

“What Is It You Want to Learn?”

Somatic Awareness in the Tradition of Elsa Gindler

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Abstract: This essay discusses somatic awareness practices created by Elsa Gindler and taught by her students Charlotte Selver, Carola Speads, Susan Gregory, and Stefan Laeng. Gindler’s somatics originated in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, and her émigré students continued the work into the context of the postwar US Human Potential Movement and into our own time. Somatic awareness echoes between fascist biopolitics, phenomenology, and liberatory turns to the body in critical and political theory, yet the freedom of body-awareness is uncontainable by any specific politics or context. Embodied knowing is not located but empty, beyond our thinking, concepts, and positions.

Keywords: Somatics, embodiment, Elsa Gindler, Charlotte Selver, Carola Speads, body awareness

1.

In 1934, Marcel Mauss published “Techniques of the Body,” in which he analyzed the education of the body as a form of power:

The child, the adult, imitates actions that have succeeded, which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have power over him. The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action, involving his body. The individual borrows the series of movements of which he is composed from the action executed in front of him, or with him, by others.

It is precisely this notion of the prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorized, tested action vis-à-vis the imitating individual that contains all the social element.

Mauss’s essay influenced Foucault and generations of scholars who investigated the body as a cultural construction and an effect of

power. This approach denaturalized the body, revealing the cultural conditioning in simple acts such as walking and sitting and in identities of race, gender, and sexuality. For Foucault, paradigmatically, “the soul is the prison of the body,” as the subject acts as an internal figure of the social domination that Mauss had identified externally.

Almost ninety years later, “the body” as an object acted upon by power remains central to the idiom of humanities scholarship.

As Mauss was writing “Techniques of the Body,” a German woman named Elsa Gindler was teaching embodied awareness in a way that departs from such structures and such critiques. Speaking to the German Gymnastics Federation in 1931, Gindler observed, “Until now, all people have been and still are accustomed to having exercises shown, explained, and demonstrated to them in a highly mechanistic way, which they can then imitate with the time and a lot of training.”

Gindler’s teaching focused on sensory experiments, in which gentle motions and sensory impressions support increasing individual awareness of sensation, and the spontaneous arising of responses to the environment. Her teaching practice influenced both body-based psychotherapy and Western mindfulness.

Gindler’s work was about an awareness available to the individual, yet it is not really a subject-formation practice. In her 1926 essay, “Gymnastik for Busy People,” she wrote that the work “can only be entered into and understood through consciousness.” She added that she “deliberately avoid[ed] defining this consciousness as soul, psyche, mind, feeling, subconsciousness, individuality, or even the

‘body-soul’” (EG 36). All those were identified with “the small word ‘I’” (EG 36), whereas by consciousness she meant something at once experiential and relational: “when a task is executed thoughtfully, and when we are contented with ourselves in the doing, we experience consciousness,” which “is centered, reacts to the environment, and can think and feel” (EG 36). Consciousness, that is, is remarkable for its responsive relationship to the “situation”: in Gindler’s characterization, it lacks any transcendent quality (EG 36). Here we find an embodied insight that is personally known—and not really of the body or the subject.

Gindler’s teaching can be difficult to study because of its emphasis on first-person sensation and its transmission through personal relays. The challenge has been compounded by the legendary destruction of her archives at the end of World War II with the bombing of Berlin.

The elusive image of this knowledge leads Katja Rothe to suggest that Gindler’s work circulates as a form of networked feminist know-how,

containing “possibilities for understanding thought as a collective, implicit, non-verbal, habitual and somatic process,” unlike the figure of “the critical intellectual who reveals, who dissects the structures of power.” Yet this Latour-oriented account overemphasizes the epistemological enigma. As Maria Meindl has recently discussed, Gindler extensively archived her work and used many written notes and reflections. Moreover, Gindler’s postwar archives survive and are available in partially catalogued form at the Gindler-Jacoby foundation, which was created in 1985.

In addition to emphasizing the availability of a Gindler archive, Meindl argues that the work can be approached through experiential study of the practices. Because these are teaching practices, they are grounded in the possibility of affecting another person in such a way that they may come to learn this embodied awareness. The personal focus is part of what makes this accessible, not ephemeral. Thus in what follows, I primarily approach Gindler through her students and as a student. I look at a two-volume collection of memoirs by her students published in 1978 and 1981, and at the teaching of two of her students, Carola Speads and Charlotte Selver, who both emigrated to the US in the late 1930s. I discuss Speads’s *Ways to Better Breathing* (1978) and *Sensory Awareness* (1976), written by Selver’s husband, Charles Brooks. Speads and Selver worked out of a shared studio in New York’s Carnegie Building in the early 1940s, but after a falling out taught separately and very differently. Speads taught in a pragmatic mode closely tied to her thirteen years as Gindler’s teaching assistant, primarily in a parquet-floored studio in her apartment on Central Park West; Selver taught in a philosophical style inspired by her sporadic study with Gindler, at locations including Esalen and the San Francisco Zen Center. I also interviewed Speads’s and Selver’s respective students, Susan Gregory and Stefan Laeng. I recorded my formal interviews with them, but I chose not to record the lessons I took: My accounts of the lessons describe how I felt and what I remembered of them afterward.

To return to the sense that knowing Gindler is a challenge, I would say the issue is less of the accessibility of the materials or the experiences the teaching produces, and more that its political meaning is difficult to contain. On the one hand, the German body culture Gindler participated was part of the rise of fascism; on the other, she was distinctly anti-Nazi and her students included Jewish women who escaped to the United States and taught the practices for decades, where it has found niches in the Human Potential Movement of the 1970s and ‘80s and the self-care practices of our own era. Meindl notes that while a conference of Gindler’s former students mostly celebrated her resistance to the Nazis and her

use of somatic practices to help students live through the war, another former student was using the practices in Israeli military work. Christoph Ribbat concludes that Speads's somatic work evidences a collapse of political life into the minutiae of awareness and stress release. While the quietism, the individuality, and the openness

of awareness of the body can be seen as an abandonment of critical practice and politics, other scholars have defended the political value of such work. Shannon Mariotti has argued that "Perceptive attention and mindful attunement to everyday life are important because of how they reconnect us with our experience....[which] connects us with the self and fosters autonomy, while also connecting us with others and fostering community." James K. Rowe maintains that the movement for "embodied social change" includes using mindful awareness to cultivate a fearless relation to our own embodied mortality, and discusses how Buddhist teachers encourage the discovery of an inner freedom that supersedes political freedom—and can help us also find the latter through loosening our perceptual and ideological habits.

My view is similar to those of Rowe and Mariotti to an extent, but defenses of the political and theoretical benefits of awareness and embodied practices have a limitation, which is that as the story of Gindler's work evinces, there is no definite link between the feeling of embodied presence and a particular politics—it can swing in any direction. Doran George has shown as much in his sympathetic, imminent work on somatic practices in dance, which traces how first racist and eugenic and then liberal entrepreneurial/capitalist ideas infused the presence of somatic awareness in modern dance. Meindl also shows how the politics of somatic awareness fluctuate, including its presence in both liberal/left and conservative/neofascist forms in our own time. Rather than argue that this teaching has a particular political bent or benefit, I will suggest that its thrill and ultimately its profundity is its emptiness. It partakes of a freedom whose contours are larger than those of the political realm, leading us to discover an emptiness in embodiment that may inspire awe.

While that is an absolute claim, the counterpart is that Gindler's is a practice of learning, in which knowledge comes from experience rather than from logic or precept. The more this work takes one into the immediate awareness of the body, the less compelling the critical and privilege form of "the body" appears, and the more limited the aim to embody knowing by putting thought and words in touch with that body appears as well. These issues are of particular concern in our own era, marked as it is by the resurgence of fascism, phenomenology, and a leftist politics of embodied knowing and being. Gindler's sensory awareness

moves like light in the sky across such contexts. It suggests a freedom in embodied awareness that may briefly resemble what Mauss or Foucault might have envisioned for the body out from under the yoke of culture, and then turns shockingly vaster, indifferent, and even pure.

2.

Gindler, whose father was a blacksmith, attended school only until her early teens. In her early adulthood, she participated in Germany's Lebensreform, or Life Reform Movement, which included a range of practices for developing physical health and reconnecting with nature, all of which had an element of resisting modern technology and bureaucratic authority. After 1911, Gindler began to study Gymnastik with Hade Kallmeyer at her Seminar für Harmonische Gymnastik

Gymnastik was a form of women's aesthetic exercise that had many different branches, with individual teachers such as Kallmeyer, Rudolf Bode, and others establishing their own schools; Gindler would lead the association of Gymnastik schools for a time. Gymnastik was already an alternative approach to bodily exploration, emphasizing inner sensations and individual development rather than disciplinary regimentation. In a 1981 interview, Speads noted that it was popular with what she recalled as the "progressive" Wandervogel movement—which for her was part of a direction of her life that her bourgeois parents "refused to even mention ... to others, they were so embarrassed" by it.

Speads observed that a measure of increased respect was given to Gymnastik after it was included in a U.F.A. film that came out in 1925. The movie, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to Strength and Beauty) is known for its nationalist images of Aryan physical vigor. But amongst its eclectic images of White strength, a short section of women practicing the slow, self-aware motion of Gymnastik stands out. In her early teaching, Gindler worked with students on formally elegant motions, much like those evident in the images of Bess Mensendieck's students in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*. The key thing that distinguishes Gindler's mature teaching from other forms of Gymnastik is her turn away from interest in the performative appearance of movement, as she shifted to absorption in students' capacity to feel how they moved.

In an interview from the collection of memoirs of Gindler published by the Sensory Awareness Foundation, Claire Nathanson Fenichel recalled that when she first trained with Gindler in 1915, the work seemed like making beautiful "movements that made me think of the figures in Greek bas-reliefs and sculpture," a reference that highlights the Whiteness of

Gymnastik. But by 1917, Gindler's work had shifted into a focus on the interior feeling. Fenichel recalled Gindler announcing to the class:

"This is a beautiful movement you are doing, but you do not look good. Let's start all over again." With these words she introduced me to an insight which became for me the basic idea of her teaching...: the difference between being and not being involved in what you are doing. (CNF II, 5)

For the same collection of tributes to Gindler, Selver provided a vivid memory of Gindler's teaching in action that also emphasizes feeling how a movement is done:

Once an engineer, builder of the Dnieper [D]am in Russia, came to a workshop. He was very tall, with a big head, eyes glowing with intensity, and very long thin legs which appeared to be nothing but bones. One morning Gindler asked him to stand up beside the wall and bring the heel of one foot gently up from the floor and let it come gradually down again. Just that, nothing more. Gindler encouraged him again and again to take time for each movement. He did this for what seemed like hours and, as we watched, we saw the leg change. Slowly it came to life; we could see the muscles beginning to appear. The color of his leg turned from ashen to rosy: it became a leg, while the other one was still a stick.

Presently Gindler asked him: "How does your leg feel now?" He paused, then shook his head. "Do you feel any difference between your two legs?" she asked. He took a moment and said: "No." Imagine! One leg so full of life, the other so dead, and he felt no difference. "What will Gindler say?" I wondered. She was silent awhile, then smiled and said: "Not yet...not yet." For me this was one of the greatest moments in her teaching.

Selver felt the man should be aware of the difference in feeling, and perhaps have his attention drawn to it, but Gindler only asked him how it felt, and did not press farther. As Speads's student Susan Gregory would emphasize to me, "if they don't discover it for themselves, it's not useful. It's something that an authority has taught them to feel" (G).

This is not to say Gindler did nothing. The anecdote contains pieces of her core practice: an experiment that involved a student making a seemingly insignificant motion, followed by Gindler asking if they felt any difference. This is what Gregory showed me when I met with her. Gregory studied with Speads for thirty-two years, beginning in

1967. She is a Gestalt therapist, voice teacher, and breath teacher in the Gindler tradition, working in an office on the Upper West Side of New York City. When I visited her in November 2019, a doorman buzzed me into

the building; the West Side Highway and the Hudson River were not far off.

*

I sit on a stool, just a little short for my height, facing Gregory, who is seated a few feet away from me. We both have taken off our shoes.

“Can you find your sit bones?” she asks me.

I have an idea of them, so I start rocking forward and back, then side to side, hoping to find contact between the stool and those bony points on the base of the pelvis. Gregory does the same, as she reassures me that this process of finding the sit bones was once a long one for her as well. She is in no hurry for me to get anywhere. Indeed, before we sat down she responded to my curiosity about her bookshelves by encouraging me to look around, letting me take in her books on singing, the mind-body connection, and a little silver cup commemorating her 1977 debut at the New York Opera. “It needs polishing!” she laughed.

“Where are you now?”

I say I think I have found the sit bones, because my back feels relaxed and effortlessly taller. When the pelvis is clearly supported by this contact of the sit bones and what they rest on, it frees the back to release upward with a lessening of effort. Gregory affirms the difference: She can see it as I feel it.

Next she asks me to close my eyes, and to sense what I can of how my body is sitting. She asks me to put what I sense specifically into words. I feel a kind of crunch forward in my shoulders, a collapsing in of my torso onto itself. Things feel twisted to the left, and pinched. I try to put it in words, but I want to begin physically exaggerating what seems to be happening, to show it in a gestural way. I ask if I can do that.

As if we have infinite time, Gregory has me pause so she can explain. In doing this work, it is important to give a verbal report to keep oneself from slipping into a meditative state, a form of absorbed attention without conceptual activity. The reason for the report is precisely so that the student does not lose their self-agency, as Gregory puts it. I’m not here to be worked on by her, or to abandon myself to her process. I must remain.

So I return, and verbalize what I can sense. It is quite difficult to be precise but simple, saying that, for instance, “there is a feeling of pulling down in the upper abdomen.” I’m not to figure it out and analyze why or how, but just to note clearly what I sense as it happens.

At some moments, Gregory affirms my report: “There often is,” she says, or “it may very well be like that.” And she reminds me that I don’t need to judge or change it. I feel myself pushing inside like a horse at the gate to judge, dramatize, and dart around to manage how it feels, but Gregory models a very simple, unhurried approach: sense, and report.

“Are you able to feel anything of your own breathing? You may or may not be able to,” Gregory notes.

I pause, slightly frightened and self-conscious. She is only a few feet away, asking me to sense myself and say what I feel.

“I am nervous.”

She lets me pause and open my eyes, for a little break.

I sense my breathing. Eyes closed. Gregory across from me, in no hurry, asking nothing. In the room with me.

I report: “I feel movement more on the left.”

“Yes,” Gregory replies, “we often do not use our selves symmetrically.” I feel my ears and shoulders moving with the breath, and report that. “Those are sensations associated with the breath,” she says. “Stay with the breathing itself. Remember how it feels now. We will compare it later.”

After the initial stage of the experiment, sensing myself breathing and reporting back what I feel, we move to the middle stage. On the out breath, Gregory suggests, I am to take one hand off my knee and place it on my upper chest. Then, sense what I feel and report.

“Don’t leave it there too long.”

My hand feels warm on my chest; almost instantly, I feel a heave in the upper chest. My neck twitches; embarrassed, I do not report it,

although I am sure Gregory will have seen it. I feel a sudden catching, shudder- ing breath lower down. My hand is back on my leg. Pulling, catching breathing. I feel something release in the belly. A leg releases out to the right and my spine straightens, of its own accord, with the room made for it by the leg opening out in the hip joint. We do this several times, as I put a hand on the chest, wait for a response, and then put it down and report what I feel.

“Don’t rush.” There is nothing to fix. Only sense whatever you can, and report.

After we are done with this phase, Gregory asks me, “Now, how does sitting feel?” I feel enormous, taller and wider in the upper body. I report this.

Gregory replies, “Your chest and back probably are bigger now. The muscle contraction releases and you have more space. How is the breathing now?”

I feel the breath through my throat, smooth and comfortable.

“Let’s stand up,” Gregory suggests. “Just sense, what do you feel, and describe it.”

I feel balanced on my legs: The hips are right on top of the leg bones—so centered. I feel the contact with the floor. My whole energy feels comfortable, settled. I have a sensation of physical and emotional integrity: of existing without question.

When asked what to call the work she did in Gindler’s style, Fenichel said: “Oh, I had to give a speech one day and I called it, ‘How to Give Peace and Comfort to the Body’” (CNF II, 9). In *Ways to Better Breathing*, Speads also identifies somatic teaching with comfort. She observed that in the US, “The body sense is usually applied in reference to pain”: One of her students claimed she could feel nothing in one experiment, by which she meant, “Nothing aches.” Reflecting on this, Speads breaks out,

as she likes to do from time in time in the book, “As if we should be aware of only discomfort! Thus many people are deprived of enjoying their own well-being” (W 8).

We have “poor breathing,” Speads explains, because of “Our way of life,” which in “modern times” means “war, crime, political unrest and upheaval, noise, air pollution, general and personal changes too sudden and too far-reaching for easy adjustment, mechanization threatening our sense of value as individuals” (W 3). The teaching of breathing is essentially about how to calm and comfort the body, enabling it to release habits of tension and holding based on experiences of fear and, implicitly, of trauma.

Speads begins one chapter talking about the power of tap as a form of touch which “can influence the condition of the body” (W 50). She notes, “a baby’s back is tapped to calm him or her,” adding that “you yourself may tap someone’s upper back to encourage or assure the person of your goodwill” (W 50). Yet it is not just any touch or tap that will restore: The work involves experiments, which take the form that Gregory followed with me. First, observing sensations in the body; second, performing some small motion or applying touch while continuing to be aware in the body; and third, observing the sensations that ensue.

Ways to Better Breathing details a series of such experiments involving tapping, pulling, and otherwise gently stimulating the body and then being aware of how it responds. In one case, Speads provides a stimulus by “get[ting] hold of a skinfold,” a “double layer” of “skin and underlying (subcutaneous) tissue,” by using the “thumb and index finger” (W 66). After taking hold of a skinfold, it is “grasped, lifted, and held off its base until a deeper breath gets through; then it is released” (W 68). Without trying to make anything happen or figure out what one experiences, in such experiments one remains aware of the sensations. “[P]ause and let through all reactions that may develop in your breathing and in your whole body” (W 51).

Explaining the general process of the experiment, Speads writes, “After providing a stimulus, we must try to let the reactions to it develop as freely as possible. These reactions will be involuntary. They happen to us: we cannot make them; we can only try to let them through” (W 7). It is a form of feedback: the body receives the new sensory information the experiments provide, and learns on its own to organize posture and motion differently on the basis of that new information. The process is enough to yield spontaneous changes in the body’s self-organization, as I experienced in my lesson with Gregory. Speads remarks that students tend

to “respond to the experiments with ever-renewed surprise: ‘I have never felt that before’ or ‘I have felt it before, but never quite like this’” (W 11).

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that a Jewish sense of the body’s centrality to human identity was broken first by Christianity’s separation of soul from body, and then by fascism’s bureaucratic management of the body as “a cadaver, no matter how trained and fit it may be.” They continue:

Those who extolled the body in Germany, the gymnasts and out- door sports enthusiasts, always had an intimate affinity to killing, as nature lovers have to hunting. They see the body as a mobile mechanism, with its hinged links, the flesh upholstering the skel- eton. They manipulate the body, actuating the limbs as if they were already severed. The Jewish tradition instills an aversion to measuring human beings with a yardstick, because the dead are measured—for the coffin. That is what gives the body-manipula- tors their enjoyment ...they measure the other with the eye of the coffin maker.

Historically, in Gindler ’s experiments the attention to the body is inter- twined with such engineering of the body, yet within this era of body culture it was opposed to such control. There is, on the one hand, the impersonal, brutal management of the body as “life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life),” which Agamben argues is for modernity “the originary political element.” This is the body as material object, subjected to power. And there is, on the other hand, a focus on the body’s personal feeling, a secular reinvention of the Jewish sense of embodied selfhood that Horkheimer and Adorno identify.

Speads enjoyed editing footage for *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*; she and her husband, a retired businessman, were able to leave Germany “at the last minute” and arrived in New York in 1940 (G). Selver, before emigrating to the US, negotiated a Germany in which some of her *Gymnastik* teachers were Nazis, some were not, and some seemed to tolerate her presence while extolling Nazism. For Speads and Selver, the politics was about living as Jewish women in search of secular, independent paths.

One can also see the intertwined-yet-differing relation of Gindler ’s work to the modern culture of body management in the struggle of the engineer involved in building the Dnieper Dam, a major work of Soviet industrialization opened in 1932, to feel something as simple as a slight movement of his own leg. The ambition to develop and orga- nize the

world collides with the patience it takes for him to feel his leg, which neither he nor Gindler can force. The engineer in Selver's story was Nicolas Kelen, a communist and Hungarian-born Jew who would die in Siberia, a victim of Stalin's totalitarianism.

Gindler herself was adamantly anti-Nazi, and a tree is planted for her at Yad Vashem in commemoration of her support for Jews during World War II.³⁰ Her former students, according to Ribbat, planted trees for her in Israel in 1962, the year following Gindler's death. Yet even this story of Gindler's students commemorating her fight against the Nazis and reminding us of her difference from those Gymnastik teachers who were supporters of the Nazis has its own complexity. As Irus Braverman has argued, America's Jewish National Fund presented the funding of tree-planting as an environmentally supportive act which symbolized the Zionist reclaiming of Israel. In the act of planting trees, the JNF framed Israel as a desolate land in need of Jewish redemption from the neglect of the Bedouin Arab shepherds.

3.

On a late February day in 2020, when there was snow on the ground in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and the COVID pandemic had not yet come to New England, I met with Stefan Laeng, Selver's biographer, erstwhile assistant, and a teacher of Sensory Awareness. He described Selver as utterly dedicated to carrying on Gindler's work, and painfully aware of her vexed position in the Gindler lineage. She was often upset with her husband Charles when he was writing *Sensory Awareness* (1974), which Laeng attributed to her justified anxiety about how it would be received by Gindler's students.

Gindler never wanted to name [the work], because she thought that it's going to be packaged into this method, and it shouldn't be that. And eventually, it came to a big clash, between Charlotte and Gindler, because Charlotte studied in an organization [which] named it, started thinking about training, and Gindler was, like, "Are you out of your mind? This is nothing that can be taught. It doesn't have a name, and you're not going to teach it, and if you do, we will never talk again," which they didn't.

This tension between Selver and Gindler informed the name that Selver gave the work, *Sensory Awareness*. As Laeng understands it, "when Charlotte named it, probably unconsciously, she gave it a name that in a way meant nothing." After all, "everybody thinks they know what it is" (L). Everyone thinks they are already aware of their body, and yet this

work is about discovering how little awareness we may have of our own body.

In the sunlit space of Laeng's cottage, we begin by sitting on simple wooden stools. He asks me to feel how it is in sitting. Then he asks me to feel the stool beneath me, the connection of the stool to the ground. I'm searching inside myself for it—it's hard to feel much. We pause, and each of us feels the base of our sit bones with our own hands. "How does it feel now?" he asks. The side I've just touched, the right side, feels wider.

He asks me to feel what else I can, including attending to the shoulders. "How much room do the shoulders need?" he asks. I feel the shoulders expanding—a muscle on the top, especially, relaxes and allows my shoulder on the right to extend outward. I feel like I'm removing a narrow band holding me in, letting myself be my full size. The body's size is different from the image of my size with which I have been using it.

We stand and do some walking around the room. "What if each step mattered?" Laeng asks, quietly encouraging me not just to feel the sensations in my feet, but to feel the relationship of the feet to the floor. I step on the floor as if I wanted to touch it, not just walk on it.

We stop and touch the top of our own heads, feeling what is there. And then, in relation, we feel the feet on the ground. "How much space is there between the head and the feet?" I'm surprised there is much more space than I think. My spine and legs lengthen up, allowing myself room to be the height I actually am. It's a relief to feel myself adjust to my height with a soft, unintended motion of releasing a cramping down.

In the last experiment we do that day, Laeng gives me a stone, like the ones in two photographs in *Sensory Awareness*. He asks me to hold it and to try to feel the pull of gravity—not its size or weight, but the downward pull itself. As I move my arm, I sense mostly the dullness of my body, and my quickness to be in my thinking and emotions. "Knowing down, we know up," Laeng says—a direction also in the *Sensory Awareness* book. As a woman, I feel awkward becoming aware of my body in the presence of a man I barely know. I ask Laeng what to do when thoughts and emotions interfere; he explains that we just want to come back to the body—not to go into thinking, and for emotions, to locate a place where we feel it in the body and be aware there. I can feel a constricting in my

head, neck, and shoulders—a general hardening inward—and an airy, uncertain motion around my head.

We put the stones on our heads and try to balance them there. Feeling the head this way is orienting for me. “Feel the floor under your head,” Laeng says at one point. This part of Sensory Awareness, asking one part to know that another part is there, is at once internal and relational. We feel a body-knowing of the presence of other objects, beings, and space—the stool, the stone, Laeng himself.

The next morning, I woke up and felt quiet in my mind. When I stood up, I felt that my body was actually on a floor. I knew there was a floor underneath and just how far down it was. In that simple way, I felt my own life delivered to me.

In my interview with him, Laeng had said, “There’s nothing to learn. It’s just being here” (L).

Sometimes, the “question will be what is it that we want to learn, or what do we think is there to learn?” He went on, almost challenging me: “Well, what is it? Can you answer it? And then, you have this linear trajectory to where? Or what is it you want to learn?” (L).

Instead, he asked, what if one could “trust” that “just to feel that I’m alive, and that there isn’t really anywhere to go” is enough (L)?

In the 1940s, Selver’s students in New York included the psychoanalyst and humanist theorist Erich Fromm, who had been let go from the Frankfurt Institute in 1939; by 1950, she was teaching at the New School for Social Research. American intellectual history has been shaped by the emigration to the US of secular Jewish intellectuals before and during World War II. In that landscape, a number of Gindler’s students (including Fenichel) were the wives, partners, and daughters of psychoanalysts: Their interest in change through embodied practice is a feminine strand of this history.

In a transcript of her “Third Los Angeles Seminar in Sensory Awareness” dated “Sunday Afternoon, August 13, 1961,” Selver has the students touch their own chests and then bring the hands away, “very gently.” She continues: “Then once more go very gently to the same place and touch as fully as possible, as far as possible. Every finger is a feeler, and the palm is a feeler. And you feel how this touch influences your breathing” (WU 94). She asks them to stand, and touch the “region of your diaphragm,” feeling “every change in breathing that might want to

come,” and then bringing the hands away and “[f]eel[ing] how it is without touching” (WU 94). One of the most interesting things in this seminar is Selver’s repeated point that the work is sensing, not watching or observing.

Feel whether it is possible that you not observe it, not strain in your head for it, but allow the whole organism from the top of your head to your feet to be just sensitively open for what happens. Without an observing attitude. Open for what happens. (WU 94)

This is not awareness of sensation, but an awareness that, unlike observation or watching, happens as sensation.

This informs the way Selver teaches intentionality in a recorded lesson on “Becoming Ready—Being Tuned In” given in 1990. It begins with reflections on how attention is created not by the mind, but by the object. As Selver puts it in her idiosyncratic English, “There is a great difference on whether I focus on something or whether something focuses me.” She elaborates, the “organism would come in touch with all kind of things which create attention. Attention. And would react to it. And you could feel to which degree this is possible and what the consequences are” (BR 3). Next, Selver leads a guided exploration:

How does the carpet influence your legs? . . . (long pause) . . . Are they free for it? Awake for it? . . . (long pause) . . . Is there such a thing like awakesness for the carpet through your back? And maybe changes towards it. . . . (long pause) . . . Can the distance of your shoulders from the carpet arouse your attention. . . (long pause) . . . And would you start to feel what it is when you would become ready that your hand would go up into the air (coughs).

. . . (long pause) . . . What happens in breathing? What happens in your arm? What happens in your head when you, let me say your right hand wants to go up into the air. . . . When you feel it is so far, let it go up. . . . (long pause) . . . How does it feel in you when you would be ready to let your hand be there for quite a while.

. . . (long pause) . . . And how does it feel when you become ready to go a little higher, but not do it yet. Yeah? . . . (long pause) . . . And allow it. . . . (long pause) . . . And become ready to come a little lower. Not yet. (Laughs). How it feels. . . . And allow it. . . . (Long pause). (BR 3)

This part of the lesson comes to its end as Selver reiterates the theme, “Who feels the difference between tuning in to something and being tuned

in by something?” (BR 4). This is a question she wants the students to answer verbally, and the class transitions to group discussion.

Student 5: I was inspired by Pat’s report last time when she said her hand really came up by itself, and so I was kind of wondering if mine really would (laughs), and it did! And (laughs) it was quite astounding to not do it. To allow it to come up. (BR 7)

As willed, conceptually driven intention is allowed to recede, bodily intentionality is ready to move on its own. This appears both delightful and a little eerie.

In his chapter on “Simple Contact” in *Sensory Awareness*, Brooks describes a class in which students are touching each other both on “the upper chest” and “between the shoulder blades” (SA 101):

It has been made clear that one partner will bring his hands to the other but will not manipulate him. This may not be easy...simply to come into full, permissive contact with another person is something many of us have been conditioned against since early childhood. ...We are actually working when we touch one another—working to try out our hands not as agents of our will but as organs of our perception. (SA 101-103)

So one might touch another person, not refraining from touch in fear that it is always violent and intrusive, but being aware and interested in how to touch gently. It seems useful that along with the idea that we should use the “hands not as agents of our will” is some direction about how we can use them—“as organs of our perception.”

Brooks describes *Sensory Awareness* with the understated passion of a WASP searching for a way out of a suffocating intellectualism he identifies with his father, the Americanist scholar Van Wyck Brooks. The book is open about his disappointments with his own practice of *Sensory Awareness*, and conveys his evident loneliness, which increases the power of his descriptions. With characteristic realism, Brooks notes how easily ruffled contact is:

Indeed, however we touch him, we may somewhat disturb our partner’s freedom. Our hands may feel hard to him, or heavy, or light and fluttery. He may feel “handled,” restrained, pressed, or—sometimes a very disappointing experience—not really touched at all. (SA 103)

Nevertheless, the “mere fact that one comes to the other quietly and without overt manipulation is normally very moving to the person touched. He feels cared for and respected” (SA 103). Brooks explains,

“the one who touches, if he is really present in what he does, is apt to feel something of the wonder of conscious contact with the involuntary, subtle movement of living tissue” (SA 103). This sheer perception of life within one person by another through the body’s knowing concerns “the natural reinforcement that the living has for the living” (SA 104). Supported by an intentionality called up by another’s presence, the work sustains a sense of a companionate world.

Anthony Giddens has argued that modern industrial society cuts people off from a sense of basic trust in the world, leaving them in a condition of “radical doubt” in which what can be relied on seems vertiginously ephemeral. If this entails a sense of liberty for the privileged subjects of modernity, it comes with a frightening sense of the questionable nature of existence, such that “no aspects of our activities follow a predetermined course.” One result of this was that the body itself came to seem contingent:

The body used to be one aspect of nature, governed in a fundamental way by processes only marginally subject to human intervention. ... [Now] the body has become fully available to be worked upon by the influences of high modernity.

As Giddens discusses, this sense of the body as a site of ongoing cultivation manifested in a wide range of bodily-focused self-help practices in the late twentieth-century US.

In this moment, somatic practices such as Gindler’s both participate in and depart from modern practices of intervention into embodiment. Selver began teaching at Esalen in 1963, the year that it opened. Her presence there marked the arrival of Gindler’s research into the organization of somatics as a field. Figures including Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Emilie D’Aoud Conrad, and Judith Aston came together to discuss what their highly individualized practices had in common. Don Hanlon Johnson was crucial to this organization of somatics in the programming he did at Esalen, as founder of and professor at the Graduate Program in Somatics of the California Institute for Integral Studies, and as the author of books including the fascinating anthology *Bone, Breath, and Gesture* (1995). Also critical to this period of somatics was Thomas Hanna, a philosophy professor and Feldenkrais practitioner who founded the journal *Somatics* and wrote several books about the field, among them *Bodies in Revolt* (1970) and *The Body of Life* (1979).

As Richard Shusterman observes, the liberation of the body from habits of tension and constraint can have a quality of dominion: He is especially critical of F.M. Alexander’s open racism and his “commitment

to the supreme value and potentially all-pervasive power of rational consciousness” over the body. Johnson wrote an influential 1980 Somatics article on “Somatic Platonism” warning that somatic practitioners should not treat those with disabilities—or even just chronic tension—as vitally flawed and in need of correction. He identified such a controlling approach with racism:

For centuries, powerful minorities have manipulated the mass of humanity in the name of exalted moral and religious ideals. Our own life-span contains a long list of results of the attempt to create some sort of superior race. It is no service to participate in this madness even at the modest level of moving connective tissue.

Johnson points out in his article that this element of control was already absent from the work of Gindler and her students. In his framing, she becomes an iconic figure in the broader world of somatics, exemplifying an ideal of respect, gentleness, and connection.

Brooks writes in *Sensory Awareness*, “Now it is suggested that merely by allowing more consciousness we might be giving things the possibility of resolving themselves” (SA 28): there’s no account of what that resolution should be. In Gregory’s words, “Gindler devised it to be a practice where the result would emerge, the results for today would emerge, and we don’t know that that will be the work tomorrow, be a result tomorrow, or an hour from now” (G). Despite the emphasis on self-cultivation in Giddens’s analysis, that is, this sensory presence is a form of responsiveness to the world, rather than of self-construction or of discipline, as Foucault would term it. This is the essence of “becoming ready,” as Selver put it, moving in response to a sense of the present rather than from an idea of how one wants it to be or become. “When I reach out for a glass,” Laeng said as he reached for a glass on the table before us, “only here can I know what’s needed.” He continued:

I may have an idea of what’s needed, but only when I’m there can I feel its temperature, its density, the way it needs to be touched, and how it’s attracted to the earth, and how much energy it takes to lift it. . . . And in a way, that’s the work. It’s not a method, but it’s being in touch, and being responsive to the moment. (L)

Explaining this at the level of working with students, Laeng said:

I can't tell you how to get up, but you can feel your way, and can you give up all you know, and trust your senses?...Well, that makes for a really hard sell, because people come to you, and they tell me, "Help me, my shoulders are hurting, what do I need to do? How do I need to change my posture, so that I feel better?" And we don't offer that solution. We offer to really arrive in our own capacity to feel, and to feel what's right. (L)

Going to the heart of the distrust Giddens considered, the work responds in a curious way to the demanding reflexivity of modern selfhood. Without entirely abandoning the idea that the body might be subject to liberating change, it shifts to find change not in the management of the body to fit a plan, but as an uncontrollable result of an accepting awareness that connects with what is. Such intimate awareness is indistinguishable from a trust in reality.

Notice how little the body as object or material presence features in this work. Indeed, Hanna argued for replacing the term body with that of soma in a series of essays published in 1986 and 1987 in *Somatics*. There, he defined somatics as "the field which studies the soma: namely the body as perceived from within by first-person perception."⁴⁸ Spreads emphasized that "The more you use your body sense, the more developed it will become," in the same way that a musician can train the ear to "hear[] details in a piece of music that the ordinary listener does not" (W 8). In Gregory's words, "as you allow yourself to become aware of what you feel in your body sensations...there are levels of detail which are, in fact, unending" (G).

To develop this sense, we need to create more, rather than less, space between our thinking and words and our bodily experience— which doesn't mean changing or undoing thinking and language, but setting them within a wider field. A major concern of humanist scholars has been how to embody thinking, by which we usually mean how to get thought into a material form; to blend thinking into the flesh. But as Anita Chari observes, "Despite the important work of many scholarly traditions to unsettle Cartesianism at a discursive level... the dualism between mind and body is arguably quite prevalent in contemporary scholarly practice," and this includes a relatively scant interest in body awareness apart from conceptual thinking.

Also emphasizing that developing sensory awareness means allowing thought to separate from sensation, rather than blend with it, Laeng considered that one of his concerns as a teacher is to be able to distinguish between thinking and sensing. And, it seems an obvious thing. ... [B]ut no,

we continuously mesh the two together, and we're with the thought about lifting, rather than with sensation. So, that's something I try to develop with people, and hone in on, just over and over again. "This is thinking. This is feeling." And it's not that thinking should go away, but can we ... build to more trust in the sensations—because the answer for how to lift, this comes from the experience of interacting within, and not from thinking about. . . . Or when you're touching yourself there, to be able to just be with that, and not expecting an outcome, but just to be with that sensation.

[A long pause.]

And it may sound ridiculous, or cheap, but in a way, it does solve all questions.

But only in the moment, the moment when I'm really there. (L)

There is an element of the abyss in body awareness, for it gives us no answer, tending to cast doubt on ideas about embodiment without providing new certainty. It "solve[s] all questions," but not by providing direct answers or results. Hence Laeng's challenge, "What is it you want to learn?" Sensory awareness's rich infinity of present connection can begin to feel like resting in free fall, or pushing off from shore.

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, writing from a Buddhist perspective, describes how openness to body awareness can foster a sense of "direct, unlearned experience of kinship" through sensing "the vivid, living power of other forms." As Manuel argues, this feeling of immediate kinship, flowing from an absence of certitude, doesn't require abandoning a sense of identities including those of race, gender, and sexuality: "The hummingbird doesn't need to detach, to let go of its form, in order to exist in a state of oneness." Concerning racial identity, Johnson has long asserted that somatic practices are aligned with a coalition politics in which antiracism, feminism, and anti-imperialism protest modernity's "incomprehensible savaging of the flesh," and his recent *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices* (2018) seeks to bring diversity to somatics. In a way, Brooks—who had also studied with Katherine Dunham—attempted to forge a link to Black American experience when he describes his and Selver's admiration for an African American cook whose movement appears "felt and enjoyed through to its very end" (SA 125). But an element of watching, rather than responding, informs the scene, and the comment that "when he turned a steak on the grill it might have graced the Parthenon" applauds the

“exquisitely felt” quality of the experience while folding it into a White ideal (SA

127). The history of somatics as a form of racial purification, which was an issue not only in Germany but also in both the US and Europe, radiates forward here as somatics continues to be a form of White modernity, albeit a form opposed to domination.

But what is weirdest about the description of the cook is the rapt respect and love in the passage right amidst the racial objectification. It feels painfully ripe for critique—and then as if what matters more is the draw of a body “exquisitely felt,” a moment of inhabited life. This is what it would mean, critically, to see thought and feeling separated as Laeng had argued. Indeed, the history of Black women in Indianapolis who practiced posing as Greek statues in the mode of

Genevieve Stebbins, one of the American somatic teachers who influenced Gindler’s teacher Hade Kallmeyer, shows embodied awareness running both through and beyond the knots of cultural practices and meanings. There are thoughts and images about the body and about types of bodies, and yet the sense of the motion can be separated from them. Embodied awareness at such a pass is abstract in its remove from culture, yet utterly living and contingent as it is there only as sense, as motion—not as idea at all. To our surprise, here we might say embodied awareness is an absolute liberty, and conceptual and verbal thought the local, constrained form.

4.

Heidegger wrote in *Being and Time* that “the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become.” The evident affinities between somatics and phenomenology, particularly their focus on intentionality and embodied consciousness, has informed a line of work identifying them. But unlike phenomenology, the Gindlerian experiment does not search for the primordial. She had students attend to the mundane activities of their daily life: “One must first come to know—through observing oneself—just what one does with breathing while brushing one’s teeth, while putting on one’s socks, or while eating” (EG 38), rather than the totemic “tree and pond,” or “deer, horse, and bull” in Heidegger. Erna Lohrke, another student, recalls Gindler saying, “Ideals are boring; they always remain the same. But reality is always different and interesting.” This reality was not ontological, but changeable. As

one student realized, “It’s about a different overall behavior in life. And that there is still something that can be changed, that brings joy.”

In “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”—first published, like Mauss’s essay, in 1934—Levinas repudiated phenomenology, and particularly the work of his mentor Heidegger, for its link to Nazism. As the essay proceeds, its seemingly sympathetic account of both Marxism and phenomenology’s emphasis on embodiment moves towards a claim that such ideas lead to racism and fascism:

The mysterious urgings of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose the character of being problems that are subject to a solution put forward by a sovereignly free Self. ... Man’s essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [enchaînement]. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self’s freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining.

Understanding ontology as “[a] philosophy of power” which “does not call into question the same,” Levinas turned to a religio-ethical sense of the Other, that which comes from outside of my own embodied life and challenges me to a world beyond my being. Like Levinas, Gindler differed from phenomenology in her interest in relation, but her work remained focused on the body, and its exploration of trusting connection is quite unlike an encounter with the essential alterity of the Other. In this regard, her work stands as an alternative path to major critical approaches to the body. Such alternatives are relevant in our era when phenomenology has returned to critical discussions of race and gender in the context of a rise in fascism.

The experiments of Gindler and her students concern the relation of awareness within the body—one is aware of oneself, which is different than just being oneself—and of the way that the sense of one’s body, rather than “the body,” brings about the possibility for a relation with the beings around one. This happens moment to moment, as part of a practice of lived presence that is so attentive to passing life as to become almost abstract, or more exactly, empty of meaning and purpose. ““Do you feel from where you depart? Can you feel the floor under your feet from which you want to jump?” Selver recalled Gindler asking. “This was completely new to me... After awhile she said, ‘Do you feel the air through which you are jumping?’” (CS 27). Such questioning has a critical intelligence that trusts in a reality unlike whatever it is we want to learn or advance. Such trust may be at once frightening and thrilling, hopeful and unmoored. Its

freedom includes a freedom from definition by the contexts and commitments among which it moves, its indifference to expectations and demands of meaning and purpose, and its trust in the possibilities of learning to live in a different way than seems presently known.

One of the lessons one can draw from somatic awareness is doubt about the major thread of thought in which the body is taken, as in Mauss and Foucault, as the prisoner of modern cultures of training and subject formation, and also, as in Don Hanlon Johnson's work and more recent turns to somatic theory, as a being to be freed from reason, or abstract thought. The body as material other, the body as governed object, the body as outsider to be freed or a resource for healing modernity all appear, in this light, as themselves figments with little relation to embodiment. And a cultivation of embodied awareness does not appear innately linked to any politics—if we think of *Gymnastik* teachers splitting between Nazi support and resistance, between liberal individualism and Zionism, we find ourselves flummoxed by an attempt to locate embodied politics in any definite sphere. Perhaps it arises across political spectrums when the abstracted subject of liberalism falls out of the center, and testifies to an underlying chaos in lived experience. A leg becoming rosier but still unfelt, the weight of a stone felt in my own hand, the fear and delight of a sense of being touched without control. What can contain or define the vibrating awareness of being within sensation, space, and connection that these practices unleash?

Notes

1. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body" (1934), in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (Zone Books, 1992): 455-77; 459.

2. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), transl. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995), 30.

3. In Sophie Ludwig, *Elsa Gindler - von ihrem Leben und Wirken: Wahrnehmen, was wir empfinden*, ed. Marianne Haag (Heinrich Jacoby-Elsa Gindler Stiftung, 2021), 128. Translations of this text are by Melanie Unger.

4. On Gindler's influence on somatic therapy see Susan Gregory, "Elsa Gindler: Lost Gestalt Ancestor," *British Gestalt Journal* 10.2 (2001): 114-17; Ulfried Geuter, Michael C. Heller, and Judyth O. Weaver, "Elsa Gindler and Her Influence on Wilhelm Reich and Body Psychotherapy," *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 5:1 (April 2010): 59-73; Judyth O. Weaver, "The Influence of Elsa Gindler on Somatic Psychotherapy and on Charlotte Selver," *USA Body Psychotherapy Journal* 3.1 (2004): 22-26.

5. Elsa Gindler, “Gymnastik for Busy People” (1926), transl. in Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. I, Charlotte Selver Foundation Bulletin 10.1 (Summer 1978): 36-40; 36. Hereafter abbreviated EG.

6. Katja Rothe, “The Gymnastics of Thought: Elsa Gindler’s Networks of Knowledge,” *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, ed. A. Lagaay (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 197-219; 208, 209.

7. See Maria Meindl’s dissertation, “Reading Elsa Gindler: Tracing the Legacy of a Somatics Pioneer” (University of Toronto, 2022), for an extensive discussion of the state of the archives, a visit to the foundation, and translations of selections of Gindler’s notes. For the information about the archive I note here, see Meindl, 9.

8. As Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter has suggested, to study movement practices we need to go beyond the record of texts and images to experience the work in our own bodies (*The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* [Greenwood Press, 1999], xiv-xv, 130-31).

9. Biographical information on Speads is from Susan Gregory, Interview with the author, New York City, 19 November 2019. Hereafter abbreviated G.

10. Meindl, 57.

11. Christoph Ribbat, *Breathing in Manhattan: Carola Speads, the German-Jewish*

Gymnastics Instructor who Brought Mindfulness to America (Transcript, 2023).

12. Shannon Mariotti, *Contemplative Democracy: Politics, Practice and Pedagogy* (Oxford University Press, 2025), xxvii.

13. James K. Rowe, *Radical Mindfulness: Why Transforming Fear of Death is Politically Vital* (Routledge, 2024), 10.

14. Doran George, *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Oxford University Press, 2020).

15. Geuter, et al., “Elsa Gindler,” 61. Another excellent piece on Gindler is Rebecca Loukes, “‘Concentration’ and Awareness in Psychophysical Training: The Practice of Elsa Gindler,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 22:4 (November 2006): 387-400. On Lebensreform and German body culture before the rise of National Socialism, see Michael J. Cowan, *Cult of the Will: Nervousness and German Modernity* (Penn State University Press, 2008); Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History 1890-1930* (University of Chicago Press, 2003);

Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (University of California Press, 1997).

16. Geuter et al., "Elsa Gindler," 61-62.

17. Thomas Hanna, "Interview with Carola Speads," in *Somatics* (Spring/ Summer 1981): 10-13; reprinted in *Bone, Breath and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment*, ed. Don Hanlon Johnson (North Atlantic Books and California Institute of Integral Studies, 1995), 25-35; 25-26.

18. See Loukes, "'Concentration' and Awareness," 388, and Gueter et al., "Elsa Gindler," 62. The work is pointedly in dissent from the culture analyzed by Anson Rabinbach in *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (University of California Press, 1990).

19. Hanna, "Interview with Carola Speads," 25, 27.

20. See Cowan, *Cult of the Will* for a discussion of *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (176), and Ribbat on Speads's appearance in the film (34).

21. Clare Nathanson Fenichel, interviewed by Richard Lowe, Los Angeles, 1978, in *Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. I*: 34-35; 34. The second part of the interview was published in *Elsa Gindler (1889-1961) Vol. II*, *Sensory Awareness Foundation Bulletin* 10-11 (Winter 1981): 4-9. The interview is hereafter abbreviated CNF I or CNF II. See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, on "the fetishization of ancient Greek beauty" as a form of Whiteness (W.W. Norton, 2010), 59-63.

22. Charlotte Selver, Letter to Charlotte Selver Foundation Bulletin, Sausalito, October 1977, *Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. I*: 27-32; 31. Hereafter abbreviated CS.

23. Carola Speads, *Ways to Better Breathing* (Healing Arts Press, 1978, 1986, 1992), 8. Hereafter abbreviated W.

24. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1987), transl. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford University Press, 2002), 194.

25. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 195. See Richard Shusterman's discussion of this passage in *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27-28.

26. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 88.

27. Stefan Laeng discusses the intricacy of Selver's attempts to find a path for herself as a Jewish woman in Germany ("This Is Your Experience:

The Life and Times of Charlotte Selver Part I: 1901-1938" [Unpub. manuscript], 2-28, 119, and *passim*).

28. See Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Penguin Books, 1982, 1988); Anne D. Rassweiler, *The Generation of Power: The History of Dneprostroi* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

29. Laeng, "This Is Your Experience," 148.

30. Lotte Kristeller, Ramat Gan, Israel, April 1978, translated from German, in Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. I: 13; Also see Mieke Monjau, "Before and During the Second World War," in Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. II: 29-30; and Loukes, 394.

31. Ribbat, 36.

32. Irus Braverman, *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chap. 2: "The Zionist Pine Tree Project," 59-114.

33. Stefan Laeng, Interview with the author, Peterborough, NH, 24 February 2020. Hereafter abbreviated L.

34. On the bodily self-image, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 67-70.

35. Charles V. W. Brooks, *Sensory Awareness: The Rediscovery of Experiencing* (The Viking Press, 1974), 134. Hereafter abbreviated SA.

36. Richard Lowe and Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt, "Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks—A Brief History," in *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence: Sensory Awareness as a Practice for Life; The Teachings of Charlotte Selver and Charles V. W. Brooks* (North Atlantic Books, 2007), 252. On Selver and Fromm, see Lawrence J. Friedman, assisted by Anke M. Schreiber, *The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's Prophet* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 136; on Horkheimer and Adorno's dispute with Fromm, see 54-62.

37. Lowe and Laeng-Gilliatt, "Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks," 253.

38. See Arthur Herzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (Simon and Schuster, 1989), Chap. 15: "Children of the Ghetto." See Geuter et al., "Elsa Gindler," on the links of Gindler and her students to the psychoanalytic world.

39. *Waking Up: The Work of Charlotte Selver*, collected and ed. William C. Littlewood with Mary Alice Roach (Author House, 2004), 94. Hereafter abbreviated WU.

40. “Becoming Ready—Being Tuned in,” 19 July 1990, Audio recording and edited tape transcript (Sensory Awareness Foundation, 2001), 1. Hereafter abbreviated BR.

41. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991), 3.

42. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 28.

43. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 218.

44. See Johnson’s “Introduction” to *Bone, Breath, and Gesture*, ix-xviii; Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen and the Religion of No Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). For a broad overview of somatics’ history, see Martha Eddy, *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

45. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 203.

46. Johnson, “Somatic Platonism,” *Somatics* 3.1 (Autumn 1980): 4-7; 7.

47. Johnson, “Somatic Platonism,” 7.

48. Hanna, “What is Somatics?” (1986-87), reprinted in Johnson, ed., *Bone, Breath & Gesture*, 341-52; 341.

49. Anita Chari, “The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment,” *New Political Science* 38. 2 (2016): 226-240; 227. Chari connects her experience as a somatic practitioner of Continuum to political theory in “The Embodiment of Conscience,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42.10 (2016): 1015-27; 1016.

50. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Sexuality, and Gender*, foreword by Dr. Charles Johnson (Wisdom, 2015), 110, 113.

51. Manuel, *The Way of Tenderness*, 101.

52. Johnson, “Introduction,” ix; Johnson, ed., *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices: Toward an Inclusive Somatics* (North Atlantic Books, 2018).

53. On the flexibility of Whiteness, see Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Polity Press, 2015).

54. Carrie Streeter, “Breathing Power and Poise,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 39.1 (Dec. 2020): 5046.

55. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927), transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, foreword Taylor Carman (HarperPerennial, 1962), 98.

56. Loukes discusses Gindler and Heidegger (“‘Concentration’ and Awareness,” 395-96). Elizabeth A. Behnke connects somatics to Husserl (see “Matching,” reprinted in Johnson, ed., *Bone, Breath, and Gesture*, 317-37; “Husserl’s Protean Concept of Affectivity: From the Texts to the Phenomena Themselves,” *Philosophy Today* 52 [2008]: 46-53); Sondra Fraleigh links phenomenology, dance, and somatics (*Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations Through Dance, Yoga, and Touch*, ed. Fraleigh [University of Illinois Press, 2015]). Shusterman argues against the identification of somatics and phenomenology in “The Silent, Limping Body of Phenomenology” (*The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen [Cambridge University Press, 2005], 151-80).

57. Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. and intro Albert Hofstadter (Harper and Row, 1971), 163-80; 180.

58. Letter to Charlotte Selver Foundation, Erna Lohrke, Ratingen Germany January 1980, transl. from German, Elsa Gindler (1885-1961) Vol. II: 39-44; 43.

59. Quoted in Sophie Ludwig, 221-223.

60. Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” (1934), transl. Séan Hand, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Autumn 1990): 63-71; 69.

61. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne Press, 1969), 46.

62. See Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006); Ju Yon Kim, *The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday* (New York University Press, 2015); Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality,” *Human Studies* 3.2 (April 1980): 137-56; Ann Cooper Albright, *Engaging Bodies: The Politics and Poetics of Corporeality* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013).