

Video 3 The body as research instrument in *your* research cycle

[Introduction]

Welcome to the third and final video in this series. In the first video I introduced somatic intelligence and different ways of knowing in relation to the body, as well as some versions of embodied scholarship. Perhaps you took the opportunity to move with lines and circles in the previous video, to explore an abstract concept through movement. Now I will discuss how you can concretely implement this within your research activities.

SLIDE 12 Somatics Toolkit

The Somatics Toolkit, which I mentioned in the beginning of video 1, is freely available online. It includes explorations to support a healthy relationship to your research in mental and emotional, as well as physical terms. It helps you to be aware of not sitting too long behind your desk, and move with ideas. This will support you as a researcher in the longer term.

SLIDE 13 Core Practice

Whatever methodology we use, every research will move through a cycle of familiar 'stations'. There will be a phase of preparation, data collection, and dissemination. We all have to deal with literature review, observations or interviews, analysis, writing and presentation. The Somatics Toolkit offers ten concrete exercises regarding such research activities, and how improvised movement can support your thinking, analysis and the interconnection between all of them. But we also face questions about our identity and confidence as a researcher, about being in the unknown, dealing with polarities in our data or emotional responses that our work might bring up.

SLIDE 14 Extended practice

Guest contributions include working with gender, blood, practices to quieten the mind, deal with discomfort, and challenging research situations, and emotional states such as overwhelm, stress and exhaustion. Rather than repeating those resources here, I would like to use our remaining time to highlight specific *aspects* you might consider exploring, to enhance your bodily relationship to your research.

SLIDE 15 To explore with and through the Body

[the following topics only have images, not slides, so I have added this slide with headers in the powerpoint presentation:

- Place
- People
- Research Aspects
- Analytical concepts
- Emotions

PLACE

Where is your research taking place? What type of landscape or urban environment are you in? How does that environment affect your somatic experience, your breath, your senses, your movements? What view or observations do your position afford you? How technology-intense is the space, and how does this affect your body? How natural or wild is the space, and how does this affect your body? You might find yourself in a familiar environment, but equally you might have never been there, or somewhere similar before. What types of body-skills are necessary to navigate this space? In the podcast series of the Somatics Toolkit for example, Dr. Jerome Lewis speaks about ways to embody different environments, especially the forest. The soil and sounds are different, the sense of space around you is different.

Also – where are you analysing your data afterward? Can you find a nice place to work that is not office-like? How can changing your environment help you gaining a different perspective over your data, or help you be more comfortable in your body while you're at it? It often helps me to put my work around me in a circle, and sit on a meditation cushion while I read, analyse, or edit my writing.

PEOPLE

Who are you with? What do you know about their somatic experience? How do they move, connect, talk, touch, express themselves? What topics are important to them? What might they think about what you are studying? From what angles or vantage points do they observe the world? Do they sit in chairs, do they sit on the ground, is most of their time spent being active or sedentary? How does your body respond to this way of being? What experience or knowledge is expressed in their movements? Again, try to find an embodied expression of these questions.

For example, if your research takes place in a hospital, you will meet patients, staff and visitors. Each of these 'groups' will have their own presence. Imagine how each role affects their movement and emotional state. What different speeds, postures, levels of anxiety or confidence do you discern? How does this affect you?

The role of doctor allows freedom to move from one ward to another. People in this role will be pressed for time and often experience exhausting long days. Movement affects might be staccato-like, efficient, tired, stressed, spacious, or full of compassion. Patients have much more restriction in their movements. They might be stationary in bed, linked up with medical instruments. There is a lot of waiting. Waiting for food; for visiting hours; a test result; for bandages to be changed. Patients might feel nauseous, but still pressed to eat something. Perhaps they can't go to the toilet unassisted. Notice how your movements and sensations in this role are different to how you moved as a doctor.

Finally, you can move as a visitor who comes to see a relative or friend. You enter the room slightly anxious. There is a strong smell of chemicals and medication. You are unsure of what to say, unsure where to sit. Your breathing is shallow. Where should you leave the flowers? Is it appropriate to share something about life outside the hospital? Again, these movements and sensations are very different to those of both doctor and

patient. Bringing an awareness of these roles into your moving body will help you be with your research participants in a different way. It will help you understand more of what they are telling you. It will add a different layer to your observations.

ASPECTS

Also, what aspects or phenomena are relevant to your investigation? This can include animals, art forms, healing practices, educational systems, rituals, or approaches to food security, social media use, robots and artificial intelligence. Can you represent or enact these? How do they influence your movements? What sensations do they allow you to experience?

For example, you might investigate music, instruments, sounds, and performances. Imagine the instrument as a living thing, just like your body. Try and mimic the shape of the instrument with your body, curving, stretching. Allow it to 'breathe'. How does it produce its sound? Is it an air instrument, or a string instrument? Does it make sound when stamping on the ground (ankle bells)? Can you mimic the sound with your voice? Can you express the quality of the sound in your movements? What bodily techniques are used to play this instrument? Is the musician sitting or standing? With what body parts does the musician connect to the instrument? Are their movements symmetrical, or different on both sides of the body? Are they playing solo, or in a group? Is there an audience? How are their bodies involved?

ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

Like the exploration of Lines and Circles in the previous video, you can work with any set of concepts. To start with, it is easiest to inquire into two distinct categories in your research, such as: group/individual, past/present, researcher/researched, man/woman, carer/patient, or parent/child. There will be several such categories present in your research. They can also be more abstract, such as objectivity/subjectivity, tangible/intangible, belonging/separation, or closeness/distance. You can move with them, almost like with a dance partner. Pay attention how they move your body in turn, and see what that exploration shows you.

You could use the following structure. Mark each concept on a separate piece of paper, through a word, or drawing. For example: you could write 'prison' and 'freedom' on the two sheets of paper. Place the two sheets in the room, some space apart. Now move towards each of the pieces in turn, and imagine 'stepping into' that particular concept. Notice what changes in your body. Again, sense your breath, the feeling texture of your body and a possible emotional response. Your body will respond to the concept when you engage with it. If I move with 'prison', my body becomes stiff, tight, locked, my breathing gets shallow. I feel scared. I look for a way out. When I engage with 'freedom', my breathing gets deeper, my body relaxes, my eyes look up, and I feel curious.

Such 'sensations' can inform your understanding of the concepts you chose. Notice if you feel neutral towards both, or feel drawn to or distanced from one of the polarities. Swap between them a few times. Do they feel different? What associations do you have with each? Is there one you feel more comfortable with? Is there one

that you might be avoiding? Is there one that feels like a friend and another like an adversary? Is there one that supports, and one that challenges? Keep reflecting on the differences. What do they teach you? Remember that there is no right or wrong, this is simply your very own and personal inquiry into your topic and the polarities you chose for today. To complete, return to the centre. Try to find a still point inside yourself. Despite what you have experienced, acknowledge the polarities without judgement, as phenomena that simply exist like day and night. If you are not there yet, ask yourself what is necessary to find balance inside yourself. The idea is to create space from which you can deal with these polarities in (the responses to) your research efficiently and skilfully, with artistry, poise, and integrity.

EMOTIONS

You can adapt the previous exploration of concepts to work with a polarity within the personal emotional sphere related to your research, for example between being stressed or relaxed, between acting now or later, between hope and despair. Again, you can write them on pieces of paper and swap between the different qualities to explore what they can teach you.

SLIDE 16 Visual of Extend Practice Invitation Dealing with challenging research situations (Faust and Pfeiffer)

In the Guest contributions of the Somatics Toolkit you will find an extended practice to deal with challenging research situations, developed by Lene Faust and Simone Pfeiffer. A simple version of this could be to select an object or image that expresses an emotional state or specific situation during your research. Externalising the situation creates some distance between your experience and the strength of the emotional charge. See how your body responds to that object (or even to the memory of that situation or emotion). Locate where the emotion is in your body, and give them shape. How do they affect your posture? Your breath? You can also move closer and further away from the object, and see if that changes your feelings regarding the situation. What if you fully 'embody' this emotion without hurting yourself or your surroundings? Does that bring insight of how to deal with it, what is needed to flow with this more gracefully? Does it bring relief, or a call to action? To complete, try to find your centre again. Remember that emotions do not need to be hidden or ignored. You do not need to be ashamed of them. They are simply part of your research process. If necessary, ask yourself what is necessary to find balance inside yourself. Perhaps simply paying attention to this will have been enough. Perhaps you can do some uncensored writing. Perhaps you can call a friend or a professional if you realise that you need a more contained space to dance with this.

SLIDE 17 Visual of Somatics Toolkit repeats

[Completion]

These are some general ideas to approach your research in an embodied way. You can apply this to any aspect and occurrence within your research. Allow yourself to move freely with your chosen exploration topic in mind. Switch between various elements of your study, whether they are people, materials, natural or other phenomena, or any emotion that you might experience in relation to your research.

Be creative and allow ample time. Remember that there is no 'right' or 'wrong'. You are simply investigating something through the unique instrument that is your body. After each exploration, make sure you consciously come back to yourself. Feel your feet on the ground, take a few deep breaths and consciously step out of the exploration. You can mark this spatially by taking a step back and turn around. Take some time to reflect on what you experienced. If you are working with strong emotional content, make sure you have ways to navigate what comes up. You can find more guidance on how to complete a session on the Somatics Toolkit Website.

Have a great journey, and even allow for the possibility of enjoying yourself!

Thank you for your time and Remember your Body.

References

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