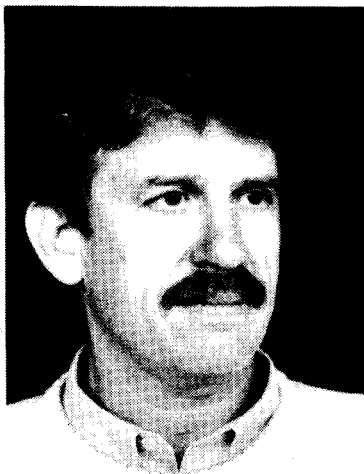




WHAT'S IN A NAME?

by
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Where the word breaks off no thing may be
—Stefan George

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Who are we and why does it matter what we call ourselves?

Naming and Labeling

Ancient and aboriginal peoples all over the planet believed that *Naming* was a creative act of ethical and humanitarian power whereby a thing, process, or experience could be understood, controlled, and appropriated for the benefit of humanity. Naming is not some simple act of merely assigning labels for certain mundane purposes. It is nothing like coming up with silly ear-catching labels designed to sell products. To properly name something is to allow it to manifest or show itself as it truly is to our full-bodied understanding.

A label provides no true understanding of a thing or process. It demarcates nothing essential and provides no clear access to inner originary meanings. Because naming allows a thing to show itself appropriately and truly to our full-bodied understanding, it



lends voice to the fundamental, originary meanings that display a thing's nature and structure. At best, labeling is a useful and/or clever way to distinguish among things that are not in any important way different from each other like brands of toothpaste or lots of material. At worst, it is a manipulative use of language designed to mislead and blur distinctions in order to persuade people to act in ways contrary to their ordinary inclinations. Labeling, then, can be either a convenient value neutral use of language or a manipulative use of language completely lacking in integrity. In contrast, naming is clearly an entirely different use of language. It is an act of understanding and integrity. It permits us to gain an understanding of a thing, process, or experience which in turn allows us to properly and care-fully appropriate it for the benefit of all.

Anyone familiar with the recent history of massage and bodywork in America knows that a great deal of discussion has centered around what to call our extraordinarily diverse and newly emerging professions. Many of us recognize that the word "massage" is not inclusive enough to adequately capture the great diversity of

our field. Energetic practitioners, *Rolfers*®, *Trager*® practitioners, *Feldenkrais*® practitioners, and many others legitimately and correctly assert that they are not massage therapists. In looking for a way to distinguish their work from massage, many of these practitioners, somewhat uncritically and sometimes unconsciously, have adopted the word "bodywork". As a result, the word "bodywork" is gaining some favor throughout the country.

Interestingly, an increasing number of physical therapists also have begun calling themselves bodyworkers in an attempt to distinguish their work from their more traditional colleagues whose hands-on skills are quite limited. I have even heard osteopaths say they do bodywork. Many massage therapists, upon completing more advanced training in corrective techniques, use the word "bodywork" to describe their newly learned way of working in order to distinguish it from massage. The many clients who have experienced both massage and these other forms of intervention use the word "bodywork" to describe the obvious differences between their experience of massage and somatic

practices that are clearly not massage therapy. As a result, significant numbers of people, clients and practitioners both, recognize a legitimate and obvious distinction between practices that are properly named "massage" and practices that are not forms of massage.

All would be well if everyone labeled by the word "bodywork" were satisfied by this designation. With the word "bodywork", we finally would have a way to make the distinctions that our intellect and informed experience tell us really exist. Unfortunately, no such uniform satisfaction exists. Many massage therapists object to the word. And far too many practitioners in functional disciplines like *Feldenkrais* and *Alexander*® work, energetic disciplines like *Polarity*® and *Jin Shin Jyutsu*®, structural disciplines like *Rolfing*, and body centered psychotherapies like *Hakomi*® work find the word "bodywork" completely inappropriate and inadequate for describing what they do.

As one of the original members of the National Certification Council and the Federation of Massage/Bodywork Organizations, I remember many long and circuitous discussions about what to call our-



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elves. Even though all our conversations took place within a wonderful spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, we were never able to come up with a name for the whole field that was satisfactory to all. However, because we all felt it was more important to work together for the good of the whole field than decide on a name, we settled on the rather cumbersome phrase "massage/bodywork". We all recognized the limitations of this phrase, and even



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though a number of us did not consider our individual disciplines a form of bodywork or massage, we agreed to this label willingly. We also agreed to keep the issue of what to call ourselves alive and to continue to re-examine it.

Part of our struggle to find a name is rooted in our struggle to find our identity as we evolve toward becoming viable professions. Obviously, we are not part of any already established health care profession. We are more like a third force situated somewhere between

the chiropractic profession and the traditional medical professions such as physical medicine, physical therapy, and osteopathy. Many of us have gained respect for our work and learned a great deal by joining hands with open-minded, free-thinking individual practitioners from the medical and chiropractic professions. But as a whole we are claimed by no existing profession and in many cases we are shunned and even suppressed by the existing professions.

We are a third force because we are part of an unstoppable revolutionary movement and inquiry into what it means to be an embodied being. This revolutionary inquiry is simultaneously an inquiry into the nature and meaning of wellness and disease. As such, it cuts against the denial of the body and our earthly existence that has dominated Western thinking and philosophy for 2,400 years. The revolution is not simply about the transformation of consciousness. It is about something much more fundamental. It is about the transformation and recovery of our bodies, our embodied-belonging-together-on-the-earth.

We are an important part

of a revolutionary movement that began over a century ago with the advent of existentialism, phenomenology, and the influx of oriental philosophies and practices. The arrival of these new sources of insight and wisdom stimulated the re-discovery of the holistic paradigm in our own Judeo-Christian and ancient traditions. It simultaneously reawakened the age old quest for the transformation and spiritual illumination of the body which is the mystical heart of every religion in the world. The transformation of the body was called metempsychosis by the alchemists and practices devoted to it are found throughout the world in every culture. Part of what is included in this reawakening is the recognition that all transformation *is* the transformation of our human body.

Often the word "transformation" is used interchangeably with the word "change". But the concept of transformation is much different from the concept of change. Practitioners of Qi Gong, Zen meditation, Hindu and Buddhist Tantra, Yoga, the practice of Circulating the Lights developed in medieval alchemy, the exercises created by Saint

Ignatius, and many of today's body-oriented therapies all recognize and insist on this distinction between transformation and change. The philosophical alchemists provide us with an interesting example of how to make this distinction. From medieval Europe to ancient China, the alchemists have always insisted that they were not involved in merely changing one thing into another. Alchemystical transformation was never described by the adepts in the language of chemical change. Transformation, they claimed, does not consist in adding or subtracting chemicals and substances to and from each other in order to produce another kind of substance. In general, transformation is not about changing one thing into another. Transformation is about freeing the essential nature of a thing of person.

Philosophical alchemy is the art of transforming what stands in misery, conflict, fixation, and confusion (often called the prime matter or prima materia) and allowing it to come to presence freely and completely as itself (often called the ultimate matter or ultima materia). It is the art of transforming our conflicted ways of being into unconflicted



ways of being. It is not a willful technology designed to change us so that we measure up to some moral, bodily, or spiritual ideal that does not represent who we most fundamentally are. Transformation is the art of allowing our essential nature, as body-mind-spirit, to manifest completely and freely without conflict and fixation. It is the art of freeing the whole person, body and all. It is not the willful attempt to change who and what we are, but the art of becoming who we are. Since the conflicts of our minds are the conflicts of our bodies, any transformational practice that does not include our bodies is not a true transformational practice.

The somatic revolution that is sweeping our planet is clearly rooted in this age old quest for transformation. This somatic revolution is a revolution in thought and practice that is reshaping and redefining the nature of the human condition. Culturally, professionally, and individually we are involved in a search for our identity because the philosophical framework that has defined all aspects of our existence is crumbling. The search for our professional identity is the search for a new

philosophical framework and for the appropriate name of our field. The search for our identity and our name is the same search. Because this search is important to us all, we need to continuously come back to the pressing and difficult question about what to call the many practices represented in our diverse field.

The distinction between naming and labeling brings our difficulty about what to call ourselves into sharper focus by raising an important question: "In settling for the phrase "massage/bodywork" to describe our field, have we merely come up with a convenient label or have we created a name?" Upon reflection I think most of us would have to agree that all we have managed to do is come up with a convenient label. We are still very much in need of a name that is broad enough to include all the practices that are now inappropriately included under the label "bodywork".

If we can agree on what to call ourselves, we can create a domain of inquiry large enough to allow all the disparate disciplines to participate in our collective journey toward self-discovery as well as contribute to the collective investigation into the nature of our

work. We need a name that preserves and respects the individuality of all the diverse massage, structural, functional, and energetic disciplines and yet says who we are as a group. In order to be able to work together for the good of our entire field, somatic practitioners who are not massage therapists must be willing to respect the desire of massage therapists to continue calling themselves massage therapists. In the same spirit, massage practitioners must be willing to respect the desire of other somatic disciplines not to be labeled as massage therapy. The time is ripe. Legislation is rapidly being enacted all around the country that inappropriately forces practitioners who are neither massage therapists nor bodyworkers to be licensed under massage laws and thereby be defined as massage therapists. For these reasons it is time to take another look at the question of what to call ourselves.

When we ask the question, "What's in a name?", the answer is clear: what's in a name is who we are.

The Body Is Not A Soft Machine

When I claim that the word "massage" does not properly name our field, I am not intending to criticize the field of massage. I mean to be stating only what I think is fairly obvious: Trager®, Feldenkrais, Alexander, Rolfing and Rolfing Movement Integration®, energetic disciplines like Polarity and Jin Shin Jyutsu, body centered psychotherapies like Hakomi work as well as a host of other disciplines are not forms of massage. Although I think this point is intuitively obvious, I will provide some justification for this claim at the end of the section entitled "The Circle of Reciprocal Bodily Presence". I am not suggesting that massage therapists or Trager practitioners or any other discipline change the name of their discipline to some more inclusive term. After many years of diligent and creative effort on the part of massage therapists and the AMTA, massage therapy is finally beginning to gain the respect in the mind of the public that it deserves. I am only suggesting that we need an inclusive name for the whole field.



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Whether we realize it or not, we are joined together as brothers and sisters in this somatic revolution. Instead of creating artificial boundaries between our disciplines, we need to think and act in ways that are big enough to allow all the disciplines to work together for the advancement of the whole. We are a diverse and creative family of somatic practitioners. Many practitioners who consider themselves neither massage therapists nor

bodyworkers want to join hands in a collective effort to evolve and advance our field by sharing resources and knowledge. But many of these practitioners and membership organizations are reluctant to work together when others of us claim that all somatic practices are nothing but forms of massage. Such a claim is analogous to saying all flowers are nothing but tulips and only serves to create artificial boundaries where none are required.

If we agree that “massage” is not the name of our field, then isn’t the word “bodywork” a likely and appropriate choice? Unlike the word “massage”, the word “bodywork” at first glance seems broad enough to cover the great variety of disciplines in our family of practices. Its use has certainly gained in popularity over the last few years. A moment’s reflection shows, however, just because a word seems broad enough to the many people who are inclined to use it is no justification for adopting it. As we shall see, in fact, there are a number of important and compelling reasons against using this word to describe these disciplines. And these reasons are the very same ones that argue against using “body-

work” to describe our entire field. As I shall show, while it is not the worst word that could have been chosen to describe our field, it is far from the best. It is misleading in its implications, jejune in its ability to articulate, and much too pedestrian in its use.

Usually the first idea that pops into most people’s minds when they hear the word “bodywork” is that of an auto body specialist. We have all experienced the easy and often simple minded jokes that can result from such an association. These associated commonplaces are not problematic enough in themselves to cause us to abandon the word. Probably no word we could come up with would be immune to humorous associations. But the fact that we can make this sort of association points to a much deeper problem with the word. In English the word “body” can be used to refer to either a living or non-living body. We talk about the heavenly bodies, a body of evidence, a dead body, or a car body. The fact that our language does not make these distinctions often lends unconscious support to the dualistic philosophies that Western culture has embraced for 2,400 years.

Metaphysical dualism claims that the mind (or, in some views, the soul) is distinct and absolutely separate from the body. Plato (4th C. BC) said that the mind is to the body as the pilot is to the ship. During the 1600’s, Descartes in his attempt to lay the foundations for science added the notion that the body is nothing but a soft machine. Both of these views are foundational for the way our culture has thought about and continues to think about the human body. Interestingly, both philosophers reduce the body to a kind of thing that we inhabit in some mysterious and unexplained way and both philosophers claim that our essential human nature is radically different and other than the body. On this view, as Gilbert Ryle a twentieth century philosopher said, a human being is reduced to a kind of ghost in a machine.

Metaphysical dualism is at the heart of anatomy and physiology and at the heart of allopathic and physical medicine. Most of our text books say that the body is a kind of machine. They claim that anatomy studies the parts and physiology studies how the parts function. Metaphysical dualism is so pervasive that it informs the way most people



consciously and unconsciously think about their bodies. This unthinking commitment to the body as a kind of machine stands in marked contrast and contradiction to the rediscovered paradigms of holism in which most alternative health care practitioners claim to believe.

All holistic disciplines maintain that working with the body is tantamount to working with the whole person. Many of us who claim to be holistic practitioners maintain that we do not work on symptoms or in a piece-meal fashion on parts of the body. But if we believe that the body is a soft machine, we cannot in the same breath say that we are holistic practitioners working with the whole person. No one who has properly experienced his or her embodied experience can believe that the living bodily aspect of our whole being is nothing but a complex machine made of parts. Living beings are unified living wholes. Machines are things made of parts. Any view that assumes a living whole person is a ghost inhabiting a soft machine is a contradiction in terms. Machines are made of parts. Living wholes are not. The mind or soul or human self is not just another part. It is

an integral aspect of the unified whole that we are. Healthy, unconflicted attention to our own embodied experience easily demonstrates that our living bodies are not like things. Our bodies are not at all like a collection of parts. We do not inhabit and own our bodies the way we own and inhabit things. Our bodies are, rather, the living condition for owning and inhabiting things. Although it would take another article to demonstrate this point adequately, I think it is clear that holism and metaphysical dualism are utterly incompatible positions.

These philosophical considerations are not mere academic curiosities. They are critically important to how we understand the nature of our embodied existence and the nature of our work. If we say we do bodywork, we are implying ideas and notions that are in direct opposition to the holistic perspective and how we work with people. Because the dualistic presuppositions of our culture assume that the mind is radically other than the body and because the word "body" does not distinguish between a living and non-living body, every time we use the word "bodywork", whether we mean to or not, we are bringing forth

associations that imply that we are not working with the whole person. Coupling the word "body" with the word "worker" adds to the confusion by bonding all the wrong associations together into one hollow but irresistible misdescription. This unhappy marriage of associations suggests that bodyworkers are workers who work on soft machines, i.e., on complex thing-bodies made of thing-parts.

If the human body were but a mere thing made of parts, it would be no different from the other things we own, inhabit, and work on like cars, houses, and suits of clothes. If the body is no different in kind from the other things we own, inhabit, and work on, it cannot constitute the essence of who and what we are. Because our culture easily and readily accepts the view that the body is a soft machine, we tend to assume without a moment's thought that the self or mind is not the body. Unconsciously cornered by the logic of this position, we think, "If my body is a machine-thing that I inhabit, then I am not my body." But if the person or self is not the body, how can we reasonably claim to be working with the whole person when we work on the body? To argue

that the mind affects our machine-body in some paradoxical way that transcends scientific understanding is an intellectual cop-out that evades and obscures the difficult issues involved. Since the word "bodywork" carries the wrong associations with it, we cannot call ourselves bodyworkers and also claim to be holistic practitioners working with the whole person without involving ourselves in a gallimaufry of conflicting concepts. Where we seek illumination the word "bodywork" leads us into stupefying unclarity.

The Circle of Reciprocal Bodily Presence

Because the word "bodywork" cannot give a clear unequivocal voice to the nature of our work with the living embodied being of the whole person, it also tends to predispose us toward an unclear and confused understanding of the client/practitioner relationship. It leads us away from a full-bodied understanding of the healing human relationship that should always take place whenever we work with another person. Every experi-



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enced massage and non-massage practitioner knows how critically important it is to the healing environment that we do not work on people in the way an auto body mechanic works on a car. The client/practitioner relationship like any authentic human relation-

ship demands a way of being with one another that is radically different from the way we relate to things. Authentic human relationship always involves a profound reciprocity of *bodily-being-with* each other, a reciprocity in which we are *open to* and *there for* each other. Because my car cannot be *bodily-there* for me and *bodily-open* to me, I cannot stand in the same sort of relationship of open bodily presence with my car as I can with another human being.

Because human relationships are always and already founded upon our *bodily-being-with-and-there* for each other, we can enter into a healing relationship with another person. Even though the practitioner is there for the client in a way that the client cannot be there for the practitioner, the relationship created nevertheless depends on this unique human capacity of *bodily-being-with* each other. Client and practitioner are in a relationship quite different than the relationship between a mechanic and a dented car. Client and practitioner are *bodily-with* each other in a profound way that is clearly impossible in our relationships with automobiles. These relationships are so obviously dif-

ferent from each other that were we to discover a health care practitioner relating to her clients in the way a mechanic relates to cars, we would conclude immediately that she was a seriously disturbed therapist with the potential of causing harm to her clients.

The foundation of our life together is this relationship of *bodily-being-with* one another. This embodied belonging together and being present for one another shows up most profoundly in the wonderfully rich and subtle ways we communicate with each other through touch. Whether we realize it or not, we are always touching and being touched by one another. Sometimes we are touching and being touched with our hands and bodies. At other times we are touching and being touched with our bodily presence as many of the off-body energetic practices so clearly demonstrate. Of course, we can employ inauthentic touch as a way to manipulate, deceive, or abuse others. But inauthentic and perverted touch is only possible because we recognize and participate in authentic touch. Touching and being touched are at the core of our embodied-being-with each other. Enough scientific evi-

dence finally exists to support what every healthy human being has always known, namely, that the health and well-being of our children and ultimately our society is profoundly rooted in loving, uncontaminated, authentic touch.

One of the root meanings of "to touch" is "to ignite". As practitioners of the art of touch, we must be experientially attuned to this meaning of "touch". The extent to which we do not know how to surrender the whole of our bodyselves to unconflicted, unconditional, caring touch, is the extent to which we are unable to ignite the healing process in our clients. This same sort of unconflicted touch and bodily presence is what founds and gathers us humans here together on the earth. It is the core of every authentic human relationship. So important is authentic bodily presence and touch to our lives that healthy human relationship and community are ignited, nourished and built upon the trust and care for others that arises from the authentic bodily presence of touching and being touched.

Helping and healing each other through authentic touching and being touched is possible because all human relationships are founded on our



primordial bodily being-with-and-there for each other. A living bodily being has the capacity to touch and be touched by another living being. Because a non-living thing can neither let itself be touched nor return a touch, it cannot truly touch in the fullest sense. Things only contact other things. When we touch a non-living thing, it does not open itself to our touch, it has no ability to refuse our touch, and it cannot touch us back.

Yes, we do make contact with non-living things through our touch. But we do not touch them in the way we touch other living bodies. Touching and being touched are only possible between living beings. Whether every practitioner understands its importance or not, learning to participate in and surrender our bodyselves to this circle of touching and being touched is essential to all the healing arts from massage to Qi Gong to allopathic medicine. Without a participatory understanding of this circle of bodily reciprocity, touch can easily and readily degenerate into merely making contact with others. Whether we realize it or not, when we merely contact others, we treat them as if they were mere things.

As an example of how the circle of reciprocal bodily presence unfolds between practitioner and client, consider the following. When a practitioner touches her client, the client has the choice to either allow his body to be touched or to refuse the touch. If he consciously or unconsciously refuses the touch, the practitioner will be prevented from providing all the help of which she is capable. If the client allows himself to be touched, he opens his body to receive the practitioner's healing touch and presence. As a result of opening his bodily being to his practitioner's presence, he becomes a more responsive and responsible participant in his own healing. In the silent reciprocity of bodily presence with one another, when the client allows himself to be touched by a practitioner who has surrendered her bodyself completely to caring unconflicted touch, he simultaneously and without premeditation touches his practitioner back. The practitioner, in order to complete the circle of being-with her client, must allow herself to be touched by her client. Through allowing herself to be touched by her client, she is able to properly understand and respond to

what shows itself to her hands. However, if the practitioner contacts the client's body as if it were a mere thing to be worked on or to be used for her own self-driven purposes, she will not truly touch him. Her touch will feel conflicted, uncaring and less than human. Without even a moment's reflection, the client's bodily presence to the practitioner will understand her contact as less than human and he will not be able to fully respond and open himself to her intervention.

Our capacity for uncontaminated caring touch is as remarkable as it is potent. Both authentic human relationship and the client/practitioner relationship demand a non-manipulative caring touch that does not turn another person into a thing to be worked on or used for our own self-driven purposes. And when we work with people within the circle of bodily reciprocity, we work *with* the bodily presence of the whole person. We never just work *on* their bodies or a part of their bodies as the word "bodywork" implies.

For many of us this bodily presence to one another also involves an obvious and important energetic phenomenon. If

our touch is oriented toward merely working on our client's body, the energetic dimension will be entirely lost to our awareness. To effectively engage the energetic dimension of the whole person, we must cultivate a kind of touch that arises from an open bodily being-with-presence. This sort of touch must transcend all simplistic and willful intentions to effect change by working on the body. If we are unable to surrender our bodyselves to the circle of bodily presence, we will miss entirely the energetic nature of presence.

The energetic practices so clearly demonstrate the importance of non-manipulative, non-willful touch for gaining awareness of and working with energetic presence that they highlight for us a truth that is easily occluded by the word "bodywork". In the end, what is true of the energetic disciplines is true of all healing practices from massage to Qi Gong: they are all based on letting ourselves be in the authentic reciprocity of bodily presence for each other. And the most effective practitioners are those who also cultivate and nourish this mode of being with presence for the benefit of others. To call such a remark-



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able human achievement "bodywork" is to label the miraculous with the mundane.

Clearly the word "bodywork" verges on an insipience that renders it incapable of giving voice to the reciprocity of

bodily presence for one another that is at the heart of all healing disciplines. As a result, it also remains utterly mute in relation to the energetic dimension of our work. Since "bodywork" cannot grasp the energetic dimension of bodily presence, it cannot even come close to articulating the energetic dimension of our work let alone properly naming the many energetic disciplines that are necessarily a part of our field.

For related reasons, the word "bodywork" is also unfit to name the many disciplines devoted to movement education that are so obviously and necessarily a part of our field. Many movement practitioners view themselves quite appropriately as educators rather than bodyworkers. Often their approach involves a hands-on component. But a very large part of their practice is devoted to educating their clients toward more appropriate patterns of movement through the use of verbal cues, instructions, and suggestions. A great deal of their art consists in using the techniques of appropriate communication to bring their clients to a deeper awareness of their bodily being and patterns of movement in order to ultimately bring forth a higher

level of functioning.

Ultimately every healing art, whether it falls under the relaxation, corrective, or holistic paradigm aims at restoring, promoting, or enhancing economy of function. The word "function" is quite broad. Promoting economy of function could mean promoting neurological, psychological, and/or energetic functioning. It could also mean economy of movement. Life is movement and loss of movement is loss of function. When *Rolfers* manipulate the myofascial system, they are attempting to restore and enhance economy of function at every level possible and appropriate for each individual client. They are not trying to create bodies that measure up to some unobtainable ideal of posture that merely looks good in a static position. They are attempting to assist people in maximizing their unique possibilities for structural integration in order to allow them to move and function at their highest possible level. When *Feldenkrais* practitioners offer new ways of moving in order to expand their client's repertoire of possible movements, they are also attempting to restore and enhance economy of function at every level possible and appropriate

for each individual client.

The goals of every structural, functional, and energetic holistic practice are the same. They all aim at enhancing the whole person by enhancing economy of function at every level that is possible and appropriate. Some of the differences consist in which aspects of the whole person (*e.g.*, the myofascial, energetic, neurological, etc.) are addressed by each particular discipline, the kind of techniques used, and how the treatment strategies are implemented according to principles of each discipline.

The hands-on dimension of the various forms of movement education are somewhat different in character from the hands-on dimension of structural disciplines. *Rolfers*, for example, attempt to release myofascial and arthrogenic fixations as a way of organizing the body in gravity in order to enhance economy of function. This way of working with the connective tissue is properly understood as a form of manipulation. Even though every practitioner's touch is ultimately a form of communication and a way of being bodily present with another, the primary orientation of the movement educator's touch is quite different in in-



tent and feel from the primary orientation of the structural practitioner's touch. In contrast to the structural practitioner's attempt remove myofascial and arthrogenic restrictions in order to free inner resources and functional possibilities, the movement practitioner uses touch and language to guide the client past his restricted ways of thinking and moving toward a recovery of resources and functional possibilities.

Obviously, movement educators do not manipulate directly osseous and myofascial tissue the way structural practitioners do. They use their hands along with their words as a way to deepen awareness of existing patterns of movement as well as to encourage and suggest new possibilities of movement in order to enhance economy of function. Deepening awareness, suggesting new possibilities of movement through educating touch and appropriate language is a profound art. To call movement education "bodywork" does not even come close to capturing how this art is practiced let alone understanding its depth. In fact, it is so far off the mark for many of us who work with movement that, if we didn't know better, we might be

tempted to think it use was meant as an insult.

Even though the primary orientation of the structural practitioner's touch is different from the movement practitioner's, both forms of touch are always at work in the hands of all experienced and effective practitioners. *Rolfers* and *Rolfing Movement* educators, for example, use and understand each other's techniques. Every experienced structural practitioner knows that the movement educator's touch is absolutely essential for effective, non-invasive, long lasting structural change. Likewise, every experienced movement practitioner knows the importance of the structural practitioner's touch for effective long lasting functional change. While a true distinction can be drawn between structural and functional techniques, in practice, especially if we are doing our jobs well, we should experience no hard and fast division between them. As one might expect, many structural practitioners who find the functional techniques of movement education indispensable to their work also find the energetic techniques indispensable. And all of these practitioners find the word "bodywork" woefully in-

adequate for describing their work.

Because our field includes practices and disciplines devoted to movement education and energetic manipulation that are not always rooted in actually touching the client's body, it is worth pointing out that phrases like "touch-based therapy", "skilled touch practitioner", or "structured touch practitioner" are also much too limited in their implications to serve as a name for our field. While it is true that off-body energetic techniques can be understood as a kind of touch at a distance, the more commonly understood meaning of "touch" implies to most people the experience of actually touching the body. This implication along with the fact that movement practitioners often use verbal techniques instead of touch based techniques makes any phrase that uses or implies the concept of "touch" an inadequate name for our field.

Since the word "massage" also implies touching the body, it is clearly not broad enough in its implications to include the many movement and off-body energetic practitioners who are very much a part of our field. Etymologically, the meaning of "massage" is

rooted in ideas of "handling", "rubbing", and "kneading dough". Of course, it also carries the meaning of "curative effects". The original meaning of "massage", therefore, is rooted in the notion of actually touching the body. This meaning is so much a part of the way we and the general public still think about the practice of massage that it cannot be ignored.

As Beverly Shulz astutely pointed out in "A Rose by Any Other Name"¹ the word "massage" connotes a passive hands on approach to the body. Unfortunately, the gratuitous assumption that almost anyone can do massage also piggybacks this connotation. Obviously, those of us who practice the discipline of massage therapy know the importance of proper training. We also know that massage therapy is much more sophisticated and advanced than a mere rub down that any untrained person can perform. However, as much as we might like to overlook connotations and ignore root meanings, we cannot simply define the word "massage" any way we please. "Massage" is simply not a broad enough term to name our field. We do not need to conduct an opinion poll to prove the truth of



If a structural practitioner makes a change in his client that does not improve function, then the change was not worth making no matter how well it matches the practitioner's preconceived notions of the ideal body posture.

this assertion. Just consider all the massage therapists who, upon completing more advanced trainings in other disciplines, begin to call themselves bodyworkers or use some other label in order to distinguish themselves from traditional massage therapy.

Or consider all the clients who have experienced both massage therapy and practices like *Trager*, *Rolfing*, *Polarity* or any other non-massage discipline. These people recognize the difference in their bodies and are inclined, without a moment's thought, to use some word other than "massage" to describe their experience. Again, it is worth mentioning that since massage is a practice that involves actually touching the body, it cannot include off-body energetic practices and the many practices of movement education.

Enhancing Function Is Igniting Presence

In an important and essential way, no matter what our discipline, whether we are a massage therapist or *Rolfer*, whether we are an energetic or movement practitioner, whether we work in the relaxation, corrective, or holistic paradigm, as somatic practitioners we all aim at enhancing function in the broadest sense. By enhancing function, wellness and healing are promoted. When an entry level massage practitioner promotes relaxation, he is enhancing

function. When a physical therapist corrects a local dysfunction by mobilizing a joint, she is enhancing function. When a *Polarity* practitioner organizes distortions in the energetic patterns of the body, she is enhancing function. When a *Trager* practitioner "hooks up", she is "reading" the restrictions in her client's movement patterns and releasing them in order to enhance function. Every massage and non-massage intervention is concerned with function. No matter how we look at it, the beginning, the middle, and the end of our work always brings us back to function. When we find that we are unable to enhance function in our clients, we immediately understand that to mean that our work is not finished. If a structural practitioner makes a change in his client that does not improve function, then the change was not worth making no matter how well it matches the practitioner's preconceived notions of the ideal body posture.

When we use the word "function" to talk about what our work enhances, we are using an objective concept that has a legitimate and well established use. We must realize, however, that the being

whose function we wish to enhance has a depth and richness that goes far beyond what the concept of "function" normally designates. This being is the living bodily presence of the whole person. There is nothing wrong with using the word "function" as we do. It is appropriate and its meaning is fairly obvious and clear in the contexts in which we ordinarily use it. But when we use the word, we should not lose sight of the fact that, at its best, our work is always concerned with the functioning of the whole person, a living being whose presence is absolutely bound up with his or her bodily being. Enhancing function is nothing like upgrading a computer by adding more RAM. Enhancing function is a profound art that requires being authentically open with our whole bodily being to the whole bodily presence of another. It requires surrendering to presence so that the presence of another can become more fully who he or she is.

We call ourselves human beings not human doings. Another word for "being" is "presence". To be is to be present. Each one of us is a human presence and our bodies are fundamentally indistinguishable from our many and



varied ways of being present. Presence so thoroughly permeates our bodily being-with one another that we normally take no notice of it. But it is constantly recognized in our every day speech. We say of another person, "He is not altogether *there*," or of a wise teacher, "His silence speaks louder than his words." When we say such things, we are responding to presence with our presence. We are responding and understanding with our whole being, body and all.

This ability to respond to presence rests in the circle of our authentic bodily presence for each other. It is also the foundation of all somatic practices. When we enhance function through touch, we are igniting presence. Igniting touch is healing touch. It is a "functional possibility" that lives within the heart of our authentic bodily presence for each other. When it is realized in our work with others, it can enhance the living bodily presence of some clients to such an extent that their lives are transformed by it. Clearly, the word "bodywork" is utterly devoid of the depth of meaning required to grasp this remarkable art of enhancing function through igniting touch.

To be true to our art we also must recognize that the practice of enhancing function and igniting presence makes us all educators. "To educate" means "to bring forth" or "to draw out". A true educator does not impose her will and preconceived ideas on her students. A true educator knows how to cultivate being-with-presence for the benefit of her students. She knows how to draw out the nascent abilities of her students by allowing them to stand forth freely in the safety and openness of her igniting presence. In this way an educator is like an artist. By allowing the presence of her students to shine forth in a way that is true to who they are, she allows them to fulfill their potential by fulfilling themselves.

Massage and non-massage practitioners are much more than bodyworkers working on bodies. We are educators. To describe an educator as a worker is not false. All educators are indeed workers. But not all workers are educators. The nature of our art is thoroughly occluded by the conflicting implications of the words "body" and "work" in the equation of "bodywork". The practice of our art should not be framed under the rubric

of workers working on bodies. We are practitioners of the art of somatic education. We are practitioners of the art of drawing out functional possibilities by allowing presence through igniting presence. We are not workers imposing our wills and preconceived ideas on our clients by working on their bodies. Our clients are not products to be manipulated and formed by our wills. We are practitioners of the art of igniting presence. In our work with others, we are at our best when our bodyselves are surrendered completely to bodily being-with our clients in the circle of authentic touching and being touched. In these moments, our presence and touch can ignite presence with such depth that it can draw out functional possibilities in our clients that at times can appear to be miraculous.

To describe such a disciplined practice and art as "bodywork" is not altogether false. But it is so far from the reality of what we do and so lacking in depth of understanding that it verges on being a form of sophomoric vacuousness. It is every bit as unilluminating as describing the Grand Canyon as a big ditch. Of course, we can choose to ignore the power of

words and continue to call ourselves bodyworkers. We can rest content with a convenient label that lacks all depth of understanding and gives no voice to the nature and meaning of our art. Or we can eschew all such hollow substitutes for a name and find a word or phrase that finally does justice to our field.

Conclusion

Fortunately we do not have far to look. The word we need already exists and is beginning to find its way into common usage. The word is the Greek word "soma" and it means "living body". I used it a number of times in this article. It has been part of our language for years. Many people who claim that "soma" is not well-known word fail to realize that we use it in everyday speech when we talk about psychosomatic illnesses. "Soma" refers to the organic wholeness of living bodily presence. It is not a third person designation that turns the body into an objective thing or soft machine that stands separate from our experience of ourselves. Rather, it refers first and foremost to our bodily



*Soma is the body
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presence as a whole, complete, lived-through participatory experience. Soma is not our body as we think about it. It is not the body as object. Soma is the body we are in lived-through experience before it is reified by reflective thought. It cannot be used properly to refer to a car body or a dead body. Unlike the word "bodywork", when used in a phrase like "somatic practitioner" it does not carry conflicting associations. It refers to the wholeness of our lived-through bodily presence prior to any reflective thinking that divides and separates us into body and

mind. It speaks with precision about the living presence whose function we attempt to enhance and draw out through igniting touch.

There are many examples of how the proper use of this word is finding its way into talk about our bodily being and about our work. **SOMATICS**, a pioneering journal devoted to our art was created a number of years ago by the late philosopher and somatic educator Thomas Hanna. Dr. Hanna in fact coined the word "somatics". The Association of Humanistic Psychology has created a section of its organization devoted to Somatics. Recently the CALIFORNIA COALITION OF SOMATIC PRACTICES was created to deal with the many issues facing our profession. A number of graduate degree programs in Somatics are already in place around the country. For example, The California Institute of Integral Studies, a nationally accredited graduate school, has created an exciting master's level program in Somatic Studies under the direction of Don Johnson. And Ohio State University has a doctoral program in Somatics.

All the disciplines that make up the rich diversity of our field are properly named by

"somatics". *Feldenkrais* practitioners have insisted correctly for years that they are neither bodyworkers nor massage therapists, and that their practice of movement education is best understood as a form of somatic education. The Rolf Institute, which teaches both structural and functional approaches, has also insisted that *Rolfing* be understood as a form of somatic education. Clearly, practitioners of the many energetic disciplines are more appropriately named as somatic practitioners or educators than as bodyworkers or massage therapists. Obviously, massage therapy is also properly named as a form of somatic education or, if one prefers, somatic therapy. Also it makes much more sense to refer to the many body centered psychotherapies as somatic practices rather than bodywork or massage.

Many other examples of how the word "soma" is being properly used to discuss our field could be cited. But the above list is sufficient to show that "somatic" is not a strange and unfamiliar word. It speaks of the living bodily presence of the whole person and is, therefore, a fitting word with which to name our field. Depending on the theoretical commit-

ments of our individual membership organizations and how we view ourselves, we can call ourselves somatic educators, somatic practitioners, or somatic therapists. Instead of calling ourselves The Federation of Massage/Bodywork Organizations, we easily could call ourselves something more fitting like The Federation of Somatic Practitioner Organizations. Perhaps we could look forward to the day when we are Nationally Certified in Somatic Therapy and Education or in Therapeutic Massage and Somatic Education rather than in Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork.

"Somatic", as I pointed out, is not a new word to our language. It has been with us for quite a while, much longer, in fact, than the word "bodywork". It already has accepted and well-understood meanings. Unlike the words "chiropractic" and "osteopathy", for example, it was not formed by combining two Greek words into a new word known only at first to its creators. Even though "somatic" is already a well-established word that is understood by many, I agree that not everyone at present recognizes it. But then, who recognized or connected with such strange



words as “chiropractic”, “osteopathy”, or “homeopathy” when they were first introduced? Language is always changing. New words are always being created and well-established words are constantly being given new meanings. The fact that the public or the marketplace does not recognize a word is no argument against using it. We need a word that names our field. Because the root meaning of “soma” illuminates the living wholeness of our embodied presence, it can name our field. Obviously, no matter what word we come up with, whether it is common word used in a new way or newly coined word, the public and the marketplace will take time to get used to it. But they will get used it and they will use it. In time the public will recognize and connect with the word “somatic” just as it now recognizes and connects with the words “chiropractic” or “osteopathy”.

During the writing of this article I asked a number of market research analysts, who are also clients of mine, about which words and phrases, in their expert opinion, they thought were best and which were worst in terms of connotations and images presented.

Like so many of my clients who have experienced both massage therapy and Rolfing, they all agreed that “massage” was not capable of naming the entire field. They all also agreed that “massage/bodywork” was cumbersome, ugly, and ought to be abandoned immediately. They were all singularly unimpressed by the word “bodywork”. They felt it was pedestrian, vulgar and also ought to be abandoned immediately. Not surprisingly, they all felt that “Somatic Practitioner” sounded the best. From a marketing standpoint, they said it sounded the most professional, most dignified, and the term most likely to garner respect for the field.

Perhaps if we agree to call ourselves by our name rather than by a label, we could look forward to the day when we could all work together for the good of our entire field, sharing with each other our research, techniques, discoveries, and inspiration. Perhaps we also could look forward to the day when laws that attempt to license and define all of us are called Somatic Practitioner Laws or Somatic Therapy Laws, not Massage Therapy Laws.

As a Rolfer and member of the AMTA, I appreciate,

support, and am encouraged by the creative and important advances already achieved by the AMTA for our field. I also hold out the hope that one day our entire field will awaken to the fact that we are all sisters and brothers in a wonderfully rich and diverse family of somatic practitioners. Signs of this awakening have already occurred with the creation of the National Certification Exam and the Federation of Massage/Bodywork Organizations. But more creative work is required to bring our field together.

At this point in time, I believe that one of the more important issues facing us concerns what to call our field. Where a label leads us astray, a name brings us together. What’s in a name, as I stated in the beginning of this article, is who we are. When we agree on the name that appropriately includes and honors all the disciplines in our family of practices, we will have created a domain of inquiry within which we all can participate and discover who we are. Without a name I fear that our labels will continue to create artificial boundaries where none are required and thereby slow down the evolution and growth of our emerging profes-

sions. When we awaken to fact that we are in this somatic revolution and search for our identity together, I wonder if the AMTA might once again change its name to something like The American Massage and Somatic Therapy Association or perhaps even The American Somatic Therapy Association?

Footnotes

¹ See *A Rose By Any Other Name: AMTA Sponsors Title Debate*, Parts I and II, **MASSAGE THERAPY JOURNAL**, Winter 1994, Vol. 33, No. 1 and Spring 1994, Vol 33, No. 2.



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