



MOVING BETWEEN WORLDS

A Guide to Embodied Living and Communicating

ANDREA OLSEN

Responses to Andrea Olsen's *Moving Between Worlds*



Eeva-Maria Mutka
Pen Pynfarch, Wales (2015)
*Body and Earth: Seven Web-Based
Somatic Excursions*
Still image from videography
by Scotty Hardwig

"*Moving Between Worlds* is a timely addition to Andrea Olsen's distinguished sequence of books exploring the potential of embodied intelligence as a resource for personal, social, and planetary health. Throughout her career as a dancer and a teacher, she has connected art, physiology, environmental stewardship, and multi-cultural communication in ways that are at once utterly original and urgently necessary."

—JOHN ELDER, professor emeritus of English and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and the Breadloaf School of English, author of *Picking Up the Flute*

"Andrea Olsen's writing calls us toward a critical quiet, an urgently quiet practice. Her guidance gives us the framework we need to regard our place—our bodies, our spirit—in this world. She has shaped a month of days to practice, remember, and remind us of what is within reach."

—BEBE MILLER, professor emeritus of Dance, Ohio State University, and artistic director Bebe Miller Company

"In our cautious, distanced modern milieu, we too easily forsake the body. Here Andrea Olsen reminds us that the body, our bodies, are the center of any engagement, interaction, or offering we will ever have. She brings multiple lenses to a 'scholarship of the body,' of lived experience, applying her findings to our needs for communicating across divides. This book is like no other, stretching between dance and dialogue."

—LAURA SEWALL, author of *Sight and Sensibility: The Ecopsychology of Perception*

"'What does the body have to do with communication?' one of Andrea Olsen's students asks impatiently. This book is her response, and it is a gift to us all. This fascinating, compelling collage of elements gradually reveals what makes the body so profoundly communicative, within oneself, with others and with the world. The body's complexity is reflected in the extraordinary richness of her means, encompassing science, stories, art, images, memories, philosophy, spirituality, and, above all, exercises that ground readers in their own felt experience. Andrea writes not just about the body but from the body. *Moving Between Worlds* is her body communicating with our bodies."

—ROSALYN DRISCOLL, author of *The Sensing Body in the Visual Arts: Making and Experiencing Sculpture*

"This book goes beyond simply making us more aware—it helps us to understand that communication, to be effective, needs to be open-ended, emergent, and ongoing. Olsen offers practices to prepare ourselves to communicate and to tune our actions in real time. In her expansive ways of thinking, she includes communication with the more-than-human world and all the beings that inhabit it. Reading this book is not only timely, it is urgently relevant as we meet both the challenges and moments of exquisite beauty in contemporary living on an endangered planet."

—CHRIS AIKEN, dance artist and associate professor of Dance, Smith College (from the Foreword)

“Working in the field of international relations requires an embodied and ethical awareness of cultures, norms, and values, as well as specific communication skills. Olsen quite sensibly puts the body at the front and center in her quest to understand the divides that can separate or connect us across perceived borders and boundaries. If you work or travel internationally, this book is a quintessential companion on the journey and can help you navigate your relationship with the world and your personal story, including self-awareness and self-managing stress levels.”

—TANGUT DEGFAY, international development and public policy specialist, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

“*Moving Between Worlds* will benefit many people involved in international communication! I can’t wait to hold it in my hands. As we become more aware of our body and our senses, our perceptivity deepens. We participate in the world of creativity with music, with dance, and with poetry, connecting globally beyond perceived linguistic and cultural barriers.”

—NÜKHET KARDAM, author of *From Ottoman to Turk and Beyond: Shimmering Threads of Identity*, and co-creator (with Amir Etemadzadeh) of the Rhyme & Rhythm Project

“The movements that our bodies make are integral to our spiritual lives. Patterns of bodily movement train our senses; we grow willing and able to perceive greater realities of which we are an active part. By providing shining examples from myriad traditions as well as thoughtful guidance in specific exercises, Olsen offers us ample resources for transforming our relationships to ourselves, to others, and to the Earth, so that we may participate more consciously in the worlds our movements are creating.”

—KIMERER LAMOTHE, philosopher, dancer, scholar of religions, and author of *Why We Dance: A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming*

“Feeling at home in our bones and bodies allows inherent intelligence to keep flowing throughout our embodied selves. As we inhabit our full sensory potential with internal integrity and extend awareness to all that surrounds us,

we allow rhythms inside to meet rhythms outside. Olsen’s book offers multiple embodiment practices that support this process, clarifying the dynamic exchange that is always happening in the day-to-day experiences of living and communicating.”

—CARYN MCHOSE AND KEVIN FRANK, founders of Resources in Movement and authors of *How Life Moves: Explorations in Movement and Meaning*

“Embodiment skills allow us as performers and as humans to tune into the frequencies of others, no matter what city or country we’re in. The invaluable tools for inherent nonverbal ways of communicating that Olsen shares through her stories, research, and movement practices are perfect for all those who are looking to connect more deeply—and for those who feel we are all already connected.”

—CAMERON MCKINNEY, artistic director of Kizuna Dance, and 2019–20 U.S.–Japan Friendship Commission Creative Artist Fellow

“Olsen’s dynamic, interactive guide offers essential body-based education and inspiration for us all—including teens and college-level adults. Her somatic activities can help them to cultivate body awareness and develop the embodied resilience needed to support healthy communication, whether within their family, during international travel, or in their lifelong journey as moving bodies on the Earth. If you’d like to support your teen or college-aged adult to become more self-aware, resourceful, and communicative—read and share this book!”

—SUSAN BAUER, founder of Embodiment in Education and author of *The Embodied Teen*

“Ooh wow yummy book! Reading felt like a mug of warm tea nestled between hands. Some very helpful reminders here for the process of studying abroad. Arriving somewhere—to this place, to this time, to this growing body—requires real shapeshifting. I can already feel this wanting to be re-read and breathed into practice. So, thank you!”

—HANNAH LAGA ABRAM, Dance/Anthropology student at Middlebury College currently studying in Ireland

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Embodied Living and
Communicating

ANDREA OLSEN

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Middletown, Connecticut

Wesleyan University Press
Middletown CT 06459
www.wesleyan.edu/wespress
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Foreword © 2022 Chris Aiken
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Manufactured in the United States of America
Designed by Richard Hendel
Composed by Rebecca Evans in Utopia and TheSans

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
available at <https://catalog.loc.gov/>
paper ISBN 978-0-8195-8089-4
e-book ISBN 978-0-8195-8090-0

5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated to creative colleagues
PETER SCHMITZ, NANCY STARK SMITH, and
GORDON THORNE, honoring the depth and
continuity of connection, unique and precious,
through four decades of making*



Poppy Study #1 by Kristina Madsen
Maple, milk paint, gesso
Photograph by Stephen Petegorsky

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8 Papua New Guinea, New Britain, Sulka
Wood, paint, 43 1/2 in.
9 Gift of Evelyn A. J. Hall, 1981 (1981.331.1),
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
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Foreword

CHRIS AIKEN

In *Moving Between Worlds: A Guide to Embodied Living and Communicating*, Andrea Olsen writes with great wisdom about the relationship between embodiment and communication, drawing on her many years of dancing, performing, writing, teaching, and collaborating with artists, scholars, scientists, therapists, healers, and community activists. In her previous works *BodyStories*, *Body and Earth*, and *The Place of Dance*, Olsen has been a leader in advocating for meaning and knowledge-building through the development of embodied intelligence. For her, this has always included a weaving-together of awareness with the biological foundations of our being. She braids these subjects together in ways that are quite accessible: the ecological, the poetic, the personal, and the cultural strands of our lives.

In this book, Olsen states: “Recognizing the impact of perception may be the most essential component of communication.” Having studied and explored perception for many decades, I could not agree more. In the field of ecological psychology, founded by J. J. and Eleanor Gibson, action is viewed as inseparable from perception. Without the ongoing ability to monitor the progress of our actions, affordances of our environment, and the emergent actions of human and non-human beings, we would not be able to survive, let alone communicate with one another. To communicate effectively involves listening to the self, as well as others, to tune one’s attention. Listening offers ongoing feedback that can be used to change one’s perceptions and tune one’s actions.

Each chapter or “Day” is full of practices and pathways that readers can explore to develop sensitivity and relational agency within their perceptions. Olsen encourages the reader to slow down, or even to pause what they are doing, to allow new information to surface and to recognize patterns in the ways we perceive, patterns that not only shape our body and our movement but also our beliefs about and connections with others. Her work here is very much connected to the pre-movement anticipatory states described in the research of Hubert Godard, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Nikolai Bernstein. Unconsciously, we are continually readying ourselves to act by orienting our senses and toning our tissues to what we anticipate is about to happen or what we are about to do. As Olsen points out, our preparations are not always connected to what is actually happening but are the result of our education, culture, and personal history. She reminds us that the speed of perception and action is so fast that it is very difficult to refine and adjust our actions once they have begun.

Through detailed exercises and stories, Olsen offers us tools to notice and explore how our perceptions of self, others, and the world are interconnected and foundational to our capacities to communicate with one another. This book goes beyond simply making us more aware: it helps us to understand that communication, to be effective, needs to be open-ended,



Chris Aiken

Photograph by Chris Randle

emergent, and ongoing. Olsen offers practices to prepare ourselves to communicate and to tune our actions in real time. In her expansive ways of thinking, she includes communication with the more-than-human world and all the beings that inhabit it. Reading this book is not only timely, it is urgent. As Olsen reminds us, we need our bodies to be fully present to meet both the challenges and moments of exquisite beauty of contemporary living on an endangered planet.

Entryways

An Introduction

*A bow of respect toward the material,
a bow of respect toward the reader.*

—Barry Lopez, from “The Wild Road
to the Far North”

Andrea Olsen
London, England (2015)
*Body and Earth: Seven
Web-Based Somatic Excursions*
Still image from videography
by Scotty Hardwig

Moving Between Worlds is the last of my quartet of books on the body, combining science and scholarship with four decades of direct experience as a dance artist and educator. My work draws on the multidisciplinary body of research and writings that feeds what is now called the field of *somatics*, and for this reason, there are many different ways to enter the text. The foundation of this work is in dance, human anatomy, and Authentic Movement. My work also draws on ecological psychology, social anthropology, and neuroscience as well as linguistics and the literature of mindfulness.

The book you are reading is focused on the experience of communication. Like my prior offerings, it describes a series of practices that bring together evolutionary movement and experiential anatomy to clarify and orient the body; perceptual explorations to understand the nervous system and restore resilience in alignment; and the disciplines of writing and specific movement practices to integrate and articulate our findings.



ORIGINS

This book is based on a life lived dancing. Every word is filtered through the body, my body. If I haven't felt my way through a topic, I don't write about it—like breath and voice, or rest and restoration. Speaking from the body, not just about the body, is part of somatic awareness. This perspective honors the deep intelligence of the body as subject, not object; the Earth as subject with intrinsic intelligence and integrity; and both as interconnected with much to teach us if only we learn to listen.

BETWEENNESS is a central theme. We wake in the morning, move from silence to speaking, indoors to outdoors, private to public, and personal to professional with multiple transitions. As we communicate with different parts of ourselves, fellow humans, and our surroundings, we cross thresholds from one dimensional realm to another. Amidst all these transitions, not-knowing is constant: there is a gap between where we were and where we are going. Interpretation of each present moment is based on our past experience and on the health and receptivity of our bodies. In this state of betweenness, we are immersed in fresh possibility. As we inhabit this "ecotone," or terrain of potential creativity, noticing what brings personal joy and insight is part of the unfolding process.

Images are what make my heart sing. Juxtaposed with themes, they support intuitive connections. A visual artist by training and family heritage, I experience art images as home ground in the realm of nonverbal communication; visual art offers a way of knowing that enriches and enlivens beyond conscious thought. As Barry Lopez writes in his vivid autobiographical narrative *Horizon*: "Art's underlying strength is that it does not intend to be literal. It presents a metaphor and leaves the viewer or listener to interpret." When encountering a compelling visual, I feel unmediated joy. And visual artists, in my experience, are essential colleagues: they see.

Embodied communication is a learning process. When I am interviewed for newspapers or podcasts, I stumble to find words that match my experience. What feels coherent and easeful inside my thinking mind is revealed as awkward. I write to learn: if I were already a great communicator, why bother to spend decades of life investigating and practicing? I danced because it was silent. I wrote because I could edit my words. I spoke on stage while dancing because I could rehearse each phrase. I now film and photograph to compare what something "feels like" to what it "looks like." And when I write a book, I simultaneously make an hour-long dance to check if what I am saying feels true.

This writing project grew out of experiences bringing embodied perspectives into graduate courses on global communication at the lively Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, in California. Career-focused students from many countries sat behind desks (on rolling wheels) with computers and cell phone screens between us. Generally, they expected fast, relevant, easily applicable tools, accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. How is embodiment communicated in this context? How can cutting-edge research on perception and brain-body interconnectedness be relevant? How can practices for self-managing

Embodiment

When asked, "What does it mean, 'to inhabit the body'?" dance artist Nancy Stark Smith responds: "For me, inhabiting my body is about feeling the actual sensations of my exact body in this exact moment—for example, expansion and release of the chest with breathing, crick in the left trapezius muscle. It is about being present throughout your body as it is, not just having one to carry you around."

Interconnectivity

We were all just "bumbling about," Janet Adler says about our time together in the 1970s to 1990s in Northampton, Massachusetts, "focused on our work." Janet and the Discipline of Authentic Movement are influences that underlie this book. Collaboration and interconnectivity are not all about talking, discussing, deciding, and planning. In fact, they have much more to do with the "nonverbal thing"—the betweenness of people, ideas, and images experienced and recorded through the living, moving body. We are impacted at every second by context and companions, even if we don't notice at the time.

Spinning

Growing up on a farm in the midlands of the U.S., I would stand in our field spinning and see the horizon swirling 360 degrees around me. From there I could go anywhere, any direction, and that became my aspiration: to have a home tether but go far afield, meet other people, other cultures, other views. Dance was my partner in this goal. Ballet classes in the nearby city made spinning into art, and art could take me anywhere—and did.

stress and working with trauma in disaster-relief zones be communicated not as concepts but as embodied skills? A book that included science-based embodiment principles and practices for living and communicating became necessary.

Embodiment skills have become increasingly relevant in the ensuing years amid the Covid-19 pandemic, global racial protests, and political challenges. The word embodiment is “here, there, and everywhere” in books, articles, songs, online summits, and social media conversations that cross time zones, continents, and academic disciplines. My desire in this book offering is for everyone to have embodied knowledge and a daily movement practice to feel connected to place, to people, and to ancestors—human and other. There is much to attend to, and our choices are impacted largely by our states of mind and attention. Perhaps a guidebook can be of use as we navigate the increasingly complex and noisy terrain of our lives. We are in uncharted waters, moving fast. How do we become calm, find flow, feel space and spaciousness, and appreciate the unique and universal bodies we inhabit?

LOOKING BACK

For those interested in the scholarly ground that underpins this book, we can reflect on several authors, scholars, and creative investigators. Current understandings of embodied knowledge from within psychology and social anthropology can be traced back to the tradition of American psychologist J. J. Gibson (*The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 1979), who posits that the world is full of rich, higher-level information. Becoming an expert means refining (refreshing) our senses to perceive what is meaningful and attuning to finer and finer differentiations of meaning. Social anthropologist Tim Ingold (*The Perception of the Environment*, 2000) further developed this notion, recognizing the dynamics of perception and perceivability. He states: “Skills are grown, incorporated into the human organism through practice and training in an environment.” Active engagement attends to “what it means to ‘dwell,’ and on the nature of skill,” weaving together approaches from social anthropology, ecopsychology, and developmental biology.

Visual psychologist Laura Sewall (*Sight and Sensibility*, 1999) focuses on place-based seeing. She asks: “Why is it important that we see from an embodied perspective when communicating? We are always held within a context, and with our feet on the ground, somewhere. But if we don’t place ourselves, if we don’t know where we are standing, we will not be balanced in our interactions.” Plant ecologist and indigenous author Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2015) concurs. How we perceive the world shapes our identity. We carry the landscapes and peoplescapes of our childhood homeland within us. If we leave our homeland, that early heritage accompanies us. She also notes that discipline-specific and science-specific terminology can create a “wall of words,” separating us from rather than connecting us to the world we inhabit.

These writers are phenomenologists at heart: the body does not exist separately from the body-as-lived experience; a person does not exist separately from the environment but is embedded in it. Rolfer, researcher, and dancer Hubert Godard amplifies this view when he writes about the importance of the gravity response for efficient alignment, which affects the space around and between bodies. He describes the theory of tonic function and the importance of fascia in whole-body awareness and communication, emphasizing the pre-movement and its impact on tonal readiness. Godard's work informs Caryn McHose and Kevin Frank's explorations in phylogenetic development and resonance (*How Life Moves*, 2006). With effective perceptual orientation, reception increases. In other words, such preparations can help us in our ability to note what's going on and to move beyond our preconceived notions by allowing us to remain skillfully receptive and attentive.

Neuroplasticity and the capacity to change behavior through awareness has been articulated by Norman Doidge (*The Brain that Changes Itself*, 2007) and Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee (*The Body Has a Mind of Its Own*, 2008). Much of what has been intuited in the past is now documented scientifically, including the importance of the brain in the gut discussed by Michael Gerson (*The Second Brain*, 1999) and the microbiome discussed by Emeran Mayer (*The Mind-Gut Connection*, 2018). The multiple roles of the autonomic nervous system in the treatment of trauma have been explored through the development of somatic experiencing by Peter Levine (*Healing Trauma*, 1999); co-regulation as an interactive process engaging the social nervous systems of both therapist and client by Stephen Porges (*The Polyvagal Theory*, 2011); and the integration of advances in brain science, attachment research, and body awareness into treatments around traumatic stress by Bessel van der Kolk (*The Body Keeps the Score*, 2015). Gabor Maté (*When the Body Says No*, 2008) and Dan Siegel (*Mindsight*, 2009) share insights on addiction recovery and mind-body wellness.

Interculturalists Houman Sadri and Madelyn Flammia (*Intercultural Communication*, 2011) offer a comprehensive walk-through of theory and practice related to communication strategies in global contexts. Turkish-American political scientist Nükhet Kardam (*From Ottoman to Turk and Beyond*, 2016) delineates a more intimate familial view of intercultural and multi-ethnic identities linked to women's human rights. Resmaa Menakem (*My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017) addresses embodied racialized trauma and promotes "somatic abolitionism" as "living, anti-racist practice and culture building." Nature writer and cultural anthropologist Barry Lopez (*Horizon*, 2019) takes us on journeys to multiple remote sites, detailing the "long learning curve" to unlearn cultural assumptions and noting the urgency of global climate action.

Philosopher of religion Kimerer LaMothe (*Why We Dance*, 2015) introduces the idea of "bodily becoming" to illuminate the vital role that movement plays in the process of developing capacities that distinguish us in degree as human—including our abilities to empathize, cooperate, engage

Com Des

Showing visual artist and author Josie Iselin a draft of this book, she reminds me that Communication Design (Com Des) is a field of study. "How can you write a book on communication and not think about design?" she queries. "So much is said by the book layout itself" I nod my head in agreement. Form is content. In my books, the space on each page, the feel of the paper, the ideas juxtaposed with images create the context for the words.

California

When I met Nükhet Kardam over coffee at Café Lumiere on a sunny March day in Monterey, California, I knew I was not in New England. She was enthusiastic, effusive, generous with her ideas and gestures—exclaiming, “that’s fantastic!” Her eyes were attentive, her hands defining the air. Her comments began as questions; her sentences consistently ended with “What do you think?” This meeting changed the trajectory of my creative investigations. It was an introduction not just to a person and a personality but to the power of cultural heritage, academic lineage, and West Coast fun.

in ritual, and adapt to multiple environments. Hillary Rodrigues and John Harding (*Introduction to the Study of Religion*, 2009) elucidate historical and critical contexts around spirituality and religious perspectives. Resources in mindfulness training through introspection and meditation in difficult times are articulated by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Thich Nhat Hanh (*Full Catastrophe Living*, 2013) and Pema Chödrön (*When Things Fall Apart*, 2000). Anthropologist and dance scholar Yvonne Daniel (*Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*, 2011) offers several cultural lenses through which expressive dances release and channel physical and emotional stresses “to ideally create individual centeredness, communal harmony, and fierce, but loving protection throughout the local environment.”

Practice as scholarship is a concept deployed by linguistic theorists as early as J. Samuel Bois and Gary David (*The Art of Awareness*, 1966) and has evolved into a flourishing subfield within art and performance theory. One example is the notion of PaR/Practice-as-Research, discussed by British scholar Anna Pakes (*Art as Action or Art as Object*, 2004) and Ben Spatz (*What A Body Can Do*, 2015). If we understand the levels of abstraction in language formation from initial stimulus to sensations, interpretation, meaning-making, conclusions, and theories, then we see that theory must constantly circulate back to “lower” sensory data, creating a cyclical balance between lived experience and scholarship. The “To Do” investigations in *Moving Between Worlds* are at heart a call to sustained research in embodied techniques.

Finally, Mabel Todd’s pioneering work (*The Thinking Body*, 1937) created an important baseline for experiential ways of knowing and considering the body as subject, not object: not just any pelvis, but one’s own pelvis—felt and inhabited in all its universality, uniqueness, and detail. This embodied perspective was carried forth in the writings of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (*Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, 1993) and Janet Adler (*Archiving Backward*, 1995), whose insights are featured in this book.

MOVING FORWARD

Embodiment—consciously inhabiting the lived body—is a theme of our time. There are a number of programs and courses where this book can be especially useful, including:

- A. Undergraduate or graduate-level survey courses on somatics, experiential anatomy, somatic psychotherapy, expressive arts, dance composition, and performance studies.
- B. Environmental and international studies programs inclusive of whole-body and place-based awareness.
- C. Communications courses that highlight the 90 percent of communication that is “non-verbal.”
- D. Psychology courses that focus on strategies for wellness, trauma recovery, and mindfulness.

E. Professionals in health centers; art, dance, movement, and physical therapists; and early interventionists, including youth educators and social and emotional learning specialists.

Note on repetition within the text

Teachers and students may find that some chapters are more applicable to their particular context. To accommodate single-chapter users, there is some intentional repetition of basic concepts and terminology, for example: the meaning of *body* (as a term inclusive of one's mental, physical, emotional, intuitive, energetic, and spiritual selves—however you define the parts); and *interconnectedness* (body systems and earth systems as one); along with my definitions of *communication* (the exchange of information, emphasizing the “gap of betweenness” that occurs), and *embodiment* (consciously inhabiting the lived body).

I believe conscious embodiment is central to our easeful living and communicating and that it enhances effective and joyful interaction. Change is possible and essential as we build on investigations of the past and move forward together in this challenging contemporary time.

Grand Lake Stream, Maine

2022

My Way

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen says about my work: “You point toward and assemble.”
I think she is right.



Paul Matteson
Blue Barn,
Bramble Hill Farm,
Massachusetts
(2015)
*Body and Earth:
Seven Web-Based
Somatic Excursions*
Still image from
videography
by Scotty Hardwig