

Embodying Nature, Becoming Ourselves
by **Jamie McHugh**

We are elements of nature: our soma and psyche are reflections of the planet. This relationship between the inner and outer ecosystems is key to any discussion about ecosomatics. Many conversations about ecology, with all of the doom and gloom statistics, often overwhelm people with despair. It is hard to hold a space for hope when fear arises. Returning to a direct sensory encounter with the natural world, though, can awaken a powerful passion and connection. As a faculty member at Tamalpa Institute, I have been taking groups to Point Reyes National Seashore for the past 20 years and have witnessed this in action.

As we go to the beach each day, we open our senses and re-organize our civilized bodies to creatively embody our primal nature. Breath, sound, touch, movement, and stillness are the preverbal somatic languages of the organism. Their use creates the inner conditions for spontaneous responses to the outer environment. I can feel my breath, my solidity and fluidity, and am aware of the universe in me. I know where I am so I can give over to nature. The somatic elements give the organism security to abandon habit and try something new. Alternating between eyes closed and open, the inner meets the outer, and all of it becomes a resource for response.

As two distinct approaches, I differentiate the biological (somatic) from the imaginal (expressive). One somatic approach I use is based on the basic developmental movement patterns of infants, one of the biological languages of the body that takes us back to the origins of life. Just like an infant, we go through the five stages of movement: Yield, Push, Reach, Grasp and Pull. Yielding into the sand, allowing my body to be fully supported, leads me into pushing against, feeling my boundaries, to then reach out into space, go to what I want, and incorporate it. Rocking, creeping crawling, rolling...all of these basic movements in relationship to the environment take me back to beginner's mind. From this mind, we then bridge to an expressive relationship with nature--imaginally exploring the qualities of sky, ocean, rock, and even other people, as the input of sensory encounters stimulates the output of your associations, feelings, and images. I use the following five activities as doorways into that process:

With different qualities of touch, and different body parts, make **contact** with rock. Become what you perceive by physically **mirroring** (imitating) the solidity, the stability, and the hardness. **Respond** with movement, sound and stillness to both the input and output. Sometimes simply **witness** – be still and place your external focus on the environment long enough to be moved internally. And punctuate all of these explorations with **rest**, open attention, assimilation of experience and just being.

After separating out all these parts, the somatic and the expressive, the biological and the imaginal, come together and become one dance. The burden of “being creative” falls away when we let go and follow the impulses and multiple inputs of all the senses, and what they stimulate in us. Our creative response reflects the richness of human experience; the animal body expresses our essence. Trusting our inner and outer nature

more, we can create, live and take action in a state of responsiveness and responsibility that could truly be called ecosomatic.

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