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TOWARD AN INTEGRAL UNDERSTANDING OF
EMBODIMENT AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION:
A SOMATIC/EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Robert Dearborn

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in East-West Psychology

The California Institute of Integral Studies

San Francisco, 1998

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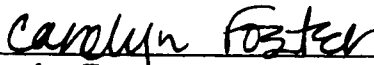
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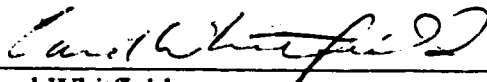
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Abstract of the Thesis:
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A variety of theorists and practitioners interested in personal health and growth have recognized the transformative potential of developing one's capacity to be aware of and consciously responsive from embodied modes of experiencing (i.e. bodily sensations, feelings--somatic/kinesthetic/proprioceptive experience in general). From fields as diverse as philosophy, psychology, psychotherapy, somatics, phenomenology, and ecology, an integral understanding is emerging from the collective inquiry into what it means to change and grow as an embodied human being in contemporary society.

The following thesis is an exploration of several perspectives, focusing on the practical approaches of somatics and experientially-oriented psychotherapy. A theoretical and methodological integration of these two broad fields suggests some general principles regarding the process of personal transformation. These principles help to articulate a growing consensus on how we as a society can most effectively understand and approach the central issues concerning embodiment and personal growth.

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**TOWARD AN INTEGRAL UNDERSTANDING OF
EMBODIMENT AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION:
A SOMATIC/EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE**

Introduction to the inquiry

The heart of the matter

Sometimes life is extraordinary. A magical night on the town, a deep conversation under the stars, a moment of creative inspiration, falling in love. Sometimes windows of clarity, of sharpened perspective, of really *being here* open up amidst the relatively listless routines of daily life. During these periods of clear, wakeful presence, things that normally escape notice may spring to life. The sound of rain falling may move us like a symphony. We may take childish delight in a routine bath. We might engage the normally invisible homeless person and find ourselves deeply stirred by the encounter.

Sometimes life is just plain juicier than usual. Whether sweet or sour, packing a lasting buzz or momentary high, these juicy bits of experience are those times in our lives when we feel particularly full of life, especially present to what ever we're engaged in—the times when we're simply more “on,” more “there,” more tuned in to life than usual. The words that fill these pages stem from the realization, which seized my attention a few years ago, that these experiences of intense livelihood, of wakeful presence, of raw-in-the-moment-aliveness, were becoming too few and far between in my life, scattered here and there amidst the languid grind of everyday existence. What since has become increasingly clear is that I had been progressively losing touch with something vibrant and essential in life, progressively dulled to any sense of mystery and magic in the world. As the prize of adulthood and maturity lay waiting for me to grasp hold, I appeared to be falling from the graces of clarity, fresh perception, and lively experiencing.

Abraham Maslow (1962) used the term “peak experiences” to describe these windows of full-living, and my initial question regarding these peak experiences was three-fold: What is the nature of such experiences; why are they becoming so few and far between in my life; and can I learn to live in such a way as to have more of them? Above all else, these experiences of heightened awareness and intense livelihood have gripped my attention and interest because they are none other than the greatest times of my life, the times when I am most fully myself. My pursuit of these questions has always been, at heart, toward a deceptively simple end: to be as fully myself as often as I can be. The following inquiry is my most up-to-date understanding of the ways many of us unwittingly hold ourselves back from the fullness of potential, of the ways we unconsciously keep ourselves from the full promise of existence, and of some ways we can effectively respond to this state of affairs.

As a student of East-West Psychology, I have surveyed a number of practices and fields of study that strive to help individuals become more fully themselves. These can generally be described as approaches to *personal transformation*--endeavors that work to provide a supportive context where individuals can learn to become more fully aware of their personal world of experience, and are encouraged to utilize that expanded awareness as a source of intelligent responsiveness and self-expression. What *transforms* in this process is the mode from which a person experiences self and world, such that the quality of one's relations to self, others, and environment changes in enriching ways as one's depth of awareness and range of responsiveness grows.

This transformative process whereby people move from a relatively unhealthy, inefficient, unfulfilling mode of functioning toward one of increased livelihood, health, and growth potential, has been understood in many different ways. The approaches that have had the greatest impact on my own life are those that understand personal transformation in terms of *embodiment*. A variety of theorists and practitioners--representing such fields as psychotherapy, somatics, phenomenology,

ecology, psychology, and mindfulness meditation—have contributed a wide range of overlapping, interpenetrating perspectives that recognize the transformative potential of developing one’s capacity to be aware of and consciously responsive from embodied modes of experiencing (by which I mean experiences of bodily sensations and feelings—i.e. somatic/kinesthetic/proprioceptive experience in general). These perspectives share a broad understanding of the transformative process, which can be generally stated as follows:

Human beings often remain stuck in relatively unfulfilling, unhealthy patterns or ways of living in large part due to a diminished state of basic self-awareness. In Western culture, individuals in this state are considerably diminished in their capacity to be aware of and respond from feelingful, sensual levels of experiencing . In order to move toward health, fullness of living, and actualization of potential, a person in this dissociated state must develop his or her existing self-sensing capacities and learn to authentically express him- or herself from this deeper, fuller sense of self.

This general view of personal transformation has been understood in at least the following ways: in terms of psychological processes (i.e. dissociation and integration), interpersonal dynamics, socio-cultural/political factors, people’s relations with the earthly environment, sensorimotor functioning, and spiritual realization. Although many of the people working and writing on these issues acknowledge the interconnectedness of these viewpoints, the project of explicitly integrating the variety of theoretical and methodological contributions into a single framework is still in its early stages. The following thesis is offered as a modest contribution to that project.

Experiences of embodiment and personal transformation

Such an integral understanding, which would create and widen avenues of dialogue between several areas of practice and study, will necessarily be rooted in the experiential foundations that link the diversity of perspectives. The particular shape of

the following inquiry stems from my own discovery of this experiential common-ground, which revolved around the peak experiences in my life and my reflections on them.

I have experienced a marked shift from my usual, routine mode of perception toward a particularly clear, wakeful presence and engagement in many different contexts. However, whatever the context--whether in conversation with a friend, hiking in the woods, playing my guitar, sitting in meditation, or typing at the computer--the transition from a typical experience toward one marked by that wonderfully mysterious "peak" quality always seems to involve an essential shift in my predominant mode of perception and expression: a shift toward a deeper sense of *embodiment*.

Such a statement implies, of course, that my typical, everyday experiences are to a considerable extent "dis-embodied." The distinction and transition between these two general modes of experiencing, the relatively unembodied usual mode and the more fully embodied peak mode, will be explored in detail throughout the following inquiry from a variety of vantage points. Before carrying the discussion forward, however, I'd like to present a couple of examples of this transformative "shift toward embodiment" from my own experience, to give a flavor of the subtleties involved. I'll begin with an interpersonal scenario.

Many times I get frustrated with what I perceive as a lack of depth and authenticity in my relationships with the significant others in my life--my partner, family, and closest friends. My partner and I, for instance, have become so familiar with each other's patterns of communication that sometimes we relate to each other on "auto-pilot," so to speak. The freshness and intensity of interaction, the peak experiencing that characterized our first few months together too often gets lost in various routines and pre-programmed patterns of relating. Whenever she and I go through a prolonged period of this predictable, routine mode of being together, the relationship becomes increasingly devoid of feeling. The electricity gets snuffed out. The relationship ceases to be a source of mutual growth and wonder. We may say the

words “I love you,” but the felt sense of a powerful loving connection is no longer perceived.

The many shifts back into a mutually growth enhancing, exciting, intensely-felt connectedness, the many returns back into the peak experience of love, have always come when one or the both of us would begin to communicate more fully from the immediacy of our feelings. Instead of the familiar, conditioned words and gestures that can so often give the impression of facade, expression toward one another begins to flow directly from the way we feel at that very moment, in our bodies. For instance, instead of answering the routine question “How are you?” with a routine answer like “Fine” or “OK, how about you?” I might take the time to sense how I actually am, checking in with the overall flavor of feeling, tension, and emotion in the flow of my bodily experience. In attempting to verbally convey this sense of how I am, I’ll often wait for words to bubble up from this visceral awareness, or if no clear words emerge, at least choose words that fit my sensual experience as closely as possible. From a sense of tightness in my chest and throat might come the realization that “I’ve been feeling frustrated that we don’t seem to really talk lately. I’m not sure why, but I feel like I want to bite your head off. I get the sense that it has something to do with your trip back East....”

As long as self-expression flows from the immediacy of ongoing felt experience, tendencies to censor or drift into pre-existing routines are set aside. This means that these feeling-grounded communications can be quite unpredictable and scary, which takes a willingness to be vulnerable. It is my experience, however, that no matter the content, this embodied mode of relating fosters a sense of authenticity, of “cutting through the bullshit,” of being “real” with one another, that has always carried my relationships into new depths of growth and fulfillment.

As another example of a transformative shift toward embodied experiencing, I could describe a recent hike through the redwoods. For the first half-hour or so of hiking, I felt like I was walking more through the terrain of thoughts, worries, and mental images

than through the forest. I was so “in my head” that I hardly noticed the breathtaking surroundings. However, as I began to shift my attention to the sensations and feelings in my body, I became more and more present, more fully “there.” Leaving my thoughts and worries for a while, I noticed the smell of the crisp, damp winter air; the feel of the cold breeze on my face and under-dressed torso; the strain of the uphill climb on my out-of-shape legs.

As I soaked in more and more of the sensuous experience of the hike, I felt increasingly clear and grounded. Thoughts and images would come into awareness now and again, but instead of re-runs from the work week or the usual muddle of stray thoughts, pictures, voices, and worries that swirl through my mind, thinking and imagining seemed to bring me into a deeper and deeper sense of aliveness and conviviality with the surrounding forest. I thought about the interconnectedness of species; wondered how pre-historic human beings perceived the forests; imagined the old redwoods as small saplings; remembered times playing in the woods as a child. By the end of the hike, I felt wonderfully refreshed and invigorated, lucidly aware of myself and my surroundings, ready to seize the day. Unfortunately, after fighting through rush-hour traffic to get home, I hardly noticed that I’d long since slid back into the familiar confines of my “head-scape.”

In both the above examples, the quality of the experiences changed in enriching and fulfilling directions following a focusing of attention on the flow of bodily feelings. This process might seem so simple and straightforward as to hardly deserve mentioning, until we consider the notion (explored in the following discussion) that for many people in our culture, one’s ability to sustain attention on bodily felt dimensions of experience is severely impoverished. Consider the following prognosis from the late psychologist R.D. Laing (1967):

As for our bodies, we retain just sufficient proprioceptive sensations to coordinate our movements and to ensure the minimal requirements for biosocial survival—to

register fatigue, signals for food, sex, defecation, sleep; beyond that, little or nothing. Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of unlearning is necessary for anyone before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love. (p. 26)

The following inquiry is divided into three basic parts. Part one explores this work's primary assumption: that, indeed, life in the modern West is plagued with a tendency toward alienation and dissociation, an attitude that drives a wedge between the thinking and feeling dimensions of being human. This fragmentation of consciousness not only renders us strangers to ourselves, but also distorts and deadens the transformative quality of relationship that is possible interpersonally, and between people and the earthly environment. It is a dissociative state of affairs that gives rise to the characteristic malaise of contemporary society--a fundamental lack of both vitality and meaningfulness that pervades many people's lives. In part two, we will look to some specific ways of facilitating personal transformation that arose in response to this alienated psycho-social situation, focusing on a select few approaches within the fields of somatics and psychotherapy. As we examine each approach and the ways they complement each other, we will move toward articulating the heart of the transformative process (part three), toward an integral understanding that connects several perspectives into a unified vision of growth, health, and embodiment.

Before moving on, it is important to note that of specific interest here is the process of personal transformation as it can be experienced by individuals who are considered healthy, mature, and well-adjusted by our cultural norms. This discussion is not intended as a commentary on psychological diseases or disorders as these terms are

traditionally used in the fields of psychiatry and psychology. In terms of human development, this thesis is an exploration of a particular process of growth and actualization of potential that appears to lie beyond the conventional pinnacle of normalcy, adjustment, and maturity.

I use the term *personal* instead of *psychological* in regard to this process of change because people so often equate “psyche” with the thinking “mind.” These terms are too often conceived as the polar opposites of “soma” and “body,” an understanding contrary to the viewpoint being put forth. *Personal* is a term that conveys more of a sense of the whole human being. *Transformation* in the context of this inquiry refers to a fundamental, palpable change in the way one experiences self and world, a change in one’s state of being. Whether conceived as personal healing or personal growth, *personal transformation* is meant to refer to the process whereby the quality of an individual’s life, as they experience it, changes in the direction of greater awareness and more authentic expression.

Part I: Experiences of bodymind dissociation:

Sensual alienation in Western culture

That many of us seem to be losing touch with a basic sense of sensual vitality or intensity of aliveness with the passing of years seems less a matter of theoretical discourse and more one of direct, experiential verification. Most of us can still recall the degree to which, as growing children, we experienced our lives with a sense of spontaneity, freshness, and being vibrantly alive in the moment; a dynamic existence filled with wonder and ripe with potential that gradually settled down as we continually adapted to the demands of society. Of course, an actual return to the childhood state is not only impossible (barring neurological impairment), but also altogether undesirable when one thinks about it. In fact, that we can think about it all in any sophisticated way is reason enough to value post-childhood developments. Children are not fully able to take the perspective of another, to consciously and responsibly change their way of

relating to self and world, and to find meaning in experiences. These things, of course, await further development of the child's conceptual capacities--the fruition of which marks a major transition to the maturity of adulthood.

What children *can* do, however, that many of us adults can no longer do as fully, is just *be themselves*. Children, for the most part, are simply more authentically expressive than the typical grown-up. Despite their relatively limited psycho-physical equipment, kids growing up in a loving environment can't help but be genuinely who they are. So, the sense that many of us have--that something profoundly important and essential has been left behind in childhood--is inexorably tied to what we might vaguely perceive as a holding back of who we are, a lack of genuineness, the sense that we express ourselves too inauthentically in our lives. Which brings us to the issue of embodiment.

The qualities of a child's experience that we long for are necessarily rooted in the available capacities that a child can draw upon--capacities that, ideally, an adult has built upon in the course of development. Although not yet able to think as well as adults, as children we could certainly *feel* our way through life. In fact, as I run down the list of things I could do better as a child--be in touch with and express emotions; open and let go to the immediacy of experience; fully love and feel love from others; experience intense joy as well as fear; move about freely and spontaneously--I find that all these qualities of living are grounded in the capacity to experience life as a bodily being. This capacity to be embodied, to center our awareness on the immediacy of sensual experiencing is, so the case will be made, precisely what typically atrophies over the years, leaving so many of us grown-ups with that vague sense of lack--lack of vitality, lack of meaning--that haunts us on the fringes of our awareness.

The notion that a typical mature, well-adjusted person in our culture is alienated from or out of touch with their bodies may seem, at first blush, curious if not absurd. Most of us yelp out in pain when we stub our toes, enjoy the pleasure of making love,

notice when we're hungry, and are saddened by tragedy. Obviously, to say one is alienated from sensual levels of experiencing (i.e. relatively dis-embodied) does not mean one is an anesthetized "floating head" bumping into things all the time. The issue is far more subtle and compelling, having to do with the quality of our relationships to self, others, and environment, and how our experience of those relationships is shaped by the processes of development and socialization. Sensual alienation simply refers to a diminished capacity to be sensually aware and the subsequent inability to respond to life's continual challenges from the fullness of such a sensually-grounded awareness.

Of course, the degree to which one perceives and responds in an embodied mode varies from one situation to the next and from one individual to the next. Some people are especially alive and present when making love, others while playing or listening to music, or while playing sports, or in certain social situations, or whatever. The problem is, however, that this sensual-groundedness is often experienced in progressively limited contexts and without much awareness. The discussion that follows means to explore the overall tendency toward sensual alienation in Western culture, a tendency that by its very nature is pervasive and pandemic, affecting each of us in subtle yet profoundly important ways.

However, since I'm a white, middle-class male, it is important to keep in mind that when I refer to "us" and "our" typical modes of experiencing, I'm basing my commentary on my own particular vantage point. While this vantage point does include relationships with women and people from other backgrounds—relationships that give me a sense that much of what I will say about embodiment and transformation has implications for a wide range of Westerners—the bulk of the following discussion will probably be most descriptive of middle to upper-class white guys like myself. Notwithstanding this caveat, it should also be noted that, since white men still hold the balance of power and influence in our culture's institutions, the following issues are quite relevant to Western society as a whole.

The dissociation of body and mind

That human beings become increasingly able to think as they mature into adulthood obviously endows the developing person with greater potential and possibility in life. Contrary to the popularized personal growth motto of “lose your mind and come back to your senses,” any sensitive and thoughtful inquiry into personal health and healing realizes the value of mindful experiencing. But there is a difference between adding a layer of depth in human awareness (moving from a vibrant, feeling-centered being to a being who also has a well developed capacity to think—a “bodymind” if you will), and losing touch with basic levels of awareness (becoming a thinking-centered being who has lost much of their capacity to express themselves from a sensually-grounded awareness). The latter is a pathological state of affairs that, unfortunately, is built in to the very fabric of modern society, shaping the lives of individuals in ways that distort and deny the fullness of experience.

Phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke (in Johnson, 1995) calls the tendency to distance ourselves from our own bodily lives the *I-it* structure of experience, which often manifests in our culture as the unshakable sense that our perceiving selves are situated somewhere “in our heads.” From this *I-it* perspective, my legs are perceived as “down there” as opposed to me being “up here.” When *I* feel pain in my back or head I say that “it” hurts. My sense is that *I have* experiences or that experiences happen *to* me. An emotion, for instance, might be perceived as if it were some “thing” that was temporarily affecting *me* in some way.

This mode of bodily experiencing, undoubtedly the norm for most of us most of the time, has to do with our sense of identity or who we take ourselves to be. While bodily impulses and feelings may be perceived, they are experienced as outside of one’s essential identity. Philosopher Ken Wilber (1979) has described this way of experiencing as one in which an artificial boundary is perceived in regard to one’s total organism, such that the entire bodily-felt realm is projected outward as not-self. Thus, a typical

Westerner is likely to claim that they *are* their mind while they simply *have* a body. In the mature, well-adjusted, normal adult, this bodymind fragmentation doesn't mean that one would fail to notice being on fire. It does mean, however, that one operates from a "locus of identity" that is situated on the ego side of an ego-flesh perceptual boundary. An individual centered on the mind or egoic side of this boundary may be aware of bodily experience, but only as an *object* of awareness. As psychologist R.D. Laing (1965) describes this "unembodied" self: "The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being" (p.69). In this subtle yet telling way, mind and body are *dissociated* in awareness, and perception of self and world is thereby distorted to fit that dissociation.

It is fairly clear that this level of bodymind dissociation is considered normal and healthy in our culture. Many of us certainly live as if we were essentially minds at the helm of our bodies--keeping them healthy and satisfied for as long as we find ourselves in them. When we experience back pain, the typical response is to go to a specialist to get it fixed or adjusted, just as we do our cars. Anxiety, especially when not consciously linked to obvious circumstances, is often treated as a "thing," a symptom to be vanquished by medication or positive thinking.

Our cultural values, in general, are simply steeped in this kind of mind-body dissociation. Being strong and stable in our culture is to be in control of the body and its feelings. To be intelligent is to be proficient in "objective" modes of knowledge acquisition, like dispassionate reason and the methods of science, valued precisely because they exclude subjectivity and feeling as much as possible. In fact, this valuing of objective thinking over subjective, feeling-centered responses to situations is typically recommended as the basis upon which to approach any important life concern or decision. In unreflectively and exclusively relying on the *I-it* mode of living in nearly all situations, we fail to realize other potential ways of being with experience--namely the capacity to *become one with* the immediacy of feeling.

The difference between being aware *of* one's body from an egoic vantage point and actually *being* one's total psychophysical organism, may sound trivial, but in terms of experience, there's a vast qualitative difference. It is the difference between merely recognizing you are sad, and *becoming* that sadness in the full release of crying. It is the difference between believing you love someone, and actually *being* in love with that person, feeling the intensity of connection in the moment. Anyone who's ever "lost themselves" in a sunset, or in a musical jam-session, or in the tender embrace of a loved one, can recognize this becoming-one-with their sensual experience. Actually, one's "self" is not at all lost in this manner of experiencing. What's lost is only one's *exclusive identity* with the egoic or concept-centered processes of the total psychophysical organism.

In contemporary society, our capacity to deeply enter into the sensual flow of experience is typically utilized less and less as we adapt to an increasingly mind-centered lifestyle, and it becomes atrophied and left poorly developed. And this capacity to *become* our sensual experiencing, to allow "it" to enter "us," is critical to personal health and growth, as this inquiry as a whole will hopefully make clear. Thus, a person may recognize that they're sad, anxious, or depressed, perceiving these feeling states well enough to talk about them in quite sophisticated ways, yet nonetheless remain stuck in the same familiar patterns. Consciously unable (and unconsciously unwilling) to engage personal issues in their sensual fullness, we necessarily struggle to get through and beyond the inner conflicts and issues that hold us back in life.

The *I-it* mode of experiencing--which rests on human beings' capacity to center awareness on egoic, mind-level, conceptual processes--is certainly not, in-and-of-itself, a bad deal. In fact, our fine-tuned ability to experience our "selves" in relation to various aspects of our awareness in an objective manner is an adaptation that distinguishes the human organism from the rest of the life-world--it is the basis of self-consciousness. Problems can and do arise, however, when an *I-it* mode of perceiving and responding

becomes the only mode of experiencing, becoming so habituated that, without realizing it, human beings gradually lose their capacity to experience life in any other way. Instead of a mode of perceiving and responding consciously utilized in an appropriate situation, *I-it* objectivity becomes the unconscious way one approaches nearly all situations.

The perceived separation of one's self from the flow of experiencing may open up an awesome range of possibilities and potentials to the human organism—from language to technological innovation—but neocortex or no neocortex, we are still sensual beings who necessarily relate to the world on a sensual level (i.e. a pre-conceptual level *prior to* the subject-object distinction). Thus, we can both gauge the trajectory of the setting sun, and be moved by its stunning beauty. We can analyze the sexual behavior of someone, as well as be aroused by them. We can form valuable insights *about* our experience and behavior, as well as allow the sensual flow of experiences to enter *into* us, *as* us, and to pass *through* us in the release of feelingful expression. Although the potential for both modes of relating exists, the whole affair has become decidedly and detrimentally one-sided.

As we shall see, the dis-identification with our sensual existence that characterizes the *I-it* mode of being, when operating in a habitual and unconscious fashion, can keep people stuck in unhealthy and unfulfilling ruts, distorting people's experience in ways that interfere with the process of personal transformation. When you approach the world with only a hammer, so to speak, everything starts to look like a nail. And if this illusion becomes too convincing, things start to get all bent out of shape.

Dissociation and repression

The habitual, unconscious, hegemonic, “hammer” approach of the dissociated bodymind is reinforced in at least two ways: through fearful repression and socialization. First, let's look at how sensual alienation is rooted in the individual's tendencies to repress and deny certain experiences.

Although fulfilling peak experiences, becoming one with previously perceived objects of awareness in a way that feels “good,” are the fruit of the centered bodymind, they are not the only variety. The sensual level of experiencing is, as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and other existential-phenomenologists have noted, prior to all conceptual distinctions, including good/bad and pleasure/pain, and the intense experiences of the lived-body can often be of intense fear, hurt, and other “bad stuff.”

Human beings, equipped as we are with our fine-tuned conceptual capacities, will understandably draw on those capacities in response to pain or fear that is experienced as threatening or overwhelming in some way. When life as a sensual, feelingful organism gets too darn scary, or hurts too much, a person can put some safe distance between themselves and their experience by centering awareness on conceptual processes. In this way, the basic stance of sensual alienation rests partly on a habituated repressive response to pain and fear. Psychologist John Welwood (1992) describes the issue this way:

As children, when an experience was too much to handle, we would contract our awareness and our body, shutting ourselves down like a circuit breaker, out of fear....Because we never learned how to open to that pain, [it] stills feels overwhelming whenever it arises, and so we still contract against it. In this way, we become disabled, unable to function in certain areas of our lives. (p.160)

Living life from an egoic, mind-centered vantage point offers a sense of stability in the face of the perpetual flow of sensual experience. As we noted, this vantage point offers some incredible possibilities and potentials, bestowing upon human beings a panoramic range of perception and responsiveness. However, as Wilber (1981) puts it, “it is one thing to gain a [degree of] freedom from the fluctuations of nature, emotions, instincts, and environment--it is quite another to alienate them” (p.187). This tendency to repressively alienate ourselves from a sensually-grounded awareness may ultimately be rooted in that most pervasive of fears--the fear of death.

In other words, to fundamentally identify with the body is to confront one's own mortality. Whereas the biological world of the lived body is one of continual flux and flow, of continual birth, death, decay and renewal, the world of thought gives the illusion of persistence and permanence. The concept "me," for instance, is persistent and basically stable over time. "Me" today is the same "me" as I was ten years ago, and will presumably be the same "me" ten years from now. Yet all actual "me"s are born, continually change throughout their lives on all levels, and eventually die. Thoroughly wrapped up in and identified with the stable self-concept "me," I can bask in the illusion that I've stepped off the train of continual change, the train ride that will eventually reduce "my" body to something along the lines of fertilizer or worm-food. Thus, it's the sheer gravity of imminent death that, according to a wide array of philosophers and psychologists (including Kierkegaard, Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Binswanger, Boss, May, Brown, and Wilber), at least partly underlies people's tendency to dissociate from the world of the lived body.

The dissociated individual seizes upon the characteristics of conceptual processes and "in flight from death, surrenders his mortal flesh and flees in fear into a world of static symbols" (Wilber, 1977, p. 130); a world that seems to offer something that neither nature nor flesh ever could—permanence (Wilber, 1981). In a certain sense, repression of all painful and fearful experiences can be understood to be rooted, ultimately, in the fear of death. Psychologist Rollo May (1969) describes the experience of repression as involving a complex struggle of an individual's "*being* against the possibility of *non-being*" (p. 19). Psychologically, a threat to any value that an individual holds essential to his or her existence as a self—be it a threat to physical life, the love of a cherished person, economic status, athletic prowess—can lead to one repressing particular aspects of their experiencing (May, 1967). If one identifies with being an active caretaker, for instance, then having kids "leave the nest" can feel overwhelmingly threatening to one's sense of self. Repression in this scenario might range from an

out-right denial that one's kids are growing up, to an unyielding stance of treating one's adult children as if they were still little kids.

The main point is that human beings, when we feel that our fundamental sense of self is threatened in some way, can turn our attention away from whatever aspects of our immediate situation elicit fear or anxiety. Although the initial response of repression can often be a creative use of one's capacities to get through the rough times of life, the habitual tendency toward dissociation and self-alienation leaves our bodymind in a continual state of contraction across situations, creating a condition of perpetual distress. This distress is, as Welwood (1992) explains, composed of at least three basic elements: "the basic pain of feelings that seem threatening and overwhelming; the contraction of awareness to avoid this pain; and the stress of continually having to prop up and defend an identity based on this avoidance and denial" (p.161). We have noted how this distress is rooted in the individual's own repressive capacities; now we can move to a discussion of how the tendency to be habitually dissociated is reinforced by the processes of socialization.

Dissociation and socialization

Although on an individual level, a person may tend to distance oneself from sensual levels of experience in response to a directly perceived threat of some kind, one typically moves toward a *habituated stance* of sensual alienation in response to a cultural situation that continually encourages and demands dissociation.

The sociological factors that profoundly shape people's experience of self and world (a culture's language structure, social value systems, implicit rules and taboos regarding behavior), can be understood as the *maps* a society gives individuals to translate the flow of one's experiencing into socially meaningful terms. As Wilber (1977) explains, "a person becomes a member of his society when he has successfully internalized the maps, or the sets of symbolic relations, constituting that society. To put it simply, a person is in society when society is 'in' him" (p.226). Since this

“internalized society” is imprinted onto the organism from society, Wilber (1977) refers to this process as “biosocialization” (p. 133).

To understand this process is to explore the ways in which the dissociative fabric of contemporary culture is sewn into each individual life. Somatic philosopher and practitioner Don Hanlon Johnson (1992) describes two levels of the biosocialization process through which “dominant cultural values get a hold on our muscles and nerves, disconnecting us from our own experience” (p.15). One is the explicit teaching of dualistic doctrine; the other encompasses a myriad of implicit teachings--the nonverbal soma-shaping techniques that train people to disregard their bodily-felt responses to life in favor of more “objective” intellectualisms. First we can consider the doctrine of mind-body dualism.

From the time of Plato right up through the Cartesian foundations of modern science, the notion that the human being is fundamentally divided into mind and body, spirit and flesh, has been so basic to the Western worldview that, like water to a fish, it is largely taken for granted. Despite the wave of cutting edge work that exposes the fallacy of the dualistic stance--from Selye’s research in psychosomatic medicine, to the experientially-oriented psychotherapists and somatic educators, to the frontiers of quantum physics--the exaltation of objective thinking over subjective feeling is still part and parcel of the Western psycho-social milieu.

Richard Tarnas (1991), in his overview of the history of Western thought, describes how the foundational philosophy of Plato was based on the fundamental dualism between the material and conceptual worlds. In the Platonic view, as Tarnas understands it, ultimate truth and reality reside in the realm of Ideas, the archetypal patterns that form the world and also stand beyond it. The material world is viewed as an insubstantial, entirely derivative manifestation of these Ideas. Information from the physical body is seen as subjective and limited to the relatively insignificant material

plane. Pure truth reveals itself through the intellect, which in its highest state has direct access to the ultimate reality of Ideas.

In fact, the activities of the thinking mind, namely rationality and reason, were elevated to divine status, leaving the realm of bodily-felt experience chained to an all-too-mortal body. Aristotle, who disagreed strongly with Plato's depiction of the material world, nonetheless held tight to this exaltation of reason as the sole province of the divine in nature. For Aristotle, only human beings were thought to share in God's nature, by virtue of being the only creature possessing true intelligence, the *nous*. As human beings share the deeper, more instinctual and feeling levels of awareness with all creatures, these levels of being were considered insignificant by comparison (Tarnas, 1991).

Although these foundational philosophies are subject to numerous interpretations, the point here is to note what was actually passed down in the course of modernity's evolution. The rending asunder of body and mind can clearly be seen in the immensely influential development of the Christian worldview (the body as the abode of sin), and is in fact a basic tenet in the Cartesian philosophy that has marked much of modern thought up through today's scientific paradigm. So, despite the countless ways that history can be interpreted, it is sufficiently clear that our culture's most fundamental assumptions as to what constitutes legitimate perception and knowledge are rooted in a dualistic worldview that exalts the intellect over embodied experiencing.

We do, however, live in a time where many deeply rooted notions and understandings, including the doctrine of mind-body dualism, are being challenged on the cutting edges of nearly all fields of knowledge. Few intelligent and sensitive people are likely to profess explicit views and philosophies that support a strict separation of mental and bodily-felt realms of experience. In fact, many are perhaps inclined to claim that their lives are unaffected by such "metaphysical" concerns— "I feel like I'm plenty embodied, thank you very much." Nonetheless, the doctrine of mind-body dualism does

indeed shape people's experience because it is inexorably tied to our social institutions, which were founded on views of reality that did embrace a sharp, "across the board" separation of objective thinking from subjective feeling. Cultural institutions are usually slow to change, stubbornly resisting the cutting edge of inquiry that foreshadows their reformation. In the meantime, regardless of the current shift in outlook, most Westerners continue to be born into and bred on a world of sharp dualisms.

Johnson (1992) describes how the doctrine of mind-body dualism supports a type of authoritarianism, one that moves beyond explicitly taught theory by supporting a variety of nonverbal body-shaping methods designed to uphold social goals. Dualistic theories from Plato to Descartes invalidate sensual authority by convincing us of the unreliability of our own perceptions, encouraging a dependency on the judgments of publicly designated "experts." The result is a belief system which encourages conformity and is designed to maintain the status quo. These doctrines are anchored into people's living bodies via a myriad of implicit teachings--the nonverbal body-shaping techniques that train people to instinctively look outside their directly felt experience for direction. Johnson calls this entire project, the many ways in which we learn to integrate these beliefs and techniques of dissociation into our lives, the "technology of alienation." (p. 80).

It is important not to mistake this notion as a condemnation of the particular techniques that have supported the success and progress of a scientifically and technologically driven modern world. Johnson (1992) emphasizes that techniques of any kind are, in-and-of-themselves, of neutral value. It's the way in which we integrate various techniques into our lives (the technology) that can either lead us either toward disconnection and diminished awareness or into levels of greater conscious connection and deeper self awareness. So, while the scientific methods of purely objective analysis have proven immeasurably useful in the development of vaccines and the making of

computer chips, they have also been used “unsuccessfully” as the sole means to make decisions and determine actions in people’s lives.

As Johnson (1992) explains, the ways in which children are able to respond to the challenges of life are shaped very early. Beginning with the ways parents hold and touch their children, infants are learning how “to be” physically in the world. As they learn to mimic adults’ behavior, children are further educated on how to move and how not to move. Despite the potential for differences in this early upbringing, most young children are energetic, highly mobile, flexible, and authentically expressive beings. As children enter school, however, these tendencies are actively shaped like never before.

As most of us have been schooled, children are typically made to sit in rigid desks for long periods of time. They must learn to ignore their natural inclinations to move their bodies physically and to express themselves verbally, expressing themselves only when some authority deems it acceptable and only in ways that are deemed acceptable. A child’s experience of fatigue, hunger, and excitement are brought into alignment with the pre-determined structure of the school day. Even during set periods for “free” expression, children are taught the “right way” to do everything, from throwing a ball to drawing a picture. Since kids’ developing sense of self-esteem is so wedded to the positive reinforcement they get for doing things “right,” expressing oneself in idiosyncratic ways is often met with discouragement from authority and ridicule from peers. Boys that are “too graceful” in the ways they walk or throw a ball can be ostracized for being a “fairy.” A girl who follows an impulse kiss a friend can be labeled a “tramp.” The message in every case is clear—move in only this set of prescribed ways in this set of prescribed situations, no matter what your own impulses and instincts are.

In the classroom, the punishments for expressing one’s self in ways considered outside the lines are more clear cut—bad grades for those who fail to do things “correctly,” and sometimes even physical punishment for those who allow their restlessness and bodily tensions to sneak out into their behavior. Johnson (1992) makes

the point that these “corporeal disciplines” train children for life after school, where the organic rhythms of the body are regulated to fit the needs of the typical work situation. Eat now, go to the bathroom now, move within these carefully prescribed limits, sleep now, and repeat for fifty years. Johnson (1992) summarizes this whole pattern of body-shaping as follows:

From infancy through old age we are taught to conform our bodies to external shapes. We learn to perform physical activities in specifically prescribed ways. We are rewarded for keeping quiet and controlling our bodily impulses. The implied meaning of these recurrent nonverbal messages is consistent with the explicit teachings: our bodies, with their feelings, impulses, and perceptions, are not to be trusted, and must be subjected to external controls to keep them from leading us astray. They must be trained to support the status quo. (p.33)

Alienation and authenticity

The technology of alienation encourages individuals to exist in a state of continual repression, a dissociated state which truncates one’s depth of awareness as well as one’s range of responsiveness. People who chronically repress aspects of bodily life have, to a significant degree, “functionally amputated” (Jourard, 1996) their bodies, leaving themselves cut off from sources of knowing necessary for full living. This state of unembodiment manifests not only in a diminished and deadened sense of self, but also necessarily disembodies one’s relationships to others. Since we experience all situations in our lives with, through, and as bodily beings, to be dulled to our own bodily senses and feelings is to be dulled to the feelingful aspects of any relationship or situation we find ourselves in.

The dimension of consciousness that an alienated individual loses touch with is what Jourard (1996) calls “somatic perception.” Jourard (1996) points out that people respond to all situations on a bodily-felt level, and that by perceiving subtle changes in the state of one’s bodily being, one can sense when a situation either enhances or

diminishes the quality of one's life. It's on this embodied level that a little girl can tell which of the smiling adults in a room actually doesn't like her; that we just "know" something is troubling a loved one, no matter how hard they try to hide it; that we simply get good or bad "vibes" about a particular situation. As a person loses the capacity to discern how situations affect him or her as an embodied being, it becomes all too easy to continue ways of living and relating that are not in one's best interest. In Jourard's (1996) words:

When we repress the experience of our bodies, we not only reduce our experience of being alive, but, in order to protect ourselves from threatening pleasure and pain, we actually create circumstances by which we become stupid, that is, uninformed, in a peculiar, somatic way. (p. 52)

Thus, to the degree one is unembodied, one is *ignorant* of how to live situations in an authentic way.

Authenticity is a word of Greek origin that originally meant "to do something oneself, to have a sense that one's actions and feelings are one's own" (Johnson, 1992, p. 153). When a person has a well developed capacity for somatic perception, one is better suited to be one's own authority on how to live in growth enhancing ways. This "sensual authority," which comes directly from one's sense of embodiment, is precisely what is stripped away via the technology of alienation. When access to somatic perception is dulled through the biosocialization process, people progressively lose the necessary depth of awareness to possess a clear sense of how to be and what to do in life. As Johnson (1992) puts it: "the technology of alienation accustoms us to sense a void between 'I' and my flesh, and between 'I' and 'you'. Because we are led to feel that we are not in immediate contact with the palpable world, we sense that we need experts who understand that world enough to tell us what to do" (pp.153-154). Alienated from our embodied experience of self and world, we give doctors authority over our bodies, psychologists authority over our minds, outside mediators authority over our

interpersonal disputes, governments authority over our environmental policies and actions, and religious leaders authority over our spirits. The shift from alienation to authenticity requires that individuals develop their impoverished self-sensing capacities and that they learn to check the dictates of outside authorities against this growing base of awareness.

Lacking an adequate depth of somatic perception, one's relationships on all levels (intra-, inter-, and extra-personal) will understandably be experienced as inauthentic. When one's sensual authority has been repressively pushed beneath the level of conscious awareness, it becomes all too easy to rely on the socially-sanctioned handbook for living that is (through the technology of alienation) always being held out before us.

Recall the example I gave at the beginning of the paper regarding the shift from a static, dull, routine mode of relating with my partner, to a more spontaneous, genuine way of being together. Part of what I was trying to describe was how people often relate to each other on "auto-pilot," investing just enough bodily attention in the relationship to respond to routine cues in a routine fashion. Mom says to Dad as he scans the sports page, "How was your day, dear?" Dad, paying just enough attention to register this cue, replies, "Fine honey, how was yours?" The sight of the mail-person as I walk to the carport elicits a "Hi there, how bout this El Nino." Phone calls and letters home so often are mostly a run-down of the latest news and happenings, with the bulk of feelingful expression being squeezed into a routine "I miss you" or a "Love, Bob."

Not to say that small talk can't be pleasant and doesn't have its place. However, the sense of authenticity that leads to a deepening of connection in relationships comes only when we speak from the heart, which requires the courage and ability to allow our communications to emerge from a sustained awareness of how we feel in a particular situation. To the degree that our somatic perception has been dulled, we don't even *know* how we feel, limiting the possibilities for heartfelt self-expression. Thus, we can see how sensual alienation leads a person to experience his or her interpersonal

communications as relatively inauthentic, as not arising from his or her own feelings as much as from conditioning and social propriety.

On an intrapersonal level, being disconnected from the fullness of our somatic perception can manifest in a lack of vitality, a sense that we're cut off from our own most sincere intentions. Interpersonally, we've seen how sensual alienation can translate into inauthentic relations. Furthermore, one could argue that humanity's despoliation of the earthly environment continues unabashedly only to the degree that we have collectively lost touch with our sensual connectedness to and embeddedness in the encompassing biosphere. As environmental philosopher and activist David Abram (1996) suggests, the sad results of our current relationship with nature stem from a "perceptual problem" in Western culture, one in which modern society simply does "not perceive surrounding nature in a clear manner" (p.27). This perceptual problem is precisely the atrophy of somatic perception that we've been discussing, the repression of our lives as bodily beings—bodily beings who are sustained by the earthly environment, by feelingful relations with other people, and through the power of our own self-awareness.

Regression vs. integration

Many have argued that the notion of valuing and trusting in the body as a source of intelligent decision making and guidance is a regressive stance that encourages an "acting out" of all instincts and impulses in a hedonic or savage way, a stance that has been rightly rejected by the majority of civilized humanity. This argument, however, fails to distinguish between body-centered regression and bodymind-centered integration. Far from advocating a doing away with rationality and reason in favor of an orgiastic sensual "free-for-all," the project of recovering sensual experiencing put forth here rests on the assumption that *increasing awareness, including the inherent wisdom of the body along with our well developed thinking capacities, is always an improvement over thinking alone. A state of conscious awareness wherein "mind and body are both experiences of an integrated self"* (Broughton, in Wilber, 1995) is asserted to be a

healthier, more satisfying, more capable, more empowering way to go through life than a thought-centered state where sensual levels of being are suppressed and denied our full attention.

In other words, the goal of recovering and developing sensual levels of experiencing is to realize ourselves as integrated bodyminds, not to go from body-repression to mind-repression. The latter would be a regressive stance where anything rational and reasonable would be actively excluded from the life process in the interest of acting from some “purely” bodily level. This is simply replacing one dissociative attitude with another, a dualistic flip-flop that changes the formula from sensual alienation to conceptual alienation, without healing the inner schism itself. To transcend mind-body dualism in an experience of integrity is to discover a depth of meaning or mindfulness in feelings and sensations, and to experience the feelingfulness and sensibility of thoughts. From the perspective of the integrated bodymind, thoughts make *sense*, feelings *mean* something. Both conceptual and sensual modes of experience point to a depth of consciousness beyond themselves, not a mind or a body, but a bodymind.

The distinction between regression and integration becomes especially important in considering examples of embodied awareness and responsiveness. For instance, I might find myself sexually attracted to my teacher as she leads a group discussion. Since I already have a tendency toward sensual alienation, one dissociative response to this situation would be to actively suppress the sexual arousal as much as possible. I might try to distract myself by consciously thinking about something else, such as an upcoming softball game. I might also rationally justify the suppression of feelings by telling myself that it’s simply wrong to be aroused by someone other than my partner. This type of sexual repression is designed to prevent any expression of sexual feelings that deviate from the established norms, and would most likely cause me to lose touch with, and thereby not be able to consciously act from, my “inappropriate” state of sexual arousal.

The problem with this approach, clearly evident in contemporary society, is that people who repeatedly deny any aspects of their experiencing will naturally lose conscious awareness, and thereby conscious control, of those levels of being. Thus, a habitual stance of sexual repression might lead to: 1) a lack of vitality and interest in all sexual situations (including the socially acceptable options); or 2) an overwhelming and uncontrollable compulsion to satisfy stifled sexual longings that might surface in harmful ways (such as in the highly publicized cases of child molestation by excessively repressed priests). We can see here how sexual offenses—acts commonly thought to be the inevitable result of men fully allowing sensuality into awareness—look more like responses to denying authentic feelings than to openly exploring them.

Another dissociative response to my sexual feelings in this example, one with equally harmful consequences, would be to shut out any rational thoughts and simply let go to whatever urges and impulses strike me in the moment. For instance, I might feel sexually aroused by my teacher and say to myself, “if the embodied thing to do is to express myself from the body, then the truly authentic action would be to jump on my teacher right here and now.” However, in order for me to go through with such an action, I would have to selectively ignore what I know on other levels (both conceptually and sensually). For instance, although I might be attracted to my teacher sexually, I also like her very much on a professional as well as personal level, and certainly would not feel very good about frightening or hurting her. I also know on a more conceptual level that sexual assault is a violent act that would bring with it a variety of consequences, including my likely arrest and imprisonment. These further thoughts and feelings would need to be blotted out of awareness in order for me swoop in on my teacher uninvited. We can see that neither dissociative option leads to an authentic response to the situation—a response that takes into account the whole of my available experiencing. To respond authentically requires an attitude of openness and acceptance toward both sensual and conceptual levels of experience.

If neither feelings nor thoughts are denied awareness, then creative possibilities for expression can emerge that are in my best interest as a whole person; not merely as a body that seeks physiological release or as a mind that seeks to do the socially acceptable thing. In the present example, it's clear that sexually assaulting my teacher will not be a growth-facilitating form of self-expression. On the other hand, by recognizing my tendency to block out the feelings of sexual arousal, and counteracting that tendency by allowing them attention, I then have the potential to consciously choose a course of action that is optimally in tune with the whole of me (such as exploring my sexual arousal with my partner, or perhaps a charged, hands-off discussion with my teacher).

In our contemporary psycho-social situation, bodymind integration so often begins with a conscious attending to sensual levels of experiencing in particular, because it is precisely those levels that are typically repressed via the technology of alienation. To realize one's self on the level of bodymind is therefore not so much a movement of awareness away from the mind toward the body, as it is an opening of awareness to *include* the previously *excluded* levels of sensual experiencing.

It is also important to keep in mind that the ideal of learning to trust in the body as a source of intelligent decision making and responsiveness, needs to be understood in the particular context of contemporary modernity and from the perspective of the typical, mature, well-adjusted individual. Since we are speaking of the movement from bodymind dissociation to bodymind integration, we are presupposing the development of "mind"—that is to say an adequate realization of one's conceptual capacities—regarding the person cultivating sensual awareness and responsiveness. Thus, it would be a mistake to apply a lot of what has been said here concerning embodiment and personal transformation to those individuals who lack the mindful capacities that characterize the mature adult. In describing integration as a growth-promoting process whereby "I" learn to sense "my" bodily-felt experience, we are presupposing the vantage point of *I-it* awareness, which presupposes the capacity for *I-it* awareness. So, applying this

discussion to children, many developmentally disabled persons, or sociopaths, misses the mark, because the capacity for full *I-it* self-consciousness (needed to take and appreciate the perspective of another) is lacking in these individuals.

No one is advocating, for instance, that parents and teachers should allow children to run amuck and express themselves in whatever ways they “feel” like. Children do need and benefit from limits and guidance, since they haven’t fully developed their own rational capacities. I might have swallowed toxic cleanser, been hit by a car, or been beaten senseless by my older brother long ago had us kids been left to our own devices. It’s the *way* adults implement these limits that can lead young people toward either alienation or authenticity. For example, one way to approach children who strike out at other children is to make them feel ashamed of their angry feelings by telling them that what they did was bad or wrong, with the added threat that Mommy and Daddy will take away their love if it happens again (“bad boy; go to your room”). This is an education in the denial of experiencing. Alternatively, a parent can try to teach their child about the experience of anger, validating and honoring the child’s angry feelings while also instructing him or her in more appropriate ways to cope with those feelings (“it’s OK to feel angry, but it’s not OK to hit your brother. Hitting hurts. You wouldn’t want someone to hit you, would you? Next time you get that mad, come see Daddy”).

For children, as for many developmentally impaired adults, what is most needed for personal growth is the development of conceptual capacities, which ideally can be facilitated without any devaluing of the individual’s bodily life. As we have seen, however, the technology of alienation is so pervasive in our culture that few of us are left without needing to heal from a significant degree of bodymind dissociation, the effects of which include a lack of vitality, a sense that experiences lack a depth of meaning, and the general sense of being held back and inauthentic in the ways we live. To transform this state of affairs would seem to require that one openly and consciously explore the repressed world of sensation and feeling. Philosophers from Heidegger to Hegel to

Wilber have asserted this; psychologists from Maslow to Rogers have tried to prove it. Whatever the argument, however, the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. The proposition is, in fact, empirically verifiable in that various methods have been discovered and developed to facilitate the recovery of our impoverished self-sensing capacities.

No one can judge how good a pudding tastes through rational analysis alone. A good argument or description might get our mouths watering, but ultimately we'll need to consider some actual recipes and taste for ourselves what works for us and what doesn't.

Part II: Experiences of bodymind integrity:

Somatic/experiential approaches to embodiment and personal transformation

The processes that work to shape people into alignment with societal agendas, that lead to experiences of bodymind dissociation, influence people's lives only to the extent that human beings are, by nature, functionally malleable. That is to say, human beings, like all forms of life, will continually adapt to the givens of their environmental situation--which for people includes a socio-cultural environment. In contrast to the technology of alienation, which takes advantage of this malleability to undermine people's sensual authority, Johnson (1992) describes another way of integrating techniques, one that encourages people to develop and connect to their unique store of embodied wisdom. Johnson calls this alternative "the technology of authenticity".

The many technologies of authenticity (including person-centered therapy, experiential focusing, and somatic education) are practical strategies that: (1) facilitate the recovery of an individual's inherent self-sensing capacities (i.e. one's sense of embodied authority), and (2) provide an environment where authentic expression of this newly expanded awareness is supported and encouraged. As we will see, the various practices engage this process of personal transformation from different perspectives, perspectives that prove to be complimentary in supporting a multi-dimensional, unified vision of growth, health and embodiment.

Toward a somatic/experiential perspective

When a physiologist or a behavioral scientist views a human being, he or she sees an organism, a “body” that is subject to the same physical and chemical forces that affect all bodies, be they plants or planets. These objectively studied human bodies are also influenced by social and cultural factors in observable, somewhat predictable ways, and are endowed with particular testable and measurable cognitive capacities. The understandings gained from this objective study of humanity are not to be minimized—they are essential and profound. Yet, a human being can also be viewed from within, and while from an externalized, third-person point of view people are objective bodies, from an internalized, first-person vantage point they are subjective beings, what Thomas Hanna (1988) refers to as “somas” (p. 20).

Soma, as Hanna explains, is a Greek word that means “living body”. The term is equated with neither the concept of body nor mind, but instead refers to the unbroken experience of ourselves as living, thinking, bodily beings. Whereas mind and body are traditionally conceived as *things* or distinct entities of some sort, the soma is conceived as a *process*:

Soma is living; it is expanding and contracting, accommodating and assimilating, drawing in energy and expelling energy. Soma is pulsing, flowing, squeezing and relaxing (...), yearning, hoping, suffering, tensing, paling, cringing, doubting, despairing. (...) Somas are the kind of living, organic being which you are at *this* moment, in *this* place where you are. (Hanna, 1970, p.35)

The world of the soma refers to “the rich and constantly flowing array of sensings and actions that are occurring within the experience of each of us” (Hanna, in Greene, 1997, p. 50).

From the traditional scientific viewpoint, people are observable, manipulable objects. Traditional doctors study people’s bodies; traditional psychologists study people’s minds. From the somatic viewpoint, people are more than just bodies

understandable and approachable on a bio-physical level, and minds understandable and approachable on a psycho-social level. We are equally self-sensing, self-moving, self-aware, self-expressing, self-responsible subjects—we are somas. Somas who not *only* are shaped by their relations with the environment and other people in observable ways, but who also profoundly affect their own state of functioning through subjective beliefs, expectations, and through the power of their own self-awareness. As Hanna (in Greene, 1997) notes, the first-person perspective discloses unique data, offering “insights and possibilities that are categorically not possible from the [third-person] bodily viewpoint that is the established perspective” (p. 51). Thus “the somatic viewpoint compliments and completes the scientific view of the human being, making it possible to have an authentic science that recognizes the whole human” (Hanna, 1988, p. 21).

An inquiry into human experience that recognizes the whole person must engage and utilize both the *I-it* mode of knowing, characteristic of the traditional medical and psychological approaches, as well as people’s capacity to know and live situations through directly felt embodiment. In other words, any approach that seeks to understand the whole of human experience must strive to include the whole of experiencing in the *process* of understanding itself. Merely thinking *about* our world of experience can only provide the objective side of the coin. The somatic/experiential perspective—the foundations of which will be laid out in the following sections—is an attempt to get underneath that coin, to stand it on its edge and view it from a balanced, integrated point of view.

I’m choosing the term “somatic/experiential” to characterize the following approaches to personal transformation for a couple of reasons. First, it is my intent to show how some fundamental principles of embodiment and personal transformation can be derived from integrating certain practical and theoretical aspects of the field of *somatics* with those of some *experientially*-oriented approaches to psychology. Secondly, I like what the term itself implies regarding the process of personal

transformation: that in our contemporary psychosocial situation marked by sensual alienation, growth and healing can be facilitated through a renewed attentiveness and responsiveness to the direct *experience* of one's lived body (i.e. one's *soma*). This point of view has roots in the existential-phenomenological tradition of inquiry.

As R.D. Laing (1965) describes it, existential-phenomenology is an approach that attempts to characterize the nature of a person's direct experience of self and world. The theoretical foundations of many of the approaches discussed throughout this thesis—including somatics, experientially-oriented psychology and psychotherapy, Wilber's spectrum psychology, and Abram's ecological view—draw upon the insights of several philosophers within the existential-phenomenological tradition who have contributed to an understanding of embodied experience.

Edmund Husserl (1960) developed his phenomenological method specifically to investigate this subjective realm, encouraging inquiring individuals to “return to the things themselves”, to focus attention on the pre-conceptual, sensual level of all human endeavors. Merleau-Ponty (1962) furthered this notion by suggesting that the “body-subject” was indeed the ultimate subject of experience, with the living body acting as the point of connection (and disconnection) to the world. Martin Heidegger (1962), an assistant of Husserl, also contributed a great deal to an understanding of people's capacity for embodied knowing and being, developing new concepts such as “being-in-the-world” that helped carry the existential-phenomenological discussion forward. Other major philosophers in this area include Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Nietzsche. Eugene Gendlin, Rollo May, Ludwig Binswanger, James Bugental, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, R.D. Laing, Thomas Hanna, and many others, have drawn on the broad base of existential-phenomenological understandings in their practical work with human beings struggling to change the quality of their own lives.

Experientially-oriented psychotherapy

Personal growth and healing in today's modern West has long been considered the domain of psychology and more practically, psychotherapy. Unfortunately, psychotherapy is often thought of as techniques for caring for an infirm mind and set in contrast to the medical profession, which is assumed to deal with people's bodies. Recent developments in both fields, however,—Hans Selyes's work in psychosomatic medicine (discussed later) and the emergence of experientially-oriented approaches to psychotherapy—are paving the way for a far more integrated understanding of the healing experience.

Eugene Gendlin (1962, 1981) and his colleagues at the University of Chicago conducted extensive research in which they found that the single most important factor in therapy affecting positive outcome was the client's ability to contact and work with his or her bodily-felt sense. It was not enough, argued Gendlin, to have a rational understanding of one's psychological issues. Many clients with exquisite theoretical and conceptual psychological understandings often continue to remain stuck in the same stultifying patterns. According to this line of research, the key to healing lies in developing one's awareness of the bodily-felt dimensions of experience.

This stressing of the sensual dimension of experience in the psychological healing process is characteristic of the experientially-oriented approaches to psychology and psychotherapy, which include existential psychology, Daseinsanalysis, phenomenological psychology, Gestalt, client-centered therapy, experiential psychotherapy (not to be confused with the broad family of *experientially-oriented* therapies), and humanistic psychology. Donald Moss (1989) characterizes the set of beliefs about the psychotherapeutic process that are broadly shared by this family of approaches as including the following: a) therapy must commence with an empathic, feelingful sharing of the patient's personal world of experience, and b) therapy proceeds most effectively through an embodied, emotional, here-and-now re-experiencing of key personal issues.

Carl Rogers (1961) describes the process of personal growth and change characteristic of this sensually-grounded approach as involving “a loosening of the cognitive maps of experience” and a movement toward “fluidity, changingness, immediacy of feelings and experience” (p.64). R.D. Laing (1965, 1967), in his writings on psychopathology, postulated that it is a person’s inability or unwillingness to experience the self as “embodied” which leads to the construction of a “false self system” and the subsequent experience of the schizoid or dissociated condition. James F.T. Bugental (1965, 1978), in the context of his humanistic therapy practice, has developed a set of powerful therapeutic techniques that ground psychological inquiry in the bodily-felt dimensions of experiences and issues. Bugental’s “inward searching” process is similar to Eugene Gendlin’s (1981) “experiential focusing”, which is a series of simple, direct steps that can be taught to people who wish to contact and work with their embodied wisdom (the focusing process will be discussed in much more detail later).

Fritz Perls, along with Hefferline and Goodman (1951), state that the basic aim of Gestalt therapy is to “extend the boundary of what you accept as yourself to include *all organic activities*” (p. 84). And as we have seen, Abraham Maslow’s notion of “peak-experiences” is also quite relevant to this discussion. Maslow (1962), considered one of the major contributors to the humanistic, the existential, and the transpersonal branches of psychology, describes the peak-experience as, among other things, a feeling of greater integration with less of a split between an experiencing self and an observing self.

While the contributions of each of the experientially-oriented psychologists are unique and valuable, for the purposes of clarity the following discussion will focus on the work of two pioneers in the field: Carl Rogers and his colleague Eugene Gendlin.

Carl Rogers and the person-centered perspective

In his classic work, On Becoming a Person, Carl Rogers (1961) provides a detailed analysis of the transformative process as he observed and experienced it unfold in psychotherapy. Rogers recognized that, from the onset of psychological development, an individual's authentic self-expression is met with conditional acceptance. Actions and expressions which support the status quo are met with encouragement and positive regard, while anything that goes against the grain gets met with some form of disapproval or rejection. As we have discussed, modern culture supports an authoritatively driven technology of alienation that contributes to a dissociative sense of self and inauthentic ways of living life.

In person-centered therapy, Rogers sought to create an entirely different relational situation. The therapeutic relationship is held such that a client's self-expressions are met with unconditional positive regard, creating an environment where a client feels safe in expressing and increasing awareness of aspects of their authentic experience that have been suppressed or repressed in situations outside of therapy. In this friendly environment of unconditional positive regard, Rogers observed how clients move away from a type of functioning characterized as static, fixed, unfeeling, and impersonal, toward a way of being that is marked by a fluid, changing, acceptant experiencing of one's self. The consequence of this movement, Rogers (1961) noted, "is an alteration in personality and behavior in the direction of psychic health and maturity and more realistic relationship to self, others, and the environment" (p. 66).

As a process directly counter to the authoritarian and dissociative engine powering the technology of alienation, Rogers' person-centered technology of authenticity facilitates a transformation in therapy clients whereby one "moves away from perceiving himself as unacceptable (...), as having to live by the standards of others" and moves toward a conception of him or herself as "a person of worth, as a

self-directing person, able to form his[her] standards and values upon the basis of his[her] own experience” (Rogers, 1961, p.65).

Rogers, as an exemplar of the experiential, somatic viewpoint being explored throughout this thesis, describes this successful, healing, growth-enhancing outcome of therapy as a process whereby a person moves from an experiential world of bodymind dissociation, to one where experiences of body and mind are integrated in both awareness and action. Effective therapy, according to Rogers, “seems to mean a getting back to basic sensory and visceral experience” (Rogers, 1961, p.103). In this type of transformative, therapeutic experience, the person adds to ordinary experience a deeper and fuller awareness of his or her sensory and visceral responses. There is an adding of levels of awareness that are often outside of what is normally screened through the “filter” of biosocialization. As the person comes to identify with levels of experience (i.e. various sensory and visceral responses to certain issues) that were previously outside of who they considered themselves to be, a person becomes more and more what Rogers calls a “fully functioning organism” (p.104-105).

The fully-functioning person that Rogers’ describes as emerging from effective therapy begins to develop a “trust in one’s organism” (p.118) as that person learns to live from the ever widening store of embodied wisdom that is continually integrated into awareness. As a person opens to more and more previously alienated levels of self (claiming more and more sensual authority), one comes to feel that the most reliable source of authority (one’s “locus of evaluation”) lies within instead of without (Rogers, 1961).

In sum, Rogers (1961) describes the therapeutic relationship as a place where one can “become a person”:

a person who is more open to all the elements of his[her] organic experience; a person who is developing a trust in his[her] own organism as an instrument of sensitive living; a person who accepts the locus of evaluation as residing within

him[her]self; a person who is learning to live his[her] life as a participant in a fluid, ongoing process, in which he[she] is continually discovering new aspects of him[her]self in the flow of his[her] experience. (p. 124)

In essence, Rogers found that, based on years of research and experience, the most effective way to facilitate personal transformation in therapy was to create an environment where a client was aided and encouraged to express him or herself freely from the immediacy of sensually-grounded awareness. Rogers devoted the bulk of his early writing and research to exploring the ways therapists could most effectively create this type of therapeutic atmosphere, and to characterizing the qualitative changes he observed in clients' behavior and reported experiences. These observations were encapsulated in Rogers' tentative expression of a "general law of interpersonal relationships", which was in response to the following theoretical question: Is it possible to formulate, in a single hypothesis, the elements which make any interpersonal relationship either growth-facilitating or the reverse?

Rogers's general conclusion was that the greater the congruence of experience, awareness and communication on the part of an individual in a particular relationship, the more authentic and mutually transformative that relationship will be (Rogers, 1961). In formulating his response, Rogers sought to probe the very quintessence of the psychological growth and healing process, as he observed it unfold in therapy. Rogers simply reported what he observed to be occurring: when a client had or developed a sensually-grounded awareness of their ongoing flow of experience and felt safe enough to express themselves in a manner congruent with this awareness, the result was personal health and growth.

Rogers' theory and research offers a compelling view of personal transformation in terms of interpersonal relationships. In his later writings, Rogers (1980) broadened his person-centered perspective beyond the context of psychotherapy, articulating an approach applicable to "any situation in which *growth*—of a person, a group, or a

community—is part of the goal” (p. ix). Summing up years of experience and a substantial amount of research, Rogers (1980) stated that an individual could foster a growth-promoting climate in any situation by 1) being as genuine, real, or congruent as possible in one’s communication to others, 2) providing an attitude of acceptance, caring or prizing of the others’ communications, and 3) being empathically sensitive to the expressions of others and communicating this empathic understanding back to those others.

Rogers’ work—with therapy clients, encounter groups, families, political groups, business leaders, and educators—essentially shows us that, when the above elements are manifest in a relationship, personal transformation happens. Of course, this begs the question “*How do we manifest these elements?*”. As we have seen, Rogers suggests an attentiveness toward bodily-felt dimensions of experiencing. Rogers’ colleague, psychotherapist and philosopher Eugene T. Gendlin, has developed this suggestion into a concrete methodology that has been successfully taught to many people, both in and outside of a therapy setting.

Experiential Focusing

Gendlin’s (1962, 1981) perspective is founded on the notion that, in all situations and at any given time, there is an ongoing psychophysiological flow of experiencing that can be attended to in such a way as to concretely transform the way we live a particular situation. Not simply sensations of the “body”, this *felt-sense* is holistic, in that it implicitly contains one’s sense of the “whole thing” of a particular situation, including what one has learned conceptually. As Gendlin (1981) puts it:

The felt-sense is in the body, yet it has meanings. It has all the meanings one is already living with because one lives in situations with one’s body. A felt-sense is body *and* mind before they are split apart. (p.165)

In other words, the felt-sense is *of* the bodymind. It is experienced as both sensual and meaningful. To get a flavor of the felt-sense, let’s look at the familiar “tip of

the tongue" experience. You *know* the name of that movie starring your favorite actor, but you just can't access that knowledge at the moment. There's absolutely no doubt that the knowledge is within you somewhere—it's right on the tip of your tongue. Although you can't name the movie, you can sense what the name is in an unclear way. This hazy place that feels meaningful yet not fully known is a felt-sense. It is sensed in the body as a vital, sensual flow of experiencing that contains meanings in an implicit way. When the implicit meaning is revealed, there is an unmistakable shift in the way we relate to the given concern, a shift that is experienced as a feeling or inner bodily movement that releases the sought after knowledge. This can also be described as an "a-ha" experience.

This felt-shift or sense of a-ha is also *of* the integrated bodymind; not just a sensation in our "bodies" nor merely an idea or concept popping up in our "minds". Other familiar examples of the shifting felt-sense include having someone else successfully complete a sentence for us while we struggle to find the right word, and the "I know I forgot something but I just can't figure out what it is" scenario. In each of these situations, meaningful knowledge is arrived at only when there is the right "fit" between a particular concept and one's bodily-felt experience of the situation. If you are experiencing the felt-sense that you forgot to bring something (which turns out to be your camera) to the airport, only a conceptual scheme having to do with your camera comes with the release of the felt-shift. Even if, while rifling through your memory, you realize that you also forgot your tooth-brush, you can "just tell" that your sense of concern had to do with something else, since the tooth-brush revelation brought no shift in the felt-sense.

These familiar examples of the felt-sense are illustrative, in a very basic way, of the level of inquiry that characterizes Gendlin's technique of experiential focusing. Focusing can be looked at as a process of being with one's felt experience as it unfolds in relation to an issue, problem, or a situation. Most situations, of course, are not nearly as clear-cut as the above, everyday scenarios. When something is on the tip of our tongues, we already know a lot about the particular type of knowledge we're looking for—perhaps

a movie title or someone's name. When the concern, issue, or situation is more complex, the associated felt-sense is experienced as much more unclear, fuzzy, and unrecognizable. However, while the felt-sense is always initially experienced as unclear and unknown, it is also always distinct, in that it feels ripe with potential meanings in relation to a *particular* situation or concern. I can choose to focus on any aspect of my experiencing--my mother, my job, this thesis, my physical health,--that is potentially meaningful for me, and each associated felt-sense will feel *uniquely* unclear initially.

In the context of personal transformation, where one's intent is to change the way one lives in relation to some aspect of experience, the first step of the focusing process is to bring attention to the bodily-felt experience of a particular concern, identifying the felt-sense as the somewhat hazy, hard to discern global sense that surrounds it. As one stays focused on this unclear sense, one can become more and more clear about what it is they're feeling, allowing various shades of meaning to emerge by the skillful use of open-ended questions (Gendlin, 1981).

Therapists Amodeo and Wentworth (1986), both of whom use focusing extensively in their respective practices, clearly summarize and describe the steps of the focusing technique as follows: 1) After allowing your attention to settle inside your body, notice if there's any concerns or issues that are getting in the way of feeling really good right now. Take an inventory of these concerns one by one until the inventory feels complete. 2) Sense which one of the issues is calling for attention right now. 3) Try to get a bodily sense of whether or not it feels okay to get in touch and be with this issue for a while. 4) Allow a felt sense to form. See how the issue or concern feels inside your body right now. Sense where in your body you hold the issue. Describe what it feels like. 5) Stay with this felt sense and allow it to express itself in whatever word, phrase, image, or gesture might come up. Allow yourself to be with the whole sense of whatever comes up. At this point, you might ask exploratory questions (i.e. What about this issue is so difficult?) or forward-moving questions (i.e. What would have to happen in order to

feel better about the whole situation?), remembering to stay with the felt sense. 6) Just allow yourself to be with however you feel inside.

In focusing, intellectual analysis of feelings and immediate mental answers to questions are identified and gently turned away in favor of responses which are experienced as emerging from the felt-sense itself. For instance, I can ask myself “is there anything keeping me from being happy and full of life right now?”, and then immediately try to mentally answer the question with things that I rationally already identify as problem areas of my life. I might say to myself, “I hate my boss, I’m not getting enough sex, and I’m fighting a cold”. This question-answer session, however, is not focusing. This manner of questioning is, in a way, rhetorical—the response consisting of things I already know. Nothing new is discovered, there is no felt-shift to indicate a movement or change on the level of bodymind.

In focusing, one asks a question of themselves and then attends to the unclear yet distinct bodily-felt sense that feels meaningful in relation to that question. One asks and then waits for a response to bubble up from the felt-sense, focusing on it until some aspect of it becomes clear. To my question as to what might be blocking full-living, images having to do with my mother might unexpectedly come up. As I say the words “it may have something to do with Mom”, a unmistakable shift in the felt sense—the sense of a-ha—would indicate that I might benefit from focusing further on whatever issues might be related to my mother. Further open-ended questions, such as “What is it about my Mom that feels unresolved?”, or “exactly what am I am feeling, right now, in relation to Mom?”, might allow the feeling of stuckness or blockedness to loosen its grip on me and rest at a place of greater resolution.

The bodily felt shift in response to an open ended question is the concrete experience of body-mind connection that is the hallmark of experientially-oriented approaches to therapy. Thoughts and concepts are continually checked against the felt sense in the process of focusing, giving the focuser access to a wider store of wisdom

than the thinking mind alone. As we have seen, this experiencing of bodymind integrity is not some esoteric secret to deeper understanding; it's something most people do to one degree or another everyday. However, this typically occurs only in limited contexts and without much awareness.

Whereas Rogers and Gendlin facilitate the cultivation of sensual awareness and responsiveness through psychological inquiry, exploring the feelingful dimensions of personal issues and concerns, the many practices of somatics focus on bodily-felt processes in the more psychologically-neutral terms of sensation and movement.

Thomas Hanna and somatic education

Thomas Hanna (1995) coined the term “somatics” and offered the first definition for a common vision of the field. Simply put, Hanna describes somatics as “the field which studies the *soma*: namely the body as perceived from within by first-person perception” (p.341). Somatics has its roots in several disciplines developed during the twentieth century in Europe and America, including the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Rolfing, the sensory awareness work of Elsa Gindler and Charlotte Selver, and the psychology of Wilhelm Reich. The history of these various movements as well as the research behind them is outlined in Murphy’s (1992) The Future of the Body, and excellent descriptions and discussions of several practices are to be found in Johnson’s (1995, 1997) Bone, Breath and Gesture and Groundworks.

Based on his knowledge of anatomy, central nervous system structure and functioning, and his many years of practice as a somatic educator, Hanna has developed a fairly solid understanding of personal transformation from a somatic perspective. From a somatic viewpoint, there’s no separation of psychological from physical health, and the majority of the typical “mental” and “physical” diseases of our society are *learned* as people adapt to a culture that supports dissociation and alienation.

In order to understand the processes involved in the movement from alienation to authenticity, Hanna roots his inquiry at the foundational level of central nervous system

(cns) structure and function. Hanna (1988) begins by observing that the most fundamental aspect of the cns, in terms of both structure and function, is the division between sensory and motor processes. Our perceptions of the world outside our bodies, as well as our perceptions of our internal bodily states, comes into the brain via sensory nerves. And every action we express, every movement we make in the world and inside our selves flows out from our brain and down through the spine by way of motor nerves. This structural division is functionally integrated within a single neural system, the brain integrating the incoming sensory information with outgoing commands to the motor system (Hanna, 1988).

The continual interplay of sensory information and motor guidance is referred to in contemporary neuroscience as “a feed back system” which operates in “loops”. As Hanna (1988) describes it, “the sensory nerves ‘feedback’ information to the motor nerves, whose response ‘loops back’ with the movement commands along the motor nerves. As movement takes place, the motor nerves ‘feedback’ new information to the sensory nerves” (p. 7). An understanding of this sensorimotor feed back loop is crucial to understanding the movement from alienation to authenticity, as central nervous system functioning is fundamental to all human experience and behavior.

Acknowledging that there are indeed physical and psychological problems that are the result of structural deformity and/or physiological imbalance, Hanna (1988) argues that many of the health problems afflicting people today are not about bodies or minds breaking down, but about individuals who have lost conscious control of their somatic functions. These “functional problems”, according to Hanna, describe a category of health problem that has gone largely unrecognized in our dualistic medical/psychological system of health care. As Hanna (1988) describes them, functional problems are ones in which the person suffers from a loss of memory: the memory of what it feels like to move certain muscles of their bodies, and the memory of how to go about moving them. This type of memory loss is what Hanna calls

“sensory-motor amnesia”, a state of diminished self-awareness that is quite reversible—that is to say, a state which can be *transformed*.

Sensory-motor amnesia involves a dual loss of both conscious control of a particular area of motor action and conscious sensing of that motor action. As the human organism adapts to repeated stressful conditions, whether resulting from the biosocialization process (cultural conditioning) or from uncontrived environmental circumstances (like extreme ecological conditions or biophysical trauma), there is a loss of conscious voluntary control of specific somatic functions. For example, faced with the stress of ridicule and/or punishment for crying or screaming out in public, the sad or angry child will contract certain motor areas of the soma (i.e. muscles) in an effort to hold back their authentic response. Crying or yelling out simply cannot happen when the corresponding muscle systems are held motionless, because crying and yelling *are* the movements of those motor areas. As this stressful response of contraction is activated again and again in similar situations, the response eventually become *habituated* and the child loses awareness of it (i.e. the muscle contractions can no longer be consciously sensed) and control of it (i.e. the child cannot voluntarily relax the contractions). The child has been successfully *conditioned* not to emote in public.

This innate tendency of human beings to develop automatic, unconscious responses in the face of stressful stimuli (i.e. the process of conditioning) was well documented by researchers such as Pavlov and Skinner. Hanna describes the loss of conscious volitional control as “sensori-motor amnesia” so as to emphasize two essential facts: 1) habituated, involuntary responses, like all somatic processes, are a reflection of sensori-motor functioning, and 2) what becomes unconscious, forgotten, or unlearned, can become conscious again, remembered, and re-learned. Thus, sensori-motor amnesia can be reversed by *somatic learning* (Hanna, in Johnson, 1995).

Somatic learning is a process that results in the expansion of an organism’s range of volitional consciousness. This process takes advantage of the feedback/loop nature of

the sensori-motor system and is described by Hanna (in Johnson, 1995) in the following way:

If one focuses one's awareness on an unconscious, forgotten area of the soma, one can begin to perceive a minimal sensation that is just sufficient to direct a minimal movement, and this, in turn, gives new sensory feedback of that area which, again, gives a new clarity of movement, etc. This sensory feedback associates with adjacent sensory neurons, further clarifying the synergy that is possible with the associated motor neurons. This makes the next motor effort inclusive of a wider range of associated voluntary neurons, thus broadening and enhancing the motor action and, thereby, further enhancing the sensory feedback. This back-and-forth motor procedure gradually "wedges" the amnesic area back into the range of volitional control: the unknown becomes known and the forgotten becomes relearned. (p. 350)

So it is that a diminished state of self-awareness and a diminished range of conscious responsiveness can expand and transform at the basic level of sensor-motor functioning. Our emotionally inhibited child, now an adult, can learn to pay focused and sustained attention to subtle sensations in the forgotten contracted muscle areas and thereby recover in awareness the sense of being perpetually held back and fatigued. With this awareness that "I'm contracting my muscles" and "I'm holding myself back" comes the realization that one can now begin to relax those inhibitions.

Although I've chosen to illustrate this transformative process with what would normally be considered a "psychological" example—the emotionally inhibited person—, the practice of somatic education (as typified by Hanna's work and Feldenkrais's Functional Integration) is normally applied to what are thought of more as "physical" problems. Middle-aged to older adults with gross-level range of motion restrictions or distortions, often the result of trauma or injury, are more typically the clients of somatic therapies. Many people who seek out and engage in somatic practices are primarily

looking to feel better and healthier on a physical level, not especially considering the implications the work has for whole-person growth and healing.

The psychological implications of “body work”, although increasingly evident and acknowledged, seem to be less than adequately understood. The example of the emotionally inhibited person hints at how an understanding of sensori-motor function can contribute greatly to psychological perspectives of personal transformation and vice versa. An integral viewpoint promises a deeper understanding of how various transformative practices can be utilized in a complimentary fashion to most effectively support an individual’s growth process.

Matching

Hanna’s work in somatic education provides one understanding of how the process of personal transformation can play out on the level of bodily sensations and movements. Elizabeth Behnke (in Johnson, 1995) gives an account of precisely how transformation on this neuro-muscular level might unfold from the perspective of direct, first-person experience. In offering a phenomenological and methodological approach to somatic education, Behnke contributes to the field of somatics in much the same way Gendlin does for experientially-oriented therapy.

Whereas Gendlin’s experiential focusing is a technique that works with bodily senses and feelings related to specific personal issues and problems, Behnke describes the “matching” technique in the context of body-work and body-awareness disciplines, which explore somatic experience in more “physical” terms such as neuro-muscular sensation, tightness, or proprioceptive experience. Schematically understood, Behnke describes matching as consisting of three parts: 1) awareness of some aspect of one’s bodily experience (such as a shape, feeling, or movement); 2) an inner act of aligning or matching oneself with this aspect; and 3) allowing one’s experience to change in some way.

Let's say I decide to practice matching. I might begin by simply lying on the floor and allowing the flow of feelings and sensations to come more fully into awareness. After a few minutes, some aspect of this bodily world will usually stand out, such as some tightness in my neck muscles. In matching this neck tightness, I don't consciously try to *do* anything, such as relax the muscles or shift my position in some way, but rather I feel my way into the tightness as if I were holding my neck muscles that way on purpose. As Behnke (in Johnson, 1995) describes this subtle process:

I *enter* the shape or the tightness, feeling from within as clearly as I am able, and I begin to *appropriate* it as something I myself am doing--tightening myself precisely here, or holding myself in exactly this shape. (p.320)

Matching is a way of inhabiting some aspect of one's somatic experience, of joining with it, "not as a static fact, but as something ongoing, something that is continuing to be just this way" (Behnke, in Johnson, 1995, p. 320). I am not a spectator of my neck tightness, but an active participant.

As with experiential focusing, matching a particular aspect of one's somatic experience will often allow a spontaneous shift to occur. A tightness might begin to relax, a hunched over posture might begin to straighten, or a shift might occur somewhere other than in the area being matched. In whatever way a shift manifests, though, it will generally be a move toward greater awareness and greater self control. Matching involves a level of personal transformation in that something involuntary and unconscious ("Ugh! My neck is so tense.") becomes something one is consciously doing ("I am scrunching up my neck muscles *just like this.*") and can thereby consciously stop doing, allowing healthier and more fulfilling possibilities to emerge.

Matching has, for example, helped transform my capacity to sing. Often while singing, I'll find that my vocal range and quality are both unnecessarily limited by involuntary constrictions in my throat and other areas of my body. As I match the sense of constrictedness (experience it *as if* it is something I am voluntarily doing) during a

series of long, held-out notes, my experience of singing gradually shifts such that the notes sound clearer and fuller, less and less choked off. It's as if by simply imagining that the constrictedness is a state that I am consciously maintaining, I *actually become* more and more conscious of the ways I unwittingly hold back my voice.

This matching process makes perfect sense in terms of Hanna's theory of sensory-motor amnesia. As awareness is brought to the amnesic area, in this case my constricted throat, the activity of sensory neurons in the throat areas increases. This increased sensory awareness sets the sensori-motor loop in motion, leading to further possibilities for movement (such as subtle degrees of relaxation) which lead to more refined awareness until the amnesic area is brought "back into the range of volitional control: the unknown becomes known and the forgotten becomes relearned".

Towards an integral understanding of personal transformation

Experientially-oriented therapy and somatic education are two distinct approaches with a common goal: to help people to move from an inefficient, unfulfilling, unhealthy mode of functioning to one of increased efficiency, fulfillment and health. That is to say, both approaches aim for transformation of the whole-person. On the surface, it appears each addresses *separate* levels of human experience, somatics being about improving people's bodily functioning while therapy works to better psychological functioning. While the terms bodily and psychological do indeed refer to qualitatively distinct modes of experience, they are quite inseparable at both the structural and functional levels. As Hanna noted, all human experience--whether perceived as thinking, feeling, tasting, seeing or jumping--is a reflection of the functioning of the entire human soma, which is coordinated by the processes of the central nervous system.

Hanna was quite adamant that his work had everything to do with what we consider psychology, and as we have seen, much of the focus of experientially-oriented therapies is on *bodily* felt processes. Hanna (1993) emphatically states that "*all* psychological states, whether healthy or pathological, are always the reflection of the

sensorimotor activities going on in the bodily system” (p. 47). And for Rogers (1961), psychological health and growth is a process whereby a person “becomes his organism”(p.103). To understand just how these two perspectives might fit together, we’ll need to take a closer look at the somatic processes that underlie the experience of personal transformation--the experience which is the ultimate concern of both approaches.

As we discussed, from an objective vantage point, all our perceptions of self and world are routed through our brains via sensory nerves, while all our movements in the world and inside ourselves flow out from our brain down the spine via motor nerves. We saw how, through intelligent use one’s self-sensing abilities, a state of sensory-motor amnesia in a given area could be reversed by somatic learning. The implications that this understanding has for the field of psychology become evident when we consider the various qualities of psychological experience in their rootedness to this very same sensorimotor system. In fact, psychological modes of expression, such as thinking, verbalizing, and imagining, can all be understood in terms of the somatic process of *movement*, while the psychological constructs of self-consciousness and self-awareness can be understood in terms of the somatic process of *self-sensing*.

At first blush, such an understanding might appear reductionistic, but as we consider this perspective in light of both scientific (third-person) and somatic (first-person) data, we’ll see how such an understanding can only add to the psychological view and vice versa.

Expression as movement / Awareness as sensitivity

“Movement is the great law of life” (p.241), exclaimed Mary Whitehouse (1958/1995), a pioneer in the field of dance therapy. This simple axiom, which has been a rallying call for a number of distinguished practitioners and theorists in the field of somatics, has been put forward most emphatically by Thomas Hanna (1993). In an effort to make the perennial question What is life? more concrete and approachable, Hanna

focused on the fact that life, although often inquired about as if it were an abstraction, always manifests itself through the autonomous movement of living bodies (somas). For Hanna then, one obvious way to approach the mystery of human life is to understand the ways in which human beings move.

From this radically parsimonious perspective, many of the characteristic problems plaguing contemporary society—typical forms of stress, fatigue, back pain, depression, anxiety,—are simply the result of individuals’ diminished capacity for movement. This is clearly the case for many problems generally considered “physical”, as Hanna and other somatic practitioners have demonstrated in their hands-on work with people in pain caused by distortions of the neuromuscular system. In order to understand how this “great law” of movement applies to many problems typically labeled psychological, we’ll need to consider how various forms of psychological expression—speaking, thinking, behaving, emoting, imagining, intending—manifest in the living body as some form of movement.

This equation of psychological expression with somatic movement can be explored from both third-person (scientific/objective) and first-person (somatic/phenomenological/ subjective) points of view. Hanna (1993) cites and summarizes several scientific studies investigating the relationship between thinking, considered to be as pure a psychological process as any, and motor activity. Edmund Jacobson, who developed the clinical procedure called progressive relaxation, conducted research that showed: 1) when subjects engaged in abstract thinking, speech muscles were predominantly activated, and 2) all mental activity decreased to the degree that muscle tension decreased. In other research, Smith, Brown, Toman, and Goodman found that subjects were ineffective in mentally focusing on anything while all their muscles were paralyzed (by a curare-type drug that did not cause any lapse of consciousness).

Roland Davis found that when subjects worked out multiplication problems “in their head”, the muscles of the subject’s dominant hand moved as if he or she were

writing. Working with a subject who reported auditory hallucinations, F.J. McGuigan found that, using electrodes placed about the subject's speech muscles, there was a subtle, ongoing movement in these muscles beginning precisely when the subject reported hearing the voices (as if the subject were actually speaking to himself!).

These and many other scientific studies suggest an undeniable connection between mental activity that is perceived as being "in our minds", and motor activity going on "in our bodies". Neurophysiologist Roger W. Sperry has gone as far as to conclude that the entire output of the human thinking mechanism goes into the motor system, so that when people think, they are activating motor neurons (Hanna, 1993). Hanna (1993) himself, based on his extensive knowledge and experience in such matters, arrives at the following conclusion: "thinking is movement--actual movement of the living body" (p.146).

Moshe Feldenkrais, with whom Hanna studied, liked to illustrate this point experientially by asking people to mentally count from one to ten as fast as possible and then try doubling that speed. In doing this experiment, one quickly discovers that there is a definite limit to how fast one can count "in one's head". When a person tries to exceed that limit, it becomes apparent that, in mentally counting, one is actually using subtle micromovements (usually of the muscles involved in speaking) and that one can only count as fast as one can make these movements (Hanna, 1993). This is just one example of how we can directly experience how psychological forms of expression are actually not-other than somatic movement.

Emotionality, another mode of experiencing generally considered psychological, is obviously expressed through somatic movement. As we discussed in the example earlier, crying is a particular movement pattern of the soma, as are screaming and laughing. Emotionally inhibited men like myself might be all too familiar with the emotional sensorimotor amnesia that can result from repeated "control" of emotional expression. By age 21, I had no need to willfully hold back tears in order to maintain my

strong, masculine image. The fact of the matter was that, by that time, I no longer felt sad enough in any situation to bring the act of crying into question. In the face of extreme disappointment and even severe tragedy, I could only sense enough sadness to muster up a pouting facial expression or a sulking posture.

In sensorimotor terms, by repeatedly immobilizing the particular patterns of somatic movement that constitute the act of crying, I eventually, in accordance with the way my sensorimotor system is set up, lost the ability to sense the sadness associated with the movements of crying. As Hanna noted, whenever we sense anything, what we are sensing *is* movement of some form. We often speak of being emotionally “moved” by an experience to communicate that we’re feeling or sensing some emotion. However, when one makes themselves as hard as stone through intense contractedness, one becomes to that degree “immovable” in terms of emotional experience.

Since emotions are a variety of psychological experience with such clear ties to bodily-felt sensations, it is relatively easy to understand how one’s psychological *awareness* of an emotion is really not other than one’s bodily *sense* of that emotion. In other words, the knowledge or awareness that “I am angry” is possible only to the extent that I feel or sense certain changes in my bodily experience—perhaps an increase in heart-beat, the hairs of my neck standing on end, muscle areas clenching. Likewise, the bodily movements associated with that sense can be understood as an *expression* of that sense/awareness. Pissed off, I might express myself with a frown and clenched fists; or I might be moved to scream or pound my fists on something (hopefully not *someone*). And as we seen, to suppress emotional expression is to dull our capacity to sense or to be aware of our feelings. So, at least in terms of emotionality, we can see how sensori-motor association is essentially the same thing as awareness-expression association. In order to make the leap from emotionality to psychological experience in general, however, we’ll need to look more closely at the experience of thinking.

Thus far, what has been presented is somewhat of somatic dictum that boils down to the familiar phrase “use it or lose it”. On a physical level, we see that bones become soft when not regularly used to bear weight; muscles become weak and less responsive in the face of prolonged inactivity; brain cells not regularly involved in a variety of voluntary activities will deteriorate (Hanna, 1993). As we shade into the psychological realm, we see how depths of emotion become dulled and lifeless when not expressed in some way. It is my conviction that all psychological processes—such as thinking, remembering, and imagining—as varieties of somatic experience—must be used (i.e. moved/expressed) or else be subject to similar atrophy. As Hanna states the somatic dictum: “function maintains structure” (p.39).

Far from being able to “prove” such a notion by citing studies or quoting other theories (although evidence of this type probably exists), I’ll simply appeal to the common sense and life experience of the reader. In my own experience, I can notice how phone numbers, calculus, and other unused thoughts wither way to forgetfulness. I can recall how often I repressively pushed socially unacceptable ideas and images into the murky depths of the “unconscious”. On all levels, my awareness of particular aspects of experiencing progressively diminishes when I choose (consciously or unconsciously) to inhibit expression of that awareness, when I fail to act from that awareness.

The point of all this is to support the following notion: many of the physical as well as psychological problems characteristic of contemporary society will continue to be poorly understood and ineffectively approached until the somatic foundations of human experience are taken more fully into account. This somatic/experiential perspective, which has been outlined above, is a point of view which takes into account both third-person and first-person data, and thus has much to offer the traditional paradigm of human health, which relies rather exclusively on a third-person perspective.

At the core of this somatic/experiential understanding are the somatic processes of self-movement and self-sensing. The idea here is that many of the diseases plaguing

modern people are best understood not as psychological disorders where minds are out of whack, nor as physical problems of bodies falling apart; rather, we are faced with functional disorders that are the result of people's diminished capacity to sense the state of their own somatic functioning and subsequent inability/unwillingness to move from that embodied awareness. From Thomas Hanna (1993):

In functional disorders, what is required is not the exchange of words with the 'mind', nor is it the exchange of chemicals and substances with the 'body'. The requirement is a change in the living system's awareness of its own functioning. The somatic system needs more information of itself and more efficient control. In sum, the distorted human soma needs new sensory information and new motor control." (p.83)

Part III: Somatic/experiential principles of personal transformation

From our contemporary point of view (from the vantage point of sensual alienation), it is difficult to understand our experiences of stuckness and dis-ease in ways which are not, at least to some degree, colored by dualism. Hence, it is hard to resist categorizing personal health concerns in terms of either mental/psychological problems, or physical problems. Throughout this paper, the case has been made that this contemporary view of personal health necessarily falls short of addressing the concerns of so-called normal, well-adjusted members of society, as the dis-eases that characterize so many of us are problems arising from the dualistic stance itself. From a somatic/experiential perspective, we have defined a new category of personal health concerns--functional problems--, which are not of the mind nor of the body, but rather of the unified soma. These functional disorders--which Thomas Hanna (1988) suggests account for more than half of all human ailments--demand a nondualistic approach that facilitates bodymind awareness and responsiveness.

Ken Wilber (1977) calls this bodymind integrated level of consciousness the "existential" level, and divides the approaches that facilitate realization of bodymind

awareness into two camps: the somatic-existential approaches (which approach bodymind integration from the “bodily” dimensions of sensation and movement) and the noetic-existential approaches (which approach the bodymind from the “mind” dimensions of psychological awareness and expression). Although these two broad currents contribute to a multidimensional “technology of authenticity” that seeks to authenticate the whole person, we can nonetheless see how a subtle mind-body dualism still permeates the ways in which each camp understands the transformative process of bodymind realization. Somatic learning and psychological growth implicate each other, but it’s not very clear how.

Far from being able to leap all dualism in a single theoretical bound, what I propose for the following sections is to articulate one possible set of principles which can be understood to underlie the approaches to personal transformation outlined above: both the “somatic” approaches of matching and somatic learning, and the “noetic” approaches of client-centered therapy and experiential focusing. As Johnson (1986-87) defines the term, *principles* are fundamental “sources of discovery” that “enable the inspired person continually to invent creative strategies for working with others” (p.4). After extricating these principles from the above approaches, I will suggest some ways that these same principles might be used as “sources of discovery” to be applied to our unique concerns and situations in everyday life.

Before explicitly stating these principles in a schematic way, it is important to formally introduce and unpack a pair of concepts: *intentionality* and *authentic relationship*. These notions are particularly useful in centering dialogue between multiple perspectives to personal transformation.

Intentionality

The transformation from alienation to authenticity in contemporary society, so the case has been made, rests on the cultivation of bodymind awareness. Some characteristics of this awareness that we’ve noted thus far include the felt-sense, the

felt-shift, an organic faith or trust, spontaneity, vitality, and a sense of existential meaning. Another dimension of experience that is characteristic of bodymind consciousness, as noted by theorists such as May (1969) and Wilber (1977), is *intentionality*. The notion of intentionality contributes greatly to our somatic/experiential understanding of embodiment and transformative experience—in fact, as we will discuss, personal transformation from alienation to authenticity can be understood as, and experienced in, the expression of one’s authentic intentions.

The etymology of the word intention, as explored by Rollo May (1969), reveals its experiential rootedness in the integrated bodymind. Intention, rooted in the Latin *intendere*, means a stretching toward something, as well as a turning of awareness toward an object. To “tend” refers to a *movement* toward something (i.e. to tend toward; a tendency). To “intend” is to *mean*, to have purpose; it also means “to make intense”. So, we can understand intentionality in its bodily dimensions (stretching, moving) along with its psychological dimensions (attention, awareness, meaning, purpose). From the onset of this project, the characteristic malaise of the alienated individual has been described as a lack of vitality as well as a lack of existential meaning that permeates experience. As Rollo May (1969) indicates, we can only understand these experiences in relation to, and as an expression of, intention: “Meaning has no meaning apart from intention” (p.228); “The degree of intentionality can define the aliveness [vitality] of the person” (p.243).

Experientially, an intention is a potential for movement, for self-expression, a “commitment to carry out some action” (Linden, 1988-89, p.54). Expressing an intention is a *moving* of a particular somatic process, the loosening of a particular experiential knot, the unfolding or actualization or bringing into being of a particular potentiality. Consider the following example, familiar to many of us. I wake up on my day off from work and ask myself, “what do I want to do today?”. When sincerely engaged, this seemingly trite inquiry is actually a grand opportunity to cultivate bodymind

consciousness; in fact, this is just a scaled-down version of the profound “what shall I do with my life?” dilemma. Sticking to the day-in-the-life scenario, our “what to do?” inquiry is essentially the same thing as asking “how do I wish to express myself today?”, which is the same as “what way of acting, of engaging my world of experience, of being-in-the-world, will be optimally satisfying and fulfilling?”. In terms of intentionality, we have asked ourselves “how do I intend to move today?” or “what are my intentions, right now, in this very moment?”.

There are at least two courses one can take at this point. The first is an act of dispassionate reason, a movement of awareness away from the immediacy of feelings toward a level of detached abstraction. Here I try to “figure out” what I *should* do, logically, given the so-called factual aspects of the situation. On my day off, these objective factors might include the following: the rent is due along with some other bills; I’m ten pounds heavier than I was last year at this time; and it’s my wife’s birthday. From this objective analysis of my situation, I arrive at three reasonable solutions to the “what to do?” dilemma: I can spend the afternoon going over my finances; I can go to the gym and ride the life-cycle for a few hours; or I can go out to the mall and buy my wife a birthday present. The inquiry has now become “what *should* I do with my day off?”. In the act of shifting this question, I have shifted away from a direct encounter with my authentic intentions (which requires an attentiveness to the whole of my experiencing as a bodymind) toward a stance of sensual alienation. I have shifted my awareness from the sense of the intention, which is directly felt in the immediacy of the situation, toward the set of cultural maps that I’ve been taught should govern my behavior. In doing so, I am surrendering my sensual authority. Detachedly ascertaining the probable consequences of each option, I arrive at the conclusion that what I should do, as a reasonable, good, loving husband, is head for the mall.

A second way to handle this scenario is to directly engage this sense of intention, to maintain an active awareness throughout the decision-making process of the felt-sense

associated with the “what to do today?” question. Focusing on this inarticulate sense of the situation, I might notice an uncomfortable feeling of inner conflict, manifesting in a slight sense of nausea along with a certain heaviness in my chest. As I inquire further into this sense (“what is behind these feelings?”; “what needs to happen to resolve this state of conflict?”), a variety of insights into my relationship with my wife might begin to emerge.

For instance, I may feel obligated to run out and buy her a token birthday gift, although I’m totally uninspired to do so. This leads to guilt feelings as I perceive myself as uncaring and self-centered. Opening to this “guilt-trip”, I begin to feel angry. I remember that my wife seemed similarly uninspired on my birthday, going through the motions while showing almost no genuine affection for me. This anger leads into a feeling of profound sadness as I realize that my wife and I seem to be slowly drifting apart, putting up a strong facade of happiness and contentment while each resenting the other for being apathetic. As the tears begin to flow, I realize that what I desperately want to do—right here and now—is to have a heart-to-heart talk with my wife. My most sincere intentions are to go to my wife and bare my soul to her, letting her know that it’s tearing me up inside to feel so disconnected from the person who means the world to me.

In the first scenario, I start with an intention which is unclear, and in the face of that uncertainty, I turn away from my directly felt experience in the name of propriety. The end result is another disappointing birthday for both my wife and me, my authentic intentions never given the chance to form into authentic self-expression. In the second case, however, a sustained, open attentiveness to the intention—in all its uneasiness and uncertainty—opened the doors to a possible life-changing encounter between us.

So, an intention is a potential for movement, for action, for self-expression, and we can only consciously express our intentions in a given situation, i.e. respond authentically in given situation, to the degree that we sense (or know, or are aware of) what those intentions are—which requires an active, focused, feelingful awareness of

experiencing. As Greene (1997) summarizes a somatic/experiential perspective of intentionality, “to function with focused, active awareness is to function with intent” (p.53). She goes on, drawing from Thomas Hanna:

The human constitutes an ongoing process of intentions: thoughts, actions, ideas, desires, feelings, goals, and beliefs constantly emanate from the soma. The soma propels itself forward in the world by the energy of its own intent. Because the dominant paradigm privileges third-person consciousness with its external focus, most of us are unaware of the potency of our own intent. First-person consciousness is the domain of intent. In affirming the priority of first-person experience, we can actualize the immense power of our own volition. (p. 53)

Authentic relationship

In Part I, we discussed how sensual alienation manifests on multiple levels of experience, distorting and deadening the quality of our interpersonal relations, our relations with the earthly environment, and our self-relatedness. This relational understanding, which goes beyond the conventional conception of relationships as primarily interpersonal, is rooted in the existential-phenomenological tradition of inquiry. As Rollo May (1969) summarizes this perspective, an individual’s world of experience or *being-in-the-world* is understood as unfolding on three basic, interpenetrating levels: an intra-personal context (what existentialists termed the *eigenwelt*); an interpersonal context (the *mitwelt*); and the *umwelt*, meaning an individual’s relationship to the extra-personal environment.

Since we understand (following Merleau-Ponty) that people experience all situations with, through, and as living bodies, a diminished awareness or sensitivity to this bodily-felt level of being (a dulling of one’s somatic perception) will manifest in some sense of alienation in all three modes of being-in the-world. On an inter-personal level, I described this dissociated mode of relating as “inauthentic”, as so many inter-personal exchanges considered normal in modern society spring more from the

implicit rules of social etiquette than from each person's embodied experience of the other in the moment. The latter, embodied mode of relating—as described in the example of the feelingful exchanges between my partner and I—is *authentic*, in that self-expression springs from one's own, directly felt experience of the interpersonal situation. Authentic relationship is an act of sensual authority, which is precisely what is obscured through the process of indoctrination into contemporary society.

This notion of authentic relationship fits nicely when applied to the intra- and extra-personal contexts of relating as well. For instance, when one's bodily movements flow freely and spontaneously from a sensually-grounded awareness, one can be said to be in authentic relationship with one's bodily world. As I danced alone in my living room today, my movements felt wonderfully authentic, they flowed into being from a place that was my own, the product of a sensual authority rarely accessed when I dance. Normally, I inhibit my most authentic intentions to move in favor of what I've been taught is the "right" way to dance—the ways of moving that are considered "cool" or masculine. Most of time, I'm simply too afraid to *really* (i.e. authentically) let go while dancing, even while alone, for fear that my dancing won't be any "good". People (including me) might think I'm goofy, or wimpy, or simply a "bad" dancer—all of which, as negative judgments of my authentic expression, lead to hurt feelings and a stance of holding back.

So, here we see how an increase in the degree of sensually-grounded expression, from both an intra-personal as well as an interpersonal perspective, is a movement from inauthentic to authentic relationship. In all somatic practices, by paying active attention to particular aspects of our bodily being that have been previously ignored, we begin to authenticate our relationship to those aspects, appropriating new somatic functions into our conscious repertoire. Likewise, as we noted earlier, the sensual alienation that is so characteristic of contemporary society has clearly contributed to humanity's callous attitude toward the sensuous, natural world that supports our precarious existence. Our

relationship to the surrounding biosphere is thereby authentic, healthy, and fulfilling only to the extent that our actions are informed by an awareness grounded in our sensual reciprocity with nature. From David Abram (1996):

It may be that the new “environmental ethic” toward which so many environmental philosophers aspire—an ethic that would lead us to respect and heed not only the lives of our fellow humans but also the life and well-being of the rest of nature—will come into existence not primarily through the logical elucidation of new philosophical principles and legislative strictures, but through a renewed attentiveness to this perceptual dimension that underlies all our logics, through a rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us. (p.69)

Authentic relationship—whether with one’s body, another person, the earthly environment, or any other qualitative label we assign to some distinct aspect of our experience—is about expressing one’s most genuine *intentions* in the context of that relationship. We suffer unnecessarily because we fail to authentically express ourselves in the world. Inauthentic relationship is only possible insofar as we continually inhibit our authentic responses to situations—that is, as we consciously or unconsciously inhibit the specific patterns of movement that constitute a particular act of self-expression. The ongoing maintenance of this “holding ourselves back” is what is discovered in various somatic/experiential techniques. We limit the possible ways our somas can move by contracting particular motor areas. Through continual contraction of whatever motor areas are involved in the unacceptable authentic response, we effectively immobilize our intentions to act in a particular way.

From our understanding of the somatic process of sensorimotor amnesia, we can see that a lack of movement in a particular pattern of motor neurons will translate to a decreased ability to sense, i.e. to be aware of the original intention as well as the decreased ability to be aware of the inhibiting process. “Do what you love to do and

you'll find happiness" is how the saying goes. The problem is that at some point, out of fear, we held back authentic expression by immobilizing the somatic pattern of movement that would constitute that act of expression. In the face of repeated immobilizations, we've lost the awareness that we're holding ourselves back, and thereby become insensitive to our authentic intentions. After too many times preventing ourselves (or being prevented by those with power over us) from responding to situations authentically, we no longer have any sense, any awareness of what we love, of what we want to do in life. Through a technology of alienation, we have been conditioned to lose touch with the sense of our authentic intentions, and we have been convinced that it is best to regard what little sense we do have as an unreliable, dubious source of responsiveness.

The crux of the matter is thus: personal transformation *is* the *movement* that springs from authentic relationship, from embodied encounter. Transformation *is* the movement from alienation to authenticity; the movement toward progressively deeper and expanded levels of awareness and authentic expression. On the level of sensorimotor functioning we understand this transformation as the movement from sensorimotor amnesia to somatic learning. From a psychological perspective this transformation is the movement from psychological dis-ease to psychological growth and self-actualization. In terms of ecology we're talking about the movement from ecological crisis to ecological balance in relation to the human species. Spiritual seekers might call it the movement from suffering to inner harmony and peace. In all contexts, the same principles can be applied, and these principles can be understood to underlie a wide range of somatic/experiential practices designed to facilitate personal transformation, each understood in terms of particular contexts of relationship. These principles can be summed up as follows:

Approaches to personal transformation, as endeavors that facilitate the movement from an alienated to an authentic mode of relatedness, are effective to the degree that

each 1) fosters and/or supports the refinement of an individual's sensitivity—that is, one's awareness of the sensual immediacy of a situation; and 2) provides a context where a person is encouraged to freely act and express from that feelingful awareness. In relational terms, personal transformation is experienced in the discovery and expression of one's most genuine intentions in a particular context of relationship.

Sensitivity as an active awareness

An important thing to keep in mind is that, from the perspective of bodymind integrated consciousness, human beings are understood “not just to know, but to do” (Hanna, in Greene, 1997, p.51). Because of the sensorimotor “looping” that characterizes our embodied existence, awareness and expression (a.k.a. knowledge-action or sensing-moving) go hand-in hand with each other. As Hanna (in Greene, 1997) puts it: “any and all experiences affect the entire soma. To each bite of experience the soma responds *in toto* sensorily and motorically” (p.51). Thus, we can describe bodymind awareness as an *active* awareness. To refine one's sensitivity is to expand one's range of responsiveness, and to respond in a new way is to further refine one's sensitivity.

Because of this unity of knowing and doing on the level of bodymind, the transformation from alienation to authenticity can be approached in different ways or on different levels. As we have discussed, an inauthentic mode of relating is the result of habitual patterns of holding back expression. In this sense, somatic/experiential practices are effective to the degree that they can experientially interrupt a habitual pattern, such that “what was habitually unconscious, patterned, and rigid may be made conscious by means of the new sensory information gained by the interruption” (Greene, 1997, 52).

Some practices (like matching and focusing) emphasize an inward focusing of attention toward the nuances of a habitual holding pattern, such that we begin (through the sensorimotor loop) to “match” the ongoing process of contraction and inhibition, bringing more and more of it under conscious control. To the extent we have the sense,

the awareness that “I am actively holding myself back”, to that extent we can choose another course of action. Other practices (like functional integration) might emphasize an expansion of one’s repertoire for movement, encouraging people to move in unfamiliar ways in order to generate new sensory experience that can, in turn, disrupt an involuntary holding pattern (Greene, 1997).

Understanding this active nature of awareness, we can note one more implication—that the refinement of sensitivity is a process of attending to further and further *details* or *nuances* of some aspect of our experiencing and subsequently expressing ourselves in more and more refined and subtle ways. In many somatic education practices, this process is so straightforward it’s barely noticeable. As I attend to the subtle nuances of how I’m habitually slumped over in my chair, I’ll quite naturally begin to shift into an increasingly optimal position. As we shade into the realm of psychological experience, however, expressing oneself from the sensual details of a situation becomes an important conscious act that can safeguard against drifting away into abstractions about experience.

In all verbal endeavors, it’s all too easy to get wrapped up in pre-existing thought patterns and lose touch with the felt-immediacy of a particular concern. Whether in a therapy session or while discussing some issue with a friend, one can get “back in touch” by describing further details of the feelingful aspects of one’s experiencing. Consider experiential focusing. One starts by getting a felt-sense of some issue that seems to be unresolved or in some way interferes with one’s health and happiness. The felt-sense could be, “I feel hurt that my girlfriend kissed another guy”. Here the process of authentic relationship is already underway, in that the person has shifted their attention toward a particular aspect of their feelingful experiencing (their sense of hurt). This is a shift toward an embodied encounter with the hurt, in that the sense of the hurt is “touched into” on a visceral level (as opposed to being avoided through intellectualization “about” the hurt).

The power and effectiveness of the focusing technique lies in the addition of the next “step”, which is a describing (a verbal expression) of the details and nuance of the sense of hurt. Without this emphasis on a continual attending and describing of these directly sensed nuances, the process can all too easily slide into a distancing stance of intellectualizing, which leaves the existing stuckness and intentions unmoved (and thus still serving as a block to any palpable change in one’s way of being). The facilitator in the focusing process will ask the focuser to move deeper into the sense of hurt by describing the details: “what kind of hurt?”, “what does the hurt feel like specifically?”, “where in your body does it hurt the most?” In my own experience with the focusing process, I can attest to the claim that this dialectic of attention to and expression of the felt sense, in the fullness of its directly-felt detail, never fails to move me in the direction of greater openness, vitality, and freshness of experience.

So, another version of the somatic/experiential principles can be stated as follows: The shift from alienated, inauthentic relating toward embodied, authentic encounter can be facilitated by 1) attending to the details, to the nuances of the other in a particular relational context, and 2) allowing whatever intentions emerge from that attentive focus to move, to unfold through some form of self-expression. These principles also make sense in terms of somatic, neuromuscular education, as Thomas Hanna describes the process.

As an example, take the client who comes in complaining of pain in the right side of his neck. The somatic practitioner might help a person identify a particular amnesic area of the soma by directing that person’s attention to some sign of somatic distortion, like the fact that their right shoulder rests considerably lower than their left one. The practitioner might explain to this person that, based on the tonus of the right lower back muscles, the lowered shoulder is being literally pulled down by the contraction of these back muscles, causing the neck to stretch accordingly. Typically, the client is not volitionally maintaining these contractions (i.e. the client can’t consciously move those

muscles), so the somatic practitioner will begin by having the client attend to whatever sense, however dull, of the contracted areas is available. In addition to simply having the client focus awareness on the lower right back area, the practitioner can move the amnesic area for the client, through gentle, hands on manipulation of the clients body, thereby setting the sensorimotor feedback loop in motion, leading to increased sensory awareness of the immobilized area. As the client gains an increased capacity to sense the state of contractedness, he or she can begin to “match” it, can begin to recover the sense of “I am contracting these muscles”. This increased awareness leads to further possibilities for movement which, when expressed, lead to more awareness until, as Hanna (in Johnson, 1995) says, the amnesic area is brought “back into the range of volitional control: the unknown becomes known and the forgotten becomes relearned” (p. 350). The person is now able to stop contracting his back, the shoulder moves back into its natural position, the neck muscles are no longer stretched and strained, and the pain goes away.

The atmosphere of acceptance: Unconditional positive regard for self-expression

Whereas the somatic/experiential principle of sensitivity has been extensively covered from multiple points of view throughout this inquiry, the second principle—the atmosphere of acceptance—has only been explicitly discussed in the context of person-centered therapy. It’s important here to briefly consider Rogers’ notion of “unconditional positive regard” in its fuller implications.

As we mentioned earlier, Rogers (1980) considered it a basic precondition of any growth-promoting situation that an individual’s self-expressions be met with an attitude of acceptance or caring. Rogers supported this assertion with a lifetime of experience and research in a wide variety of inter-personal settings. Acknowledging psychological expression as a manifestation of somatic movement, we can understand how this attitude of acceptance stands as an equally critical factor in somatic transformative practices.

Simply put, the technology of alienation accomplishes its anti-sensual agenda

primarily through an attitude of *conditional* positive regard—that is to say, those forms of movement that support the status quo are met with acceptance, while those forms that do not are met with rejection, ridicule, or punishment. Whereas subtle changes in movement patterns, such as the gradual relaxing of tense muscles, will normally flow effortlessly from a refinement of sensitivity, as soon as one's intentions to move implicate the status quo in some way, the cycle of fear and contractive inhibition that prevented free movement in the first place can kick back into gear.

For instance, I might decide to participate in a class exercise where the goal is to move freely about the room from whatever spontaneous impulses arise. After getting into the groove for a while, I might notice the impulse to move my pelvis in a sexually-suggestive manner. At this point, I would very likely hold back this intention to move, fearing that my classmates might judge me in some way for expressing it.

Of course, it's not really necessary for personal transformation that our self-expressions are received into welcoming arms—but it sure helps. When it comes down to the nitty-gritty, there's no substitute for courage. Some of the most profound experiences of personal growth and healing can come when one is able to provide one's own atmosphere of “unconditional positive regard”, when one decides to express oneself in the face of likely resistance, despite the fears. After all, if we all held our breath waiting for the perfectly safe environment to be ourselves, we'd spend our whole lives turning blue and passing out.

Thus, to authentically relate requires at least two things: sensitivity and courage. Sensitivity so as to make contact with one's deepest intentions, and courage to act on them, to live from them when such authentic expressions may be met with fear and rejection.

Somatic/experiential principles as generative

The pioneers in the fields of both somatics and experientially-oriented therapy were able to generate powerful techniques by applying the basic principles of sensitive

inquiry to their unique situations. These techniques, refined through years of practice, stand as invaluable resources for individuals struggling to recover their sensual authority amidst active resistance. However, as Johnson (1986-87) has pointed out, an over-reliance on specific techniques can reign the freedom to openly explore:

Learning techniques requires initiation, repetition, and obedience to those considered to be experts in applying the techniques. Principles unleash ingenuity; they evoke my impulses to find out about life and to organize the results of my research into my unique ways of perceiving the world. (...) An emphasis on technique creates a society of disciples and masters; principles generate communities of explorers. (7)

As explorers become more and more acquainted with basic principles of transformation, we are increasingly able to invent and re-invent strategies to work with the unique and ever-changing challenges we face in our lives. To illustrate the generative nature of the somatic/experiential principles, we can look back at some of the examples from my own experience. For instance, I mentioned that my partner and I continually experiment with the basic principles of authentic relating in an effort to maintain the sense of loving connection that so enriches our lives. Whenever a sense of distance and disconnection creeps over us for too long, one or both of us will attend to the precise way that sense manifests in our bodies, making every effort to ground our discussion in the felt immediacy of the situation. Although this way of being together is not always easy, our love continues to grow to depths I never thought possible.

We can also recall how I approached my singing troubles with these principles in mind. I love to strum my guitar and sing, but rarely can I spontaneously let go and express myself freely. I used to feel quite discouraged when I sounded “off” and out of tune, judging my singing as bad and hoping for better luck next time. I’ve since discovered that by refining my sensitivity through an active awareness of muscle tension and musical tone, I can learn to transform an “off” day into a great day, sometimes in a

matter of minutes. My days on the job also present a variety of opportunities for me to experiment with these principles.

At work, I spend extended periods of time in a residential setting hanging out with people labeled “mentally ill”. Many of these folks have endured and often continually endure tremendous suffering, and tend to communicate their unique experiences in ways considered bizarre and incoherent from the perspective of normality. Thus, it is not an option for me to rely on familiar patterns of relationship while engaging with these friends of mine. Another option I’ve chosen not to take, is to dismiss their unusual ways of being-in-the-world as expressions of “craziness” in need of normalization. Instead, I strive to embody the basic principles of authentic relating in several ways.

I try to listen with care and interest to what residents say, whether or not I can rationally follow the discussion, letting them know when I’m confused or uncomfortable with something said or done. I also pay special attention to the pre-verbal space that we share, noticing how their proximity, posture, facial expressions, and gestures affect me, and vice versa. I strive to be as genuine as I can be, letting people know when I’m stressed out or feel like I need time alone. I try to show a willingness to empathically “hang out” with people as they take risks in sharing their private world with me, checking my tendencies to automatically convert their communications into the terms of my own “reality”. In general, I simply strive to embody an attitude of care and respect toward each resident, honoring their ways of being as expressions of their unique humanness. In two years of being together in this way, a mutual trust and affection has steadily grown between us, enriching all of our lives with many touching experiences and good times.

As a final example of how I’ve tried to work with these somatic/experiential principles in my daily life, I need look no further than the here-and-now writing of this thesis. It did occur to me from the get-go that writing about sensually-grounded expression was itself an opportunity to express myself in a sensually grounded way,

although I must admit that I have not always been able to make the most of this opportunity. In fact, this particular challenge has been down-right miserable at times.

First of all, my perception of academic guidelines and standards for thesis work has been that they hardly make for an atmosphere of “unconditional positive regard”. Thus, I have found it very difficult to trust that my most heart-felt expressions wouldn’t be harshly criticized or rejected. Secondly, academic writing, and so much of what it traditionally involves (thinking, reading, arguing, convincing), has always been such a “heady” endeavor for me that maintaining even a minimal degree of sensual-groundedness often seemed next-to-impossible. Nonetheless, I did experiment with the somatic/experiential principles in the following ways—with limited success.

I tried to begin a long day of reading and writing with at least twenty minutes of silent meditation, in an effort to contact my most genuine intentions regarding the project at hand. This led to some inspired passages. Also, when I would feel particularly stuck or disconnected while typing, I would often try some combination of focusing and matching in an effort to refine my awareness of just how the creative block was manifesting in my body. Right now, for example, I can sense my heart beating fairly rapidly, a growing tension in my back and neck, and a feeling of diffuse anxiety. As aspects of this felt-sense become clearer, I’m becoming keenly aware of how anxious I am to finish this paper and move on to some less purposeful activities. Although this focusing-while-writing led to some breakthrough insights of a topical variety, more often than not I simply became acutely aware of how I was exhausting myself to meet deadlines and expectations.

In any event, it’s clear that the basic somatic/experiential principles can be drawn upon to creatively approach any number of situations in which one experiences a degree of sensual alienation.

The transformative power of consensus

The somatic/experiential principles described above have profound implications for personal transformation on an individual level, giving rise to the various health promoting methods and techniques discussed throughout. We have also seen how the refining of sensitivity is a “generative principle”, a source of discovery that can be drawn upon to continually create situation-specific strategies to promote growth and health in our unique lives. Individual work can only carry us so far, however.

Throughout the course of human history, transformation on a large scale has found support when, and only when, a “critical mass” of individuals worked together from a place of *consensus*--an especially appropriate term meaning “sense with” or “a feeling or perceiving together”. As Johnson (1992) points out:

The more isolated a person is, the more impoverished will be the amount of sensual experience he or she has available for making decisions. (...) To make significant alterations in the social molds that shape our perceptions--schools, churches, political organizations, businesses--we must work together effectively through a consensus about what to do. (p.175)

As long as the tradition of mind-body dualism remains encrusted into our culture’s most influential institutions, a collective shift in consciousness from alienation to authenticity will be an uphill battle. As a society, our children continue to helplessly give up their sensual authority as they are spoon-fed into a dependency on the opinions of various experts. Those rare adults who find the courage and loving support necessary to live in more authentic ways, often must struggle their entire lives--sometimes at great personal expense--to meet their basic needs in a society where traditional forms (career options, social mores) are no longer adequate for genuine self-expression.

However, the winds of change do seem to be blowing. As hopeful optimists, we can find evidence that a new consensus is taking shape in the post-modern world, a consensus that supports and prizes the somatic/experiential attitude. To illustrate the

implications such a shift in perspective can have—and to some degree is having—at the societal level, we can look at some signs of change in two institutions which together epitomize the tradition of mind-body dualism: medicine and education. Health care professionals are our culture’s authorities in regard to the “body”, while schools at all levels seek to shape our “minds” in accordance with predominant cultural values.

The recent contributions of Hans Selye, described by Tom Hanna (1988) as “one of the prime figures in twentieth century medical research” (p.45), have greatly expanded the scope of medical science. Selye formulated the well known concept of “stress”, and his years of research led to a recognition in the medical field that there are a category of health problems that can be described as “diseases of adaptation”, what we have been calling functional disorders. From this point of view, psychological events can be just as important as physiological events in the maintenance of personal health. The inclusion of this somatic dimension to medicine can also be seen in the swirl of research interest that surrounds the so-called “placebo effect” as well as the technique of biofeedback.

However, while the inclusion of somatic experience into the health-care discussion promises to be a radical advance in the field of medicine, expanding the scope of research within existing institutions does not involve a radical challenge to the exclusive authority of such institutions. Don Johnson (1992) cites the Boston Women’s Health Collective as a powerful example of a group of people coming together to challenge the status quo system of health care and, by working toward true consensus, reclaiming a shared sensual authority.

By collecting and evaluating medical information amongst themselves, consulting with friends in the medical profession, and sharing their own personal experiences of their bodies, a group of fourteen women were able to compile an account of their collective bodily wisdom in a women’s health care guide called, Our Bodies, Ourselves (1979). The following excerpt, quoted by Johnson (1992), dramatically illustrates the power of con-sensual personal transformation:

For some of us it was the first time we had looked critically, and with strength, at the existing institutions serving us. The experience of learning just how little control we had over our lives and bodies, the coming together out of isolation to learn from each other in order to define what we needed, and the experience of supporting one another in demanding the changes that grew out of our developing critique—all were crucial and formative political experiences for us. We have felt our potential power as a force for political and social change... For us, body education is core education. Our bodies are the physical basis from which we move out into the world; ignorance, uncertainty—even, at worst, shame—about our physical selves create in us an alienation from ourselves that keeps us from being the whole people that we could be. (p.185)

As the cultural institution most explicitly concerned with shaping the lives of young people, the educational system is in a powerful position to greatly affect change on a societal scale. Unfortunately, the defining attitudes of conventional schools have been such that sensual alienation is part and parcel of the educational process. Carl Rogers (1980) describes some of this traditional attitudes as follows: 1) the teachers are the possessors of knowledge, the students the expected recipients; 2) the lecture and exam format is the favored method of instruction, wherein interest is limited to student's conceptual capacities; 3) control is always exercised downward—teachers have the power while students obey; 4) the authority figure (instructor) is the central figure in the educational process; 5) trust is minimal (teachers assume students are too irresponsible to be trusted, while students often see teachers as “the enemy”); 6) students are governed by fear tactics; 7) the principles of democracy are all but absent; and 8) whole-person learning is eschewed—intellects are welcomed while feelings are checked at the door.

Rogers was a pioneer in lobbying for an alternative set of attitudes toward the educational process, one that embraces a somatic/experiential perspective. Rogers argued that if educational facilitators were to embody the attitudes of genuineness,

acceptance and respect for each individual's self-expressions, and empathic interest in the students' private worlds (discussed earlier as the necessary conditions of growth-promoting interpersonal relationships), then a revolution in our educational system would take place. Elements of this student-centered education include:

1) responsibility for the learning process is shared by teachers and students (and to some extent parents and administrators); 2) students are active participants in developing their own program of learning according to their unique experiences and interests, while facilitators provide resources and guidance based on their own experiences and interests; 3) process is emphasized over content (the point of courses is not to learn everything one should know about a particular subject, but rather to learn *how to learn* what one wants to know); 5) self-discipline replaces external discipline; and 6) students are active participants in the evaluation process (Rogers, 1980).

Rogers's theories inspired a significant amount of research (detailed in Rogers, 1980), showing that when facilitators held student-centered attitudes, students tended to make positive gains on a number of different scales including: reading achievement, GPA, cognitive growth, creativity, social assertiveness, and self-confidence. Students learning in this student-centered environment also have been shown to exhibit fewer discipline problems compared to other groups, and well as higher rate of attendance.

Some twenty years after much of the initial research was published, today we see schools based on student-centered attitudes cropping up with increasing frequency. As the traditional model of education continues to reveal itself as inadequate for serving the changing needs of young people, perhaps educators will soon reach a consensus to move ahead more boldly with radical reformations that embrace the somatic/experiential attitudes—attitudes that could “introduce such a ferment into schools of education that it would initiate a revolution” (Rogers, 1980, p.281).

As individuals struggling to move from alienation to authenticity in their own lives continue to create networks and communities that embrace the somatic/experiential

principles of personal transformation, a collective pool of resources and shared experiences might grow into a powerful new consensus about how to most effectively face the challenges of the post-modern age. The collective cultivation of an integrated bodymind consciousness, mythologically described as the “sacred marriage of god and goddess” (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p.664), has been hailed by Richard Tarnas (1991) as the “great challenge of our time” and an “evolutionary imperative” (p.444). Likewise, Wilber (1995) describes this integration of consciousness as marking “the next major stage of leading-edge global transformation” (p.260).

Looks like it’s up to you and me.

Epilogue

Sometimes life is extraordinary. Why not right here and now? Every moment is an opportunity to be more fully ourselves. What could be more simple, and yet...

In a sense, this thesis is the story of my life. Of course, I wouldn’t read it to a child at bedtime, although phrases like “sensual alienation” and “somatic/experiential principles” would no doubt put any kid to sleep in a hurry. If I were to explain it to a child, I’d say it’s the story of a boy who lost his playfulness and would like very much to get it back.

The healing that is possible as I come to understand this story as my own depends, of course, on my willingness to live it out. As I come to realize the extent to which I’ve been living out other stories instead of my own--stories written by others, with boring plots and predictably tragic endings--I am confronted with a choice: I can continue to deny my playful nature or I can honor that part of myself by bringing it out into my world when it is called upon. There have been so many moments in my life when, faced with this choice, I’ve tied myself in knots in response to fear. Opening to these moments in their sensual fullness is a way for me to loosen those knots and bring all such moments into this moment. Into this present moment when I can offer the resources of my adult maturity to that frightened, confused child who didn’t think it was okay to play anymore.

And by sharing the details of my story with others, I can draw upon a still deeper source of healing, as I touch into the places that threaten to overwhelm both adult and child in me.

But even the deepest of healing can not spare me from the fear that will come with the next big moment of choice. Healing the broken leg of a mountain-climber is essential, but only so that he or she may rise again on two feet to face the mountain. The mountain will still be there, with all its treacherous cliffs and rock slides and high winds threatening to knock the climber down and break his or her leg once more. Or maybe even worse. And yet, the mountain is so very beautiful. For the mountain-climber, not to climb is not to live. For the player, not to play is not to live.

And for me—a person who is part-player—, not to play is not to live fully. As I come to heal and grow through the knowing and sharing of my never-ending story, I can only hope that within this process I can discover the courage to play, the courage to be myself.

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