



## contemplative & creative exercises in embodiment

In "Among School Children" (1928), William Butler Yeats describes a "flow" experience that offers insight into the paradoxes of embodiment.

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,  
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

1. Have you ever felt like you are the dance, that no separation exists between your body and its movement? You don't have to take "dance" or "dancer" literally in this poem. Are there any activities that allow you to less separation between your thinking mind and your body's actions, whatever those actions might be? Take as much time as you need. Write in your notebook.

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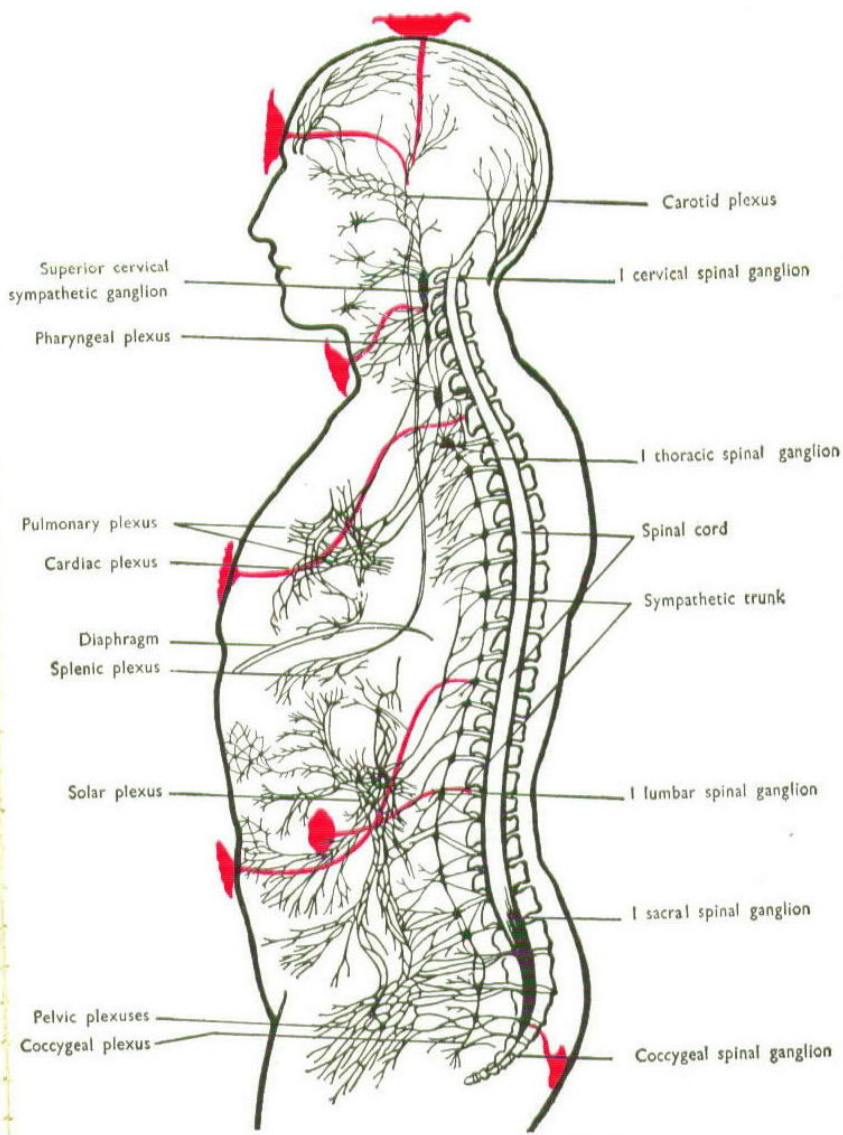
2. The videos mentioned three of many possible maps for the physical body: the DNA map, the energetic map and the socio-cultural map. What other maps are you familiar with of the human body? How have those maps influenced your own embodiment? Which maps have helped you more deeply experience your own embodiment and which have limited your own sense of your own embodiment?

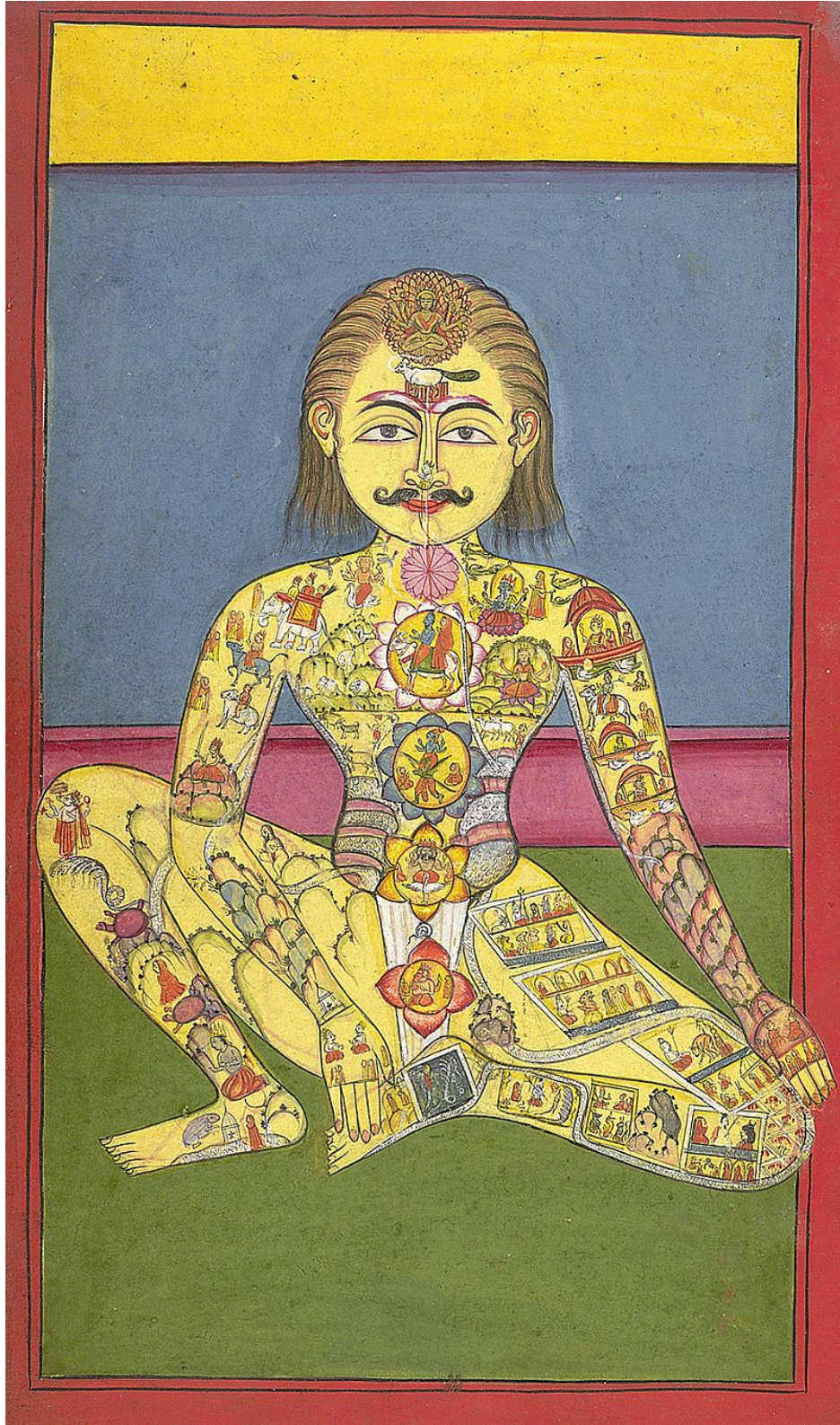
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3. Below are two diagrams of the chakra system, one "map" of subtle energy used in yogic and Buddhist systems. The first is from a 1927 text book and the second is from a late 19<sup>th</sup> century text book. The chakras roughly translate as "wheels," "circles" or "cycles" from the original Sanskrit. They're believed by some people to be gateways to experience the subtle, or energetic body. When you look at these diagrams, these maps of the subtle body, what is the response in your embodiment? This course focuses on creative and contemplative awareness of embodiment. In what ways might you creatively or contemplatively work with systems of subtle body awareness? Remembering that the map is not the territory, how might you use maps of your own body as starting points to exploration of your very personal experience of embodiment?





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4. What role does your imagination play in your embodiment? In Buddhist traditions, practitioners often imagine themselves as the Buddha. If you are feeling restricted in your embodiment, in your practice, in your life, how might you use your imagination to overcome your restrictions? If you would like to adopt a quality or characteristic in your life and practice, such as compassion, friendliness or forgiveness, how might activating your own imagination help you embody that quality? Similarly, how the imagination guide us collectively toward a more imaginative, joyful future? Take a quality or an action that you would like to embody this week. Actively cultivate your imagination until your quality or action takes tangible form.

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5. In *Varieties of Presence* (2012), Alva Noë argues that Western philosophy has “taken for granted an over-intellectualized conception of the intellect.” He writes that “Presence does not come for free. We achieve presence. We act it out ... we must always *strive* to bring the world into focus.” First, what are the ways that the intellect is embodied? Similarly, what are the ways you can “achieve presence” in your own physical embodiment?

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6. Noë writes that “Experience, in the large, and in the small, is complex and manifold; it is always an encounter with hidden complexity. Experience is fractal in this sense. Perceptual experience extends to the hidden. In a way, for perception, everything is hidden.”

Taking Noë’s cue that “experience is fractal” what kind of maps can you draw of your own body this week? Does your body extend beyond the limits of your skin? Does your body map shift throughout the week? Which parts of the body map you make are visible and which are invisible? Where are you placing emphasis in your own body mapping? What maps and stories might you imagine for your own body that are regenerative, loving and whole despite any injury or wound you may have experienced?

