

On Somatic Ontologies of Human Nature and Wellbeing and RePairing Human-Nature Condition in Movement

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Introduction

With Human Nature being standardly defined as ways of thinking, feeling and acting, the contemporary discourse on the topic reveals a primary emphasis on thinking, i.e. mental processes as the essence of being human. This observed prioritisation of cognitive activity over the lived experience, and which Merleau-Ponty calls 'disembodied scientification' (Merleau-Ponty and Edie, 1964) creates and re-enforces the commonly visible boundaries between the human and the natural world(s).

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|----------------|----------------|
| Human thinking | Nature feeling |
| psyche matter | body intuitive |
| mind rational | other self |

Objectives

In this practice as research project, guided by the living processes of somatic movement engagements, where somatic means acting from the body 'as perceived from within', and which emphasises our inborn ability for internal perception, I propose to bring the role of feeling alongside the thinking processes and engage in more embodied ways of reflecting upon human nature in a wider than anthropocentric, i.e. more-than-human world. I propose to pursue a more personal perspective on the subject matter grounded in and informed by movement experience per se and seek new models for everyday mindful practices that spring from somatic education and which can support holistic re-connection with the natural self as well as the critically developed ecological thinking.

The connective model of the exegesis, a 'communicative artefact' (Ings, 2014) attempted in this project, should provide a proper look, both, at the contextualising theory and the explanatory descriptions of the creative processes of practice.

Research Questions

As movement practice-based project, the objectives of the research are both practical and theoretical.

- Attending to the practical relevance of the research, the questions asked are:
- ➔ What happens to perception of our nature when we engage with feeling it more instead of thinking about it?
 - ➔ How can somatic experience help in bringing up, embodying and comprehending the relationship between a human and nature, and what effect can it have on overall wellbeing?
- Attending to the theoretical dimensions of the research, the main question is:
- ➔ How can somatic work as qualitative method add to current developments within eco-phenomenology?

Methods

This experiential journey of deep and responsive listening has been shaping itself through both indoor and outdoor movement sessions and building its substance through practices of self-inquiry in various expressive arts formats. It has been conducted on multiple locations throughout Scottish landscape and performed individually, by the lead researcher, as well as with a group of invited practitioners as project's co-researchers. Its methodological outset is to explore pathways for connections between phenomenology and eco-psychology and to bring to forth the intrinsic value of somatic practice as the integrative, physical, sensuous and the imaginative experience of the self as well as a valid, intuitive and reflexive inquiry.

Formats of data collected:

- Personal journals (written)
- Voicing movement recordings (audio)
- Expressive artwork (drawings, paintings, sculptures)
- Filmed movement sessions (video)



Key Terms:

somatic sensitivity; kinaesthetic awareness; intuition; reflexivity

Practice

- ➔ indoor/outdoor movement sessions, individual practice
- ➔ indoor/outdoor movement sessions with co-researchers



Approaches to Analysis

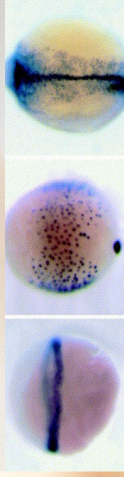


- Critical reflection from the perspective of a practitioner-researcher
- Discursive exegesis attempted in a form of a dialogic engagement between complementing theory and praxis itself
- Examples of practice submitted as substantial evidence of research inquiry woven into the analysis
- Thematic rearrangement of otherwise chronologically documented material
- Clear positioning of the praxis in a lineage of similar practices
- Rigorous referencing of the process (multi-modal documentation)
- Rigorous referencing of specific insights to broader contemporary debate
- Peer debriefing (collaborative critical reflection)

Preliminary Analysis

Somatic experience of human nature points to the depths of ongoing co-presence, co-creation and co-being with the natural world sensed as not separate from the self, thus phenomenologically described as self/world. The constant movement, as discovered in this research, reveals itself in most relational dynamics guided by 'moving towards' and 'moving away from' patterns.

As experienced on cellular level, with reference to somatic anatomy practices, movement data emerging from the research corresponds to three themes analogous to primal relationships observed in the developing embryo's primary tissue layers of ectoderm, mesoderm and endoderm.



Somatic Practice-based Data Emerging Themes:

- Sensual Presence - Relating with S;spacing
- Experiential Openness - Relating with Animating
- Insightful Intuiting - Relating with Deepening

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