

# Breathing embodiment

a study of Middendorf breathwork

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# Abstract

This thesis is about Middendorf breathwork, a way of cultivating breath and body awareness developed by Ilse Middendorf (b.1910, Berlin), based on sensing subtle bodily movements that occur with breath as it is allowed to come and go on its own. Drawing on the author's personal experience, together with interviews and formal workshops with peer participants, the thesis describes the practice of Middendorf breathwork, traces Middendorf's forebears and contemporaries, situating her work in relation to other somatic bodies of work, and discusses the significance of Middendorf breathwork in relation to contemporary discourses around breath, embodiment, and experience. The author proposes that the practice of Middendorf breathwork invites a different experience of embodiment through an integration of the kinæsthetic realm with thought, emotion, and intuition through breath. This practice can connect the individual with the somatic 'intelligence' of their body and offer an experience of how this links them in to a greater whole. Such an experience, it is argued, is a valuable redress to experiences of bodily abstraction in an increasingly technoscientific world.

I, John Donald Howard, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Breathing embodiment: a study of Middendorf breathwork' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

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My thanks go also to the Middendorf breathwork practitioners I interviewed, to my breathwork teachers, fellow students and colleagues in Berkeley, with particular acknowledgement of Anne and Charlie Smith who hosted my many visits with generosity and warmth.

Finally, I thank Ilse Middendorf who, with her students, collaborators, and antecedents, has created a complex and provocative body of work. Her work has invited me down an unforeseen path where I have experienced breath anew and been provoked to reconsider the place of breath in my life and in the world.

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## Preface

*I sit on a stool sensing the movement of my body with my breath as it comes and goes on its own. I have my feet wider apart than usual as I roll slowly forward; my head first, then my neck. My arms start to move with my upper back. I let them come down between my legs and when my hands reach the floor I place my palms flat on the floorboards with the fingers turned towards the fingers of the other hand. By this time my head and neck hang free. I still sit on the stool, but much more of my weight is over my feet as my torso hangs between my legs. I notice how my inhalation pushes out my back body wall and how it swings back with my exhalation. I come off the stool and stretch my sacrum gently up towards the ceiling and let it go. This stretch brings an inhalation and as I let go the exhalation comes. I keep doing this until I've had enough, which is pretty soon because my legs won't take too much of this, and then I lower myself back on to my stool and slowly come back up, head last.*

*When I arrive back up I find that I sit with an ease and lightness I have never experienced before. I let my breath come and go in its own rhythm and I sense my torso growing wide with each inhalation and swinging back with the exhalation. I perceive movement in my legs too, as if they extend away a little from my torso as breath comes in. I feel I inhabit my body easily. It feels right to sit here on a flat wooden stool. Here I am; this is me. I feel that I have a big wide base in my sit-bones and pelvis, my feet and legs. I am this breathing, perceiving, living body. I like this. If a simple movement sequence can bring me this joyful liveliness then I want more of this. I understand that the movement itself has not brought me this but the way I have done it, with attention, with awareness, with my full presence. It must be possible therefore to have this much sensation and pleasure in many different moments in my life, and I want this too (and, yes, not just this) (Journal 15 August 2004).*

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This is a story of experience. Experience of breath, of presence, of sensation, of body, of becoming. Giving voice to that experience, seeking the connection of breath to that experience, to the many modes of experience that make up my experience, is part of the story too. Central to the story is a body of work with breath developed by Ilse Middendorf, born in 1910, who is still living and teaching in Berlin, Germany. Her work is *Erfahrbare Atem*<sup>1</sup>. It is based on sensing bodily movement that occurs with breath as it is allowed to come and go on its own. Middendorf has written two books, the first of which is available in English as *The perceptible breath: a breathing science* (1990).

## On breath

The OED in hard copy defines 'breath' as 'the air *taken* into and expelled from the lungs', noting that this is now the main sense of the word, which colours all others. In the online version of the OED the same part of the definition of 'breath' reads 'the air *received* into and expelled from the lungs' (my italics). In the context of this project it is a remarkable difference. The former sounds active. It implies that breathing is something we 'do' – we take air into our lungs and then expel it. In the latter, the air is 'received', without the same implication of a 'doing', though the expulsion sounds laboured. The next step could be 'the air received into and allowed out of the lungs'. This would more closely describe breath as it is approached in Middendorf breathwork – being allowed to come and go on its own.

'Breath' occurs first in written English in the ninth century and means 'odour, smell, scent', coming from the Teutonic base referring to the smell of anything cooking or burning. The OED notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Middendorf's work is now known in English as 'Experience of Breath', in the US as Breathexperience™, and previously as 'Perceptible Breath'. I generally refer to it as Middendorf breathwork.

The sense passed in English through that of 'heated air expired from the lungs' (often manifest to the sense of smell, as in 'strong breath') to 'the air in the lungs or mouth' (OED online).

The word 'breath' replaced the early middle English 'ethem', which comes from the same source as the German 'atem', and the middle English 'ande', deriving from the old Norse, which is still around in dialects in the north of England today. 'Teeth to rote, breeth to stynke' is found in 'Cursor Mundi', a Northumbrian poem of the 14th century (OED online).

It is curious that English has settled so strongly on 'breath' and 'breathe', with their earthy associations with strong smells when other Indo-European languages use words more connected with air and spirit. The connection of breath and spirit, life, that which animates us, seems an obvious and straightforward one to make. When we stop breathing we die; when we die we stop breathing. Breath and life are intimately interwoven.

The words for movements of air, breath, and spirit are the same in Greek and Hebrew. English uses 'pneuma', direct from the Greek 'pneuma' (πνεῦμα), which carries the meanings of wind, breath and spirit, and it uses 'inspire' from the Latin 'inspirare', to blow or breathe into, ultimately from 'spiritus', spirit. But earthy 'breath' remains the most commonly used English word. It makes me wonder if the very earthiness of it is somehow responsible for the relative lack of interest in 'breathwork' in English-speaking countries compared with the German-speaking. The connection to the metaphysical, to the divine, is already there when I am 'inspired', but not when I 'breathe in'. Perhaps

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our breath – our life and speech – is grounded in earth and, as Irigaray (1999) writes of Heidegger, we have forgotten air.

### Early experiences

I first encountered Middendorf's work in 1996 through my classical singing teacher. She had me lie down on the carpet of her room with a small cushion under my head, close my eyes, and place my hands on my body. She instructed me to focus on the part of my body beneath my hands and to sense how my body moved with breath there. I usually left my hands in the one position for six to eight breaths, then moved to another. After the lower abdomen came the 'middle space', one hand placed on the middle of the front of my body between the navel and the sternum. Then I would place one hand on my upper chest just beneath the opposite collar bone, and after six to eight breaths change hands and sides. The next position was the ribs at the sides, as high up as I could manage to place my hands. After the front and sides I would roll over and do the same sort of thing with my back. In the early stages my teacher placed her hands on my upper back, which was awkward for me to reach, but later I did this myself. I usually covered my back in three positions – the upper, the middle, and the lower. On my lower back I would place one hand each side of my sacrum.

The order of positions was not fixed, though these were the main positions I learned to use. Sometimes I included my ribs lower down at the side. In each position I focused on the part of my body beneath my hands and on my breath. As I understood it I was supposed to imagine breath going to my hands without deliberately engaging the muscles to make that happen.

When I first started this exercise it was apparent from the movements of my torso under my hands that I mainly breathed into my belly and lower chest and barely at all into my upper chest. In the first few weeks I found little movement of my body under my hands when I placed them below my collarbones and even less in the upper back. Over perhaps six weeks of daily practice things gradually changed: these places started to expand with inhalation and swing back with exhalation. I felt that my touch and attention on that part of my body drew my breath; I was not trying to direct my breath there.

Early on in my practice I found a 'pause' developed after the exhalation as I waited for my body to breathe rather than consciously initiating the breath cycle. This time of waiting for breath felt at first like a moment of nothingness, a moment in 'suspended animation'. At first I found it disconcerting, and used to wonder if I would ever need to breathe again. But as I became accustomed to it I started to find it relaxing, a special moment before a new beginning. The more I was able to let go of any muscular tension while lying down the longer I felt this pause becoming.

Looking back at the work I did with my singing teacher I recognise that I entered into a new relation to my breath and I developed new habits of breathing. They served me well for a time, as habits will, but they turned out to be at odds with the grounds of Middendorf breathwork. The primary basis of Middendorf breathwork is to let breath come and go 'on its own' – not to draw it in or push it out, but to let it find its own rhythm. It is this that distinguishes Middendorf breathwork from most other bodies of work with breath. I recognise now that I was extending my inhalation, enjoying the unfamiliar bodily sensations and wanting more. I would have long inhalations and pauses lasting up to fifteen seconds. I must have had exhalations as well, but I didn't register those

at the time. For me at that point, breathing was really about inhaling – if I had a ‘good’ inhalation I could sing a long phrase.

Some years later in Berlin, during an individual session with a Middendorf practitioner, the practitioner gently asked me whether this was really my breath, and if it was to let it continue, and when it wanted to change to allow that. That led me to an awareness that I was *making* my breath long and deep, and it fostered in me a different appreciation of my breath, where bigger was not necessarily better. A new possibility arose for allowing breath to come and go on its own. As time has passed and I continue this breath practice further possibilities and experiences continue to arise.

### Try this 1: basis of Middendorf breathwork

I believe all this will make more sense if you, the reader, have some experiences of Middendorf breathwork as well as reading about my experience and those of my volunteer co-researchers. So I make some ‘offers’<sup>2</sup> for your experience in these early parts, which I hope you will try. With these beginnings you can then try anything else I describe later on from the workshops.

*Begin by bringing your attention to the movement of your body with your breath. Sitting comfortably, place the palms of your hands somewhere around the middle of your torso. Can you sense the movement of your body walls with your breath? If not, it may help to close your eyes or move your hands to some other part of your torso.*

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<sup>2</sup> The word ‘offer’ is much used in the Middendorf breathwork training in Berkeley, as in ‘make an offer to your breath and see how it responds’. This reflects a particular approach to the breath, that of an encounter with a living thing rather than the investigation of some object. It also reflects that we do not know what the response is going to be; that there is not a ‘right’ response.

*Can you be with this movement and allow your breath to come and go on its own? What else do you notice? Does this activity have an effect on your mood?*

*When you have had enough of this, let yourself stretch like a cat or dog does when it wakes. Extend your arms, your legs, in any way that you like that feels good to you. After some stretching while seated, stand and continue – stretch the sides of your torso, your back, your front. When you have had enough stretching, sit, close your eyes and ‘resonate’, that is, sense for a few breath cycles what this has done for you. What has changed? Where do you experience movement of your body with breath now? Do you have an experience of more space for breath in your body? Is it easier to let breath come and go on its own?*

I once offered this short sequence of Middendorf breathwork at a writing seminar, at the end of a full day. There was little time for feedback, but afterwards one of the participants said that as she sat after stretching she felt ‘pregnant with breath’ and she liked this sensation. In my experience many people report feeling more spacious in some way after this sequence, and many say they find it difficult at first to let breath come and go on its own; for some it feels like the act of bringing attention to breath changes it in some way. This seems to pass with repeated encounters with this breath practice.

When I ask, ‘Where do you experience movement of your body with breath now?’ I direct your attention to the sensations of that movement. Attending to the sensations of these movements while allowing breath to come and go on its own, is a basic ground of Middendorf breathwork. The movements can be those of the torso expanding with the inhalation and swinging back with the exhalation, or they can be more subtle micromovements that may be almost undetectable to the

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eye. The attention brought to these sensations has a particular quality denoted by the idea of 'participating in' or 'being with' compared with 'observing from a distance'.

When I ask, 'Do you have an experience of more space for breath in your body?' that is more of a leading question, more directive I could say. I want to begin to establish a language for talking about the experience of breath, and 'space' is part of that. A sense of bodily space is usually associated with inhalation in Middendorf breathwork.



## Part One: Introduction



## Chapter One: The Project

Give up learning, and put an end to your troubles  
(Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, verse 20).

I have been teaching 'voice' for well over a decade, both privately at a studio my partner and I run, and, since 1996, in the Performance Studies course at Victoria University. As I mentioned earlier, I first encountered Middendorf breathwork through my classical singing teacher who had been impressed with its potential as a 'tool' to help singers with their breathing, a fundament of singing. In July 2001 I went to London to attend a conference and series of workshops around the contributions of Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart to voice teaching; prior to that I was able to include a trip to Berlin. I took part in a three-day introductory public workshop at the Middendorf Institute in Berlin led by Dieter Gebel, then the senior teacher (Ilse Middendorf now teaches only postgraduate students of her work). I also joined some other weekly classes as a guest and experienced three sessions of 'hands-on' individual work. These experiences confirmed my interest in Middendorf breathwork and my desire to do more. Actually this is a bland understatement. I felt there was something almost magical about the hands-on work. Gebel seemed to be able to 'read' me through my breath. He seemed to understand so much from this 'dialogue' with my breath where nothing was said. I was strongly drawn to this. I wanted to find out how he did it and be able to do it myself. There were and are no Middendorf graduates teaching in Australia. Regular travel to Berlin or other parts of Europe where the work is taught seemed out of the question. There is a Middendorf school in Berkeley, California, but that too seemed out of reach.

I decided one way to find out more about Middendorf's work was through a PhD research project with breathwork as the central point of

## Chapter One: The project

focus. My initial proposal was to look particularly at whether Middendorf breathwork could provide the foundation for an integrated approach to voice and movement training for performers. This seemed an ‘obvious’ topic to me because Middendorf breathwork includes a lot of movement, and breath is the basis of voice. I was influenced early on by reading Judith Phippen and Dianne Eden’s review of and reflections on voice and movement training in Australia, *Resonating bodies*, in which they ask, ‘If we train in specializations, who does the integrating?’ (1997, 80).

So I began this project with an orientation to voice and movement training. I already ‘knew’ that Middendorf breathwork was a useful foundation for voice and movement training. It was my original intention to investigate and demonstrate the ‘how’ of this, to answer the question: what is it about Middendorf breathwork that makes it such a good foundation for voice and movement training for performance?

I ‘knew’ that Middendorf breathwork was a useful foundation from my own experience before beginning this project – from learning about Middendorf breathwork through my singing teacher, from reading about it, from practising it with my partner who went to the Middendorf Institute in Berlin and worked with Ilse Middendorf and others there in 1999, and from my own visit to that Institute in 2001.

### Outline of the project

I began my PhD project early in 2002 and after preliminary research submitted a candidature proposal that included library work, a self-study (autoethnography), workshops with volunteers from professional peers – established dancers, actors, teachers, and creative arts therapists (see below pp.34 & 41ff) – and interviews with Middendorf

breathwork practitioners, particularly those experienced in voice. My candidature was accepted later that year.

In October and November 2003 I travelled to the United States and Europe so I could interview teachers and practitioners of Middendorf breathwork as part of my research project. First I went to Berkeley, California, where Ilse Middendorf was visiting and teaching. That coincided with the first of fourteen segments of the 'professional training' in Middendorf breathwork, comprising ten days of workshops each quarter over three and a half years plus twenty-eight individual hands-on sessions with teachers. I had arranged to take part in that first segment where Ilse Middendorf taught the final two days.

In Berkeley I met Jeff Crockett, head of voice at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. In October 2003 Jeff was in his final year of breathwork training. He was attending workshops being taught by Ilse Middendorf for advanced and postgraduate students at the same time as we were attending the first segment of the training. I interviewed Jeff (Appendix A) and have stayed in touch with him. In August 2006 he wrote further about his experience of Middendorf breathwork in his teaching (postscript to Appendix A). I also interviewed Jürg Roffler, the founder of, and main teacher at, the Berkeley Middendorf Institute (Appendix B) and, through an interpreter, interviewed Ilse Middendorf (Appendix D).

In November I went to Berlin where I interviewed Bettina Follenius and Dieter Gebel (Appendices H & I), took part in a five-day workshop led by Bettina, had an individual hands-on session with her, and did some further work with Dieter. Dieter had left the Middendorf Institute in Berlin in March 2003 to establish his own practice, and Bettina had taken over as the senior teacher at the Institute.

## Chapter One: The project

The final part of my funded trip was to Männedorf, a town not far from Zurich in Switzerland, where Maria Höller, another graduate who had taught at the Berlin Institute (had in fact been one of Jürg Roffler's teachers), was teaching part of a four-day workshop in her own work called Atem, Tonus, Ton (which translates near enough as 'Breath, Body, Voice' – see her website at [atem-und-stimmelehre.de](http://atem-und-stimmelehre.de)) at Ursula Schwendimann's Middendorf Institute. I had seen on the American Middendorf website ([www.breathexperience.com](http://www.breathexperience.com)) that Maria sometimes taught in Berkeley and heard she had a reputation as one of the few Middendorf teachers also teaching voice. Maria spent a day and a half talking with me and taking me through the fundamentals of her work. Much of it was similar to the Body Voice Work that my partner and I teach (see p.26ff), although it took for granted a grounding in Middendorf breathwork. She invited me to take part in the final two days of the workshop with a continuing group of students, many of whom were Middendorf breathwork graduates. I interviewed Maria and also her co-teacher, Letizia Fiorenza, another long-time Middendorf graduate who works with voice (Appendices E & F). I interpolate extracts from these various interviews throughout the dissertation.<sup>3</sup>

Those interviews were mainly directed at the relation of Middendorf breathwork to voice and movement work. The trip gave me a broader understanding of the practice of Middendorf breathwork and how practitioners used it in relation to voice, which, at that time, was still my primary orientation. It confirmed my interest in the work and my desire to go further with it. I felt, especially after doing another introductory five-day workshop in Berlin, that I had made many beginnings with the

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<sup>3</sup> In April 2004 I interviewed Brigitte Wellner who was a guest at that segment of the training (Appendix G). Brigitte is another qualified Middendorf practitioner with a background in voice.

work but had few opportunities to go into it more deeply. I decided that I would try to continue the professional training in Berkeley, and I have done so, taking leave from my research project to travel to the ten-day workshops every three months. I graduated as a Middendorf breathwork practitioner in April 2007.

Now that I have completed the professional training I look back and see my original undertaking as naïve. Middendorf breathwork is, indeed, a useful foundation for voice and movement training for performance, but it is far more than that. It is a profound and complex body of work that has much to offer many fields of human endeavour, such as health, wellbeing, creative arts, and sports. More fundamentally still, it is a practice that offers the possibility of connecting with the very ground of one's being.

My own experience of Middendorf breathwork is that it has shifted the way I am in the world – how I sense myself in the world and in relation to others, how I feel and think about that. Middendorf breathwork has brought me into contact with myself in new ways, and has faced me with habits and patterns I have built up over years. Middendorf breathwork has given me a much fuller sense of my life as integral with the life of my body. As I progressed through the training I found myself interested in the breathwork not so much as a tool for 'improved' voice but as a body of work that taught me, and continues to teach me, about sensing, about relationship, and about myself in the world.

My project broadened out from the specific focus on the relation of Middendorf breathwork to voice and movement work to become an in-depth investigation of Middendorf breathwork, experientially, historically, and in dialogue with ideas from contemporary discourses around body, breath, and experience.

## Outline of the thesis

I begin with the experiential material, interweaving some discussion of methodological issues and some more theoretical material, then move on to historical and contemporary contexts for the work, before finishing with a discussion of some of the philosophical, emotional, and ethical implications of Middendorf breathwork.

In chapters two and three I describe the practice of Middendorf breathwork, giving examples of written responses from the journals of my workshop participants and from my own experience. This is structured around the first large research workshop I led, but draws on the responses of participants from other workshops as well. I have tried to present this in a way that makes it possible for the reader to have their own experiences since Middendorf breathwork is first and foremost an experiential body of work. I argue that part of its importance is the simultaneous individual and collective nature of breath experience. In chapter two I discuss how the subjectivist nature of Middendorf breathwork and its holistic orientation complements the orientation towards principles, the attempts to articulate what is universal within the vast array of individual experiences of breath.

In historical terms, Middendorf breathwork has arisen as part of a 'return to body' in the West, which I discuss in chapter four. Middendorf breathwork is now one among an array of bodies of 'somatic' work that can trace their antecedents back to a few figures in the mid- to late nineteenth century.

While the rise in interest in body in the West can be seen as a release from the 'prison of bodily unconsciousness' constructed by the



Christian rejection of body as 'evil', as Middendorf puts it (1990, 11), or as a movement of resistance to a dominant way of life that involves an 'incomprehensible savaging of flesh', as Don Hanlon Johnson writes (1995b, ix), it can also carry elements of anti-intellectualism. Harold Segel argues that this rejection of intellectualism in Nazi Germany was an integral part of anti-Jewish propaganda (1998).

I distinguish two different meanings given to body within this 'return to body': one concerned with an image of the physical body, and the other with sensory experience of one's own body. I argue that the former is an extension of intellectual culture and has to do with pursuing an ideal or an image rather than attending to sensation. Somatic practices, I argue, are different. At their best they break down the alienations of abstracted intellect by connecting people with an important ground of their being – the sensations of their own bodies.

I look briefly at other somatic practices in chapter five, lingering a little longer with Mabel Todd and 'ideokinesis', which derives from her work. Then in chapter six I review other bodies of work that deal particularly with breath. Chapter seven is devoted to breath in voice and movement training, harking back to the original orientation of the project. Within that I refer especially to the interviews I conducted with Middendorf practitioners who teach voice.

In chapters eight and nine I look at ideas from contemporary discourses around body, breath, and experience in relation to Middendorf breathwork – what these ideas offer for an understanding of Middendorf breathwork and what Middendorf breathwork in turn has to say to these discourses.

## Chapter One: The project

As my understanding of Middendorf breathwork deepened I began to experience how breath connects with thought, with ideas: how it is relevant in metaphysics and epistemology; how it is intimately connected with a fuller appreciation of body and being.

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, leading figures in qualitative research methods, write of how

social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom, and community (2003, 3).

I am surprised at this end of the project to find how strongly my research and reflections on Middendorf breathwork have pushed me in the direction of such critical conversations. I find myself writing about ways of being in the world, being in relation to others, and being in oneself, rather than what a good tool Middendorf breathwork is for linking up voice and movement for performers, even though it is that too.

I feel the need to present the results of all elements of the project – workshops, interviews, personal experience, and reading – at the same time. It is as if I need to say everything at once because there is no logical progression involved, no beginning, middle, and end, except in time. Middendorf breathwork offers a way of combining the perception of bodily sensation with thinking, feeling, and intuiting, to allow for what I call ‘kinæsthetic thinking’, a way of being in the world that draws on the essential connectedness of humans to the living world through breath. It is a work concerned with wholeness, both at an individual level and at a social and cultural level. It carried a sense of ‘all-at-once-ness’, of the interconnectedness of everything.

Nonetheless in writing I must begin somewhere and use some order. Before presenting the experiential group workshop material in the next two chapters, I look at some methodological issues, and make some further offers intended to give you, the reader, a deeper sense of some of the meanings and potentialities of the breathwork. I also give a brief autobiography, and some further background material on Middendorf breathwork.

### Some methodological considerations

The workshops cannot in any way be seen as 'scientific' because they did not measure anything in a repeatable way; they were experiential. This is qualitative research. Rather than establish an hypothesis and look to prove or disprove it, I endeavour to provide an account of the breathwork, an insight into what it is and how it does what it does. In this way my approach is similar to 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Glaser 1992). Academic psychologist and action research theorist Bob Dick writes:

What most differentiates grounded theory from much other research is that it is explicitly **emergent**. It does not test a hypothesis. It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is (2005, section 3, bold in original).

There is now a substantial body of literature on qualitative research.

Denzin notes:

In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's eye view which guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge. The days of naive realism

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and naive positivism are over. In their place stand critical and historical realism, and various versions of relativism. The criteria for evaluating research are now relative (2003, 245–6).

In their introduction to *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2003), Denzin and Lincoln distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework (2003, 13).

Denzin and Lincoln emphasise here the question of ‘values’ within research. Traditional scientific research, it is true, would claim to be ‘value-free’, a claim disputed by Alvin Gouldner and others more than forty years ago (see, for example, Gouldner 1964). Perhaps more importantly, from its point of view, it would claim to be verifiable – measurable and repeatable. This, rather than the question of values, seems to me to be the measure of ‘hard’ science and the stumbling block for ‘social’ science. Don Hanlon Johnson writes about this from the perspective of bodywork:

Despite the enormous body of literature about qualitative research in the human sciences, it has gained little ground beyond what it held a century ago when Husserl began to conceive of a dual science that united subjectivity and objectivity ... issues about validity and replicability continue to bedevil the myriad attempts to formulate qualitative studies. I have had a number of frustrating experiences in

which very thoughtful, creative, and open-minded scientists have told me that these bodyworks are wonderful, but they are in the realm of poetry, essential to the life of the human spirit, and perhaps to health. And yet, they conclude, because of their emphasis on subjective experience and idiosyncratic strategies, the practices have no scientific significance (2005, 9).

I could argue that 'social science' is a misnomer, a misguided attempt to claim some of the success and status of 'hard science' for studies of people, and that those involved in the world of human interaction should let go of the wish for certainty. On the other hand, I could also argue that it is cheeky of 'hard science' to capture the Latin for knowledge, *scientia*, as if it were the one true path to knowledge. Later I will argue, with Freya Mathews (2003), that the appropriate way to approach another subject is through 'encounter' rather than the wish for knowledge of a 'scientific' sort.

There is one quantitative study involving Middendorf breathwork published in English, and another in German. The former compares the effectiveness of Middendorf breathwork with that of traditional physical therapies in the treatment of chronic back pain (Mehling, Hamel et al. 2005). The latter looks at changes in body equilibrium response caused by breathing (Aust & Fischer 1997). This sort of research is needed to establish the 'scientific' credentials of Middendorf breathwork, and it is possible to imagine a similar study about Middendorf breathwork as a foundation for voice and movement training, establishing guidelines for measuring effectiveness, using controls and so on.

I did not do this sort of research. I 'knew' already that Middendorf breathwork was a useful foundation for voice and movement – I have experienced this myself many times and had this experience confirmed

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by others with whom I have shared the work as well as by others who have discovered this quite independently, like the Middendorf breathwork practitioners I interviewed who have a special interest in voice (see Appendices B, E, F, and G). What interested me in the connection of Middendorf breathwork and voice and movement was not 'whether' but 'in what way'. I wanted to tease out the connections at an experiential level. I wondered how they might sit in relation to other bodies of work already in use in the institutions of voice and movement training, such as Alexander technique and Feldenkrais. I wanted to work out through theory and practice what makes this approach to breath so remarkable.

Denzin and Lincoln refer to seven historical 'moments' in social science from 1900 to the present, the seventh of which is

the future, which is now (2000– ). The future, the seventh moment, is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities (2003, 3).

I am unsure precisely what Denzin and Lincoln mean by 'moral discourse'. It could be argued that every viewpoint holds within it an ethical standpoint, and if that is what they mean, I agree. In most parts of the Western world personal identity is no longer a given: it is something to be constructed and reconstructed throughout our lives, whether we like it or not. Attempting to reveal this construction becomes an integral part of any research that is grounded in the personal or subjective, as autoethnography or self-study is, as my group workshops were, as indeed my whole research project is.

In a note to his autoethnography of white subjectivity, John Warren (2001) cites H Goodall's description of autoethnography as:

'a method of inquiry, scholarly inquiry, that privileges the exploration of self *in response to questions that can only be answered that way*, through the textual construction of, and thoughtful reflection about, the lived experiences of that self' (Goodall 1998, 3, cited in Warren 2001, 47, italics in original).

I would like to adopt Goodall's description, but also note that the autoethnographic aspect of this dissertation is limited. There is more material from the interviews and much more from the journals or diaries from the group workshops.

Interviewing is well established in the 'social sciences'. Denzin notes: 'For a full century the interview has been the basic information gathering tool of the social sciences' (2001, 23).

The keeping and analysis of diaries is well established across a range of qualitative research methods. There are sixteen different references to diaries in Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000).

### Try this 2: an experience of experiencing

*For this you will have to take off your shoes. Socks or hose are fine. Sit with one foot crossed over the other leg in a way that is most comfortable for you to reach that foot. Tap the foot gently all over then close your eyes and explore your foot with both hands as if you were touching it for the first time, attending very closely to it. When you have had enough of this, place your foot gently back on the floor and resonate – sense the differences between your feet. At the same time sense any effect this has had for the whole of you. What is your*

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*experience? Is the foot you attended to warmer or cooler? Does it seem lower, wider, heavier, lighter? Has there been any change in how you experience your breath in your body? Many different experiences are reported from doing this. There is no right or wrong. The way you attend to your body, how you are present as you offer some stimulation and sense the outcome can have an impact on your experience. When you are ready, repeat the procedure with the other foot. What is your experience now? What do you perceive? Has this had an effect on your mood?*

It is not at all unusual to feel lop-sided part way through this sequence, or at the end. The activity can provide a clear example of perception of sensation, which can be readily distinguished from thoughts about it, ideas or imaginings, even feelings. When you put your first foot down it can be obviously different from the other one in startling ways. In this case the sensation may not seem directly connected with the movement of breath, but nonetheless the perception is of bodily sensation, and that is what the practice of Middendorf breathwork relies on.

### Autobiography

Like many in the 'West' these days, I have trodden a number of paths before coming to this one of research and writing. I went straight to university after secondary school. In matriculation as it was then known (a lovely word redolent with the idea of joining the social matrix), English was compulsory and I also studied Latin. If the school had offered ancient Greek I would probably have taken that as well, for in my family the 'classics' were as well regarded as the sciences. Otherwise I took science and maths. Until about half way through my final secondary year I had thought I was going to study medicine at



university. That, in my family, was the thing to aim for. Law, possibly, if you didn't quite get the marks for medicine. In the late 1960s when I was at secondary school doctors were still held in high regard.

Something 'nudged' me off that path during sixth form, as it was then. Whether it was reading Sartre and Camus or simply sibling rivalry (my sister had begun medicine that same year) I cannot say, but I decided that medicine was not for me, and nor was law, engineering, dentistry, economics, or any of the other status-laden career paths. I wanted to study ideas. I enrolled in Arts: Philosophy, Psychology, Latin, and Pure Mathematics.

At university I discovered a freedom of sorts and sociality, whereas before I knew mainly socialisation. I 'discovered' alcohol, and how it made me feel the way I thought I should feel all the time. I found out that while I could get by in most subjects with last-minute binges of study and writing, that didn't work for pure mathematics, the lectures for which were held at 9am, well before my new rising time.

I struggled through Arts, becoming fascinated by elements of philosophy for moments, and bored by behaviourist psychology. I dropped Latin by agreement and mathematics by necessity. I became a reasonable pool player and incipient alcoholic. In the end I decided to enrol in Social Work so I could have a source of income not repugnant to my nascent socialist leanings. It was in that course that I found what were for me the most interesting ideas – critical social theory. I took a year off, worked in various casual jobs as I had done throughout my university years, and travelled a little up the east coast of Australia. Eventually I decided I needed to finish the social work course, get a job and pay off my debts.

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I worked as a social worker in country Victoria for a few years but was unconvinced of the worth of what I was doing. I saw it as having strong elements of social control. I felt I was a small cog in the machinery of the state, pacifying those at the fringes of the system so that it could continue to operate for the benefit of the powerful few. I left and wandered through other jobs – cooking, administration for a student union – before moving to a different part of the country to join a group that was running its own presses, printing a left-wing journal. I learned linotype operation and letterpress printing at a time when computer typesetting and offset printing was just beginning to become dominant in the industry. I stayed with printing for quite a few years, learning small offset operation and helping establish a printery in the city. Somehow I had a knack for machinery despite my non-mechanical background. I could hear when the machines were working well and when there was a problem. Linotype machines and then presses seemed, for a while, much easier than people. It was while working as a printer/manager that I rediscovered singing.

I had always sung as a child, in church (attendance at which had been compulsory), at home, with my family on long car journeys. As a child I had a sweet clear soprano voice but was shy. I recall being asked to sing a solo in the chapel choir in my first year at boarding school and finding I had no voice at all, even in rehearsal. My soprano lasted much longer than I would have wished, an agonizing time after all the other boys' voices had broken. I tried to pitch my voice down in speaking and gave up singing altogether.

### *Body Voice Work*

My good friend and now partner, who was not brought up singing and only in adult life began exploring this 'gift', encouraged me in the

rediscovery of my voice. She has been developing her own ways of working with voice and body, which she calls Body Voice Work (she would not use capital letters, but I will so that it is clear when I am referring to this body of work), for over twenty years. Over the last decade and more I have shared in this development, so we both now teach Body Voice Work, though our teaching styles and emphases are different. Over the next four pages I look at the main influences on that work.

Thanks to her I rediscovered the joys of singing with others, the delights of melody, harmony, and shared experience. From the early 1990s I began attending voice workshops, took singing lessons, joined a choir, and took part in various projects that my partner set up exploring different approaches to voice and body, often combining her own ideas with her experiences in workshops with international teachers. I attended some of these workshops too.

The first I attended was given by Frankie Armstrong at the International Workshop Festival in Adelaide in 1992. Her delight in the variety of people's voices has stayed with me since then, as has her 'call and response' way of teaching. She believes that everyone can sing, and that the rhythms of singing are rooted in the rhythms of everyday life, particularly of work. She developed her own way of teaching based on this – see 'Voice is the muscle of the soul' (1987). The 'Natural Voice Practitioners Network' in the UK has sprung from her way of working with voice ([www.naturalvoice.net](http://www.naturalvoice.net)). Armstrong has published a co-authored autobiography (Armstrong & Pearson 1992), and is still active in teaching ([www.harbourtownrecords.com/armstrong.html](http://www.harbourtownrecords.com/armstrong.html)).

Zygmunt Molik, an original member of Grotowski's Polish theatre laboratory ([www.cifas.be/docs/molik.html](http://www.cifas.be/docs/molik.html)), visited Australia in 1993 and

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taught workshops in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. My partner took part in the Canberra workshop and convinced me to enrol in the Melbourne one. Molik calls his work 'Voice and Body' and we have drawn from it in various ways in developing Body Voice Work. I was particularly taken with the way he used a range of physical activities to encourage a way of breathing I refer to as 'letting breath drop in', where a release of abdominal tension seems to trigger the diaphragm to draw the inhalation without any sense of effort. Part of the attraction of this 'method' is the involvement of the whole person in sounding in connection with the outer world. These are not 'breath exercises' but they have an effect on breath. In Molik's language they are not exercises at all:

Everybody's approach differs, and mine, to put it briefly, is a search for the pure organicity – how to breathe with the whole body, not only one part of the body; how to think with the whole body and not only one part. In other words, how to integrate the whole organism into how you are speaking or how you are singing. Another idea I have is that you should sing as if you were speaking and speak as if you were singing ... In my approach the main thing is how to find the life, how to find something that can be sung out, that can be spoken out (Molik 1994, 28).

I continue to draw on Molik's work in my voice teaching, especially on those parts of his work that most encourage the capacity to let breath 'drop in'.

I found a new ease in my singing as a result of attending Molik's workshop and of the explorations of his work that my partner and I made afterwards. I was encouraged to audition in late 1993 for the choruses of what were then the Australian Opera and the Victoria State Opera (VSO), and was accepted into the VSO chorus in 1994. I sang in three productions that year, soon realising that there was much about

classical singing that I did not know, so I sought out an opera teacher and took weekly lessons for the next three years or so. It was this teacher, Loris Synan, who introduced me to Middendorf breathwork. I also took occasional masterclasses, lessons or coaching sessions from visiting experts such as Janice Chapman<sup>4</sup>, an expatriate Australian living in London and highly regarded in the opera worlds there and here. I found a strong similarity between her and Molik's way of working with breath. She wanted her singers to let go of any abdominal tension for the moment of inhalation, 'just let it all go splat!' When this was successful the effect was that of 'letting breath drop in'. She said that 'splat' was also an acronym for 'singers please lose abdominal tension' (personal communication in workshop).

My classical singing training fed into the development of Body Voice Work. So has the actor training of Michael Chekhov as taught by Dawn Langman. Chekhov was the nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov and a student of Russian director and teacher Constantin Stanislavski. An acclaimed actor, he went on to establish his own methods of actor training, which are summarized in *On the technique of acting* (1991). Langman trained as a drama teacher in South Australia before moving to London where she studied and later taught Rudolf Steiner's approach to speech and drama. Steiner is perhaps best known as the founder of the General Anthroposophical Society. His ideas about education have led to the establishment of 'Waldorf' and 'Steiner' schools around the world. Steiner's ideas about speech, put forward in a series of lectures in Dornach, Switzerland, in 1924, are published in his *Speech and drama* (1959).

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<sup>4</sup>[www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/people/undergraduate\\_music\\_staff/department\\_of\\_vocal\\_studies/principal\\_study\\_staff/janice\\_chapman.html](http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/people/undergraduate_music_staff/department_of_vocal_studies/principal_study_staff/janice_chapman.html)

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Langman encountered Chekhov's work in New York where she remained for almost a decade exploring the connections between it and Steiner's work before returning to Australia. I attended a series of five-day workshops she ran over about two years starting shortly after her return to Australia.

One further influence on Body Voice Work that I must mention is 'extended voice' work, which originated with Alfred Wolfsohn. I first encountered extended voice in a workshop led by Linda Wise, a founding member of Roy Hart Theatre, a group who elaborated Wolfsohn's work into performance ([www.roy-hart-theatre.com](http://www.roy-hart-theatre.com)). Paul Newham has written about Wolfsohn's life and work in *The prophet of song* (1997) and draws on extended voice work in his own work, which he calls 'Voice Movement Therapy' (1994, 1998). Noah Pikes, another founding member of Roy Hart Theatre, gives an account of early development of that group up to the deaths of Roy and Dorothy Hart and Vivienne Young in a car crash in May 1975, in *Dark Voices* (1999). In *Voice in modern theatre* Jacqueline Martin writes:

Vocal delivery lies at the very centre of the artistic work of the Roy Hart Theatre which evolved from the research of its founder, Alfred Wolfsohn (1896–1962), who discovered that the voice is not the function solely of any anatomical structure, but rather the expression of the whole personality, and that through the voice all aspects of an individual could be developed (1991, 63–4).

The conference I attended in London in 2001 on Wolfsohn and Hart was run by the Central School for Speech and Drama, the main voice teacher training institution in London, and was entitled 'The contribution of Alfred Wolfsohn, Roy Hart and the Roy Hart Theatre to vocal expression'. This indicates how acceptable extended voice work has

become, although it would probably still be regarded as weird fringe work in some performance training institutions because it encompasses all the sounds a human voice can make, not just the 'beautiful' ones. No doubt the 'discovery' in the West of 'throat singing', a form of folk music in Mongolia, and an aid to meditation in Tibetan monasteries, has helped expand the range of vocal sounds that are regarded as acceptable.

These are the main external sources that my partner and I have drawn on in our research and gradual development of Body Voice Work. In naming it 'Body Voice Work' I do not want to give the impression that it is somehow fixed or finished or that it is written out, codified, somewhere. It is not a 'thing' but a way of working that involves some shared assumptions and understandings, a shared history, a shared perspective. It has changed and is changing as a result of our experiences of Middendorf breathwork.

### Try this 3: breath experience with the hands

*Enliven your hands with a short massage, squeezing, stroking, shaking or tapping in any way that feels good to you. Sit resting your hands palms up on your thighs then move one arm out in front of you while you stretch your hand from the centre of the palm right out to the fingertips without strain. Do you sense the inhalation developing out of the stretching? You release the stretch and bring your arm back to your thigh. Does your exhalation follow? You go on this way, stretching and opening, releasing and coming back in, with one arm, then the other, and later both together. Your arms can move wherever you like. Sense how your whole body is involved in this. It is important that you allow breath to come and go on its own, not sucking it in or pushing it out.*

## Chapter One: The project

*When you have had enough sit with your eyes closed for a few breath cycles and resonate – sense what this work has done for you.*

### More about Middendorf breathwork

From this introduction some things about Middendorf breathwork will already be clear. I add a few more before approaching the group workshops.

Middendorf breathwork is grounded in perceiving the sensations of bodily movements with breath as it is allowed to come and go on its own. This contrasts with most other breath practices that require some form of control or manipulation of breath. Most of the time in everyday life, including when we sleep, our breath *does* come and go on its own, though not through our ‘allowing’. We do not consciously control or manipulate our breath for we are not aware of it – it is controlled by our autonomic nervous system. Middendorf refers to this as ‘unconscious breathing’ (1990, 23). She calls the controlled breath of most other breath practices ‘voluntary breath’ (1990, 25). When we start to become aware of breath while letting it come and go on its own, this is a ‘third possibility’, which Middendorf calls the ‘perceptible breath’ (1990, 27).

The ‘perceptible breath’ is experienced by perceiving of sensations of bodily movement with breath – with inhalation, exhalation, and pause. Sometimes it is also possible to hear breath, to sense its warmth or coolness, to see the vapour it creates on a cold day, to feel its flow through the nostrils. However for the purposes of Middendorf breathwork the focus is the sensations of bodily movement – expansion of body walls with inhalation and swinging back with



exhalation, and more subtle movements that may be perceived in the limbs, neck and head, or sensed internally.

While breath and sensation are obvious in this, what can slip by unnoticed is how Middendorf breathwork calls for 'presence', for participation. I can only perceive the sensations of the movement of my body with breath if I am fully present. If my attention is elsewhere, if my awareness is on something else, I do not perceive these sensations. Middendorf refers to a 'trinity' of breathing, focusing, and perceiving, where 'focusing means being consciously present' (1990, 20–1). I discuss presence more fully below (pp.74ff).

Middendorf breathwork includes both a one-on-one hands-on work that is known in the training in Berkeley as 'breath dialogue' – such as the individual sessions that I had with Dieter Gebel – and what I think of as 'group work', although it can be practised alone.

The group work often takes the form of three-step sequences like the ones above: a movement or action that might take from thirty seconds to a few minutes or more, a time for 'resonating', that is, sitting and sensing for half a minute or so what the effect of the work has been, particularly on the movement of breath, and then a rest. The 'doing' is no more the main focus than is the 'being with', the after-echo, the affect of the doing on the breath, or the further 'allowing' in rest.

I mentioned after the first sequence earlier that 'space' is part of the vocabulary of Middendorf breathwork. There are many possibilities for the experience of space in the work, but in Middendorf's book and in the breathwork training special emphasis is given to five main 'breath spaces' – lower, middle, upper, inner, and outer. While these are distinguished on the basis of different qualities of breath rather than on

## Chapter One: The project

specific anatomical bases, roughly speaking the lower space includes the feet, legs, and lower torso from the navel down, the middle space includes from the navel to the bottom of the sternum (breastbone), and the upper space takes in the rest of the torso, the arms, neck and head. The inner space is the whole inner space of the body, and the outer space everything outside the body.

In Middendorf breathwork it is understood that each breath cycle, each inhalation, exhalation, and pause, is different, as breath responds in every moment to every internal and external influence. These differences are sometimes barely perceptible, sometimes obvious. In Middendorf breathwork 'breath rhythm' refers to a rough constancy over a number of breath cycles. Middendorf breathwork assumes that, when they let their breath come and go on its own, each person has her own breath rhythm, a rhythm that is forever changing in response to changing circumstances.

We should really try to overcome the one-sided point of view regarding the breathing process as only a metabolic process involving the ingestion of oxygen during inhalation and the discharge of the waste product carbon dioxide during exhalation. We rather have an innate 'primal rhythm' which, rising out of the unconsciousness has become perceptible and furnishes us with reliable security (Middendorf 1990, 105).

### About the workshops

In preparation for the peer group workshops (see p.12 above), in early 2004 I contacted nearly a hundred people in Melbourne who I knew were involved in some way in the broad field of voice, movement, and performance – including most of the thirty-five who had attended breath workshops led by Dieter Gebel at the Body Voice Centre in Melbourne

in 2002 and 2003 that my partner and I had organised. Because of difficulties of getting a group to commit to regular meetings, I decided to begin with a number of open sessions to include as many people as possible in at least one workshop. In this way I hoped to elicit a wide range of responses to what I presented of Middendorf breathwork, and then to continue with weekly sessions at a time that suited the greatest number of those willing and able to go on. During this time I also met with a smaller group who had more experience in Middendorf breathwork. Thirty-one of those contacted attended at least one workshop. I ran four series of workshops<sup>5</sup> and travelled to Berkeley for breath training segments in between.

The number of people attending dropped off quickly after the first workshops. In series three and four the same three participants, aside from me, attended each week. In each workshop I allowed time for the participants to write or draw in response to their experiences. So I have both a wide range of responses over a small number of workshops and a stable small number of responses over many workshops. Overall the workshops generated a substantial amount of written material. In selecting from them I have tried to acknowledge the diversity of responses as well as select those that illustrate particular points.

The challenge for me at the start was how to lead the workshops and what to present in them. I began with the idea of acquainting people with the basis of Middendorf breathwork, and later including work with voice that is, strictly speaking, outside the scope of the breathwork. But as I noted above my orientation changed as I became more immersed in Middendorf breathwork. So while I did sometimes venture outside the bounds of the work into 'voice work', that was not as strong a feature of the workshops as I had originally intended.

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<sup>5</sup> The dates and participant numbers are summarized in Appendix J.

## Chapter One: The project

Although I have had many years experience teaching and running workshops in voice and movement work, I found it daunting to present the breathwork – in which I felt I was at the time a novice – to a group of peers. On the day after the first two workshops I wrote:

*I ran the first two large group sessions of my project over the weekend. The Saturday was very enjoyable and went well. On the Sunday I was tired and strung out and consequently the session was not so enjoyable for me. I have yet to read the journals from Sunday so I do not have a sense of how it was for others ... After the session I was extremely tired, but also tense in a way I couldn't identify (Journal, 3 May 2004).*

Looking back, it is clear to me that I did not stay with my own breath rhythm. I lost awareness of my breath and probably reverted to habitual patterns of body and breath that involve holding, muscular tension, some fear or anxiety, and not allowing my breath to come and go on its own. An underlying principle of Middendorf breathwork is that breath is a balancing power. If I allow it, it will show me what is needed for me to stay in, or return to, balance. But such awareness can take a long time to develop, and back then I was a relative novice. Staying with one's own breath rhythm as a teacher is one of the tenets of Middendorf breathwork.

All forty-nine workshops had a similar pattern with many variations in the actual sequences offered. In chapters two and three I use the actual pattern of the first large workshop to introduce the work in more detail, while drawing also on responses from the second large workshop I ran the following day<sup>6</sup>, and occasional responses from later

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<sup>6</sup> These workshops were on Saturday and Sunday 1 and 2 May 2004 from 2pm till 6pm, including a half-hour break during which I supplied tea, coffee, and biscuits. Before starting these first workshops I checked that everyone had read and

workshops. I hope you will bear with me through this immersion in the detail of Middendorf breathwork practice. Along with some discussion of some methodological issues and concepts of particular importance to the work, this takes fifty-odd pages. I urge you to try the sequences I offered to the participants and sense what your own response is.

In hindsight I realise that at the time of leading these workshops I did not grasp how much the practice of Middendorf breathwork involves development in perceptual awareness – development that is not necessarily linear but is nonetheless extensive and multi-layered. So in a first workshop or day of workshops it is only possible to introduce the work in a relatively cursory way. How people receive and experience that depends on their personal histories. The development in perceptual awareness that affects how the work is experienced begins straight away, but is a slow and gradual process. Middendorf breathwork offers realms of perceptual experience that do not necessarily present themselves in a single day.

What I attempt in this thesis is to evoke through experiential description some of its depth and diversity and to articulate what this signifies in relation to contemporary discourse – how it can be seen to reveal something of the assumptions of contemporary theory and life; how in a small way it can contribute to recognizing some commonly held perspectives as assumptions, not the ‘facts’ or ‘truths’ they are purported to be. The realm of breath offers such a reappraisal of some concepts and categories.

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understood the handout ‘Information to participants’ which had been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Human Development at Victoria University, ensured that everyone had filled out, signed and found a witness for their ‘Consent Form’, and gave each participant a single sheet entitled ‘Middendorf breathwork, voice and movement’ which gave a little more background to the work and its basic principles and posed some questions, which the participants were invited to respond to in writing.



## Part Two: The body of the work





## Chapter Two: Experiences of breath

A vast chasm gapes between the inescapably limited scope of human awareness in any given era at any given place and the unknowable boundless plenitude of life's manifestations  
– Kuriyama (1999, 272).

Twelve people attended the first one-day workshop. They ranged in age from about thirty to early fifties and had varied and mostly complex backgrounds in the performing arts, arts therapy, and teaching. There were actors, singers, dancers, and some who combined these fields. Many are teachers in their fields as well as performers. Some are very experienced with voice work, and some hardly at all. All had some experience of body awareness work.

One person left at the break leaving no writing except a completed consent form. Two wrote responses to my list of questions and very little else on this occasion, though more on other days. Two others came only to this one workshop. Six of those present on Saturday came again on Sunday, along with five others. I covered much the same ground on both days.

### Sensing breath movement

I asked people to begin sitting on stools, eyes closed, with their hands resting on their lower abdomen, and to bring their attention to that part of their body, sensing whether there was any movement with breath under their hands while allowing breath to come and go of its own accord. After a minute or so I asked them to move one hand to the middle of their body between the navel and the bottom of the sternum, and to allow the other hand to rest on their thigh. We continued in this way, sensing whether there was any bodily movement with breath under the collar bones, in the armpits, in the middle of the back, lower

## Chapter Two: Experiences of breath

in the back, and then came back to the lower abdomen where we had started. Then I invited people to rest, to speak to the group about their experience if they wanted, and to write something if they wanted. I did not record the spoken responses. Here are some of the written ones.<sup>7</sup>

Initial sequence of hands on – gradual inviting of the breath throughout my body until in sitting there was a much fuller sensation of breath in my body – more pleasurable, easier to sit (AG 1 May 04).

First exercise: hands on different body areas. Aaghh!! The very first position! lower belly: stretch-marked skin, 2 operations: it's an uncomfortable place for me to touch. Intensity, emotions whirl, breath becomes faster & more shallow (BC 1 May 04).

I've been doing a lot of breath work in yoga & pilates. Breath very accessible. Found it hard not to control the breath. Just allow. Breath started to feel too contained in my frame – wanted to breathe further – outside my body. Just perceive. Don't desire. Yawned a lot – eyes watering – tired – dizzy – starting to move into a more meditative state. Lots of movement perception everywhere I put my hands (OP 1 May 04).

The first thing I note is how varied these responses are. In part this simply reflects individual differences – all participants bring their own assumptions, understandings, and backgrounds, to the work, and this is reflected in their written responses. However it also reflects how Middendorf breathwork is concerned with subjective response as a

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<sup>7</sup> I present journal extracts as they were written, retaining the original abbreviations, punctuation, and underlining. Anything not in the original journal is included in square brackets, so an ellipsis in square brackets is mine, without brackets is original. Where there were illustrations I have referred to these in square brackets also. The initials I have used do not refer to people's real names, but are consistent so that each set refers to one person. My own journal entries are referred to as 'journal' with the appropriate date and are in italics.

source of meaning, which speaks to the methodology of this part of the project.

In his review of Roland Pelias' *A methodology of the heart* (2004), Robert Faux draws on Michael Crotty's (2003) explanation of subjectivism as a research approach 'most often emphasised in postmodern, structuralist, and post-structuralist thinking' because:

from the structuralist stance any meaning an object of research comes to have arises not from the object but, rather, is imposed upon it by the subject (i.e. researcher). Hence, the subject is the meaning maker, and whatever meaning is imposed may come from a seemingly endless source of experiences (Faux 2005, 2).

Faux contrasts subjective research with 'positivistic' research:

The subjectivist stance to research is clearly more holistic in contrast to the fragmentation and reductionism often practiced in positivistic research. A further critical distinction can be made between these two approaches. Positivistic research seeks to find regularities and consistencies in nature, and to establish laws to account for these regularities and consistencies, whereas subjectivist research embraces irregularities and inconsistencies. Instead of seeking merely a single interpretation of a phenomenon as in positivistic research, the subjectivist seeks multiple interpretations (2005, 3).

The group workshop part of this project clearly falls into the subjectivist side of Faux's divide. But I want to note that it does so ambiguously. The subtitle of Middendorf's *The perceptible breath is a breathing science*, and she writes:

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To let the breath come, let it go, and wait until it comes back on its own is to perceive the unconscious function of the breath within its laws (1990, back cover).

In other words, as well as being concerned with individual response, Middendorf breathwork also seeks to find regularities and establish laws to account for these. In the breathwork training in Berkeley these 'laws' are called 'principles', acknowledging that they have a different status from laws such as the law of gravity.<sup>8</sup>

Personally I am drawn to these principles. They offer me the security of an interpretative framework, a way of ordering the vast array of experiences, each of which is different. At the same time they free me both to acknowledge that there are differences as well as regularities, and to appreciate what these differences are and what they might mean. I am reminded of Shigehisa Kuriyama's poetic observation:

A vast chasm gapes between the inescapably limited scope of human awareness in any given era at any given place and the unknowable boundless plenitude of life's manifestations (1999, 272).

Looking more closely at the individual responses, AG<sup>9</sup> found a 'gradual inviting of the breath throughout my body until in sitting there was a much fuller sensation of breath in my body'. This is the sort of response I expected from this first sequence.

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<sup>8</sup> I began to draw up a list of these principles based on my experiences in the training and on discussions with the teachers in Berkeley. It became clear that there had been no attempt to formalise these principles, and there was not always agreement about what constituted a principle and what was an 'experiential possibility'. I have included the list as Appendix K.

<sup>9</sup> AG has over twenty-five years of experience in movement performance and has taught both specific skills and experiential and expressive work for many years. She came just to this workshop.

By the time of this first large workshop I was well acquainted with the Middendorf breathwork principle that breath, presence, and sensation come together when breath is allowed to come and go on its own. Much of the group work is built around this principle, often in combination with other principles. In the first segment of the breathwork training Jürg Roffler, director of the Middendorf Institute for Breathexperience in Berkeley, said that it was possible to enter the work in any of three ways suggested by this principle. We could start with breath, with presence, or with sensation. When we begin with breath, our presence is drawn to the sensations of the movement of our body walls with breath. When we bring our presence to some part of our body and wait there, breath and sensation are invited. When we begin with sensation, such as through stimulation by tapping or stroking, presence and breath are invited.

This first 'offer' is an example of beginning with presence (supported by sensation through touch). Since this first workshop I have attended many more segments of training in the breathwork in Berkeley, and I now recognise this offer as a difficult one for those unaccustomed to perceiving sensation in their bodies. But all the participants in this workshop had some experience of perceiving their bodily sensations, so it suited this group.

In the light of the principle of breath, sensation, and presence coming together, then, AG's response of finding a much fuller sense of breath in her body at the end is to be expected.

By contrast, BC<sup>10</sup> was 'confronted' by her bodily history: 'stretch-marked skin, 2 operations: it's an uncomfortable place for me to touch'.

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<sup>10</sup> BC is a musician, singer, and vocal improviser who has also performed for over twenty-five years. She has an extensive background in yoga and in swimming, both of

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Then she writes: 'Intensity, emotions whirl, breath becomes faster & more shallow'. Here is a clear statement of a breath response that most people will be familiar with – the 'shortness' of breath associated with anxiety, fear, uncomfortable emotions.

At the beginning of the second large workshop on the following day I did not use this same sequence but rather invited people to bring their attention to their breath and how it moved their bodies. BC wrote:

In bringing my attention to my breath, my awareness is drawn to those things which inhibit the clarity of my observation of breath

- \* pain or discomfort in specific parts of my body
- \* areas which are scarred or damaged (lower belly)
- \* the consequential emotional uprisings, or memories which arise (BC 2 May 04).

This is similar to her response on Saturday, but has a sense of detachment, being without the 'Aaghh'. BC identifies the emotions associated with the pain and damage to her lower abdomen as following, consequent to, her attention being drawn there. The question of the relation of emotion to breath and body arose often in the workshops, partly because emotions of all sorts arose in the workshops. Working closely with one's body in this way is inherently emotional. For all that the OED defines emotion as a 'mental "feeling" or "affection" ... as distinguished from cognitive or volitional states of consciousness', emotions often arise in attending to bodily sensation, almost as if they have been 'stored' in particular places and are stirred by attention there.

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which she regularly practises with a focus on breath. BC came to the first two workshops.

I find places of resistance at my middle back – pockets of sadness (LC 20 June 04).<sup>11</sup>

Or, as BC expresses, they come with the memory of trauma inflicted on those places.

Middendorf breathwork does not have a primary orientation to emotion, nor does it 'reject' emotion. When strong emotion has come up for people in the training Jürg Roffler usually asks, can you stay with the emotion and the sensation of the movement of breath?

OP's<sup>12</sup> response to the first sequence notes difficulty in allowing her breath, a desire to breathe further ('outside my body'), an admonition to herself to perceive, not to desire, much yawning, the beginnings of a meditative state, and a lot of movement perception. All of these are possible points of departure for further discussion, but I will take allowing.

### Letting breath come & go on its own

My first offer was designed to introduce the central practices in Middendorf breathwork: perceiving bodily movements body with breath while letting breath come and go on its own. In my experience most people can perceive the way their torsos widen with the inhalation and swing back with the exhalation either as soon as their attention is drawn to it or after a little practice. The capacity to perceive bodily movements with breath is a necessary skill, without which there is no

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<sup>11</sup> LC is a visual artist, an art therapist, and has performed as a vocal improviser. She has a regular yoga practice. She came to all series of workshops.

<sup>12</sup> OP is a singer and performer with ten years experience. She has many years experience teaching choirs, and explores breath through Vipassana meditation, yoga and pilates. She came to three early workshops and then four in the second series.

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Middendorf breathwork. That capacity becomes more refined with practice. It becomes possible to perceive more subtle breath movements and to sense such movement in more of the body.

Letting breath come and go on its own is more complex. Even those experienced in perceiving their bodily sensations can find this difficult, as OP's response indicates. Karlfried Dürckheim, whom Middendorf mentions as an influence in her preface to *The perceptible breath* (1990), learned about different approaches to breath in Japan, where he spent many years. He writes:

If you have tried to observe your natural breath and consciously perform the act of breathing, you will be astonished to see how your breath is suddenly and unnaturally disturbed by the very fact of its being put under observation. You have hardly regained composure when you notice how every single thought, image, or conscious feeling spoils its natural rhythm (1991 (1960), 31).

Charlotte Selver, whose 'Sensory Awareness' work has much in common with Middendorf breathwork, notes:

We are not teaching anybody how to breathe. In fact, the first thing (which often takes a great time to learn) is that a person who is finding out about breathing does not attempt to influence his breathing – the way he thinks it would be good. It is most difficult to bring into consciousness this function which is so much unconscious ... I agree that it's difficult to be so peaceful and undemanding that one would really be present in one's breathing activity – without influencing it – and just allow what comes to come, and what doesn't come not to come ... please do not think there is any such a thing as 'proper breathing' (Littlewood & Roche 2004, 92–3).



Larry Rosenberg writes about breath meditation, based on Buddha's 'Anapanasati Sutra', where breath is allowed to come and go on its own, as it is in Middendorf breathwork:

We're all breathing. The instruction is just to know that we are, not in an intellectual sense, but to be aware of the simple sensation, the in-breath and the out-breath. Even in this first instruction, we are learning something extremely important, to allow the breathing to follow its own nature, to breathe itself. We are not trying to make the breath deep or keep it shallow. We are seeing how it is. That flies in the face of our lifelong conditioning to control, direct, and orchestrate everything. We're terrified of chaos, afraid that if we don't keep things in their place they will fall apart. Most of us are quite good at controlling, and what we'd really like is to be even better at it. Our tendency is to ride the breath, push it along, help it out, especially when we hear that the breath is part of this marvellous sutra, that it is the life force itself and can lead us to enlightenment. All that is like a clarion call to the ego, which begins to tell the breath how to be. We hear that a deep breath relaxes the body and figure that an accomplished meditator will be breathing deeply all the time, so – sometimes very subtly – we try to make the breath a little deeper. That isn't the instruction. The instruction is to let it be, to surrender to the breathing (2004, 20–21).

I include this long citation from Rosenberg because it expresses some of the complexity of allowing breath, and it describes so well my own early experience of extending my breath (see 'Early experiences', pp.4–6), making it deeper and slower without being fully conscious that I was doing that.

In all these citations allowing breath to come and go on its own is acknowledged as difficult but also as an important first step in 'finding out about breathing'. This is a far cry from instructions to control,

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lengthen, or deepen one's breath, or to inhale or exhale *now* as is common in many Western body practices.

The ability to let breath come and go on its own is of a different order from that of perceiving sensation. A strange ability, I could say, the ability not to interfere, the ability to allow, to receive, to surrender to, breath. These are all words used in Middendorf breathwork training around this aspect of the work. With further experience of this breathwork it is possible to say, 'I feel like I am not able to let my breath come and go on its own today. I sense I am pulling at the end of my inhalation'. I could say that Middendorf breathwork has a goal or ideal of developing the capacity to let breath come and go on its own. It is on the journey towards this goal that I discover what inhibits me from allowing breath to come and go on its own. These can be many and varied physical, psychological, and/or emotional factors. I discover what it is first in experience, in sensation, and later I make sense of it to myself, I integrate it, in language.

My experience keeps reshaping my understanding of 'breath movement' and of 'letting breath come and go on its own', which in turn affects my experience. This is part of the living knowledge of the work, which is not readily contained by the categories, definitions, and descriptions of language, because they are in some degree constantly rewritten for me in my breath experience. I think I know the meaning of a phrase such as 'letting breath come and go on its own' and then it transmutes. This opens me to difference, to the possibility that another person's understanding of the phrase may differ from or coalesce with mine over time. This can promote listening and tolerance rather than an insistence on sameness, including that repetition of an exercise bring the same result. It values 'not knowing', openness to discovery, to the new. It opens the way for a non-linear growth or development. Of

course such outcomes are not guaranteed; no doubt it is possible to become egotistically involved in one's ability to let breath come and go.

## Stretching

Returning to the workshop, after the first sequence I offered some free-form stretching, inviting people to stretch in any way that was pleasurable for them. Middendorf devotes a section of her book to stretching. She writes:

If you have once watched a dog stretching, you might have enjoyed seeing it get longer and longer! We can deal with our body in a similar way: when we stretch, like an animal spontaneously we can feel very clearly that we can stretch ourselves right out on all sides into the room surrounding us. It does not matter whether you are lying down, sitting or standing up – after perceiving the stretch you will feel very well. And then, very often, you will start to yawn, which also is a way of stretching (pharyngeal cavity, soft palate). You will soon be aware that your body inhales during stretching without your help (1990, 53).

The spontaneous stretching that Middendorf is referring to is known in some contexts as 'pandiculation'. Fraser (1989) describes pandiculation as a sign of well-being in animals, noting that it is absent in all forms of general illness. Hanna suggests that pandiculation enlivens the sensorimotor nervous system. He writes:

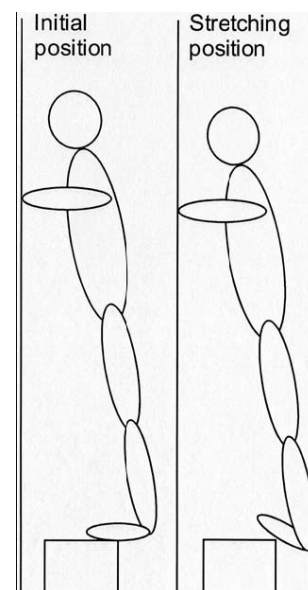


Pandiculation is the name given to an action pattern that occurs generally throughout the vertebrate kingdom. It is a sensory-motor action used by animals to arouse the voluntary cortex by making a strong voluntary muscle contraction in order to feed back an equally

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strong sensory stimulation to the motor neurons. It is a way of 'waking up' the sensory-motor cortex (1990).

Rougier et al (2006) investigated the effects of the stretch shown to the right on a measure of the capacity to maintain upright stance in healthy adults. They found an improvement in that capacity, and conclude that 'the most likely effect of the prior muscular stretching could lie in an enhanced sensitivity of the central nervous system for the somatosensory inputs' (2006, 382–3). This seems to be the same thing as Hanna says. Stretching, we could say, establishes or enhances receptivity.



For a long time now stretching has been taught as part of sports, usually with a belief that stretching will 'warm up' muscles, reducing soreness and the likelihood of injury. In recent times the reasons for stretching have come into question. Herbert and Gabriel (2002) review the literature on the effects of stretching on muscle soreness and injury. They conclude:

Stretching before or after exercising does not confer protection from muscle soreness. Stretching before exercising does not seem to confer a practically useful reduction in the risk of injury, but the generality of this finding needs testing. Insufficient research has been done with which to determine the effects of stretching on sporting performance (2002, 469).

Stretching in Middendorf breathwork has more in common with pandiculation, the enlivening of the sensorimotor nervous system, and the awakening of the organism than it does with a wish to 'warm up' muscles. As Middendorf indicates in the quote above, stretching is

connected with the sense that the body can 'breathe itself'. The emphasis is on sensory awareness, which does not always seem to be the case in other situations where stretching is used:

I was able to stretch my mid section fully, meaningfully while perceiving breath, and easily extending it to legs & feet. With that came circulation, warmth to feet too (GI<sup>13</sup> 7 August 04).

Combining breath awareness with stretching, which I could characterise as the addition of mindfulness, brings a meaning to the stretching here.

Despite the clear connection of pandiculation with yawning, in the literature I have not found any formal attention paid to the connection of stretching with inhalation that Middendorf mentions in the citation above. When I searched the database SPORTDiscus (20.11.2006) for 'stretch' there were 1534 results. When I searched for 'breath' there were 597 results. When I searched for 'stretch' *and* 'breath' there were no results. There is nothing in the literature to suggest that the world of sports and sports medicine makes any connection between stretching and breath. But in my experience with Middendorf breathwork everyone quickly recognises that inhalation accompanies a stretch, and most people report feeling better after a short session of stretching and releasing.

When he was conducting workshops in Australia Dieter Gebel illustrated the difference between stretching and 'over-stretching' by asking people to stretch up toward the ceiling, and a little bit more, and a little bit more, and to notice what had happened with their breath. Most people find under these circumstances that their breath comes in

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<sup>13</sup> GI is an actor who also has a background in chanting.

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as they stretch upwards, but as they hold the stretch their breath no longer flows. Of course eventually it will, and it is possible quite quickly to learn how to hold a stretch and allow breath to come and go, but the initial sense that holding the stretch means holding the breath is strong. Dieter says 'stretch and let', meaning stretch and then let the stretch go. At one point in this part of my workshop I asked everyone to reach or stretch up towards the ceiling in this 'overstretching' way.

Some responses to the stretching:

Free form stretch: Much greater movement in breath. Feeling of springiness in my lungs/body (OP 1 May 04).

Reaching: Inhalation with stretch, holding with suspension of movement, exhale on release of stretch. Warm through limbs, more solidity in sensation (AS 1 May 04).<sup>14</sup>

In forward & back arm stretches was amazed to discover that 'difficult stretches' meant I held my breath. Otherwise I took an inhale on a stretch (MA 1 May 04).<sup>15</sup>

When I began compiling a list of Middendorf breathwork principles I listed first 'stretching brings an inhalation' because that seemed an obvious beginning to me. Almost all workshops in the training have begun with a 'check-in' with the breath and then some stretching and

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<sup>14</sup> AS is a trained actor with lots of experience in movement work – Pisk, Feldenkrais, Mask, and Biomechanics – and voice training à la Berry and Linklater. AS is also experienced in meditation, and in Stanislav Grof's 'Holotropic Breathwork', which is based on maintaining a particular pattern with the breath rather than letting it come and go on its own. He has some experience in yoga and qi gung. He came to this one workshop.

<sup>15</sup> MA is an experienced actor and teacher with a long-term interest in yoga. She came to five workshops in the first series.

stimulation to 'invite' more breath. My experience was usually that stretching was accompanied by inhalation unless I stretched too long.

Then I realised that stretching creates sensation, and I began to think of 'stretching brings an inhalation' as a special case of the principle I stated earlier, that breath, presence, and sensation come together when breath is allowed to come and go on its own. When I discussed my first attempt at a list of principles with Jürg Roffler, he suggested that 'stretching brings an inhalation' is an experiential possibility, not a principle, because stretching can also be accompanied by exhalation under some circumstances. Indeed I have experienced this.

In the early workshops of my breathwork training I was encouraged to stretch and then afterwards sit and sense what, if anything, had changed in my awareness of body and breath. Later on we were encouraged to have this breath awareness all the time, from the beginning of stretching right through.

Before I began my stretch I perceived the breath low in my belly region, below the navel in the power centre. No breath in upper chest, throat, front of shoulders. The moment I put my hands there, I felt a v. gentle rising & falling. Was my breath there before I put my hands there? Don't know. My breathing even approx 3 secs in & 3 secs out with a pause at the end of the outbreath. After the stretch, my breath again mainly in power centre but now broadened out & back in a triangle shape (SA 7 August 04).<sup>16</sup>

It is so wonderful when I hear & perceive the part of my body that needs my awareness and I put my attention there & then allow the rest of my body to respond from this need. I get surprised by the form & shape my

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<sup>16</sup> SA is an experienced actor, director and teacher of acting. She came to the first large workshop and then five of the second stage workshops.

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body takes and amazed, the need just to stretch the hip joint that my whole body can & will be a part of this need. So from one point there is a ripple effect through the whole body if I allow this (FL 7 December 04).<sup>17</sup>

As FL indicates in this excerpt, stretching in the breathwork is not a mindless automatic sort of action but can be guided by what one's body seems to be calling for in one particular area, and then the whole body can benefit.

### Foot tapping & stroking

Next in the workshop I offered foot tapping, stroking and holding in the same way I did in the introduction ('Try this 2', p.23), beginning with one foot, sensing the effect, then going to the other.

The simplicity of feeling the feet had profound effect on ease of being & particularly a deep warmth through my hands & back (AG 1 May 04).

Stroking Feet R Foot: Warmth & a sense of flow spreads up my right leg to the whole right side of my body. L Foot: Space comes into my body, distorting body image. Sensations become unclear, disappear in some body parts. Clear space & awareness, but empty of sensation at times in some areas (AS 1 May 04).

Connection to the 'lower space', the feet, legs and pelvic area, is regarded as important in Middendorf breathwork, as in many other somatic bodies of work. In my experience, teachers of the work usually spend some time working with the lower space before the middle or

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<sup>17</sup> FL undertook classical singing training when she was younger. She came to all series of the workshops. She took part in most of the workshops that Dieter Gebel taught here in 2002 and 2003, and then in the first part of the breathwork training in Berlin, travelling there every three months just as I have been travelling to Berkeley.



upper. I mentioned earlier that these spaces are distinguished according to the qualities of breath predominantly found in them. In the understanding of Middendorf breathwork, breath in the lower space can be experienced as vital, instinctive, powerful, primal, animal-like, fundamental, basic. I often experience a sense of power when I am well connected to my lower space, and that is usually accompanied by an experience of lightness and ease in my whole body. AG's 'ease of being' may be an expression of this too.

Many people find a clear perception of change in sensation from this sequence with the feet. Often people report sensing their feet differently after attending to one foot. That foot may feel lighter, heavier, warmer, more spread across the floor. It may feel lower, even though one 'knows' otherwise, that both feet are in fact on the floor. AS mentions 'distorting body image', a feature that many people report in this sequence in particular, but also in general in Middendorf breathwork. Perceptions of enlargement and lengthening are most common, and when they apply to one side of the body and not the other, the overall sense is one of distortion.

Dieter Gebel often used this sequence with the feet early on in his sessions to help illustrate the difference between perceiving sensation and having ideas, images, or imaginings, and so to help point to what Middendorf breathwork was primarily concerned with – the sensations, not the thoughts or emotions.

### 'Feathering'

Next I offered 'feathering', a movement sequence frequently used in Middendorf breathwork to loosen and enliven the whole body. I demonstrated a gentle jiggling or bouncing of my whole body in

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standing, where my toes and the balls of my feet stay in contact with the ground and my heels come off the ground as I come up and they touch the ground lightly as I come down again. For me this action happens through the ankles. I let the jiggling come right through my body, so that my shoulders are lightly shaken and even my jaw can be affected. I shift my weight over one foot then the other. I let my breath come and go on its own. If my calves start to feel tight I stop feathering, shake them out a bit, then resume feathering. Only OP wrote a response:

Bouncing/jiggling one foot to the other. Loosen all parts. Fantastic in my jaw – strong sense of disengagement. Breath equally in the top of the lungs and the lower abdomen. Moving together (OP 1 May 04).

When she writes of her jaw having a 'strong sense of disengagement', I take OP to mean that it felt loose, released, rather than tight or held; not that it felt separate from her.

There were many more responses to this sequence on the following day:

Jiggling seems to open up pockets of my physical body – muscle holding lets go in parts and my breath rushes in to these spots – especially upper chest (MA 2 May 04).

Jiggling – gives rise to a widened back and similar 'potential' in the feet/toes, hands/fingers (HD 2 May 04).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> HD is a dancer with some experience in voice work within character and text explorations. She came to the first two days.

Jiggling – so enjoyable as a body experience. Breath awareness in the back, in the waist and upper hip area. Awareness of tissue, flesh, supporting/moving/yielding/creating the breath (BC 2 May 04).

Jiggling/bouncing from one foot to the other ... while standing, my hands were more warm, alive with tingling sensation. Sitting down, again found my attention going to my forearms and hands – tingling sensation. My lower abdomen far more flexible and available to my breath. Allowed a freedom – for my body to be available to my breath. Wanted to be more in my out breath, spend more time there (DT 2 May 04).<sup>19</sup>

On the one hand I can say that these are all ‘typical’ responses to feathering – it offers a gentle enlivening of the whole body, an invitation to release unnecessary holding and hence an opening for breath. On the other hand I can point to the individual detail and difference in the responses. MA notices how letting go of muscular holding allows breath to flow, particularly in her upper chest. HD refers to widening in her back and uses ‘potential’ as if to say that she could almost feel widening in her hands and feet too. BC finds enjoyment in the experiencing of her body in this. She senses breath movement in her back, waist and upper hips, and something of the complex interplay of body and breath where it is as if the body breathes and is breathed at the same time. DT is drawn to her hands, forearms, and lower abdomen. Her comment that she ‘wanted to be more in the out breath’ shows a capacity both to distinguish different elements of her breath cycle and to sense what they offer her.

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<sup>19</sup> DT is a performer and a Steiner teacher. She came to three workshops in the first series and to some of Dieter Gebel’s workshops.

## Being carried

In the breath training in Berkeley Jürg Roffler often began sessions with an invitation to 'let yourself be carried'. Middendorf writes about 'being carried',

Whenever you are lying on the floor (on your back, your stomach, on your right side or left side), you should *let* yourself be *carried*. If you do this, your entire body will become living, breathing, warm. You feel secure ... This will not happen if you flop on the floor. You then become heavy and the breathing movement will withdraw itself below the breast bone and the rest of the body will be hardly perceptible (1990, 129, italics in original).

It was with this in mind on the second day that I offered a 'sequence' of lying on the floor, contrasting the idea of 'being carried by the floor' with that of 'sinking into the floor'. The proposition that having one idea or other in mind while performing an action could affect the experience that follows is reminiscent of the grounds of ideokinesis, which I look at in some detail below (p.130ff). It suggests an indivisibility of body and mind, their inseparability, which is an important theme in this thesis. My body is organised in ways that run beneath my immediate conscious control. (I need only think of the many homeostatic mechanisms in my body, which I cannot and would not want to control.) Middendorf proposes in the citation above that if I have the idea of 'being carried' in my mind, my experience will be different from, richer than, if I just let myself flop.

In Berkeley this notion of being carried is extended to include sitting and standing. At the start of a beginners class Roffler introduces this idea, saying something like, 'let yourself be carried; sense the stool coming up to meet your sitzbones [he uses this German expression],

and the floor rising up to meet your feet'. By using such imagery he subverts or eludes the possibility of 'sinking down'. The ground rises to meet me, so I do not have to sink. I can rest and be carried. He suggests that this 'being carried' connects with 'allowing' breath to come and go on its own, and that both require a basic trust (in one's body, and, by extension, in the world).

I asked people to lie down, to sense where their bodies met the floor, and to imagine the floor rising up to meet them and carry them. After a while I asked them to imagine sinking into the floor and to notice what difference this made to their experience, and later come back to being carried. Then I invited them to keep the idea of being carried as they came to sitting on their stools. Here are some responses:

Being carried by the floor – Allowed my breath to flow harmoniously – like a pendulum swinging. Balance between the inner and outer breath.  
Sinking into the floor – my body again wanted to spend more time in the outer breath. Concave feeling – continuation of the sinking – funny sensation of feeling a freedom. Back to being carried – Expansion. Being more active in the breath inwards my body felt like it was projected forward. The breath in allows me to connect with the outer.  
While getting up to my stool – Sense of presence – present in my fingers which are reaching, picking up the stool. Sense of inner stillness – yet the pendulum extends out into the world – (picking up the stool) – then connects with the inner – my wonderful sense of harmony. Makes me aware of my shoulders which are not readily receiving my breath (DT 2 May 04).

Being carried – emotional meaning – people carried/carrying me ~ my breath hesitant ~ stop start breath  
Sinking into floor ~ going to sleep/oblivion total relaxation with no awareness (MA 2 May 04)

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Being carried – my heels most easily experienced & calves resisted the invitation. Breath light, fine, thin.

Sinking – I felt heavier, it is a 'grosser' instruction. Breath is thick, heavier, shorter.

Sitting on chair – 'My arms know what to do'. Gorgeous sensation, that the arms are at ease, without a job description or action to perform. This seems to be related to the comfort of the breath, its ease, but I'm not exactly sure what that is specifically (BC 2 May 04).

For a long while I thought of the comfort or ease of my breath in terms of whether or not I was doing something muscular in my body that might be restricting the movement of breath. Now I recognise that this is oversimplified, that thoughts and emotions play a part too.

Sometimes I experience things the other way around – I find ease in my breath that seems to allow for or create ease in my body.

Being 'carried' – I react with some discomfort to the idea, but feel a breath awareness spread from my skin in touch with the mat, to & thru the back of my body. 'Sinking' feels more allowable and familiar, and seems to encourage a deeper, slower breath. I move to sitting & have a strange experience of shrinking – I feel that I've become quite small, particularly from the waist up – my head feels tiny (LC 2 May 04).

Notion of being carried deepened my breath. Releasing on the out breath. Sinking beneath I felt like I went to a dark place that I was part of the dark place (landscape). Matter merging. On returning to the surface the notion of being carried felt like a deep sadness (deep ... sort of muscular deep ... fundamental ... um). Breath felt connected and (profound?) as I got back on the stool. I then experience a 'shimmering'. Sort of like my central nervous system was releasing or expressing something (OP 2 May 04).

This piece from OP speaks of the depth and complexity of some of people's experiences in the workshops, and the difficulty of finding the words to adequately match the experience, which in this case seems to be of some fundamental change.

Being carried gave me an awareness of the vertical breath movement & a clear perception of the alignment of my body especially the hips. My body in and out of alignment.

Sinking into the ground seemed to take the breath movement into a horizontal direction. Also the presence & awareness of back was stronger. Carried presence more centred in body. Sinking presence more in back (FL 2 May 04).

FL's 'breath awareness' is clear in the way she distinguishes between the vertical and horizontal direction of breath movement and her awareness of 'presence'.

There are certainly different experiences reported for 'being carried' and 'sinking into'. My proposal of 'sinking into', which some people are familiar with, is different from Middendorf's description of 'flopping'. A number of responses note a tendency to sink into unconsciousness with 'sinking into'. The invitation to 'be carried' does seem to encourage a bodily organization that provides for more ease. I find this in my own practice. If I can let myself be carried then I find it much easier to bring all of my attention, my presence, to perceiving the movement of breath.

### Slow spinal roll & sideways roll

Returning to the first workshop, next I offered a slow spinal roll from standing, allowing the head to slowly roll forward and down towards the ground, letting the spine be included in the movement, letting the knees bend as needed. I asked participants to take the spinal roll as far as

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they were comfortable and then slowly come back up, not co-ordinating the movement with breath, but letting breath come and go on its own and staying aware of their breath movements, noticing whether these changed during the roll.

After a rest I offered a standing, 'sideways' spinal roll, where the head first tilts to one side and the spine follows into a sideways bend as far as is comfortable. Then the upper body swings across to the other side and comes slowly up that side, the neck and head coming up last.

Spinal rolls have been a feature of the training in Berkeley. I recall the 'slow spinal roll' from early in the first segment, and I remember finding my breathing becoming laboured with the difficulty of it. Now I find the same 'exercise' much easier and I enjoy how my breath seems to be drawn to the part of my spine that is stretched in each moment of the roll. The idea that a flexible spine promotes good health seems self-evident given that it is the conduit for the sensorimotor nervous system.

In the breathwork training spinal rolls are regarded as having an effect on the whole body – an integrating effect in that they bring together all the inner spaces. Sometimes after a slow one we were invited to do some faster ones. Sometimes we added a hum. Sometimes at the lowest part of the roll we are invited to add a lowering of the sacrum, possibly going into a squat.

The Spinal Roll – that brings me the horizontal breath in the upper space – and the head and neck finally are able to unroll with the breath, and legs free further. No don't let the weight of the head take me down – let the breath lead me – otherwise it drags, is without lightness and without the whole. Gravity is not presence.



The Sideways Circle Only a tad in each direction as that's all I want to start – 'presence' yes = suit myself. Eventually further into the circle – then eventually a discovery of being unable to come up without going down a bit as the breath perception in the whole and the 'holdings' of knees, sacrum was highlighted – the loss of presence and breath calling me back – or more the sense the exhale wanted to find my feet, that the movement, if I follow the breath – and surrender to it, went in the opposite direction to my intended circling. To not override the breath with my movement intention was great. It let me perceive my body more (KB 1 May 04).<sup>20</sup>

I take it from KB's remarks that my instructions for the spinal roll included 'let the weight of your head take you down'. Now I would not refer to the weight of the head, because I agree with KB that such an instruction can act against a sense of lightness.

Slow, conscious spinal roll: Old injury in left shoulder ouch. Pain referring in to left elbow. Breathing into it to release. Enjoying observing breath travelling in to different areas in my back.

Sideways Roll: Much more slowly than I've done before. Sense of the breath travelling in to my hips. One lung closing as the other opened. Afterwards standing – much more movement in my sternum. Sitting. Free movement in my sacrum (OP 1 May 04).

OP's comment, 'Breathing into it to release', is indicative that the 'healing power' of breath is recognised in various traditions. From the perspective of Middendorf breathwork, the active intention implied in that phrase 'breathing into' is contrary to letting breath come and go on

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<sup>20</sup> KB has long had a practice of her own in body, voice, and movement, in which 'presence' is a particularly important feature. She attended most of Dieter Gebel's workshops, and had undertaken two segments of Middendorf breathwork training in Berkeley at the time of this workshop, so she is relatively experienced in the breathwork. She came to almost all the workshops in all series.

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its own. Of course OP may not have been so active. The Middendorf way would be to invite or allow breath into it, and the invitation could be through movement, touch, or presence.

Sideways spinal roll, I find myself being moved by the breath. I am amused by this, as it moves me differently to where my mind thinks I should go. I don't move until the breath does it – literally moves me. But I have to go very slow to remain connected to this. I feel immense relief, as if I have stopped fighting myself (LC 1 May 04).

LC's response expresses the way there can be a contradiction between how I think my body 'should' respond and how my body actually does respond; that this can be a 'fight', and that it can be a great relief to let go of the 'should' and, as Jürg Roffler said in one of the training workshops, 'love what is'. The relief, I suspect, comes from getting in touch with a source of 'knowing' about one's body from within the body itself. In my experience that inner source has a sense of certainty about it – it just feels right.

Spinal Rolls Forward – breath seem[s] to become more rhythmic.

Sideways – breath becomes agitated. Don't know why. Contractions in back & along spine. At back of skull (AS 1 May 04).

Intrigued by what was happening with the breath in the slow lean to the side – drop down – up the other side exercise – surprised by feeling 'out of breath' on every rise up, despite feeling relaxed with even, steady breath as I was doing the cycle of moves. If I was holding my breath I couldn't tell! and I wasn't doing the cycle on one inhalation to go with the moves so – who knows? (HD 1 May 04).

Spinal Roll: lovely to spend a few minutes on it, exploring different parts of my spine. This exercise was most difficult for me in terms of

observing anything in detail about my breath. There was an ongoing sense of 'my friend the breath, my trusty good friend', as a tangible presence throughout my whole torso, encased in a moving bone, muscle, tissue body.

Sideways roll: Breath was tighter, less free. I felt disoriented & a little dizzy at the end of each movement. Also: appearing & disappearing then reappearing: a feeling that the breath was the engine, driving the movement, that the breath was the source of the movement. This snapped on & off as a presence, and I was only aware it had gone when it reappeared again (BC 1 May 04).

spinal roll, a fern, or a proton or electron [sketch here] a sense of the space my breath visits as a bubble of air (like a spirit level) rolling down into my body as I rolled down, clearly passing through



upper, middle & into lower, more rapid when unrolling to standing. my back, anterior surface of my spine, felt like it was the runway for the breath bubble to run. my front was very soft and protected by the back of me. could feel my breath clearly when eg. my head/chin came to rest on my chest, or my lower belly pressing on my thighs, and somewhere in the middle also, the pressing together (by way of weight not force) of parts made the movement of my breath very evident. Connection to an ATM<sup>21</sup> session called paradoxical breathing, moving a ball of air up & down inside the thorax (JM 1 May 04).<sup>22</sup>

Again there is a wealth of individual detail in these four responses. The first three share a sense of stress from the sideways roll – breath was 'agitated' or 'tight, less free', and one felt 'out of breath'. In these

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<sup>21</sup> ATM is 'Awareness through movement', the name Moshe Feldenkrais gave to his work.

<sup>22</sup> JM has studied anatomy in massage training as well as Feldenkrais movement work, so uses anatomical phrases like 'anterior surface'. She came to six workshops in the first series and three in the second.

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extracts JM is the only one who refers to 'my breath'. The others use 'the breath', one 'my friend, the breath', giving a sense of separation from it: breath moves me, so I feel that it is independent from me; it continues on whether or not I pay attention to it.

### Paired back tapping

We finished the first part of this session with 'paired back tapping'. One member of the pair sits with her feet wider apart than normal and leans forward, resting her elbows just above her knees, letting her head hang. The other taps her partner's sacrum for a minute or so, finding an intensity that suits her partner, then strokes the area above the sacrum and below the ribs, strokes from the spine out to the sides four or five times, taps the back of the ribs, shoulders and upper arms more or less gently, again with advice from her partner about the intensity, for a minute or two, and finishes by stroking two or three times down each side of the spine from the shoulders to the sacrum. Then the sitting partner rolls slowly back up to normal sitting and takes a few breath cycles to perceive what effect, if any, this has had on her perceptions of her breath and body. The two reverse roles and afterwards speak together about their experiences.

Back Pommel: Back opens up again so that the breath can become subtle & light, almost as if there's no need to breathe. Sense of simplicity, ease (AS 1 May 04).

This reflects my own experience of moments when I can allow my breath to come and go on its own. There is no 'need to breathe' – breath will happen on its own. At those moments I experience ease, lightness, simplicity.

After tapping sacrum sequence I became aware of my back moving with my breath, my ribs rotating in their joints on the vertebrae hinging as my ribs expanded with inhalation. Yum. Sense of being taller in sitting, very comfortable, very easy. Front felt more open, which usually is accompanied by a slight feeling of vulnerability for me, but that is not present this afternoon. Feels safe. Feels good (JM 1 May 04).

Such detail! I have not experienced for myself my ribs rotating in their joints on the vertebrae.

Back massage – knocking on sacrum etc. Yum yum yum yum yum!  
Breath is free, back is open (BC 1 May 04).

After the partner rub as I was sitting up, felt a lovely sensation of the vertical spine and the breath in a neat column parallel with the spine (HD 1 May 04).

[I could] tell afterward that I was sitting straighter, that the central area of my back which often feels disengaged & weak had grown leggo [sic] pieces that fit the whole lot back together how it should be & was when I was a child (OP 1 May 04).

This sequence often seems to bring much pleasure, evident in these reports, along with increased sensation and awareness in the back.

### Rest break

With each sequence I encouraged people to let breath come and go on its own, and afterwards to sit with their eyes closed and resonate – sense what, if anything, had changed, especially with their breath movement, as a result of what they had done. We rested, talked, and

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wrote in between the different 'exercises'. MA wrote during the rest break:

Beginning to conceive of the connection between physical movement & breath – so far: that they (breath & movement) touch each other. Hadn't perceived that before: the physical sensation of it. Also connection between pain & breath: breath stops when pain sensed, in eg back rolls/side rolls (MA 1 May 04).

Mabel Todd, from whose work ideokinesis stems, draws attention to the connection of breathing and movement in *The thinking body*, first published in 1937. She looks at how the forces acting on life forms on land are different from those in the water, noting how the need to breathe air instead of water resulted in the development of lungs, and how the need to move about on the land resulted in various adaptations including the development of limbs:

The apparatus for locomotion and breathing, which appeared simultaneously in the racial pattern as vertebrates came onto the land, continue to be closely associated in the growth of individual organisms and in their functions. They are intimately related through mechanical and nervous tie-ups between appendicular and respiratory structures, also between both these and the cardiovascular system by which blood is conveyed from heart to lungs for aerating and back to the heart with its load of oxygen. And in man, the particular parts of the skeleton and musculature which operate to maintain the spinal curves and to keep the trunk erect are most closely associated with the bony and muscular parts involved in breathing (1968 (1937), 10).

MA's phrase 'they touch each other' is most appropriate. MA also raises the issue of pain with her discovery of how her breath stops when she is in pain. In the breathwork training when someone reports

pain Roffler tends to offer a breath and movement sequence that specifically includes the part of the body where the pain is reported. He will ask the person in pain to orient to the sensations of the movement of breath rather than to the pain, and particularly to try to continue to allow breath to come and go on its own. This is because an orientation to the pain, and therefore to trying to 'fix' it, is regarded as an invitation to try to 'do' something with breath rather than to let it come and go on its own.

One of the principles of Middendorf breathwork is that when one approaches breath with full presence and participation, letting it come and go on its own, it can connect one to a source within that provides what is needed for one's individual life processes to stay in balance. This is what Middendorf practitioners refer to as the 'somatic intelligence' of every cell of the body. If I stay connected with my breath, which orients to wholeness, and allow it to come and go on its own, then I create the conditions for my body to balance itself. This is what I regard as the central 'claim' of Middendorf breathwork, and I return to it in detail below (see 'Somatic intelligence', p.217).

I discovered through the breath training that as I became more sensitive to the movement of my body with breath so could I sense more of my body at the same time. Eventually I could receive my inhalation all over, throughout my body, all at once. This experience of wholeness with and through my breath is usually pleasurable, joyful, and keeps me coming back for more.

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Later in the workshop series I spoke of this approach of orienting to breath movement rather than the pain when RB<sup>23</sup> reported some pain in her chest. Afterwards she wrote:

When began focussing on where breath is held, felt it in chest – something forced, something held, something trying, something blocked. When focussed on other parts of body & breath in those areas, found that the sensation in the chest eased – the sensation was less acute – feeling more flow of breath – seemingly just by changing the focus & quality of attention – more letting it be, quietly observing and exploring (RB 7 August 04).

HD also wrote during the rest break:

After noticing how shallow my breath was at the start of the day it feels to be in a comfortable place at the end of this first session – the body is more energised and ‘awake’ – sensitised to its surroundings and alert but also relaxed – and I do feel very aware of my breathing without in any way needing to contrive inhalation/exhalation patterns to maintain the sense of well-being or equilibrium (HD 1 May 04).

A dancer by background, HD shifts from ‘my breath’ to ‘the body’, showing what I think of as a particularly ‘dancerly’ relationship to her own body – both perceptive and abstracted. She seems well attuned to the concept of allowing breath to come and go on its own.

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<sup>23</sup> RB is an experienced dance/movement performer and creative arts therapist with a special interest in T'ai Chi. She came to some of Dieter Gebel's workshops, attended six workshops in the first series and the weekend in the second series.



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A human being is only breath and shadow  
(Sophocles, *Ajax*, l.13)

After a half-hour break we began the second part of the first large workshop by returning to bodily sensation, a focus on contact with the stool, and then explored some other aspects of Middendorf breathwork.

### Rocking & circling on sit-bones

I asked people to tap all over their body as gently or vigorously as they liked, then to resonate. Next for a while, sitting, we rolled off the back of the sit-bones and returned to centre, then forward and returning to centre for a while, then combining the two and eventually settling at what felt like centre to resonate. We followed with circling around the sit-bones.

Circling the pelvis on chair was first time I felt emotion in this work.

Rocking back over sit bones, it was easiest in inhale, rocking forward, exhale (MA 1 May 04)

Into the back space from the sacrum/lumbar resonated regularly felt it uprising breath through spine. Coming f/w on sitbones – eyes horizontal, felt breath movement lower space pubic bone, perineum but also front of genitals right around (KB 1 May 04).

Circling pelvis: Brings a sense of peace, expanse & ground in sensations. Heat in hara, warm fluid feeling filling the belly (AS 1 May 04).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'Hara' is the Japanese word for belly, occurring in 'hara-kiri' ('belly cutting'), a ritual form of suicide by disembowelment. More commonly, in yoga and martial arts

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Then later on = pelvic circles & then hands on sacrum & lower belly – I go to a more intense place, I feel tense, breathing is tense & faster (BC 1 May 04).

Rolling back to stretch – caused a real heating of my body. Rolling back & forward – realising the profound use of the spinal column. Circling around sitzbones – aware of the nature of my perception. What I perceive is related to some kind of body ‘politics’ i.e. almost unconsciously I allow my attention (most often) to be ‘pin-pointed’ rather than diffuse or holistic. Just managed to glimpse what I wasn’t paying attention to (AG 1 May 04).

These two sequences following the tapping all over made for an intense focus on the pelvis. This brought some emotional response for MA and again for BC like at the start of the first session. KB notes an uprising breath through her spine, which illustrates the Middendorf breathwork principle that inhalation and exhalation complement one another with regard to space and direction or connection. In this case, an inhalation received in the lower space (pelvis, lower abdomen, legs, feet) tends to bring an uprising exhalation.

AS and AG both note sensations of warmth, and AG goes on to note that her perception is ‘almost unconsciously’ allowed to be pinpointed. The idea of ‘diffuse or holistic’ attention rather than ‘pin-pointed’ is an important one in Middendorf breathwork. Teachers in Middendorf breathwork training in Berkeley use the word ‘presence’ to integrate holistic attention with the more concentrated or focused kind. This notion of presence is central to the breathwork.

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practices deriving from Japan, ‘hara’ is the centre of the lower part of the body, the centre of power.

## Attention & presence

In 'Talking minds' (2005), Maria Carozzi addresses the issue of how attention is trained. She argues that the way scholars are formed leads them to make uncritical assumptions about their own work, including that discourse has an extra-corporeal character. Carozzi examines the many ways in which evidence of corporeality is excluded in scholastic formation, beginning with school. She notes:

In the first place, school education contributes to the separation of discourse from the rest of the body by training attention. In school rituals, the teacher's instructions and questions call the attention towards what he/she is saying or is writing on the board. Students show the 'correct' direction of their attention by answering the teacher's questions using a discourse that should be different in form – but identical in meaning – to that which he/she used before ... Additionally, the school trains the body both not to pay attention to the quality of the sound of the voice produced or listened to during an oral lecture, as well as not to pay attention to the body movement involved in writing and speaking, but to address the attention to understanding and allowing understanding, that is, to producing and allowing production of equivalent discourses (2005, 31).

Jonathan Crary addresses the historical, social, and political dimensions of attention in *Suspensions of perception* (1999), arguing that capitalism requires high levels of attentiveness from its workers, so this becomes a norm, and 'inattentiveness' becomes a 'problem':

Western modernity since the nineteenth century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for 'paying attention', that is, for a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli. That our lives are so

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thoroughly a patchwork of such disconnected states is not a 'natural' condition but rather the product of a dense and powerful remaking of human subjectivity in the West over the last 150 years (1999, 1).

This training of attention in the interests of the dominant powers in capitalism is, I think, what AG means in her report on the previous sequence when she refers to 'some kind of body "politics"'. Most of us are brought up to 'pay attention' to something someone else wants us to attend to, and, by implication, perforce not attend to other things (such as what we feel, what we want or what we might like).

It is clear already that Middendorf breathwork encourages bodily experiences that are in stark contrast to those alluded to by Carozzi and by Crary. Bodily sensation becomes the focus of attention rather than something to be ignored. A sense of wholeness is cultivated rather than a 'patchwork' of 'disconnected states'.

One of the most striking things about first taking classes in Middendorf breathwork in Berkeley was the difference in language from what I was accustomed to with Dieter Gebel. Gebel had not taught in English before coming to Australia, and while his English is good, the specialised 'breath language' he used was drawn from the English translation of Ilse Middendorf's book (1990). In that book, aside from the principle of letting breath come and go on its own, the grounds of the work are described as 'focusing, perceiving, and breathing', translating the German *sammeln*, *empfinden*, and *atmen*. In America the teachers use the words 'presence, sensation, and breath'. These are nouns rather than present participles, but they refer to the same German words. Breathing and breath refer to *atmen*. Perceiving and sensation are related – I perceive my bodily sensations – and refer to *empfinden*. The difference is mainly in the translation of *sammeln*, and

the change seems to have come about because of a concern that the meaning of 'focus' does not convey the intention of *sammeln*. 'Focus' can carry an implication of concentration on a point to the exclusion of all else, and the word 'attention' can have this meaning too. So the word 'presence' was chosen.

'Presence', closely related to 'present', has a number of meanings in English related to both time and space. 'The fact or condition of being present; the state of being before, in front of, or in the same place with a person or thing; being there' is the first of nine meanings in the OED online.

'Presence' is widely used in the fields of nursing and psychotherapy, usually with the sense of 'being there'. 'Presence' is much contested in philosophy in relation to both time and space. In the realm of spirituality 'presence' can mean 'a divine, spiritual, or incorporeal being or influence felt or conceived as present' (OED online). Jon Sharp from the University of East Anglia writes:

the key defining feature of moments of spiritual experience is the sense of 'presence' and of totality (2006, paragraph 16 of 37).

'Presence' has become an important concept in the world of virtual reality and computer simulations:

presence: the perceptual illusion of nonmediation. The term 'perceptual' indicates that this phenomenon involves continuous (real time) responses of the human sensory, cognitive, and affective processing systems to objects and entities in a person's environment. An 'illusion of nonmediation' occurs when a person fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a medium in his/her communication environment and

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responds as he/she would if the medium were not there (Lombard & Ditton 1997, 'Presence explicated').

In Lombard and Ditton's case, presence 'cannot occur unless a person is using a medium', so this meaning is far removed from that intended in Middendorf breathwork. It is also in marked contrast to the way 'presence' is used in performance training. Philip Auslander writes:

In theatrical parlance, *presence* usually refers either to the relationship between actor and audience – the actor as manifestation before an audience – or, more specifically, to the actor's psychophysical attractiveness to the audience, a concept related to that of *charisma* (1992, 37).

Jerzy Grotowski writes: 'Awareness means the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but to Presence' (1995, 125).

Phillip Zarrilli refers to the actor's 'metaphysical studio', as a place to explore fundamental paradoxes such as:

the relationship between space and time; between absence and presence; here/there; now/then; if/when ... the embodied relationship between in-spiration and ex-piration (2002, 161).

Zarrilli points out some of the problems of identifying the notion of an actor's 'presence' with a transcendental or essential self:

A reified subjectivist notion of 'presence' is as complicit in a dualist metaphysics as is the Cartesian 'mind'. Neither provides an adequate account of the 'body' in the mind, the 'mind' in the body, or if the

process by which the signs read as 'presence' are a discursive construct (1995, 15).

In looking for ways to avoid these problems Shannon Riley draws on the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio and linguist Mikhail Bakhtin to frame a 'provisional sense of presence that has more to do with perception and attention than with any essential trait or quality' (2004, 448). Riley's work incorporates two contemporary movement forms she describes as 'embodied perceptual practices' – Authentic Movement and Butoh:

Embodied perceptual practices include a focus on breath and perceptual imagery as the primary means of bringing attention to the dialogue between perceptual and recalled images, which are fully sensual in form. It is particularly through the breath that embodied perceptual techniques attempt to merge image, movement, and text in ways that are palpable. Embodied perception, put simply, is working with fully sensual imagery using one's breath and all of one's senses (2004, 454).

Riley says that the use of these practices can create a state of 'perceptual polyphony', an 'ability to work simultaneously with text, perceptual and recalled imagery, and associated feelings' (2004, 467). This strikes me as having parallels with what I describe as 'kinæsthetic thinking' (p.18).

In 2005 a group of researchers from Exeter and Stanford universities began a major research project, 'Performing Presence: From the Live to the Simulated', investigating the connections of presence in performance, anthropological archaeology, and computer science:

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Presence is a fundamental yet highly contested aspect of performance, and performance has come to be a key concept in many different fields. Notions of presence hinge on the relationship between the live and mediated, on notions of immediacy, authenticity and originality. Presence prompts questions of the character of self-awareness, of the presentation of self. Interaction is implicated – presence often implies being in someone's presence. Location too – to be present is to be somewhere. Hence presence also directs us outside the self into the social and spatial. And also, of course, into temporality – a fulcrum of presence is tense and the relationship between past and present (Kaye, Giannachi et al. 2006).

The studio in Berkeley where Middendorf breathwork training sessions take place is a quiet unadorned room. In the early sessions of the training we trainees were often encouraged to close our eyes, reducing the external stimuli to make it easier to focus on the internal sensations of breath movement. But from the beginning the question was, when I direct my attention to some particular part of me, can I sense all of me at the same time? Can I have my presence/attention throughout? And then later as this became more possible (as we became more adept) the question became, can I have this 'attention and devotion' and contact the outer world? Can I extend my presence outside my body? Can I include other people, objects, into my awareness and still stay with the sensations of the movement of breath, sensing how these movements change in response to the stimuli from the outer world? Those familiar with Stanislavski will recognise a parallel here with his 'circles of attention'.

Practising Middendorf breathwork requires one to be 'in the present moment', because attending to sensation requires being 'in the present moment'. It asks for attention, not only of a pinpointed concentrated



sort but also of a more open receptive sort that includes an awareness of the whole body. But there is more to it than this.

I recorded a short interview in October 2004 to ask Jürg Roffler, about presence and attention (see Appendix C). He responded in part:

I consider attention being a part of presence. I see presence divided up in the most ideal situation in a balanced form of attention and devotion. So the more masculine<sup>25</sup> part of presence, which would be attention, that is more linear, directed to the knee or this or that, has an intention, very clear ... there, I want my presence to be there. The other, the devotion part or surrendering part, I don't want to be just there, I want to include this into the whole. So presence, the way I understand that we are using it, holds both, holds the combination of attention and devotion or surrender (Appendix C, paragraph 2).

Towards the end of the short interview about presence Roffler says,

It is hard to describe. How would you describe an ability to be present? I think it's a soul function,<sup>26</sup> I don't know. That's the closest I can come to.

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<sup>25</sup> Roffler's use of 'masculine' in this context reflects the underlying Jungian vocabulary Middendorf breathwork. In this vocabulary 'masculine' is understood as goal-directed, or more broadly as having direction, and 'feminine' as 'receptive'. This use of 'feminine' and 'masculine' draws on cultural understandings and ideals of the nature of women and men that are no longer so widely shared and cannot be taken for granted, even if they once could. In Jungian circles it is understood that men and women have both feminine and masculine characteristics, but the fact that the labels 'feminine' and 'masculine' are intended to point to something that is contested now rather than taken for granted, remains unacknowledged. Insofar as Middendorf breathwork practitioners use this language I have included it, but otherwise I try to spell out what 'masculine' and 'feminine' are intended to convey in the context. Presence, then, is understood in Middendorf breathwork as including both the directive and receptive.

<sup>26</sup> 'Soul' is another part of the language of Middendorf breathwork that reflects the Jungian assumptions within which the work is set. It is a word that sits uneasily in most modern parlance except in phrases like 'soul music' or 'soul food', both of which are showing their age. Here Roffler contrasts soul with intellect. During my interview with him, Dieter Gebel made the same distinction a number of times. He spoke of people who had problems 'with their mind, with their mental [sic], with their soul' (Appendix I, paragraph 33). When I followed this up it appeared that he was referring

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It's definitely not an intellectual function. The intellect is participating there too, but more passively, because presence itself is a kind of a tool that affects something, and I'm not thinking presence, I am presence. Thinking can get involved in the intention of being present. I can think about, I am making a decision to be present. That can be involved, but ultimately presence itself is not a rational function, it's more like a soul function. That's the closest that I can get (Appendix C, paragraph 10).

So, according to this understanding, I can make intellectual decisions that affect my presence, but ultimately presence is not an intellectual function; it is a function of my being, one that I can learn to use and direct. Later in the workshop series RB wrote:

Body circling – pelvis – from small to big [...] – feeling that smaller is bigger – slow & miniature gives time to be in each detail – present – not overreaching – being with self & movement & breath (RB 30 May 04).

This 'being with self & movement & breath' is what I understand to be presence. Presence is about being here, now. If I am here in the space but am thinking about the past or anticipating the future then I am not fully present. If I am daydreaming or caught up in the sorts of thoughts that seem to think themselves then I am not fully present. I can say my presence is elsewhere, but that reifies presence in an awkward way. Presence is not a 'thing' in that way.

In Middendorf breathwork presence includes the notion of extending my presence to encompass others in the space. When I am teaching, for instance, I try to extend my presence out to include all those in the space. This has a parallel with the 'presence of the actor'.

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to what I would describe as 'psychiatric problems' such as schizophrenia, severe depression, and psychosis.

## Breath & hands

In the workshop we moved on next to some work with the hands. I invited everyone to begin by stroking, massaging, touching their hands in whatever way they liked. Then I asked them to look at one hand, to open it, stretching it gently from the centre of the palm, and let it go, continuing with this hand then the other then both together until they sensed a connection of hands and breath. The arms and gradually the rest of the body could be invited to join in the movement connected with breath.

Hands: Long breaths afterwards & definite sensations in my arms & legs. I feel the full length of my limbs, present in them. It is as if I can feel the breath travelling inside the limbs. The spontaneous long breaths feel very easy, effortless & rhythmic (AS 1 May 04).

Strong connection of breath to expansion of hand, arm, body, movement. Opening. Engage. All connected. Fluid. Integrated. Felt like the capacity for an emotional/psychological space was present. Needed full body stretch. Breath followed. Breath reaching the extremities of my body (OP 1 May 04).

Stretching exercise from palms of hand gave rise to a very pleasurable sensation of 'elastic' breath connected to the 2 hands – and an image of triangles came to mind (HD 1 May 04).

Opening the palm of my hand was the most touch uncomfortable thing [sic] – as though something dangerous would happen – then felt my whole perineum area very alive – thought of sphincters – anus – is my central palm like a sphincter? which prefers to keep closed? (MA 1 May 04).

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MA's response provides a contrast with the pleasure evident in the other responses. I offered the same sequence the following day and she wrote:

Stretching palms of hands. Finally breath very low in belly and full as if very relaxed. Feeling of great sadness (maybe to do with loss), Wanting to stretch my tongue & throat with it. Warm & quiet afterwards (MA 2 May 04).

Hands seem to act as a support for breath. In my experience most people quickly find that the opening of the hands brings an inhalation, just as any stretching seems to do when breath is allowed to come and go on its own, and the release stimulates the exhalation.

I remember from the first workshop that AG found the reverse – she found a connection where the inhalation came with a sort of closing of the hand where the fingers remain somewhat extended rather than curled in, and the finger pads come together (so that the hand forms a 'bud' or 'tulip'). In the breathwork training in Berkeley in the seventh and eighth segments we explored this 'reverse' form, which offers the possibility of the receiving the inhalation in the 'centre core', the location of 'self' or 'me' in the understanding of practitioners of Middendorf breathwork, and an experience of the exhalation being directed out. In the diary extract below, GP<sup>27</sup> has also found this, and then gone on to explore a combination of the two with different hands:

feeling very involved in the simplicity of experiencing my palms opening, both left & right at once as I inhaled, and closing as I exhaled. I let this opening & closing affect my body and also allowed different areas of my body to be moved as if nurtured by the warmth of my palms. Then tried

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<sup>27</sup> GP is a dancer and teacher of movement specialising in 'Body Weather'.

(engaging mental decision-making) to do the opposite – breathe out as I opened my palms – and this also worked but was very different, yet just as natural – in a way relating my energy outwards into the space around me – extending ‘me’ outwards [...] then it occurred to me to try left hand opening as right hand closed and in reverse ... the moment between becoming the most important part; and as I did this I felt entirely integrated (almost glimpsing that ecstatic peace of enlightenment!) and my breath was a continuum, a circular breath where the inhale & exhale are equal parts of a loop. My whole body was involved, giving & receiving, surrendering and expanding at once (GP 16 May 04).

So while GP made a decision to change what had come ‘naturally’, the reverse did not seem odd to her, as it does to some people (see extract below from DT). GP’s observation that she felt she was ‘extending “me” outwards’ is consistent with the experiential possibility I mentioned of sensing the exhalation moving out from the centre core.

We have worked with the hands a lot in Berkeley, including exploring the difference between having the hands facing the body and having them facing away as they open and release. There appear to be connections between the hands and the rest of the body that are not immediately obvious to the ‘rational’ mind. OP touches on this in the extract above, finding that ‘the capacity for an emotional/psychological space was present’.

Expansion/contraction of hands – Became aware of my sternum. When I let go it was as though concentration of sternum was lifted. Breathing in on the expanded hand & vice versa. So I changed the movement of the hand to contract while breathing in – wrong – felt wrong, uncomfortable – not right. Observation – Breathing beyond my body, my vessel became more than the physical. My memory reawakened. When I sat in observation rainbow colours appeared. Extending into the

## Chapter Three: Other aspects of the work

pockets that were deflated. Space around me becoming more tangible. Definitely bringing out the aches & pains (DT 2 May 04).

hands opening & closing: At first like a flower opening & closing. Then as the arm engaged, an eating plant, wanting/needing bigger & fleshier food. Inhaling on palm opening, exhaling on hands closing & retracting (BC 2 May 04).

Ilse Middendorf writes about 'free work', beginning with breath awareness and the hands and extending to include the whole body:

Breathing is the center of attention, for it develops by stretching the hands, moving you at the same time. It is also possible that the breathing movement stretches your hands. In either case, you experience something new about your bodiliness: either the loosening of tension, or tightening of slackness; or that the free play of the hands, arms, the whole body brings a sense of greater freedom and flexibility, feelings of joy and one's own creativity (1990, 155–8).

Reports from workshop participants confirm these possibilities.

Flexing hands – I always breathe in on the stretch – satisfying. Movement gets bigger – I am with myself. Stretch gets stronger till it fills the body. The breath follows. Now I perceive myself breathing to my fingers and toes. Where is my scalp & face? (OP 9 May 04).

Opening the hand from its centre – extending the movement through the body – into space ... – if I keep bringing my awareness back to the centre of the hand, I feel more & more depth, subtlety, expression – as if the centre of the hand contains a reserve of givingness  
– the breath deepens generally, feels richer  
– this reserve produces a great range of possible expressions (HP 27 June 04).

## Pressure points

One particular aspect of the work with the hands is the 'pressure points' in the finger pads. Ilse Middendorf regards the work with the finger pads as a separate part of the breathwork. She writes:

You can perceive and keep your spaces in your perceptive consciousness in a really exquisite way if you work with your fingertips. About 35 years ago, I discovered that pressing the fingerpads together provokes a breathing movement in a very special, limited area of the body. Each pair of the fingers pressed together created a breathing movement in a different space ... The pressure should neither be too hard (fingerpads should not pulsate), not too gentle, or you would experience little if any breathing movement in your body spaces (1990, 139).

I offered the pressure point work straight after the work with the hands, asking people first to press the middle finger pads (rather than the fingertips) together, close their eyes, let their breath come and go on its own, and sense whether there was any particular response in their breath. After six breath cycles or so I asked them to switch to the finger pads of the fourth and fifth fingers (the 'ring' and smallest fingers); later the index fingers and thumbs, and finally all the fingers together. For some people the effect is immediate and obvious. For others, not so. You might like to try this before reading about people's responses. Only one person in this session wrote of their experience:

Middle fingers together – diaphragm area.

Little & 4<sup>th</sup> fingers – lower abdomen.

Thumb and pointer – upper chest.

All 5 fingers – entire torso (OP 1 May 04)

This aspect of the breathwork seems to have connections with acupuncture and acupressure, with the meridians of traditional Chinese medicine, and with the hand gestures used in Hindu religious ceremonies and Indian dance, which are called mudras (from the Sanskrit *mudrā* seal, sign, token).

I used the pressure point work with the finger pads only a few times in the research workshops. In a later workshop I used the same order and combination of finger pads, then finished the sequence by offering first all five finger pads pressed together, then fingers interlinked and the pads pressed into the backs of the opposite hands ('closed prayer position').

Middle fingers pointing – directional, front, forward.

2 fingers from bottom – opening of bottom of chest/torso & downwards movement.

2 fingers from top (thumb & pointing finger) – opening of top of chest – upwards movement.

All fingers open (prayer – open) – clarity/openness – chest open

All fingers closed (prayer – close) – internal/closedness – inner focused  
(TB 16 May 04).<sup>28</sup>

I offered the pressure point work on one other occasion, but did not use the 'closed prayer position'.

Placing pads of fingers together:

- a) middle fingers → middle space – middle/lower ribs expanding
- b) ring & small fingers → lower space
- c) thumb & index finger → upper space, arm pits

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<sup>28</sup> TB has a background in Grotowski's work, in physical theatre, and in Butoh. He came to just this one workshop.



d) all – whole torso being breathed (HP 27 June 04).

Pads of fingers together

middle fingers – focus in sternum; mid-chest area – feeling supported/expanded there.

4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> fingers – felt immediately connection with soles of feet (a tingling) & with pelvic area – v. alive

thumb and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger – both in feet & in head shoulders area – less specific this time.

all five fingers – felt my body from tip to toe abuzz with energy, very alive & easily supported (RB 27 June 04).

HP and RB are both experienced movement-trained people, and both have ‘textbook’ responses to the finger pad pressure work like TB and OP. All four reports here provide support for Middendorf’s claim of a correspondence between finger pads and breath spaces, which is that the middle fingers connect to the middle space, the index fingers and thumbs to the upper space, and the fourth and fifth fingers to the lower space (see pp.33-4 for an explanation of these spaces).

Other reports were not so clear as these four.

Found in the breath pressure point work earlier that it made a difference how I held my arms, elbows, hands, at what height and shape in front of the body and what direction the wrists were rotated in (KB 9 May 04).

KB points in another direction here I think, in the direction of gesture, which is important in the connection of bodily form and movement with meaning. The investigation of breath and gesture could be a project in itself, but it is outside the scope of this project.

## Vowel space

The final 'sequences' in this workshop involved two vowel sounds. Again Middendorf regards this as a separate part of the breathwork. Like the pressure point work, it involves bodily connections that are not known in the wider culture, but whereas the pressure point work has parallels in acupressure and mudras, vowel space work has no parallels that I am aware of except perhaps in a broad sense with 'healing sound' traditions such as chakra chanting. Ilse Middendorf writes about this aspect of her work:

It becomes apparent that each vowel sound has its particular area of breathing movement in the body, which will always stay the same. It is clear that there is a *regularity* in the shaping of the 'vowel sounds'. But ... these regularities are not accessible to everyone straight away ... Patience is required to bring to life the possibilities of this work which all lie in the unconsciousness. On the other hand it is a most suitable way to sense one's own breathing ... if we do not *let the breath come*, but draw it in, there will be no *result* (1990, 61, italics in original).

The usual way to practise this is to sit on a stool, allowing breath to come and go on its own, and to contemplate a vowel sound. There is no requirement to make a sound. The contemplation of the vowel is sufficient for breath to respond with a movement in a particular area of the body, which, Middendorf proposes, will be the same for everybody once they are able to let their breath come and go on its own. This has some parallels with ideokinesis where muscle patterns are changed through the use of mental images (see pp.128ff).

During my interview with her, Bettina Follenius, now the senior teacher at the Middendorf Institute in Berlin, spoke about the difficulty of this

work for people with little experience of other aspects of the breathwork. She said:

if you have different vowels or consonants so the breath does different things. It is difficult for people who haven't done breath and movement because it is difficult to sense because it is so inwards. Yes, it takes a lot of patience to come to it (Appendix H, paragraph 24).

She refers to the vowel space work as 'pure' (Appendix H, paragraph 24), which I take to mean that it is work that requires attention and a developed capacity to perceive the sensations of bodily movement with breath; particularly, it requires a capacity to let breath come and go on its own. It does not 'work' if breath is manipulated in any way: it must be 'allowed'.

We began with the U sound.<sup>29</sup> I asked people first to 'contemplate'<sup>30</sup> the sound throughout their breath cycle for four to six cycles, noticing if this brought any change to the movement of breath in their bodies, and then begin to add sound gently on the exhalation without extending the length of the exhalation, and to continue to contemplate the vowel during the remainder of the breath cycle, noticing any further changes. We began sitting and I invited people to stand later if they wanted to.

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<sup>29</sup> In writing about the vowel sounds I use the following symbols: U as in **put**, **good**, and **should**, I, as in **see**, **pea**, **seize**, **decent**, **foetus**, and **paeon**, O, as in **hot**, **wash**, and **trough**, E, as in **hair**, **dare**, **pear**, **there**, and **vary**, and A as in **arm**, **calm**, and **Brahmin**. These are similar to the basic 'Italian' vowel sounds used in singing. Of course the vowels Middendorf uses are the German ones, and include three umlauts: Ä as in **bad**, Ö as in **fir**, and Ü as in **flue**.

<sup>30</sup> I did not elaborate on what 'contemplation' involved, nor did anyone raise the matter, and I have only more recently wondered what it means for me and for others, what it involves. Do I imagine making a sound or imagine hearing it? I would say no, actually, neither of these – I just 'imagine the sound' and it is there with a pitch and a 'vowelness'. This may just indicate how well my attention has been trained, that when someone says 'contemplate an E' that is what I do. For me this imagining of a sound is close to imagining hearing it, but putting it that way seems somehow less direct than to say I just imagine the sound, not the hearing of it – I am not 'listening' for it. And it is not the same as remembering.

## Chapter Three: Other aspects of the work

We worked for a while with U and then with E in the same way, although from the journal entries below it appears that some people interpreted this E as I.

Oo: Opening in perineum. Resonates with the pelvic floor. Space & presence there. E: Very clear definite gathering of presence, awareness & sensation in the mouth, nose & cheekbones. Presence is so clear and definite as it strengthens it brings a timeless quality (the eternal Now!) (AS 1 May 04).

Unusual for me to sense the connection between my breath & the sounds.

ooh surfed on my breath. I thought 'I let out too much air with my voice'. Less air and more voice came out with the eh sound. This seems to be an association with the Graham Clark [a teacher of voice and singing in Melbourne] work where eh was the sound to contact the voice box electrical impulse for sound (MA 1 May 04).

There was, as I recall, some discussion of Graham Clark's voice work following this sequence. MA had been a student of his and spoke about the association she writes of here, and also of an association between the E sound and the emotion of anger, which is why OP mentions anger.

'Ooo' Strong vibration in throat & upper chest ... almost couldn't get past that.

'Air' I felt strongly in my solar plexus when sitting but lost it when I stood. I didn't feel angry. I need to send vibrations to this most blocked place in my body. Chip away at its rigid surfaces. But then perhaps I will deflate (OP 1 May 04).

Sounding – with 'oo' the breath travelled a constant sustained large 'O' from the diaphragm up through the chest and out to complete the circle

in front of the torso and back to the diaphragm. With 'ee' I was more aware of the shape of the mouth as a tight narrow slot that the breath & air needed to travel through – and it travelled directly out in front of the mouth in a narrow band (HD 1 May 04).

vowel sound

pulse pulsations vision of heart (as in the organ) exposed beating (a bit yuk)

organising myself to breathe out through my mouth in prep for sounding, (like a clunking gear change)

breathing through my mouth seem somehow closer to my heart like the breathing through the mouth 'pipe' is positioned very close to the heart. a more open channel, where as the nose breathing 'pipe' seems safer, less exposing for my heart. but more satisfying. I found that I could sigh (JM 1 May 04).

I introduced this section about vowel space work with two quotations about how this aspect of the breathwork could be inaccessible and difficult in the beginning. The participants in this workshop experienced many different things in the vowel work, even though they did not all experience a 'breathing space' in the same place as that proposed by Middendorf. For AS there was a connection to presence, in fact such a strong experience of being in the present moment that it became 'timeless'.

I have experimented extensively with the vowel sounds in the way described above. With most of the vowels I sense breath movements located in those areas of body that Middendorf identifies, and I did so before reading about what the areas she proposes are. In working with the vowel sounds over a number of years, my observation is that people experienced both in vocal sound and body awareness are much

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more likely to experience breath movement in the areas of the body that Middendorf identifies.

On the following day I offered the vowels E and O in the same way as described above. Then I asked people to pair up, one to sit behind the other with their hands on the forward partner's lower ribs at the sides, while the front partner contemplated first one vowel then the other, and later sounded them. The partner behind reported on any changes they noticed in the movement of the ribs with breath.

Vowel sounds: 'Air' I recall this ex[ercise] differently previously working with the natural breath, not extending the breath on the sound. Lovely sense of vibration & connection of breath to sound. Feeling of warmth & expansion in the middle torso area – liver & stomach. Feels like I should do this every day. Beautiful soundscape with everybody on one vowel sound. Feel myself carried on a wave of breath & vibration.

: 'O' as in 'on' Strong sensation/vibration down the left hand side of my body. Lower abdomen and lower back felt more tangible.

I didn't sense much change in my partner's breathing. Felt strong change b/t [between] the type of breath I took with the different vowel sounds. 'Air' horizontal, forward/back. 'O' horizontal to the sides – into the ribs (OP 2 May 04).

breath for 'air' sound – easeful, rhythmic, predictable cycle of inhalation starting from the diaphragm up to chest and a slow exhalation with the sound, carrying the sound until it petered out (HD 2 May 04).

'o' as in 'got': big fat tunnel feeling, very open from lower to lips that seems to open as it is lower in the body. A dark sound – dank places, moody, maudlin. Very long suspended moments at the end of each exhalation, with no sound or breath, before I inhale again. If I sing a higher note & make it nasal, I close the tunnel a little.

I had more understanding of 'air' vowel after doing 'o': the contrast & differences made the qualities of each more specific. 'Air' sound from front of body, upper & up.

Working in pairs did not enhance this understanding: sense of

- ➔ impersonating myself, recreating the effects
- ➔ creating an effect for my partner

My observations were muddled & diluted (BC 2 May 04).

BC's acute observations of the 'tunnel feeling' and how that changed with pitch and nasality underline her extensive vocal experience. Her 'impersonating myself' and 'creating an effect for my partner' relate to the notion of 'authenticity', an important one in performance, which I discuss below (p.174).

'o' sound seemed more sombre 'got'

my breath seemed to solidly go at the front middle part [drawing with circle about half body width just under ribs and sternum] deepish smallish round space – maybe dark  
as I write, soles of my feet tingle (MA 2 May 04).

air – While in the activity I felt 'at home' – primal space. It was like the 'voice' or if the breath could voice its archetypal sound – it felt as if it would be this sound. It felt beautiful. Observation – became aware of my right side stresses. Rest of my body in harmony – available to my breath – extending beyond my body

ohh – Being in a group & doing this creates an atmosphere which my body has a kinæsthetic response to. The atmosphere of something about to be 'given birth to'. The dissonance of sound. I tried to not play with varying my sound and allowed sound to ride on my breath like a boat on a river. End observation – stress seemed to be lifted. Tingling resonating sense of harmony throughout my body. Awake in my upper wrists.

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Partnering up – [HD] observed an evenness in my breath. When in ‘eh’ my breath shifted with my torso not expanding as much. Whereas ‘oh’ doubly expanded – my breathing was like ‘bellows’. ‘Oh’ encouraged my breath to stay or to spend more time in the out breath – the ‘oh’. ‘Eh’ brought the image of floating on water. The opening of the middle region (DT 2 May 04).

While most people sense differences in their breath movement with the different vowels, these do not bear any obvious connection to the ‘vowel spaces’ that Middendorf proposes. There is some agreement about the ‘mood’ of the O vowel.

This was the last sequence in the first large workshop. I built in the pressure point and vowel space work towards the end of both the first two days because I wanted to give participants an overview of Middendorf breathwork that included these different aspects of the work. There was enough material generated in this first day for me to go on and discuss many of the points I would like to raise in relation to the practice of Middendorf breathwork. The only thing we did not do was to go outside the ‘pure’ breathwork to include work with voice where the focus is on resonant bodily spaces and on the sound produced rather than on breath.

I end today with a very cool, expanded sense of breath in my chest thru to head, a ‘lightness’ in my face & behind my eyes (LC 2 May 04).

The quality of this Midd[endorf] work that is different from other work is that observation – & articulation of – is the goal. In all the other practices, there are exercise/goals that are far more focused in a particular freedom. This work leaves the freedom to me to observe, without values, of having achieved any outcomes ... (BC 2 May 04).



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In these two chapters I have given a broad introduction to experiential aspects of Middendorf breathwork as well as some of the attendant issues. Now I leave the detail of the breathwork practice for a while to look at the historical context within which it was developed, how this work relates to other bodies of work in the more general field of 'bodywork', how it compares with other bodies of work focused on breath, and particularly how it compares with other bodies of work used in voice and movement training for performers.



## Part Three: Contexts



## Chapter Four: Different views

A Being breathing thoughtful breath;  
A traveller betwixt life and death  
(Wordsworth, 'She was a Phantom of delight')

Middendorf's work had its genesis in Berlin in the early to middle twentieth century so of course the assumptions and understandings that underlie her work reflect that time and place. In this chapter I look at this historical context, at how it can be variously understood, glancing at some of Middendorf's 'forebears', and at some figures who were influential in the general field of bodywork at the same time she was developing her work.

In chapter five I look at other related bodies of work, particularly some that are better known in actor/performer training institutions in the West, to compare what Middendorf breathwork has to offer in this field. Then in chapter six I discuss how major voice and movement training approaches engage with breath. The performing arts might be regarded as being on the cutting edge in relation to breath and body, but their accounts still seem a long way short of Middendorf's.

Middendorf's work can be seen as part of a larger Western movement towards bodily awareness that has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, a reaction against the traditional and especially religiously based subjugation of body. Middendorf writes about this in her preface (1990, especially 9–12), using the term 'body consciousness' rather than 'bodily awareness'. While there is no doubt that there has been a tremendous rise of interest in body in the West over this time, there are different interpretations of this transformation.

### Johnson's view

Don Hanlon Johnson, now Professor of Somatics at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, is one of the few writers in English to mention Ilse Middendorf and her work. In his view the dominant mode of life in the twentieth century involved an 'incomprehensible savaging of flesh' as evidenced by

global and local wars, genocides, politically directed torture and famine, terrorist attacks, the selling of children and women into prostitution, and personal wanton violence to family members and street victims (1995b, ix).

On the other hand he sees that:

there has been a steady resistance building among innovators who have devoted their lives to developing strategies for recovering the wisdom and creativity present in breathing, sensing, moving and touching (1995b, ix).

He sees this 'movement of resistance' as having its roots in the middle of the eighteenth century with a number of people, and gives Leo Kofler (1837–1908) as an example. Born in Austria, Kofler contracted tuberculosis in 1860, emigrated to the US in 1866 to work at the German Lutheran Church in Newport, Kentucky, and set about studying the nature of breath, through anatomy and exercises. By 1887 he was organist and choirmaster at St Paul's Cathedral in Manhattan, a position he held for the rest of his life. Johnson writes that by then Kofler had healed himself and developed a method for teaching others how to free 'restrictions' to breath, which he described in *The art of breathing* (1897). The quest for recovery from illness or injury through detailed work with one's own body when conventional methods seem

to be unsuccessful is common among those who have founded somatic bodies of work, as Johnson notes:

Many were faced with a physical dysfunction or illness which threatened their life and work, and for which their physicians could offer no relief. Gindler had tuberculosis; F.M. Alexander had chronic laryngitis; Gerda Alexander had rheumatic fever; Moshe Feldenkrais, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Judith Aston had severe accidents leaving crippling bone fractures (1995b, x–xi).

Johnson writes that Clara Schlawffhorst and Hedwig Andersen came from Germany to New York to study with Kofler. Their German translation of his book is now in its thirty-sixth edition. In 1916 they founded the 'Rotenburg school of Respiration', which influenced many of the pioneers of body awareness work, and continues today under the name 'Schlawffhorst-Andersen School' ([www.cjd.schlawffhorst-andersen.de](http://www.cjd.schlawffhorst-andersen.de)). Middendorf acknowledges the continuing importance of their influence as well as their book, *Atmung und Stimme* [Breathing and voice] (1928). Brigitte Wellner, one of the Middendorf practitioners I interviewed, with many years experience in voice, also had some experience with the Schlawffhorst-Andersen method. She describes it as: 'very solid, it's sort of technical, it doesn't go as deep as the breathwork of Middendorf' (Appendix G, paragraph 3).

Johnson's contributions to the field of bodily awareness are legion (see for example 1994, 1995a, 1997), and his thesis that the revival of interest in and awareness of body is a response to the dominant mode of life in the West is provocative. However in this context he claims to have no explanation for how the dominant mode of life triggered such a 'movement of resistance'. How there came to be such a 'savaging of the flesh' is 'incomprehensible'. And in a sense it is. There is no simple

answer, but Johnson's own work on the formation of scholars, which I discuss later, points in the direction of a complex answer where the mode of daily life is remade in the more abstract image of the relation between intellectuals. Briefly, in this view<sup>31</sup> the world has been and is being remade through abstracted technologies, the first of which was writing, so that what once were certainties in the social world can no longer be taken for granted. The technosciences arising from the coalescence of abstract intellect with the mode of production have worked and continue to work to vastly increase the destructive power of weapons, while human face-to-face contact and interaction in many areas, including in combat, are reduced.

Philosopher Charles Taylor's investigation of modern identity (1989) explores the intertwining of selfhood and morality. He contends:

Perhaps the most urgent and powerful cluster of demands that we recognize as moral concern the respect for the life, integrity, and well-being, even flourishing, of others. These are the ones we infringe when we kill or maim others, steal their property, strike fear into them and rob them of peace, or even refrain from helping them when they are in distress. Virtually everyone feels these demands, and they have been and are acknowledged in all human societies. Of course the scope of the demand notoriously varies: earlier societies, and some present ones, restrict the class of beneficiaries to members of the tribe or race and exclude outsiders, who are fair game, or even condemn the evil to a definitive loss of this status (1989, 4).

Taylor goes on to propose that these moral concerns are so 'deep, powerful, and universal' that we are tempted to think of them as instinctual. 'Culture and upbringing may help define the boundaries of the relevant "others", but they don't seem to create the basic reaction

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<sup>31</sup> This view is developed by Geoff Sharp. See for example Sharp, G. (2002).



itself' (1989, 5). He connects this with the 'almost universal tendency among other animals to stop short of the killing of conspecifics' (1989, 5). But, he argues, these moral concerns are not of the same order as other 'instinctual' reactions such as the love of sweet things or aversion to nauseous substances. In addition to the instinctual facet they have a connection to what it means to be human:

we should treat our deepest moral instincts, our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected, as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernable and can be rationally argued about and sifted (1989, 8).

If we take Taylor seriously, as I believe we should, then how is it that this past century has seen such a 'savaging of flesh', as Johnson calls it? As I see it the abstract remaking of the mode of daily life that has been happening since the invention of writing, that accelerated with the invention of moveable type and printing, and continues to accelerate with the proliferation of information technology, can remove us, alienate us, from these 'gut instincts', these felt senses of what it is to be human. And one of the tremendous possibilities of somatic works is that we reconnect with these bodily feelings.

### Middendorf's view

In the preface to *The perceptible breath* (1990) Middendorf gives a short review of the development of body consciousness in Germany, identifying Friedrich Jahn, the 'father of gymnastics', as the person who 'opened the first door of the prison of "bodily unconsciousness"' (1990, 11). She refers to 'Kallmeyer, Gindler, Menzler, Mensendieck, Bode, and Medau in gymnastics, and Duncan, Laban, Mary Wigman and Palucca in dance' (1990, 11) as important figures, and traces Hede

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Kallmeyer's work through Genevieve Stebbins in America to Stebbins' model, François Delsarte (1811–71). I will take some time to look at these figures, some of whom, particularly the dancers, are well known in the history of performance in the West, while others are not so well known outside of Europe.

Turning first to the dancers, Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) is a major figure in modern dance. He was born into a wealthy family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the son of a high-ranking military officer. Laban rejected a military career in favour of an artistic life, first in Paris, where he studied architecture, and later in Munich. He became interested in exploring human movement, initially influenced by his observations of the work of Emil Jacques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), a musician and music teacher who established a system of exercises known as Eurhythmics (different from but related to 'Eurhythmy' coming out of Rudolf Steiner's work). Later Laban expanded his explorations to include theoretical explications of the scales of movement that he believed human bodies perform in space, an attempt to discover a 'rule-governed base to movement as one of man's fundamental modes of communication' (Preston-Dunlop 1998, 37).

In the decade from 1919 Laban opened twenty-five schools across Europe, and by 1929 was recognised as the leader of the *Ausdrucktanz* (expressive dance) movement and an intellectual in the field of dance and movement study. In 1930 he moved to Berlin where he served as director of the Prussian State Theatre for four years and then as director of the *Deutsche Tanzbühne* [German Dance Stage] under the Nazis. Harold Segel notes:

By laying greater emphasis on the Germanness of *Ausdrucktanz* and advocating a new German theatre based on myth, he clearly sought to

please Germany's new masters by accommodating their nationalist ideology (1998, 87).

However his work was branded hostile to the state in 1936. He managed to migrate to England in 1938 and joined the dance school at Dartington Hall, Devonshire, where he taught until 1940. With the support of former students and friends he worked in the field of dance performance and then established the Art of Movement Studio in Manchester in 1946, which moved to Addlestone in Surrey in 1953. Laban died in 1958. His studio was renamed the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance when it moved to New Cross, South East London, in 1976. Laban is also remembered in 'Labanotation', his system of dance notation.

Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) and Mary Wigman (1886–1973) are also seminal figures in dance in the twentieth century. Gret Palucca (1902–1993) was a student of Wigman's who went on to establish her own school in Dresden.

According to dance academic Susan Gillis (1996), Duncan studied ballet, Delsarte technique and other forms of dance as a child. In the years between 1899 and 1907 she lived and worked in the great cities of Europe. In 1904, Duncan established her first school of dance in Grunewald, outside Berlin, where she began to develop her theories on dance education and to assemble her dance group, later known as the Isadorables. Duncan returned to the US in 1908 for a series of tours throughout the country. Gillis notes:

At first, her performances were poorly received by music critics, who felt that the dancer had no right to 'interpret' symphonic music. The music critic from The New York Times, for example, wrote that there was

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‘much question of the necessity or the possibility of a physical “interpretation” of the symphony upon the stage ... it seems like laying violent hands on a great masterpiece that had better be left alone’. But the audiences grew more and more enthusiastic, and when Duncan returned to Europe in 1909, she was famous throughout the world (1996, paragraph 5).

By Duncan’s own account in *My life* (1995) she was a dancer (and a ‘revolutionist’) from the time she was a baby, taught dance from when she was six, and was always fiercely committed to her art and social beliefs. Duncan describes her discovery of the source of inspiration for her dancing:

I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. My mother often became alarmed to see me remain for such long intervals quite motionless as if in a trance – but I was seeking, and finally discovered, the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversions of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance – it was from this discovery that was born the theory on which I founded my school (1995, 58).

Duncan’s discovery of her creative centre resonates with the ‘centre core’ of Middendorf breathwork, which is often identified as being in the area of the solar plexus. Middendorf writes, ‘Dance is moved expression out of the human wholeness’ (1990, 120), and draws attention to how both breath and dance are elemental, being rooted in rhythm and movement. Duncan was always committed to this sort of dance – dance as artistic expression.

Dance academic Hilary Crampton writes that Duncan, Loie Fuller (1862–1928) and Ruth St. Denis (1877–1968), are often regarded as rebels and precursors of modern dance. Duncan rebelled against the dominant status quo of performance dance, and succeeded in carving out a considerable reputation for herself, but did not leave behind an inheritance of choreographed works or particular dance technique. In Crampton's view the significance of her influence was the way in which she liberated the dance makers of the future to imagine a different sort of dance to the hackneyed and uninventive form into which ballet had degenerated at that time in Europe. Crampton suggests that it is significant that Duncan, Fuller and St. Denis were American, that this meant they had access to a more liberal education than was then available to young European women. So while Duncan was not well received in her home country, Crampton has no doubt that had she been born in Europe she would have had neither the upbringing nor the education to dare to forge the paths she took (2002, paragraphs 3 & 4).

Mary Wigman was born Marie Wiegmann in Hanover, Germany, to a family who were part of the upper middle class. She attended a presentation of Jacques-Dalcroze's method in Hanover in 1908, and went to study at his institute in Hellerau near Dresden from 1910 to 1912, receiving her diploma as a teacher of the Dalcroze method. She then joined Laban's circle of dancers in 1913, remaining with him until 1919. Authors Isa Partsch-Bergsohn and Harold Bergsohn write that Wigman, 'like Laban, was very much influenced by Kandinsky's writings. "We have to create a new dance", wrote Kandinsky, and to her Laban was the beginning of this search' (2003, 10–11).

After leaving Laban, Wigman organised a tour with her own solo program to several German cities. Her performance in Dresden was a sell-out success, and she settled there, opening her own school. Gret

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Palucca was studying ballet at the Dresden Opera House when she saw Wigman's performance. She joined Wigman, studying with her until 1925, when she set up her own school in Dresden. The Nazis closed Palucca's school in 1939, but after the war she began to give public solo recitals again and reopened her school. Partsch-Bergsohn and Bergsohn note that the communist government in East Germany supported her school, which offered classical ballet with a program in modern dance, including an academic curriculum and preparation for a stage career. They write: 'The Palucca School is now considered one of the leading dance institutions in Germany' (2003, 35–6).

Wigman made three successful tours of the US in 1930–33, returning to a changed Germany where the National Socialists had won the elections. She taught at Dresden until being ousted in 1942. She taught at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Leipzig until it was destroyed by Allied bombing in February 1945. She stayed on in Russian-occupied Leipzig, being given permission to move to West Berlin in 1949, where she established her own school in Dahelm. She taught there until a few years before her death, and choreographed for theatre until 1961.

Riley notes that some of the similarities between Authentic Movement and Butoh can be traced to Wigman's use of improvisation and guided imagery in training dancers (2004, 450).

Wigman opens her *The language of dance* (1974) with a section 'The secret of the dance', which concludes: 'It's secret? That lies hidden in the living breath which is the secret of life' (1974, 9).

Middendorf does no more than name Duncan, Laban, Wigman, and Palucca, indicating her understanding of how the development of modern dance is tied into the broader sweep of the development of

bodily awareness, but not analysing this. Except for tracing a lineage from Kallmeyer back through Stebbins to Delsarte, Middendorf likewise only names 'Kallmeyer, Gindler, Menzler, Mensendieck, Bode, and Medau in gymnastics' (1990, 11). Most of these figures are not so well known outside Germany. I will spend a few moments with them, adding in Steele Mackaye (1842–94), who was Delsarte's pupil and Stebbins' teacher, and was primarily responsible for the popularity of Delsarte technique in the US towards the end of the nineteenth century.

François Delsarte (1811–71) is widely identified as one of the earliest figures in the developing interest in body. He trained as an actor and singer but lost his voice, apparently as a result of bad training (see Delaumosne 2002, xvii). He went on to establish a system for identifying the bodily and vocal attributes of expression, gaining an extraordinary reputation as a teacher, and influencing directly or indirectly most of those who came after who were also interested in body, whether in dance, movement, theatre, gymnastics, or therapy. Ted Shawn (1891–1972), one of America's pioneers of modern dance, who married Ruth St Denis in 1914, traces the influence of Delsarte and his students in *Every little movement* (1974). He writes:

Born in 1891 in my own childhood I saw only the distorted and already outmoded falsifications – 'statue posing', in which amateur entertainers, costumed in bulky, graceless 'Greek' robes, whitened skin, and white wigs, took 'poses' supposedly expressive of grief, joy, shyness, anger, defiance, etc. etc. etc. ad infinitum, ad nauseam. This was a complete reversal and falsification of the science which Delsarte taught for he said that emotion produced bodily movement, and if the movement was correct and true, the end result of the movement left the body in a position which was also expressive of the emotion – but that it was insincere, false and wrong to 'take a pose' (1974, 11).

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Shawn writes of Delsarte: 'His most active period, when he was at the height of his powers, seems to have been 1839 through 1859' (1974, 17). His 'greatest pupil and disciple' (1974, 17), Steele Mackaye, studied with Delsarte in 1869–70, developing with Delsarte's approval 'harmonic gymnastics', designed to prepare students physically to apply and use Delsarte's 'laws of gesture'. Shawn refers to Delsarte's work as a 'pure and exact science [which] had only a limited audience' whereas Mackaye's gymnastics 'could be used (and abused) by millions' (1974, 18). Shawn refers to Mackaye at the time of his first meeting with Delsarte as a

young American genius, who was to affect the whole history of theatre in America so profoundly, then only 27 years old and at the beginning of a rich and varied career as actor, director, playwright, lecturer, teacher, inventor, and producer (1974, 17).

Mackaye's teaching popularised Delsarte in the United States, but, as Shawn notes, what was eventually promulgated under the name 'Delsarte' bore little relation to Delsarte's original work and ideas. This is a recurring problem for somatic bodies of work, and a constant difficulty for those who would like to reach an audience beyond the immediate classroom.

Genevieve Stebbins (1857–1915) came into contact with the 'Delsarte System', as it is often called, through Mackaye, and of that system's many American exponents became, as dance academic Nancy Ruyter notes, 'one of the most important in the context of dance history' (1988, 381). Whereas Delsarte and Mackaye did not publish, Stebbins' output included *Delsarte system of dramatic expression* (1886), *Dynamic breathing and harmonic gymnastics* (1893), and her own *Genevieve Stebbins system of physical training* (1899). Ruyter shows that



although Stebbins is primarily known as a Delsarte proponent, she developed her own methods by drawing on a wide variety of contemporary sources:

In four of her five books on physical culture and expression, Stebbins mentions, quotes, or discusses the ideas of over one hundred artists, thinkers, and scientists whose work contributed to her own knowledge in one way or another and to the theoretical and practical system she developed (1988, 385).

Ruyter finds significant parallels between the intellectual world of Stebbins and those of Isadora Duncan and Ruth St Denis:

Each of these innovators went outside of the field of dance for information, understanding, insights, and inspiration that contributed to the development of a new approach to dance as an art ... The second characteristic they share is that their investigations were carried on in large part by reading. It was research – intellectual activity in support of artistic or pedagogic practice (1988, 393).

Stebbins taught the Delsarte System from the late 1870s. Ruyter writes that in 1893 she opened the New York School of Expression, where she taught until her retirement in 1907. Among her students were Bess Mensendieck and Hedwig Kallmeyer. In an interview conducted by Thomas Hanna, Carola Speads, who appears below in her own right, talks about Kallmeyer and Mensendieck as the two great proponents of *Gymnastik*, a general term for various systems of physical education in Germany originally developed for women. She says:

You must remember that their two systems were at the very beginning of this movement. Both had studied with Genevieve Stebbins in

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America. People did not so much follow their systems as become provoked by this new approach (Hanna 1995a, 26).

Mensendieck developed the 'Mensendieck system' that is still in use as a treatment for back pain:

Mensendieck is a paramedical system of correct body mechanics, correct muscle function, and correct posture based on sound fundamental research developed by Dr. Bess Mensendieck and has widespread use in Europe, specifically Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands (Levin-Gervasi 1995, cited by Com1\_UK 2004).

Kallmeyer taught in Berlin, influencing many other figures in *Gymnastik*, including Dora Menzler and Elsa Gindler (two more of those mentioned by Middendorf) who both studied with her.

Karl Toepfer mentions both Mensendieck and Kallmeyer in his study of nakedness in German performance:

other Nacktkultur enthusiasts believed that nudism was primarily an educational, not a socioecological, experience, and so they pursued the idea that the most powerful site for nude performance was not in nature, but in *schools*. The leaders of this approach were largely women, beginning with the American physician Bess Mensendieck (1864–1959), who, with her headquarters in Vienna, had established by 1905 a network of schools throughout Germany that instructed young women in the 'Mensendieck System' for achieving healthy physiques, bodily poise, and confidence in their appearances. In 1896, Mensendieck began to combine photography and nudity to explain her pedagogical method, which she first published in 1906, in *Körperkultur des Weibes*, a book so popular that it enjoyed seven revised editions within 20 years (2003, 150).

As early as 1910, Hede Kallmeyer in Berlin began combining Mensendieck nudity with Dalcrozian rhythmic exercises to produce a new kind of 'harmonic gymnastics' that opened up more obviously erotic possibilities for bodily expressivity than nudity, rhythmic movement, or gymnastic exercise could achieve as separate activities (2003, 152).

So it seems that Kallmeyer drew on both Delsarte, through Stebbins and Mensendieck, and Dalcroze. Kallmeyer's 'harmonic gymnastics' are obviously different from those of Steele Mackaye and Genevieve Stebbins.

Rudolf Bode (1881–1971) and Hinrich Medau (1890–1974) are recognised as important contributors in the field of 'rhythm gymnastics'<sup>32</sup>. Bode studied with Dalcroze and established the Bode School in Munich in 1911 to teach rhythm gymnastics. The school continues to teach that today ([www.bode-schule.de](http://www.bode-schule.de)). Medau was a student of Bode, as was Charlotte Selver, as she recollects:

Dr. Rudolph Bode had a system whereby he played the piano and the students moved according to the music being played. I enrolled in his school. Although Dr. Bode considered me completely ungifted I completed my studies after two years and started to teach Bode Gymnastik. One of Bode's senior students, Hinrich Medau, said to me: 'Let's go and conquer Berlin'. This was a time when everybody wanted to study movement and in no time did we had [sic] a lot of students. During this time, I also met Elsa Gindler and began studying with her (2001).

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<sup>32</sup> The same piece of writing, author unknown, acknowledging the contribution to rhythmic gymnastics by Delsarte, Bode, Dalcroze, Wigman, Laban, Medau, and above all Duncan, appears on at least six different web pages on the internet (Google search 22.1.07).

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Medau established his school in Berlin in 1929. It was moved to Coburg, Germany, in 1974, where it still operates ([www.medau-schule.de](http://www.medau-schule.de)). The Medau Society was formed in London in 1952 and 'Medau movement' is widely taught in the UK ([www.medau.org.uk](http://www.medau.org.uk)). According to Maria Höller, a Middendorf graduate and former gymnastic teacher, Bode and Medau were friends of Middendorf's first husband, Jost Langguth (personal communication).

Dora Menzler founded her own school in Leipzig in 1913 after studying with Hede Kallmeyer. Menzler's was a relaxing system designed to encourage people to find a new balanced position and new movements. The idea was to release old, fixed, movement patterns that came from a strict education and to make the body alive for more creative movements.

I have left Elsa Gindler (1885–1961) until last on Middendorf's *gymnastik* list. She is the most widely known in the English-speaking West. She established a school which flourished between the two world wars in Berlin, teaching what Don Hanlon Johnson calls 'a radically simple way of working with experience, a Western form of meditation, in which participants learn simply how to pay attention – to eating, standing, walking, speaking, lifting a stone' (1995b, 3). Gindler herself refers to three areas of learning – breathing, relaxation and tension. Of breathing she writes:

One of the most delicate and difficult areas of our work is breathing. As we can see among small children and animals, every movement can increase and deepen breathing. Among adults, however, whose physical, spiritual, and mental processes are no longer governed by the unity of consciousness, the relationship between breathing and movement is disturbed. And almost all of us are in this situation. Regardless of whether we want to speak, make a small movement, or

think, we impede the breathing. Even while resting we impede it (1995, 8).

This is not to say that all children have 'unimpeded' breath, just that by the time we reach adulthood most of us impede our breath most of the time without being aware of doing so. This is one reason why Middendorf's work, like Gindler's, is so important. The balancing and healing possibilities of breath that comes and goes on its own can scarcely begin while breath is so impeded. Gindler's approach was to bring to consciousness this interference with the flow of breath and to gradually work to allow breath to flow freely, to overcome the tendency towards restriction:

Simply noticing the constriction already brings help, and the oftener [sic] we notice it, and the more we accustom ourselves to investigation whether it is not perhaps an interference with breathing, the more easily and naturally it will be relieved (1995, 10).

Gindler's work has strong parallels with Middendorf's. Both are grounded in letting breath come and go on its own and developing sensory awareness. Both take the approach that people must discover for themselves; that the discoveries to be made are of such a personal nature, even while they are at the same time of a 'universal' nature, that they can only be comprehended in the experience.

One reason that Gindler is better known in the English-speaking world is that at least three of her followers, Charlotte Selver, Carola Speads and Marion Rosen came to the United States because of the Second World War, each developing Gindler's work in her own way. All have been significant in the ongoing spread of body awareness work in the West. Selver called her version of Gindler's work 'Sensory Awareness' (see Brooks 1982, and Littlewood & Roche 2004). Speads focused

specifically on breath (1978, 1992). Rosen studied with Lucy Heyer, a student of Gindler's, rather than with Gindler herself. She developed a hands-on work that bears her name (Rosen & Brenner 1991). Marsha Rudolph writes about similarities between Hatha Yoga, Middendorf breathwork and Rosen work in her MA dissertation, 'The phenomenology of Middendorf breath work': 'In all of these methods breath awareness brings release and a feeling of increased space and expansion in the body' (1993, 64). Rudolph goes on to point out that the initial focus in Rosen work is on the muscle whereas in Middendorf breathwork it is on breath movement.

Charlotte Selver's work, like Ilse Middendorf's, orients to the perceiving of sensation, and to allowing breath rather than making or doing it.<sup>33</sup> I noted Selver's approach to breathing earlier (p.48). She brings the same method of open inquiry to all her investigations:

It is very interesting to find out how life is when we are more spontaneous, and when we don't embellish anything. What happens when we don't repeat ourselves and say 'this is right and this is wrong', but simply feel in the course of momentary living? At first we may notice that even when we don't try to be good, even when we just let things have their own way, that we still have this tendency to perform. Could we gradually give this up and let the true person comes [sic] out? Can we feel what is really, honestly, happening?

It is very helpful not to judge, just to allow, feel, and see what effect something has ... Usually, we swallow our sensations as though they are not existing. And yet there is this possibility to sense – as you know, the whole work we are doing is called sensory awareness, awareness of the senses. That doesn't mean that the mind tells the senses, 'be

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<sup>33</sup> Selver died at 102, Speads at 97, both teaching their work up until their deaths. Rosen is still teaching at 91, as is Middendorf at 96. Sophie Ludwig, heir of Elsa Gindler, also taught Gindler's work in Berlin until her death at 95 in 1997. This may say something about sensory awareness work, women, and longevity.

good', but the senses, in themselves, are able to feel and discriminate (2004).

Here again is a connection of kinæsthetic sensing and authenticity – the 'true person'. Of note also are the movements between Europe and the United States in different generations, some due to the Second World War. Leo Kofler came from Austria to the US where he taught Clara Schläffhorst and Hedwig Andersen who took that work back to Germany where it influenced Middendorf, among others, whose work is now being taught in Berkeley. Steele Mackaye brought Delsarte's work from Europe and taught, among many other, Genevieve Stebbins, whose work influenced Kallmeyer in Germany, who taught Gindler, some of whose students migrated to the US. No doubt many Europeans have studied or trained with Selver, Rosen, and Speads in the US and taken their work back home. There may be an element of prophets not being recognised in their own countries at work here. There certainly have been useful cross-fertilizations going on.

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Middendorf sees her work as part of the development of 'body consciousness', following the path forged by these and other figures in modern dance, gymnastics, and its offshoots. She interprets this development as taking place first 'from the outside', where the body is "discovered" by subjecting it to specific physical exertions, in the hope of revealing its secrets by these clumsy external means' (1990, 9). She proposes that this awakened consciousness of body still lacked something – namely breath. Middendorf goes on to acknowledge some particularly influential figures in the world of breath, some of who more directly shaped her own work. I look at these figures below in chapter six.

## Chapter Four: Different views

In general in her preface, and not surprisingly given her own interests, Middendorf takes a positive view of the development of bodily awareness since the middle of the nineteenth century, noting that 'Wars and political turmoil have been unable to hold up its subsequent development' (1990, 11). A different view can be found in Harold Segel's *Body ascendant* (1998).

### Body Ascendant

While there is general agreement about the spread of interest in body since the middle of the nineteenth century, there are different views about how that is to be understood. Don Hanlon Johnson sees that burgeoning interest as an expression of resistance to a dominant culture that savages, reviles, or ignores body. Middendorf and others point to the way body was regarded as the source of evil in the Christian tradition and see the 'rediscovery' of body in generally positive terms. Segel's study of the modernist concern with physical over intellectual culture takes another perspective.

Segel mentions a number of the same people that Ilse Middendorf refers to in her preface to *The perceptible breath*, specifically the dancers Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Laban, and Mary Wigman, and the gymnast Friedrich Jahn. But while Middendorf views them as figures on the path of the development of body consciousness, Segel sees them as part of a 'widespread disenchantment with intellectual culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (1998, 1). For Segel this disenchantment and the preoccupation with physicality were integral to the development of anti-Jewish propaganda in Hitler's Germany.

Segel notes how Friedrich Jahn founded the *Turnverein* (gymnastics association) in Germany in 1811, partly in response to Napoleon's



defeat of the Germans between 1801 and 1807, as 'a movement of national physical and spiritual regeneration clearly intended to boost not only German morale but German combat readiness' (1998, 210). Segel finds Jahn's organization permeated with an 'insistent nationalism' (1998, 210) that sank deep roots in German culture and resurfaced 'in a far more sinister way in the Nazi era, when military defeat – in World War I – was again advanced as the rationale for a vigorous new program of physical as well as moral national regeneration' (1998, 211). He concludes:

Demonized, reduced to a sub-human species, transformed into the very antithesis of the now-revered classical Greek athlete or the Teutonic equivalent, Siegfried, the Jew became targeted for extinction in a rationalization many found easy to accept. The modernist obsession with the physical had now run its full course. Where a culture of the body had supplanted a culture of the mind, the genocide of a people resented for putative intellectual superiority and scorned as physically inferior came to lose much of its moral stigma. The road traveled from the ascendancy of pantomime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the extremist cultivation of the body as a symbol of racial superiority was frighteningly short (1998, 251).

The detail of Segel's thesis is beyond the scope of this work, but it provides a stark contrast to the view put forward by Johnson, at least in terms of where a preoccupation with body can lead. It indicates at least that a preoccupation with the physical in itself is no guarantee of a particularly ethical path.

Too often in somatic works there is a tendency to reject 'the intellect', the powers of thought, as separating the person from their body, the 'true source' of their 'real self'. This I regard as an overreaction to the alienation from body that many people experience as a result of an

education that, 'contributes to the separation of discourse from the rest of the body by training attention' (Carozzi 2005, 31).

While I am sympathetic to Segel's argument, I draw a distinction between two different meanings given to body. The first is shown in a concern with an image of the physical body, now almost ubiquitous in the West. Gyms, personal trainers, jogging, cycling, all sorts of ways of 'getting fit' or 'staying fit', body building and beauty contests, are all expressions of this concern. The second meaning shows itself in a concern with a sensory experience of one's own body, such as that found in Middendorf breathwork when one attends to the sensations of movement of one's body walls with breath as it comes and goes on its own. There is a world of difference between the cultures of body-building, gym training, and 'somatic practice'. In a sense the cultures of body-building and gym training (which I do not wish to conflate) are an extension of intellectual culture and have more to do with pursuing an ideal or an image rather than attending to sensation. Somatic practices, I argue, are different. At their best they limit the alienations of abstracted intellect by connecting people with the ground of their being – the sensations of their own bodies.

## Chapter Five: Somatic practices

God guard me from the  
thoughts men think in the mind alone,  
he that sings a lasting song  
thinks in a marrow bone  
(W B Yeats, 'A prayer for old age').

There are many bodies of work that address bodily sensing including those mentioned earlier that trace their heritage specifically to Elsa Gindler. I use Thomas Hanna's term 'somatic' to refer to these bodies of work in general, and use 'Somatics' with a capital letter to refer to Hanna's work in particular. He draws attention to the difference between the first- and third-person perceptions of body:

When a human being is observed from the outside – i.e., from a third-person viewpoint – the phenomenon of a human *body* is perceived. But, when this same human being is observed from the first-person viewpoint of his [sic] own proprioceptive senses, a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma (1995b, 341, italics in original).

Middendorf breathwork is but one of many bodies of work concerned primarily with this first-person view. Feldenkrais work and Alexander technique are two of the best known bodies of somatic work and those most often used in the institutions of actor/performer training in the West.

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955) is another story of recovery from illness. He moved from Tasmania to Melbourne in his late teens to pursue his interest in recitation and acting. He found early on that he had a tendency towards hoarseness and respiratory trouble during recitals, and that following medical advice to rest provided only temporary relief. After losing his voice in a particularly important

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engagement in 1888 he began a close observation of how he was 'using himself' physically while speaking. The story goes that over a decade or so this led him to the discoveries and insights that form the basis for the Alexander technique, now a well-established form of somatic work often used in actor and performer training. Alexander moved to London in 1904 and was successful there and later in the United States as a teacher, eventually setting up a training course for teachers in his technique in 1930. Aldous Huxley and John Dewey were among his many well-known advocates.

Alexander's work seems to draw on Delsarte too. John Hunter notes that, apart from experimenting with 'various vocal and respiratory techniques', Alexander 'was, at one time, advertising himself as a teacher of the Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression' (1999).

Moshe Feldenkrais, the founder of 'Awareness through Movement' or Feldenkrais work, another form of somatic work widely used in voice and movement training, was a student of Alexander. According to Hanna, Feldenkrais was also influenced by Gerda Alexander (no relation) who developed a body of work called 'Eutony' (1985):

Alexander's long, intense sessions of sensory exploration had an effect not only on her own students but also on an Israeli admirer of her work, Moshe Feldenkrais. Feldenkrais, already trained in the techniques of F. Matthias Alexander when he was living in London, devised his famous Awareness Through Movement exercises by following Gerda Alexander's format of intense sensory exploration while lying quietly on a floor (Hanna 1990, paragraph 21).

Feldenkrais and Alexander have training courses recognised by governmental educational regulatory bodies around the world and have become to some extent 'institutionalised' themselves, both in the sense

of becoming institutions and in the sense of the rigidity associated with institutions. It is sometimes hard to see how it could be otherwise, although the work of Mabel Todd, discussed below (p.130), does provide a contrast.

Thomas Hanna, who initiated the journal *Somatics* in 1977, is another central figure in the development of body awareness work, especially in the US. Hanna sponsored and directed the first Feldenkrais training course in the US in 1975. Along with Feldenkrais work, he draws on the work of endocrinologist Hans Selye, who formulated the concept of 'stress' and recognized that there are 'diseases of adaptation'. Selye introduced the viewpoint that psychological events as well as physiological events determine human health and illness (Hanna 1988, 45–6).

Hanna's main thesis in his 'Somatics' is that the majority of adults in western cultures suffer what he calls 'sensory-motor amnesia', a 'memory loss of how certain muscle groups feel and how to control them' (1988, xiii). He says that this arises from the repeated triggering of specific muscular reflexes in the course of everyday life as well as through traumatic events:

These reflexes, repeatedly triggered, create habitual muscular contractions, which we cannot – voluntarily – relax. These muscular contractions have become so deeply involuntary and unconscious that, eventually, we no longer remember how to move about freely. The result is stiffness, soreness, and a restricted range of movement (1988, xii–xiii).

This is one way we establish patterns or habits of breathing too. The restrictions Hanna writes of affect how we breathe. Hanna points out

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that we often think of this as a consequence of growing older, but that in fact sensorimotor amnesia can and does occur at any age:

Children who grow up in disturbed family situations, or in other fearful environments such as war, show symptoms of sensory-motor amnesia: sunken chests, permanently raised shoulders, hyper-curved necks. Traumatic accidents or serious surgery in young people can cause the same chronic muscular contractions which in older adults are falsely attributed to aging: for example, scoliotic tilting of the trunk, a slight limp, or chronic undiagnosed pain that never disappears during the remainder of one's life (1988, xiii).

The equation of old age and misshapen bodies has been common in many cultures for millennia, but Hanna's thesis about sensorimotor amnesia implies that the stiffness associated with old age is not a necessary condition: 'This is my good news: Sensory-motor amnesia can be avoided, and it can be reversed' (1988, xiii). Hanna's prescription is a set of eight somatic exercises involving gentle movement and sensing, and he makes what he acknowledges are far-reaching claims for his approach:

I am convinced that a program of early training in personal sensory awareness and motor control would cause, within the span of one generation, a reversal of the major public health problems – cardiovascular disease, cancer, and mental illness (1988, xiii–xiv).

On the one hand my experience tends to support what Hanna is proposing: since I have been engaged in sensory awareness practices I feel more flexible, less stiff and held in my body. I feel more supple now in my early fifties than I did in my late thirties. But a cautionary note is called for: to draw conclusions about major public health issues from personal experience in this way transforms such issues into

matters of individual behaviour. In fact all manner of social, political and environmental factors can also have a bearing on health.

Hanna's sweeping claims aside, the accumulated experience of many people shows us that there are, nonetheless, benefits for the individual who goes down the sensing track, whether it be with Alexander, Feldenkrais, Hanna's somatic exercises, Middendorf's breathwork, or one of the many other possibilities now available. Middendorf's work shares with these the general concern with sensing the body – perceiving one's own bodily sensations. In her case these are particularly the sensations of bodily movement with breath as it comes and goes on its own, and this is what distinguishes her somatic work from others.

Apart from Alexander, Feldenkrais, and Hanna Somatics, there are now many different schools and approaches that could come under the umbrella term 'somatics'. At one end of the continuum this could include Rolfing (Rolf 1978), an extreme form of massage, and at the other end Charlotte Selver's gentle sensory awareness work, although, as Don Hanlon Johnson notes, it is hard to imagine Ida Rolf and Charlotte Selver sharing the same vision:

Dr. Rolf with her elbow probing people's *fasciae latae* edging them towards her ideal of perfection; Ms. Selver eschewing any form of intrusion into one's natural unfolding (1995b, xiv).

The somatic umbrella also embraces practices which combine psychology with a focus on embodiment, such as Reichian therapy (Reich 1949, 1973, 1975), Alexander Lowen's 'Bioenergetics' (1976), and Eugene Gendlin's 'Focusing' (1981). Lowen shows this concern with embodiment in reflecting on his experiences:

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Working, thinking and writing about my personal experiences and those of my patients have led me to one conclusion: *The life of an individual is the life of his [sic] body*. Since the living body includes the mind, the spirit and the soul, to live the life of the body fully is to be mindful, spiritual and soulful. If we are deficient in these aspects of our being, it is because we are not fully in or with our bodies. We treat the body as an instrument or machine. We know that if it breaks down, we are in trouble. But the same could be said of the automobile on which we so much depend. We are not identified with our body; in fact, we have betrayed it, as I pointed out in a previous book (1967). All our personal difficulties stem from this betrayal, and I believe that most of our social problems have a similar origin (1976, 42–3, italics in original).

Lowen too shows a wish to generalise from the personal experience of regrounding through body. In his case the proposal is that most social problems, rather than public health problems, arise from a separation from body. Again I am sympathetic but find the diagnosis too simplistic.

Psychologist John Rowan makes a contrast that parallels that of Johnson between Rolf and Selver:

The body therapy techniques developed by Reich and Lowen and their followers ... involve much stressful and often painful work, such as hitting, kicking, screaming, intense breathing, stress-inducing positions and movements, and deep pressure applied to tight musculature, referred to as one's body armour... In contrast to this approach is the body work developed by a few German women, including Elsa Gindler, Magda Proskauer, Marion Rosen, Ilse Middendorf ... Their work promotes mind/body awareness and integration using such techniques as movement, touch, natural breathing, sensory awareness, and voice work. These are much more nonstressful and nonpainful practices (2000, 197).



Rowan draws on and summarizes here points made by Lauree Moss in her doctoral thesis, 'A woman's way: a feminist approach to body psychotherapy' (1981). Moss wants to identify the approach of Reich, Lowen and their followers as 'masculine' and the gentle approach of Gindler, Middendorf and others as 'feminine'. I am convinced that the different approaches are influenced by the genders of those involved as an important aspect of their own histories, but am unconvinced of the value of the labels. I reiterate my point from the discussion above of the use of 'masculine' and 'feminine' to mean 'directive' and 'receptive' in Middendorf breathwork (p.81, n.25 above): the labels 'feminine' and 'masculine' are intended to point to something that is contested now rather than taken for granted.

The term 'somatic' clearly applies to the 'Continuum' work of Emilie Conrad-D'aoud (2002), Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's 'Body-Mind Centering' (1993), Mary Whitehouse's 'Authentic Movement' (Whitehouse, Adler et al. 1999), Trager work (Trager & Hammond 1987), and Hakomi work (Kurtz 1990). All of these approaches use somatic awareness, the person's awareness of their own body, as a fundamental ground of their work. This is a feature shared with Middendorf breathwork. What distinguishes Middendorf breathwork from these other bodies of work is the centrality of breath. Only in Speads' work mentioned earlier (p.117-18) does breath have the same central place.

Mabel Todd's work deserves particular attention because 'ideokinesis', which derives from her work, is used widely in the teaching of movement for artistic performance, and because Todd's work raises some of the same questions as Middendorf's.

## Mabel Todd & Ideokinesis

Mabel Todd wrote *The thinking body* in 1937. It was republished in 1968, and is an important early text in modern dance. Todd emphasises the evolutionary development of the body, and the importance of thoughts and feeling in human behaviour. At the beginning of her book she writes:

Behaviour is rarely rational; it is habitually emotional. We may speak wise words as the result of reasoning, but the entire being reacts to feeling. For every thought supported by feeling, there is a muscle change. Primary muscle patterns being the biological heritage of man, man's whole body records his emotional thinking (1968 (1937), 1).

And a little later,

The correlation of visceral, psychic and peripheral stimuli, underlying muscular response, involves the whole of a man. It is the very perception of nerves, viscera and organic life. The whole body, enlivened as it is by muscular memory, becomes a sensitive instrument responding with a wisdom far outrunning that of man's reasoning or conscious control. The neuromusculatures of skeleton and viscera interact, always conditioned by what has been received, as well as by what is being received; and this because of emotional and mental evaluations (1968 (1937), 3).

The notion of bodily 'wisdom' or 'intelligence' recurs in this thesis (for example pp.149, 213). Todd delves into the biological heritage of humankind, elucidating the principle that 'form follows function':

The principle that function makes form determines the myriad shapes of life, from the earliest single-celled organism to the latest and most complicated plant or animal. The meaning of any structure is to be

found by inquiring what the forces are to which the creature possessing it is reacting so that it can maintain its own existence. Force must be met by force, and the structure evolves as the forces are balancing (1968 (1937), 8).

Todd looks at how the forces acting on life forms on land are different from those in the water. She notes how the need to breathe air instead of water resulted in the development of lungs, and how the need to move about on the land resulted in various adaptations including the development of limbs:

The apparatus for locomotion and breathing, which appeared simultaneously in the racial pattern as vertebrates came onto the land, continue to be closely associated in the growth of individual organisms and in their functions. They are intimately related through mechanical and nervous tie-ups between appendicular and respiratory structures, also between both these and the cardiovascular system by which blood is conveyed from heart to lungs for aerating and back to the heart with its load of oxygen. And in man, the particular parts of the skeleton and musculature which operate to maintain the spinal curves and to keep the trunk erect are most closely associated with the bony and muscular parts involved in breathing (1968 (1937), 10).

In other words breath and movement go together and always have. Todd later devotes a chapter to breathing with particular emphasis on the diaphragm and the intricacy of its connection to the spine and main visceral organs:

The diaphragm and its associates, both nervous and muscular, reach into the deepest recesses of the individual ... It is tied up with every living function, from the psychic to the structural, and within its nervous mechanism sends out ramifications to the remotest points of the sphere of living. Like the equator, it is the dividing line of two great halves of

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being: the conscious and the unconscious, the voluntary and the involuntary, the skeletal and the visceral (1968 (1937), 217).

This quotation from Todd about the diaphragm also appears in *Writings on dance, 22*, an issue devoted to ideokinesis. In the preface to the issue, dance scholar Libby Dempster notes that:

Despite the fact that ideokinesis now enjoys quite widespread institutional recognition it continues as a relatively unregulated practice. There is no system of certification, no centralised process of accreditation; there is no academy or school of ideokinesis or Todd alignment. The pedagogic model to which ideokinetic teaching most closely conforms is that of apprenticeship, whereby the student attaches himself or herself to a master teacher (2003, 2).

This is an interesting contrast to Alexander and Feldenkrais, as I noted earlier. Dempster lists the early lineage of ideokinesis from Todd to Barbara Clark and Lulu Sweigard, from Sweigard to Irene Dowd, from Clark to Andre Bernard and later John Rolland, Pam Matt, Nancy Topf, and Mary Fulkerson.

*Writings on dance, 22* also contains a transcription of a class conducted by Bernard in 1980, the first of a new academic year. In that class he outlines the history, objectives and methodology of ideokinesis, and begins the practical work with the 'constructive rest' position.

Bernard notes that Todd was a voice teacher who, in 1917 or so, fell down a flight of stairs, injuring her back so badly that doctors told her she would never walk again. Todd found her own way through to recovery, and used her discoveries as the basis for a way of working with bodies. She taught for a while at Columbia University in the late

1920s and early 1930s, but had problems because '[those] in the academic world never understood what she was talking about' (Bernard 2003, 5).

Bernard talks a little about Clark, with whom he worked for ten years:

Clark would speak and communicate in the language of imagery and if you didn't understand what it was as you were working with her, you just didn't ask her to explain it. It would have been like going to Picasso and saying 'explain this painting to me' (2003, 5).

He contrasts Clark's approach with that of Sweigard, whom he describes as 'a cut-and-dried scientist' (2003, 6), and speaks of using all three different ways of working in his classes – Todd's, Clark's and Sweigard's.

In talking generally about ideokinesis Bernard says that it has:

a kind of total influence on the organism, physiological and psychological. But if we wanted to take an immediate objective, something that will satisfy the need to know, we could say that it is: **Neuro-muscular re-education** – that is, we're trying to change muscle patterns . . . The **methodology** is that of using images or mental pictures. And that's come to be known as **ideo-kinesis** (2003, 6, bold in original).

He expands on the methodology in saying the technique also employs 'thought, concept, intention and desire', and moreover, 'an image is more than just an image; an image has a life of its own' (2003, 6).

Bernard says that the work is about voluntary movement, so intention and desire are important because the desire or the intention to move

begins the process. The intention is transmitted to the muscles by the nervous system. The nervous system is the messenger, but it is also the organiser at a preconscious level. The muscle pattern is not under voluntary control, even though the movement is. Bernard uses the example that there are some 119 muscles involved in taking a step, which clarifies this distinction between voluntary movement and the involuntary control of the actual muscles. Bernard points out that the distinction between control of movement and control of muscles is more than just a semantic distinction because muscles act in groups, not singly, and muscle groups interact with one another. This question of what is potentially under our conscious control, what we can influence by our will, and what we cannot, arises again and again in this project.

Whereas ideokinesis uses images to change muscle patterns, Middendorf breathwork focuses on the sensations of the movement of breath and does not purport to change anything but rather to connect the person to a source of somatic intelligence through breath. An important underlying idea in Middendorf breathwork is that breath orients to the whole person rather than any particular part, so when a person participates fully with the movements of their body with breath, as opposed to acting as a detached observer, breath can act as an integrative 'force' because it is so integrally connected to all parts of being and life. The regular practice of Middendorf breathwork, the repeated attention to bodily movement with breath, brings a gradually heightening awareness of the physical body, a sensory awareness, and a capacity to sense the qualities of that movement.

Another way of putting this is to regard 'identity', one's sense of self, as made up, in part, of a representation of one's body in the neural pathways of the brain, as for example Antonio Damasio does in *The*

*feeling of what happens* (1999). He argues that consciousness begins with the realisation that the self is changed, albeit in tiny ways, by every interaction. So this representation will be altered by the sensory practice of Middendorf breathwork, thus changing, again in small ways, one's identity.

My own experiences with ideokinesis have helped me understand how the ideas I have about my body help shape my experience of my body and how, in turn, my experience of my body can change my ideas or images of my body. For me the same dialectical process happens with the practice of Middendorf breathwork.

I have emphasised so far how the first-person experience of sensing one's own body is the connecting point for the many different bodies of work that make up the general field of somatics, and how this is a central feature of Middendorf breathwork because in that work the connection to breath happens through the perception of the sensations of bodily movements with breath.

At this point I turn to breath itself, to look at those figures Middendorf acknowledges as influential in the field, at other bodies of work that deal particularly with breath, and to give an overview of how breath is treated in the fields of voice and movement training for performers.





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Breathing ... corresponds to taking charge of one's own life (Luce Irigaray, 2002, 74).

In her review of the development of 'body consciousness', when she turns specifically to breath, Middendorf acknowledges first of all Schlaffhorst and Andersen, whom I introduced earlier (p.103). She goes on:

The psychological root of the world of breath was mentioned by C.G. Jung and emphasized by Gustav Heyer. Cornelis Veening and Margarethe Mhe elaborated their original intuitions into a 'breathing-psychological' path and made clear what the deep contact of the breath with the essential meant. Karlfried Graf Dürckheim must also be mentioned here as the breath is embedded in his existential teachings. And in Lowen's bioenergetic teachings you can find Wilhelm Reich's 'Wissen vom Atem' ['knowledge from breath'] (1990, 11–12).

I look at Middendorf's connection with Jung below. Heyer was a pupil and later a colleague of Jung. His wife, Lucy Heyer, was a student of Gindler and taught Marion Rosen. Rosen's biographer, Elaine Mayland, writes:

The Heyers were part of a group of people in Munich using massage, breath work, and relaxation in conjunction with psychoanalysis as practiced by Jung and others. The group discovered that by synthesizing their several disciplines, the treatment time for psychoanalysis could often be dramatically reduced (1995, 55).

Cornelis Veening was a singer who became interested in breath after losing his voice. He was for a while one of the group that Mayland refers to. He went on to establish his own school for breathwork, which

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is still in operation ([www.atemlehrwerkstatt.de](http://www.atemlehrwerkstatt.de)), and developed particularly an individual hands-on approach to working with breath. Mhe was a colleague of Veening's. Moss writes:

Veening seems to be one of the few teachers who introduced the concept of 'pause-breath' as a technique in teaching people about unobstructed and natural breath (1981, 70).

A 'normal' breath cycle consists of inhalation, exhalation, and pause. The pause may be absent when a body is under strain, like during or after exercise, or when the person is ill. Breath without a pause, usually with a fast rhythm, is called 'reflexive' in Middendorf breathwork. Sometimes breath may be reflexive for reasons that are unclear. In general, however, the breath cycle includes a pause. Later in the research workshops we paid particular attention to the pause in the breath cycle:

then I [...] let my presence be in the pause & I noticed a shift in the layer of me beneath my skin as if my outer shape is the same but that the layer just beneath has dropped down & has some weight of its own that gave some more space for the pause – only a tiny change but it felt all encompassing – total, whole (SC 8 August 04).

The pause is a remarkable 'place'. I wrote about my early experiences with the pause back on page five, of how it felt like a moment of nothingness, of suspended animation, a special moment that at first disconcerted me. SC goes on:

there is a panic that lives in my observed pause. It is not a safe or comfortable place for me to be [...] There is a sense that I am holding my breath out & if I do that then it might never come in again & that will be the end of me. It is a very tight space almost an emotion rather than

anything else [...] it is not very long at all, it is rushed, it tumbles me into my next inhalation (SC 8 August 04).

Then later on in the workshop series:

Much easier for me to enter the pause if I let the exhalation finish. I think I have a tendency to rush on to the next breath without allowing the exhalation to be complete. No room for pause (SC 14 September 04).

And a fortnight later:

For me the pause seems like a blessed place, a religious place, spiritual.

After massage/stroke of hands & feet & then breathing through soles & palms I felt as if the breath filled the spaces (that the in breath made) with spheres. These spheres were spaces ready to be occupied by the inhalation but they didn't shrink with the exhalation. The pauses seemed to be the spaces between the spheres (SC 28 September 04).

This is quite a journey in itself, from 'not a safe or comfortable place' to 'a blessed place'. It provides some support for the idea in Middendorf breathwork that the pause is the place of trust.

Middendorf worked with Veening over many years, and acknowledges him as the source of her own hands-on work, and also more generally:

I owe a great deal to this great master, but especially my opening up to my own development and, above all the liberty I found in myself (1990, 14).

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Theodore Nottingham writes of Karlfried Dürckheim, who died in 1988 at the age of ninety-two, describing him as a psychotherapist and spiritual master:

The inner practice which he developed over his many years of study, travel and experience offers to contemporary seekers a way of radical transformation. Combining the insights and practices of Zen Buddhism with depth psychology and Christian mysticism, he has created a potent, practical way of inner work which thousands have undertaken (2003, paragraphs 2–3).

Dürckheim learned about different approaches to breath in Japan, where he spent many years and wrote a number of books. I have already mentioned his observations about the difficulty of letting breath come and go on its own (p.48).

Alexander Lowen, referred to above as combining psychology with a somatic approach (p.127), was a student of Wilhelm Reich and is a well-known psychotherapist and author in his own right. Lowen begins *Bioenergetics* (1976) with an account of his years of therapy with Reich, noting that for Reich, 'the first step in the therapeutic procedure was to get the patient to breathe easily and deeply' (1976, 19), and later that breathing 'is as crucial to bioenergetics as it is to Reichian therapy' (1976, 40).

### Middendorf & CG Jung

Middendorf regards Jung's psychology as 'very close to working with the breath' (1990, 14). Her connection with Jung is perpetuated in the breathwork training in Berkeley with the use of a Jungian vocabulary that includes 'conscious' and 'unconscious', 'collective' and 'individual', 'masculine' and 'feminine', and 'Self' with a capital 's'.

Middendorf draws particularly on Jung's differentiation of four 'psychological functions' – thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting – in positioning her work. She writes:

Feeling and perception are functions of the soul that have to be clearly differentiated. This differentiation is imperative for our work on the breath, although the ability to perceive has not been aroused in many people – or has been long suppressed, together with feeling (1990, 21–2).

In the breathwork training in Berkeley these four are often distinguished from one another, not with the label 'psychological function', more at the level of shared assumptions, of common language. From the beginning I have understood from Middendorf breathwork teachers, particularly from Dieter Gebel, that the work is grounded in perceiving the sensations of bodily movement with breath, that these sensations are distinguishable from thoughts, feelings, and intuitions that might arise, and that they should be so distinguished. To help flesh this out I look now in some detail at what Jung himself says of these 'psychological functions' in *Psychological Types* (1971), beginning with 'feeling'.

Feeling is primarily a process that takes place between the *ego* and a given content, a process, moreover, that imparts to the content a definite *value* in the sense of acceptance or rejection ('like' or 'dislike') ... Feeling ... is an entirely *subjective* process, which may be in every respect independent of external stimuli, though it allies itself with every sensation. Even an 'indifferent' sensation possesses a feeling-tone, namely that of indifference, which again expresses some sort of valuation. Hence feeling is a kind of *judgment*, differing from intellectual judgment in that its aim is not to establish conceptual relations but to set

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up a subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection. Valuation by feeling extends to *every* content of consciousness, of whatever kind it may be (1971, 434, italics in original).

Jung goes on to distinguish feeling from 'affect', which he describes as 'a feeling state accompanied by marked physical innervations' (1971, 435), whereas he regards feeling as having no more physical effect than thinking. He acknowledges that feeling cannot be fully expressed in words, which are a tool of thinking:

The very notion of classification is intellectual and therefore incompatible with the nature of feeling. We must therefore be content to indicate the limits of the concept (1971, 436).

In everyday language 'feeling' is far broader than this, as Marcia Moen spells out:

In use the term 'feeling' has many meanings: sentient awareness (kinesthetic and proprioceptive awareness) or sensation; or emotion, affect, and desire; or empathy; or intuition, including hunches; or the aesthetic; or 'senses' as in sense-of-self, sense-of-meaningfulness, sense-of-relevance, sense-of-solidarity (1991, 216).

Moen makes a distinction, which seems akin to Jung's use of affect and feeling, between 'feelings (definite and in the plural) that affect cognition and a feeling phenomenon which underlies the others' (1991, 216), identifying this underlying feeling as 'felt sense' the way Eugene Gendlin uses that term, and suggesting that this is close to John Dewey's 'aesthetic strand', William James's 'sentiment of rationality' and Charles S Peirce's 'Firstness' in the context of thought. Moen indicates here that a number of the best known American thinkers have identified feeling in this sense as an important human attribute separate

from, but bearing on, thinking. It is not clear that Jung treats feeling in quite this way. I follow up Gendlin's 'felt sense' later (p.258).

Turning next to thinking, Jung writes

Thinking is the psychological function which, following its own laws, brings the contents of ideation into conceptual connection with one another. It is an *apperceptive* activity, and as such may be divided into *active* and *passive* thinking. Active thinking is an act of the *will*, passive thinking is a mere occurrence (1971, 481, italics in original).

Jung defines apperception as:

a psychic process by which a new content is articulated to similar already-existing contents in such a way as to be understood, apprehended, or clear (1971, 524).

We deal with a lot of our perceptive input at a pre-conscious, automatic level, only becoming conscious at the articulated, thought level, of some aspects – those we have some special attachment to or interest in or that force themselves on our attention. But my impression is that Jung is not referring to this but rather to thinking in the normally understood rational reasoning sense.

About intuition Jung writes:

Intuition ... is the function that mediates perceptions in an *unconscious* way. Everything, whether outer or inner objects or their relationships, can be the focus of this perception. The peculiarity of intuition is that it is neither sense perception, nor feeling, nor intellectual inference, although it may also appear in these forms. In intuition a content presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or

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discover how this content come into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive apprehension, no matter of what contents ... Intuitive knowledge possesses an intrinsic certainty and conviction, which enabled Spinoza (and Bergson) to uphold the *scientia intuitiva* as the highest form of knowledge. Intuition shares this quality with *sensation*, whose certainty rests on its physical foundation. The certainty of intuition rests equally on a definite state of psychic 'alertness' of whose origin the subject is unconscious (1971, 453, italics in original).

And then about sensation Jung writes:

Sensation is the psychological function that mediates the perception of a physical stimulus. It is, therefore, identical with perception. Sensation must be strictly distinguished from *feeling*, since the latter is an entirely different process, although it may associate itself with sensation as 'feeling-tone'. Sensation is related not only to external stimuli but to inner ones, i.e., to changes in the internal organic processes. Primarily, therefore, sensation is *sense-perception* – perception mediated by the sense organs and 'body-senses' (kinæsthetic, vasomotor, sensation, etc.). It is, on the one hand, an element of ideation, since it conveys to the mind the perceptual image of the external object; and on the other hand, it is an element of feeling, since through the perception of bodily changes it gives feeling the character of an *affect*. Because sensation conveys bodily changes to consciousness, it is also a representative of physiological impulses. It is not identical with them, being merely a perceptive function (1971, 461–2, italics in original).

Jung regards both sensation and intuition as foundational:

For me sensation and intuition represent a pair of opposites, or two mutually compensating functions, like thinking and feeling. Thinking and feeling as independent functions are developed, both ontogenetically



and phylogenetically, from sensation (and equally, of course, from intuition as the necessary counterpart of sensation) (1971, 463).

I can quite readily take in the idea that sensation is primary, that touch is the first among the five senses, both genotypically and phenotypically – amoebas respond to touch, and so do human embryos at about six weeks; each of the other senses is localised to a particular organ in the head, but touch is found throughout bodies. However the notion that intuition is the ‘necessary counterpart of sensation’ is not so immediately obvious.

The OED describes intuition as used in modern philosophy as ‘The immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning process’ (OED online). For Henri Bergson, who Jung refers to above, intuition represents the return of intelligence and instinct to each other. Liz Grosz summarises his view:

Akin to an aesthetic rather than a scientific understanding, intuition is the close, intimate, internal comprehension of and immersion in the durational qualities of life. Intuition is not an alternative to instinct and intelligence, but their orientation in different directions. It is the orientation of the rudiments of instinct with the insights of intelligence, no longer directed to a single or given practical end, but for its own sake (2004, 234).

Intuition points to a different kind of ‘intelligence’ from logical, rational, language-based intelligence, a different sort of ‘knowledge’ of the world. This is an important possibility for the comprehension of Middendorf breathwork and this project, and I return to it in detail in chapter nine.

In a later paper, first published in 1936, Jung summarises his position:

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I distinguish four functions: *thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition*. The essential function of sensation is to establish that something exists, thinking tells us what it means, feeling what its value is, and intuition surmises whence it comes and whither it goes (1971, 553, italics in original).

Before looking at how Ilse Middendorf draws on these categories in writing about her work, I will provide some context by looking at Jung's own philosophical heritage.

In *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* Jung argues against the 'common prejudice' that 'still believes that the sole essential basis of our knowledge is given exclusively from outside' (1968, 57):

we are absolutely incapable of saying how the world is constituted in itself – and always shall be, since we are obliged to convert physical events into psychic processes as soon as we want to say anything about knowledge. But who can guarantee that this conversion produces anything like an adequate 'objective' picture of the world? That could only be if the physical event were also a psychic one. But a great distance still seems to separate us from such an assertion. Till then, we must for better or worse content ourselves with the assumption that the psyche supplies those images and forms which alone make knowledge of objects possible (1968, 57).

This appears to be a version of Kant's transcendental idealism, which panpsychist philosopher Freya Mathews summarises thus:

Kant provided an elaborate analysis of the (transcendental) structure of the individual Cartesian mind, with a view to accounting for the order of our thought and experience and for the appearance therein of an

external world. He argued that the forms of space and time, and categories such as those of substance and causation, are built into the mind itself, and together make up the conceptual grid with which the mind unconsciously imprints its raw experience, thereby rendering that experience coherent and intelligible. According to this account, the idea of an external world is itself a (transcendental) mental construct, and anything beyond or behind such constructs is regarded as at best unrepresentable and unknowable, or noumenal, and at worst as an unjustified hypothesis (2003, 162).

It is not my intention here to attempt a comprehensive critique of philosophical idealism, simply to note the apparent grounds of Jung's position and to see what implications they have for Middendorf breathwork insofar as it draws on Jungian discourse.

At first glance Middendorf breathwork seems so thoroughly grounded in the material world of bodies, so empirical, that it is hard to reconcile this with transcendent idealism. Although Middendorf adopts Jung's categories and sees her work as concerned primarily with sensation and only secondarily with thinking, intuition, and feeling, she appears to accept the reality of the physical body, and to accord it as much importance as the mind:

It is the sense of touch, which through its sensory awareness makes the act of breathing conscious and therefore apparent. Touching, feeling, sensing are all familiar to us. ... Carried by our sensitive nervous system, sensory awareness is the key to the body, the physical matter and is distinctly different to feeling (Middendorf 2005, paragraph 6).

Here Middendorf uses Jung's distinction between feeling and the perception of sensation spelt out above. She also makes a clear distinction between these 'psychological functions' and body as

physical matter. So it seems fair to say that she is no idealist philosophically.

Philosophical idealism can still argue that sensory awareness is a psychic event and that we have no way of being sure that it refers to anything outside itself. Within its own terms – with its assumptions of subject-object distinction and its understanding of mental or psychic events as non-material – idealism is self-contained, complete, and difficult to argue with. But when its terms are called into question different understandings become available.

For now it is enough to note that, while Jung describes attention as ‘an entirely secondary phenomenon’, it is central to Middendorf’s work, as the piece cited just above makes clear. And while Jung purports to be concerned only with psychic events, Middendorf attends to bodily events, as well as their psychic representations. Middendorf is primarily concerned with experience.

\* \* \*

I have now introduced those involved with breath that Middendorf mentions in her compact introduction. Before reviewing other bodies of work dealing with breath I note that the subtitle to Middendorf’s book is *a breathing science*. While hers may not be the usual scientific approach, she is nonetheless interested in establishing universal principles of breath, which more conventionally scientific approaches do not touch on.

## Science & breath

Scanning through the first hundred articles that are returned on Google Scholar in response to a search on ‘breath’ I note that most are

medically oriented, most have to do with measuring something while the breath is held, and none have anything much to do with breath itself or the process of breathing. Aside from the anatomy and physiology of breathing, science does not seem much concerned with breath.

Robert Fried attempts a scientific approach to breath in *The psychology and physiology of breathing* (1993). His introduction begins with an argument against those who would study electrical discharges in the brain:

Electricity is not what makes the brain work or flounder. It is its detritus. And if you want to study brain function, you also need to study breathing and blood (1993, 5, italics in original).

Specifically he proposes studying the red blood cell and the haemoglobin molecule, which transports oxygen and carbon dioxide to and from body tissues, and suggests that abnormal neuronal behaviour may be caused by mishaps in red blood cells, whose regulatory key is breathing. His book is targeted at clinicians who are 'concerned with the treatment of emotional, stress-related, and psychosomatic disorders' (1993, 6). His solutions are a 'good blend of the cognitive and behavioral', such as the advice offered by Fried's Rational Emotive Therapy supervisor: 'Tell your client to "take a deep breath now," that will reduce his [sic] tension and anxiety' (1993, 5).

In looking at the anatomy and physiology of the respiratory system Fried cites from a book entitled *Shut your mouth* (Catlin 1869):

The mouth of man, as well as that of brutes, was made for the reception and mastication of food for the stomach, and other purposes; but the nostrils, with their delicate and fibrous linings purifying and warming the

## Chapter Six: Manifestations of breath

air passage, have been mysteriously constructed and designed to stand guard over the lungs – to measure the air and equalize its draughts, during hours of repose. The atmosphere is nowhere pure enough for man's breathing until it has passed this mysterious refining process; and therefore the imprudence and danger of admitting it in an unnatural way, in double quantities, upon the lungs, and charged with the surrounding epidemic or contagious infections of the moment (1869, 27).

Fried reports that Catlin's observations have been scientifically verified:

When the air is drawn through the nose, it is separated by the septum and swirls past the turbinates, forming vortices. Due to this vortex action in the nasal passages, coarser particles in the air are removed by the filtering action of nasal hairs. Smaller particles are subsequently removed by the mucous blanket, to which they adhere. In addition to filtering the air, the nose warms and moisturizes it, creates a mucous blanket, provides drainage for the sinuses, and accommodates the sense of smell (1993, 22).

I include these observations not only for their curiosity value but because when I first came into contact with Middendorf breathwork it was clear that in that work it was 'normal' to breathe, in, at least, through the nose, whereas in my voice training background it was normal to breathe in through the mouth – often there was not the time to let breath in through the nostrils.

Fried notes that the modern study of 'normal breathing' begin with Pavlov and Sherrington, who studied the automatic execution of this complex function. He writes:

Yet, despite that apparent automaticity, breathing is clearly affected by thinking and by emotion. Conversely, abnormalities in breathing may also cause such problems (1993, 28).

I take him to mean problems of thinking and emotion. He goes on to refer to the idea of the 'wisdom of the body' as a 'canard':

the body has no wisdom. In fact, it often limits us to repeat what we did in the past. While this may in some cases be helpful, it hardly qualifies as wisdom. The future may be different from the past, but the body seldom modifies its instincts even when they doom it to extinction. Due to conditioning, it responds blindly to the future or to its anticipation. On the other hand, if there is wisdom of the mind, it may prevent the folly of the body. In biofeedback, we teach the body not to distort the mind (1993, 28).

There seems to be some confusion here between instinct and conditioning. In her discussion of Bergson's distinctions between torpor and movement, instinct and intelligence, Liz Grosz points out:

The biological units that make up the body – cells, tissues, muscles, organs, and so on – function instinctively, even in intelligent beings. Cells act as if they were instinctual organisms; they are insect-like in their collective relations to tissue building. They have a 'knowledge' of what they are supposed to do, how they are supposed to function, without learning. They 'know' in the sense of being able to enact precisely the biological functions they are required to (2004, 229).

At this instinctual level it is reasonable to put 'wisdom', 'knowledge' and 'intelligence' in inverted commas. Instinct is usually distinguished from intelligence. But since these instincts, far from dooming us to extinction, are what enable us to live, it is understandable that people talk of bodily

## Chapter Six: Manifestations of breath

'wisdom' or 'intelligence' when referring to such functions. Middendorf breathwork practitioners refers to 'somatic intelligence', which I discuss below (p.217). Conditioning is another thing and speaks of an ability to learn, and therefore of intelligence in the usual sense.

From my perspective Fried fails to acknowledge the cultural situatedness of his remarks. When the dominant culture emphasises the virtues of mind and continues to regard body as the 'dumb beast of burden' then 'naturally' people will ignore their bodies and pay attention instead to what 'experts' say. Fried's observations simply restate that dominant cultural position, ignoring a wealth of evidence from somatics and other fields that contradict his assertion and challenge the simplistic division of 'body' and 'mind'. However, the point Fried makes about repeating what we did in the past is important. Deane Juhan writes about it in a different way in *Job's body*:

there is a mental feeling of 'rightness' that comes to be associated with the specific manner of movement which produces satisfactory results. This sense of 'rightness' is a large part of the pleasure of learning a skill, and is also one of the main reasons why habits become so ingrained, why my behavior takes on such recognizable personal patterns. So much of my sense of psychological and physical continuity, my sense of unity and security, depends upon my ability to repeat appropriate and predictable actions, that this feeling of 'rightness' can scarcely be overestimated in its importance as an element of my psychic integration as a whole. Each time I 'get the feel' for a new response, I also get a new feel for myself and for my relation to the world of external objects at large ... We all stand and walk differently, but we all stand and walk with an identical internal sense of 'normalcy' associated with our own way of doing it; and this sense of norm has for each of us an equal feeling of 'rightness' to it. Yet, in spite of each individual's own sense of 'rightness', some of us stand and walk with far



more ease and efficiency than others, while some have accustomed themselves to doing it so poorly that their posture and manner of walking undermine the health of the whole system (1987, 188–9).

Juhan draws in part on Paul Schilder's foundational writings on 'body image', which I look at in more detail below (p.239). Juhan's thesis here connects with Hanna's ideas of sensorimotor amnesia introduced above (p.125), though Juhan proposes that people repeat patterns of behaviour that are deleterious to their whole selves for reasons of 'psychological and physical security', whereas Hanna's explanations have a more physical base in the repeated triggering of reflexes. Both are interested in how we come to develop habits that undermine our health. My interest is in how it is possible to perceive such bodily habits when they do feel 'right' to us, but are otherwise patterns of behaviour that we are not conscious of. My experience is that the practice of Middendorf breathwork is one way to do so, and I have little doubt that other somatic works provide this possibility also.

What I hold to be the most important aspect of Middendorf breathwork, namely the actual experience of breath, does not lend itself to scientific investigation in the usual sense of being measurable and repeatable. There is no way to measure this sort of experience. Middendorf calls her work 'a breathing science' because she endeavours to describe universal principles that breath follows when it is allowed to come and go on its own (see Appendix K).

Scientific study of the outcomes of the practice of the work is, however, possible. I found two such studies. One looks at the efficacy of Middendorf breathwork in the treatment of chronic lower back pain. The authors conclude:

## Chapter Six: Manifestations of breath

Patients suffering from cLBP [chronic low back pain] improved significantly with breath therapy. Changes in standard low back pain measures of pain and disability were comparable to those resulting from high-quality, extended physical therapy. Breath therapy was safe. Qualitative data suggested improved coping skills and new insight into the effect of stress on the body as a result of breath therapy (Mehling, Hamel et al. 2005, 44).

The other scientific study involving Middendorf breathwork concludes:

Psychophysical breath work by Middendorf leads to a general improvement of the body equilibrium which remains stable over time. The positive results from this study suggests that breath work by Middendorf may be a valuable method for the treatment and rehabilitation of balance disorders (Aust & Fischer 1997, 580).

### ‘Breathing-psychological’ paths

I quoted Middendorf on how Veening and Mhe had ‘elaborated their original intuitions into a “breathing-psychological” path’. Other ‘breathing-psychological’ paths include ‘rebirthing’ and ‘holotropic breathwork’. Catherine Dowling (2005) credits Leonard Orr with the discovery of ‘rebirthing’ in the United States in the late 1960s. She describes the technique:

The breathing technique called rebirthing is full and flowing. Inhale and exhale are connected to eliminate any pauses and, although the lungs are filled with air, the emphasis is on getting the breath up into the less used area beneath the collarbones. When a connected, flowing pattern such as rebirthing is established, it irons out the kinks and idiosyncrasies in the breathing mechanism and when this happens, it is likely that the causes of those distortions will begin to surface. This is

the point at which breathwork can become a form of psychotherapy (2005, 3).

An immediate contrast with Middendorf breathwork is apparent: rebirthing manipulates breath for a particular end whereas Middendorf breathwork lets breath come and go on its own.

Stanislav Grof, born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1931, is known for his 'transpersonal' psychology, and also as the founder of 'Holotropic Breathwork', a practice that grew out of his interest in altered states of consciousness through the use of LSD. His official website describes holotropic breathwork as:

a powerful approach to self-exploration and healing that integrates insights from modern consciousness research, anthropology, various depth psychologies, transpersonal psychology, Eastern spiritual practices, and mystical traditions of the world ... The process itself uses very simple means: it combines accelerated breathing with evocative music in a special set and setting. With the eyes closed and lying on a mat, each person uses their own breath and the music in the room to enter a non-ordinary state of consciousness. This state activates the natural inner healing process of the individual's psyche, bringing him or her a particular set of internal experiences (Grof 2006).

Like rebirthing, holotropic breathwork practice contrasts with Middendorf's approach of letting breath come and go on its own. One of the participants in my research workshops was a trained actor with experience in holotropic breathwork. He seemed to be perceptive of the movements of breath in his body, and have no problem letting breath come and go on its own.

## Yoga & meditation

Of the other fields that include breath practices yoga is probably the best known. Most breath practices, whether in yoga or elsewhere, like rebirthing and holotropic breathwork, use breath to some end, requiring the practitioner to do something with their breath. Rather than try to review them I will look briefly at those practices that share Middendorf's approach of letting breath come and go on its own.

The 'non-interfering' approach to breath can now be found in a growing number of yoga practices, including those of Sandra Sabatini (2000) and Donna Farhi (1997, 2003). Most yoga practices still emphasise manipulating or controlling breath in some way. 'Allowing breath' can be found in a few somatic practices that pay attention to breath, including those of Speads (1992), and Selver (Littlewood & Roche 2004), as mentioned above. It can be found in the voice work of Kristin Linklater (1976, 1992) and her followers, as I discuss below (see 'Breath in voice training', p.162), but elsewhere in voice (and especially in singing) most practitioners advocate breath control. Most other breathwork practitioners subscribe to 'doing' something with breath. Dennis Lewis (1997, 2004) is an exception – and he learned from Middendorf and Speads. Letting breath come and go on its own is perhaps most widely found in the West in forms of Buddhist meditation, especially Zen meditation adopted from Japan. Ruben Habito, academic theologian and teacher of Zen writes:

One breathes – placing one's full attention on every breath as it comes in and goes out – literally with one's whole heart and whole mind. Each full breath is received with a new freshness, lived in each here and now. It is this living in the here and now, focused on the breath, guided by the breath, that will open one to a deeper level of awareness (1993, 45).

The ‘full attention ... with one’s whole heart and whole mind’ is the same as what Middendorf practitioners in Berkeley call ‘full participation and presence’. Habito regards this form of breath meditation as connecting one with the living world:

As I focus on my breathing in and breathing out, here and now, I literally put myself in connection with everything else that is connected with this very breath: all the living beings of the human and animal domain with which I share the air I breathe; all the plants who receive what I exhale and give me oxygen in return, and so forth (1993, 54).

I noted earlier that Larry Rosenberg structures his book about breath meditation, *Breath by breath* (2004), around the Buddha’s Anapanasati Sutra. He writes:

Most forms of pranayama, yogic breathing, involve controlling the breath. Anapanasati accomplishes some of the same things – it is a kind of Buddhist science of breath – by letting the breath be as it is, by surrendering to the process (2004, 20).

Middendorf breathwork also involves being fully present and focused on breath, so readers with some experience of these forms of meditation may more readily understand one of the bases of Middendorf’s work. There are important differences too. Middendorf breathwork is concerned with sensing breath movement throughout the whole body and is not a meditation conducted in stillness.

I finish this section with a lengthy quote from Magda Proskauer, who was born in Hamburg, Germany, in the early 1900s. When she was eighteen she went to Munich to study medicine, specializing in physiotherapy. She also studied with Rudolf Laban, with Carola Speads, and, for about fifteen years, with Cornelis Veening, who had

such an impact on Middendorf. She moved to Yugoslavia to flee Hitler, but eventually had to leave there too and moved, eventually, to the US, first to New York and later to the Bay Area of California. Moss writes that Proskauer's work was called 'Breath Awareness', and that 'Magda's popularity in the Bay Area made it difficult to attend her classes directly' (1981, 69). Nina Winter includes Proskauer in *Interview with the muse* (1978). This is Proskauer's voice:

During my early years in Munich I worked especially with people who had asthma or tuberculosis or emphysema – all conditions characterized by breathing difficulties. During my work with these patients I discovered the breath as a healing tool. I was fascinated that with the breath you could help people not only with the cure of certain diseases, but with postural problems, emotional problems, and many kinds of pain ... When I came to this country [the US], doctors were just beginning to experiment with new approaches to help cerebral-palsied children. I found that when you used breathing techniques with these spastic children, together with warmth and love, they became relaxed and could gradually learn enough balance and coordination to function better. It was a simple thing, but no one had ever taught these children how to relate to their breath ... Most people think that you study breathing so that you can breathe better or get more oxygen, but this is actually only one part of this work. For me the breath is simply a tool for getting in touch with the inner life ... The breath happens to be almost the only function which is connected with these two nervous systems, the autonomous one which works without the mind, and the mental conscious one ... I think of the breath, more than anything, as a meditation. If you let your own rhythm come up through the breath, then you don't make the breath quiet; it makes you quiet. In the beginning there is no right or wrong way of breathing to be corrected.<sup>34</sup> There is just you experiencing yourself (Winter 1978, 67).

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<sup>34</sup> My impression is not that Proskauer thinks that later on there *is* something to be corrected. This is probably a Germanic English expression.

Here is another German woman born around the same time as Middendorf and Selver saying much the same things about how to approach breath, and with a moving story about what is possible when breath is approached in this way. So Middendorf is not alone in working with breath that comes and goes on its own, but that is still an unusual way.

When it comes to voice and movement training, particularly to voice, there is quite a history of different understandings of the place of breath, and in the next chapter I turn to that realm to complete this section on locating Middendorf breathwork.





## Chapter Seven: Performing breath

Inspiration makes ready. Readiness is all  
(Huston 1992, 29).

In most actor/performer training institutions in the West voice and movement are treated as separate specializations. The use of the word 'training' suggests 'techniques' or 'tools' that the individual performer can be 'trained' to use, though in practice a more thorough-going personal change than this implies often takes place since the 'tool' is integral with the performer. Mark Seton proposes the term 'actor formation' rather than either 'training' or 'education', and argues that:

teachers and students, through their conversations and their actions in institutional contexts of training, form each other in recognisable ways, while, at the same time, they radically misrecognise much of what they are doing to and with each other (2004, 4).

I find Seton's argument convincing and generally applicable to the contexts of voice and movement training as well as to the breath training I have been undertaking, so I will not concern myself with the debate over 'training' versus 'education'.

I began this project with an assumption that some integration of these separate specializations of voice and movement would be desirable, and with the question of whether Middendorf breathwork could provide the basis for this integration. I was influenced in this by Phippen and Eden's remark, 'If we train in specializations, who does the integrating?' (1997, 80).

## Chapter Seven: Performing breath

As I have made clear above, the focus of my research workshops moved away from a particular concern with voice and movement as the breadth and complexity of the breathwork in itself became more apparent. Nonetheless I do regard Middendorf breathwork as having much to offer these contexts, as will become apparent, so I begin here with a brief review of the role of breath in 'voice'. Then I look at breath and the singing voice, hear from established Middendorf practitioners I interviewed who specialise in voice, and finally look at the role of breath in 'movement'.

### Breath in voice training

In the second section of *Resonating bodies* Pippen and Eden review voice training (for performance or theatre rather than singing, and in the English-speaking West). They see the publication of Cicely Berry's *Voice and the actor* (1973) as a watershed in this field:

Voice texts written before 1973 generally conform in orientation and intention with what is called a conventional or traditional attitude to voice training, most simply described as training the vocal instrument much as any other musical instrument would be trained, with the emphasis on technical aspects (1997, 12).

According to Pippen and Eden, the era prior to 1973 was one of 'correct' voice, of elocution lessons and the 'King's (or 'Queen's) English'. They see the teaching of voice in this era as both reflecting and reinforcing the social and cultural milieu: 'good' speech was a strong aid to upward social mobility; some accents were unacceptable. Voice training focused on the acquisition of desirable accents and speech patterns.

Now 'Received Pronunciation' (no longer the Queen's English) is taught as an accent, and Patsy Rodenburg can argue that to speak in the accent of one's birth is a right and even a responsibility (1992, 'Vocal Imperialism' pp.105–8). This is not to say that 'good' speech is not still an aid to upward social mobility in some circumstances.

Pippen and Eden identify Arthur Lessac's *Use and training of the human voice* (1967) as the notable exception to the rule in the years before 1973. Although inevitably influenced by the 'elocution years', his approach is strongly grounded in the physical, in imagination and 'energy'. Lessac published two major revisions of his text (1981, 1996). He remains one of the major figures in vocal pedagogy in the US, although not so widely known in Australia or Britain.

The other central figures in the late twentieth century in the English-speaking world of voice for theatre have been Cicely Berry (1973, 1992, 2001), Kristin Linklater (1976, 1992), and Patsy Rodenburg (1992, 1993, 1997). Pippen and Eden write that Berry, Linklater and Lessac 'constitute a vocal triumvirate of influence' in actor training institutions (1997, 11), and they go on to mention Rodenburg, whose texts 'offer coherent and solid training schemes' (1997, 20).

In her influential study, *Voice in modern theatre* (1991), Jacqueline Martin refers to a 'duality of approaches to voice training' within actor training (1991, 171), meaning Berry and Linklater. She summarises their approaches:

Cicely Berry's approach to the vocal delivery of a classical text is principally through the text itself, whereby the actor is encouraged to involve himself [sic] actively in the structure of the thought at the moment of communication ... Kirsten [sic] Linklater's approach is

## Chapter Seven: Performing breath

based on the organic functioning of the voice, which, when liberated, receives its impulses from the senses and consequently informs the text ... Neither one of them believes in the 'correction of faults' and both of them are attempting some sort of integrated method – Cicely Berry through the text and Kirsten [sic] Linklater through the voice – whereby both what is said and how it is said should spring from the same source (1991, 178).

Martin's duality could be characterized as 'training the voice' versus 'freeing the voice', and it parallels a duality of approaches to breath – the 'interventionist' versus the 'non-interventionist'. In some ways it also parallels the two major metaphors for representing voice that Pippen and Eden refer to, namely: 'the voice as a musical instrument and the voice as a mirror of the "soul" or as revelatory of our individual human-ness' (1997, 21). This second metaphor represents, for them, the main shift in vocal training in the twentieth century. They see an inherent acknowledgment of the visceral connection of voice in the holistic approach represented by this metaphor, citing examples from Berry, Lessac, Linklater and Rodenburg, and conclude that ultimately, 'the kinaesthetic becomes the dominant aesthetic' (1997, 27).

I return to the issue of the dominant æsthetic shortly, but first I look more closely at how these figures treat breath. Arthur Lessac talks of breathing and posture as 'an essential interdependent duality. If you stand properly, you will breathe well. If you breathe correctly, salutary posture will follow' (1996, 20). 'Salutary posture' seems a rather quaint construction, carrying, for me, unfortunate overtones of 'standing to attention'. Lessac may not intend this, but his formulation begs the question of whether there is any such thing as 'correct' in breathing and standing.

Berry writes:

If you breathe from the upper part of the chest, therefore, the whole rib cage has to move and you use a great deal of effort to get a relatively small amount of breath. Unfortunately, a great deal of athletic training concentrates on this area for breath supply as it enables you to take quick, short breaths, and if you have trained in this way it is difficult to break the habit. This type of breathing produces an enormous amount of tension in the upper part of the chest and shoulders which, as we have seen, is totally wrong for the voice. You obviously need as much breath as possible without effort, and that breath you need to make into sound. If you find the breath at the base of the ribs, especially at the back and in the stomach as the diaphragm descends, then the whole frame of the body becomes part of the sound as it contributes to it with resonance ... What you are doing is reaching down to your centre for the sound. The breath goes in, and the sound comes out – you are touching down to your centre, you are finding the ‘I’ of your voice. When you find this it is as though you belong, you are present in what you are saying. You will then find the breath touching off the sound like a drum. You will find that you will not have to use a great deal of breath, because the breath will be made into sound (1973, 21–2).

I have included such a long citation from Berry because it is clear here that she does not treat voice as ‘just an instrument’ – ‘you are finding the “I” of your voice’. And yet at the same time she is interventionist at the level of breath, offering various exercises for achieving a sense of breath going down to the centre of the body (1973, 23–42).

Kristen Linklater clearly sits on the ‘freeing the voice’ side of Martin’s duality, and her approach to breath has most in common with Middendorf’s. Linklater writes:

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The involuntary breathing muscles are subtle, complex, powerful and deep inside the body. Any voluntary controls that you apply will involve muscles that are large, clumsy, external, and at several removes from the lungs. Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states, and severely curtail the reflex connection of breathing and emotional impulse (1976, 25).

Her approach is a *via negativa*, aiming to ‘remove habitual muscular controls and allow the involuntary processes to take over’ (1976, 25).

She advises:

Consciously, all you can do is keep releasing tension from the stomach area, the shoulders and the lower belly, and be aware of the breath apparently moving your body, rather than your body moving the breath. Remember that your natural breathing rhythm may not be your familiar breathing rhythm (1976, 26).

The language Linklater uses for working with breath – ‘letting’, ‘allowing’, ‘giving in to’, ‘releasing’ – is similar to Middendorf’s, as is the idea of a ‘natural’ rhythm that may not be the familiar one.

I mentioned earlier that Zygmunt Molik has been influential on my own practice, and cited his response to a question about his approach at a forum during an International Workshop Festival in London. He said:

Everyone’s approach differs, and mine, to put it briefly, is a search for the pure organicity – how to breathe with the whole body, not only one part of the body; how to integrate the whole organism into how you are speaking or how you are singing (1994, 28).

Molik was responding to a question about his approach in general, not about breath. There is a focus in the beginnings of his work on letting the body breathe of its own accord, on 'letting breath drop in', not trying to 'do' breath. As I wrote earlier, Molik was one of the original members of Grotowski's Polish Theatre Laboratory. Pippen and Eden identify Grotowski as one of a small number of theatre directors who have integrated voice and movement training in their work 'because they have authored both elements together to produce a particular kind of theatre' (1997, 81). Molik says that within the company he focused in particular on voice because: 'After four years at drama school I had no breath at all' (1994, 28).

Neither Grotowski nor Molik has written about their work. Their tradition was much more the master-apprentice model. In my own teaching of body-based voice I draw on elements of Molik's approach and find them invaluable, including exercises that encourage the experience of breath 'dropping in' without effort.

I have had no direct experience of Patsy Rodenburg's work. She clearly acknowledges the fundamental importance of breath when she writes:

Breathing is the first and last thing we do. We enter and depart the world gasping for air and life. Every feeling and thought, every mental and physical condition is first experienced and manifested in the breath (1992, 142).

To complete this short scan of the field of voice I now turn to singing, a section of the field that has its own often separate traditions and understandings.

## Breath & the singing voice

Voice for singing is still mainly taught individually in the master-apprentice tradition. The importance of breath for the singing voice is universally acknowledged, but what this means in practice varies considerably from teacher to teacher. This is apparent from Jerome Hines' interviews of forty opera singers in *Great singers on great singing* (1982). He asks about the breath and 'breath support' and gets a bewildering and at times contradictory array of answers.

Over the last twenty years or so there has been a great deal of work done on the 'science of the singing voice', some of which has been directed at breath. Jean Callaghan's *Singing and voice science* (2000) summarises this work. She devotes her third chapter to 'breath management', making it clear that there is no general agreement on any aspect of breathing, including the role of the diaphragm, or the desirability of 'abdominal' versus 'chest' breathing.

It is not surprising that there should be such a separation, in the west, of singing, especially classical singing, from other fields of voice. The mystique surrounding classical singing, particularly opera, has been around since the sixteenth century and there have been singing teachers carrying on the tradition of master and student for centuries. Cornelius Reid identifies himself as being within this long tradition of teaching, the 'bel canto' tradition. He spells out his teaching principles in five books (1965, 1974, 1975, 1983, 1992), and has been widely influential in the classical singing world.

In the third of his books Reid focuses on the whole person, on body, and on psychological factors involved in singing. He calls his approach 'functional vocal training':



Functional vocal training is founded on the belief that a correct technique must be an extension of free organic movement; that such movement is the expression of a life process subject to nature's laws; and that training procedures adopted must be based upon principles which conform to those laws (1975, first page of preface, unnumbered).

Reid acknowledges advances in four areas of science that have contributed to knowledge about 'the number and origin of vocal registers', namely acoustics, anatomy, physics and physiology. But he warns:

the value of these studies must not be overestimated. One can know a great deal 'of' and 'about' the mechanics of voice without comprehending the significance of the functional process in the slightest (1975, 3).

Beginning with an understanding that excess tension in the body is bound to adversely affect the voice by virtue of interfering with breathing, Reid writes with great sensitivity and experience of the complicated problems facing singers:

Solving vocal problems by applying techniques which encourage natural movement and cause interfering muscles to relinquish their hold can be painful. To feel free movement within a muscular system which over the years has to some extent been bound arouses the very fears, real or imagined, from which all of us spend so much time and energy trying to hide; fear of being exposed and vulnerable, fear of the unknown, fear of losing control, fear of the sensual pleasure aroused as a consequence of organic expansion, and, sometimes, fear of succeeding (1975, 14).

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In Reid's experience as a teacher not all students are capable of releasing habitual patterns of muscular holding. He seems to be referring here particularly to muscular tensions in the laryngeal area, though in my experience there are many areas of the body where habitual tensions can affect breath and voice. He writes:

To a remarkable degree, however, normal work on register development and adjustments for resonance will go a long way toward restoring lost motility, regardless of origin. By stimulating movement within the laryngeal pharynx and relieving throat constriction, other tensions throughout the respiratory tract will 'let go', not always, of course, but often enough for efforts made in that direction to be justified (1975, 15–16).

When he addresses breathing, Reid, like all singers and singing teachers, acknowledges the inseparability of breath and voice: 'Singing is so intimately bound up with the physical process of respiration, it is little wonder that the art of phonation touches upon the very essence of life itself' (1975, 106). He recognizes that singing can contravene the normal ebb and flow of 'natural' breathing by maintaining a narrowed glottis for protracted periods, but he warns against attempts to control breath, referring to:

the distorted belief that control over function can best be achieved by controlling the breath, as to both the quantity to be released and the manner in which it is to be inspired and 'prepared'. The result has been that many who could otherwise have sung naturally (in the sense of utilizing a technique which operates in conformity with nature's laws), with freedom and spontaneity of expression, have been turned into vocal cripples (1975, 109).

Reid focuses instead on exercises that enable the singer, over time, to become aware of the manner in which the laryngeal muscles operate and come to have some control over these. In this way he too is based in the kinæsthetic. He eschews breathing exercises, although he knows what he does not want:

There should be no raising of the chest or tensing of the shoulders, no pulling in or pushing out of the abdominal wall, no direct effort to expand the rib cage, and no indulgence in the often burdensome chore of breathing too deeply (1975, 110).

When I interviewed Brigitte Wellner, a Middendorf practitioner with many years of experience in singing and the teaching of singing, she referred to an American who lived for many years in Germany:

He taught educational science of singing at Weimar Music School. He called his training 'functional voice training'. He knew a lot about medical, anatomical and physiological aspects of voice, too. He offered a training for singers and singing teachers, which lasted five years, and I joined it. His approach was both scientific and holistic (Appendix G, paragraph 4).

Wellner did not remember the American's name, but agreed that he had been a student of Cornelius Reid (personal correspondence).

Janice Chapman, who I referred to earlier, and who is still teaching, is another widely influential figure in the classical singing world. Chapman acknowledges the influence of Jo Estill ([www.evts.com](http://www.evts.com)), whose 'compulsory figures' are drawn from research into voice qualities. Estill's work is not restricted to 'classical voice'. Through her 'compulsory figures' students learn independent control of different parts of the 'vocal mechanism' – the vocal folds, the velar

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port, 'anchoring' by using muscles of the head and neck or the torso, the pharynx, the tongue, and the aryepiglottis – which affect the quality of vocal (spoken or sung) sound. Estill notes that breathing is 'de-emphasized' in her work:

since there are as many 'methods' for breathing as there are teachers, and since however you breathe does not necessarily set up the source and the filter for the sound you want, and since most singers don't breathe the way they think they do, nor are they overly concerned with it when they perform – for all these reasons breathing is not a consideration in this model for voice control (1991, appendix, 6).

The sensing of breath defies scientific measurement. Actually the whole approach through kinæsthetic sensation, through sensing, is non-scientific, or a-scientific, in that the focus is on first person experience, not on what is measurable. Estill's approach comes across as scientific, and some of it is science-based, but it seems to me that the important aspects of her work – sensing the details of one's own 'vocal mechanism' – are kinæsthetic. In this way she too shares in what Pippen and Eden call the 'dominant æsthetic'.

### Middendorf practitioners & voice

I mentioned earlier (pp.13–14) the four Middendorf practitioners I interviewed who work with voice – Jeff Crockett, Maria Höller, Letizia Fiorenza, and Brigitte Wellner. Crockett (Appendix A), head of voice at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, trained in voice at the Central School for Speech and Drama in London, taught in Minneapolis for a number of years, then resigned to train full-time in the Alexander technique for three years. He began the job in San Francisco straight out of Alexander school.

It was more responsibility than I had been used to, and I was fresh out of Alexander School and ready to, you know, kind of conquer the world with the Alexander technique. And the initial passion and creativity that was in my teaching when I didn't know much was gone, and something kind of flat came in, and it was really horrid, it was really upsetting (Appendix A, paragraph 8).

Crockett happened upon Middendorf breathwork, took part in some workshops, and realised that this was good work for him:

when I started working with the breathwork I realised that part of what was killing the real essence and life in the work was in the Alexander work we're really orienting to observation and that's very different from sensation. In fact in an Alexander lesson they'll talk to you a lot about, don't feel it, inhibit and direct. It's kind of like a little straightjacket (Appendix A, paragraph 10).

I do not want to suggest that Crockett's experiences with Alexander work are representative of that field. My point is that for Crockett the orientation to sensation is the real key in working with voice. He uses this with his students, so that in voice work they orient to sensation rather than to sound, to being in sensation rather than to observing something. Again the kinæsthetic is the dominant æsthetic.

More recently Crockett wrote about using the breathwork with his students:

To 'allow' the breath is huge for them and has a tremendous impact on the way they can relate the work to their acting. Authenticity comes into the work, spontaneity and creative responses that do not

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come out of their heads, but from a richer source within them  
(Appendix A, postscript, paragraph 4).

This theme – that allowing breath to come and go on its own is vital, and that doing so encourages ‘authenticity’ – is common among Middendorf breathwork practitioners who work with voice, as will become apparent in this section.

‘Authenticity’ is a complex notion within the arts with links to religion and transcendence dating back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, as Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell’s *Performance and authenticity in the arts* (1999) makes clear. The Middendorf breathwork practitioners I cite in this section use ‘authentic’ to refer to a ‘genuineness’ of self-expression that seems to be connected both with ‘allowing’ – in this case allowing the inhalation to come on its own – and perceiving sensation – the kinæsthetic dimension that I have just been discussing.

The following report from a research workshop was made by an Alexander practitioner after practising some of the ‘vowel space’ work, using the sounds ‘M’ and ‘I’:

A major insight here. I realise why I’ve always been reluctant to go onto voice, to sound. Because I feel that sounding demands a bigger, an extra effort. So I quickly grab the breath, pull it in and push it out as sound – all unnecessary. By going through the process of establishing perception of the breath cycle, and particularly, by waiting for the breath to come back of its own accord and contemplating the sound as I observe it (not use it in a utilitarian way) the sound [...] is already there and one simply continues it as one allows the breath to go onto the creative moment (HP 23 May 04).

By adulthood many people have developed such breath and voice patterns as HP describes. Middendorf breathwork provides a different possibility, a way of ‘unpatterning’. HP’s background in sensory awareness, including Alexander technique, no doubt contributed to making it possible for him to discover this so quickly, in only the second session he attended.

Maria Höller has developed a body of work she calls *Atem Tonus Ton* that grew out of her experiences as a Middendorf breathwork practitioner and her explorations of her own voice. I interviewed her in Männedorf in November 2003 (see Appendix E). She described her work as a search for ‘joyful, authentic performing; to lose the demands for producing a “perfect voice”’ (Appendix E, paragraph 8). She has developed many different exercises based on working with *Gegenspannung*, which translates as ‘tension in contrary’. These are based on the work Ilse Middendorf refers to as *spannungsatem* (breath in creative tension). Höller works with resistance, but in a flexible, relaxed way, not by way of great muscular tension. Early on in developing her work she found:

The body should be relaxed in the upper part but we need the strength from the lower part. So it’s important to have a good posture. Tension against the earth, which gives the power of resistance, is okay, but against the heaven, means probably a pressure for the vocal cords (Appendix E, paragraph 15).

While her singing teacher proposed contracting a particular muscle, Höller found that by using resistance against the earth she got the required strength along with an easy posture, a comfortable body sensation. When we spoke Höller had a book in preparation, which has since been released (in German only). While her own work has

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continued to grow and flourish, she regards Middendorf breathwork as the foundation for it:

The perceptible breath I appreciate very much, and when I publish the book, once you will see, the biggest part is the breath part. Because this is the profound human being, and I want to clarify also for performers that you cannot manage the breath, because the breath is our being. We can experience the breath and with it ourself but when we start to manage and lead the breath, we create a disorder in ourself (Appendix E, paragraph 19).

This is similar to what Kristen Linklater says about breath as cited earlier:

Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states, and severely curtail the reflex connection of breathing and emotional impulse (1976, 25).

For Linklater this means leaving breath alone. For Höller and Middendorf breathwork it means connecting to breath, not through conscious control but through presence and the perception of sensation, and thereby connecting to inner states and emotional impulses.

To sing out, to perform, requires voluntary strength as well:

Middendorf work is a clear instruction to go profound[ly] inside of yourself and to develop the being. That means all the inner spaces and these breathing spaces are useful for the voice. But not enough for a good performing and good voice at all (Appendix E, paragraph 23).



For Höller ‘good voice’ is a question of balancing inner work with the strength and capacity to come into the outer without manipulating the vocal folds or the breath (Appendix E, paragraph 25).

Letizia Fiorenza is a singer who specialises in the folk songs of the south of Italy, where she comes from. She is also a qualified Middendorf breathwork practitioner of many years standing and teaches at Ursula Schwendimann’s Middendorf Institute in Männedorf. She was a student of Maria Höller for many years and now collaborates and teaches with her. I interviewed Fiorenza at her home a little way from Zurich a few days after the four-day *Atem Tonus Ton* workshop she and Höller taught (see Appendix F).

Fiorenza distinguishes three directions for those following Middendorf breathwork – spiritual, health and well-being, and creative-artistic-expressive. Like Höller, Fiorenza is most interested in the creative path, and in ‘authentic’ performance:

if you realize that in all moments of your life you are complete, you can live more happily and on stage you transmit this feeling to the audience through your body and your voice and they accept you, and are touched by you being authentic. Authentic does not mean perfect! (Appendix F, paragraph 4).

Fiorenza regards the breathwork as the foundation of her capacity as an artist to connect with her creativity:

Through this work with the breath and body I learned to develop the body, the force, the presence, the connection through the soul and the voice, all the things you need if you perform, yes, to be strong (Appendix F, paragraph 9).

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I think for an artist to discover the potential of your creativity inside is very important. That is also Ilse's work. It's Ilse's work ... to learn to trust your body, your breath, your inspiration! (Appendix F, paragraph 13).

Fiorenza refers to Höller's work as a 'natural continuation' of Ilse Middendorf's work:

You work through the tonus of the muscles, you go outside with the voice, you discover another dimension of the breath. The most wonderful thing for me was, that with this new dimension I could go deeper into Ilse's work (Appendix F, paragraph 11).

In response to my remark that, even though Middendorf breathwork was not intended as a way of working with voice, it seems to provide a good bodily ground for voice, Fiorenza replied:

Oh yes, it's a perfect ground if you have time to do it. I think it's wonderful, I think it's the best thing we could do because it's so real, it's pure and sincere, it's authentic (Appendix F, paragraph 26).

That she says 'if you have time to do it' is indicative of the way that Middendorf breathwork takes a lot of time, something not readily available in educational institutions.

Brigitte Wellner was a guest at the second segment of the breathwork training in Berkeley in April 2004. Whereas I had heard of Höller and her work I had not previously heard of Wellner. She offered a short class in her voice work on the evening before the segment began, and I interviewed her later in that segment (see Appendix G).

Wellner took singing lessons for three years beginning when she was twenty-one. She found her voice deteriorating over that time. 'And I noticed that many people at Music School begin with a real nice voice and they end with a terrible voice or the voice is even unhealthy in the end' (Appendix G, paragraph 2). In her search for solutions to this she studied the Schlaffhorst-Andersen method of breathwork, did a lot of Feldenkrais and Alexander technique, and took part in a five-year 'functional voice' training based on the work of Cornelius Reid. She began teaching singing when she was twenty-five, and at the time of my interview had been developing her teaching work for thirty-three years. She first met Middendorf breathwork in 1984, started the training in 1988 and finished in 1992.

Wellner describes her method of working with voice as 'voice experience', paralleling 'Breathexperience', the trade-marked name for Middendorf breathwork in America:

The methods are in line with the methods of our breathwork. The inhalational impulse must come on its own, and that's very important for the quality of voice, too. And that you feel where your breath or your voice wants to go, without any pushing (Appendix G, paragraph 5).

For many years now she has used the same approach for singing and speaking:

The basic training, to open the throat and to let it free, and to get a healthy voice that you can express what you want with your speaking or in your singing, that's the same training for all (Appendix G, paragraph 23).

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Wellner regards letting the inhalation come on its own as the first vital step for voice work:

the base is the inhale, that you let come the inhale on its own, that's important, otherwise there is a strain on the vocal cords. So our breath work is a very good base for voice work (Appendix G, paragraph 27).

Then she works with humming and allowing the jaw and tongue to move gently in the mouth, and with what she calls 'basic sound':

And then if you let then the sound flow, if you open only the mouth, you will feel what I did with you first, that there is a sound, I call it basic sound, that is a mixture between A and O and er, er [the schwa], like you are lazy and you are too lazy to pronounce some vowels. And with this sound, the vocal cords can learn to work in a very effective way (Appendix G, paragraph 27).

She begins in a very soft and easy way, including sensing 'where is my voice, what do I hear?' (Appendix G, paragraph 27) and then chooses from a big range of exercises:

then you train the tongue, you train the jaw, the movement of the jaw, you train the other muscles, and all the time the whole body too, that the inhale goes into the movement, into the feet, like our work (Appendix G, paragraph 28).

Wellner regards Middendorf breathwork as:

a very good base for the voice. But also Feldenkrais is a good base, Alexander technique is also a good base. Because some people have not such a connection to the breath, so we can offer them another method for the voice (Appendix G, paragraph 16).

For those who do connect with breath Middendorff's is:

a good method because it lets you into the deep and then your singing will become a singing that comes out of the soul and is not a technical singing. And that's the most important thing, that you sing with your whole person and that you don't sing only with a technique (Appendix G, paragraph 16).

In summary, Middendorff breathwork practitioners I interviewed who work with voice all agree that the practice of Middendorff breathwork enables people to connect with themselves, their creativity, in a way that allows this to be expressed in their voices. Voice connected to the whole person in this way carries an authenticity of expression that audiences recognise. The capacity to allow the inhalation to come on its own seems to be foundational to this. None of the four suggests that Middendorff breathwork provides the only path to such authenticity.

Overall it is clear that Middendorff breathwork, with its kinæsthetic foundation and connections to the sources of artistic creativity, is work most suitable as a foundation for voicework, both in speaking and singing. Whether it can fit into an educational institution is another matter.

### Breath in movement training

Pippen and Eden devote the third section of *Resonating bodies* to a review of fifty years of movement training in Australia. They find the literature on movement to be more diverse than that on voice. In Australia the first graduates from a formal training program for

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theatre movement trainers emerged from the National Institute for Dramatic Arts in 1994. Prior to then:

trainers evolved from their individual passion for the physical dimension of theatre and whatever ancillary training and experience came their way. Their backgrounds were largely in dance but also included physical education, Laban technique, martial arts, mime, mask, circus or somatic therapies such as those of Feldenkrais, Alexander or Keleman<sup>35</sup> (1997, 29).

Pippen and Eden order their review of this diverse field by particular movement trainers, by movement approaches, by movement theory, and by cross-cultural influences. They state their preferences for movement training as follows:

The authors believe that it is most desirable to begin to train actors in movement as Linklater begins in voice – at the level of their humanity – to return them to their bodies, to sensation, to the impulse to action, to the savouring of subtle changes in their physical, emotional and psychic states and, most importantly of all, to the experience of all these stimuli in relation to others in the context of a play (1997, 32).

My initial interest in Middendorf breathwork as a possible integrative agent in voice and movement trainings comes from this statement of preferences. I have already discussed how Middendorf breathwork is a good ground for voice work. For Middendorf, movements arising from breath are:

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<sup>35</sup> Stanley Keleman was a pupil of Alexander Lowen. In his words, he: 'has been practicing and developing somatic therapy for over thirty years and is a pioneer in his study of the body and its connection to the sexual, emotional, psychological and imaginative aspects of human experience' (2000).

the real goal of our work ... In a joint game the breath fills the movement and follows its guidance, while the movement itself springs from the breath. Movement 'arises' from breathing. Both possibilities merge into each other but can only be experienced when the practitioner knows how to focus, to perceive, and let the breath come of its own accord (1990, 46).

This is clearly movement arising from the sensations of the movers' bodies, from their humanity. So Middendorf breathwork can also provide a good ground for movement work, and it stands to reason that if it were used as the ground work for both of these 'trainings' there would already be an integrative process at work.

Pippen and Eden examine in detail some representative examples of movement trainers who have published their works as systems for actors – Nancy King's *A movement approach to acting* (1981), John Gronbeck-Tedesco's *Acting through exercises* (1992), Jean Newlove's *Laban for actors and dancers* (1993) and Jean Sabatine's *The actor's image: movement training for stage and screen* (1995). While all have something to offer, none fully measures up to Pippen and Eden's criteria. The primary influences on these movement authors are figures familiar from above. For example:

King's postural work references Sweigard, Alexander and Feldenkrais; her approach to movement impulses echoes Delsarte; her language for energy qualities reflects Laban and Doris Humphries (1997, 33).

Doris Humphries was a student of Ruth St Denis and part of the next generation of innovators in American modern dance. The other figures I introduced in chapters four and five.

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Next Pippen and Eden examine the work of three ‘master teachers’ – Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux, and Jacqui Carroll – who have developed their own processes not recorded in books. Lecoq’s work has been codified through his school, *École Internationale de Theatre* and is influential in actor training in many countries. Pippen and Eden describe his work as:

characterised by strong physical theatre skills, discipline and rigorous critique . . . The body, rather than text, is the fundament of theatre in this regime. Actors are given no theory as such, just the hawk eye of the master and the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ that signals the viability of what is offered (1997, 41).

Monika Pagneux was a movement trainer with Lecoq for many years and now conducts her own workshops in which she uses Feldenkrais method as the core of an eclectic approach. Physical discipline is integral to her training, as is spontaneity. Pippen and Eden are generally positive about Pagneux’s work, except they note that she does not deal directly with emotion: ‘Pagneux acts as if the emotional dimension will be dealt with as an organic by-product of the investment in action’ (1997, 45).

Jacqui Carroll is co-director of Frank Theatre Brisbane. Her training is based on that of Tadashi Suzuki:

Discipline is a high priority . . . there is intense concentration, animal energy, heightened muscular tonus and a sense of controlled rage in the presence of the actors . . . Rather than the exploration of an emotional range, what is explored is an ambivalent performance presence – a state of alert readiness from which any extreme of behaviour could erupt (1997, 46).



Pippen and Eden conclude about these three:

these exceptionally gifted trainers have developed their own processes which ultimately are not for recording in text books; they are inscribed in the bodies of their students who, in turn, may pass on some aspects of their learning, each in their own way (1997, 47).

Then they look at Jerzy Grotowski and Robert Cohen as examples of directors whose movement practice is generated from their performance practice. They note various phases in Grotowski's long journey in theatre, and that he has been widely influential from his early 'poor theatre' days when actor training involved the stripping away of unnecessary habits – the *via negativa*.

In the last part of their review of movement training Pippen and Eden look at the contributions of 'theatre anthropologist' Eugenio Barba and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. They note that Barba spells out what he sees as shared common principles across different styles and traditions of performance, not as a system or set of laws, but as bits of advice. He understands acting technique as a particular use of body, distinguishing between daily techniques, techniques of virtuosity, and 'extra-daily' techniques that render body artificial or artistic.

Csikszentmihalyi is best known for his ideas about 'optimal' experience or 'flow', where, as Pippen and Eden note, "the person becomes "so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous ... they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 53, cited in Pippen & Eden 1997, 54). They look at the necessary ingredients for 'flow' and conclude that they also provide

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'descriptors of the optimal training situation as well as the optimal experience of theatre practice' (1997, 55).

In conclusion Pippen and Eden contend:

Kinaesthetically based approaches such as those developed by Feldenkrais and Alexander can inform every level of the creative process rather than remain at the level of, in Barba's terms, 'daily technique' ... We have observed that, unless there has been time for the actor to touch base with their kinaesthetic process below the level of their conscious and wilful action, there can be no leverage on desired change ... At base, this is a cry to return to the senses (Lake 1995, 227) and to cultivate refinement of our capacity for differentiation of sensation (1997, 57).

As for voice, so for movement: the cultivation of the kinæsthetic sense, the capacity to perceive sensation is paramount. While it is clear from the earlier discussion of ideokinesis, Feldenkrais, and Alexander, that some approaches to movement do concern themselves with breath, there is no mention of breath anywhere in Pippen and Eden's review of movement training. It seems unlikely to me that this is an omission on their part. Rather, breath is not a point of focus in most movement practices. It is taken for granted. Sometimes, like in some yoga sequences, there will be some breath-related instruction, but these tend to be prescriptive rather than sensation-based.

However movement practices based on breath are possible. As Todd suggests, breath and movement are as intimately linked as are breath and voice. So a movement practice based in breath, such as Middendorf breathwork, could be directly linked to a voice practice

with the same basis, thereby providing the basis for the integration of voice and movement that Pippen and Eden refer to.

An example of such a practice partly grounded in breath, one which answers the 'cry to return to the senses' is found in Barbara Sellers-Young's *Breathing, movement, exploration* (2001). She aims to combine kinaesthetic and psychological aspects of the creative process through uniting:

Three somatic or body/mind processes that are associated with action and acting: *an attitude of exploration, the awareness of breath, and the unifying power of imagery* (2001, xv).

Sellers-Young writes of the experience of breath:

When the multiple possibilities of breath are explored, it becomes an element to which one can constantly return and still focus on other information. Breath is an element of learning to relax, center, and explore alignment (2001, 9).

The breath practices Sellers-Young draws on combine those that allow breath to come and go on its own and those that call for a particular use of breath. The fundamental importance of the kinaesthetic is clear in both.

\* \* \*

That concludes this part on the contexts for Middendorf breathwork. In part four I discuss how the breathwork relates to a range of contemporary notions around embodiment and subjectivity.



## Part Four: Body, breath, becoming



## Chapter Eight: Experiencing meaning

Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – even a proverb is no proverb to you till your life has illustrated it (John Keats, *Letters*, 1814-21).

The practice of Middendorf breathwork is primarily concerned with a person's experience of their own body (specifically with the sensations of the movement of breath in their body) and in this concern intersects with a diverse array of fields including philosophy, neuroscience, phenomenology, feminism, and social psychology. In this part I draw on these fields in order to discuss both how these fields might help understand or interpret the practice of Middendorf breathwork and also what the core of Middendorf breathwork, breath awareness through allowing breath to come and go on its own, has to offer these fields of discourse.

### Experience & knowledge

When I write about my experience of my own body, particularly about my internal sensations, the questions arise, how do I know what I am talking about, and how do I know whether or not what I am talking about has any general application? What is the relationship between experience and knowledge? If I want to generalize from my internal experience I have the problem that it is my experience and not someone else's, so how am I to know if it is the same as anyone else's? It is not measurable. It is not 'objective' but 'subjective'. This is often put as an argument against the use of personal experience as the basis for 'knowledge', and one reason why autoethnography, the study of one's own experiences, has not been a popular basis for PhD research. How can I 'add to the body of knowledge' simply on the basis of my own experience? This is one source for the concern that things be measurable, quantifiable. It arises from an

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understanding of the world as causally determined – the ‘Laplacian’ universe. Pierre Simon, Marquis de Laplace (1749–1827), French mathematician, astronomer, and physicist wrote:

We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes (1902, introduction).<sup>36</sup>

Although quantum physics rejects this view and many systems of thought argue against it, it is in effect the ruling world-view in the West, the commonsense understanding of the way the world is. Any other view seems ‘magical’, counter to common sense.

In his extensive review of ‘experience’ in the history of Western thought, from the Aristotelian formula ‘*nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu*’ (nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses) through to the commodification of experience in packaged tourism and extreme sports, Martin Jay points out:

Not only is ‘experience’ a term of everyday language, but it has also played a role in virtually every systematic body of thought, providing a rich vein of philosophical inquiry ever since the Greeks (2005, 4).

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<sup>36</sup> According to wikipedia this comes from Laplace’s introduction to his *Philosophical essay on probabilities*, but it was not found in the 1995 edition from Springer-Verlag, New York. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laplace>, last accessed 7.1.06.



Jay addresses both immediate sensorial experience, such as that I can have of my body being moved by my breath, and also experience as an accumulation of these immediate experiences, the basis of a sort of wisdom. His broad sweep covers religious experience, aesthetic experience, politics and experience, history and experience, 'lived experience', 'inner experience', and more.

Looking at the etymological roots of 'experience' in the Latin *experientia* and the Greek antecedent *empeiria*, Jay writes:

Here a crucial link between experience and raw, unreflected sensation or unmediated observation (as opposed to reason, theory, or speculation) is already evident. So too is the association between experience as dealing more with specific than general matters, with particulars rather than universals. As such, it contributes to the belief ... that experiences are personal and incommunicable, rather than collective and exchangeable (2005, 10–11).

Jay goes on to note some of the many uses the word 'experience' has as a noun and as a verb. Of particular interest to this project, he notes:

Because it can encompass what is being experienced as well as the subjective process of experiencing it, the word can sometimes function as an umbrella term to overcome the epistemological split between subject and object (2005, 12).

Included in Jay's review is the way some thinkers, like Kant, have rejected experience in both of the above meanings as the basis of knowledge, holding bodies to be fallible and 'pure' reason alone the

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foundation of knowledge. Then he writes of the poststructuralists who:

challenge 'experience' (even more so 'lived experience') as a simplistic ground of immediacy that fails to register the always already mediated nature of cultural relations and the instability of the subject who is supposedly the bearer of experiences (2005, 3).

The 'always already mediated nature of cultural relations' is widely recognised now. Philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin, for instance, writes:

one cannot begin by neutrally reporting observation and experience. Many cultural and conceptual forms have always already been at work in any situation, experience and thought by the time we think from it (1991, 22).

However Gendlin argues that the assumption that concepts and social forms entirely determine experience is overstated. He looks at how the 'always already' came to be assumed as totally determinative, discussing Descartes' championing of Galileo's 'imposition of mathematical ideas on nature', suggesting that the 'natural order' had its last moment with Rousseau. He points the finger at Kant:

That reversal, to make the wild richness of experience seem derivative from the imposed forms – that came with Kant (1991, 43).

But he says that Kant insisted on retaining an idea of an unknowable reality beyond our sensations and concepts, and Hegel rejected even this unknowable reality.

Hegel said that thought really meets nothing but itself. It alone develops dialectically into more and more distinctions. It was the final stage of the loss of nature. Now everything was assumed to happen only within thought-forms, *comparisons* – the ‘march of differences’. With the Romantics and Nietzsche the assumption changed – but not very much. It was still assumed that experience is produced by imposed forms, but not just by thought-forms but by the forms of culture, history and language. Again it was held that experience is possible *only within* these. Experience could not talk back in any orderly way of its own (1991, 45, italics in original).

Gendlin refers to an underlying ‘intricate order’: ‘The order that is more than form *functions* in language and cognition in many vital and noticeable ways’ (1991, 23, italics in original). He suggests that our usual thinking is based on

the assumption that order can only be something *imposed* on experience, that forms, distinctions, rules or patterns are the only order so that there is nothing else, no ‘other’, and hence no possible interplay between the forms and something more. Supposedly nothing but disorder talks back (1991, 24, italics in original).

This assumption, he argues, was adopted to correct the mistaken view that science copies nature:

The order of nature cannot be represented or approximated, because no such single *formed* order of nature is simply there, waiting for us to get it right. The correction assumes that nature is nothing but *whatever order we impose. But that is an over-correction* (1991, 24, italics in original).

Any situation is always far more intricate than can be described in language. In a way this comes across in reading the responses of

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participants in the research workshops – the rich variety of responses indicates how much can go on in an apparently simple situation.

[Kant and Heidegger] both assumed that experience has *always already* been organized by certain determinants so that no change in the determinants can come from it. Experience can happen *only within* determinants. We need a critique to limit this ‘always already’ and ‘only within’. Anything human does indeed include implicit concepts and cultural forms, but we will see that they do not work by a one-way determination (Gendlin 1991, 32, italics in original).

In choosing a research project that is concerned with ‘experience of breath’ it is probably already clear that I do not side with those who hold reason alone to be the main basis of knowledge. I prefer the arguments of those below who hold the body to play a major part as a source of our knowledge of the world. As to the poststructuralist concerns, I acknowledge that how we make sense of our immediate sensorial impressions is culturally determined, at least in part. However that does not deny the existence of such experience. Perhaps it asks that we inquire more closely, sense in more detail, what those experiences are, what their cultural determinants might be, and, with Gendlin, in what way these determinants are open to change.

In my experience of Middendorf breathwork training it is taken for granted that an individual’s experience of breath is in part expressive of the manifold events and influences that make up that person’s personal history. One of the reasons that letting breath come and go on its own is so difficult in the first place is that breathing is subject to patterns or habits that are socially and culturally determined and not readily available to consciousness. But breath awareness brings with it the possibility of change, even in deep-set patterns.

Middendorf breathwork sessions usually begin with an invitation to connect with breath – to sit on the stool, let yourself be carried by the stool and the ground, let your breath come and go on its own, and begin to sense bodily movement with breath, making a shift from thinking to perceiving sensations of breath movement.

Hands over centre.

‘Moving from thinking to sensing.’

This is always a startling moment for me. Makes me realise that I’m always thinking/directing myself more strongly than I’m aware of – even as I enter the experience (too much the knowing Alexander teacher is operating). To just observe/sense without any directing is a wake-up moment (HP 13 June 04).

Prior to his Alexander training HP was for many years a performer and acting teacher. His remarks call to mind what Jeff Crockett said in my interview with him: ‘in the Alexander work we’re really orienting to observation and that’s very different from sensation’ (Appendix A, paragraph 10). For many people, even those like HP with years of experience in other somatic bodies of work, the orientation to sensation can be unfamiliar. It is central to Middendorf breathwork and is at the root of that work’s potential as a ground for performance work.

The invitation to move from thinking to sensing reflects Jung’s distinctions between thinking, feeling, perceiving, and intuiting, all of which he regards as ‘psychological functions’. I take this to imply that they are ‘mental’ as opposed to ‘bodily’ functions in this view. But this is not how I experience the shift from thinking to sensing. My experience is that I think in my head but I sense throughout my whole body, including sometimes in my head, and I experience that as

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'being in my head' in a different way from thinking. I discuss mind-body dualism more fully below (p.262).

There may also be problems inherent in dividing up such functions into categories, but everyone I have worked with recognises that the perception of the sensations of their body as it is moved by breath coming and going on its own is not the same as thinking about or describing such sensations.

### Sensation, perception, & the primacy of touch

The experience that Middendorf breathwork is most concerned with is that of the sensation of bodily movement with breath as it is allowed to come and go on its own. In being concerned first of all with the kinæsthetic in this way it runs counter to much of the prevailing sensibility in the West, which centres on vision. Much has been written about the centrality of vision to Western sensibility, understanding, and knowledge systems. In his introduction to *Modernity and the hegemony of vision*, David Levin writes: 'We can now see that, even before Plato ... philosophical thinking in the Western world was drawn to the tuition, the authority, of sight (1993, 1). Levin draws on Hannah Arendt's observation that:

from the very outset, in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing ... The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged among things too obvious to be noticed (Arendt 1978, 110–11, cited in Levin 1993, 2).

Arendt goes on to propose that, since Bergson, there has been a shift of emphasis in philosophy from contemplation to speech, so the

predominance of the sight metaphor has correspondingly dwindled. But Levin argues that our social life and culture are still formed by the 'hegemony of vision':

in the twentieth century three major philosophers – Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida – have argued that the thought and culture of modernity have not only continued the historical privileging of sight but allowed its worst tendencies to dominate (1993, 5).

In *Textures of light* (1998) Cathryn Vasseleu writes:

Foregrounding the reliance of metaphysics on metaphors of light, Derrida names the metaphor of darkness and light, or self-concealment and self-revelation, as the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics (1998, 5).

Luce Irigaray too, according to Vasseleu, considers light as the founding metaphor of Western metaphysics:

Irigaray argues that the drama of concealment and unconcealment which is played out in philosophy's metaphoric labyrinth is an elaborate concealment of a maternal origin which is refractory to metaphysical conception. According to Irigaray, the fantasy which heliocentrism upholds is a masculine re-origination, or the appearance of giving birth to oneself – grasped self-reflexively through the mediation of light. By this means, philosophy generates a self-image while excluding any sense of its corporeality (1998, 7).

So it can be argued that this vision centredness not only obscures the importance of other modes of perception but, at least within philosophy, excludes even their consideration.

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Alva Noë points out that vision centredness encourages us to treat perception as ‘a process *in the brain* whereby the perceptual system constructs an *internal representation* of the world’ (2004, 2, italics in original), whereas he holds it to be a skillful bodily activity:

This idea of perception as a species of skillful bodily activity is deeply counterintuitive. It goes against many of our preconceptions about the nature of perception. We tend, when thinking about perception, to make vision, not touch, our paradigm, and we tend to think of vision on a photographic model (2004, 2).

This paradigm can obscure the basic importance of other senses, especially of touch, for humans. Juhan gives a persuasive example of the primacy of touch, when he refers to a report by a New York pediatrician in 1915 concerning orphanages in ten different cities where the infant mortality rate within one year after admission was close to 99% despite adequate diet and professional medical attention:

When extra help was added, so that there were enough attendants for each infant to be held, handled, talked to, played with for ample lengths of time every day, infant mortality rates plummeted. And not only did more infants survive, but the survivors were not marred by the stunted growth and the mental retardations of ‘deprivation dwarfism’. Even those who had been previously retarded showed dramatic increases in their weight, height, energy, and mental acuity. In institution after institution, the mystery of infant merasmus [wasting away] was cleared up: The *tactile stimulation* associated with tender, loving care was absolutely crucial to a baby’s development. Without it, no amount of food and no kind of medicine could produce a healthy individual (1987, 44, italics in original).



Tiffany Field has similar reports about children in orphanages during and after the Second World War in *Touch* (2001).

Juhan writes here about the importance of the touch of another for the human infant. I noted earlier how touch is primary, both genotypically and phenotypically, in humans, and in this sense touch includes the touch of another, but it also includes the touch of oneself, and more broadly the kinæsthetic, proprioceptive, and interoceptive senses. All operate through the sensorimotor nervous system, which is located throughout the body, with varying concentrations of different receptors in different parts of the body. In the main the sensorimotor nervous system operates at a subliminal level, but in the practice of Middendorf breathwork and in other somatic bodily practices, some of it is brought to awareness.

The capacity to sense bodily movement with breath as it comes and goes on its own is the *sine qua non* of Middendorf breathwork. Some people at first perceive these movements only dimly if at all. Others, like the majority of my workshop participants, are more familiar with perceiving bodily sensations.

Check in: strong pelvic base perceivable then the clarity of my immediate tendency to then arrange my posture to – re-find my mask, improve upon what is there due to unconscious impulse or conscious ‘knowing’ of what an improvement would be (KB 8 August 04).

Middendorf breathwork often seems to bring moments like these, of awareness of bodily, or perhaps I should call them psychophysical habits, personal patterns of body and mind that usually operate at a subliminal level. These patterns are brought to conscious awareness

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through an orientation to the sensations of the movement of breath, because breath is affected by such patterns.

Check into Breathing & Pause

Felt the breath, on an inbreath, moving in a circle motion in my pelvis the size of a grapefruit. Never felt or noticed that motion/movement before.

Rubbing Warming Sacrum/Pelvis/Legs

After, when I sat to perceive breath, I felt vv [very very] grounded.

Almost like my lower half from pelvis down was being pulled into the earth. My breath was v. gentle, steady & firm dropping into pelvis.

Small pause at the end of the outbreath (SA 10 August 04).

SA describes precise shapes in her experience of breath, as well as specific durations of breath cycle. I include this as an example of how clear a perception of bodily sensation can be, even if it has never been experienced before.

Duh moment – struck by how the statement, don't judge your breath, is so much about not swapping back to thinking – can't think while you sense, at least it detracts and if you stay in the moment perceiving, that which was will change. I often think of the not judging as don't be nasty to yourself, unkind etc and focus on this rather than the simple fact it blocks the sensing (KB 18 May 04).

Reflecting that I need to reflect less intellectually/thinkingly and just feel/perceive more. Maybe one way to do this is to do all of the exercises more in quick succession, vigorously (?) to get into my body more (from where I can perceive) and out of my mind (from where I can't perceive) (GI 30 May 04).

The endeavour to experience my breath as it comes and goes on its own throws up a number of problems. At the practical level, as I

discussed above, the act of turning my attention to my breath is itself enough to alter my breath. Learning to sense the movements of my body with the inhalation, exhalation, and pause is complex too. In this culture we are trained from an early age to attend to some things in preference to others, particularly to ideas rather than to bodily sensations, but also to objects, things, and their names rather than the relationships between them. So sitting quietly attending to the sensations of the movement of breath is not necessarily straightforward, as GI above and some other workshop participants found:

Still feeling a bit impatient for all this slow listening work. Last exercise I really couldn't be bothered with finding anything interesting in it. This work is confronting and demanding in that it's all up to me to make something of it (GP 16 May 04).

'Listening' here is listening in to one's body, to bodily sensations, feelings, or happenings. GP was not the only one to find the slow pace of the work confronting:

Find that the pace is great/challenging in that its slowness means I can't hide or move on from where I am – I have to sit in it & through it – extreme tiredness, etc. Also illuminating as to where it takes you – through it to something other, which isn't predictable (RB 27 June 04).

Maria Carozzi suggests that there is an additional hurdle for the scholastically trained. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, she writes:

If we consider that part of the effectiveness of rituals resides in their power to install verbo-motor schemes able to generate certain states by merely adopting a given body posture (Bourdieu 1990), we may foresee that scholastic rituals ... will have as an effect that each time

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we sit quietly we will feel compelled to produce a discourse, whether we pronounce it, write it or simply imagine it (2005, 33).

Although all the workshop participants could be regarded as scholastically trained, in addition to that training most also had a familiarity with the perception of bodily sensation through their involvement in some form of voice and/or movement work. So apart from the two comments above, the focus on the perception of sensation appeared unproblematic for participants. This is not to say that the participants did not produce the discourses that Carozzi refers to. AG writing about 'body politics', HP reflecting on his Alexander training, and KB writing about her 'immediate tendency to then arrange my posture to – re-find my mask, improve upon what is there ...', are all instances of discourse production. But most of the participants already had a capacity to focus on sensation as well, so it appears that any tendency to produce discourse did not obscure or override the underlying orientation to sensation.

### Body, knowledge, & meaning

Linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson are leading figures among those who argue for the body as a source of knowledge. They challenged existing theories of meaning with their study of metaphor, *Metaphors we live by* (1980), concluding that metaphor does not just operate as rhetorical flourish but as one of the bases of our conceptual system, which underlies how we comprehend the world and plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. Our experiences of our bodies, they argue, are the source for such metaphors. They say that we are not normally aware of this conceptual system; it forms part of the taken-for-granted underpinnings of our world:

Cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our 'world' in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself (1980, 57).

Lakoff and Johnson (re)state here the poststructuralist understanding of the always already culturally mediated nature of experience. My immediate experience, be it of my body, my breath, or of the world outside of me, is not separable from a whole array of cultural underpinnings. This does not lead me to reject my own experience as the basis for knowledge, though it may lead me to look further into what these underpinnings are.

Johnson takes these themes further in *The body in the mind* (1987). Here he is concerned with the role of human imagination in meaning, understanding, and reasoning, arguing that the way we orient ourselves to these issues is based on a set of assumptions that are fundamentally flawed. He refers to this cluster of assumptions and orientation as 'Objectivism', which can take highly sophisticated forms in philosophy and linguistics, but which exist as a set of shared assumptions in our culture. He elaborates the general form:

The world is as it is, no matter what any person happens to believe about it, and there is one correct 'God's-Eye-View' about what the world really is like. In other words, there is a rational structure to reality, independent of the beliefs of any particular people, and correct reason mirrors this rational structure ... Thus, according to recent versions of Objectivism, the *humanness* (the human embodiment) of understanding has no significant bearing on the nature of meaning

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and rationality. The structure of rationality is regarded as transcending structures of bodily experience (1987, x, italics in original).

This is a version of what Jung refers to as ‘common prejudice’, and in philosophy is regarded as ‘realism’. Johnson goes on to examine a set of phenomena that challenge Objectivist assumptions, and concludes that

any adequate account of meaning and rationality must give central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world (1987, xiii).

Johnson uses two imaginative structures, ‘image schemata’ and ‘metaphorical projection’ to pursue his argument:

An image schema is a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience. The VERTICALITY schema, for instance, emerges from our tendency to employ an UP-DOWN orientation in picking out meaningful structures of our experience. We grasp this structure of verticality repeatedly in thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright, the activity of climbing stairs, forming a mental image of a flagpole, measuring our children’s heights, and experiencing the level of water rising in the bathtub (1987, xiv, capitals in original).

Johnson argues that these image schemata, which are based on embodied experience, are fundamental to meaning and rationality. So, he argues, is metaphor, understood as a way we project patterns from one realm of experience in order to structure another different

realm: 'Through metaphor, we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding' (1987, xv). In his preface he uses the example of a simple, pervasive metaphorical understanding, 'more is up/less is down', as in 'prices keep going up', 'turn that noise down', and so on. Johnson argues that there are good reasons for the metaphorical projection to be this way around and not the reverse:

The explanation has to do with our most common everyday bodily experiences and the image schemata they involve. If you add more objects to a pile, the level goes up. MORE and UP are therefore correlated in our experience in a way that provides a *physical* basis for our *abstract* understanding of quantity (1987, xv, capitals and italics in original).

Johnson draws up a list of twenty-seven image schemata aside from 'UP-DOWN', a list he regards as highly selective but inclusive of most of the more important image schemata (1987, 126). He describes the diverse ways in which some of these become elaborated through metaphorical projection to form the basis of meaning and rationality. He draws on the work of endocrinologist Hans Selye as an example both of the constraints that image schemata and metaphor place on reasoning and how new metaphorical projection can create new understanding – a paradigm shift. As I mentioned before (p.125), Selye formulated the concept of stress and recognized that there are 'diseases of adaptation', introducing the viewpoint that psychological events as well as physiological events determine human health and illness. Johnson suggests that Selye moved from the dominant metaphor governing the medical world in the early twentieth century, 'body as machine',

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to a new understanding, 'body as homeostatic organism' (1987, 127–37).

Johnson concludes that Objectivism is not an adequate account of the world and that indeed human embodiment is the very ground of rationality and meaning:

To sum up: as animals we have bodies connected to the natural world, such that our consciousness and rationality are tied to our bodily orientations and interactions in and with our environment. Our embodiment is essential to who we are, to what meaning is, and to our ability to draw rational inferences and to be creative (1987, xxxviii).

Taking up Lakoff and Johnson's work with metaphors, dance researcher Robert Schwarz (1993) writes that his departure point is the realisation that we can understand one thing only in terms of another, so metaphors are essential for the expression of ideas. He reviews the metaphors underlying Western philosophy, law, religion, and science, concluding that all major ideas were based on twenty-nine basic metaphors. He noticed that many abstract nouns are formed from a concrete nominative or verbal core with a spatial preposition or postposition, and that the key words that seemed to advance any discourse are words of motion. So he deduced that 'motion must somehow underlie our thought processes' (1993, 47). Using Piaget's observations that children first learn to think by internalising action schemes, and using the 'rough rule of thumb that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny', he speculates that 'the architecture of human thought was erected around the experience of what the body can do and how objects can be manipulated' (1993, 47–8).



It remains difficult in a dissertation made up entirely of words to keep a grip on, and to express, the limitations of language, the extent to which words are only part of the whole: that ideas, thought, and knowledge expressed in language are one aspect of how we apprehend the world, and there is also the non-thought, the sensed, the intuited, the felt. Here Schwarz writes as if thought is the main thing, understandably since he is addressing 'ideas'. Cultural forms are everywhere at play and the fundamental one is language, but I want to keep in mind the extralinguistic too.

In my experience of Middendorf breathwork it is assumed that our bodies are the ground of our experience, but in a complex way – in part my body is both shaped by and shaping of my experiences, and this is particularly so in the realm of breath experience. Such experience is first of all sensation-based rather than thought-based. It is also understood that to translate that experience into words is to take a step aside from the experience. This step is seen as essential for a more complete understanding and integration of the work, but nonetheless the first thing is the sensation of the movement of breath, not the thought of it. This is spelt out by two workshop participants:

I cannot name these unfamiliar experiences without changing their shape a little by 'telling' them through what I already know. And yet I think this is rich territory, as my urge to describe unfamiliar terrain perhaps makes the sensing a bit more acute. I feel a bit like a botanist trying to bring home descriptions of new world plants & forms (LC 15 June 04).

Language and experience, the comprehension of meaning through language.

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Experience and articulation are not the same (KB 7 August 04)

Lakoff and Johnson have also written together *Philosophy in the flesh* (1999), which begins:

The mind is inherently embodied.

Thought is mostly unconscious.

Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.

These are three major findings of cognitive science. More than two millennia of a priori philosophical speculation about these aspects of reason are over. Because of these discoveries, philosophy can never be the same again ... This book asks: What would happen if we started with these empirical discoveries about the nature of mind and constructed philosophy anew? The answer is that an empirically responsible philosophy would require our culture to abandon some of its deepest philosophical assumptions (1999, 3).

This reminds me of Francis Fukuyama's claims for the 'end of history' (1992), and makes me sympathetic to Lyotard's wish for small rather than grand narratives. I am not convinced that cognitive science, however empirically responsible, is a suitable basis for re-envisioning philosophy, so I find this claim exaggerated. That is not to say that I disagree that 'our culture' needs to abandon some of its deepest philosophical assumptions, but that I doubt that the 'answers' lie in cognitive science. In his review of their book David Beard suggests:

Lakoff and Johnson's primary goal in *Philosophy in the Flesh* is ... to wrest control of cognitive studies from analytic philosophy ... The end result is several hundred pages of disciplinary polemic rather than the significant contribution to philosophy or to communication studies that we might expect from the authors of *Metaphors We Live By* (2001, 59).

Just as I find Lakoff and Johnson's claims here exaggerated, so too are Beard's. So let us look briefly at what *Philosophy in the flesh* has to offer this project. Firstly, what does it mean to say 'thought is mostly unconscious'? This is a different use of the term 'thought' from that used by Jung when he distinguishes thinking from perceiving, feeling and intuiting. Even though Jung distinguishes active, wilful thinking from passive, 'intuitive' thinking, nonetheless in his use thinking is clearly conscious.

Lakoff and Johnson give the example of what is going on below the level of conscious awareness during conversation. They list twelve things, the first two being 'accessing memories relevant to what is being said; comprehending a stream of sound as being language, dividing it into distinctive phonetic features and segments, identifying phonemes, and grouping them into morphemes' (1999, 10), and they regard the twelve as 'only a small part of what you are doing'. This understanding that there is a great deal going on at an unconscious level – 'It is a rule of thumb among cognitive scientists that unconscious thought is 95 percent of all thought' (1999, 13) – is one of the mainstays of their argument. 'Cognitive unconscious' is the term Lakoff and Johnson use to cover 'all the unconscious mental operations concerned with conceptual systems, meaning, inference, and language' (1999, 12). Combined with the understanding that our conceptual systems are grounded in and shaped by our perceptual and motor systems, this leads Lakoff and Johnson to their grand opening claims.

I have two brief remarks about this. First, Lakoff and Johnson make much of the individual context and little of the social context of personal formation in their emphasis on the importance of

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embodiment as the source of metaphor. Second, to the extent that breath is affected by all internal, as well as external, events, it can provide a bridge to awareness of at least some of what Lakoff and Johnson label 'unconscious'.

### Being carried

The notion and experience of 'being carried' provides an example of the interaction of conceptual and motor systems. In discussing the first two large workshops above I looked at 'being carried' (pp.60ff), noting that the responses of the participants generally supported the proposal that 'being carried' encourages a bodily organization that allows for more ease. In her book, Middendorf (1990) only refers to being carried in relation to lying down, but in the breathwork training in Berkeley the notion has been extended to include sitting and standing. As I gained more experience I tried some further investigations later in the research workshops:

Feet – being carried/walking. A feeling of unfamiliarity about the L side being carried – taking time to find this. An immediate sensation of being wrapped/enveloped in a cylindrical upward rising breath. Feeling deeply calmed. Resonating: a horizontal disc of breath extending outward from my pelvis on all sides. A heightened awareness of the space around me, especially front space, a feeling that I am infused with light & lightness. A loosening (?) & coolness around the back of my skull (LC 21 September 04).

I feel as if I am beginning to experience being carried [...] the more I could allow myself down into my feet, also physically the weight and allowing it to go straight down not via a side/forward movement [the more I felt] that my lower space was realigning itself. When I could allow the 'in' breath and the weight and myself to be carried by the

ground, then I was able to experience & allow that 'out' breath, that powerful 'out' breath to move me back to my centre but with a surprise in the movement & its ease (FL 30 November 04).

For me 'being carried' includes a sense of ease and lightness. This can happen lying down, sitting, or standing, and it can extend to the horizontal plane if I have my arms out to the sides. When I 'let myself be carried' my body seems to arrange itself in a way that means I do not have to make any effort.

Moshe Feldenkrais writes about this phenomenon:

any posture is acceptable in itself as long as it does not conflict with the law of nature, which is that the skeletal structure should counteract the pull of gravity, leaving the muscles free for movement. The nervous system and the frame develop together under the influence of gravity in such a way that the skeleton will hold up the body without expending energy despite the pull of gravity (1972, 68).

'Let yourself be carried' can be regarded as an 'ideokinetic' proposal (see p.130), an interaction of conceptual and motor systems that invites a bodily organization that minimises unnecessary effort. Such an arrangement also makes it easier to let breath come and go on its own.

### Cognitive science, body & self

While I do not agree that cognitive science is a suitable basis for re-imagining philosophy, it does have relevance for the focus of this project in that cognitive science is also concerned with experience, consciousness, and 'self'. Neurologist Antonio Damasio writes about the importance of feeling in consciousness and the relationship of

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consciousness to self (1994, 1999, 2003). He concurs with the first part of Lakoff and Johnson's 'grand claim':

It is not only the separation between mind and brain that is mythical: the separation between mind and body is probably just as fictional. The mind is embodied, in the full sense of the term, not just embrained (Damasio 1994, 118).

In *The feeling of what happens* Damasio writes:

The term *mind*, as I use it in this book, encompasses both conscious and non-conscious operations. It refers to a process, not a thing. What we know as mind, with the help of consciousness, is a continuous flow of mental patterns, many of which turn out to be logically interrelated (1999, 337, italics in original).

So in this view 'mind' is not a 'thing' but a process that goes on throughout the body. And consciousness is 'an entirely private, first-person phenomenon which occurs as part of the private, first-person process we call mind' (1999, 12). Damasio argues that consciousness consists of both 'core consciousness' and 'extended consciousness', which is built on the core. Core consciousness

provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment – now – and about one place – here. The scope of core consciousness is the here and now. Core consciousness does not illuminate the future, and the only past it vaguely lets us glimpse is that which occurred in the instant just before ... core consciousness is a simple, biological phenomenon; it has one single level of organization; it is stable across the lifetime of the organism; it is not exclusively human; and it is not dependent on conventional memory, working memory, reasoning, or language (1999, 16).

Extended consciousness, on the other hand, does depend on these functions, and it

provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self ... extended consciousness is a complex biological phenomenon; it has several levels of organization; and it evolves across the lifetime of the organism ... [while it] is present in some nonhumans, at simple levels, it only attains its highest reaches in humans (1999, 16).

Damasio's reason for proposing this construction is the evidence from cases of neurological disease in which 'impairments of extended consciousness allow core consciousness to remain unscathed. By contrast, impairments that begin at the level of core consciousness demolish the entire edifice of consciousness' (1999, 17).

Damasio also distinguishes consciousness from wakefulness and low-level attention by drawing attention to patients who are awake and attentive without having normal consciousness. On the other hand *The feeling of what happens* is built around the observation that when consciousness is impaired, so is emotion (1999, 16), meaning that consciousness and emotion are inextricably interwoven. For Damasio consciousness has two distinct aspects:

Consciousness consists of constructing knowledge about two facts: that the organism is involved in relating to some object, and that the object in the relation causes a change in the organism (1999, 20).

'Object' here is understood broadly and can include memory of an object, and the relating can be in any sensory modality and can include a reaction of like or dislike, plans in relation to it, the web of relationships of that object. Every interaction changes us, we re-form

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ourselves, albeit in a miniscule way, in relation to every 'object'. This, one could say, is the neurological understanding or representation of becoming rather than being, of being as forever becoming. These considerations bring Damasio to the sense of self:

The deep roots for the self, including the elaborate self which encompasses identity and personhood, are to be found in the ensemble of brain devices which continuously and nonconsciously maintain the body state within the narrow range and relative stability for survival (1999, 22).

So in Damasio's account, a body's homeostatic mechanisms are also the bases of consciousness and sense of self. Our bodily state, as continuously monitored and represented in the brain, underlies our consciousness, is linked to every act of consciousness, and is forever changing. In this view self is always becoming, and consciousness is, in the first place, consciousness of self in relation to an 'object'.

Damasio does not make a point of it, but these homeostatic mechanisms are also linked to breath, and they begin at the cellular level with the provision of oxygen to all cells through the blood in 'secondary respiration'. These mechanisms are part of what Middendorf breathwork practitioners refer to by the term 'somatic intelligence':

Somatic intelligence is the accumulation of cellular knowledge, which the breath can uncover, develop and organize throughout the entire being. Cells and parts of the body that have lost this knowledge – be it through injuries, traumatic experiences, or simply a lack of consciousness – are harmonized through the experience of breath, regrouping into wholeness (Roffler & Biestman 2005, 5).



## Somatic intelligence

In a recent unpublished document from the breathwork training Roffler writes:

Breath is more than just the function of breathing. It provides us with more than the substance to live, and it carries a deeper meaning than only the exchange of oxygen. Ancient cultures already knew about the potential and wisdom of a much wider experience and understanding of Breath. When we experience and participate in the physical sensation of the movement of breath in our body, without interfering with its natural rhythm, we learn that every single breath cycle – inhalation, exhalation, and pause – is different. The cycles of breath as different as they are, taken together create a breath rhythm – like a piece of music. Breathexperience™ connects us to an intelligent source within that provides us with exactly what we need for our own individual life processes to stay in balance. However, this connection can happen only when we allow breath to come and go on its own, without influence from our will, and only with our full participation and presence in our experience of breath (2006, 1).

This passage encapsulates what I regard as the central claims of Middendorf breathwork: that we have ‘an intelligent source within that provides us with exactly what we need for our own individual life processes to stay in balance’, and that we can connect with this intelligent source by fully participating and being present in our experience of breath as we allow it to come and go on its own.

Despite the rejection of the notion of a ‘wisdom of the body’ by Robert Fried (see p.151) and others, there clearly are ways in which my body, which I experience at a daily level as separate from ‘I’ who

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wills where and how my body moves, is highly 'intelligent', in the sense of being capable of maintaining the delicately balanced conditions necessary for life. Drew Leder explores this extensively in *The absent body* (1990), which I look at in some detail below. Leder cites Paul Ricoeur:

In effect it is extraordinary that life functions in me without me, that the multiple hormone balances which science reveals constantly re-establish themselves without me without my help. This is extraordinary because at a certain level of my existence I no longer appear to myself as a task, as a project. I am a problem resolved as though by a greater wisdom than myself. This wisdom is a nourishing one: when I have eaten, it is not up to me to make the food into myself and grow on it. It is a wisdom of movement: the circulation of my blood and the beating of my heart do not depend upon me (Ricoeur 1966, 418, cited in Leder 1990, 46).

In addition to this wisdom of instinctual adaptation, which, as I noted above (p.152), is distinguishable from intelligence in the normal sense, our bodies learn all manner of skills that come to be taken for granted, and they can be rightly called intelligent in the usual sense. I discuss this further in 'body image & body schema' (p.239).

Breath is intimately involved in these mundane wonders, from the cellular to the whole-bodied. While bodily events at a cellular level and the homeostatic mechanisms of our bodies are not under our conscious control, through breath awareness we connect with them because breath is intimately implicated in these events and mechanisms. They can come within our 'sphere of influence' in the sense that disturbances to the systems they balance show up as disturbances in the breath cycle and rhythm, and we can work with breath in seeking balance. So in working with breath as we let it

come and go on its own we can influence the very grounds of our existence.

### Breath that comes & goes on its own

Karlfried Dürckheim, whose writings on the 'culture of stillness' in Japan influenced Middendorf (see pp. 47, 140 above), notes that exercises of the breath are 'quite inseparable from that of immobility of the body' (1991 (1960), 31). For Dürckheim, training the breath in the West is aimed at increasing our efficiency, whereas in the East the aim is 'to learn and acquire and preserve perfect rhythm of breath, at the same time being fully aware of what is taking place within' (1991 (1960), 31). I understand the learning of this 'perfect rhythm' to be the same as learning to let breath come and go on its own. Dürckheim's description of the difficulty of this process, which I cited earlier, is worth repeating in this context:

If you have tried to observe your natural breath and consciously perform the act of breathing, you will be astonished to see how your breath is suddenly and unnaturally disturbed by the very fact of its being put under observation. You have hardly regained composure when you notice how every single thought, image, or conscious feeling spoils its natural rhythm (1991 (1960), 31).

But Dürckheim proposes that perseverance can bring

a state of 'self-lessness' in which you are released from the division of subject and object, which ordinarily dominates consciousness. In that state you can finally experience the perfect enjoyment of the unity inherent in it. You may even taste the joys of an experience which determines all further experience: 'It is not I who am breathing, it

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breathes and I merely have a share as a union of body and soul'  
(1991 (1960), 32).

Here I want to note the sense of pleasure, of joy, in Dürckheim's descriptions and how that also pervades much of the writing of participants in this research project. The notion of being released from the division of subject and object is important in this thesis too.

Rosenberg writes about breath meditation:

If you've sat with the breath for even a few minutes, you've seen that this practice is an open invitation for everything inside you to come up. You see your wild mind, which we all have, and which can be quite overwhelming at first. It has been there all along, of course, but this concentration has brought it into relief (2004, 21).

In the research workshops 'allowing breath' was a constant background: can you let breath come and go on its own? What happens then? Here are some written responses that include particular observations about allowing or controlling breath:

1<sup>st</sup> exercise in observing breath. It was not in my legs & feet. Finding it hard to 'make' it go there even when touching legs & feet & willing it to move there too. But when the exercise shifted to exploring the no-breath areas, while noticing what the breath was doing, I realised that I had initially stopped perceiving breath & holding breath for periods while touching legs quickly came to the idea that I had a 'breath block' at waist, reminding me of extended curled/tense shiver during the week [from illness] which I had yet not fully stretched out of (GI 7 August 04).

In Middendorf breathwork breath can be 'invited' through presence or sensation. 'Doing' breath, controlling breath by the will, is another thing and it has, according to Middendorf breathwork practitioners, a different effect. In my experience, when people (including me) first start practising Middendorf breathwork, they often become aware that they hold their breath in some circumstances, like GI in this example. This usually leads to allowing rather than to concluding that holding was the best thing in that circumstance. So while I write that the work is based on allowing breath, allowing rather than controlling is an orientation, not a precondition.

This project did not investigate what happened to people when they controlled their breath in some way, so I can only say that in following the instruction to allow breath many people reported experiences like GI's of recognizing when they were not allowing.

To be able to receive the 'in' breath. To be able to receive it without resistance ... When I can be open to receiving the 'in' breath, I feel strong in my body, feel grounded, present in my lower space but feel the breath movement throughout the whole body, including the back space (FL 21 December 04).

'Receiving' the inhalation is another expression of allowing breath to come, as is 'surrender'.

At the end of getting in touch with the breath, my breath went into this [sic] quick, short, reflexive breaths in the upper space. It is the first time I truly/consciously experienced the breath where I knew that I was not influencing it at all (FL 15 March 05).

This last comment came after the formal end of the research workshops. At the time I was surprised at FL saying it was the first

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time she experienced not influencing her breath, but since then I have had a similar experience and I recognise that there are different layers or levels of allowing.

The way I sit, stand, or lie affects my breath. The way I move affects my breath. When I stroke my collar bone, for instance, I can be flooded with emotion, and this too affects my breath as well as my capacity to attend to it, my capacity to be present. I can readily be drawn into the emotion with its images and associations and lose touch with my breath. So there are many ways in which letting my breath come and go on its own can be compromised. As I see it, the endeavour to allow my breath is part of the journey in Middendorf breathwork, a part that tells me a lot about my personal habits and patterns. It is a continuing path of discovery that opens up the possibility of change.

### Body, phenomenology, experience, & meaning

Earlier I looked at the resurgence of interest in body through the lenses of dance, Gymnastik, and the ever-widening spread of somatic bodies of work from the early nineteenth century. There are parallels in the fields of philosophy and social theory, especially in feminist theory, much of which is connected, either directly or in response, to the rise of phenomenology and its interest in individual experiences of consciousness. Here I look at a necessarily limited selection of works in these fields. Many of the philosophers and theorists whose work I consider draw on the foundational works in phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1969), Martin Heidegger (1962), Jean-Paul Sartre (1966), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968). Phenomenology does not concern itself so much with

knowledge as with experience and meaning, and is thus well suited to considering Middendorf breathwork.

Philosopher David Smith writes of the phenomenological domain:

Conscious experience is the starting point of phenomenology, but experience shades off into less overtly conscious phenomena. As Husserl and others stressed, we are only vaguely aware of things in the margin or periphery of attention, and we are only implicitly aware of the wider horizon of things in the world around us. Moreover, as Heidegger stressed, in practical activities like walking along, or hammering a nail, or speaking our native tongue, we are not explicitly conscious of our habitual patterns of action. Furthermore, as psychoanalysts have stressed, much of our intentional mental activity is not conscious at all, but may become conscious in the process of therapy or interrogation, as we come to realize how we feel or think about something. We should allow, then, that the domain of phenomenology – our own experience – spreads out from conscious experience into semi-conscious and even unconscious mental activity, along with relevant background conditions implicitly invoked in our experience (2005, section 2, paragraph 9).

Phenomenology can be seen as the art or practice of 'letting things show themselves', which Smith suggests is Heidegger's quasi-poetic approach (2005, section 4, paragraph 8), and in this light Middendorf breathwork can be seen as a phenomenology of breath, a practice of letting breath show itself, one which can connect the conscious, semi-conscious, and non-conscious domains of our experience, bringing them into consciousness through an awareness of how breath is affected by a wide range of events in all these domains.

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Elizabeth Behnke's 'Study Project in Phenomenology of the Body' (see, for example, Behnke 2006) is most relevant here. In 'Ghost gestures' (1997) Behnke distinguishes between two styles of experiencing one's own body:

first of all, bodily sensations as over-against 'me' – typically, as presented to an experiencing 'me' located somewhere in my head, behind my eyes (so that, for example, my felt foot is 'farther away' from 'me' than my felt shoulders); and in contrast, 'inhabiting' whatever gesture I am making with, for example, my leg or foot, such that I no longer experience myself as a punctiformal 'ego' with bodily sensations 'over-against' it, but inhabit the 'dilated' mineness of a total kinesthetic act, inhabiting it from within rather than being a spectator of it (1997, 183–4).

Behnke's second style describes the experience of body that often seems to develop in Middendorf breathwork through a focus on breath, presence, and sensation. Roffler uses the phrase 'with my full participation' to point towards this second style of body experience. My own experience is that if I stay detached, observing as if from a distance, rather than being with or in the sensations of the movement of breath, I do not have the same capacity to experience receiving breath everywhere all at once that I mentioned earlier (p.71).

In her 'Study Project' Behnke is concerned with the movements and micromovements of everyday life, the movements involved in sitting, standing, breathing, looking, listening, touching things, taking part in dialogue, being in social space, and so on. While acknowledging that such movement patterns are socially and culturally shaped, she is interested in how this shaping 'is *ongoingly and concretely* lived out – performed, executed, maintained, perpetuated (and perhaps in some cases shifted) by *individual moving bodies*' (1997, 182, italics in



original). While our tendency in everyday life is to focus on the things, tasks and people, remaining unaware of our own bodily movements, Behnke is 'deliberately asking back (Husserl's term is *Rückfrage*) into the kinesthetic powers and possibilities that are always and already essentially swung into play in ordinary experiences of all types' (1997, 182). This 'asking back into' patterns is important in the understanding of this project. It lies at the heart of the work of somatic pioneers I looked at in situating Middendorf's work, including Kofler, Gindler, F. M. Alexander, Gerda Alexander, and Feldenkrais, as well as the work of recent practitioners like Cohen and Conrad-D'aoud. And it comes up also in the practice of Middendorf breathwork.

Behnke argues for an understanding of body not as something that we 'have', and not, as existential phenomenology has suggested, something that we 'are', but rather as something that we 'do' or 'make':

I am always and already 'making a body' in an ongoing kinesthetic process that privileges some movement possibilities while others are arrested, excluded, curtailed, forgotten, or rendered irrelevant. And although this deeply sedimented kinesthetic pattern reflects both my own personal past history and a more pervasive 'social shaping' of bodies in a given milieu, all this is being ongoingly 'executed' here and now, ongoingly carried out in movements and micromovements whose ongoing 'how' I can begin to inhabit from within, and study, and describe (1997, 187–8).

This seems to me closely connected to neurologist Antonio Damasio's understanding of consciousness as including a constant remapping, remaking, of the body and all its functions in the brain, which I discussed above (p.213ff). Given there is no disconnection

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between my brain, where, in Damasio's account, the remaking goes on, and my extended body, the outer reaches of the tendrils of my nervous system – the skin as the surface of the lake and the brain as the depths (in Juhan's metaphor) – then this continual making of consciousness and body is one, my ongoing becoming.

Behnke points out that this ceaseless making is not done in isolation:

the micromovements through which I am continually making a body are situated within a more encompassing interkinesthetic field, including not only the movements and micromovements of those around me, but also the sedimented traces of such movements and micromovements in the artefacts around me. Thus I am always already caught up in a corporeal style that is not necessarily of my own making, even though my own way of making a body may ongoingly perpetuate it, with or without my being aware of the fact (1997, 198).

Don Hanlon Johnson refers to the way Marcel Mauss (1934) uses the phrase 'techniques of the body' to talk about the various practices within a culture or community that shape bodies. Johnson writes:

These include the most obvious and deliberate forms of body-shaping present in methods of exercise, dance, sports, physical therapy, etc. But more importantly, they also include everyday, non-thematized practices – infant-holding methods, the use of tools, walking, sitting. He called attention to this obvious but rarely noticed fact that simple activities which we tend to think of as 'natural' – sitting, diving, digging trenches – are highly evolved, culture- and gender-specific ways of shaping individuals according to the peculiar needs and aesthetic of that culture. These techniques accomplish two things. On the objective side, they give habitual shape to the plastic bodies of our

birth. On the side of subjectivity, they help create our body-images, our felt sense of self, the body-schema (2002, 100).

Here again we meet the always already mediated nature of culture. That such simple activities are already mediated in this way makes it clear that there is no 'outside' of culture for human beings.

Johnson investigates the 'techniques of the body' associated with scholars in a way that has particular relevance for this project. He draws on Foucault's analyses of bodies in institutions in *The history of sexuality* (1978) and points to a continuity between Christian and academic rituals:

The academic body practices to which most of us have been subjected have their origins in the medieval European universities, which themselves grew out of Christian monastic notions of reason and divine authority. The monastic orders had highly articulated notions of body practice aimed at channeling the passionate tendencies of devil-prone flesh to the superior knowledge of spirit embodied in absolutist religious authorities: abbot, bishop, and pope. Details of kneeling, sitting in chapel or chapter room, prostrating, walking, monitoring the eyes, and carrying the body through the various rituals of the Church were minutely regulated (2002, 101).

Johnson suggests that at least the echo of such body practices continued even when the universities began to challenge the role of dogmatic content in their curricula. In 'Talking minds' Carozzi draws on Johnson's work:

Immobility, lack of physical contact, uniform clothes, the exclusion of meals and drinks, a limited number of visible objects – everything seems to call attention to the word, to create selectively conscious

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bodies that are attentive only to discourse, which thus becomes practically separated from every other perception (2005, 30).

I looked earlier at Carozzi's comments about how attention in scholars is trained to the word, away from body and the sound of voice. Both Carozzi and Johnson point to the way that scholars become habituated to separating discourse from their bodies and hence cannot see or experience the ways their own bodies are implicated in what they produce. Sitting quietly becomes an impetus for the production of discourse rather than a moment to sense one's own body.

In this project there is evidence that this is not the only possible outcome of scholastic training. All the participants in this project are 'scholars' in Johnson's and Carozzi's terms, but they are scholars who have also learned to perceive bodily sensations. When 'scholars' find their way into a relationship with their bodies based on sensing, on the perceiving of sensation, as in Middendorf breathwork, new possibilities arise. This has parallels with how Behnke argues that the culturally mediated nature of everyday life does not leave me helpless: I can 'reactivate the sediment' in Husserl's phrase. I can begin to inhabit my bodily patterns. And then, she writes:

this in turn can open up alternative styles of movement and micromovement in a 'productive movement' ... that need not simply re-produce what has gone before. In this way I become as it were a puzzle piece that no longer fits easily and neatly into the current picture, but begins to imply a new one – a different order, an alternative interkinesthetic style (1997, 198).

This is what Behnke sees as the real core of her investigation, 'a kind of "action research" that not only calls us to ethical self-responsibility, but can eventually lead to the development of an embodied ethics, in both theory and practice' (1997, 198).

While not framed as phenomenological investigation, Middendorf breathwork nonetheless throws up just this kind of possibility of 'coming to become' differently. It calls me to ethical self-responsibility in just this way and can lead to an embodied ethics.

The main theme of 'Breath in Relationship', an aspect of Middendorf breathwork that Roffler has developed, is that of staying with my own breath rhythm in the face of other breath rhythms that I recognise. This means accepting responsibility for myself, not being drawn into another's rhythm, standing my own ground in the face of the other. In 'The way of breath' Luce Irigaray speaks of this self-responsibility:

We speak of elementary needs like the need to eat and to drink, but not of the need to breathe. That corresponds to our first and most radical need. And we are not really born, not really autonomous or living as long as we do not take care, in a conscious and voluntary way, of our breathing (2002, 74).

### *The absent body*

Leder's *The absent body*, which I quoted from above (p.218), is an important text in the discussion of body from a phenomenological point of view in recent times. In his introduction Leder draws attention to the paradoxical nature of bodily presence in human experience:

Human experience is incarnated. I receive the surrounding world through my eyes, my ears, my hands. The structure of my perceptual

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organs shapes that which I apprehend ... While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience (1990, 1).

Of course, one's own body *is* the thematic 'object' of experience in Middelndorf breathwork, and that opens up many possibilities for presence where there is normally absence. Leder argues that this absence of body is at the root of the Cartesian dualism of body and mind. He rejects this dualism and proposes a broad notion of 'lived body' as an 'embodied self that lives and breathes, perceives and acts, speaks and reasons' (1990, 6). At the same time, he wants to avoid falling into other dualisms, such as between *Leib* and *Korper*, between the first-person lived-from-within body and the 'object body' seen from without: 'it is intrinsic to lived embodiment to be *both* subject and an object available to external gaze' (1990, 6, italics in original). Scientific approaches to the body tend to emphasize the third-person view, but Leder does not find this is a reason to reject such approaches. Instead he seeks to incorporate them into a broader view. He also wants to avoid identifying the lived body solely with the sensorimotor level: 'I will thus examine the lived body as the seat of intellectual thought, no less than that of a prethematic sensory grasp' (1990, 7). And finally he rejects the identification of reason with the spiritual, universal or divine dimension of life:

It is part and parcel of a modern zeitgeist wherein human rationality is worshipped as the guiding principle of our world. The unhappy results of this blind faith in the intellect and its scientific and technological powers is everywhere evident in contemporary society (1990, 8).

Leder makes an important contribution to understanding the lived nature of body. He draws on philosopher Michael Polanyi's notions of 'attending from', 'attending to', and 'tacit knowledge'. Polanyi writes:

Our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical. In all our waking moments we are relying on our awareness of contacts of our body with things outside for *attending* to these things. Our own body is the only thing in the world which we normally never experience as an object, but experience always in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body. It is by making this intelligent use of our body that we feel it to be our body, and not a thing outside (1966, 15–16, italics in original).

This is an important step in relation to Drew Leder's discussion of absence. Polanyi uses the notion of 'attending from': we attend from our body to something in the outer world, or if we become skilled in the use of a tool, we use that tool to attend from, and that changes its appearance to us. We have 'tacit knowledge' of that which we attend from. That is, we know much more than we can say about that which we attend from, and it provides the grounds for our 'attending to'. Polanyi writes:

the appearance of a thing at the centre of my attention depends on clues to which I am not directly attending. These clues are of two kinds. There are some that we cannot experience in themselves. The contraction of my eye muscles or the stirring inside of my labyrinth organ I cannot observe directly. These clues are *subliminal*. Other clues to the sight of my finger are the things covered up by the paper when I look at my finger through a pinhole. I normally see these things from the corner of my eye, and I *could* observe them directly, if I wanted to. We may call such clues *marginal*. To neither kind of clues do I attend directly, yet both kinds contribute to the apparent reality of

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the object on which my attention is focused. *We may say that my awareness of both kind of clues is subsidiary to my focal awareness of that object.* These two kinds of awareness – the subsidiary and the focal – are fundamental to the tacit apprehension of coherence (1969, 139–40, italics in original).

Polanyi goes on to argue that ‘all knowledge is *either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge*’ (1969, 144, italics in original). Alfred North Whitehead makes a related point when he writes:

understanding is not primarily based on inference. Understanding is self-evidence. But our clarity of intuition is limited and it flickers. Thus inference enters as means for the attainment of such understanding as we can achieve. Proofs are the tools for the extension of our imperfect self-evidence. They presuppose some clarity (Whitehead 1938, 69, cited in Standish 1992, 13).

Leder begins with what he calls ‘the ecstatic body’, the sensorimotor bodily surface – the skin, the muscles, the layers where the sensorimotor nervous system operates – and the senses. He makes the general point that ‘insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses’ (1990, 14). He draws on Polanyi’s ‘attending from-to’ and ‘tacit knowledge’ to show that the lived body constitutes a ‘null point’ in both motor activity and in perceptual modes. ‘Perception and motility are modulations of a singular power, the from-to structure of bodily engagement’ (1990, 20). Hence our experience is one of separation from our bodies at this level.

Actually, Leder notes, even when caught up in the world, our bodies maintain a ‘subtle coenesthetic presence’ (1990, 23), a sense of self like that discussed above in relation to Damasio’s work. If this is lost,



as in the case reported by Oliver Sacks of a woman who suffered a loss of proprioceptive sense through a rare form of polyneuritis, then a body can appear 'blind and deaf to itself' as the woman herself described it (Sacks 1987, 49, cited in Leder 1990, 23). This *cœnæsthesia* is not normally part of our day-to-day awareness.

Leder then turns to the 'recessive, vegetative body', the viscera, the 'hidden mass of internal organs and processes' (1990, 36), that we usually experience on a day-to-day basis as separate from us, out of our control. He notes that the action of breathing can cross over between the recessive and ecstatic bodies:

Respiration, involving surface exchanges renewed several times a minute, is far more accessible [than digestion]. I can feel the air entering my nostrils. I proprioceptively sense my chest and abdomen expanding and can utilize appropriate muscles to change the rate or quality of breath. Nevertheless, in any visceral process there remains a central absence that can only be indirectly known. The actual air exchange in the lung's alveolar tissue is unavailable to direct awareness and control (1990, 50).

The action of breathing can in part be brought under conscious control, but gaseous exchange, in the first stage in the lungs and in the second stage in each cell in the body, is an automatic bodily function, one of a myriad of such functions needed for life, and in Leder's terms is clearly located in the recessive body.

The impulse for a breath comes from a group of neurons and synapses called the respiratory centre located in the 'older' parts of the brain, triggered by a homeostatic mechanism devoted to maintaining an appropriate pH level in the blood. Already the recessive body is implicated. The impulse triggers the diaphragm and

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other thoracic muscles to contract, which results in an increase in the volume of the thoracic cavity, drawing air into the lungs. A release of the muscles allows the body walls to swing back and the expiration happens. In sleeping, at rest, this all happens in the recessive body, without my conscious involvement. But, as Leder notes, I can 'proprioceptively sense my chest and abdomen expanding and can utilize appropriate muscles to change the rate or quality of breath' (1990, 50). Or, as in Middendorf breathwork, I can simply sense the movement of my body with the inhalation, the exhalation, and the pause. The sensations of the micromovements of my body with my breath are available to me at any time, a bridge into that other world normally hidden from my awareness.

This is not to say that I can or would want to bring under conscious control all those aspects of my recessive body of which I am not usually conscious. Popular science writer Lewis Thomas imagines an aspect of this:

If I were informed tomorrow that I was in direct communication with my liver, and could now take over, I would become deeply depressed ... Nothing would save me and my liver, if I were in charge. For I am, to face the facts squarely, considerably less intelligent than my liver. I am, moreover, constitutionally unable to make hepatic decisions, and I prefer not be obliged to, ever (Thomas 1974, 78, cited in Leder 1990, 48).

For all Thomas' humour he has a point that applies broadly to 'somatic intelligence', to the balance-seeking bodily mechanisms. But through a growing awareness of the movement of breath I can sense that I have a body, that I am my body, and I can begin to sense some of the ways in which I make my body. I can sense how breath moves my organs, my viscera. I can sense there is something there to be

moved even if I cannot and would not want to control its functioning. In *The perceptible breath* (1990) Middendorf writes about working with some of the viscera:

Our body's organs are no less exposed to the breathing movement than bones, ligaments, muscles, and skinlayers [sic] of our body walls. You not only notice a better circulation of blood, because of better breathing, but also become aware of the eternal wide-narrow of the breathing movement less actively than in the muscles. But when focused, perceiving, and breathing we turn to an organ, we can be aware of its reactions, such as expansion, and feelings of well-being and ease within a very short time ... Here one should bear the following in mind: I not only have my organs, I also am my organs (1990, 167).

And, following Behnke, I could argue that I 'make my organs' through kinæsthetic processes in which I allow some possibilities and not others, through 'choices' that are mainly but not exclusively socially and culturally determined. For example, while visiting Gunther von Hagens' exhibition of 'plastinated' corpses and organs, *Körperwelten: fascination beneath the surface*, in Berlin in 2001, I noticed a big difference in the size of the various stomachs on display. In the accompanying literature that difference was attributed mainly to different eating habits.

Although the stomach is an extreme example, in a sense we make all our organs through our 'choices' of what and how much we eat and drink, what else we ingest, how much of what sort of physical work or exercise we do, and so on. Once these were not choices but part of a way of life, as they still are in parts of the world where the individual is embedded within a social context where such things are taken for granted. Now in the West we are more or less required to make

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decisions about how we make ourselves in these and many other ways.

Middendorf goes on to describe working with the liver, spleen, and kidneys, using the hands to support breath, and a visualisation: 'Let your breath blow through ...' (1990, 167). Mantak Chia offers a similar visualisation in *Awaken healing energy through the Tao* (1983, chapter 3, 17–28), using an 'inner smile' rather than breath.

Sometimes the world of the recessive body is spoken of as 'unconscious', but the word 'unconscious' can carry some complicated associations, as Leder points out:

Our lack of conscious awareness and control vis-à-vis aspects of the self has formed a recurrent theme of post-rationalist thought. The self, it is realized, is in many ways foreign to itself, leading to the postulation of an 'unconscious'. Yet paradoxes arise when this notion is reified and mentalized, as if it were a second consciousness hidden from the first ... Prior to explicit acts of positing, our body grasps multiple, ambiguous meanings that elude articulation and conceptual grasp (1990, 55).

Leder notes that we are connected to the 'recessive body' in underlying ways, that we are in some senses controlled by rather than controlling of our recessive bodies:

The visceral depths always participate in ecstasies. As was shown, a hunger or hormonal mood colors the entire world. Vegetative needs motivate our projects and selectively channel our attention. Thus, in the broadest sense we act and experience from the visceral no less than from the sensorimotor body ... I inhabit one body, ecstatic-recessive in its entirety (1990, 56).

This has particular relevance in the case of Middendorf breathwork where the physical body is the primary object of attention (or, one could say, attending to the body is the primary object of attention). Questions arise about the possibility of experiencing both touching and being touched simultaneously when I touch my own body. What is my experience? When my body becomes the thing I attend to, what am I attending from? Is it the same thing? Can I come to have some direct experiential knowledge in addition to tacit knowledge?

### *Flesh & blood*

Merleau-Ponty has famously written about the phenomenon of touching one's own hand in 'The intertwining – the chiasm', a paper in his posthumously published *The visible and the invisible* (1968, 130–55). He elaborates from that phenomenon an ontological notion of 'flesh':

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element', in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being (1968, 139).

Leder takes Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh', which 'belongs neither to the subject nor world exclusively' (1990, 62) and suggests it could be extended to 'flesh and blood' to take account of the visceral:

The body is not just a chiasm of perceiver and perceived. Nor is it just an intertwining of perceptual powers, a 'lateral, transversal' synergy of

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hands and eyes. There is also what one might call a 'vertical' synergy; my surface powers rely upon deeper vegetative processes, as well as an unconscious fetal history and periods of sleep. More than just a 'cluster of "consciousnesses"', my body is a chiasm of conscious and unconscious levels, a viscerο-esthesiological being (1990, 65).

'Viscero-esthesiological' is, I think, his own word, *æsthesis* being 'the perception of the outer world by the senses' (OED online). Leder puts the idea that there is a parallel intertwining of ecstatic and recessive, sensorimotor and visceral, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, flesh and blood. And I want to note, or really to cry out loud, **breath traverses these!** So perceiving the way breath moves my whole being can connect me in a direct sensation-based way with myself and the world.

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The body ... is not a stable entity with unambiguous boundaries, but a temporal becoming which is always culturally mediated and integrally linked to the equally dynamic process of psychic selfhood (Lorraine, 1999, 4)

### Body image & body schema

Paul Schilder's *The image and appearance of the human body* (1950) was first published in English in 1935. It remains an important source for those interested in 'body image':

The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves. There are sensations which are given to us. We see parts of the body-surface. We have tactile, thermal, pain impressions. There are sensations which come from the muscles and their sheaths, indicating the deformation of the muscle; sensations coming from the innervation of the muscles ... and sensations coming from the viscera. Beyond that there is the immediate experience that there is a unity of the body. This unity is perceived, yet it is more than a perception. We call it a schema of our body or bodily schema, or, following Head, who emphasizes the importance of the knowledge of the position of the body, postural model of the body. The body schema is the tri-dimensional image everybody has about himself [sic]. We may call it 'body-image' (1950, 11).

Although he draws on neurophysical evidence, Schilder's conception of body image relies more strongly on psychology:

When we perceive or imagine an object, or when we build up the perception of an object, we do not act merely as a perceptive

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apparatus. There is always a personality that experiences the perception. The perception is always our own mode of perceiving (1950, 15).

At the same time Schilder reminds us that the senses are not isolated:

we should not forget that every sensation is generally synesthetic. This means that there does not exist any primary isolation between the different senses. The isolation is secondary. We perceive and we may with some difficulty decide that one part of the perception is based upon the optic impressions. The synesthesia, therefore, is the normal situation. The isolated sensation is the product of an analysis ... There is no question that the object 'body' presents itself to all senses (1950, 38–9).

Liz Grosz draws on Schilder for her chapter 'Body images' in *Volatile bodies* (1994, 62–85). She summarizes Schilder's concept of body image:

The body image unifies and coordinates postural, tactile, kinesthetic, and visual sensations so that these are experienced as the sensations of a subject coordinated into a single space; they are the experiences of a single identity. This image is the necessary precondition for undertaking voluntary action, the point at which the subject's intentions are translated into the beginning of movement, the point of transition in activating bones and muscles ... any willful action requires a plan of bodily action – precisely the function of the body image (1994, 83).

And a little later she writes:



The body image is not an isolated image of the body but necessarily involves the relations between the body, the surrounding space, other objects and bodies, and the coordinates or axes of vertical and horizontal. In short, it is a postural schema of the body. The body image is the condition of the subject's access to spatiality (including the spatiality of the built environment) (1994, 85).

Gail Weiss points to the parallel between Schilder's emphasis on the social nature of body image – 'There exists a deep community between one's own body-image and the body-image of others' (Schilder 1950, 217) – and Merleau-Ponty's understanding that 'to develop a body image is to develop an image of my body as visible to others' (Weiss 1999, 33). Just as it is important to consider the senses in their interactions, so too is it important to consider each individual in her social situation

In *How the body shapes the mind* (2005), Philosopher Shaun Gallagher picks up on the use of the terms 'body image' and 'body schema' in the literature of psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and phenomenology as a way of highlighting the distinctions between conscious and non-conscious, explicit and tacit, and willed and automatic in these fields. He traces confusion about the meanings of these terms to Schilder (1950), who used both terms to refer to a conscious representation of the body in the mind, whereas Head and Holmes, whose work Schilder drew on, 'clearly distinguish body schema from a conscious image' (Gallagher 2005, 19). Gallagher reviews the different uses of these terms, and then proposes the following distinction:

A body image consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body. In contrast, a body schema is a

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system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring (2005, 24).

Gallagher suggests this distinction is related to ‘the difference between having a perception of (or belief about) something and having a capacity to move (or an ability to do something)’ (2005, 24). He notes that body schema

involves certain motor capacities, abilities, and habits that both enable and constrain movement and the maintenance of posture. It continues to operate, and in many cases operates best, when the intentional object of perception is something other than one’s own body. So the difference between body image and body schema is like the difference between a perception (or conscious monitoring) of movement and the actual accomplishment of movement, respectively (2005, 24).

Which is not to say that body schema is not susceptible to change, even to conscious change, such as in the learning of new motor skills:

The dancer or the athlete who practices long and hard to make deliberate movements proficient so that movement is finally accomplished by the body without conscious reflection uses a consciousness of bodily movement to train body-schematic performance (2005, 35).

Earlier I noted Juhan’s idea of a ‘sense of rightness’ in movements:

So much of my sense of psychological and physical continuity, my sense of unity and security, depends upon my ability to repeat appropriate and predictable actions, that this feeling of ‘rightness’ can

scarcely be overestimated in its importance as an element of my psychic integration as a whole. Each time I 'get the feel' for a new response, I also get a new feel for myself and for my relation to the world of external objects at large (1987, 188)

There is an obvious connection between the 'body schema' and this sense of 'rightness'. Juhan goes on to note that we may have this sense of rightness even when our movements or posture are undermining our overall health. There are parallels also with what Damasio writes about how our bodily state, constantly changing in response to 'objects', underlies consciousness.

In my experience, Middendorf breathwork is a practice on the borderline between body image and body schema, to adopt Gallagher's distinctions. It is a practice in which we are confronted by the differences between our sense of rightness and the strains and tensions that sense of rightness can contain. Breath is involved in body schema, in the sensorimotor maintenance of balance and posture, and in locomotion. When we become aware of breath (and of what is involved in letting it come and go on its own), we can also have access to these otherwise non-conscious functions of body schema.

[After feathering the sacrum] felt very twisted to the right (aware that I have a scoliosis-ish thing going on in my body, but this was highlighted and I felt a bit yuk, like dizzy?) awkward [breath] most obvious in my ribs – this is somehow ugly or a weakness or vulnerability – noticed these emotions in this perception (JM 11 May 04)

Tapping & stroking: sacrum – abdomen then lower part of the body, then moving on to the rest of the body ... I've never experienced

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touching my face & neck as though someone else's. Perception shifted momentarily. Quite bizarre. Then on to other parts of the body. Gave me a strong sense of integration & peace. Allowed a much freer flow of energy throughout the body. Breath again more accessible (OP 17 August 04).

Laying on hands – lower, middle, collar-bone, etc. (front & back). A renewed sense of the life of the body, fluttering & trembling beneath my hands. More presence in the touch of my hands, perhaps? Noticing fine & delicate breath movements beneath my hands in all of the spaces I meet (LC 14 September 04).

### Feminism & body

Perhaps more than in any other field, particularly since the 1990s, feminist writing has concerned itself with body. Claire Colebrook summarises three waves of feminism and their approaches to body:

While first wave feminism demanded equality, and second wave feminism demanded difference, the body emerged in the third wave as a means of deconstructing this sameness/difference opposition. The appeal to equality assumes that gender differences are imposed on otherwise equal beings, and thereby precludes the possibility that different types of bodies might demand different forms of political recognition. In the second wave assertion of difference and specificity, the body is still seen as that which precedes social construction. But for feminists of the second wave, different bodies demand different forms of articulation. In the third wave, both these arguments are attacked for having an un-problematic appeal to the pre-representational body. Women are neither the same nor essentially different; to decide such an argument one would have to appeal to a body from which social representation derives or upon which representation is imposed (2000a, 76).

Pioneering works in this third wave, sometimes known as 'corporeal feminism' include Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the other woman* (1985a), Judith Butler's *Bodies that matter* (1993), Liz Grosz's *Volatile bodies* (1994), and Moira Gatens' *Imaginary bodies* (1996). Elsewhere Colebrook writes:

Irigaray's work spells out most clearly what is still largely accepted within feminist theory: that there is a structural and originary constitution of the feminine as negated corporeality (2000b, 31).

The challenges that Irigaray and others who follow on from her offer to everyday understandings of body, the formation of the subject, the interrelations of people, are manifold, and are beyond the scope of this dissertation. I propose to look only briefly at an example of the writing of Tamsin Lorraine as representative of the field, and then to see where Irigaray has gone more recently in writings very close to the concerns of this project.

In *Irigaray & Deleuze* (1999) Lorraine summarizes Grosz's line of reasoning from *Volatile Bodies* (1994):

Theories that reduce human consciousness to physiological processes, as well as those that depict consciousness as either a disembodied process or the effect of a mental thing, fail to capture the ambiguity of human existence. Human beings come to experience the world as conscious, sentient, embodied subjects through a process in which no clear distinctions can be made between mind and body, thought and matter, reason and emotion, interiority and exteriority, or self and other (1999, 3).

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In fact, as she goes on to point out, Grosz suggests viewing body as 'the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidedly at the pivotal point of binary pairs' (Grosz 1994, 23), as a peculiar object like a Möbius strip which problematizes these pairs:

If bodies are not corporeal containers for consciousness but are instead fully implicated in the dynamic process of social living, then our tendency to consider our bodies the preserve of the 'natural' part of our identities is false. Our embodied selves are as implicated in our specific historical situation as the social selves of our conscious experience. This means that there can be no easy distinction between body and mind; the notion of a body with determinate boundaries, just like the notion of a psychic self, is the constituted effect of dynamic forces which are always in movement (Lorraine 1999, 3–4).

Lorraine turns then to language:

An important aspect of human subjectivity is one's situatedness within symbolic systems and one's ability to produce words that will be recognized by others as the words of a subject who 'makes sense'. Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari have created theories of subjectivity that emphasize the implication of such discursive situatedness in corporeal practices that are equally situated and yet entail an extralinguistic dimension of meaning. Their work provides some of the exciting approaches toward conceptions of humanity that are able to account for 'the inflection of mind into body and body into mind' which Grosz has in mind. The conception of the human subject which emerges from their work is that of a problematic intertwining of contingent and often conflicting social identities assumed at the level of imaginary identifications involving a morphology of the body (that is, an ongoing materialization of the body in the specific forms that it takes), as well

as at the level of conscious thought. The body of such a subject is not a stable entity with unambiguous boundaries, but a temporal becoming which is always culturally mediated and integrally linked to the equally dynamic process of psychic selfhood (1999, 4).

This final description of the body as ‘a temporal becoming which is always culturally mediated and integrally linked to the equally dynamic process of psychic selfhood’, is not an everyday one. Yet it strikes me as one that finds a good balance, one that fits with my experiences of Middendorf breathwork. But I would like to add that the body in this understanding, the living body, is permeated with breath. Breath too is culturally mediated, if not so obviously as body, and is also linked to self. Sensing breath, becoming aware of breath moving our bodies as it comes and goes on its own, opens up the possibility of sensing how we form ourselves and are formed in every moment in our particular historical situations.

### *Body & breath – Luce Irigaray*

Luce Irigaray’s work on body and sexual difference is well known (e.g. 1985a, 1985b, 1993). More recently she has turned her attention to breath:

What, then, can safeguard existence in a living being that is partly nomadic in body and spirit? The breath. Breath is the source and food of natural and spiritual life for the human being. To cultivate life comes down to preserving and educating breathing, the origin of an autonomous existence, but also of the soul, understood in its original sense, as living (2002, viii).

Irigaray writes in a way that seems quite compatible with Middendorf breathwork, although her work with breath involves a ‘mastery’

through breath control that is different from Middendorf's approach. This indicates to me that the cultivation of breath awareness can be successfully approached through apparently contradictory paths. Another indication of this was the developed breath awareness of the workshop participant who was experienced in holotropic breathwork, which is not based on allowing breath (see p.155).

The practice of respiration, the practice of diverse kinds of breathing certainly reduces the darkness or the shadows of Western consciousness. But above all it constitutes the mental in a different way. It grants more attention to the education of the body, of the senses. It reverses in a way the essential and the superfluous. We Westerners believe that the essential part of culture resides in words, in texts, or perhaps in works of art, and that physical exercise should help us dedicate ourselves to this essential. For the masters of the East, the body itself can become spirit through the cultivation of breathing (2002, 7).

There is something of the flavour of *Between east and west* about Middendorf's work, though she might argue with that idea. For example, in an interview with Elizabeth Beringer, Middendorf responds to a question about yogic breathing:

All the yoga ways of breathing come out of the male way [see also p.81, n.25] The Eastern way of thinking is to find god in one direction, in a male way. 'The way is directed. I go there and I have to go; I must go.' This way needs will; that is also the reason why, in this case, breathing is connected. It has something to do with will. This male way of being needs will. When this is the basis, the breathing is under the law of the will. We are the opposite of the male way. In our work we can grow spatiality, a breathing place. This space is a power you can experience in reality; it is a real thing. Out of this, we have



direction. But to get this space I have first to be centered, to sense, and to breathe (in Beringer 1995, 71).

But Middendorf would agree with Irigaray about the depth of importance of breath in developing conscious awareness. Later in her book, in 'The way of breath', Irigaray writes:

Breathing in a conscious and free manner is equivalent to taking charge of one's life, to accepting solitude through cutting the umbilical cord, to respecting and cultivating life, for oneself and for others. As long as we do not breathe in an autonomous manner, not only do we live badly but we encroach upon others in order to live. We remain confused with others, forming a sort of mass, a sort of tribe, where each individual has not yet conquered his personal life but lives on a collective social and cultural respiration, on an unconscious breathing of the group, beginning with that of the family ... In a way we are divided between two breaths, the natural breath and the cultural breath, without a real alliance or passage between these breaths, neither in us nor between us. Thus we were born and have grown up in the perspective of a separation between corporeal life and spiritual life, the life of the soul, without understanding that the soul corresponds to the life of the body cultivated to the point of acquiring the autonomy and spiritual becoming of the breath (2002, 74–5).

Irigaray's language here is in accord with that of the breath training in Berkeley, where it is understood that breath encompasses both collective and individual, finding a balance between these two. I wrote above (p.229) about the connection between staying with one's own breath rhythm and ethical self-responsibility. This seems to be the point Irigaray is making here too: without breath awareness we live 'badly' and 'encroach upon others in order to live'.

## East & West

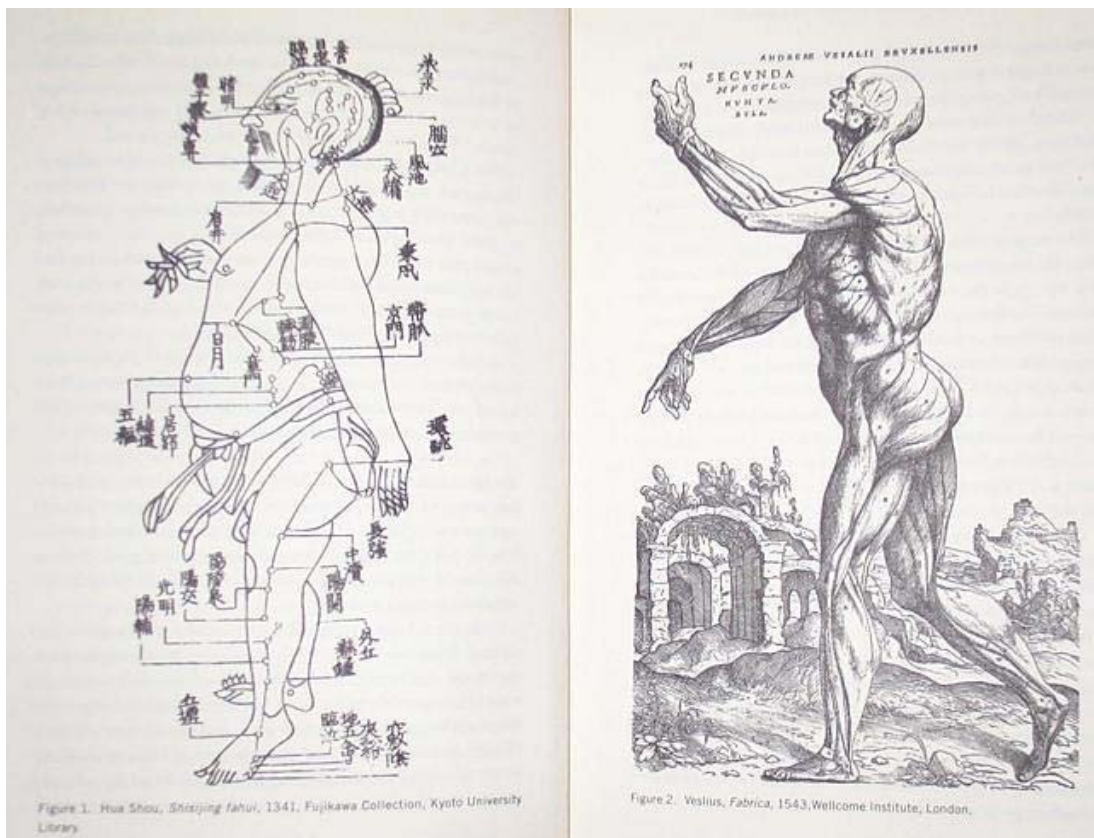
Social psychologist Richard Nisbett writes that, until a Chinese student of his pointed him in a different direction, he had been a 'lifelong universalist', meaning that he believed that all human groups perceive and reason in the same way (2003, xiii). Then in reading comparative literature on the nature of thought by philosophers, historians and anthropologists from the East (particularly China, Korea, and Japan) and the West (Europeans, Americans, and citizens of the British Commonwealth) he found that many scholars believe that two ways of thinking have existed for thousands of years. Specifically he found that:

most who have addressed the question hold that European thought rests on the assumption that the behavior of objects – physical, animal, and human – can be understood in terms of straightforward rules. Westerners have a strong interest in categorization, which helps them to know what rules to apply to the objects in question, and formal logic plays a role in problem solving. East Asians, in contrast, attend to objects in their broad context. The world seems more complex to Asians than to Westerners, and understanding events always requires consideration of a host of factors that operate in relation to one another in no simple, deterministic way. Formal logic plays little role in problem solving. In fact, the person who is too concerned with logic may be considered immature (2003, xvi).

Shigehisa Kuriyama's book, *The expressiveness of the body* (1999) points to differences in perception between East and West as much as in ways of thinking. He opens with two contrasting figures – one from Hua Shou (1342) showing acupuncture points along meridian lines; the other Vesalius's *Fabrica* (1543), an anatomical drawing. Kuriyama notes that before the twentieth century Chinese doctors had no specific word for 'muscle', and that 'the tracts and points of

acupuncture entirely escaped the West's anatomical vision of reality' (1999, 8). He writes:

conceptions of the body owe as much to particular uses of the senses as to particular 'ways of thinking'. The distances separating figures 1 and 2 are perceptual as well as theoretical; they can never be adequately charted by intellectual schemes and sets of ideas, much less by bare formulas like holism versus dualism, organicism versus reductionism (1999, 13).



Kuriyama traces the diverging paths of Chinese and Western (specifically ancient Greek-derived) medicine, looking especially at the different perceptions of 'pulse'. He concludes:

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A vast chasm gapes between the inescapably limited scope of human awareness in any given era at any given place and the unknowable boundless plenitude of life's manifestations. Changes and features that speak eloquently to experts in one culture can thus seem mute and insignificant, and pass unnoticed in another. Greek pulse takers ignored the local variations that their counterparts in China found so richly telling; Chinese doctors saw nothing of muscular anatomy. This is how conceptions of the body diverge – not just in the meanings that each ascribes to bodily signs, but more fundamentally in the changes and features that each recognizes as signs (Kuriyama 1999, 272).

For me Kuriyama's phrase, 'the unknowable boundless plenitude of life's manifestations' hints at the joyful possibility of discovery despite my own cultural boundedness and the necessarily limited scope of my awareness. It expresses the mystery of discoveries I have made while practising Middendorf breathwork wherein breath, with its cycle and rhythm, speaks to me as a sign full of meaning where once it was mute.

Robert Chia addresses 'East and West' in writing about Tao, nothingness and management. He contrasts the metaphysical orientations of 'alphabetic-literate' cultures (where reading and writing are widely practiced) where written knowledge is taken as the only reliable basis for action with oral-aural communities and non-alphabetic East Asian cultures where 'knowing is more often achieved directly through the immediate engagement of tasks' (2003, 953), leading to little systematic written recording.

Chia points to the mode of the massive expansion of education in the West by the written word and contrasts this with apprenticeship and other forms of action:

within the East and within the realm of the arts, and the performing arts in particular, such a systematized mode of knowledge-acquisition is actively resisted. Here, instead, a process of sustained apprenticeship, discipleship or understudy is emphasized. In large measure learning, knowing and performing in the arts come not so much by way of the detached acquisition of abstract causes via the written word, but through direct, sustained, experimental practice (2003, 955).

Middendorf breathwork too is taught in this experiential tradition rather than through texts. It is concerned with the unmeasurable and the non-logical, the personal in the universal. Chia equates this 'eastern' way with Heidegger's notion of 'being-in-the-world':

a state of non-reflective absorption in which the world around us is experienced as so much a part of us that it is not viewed as an object to comprehend. Instead, we 'dwell' in it (2003, 956).

Chia cites Ong on how the Chinese language

provides no *literae* or letters on which the concept literal can be built, the roughly equivalent concepts are 'according to the surface of the word' ... 'according to the dead character'. These are hardly laudatory expressions ... The rich suggestiveness of Chinese characters favours a sense of fuller meaning lying much deeper than the literal (Ong 1967, 47, cited in Chia 2003, 957–8).

Chia goes on to comment:

It is this epistemological reversal and the privileging of the invisible, the tacit and the unspeakable over the literal, the visible and the articulated that marks out the East from that dominant in the West (2003, 958).

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Chia acknowledges that this 'Eastern' way of thinking forms a subsidiary tradition in the West dating back to Heraclitus. The mainstream tradition, he suggests, begins with Aristotle's 'belief that vision provides the most reliable basis for knowledge, and that linguistic signs are eminently suited to the task of representing reality ... on this view, knowledge is ultimately a linguistic matter and not one of empirical experience' (2003, 959). Chia proposes that the idea that knowledge is only knowledge when it is made explicit privileges explanation over action, and is the foundation of western science, the achievements of which he acknowledges as impressive.

The ever-expanding written archive in the West and the achievements that depend upon that archive are testament to the efficacy of vision and linguistic signs in this representation, but to claim that all knowledge is constituted this way is to leap too far and ignore other realms of knowledge. I discussed above (p.198ff) how Western ocularcentrism has obscured the importance of other modes of perception. Bergson makes the point that language and intellect deal with matter rather than flux, and life can only be apprehended through instinct and intuition (Grosz 2004, 191).

Middendorf breathwork belongs within the subsidiary tradition rather than in the mainstream of Western thought. It is a body of work where sensation is primary and where intuition and emotion are given as much weight as thought.

### Body & language

Language is not only the detached, alienated set of signs that constitute the archive. In *The spell of the sensuous* (1996), David

Abram proposes that since the widespread acceptance of Darwin's theory of natural selection humankind has relied on the existence of language to demonstrate our 'excellence and specialness' compared with other animals. He refers particularly to the layer of abstract meanings fixed by convention, which is regarded as 'proper' language – words isolated from tone, rhythm, and the resonance of spoken expression, words as arbitrary signs linked by formal rules:

only thus, by conceiving language as a purely abstract phenomenon, can we claim it as an exclusively human attribute. Only by overlooking the sensuous, evocative dimension of human discourse, and attending solely to the denotative and conventional aspect of verbal communication, can we hold ourselves apart from, and outside of, the rest of animate nature (1996, 79).

Abram argues that this separation is mistaken, that language can never be fully separated from this sensory dimension, that in much of our communication it is the underlying bodily aspects that carry the real meaning:

The enigma that is language, constituted as much by silence as by sounds, is not an inert or static structure, but an evolving bodily field (1996, 83).

This is immediately clear when we start to consider poetic and theatrical language. Abram draws support for his position from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations, concluding:

Experientially considered, language is no more the special property of the human organism than it is an expression of the animate earth that enfolds us (1996, 89–90).

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It is possible, then, that these sensuous aspects of language, which Abram points to as not exclusively human and which are not usually regarded as 'proper' language, can express something of the realms that words alone cannot express. They do so through the kinæsthetic – the rhythm, the feel of the vibrations, and so on. This is where the kinæsthetic links to language, and it is illustrated by that aspect of Middendorf breathwork called 'vowel space work'.

I introduced the 'vowel space' work in writing about the first workshop (p.90), citing Ilse Middendorf on this aspect of her work, and noting that it is often regarded as difficult for those inexperienced in the breathwork. I made a general observation that those with particular backgrounds in voice, especially in singing, combined with bodily awareness, are more likely to describe their experiences of the vowel space work in terms that match Middendorf's descriptions. This parallels my observations of the responses of those with movement backgrounds to the pressure point work. I interpret this as a matter of increased sensory awareness rather than some sort of inculcation arising from training because, as far as I know, no movement training proposes a connection of pressure points to particular 'breath spaces', nor does any voice training suggest the existence of 'vowel breath spaces'.

'L' made me release my jaw & strong vibration in my pubic bone – wonderful – I didn't think my voice went there – very pleasurable too. Also strong, specific connection with middle band while breathing in (MA 9 May 04).

Middendorf claims that the 'L' sound is connected with the lower space, and also that the face acts as a kind of map of the whole body in the same way that feet and hands also do. Specifically she says



that the jaw and underneath part of the nose connect with the lower space, the middle of the nose and out over the cheekbones connect with the middle space, and the upper part of the nose and the forehead connect with the upper space.

Exploring vowel sounds

ōh

– sadness & curiosity

– lives in central area around spine from & including bottom of sternum to just above navel (vertical) (WS 13 June 04).

Compare WS's location with Ilse Middendorf's description (and note that the bottom of the sternum is at the sixth rib):

The 'o'-shape is perceived as a vertical spindle in the centre of the torso, starting about ½ - 1 inch above the navel and ending at the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> rib (1990, 64).

The descriptions of location are remarkably similar. WS had no previous contact with Middendorf breathwork or with Middendorf's descriptions of the 'vowel spaces', and I gave no indication of what Middendorf's claims for the vowel spaces are.

This suggests that there is a kinæsthetic dimension of language, which becomes available through breath awareness, which goes beyond what are normally considered to be aspects of this dimension. The complex synæsthetic nature of what happens in the vowel space work is indicated by the way that breath can respond in a particular space in the body simply from the contemplation of a vowel, prior to any shaping of the vocal tract and prior to any sound being made.

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I looked earlier at the notion elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson that conceptual systems and language are based in bodily experience. Gendlin argues that the meaning of language has to include a bodily sense that he calls 'felt experiencing' or 'felt sense':

We cannot even know what a concept 'means' or use it meaningfully without the 'feel' of its meaning. No amount of symbols, definitions, and the like can be used in the place of the *felt* meaning. If we do not have the *felt* meaning of the concept, we haven't got the concept at all – only a verbal noise. Nor can we think without felt meaning ... Only a very few considerations can be held in mind in a verbalized form, yet thinking involves the simultaneous role of many considerations. We 'think' them all in a felt way (1997 (1962), 5–6, italics in original).

Gendlin draws on Wittgenstein's argument that the meaning of words depends on the context of use, so that words have 'families' of meanings, and can acquire new meanings. He looks at what happens when we are trying to find the right words to express something:

when we have trouble finding words ... we can sense the physical strain as the implicit words rearrange themselves in our bodies, so that when they come, they arrive newly arranged. Words can acquire more meaning when they come in sentences that come freshly at the edge of the implicit intricacy (2004, 130).

The 'implicit intricacy' is Gendlin's expression for the way any situation is always far more complex and intricate than we can describe in words. For Gendlin language is not something 'layered onto' some more primitive human being. Rather it is an inseparable aspect of humanness. Gendlin writes:

the human body is never before language. But the implied meaning is not the result *only* of language. The relation of language to the body is more intricate than just with or without. Your body understands well the language and the phrases it rejects. But it can generate a bodily implying that goes beyond what the already-shared common meanings could imply. The body knows the language, and it always moves on freshly again, beyond the already existing meanings. The body physically rearranges the same old words, so that they come to us already arranged in new phrases and sentences. This is so in all ordinary speech, not only in fresh thinking. We do not look up single words and paste them together. If we hear ourselves saying the wrong thing, we can only stop, regain the implicit sense of what we were about to say, and wait for another set of words to come. The 'coming' of words is bodily, like the coming of tears, sleep, orgasm, improvisation, and how the muse comes (2004, 132, italics in original).

This coincides with Leder's point from above, that 'our body grasps multiple, ambiguous meanings that elude articulation and conceptual grasp' (1990, 55). It implies a different sense of 'authorship' or agency from the commonsense version, and connects with a wider sense of self that comes with being in touch with the normally absent body:

Although what we called 'you' does not control what comes, the implying is not an otherness (not an 'alterity'), not another self, not unreachable. Rather, what *comes* in this way feels more deeply and uncensoredly *from yourself*, than anything that you could construct. Now the words 'you' and 'self' tell of degrees of selfness, since we are *most ourselves* when there is a fresh and surprising coming through the body (Gendlin 2004, 132–3, italics in original).

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This is a remarkable description of the process of artistic creation involving language. The idea that 'we are *most ourselves* when there is a fresh and surprising coming through the body' makes sense for me of many occurrences in Middendorf breathwork.

I curled up on the floor and in doing so I discovered something amazing ... (my back was moving a lot with my breath) I struggle to get air in quickly enough because I am metering my out breath ... making it quiet ... and really working to make it slow ... if I just let it drop out I have a pause before my in breath. Oh my god! As I experimented with this I felt myself relax deep inside. I wonder if this is always the case with my breath??? There is a sense of uncaring/whatever attitude when I let the breath out in this way, and it is familiar in a way as 'almost asleep' breathing (JM 17 August 04).

I enjoy this sort of discovery, this sudden realisation about and questioning of one's patterns. Do I have to go on with this pattern? It had a useful function at some stage in my life, but perhaps that time has passed and now that I can see/feel/sense it I have the possibility of change. This is for me part of the beauty of the breathwork, that I come to experience myself through my sensations first and then in reflection, and this combination offers me possibilities for change if I want them.

It is so wonderful when I hear & perceive the part of my body that needs my awareness and I put my attention there & then allow the rest of my body to respond from this need. I get surprised by the form & shape my body takes and amazed, the need just to stretch the hip joint that my whole body can & will be a part of this need. So from one point there is a ripple effect through the whole body if I allow this (FL 7 December 04)

We can surprise ourselves in sensation, perception, and language. This is a point of connection to creativity. When we can remain with 'not knowing' and simply perceive the sensations in our bodies, then we are 'open for the muse'. Our capacities for making new connections through sensation and intuition are heightened because we are in a different relation to reality – connected to the world through our being in it rather than existing as a separate individual.

The breathwork training in Berkeley emphasises sensing bodily movement with breath as it comes and goes on its own. We learn about 'breath' through the sensations of movement in our bodies as we breathe. I wondered, therefore, why talk about 'breath' rather than 'breathing'. I emailed Jürg Roffler a question about this and he wrote back:

The choice for breath (German: *Atem*) over breathing (German: *Atmung*) comes from understanding breath as a physical, emotional and spiritual force. In all of her literature Ilse [Middendorf] uses breath/*Atem* and only breathing/*Atmung*, when she is describing the anatomical and physiological process of breathing – the exchange of oxygen. Breath encompasses both, a physical and metaphysical reality. Breathing however only covers the physical process of inhaling and exhaling. You may say that the important connection in our work is the connection with the physical sensation of the movement of breath in the body and isn't this what we would call breathing? Yes, but this is just the connection, the gate, opening into an experience of oneness of body, mind and spirit, which is much more than just the act of breathing (Personal communication with the author, 3.1.06).

This expresses what has drawn me to Middendorf breathwork. It is a somatic work, it functions to connect me strongly with my body, as

can various other bodies of work, but in Middendorf breathwork this is just the start. More fundamentally the work is about the experience of oneness, of connection with myself and with the world.

### Body/mind & subject/object dualisms

Descartes has come in for much direct and indirect criticism so far in this dissertation. Phenomenologists, corporeal feminists, and neurologists have taken issue with the dualism of body and mind attributed to Descartes. Damasio's first book, *Descartes' error* (1994), is the source for an earlier citation about the 'embodied mind' (p.214), and in a later book he refers to mind as a 'process' rather than a thing. But even regarding mind as a process rather than a thing does not seem to escape a basic dualism. Freya Mathews expresses this when she writes:

Although few Western philosophers, and even fewer scientists, these days subscribe to a dualistic theory of mind, in the sense of regarding mind as existing independently of matter, most philosophers, scientists and persons in modern streets retain dualistic presuppositions concerning matter, as existing independently of mind and as in itself empty of the attributes associated with mentality. Mentalistic attributes may, from this point of view, emerge from complex material configurations (such as organisms), but are not in any way essential to the nature of matter. Although postclassical physics no longer subscribes to a narrow form of mechanism, in that it has admitted additional, nonmechanical forces and indeterministic laws into its cosmology, it is still dualistic in the sense that mentalistic attributes, such as subjectivity, self-presence, awareness, intentionality, purpose, and meaning, are regarded as emergent phenomena, that do not belong to the fundamental nature of physical reality (2003, 26).

Mathews goes on to argue that materialism and idealism are philosophically co-dependent dualistic positions, with materialism defining matter in terms exclusive of mentality and idealism defining mentality in terms exclusive of materiality. For her the true converse of mind-matter dualism is:

a position that posits some form of nonduality or mind-matter unity, implicating mentality in the definition of matter and materiality in the definition of mind (2003, 27).

Mathews calls this position 'panpsychism', while acknowledging that 'panphysicalism' is equally appropriate and important. Mathews has an environmental subtext in her work, but *For love of matter* is primarily metaphysical. Her argument is based on the 'exorbitant philosophical cost' of the deanimated and dualistic conception of matter that is the materialist premise:

When the world is understood in terms of pure externality, then its reality cannot be grasped either conceptually or epistemologically. In other words, when dualistic premises are assumed, the reality of the world can neither be conceived nor known: only by adopting a nondualistic perspective can we provide a conceptual and epistemological account of the reality of things (2003, 29).

I am sympathetic to Mathews' panpsychism, and find it has resonances with Middendorf breathwork. For a start Mathews' position requires her to approach things in the manner of encounter rather than as a quest for knowledge in the objective sense. This is the way breath is approached in Middendorf breathwork – from a place of not knowing but seeking to contact. And just as I can

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experience my own interior through the breathwork, so I can encounter others in the world as subjects with their own interiors.

If we begin with a worldview, an understanding, that we all exist in the world as finite selves with our own experiences, as we tend to do in the West, then we will also tend to start with a subject/object dualism from which many other dualisms can grow. Mathews points out that such a view holds a metaphysical presupposition:

a presupposition about the metaphysics of the subject. Epistemology cannot avoid such presuppositions. Experience in itself cannot reveal whose experience it is. We have to decide in advance whether the subject of a given experience is the world at large or the finite self. Such a decision will not be made on epistemological grounds (2003, 164).

Mathews offers instead the possibilities of a subject/subject view of the world. She argues that it is possible to conceive of the universe, or physical reality as a whole, as an indivisible unity. In this view the whole system has a conatus, 'where conatus is here understood in Spinoza's sense as that "endeavour, wherewith everything endeavours to persist in its own being"' (2003, 48, italics in original). Mathews imagines:

a world that is no longer viewed, in the manner of classical science, as a piece of cosmic hardware, fashioned out of the inherently blind matter of classical physics, but is rather viewed as a subjectival matrix, within the eddies and currents of whose dynamics we and other finite creatures stake out our relative identities (2003, 4).

Mathews is critical of the relativist position of poststructuralism, a position she summarizes as follows:



All thought, and hence perception too, since perception is theory-laden, serves the needs and interests, and reflects the social experience, of particular groups in society. Our observations and interpretations of the world are necessarily selected and shaped by our situation, and it is impossible to imagine any form of knowledge that is not partial and situated in this way (2003, 166).

Mathews argues that such relativism renders the world as it is in itself unknowable; that this position is 'an elaborate form of textual solipsism' (2003, 167). This divorce from reality, she has already argued, as I cited above, is too great a philosophical price to pay, so the position is rejected.

Encounter is important in the philosophical position that Mathews provisionally calls 'systemic constructionism', which she proposes is compatible with the nondualist realism she advocates in panpsychism.

I am here referring to the kind of theory that highlights the fact that the knower is invariably implicated in the system she seeks to know, and hence that the effects of her attempts to know the world will inevitably change it. The world can therefore never be apprehended to any degree as it is in itself, but only as it is in interaction with us (2003, 167–8).

She argues that this does not imply the ontological indispensability of the subject to the object:

The fact that the appearance that the object, or known, presents to the subject, or knower, is inevitably influenced by the presence of the knower, so that the knower cannot apprehend the known as it is in

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the knower's absence, in no way implies that the nature of the known is determined by the knower. For it is the object's already determinate nature that dictates how that object reacts to the subject's presence, and hence the subject can infer, from that reaction, truths about the independent nature of the object. Indeed, the inevitability of such subject-object interrelatedness is turned from an epistemological handicap into the very key to discovery as soon as the observer-observed relationship is converted from a subject-object into a subject-subject relation, and communication is accorded priority over observation (2003, 169).

Mathews' view is in keeping with the way modern physics sees the world. One of the impacts that quantum physics has had on the 'real world' is the introduction of the term 'quantum leap' into general usage. This refers to the moment an electron, or some other 'fundamental' particle, changes from one state to another without apparent cause and without regard for the normal ways of going from A to B by traversing the space in between. The realisation that fundamental particles had the capacity for such leaps put an end to the understandings of the world that physicists had held until early in the twentieth century, the same understandings that most of us continue to operate with, materialist realist understandings, essentially that there is a world out there independent of me and my viewing of it. Many of those involved in quantum physics and other scientific fields now say things such as physicist Amit Goswami says in *The self-aware universe*: 'consciousness, not matter, is the ground of all being' (1993, 2). Or, as another physicist, Jeffrey Satinover writes in *The quantum brain*:

All of the material universe does in fact seem knit together into a single, mutually influencing whole – or, perhaps, a whole everywhere

influenced simultaneously, and coordinated, by 'something' not itself a physical part of that universe (2001, 115).

The view of the universe as an indivisible unity is, naturally, not a new one. It is one put perhaps most famously more than 2500 years ago by Lao Tsu in the *Tao te ching*:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.  
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.  
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.  
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.  
These two spring from the same source but differ in name: this appears as darkness.  
Darkness within darkness.  
The gate to all mystery (Lao Tsu 1972, verse 1).

Mathews identifies her position as essentially Taoist:

Nature, according to my definition, is more or less equivalent to the Tao: it is the wise way the world unfolds when left to its own devices. The Taoism of Lao Tzu does not announce itself as panpsychist, but clearly a world animated by the Tao is one which is possessed of some intelligent inner principle, a principle that can be trusted to guide us into the deepest channels of life (2004, paragraph 59).

The self in this view is not limited to the finite separate self, the individual of the modernist world and certainly not to the isolated self-defining self-creating individual of modern day capitalist economies. Mathews notes:

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At the level of self, latterday civilizations have involved the re-deployment of our instinctual self-realizing energies in the service of socially prescribed ideals of individual selfhood ... Instead of letting ourselves be, we compulsively make ourselves over to match external ideals, where this can result in all kinds of aberrations, from neurotic individualism to fanatical collectivism or patriotism (2004, paragraph 11).

She argues that abstract intellect is at the root of the separation of the self from the world, of the division of the world into subject and objects. In the panpsychist view, the self has a conatus enmeshed with the conatus of the whole. Mathews puts a view of the world as:

constituting on the one hand a subjectival whole (the One) imbued with its own conatus, or impetus towards self-realization, and on the other hand a manifold of relatively self-realizing individuals (the Many), whose conative impulses generally intermesh to further the self-realization of the whole (2004, paragraph 7).

This echoes with the whole and the ten thousand things of the *Tao te ching*. It is a view I am sympathetic with, and yet it seems to carry an odd anti-intellectualism with it. In seeing the root of the problem as excesses of abstract intellect, Mathews is forced into a position which marks a particular aspect of humanness, in this case the capacity for abstraction through intellect, as an aberration:

When human beings are freed from excessively abstract thought however, and restored to their conative nature, then the world is relatively safe from such 'development'. For the conative natures of all beings are, from an environmental point of view, relatively trustworthy, simply because, as I have already noted, all have evolved in concert with one another, with the consequence that their

natures are mutually cross-referencing. Self-realization is achieved, at the conative level, within the parameters of the already existent rather than the merely possible, and thus, at a conative level, all beings have a broad interest in maintaining the world as it is (2004, paragraph 13).

How is it possible to stand outside and say ‘this is in accord with your conative nature and that is not’? What is the basis for labelling abstract intellect an aberration? It seems to be a post hoc argument from the havoc we humans are creating in the environment. I feel that the answer lies not in labelling abstract thought as aberrant, but in a balancing of abstract intellect with other bodily ‘intelligences’. When I am in touch with my body, as when I can sense how it moves with breath as it comes and goes on its own, I can also sense a different relationship with the outer world. I can approach it as another subject, I can encounter it as Mathews would have it:

To encounter others, in the sense intended here, involves recognition of and contact with their independent subjectivity, where such recognition and contact inevitably give rise to a certain respect for their integrity and sympathetic concern for their fate. Our modern goal, of knowing the world, has taken the place of an earlier goal, namely of encountering it, where this earlier goal was more appropriate than the modern one to the kind of psychophysical worldview that is being advanced here (2003, 76–7).

In my experience Middendorf breathwork has this effect, of bringing me into balance with the world, whereby I can be receptive as well as directive; I can receive from the world and I can give to it or create in it. When I am in touch with my ‘somatic intelligence’ I can operate as part of the One, not just as an independent one of many. This is the

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function of somatic intelligence, which connects also with intuition, the capacity to apprehend without reasoning.

Drew Leder hints at this sort of connection with the world towards the end of his book. He says that his project in *The absent body* is to criticise the Western Cartesian-based dualist worldview on logical and phenomenological grounds, but also to recognise the strengths of that view, ‘the ways in which it resonates with and illuminates aspects of human experience’ (1990, 155), to expose its experiential underpinnings. Having elaborated what he sees as some of the consequences of the Western dualist worldview – the subjugation of women, the oppression of labourers, of other cultures, and the exploitation of nature in general (1990, 154–5), Leder asks whether the notion of the ‘lived body’ can reorient our thinking. He sketches out a line of thought based on the Neo-Confucian concept that we ‘form one body with the universe’ (1990, 156). He does not intend this as a fully developed argument but rather as some initial thoughts on, if not mind-body dualism, then what?

This perspective also fits with the views of Gendlin, who has written extensively about experience and meaning. Gendlin describes his overall project as ‘thinking beyond patterns’:

My project is to think – about, and with – that which exceeds patterns (forms, concepts, definitions, categories, distinctions, rules ... ). Such a project currently seems impossible, and for quite strong philosophical reasons. Certain very basic assumptions need to be overcome, but without ending in limbo. That can happen only with a new thinking. Logical forms and patterns are incapable of encompassing the intricacy of people and situations. Forms and distinctions cannot even define what forms and distinctions are. They are not clear about what clarity is; they cannot define definition. No

concept conceptualizes well how concepts work, or patterns, rules, or forms. But it is a great error to denigrate precise patterns or to say that they don't work (1991, 21).

For Gendlin 'felt experiencing' is the basis of meaning, as I discussed in the previous section. By 'felt experiencing' Gendlin means the perception of all bodily sensations, those that are identifiable, that we could perhaps name as 'a tension' or 'a feeling of ease' or 'a hunger' or any of the myriad of ways we describe such sensations, and those that are more nebulous, that we could not name.

Gendlin regards language as part of the embodied nature of humans. He acknowledges that in any situation there are always cultural and conceptual forms at work before we think about it, so it is not possible to report on a situation neutrally, but he proposes that to go on from this acknowledgement to argue that cultural and conceptual forms determine experience is to go too far. For him there is an order that is more than that which language and other expressions of culture impose upon the world, and we humans are a part of that order, connected to that order through our bodies, which interact with the environment not only through our five senses but in the way plants do. Adopting Mathews' description of panpsychist metaphysics as one which 'attributes an internal principle, or subjectival dimension, to matter generally' (2004, 1), Gendlin's view can be described as panpsychic. For Gendlin, much of life happens beyond the five senses. He writes:

To begin philosophy by considering perception makes it seem that living things can contact reality only through perception. But plants *are* in contact with reality. They are interactions, quite without perception. Our own living bodies also are interactions with their environments, and that is not lost just because ours also have

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perception ... In sensing themselves, our bodies sense our physical environment and our human situations. The perception of colors, smells, and sounds is only a small part of this (1992, 2, italics in original).

Gendlin's formulation here connects with the idea of intuition discussed earlier in relation to Jung and Bergson, with Bergson's description of intuition as the return of instinct and intelligence to each other, and also with Polanyi's 'tacit knowledge'. Whatever words we use to describe the phenomenon, we already know a great deal about the world, not in a purely intellectual way but through our bodies, because we are part of the One, not just one of the many. When we become attuned to our bodies with breath we become more opened up to this way of knowing. This, as I see it, is the source of our creativity. Of course there are ways to connect with it other than through breath, or Middendorf breathwork. But this is one way.



## Part Five: Conclusions



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The point is not to explain the world, but to sing it  
(Mathews 2003, 88).

I began this project with a particular orientation to voice and movement training. I already 'knew' that Middendorf breathwork was a useful foundation for voice and movement training. It was my original intention to investigate and demonstrate the 'how' of this, to answer the question: what is it about Middendorf breathwork that makes it such a good foundation for voice and movement training for performance?

I 'knew' that Middendorf breathwork was a useful foundation from my own experience before beginning this project – from learning about Middendorf breathwork from my singing teacher, from reading about it, from practising it with my partner who went to the Middendorf Institute in Berlin and worked with Ilse Middendorf and others there in 1999, and from my own visit to that Institute in 2001. Now that I have completed the professional training in Middendorf breathwork I look back and see my original undertaking as naïve.

Middendorf breathwork is, indeed, a useful foundation for voice and movement training for performance, but it is far more than that. It is a profound and complex body of work that has much to offer many fields of human endeavour, such as health, wellbeing, creative arts, and sports. More fundamentally still, it is a practice that offers the possibility of connecting with the very ground of one's being.

My own experience of Middendorf breathwork is that it has shifted the way I am in the world – how I sense myself in the world and in relation to others, how I feel and think about that. Middendorf

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breathwork has brought me into contact with myself in new ways – faced me with some of the habits and patterns I have built up over the years. Some of these perhaps served me well once but have become a hindrance. Middendorf breathwork has given me a much fuller sense of my life as integral with the life of my body. As I progressed through the training I found myself interested in the breathwork not so much as a tool for ‘improved’ voice but as a body of work that taught me, and continues to teach me, about sensing, about relationship, and about myself in the world.

So my project has become an investigation of Middendorf breathwork in depth, experientially, historically, and in dialogue with ideas from contemporary discourses around body, breath, and experience. I summarise here the conclusions from these investigations.

In experiential terms I have described the practice of Middendorf breathwork in the introduction and in chapters two and three, giving examples of written responses to the practise from the journals of my workshop participants and from my own experience. I have tried to do this in a way that makes it possible for the reader to have their own experiences since Middendorf breathwork is first and foremost an experiential body of work, one that is difficult to apprehend through language alone. I argue that part of its importance is the simultaneous individual and collective nature of breath experience. I discussed in chapter two how the subjectivist nature of Middendorf breathwork and its holistic orientation complements the orientation towards principles, the attempts to articulate the universal within the vast array of individual experiences of breath.

I have elaborated the core features of Middendorf breathwork, which I review here through a statement by Ilse Middendorf. She writes:

To let the breath come, let it go, and wait until it comes back on its own is to perceive the unconscious function of the breath within its laws. An immediate, natural movement emerges from it, a connection to the human entirety and the possibility to get to know and experience oneself (1990, back cover).

‘To let the breath come, let it go, and wait until it comes back on its own’ is often stated as the main ground of Middendorf breathwork. In chapter six I reviewed different approaches to breath, noting that most emphasise manipulating or controlling breath in some way. Middendorf’s approach of letting breath come and go on its own can be found in some yoga practices, in some somatic practices that pay attention to breath, in the voice work of Linklater and her followers, and in some forms of meditation focused on breath.

Breath that is allowed to come and go on its own is connected to somatic intelligence. My body ‘knows’ how to repair injury, how to digest food, how to balance the pH of my blood, and so on. ‘It’ performs all the many homeostatic, balance-seeking, functions necessary for me to go on living, without my conscious participation. Breathing is one of these functions – my body ‘knows’ how to breathe, how much, and in what way, if I allow it. But it is a special function because breathing can also be controlled by the will and therefore also by learned habits, by socio-cultural conditionings. By the time we reach adulthood most of us have learned to control our breath in various ways and find it difficult at first to allow breath to come and go on its own. The practice of Middendorf breathwork is, in part, a journey of learning to allow breath to come and go on its own. In this aspect it is a *via negativa*, a learning by stripping away, a learning to let go.

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This connection to somatic intelligence is what Middendorf means by the 'unconscious function of the breath'. This function is a balancing and supporting one: 'By supporting all the other functions, it balances all the fluctuations in one's life' (1990, 25).

Most of the time my breath comes and goes without my letting it or waiting for it because most of the time I am not present to (conscious of, aware of, attending to) my breath. As I noted earlier, Middendorf distinguishes between:

- the 'unconscious' breath, breath we are not aware of, which is how breath is for most of us most of the time;
- the 'voluntary' breath of most breathing practices where the coming and going of breath is controlled;
- the 'perceptible' breath, which is the 'unconscious' breath brought to awareness, without interfering with it.

The perceptible breath, breath that I am 'with' as it comes and goes on its own, responds in every moment to every inner and outer stimulus. So the balancing function of breath is not only internal and individual; breath also connects with the outer world.

By using the words 'let' and 'wait' in her statement Middendorf implies rather than states another necessary condition for this breathwork, that of presence. In her lecture in 2005 that I cited above (p.147) Middendorf states:

It is the sense of touch, which through its sensory awareness makes the act of breathing conscious and therefore apparent. Touching,

feeling, sensing are all familiar to us. We are, however, only aware of them when we are fully present (2005, paragraph 6).

I discussed how 'presence' is used in Middendorf breathwork to carry a meaning of full attention and participation, not just pinpointed 'intellectual' focus. Roffler's description of presence as having both the directedness of attention and the receptiveness of 'devotion' or 'surrender' recognises the one-sided nature of 'paying attention'. In its orientation to the whole along with, and at the same time as, the particular, Middendorf breathwork takes a different approach to human subjectivity, to human becoming, from the norm in the West.

Middendorf goes on: 'An immediate, natural movement emerges from it'. This is the movement of my body with breath, the inhalation and exhalation, as it comes and goes. In its concern with the perception of sensation, with touch, with sensory awareness, with the kinæsthetic realm, Middendorf breathwork is again at odds with the Western mainstream, as I discussed above.

The final part of Middendorf's statement refers to 'a connection to the human entirety and the possibility to get to know and experience oneself'. This human entirety includes all those aspects of ourselves that we are normally 'absent from' in the sense that Leder uses in *The absent body* (1990); not only those parts of the ecstatic or sensorimotor body that disappear when our attention is elsewhere, or when we attend from them, the 'null points' of the phenomenologists, but also the recessive body, the viscera, the bodily depths that seem more like 'it' (not with a capital 'i'), a thing separate from 'me'. Leder uses the phrase 'it can', referring to the various functions the 'vegetative body' takes care of, and then 'I must' where the requirements of this body become demands: 'I must eat, breathe,

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excrete, drink, sleep ... these vegetative processes ... while seemingly Other to the self ... are nonetheless integral to the self's existence' (1990, 48). Then 'I cannot' in reference to the functions of this vegetative body: 'I cannot act from my inner organs in the way I do from my surface musculature' (1990, 48). Breath bridges the ecstatic and recessive bodies, just as it bridges the conscious and unconscious worlds (these categories are related but not the same).

Roffler describes breath as encompassing both a physical and a metaphysical reality, as 'the connection, the gate, opening into an experience of oneness of body, mind and spirit' (personal communication with the author, 3.1.06). His use of the phrase 'metaphysical reality' indicates a belief in, or experience of, something other than material, physical reality, rather than a 'philosophical position' in the academic sense. In addition to being a therapeutic somatic practice and, I argue, a creative artistic practice, Middendorf breathwork is, finally, a practice that can connect its practitioners with the fundamentals of life and time. Although it is not spelt out and rarely raised in the breathwork training, it is clear that Middendorf and Roffler (and probably others too) believe that the breathwork can connect one to something they would call 'divine'. Again the language here, like the use of 'body, soul, and spirit', fits in with a whole view of the world that does not sit easily in twenty-first century academia. But there is clearly a rising interest in the areas this language refers to – to questions of meaning in life that go beyond the immediate material concerns of the everyday. And breath with its established connections to 'spirit', to life, is in some ways an obvious pathway for such interests.

'A connection to human entirety and the possibility to get to know and experience oneself' does not happen in isolation. Human



entireness includes the intersubjective, the connection to the collective, and also a connection to the outer world. I remember an experience in a workshop during my first trip to Berlin in 2001 where I had a sense that with my inhalation I was both taking in the world and expanding out into it, and with my exhalation I was both swinging back into myself and expressing something out into the world. I felt that I was a part of, and interchanging with, this much greater whole.

In historical terms, Middendorf breathwork has arisen as part of a 'return to body' in the West, which I discussed in chapter four. Middendorf breathwork is now one among an array of bodies of work that can trace their antecedents back to a few figures in the mid- to late nineteenth century. I looked at some of these in chapter five.

While the rise in interest in body in the West can be seen as a release from the 'prison of bodily unconsciousness' constructed by the Christian rejection of body as 'evil', as Middendorf puts it (1990, 11), or as a movement of resistance to the dominant way of life that involves an 'incomprehensible savaging of flesh', as Johnson writes (1995b, ix), it can also carry elements of anti-intellectualism. Segel argues that this rejection of intellectualism in Nazi Germany was an integral part of anti-Jewish propaganda (1998).

I distinguish two different meanings given to body within this 'return to body': one concerned with an image of the physical body, and the other with sensory experience of one's own body. I argue that the former is an extension of intellectual culture and has to do with pursuing an ideal or an image rather than attending to sensation. Somatic practices, I argue, are different. At their best they break down the alienations of abstracted intellect by connecting people with

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an important ground of their being – the sensations of their own bodies.

In terms of dialogue with contemporary discourse, the main themes that have arisen in the project and in this exegesis include the always already mediated nature of cultural relations, understandings of body, the place and scope of language, mind/body and subject/object dualisms, somatic intelligence, and intuition.

Mauss' 'techniques of the body', discussed above (p.226), make it clear that there is no outside of culture for humans, so cultural relations are always already mediated. This is now widely accepted. I propose that Middendorf breathwork is one way of 'asking back into' what is always already culturally produced in the manner Behnke describes (1997), so that culturally produced need not mean 'fully determined'. We can agree that many cultural and conceptual forms are 'always already' at work in any situation, and yet not accept an implication that the world is unknowable. The cultural and conceptual forms affect breath too, so by inhabiting my patterns of breath I open up the possibility of alternatives.

When I understand the body that I ongoingly make in Lorraine's terms as 'a temporal becoming which is always culturally mediated and integrally linked to the equally dynamic process of psychic selfhood' (1999, 4), this cultural mediation again need not mean fully determined. A practice of Middendorf breathwork that asks back into breath, which is connected to all aspects of my being, will, as a matter of course, influence both my temporal becoming and the process of my psychic selfhood.

We make our bodies, understood in this way, in a social context, in an interkinæsthetic field. Not only do our bodies have a somatic intelligence at a cellular level that keeps all the necessary balances to sustain life, they are also involved in language, they grasp 'multiple, ambiguous meanings that elude articulation and conceptual grasp' (Leder 1990, 55).

Middendorf breathwork enables me to experience myself in my body and for that experience to be an encounter, to use Mathews' term, rather than a viewing, an experience of something separate. I can experience myself kinæsthetically; I can sense how I am connected to others and to the world; I have a felt sense, in Gendlin's term. This does not mean that I do not think. My thinking can be related to this sensing. The words can come to me through my body in the way Gendlin describes, and they can be my muse. Nor does it mean that I do not feel. The very term 'felt sense' indicates the integration here. We are used to separating feeling, thinking, sensing, and this has its uses, but they are not really separated like this. Just as experience is more usually synæsthetic, so too it already involves feeling, thinking, and intuition.

In some ways it is obvious that breath is intimately connected with life – so obvious that it tends to be left in the realm of the taken for granted. Middendorf breathwork offers a path for 'investigation' of breath in many different fields. The existing studies I referred to in chapter six indicate some of the possibilities in the field of health. There are many other areas where both qualitative and quantitative studies could prove valuable – in music, artistic performance, and sport for instance. Interest in breath, particularly in breath that is allowed to come and go on its own, is only beginning in the English-speaking West.

## Chapter Ten: Conclusions

I dwell in my body. I am not separate from it as I experience it. I am it, I am my body as I make it, and the subject/object distinction breaks down. I am my living experiencing body. I think, feel, sense, breathe, without my thoughts or feelings dominating. At the same time I am connected to the world. I receive my inspiration from the world and I express my creations out into it.

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## Appendix A: Interview with Jeff Crockett, October 2003, Berkeley CA

1. **John:** Can you tell me a bit about what you do first of all?
2. **Jeff:** I'm the primary voice teacher in the whole three-year training programme [at ACT, the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco]. But I don't do all of it. There's a woman who does all the speech work, who does, you know, speech, phonetics, accents, all of that, so I don't have to do any of that, which is great. So, what do ...
3. **John:** What I'm really interested is to what extent and in what ways you draw on the breathwork in your teaching.
4. **Jeff:** Maybe the easiest way to talk about that is to go through ... I can tell you a little about the journey I've been on. Even when I was training at Central [School for Speech and Drama in London] I was really interested in what I could feel was the healing aspect of voicework and how the simple connection just with sound in a pure, raw way can pick people up; ensemble could form, people could connect, barriers were broken down, people were less fearful, their essence could come through. That's what fascinated me much more than, say, listening to someone's voice and diagnosing it, and saying, well I've got an exercise to help this nasality ... that's not really what I was interested in and I knew that right away, even though that training at Central was also about theatre and how you can support people in being able to be on the stage and bring text to life ... but I knew my real passion was about the self expressing, physically, vocally. So I kind of stumbled into a lot of things just through trial and error, using the training I had as an actor and also from Central.
5. Then I did an apprenticeship with a woman at Julliard who was pretty technical. In a way, when I look back, it seems like a gift to have these regimented, structured approaches, because that's not my way, but it's helped me have a container when it felt like the mystery of it would sort of like blow open, or I felt like, I had an intuitive sense of something going on but I couldn't communicate it or I didn't know how to put it in some kind of form to teach clearly. I mean I knew that people were having experiences but it felt like it would be more important if we could also talk about what is the shape or why is this happening, if there could be some kind of form.
6. After I finished at Central I got a job as a voice coach at the Children's Theatre in Minneapolis, so I was working with a company of actors who had been together for 25 years. Even though they do children's literature they were like the avant-garde theatre in Minneapolis. They were these wildly creative inventive people who happened to produce children's literature. But it was one of the most creative theatres I've ever been around. And because they had been together for so long there was a depth that I could work at, and I was young and didn't really know much but had a lot of passion and curiosity and they were a great group of people to start to explore with.
7. I got a professional development allowance with this job, which afforded me to do trainings, work. I did two weeks with the Roy Hart Theatre, which totally blew open my world, and at the same time I was taking regular Alexander lessons. And it was interesting because I had a sort of love-hate relationship with the Alexander technique. My first exposure to it when I was in New York and I was starting to think about being a teacher and what would that mean, and met with a mentor of mine and she said, you know, why don't you try this and this and this and definitely get yourself an Alexander lesson, class, whatever. And I remember being in that class thinking, this is really stiff

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- and posed, and I know something nice is happening while that man has his hands on my body but I look around and people look self-conscious and stiff. That was my first hit. Later in London I had Alexander lessons that had a slightly different feel and I got more depth to it and I kept getting drawn back to it, so with this development allowance I had regular lessons in Minneapolis with this amazing woman who's really doing more than the Alexander technique. And there was something about ... I knew I was really interested in my touch and what that did. And really I was working with presence and what that did with the actors when I was working with the voice. And I was having these lessons and I knew something was going on under her hands that was more than touch. It was her presence, her consciousness, her direction or whatever it was and I knew I wanted to again find some kind of structure so that I could hang onto it. It was just totally intuitive with me. I knew I put my hands on and people liked it, and they breathed easier and whatever.
8. So I decided to quit my job and train to be an Alexander teacher. That's a big deal. That's a long training. It's three years, five days a week. It's huge. And I got a lot out of it. It taught me a lot about what I was doing with my hands, but ultimately I was really unsatisfied and it was uncomfortable for me to look at that actually because I had invested so much in the Alexander technique and thought it was going to be the thing I could use as a framework to build the voicework with. So I got this job at ACT and thought, oh cool, what a great job, this is really lucky, it's fortuitous. It felt like synchronicity was working so clearly in my life. The timing, the way it all worked out, right when I graduated from the Alexander technique, I was to move to San Francisco and start this job. It was more responsibility than I had been used to, and I was fresh out of Alexander School and ready to, you know, kind of conquer the world with the Alexander technique. And the initial passion and creativity that was in my teaching when I didn't know much was gone, and something kind of flat came in, and it was really horrid, it was really upsetting. I stopped loving the teaching. It was kind of a chore and the more that I moved toward the Alexander technique the more it felt like spontaneity and the life of the person, the essence of the people I was working with was going away, and I didn't know why that was. I knew I could give someone a lesson and they had a wonderful experience, but that feeling of being in the group and that connecting feeling with voice and movement where an ensemble comes together or the way improvisational work can grow out of breath and movement and voice, it was gone. It was sort of flat, superficial.
  9. So I read the interview with Ilse [Middendorf] in *Bone breath and gesture* [Johnson D H (1995)] and something went on inside of me. I thought, oh I need to check this out, there's something in here that I think I know but I don't know anything about but I think I know something about it just from the experiences I've had teaching. And it was part of what was missing once I started doing this Alexander work. So I did a workshop, a weekend, and I knew this was the work that was going to help open me up again and to help open farther and to go deeper with less fear, because I was experiencing a lot of fear actually, working with people and the depths that they would go to and I felt like I had no container to put this in or, how are we going to integrate this so that it's healthy ... I was working more emotionally, more with imagination and people were having these huge emotional experiences, and it was a little like what I experienced when I worked with the Roy Hart people – where is this rage coming from – and somehow I felt a little ... not able to hold it well enough.



10. So when I started working with the breathwork I realised that part of what was killing the real essence and life in the work was in the Alexander work we're really orienting to observation and that's very different from sensation. In fact in an Alexander lesson they'll talk to you a lot about, don't feel it, inhibit and direct. It's kind of like a little straightjacket, you know? But it was huge for me when I would start going to classes that Jürg would have ... I would go like once a week, I would go for a period and really get fed and then I couldn't quite handle it and I'd go away for a while, and then I'd come back for however long I could ... starting to understand the difference between observing self and just being in sensation and the way self emerges made a huge difference, and I realised that the Alexander technique was leading me to become very very sophisticated in how self-critical I could be. And I was really really sophisticated. And I could watch myself live through my whole life as though I was kind of floating above myself, and what I thought was going to help me help myself and to help me go farther in my work actually took me farther away. And so the more I got into the breathwork the more comfortable it was for me to admit that to myself and then just let the Alexander work go. The key was presence with sensation. Because I had been exploring in a different way what is it to let breath come and go on its own, but in a way we were kind of looking at it or observing or something. So that made a huge difference for me. And now that I'm teaching more from the point of view of sensation – and the thing that's so beautiful about this work is that it's so anchored in people's experience and the authority comes from within you. It's your experience, it isn't ... you know I no longer feel like I'm responsible for things that aren't my responsibility as the teacher and it actually, there's much more freedom in the classroom, in the studio, because I feel like I'm stronger in myself and people are having whatever experience they're having.
11. So the sensation, the presence, the breath coming and going on its own, those three things are huge. When I began to teach more from that point of view all the other work that I did was much easier and it went deeper, spontaneity was coming, passion was coming, I was feeling much more creative and inspired. And then, pedagogically, in terms of the Middendorf work and bringing that in, it's really only been in the last year, but it's really amazing what people can pick up because it's in me. It's not like Ilse invented this, she discovered it, she uncovered it, originated it, found the way to understand it, but it's natural. So basically we work with presence, sensation, breath coming and going on its own, stretching, various stimulations, working with the three spaces, connecting the three spaces, uprising, downflowing breath, and then I go off into my own way of exploring acting, relationship between actors, audience, various work with connecting to themselves vocally and in language. I've been working with the vowel work, which is ... what I'm loving right now is how in tune with the inner sensations people can become, and I love that no-one's interested in their sound anymore, they're much more free
12. **John:** So they're interested in the sensation ...
13. **Jeff:** They're interested in themselves, in the sensation of the breath. We can do vowel work and not sound at all, and the spaces open and they start to understand, they start to value breathing space, and what grows out of that breathing space. We might work with the vowel breathing spaces and I might take them into an improvisation and they, without my even talking about it, they start to understand there's meaning in the different spaces, archetypes come through where they start to explore different energies but because they

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- have so much more of their body we go deeper and it's ... it doesn't feel unhealthy to me anymore, it doesn't feel like we're going into this emotional territory or something and it's, how do you integrate that or ... it all feels appropriate, it's like the measurement of the person, the soul developing.
14. **John:** So people don't fall into ...
  15. **Jeff:** They don't get swallowed up by the experience, they actually have the experience, which is a big difference.
  16. **John:** I had originally been thinking, well I'll find out from Jeff what he does with the Middendorf work with the students, but actually it's a lot about how doing the breathwork has changed you and where it puts you as a teacher, able to be in yourself and not start taking on what isn't your stuff.
  17. **Jeff:** That's right. And it's also, it's not like I do this very well. I'm in my own process, but the more breath I can bring into the room, that's huge. That already is changing the way people take class, the way I teach class. If I have my breath, if I come in with my breath, already that wakes somebody up. My intuition, it feels like it's clearer. It shapes my eye too, starting to see breath. You see breath you can see breath, presence as well as feeling. And it can be very powerful. In a very simple way, working with someone, I can just be more with my breath. Just what comes. A thing to say. Maybe it's not to put my hands on them, maybe it's to ... whatever the intuition that comes.
  18. **John:** I'm curious to ask how does ... I can imagine it helps the students to be more present in other classes and that there is flow-on in all sorts of ways, but how does it sit within the movement work or ... I imagine that depends on people's personalities and their own practices and so on but I can see it having so much scope for movement work for acting training in an expanded sense and yet I would imagine from my experience that some colleagues, in Melbourne for instance, would find it very difficult to ... because their own way of teaching movement or acting is coming from such a different point.
  19. **Jeff:** So you're asking how is it with me with the other faculty?
  20. **John:** Yes, do you find the other teachers can pick up on working from the breath? I mean you're doing the training and working with the breath and ...
  21. **Jeff:** You know it's interesting, when I first got this job when I was doing the Alexander work and kind of struggling I really had a hard time with the other faculty members, and now I don't at all, not really. And it's not like I feel that they need to be knowing about the breathwork. The work is there and however the students integrate it, they take that into the Alexander class. And they might have an Alexander class just before my class – it helps! They understand something about being carried. But I make it really clear that we're not observing ourselves and I'm not interested in organising to structure and trying to correct structure through thought. That's not what we're doing, and they're fine, okay, we're doing this other thing, okay, great. I actually find it's no big deal. The thing that is hard ... well it's not hard, that's not the right way to say it ... almost everybody, when they talk about breath, they're actually doing something with the breath.
  22. **John:** That's the question I meant, yes.
  23. **Jeff:** I just started an exchange with one of the Alexander teachers and ... do you know the whispered 'ah'? have you had much Alexander lessons?
  24. **John:** I've heard the phrase, but I don't know it.
  25. **Jeff:** Lots of Alexander teachers hate it but it is one of the procedures that Alexander developed and they called him the 'breathing man', did you know that? when Alexander was around. A lot of my Alexander teaching friends will say, it's kind of funny, they called

him the 'breathing man' and he doesn't really talk about breathing much. But they do the whispered 'ah', this is the one breathing exercise that Alexander developed. Well there's nothing about breath coming and going on its own in that at all, it's really directed, directed breath. Almost everybody I know who works with breath does something with it. It's very different when it comes and goes on its own, it has a whole other character. And so, someone might say, we were doing this movement work and I really was focusing on the breath, and I just want to be clear that when I'm working that I'm supporting them in finding what it is to not control their breathing, even though other people ... they might go into another situation and someone is doing a salutation to the sun kind of yoga exercise and they give over to that.

26. Anyway to answer your question I haven't felt a lot of conflict, which surprises me because I can be pretty defensive [he laughs]. I think that's a good sign. I think that when there's more breath I don't feel like I need to prove something or defend something. I can just be in what I am doing. And ideally that is what I would like to do.

## Postscript: Writings from Jeff Crockett 2/8/06

1. First of all, I begin working with the students in an atmosphere of discovery and exploration so that they don't confuse the exercises with some sort of routine they need to repeat, or so that they don't focus on trying to achieve a goal that they might perceive I'm after. I hope to get them curious about themselves through sensing and feeling, to get in touch with their own experience of sensing, being, feeling, responding. I talk about the breath being a connecting force and that we're interested in a holistic way of working. In other words, the breath includes all of them: body, mind, spirit.
2. On the physical level, the goals are improved tonus, balance and alignment. The voice is secondary and reflects the condition of the person, in this case, the physical tonus and alignment has an effect on the ease, flow, health, flexibility and resonance of the voice.
3. Although I'm writing as though body, mind and spirit can be separated, I don't experience it that way and I don't teach that way...but, for clarity sake, the benefits on a mental level are improved clarity of presence, alertness, the ability to listen. This has a huge effect on the way they speak out of a response, a thought, a feeling, they are 'in' the work rather than performing it.
4. On a spiritual level, (and I don't use that word very often when I teach because it brings up conflicting things in people) I talk more about the way the breath can connect them with their sense of self, the essence of who they are, their creative impulses and personal power. And, of course, I'm using the foundation of sensing with presence as we let the breath come and go on its own. To 'allow' the breath is huge for them and has a tremendous impact on the way they can relate the work to their acting. Authenticity comes into the work, spontaneity and creative responses that do not come out of their heads, but from a richer source within them.
5. Some classes look very much like a traditional breath class. I'm laying in a foundation of experiences so that they can develop their connection, space, flow, etc. Yet other classes include work on the floor. I find that if I always begin with sitting in the stools that a rigidity sets in for the students and if I include floor work, they can connect with the breath and then refer back to those experiences when we are sitting again. I also have them moving in ways that stimulate the breath, but I'm not so focused on their 'going in' to sense and move with the breath. I also do quite a bit of hands on work with partners. They pick up a lot about listening and being present by exploring hands on work.
6. In terms of working more directly with the voice, I sometimes work with the vowel space work, although I am finding that I'm not doing that so much anymore. I usually do a build up with the breath then explore sounding their exhale. Voicing the exhale brings in a strong sense of connection to themselves and can be very exciting. When I am building up a particular experience, say for example a clear sense of the vertical, I might use the Ä. I might do something like stand, as the inhalation comes I shift to one foot, on exhale I sound the vowel. Things like that. I will also, when the center of the middle is being developed I might have them sound O... Or there is a sequence of work I do on the floor to help the space in the lower come in and I'll have them sound U on exhale.

## Appendix B: Interview with Jürg Roffler, October 2003, Berkeley CA

1. **John:** You were starting to speak earlier of the work with the vowels, how the work with the vowels develops.
2. **Jürg:** Once the vowels have been experienced in their original breath space, and the consonants have been experienced as accentuation, we experience syllables, words etc. in a similar way we experience movement out of the breath. The breath is a creative force, a power that can move me. It can also let me sound and feel and think and much more. In the same way like the breath expresses through movements from breath in the body, breath can also initiate expression through sound, syllables, words, sentences etc. Letting the breath come and go on its own, you can experience in this way, sounds, syllables, words, sentences initiated by breath that present your truth. You can also use Haikus as a tool to experience particular breath archetypes within yourself.
3. **John:** You're doing that work as part of the whole work with the breath?
4. **Jürg:** Oh yes
5. **John:** Are you using it specifically in order to develop the voice at all or is it ...
6. **Jürg:** The Experience of Breath including the work with vowels, etc. is developing authenticity, personality, self responsibility, the Self. With this the voice comes. If I am in my breath, experiencing myself and expressing myself through my voice then my voice carries and projects, particularly when the breath spaces for each vowel have developed.
7. **John:** It seems to me that the sorts of work that we already do with the voice are also about connecting with the self and allowing that to express, although sometimes I also do quite specific technical vocal development work but I think that is becoming less a point of focus. It is more interesting to hear people who are connected with their selves rather than with some technique.
8. **Jürg:** Developing voice techniques is one thing, and definitely important. In the Experience of Breath the voice develops through breath awareness resulting in a growing awareness of Self. Maria Höller, who has developed her own voice training, based on the Experience of Breath has built a bridge between the traditional voice training techniques and the development of the voice through the Experience of Breath.
9. **John:** That's something she has developed out of her own interests?
10. **Jürg:** Yes, it is her own work. As I already mentioned, it is based on the Experience of Breath. After studying with Ilse Middendorf, Maria also studied with, and was inspired by a famous Japanese singer, Michiko Hirajama. I personally met Michiko in Berlin and was impressed by her outstanding performance.
11. **John:** Are you familiar at all with Rudolf Steiner's work?
12. **Jürg:** Yes, somewhat.
13. **John:** I'm only familiar insofar as we've done quite a lot of the Michael Chekhov actor training. He was an anthroposophist whose work was permeated with that approach, and the woman who taught us is very involved in the anthroposophy movement, and the Chekhov work has had a strong influence on our work, and I was just wondering, does it, from what you know, resound with parts of the breathwork?
14. **Jürg:** Some of it, definitely. Letting the breath come and go on its own is an aspect that corresponds with our work. It seems to me that Steiner is less interested in the physical sensation, the whole role the body plays.
15. **John:** Are you actually personally familiar with the Michael Chekhov acting work?

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16. **Jürg:** No, but I've heard a lot about and seen some things. Actually Nell Smith, a Middendorf practitioner, trained in Berkeley with us, and Waldorf teacher and a trained actor, would be interesting to talk to on this topic.
17. **John:** I remember when we were doing a lot of the training in the Chekhov work the way we were taught it has an enormous emphasis on sensation, but there was a diverse number of people in the workshop and the people who were coming directly out of the Rudolf Steiner teaching really seemed to embrace the work but have a real problem with leaping straight through the body into the spirit and therefore had trouble actually handling the sensory emphasis of the work.
18. **Jürg:** Yes, Steiner was not really giving the body and sensation the importance it has in our culture and time to integrating body, mind and spirit.
19. **John:** Yes, whereas the Chekhov acting system profoundly is a sensory based somatic ... to me they seemed to resound.
20. **Jürg:** It's pretty popular here and also in Switzerland where I grew up. One of the main Steiner Work centres is near Basel, Switzerland, the Goetheanum in Arlesheim.
21. **John:** How did you originally come to be involved in the breathwork?
22. **Jürg:** I was always interested in the body and I knew something was in the body that was holding a deep intelligence in supporting balance and healing... but I didn't know how to approach it. So I started to expose myself to somatic work in my late teens and early twenties. That was the late sixties early seventies. Somatic work became popular. I was running from one workshop to the other, trying out all kinds of modalities. I did trainings in Biodynamics, Gerda Boyeson's (she was together with Alexander Lowen Reich's closest associate) work , Gestalt, Malcolm Brown's work, etc. All of these trainings gave me something, but so far I never found the missing piece, what I was looking for. I didn't know what it was. I knew there was something more. In the mid-seventies I was introduced to the Experience of Breath, the work of Ilse Middendorf. Then at one point I signed in for a workshop, went there and immediately knew, that's it. It is the breath in this form. And that's how it started. The Middendorf work is connecting with the breath in its natural , uncontrolled state. This way I could experience a source within myself that is revealing an intelligence that is much greater than what we can think of. I found my missing piece! Most of the other breathworks were using the controlled breath and were using the breath to create a particular state in the body and being. At that point I had done a lot of trainings and I thought, not to start another one. Just wait. And I waited another two years and did another workshop in the Middendorf Breath work with Ilse. It was still the same, and it stayed with me all the time. Then I signed in for the training in Berlin, went through it and afterwards worked as a teacher trainer with Ilse at her Institute and ... the rest is history. My original career was in public relations and marketing and I am also a licensed clinical social worker.
23. **John:** Public relations and marketing before that ... has that stood you in good stead in setting up the breath institute here? One of the big difficulties for me in having a centre and offering work is the marketing side of it.
24. **Jürg:** I have difficulty with that myself. It is not what I would choose. Most of how the economy and the whole situation in the western world is organised, does not match the principles we are teaching in the Experience of Breath. The philosophy of the corporate world is based on masculine principles like direction, controlling, pushing, forcing etc., so is their breath, pushed, pulled and controlled. The feminine principle of allowing, receiving, listening etc. is missing. Our work does include both, the feminine and the masculine principles. We have lost the ability to listen. In a world that is out of balance it is crucial that we learn to make our decisions and do our work based on principles that

include allowing, receiving, listening etc. - the feminine. This is why I am struggling with marketing. I know what to do. But since I cannot stand behind these practices, it never works well.

25. **John:** Maybe that's not what to do then.

26. **Jürg:** No. I think what's to do is to trust and be what I am. I have to show myself the way I am as much as I can, make myself visible in the ways that I feel I can, and just trust that by this I can attract and inspire people to listen. There are conferences and congresses that we are invited and successfully present our work.

27. **John:** You take part in these from time to time?

28. **Jürg:** Yes. There are conferences and international events that we choose for presentation and participation every year. The one that is the most interesting for us is the conference of the USABP, the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy, which is one of the biggest events for somatic work.

29. **John:** Have you worked specifically with actors, performers, singers?

30. **Jürg:** Yes, but never uniquely actors or uniquely singers. They have taken part in workshops.

31. **John:** Obviously for the purposes of my writing I am interested in those connections.

32. **Jürg:** Maria Höller, another teacher trainer in the Middendorf Breath Work, from Germany will be able to help you there because she has many more actors and singers in her classes. My experience is just of individuals in classes or private session, where I worked with breath and the expressive forces. Ilse Middendorf has taught at the Academy for Performing Arts in Berlin for quite a while in the seventies. The Experience of Breath can be extremely helpful in supporting the expressive competence of an actor.

33. **John:** In general I am also interested in the things that have been written, particularly in English, about the

breathwork. Because it is largely unknown in Australia part of my writing is going to be giving a background to the work, situating it in relation to other bodies of work, so that it makes sense to people who read my writing. Are there particular bodies of work that you see as more closely related to the breathwork than others?

34. **Jürg:** Of course there is Ilse Middendorf's book *The perceptible breath*. Her second book, *The experience of breath in its substance* is in translation.

35. **John:** Is there much written in English?

36. **Jürg:** Probably the most helpful other than Ilse's book is the article 'The Breathing Self', which is based on a brochure that Ilse Middendorf published in German. It's a pretty good article, which has been published in a few magazines. Also, there is a whole series of very interesting articles and interviews on our web site [www.breathexperience.com](http://www.breathexperience.com).





## Appendix C: Interview with Jürg Roffler on presence, October 2004

1. **John:** How does presence relate to and how is it different from attention?
2. **Jürg:** I consider attention being a part of presence. I see presence divided up in the most ideal situation in a balanced form of attention and devotion. So the more masculine part of presence, which would be attention, that is more linear, directed to the knee or this or that, has an intention, very clear ... there, I want my presence to be there. The other, the devotion part or surrendering part, I don't want to be just there, I want to include this into the whole. So presence, the way I understand that we are using it, holds both, holds the combination of attention and devotion or surrender. So attention is a part of the presence that we are using. It can also vary. Sometimes I am using my presence more as an attention but I always have the devotion as a friend next to it in case I need it. If I need to be more precise in going to a particular place where I am trying to support my breath it's more on the attention side, but the other is coming with it. Or if I am taking presence all over, I say, well, I want to see how I can support this particular situation by just going into the whole and not being geared to one place, then I am more on the receptive, or more on the devotion or surrender side with the presence and say, everything, I'll then try to be inclusive. And attention is more exclusive, so you put your attention to something, to one thing.
3. **John:** So it is a reasonable word to use as an explanation of part of what presence is, but it's not the same thing as presence.
4. **Jürg:** No, I will not use attention only in our work because then it's becoming too linear.
5. **John:** What is the relationship then between presence and awareness? If I have an awareness for the whole of me is that the same as having my presence in the whole of me?
6. **Jürg:** Awareness of breath includes the sensation also.
7. **John:** Let's say I want to have my presence throughout my whole body, is that the same as saying I want to have my awareness throughout my whole body? Not necessarily awareness for the movement of breath, though it may include that, but I have an awareness for the whole of me.
8. **Jürg:** When I am using awareness I am always taking both together, presence and sensation. When I talk about awareness, it is not just limited to presence or to the act of applying presence to ... awareness comes in that situation where presence and sensation are together. This is how I use it in the work. Awareness is a state, a state of being aware, and that includes, preferably, the sensation of the movement of breath.
9. **John:** That makes sense. I still think I don't quite understand whether presence is something separate. Do you regard it as a process, a substance, what is it?
10. **Jürg:** It is hard to describe. How would you describe an ability to be present? I think it's a soul function, I don't know. That's the closest I can come to. It's definitely not an intellectual function. The intellect is participating there too, but more passively. Because presence itself is a kind of a tool that affects something and I'm not thinking presence, I am presence. Thinking can get involved in the intention of being present. I can think about, I am making a decision to be present. That can be involved, but ultimately presence itself is not a rational function, it's more like a soul function. That's the closest that I can get.
11. **John:** Thank you. I think it's no wonder I have trouble trying to write ...
12. **Jürg:** Right. But try to write from the experience. That will be the easiest way to help people who are reading your thesis to understand how we are using the term presence, rather than trying to define it in other terms. Because everyone has their own understandings, and if you say, it is a soul function, not everyone is going to understand that.



Appendix D: Interview with Ilse Middendorf, October 2003, Oakland CA,  
translated by Gryta Coates

*I had two meetings with Ilse Middendorf at the apartment in Oakland where she was staying while in California. On both occasions I had individual hands-on sessions from her, and this left only a limited time for talking. Ilse knew I was interested in the work she did with actors and singers between 1965 and 1975 in Berlin, and offered to speak about that and answer any questions afterwards.*

1. **Ilse:** Mrs Hilda Koeber, who was the director at that time, asked me to join. I knew her, but just briefly. She specifically wanted my work. I gave a warning that it might not be the best for the actors and singers but she insisted on it. Ninety per cent were actors, ten per cent were singers, so I refer to them as actors. One has to know that the students were very young, 18, 19, the oldest were 25. After that you were considered being old at that time. The basic work with these students was working with the vitality, that's what I found out. That was carrying the whole work. I also insisted on working with the Experience of Breath the way this work has to be worked with. Actually you saw and experienced quite a bit with me over the weekend [*Ilse is referring to a weekend workshop she taught on 18 and 19 October 2003 that I had attended*] and that's really the path I followed there too. I found out that this was the way I could really reach these young people. Sixty to seventy per cent of the students really participated and enjoyed it, but there were also students who really didn't want it and they were really in resistance.

at me ... really turning the palms and really with muscular force you are pushing something away [*we practise this*]. Really going into the width with your inhalation and coming straight ... try it two or three times. For the inhalation, have your arms at the sides ... now can you sense it? That is actually a really good support [*I could sense how my voice changed after just a few breath cycles, seeming to come from further down in my body and sounding deeper*]. It is a principle we are working with. That's what I worked with at the school quite a bit. And that requires that it is the whole body that is participating into this work with the breath, not just areas of the body. And this body should not just act for the moment of acting, this body really has to become. A body that knows this work with the *spannung*, for example, has experienced it, does not need to practice that any more because it's in you. That in itself is a wonderful aim, and some of the students reached it. The most important thing is to know that you're not just for one performance or for one work doing this or this or that, so you're not practising for one specific event.
2. Among colleagues I had to face, among these other teachers, that they always wanted the support just coming from here [*points to her middle torso area*]. They always blamed me that I was not providing enough power and force into the breath. Just on a professional level, the support has to come from the whole body. There is one element within our work, which we call *spannungsatem* [*breath in creative tension*]. This is where we work with resistance. We get the resistance not just from our diaphragm. If I have enough of my inhalation then everything is going into resistance. If you are already so far that you can sense that your breath makes you wide, then you can stand up and do it. So allow ... look
3. What was really a hindrance was that the students were so young. They really tried, but they were too young to really understand the work. One aspect of the work, which is the breath vowel space work that I worked a lot with and really built it up, and for this work I found very specific exercises that were extremely effective. Do you know already a little of the breath vowel space work?
4. **John:** Yes, just a little.
5. **Ilse:** I will just talk about the principle of it. In my inner, silently, I am singing, sounding, the E, for example, and my breath will move me at a specific area.

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We don't want to try it out now, but I will show you. [*Ilse demonstrates first silently then with sound, and tells what she finds for this vowel and others. These are outlined in her book, The Perceptible Breath (1990), pp 63-72.*] But one really has to experience this, so if I think that I know where it is we don't have the same effect. We have to experience it. There is no effect then. And the ones who were opposed to me didn't believe it, so it didn't work. So that's why they never got it, because they never went into the experience.

6. I don't know if it's in the book [*it is not*], but one of the most important works I want to show you. Once we know all the vowels pretty well, then we combine them with the consonants. [*Ilse demonstrates, using the syllables MU, MI, MO, MA, ME, long sounds, one syllable to each exhalation.*] So the vowel that I want to work with is on my silent sounding on the inhalation. And there are a lot of variations. So when I do work with students I have to give a lot of time. The M is going through the whole body walls. [*Ilse then demonstrates variations on the work with syllables, using first the same syllables but much shorter, then a range of syllables starting with T, then with Z, and with SH.*] This is actually wonderful work and mostly I got everyone with this. I always had to start at 8 o'clock, which is impossible for these actors, so when they entered I would welcome them with M-E [*sounds like mare with an elongated M*].
7. **John:** You said before that if people already knew what was supposed to happen instead of allowing it to happen, the effect wasn't there. Can you speak more about what the effect of this vowel space work is?
8. **Ilse:** What I showed you, this last specifically, it is really a training. Everything is being loosened up. It creates opening, but then there are the consonants, which are actually contractions. That's why I call this a training for speaking and singing. And it has the element of being playful and light. It's like a pianist has to practice. But it actually goes beyond being a training because it really is becoming also the body and so on. This is what the director, Frau Koeber, had in her mind when she asked me. It's because it is not about a technical completion it really is a creation. And a lot of the students then came to me for the training [*meaning the whole breathwork training at her own Institute*]. If I watch TV I still see my students.
9. **John:** I would like to ask more about the time you worked with the acting students in the school in Berlin, from 1965 to 1975. Can you speak about the sort of work you did with the students there.
10. **Ilse:** What I worked on over the weekend [*workshop in Berkeley*] were all the spaces, the lower, the middle, the upper, the inner, the outer, that is what I worked quite intense with because of the meaning of these spaces – like the lower is our vitality, the power of the vitality, the middle which is more the self, and then the upper space which is much more the unfolding into the creation, into the divine. And that meaning was very meaningful for the students.
11. The singer, Klaus Hoffman, do you know him? He is someone I trained in the breathwork and we are still in contact. The interesting thing is that various actors changed from acting to singing through the work. But, there was also a very well known opera singer, a woman, and after five lessons she said to Ilse 'I'm losing the strength of my voice'. She was in her fifties, and that was her experience. What I am saying basically is that it cannot be passed on and taught in a very short time like five hours. It really needs time to be developed.
12. **John:** When you were working at the actor institute how long, how much did you work with the students? How much each week and over what time?
13. **Ilse:** I think I had three classes at that time. And I worked six days. And the three groups were alternating. And they all got individual breath treatment. So I worked 25 hours a week.
14. **John:** Was this for one year or for three years?

15. **Ilse:** Three years, and if they were very talented they were allowed to add another year.
16. **John:** Well they were very lucky! What was the emotional journey for the students in integrating the work?
17. **Ilse:** Directly with the feeling we didn't work. And specifically because they were so young, their emotional state of being was pretty limited anyway. But from the theatrical teachers they were really trained to have emotions and actually it was really hammered into them to have emotions. So through the breath I tried to create calmness, their personal calmness, and yet at the same time that they could open up themselves and that they could have their emotions, but all connected to the breath. There was a teacher from that school, and this teacher really was very much interested in this work, she was a scene-work teacher, and she specifically learned the breath vowel space work, and then after half a year she gave three evenings where there was poems and prose. It was the most amazing experience. Every word she was speaking came out of the breath vowel space and there was no meaning being put into it and she only let come into effect what came out through the body. That was just amazing. And it was not just that way, it was not just the body, it was also filled from the soul. So it's not a soulful experience that is being created, taught, it comes on its own. Also not just about oneself it's really soul as a state of being in general; very objective. Or you could actually talk about spirit. I am still amazed by that.
18. **John:** I imagine that has to be possible with singing as well.
19. **Ilse:** Absolutely. You asked about the school, now comes a different story. Individual singers, I had a lot of them. It was interesting the students, the singers, really didn't come to learn about themselves, they really wanted to get to know about the breathwork in general and the breath vowel space work.



## Appendix E: Interview with Maria Höller, November 2003, Männedorf, Switzerland

*I turned on the recorder as we were talking about the workshop that Maria had invited me to participate in.*

1. **John:** It was very interesting, I really enjoyed the work with people. It was very interesting to see the way in particular you keep coming back to the body, where in the body, what's going on in the body and the provoking of people.
2. **Maria:** Yes. It's important for me that people get aware by watching others. So they will find the connection between certain body patterns and the voice. They should trust their eyes and ears. When it succeeds to perceive a person physically, partly psychologically and with the expression of sounding, then the students are able to teach this work. The individual experience of working with their own body and voice is just one part of the work.
3. **John:** Yes, yes. I do some of my individual teaching in the group, because I agree. I think people learn very much from watching. And I learn so much from watching when I am in this workshop of yours, or when I'm in others and the individual work is there, it's extraordinary. Sometimes because I see myself in it, and sometimes simply because it awakens something, yes. It's a shame to do individual work always on its own, strange.
4. **Maria:** And anyway, voice is communication not isolation. It's communication to yourself and to the outer, with a partner or an audience. So we should get more familiar with ourself, even with your weak points. It's difficult, I know, but I cannot find any sense anymore to behave and perform like an opera star, you know. I think the time is passed by for polishing just the outer parts of a house, and the inner living quality is not improved at all.
5. **John:** And you can hear it in the voice.
6. **Maria:** Yes.
7. **John:** Yes, and it was very enjoyable this afternoon, in this moment, with a number of moments where you were asking the person to simply make, I think, I don't speak German, but I think you were asking them to just simply make contact.
8. **Maria:** And I think they enjoyed it too, somehow. This is exactly what I am interested in. A joyful, authentic performing; to lose the demands for producing a 'perfect voice', which doesn't exist, or doing great efforts to be somebody else.
9. **John:** Yes, the polished front of the house.
10. **Maria:** Yes. And this I want to make them feel, really to perform out of their being and it shouldn't matter if the sound is not perfect. They have to learn how to treat themselves. If the sound is not right, that means too forced or with pressure, or too weak, whatever, then it's important to enter or to find the link into the inner condition. How to treat ourself in a moment, in which we feel somehow uncomfortable. How can we accept and express a condition, which we normally don't like to show. I think this is the most important thing, to make them feel how they can treat themselves. Also to become independent somehow, when singing teachers instruct the voice very strict.
11. **John:** I am particularly interested in how you developed your work and what connection it has to the Middendorff breathwork. Is it quite separate, or did you... Well, it seemed to me this morning we started with some, what would seem to me to be something from the Middendorff breath work, so obviously you use some of it. Is the other work entirely separate or have you developed it from ...? I don't quite know what to ask. You could perhaps tell me how you developed your work a bit?

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12. **Maria:** Yes I can tell you how I developed this work 'Atem-Tonus-Ton' and the difference to 'Erfahrbaren Atem' [the German name for Middendorf breathwork].
13. I am still deeply impressed by the Middendorf work because this work changed my life in the sense of freeing my personality. That's clear and by the way, I had no voice before I studied breathwork. I mean I had good speaking voice, loud speaking voice, but no more. I didn't sing any little sound. I was impressed by Middendorf and I am convinced of the breathwork, so I did this work for a long time and I still go on partly until today. I didn't plan to change the work. No, it came by itself, because I tried to find my own voice. And, so this was the way, and the Middendorf work over many years encouraged me to search my voice. That was it. I exercised the vowel work of Middendorf, all the space work, while I worked in her Institute in Berlin. (taught there for the training classes for 5 years). All of a sudden I made an inscription in the conservatorium for singing lessons. I went to the singing teacher and I said, I am a breathing therapist and I don't like to become a singer but I want to know if there is any voice hidden and wants to be developed. Yes, this was the beginning and then I took singing lessons, and then I connected certain breathing exercises with the voice. But then I had a very important meeting with a Japanese singer, Michiko Hirayama in Rome. I took singing lessons from her, but she wanted to understand more and more of my breath exercises to offer this work for singers and her students. And then continuously I searched while I prepared my own voice for certain songs, and found always new exercises. From Ilse Middendorf's work I liked especially all the exercises with *Gegenspannung*, it means tension in contrary. And this work was somehow useful for the voice.
14. **John:** In opposition?
15. **Maria:** Yes, in opposition. And this was a work which I liked and I tried very often. Once I figured out that this opposite tension is not as useful for the voice as I wanted to get it. The body should be relaxed in the upper part but we need the strength from the lower part. So it's important to have a good posture, tension against the earth, which gives the power of resistance, is okay, but against the heaven, means probably a pressure for the vocal cords. So my singing teacher always said you have to go in your legs. And she meant always movements like this, you have to take the energy from the earth. And I thought yes, but how is it going? And she said here you contract the muscle. No, this feels like uugh. And I said no, it has to be against the earth and then tension by itself makes right, a right posture. You can relax and resist in the same time. This makes a very free and comfortable body sensation. I continued to study this inner polarity more and more. And then the Eutony people I met from Gerda Alexander they invited me to her school. Because they already worked with the 'Tonus', means tension, and they transported tension but without any voice. They were happy to get the connection .
16. **John:** Are they using this resistance?
17. **Maria:** Yes, somehow. They are working partly with resistance, but not for using the voice. And so I went several times to Alexander school to instruct the students there. They confirmed this transport of the tension and I continued to research in body and sound.
18. I continued with the connection between being and doing. I wanted to balance the voluntary with the being, the breath, to come out from the introversion. I was fascinated by the experience of releasing and doing in the same moment, sensing the introversion and the extraversion. I appreciate to make very profound work and I like to perform and I like to make show somehow. To do always hands-on lessons, and you know this, it's good but it made me too heavy in my mind.
19. The more I worked on breath, resistance and voice, the more people asked for workshops and individual lessons. In every workshop I find or create new exercises as parts of a certain topic. So it came over many years, about 20, and I think I didn't really separate my work from



Middendorf work. The perceptible breath I appreciate very much, and when I publish the book, once you will see, the biggest part is the breath part. Because this is the profound human being, and I want to clarify also for performers that you cannot manage the breath, because the breath is our being. We can experience the breath and with it ourselves but when we start to manage and lead the breath, we create a disorder in ourselves. By the way, the unconscious of man doesn't want to be educated. It wants to be respected, accepted, developed, it wants just to be and to show itself authentic, but not to be trained. The breath by itself makes a very . . . gives the route for making really profound work. And Middendorf work by itself is a profound work for, let's say, for all artists, not just for singers. But the opinion that breath helps for singing without changing or using the voluntary strength is not true. We need our will as well, when we have to act, to sing loud, to move and so on. But we have to balance inside the unconscious energy with the willpower. Most of the singers, who have no special body experiences, are not able to connect these inner movements.

20. **John:** Cannot connect ... sorry I don't quite understand the last bit. A singer who has no body experience can't connect what, the voice and the body by themselves?
21. **Maria:** Yes. In the Middendorf breathwork is evocating self-awareness, but if an actor or singer is on the stage, he needs more than this.
22. **John:** Yes. It's not a clear...
23. **Maria:** Yes. It's not a clear advice for singing. Middendorf work is a clear instruction to go profound inside of yourself and to develop the being. That means all the inner spaces and these breathing spaces are useful for the voice. But not enough for a good performing and good voice at all. Of course, the breath space is a good precondition for sound spaces. But sound spaces need the sound, otherwise we don't use the resonating vibrations. While we exercise silent, the resonating vibrations of the bones we don't have. The phonation is

connected with other movements, and these you have to exercise. It's impossible to learn swimming in the air. To become a champion swimmer it's helpful to train certain muscles and coordinations out of the water, but swimming by itself is moving in the water. So when we are singing in an organic way, we get the inhalation reflex.

24. **John:** Yes, yes. So you talk about breath space and vocal space or sound space. Can you talk about the difference, or the connection, or ...?
25. **Maria:** Sound space and breath space? Yes. Breath space means an aware movement of the breath, which you can perceive as very clear movement of wide and narrow in the body walls. You can get an inner feeling of a spacious perception. The more you work on it with presence the more you discover the whole body as a space and you will distinguish the energy you get in certain parts and certain qualities of spaces. The sound spaces are located often in the same breath spaces. But a sound depends on other movements beside the breath. So in the moment of phonation, the most important part is the movement of exhale, of course. But in the same time the vocal cords are vibrating and spread this vibration in the bones, that's the body resonance or resonance vibration. The more the breath space is discovered, the more can the vibration pass on. But you can observe now the breath therapists, who worked for many years with their breath, and still they have difficulties with their voice. They have really to find the inner synchronisation or coordination of letting the bones vibrate and the vocal cords, without manipulating the vocal cords and the breath and this is somehow different. To give an eye on this, on the bone vibration, the breath and the muscle tension, tonus, this was my favourite. I wanted to give a focus on that. It doesn't work if you make quiet breath experiences and then you start singing. You might think that now the spaces and your personality is open. No, because it means psychologically, when you make a breath experience for long years quiet, you can experience yourself inside

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without connecting with the outer. But voice and sound always means connecting or at least a certain consequence in the outer. The acoustic is the outer and the acoustic is for the other people, too. I cannot just say it's for me. No. You have to balance yourself with the outer. This is sound. It's communication and you cannot exercise silent the communication.

26. **John:** No. Not just.
27. **Maria:** Not just, our body is conscious and unconscious communicating too. But I like when people learn to show themselves. To make a transfer from the inner movements, and the psychological condition to the outer. The sound and the acoustic effect is the evidence of my existence in the outer, in the society. The ability to communicate with myself in sense of perceiving me and in the same moment to reach or touch other human beings. This is, I think, the signification of music and communication. The baby got the voice not to perform and not for earn money, it got the voice to communicate and to express its needs. Any mood you can get out of the voice. Even when the baby is happy and sings lalala and is playing with its own hands, this is just communicating with itself. Actually education is a certain danger to lose somehow this given and healthy capacity. In this sense Middendorf work is very helpful. I am convinced of this work, which I practice since more than twenty years now. But on the other hand there is the outer around us too and I'm interested in it. My desire is to get conscious also about the effect in the outer. And any action, any expression has a certain effect and consequence in the outer space.
28. **John:** The Middendorf work as I understand it, does have this sense of the relationship with the fifth space, the outer space that they talk about.
29. **Maria:** Not with the voice.
30. **John:** Not with the voice, but with ...
31. **Maria:** They speak a lot about the outer, but they don't connect with showing me really clear.
32. **John:** No, that's my impression. Although my impression is that they talk about the importance of the outer, and that for some teachers that I have spent only a little bit of time with, this is a bigger part of the work than others. But for some it seems to be more focused on the inner, and then ... I might be wrong of course because I'm only meeting people a short time. But in Erica's work in the short time I met her, she seemed to have a stronger emphasis for the hearing and the opening of the eyes and the outer connection as well. And then for some other teacher I've worked with, it more seems to be the focus for the inner spaces. So it is spoken of somewhere in the Middendorf work, this outer connection. Not with the voice, but with presence. But it doesn't seem to be the big, it's not a side of the work that seems to be for everybody the main part of the work.
33. **Maria:** Yes, exactly, that's right. And there's another aspect that Middendorf work, they are speaking about the outer, and the importance, and they are working on it. But always they take the way from inside to outside.
34. My pleasure is to choose sometimes the opposite direction. Not just for the performance, also for the daily life. I have to act, I have to react, I have to deal different things and I cannot reflect immediately if it's right or not. I am a member in this society, so that means I have to be functional everyday to survive. And then I can look at myself and ask myself, oh what happens to me now? Was it a risk what I did? Am I tired now? Am I enriched now? Whatever ....
35. **John:** Yes, yes. This is a very important distinction in the sort of acting...
36. **Maria:** Yes, what I told you today in the class. We did some exercises in this topic. We acted, for example, Helen told a partner one of her, at the moment obvious qualities in one little word, and the partner should express with the breath, the body and the voice, but this quality in his way, like an actor always has to do. Actors have to fill up certain personalities with their own way of emotional contents.

37. **John:** It's a misunderstanding, though, because ...
38. **Maria:** It's a misunderstanding, yes.
39. **John:** Because the thing is, to find it inside. And really good actors might take it in but they...
40. **Maria:** Yes, and then they have to fill it up with their personality. This is for me a good actor. You know, to take this role and to fill it.
41. **John:** And to change the shape of themselves so that they can become this energy.
42. **Maria:** And there are very few actors who can do that. Or few singers who succeed to work in this way with their energy. Very often they try to act as well as other successful actors and then they are losing the relationship to themselves.
43. **John:** Yes. This is the same.
44. **Maria:** Yes. There is always something in the outer you have to manage. When musicians play a composed music on the flute or saxophone, then the rhythm is quite different than their own rhythm of the breath. The pretext comes from the outer, but they might interpret how they feel like and how they are.
45. **John:** Within that structure.
46. **Maria:** Yes, like this we can make written art very alive and somehow fashionable. To work within a certain structure which comes from outside, and to make in this structure your own art of interpretation. The improvisation is quite different. There we can come from inside and go outside. But in a good improvisation the direction changes all the time. Because improvising is a dialogue with the outer, with other, singers, musicians or partners, or the society. I like to improvise a lot, because it shows a true, direct, and creative way to communicate and entirely to live. I have to include the situation, the partners or lets say the outer in my expression. I'm interested in a playful relationship between outer and inner, and inner and outer. I want to make my students sense a joyful life. Even in our daily life there are many situations where we have to perform, no I mean stand up for ourselves or for our opinion and show who we are, not just on the stage. No, even if we go somewhere and we have to introduce the own person. I have to say I am Maria H., and I am working this and doing that, or I want to have this, I have to show myself. I can say, yes you know, [Maria puts on a very quiet low status voice] I am Maria, ... I want to have ...and can you help me?
47. **John:** This is not the Maria I know.
48. **Maria:** Yes, but really I have to become conscious how I say my name and how I behave. I was missing to come out in Middendorf work. And I was missing to combine the different functions we have. So the unconscious function of the breath to the perceptible breath and an experience, I appreciate and I love. But the other functions we have too, and we survive the daily life with different functions and we should be grateful for all abilities we've got. Even the concentration we use all the time and we have to balance the concentration with the Sammlung, means focusing.
49. **John:** Yes, focusing. Focusing but not concentrating, they talk about.
50. **Maria:** Yes, and so very often people misunderstand the sense. Focusing is very important to make experiences. In Middendorf's way of breathing, focusing is the most important part to enter in the inner world. But to get the focusing, people refuse to be concentrated, because these are quite different abilities or qualities. We are all used to concentrate on certain work, a mental or physical work. With concentration we learned nearly everything like dancing, languages, maths, games and so on. But to be too concentrated, means for the body tension and for the mind or soul a certain separation to the inner world. Though they don't reflect any more, they have to concentrate permanently. We couldn't read the newspaper or cross the street without concentration. We hope that the pilot or the doctor doing a surgery is concentrated and not just focused on his own pelvis. You know what I mean? So this is a function we need for our daily

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life. Concentration has the same value as focusing. It depends on situations. With concentration we can discover the outer space, the world, other planets. To discover the inner world we need another key, and the key is focusing. But we shouldn't refuse the concentration. It's not a helpful function to discover yourself right now. That's the difference, you understand?

51. **John:** It's good, not bad, it's good. And, maybe you would also . . .
52. **Maria:** Not bad! A doctor knows exact this knee inside, exact where is what. I would underline his knowledge and offer him a new way. He can learn the way from imagination to focusing. That means, try to feel what is going to happen when you put your hand on your own knee. You sense the bone or you sense the warmth? And this is the difference. He has a certain imagination, how it looks like. But maybe he wants to perceive now. The warmth or cold inside, the strong, soft, cold or warm hands sensing from outside. This is the focus and the outcome is the perception. It is important to distinguish between the functions. Our nature has many functions and we need all what we have got. I don't like to live without concentration.
53. **John:** I think in America they are using the word, presence, as the English word, same as focusing?
54. **Maria:** Yes presence, this is the same may be the better word.

## Appendix F: Interview with Letizia Fiorenza, November 2003, Zurich, Switzerland

1. **John:** I think it's quite clear that as far as Ilse is concerned the breathwork is just about the breath and not about the voice ...
2. **Letizia:** Of course, because she doesn't want to have it in a functionality. Just the breath is ... And if you do use the breath for something it is no more Ilse. Ilse doesn't want even to work with really ill persons, so she didn't want to work together with the health insurance system. In Switzerland we have this work with insurance, so we want, the Middendorf therapists in Switzerland want, to be accepted by the insurance system so that they pay if you are doing a therapy. Ilse doesn't want that you come to me and say, ah I have headache, and then you do a breathing therapy because you don't want headache. You have to want to breathe and then perhaps your headache goes away. I think it's very clear, it's very good, I like it. I like her to do it in this way. She was a pioneer, in a time when everything was very strongly regulated by norms, and she was almost revolutionary in her way. So I think it's okay for her to be like this. I like it very much. But this doesn't mean that you can't have another opinion and say, okay I try to do it, to go 'down' to the people. And if you come to me because of a headache, okay, but perhaps you discover there is much more than only your headache. And I think this is the development. But Ilse is, you know, she is a very old and wise woman, her work is going on in a spiritual way, I think it's wonderful.
3. With the breathing ... I think there are three directions. You have the direction of this really spiritual work. Through the body you can reach another level, another consciousness. And then you have the body, with illness, with perceptions, and what's really material. And then you have this part of what we are doing with the voice, the art, this to ... to express yourself. And if you want to express yourself you have to be really connected with your body, not only with an idea that you have of your body, but really to feel it and then you can be authentic, you can be sincere. Yes I think these are the three directions, and I have chosen to work not with insurances, not with ill people, I want to work with the voice, with performing, to be sincere even if you are on stage.
4. I think, the danger in therapy and art is that your search of change and of growth makes you look for finally perfection. But if you are in life or on stage you cannot wait for future perfection. You are living or performing now! You have to accept the momentary state, the wholeness of the moment, with all your imperfection! I know it is hard. But if you realize that in all moments of your life you are complete, you can live more happily and on stage you transmit this feeling to the audience through your body and your voice and they accept you, and are touched by you being authentic. Authentic does not mean perfect! That doesn't mean at all that your search is not necessary, it is very necessary, but we are always moving and on stage you show a moment of your life.
5. **John:** Can you tell me a bit about how you came to the breathwork in the first place, or your background more generally?
6. **Letizia:** Yes, I was twenty years old, in a marriage that didn't work, had a two years old child, no accomplished studies and no money. And I was looking for a therapist to get some clearness in my head. I found a doctor who knew Ilse Middendorf. He did work also with gestalt and a very soft kind of bioenergetics, taught and practiced by Malcolm and Catherine Brown who come from the [United] States. He started to work with me just because of problems not because I want to express myself ... His partner was Ursula Schwendimann from Männedorf [who now runs a Middendorf Institute there]. At that time she was learning the method from Ilse in Berlin. And I went to

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her in her first group she had and I was fascinated. I was a young, extroverted person but I was looking for something to go inside, the interior side of people attracted me. It was very good for me this kind of work, to go inside and to look what happens inside me in this very meditative context you have if you work with the breath.

7. Yes and then I divorced and after a few months I met my husband. He was at the conservatory and ... I knew that I had a good voice but, you know, we are immigrants from Italy, my father wanted me to be a professor in ... anything ... so I didn't think that I could study music. Then with my husband we discovered it would be good for me and I started to study just normal classical [singing] ... and I didn't really understand what they wanted me to do ... the classical way ... you should be more soft, yes okay ... how? I didn't really understand what they wanted me to do, and then I met Maria Höller. It was my fortune, my chance. Then I started to translate, to interpret what my teacher wanted me to do with my bodywork. For example, if you have very big tension in the jaw muscles it's not just because you can't relax but there is a reason, perhaps, and this reason is connected with your soul. And so I started to see the deeper dimension of the body, of the tensions. If you have to protect yourself and your shoulders are very closed then ... I have also learned to accept that now I am not able to open, I am not able, it's not possible for my soul. And if I open my shoulders like in a gymnastic exercise but I do not fill the gesture with my feelings, with my soul, than it does not look and sound good, then I'm not authentic.
8. I think it was for me a very great help that I started very soon to go on stage before I finished my studies. I could learn by doing, and I had the immediate feedback to my works from the stage situation. [Letizia shows us her first CD.] You listen, it's my first CD, and it's my natural voice. And then, because I started so early to go on stage, I felt very soon that I had to protect my voice and to ask myself what am I doing. After the concerts ... I didn't have a good feeling, my throat was hurting. And so I started to search, what can I do with my voice, what can I do with my body, which is the problem? Ah, my legs, I'm not really in my legs, my legs were really soft, you know, I'm hypotonic, I was hypotonic, too soft, too soft. But if you are too soft in the legs you are sure to have a tension in some other place, in some other part of the body. For example in the shoulder. And then I went on working and looking for the balance.
9. When Maria started her work with the singer Michiko Hirayama I started with her. It was very good for me. And I started with Ursula, she was also a pioneer [of the breathwork] in Switzerland. So I am an adept at the very beginning of this kind of work in Switzerland. And I had the chance to grow with them, with Maria and with Ursula. And then also to go my way. I didn't finish the classical way because I saw that it was not really what I wanted, to become a classical singer, to fulfil an ideal that you have of the voice. I wanted to express myself in another way. I started to work with the folk songs of the south of Italy, where I come from. It was a search for my roots and a search for the kind of voice you need for this kind of music. It was very difficult in the beginning, you know, to work with the voice and not to lose the timbre, not to lose the folk voice. My husband was very scared ... pay attention, don't take too much lessons, it's not good for your voice! And I said, you can't demand that I stay there and don't move because it's already okay, because it wasn't okay for me. Through this work with the breath and body I learned to develop the body, the force, the presence, the connection through the soul and the voice, all the things you need if you perform, yes, to be strong.
10. **John:** Are you saying that you develop that through the breathwork?
11. **Letizia:** Yes, through the breath and bodywork. And then, you know, with Ilse's work, I'm still very fascinated by this work, but I also had a big crisis because Ilse's work ... you go inside and you go inside and again you go inside and then I

dissolved myself. And with my character, my constitution, I was already very soft, and then if you get more soft and softer and softer ... it was really a very good experience for me but not a very delightful one. Only with the work of Maria, the resistance, I discovered a new world, and it's not far from Ilse's world ... Ilse also worked with resistance, but she doesn't use it for something. But the work of Ilse contains the work of Maria. Maria's work is just a natural continuation. This work has more structure. You work through the tonus of the muscles, you go outside with the voice, you discover an other dimension of the breath. The most wonderful thing for me was, that with this new dimension I could go deeper into Ilse's work.

12. Then I could go deeper inside. And I think this changing between these two kinds of persons, of personalities, like Maria and Ilse it's a beautiful thing. And for me it was important to have both. Also for the voice because with Ilse I had really to go inside and I had to face also the difficulties. Then Maria showed me the way out. And then I could go inside again.
13. I like to work with breath therapists. In our groups you know we had logopaedists [speech therapists] and breath therapists and a lot of different origin and what I like of the breath therapists is really the capacity to be in the body. And I think this is Ilse's work. Not just to have an idea of your body, you know. If you only have an idea of your body you're still in your head. And also Ilse's denying of using imagination, you don't have to give pictures! It's exaggerated because it is not possible: if you use language you create pictures. Ilse was very strong and I did not like it. But it's a good exercise to really avoid being in your head with an idea, with a picture, with an imagination. The point is I don't do anything and look what happens, and that's one possible approach to creativity. And I think for an artist to discover the potential of your creativity inside is very important. That is also Ilse's work. It's Ilse's work ... to learn to trust your body, your breath, your inspiration!
14. **John:** Then to connect it to your voice ...
15. **Letizia:** This is Maria's work.
16. **John:** So do you teach some of the time at Ursula's Institute as part of the training?
17. **Letizia:** I teach in the training but only with the voice, that's my speciality. I do the classical vowel work but I add to it the work I have developed in the last twenty years. So we have changed the name from *Vokalatemraum* [vowel breath space] to *Der tönende atem*, 'the sounding breath'. Ilse worked with the students from the very beginning with the mute vowels, the vowels without sound. It needs a great concentration and it is frustrating for the students, because first they don't feel anything.
18. I start with the voice from the very beginning, before you have discovered the space that a vowel creates inside, because it's easier, more in the muscles, you know. Then, if the students have a connection to their voice, through what we call the 'breathing as a reflex', then they can grow inside and feel the space, and not the other way.
19. **John:** Yes, you don't have to have the complete inner self before you can come out again.
20. **Letizia:** I think it has to go out and in and out again. And I think it's easier and I try to make it easier for the students. I don't say, I'm there and you don't understand anything [she laughs]. I go to them and say, come, come, come!
21. **John:** And when you're working with Maria are you doing the same sort of work when you're doing the two days with her group?
22. **Letizia:** No, it's a little bit different because then I want them also to go for expression. In the end of the training the students work with songs, with poetry, with language and, the most important thing, with improvisation. The students are already artists or breath therapists, so I can start in a different way. The improvisation is very important. You can work with classical musicians who don't know how to improvise, and you can do it

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with musical beginners. Both have to be very much in contact with themselves, look what's coming out. You have to be very present, really in your body and in contact with your feelings and your head, and you discover that your creativity comes from the body, from the feelings, from the head, from the knowledge you have. With a normal class ... I would not work in this way.

23. **John:** And it's not what they're there for.
24. **Letizia:** Yes, it's not what they are there for. But I want to transmit to my students in the classical Middelndorf training that through the art, you can learn something. There are other ways to discover something of yourself. Does it make any sense what I am saying?
25. **John:** Yes, and it's exactly the sort of thing I'm interested in. My experience up until this trip around the world with breathwork was that, for me, the breathwork had a lot to say to the voice, but wasn't saying it. I mean Ilse's work is not about the voice, and that's fine, it's not meant to be about the voice, but I'm interested in how does it connect, because it seems to me obvious that it does, and that it can provide a really good ground in the body.
26. **Letizia:** Oh yes, it's a perfect ground if you have time to do it. I think it's wonderful, I think it's the best thing we could do because it's so real, it's pure and sincere, it's authentic.
27. **John:** Yes, and this seems to me what is needed for working with the voice rather than the sort of breathing exercises where I count in to ten and I count out to ten and all that sort of stuff.
28. **Letizia:** Yes, Ilse teaches that the breath has something to do with your soul. It's not a technique first; it's not a technique. It's discovering also your personality. If you learn do it so [Letizia breathes in deliberately] then everybody is ... you are like me and I am like you, it's not ... it cannot be. You find your individuality, that's the great thing with Ilse. It's unique. It's not uniforming, you know.
29. **John:** Yes, it's not, this is how you do it, this is how you look inside.
30. **Letizia:** Yes, and then you discover who you are and you can express then your own soul. I have not a better word.
31. **John:** Yes, I didn't expect to end up writing a thesis about soul, but it's going to have to be.
32. **Letizia:** You cannot avoid it. I hope you find the right words.
33. **[Coffee break here.]**
34. **John:** Have you practiced the individual hands-on work yourself?
35. **Letizia:** I had a practice for ten years and then two years ago I had to decide. The last twenty years I had done both: the therapy work with the breath and the work with the voice. It went very good together, always better and better. But then I had to decide, would I go on with singing or go on with my practice, with my individual clients. Then I decided to stop and go on with singing. It was too much. Not only the lessons, not only the hours I worked but my supervision and just ... I wasn't strong enough ... all these people with problems, I couldn't just come home and say, okay, what do you want from me children, husband ... I just wanted to go to bed and ... leave me alone [everyone laughs in recognition] ... I'm not really the right person. And I like to work with groups, that's my thing. This group [Letizia and Maria had been teaching a group over four days a few days before this interview. Helen and I had been allowed by the group and the leaders to take part in the last two days of the workshop] was very very ... it was like this [Letizia makes a gesture and a sound like 'ergh']. In the evening I was so tired, they were a difficult group, but generally I like to work with groups [all laugh, again in recognition]
36. **John:** We know this too from our workshops. Mainly we teach now four-day or five day intensives and, yes, just one or two people in the group sometimes can make it very demanding.



37. **Letizia:** Yes, and in this work the students have really to go into their body and in touch with all they are. They have to be ready for a change and not only to have confirmed what they already know.
38. **John:** And with the individual work ...
39. **Letizia:** I don't work any more and I also don't teach it any more because you cannot teach if you're not really working with this.
40. **John:** When you were doing it did you find it also very relevant to the voice, the individual work or more the breath and movement work?
41. **Letizia:** I used to offer to my pupils to work one hour with the breath and movement and the following time with the treatment on the bed, where they are passive and I do an intervention with my hands.
42. **John:** And did you work with singers using this individual work?
43. **Letizia:** Yes. But they need to be really ready to work so deeply. I worked with singers, who were sent to me by their teachers, because they had problems with the breathing and couldn't go on. If the pupil has a very concrete problem and an exam in the next months, then it is understandable, that he wants the problem away at once. Then it's difficult to work, because if you are looking for the deeper reason of the problem you often need more time. You know, the same problem with the headache we have talked before.
44. Not every singer wants to go so deep, and you have to accept it. And to offer just what is requested and not what you think is good for them, that was difficult for me. If somebody is not ready to go this way then I am not really interested. So for me the individual work was very important on all level, and I would have liked pupils to go through, really, and to ask themselves, what's ... it's not just what kind of technique do I have to learn ...
45. **John:** to get a high note, but what is the way through bringing the whole self present in the high note.
46. **Letizia:** Yes!
47. **John:** Then you get a special quality in the sound. But not everybody wants this.
48. **Letizia:** No, and it is okay. But I had some pupils, that liked to work with me in my way and it was very interesting for all of us. I worked a lot with musicians, flute and clarinet and saxophone and this kind of instruments because they are left alone, nobody knows how to breathe in the conservatory. They do Alexander Technique and they do Feldenkrais, but they miss this connection with breath and body but they are more ... they know about the lack. I think singers don't always know about the lack ... this perhaps isn't true, but I think if they have no problem then it's okay. But if they have problems then it's not the first thing they do to go to a breath teacher ... to come to us, they go to another teacher.
49. **John:** I can imagine that the work with musicians of the brass and woodwind, of the air instruments, the ones that do need the breath specifically, would be a kind of work with resistance as well, rather than just letting the breath, so there would be quite a strong connection between that and voice work.
50. **Letizia:** Yes, of course. I work with a flautist. Next year we will write a book because it is very good work for them. And we work also through the voice. Because if they have discovered, for example, this part of the bones [Letizia refers to the cheek bones], and if they can relax the muscles in the jaw and take the force they need from the resistance to the earth, these new vibrations go through the instrument. You can really hear it, it's different, it's better without great effort, it's more organic. If all the air can move yourself and then it goes through the instrument it's another kind of sound. And it's also very concrete. A teacher says to you, ah there isn't enough sound, but he cannot tell you how can I do it differently.
51. **John:** Do you work with your husband with the breath?
52. **Letizia:** He knows the breath very well. In the beginning he was a very ... he was always with me.

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53. **John:** So you practice on him?
54. **Letizia:** No! No, never practice on the own husband.
55. **John:** Right, but he knows the breath.
56. **Letizia:** Yes, and we have the same teacher, Edgar Meyer. Edgar Meyer was the first therapist I went to when I was 22 years old, the partner of Ursula Schwendimann. He still is our supervisor. We go to him if we have something to discuss, and also for the hands-on work.
57. **John:** So he is qualified in the Middendorf breathwork?
58. **Letizia:** Yes, but not only, he has continued with sacro-cranial work and he has developed a great work with the relation between body and dreams ... he is also a pioneer and a rebel ... he is an old man now and does wonderful work. He works like a madman, he has hundreds of clients. He's a very special person. And as a teacher he is wonderful. And he is happy [she laughs].
59. **John:** It strikes me as so strange in some ways that there's such a depth of work over such a long time to do with the breath here in Europe, certainly in Germany and in Switzerland, and there's nothing in Australia.
60. **Letizia:** Perhaps you don't need it. You have more space outside, you have the sun ...
61. **John:** There is not this sensibility of the breath, but there are other things.
62. **Letizia:** But it's interesting that in Europe it's so ... also with Freud, Jung, Adler, all were around here, local heroes.
63. **John:** And some of these are very influential in Australia, but also when I think of some of the sorts of people coming to workshops with the breath in Australia, they are new to the breath but they are not new to perceiving. It's quite advanced compared to even people I met in America. There are a lot of people, particularly in the performing arts, who have a sensibility of the body.
64. **Letizia:** And what about yoga?
65. **John:** Yes, this is very big, lots of different sorts of yoga. A lot of it has got this [she inhales and exhales deliberately] sort of quality, but not all. There is a lot of dance work, dance therapy work, somatic therapy work that is influenced from Europe, from America, from Australia there is the Bowen technique, there is the Alexander technique ... so there's these grounds, quite strongly, and quite well developed, but it's not the breath.
- [Short break here]**
66. **Letizia:** People of our generation and the generation after need more structure than people of the first half of the last century, when Ilse developed her breath work. Ilse's work is a female approach to the body. An answer to the military way of using the body before. Ilse is looking for the space inside, for the forces in us that just are, if we permit them to exist. Forces that we only have to be aware that they exist, that are already there. Natural phenomena you can discover. What I call the military way is: My head has knowledge of the physical body and I teach the body to do what my head says. It's a quite different approach, isn't it?
67. Today we feel the lack of a real, organic grown structure, not a military one. So Ilse's work has developed too. Ursula and Maria and me, we add this structure to our breath work. Maria's use of the resistance is a kind of structure. Ilse's work has reached a lot of people but most of all women. I'm sure the addition of the needed structure will reach the men too.
68. **John:** In the short time I did a little work with Maria it was for me just this sense of a greater sense of the structure of the bones. Not the spaces in or the spaces of the joints, but of the bones. And this gave me a clearer sense of structure.
69. **Letizia:** Yes, and then you can experience the space much better, because you don't get like a cloud. You have both. And also your space has another quality then. You have also a structure in the room, in the space. And you feel exactly what is outside and what is inside. For me it was important to know Ilse's work and Maria's work and Edgar's

work. So I think, all the things one learns during life ... I think it's not only one method that can offer you everything. I don't know, perhaps it's not true. I think Ilse is complete in her way. She is so deep. And Edgar is complete in his way. But I have to search for my own kind to be complete. So now it's getting philosophical.



## Appendix G: Interview with Brigitte Wellner, April 2004, Berkeley, CA

1. **John:** You were saying that you have had your school for five years, will you tell me about how you came to do both breathwork and voicework?
2. **Brigitte:** Perhaps one correction, my new school is a school for breathwork only. Voicework, however, I've done for many more years. I began it when I was 21 while studying music history and German literature. The conductor of the choir where I sang, said, 'You should study singing'. So I went to Hamburg Music School to take an exam and they said, 'Okay, come back in two years, take singing lessons, you have a wonderful voice', and so on. There were two teachers at Music School who gave me lessons. During these years I noticed that my voice, which was basically a good voice without problems, became worse and worse. I wondered what was going on. And I started asking questions, because I am also an analyst, I want to know things exactly. I went to other teachers in order to see how they taught and asked them, 'Why should breath be like this? Why should I put my tongue in that place? Why should I move my head like this?' Rarely I got a real answer. And I noticed that many people at Music School begin with a real nice voice and they end with a terrible voice or the voice is even unhealthy in the end. It was the same with me.
3. In the beginning I gave a lot of little concerts in churches - classical things, Bach arias, etc. - and it worked very well. Then I got into difficulties. So I went to a man at university and asked him to check my voice and my breath. I told him that I had singing lessons with a teacher at Music School. He said, 'Oh, she teaches you, how wonderful, how lucky you are. But your breath doesn't work the right way, so you cannot sing a long sentence.' That's how I started to take care of my breath. I worked a lot with another breath method in Germany, the Schlaffhorst-Andersen method, very solid, it's sort of technical, it doesn't go as deep as the breathwork of Middendorf. But I worked with it for nearly ten years. At the same time I went to all sorts of places to learn more about breathing and singing. For example, I learnt a lot at a theatre school in Switzerland. Its director was a woman who gave Feldenkrais and meditation sessions, and her voicework was excellent, e.g., we went through a lot of tongue exercises. Voicework for her was educating the whole person, without neglecting technical details.
4. Then I met an American who had lived in Germany for many years. He taught educational science of singing at Weimar Music School. He called his training 'functional voice training'. He knew a lot about medical, anatomical and physiological aspects of voice, too. He offered a training for singers and singing teachers, which lasted five years, and I joined it. His approach was both scientific and holistic. So my own voice experience pushed me to learn continuously, because I wanted to sing.
5. After completing my first course of study at Hamburg University, I started a second one, political and educational science. But in parallel I had singing lessons with different teachers, and I went on doing research on voice. Now I am 58; when I was 21 I began singing, when I was 25 I started teaching. By and by I developed my own voice training. By analogy of Middendorf's 'breath experience', you could call it 'voice experience'. The methods are in line with the methods of our breathwork. The inhalational impulse must come on its own, and that's very important for the quality of voice, too. And that you feel where your breath or your voice wants to go, without any pushing. There are a lot of exercises along these lines, concerning the body, breath, voice, and hearing, so the voice develops together with the whole person.
6. **John:** When did you actually come across the Middendorf Breathwork and train in that?
7. **Brigitte:** It was in 1984.
8. **John:** That you started?

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9. **Brigitte:** That I became familiar with the work, and I did it very, very intensively, a lot of single hands-on sessions and groups and seminars. Because first I said, oh, why should I do this professional training? I did a lot of Feldenkrais work too, and Alexander Technique, all this body work. I was looking for what is the best for voice, that was my question, what is the best bodywork for voice? And when I came across the Middendorf work in 1984, I felt that it went way deeper into the soul, into one's own personality. I did it for three years, then, in 1987, I started my own training, completing it in 1992. And that was the year when I began to teach it also at university in Hamburg; seminars on breath experience and on voice experience.
10. **John:** As soon as you graduated?
11. **Brigitte:** Yes, because I was already teaching, when I began to train students in breath and voice work, and I did this training for many years, I think, eight or nine years. That was a very, very good work. There were students of psychology, educational and social educational science, they were all in these groups and I worked with them for one year, sometimes half a year, three hours every week. They had to write down their experience, and some of them stayed over two years, so they learned a lot about their breath, about their voice, about their personality. And they all said it was an important experience for them. I think that in all places where human beings work with human beings this work is necessary, because when you work with adults or with children you have to be in the center of your personality, otherwise you are afraid of working with difficult children and difficult adults, and you are at risk of projecting your unresolved conflicts onto the group.
12. Then I did a lot of teachers' training at an Institute in Hamburg for graduated teachers, and they did these exercises that they learned in my seminars every day. Some of them did it with the children in school, breath exercises every morning. And that I like very much, to give trainings for teachers everywhere, so that they begin to work with these exercises with voice and breath in their own social surroundings. That would be the best.
13. **John:** So you were asking yourself, what's the best body work for voice?
14. **Brigitte:** Yes.
15. **John:** What's your answer?
16. **Brigitte:** Firstly, there is no such thing like a right way. The ways can be different. Everybody has to find his own way. But if somebody finds a way to the breath work of Middendorf, it's a very good base for the voice. But also Feldenkrais is a good base, Alexander technique is also a good base. Since some people cannot relate to breath so well, we can offer them another body method for the voice. In Switzerland they teach a lot of Alexander technique that is similar to Feldenkrais technique. But if you can relate to breath, Middendorf is a good method, because it leads you into the depth of your personality and then your singing will become a singing that comes out of the soul and is not a technical singing. And that's the most important thing, that you sing with your whole person and that you don't sing only with a technique.
17. Sometimes when you hear singers, you know exactly they have learned *this* technique, the others have learned *that* technique, they come from *this* professor, they come from the other, because they imitate their teacher's method. And they have not had another possibility to find their own voice. That's my goal, that they are developing in the way they sing, so that they grow and feel at home with their voice and that they find out what they want to sing. Perhaps it's not classical. Perhaps you begin as a classical singer and then you find, oh, it's so boring all the time these classical songs, and you sing something else.
18. So during my own development, there were five years I sang in a blues band. It was very funny because all these people, they didn't know any notes. They were all the time listening to some CD's or tapes, and then, 'oh look, Muddy Waters does this'. But they had a very wonderful

rhythm feeling and they were very musical people and I learned a lot from them. So five years I sang blues. Then, for many years, I gave solo concerts chansons of the 30's, Marlene Dietrich, Zarah Leander etc., because my voice acquired a lot of depth. So I sang these songs in little theatres in Hamburg. But all the time I had the distinct feeling: 'This is not it'. And then there was somebody in an agency, who suggested to organize concerts. But I felt what the hell should I do, every week singing these Zarah Leander and Marlene Dietrich songs? I would die because it's so boring to sing all the time these songs. So now I will see what happens, perhaps something new.

19. So to come back to your question about the best body work for voice, in every body work there are a lot of known elements, e.g., the structure of the movements is always the same. Perhaps it is only the point of view that differs. In our breathwork therapy it is of central importance that breath is not intentionally controlled, but comes on its own. So I think that perhaps something new is that you put some elements together in another way so that the focus is a new one. My combination between breathwork and voicework is perhaps a little new, because mostly you have on the one hand globally-oriented singing teachers, who work a lot with feeling, and on the other hand those who work very technically in a detail-oriented way. And even here you have a variety of different variants, one says you have to move your tongue this way, the other says oh, you have to move your jaw like this or you have to move the head like this. The sound must be felt here. The other says here on the head, on the neck, on the breath. You have all these different things.
20. I think the most important thing is that you educate students in trust and confidence in their own voice, just like in Middendorf we educate students to have trust in their own breath. That's the line of our education. And that you give a lot of very, very good exercises, which you know really work. Where you know, now when I do this exercise, this muscle will be trained. If you hear a tense voice, what

can I do? Very often the muscles of the tongue, over this tongue bone, they are very tight. So you have to know exercises for different types of singers to train the connection between muscle and sound. You have to learn to hear very exactly and you have to teach that they learn to hear their voice exactly. Not that they feel only good, and oh, it feels so good. But that they learn to hear these very tiny differences. How does it sound when it's tense? How does it sound when perhaps this muscle doesn't work? And this training has to be combined with the growth of their own personality so that they can find their own voice, yet together with a precise knowledge and a lot of exercises, e.g., knowledge of medical things associated with their voice. Sometimes I had singers who had singing lessons for ten years. They didn't really know how it works when they made high pitches or low pitches. They didn't know what happened in their larynx, and that's not good, because your thinking influences your sound. If you have a wrong thinking about the voice, it has real effects on your voice. Only also if you have a wrong hearing, it has effects on your voice. There are a lot of experiments, hearing experiments of a professor in France, in Paris, Professor Tomatis, he has founded what he calls psychophonology. He did some research on the relationship between psychology and hearing, and hearing and voice sounds. So I read a lot of things about experiments and what we know really about voice.

21. What I am often asked is if there is a different method for classical singers or singers of musicals, rock songs etc. I taught this method to all sorts of singers and even actors and theatre teachers. For many years I trained theatre teachers in Hamburg. In high schools and colleges we have lessons in theatre and there are teachers who give this training and they have to learn voice training, and that's what I did.
22. **John:** So your approach is used for singing and speaking?
23. **Brigitte:** Yes. It's an approach for both, and also for musical and for classical

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singers, for all sorts of singers. And then, again, you have to feel what's your sound, where does it want to go? Is it in this musical sound, or do you want to sing folk songs, or do you want to sing lullabies, or classical arias? Now I'm just about to train a man who was a musical singer, very good voice. But he wants to be a tenor in German operas. He wants to sing German. He wants to sing Wagner. He has a really good voice, but he has too much pressure on his voice, so he has to train his voice in another way. The basic training, to open the throat and to let it free, and to get a healthy voice that you can express what you want with your speaking or in your singing, that's the same training for all. Training classical singers, however, is perhaps most difficult, because the vocal cords have to work in the most efficient way so they have to learn, have to train even more.

24. **John:** So the basis of your voice work is letting the voice, you're saying there's a parallel with the breath work, you're letting the voice find it's own way and letting it free as far as possible.
25. **Brigitte:** Yes.
26. **John:** Through this basic sound?
27. **Brigitte:** Yes. Yes. I think that's a goal for all singing teachers, but how to do it, that's the problem. Because somehow every singing teacher says, oh, let it free, but you are not able to let it free because you are so much tightened. So you need a lot of very different exercises to teach this, because you have to see what the group needs, or if you give individual singing lessons, what does this person really need as next step in his exercises. And okay, the base is the inhale, that you let come the inhale on its own, that's important, otherwise there is a strain on the vocal cords. So our breath work is a very good base for voice work. And then if you let the sound flow, if you open only the mouth, you will feel what I trained with you in the group, that there is a sound, I call it basic sound, that is a mixture between A and O and er ,er, like you are lazy and you are too lazy to pronounce some vowels. And with this sound, the vocal cords can learn to work in a very effective way. Because if you first begin to work with the tongue or the lips, in other words, with the tools of articulation, then your muscles still cling and hold on to the speaking habits they are used to. When we are speaking, perhaps the tongue is too tight and not flexible enough, the lips have a certain habit to move and all these habits are often wrong or getting in the way of singing. So it's better not to work with articulation right away, but to rather try to get rid of the overtension or undertension in the tongue, lips, etc. At first, we begin with the work on the vocal cords. If the inhale comes on its own the vocal cords open the most. If the inhale doesn't come on its own, they don't open so much. If they don't open so much, they can't work because the muscles rest a little too tensely. So we need this opening of the vocal cords and then they begin to work in a very soft way. So, for example, you start with humming and while you are humming you are moving the jaw, the tongue, the lips and all the facial muscles, all these parts above the vocal cords so they find the right tone, i.e. the right tension. I work a lot with glissando exercises. And I also work a lot with the capacities of feeling and hearing: where is my voice, what do I hear? What does the larynx really do? Sometimes you have singing teachers, who say, oh, sing without your larynx. But nobody can sing without their larynx. These vocal cords, they are always moving.
28. In our Middendorff breath experience, we also work with voice, vowels, and consonants, but it is not voice work, that's what Ilse Middendorff keeps emphasizing. It's breath work with vowels and we always feel what breath does after these vowels. It's a work where the right tension, the "eotonus", develops, and where your sensitivity develops, but it is no voice training. So training the basic sound, that's the first step and then you train the tongue, you train the jaw, the movement of the jaw, you train the other muscles, and all the time the whole body too, that the inhale goes into the movement, into the feet, like in our breathwork.



29. **John:** So is that where you start to join the breathwork in?
30. **Brigitte:** Yes, yes. And there are a lot of exercises. Some come from an American teacher, some from other lines of work — a lot of different exercises. And you work also with feelings. If you feel somebody can't sing — because sometimes something happens so that somebody starts to cry, OK., he or she has the right to speak about this or to just leave at that, or whatever. But then you have to feel really what can you do, or what is perhaps the work of a psychotherapist. If the vocal cords become more open, feelings are coming up and sometimes sad experiences of childhood. I myself, as a breathwork practitioner, can handle this, but somebody who is "only" a singing teacher might easily be overtaxed.
31. When feelings come up, you can ask students to express these feelings with their voice, that is a very creative work. Other students, however, prefer to sing given songs, arias, folk songs, etc. and they want to become professional singers, with stage appearance and all that.
32. **John:** Do you play the piano?
33. **Brigitte:** No, not really well. But if they are ready to go to stage they have co-repetition lessons, as we call them, with a pianist I know. We cooperate. He accompanies the singer. So I play the piano, but I am not a pianist. Of course I play it well enough to work on the songs.
34. Coming back to my method of singing: I would like it to spread widely, among laymen, professional singers and teachers. Because I know so many people who suffer from not being able to sing well enough. They want to sing, they have had lessons with wrong methods for years, and they suffer because the desire inside them to sing well is so strong. You can't give it up. If you give it up you will be very sad. Unless something else comes, that is as nice. But there are some people whose goal in life is to sing. I think somebody who really wants to sing, can't give it up.
35. **John:** Yes, we meet people like this in Australia, particularly from time to time, people who have been accepted into the opera school very young and found it a bad experience.
36. **Brigitte:** Bad because they can't sing, the children, or what is ... ?
37. **John:** No, no. Sometimes we teach people in Australia who are much older now, maybe 30, 40. Maybe when they were 20 had a very good voice and went into the opera training in Australia and found that it didn't satisfy them or that their voice didn't develop, or that it shrunk somehow. And yet they still have a very strong passion to sing, but yes, it's a stress. Some of them are distressed, they feel like the voice they had has been taken away.
38. **Brigitte:** And you can sing till you are very old. It's a question of techniques. It's not a question of being old. There is a famous singer, I forgot the name — Indian singer. I heard a CD of her on a tape. At the time of the recording she was I think 88 years old. She was one of the famous Indian raga singers. The vocal cords are muscles, and if you train them, they can do their work. Naturally if you are sitting in a home for old people and you are just sitting around all day long, then the vocal cords will be weakened, just like the whole body and all the other muscles. But if you are trained, if you exercise, you can sing very, very long. Some opera singers, some men, they do it. I remember a singer Heinz Hotter, he sang at Munich at the opera, I think he was 84 or 88, when he sang last at the opera. He just said: 'Now it's my last opera.' And it was okay.
39. **John:** So, I'm interested when you work with singers, do you teach them quite specifically certain parts of the Middendorf breath work?
40. **Brigitte:** Yes.
41. **John:** And then the voice work?
42. **Brigitte:** I mix it. Because when I do the voice work, it's always the voice that is in the center of everything. I work with hearing and feeling. Then I teach them

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the connection between breath and voice. E.g., if the inhale comes on its own, the beginning of the tone has another quality than if the inhale doesn't come on its own. So I teach them to hear this difference. But in between there are exercises with the breath so they learn to sense the breath, that's necessary. I always mix it with voice exercises, so they learn and they experience that the voice changes when the breath changes. I don't do half an hour breath work, then half an hour voice work. And then they feel the connection between these two parts of our work.

43. **John:** So the people you teach in your school now, are some of them doing the breath training because they're singers? Or are they mainly other people who are doing the breath training for their own....?
44. **Brigitte:** It's different.
45. **John:** Different sort of person?
46. **Brigitte:** Yes. Different sorts. Currently, in my breath work training course, there's nobody who wants to be a professional singer. But in the singing lessons, I have some professional singers. And they come and they do a lot of breath work with me, also seminars and so on. Perhaps one of them will also be breath therapist one day.
47. Currently, the setting of my work is changing. I worked a lot at institutions, at university, teachers training and other academies and I had my own breath and voice house at the Baltic Sea. And then I gave up this work at the institutions for private and time reasons. Often there were so many people who wanted to attend my seminars – 200 students - and I said I can't take them all, I can only take 20. So they protested all the time and went to the director of the university and said that they to have these seminars. So there was a second seminar, a third, and then you had no rooms. You had to see in which room you could do it and it was a lot of organization, too. Right now it's better, I am freer, I can travel. And I like it very much now to look, oh, what's in the world? So my work changes a little bit. The form has changed. But also the content and the method are changing. E.g., in my singing lessons, I am working with the singers in a kind of what I call "voice dialogue". Just take the way little children learn to use their voice. First the mother says ga ga ga ga ga, then the child responds ga ga ga, or the mother says ga la la and the child then la la ga. It is a response, a call, response and call. They fit together or not, then everybody goes their own way, then they do something together. And in singing lessons I do it very often this way: looking for your own way for the voice, even if there's somebody else who makes some other sounds. And sometimes you hear your sounds, like in the group. Hear your own sound, sometimes you hear all the other sounds, sometimes you will respond, sometimes not. Sometimes you like it to have your own pitch, sometimes you don't – you want to have your own pitch and you want to be loud, and the others are soft and vice versa. So, we practice the connection between your own voice and the voices of the others, that's a very, very important part of my voice work, too. And in the group when I work a bit longer, I work perhaps 5 days with a group, they do a little bit of their own composition. Elements for everybody that you create, then you create the sound together. And everybody chooses the elements they like now and so it becomes a music of the group, but also a music of myself. But I am not lost in the group, I am here, I am in my rhythm – my voice rhythm, sometimes I want to be with the group, sometimes not. Perhaps this is somewhat along the lines of breath working with partners, in the Middendorf therapy and in Jürg's conflict resolution work.
48. **John:** I want to ask, in your breath school, are you the only teacher in it? Or do you have other breath teachers?
49. **Brigitte:** I am now the only teacher. First I wanted to found a big institute. Then I felt I wanted to travel. I worked a lot in my life with teaching and therapy. Always, always I learned something new and I taught students and gave therapy lessons all my life. And I decided now to have one training group is wonderful and it's enough!

50. It's helpful for them to have one teacher, specially in the hands-on lessons because often sad experiences of their childhood come up. In the group lessons perhaps there will be other teachers. In the theory lessons, they have another teacher, so I am not the only one, he is a supervisor. He is a professor for educational science and psychology.
51. **John:** Is he also trained in the Middendorf ...?
52. **Brigitte** He knows the breath work very well, because he had sessions for many years. He has done a lot of communication training, he teaches them in educational science and psychology and when there are difficulties in the group, he has the possibility to supervise them, to talk with them. And I myself am a counsellor, what that means, a counsellor, Rogers, do you know Rogers? The sort of therapy about talking. So I am trained to talk with people about their conflicts too, and I have supervision. I have a colleague, and every week I have a single session with this colleague of mine. She is a very experienced breath worker. The most important thing, however, is: I have a good contact to Ilse Middendorf and I'm still working with her. She's my best 'supervisor'
53. **John:** So you have a good support.
54. **Brigitte:** So I am supervised. That's important, that you go to someone else, that you check up, is there something between me and the group? So that's what I do ..The group feels very good, and if there are problems, we discuss them in a very open way. And I try to have no hierarchy. Although it's clear I am the teacher, they are the pupils, but I am not necessarily always right. If there were difficulties, perhaps we would need another teacher too, we'll see. At any rate, when they have finished their training, I will advise them to get to know other teachers.
55. **John:** So it goes for five years, the training?
56. **Brigitte:** Yes. And when they finish I will have a new one.



## Appendix H: Interview with Bettina Follenius, October 2003, Berlin, Germany

1. **John:** As a way into talking about the more particular work, can you speak a bit about how you came to the breathwork?
2. **Bettina:** Through my first husband, just because he made this work. He had sessions for about three years and it was very beautiful but I was not interested. And then he decided to make the training here. And before you did the training you had to do three five-day classes, and he came back from the first class and he was so excited, and everything he told was so exciting for me, so I decided I want to make the training as well. I never did a lesson! And I booked three five-day workshops. The first was with Ilse, so at that time she made the workshops herself, even for the beginners, and after say three or four hours I thought, this is it. I was always looking for it but I didn't know I was looking for it. So I came to this work. The strange thing is my husband, he doesn't do any more breathwork. But for me it becomes more and more. He brought me into this but he left. So, mystery ... something mysterious.
3. **John:** Before that had you any other trainings?
4. **Bettina:** Yes, I had trainings in neo-Reichian work and I did a lot of meditation, different meditations ... even meditation with a lot of movement. They all had to do with working with feelings, all of these trainings and groups I did and I for myself had the feeling I could do it again and again. "Father I hate you, mother I hate you." Actually I like my parents, but something like this again and again. And I had the feeling it doesn't change, it is always the same, for me. So I was really fed up with these screaming, shouting ... all these things because I had the feeling I could do it to the end of my life and nothing really change. It is good you know to just come out with that, but that's it. But I didn't know anything about that before. I mean I was living in Berlin but I didn't hear anything about Ilse Middendorf before. So I didn't look for something new. I just had the feeling I wanted to change my job because I was working in a theatre and worked in the fortnightly newspaper writing reviews of performances and then I was teacher for German for foreigners and I had the feeling that this was nothing that was interesting me for a long time. So I wanted to have something to grow old with, a work which is changing me and which is changing all the time and which is always new because I'm very ... I'm bored if it's always the same. I'm not the type to do the same things every day. So suddenly, mysteriously, it came up to me from my husband.
5. **John:** When was it that you started?
6. **Bettina:** It was about fourteen years ago. Yes I'm working now ten years and I had three years this training, we worked nearly every day, and a year before, so fourteen years. I did one year just groups, evening groups and things like this, and sessions for myself.
7. **John:** Then you went and practised somewhere else?
8. **Bettina:** Cologne.
9. **John:** Can you in summary speak about the basis of the work, the breathwork?
10. **Bettina:** What do you mean by that, the basis of the work?
11. **John:** Well I know that we let the breath come, we let it go and we wait until it comes again, that's the main thing.
12. **Bettina:** Yes, that's the main thing. And it is the three, it's perceiving, focusing and breath. I don't know if that's right in English.
13. **Helen:** In English in the book it's translated as focusing and perceiving. But also the words in English, sensation and presence.
14. **Bettina:** Presence, it's much better. For me it sounds much better because focusing is so, it is like concentrating, and we don't use the word *konzentrieren* because it means that and we say *sammeln*. This is 'collect', the same word if I collect stamps or something, but presence is good. It's better than focusing. So in every work we do these three things are always there. This

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sensing, let the breath come, and presence. So these are the principles of the work. If you do movement and breath or if you have hands-on sessions or if you have the vowel space work it's always the same, these three things are necessary. Is that what you mean from basis? Not philosophical but concrete, how you work?

15. **John:** Yes

16. **Bettina:** And this is very difficult for most people because being present is not so easy. The sensation is not, you know, we are not used to have these sensations, so we don't know. So you are told if you have an 'ah' or an 'oh' it is here or here or here, it's something to do, we can't sense enough. And to let the breath come and go, my goodness!

17. **John:** Yes, this is hard enough to begin. I was really interested in the question of how the German translates into English, and you immediately say, presence, yes that's a better description than focusing, so that's good.

18. **Bettina:** Sensation is a bit difficult for us because we have the word *Sensation* and this means a very big thing, a sensational whatever. And we have some people, they want sensations ... and you know the work, it is sensational, but not in that way. So I think *Sensation* would be strange for me to use, but sensing, yes, it is better.

19. **John:** I'm interested about the way the breathwork connects with working with the voice, and there is this whole area of working with the vowels, which I would like you to speak about, and whether other parts of the work have some effect on the voice.

20. **Bettina:** Yes, of course. If you work with the pelvis and the legs and the feet, the lower space, normally the voice goes down, even if you don't think about that. Often after a hands-on session it's the same. So the people come and maybe they're afraid, or something like that, in stress, so the voice is here [*Bettina points to her throat*] and after this session they have a deeper voice, there is more volume in it, it's more plastic like a sculpture, it has all the dimensions. Is it plastic? You know sometimes the voice is

like a sheet of paper. But when it has more dimensions, this is what I mean by plastic. It has space. This is how the voice is changing if you just make the dancing with the feet or something like this, even if you don't work with the vowels. So the whole body is speaking, something like that. It's not from just here [*Bettina points to her throat*], and it's not flat, so you're speaking from the whole body even if you don't think about that.

21. **John:** That's certainly my impression and my experience for myself. And quite often yes I can just do some forms for the lower space and all of a sudden I hear my voice in a different way.

22. **Bettina:** Yes, and it is more than *Resonanz*. *Resonanz* is something you could really sense, but the whole person is in it, so, yes, this is more than *Resonanz*.

23. **John:** Can you speak about the vowel space in particular?

24. **Bettina:** Yes, Ilse has founded this just to experience the breath. This is the main thing. And if you have different vowels or consonants so the breath does different things. It is difficult for people who haven't done breath and movement because it is difficult to sense because it is so inwards. Yes, it takes a lot of patience to come to it. The main thing is to be available for the inhale because the inhale brings the space in the different parts of the body. This being available to let the breath in, not to do something, this is the difficult thing, and this is why it doesn't work even if you know, ah-hah, the 'e' has to be here and you know ... it doesn't work. So this is a work, I think it's very straight, but something more than straight. You know very well if you do something or not. If you do breath and movement you could do a bit, it's not so obvious, but if you do it in the vowel space work, you know it in the moment that you're doing something. So it's very, no 'straight' is not enough, *streng*, like a monk, very *streng*. It's more than straight [*Bettina looks in a German/English dictionary*]... severe, harsh, disciplined. It is disciplined, more than breath and movement, and so some people then think, oh my goodness I won't get it, it is very straight, disciplined, but after that, when it works, you know,

- this is like a flower. And there are a lot of people who don't want to do it, it takes so much time for the flower to grow. We have a lot of difficulties here in the Institute. The first hours all the people say, my goodness what did we do, I don't feel it, I don't know where it is, stop this, I don't like it. Because it is so pure. This is pure.
25. **John:** I'm interested in the particular vowel sounds that you work with. I imagine that they are in the first place what you might call German vowels. Have you worked with other languages?
26. **Bettina:** No, but we talked to Ilse about that and she said that it is necessary to do that work but she hadn't the time for that.
27. **John:** It seems to me that the thing is, as far as I can understand it, that if you have an 'ah' sound no matter what the language, if it is an 'ah' sound then the effect will be the same, and if it's a different sound then the effect will be different.
28. **Bettina:** Yes that's right. If it's 'oh' or 'eh' or something it will be different.
29. **John:** So in a sense there's a whole set of sounds going from 'ah' to 'er'.
30. **Bettina:** Yes there should be a difference even then inside.
31. **John:** Between little points along the way?
32. **Bettina:** Yes. It would be a good research but nobody has the time for that.
33. **Helen:** So nobody is doing, with the Italian or with . . . at the moment.
34. **Bettina:** No. So we don't know about that. Maybe they do. I think in San Francisco they try to do the German vowels [*she laughs*], which is sometimes very difficult for Faith and Margot. This 'e', they always say 'ay'.
35. **John:** Yes, but some people hear vowel sounds more clearly and I suppose it depends whether it is your own language to some extent, or whether you've got experience with other languages. Because for some people to hear the difference between those is . . .
36. **Bettina:** Yes. If you are not used to it. I was thinking about it, because I was teacher for German for foreigners and for example the ladies from Thailand, they have a very warm and very soft language, they don't have 'k', 'p', 't', all these things. And I thought it must have a complete effect on the body, different than our language that most people say is very hard: *Kater, Hund*, things like that.
37. **John:** Yes, 'k', 't', it has a lot of hard sounds, more than English. I think it's a lovely language. I like the sound of it, but it is more angular in some ways I think. You were saying you can work with vowels and with consonants and you work to combine these.
38. **Bettina:** Yes, with words, and with haikus, these Japanese little poems.
39. **John:** In German.
40. **Bettina:** Yes. German haikus [*she laughs*]. No these are Japanese haikus, which are translated.
41. **John:** So do the number of syllables stay the same?
42. **Bettina:** Yes. Five, seven, five. So this is an easier way to combine the vowels and the consonants, and it is a short one. I mean you can do literature and everything else but this is easier to, you know, have in your head, three little lines.
43. **John:** And so what's your experience when you do that? When you do the haiku?
44. **Bettina:** You have a lot of movements inside. We first make, for example, all the vowels, and then the consonants, and then some combinations, la or ba or um or something like that, syllables, and then words and then a sentence. And if you really speak from these spaces it is a lot of movement inside. And Ilse always said, you can speak yourself to health. Because there is so much different, it's not always a space. For example p-t-k, it's like p-t-k [*Bettina demonstrates as the non-voiced consonants*] and you have this p-t-k, and spaces inside so there's a lot of movement. After that you are alive. Everything came into this speaking so this is what we normally don't do. We speak from here, we speak from here [*Bettina points to her throat, her head*]. And this is

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what I like. I like the daily life talking to people. I'm not so much in the singing because I don't know anything about that, but what I try to do is to work these vowels and consonants and everything but then, you know, have normal words: *Katse, Hund*, and speak them from these spaces. So I like more the work with speaking than singing because this is something I don't know anything about.

45. **John:** So are you saying someone else does work with singing?
46. **Bettina:** I think for example Christa is doing that. I mean she does a bit different work I think, but as far as I know, I haven't seen her for years, she is doing something with singing. This is Christa Camerer. I think she's doing it together with singing.
47. **John:** Is she in Berlin?
48. **Bettina:** Yes. And what about Dieter, because he is singing as well. Is there any combination for him?
49. **John:** I'll have to ask. I haven't really spoken with him in detail. Do sometimes singers come and do the training?
50. **Bettina:** Yes. So we had, last year she was ready. In the last year you have to write something for the *Prüfung*, the ending, and she wrote about that ... it was very interesting for me because I don't know anything about singing. She is a singer, so she has concerts, and she is also a teacher. And as I understand it is a basis. It is not something they have in the concert itself, but it is necessary to work with your own voice, with yourself. But if you have a concert you have to take your techniques, otherwise you can't fill a big auditorium with the breath like we do. This is not loud enough.
51. So what I am interested in more or less is the vowel work as itself. It gives a special state of being to be in these spaces and it is like you don't have to do anything, to produce anything. This is mostly what we do, you know it from your own work as well, the people have to produce something ... if it is just flowing, this is a very beautiful space to be. And after that I like to bring it in the daily life, in the speaking with people. For example somebody working, I don't know, in the place they have to talk always to people.

And what is happening that they always talk like this, so they don't have a back. So I work about communication and have this tension between my back and, for example, the people I am speaking to. So this is what I am interested in, not the singing, but the speaking and communication. And even the tension in the room, so it helps, you get the tension, the space tension so this gives more power to speak. It is something if you have the sound and you are in the sounds, so there is a tension between you and the outer space. I like these tensions, which build you up.

52. **John:** So do you experience in speaking, in day-to-day conversation, the movement of spaces inside you, or is that more when you are really focusing?
53. **Bettina:** What I experience is, yes, is the movement, but I don't have these exact movements, because it's too quick. So I sense if I speak from the inside or just from here [*Bettina points to her throat*]. So this is what I feel and try to deal with, not always but . . .
54. **John:** Do you work with improvised sound at all? Allowing any sound to come out whether it's words or just any old syllables?
55. **Bettina:** No, but it's a good idea [*she laughs*].
56. **John:** I just thought that, when you were speaking about ... speaking the self, the self wouldn't have to be words.
57. **Bettina:** Yes, I try it. Improvisation, the syllables ana me, baba me, nana le, something like that, so in the beginning just to have something to say, just let it come, I work that way. And sometimes with a sound, if it's a deep sound or a higher sound, it is that, for every space there's a pitch and I try to play with that, different pitches. And it's good to find the right pitch that goes through this space. And this is not so easy, to find the sound that goes through this. But if you've got it, you can improvise.
58. **John:** So you could improvise either with spoken or with sung sounds.
59. **Bettina:** Yes
60. **John:** I can see it's ... a big work; it could be a whole work in itself.



61. **Bettina:** Yes, and improvisation with different words, say all words with 'f': *Fuss*, finger, fish, all these. So this makes it more alive and the people stop being so, you know, 'oh, where is it, I can't sense it'. Just to let it flow. But first you have to really get this space. Are you just working with that letting come?
62. **John:** Yes, we do a lot of work with just letting come in the sound, with the movement together, or sometimes first the movement, sensing the inner sensation coming to stillness and then just with the voice, across the pitch, so into the sung voice but with no words, just the different ... and then so different qualities of vowel sound come in different shapes of the body or ... and very much sensing presence, trying to listen to the presence so it leads the voice and also the movement.
63. **Bettina:** So it is always together, the movement and the sound?
64. **John:** No sometimes, it depends on which process. Sometimes the process is separate, that the voice comes without the movement, but the inner sensation from the voice shifts the voice. Sometimes it's from movement, and sometimes with an ensemble of people, and it is also from the rhythm in the floor and also the rhythm and sensing the shapes around ... many different dimensions. Sometimes there is a group ensemble song with no words in different tones at the same time. Then sometimes also one individual song comes more into flower.
65. **Bettina:** Why don't you make a workshop in Berlin?
66. **John:** I would love to, particularly with people who are from some other way ... it is with the singing voice, but it is not necessarily for singers. Sometimes it is much easier when we have coming to the workshop people who have a sensibility for presence, and they so, oh but I can't sing, but because they have this sensibility for presence, the voice just comes. Whereas sometimes the singer comes and then ... it's a problem. Of course we can find a way, everyone can find a way ...
67. **Bettina:** It is difficult for singers in our work as well, so difficult to allow, not to produce the sound, but just ... inside, the space. It is very difficult, much more difficult than for other people you know who don't know ... just 'oh there's the "e"'. And we don't work with movement, just with the vowels. The only thing I try to do now, just to get it in the daily life, is to stand up, not with the knees locked, and sometimes walk through the room and always do the work, maybe sound and maybe address somebody. I do things like this because I think it's not normal, we don't sit on a stool, you know, just looking inside, but you're talking to your kids, to your husband, to whatever, to the neighbour, you are moving. But Ilse didn't want the combination of movement and sound, vowel space, and I understand this because it's so difficult. With movements you could get it a bit easier, you think you get it easier, but it is not that. This, for example, was the difficulty with Christa because she makes the combination and this was difficult because this is not Ilse's work. And I try now to find a way not to change the work, because it is like it is, it is beautiful, and perfect, but to bring it more in this daily ... I'm just walking around and do I have my space or do I lose it if I just stand up or I walk or I look to somebody, look somebody in the eyes. Is the space there? I think you do it in your own work. You find it is difficult for some people ... I have to say something to someone and I lose everything.
68. **John:** Yes, so this is what we use the ensemble for ... do you lose it? With one person, yes, with another person, no ...
69. **Bettina:** So this is what I try a bit, but I don't make the movements which we do in breath and movement but just normal movements. If we do the haikus we sit two together and look at each other and one is listening, the other is talking. Things like this I am interested in.
70. **John:** And the other work, the work with the breath and movement, does that work help you become more permeable for the vowel sound, so even though the vowel work doesn't have movement, this other work does ...

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71. **Bettina:** Yes, you have to do it before ... it is nearly impossible with people who don't have any experience with the breath movement to make this vowel work. They don't know what it is. You have to be ... at first big movements, then smaller movements, this is the breath movement, then you see inside, ah, there's something opening and going back. So this is more or less the way, you have to be very big and it becomes more and more subtle. So, for example, in a five day workshop I make maybe two or three vowels because when there are many beginners it is ... so frustrating because they have the feeling it must be something else. When I ask, where do you have your 'e', for example, yes here and I here, and everything is necessary because everyone has his own way to come to this 'e' but not in some hours. So this is completely frustrating for the people because they don't know ... what shall I do? I don't know, I don't understand, so ... I do maybe two or three. And it is no use to make tricks. You can be tricky, for example to help with the hands all these things to make it easier, but in fact it is not easier. It seems to be easier. So it takes time.
72. **John:** I imagine the amount of time it takes is very variable depending on how capable the person becomes of sensing the breath movement.
73. **Bettina:** Yes, sometimes people are sensing it very quick, you don't know why. Not the singer ones normally.
74. **John:** I am interested also in the connection of breathwork to psychology or personal emotional states ... I know that is not directly ... the breathwork is not headed in that way but again it seems to have something to say about those areas or some connection to a person's individual psychology. Do you think?
75. **Bettina:** Yes, but I don't know exactly what you want to know.
76. **John:** What is your experience?
77. **Bettina:** With emotions for example? Yes, this is not the thing we are going to, but of course there is a lot of things from the past, the body remembers everything. If you have accidents, traumas, it's all in the body so if you work with it, the breath goes through, sometimes it comes again to your conscious and sometimes you have to cry or just talk about that, so it could come up. We welcome this but we don't work with it. So for example if someone in a hands-on session is talking about something, remembering something, or crying, this is everything alright. If I have the feeling now it is enough, so I go back to the sensing. I think Jürg has said, the sensing is the house for the emotions. All emotions are allowed but we try to sense ourselves during that, so it is a different thing. The emotion could overwhelm me but if I'm sensing ... if I'm anxious and I sense it, it doesn't overwhelm me. I have this feeling, I have this emotion, not the emotion has me. And sometimes the people want to work with their emotions, this is what we don't do. They are allowed, you can tell it or let it out in some way, this is alright, but we bring it back to the sensing and back to the breath. This is what changes it.
78. **John:** So I might talk, I am feeling very sad, and I might even start to cry, it makes me think of when something happened yesterday or ... but the focus is to bring it back to, where is the sensation in my body, let my breath come alone, not hold it, just perceive I have a sensation in the arms ... I'm just checking I understand.
79. **Bettina:** Yes, that's right.
80. **John:** And you say that's what changes it, to stay with the bodily sensation and with the breath.
81. **Bettina:** Yes, so this brings you into the present again. Because all the emotions are old ones more or less, even if they are from yesterday they are old, and the sensing brings you in the present. And this is changing it. Because in the present there is no problem. Maybe you are sad or happy or whatever, but there is no ... the people have problems, but in the present there is no problem. It is just as it is. I am sad, I am angry, I am happy, whatever, in this moment.
82. **John:** There is some connection there it seems to me between the present and being present. Being present in my body is also like being in the present, being here now.

83. **Bettina:** Yes, this is the only way I know. The presence in the body is to be in the present. Because my feelings, they are often ... they are old ... the mind is in the future ... you are always in this tension because of the past and the future, and the sensing is what brings you in the present now and now and now, every breath is now. Maybe you remember, oh I had this some days ago, this circling was different, it was more or less or whatever, but it is always now this perceiving or this sensation is presence ... and feelings, emotions could be from the past.
84. **John:** It could be from the present. You can have emotion in the present.
85. **Bettina:** Yes, but they come from the past. No?
86. **John:** Well sometimes certainly, but I don't think they all come from the past. Some of them come from ...
87. **Bettina:** This is what for me is the most ... the perceptible breath is to be present, now, and every breath is now, wide and back, it's always now, and this is what I like most because I know that being past, maybe with feelings, be in the future with the mind, but what is now? And I had a lot of meditations before and it was very difficult for me just to stop this blahblahblahblah in the head. And through this work there are some moments, not always of course, but there are some moments I am really ... I am, that's it. And this is the most beautiful thing in the world [*she laughs*]. Maybe that's what it's all about.
88. **John:** Well thank you, that seems like a lovely place to stop.



## Appendix I: Interview with Dieter Gebel, November 2003, Berlin, Germany

*In transcribing this interview I have left in the German 'ja' for 'yes' where Dieter used it. He sometimes uses 'yes' and more often 'ja'. I have not changed his Germanic English expression.*

1. **John:** I remember we already spoke a bit about how you came to the work in the first place, and you've talked to me about the grounds of the work, the basic principles of the work, and also I think what might be included in a first teaching session. I would like to know more about the overall scope of the training: what sorts of things are covered in the training here in Berlin and in the 3½ year training in Berkeley — I imagine it's the same work that's covered.
2. **Dieter:** Yes, you are right. Now we have two levels. The first level for Berlin people runs for 12 months and the second level runs for 3 years, so this time for 4 years for people living in Berlin. People not in Berlin first level needs 18 months and the second level needs 3 ½ years.
3. **John:** This is because it's quicker for people in Berlin because they are able to come to more other sessions at the Institute, yes?
4. **Dieter:** Yes. You are learning breath and movement, you are learning the work with the vowels and consonants. You are learning, you should go into the ongoing groups when its possible. It is a must or should be a must for students to go to the evening classes, and of course in the first part of the education it is very important the individual sessions, it is a very close, very deep work with one breath teacher and ja, these are the principles for the first level, for the first part of the education. In the second part of the education the people, the students are taught in, again, breath and movement, the work with breath vowels and consonants, individual sessions and pedagogic, how to learn, how to create, how to build a lesson. But first, for example, the first 60 minutes, the first ten hours, what is important when I start, when I'm teaching, with which exercise or form I should start. What is the topic or the theme of an hour or what is important when I'm teaching breath and pelvis ground, breath and back ground, breath and my back breath spaces. For students, it is very exciting, it is very interesting and yes, they like it because now at this time they are able a bit the first time to stay there where the teacher has stood for one year or 1½ years and they know it's different to be on the other side. And ja, this is for all, for all people. It is very interesting because for most of them they realise, they notice, that you can talk a lot, but a good student will, a good teacher will realise if you are really in the breath, if you are really in the work. It's not important to speak about the work but it's very important to show the work. Ja and this is very important pedagogic and when they finish their education they have to show that they have gained a good understanding of teaching a group, even though it's not easy because you can't step back and cover yourself behind words. Everybody will know that you cover yourself behind words. You have to show yourself. Ja, this is the pedagogic and of course the theory. It's important psychology and physiognomy.
5. **John:** Physiology? Physiognomy?
6. **Dieter:** Physiognomy is important but...
7. **John:** People need to know the way the body works.
8. **Dieter:** Right, the way the body works.
9. **John:** The structure and the function of the skeleton and the muscles and the nervous system and all that sort of ...
10. **Dieter:** Yes and they should have a base in psychology. Our work is not psychology, it is body breath work and psychology is only important that students have a base, an idea about special topics. The basics of C.G Jung for example is important for our work, or other psychology directions, but I repeat, our work is not a psychology and who is interested to go deeper, you can read in your own opinion about the psychology. But I will ... ja, my point is that a breath teacher of course is an intelligent teacher. He has a good knowledge, good knowledge about psychology, and ja, a lot of things that people should know. The

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main point is that he has not only the knowledge but ja, he is able to let the breath in his body, in his soul. This is the main point for the breath teacher. He should know, or better he should have experienced this and if he is experienced in this point, in this ground, in this space, he is really a good breath teacher. Also it's not ... it's OK, it's not a mistake, it's not false when you read books about psychology, but I think it's not a must.

11. **John:** I'm not quite clear whether you're saying that there is some ground, some sort of basic psychology ground covered in the course, covered in the training, or not? I know that there is a requirement that people understand the structure and function of the body so they have to know basic anatomy and physiology, but are you saying that they have to understand basic psychology as well?
12. **Dieter:** Ja.
13. **John:** So there is, this is part of the work that's covered in the training?
14. **Dieter:** It's covered in psychology, in the topic psychology.
15. **John:** Right. And someone does teach this.
16. **Dieter:** Right. It's a special teacher. Normally it's a psychologist. He or she has an education as a psychologist and it's very helpful for the team, for the Middendorf team, when the psychologist get or got in touch with body work, body therapy, or better that he or she could with the breath work because we didn't and we don't want to have only a psychologist in theory. It's not the same as in university – our students wouldn't want to be taught like a psychologist teaches a student at the university. It's not only the theory. We want that the psychologist is able to speak about the basics — Jung, Freud, Adler, Perls and what is helpful for leading a group, or what could be in a group when there is a conflict, so the base. But it should be connected with the bodywork. Not only the theory: it is good but for us, for the students, but it is not the real thing.
17. **John:** It makes me wonder whether there is also some, when it comes to people doing the hands on, the individual work, I can imagine that sometimes someone comes to you for individual work and they have various problems and some of them may be psychological problems, its useful to have some grounding in psychology to understand, to be able to say to this person, well, yes, its possible to stay with the breath and ...
18. **Dieter:** Right, right.
19. **John:** Is that something that you address particularly in ... you're saying that there's this ... that the psychology partly covers the psychology of group work which I can see is important. And in the individual stuff as well?
20. **Dieter:** Right, right. Psychologists will speak about these topics but the breath teacher, too.
21. **John:** Yes, of course.
22. **Dieter:** You know one level is how to learn the individual work and we start to learn with the individual work in the second level. Not in the first level because (we means Middendorf Institute) we are of the opinion that it's good that you, at first you are taught in breath and movements and breath and vowels and then you learn to work with your hands, how to create an individual session. Sometimes people came to the workshops on weekend, five day workshop, and they ask Ilse or other breath teachers, OK, I'm very keen to learn the individual work because I need it for my work. I am a body therapist in a special way and I am so interested to learn the individual work. You can't learn the individual work in one week or five months, you really have to do the whole education.
23. But back to the topic when clients are coming to the breath teacher with problems. Of course the breath teacher at the Middendorf Institute, and I think at other breath institutes too, are well experienced to speak to the students. The questions will come. One year before the end of the education, the students have a lot of questions. For example, what can I do when I feel it is a neurotic person? What can I do when I feel it's a person with depression? How can I see, how can I realise that there is a projection? And of course the breath teacher will speak and he will work to these topics. He will speak

and he will, when it's possible, how to work with people who have body problems, or a soul or a mental problem. But every well experienced breath teacher will say there's a line. When a breath teacher realises it is better that the student or the patient or client should go to a therapist, or to a psychologist we should say as quick as possible we are not a therapist, we are not a psychologist. The breath is able to create, to work, to heal a lot of bad things but there are situations where it's better that ja, the client or student should go to a psychologist or therapist. So the breath teacher will speak and work these topics. The students, every student, is not a young man, not only twelve, fifteen years. Most of them are, I don't know, the age is 30 or 35, and 40, 45, 50. And people bring a lot of life experiences. They are father, mother, they were working for 10, 20 years. We seldom have absolutely greenhorns in our seminars, so a lot of people are streetwise, ja, see what I mean. And don't forget that the breath, the Experience of Breath will bring a process and education 4 or 5 years. In this time a lot of unconsciousness, things and powers and possibilities of the students will get ripe and ja, the process will be helpful to see for a breath teacher or breath students what's to do and what's not to do. But it is very clear after the education it needs a couple of years again. Two, five, seven, eight years. Like in other programs, you practise things that you are working in the individual sessions, that you are leading groups and of course when you finish the education, you have the base, you are not a master. You have your good students and after five, ten years you will realise that your breath experiences are growing up and that the problems or these topics we just spoke about in the last 15 minutes together, John and me, you will see and discover more and more what you can do with your person, with people are building at their soul, at their mind or their mental. You will see this better and quicker and your work I'm sure is going better and better.

24. **John:** When people finish the training as you say, they are at a certain level, but is there any kind of, is there postgraduate work, is there follow-up for people, is

there support for people who want to set up their own practice? I suppose there must be a lot of graduates around Berlin.

25. **Dieter:** Well, at the Middendorf Institute, I think, and the other institutes it's nearly the same, it's good when the students who finish the education come after 6 or 9 months to 3 or 4 sessions after the end of the education, because after 6 or 7,8, 9 months there are questions from the work. 'I work with a group and then I have a problem because I had a woman and I couldn't work because . . .' and after a while it's good that there are meetings at the Institute. And this is a postgraduate, I don't know, postgraduate, maybe you can call it postgraduate. This is one form we offer at the Middendorf Institute, 3 or 4 meetings for young breath teachers who are ready. We offer a form to discuss and to work it out, ja, in the form of supervision, in the form of breath and movement, in the form of discussions. Sometimes a teacher offers, too, a special topic, breath and movement. For example, a colleague of mine, a young colleague had problems. There were women in her group and these women had problems with her border. These women have had bad experiences because other persons, father or other man were crossing in an ugly way their border. See what I mean? And so a psychologist would, normal psychologist would talk about this, and for a lot of people this is a good way. I'm not against psychology or therapy. This is a good way. Because not everybody is able to go the breath path, so it's very helpful. But you can work this topic with breath and movement, for example. You can create, you can offer the breath teacher this topic, border, borderline, crossing the borderline. What is my border? What is the border of the other person? I know then, my mother and sister. You can do that without speaking because it is, my opinion is that it's not helpful when you do two things at the same time, psychology and breath work. Either you are teaching in psychology or you are working with breath and movement. But to do both at the same time, my experience is, it doesn't work. But you can offer breath and movement. You can have partnerships and you can find out, your students, what is going on when your

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partner is coming closer and closer or the distance is bigger. So what I mean, you can offer to, not for every but for nearly every topic, you can offer working with the breath and the postgraduate students, most of them don't want to speak for the whole time. They want work. They want to be experienced in breath and movement. To read good books they can do it alone or with friends, or at the university. They come here to make experiences with the breath. And of course there are seminars and courses in other institutes too. For advanced colleagues, for example, Ilse offered I think two times a year weekends for advanced colleagues. I think Erica Kemman does the same that she offers and offered seminars and courses for advanced breath colleagues. And of course every time you can make an appointment with an experienced breath teacher and call him or her — 'I have a problem, I need supervision'. I know three, four, five good, really good experienced breath teachers who offer a good supervision, breath work.

26. **John:** Yes. I imagine that's the advantage in some ways of being in Berlin.
27. **Dieter:** Ja.
28. **John:** There's a very big community of the breath.
29. **Dieter:** Ja, there is.
30. **John:** Whereas some other places, it's not so. Just to go back in a little bit more detail about the training. I can understand the first part and the way it's set up in Berlin. You do breath and movement work and vowel space, consonant, vowel work. And the work is mainly about yourself. For me it's myself, my breath, becoming more in touch with my own breath, becoming more aware of my own breath, becoming more able to perceive it in more subtle ways, maybe. How do you tell if someone is ready for the next part? So, yes, I'm interested in the process, but also whatever you can say about how you make an assessment of whether a person is ready for the second part of the training. I know that some people obviously would say 'I don't want to go on. This is enough for me', or 'I don't feel ready'. But you may also think, well you're
- not ready, even for someone that says, 'yes I'd like to go on'.
31. **Dieter:** Ja. You know we are meeting at the Middendorf Institute every two weeks, or every three weeks and we are speaking about the education plans. We are speaking about what the topics for the students. We are speaking about the students, when there are troubles with the students. Of course the real thing between students and breath teachers, the deep secret is a secret and the breath teacher won't speak about the details. But on the other hand it is important, it's necessary that the breath teacher who is working in the individual work, and you know that when you are working alone with one person it is closer and the contact is deeper and the dialogue is deeper and it's more private. And you will see more because as a breath teacher you have only one student you are working with and not 15 or 20. We are speaking about the teacher and when a breath colleague has had the opinion that there could be problems for the second level, we discussed this topic, we discussed this scene. And we ask ourselves if it's good. Is it helpful when the students continue the breath work with second level? There were situations that we spoke to the person and we offered that it's better to, for example, to do therapy. In the same way, or to wait and to repeat the education. Very often we trusted in the breath, and very often, very often, we were right, that, ja, the breath could help. Ja, in a lot of, 80, 90 or more than 90 percent, we were right, but sometimes it happens that people have had a good, have made a good process and suddenly there were a bad process, too. But back to your question, we discuss together and we spoke or speak with the person and when we think it's better she or he should wait, we told her or him our opinion. Ja.
32. **John:** The reasons that you might think that someone wasn't ready to do the second part, what are the possible reasons?
33. **Dieter:** Well of course, for people who are not really interested in the breath work. People working as a body therapist, and they thought, oh, it's good to take this in my profession. It's good, ja, it's good to



work with the Experience of Breath, too, and they wanted to have it but they are not really deep, they were not really deeply interested in the work. Or people who have done a lot of things in their life, a lot of therapy, and a lot of body workshops and they've heard from the Middendorf Experience of Breath and for some people it is only the twentieth path to try, or the twenty fifth path to try, a bit like window shopping, see what I mean. They think it's nice, and good, but they are not really interested to jump into the water. They think it's enough when I put some water drops on my skin, but they don't realise that they have to jump into the water. People who have problems with their mind, with their mental, with their soul, we have to speak.

34. **John:** When you speak of problems with their soul, I take you to be referring to kind of psychiatric problems, that might be called, if someone was say schizophrenic, would you regard that as a problem of the soul?
35. **Dieter:** Right, ja, ja.
36. **John:** Because when you speak about mental problems, you mean kind of people with um, people who are very slow or retarded, or whatever. I'm not sure quite what the words, you're differentiating between mental problems and problems of the soul. Which is good, I like it.
37. **Dieter:** Ja. People who are suffering, really suffering, who really have hard problems. Not, it's not a joke, not a normal neurotic behaviour, but really hard problems like psychosomatic schizophrenia or manic depressive, or really hard depressive. Sometimes people, when they discover their body they think, oh I am depressive. They are not depressive, they are sometimes in a bad mood, or they are sad, but they are not depressive. Or I am psychotic, or I have, I don't know ... sometimes the result when you are looking too much to yourself, you think you have illnesses everywhere. There are of course a huge difference between a normal sadness and a hard depression. And ja, that's what I mean when your soul is very like people with a psychotic illness. Sometimes at first you don't realise that the person is a psychotic person. But sometimes you can realise this when you are working with hands on. You perceive as a breath teacher, there is something wrong. I don't know what is wrong, but the breath is not normal with the signs. What's going on with the person? It's not, there's something wrong with the rhythm, with the breath rhythm. And so you feel, you see, that there's something wrong, and as more you are experienced, as more you have an idea, or you have the experiences because you were working with 10, 15, 20 or 30 psychotic persons. And it's sometimes every people is an individual people, but it's like a red line that you can compare between, like you can compare people with a hard psychotic illness. You can compare it and you feel, ah, yes, I know this feeling. I know this kind of breath. And you've got an idea. Ja, but a normal mental problem is different from a hard, deep soul illness.
38. **John:** So what would you regard as a normal mental problem? Are you talking about a normal neurosis?
39. **Dieter:** Maybe, ja, like, like this. For example, just a moment. Everybody has his own biography and has had his own family and has his own character and everybody has his own behaviour. Something you spoke about some people seeing a situation in another way, like his neighbour. Some people is quick, or some is more slow. Some people are focused to see in another way like the other persons, ja.
40. **John:** Even though it's a little bit off the track of what I was interested in talking to you about, it's a very interesting kind of area in itself. Have you found with people who are near that red line of psychosis, that they've found that the breath work is helpful for them?
41. **Dieter:** Ja. This is a really special topic, but I will give an answer. I have worked with some of them in the last 13 years I am working as a breath teacher. And I've heard from colleagues and from Ilse Middendorf that it is able, but there are more people you can't work with than people you can work with. When you are not sure, when you are not experienced, you should end the work. You should end the session at once and either you have

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supervision with an experienced breath colleague or you know a good psychologist or therapist. You really have to be very experienced. It is possible, but you have to find working with a psychotic person, the healthy ground. You have to find the point that you can grip to the special point. If you can't grip, I'll be with this picture, you grip, and grip, and you have no point where you can fix your grip – you shouldn't do it. You shouldn't work with a psychotic person because that is dangerous and it could be very painful. It could be very dangerous for a psychotic person, because normally we breath teachers are working in a discovering way and with a person who is ill in his soul, you have to see if it's good to work in a discovering way, or maybe it's better when you re-cover. Re-cover the problem, re-cover the fire, the illness in the person. To discover, it can be helpful, but it can push the fire, it can push the illness in the people. And you have to find a balance and ask yourself, isn't it better when I work in recovery? When I'm not working so deep, when I'm working more on the surface. Ja.

42. **John:** Yes, good. Yes, I can see that could be a whole area in itself. Just to go back to the training again. You refer to topics, are there a limited list of topics that you cover in the training?
43. **Dieter:** Yes, of course. There is a colloquium, of course. There is a colloquium, and there are topics, see what I mean?
44. **John:** I think I know, a description?
45. **Dieter:** There's a plan of the course, a plan of what you have to work, which topics do we have to work with the students? For example, the three spaces, the centres, directions, the caverns, or the bones, or the organs, or inside/outside, my back, my front side. Ja, see what I mean. These are, all of this we call colloquium, this education plan, from the beginning to the end when they finish their education. And the most of them cover every topic. Most of them, so that you have a good feeling that the students are leaving the Institute, most important topics you have to work.
46. **John:** There must be some, obviously some order in which those topics are covered, some you would start with. I know I've done the beginnings a number of times and it's very common to begin with the lower space.
47. **Dieter:** For example, you start with perception, with perceiving. You start with the base, with the back, with the pelvis, with the ground of the pelvis, you start with the upright breath. You start with easy partner work, and you end your education with the cosmic form or free form of breath and movement or breath as substance.
48. **John:** Are you talking about now a particular, are you talking about a whole 3, 5 year education.
49. **Dieter:** Right, ja.
50. **John:** Or a 5 day? You have done with us at the end of a 5 day workshop, the cosmic form.
51. **Dieter:** The cosmic form is a cosmic form. Two kinds of shoes. Well, 5 years or 4 years training, ja, you have, I don't know I can't tell you, 30, 50, 80 topics.
52. **John:** Are they actually listed somewhere? Can I read somewhere the topics?
53. **Dieter:** Normally not because you're not a teacher of the breath, not a breath teacher at the Ilse Middendorf Institute. I can look, I think I have the paper. You can have a look. Tomorrow I can show it to you. It's not a secret.
54. **John:** Obviously there are a big number of possible topics over that time.
55. **Dieter:** And let me say it, you learn to discover your body, your breath, your rhythm, and the end is that you are able to be moved by and with your breath, that you are able to find a free form, that you are able to express yourself. And all the topics are part of a process that you are getting ripe to allow your breath, that the breath moves you and the breath is speaking to you, that you get an awareness of what the breath is doing with you. Sometimes students say, you give us form, you give us an exercise. I think it's better when I sit here on the stool and wait what the breath is doing. It's naïve. Maybe you feel moved with and by your breath after 5 minutes, or maybe you are waiting for a month or for a year,

so we, or Ilse, has found and grounded this work. When I say we, it is Ilse *and* the breath teacher. We had and we have a good reason that we offer the different topics. We work with covering direction, the back, the lungs, the arms, the bones, the breath in joints, that the whole person again and again get a new kick, a new idea, a new push in a good way.

56. **John:** A good impulse.
57. **Dieter:** Ja, a good impulse. Like we are going into a ball from different side, from the south, from the north, from right.
58. **John:** A ball?
59. **Dieter:** Ja. Every time we, our direction is straight to the centre, and ja, ja, it's like mathematics. It's not only plus, minus and whatever. It is so complex and so, the work Ilse Middendorf has created is so complex.
60. **John:** Thank you. This is on a different kind of track now. I'm interested to hear from you of any experiences that you've had of working with people who are actors, singers, performers. Obviously I'm partly interested in the connection of the breath work, the work with the Experience of Breath, the connection between that and voice. And I know that there's a level at which it's directly connected through the vowel space work. But the vowel space work is not *about* the voice. It's about the breath. So I'm not sure quite what I'm asking. It seems to me very clear when ... for me a lot of the time I'm interested in working with the voice when I'm working with students, but nonetheless, the work with the breath provides a very good ground, foundation for working with the voice. And sometimes not focusing on the voice at all, but just doing some breath work can change the voice, just like that. So I'm interested in anything you've got to say to me about the connection of the breath work to voice or just experiences that you've had in working with people who particularly use their voices, such as actors and singers and who knows what else. Public speakers, anyone who uses their voice. Is that clear what I'm saying?
61. **Dieter:** Let me start with the following. You know that Ilse Middendorf worked at a Berlin University for more than 10 years

and she was working with actors, singers. It was so helpful for singers and for the actors that ja, she got a title of a Professor at the University. It was like a welcome from the University for this really good work with actors and singers. My experience is I like to work with actors and singers because normally a singer or an actor is a person with a body knowledge. Is normally an intelligent person and intelligent is for me not only intelligent in mind, but body intelligence. Normally an actor before he started the education and during the education, an actor is doing a lot of body training. And when an actor came to me it was to see and to feel that the person, actor, has knowledge, awareness about her or his body. So the body is not a strange thing for an actor. Very often people coming to the courses, to the individual work and to the group, they have never had contact with their arm, with their back. Women very often told that the only contact they knew is as sexual contact, when they were sexual, or when women and men sleep together. Women feel only moved when man wanted to have sex with a woman and ja, you know from both, men movement it's not a special thing. Normally men have more sense for movement. But for actors and singers this is different. OK. They normally understand very quick what's going on, what they should do, or what they shouldn't, and they are not shy like a normal person. They are not shy to move him or herself, or to let sound into the room. This is all very good and very fine and very helpful.

62. But often an actor or singer don't understand that they are not on stage. It's not a situation that an actor has a point, and there's the auditorium with the audience, and they think they have to impress the group or impress him or herself, or impress the breath teacher, the leader of the group. And this could be work, for short time, some actors, some singers realise it very quick. Also the understanding, to understand this in the mind, in the head, to have an understanding in the whole body it could be a long way. Or there are actors or singers who don't understand what the breath teacher means, when the breath teacher said 'not too much'. It is not a

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singing when we are working with breath and vowels and consonants. It's not the same like singing. We don't have to give the pressure on your throat. Then the breath teacher offers different possibilities for a singer and actor that they understand that the meaning is not to cry or to give power in the voice.

63. What I have heard, what I have experienced working with singers and actors, that singers and actors told me after couple of hours or couple of seminars or after education (we had ja, again and again, singers and actors who wanted to do the whole training, do the whole education) is that they have a new body feeling, a new body perception. They realise what it means to speak or to sing with less or without effort. Easy in speaking for a teacher, for example. Teachers are speaking for the whole time. Very often we have a teacher in our seminars. They find it easier to sing, to play, to have more consciousness of self. There is less stress. They are singing and speaking with a diaphragm, the most important breath model in a good way, and they can do more with less effort.
64. I remember a student. She finished the education last year in April. From month to month she told me and the other breath teachers that she had the experience that the singing is going lighter and easier. And it's not a must. She enjoys the singing. It's not so stressful. A lot of singers just when they start, when they are greenhorns, they are so full of anxiety, so full of pain that they failed. It's not necessary for a teacher, for actors and singers to do the whole training, but I think a couple of hours, 10, 15, 20 hours working with a singer and actor can be very helpful. I think for all of them it can be a new impulse, a new kick, a new idea, a new awareness, a new consciousness. Ja.
65. **John:** Just to follow that last point through, if you were to think of working with actors for, just say you had a certain amount of time. 20 hours, or...
66. **Dieter:** At least 10, 15.
67. **John:** Would you do the same work as you would with any beginners?
68. **Dieter:** No. The basis is the same. The basis is the same, the basis that there's a breath, there's a perception and the collection. It's these three bases are the same. I don't create in working with an actor a new work. The base is the same. But of course an actor has another wish as, I don't know, as a man working at the computer or as a teacher or as a manager, or as a taxi driver or as working with children, with old men or working as a university professor, teacher. It is his profession and he has an idea what he wants. You have to think about it and you have to think that you will offer special topics, special themes, for example working with the voice, with the throat, with the neck connected with the diaphragm, or the small diaphragm, the pelvis ground. For a while is not so interesting for, I don't know, other people. For singers could be very interesting that the singer realises that the body as an instrument could go more and more permeable for the breath. And a singer and an actor will not be tired when you again and again are working with breath and vowels with the o, a, or small words, or like with a sentence or a poem or a haiku. You can do this with actors and singers and they like it, they have fun with it, but in one word it's a special client group.
69. **John:** Yes, yes.
70. **Dieter:** Because they are working with the breath, singing, acting. This is their life this is their base, the real thing. If they have a bad breath, they are a bad singer, a bad actor and everybody will hear, everybody will feel it, everybody will realise it. It is, I think it is terrible for an actor when the breath isn't in a good balance or when he is working with a good technique but the voice doesn't come from the body, from the pelvis ground, from the feet.
71. I'll give you an example. I had a woman, she came from North Africa, a singer and she was singing with too much effort and too loud. At first we worked the base, of course, and after a couple of hours we had a game together, we had a partnership and she should speak to me, at first only with her throat. Only speaking to me, we had a distance of 3 or 4 metres only with the throat. And she

realised, because she was experienced after 5 or 6 sessions we had together, that she spoke only from her throat. And she missed her back, she missed her pelvis. And then she spoke to me with her sternum, and then with the back and then with the whole body from the pelvis ground, from the feet. Speak to me and then sing to me from your feet like a good curve. Let the breath in. It's not singing. It's breath vowel work. Wait, and then speak to me as long as your exhale is. From your feet, from your pelvis ground with your back. Not for long, not loud, but try to reach me. And then imagine that I am 10 metres or 20 metres far away. The whole body from the feet, pelvis, back, fingertips. And then next step is that she should speak and sing with her normal singing voice. It was no longer the breath vowel work. And she should be, should have a good awareness about her body, her breath, on the feet, the whole. And she likes this, she came for a while and then she was pregnant and she interrupted, and a couple of weeks ago she told me, oh, Dieter, in 4 weeks I get my children. What can I do? And in 30, 45 minutes I gave her on the telephone. But you see, with another actor, singer you find a similar or another work, but it is interesting, it is special to work with a singer. But I repeat it, make sure that it's working with the breath, with the Experience of Breath. It is not that an actor or a singer should show a good attitude. Maybe they need the attitude when they play Shakespeare or singing the Aida from Verdi? Maybe, I don't know, but working with the breath, the perceptible or the Experience of Breath, is to realise, oh, this is an attitude. Make sure that it is authentic breath movement or it is an attitude or a mixture? Very often it is a mixture but you should get an awareness what is authentic and what is more an attitude – I want to be good, I want to impress.

72. **John:** I'm familiar with how difficult that can be.
73. **Dieter:** Ja.
74. **John:** The example you were giving me of this woman, this African woman. This was an individual session.
75. **Dieter:** It was an individual session
76. **John:** So you would also do the hands on work?
77. **Dieter:** No, I don't. The individual session is not only for the person lying on the breath table. She was experienced as a member of a group and you know the individual session is, there's a possibility that women and men are lying on the table, and I work with my hands and we had a talk, a dialogue, but very often it isn't possible. Or I, or the breath teacher realises it's better to sit on the stool and to work with vowels, with consonants, or it's better to make the same as in the group, but only with one person. That a person sometimes don't come into her or his pelvis, and the person lay on the bed and you are working and working. And so it's better to say get up and stretch yourself, have a vital form, sit down on the stool please and then have a good movement with your pelvis on the stool. This can be helpful and ja, and then when you find it's a good moment then, you can say ok, that's very fine, would you please lay on the table again, please, or you go on with the work on the stool or standing or a partner form. Ja, I told you after 5 or 6 sessions she laid on the breath table. It was a time that we took the next step in a room with a partner. In another, she was lying and I was the breath teacher. It was another relation. This is another breath topic, too. This is another relation as when she is standing there in the room and we had a distance of 5 or 6 metres. Ja, at first she was working in a process with and for herself and I could help her, and then the next step, the next development was that she stood in the room. She has a good standing and she tried to start a good dialogue with herself and with me.
78. Or you are working with a person and it isn't able to touch the person. There was a trauma, there was a bad situation or whatever, then it is better to talk to the client or I think it is better that you get up. At first we can have a talk or we can have a glass of water or you can tell me more about your life, or about your profession or about your man or woman, or children. Maybe it is more helpful to let her or him speak, to work on the stool. Ja, you have to see what it, an individual session it is

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not *per se* that the client, the students lay down on the breath table.

79. **John:** So it's really you, the breath teacher's judgement about what is right for this moment, what would be most helpful for this person to come more into contact with their own breath?
80. **Dieter:** Ja, ja.
81. **John:** Yes. Good. That's very good because I just had the impression so far because my only experience of the individual work has been lying down.
82. **Dieter:** Ja, at this moment it wasn't necessary to work in another way.
83. **John:** It's been very interesting. But I can certainly appreciate that yes there's lots of ways you could work with an individual. And that sounds a lot more like some of the work I do with individual people when I work one to one with the voice. Yes, the same sorts of thing. My experience with my own singing teacher was that she worked very much with the traditional teacher line. She would have me sing something, and repeat it and repeat it until I got what she heard was just right. And when I did get what she heard as right, for me, it was very easy. I found this place of ease and I think it's the same. You can work through the breath to find that. It's fantastic. Thank you very much.

## Appendix J: Group workshop dates and participant numbers

<p><b>First series, May – August 2004</b></p>	
<p><b>Main Stream</b></p> <p>Saturday 1 May – 12 participants</p> <p>Sunday 2 May – 11</p> <p>Thursday 6 May – 4</p> <p>Sunday 9 May – 13</p> <p>Sunday 16 May – 5</p> <p>Sunday 23 May – 10</p> <p>Sunday 30 May – 6</p> <p>Sunday 6 June – 8</p> <p>Sunday 13 June – 7</p> <p>Sunday 20 June – 5</p> <p>Sunday 27 June – 5</p>	<p><b>Tuesday ‘advanced’ Stream</b></p> <p>Tuesday 27 April – 4 participants</p> <p>Tuesday 4 May – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 11 May – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 18 May – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 25 May – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 1 June – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 8 June – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 15 June – 5</p> <p>Tuesday 22 June – 2</p> <p>Tuesday 29 June – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 27 July – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 3 August – 3</p>
<p><b>Second series, August – September 2004</b></p> <p>Saturday 7 August – 6 participants</p> <p>Sunday 8 August – 6</p> <p>Tuesday 10 August – 5</p> <p>Tuesday 17 August – 7</p> <p>Tuesday 24 August – 5</p> <p>Tuesday 31 August – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 7 September – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 14 September – 4</p> <p>Tuesday 21 September – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 28 September – 3</p>	
<p><b>Third series October – December 2004</b></p> <p>Tuesday 26 October – 3 participants</p> <p>Tuesday 2 November – 2</p> <p>Tuesday 9 November – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 16 November – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 23 November – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 30 November – 2</p> <p>Tuesday 7 December – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 14 December – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 21 December – 3</p>	<p><b>Fourth series February – March 2005</b></p> <p>Tuesday 8 February – 3 participants</p> <p>Tuesday 15 February – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 22 February – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 1 March – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 8 March – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 15 March – 3</p> <p>Tuesday 22 March – 3</p>





## Appendix K: Breath principles and experiential possibilities

In the understanding of practitioners of Middendorf breathwork the perceptible breath has regularities, which I call here 'breath principles', that are regarded as universal although subject to individual patterns. Sometimes these principles are stated in the form of 'experiential possibilities', encompassing both the principle and the understanding that the breath is subject to personal history. I emphasize that this list is my own, and although it was built in dialogue with teachers of the work, I do not claim that it is comprehensive. The principles and experiential possibilities include:

- 1 each breath cycle – inhalation, exhalation, pause – is different;
- 2 the breath responds to everything that happens to a person, so the breath cycle reflects this myriad of inner and outer events;
- 3 each person has their own breath rhythm;
- 4 when the breath is allowed to come and go on its own, breath, presence, and sensation come together;
- 5 inhalation can be experienced as creating (a sense of) space and permeability for the breath in the body, associated with receptivity, openness, surrender;
- 6 exhalation can be experienced as creating (a sense of ) direction (flow, connection) in the body, associated with a sense of resolve, clarity, and settling down;
- 7 the pause can be experienced as associated with a sense of trust, with being carried and supported;
- 8 inhalation and exhalation complement one another (with regard to space and direction or connection); in particular, when I receive my inhalation in the lower space I can experience an uprising exhalation; when I receive my inhalation in the upper space I can experience a downflowing exhalation; when I receive my inhalation in the middle space I can experience a horizontal exhalation;
- 9 it is the nature of inhalation that it wants to serve every cell in the body simultaneously; inhalation can be experienced as being received everywhere in the body all at once, and the complementary exhalation can be experienced as moving in to the centre;
- 10 the qualities of breath movement in the lower, middle, and upper spaces can be experienced as different from one another – the qualities of breath movement in the lower space include strength, power, animal nature, impulsiveness, darkness; the qualities of breath movement in the middle space include a sense of personal nature; the qualities of breath movement in the upper space lightness, mental clarity, 'spirit';

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- 11 breath spaces can be experienced as having a centre;
- 12 being present with my exhalation as it returns to the centre of a breath space can engender an experience of substance in that space (rather than emptiness); likewise if I receive my inhalation in the centre of a breath space I can experience substance in that space;
- 13 breath encompasses oneness, orienting to the whole person; this supports balancing and healing; my participation in (versus observing, being abstracted from) the breath, promotes integration. Orientation to breath rather than to conflict or pain helps resolve the conflict or pain;
- 14 the hands, feet, and face can be experienced as 'maps' of the whole body (can represent the whole being). Particular 'pressure points' (which seem to be concentrations of nerve endings) can be experienced as connected to particular breath spaces;
- 15 pressing a 'pressure point' stimulates the breath (usually, but not always, the inhalation);
- 16 each vowel refers to a specific breath space in the body – (see Middendorf 1990, 63–72) – which can be experienced in the silent contemplation of the vowel as well as with its gentle sounding;
- 17 consonants form 'accentuations, centerings, drives, connections, and loosening in the body's cavity' (Middendorf 1990, 68, retranslated from the German by Roffler);

## Appendix L: Crampton, H. (2002): 'Pioneers of modernism II - the new theorists'

*No longer available on the internet. I sent a copy in an email to Crampton who replied: 'It is a lecture I gave in the first year of the offering of the Movement and Dance in Contemporary Theatre subject available in alternate years as part of the Theatre Studies Program in the Bachelor of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne. I had no idea it had been put up on the net - with spelling errors and all and absolutely no references - I am shocked.'* Personal correspondence 7.6.06

### SCHOOL OF CREATIVE ARTS

Bachelor of Creative Arts

760-230/358

Dance & Movement in Contemporary Theatre

Week 3

Pioneers of Modernism II - The New Theorists

Hilary Crampton

In the words of the song popularised in the Australian film *Strictly Ballroom* there was definitely something in the air in late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century trans-atlantic culture. And the link between this brassily cheeky film and that period of history is not as tenuous as one might think. *Strictly Ballroom* is based upon the real life experience of Keith Bain who had his first introduction to "concert dance" through Gertrud Bodenweiser. Bodenweiser was a pioneer of modern dance in Vienna. As a result of World War II she became stranded in Australia and chose to remain here, where she and many members of her company set up schools and had a significant influence on the birth of modern dance in Australia. Her influence lives on through the students she taught here. Both Kirsty Reilly and I have been students of Keith - and so the heritage continues.

The reason I tell you this is because it helps to understand the itinerant behaviour of dancers and why there might be so much cross fertilisation. Later in the semester, Lee will talk to you about the diaspora - or the spread of dance and dancers from European and American origins to other countries, and the implications that has for the everchanging styles of contemporary dance.

Lee spoke to you in the first lecture about a number of radical women, Isadora Duncan (1878-1927), Loie Fuller (1862-1928) and Ruth St. Denis (20/1/1877-21/7/1968), all originating from the United States. History often categorises these women as the rebels and precursors of modern dance. While they rebelled against the dominant status quo of performance dance, and succeeded in carving considerable reputations for themselves, they did not leave behind an inheritance of choreographed works or particular dance technique. Their significant influence was the way in which they liberated the dancemakers of the future to imagine a different sort of dance to the hackneyed and uninventive form that ballet had degenerated into at that period, in Europe, an excuse for the men to ogle women, as they performed meaningless technical tricks.

It is significant that these women were American, they had access to a more liberal education, and a tendency towards independent thinking than was not to be found in young European women at that period. While neither Fuller nor Duncan were well received in their home country, there is no doubt that had they been born in Europe they would have had neither the upbringing nor education to dare to forge the paths they each took.

## Appendix L

But while Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis were busy breaking down tired old conventions, in Europe there were a number of men who were seeking to build theories about the relationship between action and expression - what they were seeking were definitive forms that would provide both a framework in which to study action, and a spring board for new creative endeavours in dance.

The first of these figures is a Frenchman called François Delsarte (1811-1871). As we can see his life pre-dates the emergence of modern dance, and he was not a dancer, but originally a singer, the survivor of a tragic childhood. As a result of bad training his voice was ruined, but he went on to establish a system for identifying the bodily and vocal attributes of expression, gaining an extraordinary reputation as a teacher, and receiving favours from royalty. John Zorn has published a collection of papers by former pupils and by Delsarte himself which make for wonderfully melodramatic reading. The quote I have given as a handout is but one example of the florid approach to the dramatic art taken by Delsarte. Like Duncan and Fuller, Delsarte himself did not document his work in great detail. It was left to his students, several of whom were American, to further develop his theories into a manner of teaching oratory and physical expression.

Ted Shawn, later husband to Ruth St. Denis, and one of America's pioneers of modern dance made a life time mission of tracing the influence of Delsarte and his students. What becomes evident in Shawn's book *Every Little Movement*, is the intense competition by each of Delsarte's followers to claim authenticity for the way they interpreted his theories.

The key to Delsarte's theories were his observations of everyday action, and then his analytical breakdown of the way each part of the body was displayed in relation to the expressive intent of the overall action. This included minutely detailed analysis of the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the incline of the head, the arms, hands and fingers, the torso and the legs.

While we might wonder how such detail could lead to a greater degree of naturalism in dramatic expression, nevertheless what seems evident is that Delsarte and others who followed were seeking an escape from an overly artificial style of performance.

### **Emil Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950)**

Jacques-Dalcroze was a musician and music teacher who established a system of exercises known as Eurythmics. While initially his ideas related to helping his music students to experience within their bodies the rhythms of the music they attempted to play, his methods have been expanded and adapted to include rhythmic exercises to music for children, for dancers and for general recreation. He invented a theory of moving plastic which shows fairly strong images in the Isadora Duncan style of movement.

Through a series of fortunate accidents his ideas could be said to have had an impact upon Vaslav Nijinsky of whom Lee spoke in the first week, and on Nijinsky's sister, choreographer of *Les Noces*, of which you saw a small excerpt. A young Polish woman, Marie Rambert (1888-1982), attended Jacques-Dalcroze's classes in Geneva. In 1913 she was invited to join Diaghilev's Ballet Russes to assist Nijinsky in his choreography of *Sacres du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring), and to coach the dancers in the intricacies of Igor Stravinsky's complex musical score. It was Rambert's task to assist Nijinsky in identifying the complex polyrhythms, and then assisting the dancers to hear and adhere to the rhythms as they danced.

The result of Rambert's time with the Ballets Russes was a lifetime of dedication to ballet, the founding of Ballets Rambert in England (now known as the Rambert Dance Company)

and a commitment to the fostering of new work, gathering around her collaborators from all the arts. In addition, the teaching of Dalcroze Eurythmics was incorporated into curriculum of the Sadlers Wells Ballet School, now known as the Royal Ballet School to enhance the musicality of the young dancers. This ballet school and its parent company were founded by Ninette de Valois, also a former member of Ballets Russes, who would have encountered Dalcroze's work through the guidance of Rambert.

### **Rudolf Laban (1879-1958)**

Rudolf Laban was the child of a well to do family, citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was exposed to a mix of cultures and religious influences in his childhood that ultimately led to a strongly mystical leaning, and a belief in the notion of external forces acting upon and shaping our lives. From fairly early in his life he was something of a rebel and also a leader.

He decided to pursue the career of an artist wishing "to join people who seemed to him to have a sense of responsibility and a means to reawaken the soul of the embattled city-dweller" (Preston-Dunlop 1987). With a small allowance he moved to Paris, and quickly became embroiled in the Bohemian life-style. He later moved to Munich which, prior to World War I, was becoming a centre for the arts. Preston-Dunlop writes:

the "city was the arena for theoretical and practical experiments in a kind of theatre that placed an unparalleled emphasis on dance. The Munich trend can be seen as a striking contrast to the innovations in ballet initiated by Diaghilev for his Ballets Russes in Paris....There the chic and the shocking joined forces for opera audiences, whereas in Munich simplicity and corporeality were the call" (1998-18).

In the beginning his experiments were more related to rhythm and movement, influenced by his observations of the work of Jacques-Dalcroze, but these expanded to theoretical explications of the scales of movement that he believed human bodies perform in space, an attempt to discover a "rule-governed base to movement as one of man's fundamental modes of communication" (Preston-Dunlop 1998:37). He used the three dimensional form - the icosahedron to illustrate the expressive qualities of the spatial scale. Later he developed a system for analysing the use of force or energy and how to employ this in expressive action. Still later he developed a system of movement notation that has been widely adopted internationally.

All the evidence suggests that Laban was a strongly charismatic personality. He lived amongst an avant-garde group of artists, and became involved with those rebels at the Café Voltaire in Zurich, the Dada-ists.

Laban's theories had strong appeal for a group of people wanting to abandon the theatricality and artificiality of ballet, and look for a form of dance that was uncluttered and that could speak of deep issues. He soon attracted a number of artists who became seminal in the development of a Germanic strand of modern dance, such as Mary Wigman, Hanya Holm, Kurt Jooss, Sigurd Leeder and others.

These artists were strongly committed to the notion that all men were equal. Laban became involved in working with the employees of various large industrial firms, engaging them in rhythmic action based upon his theories, and developing massive performances of what became known as movement choirs. His work proved popular in the early days of Germany's Third Reich, attracting the attention of Goebbels and Hitler, who engaged him in creating a number of events as part of the cultural supplement of the 1936 Olympic Games.

## Appendix L

However, on attending the dress rehearsal before the launch of this work Hitler was profoundly displeased, with the content which he found too intellectual, believing that it did not reflect the ideals of National Socialism.

As a result of Hitler's displeasure Laban fell into disfavour, eventually escaping from Germany and finding his way to England where former students and friends supported him. From then onwards his life was based in England, and as a result England became a centre for the work of many members of the German Expressionist dance movement including Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder. Many of them were of Jewish origin and were forced to flee Nazi persecution. But the impact of the war on the rise of German modern dance curtailed its flowering. It is only in the last two or three decades that German dance has given rise to new and distinctive voices - the most noteworthy being Pina Bausch.

However, German Expressionist Dance contributed a great deal to the new wave of dance pioneers, and we shall speak more of those artists who arose from the European school next week.

Laban's influences have been profound - his theories picked up and further developed by his many disciples to ultimately have global impact. In England the Laban Institute of Movement and Dance was established to honour his memory and further the scholarship of his theories - it is where I gained my undergraduate degree, and where I studied with many of his former students.

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