



# A Review of *The Future of the Body* Workshop

Taught by Emilie Conrad-Da'oud and Don Van Vleet  
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By Kevin Smith

I'd like to share my experience of *The Future of the Body* workshop taught in September '95 by Emilie Conrad-Da'oud and Don Van Vleet. It was a fascinating course and I believe that the cross pollination of the ideas put forth by Emilie and Don are opening the way for a new contextual framework of somatic process.

I have been studying with Emilie for the last three years and teaching a workout class based on her Jungle Gym for about a year. I have found in Continuum a set of values the implications of which have fundamentally shifted the nature of my so-

matic experience and my work with others. I am compiling a list of these for a separate article. (For a beautiful, in-depth description of an experience of Continuum, I refer readers to Gil Hedley's review of Emilie's work in the July '95 *Rolf Lines*).

I have been pleased to see a number of other Rolfers in these classes who also have found in Continuum a rich source of inspiration for their inner explorations and their Rolfing practices. Among them is Don Van Vleet. Don is doing original work drawing on observations from Rolfing, somatic psychology, Continuum, Visceral Ma-

nipulation, Qi Gong & Energy Healing. He has incorporated these observations with his own interpretations of findings in cellular physiology & microbiology (especially work done by Herbert Froelich). The result is a conceptual context that describes mechanisms by which we as practitioners can affect physiologic processes from the gross, macrostructural end of the spectrum to the subtle, microstructural level.

In the mornings of the workshop, Emilie guided the class into extended explorations of the fluid realm, a rich layering of movement, breath, and sound replete

with sensation, complexity, and nuance. Using a combination of traction, sound vibrations and wave motion we created circulatory cascades, silky articulations of tissue and bone and performed neural ballets of awareness. We explored how changing gravitational orientations expanded and deepened our perceptions of sensation, fascial elongation and fluid movement.

In the afternoons, Don's talks and demos took us on fantastic voyages of cellular physiology, micro-trabecular networks and multi-planar somatic work. These spanned a sort of fractal spec-



trum if you will, from cellular motion to the wave motion; from the micro-trabecular network of the cell to the osseous trabecula. Don is suggesting that we can, as practitioners, intentionally access these levels of physiology (i.e. influencing the bony matrix itself as well as orienting the bones in space and gravity). There was a lively, playful, inquisitive atmosphere in the room during the practice sessions that felt really refreshing, an atmosphere of people exploring stuff they loved without worrying about getting it "right".

But I'm leaving out the best part. We had our own gym, a Jungle Gym! Emilie, Scott Martin and others brought a veritable panoply of equipment. Emilie has developed a series of Explore Boards and accessories that have taken Continuum to whole other planes, literally. The slanted, curved, inverted surfaces and suspension devices became our tools for exploring the complexifying effects of traction and progressive changes in gravitational orientation. We explored these in our own movement and in hands-on work with others. I have been exploring some of these tools in my

own practice for some time and I feel that they offer powerful ways of deepening clients' perception of and participation with their bodies as movement, as well as facilitating the practitioner's access to specific relationships that are otherwise not available.

There are some profound things that have begun to emerge in my work with clients since I began incorporating into it the ideas Emilie and Don presented in this class. I will mention but two. First, novel movement positions, types of movements, breaths, sounds and relationships to gravity tend to facilitate a deconstruction of the static, habitual perceptions and images people hold about themselves and their bodies. This allows new information to influence the organism, creating a more open biological system.

Secondly, and this cannot be emphasized too strongly, is the essential quality of expressive participation by the client. This is learning by discovery, guided by sensation and feeling. It's after the rains in Amazonia, where the nervous system is akin to the rain forest, bursting with the fecundity of

growth and opportunity. Where exploration of new connections and relationships is not just invited but is part of the nature of things, as is the death of those which are no longer viable. (This is true, in my observation, in all but the most traumatized individuals). Without evoking this kind of expressive participation and exploration from the client, I find my own Rolfing sessions often reduced to giving someone an aerial tour of the rain forest, where as the passenger they get to enjoy the view but don't feel, breath, smell and touch it. Through participation, somatic presence, a term coined by Pat Ogden, developer of Hakomi Integrative Somatics, is cultivated. And this cannot be taught conceptually, it must be learned experientially.

Through collaborations like Don and Emilie's, a new line of inquiry is being opened, one that I find very timely and exciting. Emilie has proven through her work with spinal injuries that we are capable of participating in our own physiology in ways that far transcend the current scientific paradigm. Don is, as I mentioned, positing that we can also access these lev-

els of physiology as practitioners and is creating a descriptive model that is as compelling as it is elegant. These are provocative notions that challenge us to extend our basic understanding of life processes and participate with them more deeply in our work.

*The next workshop will occur June 22-26, 1996 in Boulder, Colorado. Please call Liesel Orend at the Rolf Institute for more information.*