

# Feeling Moving: Wandering Through the Flesh of Personal and Human Development

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## Abstract

This paper explores the question “What becomes possible in the processes of thinking, feeling, and being human, when a person develops more awareness of experiencing silent movements?” Written as scholarly personal narrative, the author links personal and professional experience of inner body awareness, movement, and Continuum Movement with the theories and research of Silvan S. Tomkins, Donald Nathanson, Antonio Damasio, Lisa Feldman Barrett, J. Samuel Bois, and Gary David among other scientists, psychologists, and philosophers; and somatic researchers including Emilie Conrad, Bonnie Gintis, and Amanda Williamson. A key concept throughout this paper is that developing more interoceptive awareness of sensation as movement supports more efficient flow of all affect, feeling and emotion. Continuum Movement is highlighted as one among many somatic movement practices as a way to discover one’s own inner and outer movement potential. The author concludes: We are moving body stories, and through feeling moving and moving feeling, we have the capacity to create new movement, new thoughts, new behaviors, and new meanings with every experience throughout our entire lives.

## Keyword

Movement – Interoception – Embodiment – Somatics – Affective System – Somatic Psychology – Continuum Movement

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are movement even at the most microscopic level of being and an essential feature of what it means to be human is movement. (Williamson, 2009, p. 35)

We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life...[Stories] give theory flesh and breath. (Pratt, 1995, p. 22)

This essay is moving, feeling a way through aspects of the human story in the micro and macroscopic intelligence and mystery of biology. A story that is both spontaneously creative and woven with deliberate patterns necessary to develop life. It moves through deeply personal inner terrain, through the time and space specific to one person, and through physical and emotional terrains seemingly common to all, though uniquely influenced by culture. It tells the story of how the past and present are moving in the now, together breathing life into the flesh of our future. This story asks, when a person develops more awareness of experiencing silent movements, what becomes possible in the processes of thinking, feeling, and being human?

It is October 1992, four months after leaving my husband, and one month after finishing the performances of my first full evening choreographic work; I slouch, arms and legs limp, torso deflated, on the floor sliding under my new boyfriend’s modern four-post bed. My mind swirls down a bottomless dark void, a relentless voice drones, “I have failed at everything. Nothing I do succeeds. I am a worthless...” My belly races in circles tightening inward, my lungs close in millimeter by millimeter around my heart. I spend the rest of the autumn forcing myself to get to dance class, rehearsal, or a minor part time job, then running home as fast as I can. Home, perhaps hiding under the bed is my only place of safety.

At 15 years old living in Iowa, my father was hospitalized with a diagnosis of clinical depression. For the next 15 years, I watched as he was in and out of hospitals for 1-3 months at a time, spending the better part of some years struggling to get out of bed, go to work, have social interactions, eat, and sleep. His blue middle-aged eyes would stare and dart, ineffective medications forcing his body to jerk and shake until he eventually fell limp and blank after electro-shock therapy. I sat with him many hours, days, weeks, and months listening to him say, “I have failed at everything. What is going to happen to your mother? I’m a horrible father. I’ve failed you, your brother and sister. I am worthless.” My family talked about depression, chemical imbalances, his mother’s depression, his repressed grief from my grandfathers’ deaths, and his anger regarding changes at the railroad where he worked. Witnessing my father’s experience, I became determined to insure myself against depression. I disciplined myself to get up at 8 a.m. or earlier every morning and each time uncomfortable feelings arose, I walked, ran, and danced to keep these feelings from dragging me down into paralysis.

When I awoke, aware of myself helplessly sliding under the bed, I recognized my father’s voice as my voice. This black void of paralyzing feelings was not new. I had been spiraling down for at least a year, maybe two. Smoking, drinking alcohol, dancing, sex, religion, keeping busy, destroying and creating relationships, nothing was strong enough to keep the pain at bay. My inner familial gut-wrenching voice, “I have failed, I am worthless,” became a siren alerting me to a future filled with long hospital stays and drug experimentation. The terror of what felt too familiar and hopeless drove me to find help. Thanks to a friend who had explored low cost therapy, I found a psychotherapy service in New York City. During my first session, I tell my therapist, “My throat is jammed. When I feel my throat open, I begin to cry.” She nods her head, and asks, “What are you feeling?” Her question baffled me. Had I not just told her what I was feeling? What more was there to know? Feeling jammed or opening to a torrential rain of tears, doesn’t this say it all?

Awareness of internal somatic (body) sensations is called “interoception,” which means to orient inward. All inner parts of the human body have receptors that send information to the brain to create brain maps for registering feelings of

hunger, thirst, air, and other visceral sensations. There are also receptors on the surface of the body including the teeth, gums, and tongue. These receptors carry information about homeostasis, the body's ability to maintain internal balance. This information is carried to and from the brain through an evolutionarily older set of fibers in the spinal cord. Dr. Hugo Critchley, a researcher at the Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London, explored emotional sensitivity with nine women and eight men. His experiments show that the more visceral awareness, or capacity a person has for interoception, the better a person is at experiencing the full gamut of emotions and feelings, and the more emotionally attuned or empathic a person will be (Blakeslee, 2007).

Psychologists William James and Carl Jorje Lange long ago developed a theory that emotion arises when a person perceives a bodily change. Antonio Damasio, a contemporary neuroscientist and head of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles has updated James and Lange's theory with his somatic marker hypothesis – the notion that feelings in the physical body strongly contribute to even the most “rational” decision-making in life. What James called a “preorganized mechanism,” and many other psychological theories refer to as affect, Damasio calls primary “early” emotions, with “adult” emotions being secondary. According to Damasio:

We are wired to respond with an emotion in preorganized fashion, when certain features of stimuli in the world or in our bodies are perceived, alone or in combination. All that is required is that early sensory cortices detect and categorize the key feature or features of a given entity, e.g., animal, object, and that [brain] structures such as the amygdala receive signals concerning their conjunctive presence...Consciousness buys an enlarged protection policy. Primary emotions (read: innate, preorganized, Jamesian) depend on limbic system circuitry, the amygdala and anterior cingulate being the prime players. (Damasio, 1994, pp. 132-133)

At 30 years old, I had developed vague emotional knowledge through interoception, sensing my inner body. I intuitively sensed into the “early” emotions, my affect system. Yet, despite 15 years of living with my father's diagnosis of mental illness, I had few vocabulary words to describe my “secondary” adult emotions, and very little practice talking in depth about my feelings. Meeting with my therapist several times a week provided me with support to talk about my feelings related to family history, relationship experiences, and various beliefs contributing to my strangling inner voice of failure. After a year, the therapist and I agreed I was ready to move on from therapy. Yet, I found myself wondering why my therapist never inquired further with me into how my limp, deflated, twisting, contracting, racing, jammed, opening gushing-with-tears-body, eventually ran me to her office in desperation, fear and hope. I also heard myself saying, “I need to build an emotional economy.”

What is an emotional economy? At the local level, economy means the management of household income and expenses. Economics can also be applied to the flow of resources in regional, national, and international communities. Initially my need was local. I needed to cultivate a more diverse and effective flow of personal vital resources. I needed to create a sustainable more rewarding emotional sense of being. As a modern dance choreographer and performer, I wondered how am I going to build an emotional economy with empty space and moving bodies.

During the months following the end of therapy, I spent many hours of dance rehearsal feeling my entire body lead-weighted, plastered to the floor and wondering if I would ever find a way to freely and easily stand on my legs and feet again. I continued to slug my way through daily ballet class forcing my legs into high grand battement then slamming my feet back to the ground in fifth position. After class my teacher Cynthia Babat started saying, “You really must take this Continuum workshop, cellular movement with Emilie Conrad. You will really like the movement.” I had no idea what she was saying or why, yet respecting her opinion in November 1994 I attended my first Continuum workshop.

Emilie Conrad, visionary and teacher of Continuum, grew up in a Jewish ghetto in Brooklyn, New York. She started dancing the mambo in the corner store and went on to study Haitian influenced modern dance with Katherine Dunham in Manhattan. As a young adult, Conrad spent five years in the late 1950's living in the non-industrialized island culture of Haiti. Returning to the United States in the 1960's she was deeply struck by the differences she saw in the effects that industrialized and non-industrialized cultures have on how we perceive and move as human bodies. Seeing this led her to distinguish the difference between what we call a body, a form that needs to function in a given cultural context; and an organism, an ancient process that is growing and expanding in its capacity for interaction and communication. With this insight her question was, “As a living organism are we participating in activities that lie below the threshold of our awareness? And if we became aware of them, would they be important?” (Conrad, *Continuum: Fluid new meanings for life*, 2001).

Conrad's questioning inspired her to explore ways to awaken, and to listen to deep impulses of silent sensation and movement in the organism of her body. Her exploring grew into a vision: a continuous inquiry into the expanding capacity of the human organism for interaction and communication. Eventually, she began to share her vision and explorations with others, calling it Continuum Movement.

As an inquiry into what humans call “the body,” Continuum offers an opportunity to develop interoceptive awareness that highlights silent level<sup>1</sup> activities. As silent level activities move into awareness, at their most basic level we call them

<sup>1</sup> Using the phrase “silent level” is an attempt to point to activity that is non-symbolic. Most events occurring in the living process of human beings are silent events occurring uniquely as themselves. Examples of this are movements in the brain related to cognitive processes, movements of digestion, and most organ functions. Even the heart beat is usually silent in one's awareness even though one can feel it and hear it when attention is brought to the heart beat. When

sensations. Sensations become conscious to us by amplification of the affect system (Damasio's "early" emotional processes), functioning biologically to form the physiological roots of human emotional and psychological development. Continuum Movement explorations offer numerous ways to stimulate interest in sensory information while creating a time space environment for more interoceptive awareness of sensation. In doing so, Continuum enhances efficiency in affective flow in a supportive context, creating the possibility for participants to develop value and fresh responses to all feelings.

Continuum Movement encompasses many dimensions in its inquiry process. One essential part of the Continuum inquiry is acknowledging that all life forms, including the human form, are composed of fluid dynamics. One of Emilie's most important insights is that the fluid system occurring in our bodies is a resonant system. We first experience this fluid resonance in our human development as a permeable cell of membraned water. Our cellular origin shares the same fluid movement and planetary process as that of the first living cell that appeared billions of years ago. Cellular fluid movement is in the origins of all species and of all life forms. Throughout our lives, we continue the dance of the first cell and the origins of all life forms in free-flowing, undulating, multi-dimensional wave motions. It is in this fluid movement that we resonate as one unbroken whole: human to human, species to species, with the planet, and with the galaxy.

Eventually this flowing cellular dance develops into an embryo. As an undulating embryo we are enveloped in amniotic fluid. We simultaneously develop our internal fluid systems. One is the circulatory system, a complex array of river-like arteries and veins in which blood and lymph are circulated within the membrane of our own skin. Another is the virtual sea of fluid in which our organs undulate as they perform vital life functions. Yet another system that develops early in our embryonic process is the nervous system, which streams with electrical currents. These currents internally messenger information linking together our thinking and feeling processes. The very nature of our prenatal cellular origins and our amniotic environment defines us as fluid, moving beings. This suggests to Emilie that even as adults and for as long as we live, we continue to move in an undulating cellular and embryonic process that is resonant with the planetary process.

At birth, we emerge from the world of amniotic fluid to life on land. Our fetal breathing is compelled to adjust to the requirements of the earth atmosphere. Our new breathing process involves two aspects. Gently penetrating inhalations inspire us with oxygen to maintain the form of our organism. Exhaling dissolves the form of our organism back into the environment we inhabit, by releasing compounds created by the oxygen we inhale. Inspiring, the taking on of form, and expiring, the dissolving of form, is yet another dance of the original cell. In this dance the fluid substance within the cell membrane moves throughout its life from a gel, or form state, to a sol, or dissolve state. In our experience the gel state is bound by time, is stable, and organizes our functional activities. The sol state is less bound by time and form, and is one of creative flux and fluidity.

As adaptable and resilient organisms, at birth and throughout our life process we maintain a dynamic balance between gel and sol, stability and fluidity, as we respond to the effects of gravity and to the complex stimuli generated in our external environment. Stability involves functional activities that orient our organism to survive the demands of the planet, species and culture. Fluidity heightens movements in our organism that increase communication with our internal and external environments. Like all creatures who move about in space maintaining stability and fluidity, and who have reached a certain level of evolutionary development in brain function, we embody an affective system. The affective system resides in the earlier structures of our brain. All stimuli in our internal and external environments, and our response to these stimuli, are linked in us by the affect system.

When the stimuli and our response become amplified by affect, the affective system releases a known pattern of biological events that we feel over our entire body. The patterns make the stimuli/response feel important to us, stirring us to create meaning out of our experience. These biological patterns guide us in novel or unexpected circumstances to monitor our well-being. Affects are the motivational and directional movements in the fluid system of our organism, and they are an essential part of the biological roots for our psychological and emotional development.

In a healthy body there is a dynamic flux between the stability and fluidity of movement at all levels—thinking, feeling, and electrochemical. Stability in our nervous system comes in our ability to delay responses. This function resides in the newer part of our brain, which unlike the earlier brain, is not in immediate contact with our current environment. The newer brain is concerned with higher-order functioning and records past experiences. The earlier brain emphasizes lower-order functions that have immediate fluid communication with all stimuli. We characterize the lower order as "spontaneous." These delaying and spontaneous responses function as messengers that link us as an organism to the challenges of our present environment. The duality of these functions maintains the integrity within us as an organism as long as the proper timing is operating. In a culture that values one over the other (the higher over the lower), the timing is thrown off and the organism cannot maintain its essential fluid movement. We see how this timing gets thrown off in corporate America, where day in and day out the activity is to make a "profit," which is a higher-order value. In this pursuit, people push themselves to function for extended periods of time without sunlight, fresh air, sleep, and *fresh* food intake. We also see this in spiritual belief systems that identify God as an entity separate from an unfolding organismic earth process, and who can only be contacted by transcending from the body with a higher-order definition of the mind.

As we mature, and our organism continues adapting to the physical requirements of the stimuli in our gravitational world, we also adapt to the affective-emotional and habitual requirements of our social world. This adaptation takes place initially in our family and later as we move further out into our culture. We currently find ourselves adapted to the demands of

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awareness occurs the experience has risen from a purely silent level activity to a symbolic experience of what in English we name heart beat. Alfred Korzybski was one of the first philosopher's to articulate the silent level as significant in human life (Korzybski, 2005).

a hi-tech, mechanistic society, unconsciously—often ritualistically—repeating the same movements, both neuro-muscularly and feelingly day after day. Examples of this are driving a car, sitting at a computer, and watching television. Unfortunately, repetitive action like this creates a stable sameness feedback loop, which reduces variables and our ability to respond in fresh ways to a complex array of stimuli. Stable sameness also amplifies our silent-level (not words-level) value system for experiencing the same forms and intensities of sensation over and over. This value system diminishes our essential ability to adapt and to be creative, and results in a trapped condition known as over-stabilization. We experience over-stabilization physically by feeling sluggish, dense, and lacking in resiliency; by breathing rigidly and shallowly; and by losing our capacity to recognize and value subtle sensations and movement. We experience over-stabilization psychologically by feeling the same emotions to the same degree in repetitive loops. One very common example of over-stabilization is stress. The lack of fluid movement created by stress takes many forms. In the joints this lack of fluidity becomes a painful paralysis preventing a person from performing simple daily hand functions. Over-stabilization can be brought on by a traumatic internal or external bombardment. Examples of this are the neurological blitz from a stroke and a spinal cord injury from a motor vehicle accident or fall. Both of these often cause neurological damage and paralysis. Waking up our flow of feeling-sensing-moving appears to be essential in order to insure the dynamic flux within the duality of our higher and lower orders, and to mediate any degree of the paralyzing effects of over-stabilization. To do this, an arousal of motivation (affect) is essential in order to inspire value in us for feeling subtle sensations and movement. An effective way to awaken and inspire our value for and awareness of our flow of feelings--our innate cellular fluidity--is through Continuum Movement.

Continuum Movement is an ongoing process. In this process the over-stabilized organism is able to regain lost fluidity, which enhances communication between all we have highlighted above: higher and lower orders, earlier and newer brain systems, as well as fluidity and stability. This enhanced communication increases the potential for further life processes to develop through two elemental biological functions: wave motion, which began with our original cellular conception; and breath and sound, which began in the womb and adapted at our birth (Abrams, 2001).

The use of breath, sound, wave movements and micro-movements allows silent level activities to awaken into sensations. An example of a Continuum exploration is a sequence. One sequence begins with four to seven Theta breaths, a long thhhhhh sound on the exhale. This breath slows down the exhale, increasing CO<sub>2</sub> in the blood stream helping to quiet the nervous system. Following the Thetas is a set of Blurrs, a deep inner throat-guttural incremental sound. The increments of sound interrupt and deconstruct patterning that language and swallowing create in the throat, tongue, and mouth. Interruptions like this soften tissues of the head, neck, throat and related tissues preparing them for other possibilities of movement. Next unfolds several minutes of very slow undulating wave motion in a quadruped position with forearms, hands, knees, and lower legs supporting the body with the belly-side facing to the ground. The last element in the sequence is releasing the body from the quadruped position allowing the body to twist, spiraling on the ground while limbs explore spontaneous tentacle movements lingering effortlessly in space. At the end of the sequence, the explorer spends time sitting or lying down in a state of “open attention.” During open attention breath or movement play stops and with open interest the explorer can become aware of subtle sensations and movement flowing deep within her/his body.

During the exploration of a sequence and in open attention, an individual may become aware of pleasurable or not pleasurable feelings. Continuum focuses on staying in touch with the movement of sensations, the physical expression of these feeling flows instead of focusing on what feelings mean via thought. Focusing internally on sensations and their flow patterns is a key to gaining felt-sense experience of the biological movements of what is commonly called the affective system in the neurosciences.

After six years of exploring Continuum with Emilie Conrad and her long term associate Susan Harper, I was among the first group of teachers to be authorized. Daily I was discovering new feeling meaning in the silent depth of my sensing-moving experience, and I longed for more language to communicate my new understanding to others. After a conversation about my longing with Conrad, she introduced me to her former husband Gary David a jazz musician and epistemologist. Living with Conrad for 23 years, David was influential in supporting Conrad’s understanding of the journey through silent realms of experience and language. Years prior to meeting Conrad, David’s creative journey had led him to the work of J. Samuel Bois, a leader at the Viewpoints Institute in Los Angeles. Bois, author of *The Art of Awareness*, traveled through careers as Jesuit priest and psychologist until discovering the work of Alfred Korzybski and General Semantics. Bois dedicated the rest of his life’s work to creating a model of “Epistemics,” a process of applying self-reflexive thinking to thought, and teaching at Viewpoints Institute. He mentored David until his death in 1978. During these mentoring years, David pursued his PhD in Epistemics through Union Institute and University.

Bois writes:

As a first step, we put aside the standard definition of *Homo sapiens*, such as “rational animal,” or any of its present-day equivalents as for instance, “the naked ape.” We see the human individual as a continuously transacting and expanding process that includes seven clusters of activities: (1) electrochemical; (2) sensory-motor; (3) feeling; (4) thinking; (5) environing (ecologically and psychosocially); (6) memory guided; and (7) anticipative of the future. (Bois, 1996, p. 26)

From this cluster model of the human individual David began a process of inquiry into how human feeling as emotion is functioning at the silent level of the organism – to repeat Bois, “a continuously transacting and expanding process,” and

Conrad, “an ancient process that is growing and expanding in its capacity for interaction and communication.” David’s research into the silent feeling cluster brought him to the work of psychologist-philosopher Silvan S. Tomkins and his four-volume work *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. Tomkins’ first two volumes were published in 1962-63 with volumes three and four posthumously in 1992 and 1993.

Many describe Tomkins as one of history’s most original psychologist-philosophers, and consider him the founder of modern affective science. In early adulthood, he started out studying to become a playwright. His quest to understand human beingness inspired him to achieve a master’s degree in psychology, a doctorate in philosophy, and to do post-graduate work at the Harvard Psychology Clinic studying Personology with Henry Murray (Tomkins, 2008, p. xi). Along with his clinical research, while on sabbatical he observed for long hours a day the development of his infant son. From his scientific and personal observation, he developed a theory of the biological necessity of emotions for animal survival and human development. He extensively researched evolutionary developments in varied interactions and flexible biochemical processes in the human brain, seeing them as stimulus patterns, felt all over the body, telling us via internal processing that a change has occurred. He called these general information patterns affects, a term commonly used in psychology but one subordinated to early psychology’s focus on the drives. He also studied the face of the infant with early equipment designed to focus on the detail of affect expression. According to Tomkins, the primary motivational system is the affect system, and the biological drives have motivational impact only when amplified by the affect system (Tomkins, 2008). Tomkins’ affect patterns are ignited by amplified neurological stimulation on the skin (inside and out), especially the face, or sensory input from the environment. He also developed Script Theory to account for how we create repeated patterns, powered by affect, that allow the affects to amplify themselves. Affect Script Theory offers a way to link the silent biological movement of inner feeling flows with the emotions humans create and learn through repeated experience and social conditioning. Tomkins’ insight, research, and writing about the affect system were ahead of his time. He was a pioneer in visioning what he called a shotgun marriage between physiologists, engineers, experimental psychologists, learning theorists, personality theorists, and clinical psychologists (Tomkins, 2008). Since the 1980s, his work has slowly begun to influence thinkers of all kinds involved in human development.

In his book, *Shame & Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*, Donald Nathanson, M.D., psychiatrist and Tomkins researcher, articulates a precise language of emotion in which he distinguishes differences between affect, feeling, and emotion. Affect or innate affect is strictly the internal biological process of emotion, activation within the brain releasing a known pattern of neurologically transmitted events, highly specific and unmodulated psychological reactions present from birth. These patterns can last from a few hundredths of a second or up to two seconds (Nathanson, 1994, p. 49; Tomkins, 2008, p. xiv). Feeling is the word used to describe the organism (human in our case) becoming aware of an affect. Feeling implies the presence of higher order, newer evolutionary developments in the brain needed to become conscious of something happening. If affect is biology, emotion is biology plus biography. Emotion occurs in an organism that has brain processes allowing storage and retrieval of memory information. Emotion is the combination of affect triggered by memories of previous experience of the affect, and the affects triggered by the memories (Nathanson, 1994, pp. 49-50). Tomkins eventually dropped the term “emotion” in favor of a much larger category of coassemblies of affect-memory experiences that he called “scripts” (Tomkins, 2008, p. xiv). Nathanson says, “Affect lasts but a few seconds, a feeling only long enough for us to make the flash of recognition, and emotion as long as we keep finding memories that continue to trigger the affect” (Nathanson, 1994, p. 51). Distinguishing affect, feeling and emotion in this way, attempts to articulate the difference in how affect and feeling reside in the silent realm of our experience, and emotion combines silent realm activity with movements in the verbal realm of experience.

Innate affect patterns are felt throughout the entire body and activate to give the organism information about changes that feel positive (rewarding) or negative (punishing). Nathanson outlines a model of the affect system as working like the firmware in the operating system of a computer (Nathanson, 1994, p. 37). A computer’s body of hardware (plastic, metal, glass parts linked with wires and glue) transmits electricity. The operating system tells the hardware what to do with all the transmitted signals, and when software is added to hardware, the firmware informs the hardware of the software, making it possible for the software to run and create more information in the “body” of the computer. Similarly, the affect system requires the physical and electrical parts of our body to function. When functioning, the affect system amplifies internal flow of activity into conscious form. Stimulus can be from events perceived in the world around us, and from events happening inside the body’s skin. Affects inform a person whether changes in the inner flow are optimal for well-being, and if not, the density of the rate of stimulation is helpful information for what rate is needed to improve responses to what is going on.

Computer models for the brain and nervous system were popular starting in the middle of the last century. Since the late 1980s, neuroscience has revealed more and more that the brain’s function in the body of human experience is more complex than how computer systems function. Although Nathanson’s computer model may be an effective description for certain purposes, I long for a more up to date model that visually inspires more alive, dynamically embodied understanding of this complex, multi-dimensional process that communicates through planetary moving bodies. Advances in neuroscience since Tomkins’ theory was published and his death in 1991 are making this possible. Damasio, is one neuroscientist whose research attempts to describe the anatomy of “early” emotion. Jaak Panksepp, psychobiologist and neuroscientist, refers to the system as basic emotions that emerged from other preexisting brain functions and from older preexisting components (Panksepp, 1992). Two neuroscientists Lisa Feldman Barrett and Eliza Bliss-Moreau describe the affective system as follows:

The distributed circuitry for core affect can be found in every mammalian brain and is particularly elaborated in the human brain. These areas represent crucial components of a network that binds sensory stimulation from inside the body to that coming from outside the body, and in so doing each gives the other informational value. Some parts of affective circuitry are strongly interconnected with sensory cortical areas, whereas others are strongly interconnected with areas that direct the autonomic and hormonal responses to regulate the homeostatic state of the body. The strongly re-entrant nature of neural activity makes it difficult to derive simple cause and effect relationships between the brain and the body, or between sensory and affective processing. (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, *Affect as psychological primitive*, 2009, p. 173)

From this description of circuitry I imagine a continuous flow of micro-movement inside my skin dancing along web-like pathways. Cascading from my head in all directions, winding around and through my spinal vertebrae to the tip of my tail bone, seeping out my sides through soft tissues of organs and muscles, spiraling down the bones and tissues of my arms through to my fingers, pouring through the thick bones and muscles of my legs oozing into my refined articulating toes, lighting up and vibrating from front to back and in every diagonal direction. This continuous, flowing micro-movement dances with the vibrations of sound, light, color, odors, and tastes coming in through my skin, ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. These movements journey back and forth to my brain, sometimes with ease and sometimes with dis-ease, so fast and silent I am unable to be aware of them. Eventually rippling out to my conscious awareness as feeling messages, they silently sing through my entire body, calling my attention to silent level needs at play in my entire being.

So what about this circuitry dance within the human body? What do we need “preorganized mechanisms,” “early” emotions, affects and fully developed emotions for? Tomkins elaborated why humans and other animals need an affect system:

Increasing complexity of behavior in general did not necessarily require consciousness. Did nature need a mechanism like consciousness to guarantee the viability of living organisms? Certainly not for all living organisms: the plant lives but appears unconscious. We find consciousness in animals who move about in space but not in organisms rooted in the earth. Mobility is the key. Consider how much information would have been required to be built into an organism which is never twice in exactly the same place in exactly the same world, when that world contains within it complex organisms whose behavior would have had to be predicted and handled. (Tomkins, 2008, pp. 7-8)

Living systems that move through their spatial environment need to be receptive. They need receptor processes capable of registering constantly changing information from both their internal and external environments. This information also needs to be exchanged through a central site for analysis and transformation into conscious form, so the living system knows what is going on and potentially what to do (Tomkins, 2008, pp. 7-8). Affective neuroscience shows there are multiple locations in the brain involved in affect activation. This multiple site activation is referred to as “neural reference space” and is how information received through receptor processes is analyzed and transformed through the brain into conscious form.

Barrett and Bliss-Moreau substantiate Tomkins’ basic idea about information flow:

The circuitry within the neural reference space for core affect binds sensory information from the external world to sensory information from the body, so that every mental state is intrinsically infused with affective content. When core affect is in the background of consciousness, it is perceived as a property of the world, rather than as the person’s reaction to it. It is under these circumstances that scientists usually refer to affect as “unconscious.” We experience a world of facts rather than feelings, and affect gives us a sense of confidence in those facts. (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009, pp. 178-179)

What we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell becomes fact to us through the unconscious internal process of core or innate affect. These researchers classify core affect as a neurophysiological state characterized along two dimensions pleasure vs. displeasure, measured along a continuous scale from positive to negative; and high arousal vs. low arousal, measured along a continuous scale between these endpoints.

In Barrett’s perspective articulated in her Conceptual-Act Model, she combines the linguistic relativity principle and findings from affective neuroscience to say that, emotion is generated when a person categorizes his/her core affective state using knowledge about emotion. According to her model, what we drink tastes good or bad. Some people are nice, others are mean. Some flowers we like, others we dislike. According to Barrett when affect is experienced as fact, we translate it directly into behavior. We eat more ice cream because it tastes good, we avoid a co-worker because she is mean, or we stand for hours looking at a flower because the color is captivating (Barrett & Bar, 2009).

Barrett and her colleague researchers say affect is “backgrounded and foregrounded in consciousness.” When affect is backgrounded it is referred to as unconscious affective stimuli, however affect is never a property of the stimulus. “An object is said to have affective value precisely because it has the capacity to influence an individual’s core affective state”(Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, *Affect as psychological primitive*, 2009, pp. 178-179). Gary David counters their statement saying, “An object has value, positive or negative, when it is amplified by affect,” (David, 2010) backing up his view with Tomkins’ perspective:

By being immediately activated and thereby coassembled with its activator, affect either makes good things better or bad things worse, by conjointly simulating its activator in its profile of neural firing and by adding a special analogic quality which is intensely rewarding or punishing. (Tomkins, 2008, pp. 8, vol. 3)

Tomkins' says, affect is general and combines with anything. It can combine with sensory input, drive, thought, memory, imagination, and other affect. In other words, the feeling we discover when encountering ice cream, a co-worker, or a flower is not in the object or person, the affect is the value inspired inside the body moving with the stimuli of ice cream, co-worker, or flower. The object itself is not inherently good, mean, or captivating; we say the object feels good, mean, or captivating. What is going on is we are feeling our feelings, and the object (depending on what it is) may or may not have its own feelings. When affect is "foregrounded in consciousness" we are aware of reactions we have to the world, we like or dislike a food, person or a painting (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, *Affect as psychological primitive*, 2009).

Similar to Barrett's ideas about backgrounded and foregrounded core affect, Tomkins is famous for saying "Cognitions coassembled with affects become hot and urgent. Affect coassembled with cognitions become better informed and smarter" (Tomkins, 2008, p. xxv). In psychology, the term cognition involves mental processes by which we acquire knowledge. These processes include perception, intuition, and reasoning. Tomkins used the word cognition differently. He saw cognition as an assembly of sub-processes, not a singular process in its own right. His definition included perception, motricity, memory, and linguistic-like functions. Affect provides general information, while cognitive mechanisms transform the general into specific information. This viewpoint shows the organism as both affective and cognitive, each functioning differently within what he called "the minding system." One aspect functions to bring general information into awareness and the other to bring specific information to awareness; both are forms of "knowing." Even the infant without language "knows." The difference is that an infant does not know that she knows. This comes later with language acquisition and the development of self-reflexiveness (David, 2010).

The experience of knowing something, a beverage, person, or flower, is weak or mild in our experience when no affect-feeling awareness is present. When our knowing is combined with affect-feeling awareness, our experience of a beverage, person or flower is stronger, more full-bodied and urgent in our experience. When affect is present without conscious awareness (feeling); we move through life acting without awareness of how the affect is motivating us. When we bring our ability to learn and know the feeling presence of affect through inner awareness, our movements or behaviors can become more informed, specific and clear to us.

In their paper "Affect as Psychological Primitive," Barrett and Bliss-Moreau conclude the intensity with which we are aroused pleasantly or unpleasantly will influence our judgments and decisions about engaging with the objects in our world. Tomkins concludes similarly regarding the intensity of affect influencing our judgments and decisions and engagement with our world, however he offers a rate and density perspective differing from Barrett's arousal of pleasure and displeasure measurements on a continuous scale. According to Tomkins, the terms positive and negative refer to the sense of what is optimal or less optimal for the sustainable well-being of the organism. We need positive affect to let us know all is functioning optimally in living experience, we need negative affect to let us know when adjustments need to be made to resume an optimal rate and density of information flow. Tomkins suggests we have positive, neutral, and negative affects.

Observing many infants and his infant son from birth onward, was critical to how Tomkins created his understanding of the innate patterns of affect. Barrett's Conceptual-Act Model requires the presence of language for affect to have conscious meaning as emotion. Tomkins' theory purports to suggest that infants and caregivers are immediately communicating through affect expression via facial expression, sound, and eye contact. This is essential for the infant who is dependent on the caretaker because she is born unable to move through her environment to tend such needs as food, safety, and novelty. Through this immediate and non-verbal communication and experience the infant is beginning to build emotional "understanding" from the processes of innate affect.

In an effort to create some common ground of language and a basic starting place for affect research, Tomkins distinguished nine innate affects. He chose words for the innate affects that most accurately described for him the expressions resulting from the rate and density of stimuli activating the nervous system in the organism. After many hours of scientific research, contemplation, and observation of infants and adults across cultures responding to inner and outer environments, Tomkins proposed: We are born with six basic affect flow patterns and we develop three more immediately after birth. Altogether, there are two positive affects, one neutral, and six negative. He put seven of the affects on a spectrum from mild to intense. The six we are born with all run on a spectrum of increasing or decreasing densities and rates of stimulation over time (1/100ths of a second to 2 seconds).

The six we are born with include:

*Positive:*

Interest to Excitement  
Enjoyment to Joy

An optimal increase in rate and density of stimulation  
An optimal decrease in rate and density of stimulation

*Neutral:*

Surprise to Startle

An equally instant spike and drop in density and rate of stimulation

*Negative:*

Distress to Anguish

A steady state of very dense stimulation

Anger to Rage

A higher steady state of very dense stimulation

Fear to Terror

A speedy escalation of dense stimulation

After birth, we soon develop Disgust and Dismissal (a word created by Tomkins). They interrupt the hunger drive and give the organism information about the toxicity of a potentially digestible substance. With Dismissal, we back up and away from a toxic smelling substance to avoid intake. With Disgust, we push up, out, and away from what we have ingested that turns toxic inside.

The last affect, Shame to Humiliation, is the most recent affect in the evolutionary development of the brain. Shame to Humiliation is an affect that is auxiliary to positive affect and occurs when the positive flow of Interest-Excitement or Enjoyment-Joy is incompletely interrupted, causing the muscle tone of the organism to deflate with a few seconds of cognitive confusion.

Affect patterns flow as moving aspects of the fluidly dynamic currents of the central nervous system. Uninhibited efficient affective flow is essential to the vitality and well-being of the organism's body and the development of the human being. When affective flow is inhibited, obscured, or backed up, vitality diminishes and may express itself in a variety of somatic-emotional conditions. Examples include negative moods we feel unable to turn off, repetitive stress injuries, addictions, and eating disorders. Tomkins rate and density descriptions offer possibilities for a variety of ways to explore inner movement experience and outer movement expression in support of the full flow of all affect.

When I feel into the inner silent realm of what I call my body, first I notice a small expanding up and out followed by a dropping down and inward movement of my breathing. I feel weighted in my crossed legs, warmth on my skin from the computer sitting on my lap, a slight contraction moving in and down in my teeth and jaw bones. As I drop the word Interest into the silence of my body, I feel a narrowing channel, dropping straight down the center of my belly through the bottom of my pelvis between my legs. I shift position to sit up more straight and feel a sense of rising from my belly through the center of my torso out the top of my head. The contraction in my teeth bones has diminished and my breath is lighter with more volume.

Dropping the word Anguish into my silent body, I immediately notice drooping around the outside of my eyes and mouth. My arms and legs collapse toward my torso, my skin feels open and vulnerably exposed. My breath instantly loses all volume and begins to quiver. I drop Anger into my body and the palms of my hands and feet light up with full skin aliveness. My eyes open with sharp focus, my heart beats faster, my skin contracts, bones feel steady, and muscles quicken. My teeth clench slightly as my breath picks up speed and volume.

As I hear myself articulating sensations and feelings from my inner world with Tomkins' language for nine innate affects, I discover a sense of internal support for moving the expressions of readiness, loss, and forceful clear action. As I return to writing, I feel more ease and clarity in my entire body, a renewed sense of flow, energetic resource, and free clear thinking. Tomkins articulates in his theory that enhancing flow of all affect, by maximizing positive, minimizing negative, and minimizing the inhibitors of all affect flow will support a sense of well-being and vitality in the organism. The same repetitive stimulation from environment, thoughts, or faulty internal mechanisms will create organismic Distress (a steady rate and density of stimulation negative affect). Likewise, positive or negative affect that does not fully resolve expression will back up affective flow and encourage negative affect to build. Affect that flows efficiently and fully brings vitality to the organism and to one's overall sense of being.

Although language is not immediately available to the infant human, for effective and efficient communication, language is important to a growing child and especially to a developing adult. How a person learns to describe feeling and emotional experience to her/himself can affect her/his silent level movement. Since affect is a silent level activity, how a person describes feeling and emotion to her/himself can participate in backing up affect, amplifying affect, or supporting efficient resolve of affect flow. Bois' model of the orders of abstraction (Bois, 1996) sheds light on how this works in humans. By "abstraction" Bois does not mean the opposite of "concrete." He means, "To leave out" (David, 2010). Bois gives a clear example of how human thought moves via abstracting. From the entirety of what is going on (WIGO) in the universe at any given moment, the first abstraction, the first thought form, is into the silent level form (i.e. the general movements of organisms); then from the silent level, humans enter the symbolic realm of language from description to interpretation, to judgment, and to conclusion (generalization). Each level removes us more and more from the vastness of WIGO. The silent level and descriptive orders of abstraction are closest to the vast movement, resources, and choices available in WIGO. Our conclusions feed back into the universe of what is going on (WIGO) and become part of our silent level process. As expressed in writing above, using Tomkins' innate affect words as an entry point, when I linger in descriptive language my attention and interest grow more extensions into the silent level, where more movement possibilities and more opportunities for supporting flow of all affect reside. I also access more potential for developing new conclusions instead of repeating the same affect-feeling-emotional movements, the same judgments, decisions, and behavioral conclusions.

Continuum offers a way through breath, sound and movement explorations to bring Interest (positive affect) to sensations and feeling awareness. Each breath, sound or movement in Continuum can stimulate positive or negative feeling flow by increasing or decreasing density and rate of stimulation. By bringing in new rates of neurological stimulation Continuum elements can interrupt distress patterns, and can also increase support for more full expression of both positive and negative affects. Both the interruption of repetitive stimuli and support of full affect expression offer a space for positive affective flow to reinstate itself more fully. While exploring elements in a Continuum sequence, each participant is invited to



take time, to feel their way through the process with each breath and sound. This allows increases or decreases in the rates of neurological stimulation at an optimal rate for the unique organization of each body, each organismic process. This also creates an environment rich with affective resonance, in which participants recognize all silent level needs as a group. In this resonance, an ocean full of feeling swells. At the end of a Continuum experience people often speak of feeling comfortably vibrant with a deep sense of connection and satisfied joy. The silent level needs of each organism have been recognized and supported to flow with affective freedom. Each organism silently smiles with harmonious ease and appreciation.

Continuum's inquiry into the fluidly dynamic human nature offers many ways to develop the joy of vitality through interest in the silent realm and enhanced flow of the affect system. Through the elements of breath, sound, and movement explored in sequences and creatively supportive environments, people are invited with unending interest to discover the rhythms and pulses of their own being. Encouraged to grow endless value for every nuance and murmur of sensation, they recognize themselves again and again and again. Deep internal satisfaction manifests in silent self-recognition. Belonging increases, minimizing isolating negative self-beliefs, offering space to grow fresh emotional responses, and resonate with new meaning from the information flow of sensing and feeling.

During my first five years of consciously diving into silent realms of sensation and movement I spent several hours each day, sometimes days at a time, alone breathing, moving, feeling, and sensing into long forgotten and untouched parts of my body: starting with my belly and legs, oozing into my arms, pelvis, and chest, finally radiating throughout my brain and skull. At times, a critical inner voice haunted me, "You're being awfully self-indulgent." Yet with each subtle movement inwardly and outwardly expressed through softening, vibrating juicy wet organ tissues, tingling breathing skin, and contracting, elongating, undulating weighted bones and muscles, a deep relief, deep nourishment, and rest settled in me. After months of listening to this inner voice, I eventually heard myself respond, "Yes, I am self-indulgent. I need to indulge in relief if I'm going to survive. I trust these feelings of quiet relief. They are making me stronger. One day I will understand how and why, and so will you." Each day I experienced more frequent and greater positive feeling flow and fewer periods of strangling negative feeling. My personal "household" emotional economy began to thrive.

Eventually, dancing alone in my inner experience needed to expand. I needed a greater flow of resources and to thrive in community. Emilie Conrad and Susan Harper, both based in California, travel throughout the world teaching. I needed more than attending bi-coastal workshops with them. I needed daily and weekly moving, feeling communion. After intense personal study, many workshops, and conversations with Conrad, I organized a Continuum practice group in New York City with others who had attended workshops with Conrad and Harper. Along with practicing sequences learned from my teachers, I also longed to begin teaching my own discoveries. In 1996 I began with a small group of friends who courageously and whole-heartedly supported my awkward journey into teaching Continuum. With the practice group and my first classes, my personal household emotional economy had begun to increase in flow of exchange with regional resources.

Three years later, I was fully self-employed teaching Continuum classes, workshops, private sessions, and sponsoring workshops with Conrad, Harper, David, and other Continuum colleagues. Seventeen years later, I continue these activities while running Moving Body Resources, a center in New York City where Continuum teachers thrive along with a myriad of other professionals oriented to body wellness leading group classes and offering private sessions. Through the blessings of Continuum and my understanding of affect-feeling flow, I have emerged into a greater field called Somatic Movement, a nationally and internationally developing field of research, teaching, education, therapy, and practice. Somatic Movement acknowledges the moving, thinking, feeling experiences of the organism as essential to developing a greater sense of inner well-being and connection with everything in the environment, world, and universe.<sup>2</sup> My life and work have expanded contributing to the national and international emotional economy through the field of somatic movement, as I teach myself, people in my local region, locations in the USA, and in Europe. Likewise, people from all over the world journey to Moving Body Resources to participate in many of the activities I teach and sponsor. These people are Latino, African, African-American, Caucasian, Asian, Native North and South American; and they range in age from 23-92, include every gender, a variety of spiritual beliefs, and a very wide range of physical abilities.

Together my inner world and outer world are moving, breathing, feeling the exchange of resources. During the 19 years since the moment I awoke in gnashing inner anguish, spiraling down a black void of shame-filled failure, I have discovered a vast universe of support in feeling as moving experience. From deep within, my interested eyes look out with wonder onto the world. The ocean of my body ripples, undulates, spirals, eddies, barrels, settles, quiets, and glistens in every direction with affective value appreciating in me moment by moment.

In almost every workshop I have attended with Emilie Conrad she has said, "Movement is what we are, not something we do" (Gintis, 2007). As biological living organisms, we become bodies as we navigate our historical, familial, and societal oceans and landscapes. We are moving body stories dancing with the past, in the breathing moment of now, tending our hopes, dreams, and unknowns toward our moving future.

<sup>2</sup> There are a wide variety of educational and therapeutic professional practices involving somatic movement. To name a few along with Continuum: The Feldenkrais Method®, The Trager® Approach, Body-Mind Centering®, and certain practices involving Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Movement Fundamentals. The field of work is vast with training programs inspired by pioneers like Emilie Conrad, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Moshe Feldenkrais, and Milton Trager; and training programs that incorporate a wide range of techniques that support people to develop somatic awareness through movement. My personal influences include Susan Harper, Caryn McHose, Kevin Frank, Hubert Godard, Amanda Williamson, and Robert Litman. The International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association (ISMETA), maintains a list of international training programs and registered professional practitioners.

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## Biography

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