

WHOSE BODY?

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOMATIC GROUPDYNAMICS

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ABSTRACT: This paper interprets existential and intersubjective aspects of the body as common issues of somaesthetic (Shusterman 2008) and phenomenological thinking (Merleau-Ponty 1962); it also integrates philosophical theory with the pragmatic approach of psychodynamic movement and dance therapy. The article compares several tendencies of the so-called "corporeal turn" of contemporary culture and differentiates their attitudes (Sheets-Johnstone 2009), trying to distinguish the existential interpretation of the body from the instrumentalization of consumer culture. After giving the phenomenological description of the body's primordial expressive capacity and the so-called "double sensation" (Husserl 1960, Merleau-Ponty 1962), the author disputes Shusterman's Merleau-Ponty interpretation (Shusterman 2008, 73): she argues that a double sensation of the body does not imply the impossibility of self-observation, but the spatial, temporal and intersubjective aspects of corporeity. Such phenomena of intercorporeity were thoroughly analyzed by the psychoanalyst Daniel Stern (1985) who showed the importance of vitality effects in the processes of self-development. The second, pragmatic part of the paper differentiates several types of somatic techniques regarding their individual or intersubjective focus. At the end of the article, psychodynamic movement and dance therapy (PMDT) – a Hungarian psychotherapeutic method – will be presented (Merenyi 2004). PMDT is a psychoanalytically-oriented group-therapeutic method where the main therapeutic force is the phenomenological and pragmatic work of intercorporeal processes (Vermes – Incze 2012).

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, Shusterman, somaesthetics, phenomenology, dance therapy

1. Introduction

Somaesthetics and the phenomenology of the body share common leading ideas: *we do not have our body*, but we live the meaningful life of our body: *we are our body*. If we would like to have a better life – which is the purpose of pragmatism – we have to recognize our body as an existential modality and cultivate our body consciousness in practice. Although phenomenological philosophy is less pragmatic, it helps us to understand how much primordial experience of the lived body affects all higher levels of human subjectivity. In the

philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the living, moving, perceiving, understanding body presents itself first of all as an existential modality and as an original form of aesthetics. As in the case of the arts, in the case of the body, the expressed content is inseparable from the special mode of expression; and what is more, the expression is inseparable from the person who is being expressed (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 150). However, the special existential style in which we sense and move our body is not enclosed to individual self-senses, but is deeply affected and situated by other subjects. The self is constituted by intersubjective processes (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 346-367) or, using the terminology of pragmatism – transactional processes (Shusterman 2008, 214). The existential style of our living body emerges from an intercorporeal background (Merleau-Ponty 1968): it responds to the intersubjective dynamics of our family, our personal relationships, and the society we are embedded in.

The present paper investigates the existential and intersubjective aspects of the body, integrating two viewpoints: the first is the *philosophical approach*; the second is the *pragmatic approach of movement and dance therapy*. For the main questions in the present work we consider: How can we describe the body's primordial expressivity? How much of our bodily self-senses and our body-consciousness is exposed to intersubjective, intercorporeal relations? How can we change the existential style of our own bodily self-senses if they are so greatly influenced by intercorporeal relations? What kinds of pragmatic somatic methods can facilitate such changes? The second, pragmatic part of the paper will differentiate several types of somatic techniques regarding their individual or intersubjective focus. At the end of our article, we will present psychodynamic movement and dance therapy (PMDT), a Hungarian psychotherapeutic method, where both phenomenological attention and a pragmatic working through of intercorporeal processes have vital importance (Merenyi 2004, Vermes – Incze 2012).¹

¹ The author is a group leader and trainer at the

Phenomenological openness teaches us to notice the constitutive importance of bodily perceptions and movements, to realize the intersubjective character of bodily experiences, and to describe the multiple processes of intercorporeity which create human relations implicitly. A *somaesthetical* approach is more pragmatic: it focuses primarily on the possibilities of change. "Disciplines of somaesthetic awareness are usually aimed not simply at *knowing* our bodily condition and habits but at *changing* them" (Shusterman 2008, 65). *Psychodynamic movement and dance therapy* (PMDT) as a practical therapeutic discipline, mostly applied in psychotherapeutic groups (Vermes - Incze 2012), relies on both phenomenological and pragmatic attitudes. In a movement and dance therapy group situation, both the fine perception of intercorporeal relations and the pragmatic determination of changing them are needed. Intercorporeal processes in a group situation are extremely multifaceted: the perception and movement of our body is never isolated from others; it is deeply affected by our actual relationships and our past attachments. If people want to change their own individual bodily habits or modify their bodily self-senses, they often first need to perceive and understand the complex intercorporeal dynamics in which they are embedded, and they need to perceive the implicit interchanges which they display with others. The cultivation of body consciousness can lead us both to a better life and to a higher level of reflectivity. I agree with Shusterman that higher philosophical insights about the body are not possible without somatic reflectivity, even though the most important philosophers of

corporeity, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, did not realize it. (Shusterman 2008, ix) However, I would like to emphasize that the present success of somatic methods in contemporary culture also requires some philosophical reflection. It is a part of a larger, ambiguous cultural dynamics of "corporeal turn" we have to reflect on: somatic culture is deeply embedded into the precarious cultural dynamics of consumer culture.

2. Corporeal turn of everyday culture

In postmodern consumer culture, the body has gained an extraordinary, yet precarious significance: a "corporeal turn" is taking place (Sheets-Johnstone 2009, 17). The body offers a new form of identity in an age in which traditional and communal forms of identities have collapsed. A preoccupation with fitness and wellness, piercings and tattoos, the Paleolithic diet, and yoga, among other things, are symptoms of this special cultural dynamics. Excessive care of the body's well-being and fitness signals a narcissistic obsession with corporeity instead of being a new form of consciousness and responsibility (Lasch 1991). For Featherstone the strength of consumer culture resides in its capacity to express corporeal desires as had not been expressed before the appearance of consumerism, but at the same time it puts bodily desires into such an instrumentalised, commercialized form that it makes their realization impossible (Featherstone, 1982). The alienated and excessive performance principle and consumer principle go hand in hand: neither of them supersedes the Cartesian split, and neither of them realize the existential importance of bodily expression. Both of them use the body as a mere tool and compensation, and fail to realize the existential significance of corporeity. We see how sportsmen in competitive sports use their own and others' bodies as bare tools of extreme performances: under the pressure of the performance principle, they cannot afford the luxury of being their own body. But we philosophers writing about

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the body are usually in a similar situation: we have the tendency to become estranged from our own somatic experiences, sitting long days at computers and suffering from the pressure to publish. We recognize our body theoretically, but give it up as an existential modality in practice: we use it as a mere tool of the performance principle also. We learned from Kant that we should “treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 1785/1996, 429).² If we take our body as our own existential modality, we have to respect our own and others’ bodily experiences as a vital core of our humanity. That is, we must not exploit it for the sake of physical or intellectual performances.

However, there are competing practices and theories which define the authentic treatment of the body differently. We must not encourage simple answers if we would like to escape “philosophical fallacy” (the oversimplification of experiences by philosophical theory), while also not wanting to commit “pragmatic fallacy” (the oversimplification of experiences through practical viewpoints).

3. Corporeal turn of humanities

Over the course of the 20th century in the humanities, two fundamental conceptual shifts occurred (Sheets-Johnstone 2009, 2): a linguistic turn based on the theory of Saussure, followed by a corporeal turn in the humanities. The latter is present now in several disciplines: phenomenological theories (Husserl 1960, Merleau-Ponty 1962), post-structuralism (Foucault 1975), feminism (Beauvoir 2009, Butler), trendy theories of “embodied mind” (Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1993), and pragmatic somaesthetics (Shusterman 2008). These

²“So, act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” Immanuel Kant: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in Immanuel Kant: *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Kant, 1996, 429). However, Kant did not rank bodily experiences very high.

philosophical theories of corporeal turn have different ontological and epistemological frameworks, their representatives hardly reflect on each other. However, most theorists of corporeal turn would probably agree on some points. That is, somatic experiences have vital importance in forming human identity; we have to take them more seriously in personal self-reflection, in social relations, and in theoretical work. Our body has an original responsive character: it takes shape as a response to others – to our parents, to our ancestors, to the past and current dynamics of our family and society, and to the environment we are embedded in. They would also agree that the task of theoretical work is to turn our spontaneous, un-reflected somatic responses into practical and theoretical responsivity and responsibility for ourselves and for others.

Somaesthetics has its roots in several philosophical and aesthetical fields, but it is most outstanding of all these disciplines because of its somatic, practical background (Feldenkrais method and other somatic practices). The pragmatism Shusterman advocated “puts experience at the heart of philosophy and celebrates the living, sentient body as the organizing core of experience” (Shusterman 2008, xii). It has a special integrative quality connecting distant worlds: the practice of somatic consciousness and philosophical, aesthetical reflection could meet here with hidden hopes of people wishing for a better life. The recent development of somaesthetics provides an inspiring example for phenomenologists – including the author – on how to make this connection more pragmatic and more popular. The author of the present paper made some – perhaps less pragmatic – efforts in Hungary to integrate theoretical and practical somatic disciplines: the phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories of the body with the practice of psychodynamic movement and dance therapy (Vermes 2006, 2011, 2012). This presentation will tour these interconnections in the following way: we begin with the phenomenology of bodily expression and its intersubjective dynamics (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968), continue with a

psychological description of bodily self-senses and vitality affects (Daniel Stern 1985), then we will arrive to the practical world of contemporary somatic and dance techniques, and, in the end we describe how intercorporeal relations manifest themselves in psychodynamic movement and dance therapy groups (Merenyi 2004, Vermes-Incze 2012).

4. Body as a primordial source of expression

In the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the moving, perceiving, understanding body presents itself as an existential modality. We do not have our body; we are our body. We live the meaningful life of our body. It is an original field of creativity, a primordial source of all higher expression (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 150). Corporeal expression is similar to the expressivity of the arts. As in the case of the arts, the content of corporeal expression is inseparable from the expression itself; and what is more, the expression is inseparable from the person who is being expressed. "The body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 150) We are not able to explain the essence of a Cezanne picture to someone who has never seen it, to express a Beethoven symphony to someone who has never heard it. "In a picture or a piece of music, the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colors and sounds." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 150) A novel, poem, picture or musical works are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning accessible only through direct contact..." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 151) Similarly, the expression of a face or a moving body bears a certain style, an implicit meaning, which we are not able to translate to other languages. Moreover, in the case of bodily expression, not only is expression and expressed content the same, *but the individual who is expressed coincides with the expression itself*. While the works of arts as a poem or a sculpture express the artist symbolically and indirectly, bodily movement expresses the person not only symbolically, but also immediately

and directly. There is a certain style of seeing and touching, walking and laughing which makes possible the original intersensory integration of body experiences and makes possible personal identity as well. This fact gives a special strength to corporeal expression. That is why human body and movement carry an original expressive character (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 146).

Let me give a personal example: I had a classmate when I was about ten years old. Then he moved out of town, and we did not see each other for twenty years. Later, I saw him in a metro station. I was not sure whether it was him or someone else, but then he moved his shoulder a little bit – and in that moment I realized: yes, it is him! What helped me to recognize my old classmate? It was the unique quality, the special style of his movement, revealing the existential way he related to himself and to the world. For Merleau-Ponty the body interprets and synchronizes itself by movement: the movement is a kind of self-perception, self-identification. It is a primordial, bodily self-expression, which involves a special rhythm, creates its special time and space, which expresses the subject implicitly (Vermes 2011, Marratto 2012).

5. Double-sensation, explicit and implicit body-senses

Of course bodily expression is not always immediate and integrated. We perceive the world through our body, but at the same time we perceive our own body as an object in the world. The "double-sensation" of the **body has been a** central topic in phenomenology since Husserl's Cartesian Meditation (Husserl 1960). We feel our body in two different ways: on the one hand it is a primordial subjective style of our movements and perceptions, on the other hand we can perceive it as an object for others and for ourselves; we can use our body as a tool, as an instrument of expression. Bodily expression has presymbolic and symbolic strata. We are able to feel the implicit senses of our body, but we are also able to bracket our body-senses for a while; we are able to suppress or conceal them. Shaking hands, turning our

back to someone, or clapping at political gatherings – these intentional gestures are *explicit*, mostly *symbolic*, or conventional. We are able to express or hide ourselves with them, and we can use them as portable instruments of expression. But even in these cases, an *implicit*, *presymbolic* level is at work throughout the process of bodily self-expression: we are the ones who use ourselves like this; we are the ones who make gestures like this. In the background of these symbolic acts, we feel our own movements, we feel our own body somehow, as a non-symbolized sense-horizon of all our movements and perceptions. Our symbolic acts always have a non-symbolic, existential background of our body as an existential modality, which we can never utterly leave behind. The original style of our movement and perception always remains with us: it is the vital source of any acts of symbolization.

Practical somatic methods are able to attend to both symbolic and presymbolic forms of bodily expression, but they usually focus more on the presymbolic levels: they reflect principally on the implicit existential style as we live our life. The existential style of our body is not a strange mystery: we can feel very well our own presymbolic bodily self-senses, and we can change them to some extent by somatic self-reflection. But there is something we are not able to do: we cannot get to a total transparency of our own body-senses, we are not able to be totally synchronized with ourselves. Shusterman summarized Merleau-Ponty's thought like this: "There will always be some dimensions of our bodily feelings that will be actively structuring the focus of our efforts of reflective somatic awareness and thus will not be themselves the object of that awareness or the focus of consciousness" (Shusterman 2008, 73).

Nevertheless, Shusterman criticized Merleau-Ponty's sharp distinction between the perceiving "I" and the perceived "me", interpreting it as Merleau-Ponty's denial of a self-observation (Shusterman 2008, 73). In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty declared, indeed, that in touching our left hand with our right hand there was always some insoluble distinction

between the senses of touching and being touched (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 315). However, in my opinion, Shusterman did not understand thoroughly the phenomenological meaning of double sensation in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is true that Merleau-Ponty overemphasized the difference between the subjective and objective body, but he did not deny the possibility of bodily self-observation, as Shusterman stated, relying on uprooted fragments of texts; instead, he connected bodily self-observation to movement and the temporality of corporeity.

"When one of my hands touches the other the hand that moves functions as subject and the other as object. There are tactile phenomena, alleged tactile qualities, like roughness or smoothness, which disappear completely if the exploratory movement is eliminated. Movement and time are not only an objective condition of knowing touch, but a phenomenal component of the tactile data." (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 315)

The distinction between the touching and the touched hands in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy does not mean an inaccessibility of the body for itself. I can change in any moment the focus of touching and being touched, I can shift my attention from one body-part to another. I can also equate the subjective and objective roles of my contacting hands. But I cannot eliminate the space and time dimensionality of my own body, or as Marratto explains, "there is no self-contact, or even self-anticipation, that would not presuppose movement, and thus an exteriorization and temporalization. Touching oneself takes time and 'real' space" (Marratto 2012, 137). In the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, self-touch does not mean a total transparency for ourselves, it means much more a form of expressive movement. Bodily self-perception does not happen out of time and space. On the contrary, it takes its time and space. To be more exact: bodily self-perception is a kind of movement creating its time and space. Somatic techniques of body consciousness (like Feldenkrais, Skinner release, Laban movement observation, or contact improvisation) teach us so much about these primordial experiences: every

little movement and perception of the body involves special space and time qualities; bodily self-perception is not possible without special time and space senses.

I agree with Shusterman's remark: "To treat the lived body as a subject does not require treating it as transcendental subject that cannot also be observed as an empirical one" (Shusterman 2008, 72). But, I am sure, Merleau-Ponty himself also would have agreed with this sentence, since Merleau-Ponty in whole his life struggled against the transcendental idealism of Husserl. His denying of total self-perception and his concept of double-sensation refer not to the higher transcendental ego; these thoughts refer to the deeper existential structure of corporeal experience (Dodd 1997). That is, our body is not self-contained: it exposes us to the time and to the space, and, at the same time, it exposes us to other subjects. Having a body means that we are not totally synchronized with ourselves and that our individual life responds to other lives; it is preceded by our parents, grounded by other generations— it relies on the "time before time" of other people. Our conscious acts have their roots in the "double sensation" of our body; they are preceded by the anonymous intercorporeity of intersubjective relatedness from which they emerge. Consequently, body consciousness means not a simple coincidence with ourselves; it means much more a sensitive and reflective relation to our body-felt senses. Somatic consciousness opens us to feel our own space and time; it opens us to perceive our own body while being amongst other people.

6. Intersubjectivity - Intercorporeity

The "double sensation" of being a body refers to other subjects: the distinction of being a body for myself and the body for others. The experience of being a body has never been a private affair: the style we live our body, the way we feel our body is always contextualized, formed and deformed in relational situations, mediated by continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies. As bodies we are "mediations": our

own body integrates special qualities of responsivity. The special existential style in which we sense and move our body is not enclosed to individual self-senses, but is deeply affected and situated by other subjects. In the famous chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* ("Other selves and the human world," Merleau-Ponty 1962, 346-367), our experience with otherness precedes the formation of identity, of the subject referred to as an "I". The individual self is constituted by intersubjective dynamics or, using the terminology of pragmatism – transactional/interactional processes (Shusterman 2008, 214). The self is always relational; even self-consciousness, or thinking (*cogito*) does not denote a coincidence with ourselves. In his late writing, *Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty wrote the following words:

"We must accustom ourselves to understand that "thought" (*cogitatio*) is not an invisible contact of self with self, that it lives outside of this intimacy with oneself, in front of us, not in us, always eccentric. Just as we rediscover the field of the sensible world as interior-exterior (cf. at the start: as global adhesion to the infinity of motor indexes and motivations, as my belongingness to this *Welt*), so also it is necessary to rediscover as the reality of the inter-human world and of history a surface of separation between me and the other which is also the place of our union, the unique *Erfüllung* of his life and my life. It is to this surface of separation and of union that the existentials of my personal history proceed, it is the geometrical locus of the projections and introjections, it is the invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others turn to rock into one another, the inner framework of intersubjectivity." (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 234)

Our life responds to the intercorporeal dynamics of our family, of our actual personal relationships, and the society we are embedded in. This primordial intertwining of people produces, on the one hand, their implicit senses of togetherness and joy, and on the other hand, the deepest forms of defenselessness, somatic discomfort, unbearable shame and invisible oppression. In the cited text Merleau-Ponty referred to the psychoanalytic concepts of *projections and introjections*. In the world of psychoanalysis, projection is a form of

defense mechanism in which rejected feelings are displaced onto another people, but they appear as a threat from the external world. Introjection means the reverse side: it involves internalizing some aspect of one's environment's behavior, without knowing it.³ Merleau-Ponty's philosophy made important steps towards the extension of the meaning of psychoanalytic concepts from a narrower, emotional meaning to a wider, both emotional and somatic meaning. He suggested that our lives are interconnected by projections and introjections not only on the level of symbolic, explicit acts, but they are intertwined on the level of primordial movements and implicit senses, too. Phenomena of psychoanalytic transference are not confined to symbolic, emotional acts, but they emerge from the vital ground of intercorporeal processes, that is, from the living flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964).

7. Daniel Stern

If we want to get closer to the intercorporeal dynamics displayed in human relationships, we have to read the exceptional phenomenological descriptions of Daniel Stern⁴ (1934-2012). He was an American psychiatrist and psychoanalytic, whose brilliant theory about self-development created a bridge between psychoanalysis and research-based developmental models. He was an

³ Example for projection: "A man is intensely hostile to authority. Consequently, when he sees a policeman he believes the latter wants to harm him." By Renée Grinnell: Projection Example for introjection: "A boy is berated and beaten by his father. Within a few days, this formerly cheerful child kicks the dog and calls his sister a "stupid, stupid brat!" By Renée Grinnell: Introjection. In: Encyclopedia of Psychology - Psych Central. Last reviewed: By John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on 17 Jul 2016, Published on PsychCentral.com

<https://psychcentral.com/encyclopedia/projection/>
<https://psychcentral.com/encyclopedia/introjection/>

⁴ Regarding Stern's theory of selfdevelopment, see the author's more detailed analysis here: Vermes, Katalin – Incze, Adrienne (2012): Psychodynamic Movement and Dance Therapy (PMDT) in Hungary. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*; An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice, 7: 101-114.

integrative thinker: he built connections between psychological and phenomenological thinking, also.⁵

According to Daniel Stern, the sense of the self is not confined to symbolic representations. We have multiple self-senses, and some of them have a preverbal origin; they 'do exist long prior to selfawareness and language' (Stern 1985, 6). He differentiates the following strata: sense of an emergent self (birth–2 months of age); sense of core self (2–6 months); sense of subjective self (7–15 months); sense of a verbal self (15 months on). The first three are connected mostly to bodily and presymbolic experiences; however, they coexist with symbolisable and verbal ones throughout a lifetime. Preverbal senses are formed in vital interactions with the mother (or caregiver), which create the first forms of so-called implicit relational knowing. This is a bodily sense of the self, which had never been symbolized, so it could not have been repressed, like contents of dynamic unconsciousness (Stern 2004, 116). It determines, however, our personal relations as long as we live, as it affects the ways we are attuned or non-attuned with others (Vermes 2012). Although preverbal implicit patterns derive from our past, we can feel them only in the present moment, as they are neither explicit nor symbolised; we live them in "the domain of knowledge and representation that is nonverbal, nonsymbolic, unnarrated and nonconscious" (Stern, 2004, 242). Multiple patterns of implicit self-senses take shape mostly not as words, but as bodily experiences named by Stern as 'vitality affects' (Stern, 2004, 36).

⁵ See more about these connections in *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* 1985, and *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* 2004.

8. Vitality affects⁶

Stern introduced the concept of 'vitality affects', in opposition to so-called 'categorical affects' (Stern 1985, 53–61). What is the difference between the two? Usually we think of affective experiences in terms of traditional categories of Darwinian affects: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, interest, and perhaps shame. But there are many more nuances of feelings which we cannot describe with these distinct categories. We have a continual, intersensory affect of our moving and perceiving body, interconnected with its surroundings and with other living creatures. We are never without vitality affects (whether we are conscious of them or not), while regular effects come and go. We always feel them, just as we feel we are alive. These include that special rhythm and disposition as we walk on the street, as we close a door, the special atmosphere as we look at others, as we laugh or cry (Vermes 2011, 35-37). This peculiar quality of our vitality affects connects our motions and different sensory modalities, displaying that special style by which our own body can interpret itself. It is similar to Merleau-Ponty's notion of style: 'What unites "tactile sensations" in the hand and links them to visual perceptions of the same hand, and to perceptions of other bodily areas, is a certain style informing my manual gestures and implying in turn a certain style of finger movements, and contributing, in the last resort, to a certain bodily bearing' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 150). There is a certain affective style, and reflective quality of seeing and touching, walking and laughing which makes possible the original intersensory integration of body experiences and makes possible personal identity as well. Vitality affects, which connect our senses, are the first and most basic forms of

interpersonal communication. They 'can be expressed in a multitude of parental acts: how the mother picks up baby, folds the diapers, grooms her hair or the baby's hair, reaches for a bottle, unbuttons her blouse. The infant is immersed in these feelings of vitality'. (Stern, 1985, 54) These feelings form the first, presymbolic patterns of interpersonal relatedness. The mother bends to her baby, the baby raises its head, the mother caresses the head, the baby uses its voice, and the mother responds saying something in the same rhythm. There is an unconscious interpersonal attunement of motions and perceptions, forming a common tissue of their lives. The baby feels the mother's movements, which fit to its own movements, and this joining forms the baby's self-perception. The care-giver continually mirrors, reflects and validates the baby's emerging self-senses; this vital fitting is very close in the first months, but later reduces in intensity. This intermodal–interpersonal fitting, and at the same time a differing interplay of vitality affects, forms the grounding for self-development in the course of which the child assumes the sense of being an entity distinct from other objects in its environment (Stern, 1985, 72–92). The perpetual movement of vitality affects creates the 'core self'; the fundamental moods of our personality for the whole of our lives from beginning to end. If the child does not get adequate responses from the caregiver, her/his implicit relational knowing with the vital "core" of the self gets damaged.

9. Intercorporeity in contemporary somatic and dance techniques

For Stern "abstract dance and music are examples par excellence of the expressiveness of vitality affects"; they express "a way of feeling", rather than a specific content of feeling (Stern, 1985, 56). They refer to the form and quality, rather than to the object of the experience. They do not express "something," they express an existential quality of being present, being attuned. The main characteristic of contemporary somatic and dance techniques is their

⁶ See a more detailed illustration of vitality affects here: Vermes Katalin (2011): Intersensory and intersubjective attunement: Philosophical approach to a central element of dance movement psychotherapy, *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy, An International Journal for Theory, Research and Practice*.6(01), pp. 31 - 42.

ambition to activate and reflect this intercorporeal tissue of vitality affects.

In the last decades somatic methods evolved everywhere in the world, even in Hungary. Several modern techniques of body-consciousness, contemporary ways of dance, and multiple schools of dance and movement therapies came to life, which interpret body as existential modality, and not as bare instrument of higher performances.⁷ They pay more or less attention to the intercorporeal character of movement. Here I would like to differentiate somatic methods regarding the individual or intersubjective focus they assume.

1. Classical methods of body consciousness – like the Alexander technique, Feldenkrais method, Yoga, or Tai Chi – focus first of all on people's *individual* self-inquiry and self-improvement; they are very good at fine somatic self-perception, but do not attend to the intercorporeal dynamics displayed in a group. However, representatives of these methods would agree that refined consciousness of the body helps people to perceive the world and other people better; improved somatic awareness reduces individuals' social defenselessness, makes them more self-confident, more empathetic and connected.

2. Other practical somatic methods – like contact improvisation – are more *relational*; they directly develop body consciousness and resonance amid the changing, moving group situation. Contact dance is a relational improvisative technique, which takes shape mainly in duets and groups evolving a refined process of intercorporeal attunement. However, contact dance also

generates individual somatic self-awareness: participants can be attuned to others only if they are self-reliant, if they are sensible enough to the rhythm and special vitality of their own body.

3. The technique of *psychodynamic movement and dance therapy* (PMDT) embraces *both individual and relational* body-mind practices (Vermes-Incze 2012) and tries to integrate them.

10. Psychodynamic movement and dance therapy (PMDT)

Psychodynamic movement and dance therapy came to life in Hungary at the beginning of the 1980s, first developed by the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Márta Merényi (2004). It is a psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapeutic method, based on the therapeutic efficiency of somatic work, movement improvisation and a psychodynamic working through of movement experiences and relations in the group. PMDT is considered to be effective especially in cases with preverbal problems of the sense of self and neurotic problems; it is also applied as a creative way of improving self-awareness and personal development (Vermes - Incze 2012).

PMDT is a special group method which focuses on never-ending dynamics, as individual body self-senses and movements emerge and change in a group situation, and a group is formed by moving, sensing individuals. Through individual and relational somatic and improvisational exercises, it develops parallel capacities of somatic autonomy and intercorporeal attunement. During the improvisational movement an essential question continuously arises: what happens with my body – my muscles, my breath, the sense of my weight, my somatic rhythm, my use of space and time – when I move alone, and when I meet others? How can I keep or refine my own somatic self-senses, my autonomy, when I am connected to someone else? How do we affect and how are we affected by each other before a word is

⁷ The author of this paper is lucky enough, and have acquired experience in Budapest in several methods: She is a psychodynamic movement and dance therapist and has lead groups for 20 years, and she has tried Contact Improvisation, Skinner Release technique, Body Mind Centering, Feldenkrais method, Ideokinesis, Image Laboratory, and some older methods such as yoga and or Tai Chi.

said? Consciousness and differentiation of individual and group related body-senses and an understanding of the ways somatic group dynamics proceed in personal and social situations are the capacities we need more than ever in recent times.

Both somatic consciousness and vital attunement deeply inspire the courses of movement improvisation, and serve as a central therapeutic factor in PMDT. Well-prepared movement improvisation activates and expresses many levels of the self. It can be a symbolic or metaphoric expression in which repressed unconscious contents are brought to light. On the other hand, however, it mobilizes a previous stratum of development, the primordial patterns of the self-core, including implicit relational knowing. It is implicit material, in contrast with the psychoanalytic 'dynamic unconscious', which has never been symbolized or repressed (Stern, 2004, 116–117). Much of this implicit knowing is bodily experience, not transposable into words; however, it can be worked through in the course of movement and nonverbal attunement. Nevertheless, a part of implicit material can enter into the process of symbolization and verbalization. Thus, owing to the mobilization of vitality affects, therapeutic change is possible in PMDT even in those cases when the process of symbolisation is stuck. A lot of people in contemporary society have serious deficits and injuries on the level of preverbal, implicit self-senses. PMDT can become a highly effective therapeutic method for them, even in those cases when verbal therapeutic forms are not effective.

In the end of my paper let me illustrate my thoughts by presenting a case. A few years ago there was a young man in my PMDT group who came to therapy with serious psychosomatic and relational problems. He had a normal body setup, but somehow he could not realize his own body senses; he felt as if his body had not tree-dimensional extension. He said that his body felt like a sheet of paper. After a year of PMDT group therapy, he could remember that during his childhood his mother looked at him as if he was not present. The mother regarded him as if he was without a body; at the same

time he was overwhelmed by the high expectations and inadequate emotions of his parents. He had to somehow save his integrity, so he developed special somatic forms of defense. As a child and as an adult man, he had to be always on the "surface", on the "front" of intersubjective situations: in doing this he left behind his real body-senses. He bracketed the existential expression of his body, and tried to replace it with a symbol of a two-dimensional "sheet of paper". For him it seemed to be the only way to control other people whose attention he felt overwhelming, or who looked at him as if he was nothing. However, he became extremely exhausted from this defending mechanism, and from repressing his own deeper somatic self-perceptions, he became ill. When he came to a PMDT group, he suffered from many serious psychosomatic symptoms, and complained about his excessive fear of relationships. Over the course of the PMDT group process, in the first period he was not able to attend to his own body; he lacked the capacity of individual body-work. He also feared the attention of other people, but, at the same time, he could not go without it. He painfully needed the reflection of other selves, the continual vital attunement of other group members, but feared them at the same time. After a long period of PMDT work, he began to perceive his body's "volume", and he began to regain his own senses. He developed a capacity of individual somatic work and movement improvisation, and he gained a relational capacity to be together with others, to be attuned to others without annihilating his own bodily self-senses.

11. Summary

In my article I interpreted the existential modality of the body as a common issue of somaesthetic (Shusterman 2008) and phenomenological thinking (Merleau-Ponty 1962). I compared several tendencies of the so called "corporeal turn" and differentiated their attitudes (Sheets-Johnstone 2009), and tried to distinguish the existential interpretation of the body from the instrumentalization of consumer culture.

After giving a phenomenological description of body's primordial expressive capacity and the so-called "double sensation" (Husserl 1960, Merleau-Ponty 1962), I disputed Shusterman's Merleau-Ponty interpretation (Shusterman 2008, 73), arguing that double sensation of the body does not imply the impossibility of self-observation, but the spatial, temporal and intersubjective aspects of corporeity. Then, following the thoughts of psychoanalyst Daniel Stern (1985), I delineated the phenomenon of vitality affects, which play a central role in the intercorporeal processes of self-development, but are also essential for the understanding of contemporary somatic and dance techniques. In the more pragmatic part of my paper, I tried to differentiate several kinds of somatic techniques regarding their individual or intersubjective focus. At the end of my work I showed how damaged preverbal self-senses can emerge and become repaired in the group process of psychodynamic movement and dance therapy with the help of somatic attention, intersubjective attunement and movement (Merényi 2004, Vermes-Incze 2012).

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