

# Running With and Like My Dog

## An Animate Curriculum for Living Life beyond the Track

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*We must begin to speak of the sensuous surroundings in the way that our breathing bodies really experience them—as active, as animate, as alive. (Abram, 2002, p. 6)*

**W**HAT MIGHT IT BE LIKE to live life more like my dog? I pause to soak in a memorable glimpse of Massimo, nose to the side of the gravel road near my house breathing in the intoxicating aroma of another sentient being who thoughtfully left a scent... I regain a present moment focus and dwell in

the self and other imposed linearity that has been shaping my daily life as a tenure track professor. It seems that life, although productive, has been passing me by. Between dropping off and picking up my children, juggling grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, and a marriage to a professional athlete and small business owner over and above my race for securing grants, producing publications (e.g., Lloyd, in press; Lloyd, accepted; Lloyd, submitted; Lloyd, 2009; Lloyd & Smith, in press; Lloyd & Smith, 2010), organizing national conferences, teaching five courses per annum and sitting on numerous committees, I recognize that the pace and pathway in which I traverse toward my tenured finish line must soften. I have become an automaton, impervious to the sentient world around me. A desire to reacquaint myself with my senses and feel more fully alive is gnawing at my insides for I am reminded by my dear colleagues that how you spend your day as a tenure track professor matters (Wiebe & Fels, 2010). As I look to my dog sleeping by my side, I wonder what better way to explore the phenomenon of sensing the world than with, and through a being who has what we humans characterize as “extreme perception” (Grandin & Johnson, 2005)?

Becoming more in touch with our senses beyond the narrow perspective of a human and approaching what Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes as a man-animality intertwining offers a new dimension to the notion of curriculum as lived experience (van Manen, 1997; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 2000; Aoki, 1993), what I prefer to transpose methodologically to “living” (Lloyd & Smith, 2006). For the way dogs “run their course” (Pinar, et al., 2000, p. 515) may be described as animate, as in fully alive. Humans have perfected the ability to switch off their sense perceptions as they run through life, particularly on treadmills (Gintis, 2007) or well-travelled paths (Ingold, 2004). Dogs, however, do not perceptually disconnect from the streaming, sensuous nature of the present moment and think of something else entirely as their limbs carry them through daily life. From stirring smells and darting squirrels to the enveloping soundscape that creates a panoramic field of wonder, dogs are able to experience the world for what it really is, “a swirling mass of tiny details” (Grandin & Johnson, 2005, p. 67). As academics, we might question the extent to which we are in touch with the potentiality of the living moment. The very act of writing a paper, for example, may be perceived globally as a ‘deadline’ to reach, a process thus filled with deadening tension where sensations of joy and fulfillment may be achieved in a flood of well-being only once it is over, submitted.

Submit... to surrender one’s soul for the sake of filling up a *curriculum vitae*? I purposively wonder if, in the very act of writing, we may tap into the glorious sensations of an animate curriculum as “deadlines are not lifelines....[and...] find release in just the sheer joy of being alive” (Snowber, 2011, p. 12). What if for the purpose of this inquiry I draw upon moments when my ‘lifeline’ is strengthened, moments I share with my dog as we run, walk, swim, stretch and on the rare occasion pause; as we soak in the gravel road, field, marsh, trails, forest, hills, river and rocks near our house? I am not purporting that time spent with my dog is more prized than the rest of my life but... there is something distinctly different and special about our playful moments when I connect with, and on occasion even become more like my dog in the way we collectively move and experience the world. My intention in exploring such moments of meaningful duration and comparing them to other vignettes of humans running in the presence of animals is this: to better understand what it is like to experience an animate consciousness and an enlivened mode of being for living not only with dogs, but beyond the rigidity of a self-inscribed track, tenure, athletic or otherwise. I hope that you will join me on this adventure. I promise you that an animate curriculum<sup>1</sup> for running through life awaits...

## A Methodological and Ontological Orientation

What is it like to run with a dog? What is it like to run like a dog? Two questions, deceptively similar but on deeper reflection, come from different ontological frames of reference. The first offers an orientation toward experiencing and understanding physical activity with an animal companion from a human way of perceiving the world. The second invites us to consider what it might be like to experience the very same phenomenon in a way that a dog might.

To answer questions of what it is like to run with and like a dog, it seems only fitting that a phenomenological approach is adopted as it is a mode of inquiry based on “re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). On closer examination, however, exploring a phenomenon in a way that asks us to be less human and more primitive and animal-like is arguably underdeveloped historically when one examines the field of phenomenology at large. There are pockets of references to animal consciousness such as the empathic understanding Levinas experienced from a dog named “Bobby” who befriended him at a labor camp in World War II, Heidegger’s flirting consideration for how animals might experience temporality, and the way Derrida wondered what it was like for his cat to see him naked in the shower, to name a few (Guenther, 2007; Buchanan, 2007; Houle, 2007). Seldom, however, do we see a departure from an anthropomorphic frame of reference where human feelings and emotions are inscribed on animal companions.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) in his final working note published in *The Visible and the Invisible* gave a glimpse of what it might be like to be less human-centric in the way we may approach a human-animal intertwining of consciousness, beyond “traditional hierarchical distinctions between human and non-human life [as he] redrew them laterally as so many ways of being bodily within the common element of ‘flesh’ (Smith, 2007, p. 118). Perhaps one of the most interesting extrapolations of this primordial, perhaps cosmic fold of unified flesh is revealed in Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) assertion that “if barking is ‘done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog’...The dog inside you wells up. Your barking brings your molecules into contact with the canine” (Quoted in Neimanis, 2007, p. 281). Such a theoretical position, further explored in Deleuze and Parnet’s (2006) questioning of “What are you becoming” (p. 2) exudes notions of the ‘primordial’ and ‘cosmic’ anatomies that Emilie Conrad (2007) describes, as a departure from our typical solid, socially constructed ‘cultural anatomy,’ and an openness to experiencing what it might be like to live in fluid resonance with the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996). Within this orientation an obvious ontological shift is required from schools of thought that purport a Cartesian disconnect between human and more-than-human bodies that may be drawn upon to describe what it might be like to “run with a dog”. To answer the question of what it is like to “run like a dog” we must step into the reality of Gaia (Lovelock, 2007) that we live within a “planet that might best be described as a coherent, living entity” (Abram, 2002, p. 1).

## Running like a Human: A Kinetic Consciousness

Approaching the phenomenon of running with an animate consciousness within an animate world stands in contrast to the way one might mathematically perceive the body (e.g., Descartes) and ecology (Castle, 2000). For many, a run has become a means of burning calories where preference is given to a mechanical journey on a treadmill, a flat, consistent, predictable pathway where the sound of one’s stride creates a monotonous rhythm on a modern-day drum, lulling one into a sense-numbing trance. Unlike the reciprocal awakening possible within the reversible folds of a Merleau-Pontian (1968)

sentient-sensible embrace, a run is often coupled with a perceptual disconnect from the sensations of our breathing bodies (Gintis, 2007) and breathing world (Abram, 2010). The lure of the technological screen, a modern-day landscape, transmits two-dimensional images and sounds of a new world. Here, the Merleau-Pontian (1968) elemental notion of flesh that orients us to the Greek derivation of soma, the “living body” (Hanna, 1988, p. 20) moving within an animate landscape fades. The objective body, one to be *worked* out and understood through scientific reduction and dissection of a dead body (Pronger, 1995; Welton, 1999) sharpens a modern day focus wrought with concerns of obesity, inactivity and exercise physiology based-interventions aimed at reducing manifestations of global dis-ease (McKenzie & Kahan, 2008; Davidson, 2007).

For those who take the experience of a run off the treadmill, beyond a means of burning calories, and into a competitive setting, other characteristics shape the experience: technology from the latest model of shoe to heart-rate monitor; training programs aimed at optimizing energy systems, pace, and distance; a mind-over-matter focus that leads one on the unidirectional pathway toward a personal best; and when the mix is ideal, the elusive ‘runner’s high’ (McMillan, 2009; Garcin, et al., 2006). If a dog joins a human running with such a focus, the dog will arguably become less ‘dog’ in the process and more human. Consider Murphy’s story, for example, a dog who has been described as being ‘hooked’ on running competitively just as much as his owner:

For some folks, training with other runners is critical to their continued participation. Some enjoy the camaraderie, others the competition, or maybe it’s the mutual commitment that keeps them going. I’ve never felt those needs. I like to decide when, where, how far, and at what speed I’ll train. [...]. That said, having a canine running partner somehow fits like a glove. Murphy runs where I lead (for the most part) at my pace and doesn’t feel the need to engage in small talk. [...] we both put in, on average, 30 to 35 miles per week, 52 weeks a year. I figure that makes Murphy just about the fittest dog in town. (Acker, 2006, p. 62).

Acker describes running with his dog in a way that fits his training program ‘like a glove.’ Murphy is a silent companion who does not engage in small talk. He keeps the ‘pace’ and has grown out of his innate tendencies to run in response to the scents, sounds and darting images that cross his peripheral field. On the question of maintaining a human-oriented consistency Acker (2006) explains:

A dog’s top speed—used only in chasing cats, rabbits, or (thank goodness not in Murphy’s genes) cars—is full out for short distances. As long as my pace is over 7:30 per mile, Murphy stays out in front of me on the leash, in a trot. Whenever I hit or dip below 7:30-per-mile pace, Murphy kicks it into the next gear, a canter, and stays there until I am forced to slow down. All I have to do is look at the pooch on the end of the leash to get a very good sense of my speed. I must admit that as long as he’s on one end of the leash and I’m on the other, he has no opportunity to use his top speed. (p. 61).

While Acker’s account of a dog not experiencing top speed is described as a good thing in terms of maintaining an ideal training pace, it may also be viewed as a somewhat limited way of experiencing all that is possible when running with a dog. If we consider the motile nature of joy for example and its animate expressions, it becomes palpably visible in a dog’s spontaneous sprint off the trail, moments of openness to being moved by the animate earth, its scents, sounds, vibrant images and sentient beings. We know a dog is happy when his mouth is open and relaxed. McConnell (2007) explains that “biologists call the look ‘open-mouth play face’ [...] not unlike a human smile—If you smile right now,



you might notice that your teeth are not touching and your lower jaw is relaxed” (p. 44).



Surprisingly, little attention is paid to such animate expressions of joy within a human run. The phenomenon of a “runner’s high” is described either physiologically with reference to endorphin levels and the presence of anandamide, “a naturally occurring chemical that acts on the brain much the same way as THC, the active ingredient in marijuana” (McGinn, 2010) or psychologically, as a training and/or competitive run has the potential of producing a peak mental state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Arguably, no attention has been paid to the physical expressions of emotion one exudes while experiencing flow. It makes no difference if the feeling of happiness is experienced when the event is over, when the flood of well-being rushes in (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) or within the process of running itself. Furthermore, the experience of flow in the way it has been researched does not attend to the motile expressions of flow, the degree to which a facial grimace or notable muscular tensions beyond what is needed for an efficient stride are present. While I have yet to empirically test this hypothesis, I wonder if words some athletes use to describe their peak experiences of flow, such as: “on auto”, “everything clicks”, “switched on”, and “total control” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 12) exude a different facial and rippling bodily expression than those who use descriptors such as: “in the bubble”, “total involvement”, “peaceful”, “weightlessness”, “super alive” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 12)? Surprisingly these terms are given equal consideration and attention in the *Flow in Sports* text but one might postulate that feeling like one is “on auto” for example is much different in a perceptual and physically expressive capacity than “super alive.” When the animate tensions, amplitude and projections of a motile living, unfurling conception of emotion (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Stern, 2004,) are considered within the process of running, the postural and expressive constraints of rigidity associated with movement performed in a repetitive, robot-like fashion may

become more apparent. So often we humans run as if we have self-imposed blinders. We run with a view fixed on the horizon, a gaze that is not open to the possibilities of the path we have the potential to not only follow, but to create. In the act of “lay[ing] down a path in walking” (Machado, accessed 2010) or in this case running, we may become more open to experiencing the Merleau-Pontian notion of perceptual reversibility, moments where the undulations of the terrain actively reach out and perturbate our soles and souls (Lloyd, submitted). While mileage might be gained by following a pre-set path and pace, we might wonder what is experientially lost from not veering off course.

### Running with a Dog: A Kinaesthetic Consciousness

Running with my dog is an activity that I cherish in my busy life. I feel that I enter the realm of the sacred when the sense of fresh, unbounded life surges through my pores. Massimo, my Bernese Mountain Dog/Golden Labrador mix nudges me if it has been too long since our last adventure. I purposefully choose to spend what little free time I have for physical activity with him, as his presence energizes me beyond what running on a treadmill in an air-conditioned gym would provide.

*When I am with Massimo I get lost in the kinaesthetic sensations of running. Friends tell me that I look more like a dancer than a runner and, to be honest, it does feel like an improvisational moment as I move with nature. Although I have corrected my turned out stride, the carriage of my torso, soft neck and fluid arms gives me away in an instant. To others my stride may sound silent but when I run I hear the pulse of my heart and smooth passing of air filling up my lungs.*

*This morning sounds different. The crinkling of leaves, left over from fall, let the nearby animals know I am coming. On one occasion I have seen a fox and on another three bears from a not so distant distance, but so far today I just see Massimo crisscrossing the path ahead between his playful bouts of chasing ducks floating on snow-melted puddles.*

*I don't know how long I have been running because I left my watch on my bedside dresser. But I am not concerned as my leaps over muddy patches and ducks under branches, occasionally transforming my heel strike into a graceful glide, keeping me in the present moment.*

*The increasing length of Massimo's tongue that flaps in his joyous stride tells me that it is time to take a break. I slow down, walk to the edge of the cliff-shaped rock and salute the morning sun. My hinge forward feels different than the ones I perform on my yoga mat. I sway gently in response to the undulations of the rock and feel the dynamic play of balance between the span of my toes and heels as I ground down into a warrior pose.*

*There is a new sense of awaking as I continue to move through the postures and hover just above the ground in a supported 'upward-facing dog.' The strength and flexibility that I have been progressively building in my Saturday morning yoga class suddenly makes so much sense. My stomach and thighs are preserved from the mossy ground as I inhale into a chest-opening arch and I effortlessly push backward into another downward facing dog. Massimo has already started to head down the front edge of the mountain so I finish my salutation in three more breaths.*

*I begin to feel the presence of someone or something else. The sheer magnitude of the nearby rocks remind me of the possibility that they may provide a home for hibernating bears, ready to wake up from their slumber. I purposefully slow down the surge of adrenaline that creeps up into my throat by breathing deeply and choose to follow the zigzag pattern of my dog's descent. I breathe a little easier as the trail flattens and I find my way to a well-travelled path. As I look to the distance and see the pond to which I will make my way around, I see a flash of white in the upright tail of a nearby deer. Massimo, only sniffing what is directly in front of him, misses the magical moment. I reach down and hold his*

*collar as the deer effortlessly bounds up the path from where we just came. A vibrant smile emerges across my face and warms my entire sense of being. I feel a joy in being alive and present on this very special day as I continue to run homeward...*

Looking back on this experience of running with Massimo, I was very much attuned to the kinaesthetic experiences of running and moving in, and by nature. My experience was not dictated by external measures of time and cadence, but responsive to my bodily sensations of breath (Lloyd, in press) and blood as well as the sounds and sensations my movement produced in relation to the world (Abram, 1996).

From the perspective of “running like my dog” however, the experience was very much human-centric. Massimo was my beloved companion—nothing more nothing less. There were moments of perceptual intertwining where I was moved by his eagerness to go on a run, his energetic presence in darting off the trail to chase birds as well as his eventual elongated tongue which signaled to me it was time to ease up on the pace and slow down to experience a collective breath, a perceptual phenomenon some may describe through mirror neurons (Gallese, 2009) and how they reduce the self-other gap. Upon reflection, however, I did not *fully* step into his perceptual world. My run was certainly more than a kinetic experience; it exuded a kinaesthetic consciousness (Lloyd, accepted; Lloyd, in press; Lloyd & Smith, 2009), but it was also limited in terms of the sensations that running like a dog could provide.

### Running Like a Dog: An Aesthetic Consciousness

Perception is a term that is interchangeably linked to consciousness, experience, understanding and meaning-making but for the most part in very human terms. Stelter (2000) asserts that a “person perceives and creates his or her personal reality by having a relation to the world and by giving context a specific meaning which arises out of previous experiences, personal history and which evolves as the result of a concrete action of the person in relation to the specific environmental context” (p. 64). But unless we step out of our human approach to meaning-making and experiencing the world, we are limited in terms of what we allow ourselves to actually see. Grandin and Johnson (2005) explain that animals “don’t see their ideas of things; they see the actual things themselves” (p. 30). The very intention of phenomenology is to see such a world, to take a step back from our past experiences, those clouded by preconceptions and theories influenced by “empirical sciences (physics, chemistry, biology and psychology) in viewing matter, life and mind as part of nature” and to concern ourselves with “how form becomes constituted as an object for scientific cognition in the first place” (Thompson, 2007, p. 81). Form, scientific, kinetic, aesthetic and otherwise, as Merleau-Ponty theorizes, is “borrowed from the perceived world, [...hence] the notion of ‘physical form’ cannot be the real foundation of the structure of behavior, [...] the notion of form is conceivable only as an object of perception” (Thompson, p. 81).

If one would like to approach and better understand what it might be like to run like a dog, a shift in perception and form is required. We must acknowledge the limitations of the familiar culture in which we live and consider expanding our “semiosphere—a concept originating in the work of the great Estonian semiotician Jurj Lotman (1922-1993) [...] to refer to culture as a system of signs, [...as] humans have the ability to reshape the semiosphere any time they want” (Danesi, 2004, p. 39). Not only do we have the ability to close cultural gaps of perception in our semiosphere, we also have the ability to access Thomas A. Sebeok’s notion of “biosemiotic movement [...] cross-species communication” (Danesi, p. 275). Sheets-Johnstone (2007) elaborates that perception is closely tied to “the evolution of animate forms” (p. 295) and suggests that we might reconsider the importance of our motile nature in the very essence of thought being a movement in and of itself.



In terms of perceptually remaining in touch with our evolutionary origins, Grandin and Johnson (2005) remind us that our brain does not suddenly change to produce a new one, it adapts. They explain,

the human brain is really three different brains, each one built on top of the previous at three different times in evolutionary history....each one of those brains has its own kind of intelligence, its own sense of time and space, its own memory, and its own *subjectivity*...[In terms of function,] you have your lizard brain to breathe and sleep, your dog brain to form wolf packs, and your human brain to write about it. (Grandin & Johnson, pp. 53-54).

My intention in sharing these various theories of perception is to provide a backdrop for considering what it might be like to experience the cellular resonance Deleuze and Guattari (2004) address. That mimetic acts such as running or even barking like a dog, performed with enough passion, brings “your molecules into contact with the canine” (Neimanis, 2007, p. 281). And so with this in mind, I invite you to step in my stride and playfully approach what it might be like to run like a dog...

*My eyes softly open. The sweet song of soaring birds fills the warm summer air as I deeply inhale. It's going to be a scorcher today. Martin rolls over as I quietly slip out of the tousled sheets, wash the sleep out of my eyes and find something to wear. My fingers delve into the depths of my drawer to find a pair of rolled up knee-highs. In Walter Benjamin fashion, I unwrap the 'present' and slip them over my manicured toes. Perfect. Although the purple and gray stripes don't match my green shorts and cornflower blue bra top, they will provide a much-needed layer of protection from my anticipated brush with poison ivy, a natural hazard in off-trail adventures. My hair, typically tied back for fitness classes or smoothed and straightened for work, has an especially wild look to it today. I've grown to love the feeling of the wind rippling through my progressively longer locks and imagine the enhanced sensitivity possible for Massimo covered in filament-like conductors.*

*My contacts stay in their plastic container. No need to sharpen one sense in lieu of the others. I was inspired by Marc Grossman (2001) to become accustomed to experiencing life through the softness of a visual blur. Apart from letting my eyes breathe and feel a direct contact with the world, running without prescriptive correction, considering their visual acuity<sup>2</sup>, helps me see more like a dog.*

*As I leave my house and quietly close the door to make sure that little Otis and Ian remain asleep, I can see clearly enough to know that it is a beautiful day. The moon and the sun are shining from their respective positions in the early morning sky and I see a robin red breast perched on a nearby wire acknowledging my presence. Massimo pulls, anxious to get to the trail where he can roam free. It's funny he hasn't learned to walk with a relaxed leash. It is partly my fault as I never took a dog-training course. I figure in the two minutes it takes to cross Old Chelsea Road to reach the beginning of the field, teaching him to “heel” isn't a priority.*

*I unleash my dog. The seagulls standing serenely in the soccer field sense our bounding presence as thirty or more open their wings in a circling assent. Our feet follow their reflective path as Massimo and I circle toward the opening of the forest. My gaze shifts to my immediate right as I approach a slew of wild flowers. My sense of smell, mysteriously only accessible in intermittent unpredictable waves, enlivens me and in this very moment almost knocks me over in an intoxicating stupor. The cadence of my light jog suspends in a magical moment as my full synaesthetic attention is held. Smells of purple flowers, sways of hip-height grass, seagull squawks, melodic peeps of marsh-nestled birds, sparkles of sun and the freshness of the morning dew intertwine in one glorious inhalation. Nothing else exists in this moment but an all-encompassing envelopment from a vibrant world.*





*A gentle tug from an invisible leash pulls on my torso and sends my feet in the direction of what Massimo finds fascinating further up the trail. His rapid sniffs must be soaking in aromas left by other dogs leaving their mark on this unmarked trail that the Gatineau Park Association has yet to claim. Together we follow the curve of the hill-hugging path. I drift to memories of my two-year-old son Ian experiencing his first forest trail. His circular and multi-directional tendencies remind me that following a trail is a learned behavior. Over the past year of walking hand-in-hand he is just beginning to recognize the directional meaning contained within a path and a dawning concern for what Ian will perceptually miss through my hand-held guidance suddenly registers... A subtle crack of a twig some twenty-feet in the thick of the forest awakens me into the streaming presence of this moment and sends Massimo on a high-speed chase. Curious, I too navigate my way around the trees, roots, rocks and leaves but my pace is about one fifth of Massimo's. One day I hope to experience such a sprint with wave-like agility. For now, I vicariously soak in the miraculous nature of his feat.*

*Taunts from a squirrel, safely looking down from a branch overhead, capture Massimo's full attention for the next few seconds, long enough to let Massimo know that the chase is over. Massimo's mouth opens as his gaze remains transfixed. Drips of saliva roll off his tongue. All I can hear is the sound of his rapid pant. I let my tongue out and begin to breathe from the depths of my diaphragm. It is faster than any breath I have yet to experience but again, I am one fifth of Massimo's cadence. I feel good. I feel loose. My jaw, usually stiff from the tension that seeps into my dream-state, the weighing reality of the daily 'grind' that sometimes holds me back from soaring possibilities, releases fully. Not missing or messing up the pace of the pant for an instant, Massimo releases his gaze and sets off. I run, fumble with the coordination to pant at the same time, and swallow in moments of fatigue.*

*Although my visual acuity can't map the exact point where the foliage meets the narrow footpath, I feel what direction my feet need to be. We are approaching the top of the small mountain that provides*

*a view of the village block that surrounds my house, the very spot where one year ago I was inspired to do a sun salutation to the morning sun. I approach the flat rock, assume a mountain pose, hinge forward, move from a downward to an upward-facing dog but the linearity of the movement feels forced. Massimo, my dog isn't stretching in upward or downward directions, he is already sniffing out a route for our descent. I spring up and follow his lead between narrow cracks of caressing rocks and jutting twigs of supportive branches. Normally at this point we circle our way around to the beginning of our forest path to complete the loop but today something in the air, perhaps it is the hot summer sun mixing with the heat exuded from my playful pants, sends us in a new direction.*

*I sense the Gatineau River is close. I look up and see cathedral-like trees swaying above our heads providing foliage for four crows, each one squawking in sequential fashion, before they fly from one tree to the next. I know roughly where the neighborhood secret swimming hole is but I have never approached it from this location. A sign, "No Trespassing"... ahhh, within a few feet I see a well-travelled trail. Massimo, running free, leads the way to the water. I catch up to see his head sniffing shimmers of morning sun.*



*A flat rock invites me to lie down and I release a sonar of circling "O's" much like a chant one might perform at the beginning of a yoga class. This song, inspired by the practice of Continuum<sup>3</sup> is different, however, in quality, meaning and pace. It is not led by an instructor. It is long, expansive in trajectory and viscerally deep. I am not alone. Open attention invites a fluid intelligence to mate with my consciousness. My neck strain dissolves as I feel a gentle lengthening in a position beyond my typically rigid range. For several minutes of what feels like an eternity I am not only sensing the world like my dog. The world is sensing, supporting, suspending and holding me. Love beyond what could be produced from a human hug playfully suckles my big toe... Perhaps I have shared too much; perhaps not*



*enough. Once one has tasted the sweetness of cosmic life, one is naturally drawn into wanting more...*

Combining a run like a dog with approximately twenty minutes of Continuum (Conrad, 2007), as you can see, was a much different experience in bio-morphic quality than my previous run with my dog interspersed with the linearity of a yoga practice. Such a consciousness has also seeped into a more fluid way of being beyond my runs. My five-year old, formerly carrying the tensions of battling Transformers™, now wants to curl up into my lap. I also carry a newfound desire to detach myself from my former addiction to phasing out in front of the television at the end of a long day and release my grasp on my hand-held cellular phone that receives and sends email. I now seek to communicate with the vibrant world on an intimate, palpable level, sensing for myself what Merleau-Ponty (1968) also felt within the field of the invisible.

### Running like Dogs through Life: An Animate Consciousness

Cesar Millan, otherwise known as Hollywood's dog whisperer, describes the way humans may better connect and communicate through what he describes as a "truly universal, interspecies language [...] called *energy*" (Millan & Peltier, 2007, p. 61). He doesn't turn to Merleau-Ponty or any other philosopher to better understand his energetic connection with dogs, he simply spends a lot of time with animals from the Mexican farm in which he was raised to the packs of dogs he surrounds himself with on his runs, rollerblades and bike rides in the Santa Monica Mountains. The shift in my presence after attuning to my dog Massimo on our morning runs, a presence that was detected and felt in a responsive loving way by my son, for example, could be explained through his practical philosophy: "How can *energy* be a language?... In the wild, different animal species intermingle effortlessly. [...] The energy they are projecting tells them everything they need to know. In that sense, *they are speaking to one another, all the time*" (Millan & Peltier, 2007, pp. 61-62).

Millan uses what he describes as an energetic language to help humans better communicate with their dogs. Considering "recent research on dog DNA shows that humans and dogs have been keeping company for over 100,000 years" (Grandin & Johnson, 2005, p.176), a symbiotic relationship that evolved from wolves scavenging human "cave dwellings as long ago as 400,000 years" (Olmert, 2009, p. 70), it seems only fitting that energetically attuning ourselves to dogs in comparison to other wild animals would be a natural first step in broaching the energetic language of interspecies communication. Dogs, from an evolutionary perspective are young wolves that never grew up due in part to the fact that the more puppy-like they looked, the more likely they would be adopted as part of the human pack to the extent where women in cultures, such as the Amazon basin in 1934 and present-day Barasana women in eastern Columbia, would suckle their puppies at their breast<sup>4</sup>. To maintain their place in the human pack, dogs not only learned to "look at their owner's faces for information" (Grandin & Johnson, 2005, p. 177); they attuned themselves to the energy we radiate, such as feelings of stress, compression, or calmness. Rarely do we consider that the behavioral problems pet owners subscribe to their dogs are a direct result of what they are sensing. Millan finds that his clients are unaware that they "are communicating through energy a very strong impression of what they don't want from their dogs" (Millan & Peltier, 2007, p. 202). Much of his consultations are geared to helping humans attune to their projecting energy and manipulate it in such a way that they may become 'top dog' so to speak and calmly assert a presence that invites dogs to be 'submissive,' relaxed and receptive.

Becoming dog in more of a lateral fashion, i.e, running like a dog, is not something that Millan addresses, most likely because he has based his business on training dogs to behave in our domestic



environments. In fact, he has approached the notion of running a dog in ways that fit our modern world. For him, the treadmill is a viable option:

Many of my clients are skeptical about putting a dog on a treadmill. [...] but any dog has the ability to do this. Dogs using treadmills are nothing new... Back in 1576, Doctor Johannes Caius of Cambridge University described a mongrel breed of dog he called “turnspit.” These dogs were specifically trained to walk on treadmills that mechanically turned the spits on which people roasted their meat. (Millan & Peltier, 2007, p. 208)

From a kinetic frame of reference, the idea of putting a dog on a treadmill certainly meets the physical activity requirements for expending energy. I question, however, what is lost on the mechanical journey that disconnects the dog from attuning to the energy of the world and in this case, the harnessing of energy to cook and deaden animal flesh. Within the contexts of our present world, sadly, exercising with such a focus on energy expenditure and sentient loss is commonplace, not only in our adult gyms filled with machines but also in schools where many physical activity intervention programs exist (Kahn, et al., 2002; Lounsbery, Gast, & Smith, 2005; Rabin, et al., 2006; Saunders, et al., 2006; Woods & Weasmer, 2006). Thomas Myers labels the numbness we are currently experiencing as a culture but more alarmingly in our physical education classes ‘kinesthetic dystonia,’ where “for the majority of students, training in movement, in the intricacies of the felt sense of the body, or even the ability to touch sensitively is near nil” (Myers, 1998, p. 103). While the enthusiasm that teacher and teacher candidates alike have for identifying learning styles through the senses, e.g., visual, auditory and kinaesthetic or “VAK learners” certainly transfers into the physical education context, the felt sense, sixth sense or what Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) describes as a synaesthetic intermingling of senses is absent. Furthermore, we may even critically assess why teachers would aim to isolate one sense in lieu of another, a practice which lacks evidence-based support, one that Sharp, Bowker, and Byrne (2008) playfully label as being VAK-uous. Abram (1990) reminds us that in everyday life, “the so-called separate senses are thoroughly blended and intertwined, and it is only in abstract reflection, or in the psychologist’s laboratory, that we are able to isolate the various senses from one another” (p. 11).

A caveat is worth mentioning, however, that one sense, even if attempted to be isolated is better than disconnecting from our sensory connection to the world completely. Similarly, exercising on a machine in a perceptually disconnected fashion is better than nothing at all considering the growing levels of inactivity, obesity and global dis-ease in both our school-age and adult populations. Perhaps this is the frame of reference Millan uses for suggesting we put dogs on treadmills. What we are seeming to neglect, however, is what we may learn from animals in the way they move and perceive the world.

I must admit that after reading Millan and Peltier’s (2007) book, however, I was amazed by how quickly Massimo responded to me becoming ‘top’ dog. Last night on our evening walk before bed I followed his advice. I walked out of the door first, kept him on a very short leash and didn’t let him sniff anything for the first three minutes. It worked like a charm. Massimo did not pull on the leash for the first time in our three-year history and I felt totally in control of where we were going. In terms of the walk being enjoyable, however, walking down the side of the road with my gaze fixed on the horizon was dulling to say the least. While the goal of exerting my dominance was accomplished and palpable, in sticking to the linearity of the self-imposed track I felt less alive.

Conrad (2007) draws attention to our forward gaze tendencies that not only come from sticking to the sidewalk or treadmill, she explains that “Western bodies maintain an almost constant forward thrust that now includes watching TV, using computers, reading, driving etc., [...]. Even when sleeping, a forward tendency can still be detected due to its now almost perpetual dominance” (p. 302-303). In

revisiting the two accounts of running ‘with’ and ‘like’ my dog, a departure from the rigidity of the forward facing gaze was only approached in the latter. Prior to this awakening, I, someone who regularly engages in yoga and proprioceptive fitness practices such as training with a Resist-A-Ball™ (Lloyd, 2008) with all the kinaesthetic attention I could muster, could not alleviate the chronic tension I experienced in my neck. Only when I loosened my gaze on the path ahead and let my animate senses guide me to soak in the aromas of wild flowers and squawks from birds overhead did I dissolve the forward-facing comportment I learned so well. I understand, viscerally and somatically, Brown’s (2004) assertion that, “a companion animal may be a person’s strongest link to life itself” (p. 83). Thanks to Massimo, a softness, fluidity and ease are now present as I depart from a process of becoming fit in a way that Mazis (2002) describes, the reality that in “hardening our bodies [...] in every sensory solicitation, we manage to become dead while still being alive in some very real sense” (p. 54). An emergence for a fluid presence beyond linear, repetitious constraints thus awaits...

I conclude with a plausible beginning for experiencing an animate curriculum not only as runners but as tenure track professors, mothers, friends, or whatever label we might choose to inscribe—an enactment of a simple yet profound gesture: the closing, blurring or shifting of our eyes from the path ahead. We might then lose our human “blindness” of consciousness as Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 248) describes and experience the realm of the invisible in synaesthetic capacities, the fluidity that lives within perceived rigidity. If we do not listen, Gaia, as Lovelock (2007) asserts, will have her revenge. Alternatively, we might lovingly open ourselves to the possibility of living in fluid resonance with the world through respiration, the very act that defines and sustains life. More than a kinetic exchange of gases, the kinaesthetic, aesthetic, and energetic intertwining of breath on cellular and cosmic levels provides expansive possibilities of a gel-sol exchange, “gel being semi-solid (more stable) in comparison to the dispersive flow of sol (more fluctuation)” (Conrad, 2007, p. 14). The hard, objective divisions of a Cartesian body separated from intelligence, others, and the world, have the potential to dissolve with every exhalation and gather or coagulate in the sweet intoxicating scent of every inhalation. More than a conceptual abstraction, we thus have the perceptual ability to experience an animate curriculum, a world as our dogs might “as active, as animate, as alive.” (Abram, 2002, p. 6).

## Notes

1. It is worth noting that although the term ‘curriculum’ can be etymologically traced back to the action of running a race course and philosophers as early as Dewey (1916) drew upon the notion that the child’s experience and various forms of subject matter make up the ‘course of study,’ there is still a present day tendency to think of curriculum as “being something fixed and ready-made in itself” (Jackson, 1992, pp. 5-6). In other words, curriculum is considered to be a noun instead of a verb and a developmental action of unfolding.
2. “A typical dog has a visual acuity of 20/75, which means that a dog has to stand twenty feet away to clearly see an object a person with normal vision sees well standing seventy-five feet away.” (Grandin & Johnson, 2005, p. 40)
3. Emilie Conrad’s (2007) Continuum is a somatic movement practice where one becomes open to the rippling possibilities of moving in a fluid fashion, much the same way the surface of a pond may respond to a breeze. While one must physically do Continuum to know what it feels like, similar to the way one must jump into water to learn how to swim, the following description gives an inclining of what it is like to depart from the repetitive patterning within the limitations of the ‘cultural’ anatomy (the one most often associated with fitness-forming activities). “Stretched to its limit, tissue structure lateralizes and spirals in such slow rotations that there is no possibility for the efficiency of “doing chores”:  
 “now we are in a completely different domain that has nothing to do with any of those concerns. [...] we see very long intervals of suspension where the entire body maintains a movement without strain for an extended time before another movement emerges. Note that to be in a movement without efforting for several minutes, one must be suspended from a greater field. [...] These movements do not make “sense” in our conventional way of looking at things; they are not a manifestation of our linear consciousness. Let’s just say that other aspects of our organism are revealed since there are no inhibitors to mute them. Sequences of movements (often combined with sounds) become

an opportunity for tissue structure to respond in a multiplicity of ways. An exhilaration of the system results.” (Conrad, 2007, p. 312-313)

4. “Even in societies that eat dogs, pups that are breast-fed by women are often spared because of the affection that wells up during the act of nursing” (Olmert, 2009, p. 72). Such a fluid human-dog bond has reciprocal possibilities. In Greek mythology, for example, there is a story of “Asclepius, god of medicine, who as an infant was saved by being suckled by a bitch” (The Monks of New Skete, 2002, p. 4).

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