

Why Somatics?

Somatics as applied to our work involves consciously working with the body-mind-spirit connection from a state of presence or mindfulness. While the conscious mind is generally absorbed by thoughts about the past or the future, the body only exists in the present moment. All bodily sensations and functions occur now, even when they are a product of our conscious mind. For this and other reasons the body is a reliable and constant source of true information. The conscious mind chooses what parts of this information it wishes to hear; this can be called preferences.

We often see our bodies as our opponent, the cause of our miseries and fear, and a constant challenge to our notions of perfection. Whereas, any part of the body, as seen from the perspective of design and organization, reveals a great mystery. Even the least functional body or the worst pathology is interfused with mystery. We have learned to describe the body's systems of interaction and function. We have devised treatments for interacting with these systems. But what is implied in those systems remains an awe-inspiring mystery. The more we learn, the more we are humbled by the beauty and complexity. As body-workers we work with the body very intimately and knowledgeably. We are continually baffled and entertained by what our hands reveal. We realize that while we have learned to appreciate the designer, and come into intimate contact with the intricacies of the design, we can never apprehend or understand fully what we are dealing with.

Most persons regard the brain as the center of thinking and consciousness. The brain and its functions are part of the organization of the body. Normally the mind is split between conscious, that which we are aware of, and unconscious, that which we are not. In much of our conscious thought we think as if consciousness is independent of the body. Most bodily functions and organization are relegated to our unconscious mind. And for the most part the design and its author also remain unconscious. Our conscious mind is prone to pay attention only to the bodily signals it chooses, disregarding the rest. We dictate our preferences to the body. We cast ungrateful aspersions on the body when it cannot meet our demands. The body, with its implicit designer, remains our faithful but disfavored servant.

As bodyworkers we are very aware of the split between body and mind that is part of almost all systems of thought. Indeed, most of us participate in that split for a good part of our lives and in our work with clients. We can feel the effects of the mind in every part of the body and we become aware that changes in the mind produce changes in the body and visa versa. Most of us feel a direct contact with the mind through our touch: the conscious mind of the client, the unconscious mind as it is revealed in the tissue, and the Designer's Mind that surprises, entertains and guides us when we pay attention.

When the conscious mind starts to pay attention to the full language of the body, things change. This is the basis of all somatic approaches. Until then the mind only pays attention to what it likes and tries to eliminate what it doesn't. Ordinarily we pay attention to the autonomic and sympathetic impulses when they break down or engage. Part of the role of the somatics practitioner is to help the client pay a different kind of attention to the body than preferences, demands, and avoidances. As we attend to our clients in these ways we also start to change. Our senses are heightened. We become aware of different kinds of information that guide us in our work and our lives. As we help our clients discover the connections between their conscious and unconscious minds through the simple tool of presence, we too become aware of those connections. By so doing, we and our clients, get to partake of the Mind of the Designer.

©Jack Blackburn, 2004