

# My Work is Not an Interpretation of Thomas Hanna's but the Application and Development of It

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In this essay, I make a foray into the underpinnings of somatics: the inter-relation of mind and body.

Body and mind are not the same, but they are connected with and influence each other (the way vertebrae and discs are different from, continuous with and influence each other). This essay isn't an intellectual exercise (though it might seem to be one), but an *intuitive* exercise requiring the application of the reader's intelligence. It distinguishes different aspects of somatic experience clearly from each other. It states the role of principles in the development of Hanna somatic education (and educators). By working through this essay, what you'll do is sharpen the tool of your attention and empower your practice of somatic education. Sharpen away.

**T**here may be some who view my somatic work as an interpretation of that of Thomas Hanna.

This view is, simply, incorrect.

It is incorrect for a number of reasons, the first of which is obvious, when considered: "interpretation" exists in a completely different sphere than "practice."

Interpretation is conceptual; practice is experiential. They cannot be equated to each other.

The second reason that I have not "interpreted" the work of Thomas Hanna is because I *have built upon it*. It is not a restatement of his work; it is a development of it, with the foundation fully intact.

Thomas Hanna's work embodied certain principles. By "embodied," I mean that in his practice could be seen certain principles. The two, practice and principle, are not equivalent to each other, but correspond to each other, each in its domain (abstract and concrete). The two related views, combined, create a deeper experience of understanding. (This corresponds to the maxim, "As above, so below.")

Let me say more.

Concepts exist in two subjective spheres: understanding (the sphere of "I") and communication (the sphere of "we"). When we use a concept to represent or describe something to ourselves, we call it understanding. When we use it to represent or describe something to someone else, we call it communication. Communication requires at least some understanding to exist already, so we can build upon that understanding toward something new. Communications require experience for interpretation to be possible.

We are getting into the peculiar domain called, hermeneutics. Without getting too brainiac about it, hermeneutics is the study of interpretation.

## **UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES EXPERIENCE**

Understanding requires experience. Only if we have the experience (memories/functional familiarity) referred to by a communication, does the communication have meaning for us. Meaning has a feeling to it -- generally, the feeling of how we respond to the communication either inwardly or through action. Without a response, "eez meaningless."

Only communication and understanding involve interpretation. Only by our own experience can we give meaning to (interpret) some concept or verbal communication. Without experience, an interpretation of a communication makes about as much sense as the word, "encyclopedia," does to

a dog. The best we can do, without experience is assign a meaning by likening the communication to something else, as in "is Hanna Somatic Education like chiropractic?"

### **NOT ALL INTERPRETATIONS ARE EQUALLY VALID**

It's fashionable, nowadays, to say that everything is subject to interpretation, as if all interpretations were equal in validity.

This is, of course, confusing, if not laughable, if only because the view, "All interpretations are equally valid," holds itself as more valid than the view, "some interpretations are more valid than others." Give it a moment to sink in.

If we actually lived that way, we would have more looney bins than prisons. (Wait a minute – do we?)

Interpretation is a functional act, and what makes it functional is an interpretation's dependence on an actual experience. There are *more accurate* interpretations and there are *less accurate* interpretations.

### **WHAT MAKES A PRINCIPLE A "PRINCIPLE"**

Getting back to Thomas Hanna's teaching, there are principles that he explicitly cited in his written and spoken words – for example, that a soma (living being) experiences from its own "hereness." It's a statement of description with no exceptions. More than that, it's an operational statement, describing how we and things operate, not subject to interpretation.

The interesting thing about principles is that experience can validate them (and make experience comprehensible and more generally useful), or experience can fail to validate them (changing the status from "principle" to "notion"). But principles can't be correctly interpreted more than one way.

If experience validates a principle, that principle can safely be taken as the basis for further exploration and development of experience and understanding, i.e., "true." If not, it's useless and false.

You may be wondering what I'm getting at, here. I do have a point. Bear with me.

To help, let's pandiculate what I'm saying, here, by exploring its opposite. Let's say that experience need not validate a principle in order for a principle to be a principle. (This is the mood of those who say that everything is subject to interpretation and that all interpretations are equally valid. So, let's go for it.)

What do we have, when we have a concept without an experience to back it up? We have what I'll call "a dangling principle," which is what a dog experiences when he hears the word, "encyclopedia." In that case, we have a person who pretends to know what (s)he is talking about, but who doesn't really. (S)he sounds earnest and has good intentions, but behind that, (s)he has the feeling expressed by the word, "Huh?" – which makes you also have the feeling, "Huh?" – possibly masked by the need to look like you understand. It's like when you meet up with someone and you can't remember their name. In any case, "Huh?" is the underlying communication from person to person. You know – "Quantum Healing," "Cellular Memory." Welcome to California froo-froo.

Or we might have a "popularity principle," which is what we had when people believed in the flatness of the Earth or in the inherent superiority of White Men or in Humours of the Night creating disease. I know that these examples refer to things, rather than to ways of operating, but the effect is the same. Acting on a "popularity principle" produces less than optimal results. If you don't know the thing, you can't operate intelligently upon it. Some call a concept without experience to back it up, "faith"; I call it "investment in a hypothesis."

From another angle, what do we have when we have an experience without a concept for it? We have a mystery, something unknown. Again, if you don't have a concept for something, you can't understand its principles, and therefore you can't operate intelligently upon it.

But when experience and concept correlate, we have understanding and an operational basis for functional (not random, but deliberate) exploration and elaboration.

Nature does that with principles all over the place. It's the reason so many lifeforms have a front, a back, a left, a right, duplicate organs, two eyes, two ears, a mouth, a nose with two nostrils (never three), and skin, to name a few. As Thomas Hanna stated so unequivocally, "Function determines structure." That's also the reason that although so many lifeforms share these features, there are so many variations on the theme. A shark's stomach is shaped like a corkscrew or helix, a cow's is like a four-pack of milk, whereas ours is shaped like a fat banana, more or less. The point is, different designs may carry out essentially the same functions; the functional principles manifest in various ways.

### **PRINCIPLES IN HANNA SOMATIC EDUCATION**

Back to Thomas Hanna's teaching: principles show up in specific techniques of teaching and in specific ways of understanding what is being taught. In specific, he delivered to us three basic clinical lessons corresponding to the three reflexes of stress, a bunch of recordings of workshops and lectures, and a set of principles for generalizing beyond those three lessons. The principles, of course, are embedded in (and make functional) the three lessons – but, as in nature, variations and elaborations consistent with, but in addition to those principles, are possible, and evidently, inevitable.

This matter of interpretation, however, is problematic when people don't understand the principles, experientially. They have dangling principles ("Encyclopedia Syndrome") and "popularity principles", and so they indiscriminately try to equate all variations of technique as equally valid, or else they describe further developments based on Thomas Hanna's stated principles as being mere interpretations of his work, no better than any other, and not really part of, his work. (How post-modern.)

Remember, an interpretation is conceptual. Principles are abstract patterns and concepts are subtle, linguistic representations of those abstract patterns; practices are concrete experiences of those patterns. Principles, concepts, and practices correlate in any sound teaching (the way first-person, second-person, and third-person experiences correlate in somatic education). Principles have only one correct interpretation (e.g., we perceive by contrast between two experiences).

To exclude from a teaching any practice that has that full correlation of principle, concept, and practice is to fail to operate from principle. So, goodbye principles, hello, popularity contest.

Principles found in Thomas Hanna's teaching (and that of others, as well), have guided my somatic explorations, but at last, the explorations are my own. I do not separate mine from theirs, but I went where I did with their teaching until I reached new, unknown territory and explored. This new territory is not an interpretation of what has gone before; it is not an interpretation, at all. It is experience. The question is, What defines whether a teaching is a new teaching, an interpretation of a previous teaching, or an extension of it? Popularity contest or principles?

My experiential work is not an interpretation because it is not based upon Thomas Hanna's *words*, but upon my own experience, as soma. My communicative works (and Thomas Hanna's) *are* interpretations, however. There are interpretations for this reason: experiences have been converted to symbols – words and pictures. We interpreted our experiences into instructions for having those experiences. The reader or student must interpret the words and instructional materials into actions and experiences for them to be useful. So interpretation is involved, at first.

### **YOUR PRACTICE**

What does this say about your practice? If you are operating from principles, rather than popularly held ideas or ways of doing things (herd mentality), your work is not an interpretation, but an emergent expression arising from the origins of Thomas Hanna's work, which is the experience of soma, itself. Doubt and confusion dissipate when we operate from principles because we experience and operate with integrity of action, experience, and understanding, synergistically combined into one big enchilada. This was the recipe.

Mexican food, anyone?