

Language of the Body



Shelley Lake, *Venus of Willendorf*, 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 32 Frame Animated GIF

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## CONTENTS

### PREFACE

*The story of my virtual family*

- I THE DREAM FACTORY  
*New aesthetic experiences*
- II LANGUAGE OF THE BODY  
*Somatosensory Awareness*
- III BREATHING  
*Our primal connection and communion with nature*
- IV CRAWLING  
*Becoming autonomous*
- V STANDING  
*Taking a Stand*
- VI WALKING  
*Going after what you want*
- VII INTEGRATION  
*Bodymind and fellowship*

## PREFACE

“If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.”<sup>1</sup>  
 —George Bernard Shaw, *Immaturity*



Shelley Lake, [Anorexic Tango](#), 2008, 18” by 24” archival pigment print

This is the story of my virtual family. Come with me and play a starring role inside the digital dollhouse. Take a look and you will see a fictional world of mythological characters. Living there you will find imaginary shapes of experience—forces of nature expressed as action patterns in the bodymind.

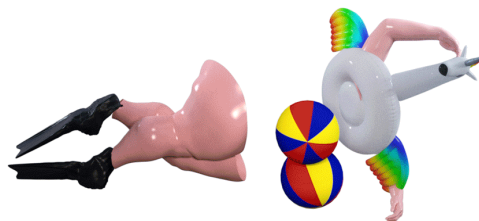
In our shared fantasy world of pure imagination, we may build bioenergetic bridges to learning, engagement, and transformation.<sup>2</sup> Increased awareness of thoughts and emotions may give each of our lives greater meaning and purpose. Together, we may come to better understand our inner world.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Immaturity* (London: Constable, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> *Pure Imagination*, Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (Paramount, 1971).

## I THE DREAM FACTORY



Shelley Lake, [Freestyle](#), 2020, 56 frame animated GIF

*Bioenergetics, technology, and aesthetics* intersect on a virtual stage. *Bioenergetics* engages physical, intellectual, and emotional curiosity, unlocking a door to the inner workings of the bodymind.<sup>3</sup> Anatomy, the organic material that gives rise to our humanity—is the spiritual gateway to sensation, thought, and aesthetic experience. The ground of meaning begins with recognizing the action patterns of an organism and its relationship to the environment.<sup>4</sup>

*Technology* is the connective tissue—it is a mirror, it is a window, it is the wisdom of the ages. Technology is the bridge that unifies disparate fragments of self, technology is the thread that connects us to one another, and technology is the fuel that ignites our cultural imagination.

*Aesthetics* is the embodiment of matter, space, and time. Life is experienced through the bodymind. Meaning is profoundly influenced by a multitude of sensations. Even now, as you read these words, the *sound* of each syllable is silently spoken, heard, and actionated within the bodymind. Words on the page have a rhythm and a cadence that expresses more than an idea.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 98.

Three-dimensional scene simulation is the experimental bedrock of my interactive *dream factory*. My digital laboratory of imagination is a soft architecture<sup>5</sup> based platform that supports more than prefabricated figures and characters. It is a customizable “character engine” on a synthetic stage that helps give rise to a unique cast of avatars.<sup>6</sup>

The toolbox in the digital domain is so expansive that the outcome often exceeds the detail from the highest resolution cameras, because the process used in image creation is not optical—it doesn’t suffer from the limitations of a lens or the use of light-sensitive material.

Together, we render artworks inspired by the *Language of the Body*. We explore the creative possibilities attainable at the margins of technology, in search of new aesthetic experiences.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Negroponte, *Soft Architecture Machines* (MIT Press, 1976).

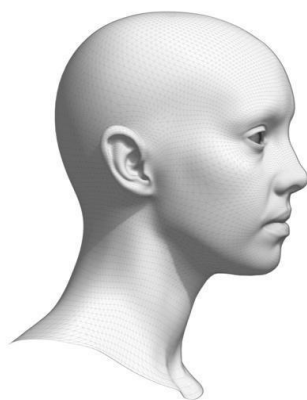
<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, “DAZ Technology,” Application Software, 2021, <https://www.daz3d.com/technology/>.

<sup>7</sup> A. Michael Noll, “The Digital Computer as a Creative Medium,” *IEEE Spectrum* 4, no. 10 (October 1967): 89–95.

## II LANGUAGE OF THE BODY

*The self cannot be divorced from the body, and self-awareness cannot be separated from body awareness. For me, at least, the way of growth is by being in touch with my body and understanding its language.*<sup>8</sup>

— Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics*



Shelley Lake, [Emily 2.0](#), 2019, 104” by 80” pigmented ink on adhesive vinyl

We speak the Language of the Mind. We speak the Language of the Senses. We speak the *Language of the Body*.

When we speak the *Language of the Body*, we express our desire for meaning. We reveal our way of being in the world. Ken Dychtwald, author of *Bodymind*, describes how emotions can burrow their way deep into the myofascial matrix, “The body begins to form around the feelings that animate it, and the feelings, in turn, become habituated and trapped within the body tissue itself.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lowen, *Bioenergetics*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Dychtwald, *Bodymind*, 1977, 22.

Everyday activities that we take for granted are respected and honored, to better understand unconscious patterns of habitual behavior. Those activities that are seemingly automatic, are of greatest importance.

Innate intelligence of the beating heart is a bioenergetic act of magic. The primordial pacemaker produces an electrical impulse, that travels through the energetic conduction system of the heart, causing a muscular contraction. The coronary, cyclic, extra-mechanical life force of the body expands with joy and breaks with grief.

Mirror neurons, invested throughout the neuroceptive structure of the bodymind, feed our empathic emotional core—activated when we dream *and* impassioned when we see the behavior of others in the context of our shared environment.

Primal behaviors such as breathing, crawling, standing, and walking may be affected by a lifetime of unconscious tension, stress, and anxiety. Decades of repetitive microtrauma may remodel and harden the density of connection tissue, creating a suit of armor throughout the anatomy train.

When we become aware of our physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts, we unveil another layer. Self-discovery is a never ending journey of acknowledging stress and releasing tension.<sup>10</sup> Letting go of false fronts allows for progressive relaxation, increased well-being, and an atmosphere of emotional freedom.<sup>11</sup> We may focus our attention on breathing, balance, and vitality—while calming the mind.

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<sup>10</sup> Edmund Jacobson, *Biology of Emotions* (Charles C. Thomas, 1967).

<sup>11</sup> Carl R. Rogers, *Becoming a Person* (Oberlin College Board of Trustees, 1954).



In *Bioenergetics*, Alexander Lowen explores the connection between emotional embodiment and increased vitality: “If you are your body and your body is you, then it expresses who you are. It is your way of being in the world. The more alive your body is, the more you are in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Introspection and observation may lead to greater insight, into more mindful ways of being.

In the absence of excessive physical and emotional effort, we may discover an economy of living with reduced tension.<sup>13</sup> We may become more present, more understanding, and more compassionate.

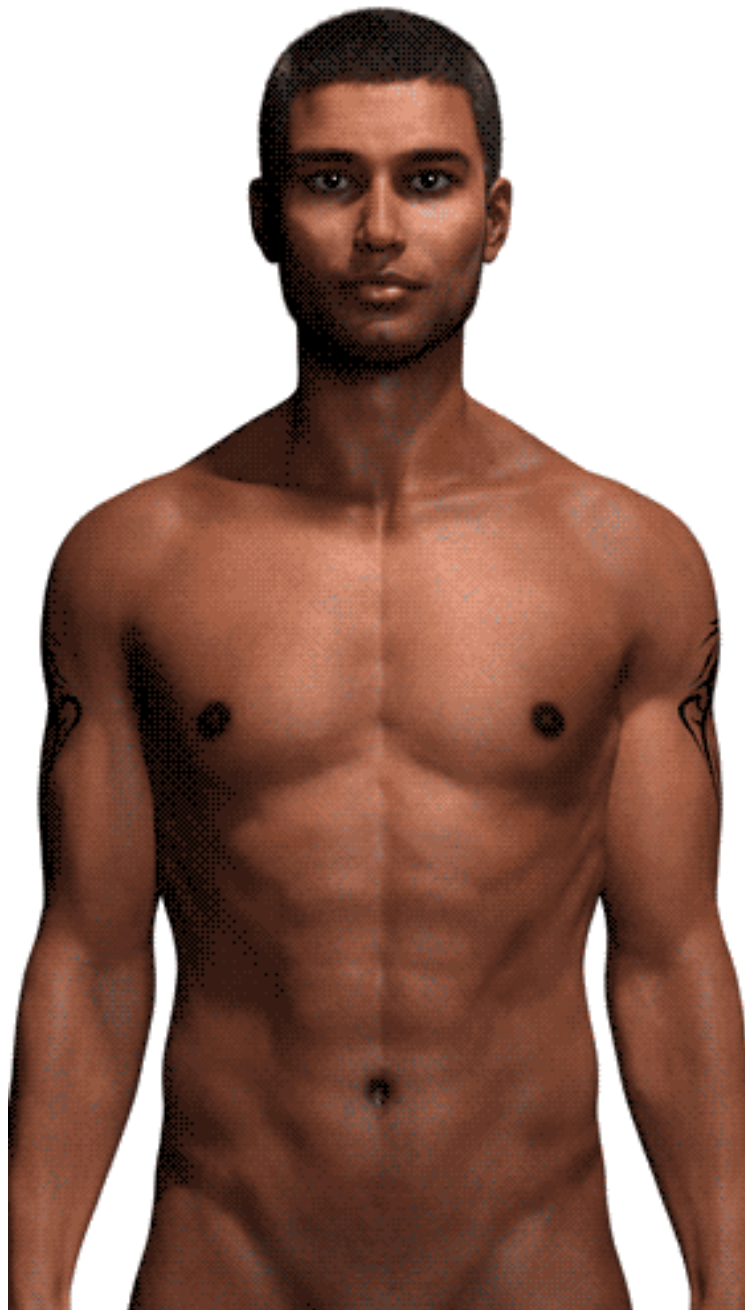
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<sup>12</sup> Lowen, *Bioenergetics*.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Jacobson, *You Must Relax* (National Foundation for Progressive Relaxation, 1957).

### III BREATHING

*“Breathe as if you do not breathe” – Lao Tzu*



Shelley Lake, [Stefon Breathing](#), 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 90 Frame Animated GIF

In the rule of threes, we can live without food for three weeks, we can live without water for three days and we can live without air for three minutes. The time-sensitivity of our breathing apparatus accentuates the importance of our shared airspace.

The global atmosphere and human respiration play an increasingly important role in the survival of our planet, our species, and every living organism. Although our autonomic nervous system drives our unconscious respiratory behavior, with increased awareness, we may begin to breathe consciously.

Conscious breathing increases the vital capacity of the respiratory system, reduces anxiety, improves circulation, and reduces the transmission of pathogens. Breathing through your nose increases oxygen absorption, improves posture and supports our immune system. We may optimize this often overlooked act of primal significance. Every breath holds the potential for a balanced exchange of nourishment and elimination. With improved vital capacity, we can become more connected in body, mind, and spirit.

Ken Dychtwald, author of the healing arts classic, *Bodymind*, describes how “Shallow breathing can act as a personal defense against the experience of feeling, for to breathe is to feel; and conversely, to limit breathing is to limit feeling.”<sup>14</sup>

To improve respiration, our first inclination is to take a deep breath. Nothing could be further from the truth. Over-breathing, also known as hyperventilation, leads to less oxygen available to the brain and body. Clinical psychologist, Inna Khazan shares her latest research into conscious breathing that supports the following guidelines:

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<sup>14</sup> Dychtwald, *Bodymind*, 146.

**1. *Breathe Slow***

Slow your breath down, so slowly that your nasal hairs do not move.

Take comfortably sized breaths.<sup>15</sup>

**2. *Breathe Low***

Keep your breath out of your neck and shoulders.

Shift inhalation from your chest down into your abdomen.

Do not breathe deeply.

Be gentle, do not rush into the next inhalation.

**3. *Nasal Breathe***

Inhalation and exhalation must take place through the nose.

Nasal breathing increases oxygen intake by ten to twenty percent.

Nasal breathing warms, filters, and humidifies incoming air.

Nasal breathing removes a significant amount of germs and bacteria.

Nasal breathing produces nitric oxide, a powerful bronchodilator

Nasal breathing reduces over-breathing, hyperventilation, and air hunger.<sup>16</sup>

Our life force, our spirit is enhanced by conscious breathing. Breathing fuels our energetic body, provides the cellular sustenance for the tissue beds, and ultimately can become a vehicle for communion with the universal.

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<sup>15</sup> Inna Khazan Ph.D., “Do Not Take a Deep Breath,” *Psychology Today*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/biofeedback-and-mindfulness-in-everyday-life/201912/do-not-take-deep-breath>.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick McKeown, “The Buteyko Method,” Buteyko Clinic, *Myotape: Nose Breathing Safe and Simple* (blog), accessed April 26, 2020, <https://buteykoclinic.com/the-buteyko-method/>.

## IV CRAWLING

*Crawling increases independence. The beginning of language accompanies crawling, a further tool in overcoming helplessness. Crawling also frees the head for scanning, encouraging an organization of space that leads to sitting.*<sup>17</sup>

—Stanley Keleman, *Emotional Anatomy*



Shelley Lake, [Cross Crawl](#), 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 90 Frame Animated GIF

It takes a few months for a newborn to lift its head. It is the beginning of a process that changes the underlying structure of the developing infant spine. With each passing month, the growing child begins to establish independence first by raising its head, then creeping, and eventually crawling.

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley Keleman, *Emotional Anatomy: The Structure of Experience*, 1989, 22.

## V STANDING

*Many human qualities that are worth mentioning have been directly attributed to the erect posture of our species. Most important is that it frees the forelimbs from their subservience to the functions of support and locomotion and allows their evolution into the human arm and hand...A second result, however, is that man faces the world with the most vulnerable aspect of his body exposed, his ventral side. Thus, his chest and heart, his belly and loins are more accessible to touch and less protected from attack. It is conceivable that the quality of tenderness is related to this way of being in the world.<sup>18</sup>*

—Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics*



Shelley Lake, [Superman](#), 2015, Digital Scene Simulation

The depiction of *Superman* represents a humanoid, hypertrophic, herculean character with supernatural powers. In the role of guardian, his grounded, symmetrical, posture of stability reassures us that we are safe. Hands-on-hips accentuate physical size. In contrast to a classical contrapposto posture, this is the quintessential superhero stance, a symbol of strength, protection and security. Head and feet point forward, another sign of physical readiness for engagement. Openly exposing the heart and throat can be a non-verbal display of fearlessness.

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<sup>18</sup> Lowen, *Bioenergetics*, 228.

Erect posture broadcasts our social stature—from standing firm, to no standing, to good standing, collapsing, slouching, shifting, slumping, standing off, standing your ground to standing up well. Our relationship to the ground begins with our footing. Is there an equal distribution of weight over each foot, are the knees locked out, is the bodyweight over the heels or the balls of the feet?

Carl Rogers, in his lecture *What It Means to Become A Person* asserts that “the most common despair is to be in despair at not choosing, or willing, to be one’s self; but that the deepest form of despair is to choose “to be another than himself.”<sup>19</sup> The desire, to be another, is a form of not taking a stand, not choosing to be one’s self.

Our standing in the world presents a unique challenge to the bodymind, in a world where danger, real and imagined, haunts our sensorineural circuits. Finding a safe haven from which to take a stand begins with acknowledging the truth of one’s character. Learning to hear the whispers that afflict the heart and mind. Replacing the public masquerade with authentic interiority, revealing hidden thoughts and emotions that emerge with fearless introspection. Feeling secure enough to stand out in the crowd. Becoming safe enough in one’s convictions to allow others inside our circle of trust. The physicality of getting in touch with the ground and rising to the occasion, requires becoming present while gaining a foothold in the gravity field.<sup>20</sup>

Oral storytelling traditions may be the most common form of communication, however—nonverbal communication—posture, gesture, and facial expression speaks the *Language of the Body*. The unspoken *Language of the Body* is a timeless, unfiltered representation of our inner voice.

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<sup>19</sup>Rogers, *Becoming a Person*, 11.

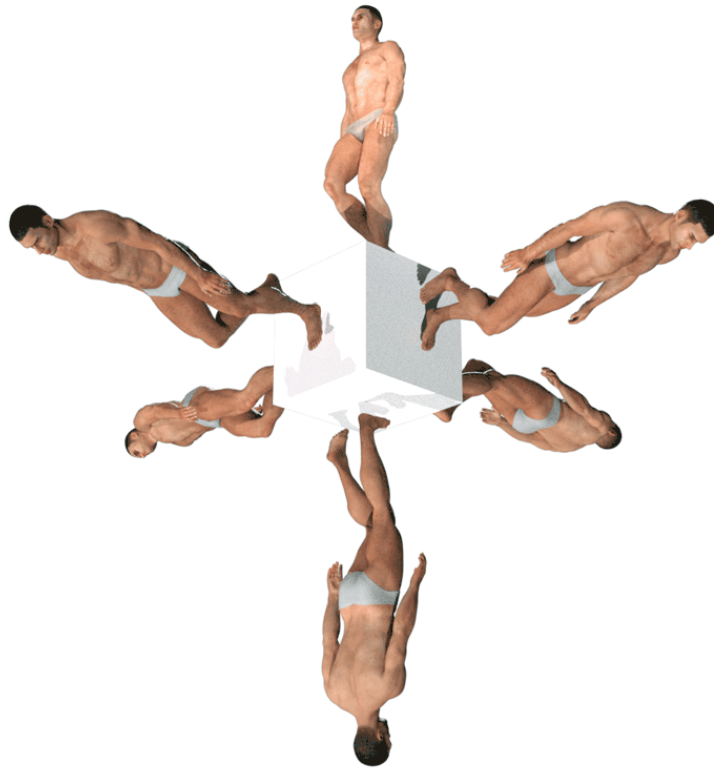
<sup>20</sup>Ida P. Rolf, *Rolfing* (Healing Arts Press, 1989).

## VI WALKING

*“No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path.”*

– *Buddha*

Walking, like breathing, is profoundly important. Instead of passively waiting for someone else to fulfill our desires, walking symbolizes the ability to go after what you want. Walking energizes. Walking facilitates the calf pump, a pump comparable to the heart as an advocate for the circulatory system. Walking engages the respiratory apparatus, forcing the diaphragm to communicate with the chest and abdomen—unifying the upper and lower body.

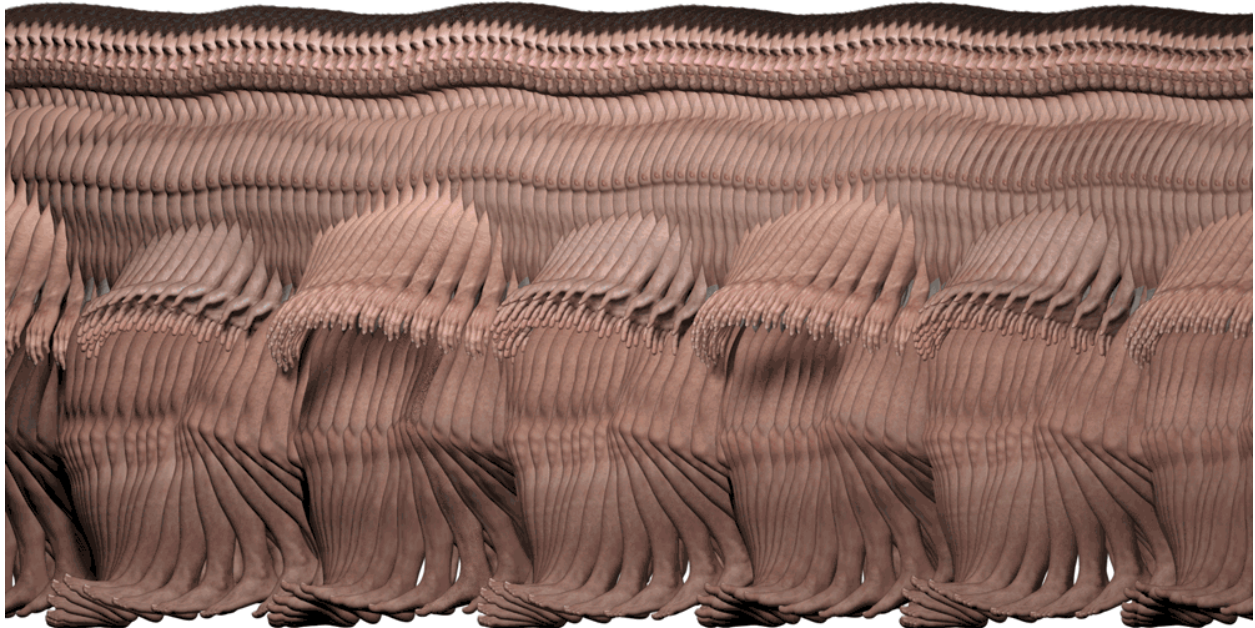


Shelley Lake, [Falling Man](#), 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 90 Frame Animated GIF



*A person who doesn't breathe deeply reduces the life of his body. If he doesn't move freely, he restricts the life of his body. If he doesn't feel fully, he narrows the life of his body. And if his self-expression is constricted, he limits the life of his body.<sup>21</sup>*

– Alexander Lowen, M.D., *Bioenergetics*



Shelley Lake, [Jeremiah CrossWalk Composite](#), 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 90 Frame Animated GIF

Oppositional cross crawling movements of each arm build a neurological bridge between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Locomotion in the gravity field strengthens the musculoskeletal system and helps restore balance, alignment, and immunity.

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1994), 43.

## VII INTEGRATION

“...the body is a **whole** and must be viewed and treated as a whole if real **integration** is to occur.”<sup>22</sup>

—Ken Dychtwald, *Bodymind*



Shelley Lake, [Monique and Novak](#), 2020  
Digital Scene Simulation, 54' by 54" pigmented ink on cotton rag

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<sup>22</sup> Ken Dychtwald, *Bodymind*, 1977, 128.

The *bodymind* is the key that unlocks the door to integration. The holistic interrelationship of body and mind provides the physical, intellectual and emotional backdrop where integration takes place. The body systems: respiratory, cardiovascular, nervous, gastrointestinal, urogenital, endocrine, immune, lymphatic, integumentary, reproductive, musculoskeletal—all find unity and connection in the bodymind, where wellness can be expressed through balance and harmony.

Somaesthetics, the synthesis of body awareness and aesthetics, cultivates and honors the “living, sentient, purposive body”.<sup>23</sup> Developed in the 1990’s by Richard Shusterman, somaesthetics goes beyond traditional aesthetic values to include interdisciplinary creative engagement of our primary tool, the body. Shusterman explores body consciousness through the lens of transcultural inquiry to create a new paradigm for the fine art of living:

*Just as skilled builders need expert knowledge of their media and tools, so we need better somatic knowledge to enhance our understanding and performance in the arts and the humanities; and this includes the cultivation of what I consider the highest art of all—that of perfecting our humanity and living better lives. We need to cultivate ourselves, because true humanity is not a mere biological given but an educational achievement in which the body, mind, and culture must be thoroughly involved.*<sup>24</sup>

Our ability to explore integration can only take place in a safe environment. Abraham Maslow, in his essay *A Theory of Human Motivation*, places humanity’s need for safety, second only to basic physiological needs.<sup>25</sup> According to neuroscientist Stephen Porges—*neuroception*, the internal surveillance system that monitors “whether situations or people are safe”, plays an extremely important role in our ability to hold each other in our hearts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Shusterman, “Body and the Arts: The Need for Somaesthetics,” *Diogenes* 59 (1-2) (2013): 7–20.

<sup>24</sup> Shusterman, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Abraham Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370–96.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Porges, “Neuroception,” *Zero to Three*, May 2004, 19–24.

Shusterman creates a safe place for pleasure and entertainment as a form of art, confronting “perhaps the most stubborn dogma of all: the opposition of pleasure to meaning and truth”:

*More generally, our appreciation of art’s sensuous beauties has an important somatic dimension, not simply because they are grasped through our bodily senses—including the sense of proprioception that traditional aesthetics has ignored—but moreover because art’s emotional values, like all emotion, must be experienced somatically to be experienced at all.<sup>27</sup>*



Shelley Lake, *Infinity*, 2019  
Digital Scene Simulation, 48” by 84” pigmented ink on canvas

Integration takes place in the *individual*. Integration takes place in the *relationship between individuals*. Integration takes place between *cultures and nation states*. And integration *awakens the spirit* to unleash our innate intelligence and infinite wisdom.

The bodymind is a roadmap for beauty and the spirit gate into creation, our common denominator, our inescapable temple—the sacred connection of humanity with divinity.

At the heart of chiropractic philosophy is a system that allows the body to heal itself—seeking harmony between mind, body, and spirit. When the mind and body are in balance, the spirit will follow.

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<sup>27</sup> Shusterman, “Body and the Arts,” 18.

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