

Somatic Expression in Nature: Embodying Your Place in the World

With Jamie McHugh April – October 2023

“At a certain point, you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world, Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive. You empty yourself and wait, listening.” - Annie Dillard



For the past 30 years, I have been guiding weeklong group immersive retreats primarily on the Northern California coast, but also in the French and Swiss Alps, and the German and Oregon forests. These somatic-expressive journeys into self and place have been codified with students over time in the Embodying Nature/Somatic Expression protocol that has been developed through trial and error, witnessing and responding, recycling and clarifying. It is now time to spread this evolving work out into the world for more “homegrown” explorations and applications. Read an article about the methodology [HERE](#)

Embodying Nature/Somatic Expression combines the fullness of sensorimotor engagement with aesthetic creativity in the natural environment – quite simply, we land in ourselves, open up our perceptual capacities, engage with the immediate natural environment mindfully and playfully through our bodies, and use the multiple channels of aesthetic creativity to cohere and integrate our experience in a tangible way. What makes this approach unique is the confluence of mindfulness, bodyfulness and playfulness as a pathway into a deep relationship with the larger body of the planet.

- Cultivate a somatic-expressive relationship with your own terrain
- Investigate, explore, romance and in-corporate place in an ongoing manner
- Create as a means to share with others, using your phones for images, videos, and sound recordings as part of your expressive repertoire

Sensorimotor engagement: A good part of readiness is clearing the mind by attuning to the body's sensibilities through the five somatic technologies. Simple somatic practices create the transition from the ordinary body to the extraordinary one, shifting from repetitive/habitual ways of breathing, moving and thinking to varied ways of perceiving in present time. With this inner re-orientation comes more ease for attention to both focus and wander, and perceive the outer landscape in unaccustomed ways, creating an opening into substantive contact and connection.

Sensorimotor engagement consists of The Five Somatic Technologies (Breath, Vocalization, Contact, Movement and Stillness) with the Five Phase Relational Map (Witness, Contact, Mirror, Respond and Rest).

Aesthetic Channels of Creativity: Art is for all people. It is re-creation. It is inspiration. It is the multiple languages of the senses heightened, utilized and made visible. And the impulse to create is embedded in the human soul, just as it is embedded in the larger cosmology. We knew how to do this naturally as 5 year olds – to make up songs, spontaneously dance, sculpt our environments, and play with color and words. Art was fun and joyful, an effortless expression of our aliveness. Coming back into contact to place through sensorimotor engagement reveals the participatory art of nature as we become “part of” the creative act.

Aesthetic Channels of Creativity: Writing, Spoken Word, Recorded Soundscapes, Images (Drawn and/or Photographed), Videos, and more...



... I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing...with which I am not linked.” – C G Jung

MONTHLY STRUCTURE

Group meetings 1x/month for 6 months - the first and last meetings in April and October are 2 days. These experiential online gatherings are used for exploring somatic practices and the relational map to apply out in the field as well as for exchange with other participants.

9am-noon Pacific Time each day

April 22-23 (Formation, Somatic Technologies, and Phase 1: Rest & Witness)

May 20 (Phase 2: Contact)

July 1 (Phase 3: Mirror)

August 5 (Phase 4: Respond)

September 2 (Phase 5: Respond and Recycle)

October 7 & 8 (Completion)

All Online gatherings are recorded for your personal use.

Specific focus and exploratory prompts will be given for your explorations of the inner and outer landscape each month

Individual monthly consultation with Jamie (30 minute consults scheduled each month during the course)

Small Group Check-ins to share resources and experiences, create a generative community and keep the spark of adventure alive between sessions

10-11am Pacific Time:

May 12

June 16

July 14

August 18

September 29

Selected readings and videos to offer different aesthetic/social/cultural perspectives

Dedicated Archive Webpage that contains all readings, monthly prompts, and scores for ongoing use

“If you will think of ourselves as coming out of the earth, rather than as being thrown in here from somewhere else, you know, we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth, and this is the voice of the earth. What else?” - Joseph Campbell

WHO & HOW

This laboratory is for all ages and types of people who want to commit to somatic-expressive engagement with the natural environment for 6 months – as a meditative experience; as a creative experience; as a spiritual experience; or as a social experience. It can be for continuing education and/or personal re-creation. The application of the model is as diverse as the individuals who use it - Embodying Nature has been used as a foundation for performance, creative writing, environmental education and ecopsychology. What is important is you make space in your life to enter into an active relationship with your bioregion and learn from your own practice of exploration what nature has to offer to you – and what you have to offer to nature.

\$675-975 Sliding Scale - According to your economic means/ fees are deliberately low to encourage inclusivity

Submit an application to Jamie McHugh naturebeingart@gmail.com with a little information about yourself and your intention for being part of this group. Payment and technical information will then be sent.

"So these questions of practice remain: What are the tools by which you stay grounded but not buried in the ground? And what are the tools by which you are lifted but not removed from all that is real? Staying grounded but not buried and lifted but not removed is how we repair, reimagine, and rebuild the world." - Mark Nepo



YOUR GUIDE Jamie McHugh

I have primarily lived in rural locations on the US West Coast for the past 20 years. While staying connected to the modern world virtually, the bulk of my time was in the vastness of the environment. I became a photographer of water in all of its many dimensions, particularly in the coastal ecosystem of waves and eddies, coves and tidal pools.

The beach was my movement studio where I could lay down in the embrace of sand, breathe and move while listening to the ever-present drone of the ocean, and enter another frame of consciousness. Taking my camera on these excursions amplified this kinesthetic state of mind though focused attention on the visual domain. Where the confluence of breath, vocalization, movement and stillness enabled a wide-open fluid perception, the focus the lens enabled brought concise attention to detail, form, and color. Suspending time temporarily, momentarily holding my breath and pressing the button to embrace an ephemeral moment as a still image, and then viewing that image in the camera's monitor became a repetitive practice of action-reflection, impression-expression, gather-hold...and then release, re-set, wiggle and glide.

This rhythm of concentrated attention modulated by spacious breath and movement was a reward unto itself, deepening my relationship with place while altering my state of being. Having all these countless "souvenirs" (from French, *memory*) that I could share with others as prints and video montages was an extra bonus! Making art has potentiated and amplified my relationship to place just as place has potentiated and amplified my aesthetic sensibility. www.naturebeingart.org

This mutually informing process is what I wish to share in this laboratory dedicated to Somatic Attunement, Relational Presence, and Creative Engagement – with ourselves, others and the environment. You can discover more about my teaching history [HERE](#)