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Other People's Movements: Ethnologic Perspectives on Motoric Armouring in Body Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores the body as subjectivity, dialectically constructed and influenced by its cultural, ethnological, and political history. It introduces the concept of uber-bodyness, a cultural internalised ideal of a body, with which we are in constant dialogue. The paper examines the body, as well as body-to-body communication as processes that should not be reduced to verbal exchange alone but merit a separate, unmediated, somatic language. When working with clients we therefore seek not only to identify presenting (and absent) self-states, but also to discern which bodies are present in the clinic. The paper offers a third approach to looking at and working with movements in psychotherapy, an approach that derives from relational body psychotherapy. On the one hand, Dance Movement Therapy explores movements as expressive material, which is analysable and interpretable; on the other hand, bodywork disciplines, such as Yoga and Pilates, encourage us to sense our body and find rest within it. This paper examines movements as expressing the body as subjectivity, not necessarily expressing the mind. A case study illustrates the extraction of ethnological, gender, and class aspects as these manifest in the body and its movements. The paper further offers some relational techniques to work with such movements as part of an analytic therapy, whereby the language of the body is welcomed as an irreducible agent. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: relationality; movement; uber-bodyness; motoric-armour; body-armour

BOILING POTS IN BEER SHEVA

It's the 1980s in Beer Sheva, Israel. Frying can be smelled from early in the morning. These are real frying smells, not those superficial, cauliflower-marinated-with-olive-oil-and-sea-salt casually sent into the oven. No; the food here has depth. The sauce has a base and it's saturated with oil, to soothe and stroke. Later come the spices. These are the spine, they set the direction of the dish. The dish is dipping in its sauce, making its mind how much to absorb. It does not really have a choice, yet it doesn't know it yet. There will come a moment when the dish will surrender. The fumes of the sauce will close down on it, and it will helplessly drown in them. The dish will never know when it will soften into the sauce, melt therein, surrender, yet it is but a matter of time. In

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the end it will surrender. Then, the finale, sugar. A little bit of sugar. To dissolve inside with its granules, to open up appetite. People's appetite needs opening up, so I was told; then they will come on their own.

UBER-METAPHORS AND UBER-BODYNESS

Beer Sheva is a city in southern Israel. Like many other southern cities, it has a life of its own that is unlike the life in the central, modern parts of Israel. Life in the south is sleepy, somewhat arrested. Nonetheless, it has its own pulse.

In Beer Sheva in the 1980s external markers have great power. Some symbols allow you to invent yourself afresh within them. Women, for example, straighten their hair. This is a clear mark of European beauty: classic feminine beauty. Curly hair is primitive, unkempt, untamed. North African Jews, those who came from hot and exotic countries to Israel hasten to blur the signs. Why? Is it only about the Israeli culture, which advocates a melting pot of cultures on the one hand, yet creates ethnical segregation on the other? Could it touch on a deeper, more archaic archetype where the unkempt hair testifies of the primal nature of the woman? (Butler, 1990; Cixous & Clement, 1986; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b).

I look at my curly-haired daughter, who ceaselessly watches Disney films. The women there are always slim, most of them with straight hair. In the only film where the heroine is curly – Merida in *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), her luscious red hair is uncontrolled, implicating her riotous predicament. Is Merida's destiny dictated by the shape of her hair? Can her environment determine her identity because of her hair? Could Merida herself be influenced by archetypes, by the cultural attitudes to those archetypes, thus stirring her life accordingly? (Cixous & Jenson, 1991). "Mummy", my daughter tells me, "princesses don't have curly hair. I shall never be a princess". Is a princess-esque character always straight-haired? Whether it is or not, could one's bodyness direct one's life?

In Israel, we clearly get excited by a light eye-colour in babies, or particularly graceful movements in a girl. A man's voice is an important factor when first introducing himself on the phone. Nonetheless, I was shaken by the curly-hair episode: What type of bodyness is internalised so deep within us, unconsciously, as deserving or undeserving – and what if it is influenced by more than bodily markers? What if it is deduced from gestures, movements, shapes, voices? (Ensler, 2001, 2004). Perhaps it is not only a baby who lives in an essentially floating way, within scattered Beta fragments? (Bion, 1962). Perhaps we too move within disintegrated parts, where our own swamps, our own little traumas, hold a firm grip on us via the body?

I propose that at the heart of our relating to another lays an uber-bodyness. This uber-bodyness is not necessarily universal, rather it relates to the peer group to which we wish to belong. In order to belong to this group, the person must adapt to this group's markers. Moreover, he or she needs to identify the group-bodyness, and adjust his or her body to it, possibly even contributing new bodily characteristics to it. The uber-body is a developing, changing, and dynamic body. It is dialectic: setting a culture, but also requiring updating (Irigaray, 1985a; Orbach, 1978; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2015).

Since this uber-body is not universal, different groups may set different rules concerning its presentation. These rules need to cohesively integrate with internal guidelines, such as morals, as well as with external ones. What happens when we abandon old rules and adopt new ones?

doi: 10.1002/ppi

How do we internalise this uber-body? The uber-bodyness pulsates as a living image within us (Klein, 1929), influences my dialogue with another and the way I perceive the world. I act from my body, but also from the internalised images I formed of this body and their expression in the world and within another.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that the basic linguistic metaphors have a physical basis. Mostly, abstract notions are metaphors rooted in our sensorimotor capacities. These are metaphors that associate heat with love, heaviness with importance, hard with difficulty and so forth. The body and our sensory experience serve as the basic substrata for metaphoric structures. We cannot attribute meaning to concepts without bodily experiences (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

The majority of metaphors we use stem from meta-metaphors, or uber-metaphors. For Lakoff and Johnson (1999), those uber-metaphors create analogies between the abstract and the concrete, thus making the abstract more accessible. Metaphors exist beyond language, though. We think and understand a large part of our existence through metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson claimed that our bodies not only dictate *how* we think but also *what* we think. Our thinking is defined (and limited) by our somatic capacities and the relationship between our body and our surrounding (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

UBER-BODYNESS AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

While Lakoff and Johnson (1999) spoke of metaphors deduced from the body, I want to follow Merleau-Ponty (1962) and argue that the body produces its own language, through gestures and movements, sensations and perception, touching another and imitation – all these are ways of communicating this uber-bodyness to another. Learning about this uber-bodyness takes place not only through imitation or genetic heritage, but also by acquiring and internalising bodily values from the environment, expressed in movement and through transgenerational mechanisms which aspire to keep entire past generations alive in our body.

There are movements that live inside me: they are not mine; they are other people's movements. Some of them are generative movements: they assist me, complete me, or support me. There are also other movements, habitual or degenerative; movements which I avidly recall from my childhood; movements that I have unconsciously adopted from my childhood, some that want to lash against my daughters. This is where I have to hold them in, in my head and thought, to prevent them from coming out. Sometimes movements cannot be spontaneous, and ought to remain unexpressed. I remember those movements very well.

Where do my movements come from? What do they re-enact? Some of these movements belong to my mother, second generation to the holocaust. I recall many movements from there: always be the first to take food off the table; eat quickly, and fill my stomach; never throw food away. I remember how to walk with my chin up anywhere, even when this is not needed. To love, but never all the way: "Always keep something for yourself", my grandma used to say, "Always have some money on the side and never love all the way". "What is not to love all the way?" I used to ask, and she would always answer:

> "Keep your distance, don't get too close, don't stay too long close to someone, get some space, so nobody can catch you, so that you can always run away. Never stand too close". "Here", she signals with her hand, "you see? Never closer".

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I laugh. "Even when I'm asleep, Nan?"
"Especially when asleep", she answers solemnly, "particularly when asleep".

A plethora of movements live within me: Beer Sheva mixes in my body, myriads of people and tastes, most carry an ancient tradition but no prophecy: yearning for our fathers′ home in Israel of the 1980s is expressed in the body and not in words. Discrimination shouts but neither yearning nor memory speak; it would take a few more decades for those to come. The body in the West, the heart in the East, the body in the East and the heart in the West – and these are continuously interchanging. Perhaps this is the secret of the state of Israel.

Grandma's movements, the stories she told me that embedded in my body; my attempts to adapt my movements to my daughters and to elect those that I want to keep and those I don't. What can I eliminate, what can I not? Where can I learn how to do that?

In the psychoanalytic field, attempts to symbolise are essential. But what about that which has no representation and yet is saturated with meaning? What about the body's mechanics, its inner mechanisms, its language? What about the body not merely as an expressive element of the psyche but as a being-in-itself, a perceiving, sensing and acting agent (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In the world of body psychotherapy, movement in itself can change. We can work on movement, we can alter the body who activates the movement (Young, 2005), but how do we do so methodologically? How do we extract from the body an embedded movement, or a body satiated with a movement?

BODY ARMOUR AND MOTORIC-ARMOUR

Shape without form, shade without colour
Paralysed force, gesture without motion
(Eliot, 1952)

In his theory on character analysis presented in 1927, Reich elaborated on muscular armour, arguing that aggression, anxiety, and every other strong affect is consistently expressed in our musculature (Reich, 1933, 1949; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014). Reich understood this muscular armour as "*history frozen in space*" (Boadella, 1985): the organism's way of organising itself against life to protect itself. Thus, chronic muscular holding is an inevitable human process just as defence mechanisms are. Muscular armour serves as a regulator for unbearable sensations and emotions (Carroll, 2002, 2009), which are impossible to contain or possibly even to project and thus remain in the body as a testimonial.

Reich (1933, 1949) attempted to soften the armour (or, in his terminology, to break it) in order to foster a less defensive and more adaptive psychosomatic organisation. One possible way of achieving this is by loosening psychosomatic patterns: working directly with the body armour. Without this, Reich claimed, therapy remained limited to insight and understanding and did not necessarily allow for the emancipation of our human vitality, which would be left imprisoned within our tissues. Appropriate bodywork could release the somatic aspect of the conflict, thus restoring the capacity for pleasure and vitality, potentially releasing the body from imprinted traumas which prevented the person from fully developing their bodyness. Let me illustrate this with a case vignette:

doi: 10.1002/ppi

"Tell me", he told me in our first session, "you Ashkenazi woman. What do we do here? Are we really speaking for an hour? I've never spoken for an hour, not even with my wife".
"An hour. Speaking for an hour. It really is a long time".
"Great. So that's what I came here for? So you'd tell me it's a long time?".
"Why did you come?".
"My wife said that if I don't start therapy she kicks me out. Get it?".
"I get it".
"So, start working. I need for her to see that I'm in therapy".
I make no move. We are silent.
"Well?" he says.
"You don't honestly expect anything to happen like this, do you?".
"Perhaps you can tell me what to do then".
"I am waiting for you to ask".
"Another one to educate me… all those Ashkenazi women…".
"You know, I am not exactly Ashkenazi".
"Really? You cannot tell by looking at you".
"Honestly".
"So why didn't you say so?".
"I'm telling you now".
"Ok. So what do we do now?".

It took me years to get it, but I finally understood that the sugar of this enchanted dish, of all these blessed hands of the neighbours who would pick me up at lunchtime and feed me off their own rough hands, who taught me how to take the lid of pots, to taste, to take pleasure not just in the food, the smell, but from the sheer quantity of pots on the hove, a museum of pots. It was then that I understood that the sugar – at least in my case – did not dissolve in the dish. It remained on my tongue, unwilling to be digested. I am thus destined to remain preoccupied with hunger, to explore hunger, to be hungry for myriad of things with names, and for countless nameless others.

A neighbour placed sugar on my tongue and that was that. The movement froze there. I remember her hand, her golden watch, the squinting of her eyes; the contraction of my lips. One move. I can break it to a thousand frames. I can recall it backwords and return. These are trackable moments, physical moments I can call forth, not for the sake of understanding or interpreting, but to enliven them in the body. To understand what they did to my life. Where are they in me? Scattered, they move with me, possibly directing my movement.

In my clinic, I often trace a life-changing movement. It is not a movement to be held in mind alone, nor is it an imagined one. It is a movement seeking to express something within, a movement which awakens the other in your own body; the same other, who lives through you.

Who is that *other* who is awakened in the body? This is not only a psychodynamic or a bodily question, it is also a political and cultural one (Appel-Opper, 2010; Benjamin, 2004; Dworkin, 1997).

One day he tells me that he went to eat in a shish kebab diner, nibbling on his pickles. (In Israeli culture, vegetarian men are often perceived as "weak" or "soft", and Shish-kebab places are seen as primarily manly.)

"Aren't you vegetarian?".
"So?".
"It just seems weird that a vegetarian would dine at a shish kebab place".
"Why? There are salads and breads, the humous, and the best pickles in town".

doi: 10.1002/ppi

"Ok".
"Can I tell you something?".
"Yes".
"So. I am sitting there eating, and next to me sits a guy with his friends and his son, perhaps five or six years old. And the dad turns to his boy, next to everybody and shouts at him: 'You wet yourself again? How do you keep losing it all the time?'. And the boy just stands there and then, suddenly I see that there is a trickle of pee streaming down his pants, and his father sees it too and laughs, perhaps he is embarrassed. And the boy just stands there and his body retracts into itself, if he could he would have become the pavement, the asphalt. And I know that that's it. From now on he will walk like that his entire life. Do you know how I know it? "Look", he tells me as he gets up, "I know this body".

And in a matter of seconds, this heavy-built man shrinks before my eyes as if all the air has left his body and he stares at me, looking small with his skin flapping lifelessly on his body. His legs and mouth shiver, and his fingers restlessly look for something to do. There he freezes in that posture. Not moving, time stands still. And I look at him. How long would he be able to retain this posture? And when he leaves it, what would collapse first and what would remain? What of these movements shall stay and what would be repressed? How would he return from this posture of that boy to being a man again?

The contrast between the pickles and the shish kebab is representative of the client's inner conflict, which is also between the desire to return to the smells and tastes of childhood, while nonetheless attending to the wounds inflicted therein and offer these wounds possible healing.

Time passes and then, without words, he changes before my eyes again. He is inflated. He inflates his muscles and chest, his stomach and face, stomps his legs, emphasises his chin. No words are required. We both know what a muscular armour is.

He transitions from the boy he once was, from this internalised child, to the adult he became through acquiring the somatic defence mechanism of the muscular armour. The transition between postures illustrates the armour, explaining the choice in the shape of his body, in the shape of his psyche – of self-states (Bromberg, 1998), which were fixated because of one movement, because he could not control his bladder. Could this loss of bladder-control have any words at all?

SHAPES AS MOVEMENT-SUBSTANCES

Tustin (1981, 1984, 1986) believed that human babies have innate tendency to create shapes. These primal shapes are complex structures of sensations. They are created to balance the arbitrary flood of sensations which typifies the baby's early being. Soon the baby learns that he can make certain shapes reappear with his movements. Some of these will form the basis of repeating experiences. These bodily matters are shape formers. In healthy development, the capacity to make shapes is soon associated with the real shape of concrete objects. Autistic children do not share their shapes with others and so these shapes become private and idiosyncratically strange. Unembodied objects and processes tend to create autistic shapes. In a similar note, Keleman (1971) developed a biologic vision, according to which life is an evolutionary process of shapes. A cell, a tissue, a system of organs – all these continuously take shape and change shape.

Body shapes represent inner and outer forces operating on the self, and our shape is the way we are present in the world. It is the body we inherited, the societal, environmental, political body. It

doi: 10.1002/ppi

is a process of binding molecule to molecule, cell to cell until an organic structure is created, one with consciousness and subjective experience. Keleman (2012) advocated actively choosing and taking a stance in the process of forming a body, forming a movement, so that we become agents in our lives.

Autistic development is therefore a shape that has not developed into movement, into experience. It has remained rigidified and repetitive. It is not uncommon to recognise our own autistic parts through body shapes. We may notice a movement freezing, or one that seems not to belong to its preceding movement, or one that repeats itself. Frequently, these are the places in our body where trauma was imprinted.

> "Let's work on ring muscles for a bit?". (The ring muscles, such as those around sphincter, the eyes and mouth, are semi-autonomous and connected to control and letting go of control, they are necessary for bladder and bowel control, for instance).
> "Come on, really?".
> "It's not about strengthening the muscles, but about recalling a movement".
> He doesn't ask why.
> "I don't do loose muscles. I don't know how to relax. Muscles need to work, to be tight".

Time and again. Contracting ring muscles and relaxing them. We stand with our legs spread and shake. We further spread our legs, bending our knees. Again. And again. Taking this movement and breaking it to its components. Until the entire body shakes and you cannot do it more. He collapses into the couch. His face is red.

When we can break down the movement to its components and follow its sequence, something in him relaxes. He allows the movement to take over, enlivening it in his body, giving it a voice and even naming it. We control the breaking down process. He can stop when I ask him to, he can freeze in this movement for a long while, allowing us to explore it. Where is it felt? Can it breathe? What is the movement he chooses to continue with and is it habitual or could he create another sequence?

Creating a novel sequence is, of course, a later development. We first fall in love with movements. Falling in love with a movement (which becomes repetitive without desire to explore others) is oftentimes linked with autistic and traumatic self-states. Something happened in our past, and the body later attempts to compensate for the trauma. We cannot move on (naturally, there are many more aspects to falling in love with a movement).

Developing creativity is central to working with movements. Balint (1968) defined the creative zone as a part of a very early psychic structure, prior to our experiencing of an external object. Balint suggested that we can find partial and primitive pre-objects in that zone. Since that zone lacks external otherness, there is no transference there and it is therefore difficult to understand and examine the experience therein in psychotherapy.

Embodying that specific movement, breaking it down and freezing within it, and then tracking its structure (very slowly) into our contemporary form by activating our muscular armour – these all serve to liberate our creative zone. Like Balint (1968), this movement does not require psychodynamic interpretation, nor does it exist in transference dynamics. But unlike Balint, there is a trace of another body, and therefore of another subjectivity. There is another body who bears witness to him and his body, and to his repeating movement and the efforts of his body to extract that movement. He tries to give life, to provide a place for it that is not merely internal, a place in space and time, of tolerance and empathy.

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We both know something about muscular armour and something in my body awakens by his movement.

> "Tell me, can you bring a movement from that boy into your body now?".
> The staring gazes returns. He looks at a point in the wall and disappears.
> "Don't vanish into the movement", I ask.
> "I can't. You ask for a movement, but I get lost there. I cannot be him in one part and me in the other".
> "So let's try an organ. Can you be that boy in one organ of your body and be you in the rest of you. Is that possible?".
> "It's a bit weird, but we can try".
> He thinks a lot, adjusting his limbs and organs and coming back. Then, after many attempts, he empties his lower stomach of air. It is a small movement. Just a little tension is let go of. Immediately he returns.
> "How shameful. I nearly peed my pants".

THE SHAPES OF SHAME

I try to soften my own body when faced with those movements. To learn other movements. It doesn't always work. Sometimes the memory of a movement paralyses my body, which collapses into the movement. Sometimes I can teach my body to soften, to space out cartilage tissues, tendons and bones and let more air in; allowing the memory to move through those spaces and leave the body. Sometimes I can share it with another and the shame dissipates a little.

I am ashamed of these violent movements inherent within me, those seeking to come out. I am ashamed even writing about them here. I am ashamed of facing them helplessly as they, time and again, come to life. Sometimes I can overcome them, but they lurk in the dark attacking whenever I am weak. I fear that certain movements will take over. What will happen if they take over my body and I would act them out?

Working with motor tracking may resemble Yoga or Pilates, exploring one movement from many angles. Marian Chace, one of the founders of Dance Movement Therapy, sought to meet the momentary need of the movement. Chace argued that to develop a therapeutic relationship on a motoric level requires visual and spatial perception of the client's movement (Chaiklin, 1975). Unlike Yoga or Pilates, in my work we emphasise time and space, and differently to Dance and Movement Therapy, there is no attempt to create or interpret relational dynamics.

Body psychotherapy views the body as more than an expression of the psyche. It is the platform of our organismic being, and our attempt is to embody our bodily self. It involves two bodies realising their bodily existence and in this embodiment – sensory, real, concrete and imagined – is where they meet.

The techniques are awakening processes, similar to those proposed by Chace and Keleman – recalling something in the body, trying to be a body of a different age. The two bodies in the body are not only reflecting one another, bearing witness, they also impact on one another and are impacted upon, saturated in other worlds and existing for a moment together. The therapist cannot but take an active stance in this shared work, which forms the basis for developing other relationships and other bodily connections. Working with movements frequently involves working with fragile self-states and we touch, through the body, the edges of this fragile self – sometimes undoing and something succeeding in creating novelty. Such work cannot but touch us too. Acknowledging the body requires us to enter our own danger zones.

doi: 10.1002/ppi

I understand that it is not his work alone; that I need to be touched and changed, to resonate his own processes (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2008). To change his destiny necessitates changing mine too. One day he leaves the clinic after exploring a movement that we work with for a long time. He cries. This movement haunts him like a ghost, seeking a place to come out and possess him. He needs me there to prevent it from taking over. It's not easy for him to trust me. It is difficult for me to trust myself. I too am not easily letting movements out, I know something about not trusting another. What if it takes over? What if this movement passes on to me? What if it remains in the clinic, held, imprisoned as an infinite incomplete moving sculpture?

Once I asked what happened after the boy in the shish kebab place finished peeing. He took a while to answer.

> "There was silence. Everything froze. The father became really hardened. The rest of the people were embarrassed".
> "And the boy?".
> "The boy looked at his dad and cried. He wet himself but he seemed to not cry from shame and humiliation. He wanted his father to look at him but dad stared forwards and became hard".
> "And the boy?".
> "How much can you cry? Someone gave him water and his dad put him in the car and that was it".

In my reverie I remember another client and a story that accompanied us for a few years. In her story she is five, talking to leaves and birds and flowers and singing and skipping in the communal garden. She suddenly sees a very bent old woman. She sits on a bench, wearing old clothes and holding a walking stick and she is all wrinkled. Their eyes meet for a moment and my client, five years old, cannot take her eyes off this woman and she stands there looking while a huge pain pierces through her, and in that moment, something in her bends too. She leaves the garden, this five year old girl, but she is no longer skipping. My client suffered from severe sclerosis which was diagnosed when she was six years old. Today she is forty, and her sclerosis is highly limiting. It hurts her to stand straight. Some days she cannot even leave her bed.

> "I often feel that I've been wanting to die since a young age and I don't know why. Something in being bent against the world, surrendering to it. As if there is no choice. The world has won and I lost and bent, wanting to return to the ground".

I remember her as I stand in front of my client. In me, lives the five-year-old girl who was my client and I work with her, from her. I want to heal something. I ask this five year old in her to speak to the five year old in him and tell them both that it doesn't have to be like that, that while one seminal event can form a life, movements can change, and the body can change with them. Whenever such an event takes places, claimed Merleau-Ponty (1962), something in the body closes before the world; an option closes down and shall not open again. I want to take it into the body – an event imprinting on our body and our body changing, creating movements or motoric armour and walls of defences, but underneath these are all those movements and they can be summoned, called back to life.

> "Look at this girl that lives inside of me", I tell him. I show him the sclerosis of my back, how hard it is for me to stand straight.
> The ceiling in my clinic is very low. Most people need to bend a little to come in. My own transition into the rabbit hole.

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"Do you want everybody to have sclerosis?", he asks.
"I want everybody to feel something of mine", I answer.

We speak about children and traumas embedded in the body. We think of a movement to replace another movement and whether we can pay attention to the new one we let in. We speak of our fear of small, invisible movements like the contraction of the sphincter and anus and our attachment to large, firm movements.

At the end of our session he asks if he may stroke my cheek. He leaves. I remain motionless in my chair.

I let him go and let the five-year-old girl go too. I open the small window above my head. Now it is my time. I know that both of them are there, my two clients, and that their transformation and movements have now become part of me.

POST SCRIPTUM

For a long while, Beer Sheva is no longer a city for me nor is it a collection of memories. It is people living in me, faces, smells of spices and desert views. These are all concurrently alive in me, not always speaking out. But they form a part of a movement. Through them I touch myself the way I used to be, in ways I shall no longer be. For me, the movements encode and embody the somatic self. I attempt to understand movement not only as an emotional mechanism, but also as part of coming into contact with the world, with options which were once open before me and are now closed; contact with lost parts that have neither name nor expression. These are movements seeking to form relationships with the other, to establish a dialogue with him or her. This is touch that leads to an experience which may or may not have words, but it creates a space in the body, a gap, within which it can exist.

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