

THE RHIZO-SOMATIC SPIRAL: POTENTIALITIES AND THEMES IN EASTWEST SHIN  
SOMATICS

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## DEDICATION

To the Eastwest Shin Somatics community, especially the women who participated in this study.  
For your devotion to listening deeply, adapting to change, and being here/now with me.

To my ARGS students, especially the class of 2023, who expressed curiosity and support  
throughout this process.

To my husband, Glenn, for stepping up and stepping in throughout this process.

To my mother, who left this world before I completed this project.

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## ABSTRACT

DENISE PURVIS

### THE RHIZO-SOMATIC SPIRAL: POTENTIALITIES AND THEMES IN EASTWEST SHIN SOMATICS

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This research explores Eastwest Shin Somatics within its current embodied philosophical context in two global locations and suggests that a shift in philosophical approach may open the practice to new possibilities. It engages a theoretical framework and case study methodology, modified to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic, to discover how skilled practitioners understand and embody key somatic concepts. Participant interviews and document analysis provide insight into what Shin Somatics is and what it means to those within the practice. An examination of the current philosophical undergirding of Shin Somatics provides a starting point to challenge what I perceive as reliance on concepts of self and other within the practice, albeit one that seeks to discover and reinforce inter-relationship of these concepts. Post-structuralist philosophy, particularly that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, suggested as a line of flight that both acknowledges Shin Somatics' current valuation of the individual in community with others and presses it beyond the subject/object turn to the point where somatic practice is an exercise in subjectivation.

The purpose of this research is to press against the current philosophical undergirding of Eastwest Shin Somatics to shift beyond a focus on self in interrelationship with others and the world to self as forming and in-formed by the world, thereby expanding current literature on somatics. Additionally, the research increases understanding of a global somatic practice within specific geographic and socio-historical context and adds to the literature by moving beyond the first-person narrative of innovators within the field. While a great deal of literature explores the

philosophical underpinnings of somatic practice and exhorts its benefits in well-being, somatics scholars cite a preponderance of first-person narratives from a homogenous group of somatic innovators (white, Western, and often male) with little quantitative and/or qualitative research to support these narratives (De Giorgi 2015, Gilbert 2014, Ginot 2010). This indicates a gap in the research that critics suggest gives rise to a somatic “doctrine” that privileges the white Western body as a universal entity. Through examining Eastwest Shin Somatics in Mexico and the United States, this research clarifies a specific somatic modality and provides additional first-person narratives that add to the literature. As participants are all women, and almost half identify as Mexican Latin-American, their voices offer much-needed insight about somatic practice.

I engage post-structuralist and process philosophy to suggest that Shin Somatics is rhizomatic—an embodied practice that is rhizomatic in nature, and its engagement of intuition as a philosophical method might press current understanding within the practice to become, thereby allowing the Shin Somatics community to let go of a sense of self as subject to attend to the process of subjectivation. I further argue that this process of subjectivation is one that privileges difference within the community and might allow the minor, or that which is not in the forefront of attention, to be foregrounded. I suggest that Eastwest Shin Somatics offers a model of a rhizomatic practice that allows becoming through dancing with each other and nature, respecting individual difference with an attitude of affirmation.

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# CHAPTER I

## WALKING IN THE GARDEN

July 10, 2020 – A Personal Journal Entry

I was planning to dance in the lake, but while I was talking to my husband after logging off zoom a rainstorm descended on me. It was one of those fabulous torrential downpours that you get in the summer. I kept talking to my husband but I couldn't stop watching the rain. And then the sun came out while it was still raining, and I told him I had to go dance. So I danced in my yard in the sun and shadows, rain pouring down on me. Sondra had asked us to cover ourselves in something, so I let the rain cover me. I lay down in the grass and let the grass and dirt cover my back surface while the rain soaked me. That was the best part, just being in the dirt and water. Then I decided to dance with a tree that had low-lying branches with big, huge leaves. It was like having a partner as I swirled arms around the branches, and they moved with me. I turned my face upward and realized the tree was covering me. A surprise covering! I wrapped my arms into the branches and flapped them like angel wings, then I rested my head and shoulder girdle in the branches. It reminded me of the feeling when I put swim noodles under my head and shoulders and float in the lake. The rain began to slowly move out so that I could choose to dance in the rain or out of it while still being in my yard. And there were both shadows and sun for me to dance in (see Figure 1).

My word of the day was luminosity (though Sondra didn't ask me for it today).

How perfect.



Figure 1. Image of a person dancing-with trees. Art by Carrington Purvis.

I wrote the above journal entry during my final training workshop to gain certification in Eastwest Shin Somatics. This workshop marked the end of a process I began six years before; or I suppose one could say the process began with a false start in 2002. I first met Sondra Fraleigh, the originator of Eastwest Shin Somatics, in 1999 when I was a new MFA student at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Brockport. She taught my first-year seminar course and introduced me to dance research methods. While she also taught somatics courses at the time, I

did not enroll in them. I was fully engaged in technical and creative training, along with pedagogic methods. I had completed a course in undergraduate school that introduced me to several somatic methods and enjoyed the experience, but I did not intend to continue studies in that vein.

Upon graduation in 2002 I found myself enrolling in a somatics workshop Sondra<sup>1</sup> offered at SUNY Brockport during the summer. A friend who completed a similar workshop with her in Hawaii a year or two before suggested I would enjoy the work. I believed the workshop would keep me connected with dance while I transitioned from graduate student to professional. I was also pregnant with my first child, and sought movement that would not overtax my changing body.

My memory of the first day is sketchy, but I recall dance improvisations, learning a leg-clearing pattern with partners on tables, journaling, and drawing. The prompts assigned eludes me. What I do remember clearly is that, after the first day, I was not at all interested in continuing the workshop. I felt time spent looking inward was wasted, and I couldn't fathom why people would bother moving each other's body parts around as if some magical thing was going to happen. I made some kind of excuse to Sondra about being pregnant and the physicality being too much for me. While she encouraged me to continue with the workshop, listening to my body and pulling back physically, she did not press the matter. She refunded my tuition in full and I did not think about Eastwest Shin Somatics for many years.

After my first and second children were born, my husband and I decided to move to our home state of Virginia to be close to family. We lived there for eight years, and I taught in a high school dance program and had a third child. I also completed a program of study with Bill Evans,

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<sup>1</sup> Within the Eastwest community, first names are used immediately and signify intimacy and belonging, welcoming all into the community. Therefore, I use first names throughout this dissertation.

who identifies himself as a somatic dance educator and blends Laban and Bartenieff concepts into his pedagogy. This shifted my own pedagogy to one that focused on concepts aimed to teach dancers as individuals rather than a homogenous group. In 2012, I applied for a position as the dance education specialist at Southern Utah University (SUU) in Cedar City, Utah. My husband and I moved our family several thousand miles for this exciting new opportunity. I quickly connected with a dance company in neighboring St. George, Utah. In the summer of 2014, the artistic director sent me an email with a flyer advertisement, telling me I should check out the teacher; that I would like her because we had similar approaches to life and dance. I opened the flyer to see it advertised yoga classes with Sondra Fraleigh. I know a sign from the universe when I see one. I contacted Sondra and enrolled in her next weekend workshop. Thus, I began the very slow process of certification in Eastwest Shin Somatics, completed in single days, weekends, and week-long training sessions. This time the work felt meaningful. The time was right for me to delve into the practice. I was ready to slow down and attend to myself and others, and I was ready to learn.

I enrolled in the PhD program at Texas Woman's University in 2016. I continued to study with Sondra and work full time at SUU. In 2017, I left SUU and returned to Virginia to be closer to my mother and father-in-law as they grew older but I continued to study with Sondra. When the time came for me to select a dissertation topic, I was encouraged to study something I would do even if I weren't completing the PhD. I selected Eastwest Shin Somatics because I felt it had great potential to positively impact my community of dance students. I wanted to better understand why and how the practice engaged with the world.

During this research and writing process I reflected on why I chose to study with Sondra. What was different in 2014 that drew me into the work? Many of my study participants sought

the work as a way to heal after injury, but that is not my story. Certainly maturity helped me prepare for self-reflection. Yet, I think the primary difference was that I had children and had been a school teacher for several years. This shifted my focus from myself to others. This change drew me into a process of self-reflection in order to be aware of my own wants, needs, and biases. Interestingly, I think it was Bill Evans who inadvertently opened me to Shin Somatics. He encourages educators to teach students in a way that honors both what the students need and what the teacher needs so that the entire community grows. I believe this shift in thinking from teaching technical skills to teaching concepts, and from teaching my students to teaching all of us prepared me to work with Sondra. I was ready to dig into my self so I could be a better person and teacher. I was ready to acknowledge my biases, wants, and needs, so I could let go of what was not serving my students, my family, and me and further develop what served. This is what I feel Shin Somatics offers me, and by extension those I teach and live with.

I can assert that Eastwest Shin Somatics has helped me develop my ability to be present with *all* my students (not just those who want to be professional dancers), match them, and offer new possibilities. It has helped me navigate parenthood with grace (most of the time), and listen deeply to students, colleagues, and friends. It has helped me accept and move through all the changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As I write this introduction, I am grateful for Eastwest Shin Somatics and the community it provides me. I value it beyond measure and firmly believe the practice offers an example of how somatic practice can serve the individual, valuing difference while seeking community.

Eastwest Shin Somatics Institute was founded by Sondra Fraleigh in 1990, but Shin Somatics is the result of a process that began much earlier. Sondra blended her study of yoga, butoh, zen meditation, Feldenkrais Method®, infant development, and dance to create movement

patterns and explorations designed to facilitate balance and wellness within the body (Eastwest Somatics 2018). A respected dance phenomenologist and prolific writer, her understanding of existential phenomenology permeates the work, though it is more explicit in her writing, conference presentations, and informal discussions than in the physical practices engaged within Shin Somatics. The practice engages yoga, bodywork, and intuitive dance in repeatable patterns with permission to creatively improvise. The Eastwest Shin Somatics Institute website summarizes the work thusly,

Shin Somatics® represents educational and therapeutic methods evolved at Eastwest that utilize the encompassing meanings of the body through Shin (Oneness) and Soma (Body as experienced). Our students learn Shin Somatics® Methods for moving consciously, as individuals and in community. Our Shin Restore bodywork is based on an understanding of movement patterns and how to facilitate these in Shin Restore Bodywork with *teaching through touch*.

Based on infant movement patterns and human development, Eastwest's original *Land to Water Yoga* is a somatic form that anyone can do. *Soma Flow Yoga* offers challenges to those who are ready. Mindfulness Meditation is part of our yoga process. *Flow Repatterning* underlies all of our movement work, and the Feldenkrais Method® influences our approach. Moving with nature is a core principle of Shin Somatics, just as nature allows everything to be itself and to grow. (2018)

Eastwest Shin Somatics is at its core a system of movement education and re-education, designed to encourage increased self-awareness and discover more easeful, healing movement. Practitioners understand the body as part of nature, and intentionally engage in relationship with others and with the environment with the intent to seek harmony and balance in everyday life.



## **Providing Context: Literature Review**

Here I review literature related to somatic practice as a field, Eastwest Shin Somatics in particular, and those somatic practices incorporated within Shin. The study of embodied experience is essential to understanding somatic practice. Somatic scholar and dance educator, Jill Green shares that “bodily knowledge may be seen as the ways we understand our selves and our environments through the body; it is also the ways we make meaning of the world through our bodily experiences” (2002, 114). Sondra Fraleigh turns to existential phenomenology to connect body knowledge to consciousness, stating that “Consciousness selects, sorts out, and organizes stimuli according to present purposeful perception—purposeful because it is directed toward, and involved in, its objects. The body, in this view, is a sensitive perceptive actor. It does not have a consciousness—rather, it is a consciousness” (1987, 15). Somatic pioneer Thomas Hanna understands the soma to be internally perceived—not reliant on an outside observer to make meaning of experience (Johnson 1995, 341), that self-consciousness and self-awareness are both voluntary and critical to well-being (ibid., 347), and that one can bring unconscious bodily habits into consciousness through attending to bodily experience through sensation (ibid., 350).

While all somatic practices privilege embodied experience, they range in both philosophy and praxis. Shin somatics is part of the larger field of somatic movement and dance education (SMDE). SMDE is a complex concept— a multiplicity that is difficult to define. Essential to the field are the concepts of bodymind unity, self-awareness through present-centered attention, and healing through mindful bodily practice (De Giorgi 2015; Eddy 2009; Eddy 2002; Fortin 2002; Fraleigh 2015). In discussing somatic bodywork, or hands-on somatic practice between a trained practitioner and student/client, Sondra Fraleigh indicates perception is key, identifying it as precursor to consciousness (2015, xxiv). Somatic bodywork is improvisational and relies on

interrelationship between bodyworker and client/student. Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen agrees, describing her work as “process-oriented” and “intuitive, creative, and an improvisational style” (Eddy 2002, 54).

Somatic practitioners often blend embodied practices and belief systems from multiple global cultures, giving rise to what Williamson et al. describe as, “a heterogeneous compendium of body-mind disciplines derived from diverse cross-cultural and philosophical sources dating back to the turn of the 20th century that... pose a radical view of embodiment by placing perceptual awareness through movement at the center of dismembering dualism” (2014, loc. 306).<sup>2</sup> In an effort to “dismember dualism,” prominent scholars regularly draw from the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his scholarly descendants to understand the value and potential of somatic practice, leaning heavily on the concept of “lived experience” (Fraleigh 2015; Shusterman 2008; Williamson 2016). Merleau-Ponty understands sensual perception as the path through which one relates with and makes meaning of the world. He states, “The senses and one’s own body generally present the mystery of a collective entity which, without abandoning its thisness and its individuality, puts forth beyond itself meanings capable of providing a framework for a whole series of thoughts and experiences” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 146). Thus, somatic practices rooted in phenomenology seek to provide meaning through embodied experience, and research into such practice must necessarily explore participants’ meaning-making within an embodied context.

Somatics as a field also desires personal transformation through developing self-awareness in order to facilitate bodymind wellness. Naomi Jackson summarizes the somatic goal

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<sup>2</sup> Sangeet Duchane provides a brief account of Asian and African influences on Western somatic practices in the chapter, “Global Roots of Somatic Movement: Asian and African Influences” in Martha Eddy’s *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Consciousness Action*.

thusly, “Somatics takes a first-person perspective on the experiences of embodiment, movement, and dance, with the goal of making healthier, more anatomically correct and expressive choices” (2016, 166). Additionally, one of the most central concepts identified in somatics literature is freedom— freedom from habit, freedom from cultural hegemony, freedom from oppression, and freedom to make one’s own choices (Williamson 2016, 284; Eddy 2009, 19).

Complicating this narrative, scholars such as Doran George (2020), Isabelle Ginot (2010), and Margherita De Giorgi (2015) point out that somatics is primarily a white, middle-class area of scholarship and practice. They further assert “that the aforementioned value of ‘freedom’ is related to notions of white, liberal democracy” (Candelario 2021). This is a critique that Merleau-Ponty himself may agree with. Sonia Kruks explains that the philosopher points to the challenge of the body-subject in *Phenomenology of Perception*. She shares that the body-subject always “carries its past and present with it; and that past, ‘a sort of sedimentation of our life,’ precludes ‘pure subjectivity, thus “pure” freedom of will. Insofar as the self *qua* situated bodily existence carries its history around with it, it carries around a certain opaque presence of the “in-itself” within it. This manifests itself as the weight of *habit* in our way of being in the world” (Kruks 1987, 239; emphasis in original). If the bulk of practitioners within a given practice are embedded within a culture rife with implicit racial, gendered, and other biases, then it is likely that these biases are habits that need attention in order to be acknowledged and released.

Eastwest Shin Somatics reinforces the somatic goal of facilitating every body’s health and well-being through connecting self and environment in order to acknowledge and disrupt habits. Existential phenomenology provides a philosophical foundation for Shin Somatics,

opening “a door to the study [of] experience and a way to share it from a subjective point of view” (Fraleigh 2015, 20).

Like many somatic practitioners, Sonda explicitly borrows from the Asian disciplines of yoga, butoh, and Zen meditation, blending them in multiple ways to produce a form that is no longer Eastern or Western, but an openly amalgamated practice. While Sonda attained these practices through direct study in each discipline, this blending of styles is one element criticized as appropriative by somatics scholars. Nevertheless, they are integral to the practice, thus warrant explanation. Following is a brief exploration of specific practices that influence Eastwest Shin Somatics.

From yoga, Sonda borrows the understanding of the body’s energy centers, engaging moving asanas to awaken, or unwind, the chakras (Fraleigh 2015, 6). Within Indian philosophy of embodiment, the ultimate goal is transcendence; however, matter is important and not to be negated. Examining the Vedas, Kapila Vatsyayan explains a concept central to yoga: the atman, or soul, cannot be fully realized except through embodied experience that is yoked, or controlled, through physical and psychical discipline (1997).

For Sonda, yoga chakras connect to butoh through the root chakra and Hijikata Tatsumi’s oft quoted statement, “I come from the mud” (Fraleigh 2015, 7). Butoh co-founders Hijikata Tatsumi and Kazuo Ohno valued metamorphosis and transformation in dance (Hijikata, Shibusawa and Kurihara 2000; Schwelling 2019). As Megan Nicely points out, butoh aligns with somatics but often works in the opposite direction, using “tension, overwhelming sensations, discomfort, exhaustion and dark subject matter as important aspects of its methodology” (2018, 112).

Whereas yoga and butoh are movement practices, Zen Buddhism advocates stillness of the body, or just-sitting (Nagatomo 2019). However, Zen shares the ultimate goals of transcendence and transformation. The ideal achievement of a Zen practitioner is *shin shin ichi nyo*, or body-mind oneness, which applies to both inward and outward activities (Nagatomo 1992; Ozawa-de Silva 2002; Yuasa 1987, 24).

From the West, Shin Somatics is most heavily influenced by the Feldenkrais Method, and to a lesser degree Alexander Technique, Craniosacral Therapy, and Depth Movement Dance. Key to Feldenkrais are the concepts of reversibility and readiness for action (Feldenkrais 2010, 99) These are attained through conscious attention, which is developed through continually novel movement experiences (*ibid.*, 37). Alexander Technique seeks to right “bad” movement habits through self-conscious movement repatterning, focusing primarily on head and neck movements (Alexander 1974; Arnold, n.d.)

Mariann Sisco explains that Craniosacral Therapy utilizes palpation on the cranium to release repressed memories into conscious awareness, where the body can dissipate them and heal (Sisco). Haller, Dobos, and Cramer summarize the work stating, “Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is derived from osteopathic manipulative treatment and uses mindful, very gentle fascial palpation techniques to reduce sympathetic arousal by modifying body rhythms and to support the body’s function and capability of self-regulation by relaxing physical and mental structures” (2021, n.p.). It is engaged to treat multiple ailments, including such wide-ranging issues as depression, respiratory disease, autism, and gastrointestinal disease (*ibid.*)

Depth Movement Dance, a partnered improvisation rooted in Jungian psychotherapy, is an essential element of Authentic Movement (Pallaro 1999). The practice understands that

“healing takes place within the moving body, and the body’s essential role, and *moving* centrality, [supports] transformational process” (Williamson et al. 2014, 6; emphasis in original).

### **Eastwest Shin Somatics as a Deleuzian Rhizo-Somatic Practice**

In this dissertation, I engage post-structuralist and process philosophy to suggest that Shin Somatics is rhizo-somatic—an embodied practice that is rhizomatic in nature. I further assert that its engagement of intuition as a philosophical method might press current understanding within the practice to become—allowing the Shin Somatics community to let go of a sense of self-as-subject and attend to the process of subjectivation, wherein the subject arises through interaction between forces within and outside a body in-the-event (see further explanation in Chapter 3). I argue that this process of subjectivation is one that privileges difference within the community and might allow the minor, or that which is not in the forefront of attention, to be foregrounded. I suggest that Eastwest Shin Somatics offers a model of a rhizomatic practice that allows becoming through dancing with each other and nature, respecting individual difference with an attitude of affirmation. Especially important to my argument are the concepts of the Body without Organs, plane/map, line of flight, intuition as a philosophical method, and rhizome.

I engage Deleuze and Guattari to suggest that Eastwest Shin Somatics can encourage the body to dis-organize, or release hierarchies of habit resulting from its situatedness, through disrupting bodymind habits and attuning to potential. If intentionally dis-organized, Shin Somatics might move toward the Deleuzian Body without Organs (BwO). A body is not necessarily human. It is an assemblage arising with-in the milieu, and hierarchies that develop within the assemblage organize the body. The organized body exists within a specific territory, or plane.

Plane has multiple meanings in Deleuze's work. Brian Massumi notes that the original French word, *plan*, denotes both a geometrical plane and a plan (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvii). The French word *plan* also translates to map. Yet the kind of mapping referred to with the word is one of design, such as a blueprint, linking the concept to creation rather than tracing existent boundaries. Planes can function variously—a plane of consistency, a plane of composition, plane of organization, etc. They hold the milieu in relations of speed and slowness (ibid., 507). A plane can be escaped through a line of flight, which has nothing to do with flying. As Massumi explains, *fuite*, or flight “covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance” (ibid., xvi). Thus, a line of flight allows for escape from a plane through a seepage or oozing wherein the milieu and its resultant assemblages and bodies transform while retaining their unitary substance.

The BwO is non-hierarchical, though temporary hierarchies may establish through pragmatic relationship with other bodies in a given milieu (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The BwO is always becoming, and never concretizes. Deleuze and Guattari explain, “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but [it also] has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first” (ibid., 238). The BwO as a destabilized and destabilizing phenomenon aligns with current trends in somatics, especially within branches such as eco-somatics and somatics for social justice.

Deleuze (1991) argues that intuition as a philosophical method aids in disorganization through a shift from hierarchical, subtractive, conceptualization of the world to attending to qualitative difference within the milieu. In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze suggests science and metaphysics (and therefore those of us engaged in these fields) make a fundamental error in

“conceiving everything in terms of more and less, seeing nothing but differences in degree or differences in intensity where, more profoundly, there are differences in kind” (1991, 20).

Intuition, Deleuze states, is the method through which one becomes aware of difference in kind, thereby understanding bodies as heterogenous multiplicities with differing qualities. In this dissertation, I suggest that the Deleuzian privileging of difference provides a line of flight to a map for equity within somatic practice; a map that is already begun within Eastwest Shin Somatics.

A rhizomatic release of evaluation (good/bad, right/wrong) already exists conceptually within somatic praxis. The rhizome is an integral metaphor for Deleuze and Guattari, it has no beginning or end (1987, 25), and is discussed in contrast to arborescence. Where a tree (imagine an oak tree) is a singularity, coded from the seed to be a single plant, a rhizome is a multiplicity, with multiple nodes (plants in potentia), that spread broad tendrils just under the surface of the earth. Thus, rhizomatic potential is invisible unless one digs beyond the organized body to discover it. Because its roots are shallow and far-reaching, it claims a wide swath of territory. Due to its multiplicitous nature, it adapts easily to ruptures, shifting territory as needed. For example, if one pulls up one section of a rhizome but does not dig far enough into the surrounding territory to destroy its entire root system, the plant will simply resurface wherever its shallow roots and bulbs still exist.

The authors explain that the rhizome makes a map rather than a tracing, wherein a map “is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12) as opposed to a tracing, which fixes boundaries based on what has already actualized, thereby halting change. My experience with somatic practice indicates that while we regularly engage in non-judgement, we have not yet let go of valiative ideas such as wellness in practice.



Therefore, research highlighting alignments and departures of somatic practice and Deleuzian theory might create a potential line of flight to a practice that truly eschews fixed definition in favor of creation. A line of flight shares the substance of a rhizome while transforming a multiplicity/body (ibid., 9).

The line of flight I hope to create through this dissertation is an oozing or seepage that shares qualities with existential phenomenology, within which Eastwest Shin Somatics is rooted, while discovering the minor within the philosophy. It begins with Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity, wherein "each subject possesses the individuality of its own perspectives," (Lau 2004, 158) and challenges the existence of the subject itself. In doing so, a Deleuzian approach to somatic practice may open Shin Somatics practitioners to an awareness of the process of subjectivation, as explored by Erin Manning, who engages Deleuze alongside process philosophy to suggest that movement is the way in which we come to know our bodies, in the event that occurs within the relational web of movement (Manning 2014, 178-180).

This intentional shift of understanding of body as a verb rather than a noun and subjectivation as a process draws our attention within somatic practice to the conditions of experience. It leads to an awareness of the ever-shifting qualities of everything within a given milieu (including the human and non-human), attending to the social, and acknowledging cultural and qualitative difference as it is in the moment. I contend this may provide the conditions necessary to dis-organize pre-existing understandings of self and other (whether implicit or explicit) and open us to a practice that foregrounds creating community through difference. This is a shift from seeking the unity of the natural and balanced body perceived as existing at birth or within nature, which is a primary critique of the field offered by Doran George (2020). Importantly, this shift in intent may allow us to more fully achieve Merleau-

Ponty's project, understanding the world as inter-subjective by releasing the subject/noun completely. A Deleuzian attending to bodies that actualize and might actualize in the event (or in the moment where virtual/potential becomes actual) may open us to new awareness of the temporal, social, and durational nature of the becoming-body. As Manning shares, "Movement is the vibratory force that creates a relay between planes, between fields of the virtual and the actual. It is one of the ways in which the immanent can be felt. What is in-act, in movement, always carries the seeds of the virtual- it dances immanence" (2014, 183).

### **Start Where You Are, Learn as You Go, Build Capacity along the Way**

#### **Chapter Overview**

After the introduction, I address my methodology in Chapter 2. Here I explain my intent to research Eastwest Shin Somatics in the United States, Mexico, and Japan to explore the ways in which practitioners understand and embody central concepts within the discipline. I follow the progression of my research project, from an intent to complete a qualitative three-site case study to a modification necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting to general qualitative methods utilizing Zoom. After foregrounding my positionality as an insider within Eastwest Shin Somatics, I share the value of qualitative research to address my research questions, which seek to understand why and how practitioners engage in the somatic modality. I then chart the progress of my project, from gaining approval from community gatekeepers through data analysis and the application of Deleuzian and process philosophy to understand common themes within the practice and areas in which we might press against our existing understanding of self within Shin Somatics. I share my write-up process, which I describe as beginning somatically and progressing through extensive member-checking. I explain that members then engaged me in

discussion aimed at clarifying not only my interpretation of common themes within the practice, but also my understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the work.

Chapter 3, “Becoming Rhizo-Somatic: Oozing Phenomenology and Dis-Organizing Bodies,” addresses current philosophical underpinnings of Eastwest Shin Somatics in existential phenomenology and suggests a move toward post-structuralist and process philosophy might enable a philosophical oozing wherein Shin Somatics opens itself to those who have been implicitly and unintentionally excluded from the work. Exploring the practice as a rhizome, I engage Deleuze and Guattari alongside Erin Manning to suggest that Eastwest Shin Somatics’ focus on being-with an other in the present moment, intuiting the here-and-now, and willingly dissolving the boundaries of self and other, primes the practice for a further shift from understanding the self as subject. I suggest the Shin Somatics community consider the self as a process of subjectivation rather than a fixed subject, ever-changing within the current milieu. This focus on becoming rather than being might enable new possibilities for that which is minor—or not at the forefront of our attention—within the practice to come forward, creating new possibilities within the Eastwest spiral.

In Chapter 4, “The Rhizomatic Spiral: At the Originary Node and Along the Continuum,” I describe Eastwest Shin Somatics as a spiral in which the curving line forms a central metaphor within the practice. At the beginning of the spiral, or the originary node of the rhizome, is the originator of Eastwest Shin Somatics, Sondra Fraleigh. I explain her path in developing the practice and her understanding of the work, then move along the spiral to Ashley Meeder, who organized and directs Eastwest Shin Somatics Mexico. The chapter provides the reader an understanding of how the practice shifts through Ashley’s branch of Eastwest Somatics Institute, maintaining its original focus while adapting to another culture. It also provides a window into

future spirals of the practice as it continues to adapt to the needs of Shin Somatics practitioners and the people with whom they live and move.

Chapter 5, Mapping the Eastwest Shin Somatics Spiral, provides a current map of the blending of Eastern and Western philosophies and somatic methods that occurs within Shin Somatics that I briefly traced in this introduction. I then delve into the training program at Eastwest Somatics Institute, clarifying the certification process. Next, I explore the three areas of study that comprise the whole of Shin Somatics practices: intuitive dance, somatic yoga, and Shin Somatics bodywork. I offer clarity regarding discrete practices engaged in Shin Somatics, supplementing this with specific examples of these practices as they are engaged in a movement lesson. The chapter continues with an explanation of additional tools utilized in Eastwest Shin Somatics, including effective communication, butoh-inspired movement exploration, imagery, and Zen meditation.

Chapter 6, “The Spiraling Flower: Shin Somatics In/With the World,” begins with a brief explanation of how each study participant found Shin Somatics and how they engage the work today. Three participants live and work in Mexico and four live and work in the United States. They range in experience from having taken one Eastwest workshop to having graduated years ago and moved into the role of teacher-trainers. All are women between the ages of twenty-nine and eighty-four. All consider themselves middle-class. Two identify as Mexican-Latin American, one identifies as Mexican, and four identify as White. After introducing participants, the chapter explores the Eastwest curriculum model as praxis according to participants’ perceptions. I combine interviews of all participants, providing their own words as often as possible to foreground their voices.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation, considering where the critiques of somatics as a field might be addressed through Eastwest Shin Somatics' focus on present-centered attention, intuition, and inter-relationship. I briefly return to the limits I perceive in Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology before drawing from Deleuze to seek new potential within the philosophical undergirding of Shin Somatics. I reiterate my suggestion that the practice move along the phenomenological spiral to attend to life-as-lived, seeking difference rather than commonality in order to affirm multiple becomings.

## CHAPTER II

### DIGGING INTO THE FERTILE SOIL

#### **Defining My Research Goals**

On February 26, 2020, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct a research study titled “Understanding Embodied Practice in Eastwest Shin Somatics” with the following purpose statement and research questions.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to explore how Eastwest Shin Somatics practitioners and their clients and students in the United States, Mexico, and Japan understand and embody central concepts within the discipline. This is accomplished through a three-site case study utilizing qualitative research methods, including participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis is filtered through a theoretical framework engaging post-structuralist and process philosophy in order to press against current philosophical understandings within the community and access new potential within the practice.

While there is a great deal of literature exploring the philosophical underpinnings of somatic practice and exhorting its benefits in well-being, somatics scholars cite a preponderance of first-person narratives from a homogenous group of somatic innovators (white, Western, and often male) with little quantitative and/or qualitative research to support these narratives (De Giorgi 2015; Gilbert 2014; Ginot 2010). This indicates a gap in the research and that critics suggest gives rise to a somatic “doctrine” that privileges the white Western body as a universal entity. This gap may be addressed through a two-pronged research approach exploring how possible theoretical shifts allowing increased awareness of connection through difference within somatics might be engaged alongside the perspectives of somatic practitioners from diverse

geographical and cultural backgrounds to expand current literature on somatics beyond the first-person narrative of innovators within the field. Additionally, the research increases understanding of a global somatic practice within specific geographic and socio-historical context.

### Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions:

How do practitioners, clients and students at three international centers for Eastwest Shin Somatics describe and embody key concepts within the somatic discipline?

How does the practice of Eastwest Shin Somatics change at each of these unique sites given the shift in location, culture, and leadership?

Only weeks after I received IRB approval, schools, events, and even borders began to shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I was unable to travel to complete the study. Fortunately, training workshops moved online and several members of the Shin Somatics community agreed to complete interviews via Zoom. I revised my IRB application to address the need to complete all interviews remotely via Zoom. My modified application received approval on July 2, 2020. While I was unable to observe group classes and one-on-one sessions with Eastwest practitioners and their clients due to COVID-19 restrictions, I nevertheless conducted qualitative research guided by my initial research questions, discussed in more detail below.

### Positioning the Researcher

It is important to note that I value this practice and am personally connected to several study participants. I completed my certification through participation in training workshops during this study. Throughout the study, I positioned myself as an insider who is in the final stages of certifying in Shin Somatics, has published and presented on the practice, and is friends

with several Eastwest organizational leaders and teachers. Additionally, I positioned myself as an outsider, observing, taking field notes, memoing, and member-checking to gather, analyze, and understand data.

I am aware that the modality engages many Eastern somatic practices, blending them with Western philosophy and embodied methods to create a distinct method that is neither wholly Eastern nor wholly Western. While Sondra Fraleigh gathered these Eastern practices through intensive study and long-term relationships with experienced teachers from India and Japan, the participants in my study, including myself, do not share this attribute. Additionally, all study participants are from the Americas, and over half identify as white. All are middle class women. The community is aware of issues of appropriation within Somatics as a field, and there is an attempt in public presentations of our work to cite sources and be clear about how Eastern practices are being engaged or modified within Shin Somatics. In this study I have chosen to address participants' current understanding of the work, following the Eastwest practice of affirmation rather than engaging a critical lens. Yet it is my hope that Chapter 3, "Becoming Rhizo-Somatic: Oozing Phenomenology and Dis-Organizing Bodies," works alongside existing somatic discourse relating to appropriation and universalism within Western somatic practice (see George 2020; Johnson 2018; Jackson 2016; De Giorgi 2015; Ginot 2010; Eddy 2002) to help our community continue to question existing challenges of privilege blindness and appropriation so that we may create new possibilities within the somatic field.

### **Identifying What Is: Data Collection and Analysis Methods and Proposed Procedures**

This qualitative research study was designed to utilize case study methodology to collect and analyze data regarding participants' understanding and embodiment of central tenets of Eastwest Shin Somatics in three different social and geographic contexts. In a case study, a



researcher explores a bounded system, or multiple bounded systems, over time, either in a singular site or over multiple sites (Creswell 2013, 97). As Winston Tellis explains, “case studies... are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data” (1997, n.p.). In this methodology a specific case “is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam and Tisdell 2015, 254). Data sources include interviews, participant observation, written and verbal discourse, and document analysis, providing a holistic approach that engages multiple qualitative methods in order to understand a “complex functioning unit... in its natural context” (Johansson 2003, 2).

A collective, or multiple, case study addresses a singular issue or concern but does so through studying several cases. Case studies are not generalizable but can provide insight into potential relationships between the case study and similar situations. In light of scholarly criticism of somatics’ doctrine of universality, case study’s focus on specific cases within socio-historical context offers an integral opportunity to increase understanding of somatic practice while addressing a critical gap in the literature.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this study and forced a shift in the data I was able to collect. This unintentional circumstance shifted the data I collected, highlighting ways that cultural differences and economic circumstances impact a research study. My host in Japan was forced to close her school and her students and clients were uncomfortable speaking to a stranger via meeting software such as Zoom. Therefore, the Japanese voice is absent from this study. Because I could not travel and am not fluent in Spanish, Mexican participants were limited to those fluent in English with reliable internet access. Based on my interview with Ashley, I believe that if I could have travelled to Mexico with a translator, or if I were fluent in Spanish,

this dissertation would provide more clarity regarding ways indigenous somatic practices blend with Eastwest Shin Somatics in Mexico. Yet the pandemic also initiated shifts within Eastwest Somatics Institute that allowed globally-shared virtual spaces and increased online communications.

Ultimately, I participated in online workshops based in the United States and Mexico, gathering data through participant observation. Additionally, I interviewed five US-based participants and four Mexico-based participants. Because hands-on and in-person work was cancelled, I was unable to observe movement therapists during one-on-one and group lessons. However, the pandemic led both United States and Mexico locations to increase communications through websites, and all published documents remained available as data sources. The result is a study utilizing qualitative methods to explore Eastwest Shin Somatics in the Americas.

Prior to commencing my study, I contacted Eastwest Shin Somatics innovator, Sondra Fraleigh to request permission to complete research at the Eastwest hub in St. George, Utah. After that, I contacted the women who maintain Shin Somatics training centers in Mexico and Japan via email, detailing my research purpose, my level of involvement, and participant involvement and protection of confidentiality. These community gatekeepers are fluent in English; however, I hired a translator to prepare informed consent documents for all participants in Mexico and Japan. Ultimately, I only used consent forms in English, though I shared the forms in both Spanish and English with those in Mexico.

I focused on sites that offer access to training centers organized and maintained by highly experienced Shin Somatics practitioners because these locations offer access to people ranging from those enrolled in their first workshop to teachers with extensive training. I assumed that those seeking training for the first time would offer me a beginner's insight into Shin Somatics,

while those who have extensive experience with the modality would offer a deeper understanding of the nuances of the work and its application. As these individuals work with solo clients as well as groups, and train future Shin Somatics practitioners, I would be able to gather data representative of a participant group from multiple geographic locations within the Americas who apply the work in diverse movement-oriented professions.

After gaining approval from the gatekeepers, I joined a one-week online training workshop via Zoom hosted by Sondra Fraleigh and Kelly Lester, president of Eastwest Somatics Institute. During workshop I recorded field notes, using thick description and memoing. Of particular interest was language used as well as physical communication between practitioner and students such as facial expressions and other subtle cues. Physical communication was expressed through observation within the Zoom meetings as well as in videos of yoga and bodywork lessons shared during the workshops. Participants were in various stages of lockdown and joined the Zoom meeting from their homes rather than places of work.

In lieu of in-person recruitment, I emailed workshop participants explaining my research and asking for volunteers to complete an interview about their experience with Shin Somatics via Zoom. One participant, Shirley, offered to give an interview. I supplemented this with interviews of other long-time members of Eastwest Somatics Institute, including founder and director Sondra Fraleigh, president Kelly Lester, and graduates Kay Nelson and Fae Ellsworth, both of whom are bodyworkers by trade.

My research of the Mexico branch of Eastwest Somatics Institute also included Zoom interviews and participation in an online training workshop. The Mexico workshop was conducted in Spanish, with limited translation to English for my benefit. The founder and director of Eastwest Mexico, Ashley Meeder, graciously connected me with several graduates of

the Eastwest Mexico certification program. I scheduled interviews with three participants via direct messages through WhatsApp, the social media app commonly used for communication in Mexico. Yanina Orellana is a dancer and choreographer. Gladys Olivares is a yoga instructor, and Daniela Orlando works with victims of natural and social trauma. I emailed or messaged consent forms in English, with Spanish versions sent to Mexican participants as well, well in advance of interviews.

I reviewed consent forms with all participants prior to conducting interviews. After transcribing each interview, I sent the transcripts to each participant to review and alter as needed. These transcriptions, along with my notes and journal entries made during the training workshops, form the bulk of my research data. I then completed follow-up questions and member checks via online communication systems.

Eastwest Shin Somatics incorporates three broad categories of practice—somatic yoga, bodywork, and intuitive dance. Yoga is taught in the traditional manner as a group class cued verbally and physically. However, bodywork and intuitive dance are touch centric. The online format of training workshops and the conference limited this important element of the practice. While we took yoga classes and participated in improvisational movement exploration, table work with another person was limited to demonstration by teachers and presenters unless participants were able to work with a close friend or family member in their home. However, some modifications provided self-referencing alternatives to touch-centric movement patterns. This novel approach provided new insight to these patterns.

Additionally, I attended a weekend Eastwest Somatics Institute online conference in October 2020, which featured many practitioners in both the United States and Mexico. An annual event, the conference offered movement workshops, paper presentations, and discussions

of multiple somatic practices. While the focus was on Shin Somatic practices, the conference was open to anyone and was advertised globally. Therefore, presenters hailing from Mexico, the United Kingdom, France, South Africa, Scotland, and the United States supplemented Shin Somatics presentations and workshops by addressing topics as diverse as somatic inclusiveness, somatic writing, and somatic dance and film. For the purposes of this project, I focused only on presentations directly addressing Eastwest Shin Somatics.

I also gleaned data from published documents and personal communications sent directly by participants via email. Likewise, a thorough review of the Eastwest Somatics Institute websites in both the United States and Mexico offered insight to the practice.

As a long-term member of the Shin community, it was necessary to foreground my positionality and maintain a reflexive stance when gathering and analyzing data. When participating in training workshops, Sondra and Ashley introduced me and explained that I was both participant and researcher. To ensure that participants of training workshops and the online conference were aware that I was a member of the community who was also researching the practice, I spoke briefly about my research questions and process, and those present were invited to ask me questions about the project. To aid in delineating notes from participant observation and self-reflection I kept a separate journal reflecting on my own experience and questions throughout the study. Here I wrote questions for myself such as, “How do I *live* somatics?” alongside observations such as the fact that I skimmed through one of the instructional yoga videos included in the July workshop because I felt overloaded with yoga. In this journal I also noted my own tendencies, such as affirming interviewees by stating that their words were beautiful, poetic, or powerful. Additionally, I noticed that interviewees often checked to see if they were telling me what I wanted to hear. A journal entry dated August 24, 2020 states,

What I am noticing today is that several interviewees have asked me if they are giving me the answers I am seeking, or telling me to let them know if I want them to go in a different direction with their answers. While this may just be from a human desire to please, I suspect this might be indicative of a common personality trait among Shin practitioners—a desire to give someone what they want and/or need.

Reflections such as this ensured I analyzed data with awareness of my potential influence on the research as participants sought to “give me what I want.” While I couldn’t eradicate that influence, I did my best to acknowledge it and seek to accurately represent participants’ perceptions.

To ensure my data analysis did this, I first engaged in vivo coding. Saldaña explains that in vivo coding, wherein the researcher codes using the participants’ words, is appropriate for research questions that are ontological in nature (2016, 70). Codes such as “feeling your body,” “active listening,” “how to stay connected with oneness we are born with,” and “relax into nature,” provided insight into participants’ internal experience of Shin Somatics and their understanding of what it is and how it is engaged in both their work and personal lives. It was essential to begin with their understanding of the work. In analyzing these codes, I noticed that several participants discussed common themes: deep listening and intuition, acceptance of and freedom to change, creativity, relationship, and emulating nature to achieve social and emotional balance and wellness. Additionally, participants described the practice as adaptable, creating the opportunity for individual practitioners to pair Shin Somatics with other somatic methods depending on their own cultural beliefs and practices. Practitioners agreed that Eastwest Shin Somatics values affirmation as a social, emotional, and physical concept. Their experience with

Shin Somatics spills out into their daily interactions, encouraging them to become aware of social and natural inter-relationship on an everyday basis.

As I analyzed codes, I completed several situational analyses to ensure I understood who my participants are as well as the limitations of my research. This practice utilizes situational, social worlds/arenas, and positional maps to help the researcher understand the complexities and embeddedness of research participants (Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018, xxiv). Situational Analysis considers human and non-human elements of a given research setting and broadens the analytic focus of research to “include all the key elements that characterize the situation of inquiry broadly conceived” (ibid., xxv). I completed several maps addressing geographical location, gender, age, levels of education, professional training and employment, and somatic training in other modalities. These led me to understand that my participants are all female-identifying, generally highly educated within the Western educational system, and enter Eastwest Shin Somatics with prior experience in dance and/or other somatic practices.

Situational analysis arises out of Grounded Theory and seeks to apply theoretical developments resulting from the application of postmodern, poststructural, and related philosophies to social sciences research (ibid., xxiv). Creswell explains that theory can be used as an a priori lens through which the researcher orients data analysis, or it can be the end point of a study (2009, 62-63). I engaged a Deleuzian conceptual framework in hope that I might open new potential for understanding within the field. Because Eastwest Shin Somatics is explicitly rooted in existential phenomenology, shifting the philosophical lens slightly to incorporate a Deleuzian and process philosophy filter through which data is understood may prove beneficial to future opening of the practice to those who have been implicitly and unintentionally excluded. Reading the data through such a conceptual framework offers a deeper understanding of ways in

which somatic practice may press against the territorial boundaries of existential phenomenology, remapping the field in a way that might move beyond universality to multiplicity.

While analyzing data, I noted alignments between participant experience and Deleuzian philosophy. A strong focus on deep listening, intuition, and present-centered relationship with others indicated to me that Deleuze's reading of Bergson might align with current practice. Such a reading might also highlight how Shin Somatics practitioners can engage intuition as a philosophical and pragmatic method, thereby encouraging awareness of the durational qualities of others within their milieu and allows them to attune to those different durations in an immediate way that subverts pre-existing and implicit hierarchies of understanding.

My writing process reflected the non-linear nature of somatic processes. I began with my chapter on Eastwest Somatics Mexico because the participants' philosophical explanations of their practice, warmth, and willingness to share intrigued me and invited me to learn more about them through writing. I felt compelled to write the chapter in short sections focused on recurring themes within their interviews, but I sensed that I was not yet ready to thread these sections together into a linear chapter. I continued to a chapter draft addressing common themes among my participants in the United States. This made clear to me that the two participant groups had more commonalities than differences, so I combined the two sections into a single chapter addressing common themes within Eastwest Shin Somatics. I then worked my way backward, writing a chapter on the beginnings of the practice with Sondra, and its current iteration with both Sondra and Ashley.

Sondra remembered Yoshito Ohno teaching about a slow growing orchid and Ashley discussed Eastwest training modules as spirals. With these ideas at the forefront of my



awareness, I began a search for a spiraling orchid, and landed upon the *spiranthes cernua*, a rhizomatic plant that grows in an upward spiral. The plant seemed a perfect representation of Shin Somatics as a historical and pragmatic practice, spreading shallow roots (life in potential) underground while actualizing a spiral above ground. Just as Shin Somatics seeks to be open to new possibilities within a given milieu, adapting to the environment and the people in it, the rhizomatic root of the orchid is full of potential, able to begin a new plant above ground from any point within its root system in relationship with environmental influences. In this space of possibility and potential, the rhizomatic root and Shin Somatics both swim in the virtual—the possibility not yet enacted. However, the spiraling flower of the *spiranthes cernua* is the rhizome's actuality. It is the plant in the visible world, it actualizes, interacts with the world in the set pattern of the spiraling flowers and long leaves, just as movement patterns and set practices within Shin Somatics actualize in yoga, bodywork, and intuitive dance. Yet these flowers and leaves are also in relation with the larger environment, adjusting to environmental support and stressors. Just so, Eastwest Shin Somatics is an adaptable practice designed to exist in relationship with the environment.

This mix of virtual and actual hearkened back to a chapter draft I wrote for a different project in early 2019 that never came to fruition. The chapter addressed Deleuze, intuition as a philosophical method, and Erin Manning's exploration of the superject. As I considered the chapter for inclusion in my dissertation, it drew my attention to some of the themes that arose in my earlier explorations of participant interviews, in particular a focus on intuition and duration. Yet the chapter also seemed poised to offer an opportunity for Shin Somatics to continue to change and grow. The revised version is included as Chapter 3 in this dissertation, pointing to

current alignments with post-structural and process philosophy and future possibilities along the Eastwest Shin Somatics spiral.

Throughout data analysis and the write-up process, I engaged in multiple member checks to maintain an ethical approach and ensure study validity. A qualitative researcher may interpret data in a radically different way than participants, threatening validity of the study. Eisner's directive to ensure the weight of evidence is persuasive, seeking the opinion of others through member checks, peer review and external audit to determine "that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of [a situation is] right" is apropos here (quoted in Creswell 2013, 246). Likewise, Creswell's assertion that a write-up must resonate with its intended audience and "be compelling, powerful and convincing" is important (Cresswell 2013, 248). This ensures validity within the study. As I began to develop ideas about the practice, I often emailed or messaged participants to ask what they thought of the direction I was taking. When sending chapters to participants for their review, I asked that they not only ensure I cited them correctly, but that they feel free to affirm or challenge my assertions. Members validated me, provided additional insights, or openly disagreed with me. I shifted my analysis accordingly. For example, during Ashley's interview we discussed her use of an altar in her practice. Sondra does not engage in Shin Somatics as a spiritual/religious practice, so I began to wonder whether blending spiritual practices with Eastwest methods was specific and common to those in Mexico. I began a group message on WhatsApp with Mexican study participants, asking, "I'm wondering if you are willing to share your own understanding of the place of religion and spiritual practices within Shin Somatics in Mexico and why you see the connection (or lack of connection) that way." Participants provided several and varied responses, making it clear that Ashley's approach was unique to her personal values rather than a commonality among those embedded within the

Mexican culture. Therefore, I did not discuss this as a common theme within the community in my write-up.

Affirmations included statements such as “I felt you captured Sondra and Eastwest Somatics process so beautifully!” and “It is a beautiful account of the work.” Sondra and Ashley pushed me to clarify my philosophical interpretations and assertions, particularly pushing back against my focus on intuition within the practice. Sondra felt such a focus on intuition arose because the participants I interviewed were highly intuitive people and a different participant pool might offer a more objective understanding of Eastwest Shin Somatics. This indicates that within the confines of this study intuition is important. Additional research is needed to determine whether it is important within the more general Eastwest population. Ashley interpreted intuition as a special quality that only some people can access and was concerned that such a word might lead to an elitist understanding of the practice. This led me to clarify my use of the concept to identify it as a philosophical and pragmatic approach available to all people.

This dissertation reflects Eastwest Shin Somatics as it is understood and practiced by a specific and limited group of practitioners within this specific historical period. This is a hallmark of qualitative research, which seeks to understand people’s beliefs or behavior, clarify social and cultural norms, and understand why and how people engage in processes and behaviors (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011, 10). *My* understanding of the practice relies heavily on participant interviews, published documents, and websites authored and maintained by Eastwest practitioners, and is filtered through my own experience. While the dissertation does not reflect the entirety of the practice, it offers valuable insight that adds to the literature through providing clarity regarding common themes of the work for these participants and indicating the adaptability and applicability of Eastwest Shin Somatics in two specific cultural and

geographical locations. As the practice continues to grow and change, this research provides a snapshot of what is for this participant group, and offers a philosophical challenge to move beyond self-other interrelationship to an awareness of self as forming and in-formed by the milieu.

CHAPTER III  
BECOMING RHIZO-SOMATIC: OOZING PHENOMENOLOGY AND DIS-ORGANIZING  
BODIES

A poetic invitation:

***When is Shin Somatics?***

Speeds and rhythms shift through touch, breath, attention, and exploration.

We dance.

Roots spread far and wide, under the surface. Changing and being changed.

I join-with, becoming anew.

The world and i body together.

Folding and Infolding.

Both, and.

A heterogenous multiplicity, beginning without defining the end.

Trusting in the process.

Yes, and. Yes, and.

What, now, is possible?

Who, now, do we become?

In this chapter I delve into the philosophical undergirding of Eastwest Shin Somatics to find openings to new possibilities within the practice. Particularly, I press against the practice's current rooting in existential phenomenology<sup>3</sup> allowing it to maintain its own durational quality while becoming more-than itself. I assert this shift in duration might allow the community to learn through exploration of somatic movement in the thick present (concepts I explain in the next paragraphs), not only respecting differences but privileging them in order to become more fully

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<sup>3</sup> There are many phenomenologies, and a discussion of these is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Here I simplify my discussion of phenomenology to clarify my argument. I am primarily influenced by my reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012) alongside scholars such as Lawlor (1998) and Manning (2014), who critique Merleau-Ponty's work, and Levin (2016) and Günzel (2014), who draw connections between Merleau-Ponty's work and Deleuze and Guattari. For a brief exploration of the multiple branches of phenomenology from Sondra Fraleigh's perspective, see her chapter "Branching into Phenomenologies" in *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance* (2018a).

who we are. In doing so, I honor the practice of adaptation within Shin Somatics. As Sondra shares, “I trust that [practitioners] will use the openness of our form to take it in their own directions” (Fraleigh 2020). Study participants also value change and adaptability within the modality. Kay explains that Shin Somatics “is fluid, and it changes, develops, evolves, and grows” (Nelson 2020). The way Shin Somatics changes is guided by each practitioner’s intuition, in the present moment. Kelly shares, “What I have discovered in the teaching of [Shin Somatics] is that I can follow my own intuition and not be disrespecting the work, and not be going in the wrong direction” (Lester 2020). This chapter follows my intuition, seeking to open the practice to new possibilities for the minor, or those who have not yet been attended to within Eastwest Shin Somatics.

In *Making Connections*, Peggy Hackney remembers Irmgard Bartenieff explaining that “Movement is an event that leads to consequences” (2002, 33). In the context of this dissertation, it is important to make explicit that her statement addresses movement in a somatic context. Thus, I explicitly focus on movement as an event that leads to embodied consequences—for the individual, the community, and the earth. Below, I briefly explore the philosophical underpinnings of Eastwest Shin Somatics before inviting post-structuralist and process philosophy into the practice to find openings for the community to eschew faciality, or definition of form and similarity within the community. This may allow attentional focus on that which is minor, or not currently foregrounded within the practice. Because Eastwest Shin Somatics shares with many other somatic practices a rootedness in existential phenomenology, I address the literature as a whole before focusing on Eastwest in particular.

## Restating the Context, Identifying the Subject

As mentioned in Chapter 1, somatic literature indicates a metanarrative of wellness that critics complicate by pointing out that somatics is grounded in privilege that leads to universalist language that implicitly and explicitly marginalizes socially minoritized groups. This may be due to the fact that much of somatic literature is steeped in Western phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose work asserts the inevitability of the first-person lived experience, which, as Ginot states, is used by somatics authors to validate their embodied practice as “true because it emanates from a singular lived experience” (2010, 14). While this is a misinterpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s work, evidence of such a reading engaged within the literature abounds (see Feldenkrais 2010; Ginot 2010; Alexander 1974; Johnson 1995).

Whereas in the first chapter I discuss Merleau-Ponty in brief and in relation to somatic literature in general, here I provide a more in-depth exploration of his phenomenology. In doing so, I clarify the complicated inter-relationship of subject and object evident in both his work and Shin Somatics. This allows me to offer a line of flight to subjectivation through a Deleuzian dis-organization of phenomenology that encourages awareness of bodying as an act-in-the-event, forming and in-forming in relationship with the milieu. This dis-organization dissolves pre-existing hierarchies of understanding to allow the somatic practitioner to attend to that which is minor, or not previously foregrounded in their attention.

Merleau-Ponty figures prominently in Shin Somatics literature, alongside his predecessors Heidegger and Husserl. A thorough discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s work is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is important to understand the phenomenologist’s assertion that body and world are inter-connected. In his oft-cited work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty asserts that our pre-reflective, subjective, sensing self is in unity with

the objective world, stating, “In that originary layer of sensing that we discover on condition of genuinely connecting with the perceptual act and of leaving behind the critical attitude, I live the unity of the subject and inter-sensory unity of the thing, I do not conceive of them in the manner of reflective analysis and science” (2012, 248). However, through reflection, we make sense of the world (acquire a “knowledge of things”), which we are regularly measuring against a perceived objective world. “The world itself remains the same world throughout my entire life because it is precisely the permanent being within which I make all corrections to knowledge, a permanent being that is not affected in its unity by these corrections, and whose evidentness polarizes my movements toward the truth through appearance and error” (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 342).

While Merleau-Ponty’s project is, at least in part, to acknowledge the “historical and embodied character of experience” (Toadvine 2019, n.p.) and the essential unity of subject and object, he also draws attention to the fact that subject and object maintain that unity only when in a pre-reflective state. Once a subject moves beyond pre-reflective sensation, it relies on historical knowledge to perceive the object, thereby introducing a separation of subject and object (albeit it a false separation). Merleau-Ponty does a great deal of work to draw forward our awareness of the manufactured nature of this separation and offer examples of instances when this perceived divide is overcome, particularly in his later works. Toadvine explains that “Merleau-Ponty summarizes his research after *Phenomenology* as focused on a ‘theory of truth’ exploring how knowledge and communication with others are ‘original formations with respect to perceptual life, but...also preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it’” (2019, n.p.). Yet the above quote references an unpublished text, and much of the somatic literature that I have read engages Merleau-Ponty’s earlier and better-known text, *Phenomenology of*



*Perception*. Furthermore, critics such as Ginot (2010) cite the philosopher through the lens of Richard Shusterman, who asserts that Merleau-Ponty advocates for somatic silence. Shusterman states, “I will do my best to explain Merleau-Ponty’s resistance to thematized somatic consciousness or somaesthetic reflection. But I will not be able to justify it. For this attitude is precisely one of the features of his somatic theory that I find most problematic, not only as a pragmatist philosopher, but as a somatic educator” (2008, loc. 1238-1241). This claim is understandable, as somatic practitioners seek, among other things, to understand inner experience. This requires self-reflection, which Shusterman states Merleau-Ponty is expressly against, sharing “Our body, he [Merleau-Ponty] insists, wonderfully guides us, but ‘only on condition that we stop analyzing it’ and its feelings in reflective consciousness, only ‘on the condition that I do not reflect expressly on it’” (2008, loc. 1231-1233).

If the somatic field is influenced by the earlier and published work of Merleau-Ponty, which understands the subject as separated from object, not in originary substance, but through reflection, then it is perhaps no wonder that many somatic practitioners feel they engage somatic modalities to seek the essence of the subjective self, looking inward to transcend this duality. (Eddy 2017, George 2020). This goal assumes that such transcendence is not only possible and desirable, but essential to human well-being. Sondra, who has delved more deeply into the work of multiple phenomenologists, considers transformation rather than transcendence as the goal, and understands self and other as inter-related. Yet she still relies on first-person experience. She discusses multi-directional attention within phenomenology and somatics, stating, “The descriptive function of phenomenology is... associated with originaive experience, creative impulse and first-person intuitive voice. Phenomenological descriptions study experience in other words, as do somatic processes. One can take this in any direction, letting perception well

up naively, as I do... directing my attention somatically out towards nature and in towards home” (Williamson et al. 2014, 257). While multi-directional, phenomenological experience is still reliant on the first-person, which I contend is perceived as self/subject, that is understood in relation to and with other/object within somatic practice.

Here I turn to dance philosopher Erin Manning (2014), who posits that phenomenology (particularly that explored in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*) relies on the conception of a subject, perceived in relation to an other and brought into conscious awareness through sensory perception.<sup>4</sup> Within the bulk of somatic literature, as is the case with phenomenology, this subject is human. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone explains, “phenomenologically, the ‘objectively’ given has its roots in the human consciousness, as that consciousness intends or creates its own objects” (2015, 8). This human body is, at least in the existential phenomenology that undergirds much of Western somatic practice, a lived body that “is considered the center of the universe” (Fraleigh 1987, 55). Yet phenomenology also seeks connection between humans. To place this underlying philosophy in current terms, “Phenomenology begins with experience.... [and] we first experience the world as it appears in subjective life, and...such experiences can be described and shared” (Fraleigh 2018a, 1).

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<sup>4</sup> Sondra complicates Manning’s reading of Merleau-Ponty. In a personal communication dated December 6, 2021, she shares, “Phenomenology as a field of studies does not oppose self and other, it admits that these are perspectives that make each other possible. Many phenomenologists [such as Ricoeur and Levinas] in the current scene write about the ethics and importance of inclusiveness. At the root of phenomenology through Husserl, self and other are activities within the world.” I do not argue Sondra’s point. However, Manning supports her reading through multiple scholarly viewpoints, and my personal experience of somatic practice is that the self as subject is of primary concern, even when perceived in relationship with the environment. Manning’s paper challenges the human-centric understanding of subject, utilizing Merleau-Ponty’s later works alongside those of process philosophers. This is the argument I wish to engage to open Shin Somatics to new potential.

## Bringing Awareness to What Is and What Can Be

I embody the complex present of the somatic field. I am a highly educated white, middle-class woman who has lived her entire life in the United States. I study Shin Somatics, a practice rooted in the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty that is an amalgamation of both Eastern and Western somatic disciplines. The practice is influenced by (though not limited to) several modalities created by white men (Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, Craniosacral Therapy). Therefore, my practice is directly connected to those who are criticized by current scholars and the popular practice of blending cultural somatic approaches. However, I am more than this. Born and raised in western Virginia and a current resident of Richmond, Virginia (once the capital of the Confederacy), I am consistently reminded of the negative impact of racism, sexism, nationalism, and more in my everyday life. Having lived in Utah for several years, I have witnessed the deep orientalist roots in American culture as well as the consistent silencing of Native American people.

These challenges are constantly visible, and I am ever seeking transcendence of socially imposed identity for myself as well as my students, friends, and colleagues, even as I seek to create space for individuals to self-identify. The transcendence I seek is not a once-and-for-all moving-beyond our differences into universal sameness, but a willing travelling through and beyond individual identity bound by socio-cultural belief systems. It is a becoming-with that is both individual and more-than. This transcendent identity is both in-formed through, and informs community. What I seek is an everyday somatic practice that attends to *difference as the key to equity*, and I believe Eastwest Shin Somatics can become this practice. With training centers in Mexico and Tokyo, and growing online training workshops, those certifying in the practice are increasingly diverse. Respecting differences is a core narrative within the curriculum

model, and key principles include such practices as suspending expectation and judgment, drawing forth, not knowing, not interpreting, not advising, and not fixing, alongside affirmative principles such as saying yes, finding openings, and learning as you do. Practitioners' phenomenological worldview attends to lived experience, which is necessarily steeped in differences as each individual experiences life differently, even as they seek to attain what are perceived as common goals of health, balance, and well-being. We need only press a little further—beyond subjective lived experience to life as lived. A focus on life as event and subjectivation as process may help dissolve current understandings to listen more deeply to difference within the community and more effectively become with what is.

Here, I believe the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze can draw forward new possibilities within somatics as a field and Eastwest Shin Somatics in particular. Deleuze engages Michel Foucault in an argument against subject as a defined and essential entity. Deleuze writes that Foucault excludes the subject, stating that the subject is “a set of variables in the statement” (Deleuze 1988, 55). Therefore, theorists who strive to know and define the subject are misguided. For Foucault, the subject can exist, but it comes into being through relations between forces outside the “self.” This process is *subjectivation*, where force from within a body relates with outside force, bending the outside and infolding so that no force is diminished, only changed (ibid., 101; emphasis mine). This folding occurs through embodied practice. Deleuze explains, “just as power-relations can be affirmed only by being carried out, so the relation to oneself, which bends these power relations, can be established only by being carried out” (ibid., 102). Foucault understands sexuality to be the practice through which subjectivation occurs. However, I suggest here that other embodied practices will attain subjectivation.

Shin Somatics moves toward accomplishing this infolding in many ways, including inviting many global perspectives and practices into the work and allowing those perspectives to shift and ooze into each other. Within the idea of Shin as oneness, different ways of embodiment maintain their own quality (which I maintain is currently conceived within the practice as self) even as they mix with other qualities, always creating a new Shin. This new Shin is made of the stuff from before yet is also different from each individual practice, viewpoint, and embodiment blending within it. Thus, Gladys blends her salsa dancing with her Shin approach to yoga, experiencing a different oneness than Ashley, whose practice incorporates an altar and blends her spiritual beliefs with embodied practices. Sondra's Shin often arises from dancing in and with nature. She describes her experience with somatic dance in nature, sharing, "The environment really holds us all, and the boundaries [between self and other] dissolve of their own accord, because people are truly relating to something bigger than self" (quoted in Bingham 2018, 43). For all practitioners, different qualities of embodiment are understood in relation with the environment, of which the human is part rather than overlord. It is important to note the understanding of self in relationship *with* nature, with its own boundaries that dissolve. This is different from a self that arises through specific conditions of experience. As a Shin practitioner, I immerse myself in nature and acknowledge my inter-connectedness with it, but I do not (yet) perceive myself as bodying-with nature.

What I believe Shin Somatics is moving toward is a philosophy of becoming, one blending phenomenology with post structural and process philosophy. What post structural and process philosophy offer Western somatic practice is a focus on becoming rather than being. In the next pages I argue that full realization of movement through and beyond individual subjecthood requires a shift in the philosophy that currently undergirds somatic practice. I

suggest a sort of philosophical oozing of phenomenology and process philosophy. I also explore what I perceive as the beginnings of this oozing within Eastwest Shin Somatics, in hope that such a shift may continue within the practice, creating potential for a similar ooze in other somatic modalities.

### **Moving From Lived Experience to Life as Lived**

To understand Shin Somatics' function thusly, I consider my lived experience of moving-with another while engaging in one-on-one table work. I stand by a table, observing a woman lying before me, adjusting my breath rhythm to match hers. I shrink my environment through intentional attention, entering a space centered upon my relationship with another. I am aware of the room around me, but I do not focus on it. I hear my partner's body sounds—breath, shifting limbs, rustling clothes—while environmental sounds fade into the background of my attention. I quiet my thoughts and extend my perception toward my partner in an attempt to connect with her energetically, to sense her current relation with her environment and join in this relation. I clear myself, slowing time through directing my attention toward my partner. This travels me into a thick present integral to creating new possibilities. The thick present includes only the immediate past and an undetermined future in potentia.<sup>5</sup> Within the thick present I let go of the actual, or what is manifest and already defined in my environment according to my pre-existing understanding. I let go of past and future, though there still exists a tension between what I “know” of the soma and what I willingly seek to un-know. I am listening with my ears, hands, vision, and intuitive sense. I am ready to respond. I am present. I am ready to “change spontaneously according to individual differences in bodily temperament and habitual response” (Fraleigh 2015, 37). From this place of clarity, my partner and I enter into an improvised dance

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<sup>5</sup> For a rich explanation of thick present, see Capurso (2022).

wherein I respond to my intuition with the intent of matching—moving alongside, along with, and in response to. I sense a holding pattern within her body, and I move to the area where change has ceased—her embodiment traced rather than mapped—halted perhaps by an injury, a desire to protect the self from emotional trauma, or a habit otherwise created to cope with her environment. As I connect with her body physically, we move in concert, becoming a two-person body. We dance together: a sagittal circling of a leg, a lifting and folding of an arm, a rocking of the spine. Each action invites new perceptions. New perceptions lead to new possibilities. New possibilities lead to creative action. We dance together—a dance of oneness.

This dance of oneness is one Ashley describes as a phenomenological experience (Meeder 2019). Phenomenology seeks to describe and understand the essence of things as understood through lived experience. In “A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance through Phenomenology,” Sondra Fraleigh explains that “phenomenology aims first to describe immediately perceived features of anything, admitting the subjective character of perception” (1991, 15). Phenomenologists understand that I am a subject—a first-person experiential being. I am also an object—a third-person experiential being. Subject is pre-reflexive and present-oriented, sensing and perceiving without conscious attention. Object can be reflexive and understood through sensual perception, but quite often object refers to what/who is not self and is defined as other. I am a self/subject, and that which is not I is other/object. I understand myself in relation to or with the other. Sondra illuminates this duality, sharing, “The very notion of a self depends on the notion of an other (or others) separate and distinct from the self” (ibid.). Phenomenology acknowledges and seeks to transform this self/other duality.

Also important to the phenomenological worldview as engaged in somatic practice is the belief that I develop self-awareness through increasing consciousness (or reflexive awareness) of

myself as individual in relationship with the world. Somatic practitioners seek to develop self-consciousness in hopes that, as Sondra explains, “Consciousness transcends separate acts of perception to unify our experience of phenomena” (ibid., 12). Through consciousness, I transcend my individual self, understanding not only the “uniqueness of experience” but universal, “shared meaning, recognizing that this world is indeed ‘our world,’ that our being-in-the world is conditioned by the existence of others” (ibid., 11). This, then, is the phenomenology upon which Shin Somatics is currently based. This phenomenology shapes our mindset, inducing what Ashley calls “phenomenological attitudes” (a term she borrows from Silvia Gomez, an existentialist analyst) in our practice and everyday life (Meeder 2019). It is rooted in Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, seeking understanding of individual lived experience while acknowledging the desire to connect with others and find community at the intersection of subject and object. A phenomenologist moves “with others in mind” (Fraleigh 2019). I exist, and I am in community with my world, my moving body is both subjective and inter-subjective (ibid). I am both shaped by and shape my world, nonetheless I am I.

But what if? What if being I is limiting the potential of not I? What of the minor—that which is othered, both human and non-human, and often relegated to the recesses of our attention? I wonder what I am not attending to when I hold onto a sense of I—a self that *exists in* relationship rather than a self that *becomes through* relationship. What potential is not created?

Erin Manning engages the process philosophy of José Gil to explain that dance (and here I add somatic movement) makes the infinite virtual actual, but that there is always more-than the actual. She describes a duet, explaining that in movement,

A mobile axis emerges between movements that no longer expects or seeks a center. The resonant field of relational movement is itself on the move, creating a



multiplicity of balances in the making. The field of dance has opened to the more-than of its physical iteration. There are not two dancers, but two+i, where i stands for interval, individuation and the infinite infinite. (Manning 2014, 173)

Recall my earlier description on page 43 of clearing myself to enter into the thick present, joining with another's body to become a two-person body. Here I wonder if I can press even a bit further than Manning, acknowledging the current somatic dance as two+i, and moving toward the conception of an i-subject (which I also refer to as i), thus foregrounding the potential inherent in interval, individuation, and infinite infinite. The i-subject is not a two+, rather it is a multiplicitous self that occurs in-act, in-the-event, always bodying within the milieu. What might be possible if I *become* i, inviting poststructuralist and process philosophy to ooze-with phenomenology. Rather than seeking interrelationship, I body-with the milieu within which I exist? What happens when I shift my focus from lived experience (what I am defining as organized and self-reflexive experience) to life as lived (what I am defining as dis-organized present experience)? What if I stay here, now, attuning to a present that does not attune to past and future but is just now. Just *these* conditions of experience? Just *this* event? What can *® now* let go? What do i *now* sense? How do i *now* become?

*This* is what I wonder. What happens if I acknowledge that i am in-formed by and in-form my environment. What if i open myself to the understanding of world as arising from the environment through assemblages of “physical organs, social, and cognitive processes that interact at and across levels of dynamic organization” (Seibt 2017, n.p.). i world the milieu within which i form and the world body's me. If body moves from subject to verb, what then is possible? If I dis-organize my somatic practice, thereby dis-organizing my body-world, who then

may i attune to within my bodying world? How does bodying shift for me and those who body-with me?

What I seek to do here is find an opening within Eastwest Shin Somatics to a radical phenomenology—a *(r)evolution* of sorts that meets Shin Somatics at the point of evolution (or change) and invites the eternal return into the practice. Here poststructuralist and process philosophy offer a line of flight to new potential. The phenomenological (r)evolution is also a Deleuzian eternal return (borrowed from Freidrich Nietzsche), a becoming that privileges difference and never ceases. Deleuze explains Nietzsche’s eternal return thusly, “The lesson of the eternal return is that there is no return of the negative. The eternal return means that being is selection. Only that which is affirmed returns. The eternal return is the reproduction of becoming but the reproduction of becoming is also the production of becoming active....becoming, multiplicity and chance do not contain any negation; difference is pure affirmation; return is the being of difference excluding the whole of the negative” (1983, 189-190).

In the context of Shin Somatics, I understand this as a charge to activate, or ®evolve, phenomenology—to ask where practitioners might be fixing (or defining) their sense of the I-subject and un-fix it. It is an invitation to question whether they are truly becoming, or whether they are seeking somatic boundaries organized around implicit truths of wellness. Might Shin practitioners ask where what they seek is that which is “better,” “more balanced,” or “more easeful,” when what they could seek is what the somatic act of bodying through moving-with another in the thick present affirms when becoming? Might this highlight difference within the practice, allowing the minor (that which we have not attended to due to pre-existing understanding) to come to the fore and body-with the milieu in a way that re-organizes the current somatic body? Shin Somatics practitioners have already taken the first steps down this

path—first clearing the self in order to intuit another’s somatic being, then affirming their current way of being, and continuing to follow their bodily and energetic cues while remaining in the role of the supportive guide. The practice is poised to allow even more dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, more dis-organization in order to swim in the milieu of the here-and-now.

Key to the @evolution are two concepts: intuition and duration. Deleuze turns to Bergson to understand intuition. Intuition seeks experience at its source, leading “us to go beyond the state of experience toward the conditions of experience” (Deleuze 1991, 27). Intuition “primarily denotes an immediate knowledge,’ and ‘involves a plurality of meanings and irreducible multiple aspects” (ibid., 14). Further, it is a *lived act*, meaning it is not a fixed concept, rather it is creative and becomes through the act of intuiting. In Shin Somatics, intuition is an immediate embodied understanding of a lived experience. Sondra also turns to Bergson when discussing intuition in *Dance and the Lived Body*. She cites the philosopher, stating, “intuition lies behind analysis [...]. Through intuition, the unique features of the world arise.... Intuition is the light that floods an idea and lights our understanding” (1987, 168).

Deleuze shares that Bergson understands intuition as a methodology that presupposes duration (1991, 13). Duration is a term developed through Deleuze’s understanding of both Bergson and Spinoza. Deleuze defines duration as “the continuation of existence from a beginning onward.... It involves a beginning but not an end” (1988, 62). Duration refers to time as a qualitative substance, and includes all qualitative differences, “to the point where it is defined as alteration in relation to itself” (1991, 92). Deleuze explains that duration “tends for its part to *take on or bear all the differences in kind* (because it is endowed with the power of qualitatively varying with itself)” (ibid., 31; emphasis mine).

If intuition is “the movement by which we emerge from our own duration, by which we make use of our own duration to affirm and immediately recognize the existence of other durations” (ibid., 33), then intuition and duration are ultimately about recognizing difference, which for Deleuze is key to becoming. In my Shin Somatics practice, intuition arises from present-centered attention and guides every choice I make. If I am present, I am able to notice my own embodied experience while sensing that of my partner. This noticing is non-judgmental and non-reactive, allowing me to respond immediately, without first analyzing movement possibilities. In this way, I avoid making choices based on my hierarchical understanding of “right” or “good” movement, choosing instead to practice an intuitive whole-bodied listening and response, guided primarily by my partner’s movement through practiced patterns that easily adapt to subtle bodily cues.

One example of this in Shin Somatics bodywork is a practitioner moving toward a body’s inclination rather than moving in a prescribed manner. In a YouTube video titled “Seahorse Float in Shin Bodywork,” a practitioner named Angie stands at the head of a table upon which a person lies (Fraleigh 2013). The video records a training workshop where students observe experienced practitioners, then take turns being supportive guide and primary mover. Angie states that she is noticing which way her client’s head is naturally turning and she is going to “work with that” (ibid.). After completing a movement-with-touch pattern, Angie steps away from the table, stating that she is “letting that go. Letting that process” (ibid.).

To invite different understanding of this attunement to present-centered potential, I propose applying Deleuze’s discussion of intuition as philosophical method directly to the Eastwest Shin Somatic experience. He explains that, through intuition, we seek experience “above that decisive *turn*, where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes a

properly *human* experience. Above the turn is precisely the point at which we finally discover differences in kind” (1991, 27; emphasis in original). Here we determine “lines” wherein “apparently diverse facts are grouped according to their natural affinities, drawn together according to their articulation” (ibid.). When pushing each line beyond the turn, we extend them beyond our own experience, “an extraordinary broadening out that forces us to think a pure perception identical to the whole of matter” (ibid.).

When I engage Shin Somatics, I am aware of moving above the turn in the moments after I clear myself and match my partner through movement and/or touch. Shin practitioners value not starting. They seek to be present, attuning to their partner, client, or student. In this moment, they exist as cultured bodies, but they are becoming more-than. Their past shapes their present but does not define it. Nothing is fixed. As they move-with their partner, the two-now-one move beyond the decisive turn.

However, Deleuze also explains that “when we have followed each of the ‘line’ beyond the turn in experience, we must also rediscover the point at which they intersect again, where the directions cross and where the tendencies that differ in kind link together again and give rise to the thing as we know it.... These lines must intersect again, *not at the point from which we started, but rather at a virtual point*, at a virtual image of the point of departure, which is itself located beyond the turn in experience” (ibid., 28; emphasis mine). Might this be the somatic process of developing awareness, recognizing habit, and seeking freedom of movement choice?

Within phenomenology, this reflexive awareness leads to consciousness *of* the self. This consciousness then allows us to acknowledge habits of thought and action and seek a universality that exists beyond the subject/object duality manufactured through reflection. Remember that Sondra discusses this universalizing impulse when she shares the import of both uniqueness of

experience and discovery of shared meaning and an understanding of this world as *our* world. (Fraleigh 1991, 11). However, she also emphasizes that in dance (and here I extrapolate to include Shin Somatics movement practices), we seek a “bodily lived communion with others” (ibid., 15). Communion indicates that movement does not seek universality as sameness, rather as a shared experience. Vida Middelwong engages the work of Thomas Csordas to highlight the import of differentiation within somatic attending, wherein movement patterns function as “a dialectic interplay between being and becoming sensitive to the qualities and intensities of situations” (2018, 66). Thus, somatic practice allows for both diversity and commonality. Yet it is not enough to attend to differentiation. One must intentionally attend to the minor within both the individual and community body.

I propose applying Deleuze’s durational attending through intuition to further highlight the potential for Shin Somatics to foreground difference in order to honor the minor within the practice, thus altering “habitual responses in creative and insightful ways” (Middelwong 2018, 66). As Deleuze shares,

The expression “beyond the decisive turn” has two meanings: First, it denotes the moment when the lines, setting out from an uncertain common point given in experience, diverge increasingly according to the differences in kind. Then it denotes another moment when these lines converge again to give us this time the virtual image or the distinct reason of the common point. Turn and return.

Dualism is therefore only a moment, which must lead to the re-formation of a monism. (Deleuze 1991, 29)

This monism is not a universal sameness, rather it is *full of difference*. It is also completely virtual. Everything is possible, because we have moved beyond hierarchy. Habit is released,

definitions are obliterated, we exist in what Ashley and her colleagues in Mexico term *Somalandia* (Meeder 2019). Somalandia is a place of inaction, not because of inability but because the an-archic body swims in present-centered potential. In Deleuzian terms, one might call this dis-organization, or moving toward becoming a BwO.

As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the BwO is non-hierarchical, though temporary hierarchies may establish through pragmatic relationship with other bodies in a given milieu, or “molecular medium” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 214). The BwO is always becoming, and never concretizes. It has no self, for a self would indicate a fixed body. Deleuze and his partner Félix Guattari state, “The BwO is what remains when you take everything away” (ibid., 151). Thus, the BwO is uncoded and uncoded, changing in relation with its environment, and without a fixed identity. It can be difficult to accept, because it requires a dissolution of the subject—a dissolution of a sense of I.

For those of us steeped in Cartesian dualism, allowing the subject/object duality to dissipate means untethering from identity. In pragmatic terms, this can be detrimental in a culture that normalizes unbreakable boundaries around identity. Western culture privileges definition, or what Deleuze and Guattari might call the faciality machine. The scholars explain, this machine “is the social production of face, because it performs the facialization of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus” (1987, 181). I contend that such faciality, while serving somatic practitioners through defining their specific practice, also closes these practices to the minor and limits becoming. The tension between mapping the boundaries of a system and allowing a practice to become is evident within Shin Somatics.

Maps figure prominently in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and can elucidate our understanding of the somatic container here. Within the work, maps, or planes, are the location of assemblages, haecceities (the this-ness of a person or object), events, becomings, and the like. They hold the milieu in relations of speed and slowness (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 507). Shin Somatics can serve as a plane of consistency wherein containers, or movement patterns, are established and maintained. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the plane of consistency allows a body (or in our case, the containers which Shin Somatics utilizes in a movement lesson) to be defined by its latitude and longitude (1987, 260). Yet the practice can also serve as a plane of composition and de-composition, wherein the modality offers recognizable movement patterns and somatic experiences that allow and encourage multiple becomings through awareness of the thick present.

In a 2018 personal communication with the author, Ashley describes Shin Somatics as an “open form,” wherein movement and touch patterns provide a template of sorts for a present-centered interaction between client and practitioner, student and teacher, self and other. Sondra prefers to refer to Shin Somatics as adaptive structures, thereby providing a sense of discrete practices within the modality (Fraleigh 2021c). I believe this adaptive nature provides fertile soil for actualizing a somatic (r)evolution. Yet I also notice within my somatic circle a very human desire to define the practice—to recognize its face. We seek to set standards, explain how Shin Somatics works, clarify, etc. In training workshops, I notice students asking the teacher, “How do you know what to do?” and variations of this question. There is sometimes a desire to forego intuition and practice patterns and techniques deemed “right,” even as the instructor insists there is no singular right way to engage in somatic movement therapy and education. In response, teachers create manuals, online training modules, clarify their in-person instruction, and strive to



give students of somatic practice markers of success, effective verbal cues, notes on when, where, and how to make physical connection with bodies. All these things provide a feeling of comfort for the new practitioner, and define a given practice. They aid marketing, offering the promise that after so many hundreds of hours, one will be a skilled practitioner and after so many more hours, one will be a qualified teacher.

I believe these are important to students, teachers, and clients. Certainly quality control is essential and requiring in-depth study with experienced practitioners aids in ensuring high-quality somatic practice. In a culture where one relies on one's trade to survive, levels of certification ensuring future clients their practitioner is highly qualified in a specific technique is important. Additionally, being clear about the differences between somatic modalities is integral to helping potential clients and students find the practice that offers what they seek. For example, I would not want a client to come to me seeking the benefits of a Feldenkrais ATM session, a shaman, or the experience of Gabrielle Roth's 5 Rhythms. That would simply lead to dissatisfaction for both myself and my client.

However, I also believe this is where somatic practitioners get mixed up, confusing the patterns engaged to create new possibilities with faciality-a territorialization that fixes the practice through tracing rather than mapping, defining it in a way that puts its boundaries in Sharpie rather than pencil. These boundaries establish clear and obvious lines around a practice and those who belong in it, rather than dotted lines that can be erased, expanded, contracted, etc. as the conditions of experience change. Practitioners create an organized and recognizable body, claiming that this practice is Feldenkrais, this is Alexander, this is Authentic Movement, etc.; and once the faciality of the body is defined, it is carved into training programs, taught as a method with training manuals, proven effective through articles, books, quantitative and qualitative

studies. This brings people to the practice who read the studies, have money to pay for training, can easily travel across state and national borders, or have access to reliable internet and space in which to learn the practice. Once these people receive a stamp of certification, they can then charge for their services, thereby providing a livelihood while simultaneously, and often unintentionally, excluding those who do not have the means to learn about and pay for such services.

Where might a desire to define somatic boundaries (or as Sondra might say, the containers within the practice [Fraleigh 2021e]) be limiting us? When does definition turn into fixing, ceasing to become? And when that happens, what minor voices are implicitly excluded? As Shin Somatics (and other somatic practices) (r)evolves, how does the community seek a *mapping* rather than a *tracing*? How do they create porous boundaries that crystallize the container of Shin Somatics while encouraging it to ooze?

I believe somatic practice can ease this difficulty through allowing itself to dis-organize and re-organize in present time and space, acknowledging current social and geo-political norms, temporarily releasing them in *somalandia*, and then willingly choosing which norms will continue to provide boundaries for identity, and which will remain dissolved. I believe this is especially important work for somatic practitioners who are steeped in privilege, as it may open the field to the minor. This work requires both skill and willingness to swim in the present, intuiting movement, and enthusiastically dis-organizing the I-subject so that different, minor selves—those selves one may not attune to when immersed in the I—may be foregrounded. These minor selves may then become new rhizomatic nodes that re-organize, creating spirals from the Shin Somatics rhizome and shifting the boundaries of their oozing identity.

The Shin Somatics rhizome is an assemblage of heterogeneous approaches that create movement possibilities arising in relationship with the milieu and existing within a specific crystallization in time and space. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (1987, 7). The rhizome, being multiple, has great potential to change in relationship with the world with which it interacts. It defies over-coding, thus can only be understood within a specific spacetime (ibid., 9). In somatics, this may be understood as engaging a new movement pattern to acknowledge a habit (which is singular and arborescent in nature). When habit is ruptured, the rhizomatic body simply reorders itself, becoming a new body that realizes different potential. Therefore, if one attempts to over-code a rhizome (for example, if one strives to contain it within set “right” movement patterns), the rhizome will rupture. I recognize this rhizomatic nature within Shin Somatics when Sondra thoughtfully incorporates a student’s concept into her existent work, when Ashley shares that she and her students have created new animal images and movement patterns in the Shin practice Land to Water Yoga. I sense it when I am in the midst of a much-practiced pattern in table work and I begin to improvise new movement inspired by my partner’s unique response to my touch.

Yet, even as Shin Somatics ruptures bodily habit, it is rooted in an understanding of self as an essential concept. While practitioners foreground interrelationship between somas, there always exists a sense of the I-subject discussed earlier. I am a part of the world, rather than informing and being in-formed by it. And even as I allow myself to flow into and out of the environment, I seek a deeper sense of self, or what I understand as the essential subject—the essence of me. Sondra also wrestles with this undercurrent within somatics. She shares in a personal communication,

I believe the self is an obsession in somatics and not a good one. We inherited it from Hanna, and I want to decenter this outmoded definition. A phenomenologist would say there is no such thing as the self, since we are always incorporating others from birth on, and we are simply part of the world around us. Any way of speaking about our relationship to the environment would have to account for our being a part of it. We always put ourselves at the center, and this is a problem that I have been aware of since my study of butoh. (Fraleigh 2021b)

Dance philosopher Erin Manning offers a line of flight from this self-centeredness, explaining that movement unmoors the I-subject. Manning shares that, “movement is always in the infinity of a crossroads between a *where* and a *how*, and never a *who*. Not me, not here, not there, *where*, in the middling of experience in-forming. Not a “who” but “how” – not who the subject is but how it comes to experience (as event, as bodying)” (2014, 167; emphasis in original). She further explains that experiencing the world directly in movement “is to participate in an enfolding that challenges the centrality of the I. It is not ‘I’ as self-enclosed subject who is creating movement, but movement itself that is in the process of recalibrating an ‘I’ that will eventually emerge, unmoored.... A body is never in advance of its moving” (ibid.).

I believe Shin Somatics is an adaptable form allowing for an unmooring of the I, thereby creating potential for the i—a subject that no longer relies on object to define itself. The i-subject as I understand it is actualizing through movement-with and within the milieu. It is in flux and only briefly crystalizes into a sense of this-ness. It is what I experience as the somatic i—not as bodymind, rather as worldingbody-bodyingworld. This i body is rather than is a body—always creating itself, always worlding, always changing. This i is present in this moment, in this milieu. I believe it is both pre-reflexive and reflexive, knowing itself as always in-forming in motion. It

is a slippery self-consciousness, wherein the self is in excess of the I-subject. It is what Manning borrows from process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead to term the superject—the subject of the event, or the present in actuality.

Manning also engages Gil to press against phenomenological self-consciousness. She explains that Gil advocates for consciousness-*with* rather than consciousness *of*. For Gil, consciousness is co-emergent with experience in the thinking-feeling.... It is force before it is form, microperception, tendency, opportunity, *felt as such*.... This consciousness-with is a kind of porous awareness, open, multiplying, dispersed” (ibid., 177). Therefore, consciousness is a becoming that occurs in a given event that leads to an awareness of self as more-than subject. I suggest that the superject constantly becomes through the eternal return—that which is affirmed returns in every event, through addition. The superject is never defined, rather it becomes here, now, in relation with the current conditions of experience.

If I allow my self to become unmoored, then i am always becoming, never fixed. I believe this is the release of habit sought in Shin Somatics. Practitioners do not fix. They are not concerned with an end-goal. They are always in potentia. As a Shin practitioner, I clear myself before dancing-with. I allow my intuition to guide me, thereby attuning to the milieu. Yet it is hard to dis-organize, to let go of form and trust the event. It may be even harder for one new to the practice. I notice this when I dance with my students and they remain in the comfort of their habits, tracing and re-tracing the familiar rather than exploring new movement possibilities.

How easy it might be to make tracings out of maps, fixing boundaries so seepage is contained. But what if this means some people feel the implicit exclusion that accompanies facialization and never join the community, or leave after a brief visit, upon sensing that they do not belong. How easy to claim that everyone is welcome in the community even as practitioners

are blind to tracings created through language, images, and movement and touch patterns that unwittingly communicate a separation of self and other. This study offers an opportunity to recognize some of the common elements within the Shin Somatics plane of consistency that might lead to faciality. Deleuze and Guattari encourage such recognition as a necessary step in moving beyond the face, exhorting, “Find your black holes and white walls [that constitute the face], know them, know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight” (1987, 188).

As the Shin Somatics community continues to grow, publish, give form to the formless, and (r)evolve, I bring into our current awareness Erin Manning’s words, adding somatics:

“The [somatics] body” is a paradoxical precisely because it has never existed as such. It comes to form, it breeds figures, but it never “is.” Body is always a verb, an activity of bodying, a becoming-active of the paradoxical tendings – the disequilibriums, the multiple balances – that incite it to co-compose, dynamically, relationally, with the world. What we have come to know as “body” is felt, as wonder-ful paradox, but only in the moving, and what is felt is not its exteriority or its external image but the withness, the in-actness of the event coursing through it.

Body is event. Dancing event. (2014, 178)

I encourage the Shin Somatics community to continue to dance, seeking to acknowledge a community body of difference, one that is always shifting as they attend to what becomes, in the somatic act. I encourage us all to suspend expectation within the practice to the point that we may constantly dis-organize and re-organize, adjusting to the milieu so that each individual within the practice may truly become more fully who they are.

In the next chapters I map Eastwest Shin Somatics as it currently exists, exploring its historical development and its curriculum model as it is discussed by practitioners within the community. This brings attention to faciality while also drawing forward the ways in which the somatic modality is rhizomatic and oriented toward dis-organization. Shin Somatics practitioners need only lean into this dis-organization and attend to oneness through difference rather than universal sameness. I conclude this chapter with this offering: Let us dance. Let us acknowledge the multiplicity that is our ever-changing Eastwest Shin Somatics body. Let us be present with/in the milieu, bodying and worlding in a diverse community that arises in the event. We shall ooze with affirmation and joy, discovering the (r)evolution of Shin Somatics as we go.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RHIZOMATIC SPIRAL: AT THE ORIGINARY NODE AND ALONG THE CONTINUUM

When we touch with healing in our hands, we give our hands to nature, listen to the nature of another, tune our nature to that nature, become part of that nature.

Expect nothing. Wait. Spiral inward. (Fraleigh 1996, 18)



Figure 2 *Spiranthes cernua* (davecz2, n.p.).



The *spiranthes cernua*, or spiral orchid (see Figure 2), is a variety of orchid native to the Eastern US. According to the North Carolina State University Extension, the plant can reproduce through both seeds expelled from its flowers and offshoots from a rhizome (NC State Extension, n.d.). Interestingly, normal plant development can only occur when there is a symbiotic relationship between the orchid's roots and a fungus (ibid.) Additionally, the spiral orchid is one of the very few orchid species that emits a fragrance (ibid.). A plant that reproduces through multiple methods, relies on another organism in order to grow, and extends beyond itself through its fragrance seems an apt metaphor for Eastwest Shin Somatics.

The practice is most certainly rhizomatic, with roots spread wide throughout the world and drawing from multiple Eastern and Western practices to create an organism full of potential and adaptable to a changing environment. However, it is also a spiral, or perhaps several spirals, each extending from their own node of the Shin Somatics rhizome. A spiral is always moving, with an origin but no end point. It travels both inward and outward. There is a sense of equivalence and connection along the continuum of a spiral. Each point of a spiral is as important as any other point. One can enter a spiral anywhere along the continuum and travel either toward its origin or toward its becoming. As a gift for Sondra's eightieth birthday, several members of the Eastwest community created poems, drawings, and written reflections to print and put into a book. I wrote a poem of gratitude and placed it within the image of a spiral. When I attended Ashley Meeder's January 2021 certification training workshop, she discussed lessons as spirals. In her interview, she referred to each of her training modules as spirals. Within Land to Water Yoga and Shin Somatics bodywork, spirals figure prominently, especially through

the spinal center of the body. I consider the spiral, with its continuous movement in different directions, as inherent to Eastwest Shin Somatics. This chapter examines two very important points of Eastwest's historical spiral—the beginning, or Sondra Fraleigh, and its becoming through the example of Ashley Meeder.

Sondra's prominence within Eastwest Shin Somatics shifts as one changes viewpoints. If looking at the spiral from its beginning, extending from the originary node of the rhizome in 1990, she looms large. Ashley explains that Sondra's impact is evident in her pedagogic approach and mentorship. Kelly shares that she will sometimes hear herself speaking "my Sondra's words" (Lester 2020). When I teach, I am often inspired to share words of wisdom Sondra has spoken in workshops and written in books and articles. She forms the foundation of the work, models the practice that is Shin, and mentors students and teachers throughout and beyond their training. Her written work guides when she is not present, and her charismatic personality and leadership ensures she is ever-present in practitioners' awareness.

If one moves toward the ever-expanding endpoint, Sondra recedes into the distance, though she is still ever-present through the work of current and certifying practitioners. In training workshops she often mentions the Zen concept of the disappearing teacher. Her Eastwest Somatics Institute "team" of leaders handles more and more teacher training alongside administrative duties. Once, while riding with me from a workshop to her home, Sondra told me she considered dissolving Eastwest as she moved into her later years. Yet her students and colleagues urged her to maintain the organization. Today it continues to spiral, shifting and changing as each practitioner brings their own embodied selves into the work. This chapter discusses Sondra's

understanding of Eastwest Shin Somatics, considering her the inner core of the work. It also addresses Ashley Meeder's understanding of the practice, considering her an exemplar of a well-defined point along the spiral. The chapter closes with an exploration of Shin Somatics as a plane of consistency and composition wherein shared practices offer adaptive structures. These structures serve as the line of the spiral, allowing creative growth while connecting to core practices and principles within Eastwest Shin Somatics.

Sondra is a lifelong dancer, teacher, and writer. She approaches dance and somatics from a phenomenological viewpoint, seeking to explore the bodymind as lived through the movement explorations included in Eastwest Shin Somatics. Her phenomenological exploration began well before developing Eastwest Somatics Institute, which she began in 1990, with official ISMETA certification obtained in 1993 (Fraleigh 2020). Sondra describes Shin Somatics as growing gradually and in layers, changing as it grew. This devotion to taking one's time and allowing a practice to grow in its own time remains essential to Shin Somatics today. It is still spiraling, with no end-point.

Sondra offers a thorough explanation of the multiple Eastern and Western influences in Shin Somatics in the chapter, "Dancing Becomes Walking," in her book *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations through Dance, Yoga, and Touch* (2015). Here, I include a brief summary of her path toward today's manifestation of the practice. Sondra studied gymnastik in 1965 with Frau Mathilde Thiele at the Mary Wigman School in Berlin, Germany. She cites gymnastik as one of the first forms of somatics (Fraleigh 2015, 26). Throughout Sondra's career as a dance educator, she trained in Alexander Technique, Rosen breath work, Craniosacral Therapy, and Feldenkrais Technique (Fraleigh 2020; Fraleigh 2015, 52). These practices informed her as she

created her own unique approach to hands-on movement education and bodywork, as did her studies of butoh in Japan in 1985, 1990, and beyond, and Zen meditation in the United States and Japan. Her study of yoga includes Hatha and Kundalini Sida yoga (Fraleigh 2021e; Fraleigh 2015, 67). In the year 2000, she traveled to India to study at Sri Aurobindo's ashram in Baroda India (Fraleigh 2015, 67.). All these influences blend with Sondra's understanding of infant development patterns to provide fodder for her unique blending of somatic movement practices into Eastwest Shin Somatics (Fraleigh 2020; Fraleigh 2012).

Eastwest Shin Somatics has had two primary home bases. The first was in Brockport, New York, where Sondra taught dance and somatics at SUNY Brockport for over forty years (Eastwest Somatics 2018). The second and current home is in Sondra's native state of Utah. Born in Circleville, Utah, she returned to the state after retiring. St. George, Utah serves as the current center of the United States branch of Eastwest Somatics Institute, though a new hub is currently emerging from practitioners based in Elmira, New York.

It is from these places that the current leaders of Eastwest hail. The majority of the Eastwest leadership team studied with Sondra when she was at SUNY Brockport. This includes Ashley Meeder and Akiko Kishida who established their own Eastwest certification programs in Mexico City, Mexico and Tokyo, Japan, respectively. Certified practitioners are largely connected with Sondra through personal relationship in New York, Utah, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, though there are people who have attended workshops in Greece, Italy, and New Zealand and continue studying with the

institute. While Ashley's and Akiko's offshoots are growing, as is the one in Elmira, New York, Utah remains the central rhizome of Eastwest Somatics Institute.

When asked about the use of the Japanese word *shin* to describe her practice, Sondra recounts a search for the right word (Fraleigh 2020). She began her institute with a different title but was contacted by another bodyworker who was also using the name and wanted to purchase the rights to it. After agreeing to the sale, Sondra was left to discover a new name for her program. She chose Eastwest to indicate the blending of Eastern and Western philosophies and practices incorporated in the body of her work, but she felt she needed something more discreet to describe the practice. At the time, she was writing a chapter about butoh artists, which included Yoshito Ohno. One morning she woke with the memory of Yoshito using the word *shin* to identify wholeness and unity. Sondra recalls Ohno describing *shin* as a slow growing orchid that takes seven years to grow. He asked students in his workshops to carry this orchid across the room for seven years. Flowers taking time to change and develop resonated with Sondra. In our interview she explains, "How does one develop a slow-growing orchid for seven years and walk holding that, moving across the room? I think of that a lot, along with my vast experiences with Yoshito. They move from getting really shaken up and dancing to Pink Floyd, to slow-growing orchids and the deep quiet and emptiness in Buddhism" (Fraleigh 2020).

Like the orchid Yoshito Ohno described, Shin Somatics is slow-growing, and is carried in the hands and bodies of the practitioners. It is responsive to its environment, just as an orchid is reliant on the nutrients in the soil and air, and always developing. Within Shin Somatics, nature is ever-present. The institute's versions of yoga and

bodywork are inspired by nature through flowing asanas such as seahorse float and lazy lizard. Dance in and with nature is also an integral aspect of the practice. Practitioners cover themselves in mud, dance in the water, meditate in canyons, and sense the rhythms of nature within their bodies. They understand that human nature is not a universal, but that every human has a nature that they can connect with through emptying out the self, waiting, doing nothing, and intuiting the rhythms of another person. They strive to start where they are, attending deeply to the environment and community. In working with others, they follow the lead of the other, allowing intuition to guide them. Practitioners strive to be witnesses and supportive guides, following another's lead and matching their movement in an attempt to hold presence while they sense more of themselves and what they want and need to learn. In doing so, the Shin practitioner learns about themselves- what is difficult to let go, what resonates within them as they move-with another. They sense and learn what new possibilities exist in the spaces between their presence and that of another.

For Ashley Meeder, these new possibilities grew into a new shoot of the rhizome to become Eastwest Somatics Institute Mexico. Just as Shin Somatics flows and adapts to the needs of each person, Eastwest Mexico grew from Ashley's life. Her introduction to Eastwest Shin Somatics was through coursework at SUNY Brockport in the early 2000s. She was enrolled in Sonda's somatics lab course as part of her graduate degree. However, she was also an accidental client within the course. While traveling home from school one semester, an eighteen-wheeler struck her car several times. As a result, she suffered a severe back injury that prompted her to delve deeply into the healing capacity of Shin Somatics in order to fully recover. She shares that she is blessed because the injury taught her so much and changed the course of her life. It is

perhaps this experience of being “desperate for somebody to help and listen and help figure out what was going on” that allows her to connect easily with those in Mexico who are seeking a healing practice (Meeder 2018).

After graduation, Ashley spent several years living and working in multiple capacities in New York City, including teaching Pilates and studying with a skilled chiropractor. She relocated to her significant other’s homeland of Mexico in 2010 (ibid.). In Mexico City, she began working with a team of practitioners to provide therapeutic bodywork to clients with chronic pain. What began as a few classes in a rented dance studio developed into an eight-module certification program replete with in-person and online training, manuals, and workbooks.

Ashley explains that she felt a resonance with much of Mexican culture.

There’s a famous singer, I think her name’s Chavela Vargas. She is Mexican but was born in Costa Rica. She says, “Los Mexicanos nacemos donde nos de la rechingada gana.” Meaning, we Mexicans are born where we feel like it.

(Although her language is a bit more colorful!). I definitely don’t have any Mexican heritage in my blood line, but maybe in a past life I do! Because I have resonated with a lot of things in this culture that are very healing to me. I didn’t realize that at the time, and I think I’m still understanding what the culture in Mexico gives me. I wish I had a better grasp of explaining and capturing the essence of what Mexico means to me. I just stayed. It’s like when I met Sondra and I didn’t want to leave her side. I think intuitively I knew that Mexico had

something important to teach me. It's felt like a coming home in some way.

(Meeder 2021)<sup>6</sup>

While Mexico gave Ashley space to heal a weary spirit that had been battered by an egocentric New York City culture, she discovered that she had something to offer the people in her circle. She shares that she originally engaged with the dance scene, and quickly realized that many of the dancers she worked with experienced an aggressive top-down and hierarchical training environment.

In 2010 when I arrived, I observed many dancers didn't have a lot of autonomy, collaborative spirit, or sense of agency. There was this sense of using the bodies of the dancers, and the dancers were armed with little knowledge of keeping their bodies safe through somatic practice, experiential anatomy, or perspectives like Laban. While there were, and continues to be, strong schools of somatics here [in Mexico], the dancers I worked with didn't have a lot of exposure to the practice. And of course, what Eastwest offers has so much richness in discovering a person's inner space and inner freedom. So I just started teaching.

One of the central tenets of Eastwest Shin Somatics is to start where you are, learn as you go, and build capacity along the way. Ashley's path exemplifies this mantra. She began by hiring a tutor to teach her Spanish. Rather than learning through a generic class, Ashley spent hours each day with the tutor, learning the specific language she needed to teach a class or workshop. Thus, she learned Spanish in relationship with Shin Somatics, and the slow-growing orchid was planted within the soil of Mexican culture. Growth occurred organically.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all future citations of Ashley in this chapter are from this source.



Every time I taught a workshop it would be two hours longer. It would be two hours, then four hours, then six hours, then a whole day. Then it would be two days, a weekend. And [Sondra] just said to me one day that I should offer a certification level for the workshops I was teaching. That was around the spring of 2016. And I've been doing it ever since, and obviously it has grown from there.

Ashley's experience of "learning as you go" was full of challenges. She shares that she had to trip over her own feet to figure out how to build Eastwest Mexico. Yet, she understands this tripping up as a continual part of the Shin Somatics process. About Sondra she shares,

She is my eternal teacher. And one of the things- I almost get emotional thinking about it— when I look back at 2016 and how little I knew, and how she still entrusted me with the work... But she kind of just always called it *our* work. And I just feel so blessed because it has really marked my life path.... I don't have anything but gratitude for the path and for Sondra's openness and willingness to kind of allow [me to figure] things out. And I'm sure that in ten years I'm gonna be like, "Ashley, wow, doing this interview you didn't know what you were talking about."

As Ashley continues to grow Eastwest Mexico, she shifts her pedagogy to be more inclusive of her students' individual needs and gifts. This has resulted in slightly different expectations regarding students' prior and supplementary training. In the United States program, students are expected to enter with previous training in anatomy and kinesiology. Alternatively, they may do additional study on their own while certifying to ensure adequate knowledge in these disciplines. However, Ashley explains that training

in anatomy is not available to many of her students as it is offered in specialized institutions such as colleges. Many of those in the certification program do not have that training, so she incorporates anatomical training in her modules.

Both Sondra and Ashley regularly invite Eastwest certification students to teach at workshops. To honor her students' diverse expertise Ashley asks them to share a practice of their own within her training modules. She explains there are many somatic practices inherent in Mexican culture, although they might not be specifically labeled that way. Practices such as plant ceremonies, herbalism, limpios energéticos, ofrendas and altars, traditional Mexican medicine, and the Temazcal sweat lodge have a somatic root of integrating bodymind, and Mexican culture also brings in spirit. Honoring the students' indigenous somatic knowledge may be as simple as acknowledging that it is the equinox and inviting a student who is an astrologer to share a practice honoring the event. Students might also bring in more involved activities that connect with their own embodied practices outside the framework of Shin Somatics. Additionally, Ashley regularly invites Eastwest Mexico graduates to teach yoga classes at training workshops in an effort to model the ways in which each practitioner is encouraged to do what she describes as, "investigate, incorporate, and integrate what serves them, and what [doesn't], to obviously let go." She shares that these classes offer

a real space for them [the graduates and other students] finding their own voice, which I feel like I was really encouraged to do [in my own training]. And it's interesting how each student takes it completely differently and does it in totally different ways.... And as I have matured in the work, I've tried to create more and more opportunities for more voices to come in.

Thus, Eastwest Mexico spirals out from the originary rhizome, adapting to the needs and gifts of its individual students and practitioners to create an inclusive and supportive community.

This adaptation to its current context makes Eastwest Shin Somatics somewhat slippery and difficult to define. When asked, “What is Shin Somatics?” Ashley considers for a moment.

Could the answer be confidently, “I don’t know?” I could say something like, “Shin Somatics is an inclusive, evolving, experiential practice of learning and returning to the body in its oneness through movement, attention, and breath. But the thing is, that might be very limited. Really, my personal relationship with the word somatics is constantly evolving. And I don’t even know if I can call it a field of study. I still have an evolving definition of somatics. Recently I’ve been defining somatics by *when is somatics*.... I know that each one of us in our somatic journey has come from Shin Somatics, but we also have the freedom, thanks to the wisdom of Sonda, to be evolving and developing our own ideas.... I feel like Sonda has created a container that has limits but is also quite inclusive so that it has allowed me to grow in my definition of somatics in general (emphasis in original).

If pressed, Ashley provides some clarity regarding the nature of Shin Somatics. She shares that “It’s an experiential practice in relation to the body to find inner freedom and self-knowledge. We can engage in this practice as a practitioner trained, and first we are the student of ourselves.” Shin Somatics is student- or client-centered. It values “wholeness, oneness, creativity, awareness, acceptance and inclusivity, non-judgment.” It means “dancing between

structure and non-structure, intuition and rationality, and East and West.” At another point in our discussion, Ashley adds North and South to the mix, describing the United States as North and Mexico as South. She discusses many of the philosophical underpinnings of Eastwest Shin somatics, including the bracketing of self in order to observe both self and other that stems from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. Bringing in her own studies, she cites American Franciscan priest, Friar Richard Rhohr’s discussion of order, disorder, and reorder as a cycle for wisdom that keeps rebuilding and repeating itself.

We start with order, come into disorder when we realize our order does not work anymore, then eventually begin to reorder. In between these phases is a certain type of liminality (often an uncomfortable space) that the Shin Somatic experience gives us tools to navigate through. Shin allows us to be in that feeling state and include all that is there and move through it. Shin allows the body to accompany us.... We are culturally used to USING the body, ordering it, aligning it, fixing it, correcting it. Shin can create a lot of disorder in our sense of who we are and how we see the body. It also can bring us into reorder, or ordering in our self—awareness, posture, reordering our nervous system, our patterning, and our sense of self (emphasis in original).

Rather than offer specific practices in defining Shin Somatics, Ashley discusses it as flowing like water and taking the shape of many different containers. For her it is an all-inclusive playground of “Yes and. Yes and.” Acknowledging the difficulty this might create for students who habitually seek clear definition of the practice, Ashley explains that “the practice of returning to the body in its oneness is something we get to practice every day.”

This fluid exploration of Shin Somatics certainly rings true for me and is echoed by many of those I interviewed for this study. Yet, there is consistency within the practice. As I discuss in Chapter 5, bodywork patterns repeat, asanas are discrete, mantras are shared, touch is essential, and methods of matching through touch are specific and intentional. Several experienced participants describe Shin Somatics as a shared language. Ashley also mentions this at another point in her interview when she discusses inviting guest teachers from other somatic methods to work with her students and finding that unsuccessful because they don't speak "the same kind of language we're speaking."

This common language might be better conceptualized as a plane of consistency wherein common practices are shared but can adapt to a specific context. Bodywork, yoga, and intuitive dance offer repeatable experiences and patterns that shift and change in present-centered relationship with a student, client, and/or the environment. Sondra describes Shin Somatics as "adaptive structures" (Fraleigh 2021c) explaining that "creativity and agency are embedded in experiences of shin by design" (Fraleigh 2021b). So while Eastwest Shin Somatics is a discrete practice, it offers practitioners the freedom to adapt to their present environment. This means that they experience it as a creative form that can incorporate practices beyond Shin Somatics. Yet, the philosophical underpinnings of Shin remain even as learned movement patterns change, training modules shift to accommodate the needs of specific students, or practitioners engage methods from different techniques. A focus on consciousness, or self-awareness, through relationship with others, oneness, and creative adaptation with the environment persists regardless of the specific pattern or practice being engaged.

This creative adaptation is also evident in variations within practitioners' pedagogy. When Sondra teaches, she pulls from a wealth of experience, intuitively guiding students in familiar patterns in a way that incorporates their curiosities. A lesson begins with a question, an internal exploration, a simple movement pattern, and grows from that point in relation with the students in the room. Students and practitioners of Eastwest Shin Somatics describe her teaching as coming from her, in the moment, hearkening to the rhizomatic nature of the modality. Sondra explains that "somatic practices do not develop exercises; rather, they create frameworks or maps for movement and dance experiences. As a somatics practitioner and teacher, I sometimes think of myself as an archeologist, a treasure hunter on a dig, excavating body memories and possible selves.... There is no goal but the learning itself" (Fraleigh 2015, 9-10).

Kelly Lester, a leader within the Eastwest organization, contrasts Sondra's intuitive approach with her own need to clearly structure a lesson. She explains, "I have to have the steps of the lesson, then we investigate something and we put it back together. That's not how Sondra teaches, because it comes from her. She just shows something and people ask questions. As they ask questions, she fills in the information" (Lester 2020). Thus Sondra, at the core of the spiral, pulls from a wealth of life-learning in multiple practices as needed, in-the-moment. Those who studied with her and now teach and work with clients spiral out from that central wealth of possibilities, bringing into the spiral their own somatic understandings and pedagogic tendencies. This yes-and approach that integrates existing concepts and movement practices with those that enter the spiral through other Shin practitioners offers many possibilities for creative inter-play among somatic approaches. It also creates a community that welcomes difference, easily

accepting that each individual will relate with the work in their own way and that the ultimate goal of a practitioner is “learning how to learn,” a phrase she borrows from Moshe Feldenkrais (quoted in Eddy 2017, 111).

The orchid grows with its environment. Some orchids root in the earth, receiving sustenance from the soil. Others grow with the air around them. They grow at different altitudes, requiring different amounts of water. Some orchids grow vertically, while others maintain a horizontal relationship with the earth. And some orchids spiral, just as Eastwest Shin Somatics spirals. Yet they share an orchid-ness, as Shin Somatics shares a common philosophical understanding of a set of specific practices joined together with a focus on creative adaptation. As the next generation of Eastwest practitioners continue their rhizo-somatic spirals, the practice will adapt and accommodate, valuing creativity and agency in order to hold space for each individual to become, in community with each other. In the next chapter I describe in detail the practices that currently make up Eastwest Shin Somatics.

## CHAPTER V

### MAPPING THE EASTWEST SHIN SOMATICS RHIZOME

#### **Seeking Clarity: What Is Eastwest?**

What is Eastwest Shin Somatics? One way to answer the question is that it is a collection of somatic movement practices—including yoga and meditation, dance experiences, and group and individual movement therapy and bodywork—led by somatic movement therapists and educators who certify through the Eastwest Somatics Institute. People engage with Shin Somatics as individual clients seeking somatic movement therapy to reduce pain and increase overall wellness, as students in community and educational institutions studying dance and/or somatic practice, and as students seeking augmentation of a different somatic practice and/or certification in Eastwest Shin Somatics. At times, Eastwest graduates will work in group therapy sessions such as women’s centers, or in community settings such as recreational programs, to offer mindfulness training through Shin Somatics methods. Many Shin practitioners engage the methods in dance-making to increase dancers’ self-awareness, encourage a deeper connection to nature, and build a sense of community through empathy within a group of dancers.

Another way to answer the question, “what is Eastwest” is to ask it as another question: What is East and what is West about Eastwest Shin Somatics? I asked this question of all study participants and received various responses. Yanina expresses that Eastwest is a way to bring together Eastern ways of experiencing the body and Western ways of conceptualizing the body (Orellana 2020). Fae, who has a deep interest in Japanese culture due to the fact that her husband lived in Japan for a few years, understands Shin Somatics as engaging Eastern practices such as meditation and a focus on simplicity to help Americans be civil and make “the world a better place” (Ellsworth 2020). Gladys clarifies that Eastwest is



The yoga or union of two words...And I think that it's a challenge to translate that far East culture to the Western value sets of mind. Maybe Eastwest is the intention—Sondra's intention—to reconcile the differences, or the arbitrary separation of “better” Western approaches versus “traditional” Eastern Approaches. (Olivares 2020a)

Ashley provides me a chart, which she states is a working document, and a jotting of a few initial ideas. Figure 3 below lists her descriptive words indicating what she feels is more “Western” and more “Eastern” within the practice.

| <b>West</b>                                      | <b>East</b>                                 |
|--|---|
| racional/intelecto                               | intuitivo                                   |
| estructura                                       | fluir                                       |
| ser  | habitar                                     |
| masculino [in pencil, almost as an afterthought] | fem. [in pencil, almost as an afterthought] |

Figure 3 Ashley's working document listing what she feels is "West" and "East" within Eastwest Shin Somatics.

Sondra herself adds, “To augment our somatic venture both philosophically and culturally, we include Eastern perspectives on the body that are compatible with Western phenomenology and neurobiology” (2015, xxviii). Sondra's explanation highlights what she sees as an alignment in Western and Eastern philosophies, which is further developed through the practices incorporated within Eastwest Shin Somatics, such as yoga and meditation.

This chapter addresses the question, “What is Eastwest?” in yet a third way, by describing the structure of the Eastwest Shin Somatics Institute, programs offered including certification, and the core practices of the Eastwest Somatics Institute. I end this chapter with a

discussion of how these practices increase empathetic awareness of intersubjectivity of and with each other within our natural environment.

### **Learning as We Do: The Eastwest Shin Somatics Institute**

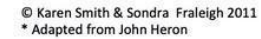
The Eastwest Somatics Institute in the United States offers training locations in the United States including Utah, New York, Hawaii, and on Zoom, all of which provide both personal development workshops and certification. Eastwest Mexico offers several workshops each year, primarily in Mexico City. Eastwest teacher-trainer, Akiko Kishida teaches regularly in Tokyo, Japan and other Eastwest graduates teach classes and workshops in the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy, and New Zealand. Additional workshops and retreats are advertised yearly and take place in a variety of international locales. With the onset of the 2020 pandemic, training moved online, which has increased accessibility beyond the United States, leading to new participants from nations such as Scotland and Belgium. It also makes participation in US workshops more accessible for Eastwest students in Mexico who are comfortable engaging in English-language training modules.

A typical workshop offers both a personal development track and a certification track. Those seeking personal development attend morning lessons, alongside those certifying. These mornings generally focus on yoga and intuitive movement lessons, both of which are explained below. Certification candidates also attend afternoon classes, which focus on bodywork. One can also choose to attend an entire training module without certifying.

Eastwest Somatics Institute's certification training program includes yoga, dance, and movement therapy; these practices are encompassed by particular processes and principles developed by the Institute, as depicted in the curriculum model in Figure 4.

Shin Somatics® *Moving Consciously*

- Being enough
- Heart's purpose
- Nature as container
- Calming the mind
- Constancy - oneness and separation
- Embodying the unconscious
- Evolutionary patterns
- Extending consciousness
- Five planes of motion
- Infant movement development
- Learning through exploration
- Intuition through imagery
- Energetic progress in the good
- Nothing to do/nowhere to go
- The patience of not starting
- Respecting differences
- Effective communication
- Encouraging options
- Empowering others by not advising
- Not needing to fix
- Remembering our intrinsic perfection
- Starting where we are
- Being more fully who we are
- The spiritual meanings of the chakras



### Figure 4 Shin Somatics Curriculum Model

The model is circular in nature, offering multiple starting points and no endpoints in the work. Sondra has expressed a vision of the model as a three-dimensional, interactive model with four hands-on wheels that can be manipulated by the user, offering a kaleidoscopic viewpoint of the work (Fraleigh 2021a). Thus, the model seeks to offer inroads to the work without tracing it and establishing a fixed definition of Shin Somatics. The model is designed to move-with the practitioner, offering many possibilities so that it may be adapted to the present moment and milieu.

When exploring this two-dimensional curricular model, one can begin at different points and follow their curiosity as they chart a path through the map. As the model is developed by native English-speakers and written in the same language, it is safe to assume that most readers will begin reading on the left and then move to the right. A columnar orientation invites the reader to read down the list of core narratives listed in a left-hand side bar before interacting with the less-directed circular map to its right. These core narratives describe underlying principles that guide practitioners in and through movement lessons. They are written with personal pronouns and communal language, intended to be practiced and adapted to a given situation rather than serving as rules or codes within the form. Phrases such as *starting where we are*, *extending consciousness*, and *nature as container* suggest ways of being and becoming that are foundational within Shin Somatics. A focus on process with no set endpoint exists alongside narratives that swim in the present such as *learning through exploration*. Words such as *encouraging*, *empowering*, *extending*, *being*, and *calming* are affirmative in nature.

At the center of the model is *Shin*, or oneness. Moving outward one finds broad categories, within which specific Shin Somatics practices can be framed. *Effective communication* and *focusing awareness* connect these categories with more discrete processes

within the somatic modality. These practices are surrounded by a circle of verbs of permission and shared understanding and values within the Shin Somatics community. Principles such as *suspending expectation*, *moving with nature*, and *doing less to feel more* guide practitioners as they work with others. Principles such as *pleasure in movement*, *being with what is*, and *not knowing* aid in letting go of expectations and being in the present without judgment. Wrapped around the outside of the circular model are what I understand to be key skills for the practitioner leading to several categories of potential results of the work. Skills such as *drawing appropriate boundaries* remind the practitioner to be present with another person without co-opting their individual somatic journeys. *Applying sound anatomical principles*, *holding presence for others*, and *discovering neutrality* through somatic practice lead to pragmatic *integration of science and art* and *reflecting and making sense*, exploring *possible-selves in community with others* in a playful way through *engaging imagery and intuition*. Elements of this curricular model are embedded in training workshops and generally taught through pragmatic explorations of Shin processes.

Students may attend workshops on a personal development track or as part of a path to certification. To fully certify through Eastwest, one must complete a 720-hour training program. This includes anatomical science courses that can be completed beforehand. The core training program includes seven one-week in-person or online training modules supplemented by guided individual study. After the fifth module, which includes training in Sondra's Land to Water Yoga method, participants may qualify for a RYT-200 certification through Yoga Alliance. Those who continue to study past the fifth module also complete an individually designed case study that serves as a capstone. All students who complete the full program in either the United States or Mexico qualify to become a Registered Somatic Movement Therapist and/or Registered Somatic

Movement Educator through the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association. Those who wish to become teacher-trainers for the Eastwest Somatics Institute may apply and be invited to complete an optional eighth module and a teaching apprenticeship within an Eastwest training workshop.

The organization does not collect demographic information from students and graduates. Anecdotally, many Eastwest Somatics Institute students come to the organization already practicing a related somatic therapy such as massage therapy or yoga, or even having experienced a traditional medicine practice such as temazcal. Several are dancers and dance educators who seek to engage Shin Somatics in their movement practice. In a personal communication, Kelly Lester, identified on the Eastwest website as “team captain” (a choice that challenges the hierarchical structure implied by the more traditional label of president) states that Eastwest Somatics Institute in the US typically enrolls one to two college students per workshop, alongside seven to ten professionals (2021). A typical workshop includes one male and eight to twelve females (*ibid.*). Many come from a dance background, with others coming from careers such as social work, psychology, and massage. Participants hail from multiple countries, including Belgium, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Greece. Eastwest’s annual review, submitted to ISMETA and shared via personal communication by Sondra, states that the organization graduates three to five certified practitioners per year (Fraleigh 2021d). The Mexican branch of Eastwest is growing and currently boasts twelve graduates, and Akiko Kishida maintains a certification program in Japan, though her school temporarily closed in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Certification can take place within one and a half years, but students are generally encouraged to take more time. Sondra often shares that it takes until about the fifth module for

the work to start making sense to the student. Because Shin Somatics remains unfixed and adaptable, my research indicates that those new to the practice often have difficulty identifying and replicating the structures within the practice. Each student needs to engage with the practice on their own terms and in their own time before they get a sense of what Shin Somatics is to them. Certification is a journey, requiring a student who is devoted to personal growth and invested in learning a practice without fixed boundaries.

Upon certification, graduates are qualified to teach Shin Somatics in dance and yoga classes, and creative practices such as dance-making; additionally, they may lead Shin Somatics movement therapy sessions in group therapy settings such as women's trauma centers and rehabilitation centers, and in individual client sessions focused on therapeutic treatment of somatic trauma and chronic pain.

### **Defining Eastwest Processes**

Dance is the thread that runs throughout Eastwest Shin Somatics, and it manifests through three discreet practices: intuitive dance, yoga, and bodywork. Many Eastwest Shin Somatics Institute students come to the practice through dance, dance is highlighted through both language and images on both the Eastwest Somatics Institute and Eastwest Somatics Mexico website, and it figures prominently in writings by Sondra and other Shin practitioners. Intuitive dance is indicated as one of the three areas of study on the websites and Ashley offers a video testimonial from dancer and choreographer Yanina Orellana to support study at Eastwest Somatics Mexico and the United States website offers several testimonials from dancers, a reference list including many articles addressing dance and image after image of dancing in the dance studio and in nature. However, Shin practitioners understand dance as larger than a theatrical artistic practice. As Sondra explains,

Dance is a much wider participatory activity, with transformative healing potentials.

Dance is for all who desire to move expressively, with rhythm, or in the spirit of the moment. Dance is global and primal, not just for those who train and perform on stage.

As somatic innovator, Gabrielle Roth liked to say: “If you have a body, you are a dancer.” (2015, xxvii).

Dance may be implicit or explicit within Shin practices, but it is ever present and practitioners regularly engage flowing, expressive, rhythmic, present-centered movement within Eastwest lessons. As a result of this dance-centric approach, yoga, and bodywork move through patterns, encourage creative movement improvisation, and highlight the sensing and feeling body.

### Intuitive Dance

Threaded throughout multiple practices, dance is perhaps most evident in Shin Somatics work through contact unwinding. Contact unwinding can occur in multiple settings. It might be engaged within a yoga practice, at the end of a bodywork session, or on its own as a group or individual exploration. In “Shin Somatics Contact Unwinding: Developing Mindfulness Through Interpersonal Relationship,” I describe one instance of contact unwinding.

Paired bodies stand, sit or lie in stillness, some with eyes open and others with eyes closed. These are listening bodies. They hear the synthesized music permeating the room. Yet more so, they listen to their own somatic intuition. One member of the pair attunes to an inner dance. What wants to move? How do I feel when I move? The second individual also listens. She listens to her partner’s body through visual cues, intuitive responses to the dancer’s choices, her own soma’s desire to dance with, or disrupt, a movement pattern. After a time, she joins her partner, supporting the dance through attentive cues. She notices her partner’s tendency to spin in place, so presses a supportive hand on the



back of the rib cage, encouraging locomotion while turning. Perhaps she notices the dancer moves frantically, and she senses stillness is needed. She wraps her body around the dancer's, disrupting movement, bringing quiet to the dance. A woman who has remained outside the group signals an end to the session. Relying on intuition and non-verbal communication, duets discover an ending. A few moments of quiet completion and internal reflection follow. Then the music begins again. Roles shift. A new dance commences. (Purvis 2018, 276)

Contact unwinding is a movement improvisation led by the client (in a therapeutic setting) or student (in an educational setting), who functions as a primary mover. They move in the moment, responding to physical cues about what feels good, what needs to move more, what they are curious about. Another person acts as supportive guide, attending to their partner's dance and offering tactile and movement suggestions. This is an exercise in equity rather than equivalence. Roles switch, sometimes when directed by an outside group leader and sometimes spontaneously between the dancers. This offers each person the opportunity to be both primary mover and supportive guide. Contact unwinding often incorporates music selected by a group leader to support movement exploration without driving the primary mover's choices.

Contact unwinding draws the primary mover's attention to their embodied habits through the supportive guide's reflective dancing-with and/or physical touch. It often disrupts habit through gentle physical suggestions such as a light press on a shoulder blade, a guide connecting with her partner's back, or, in a more directive example, a binding hug. When habit is disrupted, the primary mover makes a different choice, exploring possibilities they might not otherwise discover. The movement explorations within a contact unwinding lesson may or may not result in lasting change. While *Energetic progress in the good* is listed as a core narrative within Shin

Somatics and may seem to suggest that change is ideal, how progress in the good is undefined so that people may feel free to make their own choices about what to change and what to hold onto. Shin Somatics practices offer the primary mover the opportunity to notice a habit that they might not otherwise be aware of, and the option to consciously make different choices. Reflective discussion after a lesson allows the primary mover to share their experience. In this reflection, the primary mover again leads while the supportive guide listens without inserting themselves into the discussion. They may simply listen and affirm the primary mover's observations or ask questions to enable the primary mover to delve more deeply into their own understanding of the experience. Ultimately, the primary mover decides whether they want change or whether the habit is serving them in a positive way.

In addition to contact unwinding, Shin Somatics values dance in nature as a primary practice. This exists in multiple capacities, from somatic walks in natural spaces, to dance maps (or improvisational movement scores) guiding the dancer through an open structure in order to awaken somatic awareness and "clear away obstacles or pain" (Fraleigh 2015, 70). Within Shin Somatics, dances are improvisational and guided by the dancer's intent to dance-with nature. Sondra explains that we dance "in continuity with the world, whether wild, cultivated or in need of repair" (ibid., 65). She further clarifies that "to dance is to change and attune to changes in others, oneself, and the environment. Through attunement and adaptation, we can listen and learn" (ibid.).

A dance might be as simple as a walk through a canyon or along a river. The practitioner listens to the environment with all senses and responds through improvisational movement. Sometimes prompts may be offered to guide exploration of the environment. For example, participants of the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop* were directed to

explore covering themselves in nature. One participant danced under a tree, building a covering that she described as a nest of leaves and sticks. My dance in the rain is described in the opening of Chapter 1. In other workshops and classes, Sondra has offered dance maps adapted from butoh workshops with Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno. These include a map she titles, “Be a Stone,” that she first experienced with Kazuo Ohno (Fraleigh 2015, 216). This dance score, described in one possible manifestation in the final chapter of *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations through Dance, Yoga, and Touch*, begins with word association, followed by seeking a stone in nature, and progressing to a dance improvisation seeking to be “the stone or stones of your awareness” (ibid.). This dance map, like many others within Shin Somatics, can be explored as a solo or group improvisation, and leaves much space for individuals to interpret and adjust their exploration in the moment, as inspired by their relationship with the environment. Dances in nature offer the possibility of attuning to the environment. Sondra explains that this attunement “holds potentials for experiences of belonging – inviting transformational morphologies through letting go of self” (Fraleigh 2016, 70) along with enabling a path of difference and gratitude for otherness, “letting things be what they are” (ibid., 62).

### Yoga

Yoga exists as its own entity but is also woven into bodywork and intuitive dance. Every training workshop includes classes in Sondra’s unique approach to yoga, Land to Water Yoga. Sondra explains that she blends traditional yoga postures with infant movement development patterns and somatic principles to design a practice that moves from complex to simple movement patterns to provide opportunity for the yogi to retrace human development to its source (Fraleigh 2009, xii-xiii). The practice is arranged in a five-part sequence that begins with

standing and walking, regressing to kneeling and crawling, sitting and turning, front-lying, and back-lying poses/asanas (ibid., 1-2). It then moves progressively through these five parts, exploring different movement patterns to return to standing (ibid., xiv). While teachers and individual practitioners may choose a different sequence to follow, this is the standard progression, ensuring a spiral form to each yoga practice.

Essential to Land to Water Yoga is the use of playful, dancing transitions between asanas. For example, one might begin a circular tracing of the fingertips of the right hand across the collarbone, down the left shoulder, and along the left leg to find themselves in a forward fold that can then become a bear crawl incorporating a bearish growl to wake up the throat chakra. This might morph into “downward facing bear,” a wide-stance version of downward facing dog. These shifts from one asana to another can be compared to a kaleidoscope, an image that Ashley Meeder referenced in her January 2021 online training workshop. It is worth noting that this is also an image Sondra used to describe her ideal curriculum model. Land to Water Yoga shifts as it is moved, and practitioners are encouraged to shape movement patterns and postures in the moment, in relation with those practicing rather than performing set poses in repetitive structures. In a different workshop with Sondra, one student expressed that Land to Water Yoga felt like “gradual movement of the body toward form, composing and decomposing” (*Moving Consciously* 2020).

Land to Water Yoga is presented as somatic yoga in its focus on increasing self-awareness through easeful movement. Within training workshops, Sondra explains that many yoga practices are somatic, while some are focused less on self-awareness and more on athletic training (for example, practices such as PiYo and other practices engaged in settings such as gyms). When I teach Land to Water Yoga I consistently draw attention to the feeling of each

movement with cues such as, “notice whether you feel any different on one side of the body than the other,” “feel the texture of the floor with your feet as you walk,” and “how does changing the way you roll through your foot impact your legs, pelvis, spine, head, arms?” Postures flow from one to the next, and students are often encouraged to notice how it feels to move through patterns. The Shin Somatics approach to yoga focuses on easeful and conscious movement in order to seek homeostasis, or balance, within the body. Citing the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, Sondra often calls for attention to feelings when engaged in somatic practice (*Moving Consciously* 2020; Fraleigh 2018b, 36-37; Fraleigh 2015, 39-40). For Damasio, feelings are emotions linked to consciousness. Connecting consciousness to presence, he states, “the presence of you is the feeling of what happens when your being is modified by acts of apprehending something” (Damasio 1999, 10). He further explains that consciousness and feelings are inseparable (ibid., 16). In Shin Somatics, feelings are linked to bodily sensation, and both are considered essential in moving toward balance within the bodymind, which is understood by Sondra to lead toward wellness (Fraleigh 2018b, 36).

Sondra shares that, just as other yoga practitioners do, Land to Water Yoga practitioners and teachers “pay conscious attention to energy centers” or chakras (Fraleigh 2009, xix). This occurs in multiple ways—talking about chakras in class, movement directly exploring each chakra with the body, and intentionally unwinding each chakra with asanas and movement patterns. The five-part sequence in Land to Water Yoga is designed to access and unwind each chakra with the understanding that this will happen whether or not a teacher or practitioner draws attention to it. Training workshops include multiple movement patterns addressing each chakra through pragmatic application in yoga as well as body work. A common yoga asana such as dancer pose, a standing pose with one leg bent behind the body, bound with the hand holding the

top of the foot, is explored as a traditional standing posture as well as a side-lying pose in Land to Water Yoga. That same side-lying asana is performed in table work with the supportive guide shifting the primary mover's leg into the pose. Postures and movement patterns recur and adapt to multiple processes within the larger modality.

Sondra explains that “yogic concepts can be projected beyond specific yoga postures into movement patterning and dance expressions that have lived correlations” (ibid., 6). This manifests in several ways, including adjusting traditional asanas so that they move through space, drawing attention to everyday actions that might connect with specific chakras, and suggesting ways in which one might approach the everyday through a yogic lens. Within my own Land to Water Yoga class, the traditional mountain pose with two feet planted underneath the upright body just under the hip sockets may be explored as rooting into the earth through the pelvis, legs, and feet, even as the chakras spiral upward through the body, reaching into the heavens through the crown chakra. This asana might morph into mountain stride—a walking dance wherein participants are encouraged to notice the feeling of their bodies as they move through space. Here I might remind them that they walk every day and ask what they might discover if walking to class with somatic/yogic awareness. I will often add my own spiraling transition from one asana to the next or encourage yoga students to explore their own transitions and notice what movement feels good enough that they might want to explore it outside of class. I sometimes borrow from a yoga lesson offered by Kelly Lester in the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop*, telling my students who are resting in a lying posture to take the next ten or fifteen minutes to explore the asanas that feel right to them, making new asanas if it feels good to their bodies, before joining me at mountain pose. At the end of most classes, I offer

students time to reflect on their practice and articulate what they want to hold on to from class to apply to their lives outside the yoga classroom.

### Bodywork

Chakras and Land to Water asanas also guide bodywork patterns. In bodywork, the client is considered the primary mover, wherein their embodiment provides cues to guide the Shin practitioner, who matches them through attention, visual focus, and touch. Through easeful movement of the client's body, the practitioner acts as a supportive guide, following and supplementing the primary mover's exploration of embodied habit and previously unexplored possibilities. Shin practitioners consider bodywork a movement lesson rather than a therapeutic session, as the goal is not to "fix" or heal a client, rather to offer movement patterns that allow self-discovery of habits and new possibilities. Healing can happen, but the client/student heals themselves.

Bodywork can be performed on a table, the floor, or in a chair. The five-part sequence utilized in yoga is honored in bodywork as well. However, rather than a yoga teacher guiding a group of students in a class setting, bodywork involves a Shin practitioner and a single client. While there are many intentional and practiced movement patterns within Shin bodywork, a skilled practitioner learns how to listen to a client's somatic cues and explore new movement patterns if they sense an opening to a different option. A practitioner's choices within a bodywork lesson are guided by intuition and deep listening through vision, touch, and empathetic connection with the client.

When commencing a table, or bodywork, lesson one begins by asking a client what they want to receive during the lesson, as every session is a movement lesson for the client. Many times, a client will express that they want relief from pain in a specific area of the body. Other

times clients will express more abstract desires inspired by personal challenges in the moment. For example, in a video demonstration offered during the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop*, the primary mover expresses emotional concern about events being covered in the news and a resultant desire for personal loosening, ease and space. At an earlier workshop I observed Sondra completing a bodywork session on a student volunteer who stated that she wanted to learn where her soul was.

After listening to the words of the client with the ears, the practitioner invites them to take a walk around the space and practices an embodied listening, one engaging intuition to shift duration, joining that of the client. The practitioner walks beside or slightly behind, attending to the client's embodiment through matching their gait and watching the walk closely. Matching here functions in much the same way as it does in contact unwinding. It allows the practitioner to meet a client where they are, feeling their movement patterns from the inside rather than relying solely on visual information. It is a deep listening that is key to the practice. For the Shin practitioner, listening is a whole-body activity. They listen with hands, breath, body. The supportive guide responds as witness, holding space for a primary mover to follow their own exploration. In the walking exploration, the primary mover does this through their gait. The supportive guide notices how the primary mover shifts weight from one foot to another, where the pelvis likes to be, how the head relates to the spine, how arms do or don't swing in the walk, and more. The guide listens to their own somatic response to the client, sometimes allowing it to guide the work and other times letting it go because it does not serve the moment. In addition to observing the walk visually, they might place a hand lightly on the client's sacrum to allow a physical listening that provides an even deeper understanding of the primary mover's embodiment. When I act as a supportive guide, I feel as if I am creating porous boundaries in the



mapping of self and other, beginning a process of deepening somatic intersubjectivity wherein my client and I might form a two-become-one body.

After walking, the Shin Somatics Practitioner invites the client to lie down on a table or the floor. Modifications also exist for the client to sit in a chair. Again, the bodyworker listens. The client simply rests. At this point, the goal is to “*do* nothing,” where doing indicates action such as judging resting posture, planning a next step, or beginning a movement pattern. They wait. They watch the breath, notice what draws their attention in the moment. They are tuning into intuition and letting go of words and pre-set patterns. Those exist, but they are outside of, or perhaps underneath, this space. Sondra borrows this notion of a time of doing nothing from butoh dancer Yoshito Ohno, who teaches his students to “dance Shin, which he calls ‘the patience of not starting’ and ‘the very center of the body,’ also ‘heart of grass’” (quoted in Fraleigh 2015, 66).

In my own work, this is a time where I intentionally match my client’s breath pattern. My eyes scan their body, noticing a slight turn of the head, a tenseness in the shoulder, one leg that is more outwardly rotated than the other, or anything else that stands out to me. I am aware that the things that call my attention are what I consider imbalances within the body. Following the Shin Somatics curriculum model, I seek to provide my client the opportunity to discover neutrality through our session. This involves balance between the two sides of the body, a spine that expresses its own natural curves without reduction or excess, and a head that rests easily and continues the central line created by the spine. As I notice imbalances in the client’s body, I am not judging or thinking of anything that is not neutral as wrong. Rather, I am noticing this as a habitual way of being. It serves the client, or it wouldn’t exist. What I hope to do in my lesson is draw their awareness to these habits. This sometimes happens on a pre-reflective level, and it

sometimes happens on a conscious level. I accept that the client will do with these patterns what they will, as it serves them. I do not have an end-goal in mind.

After a few moments of listening and being-with the client, the practitioner senses or chooses a place to begin “clearing” the body. Shin Somatics begins with affirmation—with an attitude of “yes, and.” When moving the client’s body, the supportive guide begins moving with the primary mover’s natural inclination. When rolling the head, for example, the roll begins in the direction the head is already facing, then moves in the opposite direction only when it feels easy to achieve. The practitioner first affirms the client’s embodied habits, then offers other options. When working with a client who is injured, the guide begins opposite the injury. For example, when working with a client with a healed but still problematic right rotator cuff, the practitioner begins with the left arm. By doing this they focus on a client’s health rather than their injury or dis-ease.

A full bodywork session encourages the client to be back-lying, side-lying, and front-lying. Shin practitioners work with the three-dimensionality of the body, offering the client the opportunity to experience supported release of habit in multiple relationships with the table or floor. When working on the floor, a supportive guide can shift a client to the side, belly, or back with gentle pulling or pushing of the body. Progressing slowly, if the client tenses or seems uncomfortable in any way the guide steps back to either wait before trying again or move to a different pattern. This is a process of light touch and easy movement of the body in practiced patterns.

While Land to Water Yoga serves as an organizational model for bodywork, it is influenced by Feldenkrais Technique, Alexander Technique, and Craniosacral patterns. Citing sources is highly valued within the practice. Thus, when teaching a movement pattern that

originates in another somatic technique, the instructor states where the pattern comes from and why it is engaged. Sondra, who is certified in Feldenkrais Technique, will often tell a story about her experience learning a specific pattern. Teachers who are certified in other methods will share their understanding of specific movement patterns so that they might contextualize their work within the larger scope of somatics. Other movement patterns have been conceptualized by Sondra and are readily adapted by Shin practitioners to address the unique bodies of the primary mover.

A practitioner may choose to begin a lesson through exploration of any part of the body. Common starting points include the feet, head and neck, or arms and shoulder girdle. The bodyworker gently connects with the primary mover physically, perhaps resting a light touch on a hand or ankle, or perhaps grasping the wrist just above the condyles with a feather-weight thumb and middle finger. The supportive guide explores movement range, gently dancing with the body to discover where a primary mover has much movement range and where range seems limited. Many movement patterns incorporate spirals, perhaps a spiraling of the arm from the shoulder joint or leg from the hip joint. At some point in a lesson, the primary mover will be encouraged to rest in a half front- or half-back and half-side lying position so that the spine's spiral can express itself. For example, the easy alligator twist involves a primary mover resting on their back with the knees bent and resting on one side of the body. Another common pattern, the lazy lizard, involves a primary mover in a front-lying position with one body half bent, arm at a right angle framing the head, which is turned to face the bent elbow. The other half of the body is straight, with the arm long along the side of the body. The primary mover is invited to breathe into the belly chakra. This position also gives the practitioner access to the entire spine, which might invite some exploration of a craniosacral touch pattern.

Eastwest students practice these patterns in training workshops. Sondra or another experienced teacher-trainer demonstrates them with a volunteer while other students watch and ask questions, then practice with each other. Always, there is improvisation within the movement patterns inspired by what the supportive guides sense through their own vision and touch as well as curiosity about what might be possible. They might choose to insert a rotation of the arm in the shoulder socket when executing an arm and shoulder girdle pattern adapted from Feldenkrais technique because they sense a tightness in that area that may release with some gentle movement exploration. Likewise, when supporting both legs with the hands, they might feel a need to play with a large or small figure-eight movement pattern of the legs based on the amount of ease or restriction sensed in the client's lower body. Certification students are often a bit clumsy when learning bodywork, but through repeated practice in workshops and with volunteers at home, they eventually find their own flow and begin to allow themselves creative explorations of familiar Shin Somatics clearing patterns.

In my practice, I usually choose my first touch or movement in an area exactly opposite one that appears to hold excess tension. For my husband, who has a severe scoliosis that results in a significant muscular imbalance around his upper thoracic spine, this tends to be in the arms and shoulder girdle. I might lightly grasp his wrist on the more relaxed side of his body, lifting it from the table and supporting his elbow with my other hand as I gently pull the arm toward me, rotate it in the shoulder joint, and take the arm across his body to place his hand on his opposite shoulder. As his body shifts slightly toward the shoulder, I slide my other hand under the muscles behind his shoulder blade and we rest there together. My hands, one on his hand and one under his back, offer tactile reinforcement of connection through the shoulder girdle, as well as any unnecessary muscular tension that might exist. He breathes, notices the tension, and chooses

to let it go. Sometimes he is more ready to let go of the tension than others. It seems to depend on how much stress he is experiencing in his day-to-day life. After a few breaths—after I feel a softening of his muscles—I reverse the movement pattern and rest his arm easily by his side. Then I step back and wait, noticing anything that seems to want noticing. I’m listening again for cues from his body. Should I repeat the pattern on the same arm? Should I move on to the next side and offer symmetry? Should I attend to a different body part before moving to the other side? I wait as long as I need to, as long as it takes for me to feel like I’m drawn to the next action. This might be a few seconds or a few minutes.

As the Shin practitioner completes a bodywork lesson, they assist the client in sitting, then support them as they dance lightly to standing. If moving from the table, this might involve the practitioner standing facing the seated client, lower arms and hands facing upward and aligned with the client’s lower arms and pressing one arm gently back while the other advances and the client looks over the back shoulder, then reversing the spiral. This movement travels through the spine to encourage a “walking” forward of the hips on the ischial tuberosities, easing the client off the table until they can gently place one foot and then the other on the floor and move into a walk. The lesson ends as it began, with the supportive guide matching the primary mover’s walk and noticing. This time both parties notice difference if it exists. What changed during the lesson? The practitioner might invite the client to dance their experience of the bodywork, draw a picture, or discuss what they felt during and after the bodywork. This provides an opportunity for conscious reflection and closure.

### **Inviting More: Additional Processes in Eastwest Shin Somatics**

While no less important, the methods discussed in this section are incorporated throughout the discreet approaches addressed earlier. They highlight the values embedded within

Eastwest Shin Somatics—being present with self and other, acknowledging habit and inviting change, and building empathy through inter-subjective experience.

### Effective Communication

The centrality of listening and being-with another leads Shin practitioners to develop these skills through a linguistic practice called effective communication. This involves a simple listening activity wherein one practices attending to another's story without inserting the self into it. The practice offers a supportive guide an opportunity to notice, and let go of, the tendency to center the self in both conversations and relationships. Partners are directed to sit comfortably facing each other. One person talks about a prompt. The specific prompt is selected according to the context of that moment. I often prompt students to talk about a memory, a favorite place, a dream, or anything else they want to share with their partner. I could also prompt them to close their eyes and wait for an image to appear to them, then describe the image and talk about it. The speaker, in a role equivalent to the primary mover in a bodywork or contact unwinding lesson, then tells their story for three minutes. The listener is encouraged to listen without offering verbal or physical reactions. They are asked to connect with their partner visually and remain engaged and listening deeply, but not to react beyond an expression of interest. When three minutes is up, the listener selects something the speaker shared that they would like to learn more about. They state, "I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_. Would you like to tell me more about it?" The speaker then has two to three minutes to say more, if they choose. The roles then reverse.

This activity offers several learning opportunities. The speaker experiences three or more minutes of uninterrupted attention from another, allowing them to feel heard and understood. The listener has the opportunity to recognize their impulses to guide the story with their own

responses and choose to let them go. This brings them more into the present moment with the speaker, allowing them to truly listen rather than plan their response.

When leading an effective communication experience in my dance and yoga classes, I often find that my students express a strong desire to offer positive feedback to the speaker through smiles, verbal affirmation, postural cues, and the like. Disrupting these tendencies helps them realize existing social structures within conversations and analyze how these structures might encourage those in everyday conversation to listen to respond rather than listening to hold space for another person. This distinction is key within Shin Somatics. Practitioners strive to listen—aurally, physically, emotionally—to hold presence for a primary mover. Doing so allows them to follow a primary mover's (or speaker's, in this case) lead rather than letting their own metanarratives drive a lesson. To successfully hold presence, one must acknowledge and let go of any implicit desire to direct the moment.

### Butoh

Butoh, as shared by Sondra and rooted in her experiences with Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno, provides another important influence on Eastwest Shin Somatics. Sondra explains that her teaching is “loosely based on butoh.” She says that “metamorphosis [is] at the aesthetic core of the new genre that emerged through Hijikata Tatsumi, and secondarily through Ohno Kazuo and his son Ohno Yoshito” (Fraleigh 2016, 61), and therefore she also calls her own work “metamorphic dance.” She connects butoh and the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger to understand the human as belonging to the world as a being in the world, a member of the natural community (ibid., 62). She sees this understanding of humans as both natural and cultural beings (ibid., 63) as a parallel between phenomenology and butoh. The influence of this in Eastwest Shin Somatics is felt primarily through the focus on dance in nature, described above.

Another aspect of her work that Sondra attributes to her study of butoh is acknowledging the uncomfortable and “inviting your pain to tea.” She shares, “I use my study of butoh to inspire non-habitual expressive responses in students, and to assist them in accepting transitional states of change.... It is important to acknowledge a full range of affective influences, not just the pleasant ones.... Moving consciously with attention to the whole, and without denial, provides a strong foundation for psychological, cognitive, and perceptual integration” (Fraleigh 2015, 35). Not having arrived at Shin Somatics from a place of physical or emotional pain, the concept of sitting with my pain, listening to and learning with it, is not something I generally focus on. Yet sitting with emotional discomfort is a regular practice in my general life activities as I seek to confront my own biases in teaching and explore personal growth in my home life and career. I suspect that those who seek Shin for healing want to attend deeply to their pain to learn the lessons they need from their bodies to find balance and move forward.

Many Eastwest practitioners have no direct experience with butoh, however. We have only participated in butoh-inspired dance improvisation with Sondra. I have done cursory research on the dance form. Because many practitioners feel they do not understand the dance practice deeply enough to provide instruction in the form, they simply acknowledge its influence on the practice in general and only occasionally reference it in their own teaching practices. Sondra herself says she never intended for her students to perform or teach butoh, but she feels they can benefit from some of its perspectives (Fraleigh 2021e). In her interview, Ashley discusses what she perceives as butoh’s focus on the shadow—the dark and uncomfortable—as essential to the work. In all the workshops I attended since 2014, the shadow was only deeply explored in the 2020 online workshop with Sondra and Kelly, so I find it interesting that Ashley



focuses so heavily on it. Perhaps, like yoga, it is a thread that sometimes surfaces and sometimes recedes, depending on the community within which Sondra is teaching

### Imagery

Imagery is another essential tool for suggestion without dictation of end-goals. Included throughout Shin Somatics, practitioners adapt imagery practices such as active imagination from Jungian psychology and somatic imaging from Eugene Gendlin to allow the pre-reflective self to emerge into consciousness through feelings, thus increasing self-awareness (Fraleigh 2015, 53; Fraleigh 2018b, 38-40). Sondra describes utilizing Gendlin's focusing with a client.

I often begin a somatic session by asking my client/student if she or he would like to sit in silence and pay attention to whatever image may come to consciousness – a sound or a picture, a colour or smell – a person, taste, feeling or perhaps a movement. In focusing the image, the client/student eventually describes something (anything) that comes to her. (Fraleigh 2018b, 38)

The primary mover is then asked whether they can locate the image in their body. They are invited to move with the image. If they choose to move, the practitioner asks questions such as, “Does this image have a location somewhere in your body?” and “Can you describe how it feels?” to encourage kinaesthetic exploration (ibid., 40). The images often give rise to emotional feelings, which, following the work of Damasio, are understood as key to consciousness (1999, 26). Shin practitioner Robert Bingham expands on this connection through his discussion of what he terms a “somatic image experience.” He explains that somatic imaging allows one to forget oneself while also feeling most like oneself (Bingham 2015, 155). Bingham shares that images bridge felt experience with language, acting as a conduit. “The image provides a direct link to a distinct somatic feeling-state, one that I can access again and again through the medium of

language. It is a somatic reference point, anchored now by the very words I am writing” (ibid., 159). This link can be heightened through written or aural reflection, through metaphoric tactics such as drawing or writing poetry, and/or by a supportive guide who witnesses the primary mover’s dance and “dances back” what they observe, reiterating the primary mover’s dance by repeating their movement and/or translating it into a different improvisational dance for the primary mover to witness.

When reflecting on a somatic imaging experience a primary mover may become more aware of the connection between their bodily movement habits and their emotional selves. The primary mover’s dance and the words used to discuss the image reinforce its somatic feeling and create a reference point. The supportive guide’s act of witnessing enhances the intersubjectivity within the experience by allowing a witness to reflect back to a primary mover their experience, but through the filter of the witness’ own subjectivity. When doing such an activity in the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop*, one member of the group shared that when she was witness, she felt she was trying to get into her partner and then come back into herself. She felt that doing so could possibly highlight something for her partner that would have gone unnoticed before.

### Meditation

Meditation practices are threaded throughout the work. With its consistent present-centered attention, Shin Somatics as a whole practice can be considered a moving meditation. Sondra describes mindfulness as being of Zen origin and connoting “unification and surrender to the present moment, without worry over the past or anticipation of the future” (2015, 54). While Sondra clearly cultivates a meditative practice of silence and stillness (ibid., 59), my meditative practice is one of inner-attentive movement. When I practice Shin Somatics, I understand every

moment of a class or session as a meditation. From the first intentional breath and focusing inward to clear myself of the clutter of past and present awareness, to my opening of the boundaries between self and other to create a sense of two-now-one.

### **Following the Process: Listening and Responding**

Sondra draws a connection between phenomenology and somatic movement arts, explaining that they share common narratives, and value clearing, or bracketing existing habits of thought and action in order to let go of assumptions and allow “a tabula rasa approach to lived time, body, and lifeworld, wiping the slate clean in order to rid the psyche-soma of limiting habits” (ibid., 17). This bracketing clears the way for “looking at what is taken for granted and preparing for new insight. This is also a matter of finding voice through the power of *both-and inclusive thinking*” (ibid.; emphasis in original).

Activities such as clearing the self before beginning a movement practice or pattern allow the practitioner to acknowledge and let go of the past and future, and any resulting hierarchy, even if only for the present moment. An intentional focus on letting go of the boundaries of the self in order to support another is evident in the practice’s roles of primary mover and supportive guide. In every lesson, the client or student is considered the primary mover. This is true even in table work, where someone outside the group might misunderstand the practitioner as the primary mover. In reality the practitioner is the supportive guide, listening deeply to the client’s habitual embodiment, noticing breath and physical holding patterns, beginning any movement patterns in the direction of the client’s current inclination, and offering new possibilities through repatterning slowly and attentively. The Shin practitioner is always listening and responding. The response is guided by the primary mover’s physical and energetic cues, rather than the guide’s

valuative judgment. We start where we are, learn as we go, and build capacity along the way. There is no end goal other than exploring new possibilities together.

A caption of an image in Hillel Braude's chapter within *Back to the Dance Itself*, titled "Radical Somatics," shows Shin practitioner Nathalie Guillaume in an Eastwest Somatics Institute workshop acting as supportive guide to Joan Englander. Nathalie stands to the side of Joan, who is seated in front of her. One of Nathalie's hands, spread wide and softly placed, rests behind and on the bottom half of Joan's right shoulder blade while her left is hidden but seems to rest somewhere near the front and inside of her left shoulder joint. The caption reads, "Nathalie Guillaume directs her touch intentionally without excessive concern for outcome" (Braude 2015, 131). This statement encapsulates the whole of the work in Shin Somatics. Practitioners touch, move, imagine, reflect, and more with clear intent to offer new possibilities in embodiment without excessive concern over where they will end up. They trust that the primary mover will hold on to what serves them. They follow their lead and simply offer ourselves as filters, facilitators, reflectors, and more. They understand they are not fixers. They are not movement masters or master healers. They are simply people longing to let go of their habitual selves and join with another for a while in order to help them learn more about themselves, and in the process they, too, will learn more about themselves.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SPIRALING FLOWER: SHIN SOMATICS IN/WITH THE WORLD

#### **Introducing Study Participants**

People find Eastwest Shin Somatics through multiple pathways, but they share some commonalities. In the United States, many know Sondra personally, and come to the work through her. Those who study in Mexico often find Ashley through acquaintances or her website. Those who volunteered for this study are all women from a middle-class background with careers in dance and/or somatic practices. All except one hold university degrees. While not all Shin Somatics practitioners share these attributes, these participants are representative of the majority of Eastwest Somatics Institute students and graduates. Yet, each member of this study has a unique life and engages with Shin Somatics in her own way. The next paragraphs introduce each participant, then draw attention to their understanding of the work by addressing skills developed through Shin Processes as identified in the curriculum model.

#### **Daniela**

Daniela is an Eastwest graduate who lives in Mexico City. She met Ashley after leaving a professional dance training program due to injury. After taking eight months off to recuperate, she felt she was not getting better and began searching for a physical practice that might lead to healing. Three years later she began the Eastwest Somatics Institute Mexico certification program. Daniela currently uses Shin Somatics practices in anxiety workshops that she offers to those who suffer from trauma as a result of a massive earthquake in 2017. Additionally, she collaborates with a nutritional epigenetics researcher and a neuropharmacologist to offer a training program for those who want to work with people suffering from anxiety and depression.

She shares that her primary interest is in developing somatic pedagogy, or what she terms *counter-pedagogy*, drawing from Rita Segato (Orlando 2020b).

### **Fae**

Fae is an Eastwest graduate who lives in Utah. A visual artist and massage therapist, she describes herself as “born a dancer.” She recounts growing up and twirling in her skirts and sneaking out during her teen years to see Ike and Tina Turner reviews so she and her friends could dance, dance, dance. While married to a professor at Brigham Young University she took several dance classes, including salsa, clogging, and modern dance. In her forties, she studied to become a massage therapist, blending in elements of Reiki, Touch for Health, Watsu, and rapid eye movement therapy. Fae was encouraged to take Sondra’s yoga class by a friend and family member. She attended class twice a week for several years until Sondra invited her to become certified in Eastwest Shin Somatics. She now blends Shin Somatic practices into her massage therapy. She focuses her therapy on women who have experienced trauma.

### **Gladys**

Gladys is an Eastwest graduate who lives and teaches yoga in Mexico City. Prior to studying with Ashley Meeder, she maintained a Certification in Yoga and Conscious Alignment through Yoga Alliance. Her yoga practice was heavily influenced by Iyengar and Vinyasa yoga. In recent years she developed sacroiliac dysfunction and lower back spasms common to those who have practiced yoga extensively. This led her to question her practice, and she enrolled in a certification program in Therapeutic & Restorative Yoga in Mexico that values consciousness through movement, anatomical awareness, pain alleviation, and Feldenkrais Technique. Graduates of the program address their clients’ physiological pain through anatomical analysis, posture, and including medical techniques such as examining X-Rays. Gladys found this a useful

approach to helping others, but eventually sought something less rooted in judgment about “proper” alignment and “right” ways of embodiment. She began to feel that some yoga approaches failed to encourage the principle of ahimsa (nonviolence, or noninjury), not only in the way students related to their own bodies, but in the way teachers were guiding classes. She also felt frustration when examining the push in yoga studios to overfill classes to make a profit.

As Gladys sought a new approach to yoga, she looked for a practice that addressed the somatic/autonomic nervous system. She discovered Eastwest Somatics Institute through a friend’s posting on her Facebook timeline, and she called Ashley to learn more about the program. After an hour talking to her on the phone, she felt Shin Somatics focused on the element she was missing: yoga as the joining of spirit, body, and mind. She believed Eastwest offered her a pragmatic exploration of this union.

### **Kay**

Kay is an Eastwest graduate in Utah. She is a massage and craniosacral therapist who met Sondra at the wellness center where they both worked. She took Sondra’s yoga class (her first yoga class) at forty-five years old. Kay’s strong organizational skills led Sondra to invite her to plan workshops in St. George, Utah and abroad. She traveled with Sondra to Greece and Italy, and helped organize training workshops in Hawaii, New York, and Utah.

Kay explains that Sondra’s class “introduced her to her body” (Nelson 2020). She shares that she was raised “with blinders on,” marrying and having six children right out of high school. Kay describes her approach to embodiment prior to studying with Eastwest as “let’s just run it ragged and overlook whatever needs to be done and just toughen up and get it done” (Nelson 2020). Explaining her early workshop experiences, Kay states that she felt her own body movement through observing others. This sympathetic movement experience helped her to

connect with her consciousness and pay attention to what wanted to be expressed through movement. She maintains her own therapeutic practice blending multiple somatic approaches and assists in organizing and teaching Eastwest Somatics Institute training workshops.

### **Kelly**

Kelly is an Eastwest graduate who teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi. She began working with Sondra after enrolling in her somatics course to fill three credits in her schedule at SUNY Brockport. Half-way through the course, Sondra asked for volunteers for a work study to help with administration duties related to her Eastwest workshops, and Kelly applied for the position. She explains that she attended workshop after workshop and became more and more immersed in the work. After completing the certification program, Kelly taught alongside Sondra occasionally until she eventually taught her own five-day workshop. She now assists Sondra in facilitating online workshops and managing conference proposal review processes. She also utilizes Shin Somatics in her creative process and when teaching somatics and other courses within her university.

### **Shirley**

Shirley has participated in only one Eastwest workshop. She lives in Colorado and comes to the Institute with significant experience in other somatic modalities. She shares that she has “done” Authentic Movement, Sensory Awareness, and Mettler-based dance teacher training (Smithson 2020). She currently teaches yoga, improvisation, and choreography. She specializes in children’s yoga teacher training, sharing that somatic practices are really successful with children because they “have their body awareness,” and “haven’t chopped themselves off at the neck yet” (ibid.). Shirley found Shin Somatics through a web search. During the pandemic, she had less work and spent more time on her own practice. This led her to seek out something new



to “stretch” herself (ibid.). A web search brought up Sondra’s books, *Moving Consciously* (2015) and *Land to Water Yoga* (2009). After reading through these books and the Eastwest website, she found the July online workshop that would allow her to learn without leaving home. Excited by Shin Somatics’ blending of improvisational movement and yoga, she enrolled.

### **Yanina**

Yanina is an Eastwest graduate who lives in Mexico City. She is a dancer who explores digital media content and dance film. She states that somatics changed her life, shifting her understanding of movement in her own body as well as her choreographic work. After taking some somatic classes prior to her undergraduate work, she entered California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles to pursue a degree in dance. However, the program was not somatically oriented, and after returning to Mexico she sought to return to the practices that first inspired her to move. In her search, she discovered Ashley and Eastwest. Yanina chose Eastwest because she found Ashley likeable and felt connected to her. Additionally, she felt the tools offered through Shin Somatics would help her pursue a career as a movement therapist. Yet, her path took her in a slightly different direction. While Yanina does offer some therapeutic services, her study with Eastwest has primarily impacted her creative work. As Yanina developed a continuous personal somatic practice, she became a prolific choreographer. Dance projects streamed from her embodied consciousness, resulting in several small projects. These small projects led to larger projects in both live dance and digital media, and she now describes her creative project as exploring “what it is to bring the somatic being into digital interactions and into the software that we develop, or the virtual experiences that we develop as artists” (Orellana 2020).

## **Exploring the Curriculum Model**

As explained in Chapter 2, my research seeks to understand how members of the Eastwest Shin Somatics community understand and embody the practice. To that end, I began interviews with the following questions:

- 1) What is Shin Somatics (and what is East and West in Eastwest)?
- 2) What do you think when you do Shin Somatics?
- 3) What do you feel when you do Shin Somatics?
- 4) How do you use Shin Somatics in your everyday life?

From there my participants and I expanded our discussion, following our curiosity. I asked additional questions to clarify their responses and they often wandered through the conversational interview, telling stories of personal pain, surprise opportunities for bodywork, and special memories of working with students or clients. Sometimes participants wandered into memories of loved ones who passed away or terrible accidents that caused them immense injury healed over many months and years. Each woman has a unique story to tell, which makes drawing clear themes out of their interviews very difficult. Adding to the challenge, several participants expressed that Shin Somatics functions in a space before or beyond words. As a result, practitioners grappled with descriptions of processes, principles, and skills engaged. Yet each participant took her time answering my questions. They sought the right words, often trying out several options before choosing the most accurate language to express their feelings. In this chapter I attempt to provide organization, but the subject matter refuses to be satisfyingly linear, instead spiraling out from multiple nodes of the Shin Somatics rhizome. Therefore, I provide here an exploration of participants' musings as a collage that offers some insight into the Shin Somatics curriculum model in praxis (see Figure 4).

As I discuss in Chapter 5, the curriculum model is circular in nature and identifies core narratives, categories of practice, specific processes engaged in Shin Somatics, and principles within the practice. The outer ring of the model identifies categories of intent within the practice, including Conceptual Clarity, Practical Skillfulness, Experiential Openness, and Presentational Playfulness. These are linked to each other with general skill sets valued by practitioners and developed through Shin Somatics, including Drawing Appropriate Boundaries, Applied Anatomy, Holding Presence, and Discovering Neutrality. Just inside this ring are principles of Shin Somatics, such as Focusing Attention, Saying Yes, Moving in the Moment, and Trusting Intuition, that are engaged in Shin processes such as intuitive dance, Land to Water Yoga, and bodywork. In describing Shin Somatics, study participants largely discussed these principles. Processes were discussed briefly and in relation to their underlying principles. Yet their discussion of these principles can be grouped under three of the skill sets included in the outer ring of the model: Holding Presence, Applied Anatomy, and Discovering Neutrality. In addition to these skills, participants often discussed nature as respite, metaphor, and model. The next paragraphs explore these topics.

### **Applying Anatomy**

Applied anatomy encompasses processes such as contact unwinding and flow repatterning through yoga and bodywork. Key principles within this skill set are resting to learn, learning as you do, doing less to feel more, moving in the moment, bringing awareness to, and pleasure in movement. Yet before any of this can happen practitioners must first clear the self. This allows them to be present with the primary mover and allow them the opportunity to attend to their body unencumbered by the practitioner's current relationship with the world. Kelly discusses her struggle to empty herself. She uses tools such as visualizing her thoughts as written

sentences that go by her and leave (Lester 2020). In her interview, Sondra explains that Shin Somatics is a moving meditation and that she seeks to first empty herself so she can attend to another person without “imposing Sondra” (Fraleigh 2020a). She states, “I think about emptying out and clearing away any troubles and worries. Entering into a pure space of feeling and mind so that whatever comes to the surface will come into a kind of tabula rasa. A clear space” (ibid.). For Kelly, this pure space allows her to be present with her students. “I’m truly here with these people. That’s just where I want to be. I’m witnessing my students. Here. Listening” (Lester 2020).

Daniela explains that this clearing allows the practitioner to understand what is happening in the moment.

We don’t observe the body as if we know it. It’s more like we observe the body as an unknown body. So that way we can watch and understand what is really happening in that moment, in that person... I think the most important part is that we understand that the body is something changing, and we try to give tools of observation. And in this observation and questioning, we can discover or explore some aspects of the self. (Orlando 2020a)

Being present requires deep listening, engaging intuition as methodology. This principle is addressed by many study participants as key to working with clients and students, as well as engaging in relationships beyond therapeutic and educational settings. When discussing bodywork, Kelly describes *moving in the moment* as a type of kinaesthetic listening. Describing her connection to another during a bodywork session, Kelly explains.

I really focus on energy. [I ask myself] am I breathing with them? Can I inhale and exhale on their rhythm and connect with their energy? But there's definitely another layer to it. I do a lot of waiting and trusting with my hands. And I'm witnessing, trusting my hands to feel what's happening and what I'm sensing in the body. But I'm also observing because, for example, if I'm working on the leg and moving it slowly, I might see them take a deeper breath and so I know there's something happening in this nervous system. I don't need to know what it is. And then sometimes I take my hands off and give them a moment to integrate. And at that moment, I might think about where I'm going to touch next or if I need to wait more. (Lester 2020)

As Kelly's words indicate, waiting allows the practitioner to attend deeply to both themselves and others. It allows a shift of focus from self to not-self, as well as a blurring of these dichotomous boundaries. As Kelly waits, she listens. She notices the primary mover's breath, how they lie on the floor or table, the tilt of the head, tension in a leg, and so on. She practices being with what is. Kelly matches her client's breath, attempting to blend her own energy with the client's. Then, she intuitively explores the next movement, trusting intuition to guide her choices as she responds to the primary mover's cues.

Offering a perspective of the work from the viewpoint of a new student, Shirley shares that she would describe Shin Somatics as "subtle transformation" guided by her body's desires (Smithson 2020). She describes her experience as primary mover during the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop*.

It was very subtle, but very transformational. It's like you didn't even know it was happening, but I felt all these different energy shifts. And I thought, "Okay I'm

just going to sit with this and let this just flow through me.” Because it was totally non-thinking. It got into the body and I just let my body do what it wanted to do. (ibid.)

She offers this understanding,

When I’m moving, I’m really listening to my body... and noticing “Oh wow! My right side is still a lot tighter than my left.” Or that particular movement felt smooth or not smooth. I guess I’m giving it labels in language from the cues my body is giving me. (ibid.)

Kay elucidates the import of this bodily sensation to dis-organize and access the virtual during a Shin Somatics lesson, explaining that people are “doing what their body is feeling, how it’s understanding itself, and how its feelings want to be expressed.” She continues,

I like to have that place of allowing and creating that Sondra talks about, a place of all possibilities and being okay with those possibilities. Then resting into that and allowing things to process. (Nelson 2020)

### **Discovering Neutrality**

Discovering neutrality arises out of holding presence (discussed below) through imagery and intuition engaged in an attitude of presentational playfulness. Principles related to this skill set include being with what is, suspending expectation, suspending judgment, trusting intuition, drawing forth, not knowing, not interpreting, and not fixing. These principles are explored in all Shin processes, giving rise to the movement exploration of all possibilities that Kay discusses above. This exploration relies on the senses to move beyond attitudes of expectation and judgment to create space for discovery of possibilities within one’s embodied being. Gladys discusses the relevance of moving beyond what she labels her primary way of learning-using

logic through attending to her senses and sensations. Gladys discloses, “I have to connect with my deeper sense, my deeper ways of sensing life and sensing the environment” (Olivares 2020a). Gladys describes herself as a rational thinker, identifying rationality with her inclination to push herself to do more and do it better.

I notice sometimes that some part of me is trying to push me into hard work. Let’s do some abs. Look at your arms, you need to work them out.... Maybe if somebody has a very rigid education related to the body, like “no pain, no gain,” some part of your brain is as a little tyrant that is calling you for more action. More effort. Do it better. Be perfect. So when he (this voice is like my father’s voice) is telling me that, I say, “Oh, shhhhh. Let’s see what we really need at this time.” Maybe it takes half an hour, a quarter of an hour, but I need to enter into that mood so I may feel my body. (Olivares 2020)

As Kay explains, this can be difficult, especially for those new to Shin Somatics. It requires a certain amount of bravery to continue to engage in movement exploration focused solely on what the body wants to express. Here she is letting go of organized habits of thought, opening the map of her body so that she may shift her duration, seeking her physical and emotional body’s needs in the present moment. This is evident as she recollects her first Shin Somatics training workshop.

It was a whole new experience for me to just be still and feel what’s going on within instead of hit the ground running. Take care of this. Do that run here. Play a sport, it’s fast. Move, move, go, go, go, instead of being still. Like even meditation, that was all brand new to me. Really? Sit still? It just was all very new. (Nelson 2020)

Later in her interview she expands,

I think my first experience was just seeing women move and having a feeling of moving arise within me. I had never done that before. It was very hard for me to step into those things. I would get the biggest knot in my stomach and I still kind of do. Not that I feel like I had to perform or do it a certain way, but I just felt like, where is that feeling I'm supposed to be connecting with? I didn't know what it was. I didn't know how to express it. I can just remember watching in awe of the beauty of movement and there were so many different movements out of all these different people, and I loved it all. It wasn't in a way of judging. I was feeling my movement in watching their movement. It helped me connect with my soul? Or my consciousness? Just being able to pay attention to what wants to be expressed through movement. (ibid.)

Kay shares that she still experiences some discomfort in the Shin Somatics work, though she now looks forward to it. She states that the discomfort leads to emotional release for her, but that it requires bravery to say yes, or "step into those experiences." She describes returning home after early workshops and telling her husband,

"I'm not going back. I hate that I'm uncomfortable. I feel like a fish out of water. This is not for me." But then I would step back. And it's like giving birth. You forget about the pain, and you remember all the wonderful things you experienced. So the next thing I knew, I'd be back in another workshop. [Now] I love being the fish and swimming with all these other beautiful fish and learning what I can. (ibid.)



Movement explored by Shin practitioners and their clients and students is not always beautiful, and an attitude of non-judgment is essential. Yanina discusses connecting to her inner sensing, calling somatic movement exploration a somadance.

It's its own kind of self-generated movement, a very special kind of state. It's a place where you don't have to show off or you don't have to rise to certain expectations and it can just be movement for yourself and enjoy doing the movement.... No one has to see it. No one has to judge it.... I'm connecting to intuition. I feel- that there are certain kinds of reflexes or things I don't allow my body to do in regular hours. And sometimes they're jerky and weird. It's blissful, I think we all know that. But I think for myself, whenever I'm getting into it sometimes it's not very romantic. There's weird things that come up that are very personal for me. (Orellana 2020)

Kay points to a common Shin pedagogic method that relies on description of activities such as intuitive dance and yoga rather than demonstration as integral in allowing clients and students to release judgment.

Because everybody is different, it [Shin Somatics] does not have to look a certain way. I love how when we teach it's not as much through action and "watch me" as it is through explanation. So that way students can find that information and that pattern within their own body. I loved that for myself also, because I always felt like I wasn't doing it right or it didn't look like everyone else. When I can close my eyes and do what I'm feeling, [instead of] what someone's teaching me to do, then I can feel it in my own body and I don't have to compare myself to the person next to me. (Nelson 2020)

Shirley concurs, expressing,

I felt very safe. I felt very accepted. I felt like I could express however I needed to express. I felt totally comfortable moving the way I needed to move, without any feeling of, “Wow, am I doing this right or wrong?” (Smithson 2020)

Kelly shares that this pedagogic approach and attitude on non-judgment spills over into her daily life, allowing her to be truly present and attend to others in all activities.

[Shin Somatics] impacts my teaching.... It is listening-active listening in my classroom. It's verbs of permission. It is description. It is reflection. It just truly guides my lesson planning, but also my movement.... I'm truly here with these people.... And with my parenting, I ask myself, “have I stopped to really listen to what [my child] is saying?... So I'm trying to get them to reflect on and articulate different things. (Lester 2020)

### **Holding Presence**

Other study participants agree with Kelly that holding presence, or as they often refer to it, holding space, for another utilizes many Shin principles, is essential to the practice, and spills out into their daily interactions with others. Kay describes holding presence—a willingness to clear one's assumptions and be present with another person, allowing them to fully and freely express themselves. She explains that the skills developed through Shin Somatics help her be more present in her relationships in general by developing her ability to clear her mind and gather all relevant information before she makes an assumption or decision.

It allows me to listen to other people, not just with my ears but with my heart, and watching their body language. A lot of the things that we learn in Shin Somatics—listening, giving and receiving, and understanding when to be still and

have movement—these apply in relationships with people in different situations.

(Nelson 2020)

Daniela also explores the import of holding presence for her clients, describing herself as an anchor. She explains, “It’s like I need to be the anchor of this calm space so they can feel comfort to get into this relaxing and breathable space” (Orlando 2020a). As most of her clients are recovering from anxiety and trauma, Daniela highlights another Shin principle, pleasure in movement. She states, “If you don’t feel good, if you’re not feeling enough pleasure, it’s not happening. It’s like, you need to search always for good” (ibid.). This focus on holding presence and allowing others to seek pleasure, or joy, oozes into her life beyond a somatics session or class, making her more empathetic to others. She discusses pausing and sensing her thoughts and emotions when interacting with others so she can discover the nature of her response to a situation before moving on to interaction. She applies this same approach to her observations of others in her life. This is evident in her explanation, “I have a kind of self-awareness that allows me to observe and empathize with other people so I understand their reactions, including their movement reactions. I kind of briefly pause before saying something. I’m feeling how to react” (ibid.). Daniela also shares, “This allows us to be better partners in everything, like work and school, love partners, family members, friends” (ibid.)

Yanina also sees somatic movement as a way to relate to others in everyday life.

I see [others] move, and how they go about their other activities, and I think it gives me an “in” to relate to them in a different way that is not just verbal. It gives me tools to be present with them when they’re speaking or when they’re in the room. I think that I can observe them with an eye that acknowledges their presence, and everything comes with

it. And I think that the sharing of the space becomes more, I guess, significant. (Orellana 2020)

The specific processes such as Land to Water Yoga and matching through touch are important, but just as essential are intentional, kind words that guide a client to tap into their emotional intelligence through the body and offer different options for feeling and moving. Daniela calls these tools and words a somatic lexicon, and she states that the Shin Somatics community shares a lexicon of movement patterns and pedagogic approaches that act as a non-verbal language. This non-verbal language is process-oriented, and requires an attitude of *not knowing*, or not defining an end-goal. In her paper presentation at the October 2020 Eastwest Somatics Institute Conference, she shares, “Somatics is how we learn to be before acting, before saying.... Sensation is now, what is happening now, how I feel right now, who I am in this moment. We can only transform ourselves by being aware of where and how we are. That’s the somatic process, to start without a finish line” (Orlando 2020b).

### **Dancing In/With/As Nature**

Nature permeates Eastwest Shin Somatics. In the curriculum model, Nature as Container is listed as a core narrative and Dance in the Environment is listed as a key process. Many Shin processes engage natural metaphors, and processes such as intuitive dance often occur in natural settings. Therefore, while dancing in/with/as nature is not listed as a separate skill set on the curriculum model, I discuss it here.

Nature offers both respite and example to Shin practitioners. Fae describes her home surrounded by nature and shares that she often dances in her yard. She shares, “I walked out this morning and looked up and a blue heron was flying. I ran around the back and saw it flying, flying, flying. And then I just started kind of moving like a heron with my arms way out, opening

my chest. I do a lot of that during the day” (Ellsworth 2020). Shirley talks about taking a walk shortly after the *Moving Consciously 2020 Online Certification Workshop* and deciding to attend to her environment in order to “get back into who [she is], the explorer, the person who really loves to relax into nature” (Smithson 2020). In her interview, Sondra explains that “we are part of what we call nature” and she encourages intuitive dance (known to many dancers as improvisation, but with attention to the self/other and/or self/environment relationship) in natural settings to help us acknowledge that we ourselves are nature.

The awareness of sensation so central to Shin Somatics occurs through engagement of what Daniela describes as a sort of “animal intelligence” (Orlando 2020a). She describes the soma-state as being entirely in her body and accessing a body consciousness where she is in charge of her own body. She explains that when she is in this soma-state, she cannot judge. She feels peaceful and pleasant. For Daniela, this animal intelligence lives within a body that resembles the sea. She shares,

Both [body and sea] are only understandable as a whole: their limits and borders are not specific. They move in a massive, constant and oscillating way, even if we can’t perceive it. The body doesn’t move only on the surface; it transforms in response to emotional, psychological, and external aspects as well. Our body is one but never the same. (Orlando 2020b)

Along with other natural metaphors included in Shin Somatics—for example the gorilla (that inspires a walking asana in Land to Water Yoga wherein one curves the upper body forward, releasing and swinging the arms and neck to provide a gentle stretch and release through the spine), bamboo sway (that inspires a side-to-side upper body swaying that can occur in Land to Water Yoga or bodywork—the sea is a recurring image. Explaining that water helps

put her in a soma-state where she lets go of ordered thinking and is immersed in feeling, Yanina shares that the seahorse float, a specific moving asana within Land to Water Yoga, is one of her favorite movement processes. The seahorse float is performed by lying down on the back with knees bent, feet at standing, and arms resting by the sides. A deep breath into the belly allows it to fill and float up toward the sky as the tail sinks toward the earth. The movement travels up the spine, rocking the head with the breath. A breath out sinks the belly toward the earth, moving the tail up toward the sky and the head gently rocks in the opposite direction. The mover imagines floating with the waves of the ocean. In training workshops, Sondra often explains that the seahorse is a poor swimmer, and therefore it holds onto ocean plants and allows itself to rock with the waves. Similarly, the feet root the body while the spine moves in a rolling motion. Yanina explains that this movement connects her to her body and is a whole-body experience that feels like waves of water.

For Gladys, connecting to watery movement and imagery draws into somatic practice her experience with Afro-Caribbean and Salsa dancing and movement devoted to the Yoruba and Santeria orisha, Yemaya. She sought out Ashley to discover healing movement for severe sacroiliac pain. As Gladys adapted her yoga practice to incorporate Shin's more consciousness-oriented focus toward easeful movement rather than her previous experience of "training" the body for strength, flexibility, and proper alignment, she also discovered the power of the ocean in her movement. The wave-like movements within Shin Somatics blended with watery undulations of Salsa dance. In her paper presentation at the October 2020 Eastwest conference, Gladys describes her experience with Yemaya in a salsa dance class.

Now we are undulating the torso, first slowly and then convulsively, body-rolling from the pelvis through the chest and from the chest through the pelvis, involving the

paraspinal muscles. “Feel the core as soft caramel,” says the teacher. At the beginning, I am afraid. I am concerned that my pelvis could reply with a dry stab in the sacrum. But what is happening is completely the opposite: my whole vessel is recognizing the movement as natural and the sacrum is invited to soften the stiffness and let go. (Olivares 2020b)

In our interview, Gladys shares the healing power of the wave that she feels in both Salsa dance and in the many water-inspired asanas withing Eastwest Shin Somatics. This wave permeates her somatic practice. Standing up and stepping back from her computer she rolls her body, sharing that this wave-dance is now part of her practice. As she dances, Gladys tells me,

Two months ago, I discovered that movement—not stability, but movement—is the secret that makes possible the spirit of my SI joint to come. And all the pain, the emotional pain, that I’m still feeling from a lot of things.... And when I move my pelvis, I move my hips, it’s like my SI joints are coming alive again and feel healthy.... Waves in my arms, in my hips, in my joints, in my whole pelvis. And I need to talk with my chest. Look at me. I need to move to explain this. I need to feel it. (Olivares 2020a)

I feel these waves in Ashley’s class in her January 2021 training module. We stand, placing a hand on the pubis and a hand on the belly and she instructs us to soften the front body, bringing the hands closer and further away from each other. We improvise, finding small waves through the spine as we touch each chakra and dance with an awareness of their relationship with each other. Ashley tells us to imagine a *rio suave*—a gentle river. The body of water no longer as vast as the sea, yet just as important.

Because Ashley teaches in Spanish and I am far from fluent, I experience first-hand the shared lexicon of Shin Somatics movement. We begin a class with improvisation and I catch a

word or two that I am familiar with. It is enough, because my body knows this movement. As Ashley places her hands on her body, I understand that we are unwinding our chakras and I close my eyes. I imagine the rio suave moving through me and I see the chakras in their energetic colors spiraling through my body, mixing and changing as they dance with each other. As the class progresses, Ashley begins to speak in English occasionally. I find myself irritated because I cannot shut out the words and allow the movement alone to guide me. Yet I still feel the river flowing through me. And I feel connected with the other students as we move with the same images, each dancing our own dance but dancing it in community with each other. We are each our own spirals, connected through the Shin Somatics rhizome.

### **Trusting Intuition, Finding Openings**

Threaded throughout participant interviews are references to approaching somatic practice without expectation or judgment, with an attitude of not knowing, not interpreting, not advising, not fixing. Reflective questioning is highly valued, as is listening for what has heart and focusing attention. In the next chapter I will ask questions that press against the current philosophical underpinnings of Eastwest Shin Somatics. In the spirit of trusting my intuition and finding openings for new possibilities, I will suggest that Shin practitioners might shift their attention and current understanding, much as we do in a somatic session.

In thinking about this, I remember a presentation Ashley gave at the 2019 Eastwest Somatics Institute Conference. She invited those present to enter into not knowing, exploring possibilities, and being present, just as I do in Chapter 6. Here I invite the reader to imagine being present at her presentation, given in the middle of the conference after several other presenters have filled attendees with movement experiences and rich discussion of the work. Embedded within the story below are many Shin Somatics principles, including not knowing,



suspending expectation, focusing attention, deep listening, and being with what is. These principles combine to allow one to *find openings* to understand what Eastwest Shin Somatics is.<sup>7</sup>

Inviting us to lie on the floor and rest, Ashley expresses that we have experienced a lot so far in the conference. She draws our attention inward through verbal cues given in both English and Spanish. I do not remember the cues given, but I do remember that Ashley addresses English-speakers and Spanish-Speakers with equal attention. She often begins with Spanish and translates into English, subtly foregrounding Mexico throughout the somatic introduction. After this rest we are drawn into a seated circle and Ashley speaks as if telling us a story. She passes along a hard object wrapped in fabric. We each explore the object with our senses, sniffing it, feeling its weight, hardness, shape, shaking it to see if it makes sound. I try to think of things I know that might feel like this. There are many lumps, no sharp angles. It is hard like stone, but too complex a shape to be a polished rock. The object fits neatly into my two hands. I do not know what it is.

All the while, Ashley tells us the story of Eastwest Somatics as it is lived in Mexico. She shares an understanding that the body's movement is our material. Life is change. A sense of neutrality allows one to observe the body as a phenomenon. Honest communication matters. We are three-dimensional—body, mind, and spirit. She shares the stories of some of her students. The yoga teacher who discovers creative movement and incorporates that and other somatic concepts in her Vinyasa practice. The chemistry teacher who experiences what Mexicans call a *crisis curative*, or healing crisis, wherein she uncovers a great deal of deeply buried pain and anger and in processing those emotions heals from a life-threatening medical emergency.

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes for the remainder of this chapter are attributed to Meeder 2019.

As the stories are shared, one after another, we pass the object along. Some people make verbal guesses about what it is, but Ashley merely chuckles and directs us to keep passing it. Eventually it makes its way back to her for the big reveal. As she unwraps it, we see it is a small sculpture. I have no idea what I am looking at. It seems to be two animals connected to each other. As Ashley passes it again, we discover a sculpture of two dogs that are connected at the belly (see Figure 5). Their mouths hang open, tongues lolling, standing on two legs with their forelegs wrapped around each other. They are dancing, perhaps. One dog has many wrinkles and one is smooth. The dogs are an ancient breed that has lived in Mexico since the Aztecs. Called Xolotzcuintli, Ashley explains they are connected to the feminine in Aztec and Mexican lore. This sculpture is a miniature replica of a giant sculpture in Colima, Mexico. Ashley continues to share that she sees the connection at the dogs' bellies as an umbilical cord, wherein wisdom and information passes from the older, wrinkled dog to the younger one. With a warm smile, she looks around the group as she says, "And I think about all of the amazing gifts that the practice of Shin Somatics has given me, and has given many people in Mexico, and people who just come to a workshop with [my graduates]. They don't even know, but it's just getting shared around."

Eastwest Shin Somatics certainly offers many gifts. Gifts of presence, deep listening, suspending expectation and judgment, and more encourage practitioners to be with themselves and others, in the moment. This facilitates finding openings to new possibilities, learning through moving in the moment, doing less to feel more, and developing self-awareness through focusing attention on sensation. Just as the dancing dogs are linked at the belly, shin practitioners are linked through a shared somatic lexicon and a desire to start where we are, learn as we go, and build capacity along the way, all guided by an intent toward energetic progress in the good. This

chapter explored some ways these principles are manifest.

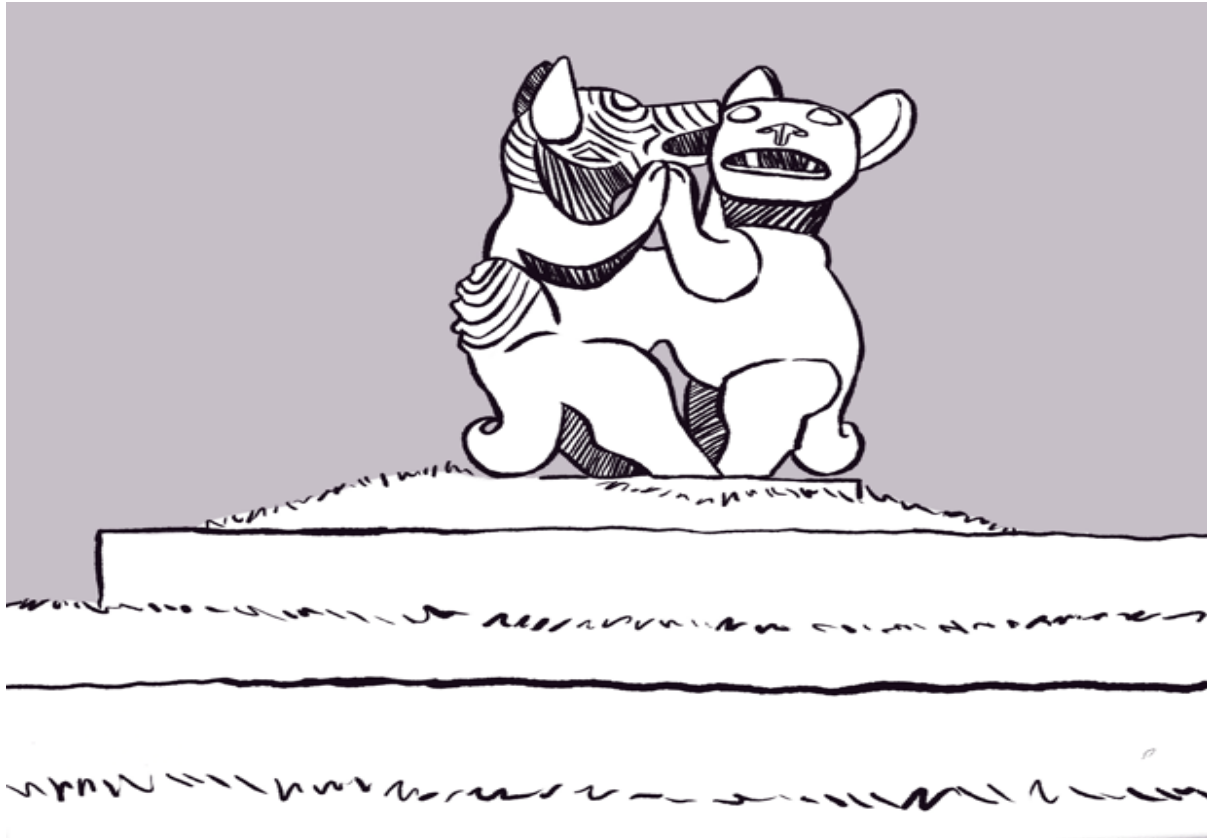


Figure 5 A sketch of the dancing dogs statue in Colima, Mexico. Art by Carrington Purvis

## CHAPTER VI

### TRANSPLANTING: DANCING EASTWEST SHIN SOMATICS, DANCING THE SOMATIC FIELD



Figure 6 Image of a Rhizome (Vincentz 2005, n.p.)

To conclude this dissertation, I return to the *spiranthes cernua*. The spiraling flowers are lovely. They reach into the world through their fragrance, making the plant a unique orchid. Yet if one focuses only on the flowers, one does not see the ever-renewing potential of the shallow roots spreading underground (see Figure 6). Additionally, while the plant can reproduce via seeds of the flowers, this is difficult. More effective is to rupture the rhizomes, gathering them from the earth and transplanting them in different

soil (NC State Extension, n.d.). In the Shin Somatics manner, I affirm its somatic spiral that reaches out into the world and in toward the individual. At the same time, I suggest the community might be able to dis-organize just a bit more to open themselves to affirming difference within the milieu by attending to life-as-lived, un-fixed and becoming in the event rather than lived experience. And I wonder how that shifting attention might accommodate the different mappings of those within the milieu.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, Eastwest is similar in some ways to somatic modalities criticized as being rooted in White, liberal, patriarchal values. Eastwest is a community of practitioners, primarily White (though that is shifting) who blend Eastern and Western practices, to seek healing through rediscovering the natural body in movement. “Proof” of success relies on anecdotes. Western processes are descended from the male progenitors of the somatic field. And like many somatic practices, phenomenology undergirds the work as both philosophy and methodology.

Yet in other ways, Eastwest Shin Somatics ruptures this metanarrative. Sondra has dedicated much of her scholarly writing to countering the patriarchal narrative (see in particular *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, 2004). Shin Somatics’ phenomenological valuation of first-person experience and interrelationship of self and world de-centers the patriarchal model. When teaching, Sondra and Ashley shun the master-disciple relationship and democratize workshops by inviting graduates and those certifying to teach lessons to add their insights to discussions. Eastwest training centers in Mexico and Japan, as well as online training modules, open the work to a global community. Shin Somatics shifts to suit the unique needs of diverse cultures though language use, altered pay structures, and models of case study best suited to the people with whom they work. Importantly, the curriculum model challenges linearity and offers

multiple inroads to the work. Shin processes are open and adaptable in a desire to ensure everyone who engages with the work has the opportunity to fulfill the core narrative of *being more fully who we are*.

Practitioners strive to clear themselves and match a primary mover where they are, rather than entering the work with a set of expectations for correct embodiment. They value creating space for primary movers to make their own choices through suspending judgment, not knowing, not advising, and not fixing. This openness and adaptability can be seen as Yanina dances with the people in the streets of her home and creates dance from a somatic starting point that spirals out into the world to give voice to minoritized women within her community. It is evident as Kelly engages a somatic approach in her dance classroom, guiding students with open-ended questions and verbs of permission, rather than directives, to offer inroads to understanding their own selves through dance. It manifests as Daniela blends Shin Somatics with science, collaborating with others to help people heal from trauma.

Shin Somatics spirals out into the world, but its roots spread wide under the surface of specific processes engaged. Potential abounds within the core narratives, principles, and valued skills in the Shin curriculum model. Eastwest Shin Somatics is always in process, and that process seeks to match presently organized bodies within the milieu. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation map Eastwest Shin Somatics as it is today. That the practice is expanding its reach, even in the midst of a pandemic, indicates it is valuable to the people who study it. Online modules and pay scales adjusted to the economy of people living in multiple global locations provide additional inroads to the work. This dissertation adds new voices to the somatic discourse, moving beyond the creator's anecdotes and offering insight into a global somatic practice that shifts and changes with each person, in each time, in each culture, in each

geographical location. It also offers an example of a somatic modality that values interrelationship of self and other, honors diversity, and moves toward becoming. However, we can do more to challenge the perception of critics such as De Giorgi, George, and Ginot, who perceive the somatic field from the inside, as active practitioners.

Thinking through a Deleuzian filter, I understand perception, both in the everyday sense and the phenomenological one, as action in-the-event. It is part of the worlding process, wherein my understanding of the milieu draws my attention to specific elements, and in that process applies meaning, hierarchies, and organizations. And scholars' critical suggestion of somatics as a field that seeks the "natural" body, one that is universal and primordial, is worth considering and addressing. It is not lost on me that Don Hanlon Johnson's recent offering of an anthology of essays exploring diversity in somatics begins with an introduction highlighting a need to recover what he borrows from Ursula Le Guin to term a "native tongue," one which bridges the gap between self and other through its "ancient healing wisdom" that will supposedly help us all (2018, 19). Even as Johnson, one of the first and most prolific writers within somatics in the US, supports the need for the text that explores multiple somatic practices as engaged by people of color, neuro-divergent people, and differently abled people, he draws attention to a desire to find commonalities among all people stating, "I am able to find a similar space with you, where our ideas become something like the clouds I see floating by, not intruding on the reality of you and me—a fertile ground for making a new world" (ibid., 18).

Chapter 3 suggests Shin Somatics can change through affirmation and addition by valuing difference rather than seeking similarity. The shift I call for in this dissertation is slight, but one that dances with difference. I believe Eastwest Shin Somatics is poised to make this shift alongside other somatic modalities. Sondra leads the way, constantly attending to her milieu and

adapting with it. She lets go of words she once used, such as universe and embodiment, and even self—the word I so often critique in this dissertation. She points out the problem of *self* in that it centers the human, whereas Shin Somatics understands “a more equitable relationship to nature and sound ecology in Shin unity” (Fraleigh 2021b).

This equitable relationship within the milieu resonates throughout my research. It is reflected in participants’ observations that somatics allows them to be with others in a present-centered way. I feel it when I dance in and with nature, as I feel the grass under my feet. When I imagine the wind blowing through my body, passing through the spaces between my cells, I visualize my body disorganizing and being a part of the air, the earth under my feet, the sky above me. Perhaps more importantly, when I engage in bodywork or contact unwinding in particular, I place another person in the center of my attention. In preparation for such a movement lesson, I consciously clear out all the everyday clutter of thoughts, to-do lists, and even my own sense of identity so that I can focus as completely as possible on another person, in the moment and without judgement.

As somatics in general and Shin Somatics in particular move forward, I wonder how somatic processes might offer a line of flight from self-other interrelationship to disorganizing and re-organizing with the milieu, in the event, affirming difference and allowing heterogenous becoming. Shin Somatics is not there yet (or not always there). My sense is that those I interviewed are currently understanding self and other (or subject and object, I and others, I and nature, and so on) as inspired by existential phenomenology, wherein “my body and the body of the Other co-exist in connivance,” and “the connivance of my body with the body of the Other leads towards a primordial understanding of the situation of the carnal subject within its intersubjective world....



That means the body of the Other over there, as perceptual subject too, is genuinely the extension of my body here, and *vice versa*” (Lau 2004, 146; emphasis in original).

Within Shin Somatics I sense that inter-subjectivity is key, and equivalence of self and other, subject and object, human and nature, is accepted as primordial. We are all already and always interconnected, and the practice seeks to delve into and affirm this interconnectivity through intuitive dance, yoga, and bodywork. Gladys describes the unity of the individual body stating, “Shin is to [understand] the body as one, not separated from the mind or emotions. It is a new way to experience your life” (2020a). Daniela explains the import of the social body when she explains, “Sharing is taking intimacy out of our mind” (Orlando 2020b). Here she discusses pain in particular, though I believe her thoughts apply to other emotions and ways-of-being when she states, “Socializing pain is the strongest way of changing. We have very powerful examples in our streets right now, like the women’s marches in Mexico.... Naming pain is to give it life, sharing it is to create a different possibility” (ibid.).

However, if Shin practitioners shift attention from inter-relationship to discover similarity (or what we have in common) to attending to difference among bodies in an additive manner as they body-with the milieu, they might notice new possibilities within the community and within somatics as a field. This is the place where post-structuralist and process philosophy can ooze into Merleau-Ponty, shifting his identification of reflection as subtracting differentiation (1968, 203). It is to Deleuze the practice may turn for the phenomenological somatic line of flight. Corry Shores explores Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza and difference, explaining that simple bodies (consider something as small as an electron) become reciprocally united with each other, forming a

fixed relation of continuous co-variation. “What makes the relation fixed is not that it stays the same, but rather that the simplest bodies adaptively co-vary so that they may together maintain themselves as a compound despite one affectively altering the other” (Shores 2012, 198).

This feels like somatic processes to me. If practitioners attend to difference, they can intentionally allow the somatic body to continuously disorganize and reorganize, feeling “the intensity of the change, and thus we are phenomenally aware from moment to moment of a continuous alteration of affective intensity” (ibid., 201). This might allow somatic practitioners to sense more in the moment than they are already attuned to, as they move beyond lived experience, wherein habits of understanding are based on what “senses agree on what they sense,” to life as lived, immersing themselves in intense phenomenal experiences only available through dis-organizing the somatic body (ibid., 206).

Even as I advocate for a shift in Shin Somatics, I realize the practice offers the somatic field an example of letting go of expectations to immerse oneself into dis-organized, present experience. While there are common narratives and principles within Shin Somatics, and there are set movement patterns and processes embedded within the modality, there is also much room for becoming. This is evident in Daniela’s statement that Shin Somatics facilitates her ability have a self-awareness that “allows me to observe and empathize with other people.... It’s like I’m not reacting all the time. I’m feeling how to react. It doesn’t mean that we have the right answer all the time, but I think we’re not called to” (Orlando 2020a).

Within both the Shin Somatics spiral and the curriculum model is the principle that body and mind are one. For practitioners, that bodymind is one of community, forming through the somatic act without an end-goal, valuing diversity and inter-relationship. Shin processes offer practitioners a rhizomatic root full of potential that resists overcoding so that they may each discover their own spiral within the milieu. Body and mind are one, but they are not homogenous. The bodymind is a multiplicity, just as the Shin Somatics community is. This dissertation offers one map of the Shin landscape, but other maps are possible, as the practice eludes fixing and tracing.

I now spiral back to the beginning of this dissertation and my dance with the rain and sun, grass underfoot and covered in a blanket of leaves, dancing with tree-branch angel wings. The word of that day was luminosity, which is defined in my Google dictionary as the intrinsic brightness of a celestial object. This dissertation brings forward the luminescence of Shin Somatics practitioners as they are. Yet it also challenges the practice, and by extension the somatic field, to dis-organize, activate the subject, and attend to the minor within the milieu through attending to life as lived. In privileging difference in order to become, somatic practitioners can understand themselves as bodying-with the world through somatic movement, dis-organizing and re-organizing in the moment, as determined by the conditions of experience, thus rupturing the somatic rhizome and allowing a becoming unfettered by pre-existing habits of understanding.

My intuitive dance with nature offers one example of one such rupture and becoming. As I danced-with the rain, sun, soil, grass, and leaves, I attended to myself as in-process. I let go of my pre-conceived boundaries, engaging intuitive dance to dis-

organize and become the nature with which I danced. I emerged from that experience a different person, full of the world that bodied me in that moment.

The image my daughter created, included in Chapter 1, evidences the sense of with-ness I felt when dancing. She draws my body as androgynous, uncoded by gender. She depicts my surrender to becoming-tree, also allowing the tree to become-denise as it sends tendrils up my limbs. She includes a sun that shines through my porous body, allowing its luminescence to pass through the boundaries of self. The image illustrates a dance of subjectivation, I am more-than a singular self—I am worlding-body, bodying-world, wherein my duration and the earth's duration meet and mingle, creating a new, multiplicitous, body-in-the-event. This is the rhizo-somatic dance—a dance of subjectivation wherein the flowering spiral grows forth from the Shin Somatic rhizome, a multiplicitous, heterogenous, and un-ending becoming, full of difference.

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