolved around: Invigorating, re-organizing, refreshing, re-inventing, revitalization, a tonic, a vital life force and strengthening. The book helped students to think about dance on a more human level than a professional and athletic level. Dance is for every body instead of the skilled and trained technical bodies. Students were able to learn a much wider vocabulary of language, including the language of physics: momentum, gravity, inertia.

From a personal perspective, I appreciate how Pallant is able to articulate a physical dance form into words and asks thought provoking questions and can bring the reader from the macro (history, legacy) into the micro (specific exercises of deep listening) of this unique art form. As the reader, I am able to understand and gain a unique perspective of CI not only in my brain from the words but also in a particular sensation/connection in my body, in a particular space, in a particular time, within a particular vernacular.

Sarah Whatley

PhD, Director of Centre for Dance Research, Coventry University

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April 25 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Cheryl Pallant

I am delighted to offer this reflection on the work of Cheryl Pallant, and particularly the impact that her published works have had on students, educators and practitioners with whom I work, or have connections with, within the dance and somatic practices community. As editor of the international peer-reviewed 'Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices' I am aware that her work is a rich resource and often cited by others; her publications are a valuable and respected contribution to the ongoing development of this discourse. Cheryl's writing is also a valuable reference point for students at all levels. Her writing reflects her considerable experience as dancer, healer, poet and teacher, which allows her publications to be infused with these different perspectives and all provide a very accessible entry point for those interested in how

body-based practice can be transmitted in vivid ways through the written word. From a personal point of view, I find Cheryl's published works both inspiring and innovative.

Her expertise and authority provide her with special insights that she communicates through somatic writing that others have been able to benefit from. Her works are recommended to my students who are studying somatics at different levels and my own PhD students frequently look to her work to develop their own research enquiries. In particular, her publication *Contact Improvisation: an Invitation to a Vitalizing Dance Form* has been a valuable text for all dance students at Coventry University who are often experiencing contact improvisation, somatic practice and a more holistic approach to dance education and training for the first time.

Moreover, this book and her other writing, are excellent examples of how to combine moving and writing in different modes, from journaling drawn from embodied experience through to more traditional scholarship.

Similarly, my research colleagues draw on her work to find routes into deepening their own approaches to somatic practice and writing. What is particularly valuable is her ability to integrate exercises and practical ideas with imagery, poetry and theory drawn from several disciplinary fields. This allows readers to find their own entry points and find new connections for their own research that broadens awareness of how body awareness and bodily intelligence both informs and benefits from, other subject domains.

Cheryl has an impressive and diverse list of published works that span across different disciplinary fields and those publications that I particularly draw on myself impress me for their rigour and originality.

There is no doubt in my mind that Cheryl has made, and continues to make, a highly appreciated contribution to the field of somatic dance and movement scholarship, education and practice.

With kind regards

Professor Sarah Whatley

Director, Centre for Dance Research

Coventry University, UK

Cynthia J. Williams

MFA, Dance Professor, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Impact Statement Contact Improvisation: an Invitation to a Vitalizing Dance Form

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been using Cheryl Pallant's book on Contact Improvisation for over a decade in two courses I teach regularly; a First Year Seminar called Fields of Play: Improvisation in Life and Art, and a course in Dance Improvisation that serves as an upper level elective for Dance Department students. Pallant's text offers an accessible introduction for beginning students and simultaneously provides students with more dance experience a text that guides them through nuanced and challenging explorations.

Cheryl Pallant's *Contact Improvisation: an Invitation to a Vitalizing Dance Form* has a wonderful balance between theory and practice, clear description and poetic invitation. For students new to Contact Improvisation, Pallant provides a brief history of the form, situating it within the social context of its inception and insights into why it developed the way it did. I really appreciate how Pallant then presents the reader with the basic principles of the form, encouraging students to explore both the practical elements and what the experience of CI may bring. Her tone is reassuring and informative; my students also remark on the poetic

imagery of her descriptions which they find inspiring. Pallant offers easy to understand definitions of somatic concepts such as “listening,” “remaining present,” and “centering,” which many students new to dance have not encountered.

Of particular importance for students in colleges and universities is understanding movement practices such as Contact Improvisation within a broader social context. Pallant explores the relationship between Contact Improvisation and the myriad implications of that practice in terms of identity construction and ingrained social attitudes toward the body; she further expands those ideas into questions of social values, community, and collaboration. Throughout the text Pallant provides dynamic photographs, questions for self-reflection, and suggestions for further experiential research.

Pallant’s final chapter, “The Dancing Body,” brings forth the voices of other Contact Improvisation teachers and specific exercises that are reflective of their varied approaches. It is a great resource for students and teachers, reminding us of the infinite variety and on-going development of this form. The text also has a glossary of terms, appendices of resources, notes, and a generous bibliography, elements that elevate it from a “how-to” book to a complete text.

Contact Improvisation: an Invitation to a Vitalizing Dance Form is beautifully written, informative, and inspiring. Cheryl Pallant’s introduction to Contact Improvisation text is of

great value to college students and faculty, offering an experiential and theoretical perspective on the dance that enhances the students' physical experience in the studio.

Cynthia J Williams

Dance Department

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Geneva, NY

George Quasha

PhD, Station Hill Press

Poietic Impact - May 1, 2020

Cheryl Pallant is one of very few living writers I learn from consistently and in even the briefest encounter. This goes back to our first meeting two decades ago, and yet there's difference in that the instructive gift of her work is even more obvious now than then. And it points to the one sense of *impact*, and indeed *legacy*, that is truly meaningful to me.

The sense I'm indicating is the self-renewing contribution that certain writing can make like very little else in our field of cultural forces. It hits us one way when we come upon it for the first time and another way when we come back to it at different points later. No matter how much we read a given text, it remains unread. The book is never the same; it seems to revision itself; it refuses familiarity. I associate this sense of reading with the great French writer Maurice Blanchot whose work we published two decades earlier (1978-) and continued publishing at the same time as Cheryl's. In the essay "Reading" Blanchot wrote what I would still say about reading Cheryl now: "...this unique reading, each time the first reading and each time the only reading...."⁴

⁴ *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. George Quasha, in collaboration with Charles Stein (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1995).

We published two books by Cheryl at Station Hill Press, *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (2001) and *Into Stillness* (2003), and they hit us as not only among the most “original” and innovative instances of new writing, but something quite unprecedented. Of course it made use of preceding innovations in writing from the whole previous century—considered, that is, from the dubious and ultimately trivial perspective of “technique” or “literary device”—but the confident élan in its process and non-arbitrary display of language reformulation at the service of an actual life—this was something with its own species of newness. While much of this might be true of richly conceived writing in general, I’m applying it now to writing that, in Ezra Pound’s phrase, *stays news*—the intentionally open, the fecund inconclusive. Work that despite the passion of its commitment successively evades coercive statement.

It’s difficult to honestly assess a work’s impact and influence, especially a work so subtly and fluidly unexampled as Cheryl’s, work that stands outside the dominant “styles” of our historical moment; it’s easier to convince ourselves that we know where work of the more distant past stands. I know writers who have regarded her work as just short of manna. The actual process of the work, however much one might associate it with other work or not, happens in fact at a high level of singularity. For me personally it has carried great force. I even wonder now, and for the first time, whether I simply didn’t see the influence of these two books on my own work in an invented genre I call “preverbs,” which I was just beginning around the time we published her books. Cheryl has written poignantly about this particular work of mine, indeed with a startling creative accuracy viewable as its own

genus of critical response. And reading it, in addition to giving me new insight into my own work, allowed me to appreciate the empathic subtlety of her mind and sensibility.⁵ If I could write as profoundly about her work as she has about mine I would think to have reached a new plateau.

And what this empathic subtlety indicates is a sensibility honed both inside and outside language and literary disciplines. Perhaps only a practitioner of body arts—ranging from dance and performance to healing touch/bodywork—could develop the particular order of insight that her writing embodies. The quotation at the beginning of *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* by the great Japanese artist Kazuaki Tanahashi frames the real issue, and one almost entirely unacknowledged in the vocabulary of our critical practice in the West: not “how much feeling or thinking was behind the work or how well the work was done” but a “standard of excellence” conceived as “how fully present the artist was during the process.” Presence in this sense requires a continuously refined process of feedback from the medium of language equivalent to the indispensable feedback a bodyworker or a Contact Improv dancer gets from an actual body at the moment. Here advanced concepts are sometimes even more a hindrance than a benefit, for overthinking and overpreparedness can interfere with the subtle energetic indications of what is transpiring at a micro-impersonal level. At stake here is the *level* of a practitioner’s deeply honed approaches to a work at hand and how well a rarified level of stepped-up awareness can be sustained.

⁵ “Poetry Saying,” <https://www.dispatchespoetrywars.com/commentary/poetry-saying-on-george-quasha/>. When we write “self-truly” about another’s work, we can also discover values we live by and write toward.

A work's impact in this focus, if indeed we could somehow assess it in any comparative sense, would have to be beyond a given field, such as literature, and in an "interdisciplinary" perspective. But discipline is also a limiting concept. For with work of such complexity of orientation I prefer to think of its core *principle* as it extends one's deepest commitments in practice. This would be an interactive principle that allows writing and body-centered practices to be viewed together as co-performative in the broader—but also more sharply refined—sense of *the work*. I believe this to be the focus of Cheryl's work in writing, performance, and body-centered practices, as well, and most particularly, as educator. I say this because to the extent that her writing is involved in communicating something, its actual modality is as much an interactive event as, say, bodywork. The communication is more in the nature of transmission of essential value, which is to say a *communion*. This quality of communing is in the special intensity of the interactive/interpersonal value exchange, an event whose content is in the possibility created and the transformation initiated.

To make this understanding of the impact of work at Cheryl's level of stepped-up intensity more vivid, I would have to discuss in detail the process of her language— what I call its *linguality*, its transformation of and within language, and indeed its reality-altering valence. There is, so to speak, a poetics in its haptics, a quality of the language process that bears more than a metaphoric relation to touch and principled body practice. The *torsional syntax*, wherein the linear flow responds to the cross action of alternative perspective, further defines a given thinking as it unfolds with awakened ambiguity. The syntactic and

semantic revelations contain further potential for emerging insight. A syntactic process holds open a frame for the unthought and the unrealized.

Work of this nature is vital for the “evolution” of human psyche, species mind. It works at the foundation of what can be thought, lived, known. It exposes the limitation of viewing work only within consensual literary values. It models beyond modeling. It exposes cultural values as both a conservative force and a defensive retardant of novel consciousness. If we imagine a species level of what we do, our co-evolutionary responsibility, we veer toward a “higher” proprioceptivity—what I call *ecoproprioception*—where *self* serves as the medium of insight into *other*, an omnidirectional cast of mind. This shows up in embodied syntax, the process of which transmits the very opening of mind.

Poets—from Blake to Artaud to Charles Olson to Robert Kelly and onward into the present—have on rare occasion found keys to a comprehensive opening that could guide us at the present level of planetary crisis. I see Cheryl Pallant as a practitioner of *poiesis* in the widest, and still open, sense. And as such she’s a member of a sadly small contingent within our species whose practice *is* language—again in an extended sense, including the living bodymind *presencing* in its own dimension of linguality. It’s as sustained living practice that it opens into what Olson called *further nature*.

George Quasha

Barrytown, New York

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Grant Matthew Jenkins

PhD, Associate Professor, University of Tulsa

2 May 2020: STATEMENT OF IMPACT FOR CHERYL PALLANT

Cheryl has asked me to write a statement about the impact of her work, and I am happy to do so. While I am not an expert on Cheryl's impact in the larger profession and can only speak about it in general terms, I can speak to her work's impact on me and my students. Overall, I have to say that I may not still be a practicing poet if it weren't for Cheryl's guidance, inspiration, and encouragement.

Cheryl Pallant is not only a writer but a facilitator of writers, in the tradition of Ezra Pound or Virginia Woolf. I first met Cheryl through the Buffalo Poetics listserv when I put out a query regarding my impending move to Virginia (I taught at Hampden-Sydney College in 1999-2000 and Old Dominion University from 2000-2003). She responded immediately by inviting me to join her and a group of artists for a gathering at the famous Jefferson Hotel downtown Richmond—that was the beginning of what has been a very fruitful collaborative relationship. Since then, Cheryl and I have held readings together in Tulsa, Richmond, and Norfolk, written poems together, and participated in poetic conferences, readings, and events from New York City to Austin, Texas. She is one of the most supportive colleagues I have ever had.

A decade ago, we co-wrote a book together, *Morphs* (Cracked Slab, 2009), an experimental, open-ended series in which we exchanged texts and altered them using various algorithms. As a prolific writer, Cheryl has furnished me with an example of how to produce quality work in a short time and she has included me in her vast network of writers, dancers, and artists. Even

though Cheryl's artistic process is open-ended and unscripted, she has always managed to find time for her writing when the muse visits—I'm sure that she will bring such diligence to her coursework. As to the form of writing in the book, much of what Cheryl sent to me could be considered prose poetry (a form she employs in several of her other works), of which she may be considered one of its expert practitioners. In fact, samples of her work were anthologized in *Introduction to the Prose Poem*, edited by Brian Clements and Jamey Dunham.

As a writer, Cheryl is uncannily intuitive about the relation of language, the self, and the world. She has produced a broad array of writing, most of which I have read, from poetry to fiction, journalism to travel narrative, creative non-fiction to academic non-fiction on the subjects of contact improvisation dance, spirituality, and embodied writing. It is her poetry, however, that I know the best. I was a reader and commentator on three of her books, *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* (Station Hill, 2001), *Into Stillness* (Station Hill, 2003), and *Continental Drifts* (Blazevox, 2012). *Into Stillness* is, in my opinion, one of the most important book-length poems to come out in this young century. Although it reminds me much of contemporary women writers in the tradition of Gertrude Stein, it challenges some of the arcane irony of much avant garde American poetry with wit and unabashed sincerity. It weaves together meditations on meditation, sonic word play, and fragments of narratives of atrocity, individuality, and sociality. In fact, I included it in my sophomore-level survey, "Major American Writers," because it deals with these issues in a way I haven't seen since Charles Reznikoff's late poems. For many reasons, it's difficult to say when someone is doing something "new" or "original" or even "different," but Cheryl's *Uncommon Grammar Cloth* leaves that impression. What strikes me as unique about this poem is its kinetic poetics that feels more like dance than linguistics. A canny combination of clever, conscious puns and unexpected, ecstatic discovery, like the smooth moves of dancers in couple, Cheryl's para-poem revels in language and gleefully follows her unconscious consciously spinning out in tactile waves: "my touch sways delicately winged in the feather of this moment. again now. again." (44)

Although claiming an affinity with Stein's perpetual present, this work prances further into the realm of spontaneity, surprise, and self-awareness. Because Cheryl draws on her lifetime study

of dance and movement, dance is not really a theme of *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*. Dance motivates the feel of its syntax. Just as collage or jump cut makes no sense in the context of dance—because one’s movements must naturally flow from one to the other because the way our limbs move—the usual postmodern descriptions of Language poetry don’t really fit *Uncommon Grammar Cloth*. Its somewhat conventional syntax is analogous to the limits of space, body, and gravity for a dancer, part of its very form. Yet such limits create for Cheryl a field in which free expression truly becomes possible:

“ring, ring the new year or dangle earrings or glide smoothly past the past and leave for compost or a composition and suppose i don’t and you do or saying is as doing doesn’t and remaining is frequent. then drop the draw a string. then go jump in the like you very much, love even or not at all, but to please welcome into the house of dreams where reality needs no disguise but drinks daiquiris with abandon, looses tongues, and fills the sink with many a dirty dish...as yippee and other vernacular phrases that no one clips for her wall or mirror or computer standard but evidence the smile and child’s delight and oh so, oh so.” (66)

The syntax of this prose poem is also made unusual by a regular rhythm of fissures, or more to the metaphor, sudden changes in direction, like a dancer following her internal gyro. The constant shifts in thematic frame move attention from contextual, narrative sense to “the sprint up the mountain sliding into a heaven of our making, a wilderness passing into a public sphere ranging wildly as imaginatively possible. in this chaotic rule where form asserts its own benign dominion, my raiments fall away, my clips and constant queries quiet to mere seeing, mere hearing, mere abstemious luxuries” (40).

Like a dance, this book-length poem is sensual and even erotic— “with such bold stands how can saying reach any where other than a faraway intimacy along the shores of another’s delight?” (56). That shore is as close, and far away, as the skin:

“coming as nothing before. in the reach of your palm my majesty beckons. if being so lightly as your skin brushing against my glance let being have it done with integrity and candle wax dripping. i as never always want don't the blush of rushing in pace with flames rise soft as burn. (59)

Music, movies, painting, and even sculpture have been used to describe poetry of the 20th century. Perhaps Cheryl's dance has given us a new repertoire for the 21st. Moving through her corpus, *Into Stillness*, is a much more solemn piece that deals with how the human mind can meditate on and come to terms with the atrocities of the modern world, from torture to terrorism. Begun prior to and reaching its fruition during the events of September 11th, this poem is perhaps one of the most timely and relevant experimental poems yet produced on this subject matter.

Her book, *Continental Drifts*, is an epic book-length poem interweaving the languages of politics, science, and love. It is her magnum opus so far, in my opinion, which indicates that she just keeps getting better and better. Her latest book, the 2017 *Her Body Listening*, is the work of a poet at the height of her career and consists in the culmination of all that has brought Cheryl to her avocation: the body, movement, sound, energy, and the associational magic of language. It is a true masterpiece. Her prolific production has prepared her to complete a doctoral program and to produce something truly memorable and impactful beyond the department that endorsed it.

Her work has directly impacted my teaching, and I will talk about how her work and her own teaching has influenced mine. In terms of my teaching, Cheryl's work has been invaluable in several ways. First, Cheryl emblemizes a poet living a poet's life. Therefore, I invited her to visit several of my classes over several semesters. She was generous with her time and talent, and students remembered her for a long time after she visited, so she clearly had an impact on them. Second, Cheryl's poetry embodies the kind of work that I want my students to produce—risk-taking, personal, responsive to the body, and fully aware of the power of

language. I've required various books of hers in five of my courses, from surveys of American Literature to graduate courses on 20th Century poetry. Students spent weeks intensely studying, discussing, and writing about her works in ways that had a lasting impact on them.

In terms of her teaching, I nominated her to be hired as the Lubell Visiting Professor of Jewish Literature and Culture at The University of Tulsa in 2009, and she was selected by the committee for its one-year term. The committee was drawn to interdisciplinary background that weaves together writing, dance, philosophy, science, and an intense focus on religious traditions, particularly Buddhism and Judaism. In her time at Tulsa, Cheryl proved herself a superb teacher with a pedagogy combining humane warmth with the rigor of assigning very difficult texts. I had several of her Poetry Writing students in my Advanced Poetry Writing course the following semester, and they were prepared to take on conceptually difficult experiments in form, thanks to Cheryl's preparation. Her teaching evaluations were excellent, and she won the respect and admiration of all her colleagues here.

Aside from her ability to teach, produce and publish high quality creative writing, Cheryl has also proven a dedicated, selfless, and warm life-long colleague. Any institution would be enhanced by the legacy of her dynamic personality as well as her one-of-a-kind creativity. I cannot recommend that you award her strongly enough, but if you would like to discuss her candidacy more, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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The Impact of Cheryl Pallant's Writings

by Brian Buck, Professor of Technical Theater at University of St. Thomas

The impact of Cheryl Pallant's writings on my own artistic endeavors has been immense. When first asked to write this reflection I reeled as I imagined exploring my work as it relates to Pallant's influence. Pallant's words first moved the synapses of my brain to dance in unfamiliar worlds constructing new environments. As a visual and performance artist it is difficult to inspire the mind to think alternatively, but Pallant manages to shift my vision of thinking to construct alternatives to the world at large. While her words are not the sole influence of my work they have weighed heavily on how I invent my installations and approach performances..

My work as a performer and stage designer is simple and tends to work with materials at hand. Much the way Pallant's stories muse on everyday occurrences and elaborate into what one might consider outrageous circumstances, I utilize materials obtained freely from the everyday world or that I have on hand to create environments around ideas or concepts. Pallant's story "Till death do them Part " where a deceased wife returns to her widowed husband, and for a brief period they live as if that was a normal occurrence. The idea of a skeletal corpse continuing on as a normal event, shook my mind by opening it to the idea of short stories as surreal entities. I had practiced surrealist games such as the "exquisite corpse" but somehow hearing this story connected dots from simple games to creating art, in this case a short story in a way I had never fathomed prior. This was my first introduction to Pallant.

As I read Pallant's poetry and the way in which her words flowed on the page rattled my synapses. On the surface, her poetry could appear nonsensical but by looking closely at the work I found myself rapt in a vision that allows one's imagination to envision a world beyond the surface of the words. My work lives in a physical space, revealing itself in a visual fashion but it's goal is reinventing preconceived ideas of performance space. The picture below is from a piece titled "Remembering Happens" where keys strung together acted as metaphors of memories. Memories of say, "shoes in the closet," a line from *Into Stillness* but who really recalls "shoes in the closet." Are shoes also metaphors for memory? The lights for

Remembering Happens, the image as a “memory.” These elements individually are random objects



of everyday life that evoke various metaphors of memory. Similar to Pallant’s words which evoke specific descriptions of everyday life but the words often dance around their intended meanings to create different images. The keys, which I was told looked like origami crane’s linked together, and the light with a simple shade of color, evoke a ‘historic’ look that evokes memories. Thus creating images within a world for the audience to decipher in their own imaginations. Just as Pallant words sculpts images to shift a reader's concepts into a varied reality.

Another piece I designed for, *Once Upon Green Skies and Blue Grass and Red Bottomed Shoes* I designed five different spaces to express the vision of Jhon Stronks who choreographed a series of scores to lead an audience through my environments which existed as paradigms of his world. Each space, pictured below created its own world, in similar ways that Pallant’s stanzas evolve into a broader picture of the entire poem. In creating this set using a wide variety of mediums as my vocabulary for generating environments that evoke the

sincerity of an artist's vision into a set of universal truths. Much the way Pallant states universal truths in her stories and poetry.



Art is intended to be transformative and aid in our understanding of self and the world. Pallant's work has done that for me as an individual and as an artist. As I intend my work to give understanding to viewers as they understand the imagery but also to the world around them. Pallant's words shape a subject to create images that recall the world as it is but subtly shift into an altered state of existence. Just as I intend for my designs to shape an audience's experience and offer a better understanding of the world. Pallant's words have given me "poetic license" in ways I could not have fathomed otherwise to create said offering. In her poetry the words dosedo from one "room" to another using metaphors and similes to in-flect upon the imagination causing synapses to dance in the mind. Thus creating a free flow of imagery that is ever shifting which is how I approach my own work. It is the free flow of thought and imagination within the collective words that inspires my process. The subtle shifts from one existence to another where I attempt to open the audience's mind and give a new perspective, my efforts are a direct correlation to Pallant's words which are, to me, transformative. I hope that my work instills the same for others.

