

Eco-Somatica - Finding Ground

Winter Wild 2023

PART 1.

Visitor Centre: Main Room

Acknowledgement of country: The Gadubanud people of Maar Nation

Workshop themes: eco-crisis - attention paradox - Groundedness - Trust - Ancestral heritage - evolutionary ecology - Gratitude

Workshop synopsis: We are on a mission to find our GROUND.

Our bodies and the environment will be our text book - we will move from different body positions and through different environments, leaving from and arriving back at the Visitor Centre

Provocation: The age of Anthropocene, the age defined by human impact could be the age that ends us. The predictions are ever more dire and with ever more consensus. We live amidst tipping points teetering around us like gigantic existential plates spinning on sticks. And everywhere the noise is deafening and unceasing. We race against time, competing needs and an insatiable demand for our attention.

In this tension our senses are heightened and we are frightened, we protect ourselves with distraction and downtime but we're never far from the clamour and roar. We are on high alert and constantly alerted by a tsunami of notifications. We are more connected than ever and simultaneously more alone. We live in a paradox.

This is the eco-crisis in which we find ourselves. If ever there was a time for us to re-connect to the ground beneath our feet it is now.

ACTIVITY: Lie down on your back...

The ground is a kinaesthetic mirror. It mirrors how we connect. Our physical response to the ground is a reflection of how we move within ourselves to respond and adapt to the world around us and the earth beneath our feet.

- *which parts of you are pressing hardest? Which parts are not pressing at all?*
- *the ground is felt as hard when our muscular response is hard. The softer we are, the softer the ground becomes.*
- *The ground is a metaphor for our environment*

- *Bend knees - tilt pelvis forward and back - head movement???*
- *The head will move when the musculature of the torso and neck is not held rigidly*
 - The ground is the way in to feeling ourselves.
 - 'Groundedness' is an expression of our capacity to connect with that which supports us.

- This connection is what grants us freedom to move.
- The more grounded we are the more liberated from the ground we become.
- The less grounded we are the more threatening the ground, the more likely we are to fall.
- The more threatened we are the more rigid we become.
- This is not limited to our bodies and movement it extends to our thinking, our perceiving and our very way of being.
- So, lets explore this relationship so that you and the body you lie on might get a little closer.
- Because that body offers you a way into yourself.
- When the ground is felt through the lens of fear, the bodily experience is one of self preservation. If the environment is not safe then naturally we must ensure safety by taking protective measures.

I have attached a detailed .pdf document of the activity 'Connecting pelvis to head' separate to these notes. Please enjoy taking yourself through the exploration as a means to create ease in your body.

ACTIVITY: Binoculars in reverse (distancing) & Normal (too close to see)

CHECK BINOCULARS IN REVERSE as an exploration - Walking through the room one side to the other, weaving between one another.

This mimics our generalised propensity to distance ourselves from discomfort. Our desire to look away rather than get up close. As we experience it looking through the binoculars, the world is more difficult to navigate when seen at a distance.

CHECK BINOCULARS CONVENTIONALLY - Getting too close also makes it difficult to navigate and to see the wider picture.

NO BINOCULARS - Peripherhal vision and soft eyes. When we soften the musculature of the face and eyes and trust our sensory apparatus we can see more and more easily. Our vision and our attitude opens. Another way in to another kind of ground.

PART 2.

Visitor Centre: Theatre

Tech: Fit participants with audio receivers and ensure they're all working

On screen: Video montage

Audio: Greta Thunberg composition

Contention: Allowing our feelings is part of finding ground.

ACTIVITY: Sitting, noticing ground contact and base of support, listening and feeling.

Quote:

”If I continually reach out to others for love, I am tipping forward, off-centre and unstable, leaning on whoever I contact, and likely to fall flat and hard if the other leaves. If I continually withdraw in fear, I am tipping backward, tense and rigid, and the slightest surprise will push me over. If I feel uncertain in myself and unstable in my base, then all my contact with others will be wobbly and lack conviction. In contrast, if I can become centred and balanced in my own experience, then I can carry this moving centre with me. If I am balanced now, then I can move in the direction I wish with no danger of falling, and my contact with you is solid and real, coming to you from the root of my living.”

-Barry Stevens - Introduction to 'Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain'

Quote:

*Although the road is never-ending
take a step
and keep walking
do not look
fearfully into the distance . . .
On this path
let the heart be your guide
for the body is hesitant
and full of fear*

– Rumi

ACTIVITY: Walk to Research Base in quiet silence. Simply notice...

PART 3.

Research Base: Landing

HOW DO WE TRUST A GROUND THAT SHIFTS AND MOVES?

We live in deeply troubling times where the notion of 'safe ground' is shifting and changing. Finding a sense of safety on the ground needs to begin with our capacity to adjust to the changing ground of our times. Being well grounded can at once enhance our sense of touch, and enhance our capacity to trust.

‘Trust’ in ground. What an interesting idea. If we are able to trust the ground we can make small intangible adjustments in ourselves in response to the ground that in turn create a sense of trust in

ourselves. If we can trust the ground we can begin to trust in our response to the ground. The better we are able to do that, the more adept, swift, light and sure we can be in our physical experience. But it's a circular argument. What comes first the trust in ourselves or trust in the ground?

We are in a very strange position at this point in our history. The ground as a steadfast, solid and unwavering support is shifting beneath us. The world is a changing and unsure place. There are all kinds of environmental calamities afoot and on a deeply existential level we may very well be questioning where to place our next step.

ACTIVITY: SOFT GROUND SOFT FEET

Take off your shoes and venture to some ground that verges on treacherous. Perhaps it is gravel, or grass with prickles, mulch that may have broken twigs, uneven or broken ground. Something that brings up the fear of 'otherness' of the environment.

Walk slowly upon this surface.

Notice in yourself:

- How do you accommodate the walk in your whole self?
- What parts of yourself are rigid, prepared for shock, pre-emptive recoil: what does this afford or close down in the fluidity of your motion?

When the ground is felt through the lens of fear, the bodily experience is one of self preservation. If the environment is not safe then naturally you must ensure your safety by taking protective measures.

- Now stop and imagine. What if you knew the surface would not hurt you. What if it would accommodate your comfort, your safety? How would you walk upon it then? Imagine this in yourself.

Now find a section of lush grass, benign ground, or some kind of safe surface: a carpet or a rug. Walk once more.

- How do you accommodate the walk in your whole self?
- Can you feel from your feet through to your head a softness, a willingness, a 'give'? How does that feeling transform your walk?
- Is it easier to relinquish the holding patterns, the protective muscular response?

When the possibility of shock, pain, surprise is removed, we are more able to be in trust. Trust affords responsiveness, flow, smoothness, ease.

- Now flip it. Instead of asking the environment to prove itself so you can find trust, what if the trust came from your own sense of knowing you can adjust to the changeability, the unknown in the environment, the ground.

- Walk on the uncomfortable, threatening surface again and notice how you are in yourself from feet through to head.
- The more you are able to inhabit your capacity to respond with sensitivity, immediacy, softness, yielding, flowing, the more ease can be found; the 'groundedness' shifts within. Trust is located in yourself. The ground is met and felt for what it is. You are not in opposition, you are in relationship and the conversation follows the myriad contours and trajectories of a wild and unknown surface.

The degree to which you trust yourself is the degree to which you can trust the ground. Your softness is felt by the ground which becomes you.

PART 4.

Research Base: Upstairs

Tech: Powered speaker and mixer and audio device

Activity: Sitting and listening and feeling.

Audio: Ancestors piece.

Quote:

"As individuals and as a species each of us carries a record of the evolutionary stages within. We don't just carry it, we live it from the moment of conception. We begin as single-cell creatures and during gestation we transition from invertebrate, to vertebrate, through fluid-dwelling and on to our births as air-breathing, land based mammals."

Julie Peck & Leslie McLennan, Moving from the Inside Out, 2019

ACTIVITY: Ancestral heritage through time.

This workshop follows the unfolding developmental path humans undertake from wriggling to crawling to walking, through the developmental patterns of spinal, homologous, homolateral, and contralateral movement. Each stage adds new ways to transfer weight and move through space. Each stage takes in more information from our environment and gives us additional ways to respond.

The ultimate story is that of humans attaining full height, with the ability to scan 360° on all planes.

SPINAL movements are very small responses to the pressure of the ground or the surface on which we lie. These are the movements of our invertebrate and early vertebrate ancestors: twitchings, wiggings and wormlike beginnings of coordinated movement.

HOMOLOGOUS comes from the the ancient Greek 'to agree'. In terms of movement, it means the movement of the top half of the body 'agrees' or is roughly the same as the movement of the bottom half. Like reflections, the halves move towards and then away from each other. Frogs hop with this pattern.

HOMOLATERAL means 'same-sided', so all the flexion happens down one side of the body, while the other side extends. As with homologous, the head moves with the curving spine, as a simple extension. Reptiles use this 'same-sided' movement also known as 'ipsilateral'.

CONTALATERAL occurs when the upper right side now coordinates with the lower left side (and vice versa) - or opposing sides agree. So the right shoulder moves forward as the left hip moves forward. This diagonal relationship creates a twist or spiral through the torso. Now the head becomes free to move independently of the spines direction. All mammals have at least rudimentary contralateral movement.

This evolution is iterative. Each stage lives out the stages that came before. We embody the evolution of movement in our development. In our present from we carry a record of the evolution of life. This is to be celebrated and explored...

PART 5.

Eco-walk to ocean lookout

Narrative: Sea level rise, the Gadubanud people, Australia's first climate refugees.

PART 6.

Eco-walk through forest

**Activity: tracking our evolutionary journey through developmental movment patterns:
Contra lateral, homolateral, homologous and spinal.**

PART 7.

Visitor Centre: Back in the Theatre

The human head is approximately 5kg's - 40 bananas or 5 pineapples - So we ought to take our alignment seriously. This too is part of our journey to ground.

Postural ideals

Feldenkrais' image of the ideal is specified in biomechanical principles.

For example, "*Good posture is the ability to move in any direction without hesitation or preparation,*" and "*the force should travel longitudinally through the spine, and not across it*".

These are statements of an ideal.

They state the ideal way posture should function.

They define not what good posture feels like or looks like, but how it behaves.

Posture measures your ability to shape the next act.

It upholds the dignity of choice.

Activity: Pelvic tilting in seated position on the bench seats

- Tilting pelvis forward and back
- Becoming tall and small
- Finding sit bones
- Finding the stability plateau
- Feel for connection to head.

Activity: Sitting symmetrically and finding Axes of Rotation for head

1. Earlobe fingers - nodding
2. Same height at nape of neck, other tip of nose - tilting left & right
3. One finger top of head, imagine a rod directly through to top of spine - face turns left as back of head swings right (variation: focus now on back of head as you do this)

CONCLUSION

The ground within

If we feel a connection to ground, we are able to soften. Our contact is more sensitive and our touch lighter. We know when we touch down and we are quick to adjust. Once we find this softness in our touch our central nervous system will spread it through our entire selves. Our perspective shifts as we begin not only to 'feel' the ground but to be 'felt' *by* the ground. This is the state of unravelling where the foundation of ground is found within.