

# EXCERPT

## MEDICINE WITHOUT AN EXPIRY DATE

*Indigenous Remedy for Modern Trouble*

### Episode 6

## Critical Content: Body Work

*Includes; pages 1-25 Table of Contents, Acknowledgments, Introduction by Dagara Elder Malidoma Somé and pages 221-257 Episode 6 - Critical Content: Body Work*



*"Our native human wisdom is a knowledge of community and oratory... a wild genius that is the true source of any ability we may have to remake sustainable culture that includes long forgotten members named Nature and the Spirit World."*

*Medicine Without an Expiry Date* argues fiercely for the reclamation of our own indigenous intelligence. The book weaves an intricate fabric of perception, melding personal experiences with indigenous ritual, stories of initiation, and a deep exploration of what Jones calls *storycarrying*.

He includes discussions of the wisdom of the body, emotional intelligence, the nature of education, and a look into the practical value of the wild mythic imagination. Intended as a combination of "teaching harangue," poetry, field notes, and guidebook, it defies simple categorization: it is *sui generis*, without genre, "of its own kind."

*- from the Introduction by Malidoma Somé*



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MEDICINE WITHOUT AN EXPIRY DATE  
Indigenous Remedy for Modern Trouble

RANDY THOMAS JONES



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*Indigenous Remedy for Modern Trouble*

A barefoot shaman's manual

RANDY THOMAS JONES  
Introduction by Malidoma Somé

# Randy Thomas Jones

# ~~Medicine Without an Expiry Date~~

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***Indigenous Remedy for Modern Trouble***  
**(A barefoot shaman's manual)**

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# Medicine Without an Expiry Date

*Indigenous Remedy for Modern Trouble*

*(A barefoot shaman's manual)*

By Randy Thomas Jones



*Dedication*

*To Whom it May Concern . . .*

*Rascals At:*

*The Office*

*of the Ancestors*



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*In favour of alternative initiations for girls.*

*In favour of alternative initiations for boys.*

*Come to think, in favour of alternatives in general.*

*In favour of initiations where possible.*

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*Randy Thomas Jones*

*Voluer:*  
*A flier;*  
*also, a robber, or highway theefe;*  
*& an inroder, or a road-maker*

*Cotgrave*

# ACT OF FAITH: IN- ROADS



*Malidoma Somé is an Elder, shaman, and diviner of the Dagara Tribe from Burkina Fasso, in West Africa. He is the holder of three Master's degrees and two Doctoral degrees from the Sorbonne and Brandeis University.*

## PROLOGUE IN-GREE

*The sustatikos, commendatory, in which either the play or the poet is recommended;*

### *Introduction by Dagara Elder Malidoma Somé*

As an Elder and traditional medicine person of my tribe, the Dagara of Burkina Fasso, West Africa, I have been charged, for the last thirty years, with an "assignment" to share indigenous wisdom with the modern west. Originally, the project was inspired by my Elders, who saw the increasing intrusion of modernity affecting our culture, and especially seducing youth away from the village and traditional ways, toward an illusionary prosperity offered up in the image of modernity. Those Elders saw a possibility of offering to share the "technologies" of culture which make the Dagara renowned in West Africa as healers, diviners, and carriers of traditional medicine, especially of ritual forms that keep the community stitched together.

The Dagara share, with other indigenous peoples, a sense of abundance derived from a larger idea of community that includes people, ancestors, spirits, the natural world, and the elements. It is precisely this older sense of community, that provides a model of how to live in harmony with nature and each other which is lost in a headlong rush to modernize. Addressing the jeopardy of de facto economic and cultural colonialism (in spite of technical and legal independence) as an opportunity, through making "friends with the stranger of modernity," provided a great challenge, and yet a sensible approach to maintaining the independence of our people in the long run.

However, such cultural knowledge cannot be transplanted

wholesale and without translation. Moreover, the Dagara indigenous wisdom, as echoed in other traditional knowledge, stresses the need for a dynamic and living relationship between the worlds of spirit, the mythic, nature's voice, and the human village, so there is no way of "industrializing" the kind of education which might be truly representative of indigenous knowledge or wisdom. This suggests that it is essential to develop the kind of dowsing which is able to reveal multiple sources of indigenosity at their wellsprings, even in the modern world, without relying on dogma.

In my experience, there is such a source of the water of indigenosity in the hearts of modern people which can provide a resilient renewal to that kind of wisdom if it can be activated. The indigenous can provide a healing contribution to ailments the modern world experiences. It is my hope that the indigenous will earn a renewed respect and therefore gain a chance to survive and even thrive. Randy's book is one such contribution to this project of healing.

He is one of the more exceptional people I have met. Knowing him since 1996, when he attended a conference I presented, has been an enlightening, inspiring and energizing experience. I remember him dancing around the room in such a way that it was like smudging the room, not a foreign concept to Africans. I have seen him naked in the fire pit during a ritual, sorting through ash to share with eighty men as a gift of protection. And I have also seen him speak with a kind of eloquence which our people say comes only from the other world, when a person is able to make themselves temporarily a vessel of spirit.

These signs of "going native" are not at all unique to him, which gives me a hope of indigenous wisdom returning again to be a strong force of healing in the world. What is also hopeful is to hear a voice of intuitive understanding based on the intrinsic nature of the western mind, always searching for a meaningful connection to self. Randy delved deeply into his own nature, having traveled many roads to reach this point in his life, emerging as a person dedicated to teaching others by encouraging them to expand their horizons, explore their inner emotional depths and transform their way of being in the world.

His self-described label as an "organic intellectual" is very apropos. His experience spans many varied and

interactive fields and he applies both the practical and theoretical to everything he undertakes. In his first book, he has created a deeply personal journal, an exploration of *crafted ritual* applied in modernity, combined with a clear calling for the revivification of ancient shamanic wisdom. *Medicine Without an Expiry Date* contributes to a growing awareness that such wisdom, and the forms of ritual which have perennially tied communities together, is a native human ability which can return from what I call an "oasis-like" status, and invade the "desert" of modernity.

The book argues, in both practical and theoretical terms, that the lack of such knowledge and practice may be leading us further and further from our humanity and causing our progress as a species to be mechanical and non-sustainable. As we become more and more capable of surviving short term and local problems with technical "know-how," our global self, our species as a whole, suffers more and more. As modern society continues to devise ways to simplify life and remove stress from the experience of life, our lives become less tenable. When we focus on individual success, we suffer as a group.

Much of the trouble brewing in modernity can be attributed to our inability as a species to properly communicate with each other and the natural world. The connection to those around us, the shallowness of understanding between us, places modern families and communities at risk of being starved of the kind of intimacy that becomes available through the natural experiences that have long been made "taboo" in the modern world.

Jones reminds us that ritual, as practiced by all societies since before history, provides the "space" for certain, unspeakable things, to be "said." Agonies, grievances, fears, ecstasies, regrets, and the like are not well communicated with words. Only a vague description can be given with words, while a single cry can communicate the exact essence of an emotion. Such understandings defy logic and validation, they simply are. The loss of this understanding of ritual makes it impossible for our societies to communicate, and therefore address appropriately, the truth of extreme emotions that are part of everyone's daily lives. Because we try to explain everything in an "empirical" way, and we are skeptical of things that cannot be proven, we are having more and more difficulty simply telling each other that we love and need one



another. As he says:

“This book is in a sense a defense of that kind of sensitivity, a demand for the simply human right to be in conversation with other members of the community of life, what that might mean, how far down the rabbit hole we might have to go before it can begin to happen, what it might look like, why to do it, and how we might still do it. In this, it is a defense of indigenosity itself, since the indigenous is exactly characterized by the kind of conversation called ritual which ends up being an entire cycle of setting a meeting time, a discussion, conclusions reached, and action points implemented.”

Jones makes his case while telling the tale of one of his many rituals, inspired by the practices of my people, the Dagara, but adapted to the modern setting with modern people.

What results is a natural “tutorial” for anyone in touch with ancient shamanic instincts, assisting them to head toward their true consequence and expression in modernity. The detailed descriptions of a burial ritual, provide several view points from participants. The personal stories of the participants provide so much practical evidence for the existence of the type of healing that is available from the resigned experience of ritual. The practicality, the absolute logic, of the practice of shamanic ritual, becomes clear as the event unfolds and the human processes are revealed. They show the profound communication that can exist between us as planet-sharing animals and the natural world in which we live. The ability to be sensitive to each other and the effect we have on everything around us is within each of us.

This book defends this sensitivity and declares that ancient wisdom, as can be accessed by each of us, is a fundamental right. Each of us can experience the natural world and be “turned on” to its inherent wisdom. It is the ability to communicate, with accuracy, the truth, which is hampered by modern knowledge. Our ability to reach beyond our mortal, verbal communication, so electrified by the vast array of technology that conveys it, is absolutely essential to our long term wellbeing.

*Medicine Without an Expiry Date* argues fiercely for the reclamation of our own indigenous intelligence. The book

weaves an intricate fabric of perception, melding personal experiences with indigenous ritual, stories of initiation, and a deep exploration of what Jones calls *storycarrying*. He includes discussions of the wisdom of the body, emotional intelligence, the nature of education, and a look into the practical value of the wild mythic imagination. Intended as a combination of “teaching harangue,” poetry, field notes, and guidebook, it defies simple categorization: it is *sui generis*, without genre, “of its own kind.”

This didactic methodology is undertaken by design, in an attempt to address the deep issues of translation between modern and indigenous world views, and include both hemispheres of the brain in the journey. Some time is devoted to the defense of such a methodology, and the reader may find themselves “leaping,” as Daniel Deardorff has called it, back and forth between philosophy, anecdote, biography, anthropology, argument and description. It can at least be said with certainty that anything which began to look like a standard training manual as we have come to know it in modernity, with descriptions of procedural certainty, would *not* be the right approach to explain indigenosity!

*Medicine Without an Expiry Date* is a walk between two worlds, authored by one who received the name “Calls Forth Voices” from the Dreamtime, contributing an understanding and deep connection with the elemental knowledge of the indigenous into the personal, social and environmental domains of the modern.

*May your ancestors walk with you,*

*Strengthening the delight of your journey.*

*Patrice Malidoma Somé, PhD*

*“The medium is the message” implies that the invention of a dichotomy between content and method is both naïve and dangerous. It implies that the critical content of any learning experience is the method or process through which the learning occurs.*

Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner:  
*Teaching as a Subversive Activity*

## EPISODE 6      CRITICAL CONTENT: BODY WORK

### 6.1 *Nomadic Migrations*

**W**hen I was around ten or eleven years old, my friends and I began to exercise our increasing range of territory. I grew up mainly in Alberta, but spent two years in Tanzania, east Africa, when I was five and six. I’m sure the African experience of seeing large animals up close was influential in creating my interest in exploring nature.

One of our big adventures was walking a block to the edge of the city and going on a three or four hour hike on the grasslands. We’d work our way up to our perch, and make our lunch camp on the sandstone giants that jutted out of the side of the foothills, surveying our territory. The prairie grasslands have been stripped of their native prairie grass, which stood six feet tall 100 years ago, except for a few remaining patches, but for us it was still wild enough to serve as a welcome escape from the constrained order of suburban life.

The prairie has an incredible presence of sky with it which anyone who has spent time there and taken a moment to notice always remembers. It brings a paradoxical feeling that one is very small in the landscape, yet also in some way very large, because this seeing—this *expanse*—exists, in one way, *inside* of you. In the winter we would go tobogganing, taking advantage of every chance we got to go out in the snow and play. The three of us in my pack lived at the top of a two

hundred meter hill. The alley in winter became slick with ice, the perfect place to risk pain and injury and cheat a little more status among one's peers through dare-devil bobsled style runs down the hill. Snow boarding and skiing to me seem exotic by comparison, but I certainly understand the ecstasy of the roller coaster.

On a field trip to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, I saw the taxidermied Buffalo. Only later would I really understand the damage that had been done when these great beasts were exterminated from the plains. There were reports of single herds 30 miles wide and 100 miles long rumbling through the prairie grass. These were the lifeblood of the land where I was born, and they had been wastefully slaughtered. It was on one such field trip that we got a chance to taste the famous pemmican of the Native Cree, a mixture of dried meat, fruit and fat, a food which could remain in storage for several years and still be edible.

I discovered that I liked dancing in Grade Seven when one of the Grade Nine girls kissed me on a never-to-be-repeated impulse after a school dance. I imagine this was the moment, in my mind, that dancing became a *good* thing. Lovestruck, I took long wistful walks over to her house for months afterward late in the evenings so I could use the lateness of the hour as an excuse for my lack of courage to knock on the door. One of my first jobs was being paid for walking—as a paper boy. At age seventeen, my first full time job was working on a seismic crew as a “jughound.” This was another walking job: we worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week in the dead of winter. We would cover about ten miles a day on average as we laid out recording equipment for the electronic profiling of rock strata in the search for Alberta's oil. Dancing, walking; a reprise, a practice, a riff, a mantra, a *lazzi*, the *Comedia del Arte* term for a repeated embellishment on a theme.

After seismic work, running my landscaping business seemed physically easy by comparison. All these experiences served to change me from the weakling who would get picked last for the sports games into a person who had confidence in his body. I became so healthy with the aerobic effect of the work, that even landscaping left me with enough energy for dance classes. I began with Jazz classes when I was midway through my twenties and since then I have taken various movement classes on and off and continued dance for the

sheer exuberance of it. Now, somewhat older, I do notice a certain soreness the next day after I have been dancing for four hours, but I hope to continue into old age.

It is inspiring to see old people dance, and especially when they have kept the permission in their own bodies alive. Once in a while you see one that is still as limber as a twenty year old. On the other hand, there are some that slow down, but who have stripped away everything unessential, they carry an otherworldly grace in the simplest moves. At some of the native gatherings, I've seen the old women go around and, pretending to shuffle along as if they didn't know what they were doing, fix people in the crowd with their eyes, and beckon people to come and dance. It is very hard to say no, because they are actually projecting their personal power, making a corridor of permission which encompasses the room. There are people who carry so much permission that they can dance by a person who is not dancing and make them get up and dance without ever knowing what really happened.

## 6.2 *History of the Body*

**T**he human body is designed to travel ten or twenty miles a day, and there are documented historical cases of individuals who as a routine walked fifty miles a day. The nomadic part of our heritage must suffer for our current under-stressing of our natural potential. What have we lost? The lack of physicality in our lives makes many people shy about dancing. Showing this animal nature can make people self-conscious in a culture that is not expressive. On the other hand, movement can bring up feelings from *inside*, and the feeling of being watched by an inner dragon is easily as disconcerting as being watched by a group of strangers.

How much of the entire enterprise of western civilization is an attempt to *regulate* movement? The Internet has the hidden danger of suggesting the possibility of never having to move again, while still being "interactive," a seductive dream which television could never realize. Of course, this will be impossible until the technology of robotics develops to a very sophisticated level, but nonetheless, it remains a vision in some

quarters. My enduring fondness for *Star Trek* derives from the continuing involvement of the human body in its vision of the future.

Body is a touchy subject. We all have a history of body, and always in that history is drama and trauma, triumph and triage. On first blush, one might think that the sensitivity around body issues relates to sex. But in my counselor training group, sex was far less upsetting than another topic related to body—play. Though it is fair to say that play is related to power, knowledge and intimacy, and hence to sex. So, on further consideration, a body history encompasses all these realms, but body issues are always related to sex in *some* fashion.

Morris Berman has written in *Coming to Our Senses* about the need for an alternative perspective in the study of history taken from the viewpoint of the body. On a personal level, what would a biography or resume of the *body's* knowledge and experience look like?

In David MacMurray Smith's *BodySense* course we students were asked to write such a history of the body as a way to begin exploring this question.<sup>158</sup> David's concern (as a veteran dancer/mime/actor, instructor, and performance coach) is assisting the performer to reliably draw out a powerful contribution to a performance while continuing to hold the awareness of differing levels of reality that occur simultaneously: the theater space, the "reality" of the play, and the performer's internal awareness and experience. He is convinced that a stellar performance is always sourced from an honest inner feeling and occurs only when the performer is fully present with an awareness that goes both *out* to the world, and *in* to experience. How does he go about teaching this?

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158 Fantastic Space Enterprises, David MacMurray Smith at [fantasticspace.com](http://fantasticspace.com).

### 6.3 *Reach, Relax, Breathe*

**W**e are at David's studio, a wonderful hundred year old dance studio which used to be a theater. The ceiling arches twenty feet high and light streams in from the south windows overlooking the Fraser River. As the years go by, the lands surrounding will be developed, but redevelopment of the theater site itself will be halted when a historical burial site of the Coast Salish Musqueam people is discovered during the excavation. David keeps a maximum class size of about 12 in the 1500 square foot workspace.

MacMurray Smith developed exercises to teach free release of the diaphragm at the same time that emotions are allowed to flow and express. At the same time the "inner observer" is practicing the skill of watching and providing orientation and facilitating the experience.

MacMurray Smith is interested in studying and working with the relationship between muscles, neurology, and how memory patterns itself in the body. It turns out that control over the muscles may be voluntarily relinquished, after a process of "deschooling"<sup>159</sup> of the social controls over body movement. This is an approach to physical education 180° opposite of the controlled and regulated movement we are used to from sports, or more recently, yoga. The ability to deregulate movement, including the contraction of the diaphragm, is a foundational skill for working with the body as a full instrument. This is a different access to physical expression that works directly with potential energy stored in the muscles. It is closely related to *chi* in Eastern approaches. Working with this wild source of *chi*, while simultaneously training one's "inner observer," makes it possible to be in an ongoing development of wider range of expression.

David has developed and integrated a variety of theoretical approaches through his own research. The first foundational tool is the process he calls the "free kinetic" or bio-kinetic release work. It is an extension of the work of Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen. Students lay on the floor, and are instructed to move one arm slowly up in the air and then out

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159 See Illich, Ivan, *Deschooling Society*, 1971, Harper Collins, 1983.

to the side, and back parallel to our bodies. We are told to *both* extend the reach with the arms, *and* to relax at the same time. Reach, relax, breathe.

And again and again. Reach relax breathe. We will repeat the “mantra” over and over while completing *one* cycle of the arm movement form within the timeframe allotted for the focus, which is one hour. I have been *slowly* progressing through the form of movement and by around 30 minutes into the exercise, my arms are out from my sides about 6 “ off the floor. I have been faithfully going over the mantra and physically tried to experience the paradox of reaching (with effort) and relaxing (with allowance):

David comes over and says, “*Feel the vibration yet?*”

“Huhn?” I answer, ever your perspicacious commentator. “*Ok,*” he continues, “*I’m just going to touch your shoulder gently—is that OK?*”

“*Yeah, OK.*”

He moves my shoulder socket ever so slightly and says, “*Do you feel the point where your shoulder is starting to twitch? Loosen it up a bit.*”

Now I *can* notice the twitching a little, and after working it (working at “not working at it”), I find that I can facilitate the chaotic vibration while still keeping my arm in the general position! It feels strange, almost like the kind of shaking you do when you are shivering with cold. After some weeks of practice, it will become an ability I and the other students can turn on or off. The process is natural, and in fact does have the same bio mechanics as shivering. The muscle is firing potential energy that exists in the chemical motor of the muscle.

The next couple of days we explore the phenomenon more. We move our focus from the shoulders to the hips with our legs, then progress to attempting to allow both arms and legs together to get into the “shaking zone.” Shortly we are ready to tackle the diaphragm. We take a breath and relax while breathing out, giving a little “ha ha Hahaha,” sound. When we begin, it is a chortle that is consciously done. But there is a moment that it becomes genuinely funny, and a real laugh follows for a couple of gasping breaths. Then it “dies.” Not funny anymore. Start again. This method of doing a technique to open a path of permission for energy to flow can be called



“cueing.”

This process of “free release” of the diaphragm is simply re-accessing a facility that is innately human, and is observed in all healthy infants. What has happened in the process of socialization is an internalized control of the free response of feeling and expression. But when the process of facilitation becomes an unconscious habit, we have lost two extremely important natural inner mechanisms that help us *know* where we are, and help us *be* where we are.

If tension is held, as it is where the body cannot respond with its full natural expression, illness can develop as a sign of trauma. This is the insight clarified by New German Medicine, which is attempting, with some success, to map specific kinds of trauma with locations in the body. And when the tension is held, we actually do not know our “location”—what we feel, what our response is. This is intimately connected with a situation where there is grief all around, which cannot be expressed and released: it is an essential part of why changes cannot be made in the public arena to address the healing of the Earth. The actual experience of where we are is being repressed. Feelings are held inside, and worse, “out of sight, out of mind.”

On a larger scale, the modern world is acting as a system that is expressing symptoms of un-expressed trauma. Just as in a human body, where unexpressed emotional response can form sickness and begin a process of self-poisoning like cancer, the modern world has its form of self-poisoning in the form of pollution. The grief and outrage of old injustices gets typically projected to another, less fortunate nation or people, as if it was not “our” children that are starving in that foreign land. This is why the work of emotional fluidity is key to any political or spiritual work which says it wants change.

## 6.4 *Laughter Yoga*

**A**fter the first few weeks of working with this twice or three times a week in class, most of the students are eager to use a good twenty minutes of hilarious giggling and laughing to “warm up” together. There is a natural process

and phenomenon of resonant sympathy between the human bodies.

After a week or two, there turns out to be some crying mixed into the laughter. *Switch!* The kinetic process has been re educating a wider range of expressiveness physically, and it turns out to have an emotional parallel. The crying comes because exactly the same diaphragmatic musculature is involved in both crying and laughing. And the physical bio-mechanics are the same as in the trembling in the shoulders and hips we found access to in the kinetic work.

Physical work with the diaphragm can access emotional expression because emotional history is held in the body. The release of charge is self-managed, though mainly unconsciously without training, by a complex internal system of permissions and allowances. Which emotions are acceptable, under what circumstances, we ask ourselves . . . and a reaction takes place before we become conscious of it. The freedom of the charge and discharge of the emotional expression can be increased by assisting in the release of emotional attachments to historical experiences. This promotes increased energetic balance in the system as well as helping to deconstruct the “automatic” emotional default responses that traumatic experiences can create.

The development of the increased range of expression then depends upon increasing one’s range of internal permissions. Increasing permissions depends upon practice in a setting and environment where it is safe to do so and a conscious self awareness of the process can be nurtured. This opens the door for new possibilities of response to be experienced. New or familiar situations can be experienced more directly instead of through the filter of previous trauma that has specifically modified the emotional response mechanism inside of us.

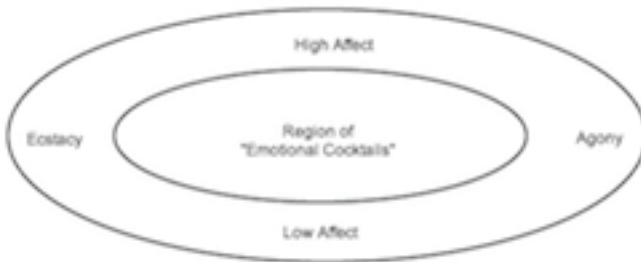
Fast forward to one year later. Class warm up now consists entirely of free kinetic. We work with the intention of loosening *all* of our muscles by the end of a one-hour warm up, taking the diaphragm as a primary point of departure. And a secondary challenge has been introduced—to exercise the ability to simultaneously take the physical weight of our own bodies while continuing to allow the free kinetic to move. We are no longer in a position only on our back on the mat, though we usually begin there to invite the warm up. So the spectrum of ability we are looking to reawaken in the kinetic is from

“fully” controlled movement in day to day street behavior, all the way over to free “shivering”. We are operating in the territory between the two extremes, with volitional ability to move either way.

An even greater challenge is to *consciously* switch from laughter to tears. The body must be very warmed up to do this, but the experiential evidence suggests that the agony/ecstasy cycle is circular. It can be imagined as a circle. At the bottom of the circle would be low “affect” or less feeling expression; at the top of the circle would be a meeting point between full laughter and tears, a veil between worlds, if you will, that is possible to slip across. The diameter of the circle could represent expanding or diminishing capacity of expression. Since the diaphragm is a muscle, it actually strengthens from use, and atrophies when not used.

It turns out that it *is* actually possible to switch back and forth. The emotion in *both* cases is real, *and* it is possible to access it without a particular “presenting” issue. We all have a storehouse of feeling inside. The switch is accomplished by a subtle combination of physical, intellectual, emotional and imaginative facilitation. You turn the corners of your mouth down, or up, and “think-feel-imagine” into the territory you are facilitating. Carlos Castaneda’s Don Juan says, for example, “I can either laugh or cry, so I choose to laugh.”<sup>160</sup> There is a deep truth behind the colloquial phrase, “I laughed so hard I cried.”

Diagram 1 — Agony and Ecstasy as a function of Affect




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160 Castaneda’s many titles can be credited with some of the early revival of popular interest in shamanism. I recommend Castaneda’s *Journey to Ixtlan*: this is where the admonishment that a warrior must “follow a path with heart” originated.

Laughter Yoga, which has gained some adherents, is a modern form of practice recognizing these simple mechanics of the body.<sup>161</sup> The problem with laughter yoga can be that it uses a process technically called “pumping.” This is when the environment or teacher gives subtle rewards for the “correct” behavior of laughter. But it is important to remember that the *body* does not have an allegiance to laughter . . . for the release of tension, the body itself is biologically as comfortable with sobbing as with laughter.

David’s work is painstakingly disciplined and precise exactly to avoid the detrimental effects of pumping. A popularized technique like Laughter Yoga can certify leaders of varying ability and some will recognize that tears are part of the possible outcome of a diaphragm with a wider range of response, and some will not. When permission is given for *both*, it can create a pathway where the body can “unwind” its held tension on its own terms. It is important to remember that the whole process is based on revealing a natural tension release mechanism—it is not a forced process, or “pretending” to release. (Though pretending *can* be a doorway into the real expression—this is referred to as “cueing” to enter a territory.)

The process of emotional *expression* is influenced by our own volition. But even if we have a choice to express or not, it seems to be true that if the *expression* is shut down, the *sensitivity* tends to diminish as well. At the very least, the *awareness* of the source of feeling diminishes. A habit of not expressing leads to diminished access to the feeling realm. Different cultures have different background permissions that form gender identity. For men, less permission is usually given than for women to express grief, while women are usually given less permission to express anger.

Another aspect of emotional expression and awareness is that we apparently have an inbuilt capacity to feel either personal emotion, or, on the other end of the spectrum, universal emotions, through the capacity of empathy and compassion. During the traditional grieving rituals, the specialists in grieving can travel from the current situation into the un-grieved sorrow of the community, and from there enlarge even further into experiencing the grief of other places and times. Certain people have a high capacity to experience

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161 Kataria, Madan, *Laugh For No Reason*, Madhuri International, 1999.

the emotion of others in the same room. This ability is meant to be a service to community, but usually becomes debilitating to the sensitive one if they are not able to learn the distinction, and learn how to both shield appropriately and let excess emotion travel through the “instrument” of their own body. Psychology constantly attempts to reduce all universal to personal, but it is also obvious that to have an emotional response to something that is *not directly* personal is the very basis of compassion.

## 6.5 *The Impulsive Behavior of Shakers*

**T**he bio-kinetic work will be one of the streams of focus continuing through the work at Fantastic Space with David. We work to develop a usable vocabulary to navigate through the territories we are exploring. Very early in the coursework, David introduces a discussion of routine and habits. We are looking for something repeatable in our performance, but not routine. We wish to stay awake, in the Russian philosopher Gurdjieff’s sense, being simultaneously aware of the differing levels of reality, as much as we can.

He poses the question to us: “*What are the grammatical terms or elements of the body’s language?*” There is a list of “principles” written on the blackboard: Relativity, Observation, Listening, Fluency, Transition, Allowance, Coexistence of Extremes. He postulates that such aspects as weight, feelings, sound, touch can be used as markers. Noticing what is happening in these dimensions while we navigate through different experiences of the kinetic help us *know where we are*, specifically and non-judgementally. These markers function like a phonetics of body language; they are the qualities of pronunciation that the body is using in its expression. He points out that *sound* is the perception of being *touched* by shockwaves in the air. We quickly use the principle of “relativity” to spiral into relative confusion from the introduction of too many new concepts at once! We need a practical example.

Out come the large colored rubber balls—twenty inches in diameter—these are the same ones used in many fitness centers or Yoga centers— you can sit on one comfortably enough, as you would on a small stool. Bounce on it a bit, try

balancing with no feet, now bounce, with your feet on the floor again, and then stand up. Now go back again to bouncing and see if there is a way you can simply let the momentum (weight as an element of grammar) *carry you* up. A few moments of studious bouncing follow this last instruction until one of us coos, “ooh!”

Gradually we all get some sort of sense of noticing that there is an initial impulse, which is followed by momentum, and then an arrest, as gravity prevents us from floating up to the ceiling. At one particular combination of intensity and relaxation, the body can seem to simply *receive* the energy of return from the ball, and carry through to standing without adding energy of its own. We are observing actively to discover if there is an *impulse* that “apparently” has an independent energy of its own that you can ride. The concept behind the word “apparent” is key to the observer’s, to the learner’s or the student’s, investigative skill. We “observe,” but what is the substantiation of that observation? How directly are we able to observe reality and then report on it? Since everything we experience is processed within the structure of our own memories, permissions, noticing abilities and biases, it seems to be more honest to tag the appellation “apparently” onto most of, if not all, of our perceptions.

Over the next few weeks, the apparent perception of impulsive energy will be refined. Simultaneously, the kinetic work has extended to include all body muscles, still including the diaphragm. The new, wider, range of responsiveness that is emerging in us makes it now noticeable that there is a constant stream of impulse inside of us. It is the source of *all* movement, but we are in the habit of using it unconsciously. Working in a condition of unconscious habit imprisons us in the unintentional constraints of expression which body history has taught us. The condition of unconscious habit is also the condition of an oppression of feeling that has become internalized.

In refining the sense of working with impulse more consciously, we first use “plastiques” from Jerzy Grotowski’s physical training for actors—the intentional shaping of particular body joints at every possible angle—and simultaneously, observe to see if an inner image and feeling is formed. Following a wrist movement may be a thought or feeling of waving—an imaginary world may form. One may

find oneself on the deck of a departing ship, or wielding a sword in the Middle Ages. Allow that world to take shape, act it out.

A curious thing happens: As the body engages in the play-acting sourced from the original impulse, it moves into a new shape. An imagination can blossom, and then it may last for a few seconds. With practice, the aliveness of the initial impulse can be sustained for more time. The impulse flow, and the imaginary world, can last longer. The impulse generated from the source will come to an end, or a rest. Often this can be a matter of seconds when first learning the technique. An actor in a play would simultaneously be working with a general “character” motivation or impulse, while at the same time looking for the sources moment by moment as the action of the script develops.

It is common that the emotional territory uncovered in free exploration causes the worker to get “thrown off.” At one moment, the impulse was alive, being expressed vibrantly and congruently, and then something happens and you are no longer inside the world of letting the impulse and the imaginary world use you as an instrument to express. This is the situation of actually switching from the “task” to a *reaction* or *response* to the feelings or circumstances experienced *as a result of attending* to the task, however briefly. This is the same territory that “meditation” is attempting to experience. It is also the exact territory of relationship. What is the *actual* situation we are in, rather than experiencing a “second-order” *response* to circumstances, then responding to our own response or reaction as if the response or reaction was the initial event? David uses the shorthand “Going Out” to describe the phenomenon of going “off task” into a re-orientation moment.

The imaginary worlds are naturally fragile. But every moment is an opportunity for the “observer” to be on the task of simply asking: “Where am I?” Am I in an impulse flow? Am I in a moment of reorientation? Am I engaged in the task of inviting the imaginary worlds by consciously shaping the corporeal forms, moving joints into different positions to see what can be invited? What was the point at which that world of imagination died? The agreement of the workroom is to let impulses that are no longer alive go, immediately. Then begin again go back to the literal, the *plastique*, the shape without content, and wait for the next “figurative,” or imaginary, world

to take you.

Comfort and fluency improve as we get more used to the surprising effects and unexpected territories of imagination and feeling we are able to access. As time goes on, we censor our own weirdness less. We are gaining confidence in the process of listening inwardly. What is happening in the room, and in oneself, is relative to the perspective of attention. A more skilled observer will be able to take in more detailed information about what is happening and have a high level of distinguishing details. Our inner observers are gaining strength and facility through the work week after week. We begin to get a sense of the benefit of accepting the coexistence of extremes.

There will be an evolution of what gets expressed. Typically, *stereotypes* will be some of the first image-worlds that can be allowed permission. With practice, the deeper and more powerful energies of *archetypes* begin to emerge. With further practice and development, the typically less focused archetypal energies usually begin to be particularized into elements of *character*.

The sequence is important to note: the development of *character* depends on the inclusion of what is unusual and unique, along with an access to the powerful archetypal energies. The adaptability of human nature has made it possible to mold people into behavioral boxes. "Fitting in" to modernity means very exactly to *not* be unusual or unique, *not* be in touch with powerful archetypal energies. This social control has a sinister origin in the desire to continue to provide more worker ants for the insatiable projects of "civilization." If not, why is so much creativity pressed out of children by our structure of education? Why is there so much resistance to change when it is well known that our relationship with the living Earth needs change?



## 6.6 Rivering

**T**hese experiences of imaginary worlds, lasting only seconds of time at first, are building blocks for the exercise which Grotowski named “Rivering.” The beginning place is to hold a willingness to follow the impulse to impulse perpetual motion, and note when an imaginary world is gone, or has, in the slang, “died.” In the game of rivering, when an imaginary world is gone, you attempt to immediately again notice the origin of a new desire for expression, an impulse, in the body. It may be located in any muscle in the physical body, but it is located in that red meaty stuff, not in the energy chakras. Let that new impulse bloom and encompass the rest of the body-mind. Let the body take shape to honor the sentence that the body wishes to declare. Perhaps the sentence will be an interrogative, exclamatory, or imperative one. What feelings, thoughts, images, passions are spoken of in this sentence which you have allowed and facilitated?

You may be able to “stay on board” with the impulse long enough to notice that the impulse has a contiguous life—it will travel around the body, occasionally jumping instantaneously to a new location. Between each point of punctuation, there is a natural physical shape that is *congruent* and rich in depth. The body will have a natural desire to express congruently and fully. The ability to physically express this congruency is related both to internal permissions and taboos, as well as the physical capacities of the body. Habits of posture that have become routines can get in the way of full congruence, and habits have probably begun as issues around protection that have now become institutionalized, at least to a degree, as physical limitations. Social allegiances can edit expression as well. As performers interested in expression, we are interested in challenging these borders. We are exploring in a fashion designed to expand our repertoire; to be able to fulfill the impulse with *less and less editing*, and *more and more awareness* of the editing that *does* remain.

“Editing” refers to either conscious or unconscious facilitation of *how* impulses find expression. An impulse to strike the floor should be modulated for safety reasons, for example. But editing can happen because the *conjecture* or *anticipation*

of experiencing uncomfortable feelings from fulfilling an impulse stops the expression. Self-conscious anticipation about how you will be viewed can also inhibit expression. But with practice, the “river” evolves to the point where it “flows,” with worlds coming into being, and being transformed into other worlds, again and again, with an attendant emotional experience of response to new and evolving circumstances.

We develop greater tolerance to the intense experience of the *River*. Over time, we will work our way to be able to handle focusing for up to 90 minutes. David himself has done marathon experiments, staying in a *River* for up to 8 hours at a time, and says that the impulse source apparently has no end.

## 6.7 *Ringmaster and Entities*

**D**avid leads us in articulating verbally a set of concepts to speak about the experiences. There seem to be different classes of worlds we can enter: actions, emotions, characters, personifications. When we go deeper down, we go sometimes to animal totem worlds. Eventually, we can encounter areas called creature life, monster life, and the fantastic tropical humidity of dinosaur consciousness. All of these full “beings”—characters, animals, creatures, and monsters—can be technically termed *Entities*. These techniques have uncovered some of the dynamic processes that are involved in “trance possession”—which is now revealed much more as a disciplined process with a highly skilled level of self-observation and monitoring. The technical term for the self-observer who monitors what is going on and also facilitates is the *Ringmaster*.

Carl Sagan noted that previous evolutionary consciousnesses are still stored in our genetic memory.<sup>162</sup> The deepest biological regression world is being liquid in the primeval soup. This shocked and frightened me greatly the first time I contacted it. The body writhes as if a mass of searching impassive protoplasm. Even though the process is begun consciously and voluntarily, and may end the same

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162 Sagan, Carl, *The Dragons of Eden*, Random House, 1977.

way, the experience at that moment is (except for the thin thread that leads back out), disorienting in terms of ordinary experience. Thought is reduced to the grunt of simple pulsing in the protoplasm body; the emotional landscape is reduced to an implacable acceptance of sensation; the body comes alive in every nerve leveled to the equality of something which is unshaped. Yet this is one of the most basic answers to the question: What does it mean to be alive?

We have learned a variety of techniques to get started, or get back on track: paying attention to an inhibited body part, making sounds, using a set of procedures for preparation, following a thread of awareness, following momentum, copying, interrupting a tempo or rhythm. The goal is the integration and fulfilment of impulse expression—to complete, or make whole. Once an impulse starts, it has an inherent trajectory that calls for completion. Instead of controlling the body, we gain comfort with following. The new vocabulary we are learning helps provide a mapping system that allows for orientation within the circumstances of being disoriented.

Actually, you can't *be* disoriented, or *be* oriented, because that is simply a reflection of the perceptual lenses which are currently being used. The words are too global . . . the specifics of orientation are much more valuable. The global terms are what are termed *generalizations* in Neuro-linguistic Programming. Whenever the impulse is gone or "dies," we gain skill at following that moment in awareness into the void of "disorientation," and learn that there is a library full of other impulses in the body.

The *Ringmaster* has a current set of perceptual allegiances and self-observational skills. This is what one is willing *and able to* pay attention to from the body. There is an array of possible impulses to use as a new source, and it takes a highly trained physical body and Ringmaster to approach the limits of possibility. Any one of these impulses can be accepted as a new source for facilitating the return to the exercise of Rivering. Of course, it is also true that the process of disorientation and recovery is actually still a part of Rivering. An essential feature of David's work is developing the facilities of the Ringmaster in order to have a reference for where one is within the "landscape" of possibilities.

The term Ringmaster is borrowed from the Clown tradition. The Ringmaster watches the observer and keeps the

arena safe for play and extension. For example, an impulse to run while working within an imaginary world gets modified by the Ringmaster stopping the person from running into a wall. There are two kinds of Ringmasters, the internal one, and the external Facilitator, David. When the internal Ringmaster is highly skilled, it becomes possible to extend commitment to the imaginary world and the emotional responses. Even though the connection back to ordinary reality is reduced to a thread, that thread becomes strengthened and increasingly reliable. This becomes an important feature of being able to inhabit the differing levels of reality that are encountered in indigenous consciousness. This kind of work with “trance” could be called *trancing in*, as opposed to the unconsciousness of *trancing out*.

The process of strengthening the Ringmaster, and exploring physicality in the presence of emotionality, is similar to learning another language of speech. Initially, there is awkward incompetence, but as the first ability to express emerges, the ability to be humorous with these same neophyte skills is following fast. The humor is an extension of the logical skill into the illogical realm of the heart, which is the natural vector of any developing competence.

## 6.8 *The Choreography of Rivers*

**A** *wild river will proceed* in the way I have been describing, from impulse to impulse without plan. But there are also other classes of rivers. A *themed river* takes a subject matter: it could be the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, which lead into words, or it could be a character study—it could be a world of emotional life. *Anything* that provides a touchpoint to a thematic exploration could be a “source” for a *river*. A dramatic script for a stage play is in the class of *choreographed river*.

*Rivering*, or impulse work can also include vocal expression, either in sounds, or in words, either improvised or scripted. The layering of sound is generally referred to as “text,” whether it includes words or not. And the expression of text can also, like the physical expression, be a cause of an

internal response to the event of uttering the text. Some vocal expressions have become taboo in our own consciousness. The self-facilitator is expanding the capacity to express in a workroom environment so that a wider range of expression becomes available either within the work of a dramatic performance or event, or in life outside the arena of the workroom. Educating the body and emotional life and the imagination toward a wider range of expression actually is a solid foundation for more appropriate expression of powerful emotions in the world. A lot of the violence in the world is an attempt to discharge internal tension and trauma that has not had the benefit of safe places to explore these internal worlds, so they burst out when the internal tension becomes too much for the person to handle.

David says that going through a script as a performer, or completing a choreography as a dancer, *still* properly demands a renewal of energy in the *present moment* from genuine impulses, even though they are responded to with more, or less, *facilitation* by the performer. This is actually *not* the norm in performance training. He calls the typical process of dance or acting training to be a process of “performing an image” of the subject or the choreography. The processes I have been describing are deeper, but also slower, training methods than the “pumping” of “performing an image,” and results are slower to emerge as well, which often does not fit into the economic side of the arts, or arts training.

In the continuing work, we borrow some common artistic terminology. *Working* is synonymous with “wild” or “open” Rivering—a free exploration. A *Study* is synonymous with a *Themed River*—like a painter’s “study.” A work-shopped performance or *Improvisation* is like a loosely choreographed river—the material has been widely explored, even though the particular expression is freshly invented.

Any dramatic script, with a pre-scripted choreography (and text in the case of theatre), is always in danger of becoming too tame. A tame delivery will make it lifeless; not sourced deep enough makes the presentation just “performing an image.” As Thoreau pointed out, with wildness gone, there remains only *reservation*, but no *preservation*. In order for the script to be *preserved*, that is, last through time, it demands an ongoing *wildness* that brings it to life. This is the same point raised earlier about the dangers of “scripting” ritual, and

thereby reducing it to “ceremony,” the lifeless mimicry of an alive ritual.

Every script, impulse river, or event, calls for some kind of internal facilitation. One level of facilitation is of physical safety that the Ringmaster is responsible for. The ability to perform without physical injury is related to *both* the degree of proficiency in the behavior or the action *and* proficiency of the Ringmaster in self-facilitation. Circumstances can create an arena which seems to be within our capacities or greater than our capacities to manage and thrive within. Challenges can include physical demands of a task, emotional territories of that task, and even imaginative requirements. As challenges increase, they apparently become a more important element of the self-observation loop, and begin to influence performance. As the envelope of included impulses is extended, a higher degree of self-observation experience (under pressure) becomes necessary to competent performance. The extension of performance ability brings emotional response, intellectual evaluation, physical conditioning, imaginal coherence, all into the situation to enrich it.

In the realm of performance, there is a distinction between “fully committed” (*simply* but *fully* pretending) and “less committed” (only *pretending* to pretend). Both performer and audience can experience the difference—the sensation where hair stands on end or the belly flutters in excitement. The fully committed engagement in expressing an impulse river can look like there is no “facilitator” or self-observer, but a highly skilled self-facilitator can be present without being observable in actors who have high expertise and practice. If a stage performance has this high electric feeling of full commitment, the audience will feel as if the very spirit of the character is on the stage. This is similar to what happens in indigenous trance possession.

Indigenous trance possession has been a slippery subject for academe to evaluate. Explanations have ranged historically from seeing the phenomenon as hucksterism to insanity to cultural hypnosis. But for indigenous peoples the phenomenon is seen as a valuable resource because of the idea that it opens a gateway whereby the other non-human members of the community are able to speak through the possessed human being. Most cultures had bridgeways into those sorts of experiences *without* a drug experience. While

those drug experiences are undoubtedly perception altering, I hold with Aldous Huxley when he says, “Drugs *open* the doors of perception, but they don’t *hold* them open.”<sup>163</sup>

## 6.9 Resonance and Resurrection

**B**radford Keeney describes that the free kinetic is *the* essential feature of healing work among the San Bushman in southern Africa.<sup>164</sup> Keeney “discovered” a capacity to access the kinetic independently, and kept it mostly hidden through the early part of his distinguished academic career. Currently he works within Ringing Rocks foundation, that publishes accounts of indigenous healing practices in the words of the healers themselves. For Keeney and the San, the mechanism of healing is the resonance that occurs through physical contact with the healer who is able to allow the pulsing of biochemical discharge through their own muscles.

In the emotional release work that accompanies free kinetic, human bodies do pick up the energy through sound and the fact that we share the same biological design. Laughter in our workroom with David almost always was “infectious.” Tears can be the same way, as we have all experienced at one time or another. Resonance is a feature of the powers of the imaginative consciousness combined with the fact that we all share a similar structural design. The principle of resonance is the origin of the idea that an intention set allows the “universe” to move in surprising ways to support a wish. Dynamic systems exhibit the ability to synchronize across many different domains.

Up till now, I have been describing the independent work of the bio-kinetic explorer. The same skills apply to work in relationship, what David calls the “Meeting Corridor.” This is work undertaken which applies the skills of self-observation

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163 Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954, Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition, 2009

164 See Keeney, Brad, *Bushman Shaman*, Inner Traditions, 2004, and Kottler, Jeffrey A. and Carlson, Jon with Keeney, Bradford, *American Shaman*, Psychology Press, 2004.

within the realm of interpersonal interaction. In this sense, they are skills for intimacy. Work toward the Meeting Corridor is introduced after work with Rivering and with “Impulse Passing”—where one completed gesture of movement is offered to the group to copy, and then letting another person take a turn being the “impulse leader.”

In one of the more advanced exercises in David’s class, we were doing interactive Rivering. The group stands in a loose circle around one person, who is leading themselves through a themed river. The surrounding members agree to work to support the river in progress—and the support *may* be in a form of “agreement” with the direction the river is evolving, or it may be a support offered by giving *resistance* to a dynamic tension in the river. Individuals from the circle would enter the circle as they felt an impulse to support in either way.

John’s river on this particular day led him into a territory of spirituality, vulnerability and martyrdom. My impulse to support this process was to give him more pressure to help him explore the limits of his goodness. Our interaction accelerated in intensity to the point where I had a clear choice: to become redeemed beyond *my* oppressive attitude, or to “kill” him.

At the moment of truth, looking into John’s eyes was like looking into the eyes of the Christ archetype—a totally loving being. But my *own* response was a shock. In *my* river, which was entered into when I entered the circle as a supporter, I had explored the territory of *oppressor*. Now I found myself in the midst of the feelings and imagination of ignorance, fear, and sarcastic expediency. I plunged an imaginary “knife” into his heart, and he collapsed on the ground.

The moment was full of dramatic presence, and the conclusion of my presence on the “stage” had been reached. I left the circle as someone else joined, and helped John through his “resurrection.” But a few minutes later, as the scene ended, and we stopped for a break, shock and horror at my own actions hit me.

I shuddered at the thought that I contained such an impulse. And even more at the understanding that the final “death blow” in the imaginary world was not malicious, but simply bound in misunderstanding, self-protection, fear and indifference. I burst into tears and let the regret drain out of my body. Facing the dark side of humanity in one’s own heart like this is not pleasant, but what is the alternative? To “pretend to



pretend" that we do not possess this aspect is *the very road* that leads most surely into the *actual* expression of violence. We generally don't have a way of accessing this dark material in the psyche until it bursts out as a projection. We have a vested interest in keeping it hidden, even from ourselves, because it is almost unimaginable what we would, or could do if it emerged. But it can be the opening into a greater humanity and one that is more genuinely compassionate, because it realizes that the potential for ill-doing is in each of us.

True intimacy in relationship is broader, deeper, wilder to comprehend than the political manageability of participatory decision-making. Kushad Watson, who facilitates meditation groups on relating, says that there are two possibilities for interaction: *business* or *relating*. *Business* is bound in time and contract—the future and past are relevant, agreements are relevant, prediction and stability are valued as virtues.

But *Relating* has a more chaotic nature. In relationship, my responsibility is to truly honor and facilitate the impulse of the moment, while working within the agreed context that is *conscious*, while simultaneously facilitating and transforming the emerging unconscious material into articulate expression.

If we want *Relating*, we need to consider both what we are willing to do, and what preparations we have made for the necessary demands of the task of intimacy. Are we relating on a democratic basis where the one with the most power wins? Are our mutual decisions come by consensus? Will the things that live in darkness lurk there forever unwelcome and threatening? Does the knowledge and experience exist between us to allow for times of rotating leadership? Do we still wish to keep the ball in the air with each other?

## 6.10 *The Touch that Satisfies Both*

**M**eeting Corridor exercises are called *Crossings*, which are meant to develop capacity for increased presence in fielding the exchange of the many impulses that pass between people as they meet in relationship. *Crossing* is actually a title for a whole class of performance training games, but I will describe one of the basic foundation

versions. The goal of the game is to work with the intention to “find the touch that will satisfy both,” and simultaneously not lose contact during the entire process. So there is agreement that we are playing within a specified, artificial set of rules, a “contract” which sets up the physical and intentional boundaries of what we are doing.

Two participants stand about ten meters apart. Players take turns moving. Each move is defined as one completed gesture or “step” that accurately fulfills the present impulse sensed in relation to the working intention of finding the touch that satisfies both. You could visualize the players either taking one step toward, or one step backward (advance or retreat). The *impulse* moves into a step, which then has its natural completion. Eye contact is the difficult part of the game. We have, in modern culture, a socialized mechanism of moving the eyes away to recover inner bearings. Now we are attempting to meet with this “intention” of finding the “touch that will satisfy both”—an intense interaction, but *without* “losing” the eyes.

The touch may or may not happen—that is not the “goal.” The goal is to stay “on task” with (1) *having* the intention, (2) maintaining eye contact, (3) exercising action with integrity (either advance or retreat) and (4) *being present in what actually happens*. If either participant “goes out” by losing eye contact in a moment of “self recovery,” that is the end of that particular “round” and then the players start again from ten meters apart.

The *anticipation* of a “future possible” experience—the touch, can cue feelings on many levels and in many territories. Will the touch be friendly? Intimate? Overbearing? Sexual? Too distant? At the moment of beginning, neither one of the players know what possible touch it could be that equally could *satisfy* both. I may or may not even be aware of my full feelings on what would satisfy *me*. The feelings or the relationship may evolve *on the way to the meeting place*. Attending to the four aspects of the “contract” create ample opportunities to go “out.” But partners working together will learn about the territory of questions and intrigue that is in the relationship between them and will often be able to advance into the “touch arena,” that place within physical touching distance of each other. The next move is potentially an actual physical.

Tahina and I did the exercise in class one day, and after several rounds ended from loss of eye contact, finally got

within touching distance of each other. Now the question was facing us immediately: "What is the touch that will satisfy *both*?" Along the way, we had been *intending* to find that touch. Now it was a physical possibility, but the exact form was not obvious at all. Will it be a hug? Will it be a handshake? The answer is still not known, because the exercise is done without words. It is working to develop intuitive "radar" which is able to find a "gestalt" or completion *without* relying on language.

We both gave a couple of false starts to our gesture of touch, and both of us slightly recoiled and pulled back before a touch was actually made. In knowing together that we had not yet found the form, yet were still in the exercise together holding the intention. We were in relationship within the context of the task. We were, as David calls it, "in the event we were in." The completion of finding the touch was not "accomplished," yet we managed to keep a continuity of eye contact throughout the process. *We were in the question.*

After a minute or two, the tension between us was building. We both had a high intrigue with the prospect of successfully finding the touch that could satisfy both of us, and we had made strides by getting closer and closer to the "touch zone" in the several rounds we had done. David came over and said, "Good work, OK, rest now." But we were locked into our focus and continued, ignoring his instruction.

We had both worked hard to get to this point and were in a minor trance. Our intention to complete right through to the actual touch had built up a power that was somewhat impervious to his instruction. Our intrigue was more important to us than his instruction as a facilitator for the moment. With a more forceful tone in his voice, David again repeated his direction for us to rest: "That's enough."

Tahina and I began to smile, still keeping our eye contact: we had come a long way since our first attempt at the exercise! Maybe this was OK for today. The smile was the beginning of a transition out of being in the exercise to coming to a rest. Somehow we came to a nonverbal agreement to stop the exercise simultaneously. Immediately following our shared impulse to stop, we broke into laughter, and literally fell into each other, forearm holding forearm. The *tension created by the intention* had found its own resolution when we let our conscious minds have a break from the concentration: our bodies had taken over and solved the question naturally. We had stumbled

into the perfect solution: a touch that satisfied both, neither *too* intimate, nor falsely *removed* from intimacy.

Advanced versions of *The Touch That Satisfies Both* allows for the inclusion of movements that incorporate emotional gestures. The first level still uses taking turns with a single step. The next level also includes other gestures, as long as the move is a fully *completed* gesture of movement, taken in turns. Even further, the players may move continually and simultaneously, responding, and initiating “on the fly.” Within the advanced versions, the basic “rules” of holding eye contact and holding the *intention* to find the “Touch that satisfies both” still apply. The principle of approach-avoidance is involved in our real life relationships as well. Some people seem to have under developed skills in setting boundaries and either allow *too* much approach, and others prematurely resist intimacy to protect themselves.

### **6.11 Playing Catch (Apparently)**

**D**avid has developed an extensive array of work with the stability balls to work with performance training and *ensemble* training. The ensemble is any creative working group that has gathered together for either training, research, or to produce a specific project.

Games devised using the balls highlight issues in group dynamics and performance levels. The “Ball Play” also illuminates issues of working dynamics between smaller subgroups including pairs. One of the early exercises David will lead us in has the group of eight students holding one of the twenty-inch balls at chest height between them. The instruction is to “facilitate the *apparent* movement of the ball, but not to intentionally make it move or manipulate it into movement.

After a few seconds, the ball begins to hover, as if coming to life. It begins to float slowly in one direction. The ball begins (usually) to explore the entire room, trailing the group members behind. Slowly at first, then more furiously, amidst building laughter from the “facilitators” who are all aware by now that no particular individual is shaping the direction of

movement or speed of the ball.

A complex self-governing system has been created by our acceptance of the instruction to simply “facilitate the apparent movement.” We pick up micro-movements from the involuntary twitching of our own and other participant’s muscles, and these *feed-forward* into a movement designed to *allow* the movement to continue. The playful feeling persists, despite this explanation, that the ball has a life of its own. The concept of what is “apparent” comes up again and again because there is a dichotomy between the *logical* explanation and the cause and effect as interpreted by the simple body, unfiltered by organizing models. Simple perception seems to tell us that the ball is moving by itself.

Extensive discussion follows each of the practical “experiments with experience” in David’s classes. This “debriefing process” is essential in developing fluency at navigating through the startling territories of experience we are investigating. David describes his approach as an educator as *curiosity-driven / inquiry-oriented / principle-centered*. As described by Malidoma Somé and others, this style of teaching process in education is echoed in indigenous mentoring processes. Somé goes so far as to say: “Beware the stigma against self-authorization.” David will say that his goal as an educator is to “make himself obsolete.”

This approach puts a responsibility on the learner as an interactive agent, rather than just a consumer. Curiosity-driven education means that the points that create intrigue with students influence the arrangement of curriculum. The facilitation becomes opportunistic, exploiting the current energy and excitement. Inquiry-oriented education means that open questions form the backbone of the debriefing process. Principle-centered education means that there is an ongoing search for principles transferable to other contexts.

After the first ball exercise, we attempt to pass the ball in the circle without manipulating its initial momentum. This requires that the whole body become involved in *receiving* the ball, adjusting to the trajectory it is approaching on, and then making a smooth transition to *giving* the ball to the next person in the circle. The initial tendency is to make adjustments that are actually *not* “on task.” It is easy to spot in the other players, not so easy to spot in myself. From across the circle, it is obvious where the ball gets a bump either in the reception,

the transition, or the giving. The point is the education of the body to gain ability in following a choreography dictated by the task itself rather than preconceived or unconscious habits of behavior. People will have a strategy of managing the whole physical / emotional / mental / imaginal situation of giving or receiving, and what happens in between. The practice is a way to attempt to clean this up, and try to deal with the event that is actually happening (the task) rather than the whole inner world of preconceptions and pre-existing habits and strategies. It is, in fact, a foundational training for martial arts, theater, or relationship of any kind.

After work with passing the ball around the circle while attempting the same facilitation skill of *not* manipulating the direction or momentum of the ball, the group will eventually move to the class of games called *Ball in Flight*. We gently throw the ball into the air to start the game and attempt to facilitate the myriad of changing elements of the moving ball in flight; momentum, trajectory, speed, rotation.

It is a challenging exercise both physically and mentally. Imagine you are one of the balloon clowns that has a weight in the lower half so that it comes back to upright when tipped unless a weight is added to hold it down. You may be off balance and have a tendency to return to upright, but if you go too far over, while receiving the ball, the ball will have enough “weight” to keep you from regaining your balance. It is a similar sense to the sensation when you *almost* trip: the body compensates enough to regain balance, but does not overcompensate to the point of falling the *other* way.

The moving ball has its *own* momentum—you can facilitate that apparent movement and let it meet *your* own center of balance, and tendency to resist falling over. The ball can come to you as if you are a trampoline skin: you are flexible, but you tend to come back to your own shape. If you are successful, the ball will again become airborne for someone else to catch and move with, in turn letting it “rebound” off of them. The goal is to make your return throw entirely in accordance with only these two vectors of force meeting naturally. If the ball gets to far past your own center of gravity, it will go to the floor, and we begin a new round.

We are all surprised to see how easy it is to “read” when someone has given an extra push to the ball, though it is more difficult to evaluate oneself with complete accuracy. We notice

that there is an “apparent” difference between the graceful “rebound” and the “throw.” Throwing *adds* a manipulation that was *not* implied in the natural rebound. Each day will see the introduction of new parameters and depth to the game.. One of them is “orbiting” the ball around one’s own body as we spin. We find that “orbiting” can be an extension of the interaction of all the forces we have been using. Tahina is gifted at this. Terry is inconsistent but occasionally brilliant when she lets herself relax in a full commitment and engagement to the process. Sam always gives a barely perceptible push at the end of the return “throw.” We all have different talents and habitual weaknesses.

It is agreed by all during discussion that each “worker’s” style (each student can be called a worker in the ensemble terminology) in Ball Play exactly mirrors the action style of the person’s life. Some people tend to catch the weight of experience so that it slows down their response and appears to be heavy, and slightly late. Others don’t let the experience *in* enough, and the response seems shallow and protective. David confirms that most of his other students have noticed the correlation as well: he offers the terminology *pocketing*, *projecting* and *protecting*.

David has used the terminology “*argument structure*” to describe the repeating underlying structure of the way people have of dealing with interactions of give and receive. The argument structure is so apparently indestructible that the goal is not to break it apart, but to actually get skilled at facilitating it—knowing it, recognizing its imperatives, and beginning to stretch its responsiveness so as to appear flexible *by performing* flexibility. In turn, this *practice of performing* flexibility actually creates more flexibility. The habits of the argument structure don’t go away, they just become less dominant, but they have deep origins in childhood experience, and get wired deeply into our system of allegiances and permissions since they seem directly related to survival.

To perform with fluency and fluidity in the ball play, we are meant to continually adjust our bodies to the speed and position of the ball as we come into relationship with it. The workers use the experience and practice of the ball play to increase their skill with resiliency and adaptability in order to become more adept in transmission of energy as opposed to containment or holding.

When the ball players are skilled, an observer will see / experience the trajectory of the ball as a sensation of complete unity of movement between the ball and the players. It will appear as a seamless, frictionless event where momentum is sustained by an apparent conservation and recycling of the energy of the initial impulse.

The game is to keep the ball “in play,” while moving at the exact point of balance that is the natural rebound. For a player, this can feel like oscillating between receiving, responding, and rebounding and in this way can be a metaphor for relationships. The ball may go “out of play” if no one is in place to meet its momentum with a natural counter balance. It may then drop to the ground, or fly out of the circle, and a new round begins.

The ball play can even be done in pairs, and then the style and habits of the players are even easier to identify. (This pair work is a particular form of the *meeting corridor*). The body of the worker shows clearly how much receiving is comfortable, how much manipulation is habitual, how much rearranging of the frame of reception is typical and it is a fantastic diagnostic tool.

Before any work with the ball in flight, one of the things that David always does is to ask, “Does anyone in the group have any ball history?” This refers to any personal experience of being hurt by a thrown ball, or nervousness about throwing or catching. When introducing something new as a facilitator or teacher, it is a good idea to keep current with the group’s feelings about the territory that is being introduced. A lot of times this is missed because the leader is nervous about getting “off track.” But the work is about the students, so how can it be off track to ask them where they actually are? When we are talking about the possibility of relationship, I think of this work with the ball and wish that it was a much more common kind of work where people could practice their abilities to interact with a dynamic flexibility to receive and give naturally. In my opinion, ball work of this sort should form the core of every teenager’s physical education.



## 6.12 Suggested Rules When Death is in the Room

**T**he end of a round where the ball is lost out of the circle of players is a small visit from death. Something has changed, something has ended, and no one can mistake the fact that the ball is bouncing across the floor and someone needs to retrieve it. How could anything be clearer? Is the event happening, or is it over? Yet when a world “dies” during *Rivering* the person has to self-observe, admit an ending has occurred, and be willing to start again. What about when the ball play drifts off the delicate balance between “pocketing” and “protecting?” There is often no absolute line to say that a round has ended. Loosing eye contact in *The Touch That Satisfies Both* is considered the end of a round, but it requires the ability to *notice* that it has actually happened.

We are engaged in some kind of ongoing practice of observing the idea of death, the death of how things *had* been up to that point, and learning about endings. The death is some kind of acceptance of surprise like the shock of jumping into a cold mountain lake. You can develop your own style—run and leap, hold your breath and step off the pier, trip and fall in, or slip down quietly—as long as you actually get in the water. In the universe of the slowly boiling pot of water floating on the cold ocean of experience, you are going to be wet. But there is a way to live like a goldfish and there is a way to live like a salmon. It is important to reiterate that we don’t all have to be the *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* of salmon. Just to recognize that human beings are inherently built more like salmon than goldfish. You risk dying on a journey far from home in order to actually get a chance to live.

What is *apparently* happening is always relative to the perspective of the observer, and what sensory and inner information that observer is attentive to. Showing the difficulty between deciding whether an event is actually still occurring, or not, shows the human ability to fake behavior. Being able to let the imagination fill experience while simultaneously retaining a thread back to the “real” world is the essence of participation in indigenous consciousness. This is the “state of mind” required when entering into a “trance in” ASC. Yet

there is not always the dramatic evidence to observe like that which Wade Davis saw in Haiti to indicate what is happening in the experience of a person.

There are two enigmatic “rules” of etiquette in ball play, *Rivering* and *The Touch That Satisfies Both*. The first is self-refereeing. *Ultimate Disk*, the sport played in teams with a *Frisbee*, is the only international sport that is self-refereed. The ball player practices self-refereeing at all times, just like the worker doing *Rivering*, or just like in the game of *The Touch That Satisfies Both*. If self-refereeing is not practiced during “practice times” or “workroom times,” it is likely not to be an available skill during the “real event.” And what are the “real events?” For the *River Worker*, it could be the trance possession time in a sacred ritual. For the *Ball Player*, it could be a time of working collaboratively on a project with others. For the *Worker in The Touch That Satisfies Both*, it could be an interaction in a real intimate relationship. The applications of these “General Action and Performance” skills and principles are in every sphere of life.

The second rule of etiquette in all these “performance games” is that, as in Hackey Sack,<sup>165</sup> (did you notice the French *gendarme* in Hitchcock’s film *To Catch a Thief* playing hackey sack as they stake out Gregory Peck?) one never says sorry for missing the ball. Once, when a collision occurred between Tahina, who we had dubbed the “orbit queen,” and myself, she apologized, saying “Sorry.” David instructed us that, “You don’t have to say sorry unless you *meant* to do it.” Not missing a beat, Tahina, replied, “Oh, ok, I understand,” and then turned to me and mischievously repeated deadpan: “Uhm . . . sorry!” It reminded me of the national joke that if you bump into a Canadian, he or she will tell you, “Uhm . . . sorry”!

For short seconds, when the ball is in play, there are occasionally a series of throws that are ballet-like in fluidity and grace. “Rebound,” without either “pocketing” or “protecting,” is a natural ability we are rediscovering. MacMurray Smith has worked with some groups up to two years at the Banff School of Fine Arts, and says it is possible to develop the skill so the sense of magic lasts moments instead of seconds. The ball play

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165 An obscure piece of hackey sack history: did you notice the French *gendarme* in Hitchcock’s film *To Catch a Thief* playing hackey sack as they stake out Gregory Peck?

at this level is an extremely dynamic and vigorous activity, as intense as a martial arts training or dance like the Brazilian *Capoeira*.

The discipline of work required to build the inner permission for fully filling of imagination with the physical and emotional capacity to stay with the experience while *simultaneously* retaining the presence of the *Ringmaster* is the work of the indigenous “trance dancer” or shaman who is bringing a message from spirit to the village. This is one of the timeless ways of working to bring the voice of Nature or the spirit world into the human community. And one of the essential honesties required is to know whether the time of “channeling” or “possession” or “trance” is over or not. Even experienced and trained “journeymen” usually enter these states with the assistance of a ritual setting and particularly rhythm of a special kind. Occasionally, certain sensitive individuals will enter the states simply within the presence of rhythm or ritual space. But for those who guide or lead such contexts, training and experience in these dynamics can be a great assistance.

### 6.13 Efficiency

**F**or several years, I was cutting lawns almost every day between March and November. The routine for the two people that make a lawn cutting team is to drive up to the residence and park, jump out of the truck immediately, and then begin unloading the equipment. When you do this all day long every day, there is a natural tendency to become more efficient by adjusting routines to avoid recurring problems, and thereby being able to keep things running smoothly most of the time.

The next logical step is to make efficiency into a game, for productivity, and profit, and also for the psychological benefit of being challenged while engaged in what could otherwise be a stultifying and repetitive grind. The notion starts developing of how to compose and arrange all the little tasks into a *choreographed routine* that flows smoothly.

When you look at the elapsed times for each lawn cut after implementing revisions, they have decreased by ten per cent. At first, saving the three minutes off a 30 minute lawn cut

doesn't seem like much. But if that becomes four hours off a 40 hour work week, and you work that remaining 36 hours in four days, you've now got a three day weekend instead of two. So by working 10% less, you now have 50% more time off, and make the same amount of money.

The same kind of effect happens in all routine action with the energy spent by the physical body, and the energy it has left over to do other things. But "perfect" efficiency, as for example on a factory production line, has the associated downside of repetitive task injury syndrome. The other extreme is *seizure*; free firing of muscle impulses that are entirely out of control of the conscious mind. This is the process accessed by David MacMurray Smith's "free kinetic" exploration. When movement finds the balance between efficiency and seizure, it becomes *elegant* and includes both freedom and power.

The metaphor for the body in elegant movement is dance. We learned how to choreograph every movement to maximum efficiency when we arrived to begin a lawn cut. Tailgate on the truck: down—reach, pull, lift: weedeater—started: 1st lawnmower—started: it happened that fast, in a matter of seconds. The lawnmower has power assisted wheel drive. This means that you are walking behind, steering, engaging and disengaging the power drive according to the vagaries of the terrain. There is a natural maximum speed that you can go over a particular piece of turf. There is a pattern to cover the area that is the shortest route. And you are trying to keep up with that "ideal type."

But operating the weedeater is where the dance metaphor becomes more obvious. The weedeater is a two stroke engine, mounted on a 60 inch shaft drive and ending in a fixed angle, rotating, cutting head that houses plastic cutting line. The idea is to trim the edges of the turf area where the lawn mower will not reach or cut evenly. So you walk along, holding this 13 pound unit and using the cutting head as a sculpting tool.

A few months go by. One day, you are approaching some particular bush in the yard that has always been awkward to trim around. But today, something happens that is different. You extend your reach a little further, bend your legs a little more, give a twist to your wrist, and s-l-i-d-e through the step. Somehow you have happened upon a more graceful way to do that section, and everything is trimmed properly underneath the bush. It starts becoming clear: *operating the weedeater is like*

*Tai Chi*. The question is: does operating the weedeater extend into the territory of elegance further than the simple efficiency of lawn cutting?

On the one hand, there is a perfectly efficient path for that cutting head to travel (the “ideal” type of the choreography); on the other hand, there is your actual ability to move, and be the source of travel for the cutting head’s path through three-dimensional space (the “action” in the real world). There is a discrepancy between the two when low branches obstruct either the path of the shaft, or your body. The edge of the lawn actually maps the *choreography* for the path of the cutting head (within a gross margin of perhaps 20 degrees), but there is still room for interpretation as to how the *rest* of your body is going to arrange itself around the *hands*. This makes the difference. Beyond the simple idea of not tripping, there is an endless world of gracefulness to explore within that basic script.

When I began learning with David, I recognized a similar territory of working between task, event, choreography and dance that I had already been working with in the lawn cutting “meditation and martial arts” school. The modern world prides itself on the ability to create change, but most of it is meaningless in the context where the tasks are obviously things like restoring clean drinking water for all of the world’s children and stopping war and violence. There is a hidden, (or not-so-hidden, depending upon your perspective), almost complete inability to adapt meaningfully to the challenges that face us because the deep-seated inclination and habit is to *not let the task or the event that is actually happening affect our own responses*.

Many people mistakenly believe that incremental changes such as doing more recycling have an effect on the larger systems of oppression and environmental damage that continue to cause real pain for a majority of the world’s peoples and ecosystems, and death or extinction for some. And while most people want things to change, true adaptability remains an elusive elixir. It might be that these skills I have been talking about are part of the solution to that inability to change meaningfully. Literacy has become a widely dispersed skill when at one time it was exotic and rare. The *BodySense* skills I have been describing, David MacMurray Smith’s body of work, are also teachable and could be more widespread and seen as a foundation for a new kind of education which

is different enough to actually make an impact on the background discussion of modernity. If things that are done in the social justice movement or the environmental movement are not “different enough”, they simply get co-opted into the machinations of the existing system.

### **6.14 Choreography of Chaotic Terrains**

**P**art of the gardening work can be pruning. When it is time to prune a tree, the question arises: Does this tree have its own natural choreography arising from its terrain that speaks to the way it should be pruned? When you climb up in the tree, it becomes apparent that the task is again more complex than using the weedeater. The body gets stretched into more unusual shapes, because the territory is now a 3 dimensional space instead of an undulating 2 dimensional plane. The shape of the branches provides a variety of possible ways to climb and rest to make pruning cuts, but choosing to make a particular cut limits that set to fewer options.

Coming from the “recognizable human walking” of operating the lawnmower, the body has to express a *more full extension of range* of movement in the activity of pruning. You can see how this need for extension is the same case as with singing, or the subtlety of color palate used by an artist, even the range of vocabulary and style used by a writer. The limits of such expression are not necessarily fixed, but there is a definite contrast between the art that is going in the direction of extension, versus the art that is staying within the realm of polite social allegiances. The conventional forms have less and less to say today, because in the culture that is actively and willfully ignoring the weird, where the power structures are responsive only to what is normal, more and more people attempt to *appear* normal, while it is simultaneously becoming apparent that fewer and fewer people are actually being satisfied by such an arrangement.

In modern culture, the unspoken threat is that you will not be fed by your tribe if you do not follow the routine scripts and force your *daimon*, your genius, into submission and obedience. It supports the growth of an underground *Clockwork Orange*

mentality where “ultra violence” explodes to the surface as a foregone conclusion. In the psychological mumbo jumbo, Alex and his “droogs” are seen to be giving a cry for help in the same way the attempted self initiation by youth with branding or tattoos is merely showing on the surface a hidden pain. But the real ultra violence of Anthony Burgess’ novel is the proposed treatment modality which finally creates Alex as the ultimate Nietzschean superman, beyond good and evil, impervious to any further moral instruction or evolution by virtue of the fact that the last vestiges of his humanity have now been surgically removed with “therapy.”<sup>166</sup>

What was dangerous because wild has now been made even more frighteningly destructive because *all* of the wildness has been tamed. There is a kind of secretive and metaphorical eugenics being promoted in the realm of the human soul attempting to banish passion and imagination and make the body serve the approved routines of the status quo. To resist successfully, we must “Grok” whole solutions, and these solutions are not to be found in the form of logical utopias, but rather in the form of conversational ability in the task of dancing with dragons.

Robert Heinlein, who coined the word *grok* in his novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*,<sup>167</sup> understood that “understanding,” in an intellectual sense, is *not* enough to “make a difference.” To *grok* is to understand, comprehend, emotionally and physically, as well as imaginatively, as well as intellectually. To fully *grok* is to *embody* and know the spirit of the thing from the inside out, not from the outside looking in. *The single thing that **most** needs our attention, the point of leverage to be groked, is the way of knowing that **is** groking.*

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166 Burgess, Alex, *A Clockwork Orange*, 1962, Penguin edition, 2011.

167 Heinlein, Robert, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1961.