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Articles

## What's in a Name? Somatics and the Historical Revisionism of Thomas Hanna

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### Introduction

In the 1970s, the founder of somatics, Thomas Hanna, wrote a series of works claiming a “somatic” tradition among European philosophers. With psychologist, educator, and scholar Eleanor Criswell, Hanna founded the Novato Institute for Somatic Research and Training in 1975, as well as the *Somatics: Magazine-Journal of the Bodily Arts and Sciences*. By 1976, Hanna produced an essay, “The Field of Somatics,” for his magazine-journal, rhetorically beckoning the practical field into being after he had already co-founded its first institutions. This article critiques Hanna’s writing from the period, aiming to prove not only that Hanna’s work was historically revisionist, but also that Hanna’s articulation of a field of somatics emergent from a “Western” philosophical tradition fabricated the grounds for the field of somatics as such. His naming of the somatic field was thus ultimately performative; through writing, Hanna aimed to provide historical and terminological bases upon which white body-based research, practice, and therapy, which emerged in the United States and Europe, could be institutionally advantaged by reconstructing history to privilege them. Hanna’s position as the somatics progenitor has reached encyclopedic status,<sup>1</sup> and therefore his work to formulate a historically and philosophically Western basis of a somatics field continues to provide cover for white somatic practitioners whose institutionally minted somatic forms extract philosophical and practical knowledge from non-white body-mind practices internationally.

I center my critique on the general term for therapeutic body-based practices that Hanna coined: *somatics*, and its Greek root, *sōma*. The operation of both in the logics of white-centric somatic practices has received little critical attention from researchers. Meanwhile, Hanna’s definition of *somatics* provides the basic logic by which practices deriving from vastly different cultures, practitioners, and philosophical histories can be brought together into a global network. The use of the word *somatics* to certify body-based practices falls in line with the European scholarly tradition of taxonomic formalization and institutional standardization. As such, the term *somatics* significantly gestures not only toward Eurocentric scholarly habitus, but to colonial history.

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The terminological and taxonomical facets of colonial power have been well historicized by Mary Louise Pratt, who wrote in 1992 of “the continental, transnational aspirations of European science” (Pratt 1992, 25). She used as an example the work of the eighteenth-century naturalist Linnaeus, who like many others “deliberately revived Latin for his nomenclature precisely because it was nobody’s national language” (1992, 31). During colonization, Latin and Greek were put to use to draw the world together into a unified European system of scientific classification. As Pratt wrote, “One by one the planet’s life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order” (1992, 31). Within this article, I argue that Hanna initiated the field of somatics precisely in the colonial tradition of European science, even while doing so as a critique of European scientific thought itself.

With this body of research, I aim to supplement recent work—such as that of Resmaa Menakem, Ben Spatz, and Margherita De Giorgi—that formulates ways of challenging or undoing the colonial logics (or what De Giorgi would call the “paracolonial”) embedded in somatics.<sup>2</sup> I focus on how colonial logics operate within the structures of etymological genealogy and Eurocentric historicity through which Hanna formulated the field of somatics. When Hanna began writing the field of somatics into existence, he claimed it as the inheritor of his own imagined, Western tradition of “somatic philosophers” including Darwin, Freud, Lorenz, Piaget, Reich, Kant, Kierkegaard, Marx, Casirer, Camus and Merleau-Ponty. Hanna’s way of seeing “the West” is embedded in the term, and there it behaves as an organizing principle within the field, enacting—and itself *being*—a Eurocentric method of ordering global body-based practices. I aim to show that, despite efforts of some somatics leaders to the contrary, the field of somatics continues to reiterate Hanna’s pronounced intentions in naming the field as such. Most fundamentally, what I argue herein is that the field of somatics, so long as it has organized around the logics of Hanna’s term, has repeated the historical revisionism and supremacist falsehoods upon which his vision of somatics was formulated in the 1970s. Hanna framed a Western philosophical history for somatics that has since long implicitly “justified” why anybody who is not European or white American should be excluded from the lineage of innovators central to the field.

In pursuit of this argument, in this article I set aside the praxeological aspects of body-based techniques, now termed as *somatic*, to address the historical and etymological logics through which Hanna envisioned somatics as an institution (and which continue to be perpetuated within the field). I move through his sources in philosophy and theology, looking at how he attempted to reshape the history of “Western philosophy” into a history of somatic philosophers. I critique his oversimplistic comparisons between “East” and “West,” showing the ways Hanna’s thinking mirrored the drives and operations of scholastic Orientalism. I address the continued influence of Hanna’s Eurocentric institutional and historical logics on the current field of somatics and the work of its institutional leaders. I end with a proposal for overwriting Hanna’s historicization of the *sōma*, following the various uses of the term from Homeric Greek, in which the *sōma* signaled a dead body, to Koine Greek, in which the *sōma* signaled social death and thus became a euphemism for the body of the slave. Rebuilding a “deep time” history relating *sōma* and somatics, I propose the field reground its understanding of the “first-person experience of the body,” informed by Afropessimism, Black Accelerationism, and Afrofuturist thought.<sup>3</sup>

## I. *Sōma*: An Aggregate Body

Deriving from the Greek *σῶμα*, an ancient word with myriad meanings denoting the physical body, *sōma* had by Hanna’s lifetime been through a long, rough etymological ride (Renehan 1979). Mediterranean antiquity and later European medicine and scholarship would have produced for Hanna a tangled, muddled, incoherent corpus of references to *sōma*, comprising a wide, cross-disciplinary, conflicted, and disjointed topography of use. Although addressing the term *sōma* as the etymological root of his vision for a field of somatics, Hanna’s publications do not address

the muddled history of the *sōma* and further ignore the disunity of the term's meaning among the works most influential to Hanna's own conception. To create somatic order of European historical thought, Hanna created false historical stability within the term *sōma* itself. Hanna then projected a false etymology of *sōma* onto a myriad of European thinkers in his pursuit of "somatically" reframing European philosophical history. Hanna's framing of the term *sōma* shows his unwillingness to address the complexities and disunities present in the Greek word he chose to pluck from history and wield within the name of his new field of somatics. In turn, that unwillingness speaks to Hanna's larger proclivity to imagine uncanny, cross temporal unity into the otherwise disjointed, internally conflicted history of Europe.

Hanna's most well-known definition of the *sōma* can be found in a 1986 essay "What is Somatics?" Therein, Hanna defined the "soma" into a recursive relationship with his vision of somatics itself: "Somatics is the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception" (Hanna 1986). Since that time, this basic definition of somatics and its object of study—articulated as the body from within—has provided the foundation upon which a diversity of allied body-based practices network and co-organize, most notably through the creation of the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association founded in 1988.

In 2004, Hanna's close colleague Don Hanlon Johnson spoke on the sources Hanna used to define the *sōma*, describing the concept of the ancient Greek *sōma* as a living body opposed in nature to the abject and objectified state of *necros* (2004, 106). Johnson went on to substantiate this explanation of the "classical Greek soma" with a reference to Dale B. Martin's heavily biblical work, *The Corinthian Body* (1995).<sup>4</sup> As the title of Martin's work suggests, the book's investigation of the classical conception of *sōma* was conducted through an analysis of Corinthians, in which it adopted a Pauline sense of *sōma* within the Bible as articulated in mid-twentieth-century German theological scholarship. Indeed, evidence strongly suggests that Hanna's conception of *sōma* was informed by a short-lived (and ultimately incorrect) understanding of *sōma* that emerged in biblical scholarship.

It is highly likely that Hanna was first exposed to the understanding of *sōma* he articulated in his later writings while in divinity school at the University of Chicago, where he began his undergraduate work in 1954 and his PhD in 1958. It was Rudolf Bultmann who first used "the *sōma*" to approach the notion of embodied, lived personhood, and he did so by identifying *sōma* as a Greek biblical term particularly meaningful within Pauline texts. Bultmann's work was published in English translation beginning in the early 1950s and took divinity schools by storm. Bultmann wrote, "It is clear that *sōma* does not mean 'body form' nor just 'body,' either," and, he continued, "by 'body' he [Paul] means the whole person—undoubtedly in some specific respect which we have yet to define more exactly" (Bultmann 2007, 194). Then, Bultmann extended this claim of what the apostle Paul meant by the *sōma* into the very direction that later "somatic practitioners" would call particularly somatic (after Hanna). Bultmann wrote, "It is clear that the 'sōma' is not something that outwardly clings to a man's real self (to his soul, for instance), but belongs to its very essence, so that we can say man does not have a 'sōma'; he is a 'sōma'" (Bultmann 2007, 194).

However, within scholarship of Hanna's time, the *sōma* was a site for an etymological debate that Hanna never chose to address in his lifetime of work—one which tore apart the embodied/subjective wholeness Hanna proposed as fundamental to the etymological foundations of the term *sōma* itself. As pointed out by Bruno Snell in 1943, in Homeric Greek, *sōma* seems only to refer to the corpse left after the departure of psyche (Snell 1943). So, studies of Homer caused Snell, in his influential *The Discovery of the Mind*, to posit that in ancient Greece "the physical body of man was comprehended, not as a unit but as an aggregate" (Snell 1943, 6). Such an aggregate was, according to Snell, as much about the body's passage through different states as it was about the various parts and pieces composing the body as a whole. Bultmann's biblical argument could not actually account for wider use of the word *sōma* among ancient speakers of Greek, and

Snell's work indeed pointed out the historical disunity of the word *sōma* extending from the classical period to Christian antiquity.

Around the time of the translation of Bultmann's work into English, texts written in English emerged that seemed to reconfirm Bultmann's theory in American theology, such as John A. T. Robinson's *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (1952). As described by Robert H. Gundry in *Sōma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (1976), "the book has had a profound effect—along with Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*—on current [1970s] understanding of Paul's use of the *sōma*" (Gundry 1976, 5). Robinson and Bultmann's definition for *sōma* was particularly alluring to biblical apologists, as it argued that *sōma* was a biblical expression of embodied personhood and, as such, bolstered arguments that distanced antique Christianity from hatred of the body. By the 1970s, such an idea was particularly attractive among various (New Age) popular cultural movements to which many forward-thinking American theologians, including Hanna, were drawn.

By the time Hanna was working in earnest to develop the field of somatics according to an understanding of the term from midcentury biblical studies, Bultmann and Robinson's definition of *sōma* had been all but overturned. Writing of *sōma*'s uses across a wide variety of Greek works—by Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschines, Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes—Gundry's 1976 work reflected on the shiftiness and slipperiness of *sōma*'s meaning within antiquity and concluded that the word maintained inconstancy throughout its use into the twentieth century. Within his work, Gundry determined that midcentury arguments that the Pauline *sōma* related to personhood were incorrect:

We may fairly presume that the lexicographers have chosen the best examples known to them from ancient Greek literature to support the proposed meaning "person" for *sōma*. Yet on examination in context it appears that *sōma* is not at all a comprehensive term. The term always points in a contrary direction—toward thingness in one or another capacity (as slaves, prisoners, troops, corpses, entries on a census list, and so on) or toward other specifically physical emphases (bodily presence, sustenance, procreation, and the like). We may excuse the lexicographers for giving "person" as an equivalent for *sōma*, simply because in the cited passages "body" would sound awkward in our language. But since context makes clear that *sōma* always focuses attention on the physical, we would make a mistake to appeal to these extra-Biblical passages in support of a holistic definition. (Gundry 1976, 15)

Gundry's work against the holistic definition of *sōma* was a powerful analysis of the problems language and translation pose within historical textual analysis. Gundry's point, however, was also simple: as with any language that existed so long and so widely among different groups as ancient Greek, a certain shiftiness in the meaning of words is inevitable. Gundry's double-pronged argument—which overturned the definition of *sōma* as embodied personhood and denied the stability of *sōma* itself as a word—laid bare the shortcomings of previous idealistic interpretations of *sōma* as embodied personhood. Nonetheless, Hanna's somatic thought in the budding field of movement therapy depended on such an interpretation, and from the 1970s on, Hanna either ignored such scholarship or ceased reading about the somatic etymology that had inspired his life's work. Primarily through Hanna's influence, the flourishing of the somatic as a whole-person embodiment and first-person embodied perspective transferred from mid-twentieth-century biblical studies to various alternative cultural scenes arising in the 1970s, and thereby in relation to experimental dance practices.<sup>5</sup> And so, it is here that Hanna contributes to the confused meaning of *sōma* in European scholarship without recognizing that he has done so. Hanna adopts the term as if it were settled etymological inheritance when it had in fact been a site of disunity not only in his own time, but for thousands of years. This initial act of ignoring the disunity of the *somatic* term became the first in a long series of acts through which Hanna sought to conjure a

Western, Eurocentric genealogy of somatic thought. It is worth emphasizing that Hanna was a self-proclaimed founding scholar of a new discipline, who began his work by either editing out, ignoring, or remaining ignorant to the antique uses of *sōma* to refer to the bodies of slaves, to the dead, to prisoners, and to foundlings and indentured servants listed among other “property” in ancient records.

As it stands, Hanna’s earliest impulse toward the *soma* as a source-term for somatics drew upon a theological conception of the *sōma* popular for a mere twenty years in biblical scholarship. It was, in fact, just six years after Hanna first described his conception of *sōma* as a living bodily being that Gundry published his work *Sōma in Biblical Theology* and began his dispute of the claim that the word *sōma* had anything to do with body as personage. Gundry’s work has been substantially supported by such recent works as Lorenzo Scornaienchi’s *Sarx und Sōma bei Paulus: Der Mensch zwischen Destruktivität und Konstruktivität* (2008), which argues that Pauline use of the word *sōma* related the physical body to its objectified state, whether living or dead, as slave or corpse (Scornaienchi 2008). Indeed, the *sōma* that biblical scholarship now considers true to the Pauline texts is precisely the kind of objectified and dehumanized status of bodily being that Hanna most hoped to evade in his conception of somatics.

## II. Somatology and Somatics: Instituting a Field

Historical revisionism is part and parcel of the methods by which Hanna initially sought to institute the field of somatics, and such revisionism remains present, as well, in later works that sought to restructure or restabilize somatics as a field. In 2018, Johnson described the early impetus toward instituting the field of somatics in his edited volume *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices: Toward an Inclusive Somatics*:

Nearly fifty years ago, a handful of us joined in using the Greek-rooted term somatics as an umbrella designed to coax together a fragmented community of innovative and revolutionary teachers who had managed to craft methods of sensory awareness, touch, breathing, sounding, and moving to address the healing of old and widespread traumas, and to enhance human functioning. . . . They shared the common goal of addressing a very peculiar virus originating in Paris, London, and Athens dividing “mind” from “body,” a virus that was harmful not only to infected individuals but to larger communities when it became a weapon used to justify colonialism, slavery, displacement of tribal peoples, and ravaging the earth. (2018, 16)

Johnson’s origin story for somatics in *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices* focuses on the shared motivation of the field’s early advocates and harkens to body-mind praxis and community building as operations fundamental to the institutionalization of somatics. Johnson clearly aims in this quote to clarify colonization and racism as central concerns of somatics. Further, as the title of the book suggests, he intended to diversify published somatic voices. It is thus notable that Johnson distanced somatics from Hanna, who remained unlisted on a page that not only includes as somatics progenitors Arnold Mindell, Joanna Macy, Stacy Hains, Anna Halprin, Gabrielle Roth, Susan Griffin, but also includes Wilhem Reich, Gandhi, Trigant Burrow, Carl Rogers, and Eugene Gendlin as inspirations—if not of “somatics” itself, then of its expanded field or perhaps milieu (Johnson 2018, 16). Indeed, Hanna is completely absent from the book.

Sixteen years earlier, however, Johnson told the narrative about the beginning of somatics in a somewhat different fashion:

Thomas Hanna, like myself a recovering philosopher, succeeded in gaining broad acceptance for a name and theoretical umbrella to the many particular schools:

he called the field “somatics,” inspired both by Husserl’s vision of “somatology,” a science that would unite a methodical knowledge of the body derived from experiential studies with the biological sciences; and by the classical Greek *sōma*, the living bodily person, in contrast to *necros*, the dead mass of flesh.<sup>6</sup> (Johnson 2004, 106)

Historical documentation on the founding of somatics more clearly supports Johnson’s 2004 account (above) that it was specifically Hanna who pushed for his Greek umbrella term to gain wider acceptance and use. Although various progenitors of experimental and therapeutic practices did adopt the term *somatics* over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, it was Hanna who most focused on what *somatics* was supposed to mean, both to the practices it aimed to ally and as a basis for the institutionalization of those practices. Johnson’s later decentering of Hanna in the founding of the concept of somatics reads as disingenuous—as an attempt to rewrite the origins of the field to make it more appealing. Rather than do the work to critically address Hanna’s white, male-centric means and methods to institute the somatics field, Johnson’s *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices* paints a rosy picture.

Hanna aimed to institute the somatics field by working with two distinct corpora. As Johnson noted in 2004, one pulled from biblical scholarship Hanna had read in divinity school (which Johnson mischaracterized as a classical Greek meaning of the term), the other from Husserl’s somatology. By the beginning of the 1970s, Hanna’s conception of somatics as a burgeoning field of body-mind research had crystallized enough to produce a book-length volume on the subject (*Bodies in Revolt* 1970). The work primarily attended to the philosophical, historical, and sociopolitical justification of somatics as an instituted field of body-based research. Perhaps the most important source Hanna used to construct that justification was Husserl’s conception of somatology. Indeed, Husserl had proposed somatology in *Ideas III* as the “science of animate organism,” grappling with the first and third-person perspectives through which such a science would be grounded—a topic Hanna began to deal with not only in *Bodies in Revolt*, but also in his 1973 essay on somatology as well as in his 1986 definition of the soma itself (Husserl 1980, 7).

In *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking* (1970), Hanna claimed somatology to be the most important philosophical framework of recent history:

Now that we are in an historical position where we can appraise what has been developing during the past century and more, it is clear that the movements of existentialism, phenomenology and humanistic psychology can only be understood as crucial confluent of a single movement: namely, the development of somatology. (Hanna 1970, 157)

Like much of Hanna’s *Bodies in Revolt*, the above quote exemplifies his pursuit of rewriting philosophical history, centering somatology within it as a stepping-stone toward the ultimate centering of his own somatics field. Indeed, Hanna’s articulation of somatology in 1970 is a case in point of his larger pursuit of retroactively aligning a collection of Western philosophers behind his own somatic universalist vision.

Evidence of the influence of somatology over Hanna is clearest in his essay “The Project of Somatology” (1973), wherein Hanna nonetheless seems to engage in a bit of useless historical revisionism. Despite the fact that Husserl’s advocacy for a somatological field most profoundly and directly influenced Hanna’s impetus to likewise found somatics, Hanna diminishes the influence of Husserl over his work. The move smacks of a disingenuity much more pronounced than Johnson’s, as diminishing the influence of Husserl could contribute to Hanna’s claim as sole progenitor, as a somatics “originator.” Detaching somatology from its strong historical co-relation with Husserl, Hanna instead produced a revisionist account of somatology as a philosophical pursuit

inspired by the work of Kant and merely inclusive of Husserl alongside “Kierkegaard, Marx, [and] Nietzsche” (1973, 6). De-emphasizing Husserl’s importance to somatology allowed Hanna to claim a more general somatological movement that had become, according to Hanna (while previously unrecognized as such), the most important organizing principle of philosophy since Kant. Hanna claimed somatics as the rightful descendent of somatology, and as such, somatics became—again, according to Hanna—the inheritor of a philosophical tradition. Hanna also claimed Heidegger as a philosopher of somatology, writing that Heidegger employed somatology “with perhaps the greatest success” (Hanna 1970, 73). Interestingly enough, Heidegger’s most well-known address of somatology arose from a dispute with Husserl in 1927 over an *Encyclopedia Britannica* article (Guignon 1983, 60–61). Therein, Heidegger wrote about the “one-sided reflections of somatology”—by no means an endorsement of the concept (60–61).

Ultimately, Hanna’s collection of somatic philosophers in *Bodies in Revolt*—some he explicitly associated with somatology, others he did not—included Darwin, Freud, Lorenz, Piaget, Reich, Kant, Kierkegaard, Marx, Casirer, Camus and Merleau-Ponty, all clarified by Hanna as the most important (rather than exhaustive) collection of Western somatic philosophers. They were each then critiqued, in a style resembling a book report, for their readability and various limitations. *Bodies in Revolt*, as the foundational text for Hanna’s vision of a somatics field, sought to unify European philosophical history into a project of Hanna’s imagination. Hanna disregarded historical contexts while marginalizing his direct influences, reducing the presence of precisely those texts from which his own was most derivative, and inventing a lineage of important philosophers as somatics forefathers, many of whom minimally dealt with—or simply did not deal with—any cognate of the term.

While Hanna invented a lineup of Western somatic philosophers, he also disregarded philosophical histories actually relevant to his project. Hanna did not, for example, mention the writings on somatology that extend into sixteenth-century German Protestant Scholasticism and set the historical conditions to which Husserl’s and others (and by consequence, Hanna’s) were responsive. These include Otto Casmann (sixteenth-century German scholastic thinker) and Samuel Strimesius (seventeenth-century physicist and theologian). Hanna also completely ignored eighteenth-century scholarly discourses around the term *somatology*, like that developed by Jeremy Bentham. As described by John Hill Burton in his *Introduction to the Study of the Works of Jeremy Bentham* (1843), in Bentham’s work

Natural History and Natural Philosophy are respectively represented by Physiurgic Somatology, and Anthropurgic Somatology: the one signifying the science of bodies, in so far as operated upon in the course of nature without the intervention of man—the other the science of bodies, so far as man, by his knowledge of convertible powers of nature, is able to operate upon them. (Burton 1843, 16)

In his conception of somatology, Bentham introduced an interesting formulation of mind-body split: there are bodies everywhere, but there are those upon which a human mind cannot operate, and those upon which it can. As much as Hanna’s somatics responds to and amends this claim, Hanna never addressed it. In the end, it seems Hanna’s most lengthy public writing on a philosopher who actually wrote on somatology was Immanuel Kant, who, as Francesco Tommasi quipped, “explicitly mentions somatology at least once” (Tommasi 2018, 134).

Thorough analysis of Hanna’s constructed history clarifies the degree to which Hanna wished to be associated with the *Great History of Western Philosophy* rather than with the drudgery of the history of medicine and the many physicians who used the word *somatic* since the eighteenth century. Interestingly, Hanna never claimed that his adoption of the term *sōma* derived from its uses in medicine and psychology, despite the fact that it was in these fields that the word *somatic* (rather than *somatology*) emerged and remained in heavy use. Medicine developed the term *somatic* to identify both the relationality and self-incorporation of the body within the tissues of the body itself. Thus,



the *somatic* emerged in late eighteenth-century medical texts that used the term to demarcate the skin, skeletal muscle, aspects of the vascular and voluntary nervous systems, and sensory organs that together make the basis for one's contact with the environment surrounding one's body. In a sense, though the use of the term *somatic* in medicine related to specific anatomical structures, the way medicine used the term to label tissues directly associated with embodied self-awareness and self-oriented sensation does resemble Hanna's definition for *sōma* itself.

There are a host of non-celebrated European medical practitioners important to the concept of the somatic that remain unmentioned by Hanna. By 1818, the use of *somatic* to demarcate anatomical systems concerned with environmental contact was amended by Johann Christian August Heinroth for use in psychology, in which Heinroth coined the term *psychosomatic* to describe the causes of insomnia as rooted in the body-mind relationship.<sup>7</sup> Thus, psychology shifted the term *somatic* to describe a process through which mind and body, flesh and intellect, were mutually co-constructive. Around the same period, Philippe Pinel had returned to ancient theories of hysteria, hypothesizing that mental illness could derive from organs outside the brain—namely the uterus (Kleinert 1828, 141; Porter 1993, 262). Pinel's early work on the somatic is exemplified by the 1828 German publication *Allgemeines Repertorium der gesammten deutschen medizinisch-chirurgischen Journalistik*, which briefly referred to Pinel to discuss psychological thought on “die somatischen Ursachen der Geisteskrankheiten.”<sup>8</sup> With Freud and Breuer, psychosomatic ideas informed new therapeutic approaches to mind-body relations, ultimately influencing later somatic approaches to mind-body therapy. For his part, Hanna reclaimed Freud from psychoanalysis as a somatic philosopher, writing of him that “the enormous legacy of Freud's writings for the late twentieth century is not his technique of psychoanalysis, but his evolutionary somatic vision of the human creature” (Hanna 1970, 79). In claiming Freud as a somatic philosopher, Hanna still refuses to admit Freud's actual *praxis* into the sphere of somatic philosophy.

Hanna's rejection of medical and psychological praxes becomes clearer upon the publication of “What is Somatics?” in 1986, wherein he critiqued the fields of medicine and psychology for their inability to access the *sōma* through their “third-person” viewpoints. With no references to previous thinkers or somatological traditions in the essay, Hanna began a veritable takedown of fields that had used the term *somatic*: “medicine takes a third-person view of the human being”; “physiology, for example, takes a third-person view of the human being”; and “psychology, for example, takes a third-person view of the human being” (Hanna 1986). Hanna thus defined medicine, physiology, and psychology as methodologically incapable of addressing the soma:

When a human being is observed from the outside—i.e., from a third-person viewpoint—the phenomenon of a human body is perceived. But, when this same human being is observed from the first person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive senses, a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma. (Hanna 1986)

The quote marks an almost mythical severance between Hanna's approach to praxis and all previous approaches to healing, and thus between somatics and its medical and psychological predecessors. The quote further distances somatics from many psychologists – including his partner Eleanor Criswell – who were fundamental to the development of somatics since its beginning.<sup>9</sup> In distancing somatics and its living, first-person soma from the third-person body Hanna attached to medicine, physiology, and psychology, Hanna asserted an ultimately dominating perspective on somatics that, with the principle of self-sensing, antiquated all other fields. Riding on the coattails of Ivan Illich's critique of institutional healthcare in *Medical Nemesis* (1974), Hanna claimed the *soma* to be as much a fact of internal experience as uniquely his domain—predated by no other forms of therapeutic practice in the West.<sup>10</sup>

In the writings in which Hanna initiated the somatics field into being, Hanna chose to both centralize and problematize the Western history he was naming as his inheritance. He associated his

own thinking with few but the looming figures of European philosophical history, all the while arguing that those same figures were misfits and unsung visionaries, “eccentric voices crying vainly in the wilderness of the 19th century,” as he called Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, and Husserl (Hanna 1973, 6). By repositioning some of Europe’s most celebrated philosophers as unheard voices and disregarded minority reports, Hanna sought to isolate both his self-claimed philosophical lineage and his own work from the disembodiment of the West even while restructuring somatics into the center of Western philosophy since the Enlightenment.

Within Hanna’s narration, the West was protagonist and antagonist. The Western field of somatics would revolutionize a historically disembodied Western culture. The history of the West as a disembodied block would be overturned by the “mutant” culture now somatologically synthesizing the history of European somatological philosophy for the somatic revolution. Hanna wrote about how such a cultural revolution in the West would not upset or overturn the logics of the philosophical legacy of somatics he built up in his 1970 *Bodies in Revolt*: “After all, it would seem only fitting that the cultural tradition should display some positive paternal interest in the mutant child it has fathered” (Hanna 1970, 20). Notably, Hanna, as a proponent of Lorenz’s ethology, likely derives his concept of the “mutant” from Lorenz’s work on the domestication of geese but uses it to signal a coming techno-human supposedly foreseen by Western philosophers.<sup>11</sup>

Hanna later described somatics as interstitial to a mass movement: “Millions of people thrusting somatology into such prominence are also those who are learning that a wholistic vision of man supplies the only antidote” (Hanna 1973, 14). The first-person soma was the explorer of this revolutionary new age, of this new “New World” to be discovered:

After centuries of third-person exploration of the powers and structures of the enviro-ning universe, we have now entered an era of exploration of the powers and structures of that corresponding universe: the somatic centrum which is the explorer. (Hanna 1973, 14)

Thus Hanna’s Eurocentrism manifests his revolutionary spirit, from which comes the basis of his colonial drive and thus his Orientalism. As the next section will show, Hanna’s generalization of swaths of European thought into uncanny agreement produced the basis upon which he would argue that an ideologically unified West existed in contrast to a likewise differently and ideologically unified East. Somatics, by consequence, was to be integral to a revolution within the West that used European scientific abilities to systematize ancient body-mind forms of practice. Hanna’s ideas of the Western philosophical history of somatics, the division of the globe into halves of West and East, and the field of somatics as a calling to “westerners” to reintegrate the globe into what Hanna called “planetary thinking”—these continue to be perpetuated within the field of somatics Hanna beckoned into being.

### III. “Eastern Influences”: The Orientalism of Somatics

Following Hanna, boilerplate descriptions of the field of somatics tend to historicize it as a Western field of body-mind practices with various “Eastern influences.” This is traceable back to at least the 1970s, when Hanna tended to describe the “Eastern tradition” as an influence upon somatics, or as a collection of skills that should be used to positively influence “the evolution of Western experience” (Hanna 1973, 6). Hanna’s “The Project of Somatology” (1973) is an early exemplar of this, framing somatics as progression toward planetary thinking that would emerge from the newly embodied “Western science” of somatics via its extraction of knowledge from the Eastern tradition:

The Eastern tradition (and particularly the complex science of yoga) has not only explored altered states of consciousness but has devised effective techniques for

bringing them about; and this is a massive tradition of 5000 years of somatic science which has never been entered into by Western science. Stripped of its mythological framework and clarified by the techniques of Western science, the Eastern yogic, meditational, and mystic tradition is an immense source of practical facts about the range of possibilities for human transformation that is possible for any of us. (Hanna 1973, 11)

Five years after Hanna's essay emerged in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Edward Said published his seminal critique of essentializing ideas about "the East" in *Orientalism* (1978). Said's analysis provides what probably remains the most clear-eyed critique of arguments like those of Hanna above, along the way quoting many comparable passages of Orientalist European scholars within his analysis. The cross-applicability of Said's argument to Hanna's work is best facilitated by a comparable passage taken by Said from Gibb's article "Literature" in *The Legacy of Islam*, published in 1931 and quoted in *Orientalism* (likewise for the sake of comparability to yet another passage):

The German romantics turned again to the East, and for the first time made it their conscious aim to open a way for the real heritage of oriental poetry to enter into the poetry of Europe. The nineteenth century, with its new sense of power and superiority, seemed to clang the gate decisively in the face of their design. Today, on the other hand, there are signs of a change. Oriental literature has begun to be studied again for its own sake, and a new understanding of the East is being gained. As this knowledge spreads and the East recovers its rightful place in the life of humanity, oriental literature may once again perform its historic function, and assist us to liberate ourselves from the narrow and oppressive conceptions which would limit all that is significant in literature, thought, and history to our own segment of the globe. (Gibb 1931, 209)<sup>12</sup>

The treatment of the East as a unified, essentialized block, the usefulness of that block as a cultural totality to the West, and its cultural revitalization (identified by Hanna and Gibb alike as a kind of "planetary knowledge"/"life of humanity")—these two problematics are mirrored between Hanna's 1973 quote and that of Gibb in 1931. Writing on Gibb's passage, Said described a "seemingly inviolable over-all identity of something called 'the East' and something else called 'the West,'" further critiquing Gibb's essentializing perspective that "the East could be confronted as a sort of humanistic challenge to the local confines of Western ethnocentricity" (Said [1978] 1994, 257). Hanna's vision for somatics was fundamentally Orientalist, though with a twist. While Gibb could rely on the European historical concept of literature, for somatics to join the Orientalist tradition, Hanna had to first contrive a Western history for the field.

As a field of embodied research, somatics pushes beyond the normal purview of scholarly Orientalism described by Said. Somatics, envisioned by Hanna as a field birthed by bringing together Eastern embodiment and Western intellect, participates in the further Orientalist trope of envisioning the East as feminized and sexualized embodiment against a masculine calculating intellect associated with the West (Said [1978] 1994). Exemplary of this is Hanna's proposition that the universalization of Yogic science necessitated Western science as translator and systematizer. If Hanna's work aimed to challenge the mind-body split as brought about by the binary between body-oriented praxis and theory, he did so by reiterating a false binary of Western articulation and Eastern praxis-based methodologies. Hanna hoped to build his argument about the latter through the former, and thus his blend of West and East followed a historically Eurocentric hierarchy in which the East was perceived as only adaptable to what Hanna called "the human race" in the case that the West would formulate the terms of that universality. Behaving as if an inheritor and intellectual representative of the West, Hanna saw himself as a person with means to translate the East and its somatic traditions, practices, and mythologies so they might be universally applied through the rational power of Western philosophy.

Hanna's Orientalist articulation of somatics, with its confounding of the West with the development of universalist knowledge, continues to reverberate through the field. It shows up in Eurocentrist and Anglocentrist research, much of which deals in oversimplistic binaries between West and East after superficially identifying somatics with an assumedly unified Western tradition. The International Association for Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS), with a 2009 writing of Glenna Batson, participates in reproducing the centralized West and its "non-Western" influences as a historical vision of the most powerful dance science organization in the world. While defining "somatic studies and dance," Batson writes, of "the origins of western somatic education" and "western somatic practitioners," noting in the article that

the origin, growth, and development of somatics did not evolve from western philosophy alone. Although coining the term "somatics," Thomas Hanna was well-aware of the philosophical contribution of the ancient Far East. Both Moshe Feldenkrais and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen drew heavily from Asian disciplines in developing their work. Emilie Conrad D'aoud drew from Haitian and African cultures in developing her work in Continuum movement. As we ponder the questions of multiculturalism in somatics, a deeper one emerges: The integration of cultural histories and practice in the pursuit of a personal—yet universal—set of principles of somatic training implies that somatic studies need to be viewed through the lens of a multi-cultural world. (Batson 2009)

Here, Batson pays lip service to diversity while skipping over the names of at least three important non-white people in the history of somatics—Jigorō Kanō, Haruchi Noguchi, and Katherine Dunham. Posted on the IADMS website, Batson's paper is included as a "resource paper for dancers and teachers," and it inevitably reproduces the kind of partialist history through which Hanna contrived the Western roots of somatics. Batson's paper consequently acts as justification for the centering of somatics institutions in a Western tradition exclusive of but influenced by the externalized East. While giving lip service to multiculturalism, Batson's writing reiterates Hanna's vision of a somatics universalism as intellectually formulated within—and behaving as an antidote to—a Western philosophical tradition.

The seminal somatics scholar Martha Eddy has ventured toward untangling the field of somatics from its problematic claim to universalism. She wrote in 2002 that "I hypothesize that the search for 'the universal,' or 'the humanistic,' or 'the biological' as a through-line of body-mind investigation, has encouraged a mono-cultural approach to 'somatic' pedagogy and to the promotion of the field" (Eddy 2002, 46). To combat the problem, Eddy has sought to write from a perspective that would aim toward "examining how cultural and religious movement practices from diverse cultures have provided philosophical underpinnings and influential theories and practices to the field" (Eddy 2002, 46). While claiming Eastern traditions of body-based practices as predecessors of somatics, Eddy nonetheless based her argument about the field's non-Western source material on two American progenitors of somatics, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Emilie Conrad:

My methodology has involved literature searches and interviews from which, through selected stories and with emphasis on the lives of two women who have been progenitors of somatic movement disciplines (Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Emilie Conrad), I hope to show that in many cases somatic practices often perceived as western concepts and constructs actually also have formative roots from cultures beyond the Euro-American sphere. (Eddy 2002, 46–47)

By focusing on the use of non-Western influences by Euro-American somatics founders, Eddy's historical framing extends somatics beyond the West quite simply in the way somatics as a field has done following Hanna—through westerners who are influenced by practices and practitioners beyond the Euro-American sphere. In other words, Eddy, like Batson, grounds the field of somatics

in a certain lineage of white Europeans and Americans while unceremoniously classifying half the globe as delimited to the status of outsider influence. One is left to question why the non-white practitioners with whom Conrad and Cohen engaged are influences upon somatics rather than classified themselves as progenitors of modern somatic forms. Why is Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's teacher Haruchi Noguchi, whom Cohen credits as the founder of Katsugen Undo—which works with the involuntary nervous system and was practiced by Cohen for thirty-five years—not recognized by somatics institutions such as ISMETA as a somatic form? Such questions extend to the practitioners who trained Emilie Conrad (including Katherine Dunham), as well as to the informants, mentors, and correspondents of other claimed somatics “progenitors,” such as Jigorō Kanō, the teacher of Moshe Feldenkrais in Paris.

Eddy introduced her “Brief History of Somatics” in 2009 by writing that “the field of ‘somatics’ is barely a field. If necessarily seen as one, I liken it to a field of wildflowers with unique species randomly popping up across wide expanses” (Eddy 2009, 6). Thus, Eddy answers a difficult social and political question about what somatics is, as a field, with an appeal to the innocence of flowers. However, as a field, somatics does not describe Swami Vivekananda as a progenitor, though he brought yoga to Europe and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and rendered the form palpable and performable for Europeans, influencing intellectuals and transcendentalists along the way. The field of somatics does not describe Shri Yogendra and Swami Kuvalayananda as progenitors, though they created the initial blends of yoga with European gymnastics, systematizing the initial flowing sequences, by now deeply associated with modern yoga. The field of somatics does not describe Jigorō Kanō as a progenitor, though he was the teacher of Moshe Feldenkrais in Paris (1933), invented Judo by reworking jujitsu, and traveled, taught, lectured, and wrote extensively on embodied practice and mindfulness in his life. Describing European gymnastics as of “little use for the cultivation of the mind as well as for daily life,” Kanō sought to introduce deeply structured, well-researched, historically rooted mind-body practices into the European context (2005, 53). Thus, these early twentieth-century mind-body researchers from India and Japan did not merely influence white European and American practitioners—they formulated twentieth-century mind-body research and laid the necessary groundwork for its institutionalization. All the field of somatics had to do to structurally exist was create an alliance of white practitioners who built a body of practices upon their backs, citing them as antecedents and influences.

It remains that the field of somatics seems to be closed off from asserting the non-white teachers of its claimed progenitors as themselves founders of integrated practices or teaching methods definable as somatics and thus integral to—rather than behaving as outsider influence upon—the field of somatics itself. This is despite the fact that such teachers were in many cases engaged in the project of “modernization” of longstanding body-mind practices, which is explicitly articulated by Hanna as indicative of a somatics practice. It seems the field of somatics is addressed as “a field of wildflowers,” or conversely as a Western historical lineage, in order to maintain the field's status quo—its “diversification” through inclusion of multicultural participants and international, Eastern and non-white influences alongside its maintenance of an all-white, American and European list of founders, progenitors, and historically important figures. This is exemplified by Eddy's articulation of the history of the somatics field further on in the introduction of a “Brief History of Somatics,” after she had introduced the field as “barely a field”:

From the unique experiences of exploratory individuals across the globe, fresh approaches to bodily care and education emerged. However, it took the outside view of scholars, some fifty years later, to name this phenomenon as the single field of somatic education. Thomas Hanna (1985), supported by Don Hanlon Johnson (2004) and Seymour Kleinman (2004), saw the common features in the “methods” of Gerda and FM Alexander, Feldenkrais, Gindler, Laban, Mensendieck, Middendorf, Mézières, Rolf, Todd, and Trager (and their protégés Bartenieff, Rosen, Selver, Speads, and Sweigard). (Eddy 2009, 6)

It is thus the naming and unifying of somatics by scholars like Hanna and Johnson that severs its history of progenitors from its supposedly multicultural inclusivity. Hanna's naming of somatics cuts the field into two: a series of traceable "inheritances" on the one side, and a collection of cultural "influences" on the other. This severed history of somatics as inheritances and influences extends even beyond the legitimizing mechanisms of teacher-student relations; it is propelled further by Hanna's underlying formulation of the West as the actual, genealogical, structural history of somatics that Hanna sought to indicate by its name and trace with a history of European ideas. This is evidenced by the fact that, while numerous later progenitors of somatics forms studied with and were directly influenced by "somatics progenitors," the field of somatics was also ready to include the work of a later white practitioner who merely adopted non-white body-mind practices to European and American therapy and research. The incorporation of Emilie Conrad into the field of somatics is initially validated by her research work at UCLA under the tutelage of Valerie Hunt, as Eddy describes:

Her goal was to make her accumulated knowledge universally accessible—to broaden it beyond a folkloric experience and make it the basis for a technique of communication of the organism in its environment. Her work uses non-culturally specific terms, such as "cellular world" to describe a technique for the freeing up of bodily energy. (Eddy 2002, 56)

Here, Eddy implicitly identifies Conrad's emergence as a progenitor of a somatic form with the extension of her practice beyond the "culturally specific" and into the "biologically universal." Biological "universalism," as Eddy elsewhere acknowledges, is not quantified by the isolation of organisms, environments, and "cellular worlds" from so-called folkloric experience. Such an argument asserts a scientific contrast between cultural situatedness and the researcher/practitioner's supposedly achievable unbiased position. It is instead whiteness that has been historically coded as universalism in somatics. Nonetheless, Conrad's recognition as a somatics practitioner requires her engagement in universalism. As argued by Isabelle Ginot, this is essential to engagement in somatics discourse:

Somatic discourses are mobilized by thoughts of the universal. They are freighted with innumerable ideologies: the natural (indeed, the animal), the transcendent (indeed, the religious), the biological difference of the sexes, and cultural hierarchies. They cover the world of their tautology, ignoring what is unfamiliar to them and creating a system of reference centered on itself. My hypothesis is the following: behind the insistence on the singularity of each corporeality, most somatic methods have as a backdrop a homogenous, universal, ahistorical, and occidental body. (Ginot 2010, 23)

In this quote, Ginot describes not only the universalism defining somatics, but the consequential alliance of somatics with colonial pseudosciences.<sup>13</sup> In its appeal to scientific universalism, somatics also codes universalism as articulative by white authority "among the natives." Whiteness was implicitly fundamental to the academic and intellectual validation Hanna herself saw as key to the institutionalization of the somatics field. Thus, the system of so-called Western inheritances and the so-called Eastern (or diasporic Black, global Indigenous, and philosophically/praxeologically Asian) influences that propels the somatics field, its historicization, and its legitimization here again follows scholarly power dynamics Said described in *Orientalism*. Somatics uses non-white body-mind practices, teachers, and innovators as "native informants" within the power structures of American and European academia to fill the belly of neocolonial white research (Said [1978] 1994, 324).

## IV. A White-Centric Somatics

The consequences of this are dire. The historicization of somatics continues to be perpetuated by powerful figures in the field who repeat fable-like origin stories. Work that critically investigates the history of somatics has been published in papers that continue to be treated as peripheral within the field (see Ginot 2010) or for too long locked up in PhD dissertations (such as the late Doran George's "A Conceit of the Natural Body: The Universal-Individual in Somatic Dance").<sup>14</sup> Hanna's misconstruing of the *sōma* meanwhile continues to problematically inform scholarship both inside and beyond the field of somatics. A 2012 work by Lin Zhu titled *The Translator-Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, for example, draws on the problematic work of Douglas Robinson, which applies somatics to translation, and thus turns to Hanna for a definition of *sōma*. Zhu writes that "he [Hanna] defines soma after the Greek word (from Hesiod onward) meaning 'the living body in its wholeness'" (Zhu 2012, 131). Zhu further clarifies that Hanna's Husserlian somatological "study of the relationships between knowledge derived from directed bodily experience and scientific studies of the body" drew from "the classical Greek contrast between the dead body, *necros*, and the enspirited person, *soma*"—a definition cited from Johnson that I dispute (Zhu 2012, 132).

At present, Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color are often left unnamed or vaguely mentioned in somatics writings and are, by consequence, by and large left out of historical records. Essays from the book *Dance, Somatics and Spiritualities: Contemporary Sacred Narratives* (2014) provide a series of examples of how white somatics practitioners have wielded such vagueness when speaking of their Indigenous teachers and mentors: "I worked with indigenous shamans in Mexico, the Andes, and the Amazon of Peru." "In my fifties, I worked with Toltec shamanic practices." "I have lived for several years in Australia, with some exposure to indigenous culture there" (River 2014, 322; Poyner 2014, 211). Decades of such white exclusion of the names of their BIPOC "sources" means that many authors are lost to history.

Meanwhile, those most empowered within the field of somatics seem stuck on basic questions. Of a discussion with Michael Roguski on Emilie Conrad, Eddy, for example, writes:

We debate, should Continuum, her [Conrad's] somatic method, be taught with more explanation of where these ideas and healing movements come from? Working further with Roguski, a New Zealander with Maori heritage, who is a post-colonial theorist trained in psychology and cultural anthropology, helped me forge more questions. (Eddy 2019)

Certainly, whether it is a necessity to historicize Black diasporic and Indigenous authorship of what became Continuum movement is not even a question. The answer is yes. Conrad's work on Black diasporic dance should also be contextualized in relation to the anthropological work of, for example, Zora Neale Hurston and Conrad's teacher Katherine Dunham, as well as Dunham's teacher Robert Redfield and his concept of "folk-urban continuum" (Raphael-Hernandez 2000; Aschenbrenner 2002). The fact that Eddy proposes such historical necessity as a question reflects the history of somatics as initiated by Hanna and its assumptions about what is worthy of inclusion and necessary to historicize.

As Eddy herself writes, "At present the 3 generations of Somatic Pioneers that I identified in *Mindful Movement* are all white. This is despite the fact that there have been millennia of holistic practices that have been developed by communities of color that contribute to the goals of self-healing and balance of the nervous system" (Eddy 2019). Until Eddy moves beyond merely pointing out the white supremacy characterizing her own historicization of somatics, her various questions about what "whites as dominant forces do to release power" or whether "it is always important to share people's race in citing work" are meaningless (Eddy 2019). If histories of somatics are

Eurocentric, Orientalist, and white supremacist, they need to be critiqued and rewritten to reflect the facts.

As it stands, Black performance studies scholars and somatics practitioners have for decades been doing the work of discussing the othering of non-white bodies in institutionally centralized somatics spaces. In an article on the spirituality of Authentic Movement practice, for example, Christopher-Rasheem McMillan makes a note of his experience: “I am also painfully aware that I am the only black man at this authentic movement workshop” (McMillan 2018, 72). The absent histories of somatics continue to be pointed out for their absence. As written by Sandra Golding of her somatics education, “I realised that the fundamental movement activities and theory within somatic movement and dance therapy are often rooted in different African dance ideologies, and yet they are not always accredited as such” (Golding 2018, 107). Intergenerational and place-rooted knowledges come to the fore in Tada Hozumi’s “Open Letter to Mark Walsh and the Embodiment Conference” (2020), which pointed out the power dynamics in white appropriation (Hozumi 2020). As Hozumi wrote to Walsh, “The people of my ancestral lands are keepers and founders of a lineage of practice your work derives direct benefit from in both material and social capital. That is how close to the bone these matters are. They are not at all abstract and distant” (Hozumi 2020).

As well, non-white practitioners have been building and holding space for the somatic work of Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color. The work of Prentis Hemphill, ChE, and Nazbah Tom is notable. A 2020 presentation of Angie Pittman, *día bùi*, and Orlando Zane Hunter Jr. at Danspace, titled “Decolonizing Somatic Care Practice for the Body in Protest,” lays out social justice approaches. Scholars have also structured initial resources. “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment” (2019) by Ben Spatz provides important analysis and a bibliography.<sup>15</sup> Spatz has further pointed me to the proceedings of the Arts Research Africa Conference (Doherty 2020), “How Does Artistic Research Decolonize Knowledge and Practice in Africa?”<sup>16</sup> Don Hanlon Johnson’s *Diverse Bodies, Diverse Practices* is an important text in that it shows dialogue between present practitioners in the somatics field and one of Hanna’s closest somatics colleagues. The book makes efforts to acknowledge and address the diversity of present somatics practitioners who challenge white supremacy, ableism, and heteronormativity in the field. It includes tayla ealom, Haruhiko Murakawa, Roger J. Kuhn, Antoinette Santos Reyes, and Nick Walker—all practitioners critically informed by and responsive to their diverse cultural, social, and political histories. Even here, in a book obviously purposed to reorient the trajectory of somatics toward decolonization, Johnson fails to turn a critical eye to the field’s historical problems. He calls the book “an update,” as if decolonial praxis merely requires a few adjustments to the paradigm.

Developments in praxeologically decolonizing the field of somatics will be limited so long as they emerge in the absence of extensive historical analysis. As the cultural somaticist Resmaa Menakem pointed out, historical narratives find their way into our hands, our movements, and our practices (Menakem 2017). Thus decolonial praxis in somatics must relate directly to historical understanding of the field itself. Further work on Hanna’s interests in social Darwinism and ethology require greater analysis. Further work needs to be done on the Nazi ideologies emphasizing body training that weaves through the narratives of somatics practitioners, including Mary Starks Whitehouse, Rudolf Laban, Irmgard Bartenieff, Elsa Gindler, and others (Shug 2010; McDonald 2006).

This is not to ally Hanna or other early somatics practitioners with Nazism or the worst of scientific racism. It is to say that there has not yet been enough critical analysis of the histories of scientific racism that remain lurking in the shadows of somatics theories, and their dependence on the universalist idea of the “natural body”—an essentialism that most ties current somatics practices to behavioral pseudosciences emergent from Darwinism. A quote by Brenda Dixon Gottschild serves to clarify: “One of the most prevalent and pernicious myths attached to the black dancing body is that the movement is not learned by inborn. . . . It behooves us to question what is ‘natural’”



(Gottschild 2003, 47). An example of Gottschild's point can be found in the concept of the shaman within Global Somatics Process (GSP) developed by Suzanne River, who sees the shamanic Indigenous body as a natural body and her own work as that of a "somatic shamanic practitioner." Through somatics, River is able to self-position as professional and wield consequent articulative authority over the shamans from whom she draws. In that sense, the theoretics of "natural body" ally with the institutionalization of somatics to reduce Indigenous shamans to "native informants" and lift up white somatics practitioners as researchers. As Doran George has written, the field of somatics systematically reduced the authority of "native informants" by describing their practices as "non-Western practices that they represented as ancient and mystical" and by metapho-rizing their techniques to "lost corporeal capacities that they believed were still evident in children, animals and supposedly primitive societies" (2014, iii). The history by which the field of somatics has legitimized and thus achieved its institutional status is interstitial to the practices by which its proponents continue to engage in colonial knowledge extraction, white supremacy, and systematic infantilization. Since its founding, the field of somatics has been playing a game of institutional power. It has mined Indigenous practices for capitalistic pedagogical ventures, it has centralized its institutional structures in primarily white organizations, it has envisioned the universalistic applicability of its claims, and it has even filtered white savior complex through its various translations of Indigeneity.

## Conclusion: Envisioning an Afropessimist, Afrofuturist Somatics

### *So what then?*

I acknowledge that abolishing somatics altogether might be a worthwhile pursuit in this case. It is certainly unreasonable to knowingly continue any field that rests upon structural racism down to its mytho-historical bones. Somatics seems to be built upon white imagination of the "systematization" of folk knowledges. Somewhat like character dance in ballet, this kind of appropriative practice is implicitly justified with the assumption that it improves "folk" knowledges, refines them, so to speak, and "universalizes" them in the way that whiteness is itself coded as universality.

Nonetheless, I will conclude this article with a proposal which models a few interwoven directions by which historical, theoretical, and practical work in somatics can address the problems discussed within this article. As Hanna grounded the somatics field upon historical revisionism and false etymological claims of the term *sōma*, I will in this conclusion aim to merely correct Hanna's exclusion of a complex of antique meanings from his definition of the word *sōma*, and thus show how remedying this can already be a first step in a process of unhinging somatics from its white supremacist foundations. Johnson, earlier quoted in this article, noted that Hanna perceived the *sōma* in contrast to *necros*, dead flesh. So let us begin by correcting him there, and follow through to how slavery and death, both of which are included in antique meanings of the word *sōma*, can participate in historically grounding a field of somatics within Afropessimist and/or Afrofuturist/Black Accelerationist thought on embodiment following the work of Orlando Patterson.<sup>17</sup>

In his groundbreaking analysis in *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Orlando Patterson used the term *social death* to describe how, in antiquity, slavery had been socially and politically conceptualized:

Archetypically, slavery was a substitute for death in war. But almost as frequently, the death commuted was punishment for some capital offense, or death from exposure or starvation. The condition of slavery did not absolve or erase the prospect of death. Slavery was not a pardon; it was, peculiarly, a conditional commutation. The execution was suspended only as long as the slave acquiesced in his powerlessness. The master was essentially a ransomer. What he bought or acquired was the slave's life, and restraints on the master's capacity wantonly to destroy his slave did not

undermine his claim on that life. Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson. (Patterson 1982, 5)

In his discussion of language used to describe slaves in ancient Greece, Patterson did not mention the term *sōma*, though in comparison to the most common Greek word for slave (*doulos*), *sōma* best supports his argument. Over centuries, the meaning of *sōma* transformed from a Homeric corpse denied burial rites (often after battle) to a Hesiodic description of the living body in states of subjection, to finally take shape in Koine Greek to mean *slave*. Jennifer A. Glancy in *Slavery in Early Christianity* (2002) described how “equation between slaves and bodies actually begins with the lexicon of slavery. The Greek word for body, *to sōma*, serves as a euphemism for the person of a slave” (2002, 10). Citing the slave-born, first-century stoic Epictetus (whose name literally means “acquired”), Glancy analyzes how, in Epictetus’s theorization of “his own body as a negligible thing, a *sōmation*, he underscores once again the slavish nature of the body, the *sōma*: ‘my paltry body, something that is not mine, something that is by nature dead [*to sōmation, to ouk emon, to physei nekron*]’ (3.10.15)” (2002, 33). Here, Epictetus draws the *sōma* into connection with its earlier association with dead flesh, *nekros*. In *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece* (2010), Brooke Holmes discussed the antique particularities of *sōma* as dead body, including its use in Homer to signal the dead body denied posthumous rites:

In exploring the idea of a death beyond a death—a death, that is, that comes from denying the hero the posthumous rites that memorialize his death and confer social recognition on it—the poet [Homer] appears to accord *sōma* particular weight . . . *sōma* occupies the point when form is yielding to formlessness . . . the “utter nonhumanity” awaiting the corpse denied care is the fate of the *sōma*. (Holmes 2010, 34)

Further noting the shift of *sōma*’s meaning in Hesiod to the animalistic qualities of living bodies, Holmes then describes “coiled possibility inside the word *sōma*” (2010, 36). In its shifting meaning between Homer and Hesiod, writes Holmes, *sōma* expresses “formlessness and disintegration, vulnerability and our need for care, animality and interincorporation” (36). Central to her argument about what holds in *sōma* over its centuries of ancient use is the concept of care: “Whereas the dead *sōma* in epic requires a single act of care to rescue it from disintegration, the physical body will demand constant attention in order to maintain its integrity” (36).

It is into these differences between the living and the dead, between care and abandonment, and between “loss and absence” that Afropessimism arises. As written by Afropessimist dance scholar Mlonzi Zondi, “Afro-pessimism expands the conception of death as not only biological but also psychic, social (lived), and imbricated in desire” (2020, 257). Zondi draws in part from *Afropessimism* (2020), written by Frank Wilderson III, a book that injects into discourse on embodiment and social death by beginning with a description of Wilderson writhing on a gurney, gripped by a mental break. Terrified and unable to speak, Wilderson nonetheless feels compelled by the “cardinal rule of Negro diplomacy” to make the white doctor and nurse—rather than himself—“feel safe” (2020, 6). Wilderson’s *Afropessimism* roughly picks up where Frantz Fanon’s life ended—treated in a hospital, where in his last days, as written by Homi K. Bhabha, “his hatred of racist Americans now turned into a distrust of the nursing staff” (2004, viii). Wilderson’s story flows out as if precisely from the event of his affliction and terror upon the gurney where his Black body lies, vulnerable. Wilderson draws from his medical crisis to describe a “Human” world nourished by anti-Black violence. He writes:

Why is anti-Black violence not a form of racist hatred but the genome of Human renewal; a therapeutic balm that the Human race needs to know and heal itself? Why must the world reproduce this violence, this social death, so that social life can regenerate Humans and prevent them from suffering the catastrophe of psychic

incoherence—absence? Why must the world find its nourishment in Black flesh?  
(Wilderson 2020, 17)

*Afropessimism*, described by Wilderson as a “metatheory: a critical project that, by deploying Blackness as a lens of interpretation,” can act as a powerful means to interrogate the white centrism in scholarly disciplines, including somatics (2020, 14). In the first sense, the field of somatics is, through the lens of Afropessimism, no longer afforded the pretense that the first-person experience of the living body is necessarily one that precludes the experience of death or deathliness, what Wilderson also calls “absence” or “the loss of loss” (16). Wilderson argues that Black liberation resides in acknowledgement of an “antagonism between Black people and the world” rooted in “what Orlando Patterson calls ‘social death’ or ‘deathliness’ in the words of David Marriott” (40).

To do the work of conceptualizing somatics through a *sōma* etymologically rooted in slavery and social death and theoretically driven by Afropessimism, the field would need to consider deathliness and its embodiment as lived in Blackness and absented from the white-centric definition of *human*. Wilderson employs a nonhuman perspective on Black liberation, writing that, through social death, “Blacks are not Human subjects” (2020, 15). His perspective is predated by Black feminist scholarship and posthumanist works. Pushing against the subject, Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), posed the question: “What would be made possible if, rather than assuming the subject, we began our inquiry with a description of subjectification that did not attempt to name or interpret anything but to simply describe its surfaces?” (1997, 100). Theorists like accelerationist Kodwo Eshun, who first published *More Brilliant than the Sun* in 1998, visualized the music of Black liberation as stripped of the category of “human,” and wrote, “Part of the whole thing about being an African-American alien musician, is that there’s this sense of the human as being a really pointless and treacherous category, a category which has never meant anything to African-Americans” ([1998] 1999, 193).

Eshun describes Black diasporic posthumanism against an assumed authenticity and a human holistic. He critiques a mass-mediatized desire to “recover a sense of the whole human being through belief systems that talk to the ‘real you’” as a position that “compulsively deletes any intimation of an Afro Diasporic futurism, of a ‘webbed network’ of computerhythms, machine mythology and concepttechnics which routes, reroutes and criss-crosses the Black Atlantic” ([1998] 1999, -006). Eshun’s thoughts easily contrast from Hanna’s valuing of the authentic, whole body within his concept of “first-person experience of embodiment.” Eshun continues:

This digital diaspora connecting the UK to the US, the Caribbean to Europe to Africa, is in Paul Gilroy’s definition a “rhizomorphic, fractal structure,” a “transcultural, international formation.” The music of Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra, of Underground Resistance and George Russell, of Tricky and Martina, comes from the Outer Side. It alienates itself from the human; it arrives from the future. . . . From the outset, this Postsoul Era has been characterized by an extreme indifference towards the human. ([1998] 1999, -006 to -005)

While preceding Wilderson’s distancing of Black life from “the human,” Eshun’s vision reiterates Wilderson’s articulation of such a position as interstitial to Black liberation, but speaks into such a position none of the social death of Afropessimism. Through the work of Eshun, the *sōma* shifts away from its antique relation with social death and toward what Holmes described instead as “interincorporation” (2010, 36).

Theory and practice—described by Hanna as so unfailingly extricated from one another in Western history—are further argued by Eshun as already inextricable from one another. “The way to introduce theory,” he writes, “is to realise the music is theorising itself quite well” (Eshun [1998] 1999, 183). There is as well, within the scope of Eshun’s work, a scoffing at the accusations of “disembodiment” that has long served as a call to arms within the somatics field. Eshun writes that

“sonically speaking, the posthuman era is not one of disembodiment but the exact reverse: it’s a hyperembodiment, via the Technics” ([1998] 1999, -002).

If Wilderson argues that Black bodies have been rendered “structurally inert props,” and through social death thus not only dehumanized but *thinged*, Eshun sees mutual liberation for things and Black bodies, for machines and Black life (Wilderson 2020, 15). With a series of examples, Eshun “affirms the machine state which used to be called dehumanization” and shows how Black artists ally with machines to transcend the logics of dehumanization rooted in slavery ([1998] 1999, 07).<sup>18</sup> Thus, Eshun’s vision of Black liberation suggests (and also slips) a deep time history in which the word *sōma* is entangled. If, in late antiquity, the word *sōma* was used to transform the bodies of slaves into things listed on property registers, Eshun describes how such listed things and bodies mutually shake their way off the page.

Setting aside Hanna’s Western (i.e., white) canon of European somatic philosophers and recentering the field around exploration of Black diasporic theories and histories of embodiment, as articulated in the works of Eshun, Fanon, Hartman, Patterson, Wilderson, and Zondi, would make it possible to disentangle the *sōma*, and thereby somatics, from Hanna’s historical revisionism. Brought into cross temporal conversation with works of antiquity, Patterson’s work alone provides historical and theoretical grounds for more nuanced and profound cross temporal relationships between the somatic and the antique etymological complexity and disunity of the *sōma*. Furthermore, the writings of Eshun more compellingly achieve the radicalism Hanna envisioned of a technologically revolutionary embodiment. If the engagement of the somatics field with Black scholarship is extended to account for those progenitors left out of the field’s current historicization, Black feminist anthropology, including the work of Katherine Dunham (a teacher of Emilie Conrad all but ignored by somatics proponents) can be directly addressed (as well as the work of Zora Neale Hurston). As somatics still relies on an anthropological approach rooted in scientific colonialism, Dunham and Hurston’s reflections are important to confronting the power dynamics of knowledge “exchange” in somatics and the field’s historical extraction of Black diasporic, Indigenous, and Asian healing practices.

In exploring how Black deep time and futurity might reshape somatics, I have also herein sought to show that historical re-narration of the *sōma*—from Homeric and Hesiodic epics, through Christian antiquity, into the rise of transatlantic slavery, and into twentieth- and twenty-first-century Black diasporic radical scholarship—holds the potential to undo Hanna’s founding of the field of somatics upon historical revisionism. If the etymology of *sōma* is addressed, social death and the inhuman, accelerationism, Afrofuturism, cyborg futurity, and what Zondi describes as “aesthetic motifs associated with formlessness and disassembly” in Black performance can reshape the somatics field and its embodied explorations while centering Black scholarship and practice (2020, 258).<sup>19</sup> The *sōma*, as an antique designation of social death, bodily disintegration, objectification, dehumanization, interincorporation, slavery, and the necessities (and denial) of care, belongs in its cross temporal logics profoundly more to the works of Eshun, Fanon, Hartman, Patterson, Wilderson, and Zondi than to the somatics of Hanna. Indeed, Hanna’s *sōma*, which denoted universalist, holistic, “first-person” embodiment rooted in so-called Western philosophy, reflects a vision of corporeal life that, I venture to argue, exists only so far as it is a white supremacist construction.

## Notes

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This work is in memoriam to Sami Omar. Ich werde Ihre Worte nicht vergessen.

1. In the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (1997), it is written that “the field of somatics was given a name and identity by Thomas Hanna, who was directly influenced by existential phenomenology of the Body.” See Embree (1997, 70).

2. De Giorgi writes of the paracolonial in the early somatics texts of Hanna and others: “The paracolonialist posture seems to operate as a common principle both in the appropriation of tradition(s) and the rejection of the scientific objectivism. In both cases, the struggle between body and soma acquires a central role, since it reveals a political side. On one hand, its substance is epistemological, since it deals with the transformation of corporeal representations, as well as the scientific advancement in the industrial and post-industrial era. On the other, it becomes the metaphor for an ideological competition between legitimate and precarious practices, which in the first generation of somatic activism seems to be still more influenced by economic survival than by ecologic adaptation” (2015, 71).

3. I wish to acknowledge dance scholar Nadine George-Graves for encouraging me in this direction.

4. In relation to his argument, Johnson cites Husserl’s *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences* (1980), Elizabeth Behnke’s *Sensory Awareness and Phenomenology* (1989), and Husserl (1980, 2–3; Behnke (1993, 11); Martin (1995, 271 fn9 for ch. 5).

5. Hanna’s preeminence as a founder of Somatics among scholars of dance studies and history is well supported by the literature. Jill Green in the *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (2007) writes, “With the popularity and embrace of somatic systems beginning to emerge in the dance world and in academe in the 1980s and 1990s, a number of dance education scholars began thinking about and researching somatic theory and practice, connecting the growing field of dance to the theories of Thomas Hanna, Don Johnson, Richard Shusterman . . . and other somatic thinkers outside the world of dance” (Green 2007, 1121). For another example, see Karkou, Oliver, and Lycouris (2017).

6. Hanna polarizes *soma* from *necros* most directly in his 1970 *Bodies of Revolt*: “‘Soma’ does not mean ‘body’; it means ‘Me, the bodily being.’ ‘Body’ has, for me, the connotation of a piece of meat, a slab of flesh laid out on the butcher’s block or the physiologist’s work table, drained of life and ready to be worked upon and used. Soma is living” (Hanna 1970, 35). The description here evidences Johnson’s claim that Hanna understood *soma* as a body oppositional in the Greek to *necros*.

7. It is notable that Heinroth’s anti-Semitism is documented, in part, through his correspondence with his mentee Konrad Lorenz. See endnote 11.

8. “Untersuchungen über die somatischen Ursachen der Geisteskrankheiten welche ihren Sitz entweder im Gehirne oder in den übrigen Organen des Körpers und deren Nervengeflechte haben” (Investigations on the somatic causes of mental illness which are located either in the brains or in the other organs of the body and their neural networks). (author’s translation)

9. Eleanor Criswell, founding director of Saybrook University, former chair of the Sonoma State University psychology department, and co-founder of the Novato Institute at the Somatics Magazine/Journal, articulated somatics differently from Hanna. Her “Somatics Research Bibliography” (2020) is case in point. Therein, she provides nearly 100 pages of references to primarily scientific articles from the fields of kinesiology, psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry, medicine, arts therapy, and other health-oriented journals as evidence of therapeutic value of somatics-aligned practices. Notably, Criswell is, despite co-founding the Novato Institute and the first Somatics journal, often sidelined in historical descriptions of the field of somatics. Her devaluation as a founder smacks of male-centrism, and produces citational histories (such as this) that,

while tracing the lines of male-centric self-assertion, by consequence participate in the habitual sidelining of women founders who have, in all likelihood, as much to answer for.

10. Hanna briefly acknowledged the importance of Illich's work to his own thinking in 1991 in a piece titled "Beyond Bodies in Revolt", mentioning only that he was drawn to Cuernavaca because "Erich Fromm, Ivan Illich, and my good friends Art and Jane Sheldin live here" (1991, 22). An interesting discussion of Illich's own address (and non-address) of the soma, somatic, and disembodiment can be found in Barbara Duden's "The Quest for Past Somatics" (2002).

11. Though it is beyond the scope of this article, Lorenz was a notable member of the Nazi Party. His work on the domestication of geese due to the pressures of urbanization caused him to believe in Nazi eugenics and argue that such policies were scientifically justified. See Klopfer (1994).

12. Quoted from Said (1979, 256).

13. For a classic work on colonial pseudosciences, see Gould (1981).

14. After their untimely death, George's dissertation was finally edited by Susan Leigh Foster and published as *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training* (2020).

15. See <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/731297>. Spatz is also leading an Embodied Research Working Group, within which they further co-organize a "Decolonizing Embodiment" reading group.

16. For the full proceedings, see <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/29248>

17. Notably, though Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* was profoundly influential to Wilderson's *Afropessimism*, Patterson did not entirely support the use of his text as such. In an interview with the Harvard Gazette, Patterson said, "I find myself in an odd situation because the Afro-pessimists draw heavily on one of my books, 'Slavery and Social Death,' which is ironic, because I'm not a pessimist. I don't think we're in a situation of social death, because one of the elements of social death is that you're not recognized as an integral member of the civic community, the public sphere, and we certainly are, on the political and cultural levels. And we're very integrated in the military, which is the quintessence of what defines who belongs. The Afropessimists are right, though, to point to persisting segregation in the private sphere." See Mineo (2018).

18. The quote refers directly to what Juan Atkins did in choosing to be renamed Model 500.

19. Nonetheless, the thread of somatic thinking I have shown here is by no means exhaustive. I've left out much, including the discussions of slavery in Acts of Paul (a Pauline text ignored by Hanna even as he used Pauline biblical text for his problematic definition of *sōma*); Saidiya Hartman's extensive work on subjection, vulnerability, and care; the massive corpus of Black scholarship influential to Wilderson (Zakkiyah Iman Jackson, Joy James, Achille Mbembe, Christina Sharpe, Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter); as well as the groundbreaking work of Frantz Fanon on anti-Blackness, colonial oppression, and subaltern decolonial visions. Meanwhile, analysis on the entanglement of somatics with white supremacist histories and ideologies of embodiment needs to be further synthesized. Further work can be done, as well, to deconstruct the reliance of somatics on white supremacist histories of the West. For example, somatics would benefit from analysis on the dependence of Enlightenment philosophy—and thus Hanna's early Western, somatic theorists—on Confucian classics translated into Latin by Xu Guangqi and Matteo Ricci. Hanna's Eurocentric vision of the *sōma* can be undone through investigation of translation and trade routes in antiquity. Since the fourth century BC, Koine Greek (and its usage of *sōma* and its cognates) was operating as a lingua franca of the Mediterranean, belonging as much to a diversity of North African and the Middle Eastern as to ancient Hellenic peoples. Ideas also flowed between Mediterranean languages, especially between Arabic and Greek. Arabic scholarship, archiving, and translation in antiquity are, at the very least, responsible for the survival of many ancient works in Greek, especially philosophical and medical texts. Hanna's assumption of the supremacy of European philosophy caused him to ignore relevant historical thinkers, and this is also a worthy topic of exploration in the restructuring the relationship between somatics and the history of philosophy. Philosophers absent from, but interstitial to the philosophical traditions from which Hanna pulled, include Ibn al-Haytham, whose tenth-century work on optics heralded modern phenomenology.

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