Toggling toward expression:

discursive communications,
continual recalibrations

A terminal project report by Carol Yahner

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Contents:

BODY
WOMAN
PAINTING

BODY seeing is feeling, listening to midline
“Anatomy of course does not change, but our understanding of anatomy and its clinical significance does change, as do anatomical terminology and nomenclature.”
– Frank Netter

“Neuroscience research shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience and learning to befriend what is going on inside ourselves.” — Bessel A. van der Kolk

In 1989 Frank Netter, practicing physician and artist, published the *Atlas of Human Anatomy*, a book filled with over 500 full-color illustrations of the human body’s gross anatomy, classified by system and region of the body. He studied art at the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design before attending medical school at New York University, where he received his medical degree in 1931. Translated into 16 languages, his efforts have assisted healthcare practitioners around the world. The illustrations are drawn from multiple vantage points so the student can gain expertise of bodily form and function; detailing the minutiae and subtle complexity of the structures that lie below our visible, superficial layer of tissue often referred to as *skin*.

Human anatomy is studied from the vantage point of a three dimensional Cartesian coordinate system, referencing anatomical planes from which to orient and view the structures. The frontal plane provides anterior and posterior views as seen if standing directly facing the front or back of the body, the sagittal plane divides the body into two corresponding halves, vertically, with right and left sides. The transverse plane runs horizontally through the midsection, dividing the body into segments seen from either superior or inferior perspectives.

Embodied cognition is a growing area of research which addresses the role the environment plays as part of one’s ability to cognitively process information (Cowart, 2015). The understanding of one’s anatomy becomes a crucial component in understanding the relationship between cognition and physical sensation. There
are *many* forms of somatic practice that lend themselves to access greater embodied cognition, two of which I'll briefly highlight within this paper: Yoga Nidra and Visceral Manipulation. These modalities, along with other mindfulness practices rooted in ritual and art, assist in contextualizing my studio practice and relate to the understanding of my lived experience.

Regardless of method, when both subjective and objective frames of reference are considered with equal measures of respect, a third thing emerges. The wisdom of the system itself takes over and seemingly takes autonomous, corrective action. In a manual therapy context this requires the engagement of both individuals within the treatment dynamic, the attunement between client and practitioner. The process requires transparency of action and clarity of intention on behalf of the practitioner. Only at this juncture – where the practitioner has no agenda and the patient feels a sense of safety – can receptivity and integration take place.

Yoga Nidra is a restorative style of yoga which operates as more of a meditative practice rather than an exercise oriented to address physical ailments. Yoga Nidra is used to assist those with fatigue, insomnia and anxiety and its origins are found in Tantric texts from ancient times (Saraswati, 1998). The method assists the practitioner to drop into a place of profound relaxation within the body and connect with a more intuitive, spontaneous wisdom of the body. Richard Miller, clinical psychologist and author of *Yoga Nidra: A Meditative Practice for Deep Relaxation and Healing* defines Yoga Nidra as a re-educational process that teaches one how to be receptive to our bodies knowledge and notes that this form of yoga does not engage a hypnotic state, instead it’s understood as a very natural state of meditation (Miller, 2010). In the practice one is guided through a cyclical process which includes 1) movement, 2) stillness, 3) intention, and 4) rotation of focus via felt-sense perception (Saraswati, 1998).

In my art practice I loosely follow a similar methodology and goal toward attunement between myself and material. A couple layers of consideration are in play during the painting process. Allowing freedom of movement, some intuitive choice around color and then the stepping back from making altogether to question and respond to what is on the canvas, then setting a basic “what next?” intention to assist in moving on and *going back in*. Distance and proximity
become crucial steps in the process; distance from concerns and worry about whether I will make the 'right' or 'wrong' mark mixed with the occasional surprise of a curious and unexpected gesture or a 'mistake' that turns out to lead me forward, sometimes in an altogether new direction. The more allowance I can muster to simply make without fearful thought patterns taking hold, the deeper I trust the moment at hand. Occasionally a piece comes through which reflects back something, some unspoken truth which I cannot wholly articulate. These moments keep me curious and engaged despite equally questioning my approach at times. I wrestle within the ambiguous nature of not knowing.

Visceral Manipulation (VM) is a style of manual therapy developed in the 1970s by Jean-Pierre Barral, an osteopathic physician and physical therapist from France. Subtle and specific forces are manually applied to one’s internal organs such that the force mobilizes the fascia surrounding a restricted structure to encourage movement within each of the anatomical planes (frontal, sagittal and transverse). Once positionality has been established and while the client remains relaxed, the practitioner waits, continuing to hold the ‘barrier.’ Shortly thereafter the physiology of the body itself begins to respond, proprioceptive messaging moving from the organ to brain and brain to organ and back again, until the nervous system communications allow the body’s movement patterns and rhythms to directly -- or discursively -- release their tensional strongholds.

The efficacy of VM work is contingent on how well a practitioner can assess the patient. This assessment takes the form of palpating with the hand in various locations on the body and is called ‘listening,’ a term coined by osteopathic physician Rollin Becker (Barral, 2007).

One aspect of VM focuses on using a thermal technique to locate restrictions held within the subtle energy body; typically associated with held emotions within the body. Discharging unprocessed emotions – whether conscious or unconscious -- assists in restoring homeostasis within the system. “The myofascial continuum is rich in interoceptors that are able to stimulate the areas of the brain that control the emotional state; manual therapy involves both the structure and the emotional sphere” (Bordoni and Marelli, 2017).
As I paint, various perceptions arise, my body-mind working through relational interactions and experiences of everyday life. Sometimes exaggerated movements need to work through in repetition before more quieted actions take place; scraping, scratching, sanding then soothed over with thin transparent washes. Often times insecurities and vulnerabilities emerge. I trust this process, despite its lack of clarity at times. And other times, I am unequivocally clear on my emotional content, understanding that the “cause” of such content is reverberating through layers of tissue and time and as such, has a lasting effect on my body.

These written materials – anatomy and meditation books – are additional studio tools used in the intersection of my painting and bodywork practices.

WOMAN reciprocity between Self and other

“I never violate an inner rhythm. I loathe to force anything. I don’t know if the inner rhythm is Eastern or Western. I know it is essential for me. I listen to it and I stay with it. I have always been this way. I have regards for the inner voice.” – Lee Krasner

“. . . improvisation is about working between subject and object; the object is merely a place through which questions are addressed.” – Amy Sillman
American abstract expressionist painter Lee Krasner referenced herself as being a part of nature, in a way belonging to Nature. “I merge what I call the organic with what I call the abstract . . . As I see both scales, I need to merge these two into the ever-present.” (Krasner, 2019). Krasner did not stop to consider what these aspects symbolized, stating that perhaps they might reference spirit and material or the idea of merging versus separation or aspects of both masculinity and femininity. Krasner worked within cycles and rhythms all her own, periods of intensity and dormancy and often recycled her own works to create new ones.

Working with a sense of freedom, making marks along the canvas, moving my body – moments of quick gesticulation along with moments of reprieve and rest – toggling between subjective states of mind and then response to what is seen. Sometimes I wonder about the source of such energy; is it a reflection of my inner states alone or at times does the energy of the collective also move through me? Amy Sillman notes this process of trying to find form as “. . . a very fragile thing to do” (Sillman, 2020).

Michelle Grabner’s paintings connect past and present, drawing the viewer’s attention to the beauty of domestic, everyday items. Passages through time, memories slipping above and below, merge and emerge, over and under, under and over again are what become central and not-central simultaneously. Grabner notes that pure originality in artwork is nonexistent and that within her work she’s thinking through the “. . . gradual evolution of decorative motifs, some of which can be traced back for millennia.”
With her use of repetitive line, continuity of labor with paint and graphite, Agnes Martin’s paintings reference time and material processes as well. What is the relationship between labor that is unseen versus seen? How is unseen labor understood by others who may or may not experience their bodies different to another? Where does the labor lie in such efforts toward understanding and explanation? Where to direct one’s labor becomes a matter of choice, born from individual discernment in relation to Self and the collective. Martin’s own imperfect labors become the subtle contrast within her grid formations. She described her grid paintings as moments of happiness, inspiration, innocence and beauty. Martin was influenced by Suzuki Roshi’s teaching on Zen Buddhism and while she did not contextualize her works as spiritual in nature, the embodied process of repetition
seems to operate as a contemplative practice nonetheless. Martin states, “Beauty is the mystery of life. It is not in the eye it is in the mind. Beauty speaks a message to us. We are confused about this message because of distractions” (Martin, 2018).

Distractions, along with joy, are a part of life. When one’s joy and agency are taken up solely in the service of deciphering, sifting and sorting and laboring over distractions, it can deplete the energy system. Learning to navigate what may be perceived as an unending gauntlet of distractions in the effort to get to the non-distractions is a misperception in itself. We become impatient, aggressive, antsy or conversely saddened, despondent, withdrawn. Working as one will – discursively or directly -- through both the distractions as well as the “good parts” of life become a crucial material choice.

A close collaborator of Carl Jung, Toni Wolff, developed a construct in which to locate Self in relation to four particular feminine archetypes. Today the model could be extrapolated more
broadly to include anyone. It was devised as a simple quadrant in which one might personally identify along the vertical axis as *Mother* or *Hetaira* archetypes and along the horizontal, how one may align to the larger, cultural landscape from a *Medial Woman* or *Amazon* archetype. While the archetypal names are outdated, the generality of the model might still hold relevance. Wolff noted that most women identify with one archetype more predominantly and that a second type is also not too difficult to witness in oneself. Incorporating the opposite aspects of one’s identified archetypes is how Wolff located the work toward integration of Self. (Vermeesch, 2021).

![Feminine Archetype diagram](image)

**PAINTING** daily abstractions in the making

Work title: Pink Papers // Dream Sequence

Energy is funneled through, thought through, cautiously questioned; clarity reveals itself and then shifts again . . . sometimes within grasp and sometimes not. Images flash and then disappear. I use the grid as a compositional tool, providing scaffolding for the colorful chaos of life. As a framing device it reminds us that the mind wants to remain in charge, staying vigilant in protection of it’s partner, the feeling-body. The frames of reference and lines of knowing,
feeding into each other with echoes of past intermingling with the present moment, coexisting toward an unknown future.

Magenta, appears in the night and now subtle traces in daytime too. What to make of such dreams come true? Fragile, ephemeral, seen – a sunny spot, gathering brightness, void of answers except for a slight crinkle of sound as air moves through the space.
Work title: Rupture and Repair // Origin Point

A conglomeration of bits and pieces, cut and torn, hung up around a gallery space. Evidence of time spent, proof of work completed, fragile fragments hung with care. Tape as the sticking substance to help adhere, connect and remain in position. Scotch tape for quick expediency, leftover bits of white artist tape, with less tack, used to facilitate a “first draft” of the pieces. Final placement secured with the double-sided kind. Improvisational moves assist in the creation of a certain rhythm and structure along the wall surfaces. I arrange and rearrange the painted fragments, allowing for chance operations to dictate a certain logic all their own. Small material decisions feed into the larger decision that reads as the work itself; this decision only a byproduct of time spent painting, formulating thoughts and gathering words – now, that is the real work which often gets employed in ways more relational than visual.
The work, while superficially is “the best I have at the moment,” also touches on my deeper desire to be left with the paints, to make quietly, to simply move about without any internal or external judgement or analysis. I trust my own embodied sense of movement while cleaning/tidying the studio, gesso-ing a substrate, scraping, rolling, dotting, skipping paint across a surface, layering transparent washes and watching the subtle changes in color appear and disappear. These are the ingredients that help bring forth a certain awareness that helps me to process life. Images coming into form shift, appear and disappear, at times unclear, point to my own conflicted interiority.

Color brings pleasure but the act of moving and making gets mired and enmeshed with worry and anxiety. Mind exerting instead of allowing, the process folding unnaturally, intuition left outside the door or alternatively, body-mind together learning to share the studio with a new partner; discernment. The paintings are a process point for assumptions gone unnoticed, projections uncorrected, all in the name of keeping the peace. Peace for whom? This question
rattles around in my brain as breath comes and goes; with the realization that the labor necessary to answer this question is held only within the immeasurable future.

Labeling the paintings as “interior landscapes” and attempting to make no attachment to them is both difficult and medicinal in nature, leading to my own regulated nervous system. Toggling between the action and stillness, fragments of language form, enabling me to reclaim aspects of my own embodied knowing, lost at times within life’s rapidly changing circumstances. Listening inward I feel both a grounded and spacious sensation within, reminding me that hearing and movement are intertwined; the ear having its embryological origins from tissue designed to perceive gravity (Krauss, 2021).

In collaboration to the visual elements, practitioner Amy Green introduces sound elements into the space to create an immersive experience. In Tibetan Buddhism, medical illustrations come in the form of thangka paintings, thangka referring to a thing that one unrolls (Rhie and Thurman, 1999). As individuals arrive, lay down on mats and the sound bath begins, unseen frequencies reverberate and penetrate in and around our physical forms allowing for the body’s capacity to autonomously listen and respond with restorative care within the vibrational field created. Once concluded, bodies leave the space, heading to the next portion of their day, life continuing to flow through and around them, just as before, always in flux.
The documentation of the visual work reveals moments, frozen in time, images to easily scroll through with minimal effort belying the actual effort involved in the making. Documentation of the event is a performative gesture, staged to prove the existence of the activity prior to its happening. To photograph during such a vulnerable time would be invasive.

Work title: Overlaps and Parallels // Absence and Expression
The challenge to express myself is felt throughout my body – tightness of torso, legs stiffening, limbs moving, hesitation of breathe, thoughts both conflicted and appreciative, frozen and moving; contained within an expanse of time and place.

Josef Albers stated that art is in the performance – how something is made, not what is made - and ideally acts as revelation, not as information (Gabriel, 2019).

The act of making and my own subjective understandings are reflected back to me. At times the revelations are small and at other times, overwhelming, as I muddle through and continue my process. Plans upended, actions reversed, shifting assumptions reexamined. I frame and re-frame in an attempt to understand the illogical, logically.
I am stuck within a set of double-binds, *feeling* the disconnect between action and truth. Overlaps and parallels, continuation of effort. Ideas come and go; glimpses of understanding that pass through before they materialize. I make in an attempt to understand. I labor to express myself, a continual negotiation of just how much effort is required to cajole my body to move in rhythm to another? In the studio these movements come in the forms of color, repetition and rhythms that influence my being, allowing me the space to frame and question. In an effort to make tangible, I draw the questions out. I view and re-view, various frames of reference considered: what is left behind and what is allowed in? In this way, I consider life anew.


Simon, J., & Martin, A. (1996). Perfection is in the mind – An interview with Martin, Agnes. *Art In America, 84*(5), 82-.
