

Moving Our Voices for Strength and Justice, Somatically

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Abstract - Moving Our Voices for Strength and Justice, Somatically

Drawing on her lineage of somatic movement studies, the author shares her methodologies and motivations for including somatic approaches in health, art and educational settings. Focusing on the power of vibration in healing, whether it be through vocalization or larger body movement, Eddy describes how *somatic sounding* influences her system: Dynamic Embodiment and how she is influenced by her work partner with whom she co-founded Moving On Center School of Participatory Arts and Somatic Research, Carol Swann. She studied with early pioneer Irmgard Bartenieff, PT, CMA and graduate Luminary – Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Occupational Therapist, Certified Movement Analyst, and Master Somatic Movement Educator. She goes on to interview her co-founder of Bay Area Moving On Center, Carol Swann who developed VocalMotion, teaching a combination of voicework and larger everyday and cultural movement.

Keywords: Somatic sounding. Vocalization. Cultural voices. Singing. Somatic movement education.

Resumo - Movendo Nossas Vozes Somaticamente para Força e Justiça

Baseando-se em sua linhagem de estudos do movimento somático, a autora partilha as suas metodologias e motivações para incluir abordagens somáticas em ambientes de saúde, arte e educação. Concentrando-se no poder da vibração na cura, seja através da vocalização ou de movimentos corporais mais amplos, Eddy descreve como a *sonorização somática* influencia o seu sistema denominado de Corporalização Dinâmica, e como ela é influenciada por sua parceira de trabalho Carol Swann, com a qual fundou a *Moving on Center School of Participatory Arts and Somatic Research*. Ela estudou com a pioneira Irmgard Bartenieff (Fisioterapeuta e Certificada como Analista do Movimento Laban – CMA) e com a grandiosa Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Terapeuta Ocupacional, CMA e Educadora do Movimento Somático. Neste texto, a autora se fundamenta em entrevista realizada com Carol Swann, cofundadora de seu projeto *Moving On Center* na Baía de São Francisco, Califórnia, que desenvolveu o *VocalMotion*, ensinando uma combinação de trabalho vocal com movimentos cotidianos e culturais mais amplos.

Palavras-chave: Sonorização somática. Vocalização. Vozes Culturais. Canto. Educação do Movimento Somático.

Resumen - Moviendo nuestras voces somáticamente por la fuerza y la justicia

Basándose en su linaje de estudios del movimiento somático, la autora comparte sus metodologías y motivaciones para incluir enfoques somáticos en entornos de salud, arte y educación. Centrándose en el poder de la vibración en la curación, ya sea a través de la vocalización o de un movimiento corporal más amplio, Eddy describe cómo los *sonidos somáticos* influyen en su sistema nombrado Corporalización Dinámica y cómo está influenciada por su compañera de trabajo Carol Swann, con quien fundó la *Moving on Center School of Participatory Arts and Somatic Research*. Estudió con la pionera Irmgard Bartenieff (Fisioterapeuta y Analista Certificada del Movimiento Laban – CMA) y con la gran Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Terapeuta Ocupacional, CMA y Educadora del Movimiento Somático. En este texto, la autora se basa en una entrevista realizada a la cofundadora de su proyecto *Moving On Center* en la Bahía de San Francisco, California, Carol Swann, quien desarrolló *VocalMotion*, enseñando una combinación de trabajo vocal con movimientos cotidianos y culturales más amplios.

Palabras clave: Sonido somático. Vocalización. Voces culturales. Canto. Educación del movimiento somático.

Introduction

We need to move to speak or sing. We need to move to think – there is even a fancy word for it: Embodied Cognition. Embodied Cognition is a term that emerged from philosophy, anthropology and neuroscience that basically recognizes that we need to move to think. Our entire bodies, not just our brains are involved with forming images, thoughts and sourcing emotions (Varela *et al*, 1991; Bell, 2024). While we move we are often finding words. Movement is vibration, so is sound. Our first utterances express our feelings. At any one second it could be satisfaction, delight, hunger, discomfort or disappointment. We also learn from our first utterances – sounds resonate and move our bodies, and these sounds and movements come to have deep meanings, often similar and other times varying from culture to culture. They form into a communication of experience, conveyed through sound and sometimes specific words.

Just as sound is a type of vibration, vocalizing is a type of movement. In my work developing the Somatic Movement Therapy Training (SMTT) beginning in 1990 – now called Dynamic Embodiment[®] SMTT, I teach different uses of movement, touch and dialogue for emotional and physical vitality and expression. As part of this training, I weave in much of what I had developed as a form of somatic dance entitled BodyMind DancingSM (BMDSM). Whether working with everyday movers, actors, dancers, writers, businesspeople or poets, as examples, the movements served to awaken body awareness, motivate action with diverse feelings, and bring health to whatever areas of the body the movement studies attended to. It is now a codified system of over thirty movement/dance sequences as well as dozens of movement explorations, also sometimes referred to, especially by Body-Mind CenteringSM practitioners as somatizations. Like Dynamic Embodiment, BodyMind DancingSM uses movement, touch and meaning-making approaches from four major sources – Authentic Movement, Bartenieff Fundamentals of Movement, Body-Mind CenteringSM, and Laban Movement Analysis (Movers & Shapers, 2018; Eddy; Smith, 2021).

There are different ways that I have worked with the voice over the years. My first exposure to using my voice (besides singing gospel music and Spanish songs every Sunday at church with my family in East Harlem) began with performing postmodern choreography where we would speak while dancing. For example, with the Laura Foreman Dance Company, we would count to 100 as we moved through the Museum of Modern Art

sculpture garden (Probst, 1973), or shouting sounds as we ran across the Commons of Cooper Hewitt Museum. It feels totally connected to these early performance experiences that my favorite type of choreography has always been storytelling with a combination of words, vocalization and movement. Indeed, by the late 1980s I was speaking and singing on stage telling my life story of crossing borders – the sensations as a child, teenager and young adult of shifting attention as I moved across 96th street from my Life in East Harlem to the many resources we had in New York City's Upper East Side – schools, restaurants and the 92nd Street YMHA – now called 92NY.

From 1974 through the 80s I learned more about the voice and movement from Irmgard Bartenieff, physical therapist and creator of the curriculum to become certified as a Movement Analysis using Laban theories (Graduates of the full 500 hour training CMA, CLMA, GCLMA). Her own work, the Bartenieff Fundamentals, uses sounds from Indian culture. She taught how to breathe three-dimensionally with *shape support* (allow the torso to grow and shrink in different directions in response to the breath) influenced by her reading about the chanting that one might experience in yoga. The practice involves noticing the shape our body makes as we sound each of the vowels sounds, with a particular awareness of the widening, lengthening and deepening that happens with these respective sounds – *eeeeee*, *ahhhh*, and *oooo* (Eddy; Smith, 2021). This vocalization was used to help *shape support*, also called *internal shaping*. We spent time finding out how sounds can help support posture, support the internal organs, and the different shapes our body takes in different emotional and expressive states. For instance, if we feel great, we might notice that we're keeping the head up, widening in the chest, feeling an expansiveness and opening upward towards the sky. This ability to expand or shrink in different shapes or forms in the torso is how the internal breath and related sounds supports how we present ourselves to the world. Our postural shape supports our voices and words in what feelings we are expressing. In Dynamic Embodiment, we further elaborated with source material from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. During Bainbridge Cohen's early 1970s year of study with Irmgard Bartenieff her cohort explored how breath and sound relates to dimensions, planes and the Space Harmony scales of Rudolf Laban. The E sound widens the mouth, and the pursing of the lips forward creates the oooh sound, and sliding these together we can feel the combination of sounds merging into a new sound. Bainbridge Cohen investigated this deeply for her final certification program and has written a book on the topic (Bainbridge Cohen, 2015).

When working with shaping sounds or moving our torsos and limbs with spatial awareness, what we call Space Harmony, we often work with polarities and spatial pulls. These are bodily stretches from different muscular attachments or body parts that set up a tensile force. This process is also known as bio-tensegrity (Levin, 2021; Eddy; Smith, 2021; The Fascia Guide, 2023). When your lips project forward you can also feel how the sound is coming from the back of your throat. Hence there's a forward and back continuum - from the back of the upper vocal chamber, specifically from the oral pharynx to the lips. The tips of the lips are the most forward and the back of the pharynx, behind the mouth, is the furthest back point of tension. By finding the sound that supports the resonance of this front to back depth in the mouth and beginning of the upper throat we find a deep open space in the sagittal dimension. This shape and space can then be echoed in other parts of the body. For example, we often need to open the breath through the chest to allow for vibration to move anywhere further down in the torso. Even before that, we need to open the full neck including the vocal chamber of the larynx in the mid-throat region. If there is a closure at any part it is like pressing down on a string to make a different note, rather than finding all the support for a specific sound. If we close the glottis of the throat we create the vocal diaphragm. We can also shift the resonance of the neck by closing the glottis and breathing out while speaking - it is one way of making a raspy sound.

When we allow any diaphragm (vocal, thoracic, or pelvic floor) to merge the intentionality of deepening or widening, with the plunger action of the diaphragm going down, we help to create a vacuum for the influx of air. As the breath exits from the upward doming of the thoracic diaphragm, there is also a narrowing and lengthening component. Of course, the thoracic diaphragm's critical action is downward to create that vacuum for oxygen to fill the alveoli of the lungs. When we allow for a deep diaphragmatic inhale we can also massage down into the pelvic bowl and through the back and the front of the lower torso. One can imagine or sense the cylinder shape of the torso and that this entire container is being massaged by the breath. It is wonderful to then discover the awesome sounds that emerge when you let the roof of your mouth open away from the jaw, let out a long sound from the up and down pulls of the upper and lower jaw. See if it helps you vibrate higher or lower than you've already heard, felt or moved. This aaah sound supports lengthening. Making sounds by consciously shaping the mouth and matching the shape in the torso can provide a huge opening for many people. It is particularly helpful to practice

these shape changes and bio-tensegrities to support exhalation. This supports a more resonant sound. Remember, sound is made when we're breathing out. It's close to impossible to make much sound when breathing inward.

Activity: Please take a moment and try this movement and sounding. It can sound a bit like a gasp, so when you encourage people to exhale and vocalize you're also encouraging deeper elongation of both the sound and the breath.

Added to getting deeper and moving into length is a type of full shaping of the inside of the body. Once we learn to fill our cylindrical body, our personal instrument of sound, with air and vocalization, you can choose which type of shape to be in (long, round, flat, spiralic = we say in Laban language - the shape of a pin, a ball, a wall, or a screw). In everyday life these shape changes often happen unconsciously, in response to an interaction - with a person or a task or a feeling. We are constantly allowing our bodies to form into whichever shape reflects our mood, our feelings. For instance, if feeling a little tired, chests might collapse downward. On the other hand, the breastbone might move forward and be uplifted while looking up and filling the chest with air. Then we could feel wide in the front and narrow in the back and in so doing have a feeling of elation or lightness. We might feel happiness or a bit of joy. Much of our language follows these correspondences of what our bodies are doing based on what's being felt inside the body. We also have sounds with different tones of voice that reflect different feelings, and related movement. In Dynamic Embodiment we continue to explore different shapes while sounds, or in silence with awareness of the *inner shaping* of the breath. One way to ensure that we were breathing is to make sounds during this time.

Martha's development of 3-Dimensional Breath and Sounding strategies

I met Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, who created Body-Mind CenteringSM, circa 1975. I quickly was drawn to how she used vocalization to help us feel and activate our organs. Sensing the organs is a fantastic way to support posture and inner shaping. She had learned from her private studies with a Yogi Ramirah who had recently come to New York from India. This experience taught her that you could vibrate the organs each distinctively bringing them into a healthy vitality. She taught us to use different tones in the voice to change the tonicity of the organs. We learned and felt that when organs found their volume that it changed the surrounding musculature, mostly softening tension. For me, this fits so beautifully with the shaping that I learned from Irmgard Bartenieff and other teachers of Bartenieff Fundamentals. It turned out Bainbridge Cohen had recently spent a year studying with Bartenieff as well. Her approach with *organ support* brought another level to the experience that how we shape our body is also expressing our moods. How powerful it can be to allow for postural change, not just at the level of our muscles and bones, but literally from our organic selves, from the organs. This awareness of how movement could support our health and vitality of our organs, was echoed across different holistic health methodologies, resonating with Chinese medicine and meridians and their links to specific organ energies, and then also to nature energies – the five elements. Irmgard Bartenieff had been learning QiGong in Hawaii with a master there. QiGong, like Tai Chi (Yeung *et al.*, 2018) can help with internal regulation and is a method of body-mind awareness, cultivating a stronger connection to self and others.

Vocalizing and sounding with different pitches and different resonances happens in two specific ways:

1. Shaping the mouth very carefully while finding a pitch that matches the depth of where you are aiming to vibrate;
2. Bringing breath and oxygen to the body in general but doing so through *volumizing*.

Volumizing is a word I use to say I'm going to feel the internal support of my body with awareness of the breath moving in all three dimensions – length, depth and width, and each organ has a happy and whole feeling.

The result is having a well-supported posture and the capacity to express different postures, and thereby different feelings and emotions in a deeply organic way. I use this continually in my private practice and in the teaching of Dynamic Embodiment Practitioners. In Dynamic Embodiment vocal work, I blend principles from Irmgard Bartenieff as well as her embodied approaches to Rudolf Laban's Space Harmony. Space Harmony seeks to move our bodies three-dimensionally in and around and through three-dimensional space in systematic harmonious ways. I discovered that this exploration of harmonic spatial pulls is a type of neuromotor challenge integrating reflexes for equilibrium with somatic awareness. The mover can be aware of both being upright as well as the inevitability of sometimes falling, inclining, leaning or needing to catch oneself. This deeply embodied process of resonance begins with gravity's vibration and our physical aliveness, melded with the study in quantum mechanics I engaged with as an undergraduate student in 1978. At this time, I was enrolled in a course entitled *Nature loves to Hide*, taught by Lee Smolin, the great cosmological physicist who was a peer and a guide (Smolin, 2007) mentored in turn by Herb Bernstein. What they meant by "nature loves to hide" is that anything in the world feels like it's solid because it's made of particles, but every particle can also be perceived as waves. Waves can be most easily perceived as waves of light (hot and cooler) or sound, but they also exist in movement vibration which is what vocalization is. This study made it so clear that sounds vibrate physical and emotional tension patterns, helping to transmute what feels stuck or overly solid. Particles move into light or sound, or any type of wave as needed. Waves patterns are like water – more fluid, more mobile. Hence the interaction of waves and particles are two sides of the same coin signifying that we have choice at any moment. This helps me understand ways to support myself, and people I do work with. Vocal exploration exemplifies the Laban theme that life is a constant interaction of *stability and mobility*. At times we stabilize, concretizing when needed. When we need to be strongly present and manifest in the world, creating and solidifying our ways of speaking, chanting, singing is helpful. At other times we need to get fluid, relax, find our wavelike nature, and allow life to flow. This is mobility.

I went on to name my work Dynamic Embodiment to represent this dynamism of Laban/Bartenieff Movement and the deep embodiment practices of Body-Mind CenteringSM (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, 2018; Hartley, 1994; Eddy 2017; Eddy; Smith, 2021). I had first named my amalgam system before anyone was using the term somatic movement - the

Somatic Movement Therapy Training (SMTT). Then as somatic movement therapy got to be known through the hard work of many people active with the professional association - International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association (ISMETA), I realized that my dream had come true. Somatic movement therapy was becoming a generic term. Once that somatic movement was a known concept, albeit still a fairly new profession in many countries, I gave my work a new name - Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement Therapy Training DE-SMTT.

Dynamism in movement involves working with vibration. These phenomena show up in our new book *Dynamic Embodiment of the Sun Salutation: pathways to balancing the chakras and the neuroendocrine system* (2021). This book, written together with Shakti Smith, really celebrates vibratory patterns as energy systems that flow through our bodies. The piezoelectricity that we generate through pressure in our bones or muscles can be viewed as either particles or waves. My approach to Laban studies is not just being facile as a mover but also about not being overly static. The goal is to access times of stabilization and avoid being blocked in one or more areas of the body. This involves being ready for change at any moment - being prepared to be more vibrational or to be more porous or fluid as solid. A particle that is porous with membranes that can change what they let in or out has clear boundaries about is also mutable. This is one reason why a truly celebrated aspect of my work is applying and expanding on Body-Mind CenteringSM into forms like BodyMind DancingSM and Moving For Life.

I have been developing movement sequences for moving the circulating fluids of the body in concrete supportive patterns for almost 50 years. Graduates of DE-SMTT have also chosen to engage with the fluids as a baseline. Centering the fluids in our body as a source of wave-like patterns of vibrations that move resulted in a sequence of patterns using the different rhythms of the fluids in concrete movement directions and shapes. By varying directions in logical sequences, one is hovering in the domain of developing harmonious movement. Laban created movement scales to get us oriented in all directions in space. My fluid phrase or sequence is part of the language and repertoire of BodyMind DancingSM. I also taught this sequence to the Instructors of Moving For Life, who work with elders with chronic illnesses, people with cancer. The combination of breath, movement and specific balanced vacillations in space is described by students as bringing vitality to the organs. The breath is key in this. We make sounds as part of the fluid that serve as a pump to squeeze the

interstitial fluid. It sounds like slurping, involving squeezing of the mouth and face and then opening and widening the whole face.

I chose the sound PAH for the exhale after a squeezing of the body fluids. In the BMD Fluid phrase, we next move the synovial fluid – the joint fluid. Not only do we vibrate the limbs as in a shimmy, but we vibrate the Jaw, the mouth and sometimes if comfortable, the tongue. We jiggle the joints in order to move the fluids in the sacs of each joint. And as you shake the bones you shake the fluid, and you activate varying the pressure in that area. Any movement helps move the hydrostatic forces that are present. Shifting brings more mobility to the very parts of our body that we need to mobilize.

From interstitial fluid movement to synovial fluid leads to swing-like rhythm of the venous flow of the blue blood back to the heart, the flow of the blood that has valves - it has a kind of swoosh kind of returning a waltz-like rhythm. So, in Body-Mind CenteringSM we learned these nuances and we asked questions. I often asked the questions: what is the viscosity of that fluid? What is the container of that fluid? What is the pump of that fluid? With that information we can put together what the rhythm of that fluid is. Then like the organs, I allowed a sound to match these elements. What is this sound of a swinging pulse? It has an up down up, or down up down, or down up up, or up up down wave like rhythm. This reflects a shift with gravity, falling and rising. For me, that became a swooshing that can be sung as a kind of seesaw song – Whoosh, laa, laa – whoosh laa laa. Or a bit more active – Da da daah, de da, de da. Each vibrational pattern aligns with the receding of the venous blood into the valves and then reinitiating to return back to the heart. Of course, our movement includes swings too.

The cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) is another important fluid that bathes the brain and spinal cord, protecting it. It emerges from the spaces in the brain, the ventricles, flowing downward inside the spinal column. It is contained in a sac called the dura mater. The sound for supporting the CSF matches its rhythm – a quiet, slow, monotone hiss or long soft sound. In other words, the CSF moves in a steady pace that is almost timeless and quite contemplative. Silence can be the accompaniment to long ongoing movements in one direction. However, hissing, breathing out in an ongoing flow, or a sort of whispered eeeee, or aaahh sound can help remind us to really move slowly and without any rhythmic fluctuations. When this at least six – twelve second cycle is repeated with no changes of

rhythm, the related sounding process helps us to become timeless entering a meditative space.

This process of finding the sound vibration of a body part or specific set of tissues can be transferred to any part of the body – bones, muscles and glands (Eddy; Smith, 2021). Toning can happen from within, or from a practitioner making sound, sometimes very close to the desired tissue or even on the body. Babies often love this type of interaction – being *toned* into. There is a communication that is instant – just as color and light move through us instantly.

I could go on and on with all the ways we use sound in Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement activities whether in a private session or a movement class or a performance. However, I would feel remiss if I didn't share the influences of my colleague, Carol Swann and what she has brought to the somatic field through a lifetime of work.

Carol and I started an educational non-profit organization – Moving On Center – in the Bay Area of California in 1994. We began at the Malonga Center (formerly the Alice Arts Center) in downtown Oakland where the sounds of the music and dance of the African diaspora greeted us each day, all day. We both felt at home with this welcome. I am delighted to share from a two hour interview I conducted with Carol Swann (2024).

Carol's Early Life and the Power of Singing

Carol's deep understanding of the unifying and expressive power of the voice stems from her unique upbringing in an intentional political community in the 1960s. Instead of watching TV or being glued to phones, people in her community sang and folk danced together, learning songs and dances from various cultures, including the Balkans, Northern and Eastern Europe, and the African American tradition of freedom songs and spirituals.

I grew up folk dancing with those different cultural sounds and songs including those from my own culture, which included freedom songs. We also learned spirituals and sang them in rounds. We sang (into the 70s and 80s and onward) because in the political community, folk singing was intentionally brought in at times for political activism, bringing people together as it had been done in the civil rights movement (Swann, 2024).

Carol's early experiences taught her the power of collective singing to unify people, lift spirits, and serve as a form of nonviolent action during complex times. She began teaching folk dancing and songs to groups at the age of 15, and even worked with individuals privately,

helping them find their powerful, expressive voices, which she has continued to do for another five decades!

Integrating Developmental Movement with Vocalizing

As Carol deepened her studies of somatic practices like the Alexander Technique, Body-Mind CenteringSM, and Bartenieff Fundamentals she began to integrate principles of spinal aliveness as well as developmental movement with her approach to vocalizing. Each of these systems have a neuromotor perspective that is developmental. Each recognizes that engagement in movement references coordination patterns that we go through in learning to roll, crawl, sit, stand and walk. Carol realized that the body and voice are intrinsically integrated, and that one can access the voice in a pure sort of way by engaging with these infant and early childhood developmental movement patterns.

The more I got into improvising with my body, the more I realized that the body and voice are connected, how can I think otherwise? [...] I begin to utilize Bonnie's developmental work, which starts with a class I called the Developmental Voice class. It uses the sequence of being in the womb, coming out of the womb, related to what you teach, Martha (Swann, 2024).

In her Developmental Voice class, Carol guides students through embodied experiences of prenatal and early childhood development, reconnecting them with the primal, uninhibited voice that emerges naturally from a fluid, supported body. By returning to a state of *baby-ness*, students can bypass cultural conditioning and judgments about what makes a *good* or *bad* voice.

An Improvisational Approach to Exploring Voice-Body Connection

Central to Carol's teaching is an improvisational, non-judgmental approach that invites students to explore the full range of their voices without imposing a particular technique or ideal sound. She creates safe, supportive spaces where people can make ugly, beautiful, and everything-in-between sounds, discovering the intrinsic connection between vocal expression and physical sensation. "I'm more interested in spirit and am in awe of the impact of what it can do for social movements. This positive effect can be for the person singing or sounding, for myself as a facilitator, for communities, for the world. Now I don't separate 'voice and body' at all." (Swann, 2024).

Carol often begins with guided improvisations that encourage students to make sounds from a place of felt sensation and emotional impulse, rather than predetermined ideas of what singing *should* sound like. She draws on her extensive toolkit of exercises from different somatic modalities to help people address habitual patterns of tension and discover new possibilities in their voices.

The Healing Potential of Vocalizing

For Carol, vocalizing is not only a means of creative expression and playful exploration, but also a powerful tool for healing and transformation. Like many somatic vocalists, she sees the voice as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious, the mind and the body, and believes that sounding can help to release deep-seated emotions, traumas, and blockages.

Sound just evokes and invokes such deep, unconscious stuff that you can't name it until maybe it's worked on. It can be like, all of a sudden, people burst into tears. Why that happens doesn't matter. For those of us who are somatic therapists, we are comfortable with letting it rip. And just maybe we'll find out if there's meaning to it, or maybe not (Swann, 2024).

Carol is comfortable with letting feelings ripple and like me helps people to get bodies and emotions moving, sometimes moving out as a release or integration of stress or trauma. She and I have both been involved in Embodied Conflict Transformation work for many years. Carol's conflict transformation work has a strong root in the Mindell Process work of Conflict Facilitation (Mindell; Mindell, 2024). My involvement with embodied conflict

management came from teaching for Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in the NYC public schools together with Educators for Social Responsibility and then with the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility. I went on to do my doctoral research (Eddy, 1998) on excellent school programs that used movement to teach natural and automatic responses to conflict and violence. Carol also studied Hakomi, another form of Body Psychotherapy that is used to enhance communication and emotional awareness. Hakomi is the root system for Pat Ogden's SensoryMotor Psychotherapy work which also often partners with Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing trauma recovery work. Pat Ogden helped to found the Hakomi Method with Ron Kurtz the author of *Body-Centered Psychotherapy: The Hakomi Method* (1990). My work in NYC included trauma recovery as well, working at the three Ground Zero public schools after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. I have since developed numerous programs like Moving Toward Peace, Conflict Resolution and Community Building through Movement and Dance, Embodied Approaches to Violence Prevention (Eddy, 1998; Eddy, 2010; Eddy, 2015; Eddy 2016; Eddy, 2017; Eddy *et al.*, 2020).

In Carol's classes and private sessions, she often witnesses profound shifts and openings as people give voice to previously unspoken or unacknowledged aspects of themselves. She sees this as a natural extension of the developmental process, in which babies and young children freely express their needs, desires, and emotions through sound before language takes over. And she knows how to work with large groups expressing themselves as individuals or as cohorts. This is particularly supported by the *World Work*, a branch of the Process work of Arnie and Amy Mindell (2024): "I think there's a way in which people get stuck in thinking, 'I can't use my voice unless I learn to read music and take it seriously.' I just sang because I'm more interested in spirit and the impact of what a singing spirit can do for social movements."

From her studies with me at Moving On Center and other great teachers, and directly with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Carol also emphasizes the physical benefits of vocalizing from a Body-Mind CenteringSM perspective. As this essay began, with BMCSM we explored how we can create vibrations that resonate through the bones, organs, and tissues of the body, promoting circulation, releasing tension, and stimulating the nervous system (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012; Eddy, 2021). Carol often incorporates touch and hands-on work to help students find more ease, support, and freedom in their voices.

Cultural and Social Justice Dimensions of Collective Singing

Throughout her life and work, Carol has witnessed the transformative power of collective singing in various cultural and social justice contexts. She sees group vocalizing as a way to honor and celebrate cultural diversity, build solidarity across differences, and mobilize communities for change. “Sounding and singing has been a way of nonviolent action to bring people together, and hold this unity, as well as to lift people's spirits in complex times. Across all the times of humanity there are songs – for giving birth, for healing, for rituals, especially in traditional cultures.” (Swann, 2024).

Carol is mindful of the need to respect and acknowledge the origins of the songs and chants she brings into her work, and to avoid cultural appropriation. She recognizes that many traditional societies have maintained a deep integration of voice, movement, and spiritual practice, which Western culture has largely lost touch with. “This to me, is what I've been calling the contemporary somatic practices. They are ways in which our white Western culture has been trying to reconnect back to the body, whereas other cultures have continued to connect.” (Swann, 2024).

At the same time, Carol sees the reclamation of the voice as a crucial aspect of empowerment and liberation for marginalized and oppressed groups, particularly women and people of color. She notes that finding one's authentic voice and speaking truth to power is an act of resistance against forces that seek to silence or erase certain voices.

Partnership with Martha Eddy and Advocating for Voice in Somatics

In her decades-long friendship and collaboration with Martha, Carol has found a kindred spirit who shares her passion for integrating voice, movement, and somatic awareness. Together, they have taught workshops and retreats that explore the intersection of Body-Mind CenteringSM, VocalMotion, Dynamic EmbodimentSM, and other modalities, creating rich and transformative experiences for participants. When things get tough in community – whether in class, or a rehearsal, or in developing an activist project – there is always the possibility to pause and sing together.

I think the reason we coalesce so well is we both really don't have a system (of set techniques). We have a creative process that meets people in their individual kind of soul. And it's improvisation with a big toolkit coming out of many, many

different trainings that we've done and with this toolkit, you know, we address each individual or group based on what we see is in front of us (Swann, 2024).

Carol and Martha have been vocal advocates for the inclusion of voice work within the larger field of Somatics. They see vocalizing as an essential part of the human experience that deserves equal attention alongside movement, touch, and other somatic practices. By bringing voice to the forefront, they hope to contribute to a more holistic and integrated approach to embodiment and healing.

I think voice is yet to be lifted up in relation to all these connections. There are obviously others doing this work, but we can name on the fingers of our hands about 10 people or programs that are really doing deep voice work from a somatic perspective. Some others besides VocalMotion that come to mind are the Alexander Technique, Bartenieff Fundamentals breath work, Body-Mind CenteringSM & Dynamic EmbodimentSM organ and gland balancing, Fitzmaurice Voicework, Linklater Technique, Patricia Bardi's VoiceMovement Integration, Resmaa Menakem's VIMBAs, and the Roy Hart Method. Carol Swann's VocalMotion seeks to give voice to every manner of authentic expression and given its location within Moving On Center (MOC) and Carol's development of the Socially Conscious Body, it also seeks to give voice to oppressive forces. It can be infused into MOCs work with Theatre of the Oppressed¹ as well.

The Alexander Technique is one of the oldest forms of somatic education. It emerged when actor F. M. Alexander (1869-1955) lost his voice, and no medical professional could help him. He spent many hours in front of a mirror and discovered that his *bodily use* was impacting his vocal chamber. With becoming aware of posture, and actively releasing the weight of his head from a downward pull he was able to regain his ability to speak again, especially with the range needed for acting. He then developed a method to teach others this embodied educational process. He is known for giving lessons to the highly influential educator John Dewey (1859-1952), whose philosophy led to student centered constructivist learning (Eddy, 2017).

Bartenieff Fundamentals of Movement is the work of Irmgard Bartenieff, physical therapist, dancer, co-founder of dance therapy, dance anthropologist with musicologist Alan

¹ The Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatrical form elaborated initially in Brazil by theater practitioner Augusto Boal beginning in the 1950s. Later it expanded to Europe and other places. Boal was influenced by educator and theorist Paulo Freire and his practices on the pedagogy of the oppressed. See: <https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/catalog/trajeciores-intercontinentales-du-theatre-de-l-opprime>. Access in: 10 July 2024.

Lomax, and creator of the Laban Institute of Movement Studies. She studied with Rudolf Laban and created the only 500 hour curriculum to become a Movement Analyst based on the fullness of his theoretical and practical work. Initially she partnered with the Dance Notation Bureau that teaches LabanNotation. She felt the need for the principles behind his analysis to be conveyed.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, founder of Body-Mind CenteringSM, studied with Irmgard Bartenieff and became a Certified Movement Analyst. Her students, myself (Martha Eddy) and Patricia Bardi have created programs, Dynamic Embodiment (Eddy; Smith, 2021) and VoiceMovement Integration respectively, which use voice as an integral part of the work. This is true of most other Body-Mind CenteringSM derived somatic movement training programs.

As Carol continues to teach and inspire others with her unique approach to vocal embodiment, she remains committed to the simple yet profound belief that everyone has a right to express themselves fully and authentically through their voices. By creating spaces where people can rediscover the joy, power, and wisdom of their own sounds, she is helping to heal not only individuals but also communities and the world at large.

Carol Swann's Early Life and Influences on Somatic Vocal work

In reflecting on Carol's life experience and somatic expertise here are some highlights:

- Growing up immersed in folk singing and dancing, exposed Carol (and many others from cultures who are not afraid of the body) early on to the power of collective vocalization and how it can build community and lift spirits, especially in challenging times. This laid an important foundation for our later work which is still active in challenging white hegemony and referred to as Social Somatics (Eddy, 2017; Grant 2023; Leguizamon; Grant *apud* Eddy, 2017).

- Studying Alexander technique and contact improvisation opened new realizations about the bodymind connection and how habits, tension, pain etc. can restrict the body's natural expressiveness. This informed Carols' approach to helping others free their voices including one system she called VocalMotion.

Here are some components of VocalMotion:

- Understanding that the Global South has kept singing and dancing or music and movement as interrelated as the communities themselves are. Western culture tends to separate and specialize abilities (scientist, mathematician, artist etc.), losing sight of the inherent human need to express through the integrated body and voice. Carol's work aims to reconnect people to the unity of the body as expressed using both sound and movement.

- Improvisation and play are key elements used to help people get out of their heads. "When you add the voice to your exploratory play it forces a shedding of inhibitions. Many people rediscover the raw, instinctual voice they had as babies before it became repressed."

Carol's modeling of a wide range of sounds using vocal abstraction gives *permission* to unexpected as well as familiar vocal expression. I'll never forget how Carol's annual workshop retreat called Outfall, a wonderful movement festival in the nature of the California hills, got me singing a highly distorted and passionate version of *Sitting at the Dock of the Bay* (1968) as sung by Otis Redding ((Sittin'On), 2012). I began walking and singing and then continued dancing/moving/performing in a hot tub as the sun set. It lives inside of me as a visceral experience of being witnessed in community and being free to find new forms of meaning and beauty.

Perhaps because of her training in the Alexander Technique, Carol also teaches that alignment is crucial – when the spine is elongated and supported, the breath is free, and the whole body can resonate optimally the voice moves with ease, as does the body. But habits of misalignment, tension and compression (physical and emotional) block this. My own viola playing gave me a tactile sense of how physical resonance in a body can be adjusted by where the compression is – just as the pressure of fingers alters the pitch of vibration and the resulting sound. In the larger instrument of the body, which enables greater resonance, we can have very cut-off voices because of the tension we hold in the head, the neck, the breath, and just about anywhere in the torso.

Here, I would like to thank Carol, for shaping an interconnectedness of voice, body, alignment, emotion, play and expression as a model for everyone interested in the whole person. This is fascinating work that she pioneered over many years to help people reclaim their fullest selves. Carol's choice to integrate the voice with somatic work, whether it's in individual or group sessions focused on physical or social healing, is something I've always really respected. More and more people are doing this now, but Carol was one of the first. Carol makes clear that the power of the moving voice and moving body is always integrated.

David Darling, cellist with Paul Winter Consort, would always say “Music is MOVEMENT” (Winter, 2021).

Hopefully these stories provide pictures or memories of sensations, feelings, and thoughts of your own vocalization. Our somatic approaches developed before and during our partnership with Moving On Center have been shaped by letting the voice naturally respond to and express the body's emotional needs. We made space with Heart Circles for silence, for singing and even occasional screaming to allow for personal and collective expression. We have had many accountability discussions to support how this expression makes a difference in the world – when is it just expressing privilege and when is it moving an agenda of agency forward. We discovered how spontaneous child-like vocalizing exemplifies this freedom, before it often gets cut-off in adulthood. And we encourage our *inner child* energy to heal and continue to be creative and bring new visions into the world.

Our graduates are carrying these visions forward and spawning their own. We have graduates, colleagues and faculty who do somatic voice work, somatic vocalization, embodied singing, as well as toning into the body, also exploring chanting as well as silence. Of course, just as bringing somatic movement work into the world has been challenging, the choice to bring vocalizing into a classroom or performance has often been challenging in many public and institutional settings. It goes against Northern European Christian cultural inhibitions, and related academic models to open one's voice without a well thought out cortical plan. The idea of just letting emotion and expression out through the voice can feel audacious in some settings, distracting in others, and scary in yet others. However, once inhibitions are loosened, effects are felt – with tissues softened where there was tension, when a voice emerges that is strong and confident it becomes clear that what has always been integrated in Indigenous cultures is an important resource for all people everywhere wanting to heal, discover, feel power, or open to vastness of the space we sound into. As discussed, in Dynamic Embodiment we use skills and principles from Body-Mind CenteringSM (BMCSM) together with others from the explorations of Irmgard Bartenieff and the Laban Movement Analysis community that she spawned. These myriad approaches lead to an unlimited number of explorations through every centimeter of the body and with different relationships with the environment. We are aware that the context of interpersonal dynamics and environmental conditions are huge influences on what we say and when we choose to remain silent or even *stuff our voices*. Carol Swann has developed her own methods

from Hakomi, Process work, the Alexander Technique and years of singing, both liberation songs, and songs of joy and love from diverse cultures.

My own vocal play has led us in new avenues as well. In Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement Therapy, like in BMCSM, we spend time to resonate through the organs and glands (Eddy; Smith, 2021), and actually through every tissue of the body, to release stress, integrate the learning from trauma, to activate quiet or numb places, as well as to shift into joy, humor and playfulness. This shifting is most clear in our dancing together. In other programs I created – both Moving For Life (somatic fitness for older adults, and cancer survivors or people of any age with chronic conditions) and BodyMind DancingSM (somatic dance expression and technique), we use the principles of Dynamic Embodiment to dive in deeply with the voice, often sounding rhythms and pitches of different body parts and physiological systems. The BodyMind DancingSM Fluid Phrase takes us through each of the body's circulating fluids, which correlate to different moods. In this signature Fluid Phrase Certified Teachers of BodyMind DancingSM and their students sing and dance without judgment into states of cellular contemplation and presence (accessing the cellular fluid for support often stepping out in silence or stating in one's mother tongue – *I am here*). Next we activate interstitial squeezing and expanding of our *muscle pump*, actively moving in spiralic patterns in order to massage deep into as many parts and layers of the body as possible. We use a slurping sound followed by a big EE-AH sound to widen and lengthen in the coronal/vertical plane. Synovial fluid in the joints is loosened by wiggling freely in any pattern while making a vibratory shaking sound. When we engage with the venous flow of carbon dioxide filled *blue blood* returning to the heart I suggest swinging of arms, legs and torso at different tempos but as much as possible with a $\frac{3}{4}$ time beat. This is followed by slowing down to a monotone rhythm of movement of ongoingness representing the cerebro-spinal fluid. This rhythm is particularly healing. When one's movement is led by a personal experience of the cerebro-spinal fluid's monotone timeless rhythm the nervous system settled and we can shift into a mostly quiet or slow hissing contemplative state. Like mindful walking, moving with the rhythm can become mindful dancing or lengthening of muscles. Finally, we get bouncy and fun-filled with the heart's bloodful energetic red blood $\frac{4}{4}$ beat. Here we sing or count out loud. We interact with one another speeding up in order to raise the heart and breath rate, moving the blood to wherever it is needed in the body. I set this rhythm inside Rudolf Laban's most basic scale – the Dimensional scale (Bartenieff, 1980). Our

goal is to take these rhythms into any direction we want to move in or shape, knowing they can support any mood or mindstate we want to claim. The different rhythms are easy to shift especially when supported by movement and sound, allowing for facility of spirit and interaction.

The BodyMind DancingSM Fluid Phrase is just one somatic vocalization tool, a ritual of community transformation. There are as many ways to use our voice as there are people, feelings, and sounds. In this lineage of vocalization as taught at Moving On Center by Carol Swann and myself, everyone's gifts are celebrated, and play is too! From this childlike state of shifting rhythms, we often evolve into a state of gratitude, thankful for the sacredness of our bodies, including our amazing voices. This ability to change state through movement and sound exploration and improvisation underlies conflict transformation, social somatics, finding voice in the face of oppression and coming together in harmony during troubled times.

There's something about accessing people in their baby-ness which includes play. Playing is important in how we develop as children. Play teaches us so much about life. In fact, Emilie Conrad [founder of the Continuum Method] talks about how play is how we figure out relationships. Play's how we choreograph. Play is how we come to do everything and that includes playing the voice (Swann, 2024).

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