

# An Interview with Dr Marcia B. Leventhal

## Jane Refshauge

*Dr Leventhal graciously accepted our invitation to be interviewed whilst in Australia at the National Gallery in Melbourne - this took place in December 2004. Dr Leventhal emerged from the Edvard Munch exhibition to be greeted by Jane. The two of them had lunch and talked before Dr Leventhal immersed herself in the Andy Warhol exhibition (such is her love of the arts!). The following interview was conducted in the National Gallery Café, overlooking the famous St Kilda Road, Yarra River and Melbourne's beautiful Royal Botanic Gardens as well as the huge atrium of the recently refurbished gallery. Amidst the bustling clatter of coffee cups and food trays and the odd rumble of trams passing by outside, Dr Leventhal talked for over an hour about historic and more recent times, places and people. With hardly a pause, she demonstrated an amazing ability to recall these memories and events clearly and quickly.*



**Dr. Leventhal** is an Internationally known lecturer, workshop leader and Professor, who has developed many innovative techniques and been awarded grants and honors for her work in assisting human growth and development through the arts. She is committed to helping individuals re-discover the deeply healing/transformational potential in dance movement and the creative process.

Director of the Graduate Dance Therapy Program at New York University for sixteen years, where she was an Associate Professor, she went on to play a significant role in the history of the development of

dance movement therapy in this country. Her first visit was in 1987, when she was invited to be the keynote speaker at the first Australian Dance Therapy Conference in Melbourne. Since then she has been a frequent visitor conducting training groups, mainly in Melbourne, but also making presentations in Adelaide, Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane and Tasmania, initially travelling here three or four times per year. Dr. Leventhal helped found the training organisation, The International Dance Therapy Institute of Australia (IDTIA), created and taught in their Diploma Course for 10 years and continues to support the teaching faculty as Education and Training Director.

Dr Leventhal (Ph.D in Clinical Psychology) currently directs Dance Therapy Training courses worldwide and offers Quantum Healing Dance (tm) workshops and integrated arts programs for various art, education and business organizations. She has assisted in the development of Dance Therapy Training in Argentina, Greece, Japan, Great Britain and Sweden. Dr. Leventhal is the co-founder of the Dance Therapy Course at Froebel College in London. Graduates of the four year training program in Greece met all the qualifications from the IDTIA and were awarded Diplomas in Dance Therapy from IDTIA. She is the Co-founder of the Dance Therapy Institute of Princeton.

Besides having trained and studied in all styles of dance, theater and mime worldwide, and various body therapy techniques, Gestalt and Psychosynthesis, she is certified as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Dr. Leventhal has studied with non-traditional healers in Bali, Peru, Hawaii, India and the American Southwest in her quest to develop an understanding of healing and change. She has been a lifelong student and research associate of Dr. Valerie Hunt and also studied with Dr. David Bohm.

Dr. Leventhal is a former co-editor of the Journal of the ADTA and has served on the ADTA Board of Directors. Her latest book, *Journey to The Heart of Matter, The Ancient Healing Art of Dance - A Blueprint For Change*, is being readied for publication. She resides in Southern California where she maintains a private psychotherapy practice, teaches, performs, consults and works extensively with Juvenile Offenders.

Dr. Leventhal has been an officer on the Boards of Directors for non-profit organizations in NYC, Los Angeles, and Melbourne, Australia. Her degrees are from Brandies University (BA), UCLA (MA) and FIT, School of Psychology (Ph.D), with certificates from the University of Paris, the Common Market School in Paris, and the Professional Actors Program at The Royal National Theatre in London.

**Jane Refshauge**, BA, MFA, DipDMT (IDTIA), MAPs, AuSTAT, has a background in the performing arts and psychology. She has studied, performed and taught dance and movement disciplines, that have developed from the premise that the body is a "psycho-physical unity", working within professional dance studios, tertiary and secondary educational institutions, and psychiatric hospital settings. From 1979-1984 she lived, studied and performed in the USA. She studied Ideo-kinesis with Andre Bernard, Body-Mind Centring with Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, Kinetic Awareness with Elaine Summers and the Alexander Technique with June Ekman and Marjorie Barstow among others. In 1979 she met and worked with Deborah Hay and was invited by her to become a founding member of The Deborah Hay Dance Company in 1980. In 1984 she completed her MFA in Acting and Performance at the Tisch School of the Arts, NYU. On returning to Australia in 1984 Jane was invited to teach at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in the School of Dance where she developed a Kinesiology and Kinetic Awareness programme that integrated kinaesthetic body awareness skills with the teaching of traditional dance techniques and the facilitation of new choreographic forms. She qualified as a teacher of the Alexander Technique in 1989. In 1994 she returned to the USA, with the support of an Australia Council grant, to further her studies and at this time undertook an internship in Dance Movement Therapy at Princeton House, a unit of the Medical Centre at Princeton, New Jersey, under the supervision of Barbara Harrison. Jane's Dance Movement Therapy Diploma, was completed under the direction of Dr Marcia Leventhal in 2003. She currently works in private practice as a psychologist utilizing both dance movement therapy and movement re-integration modalities and is completing her masters degree in Psychoanalytic Studies with the Department of Psychological Medicine, Monash University.

**Jane:** *I've been thinking about the process of developing one's personal model of dance movement therapy. In my training with you at the IDTIA, the development of our own personal model of DMT was quite central to the entire training and I was aware in my training how difficult it was to actually establish my own personal model. It seemed to emerge out of a combining of my dance history, my work experience and the different people who were very important in mentoring and teaching me..... so I would like to ask you about your own personal journey in developing your own model of DMT.*

**Marcia:** Well it certainly happened over a long period of time. It comes from the influences in my life as a human being - the things that happened to me growing up as well as the people who mentored me as I got older and got involved in dance movement as a healing art. But particularly I was very moved by my two main mentors Dr Hawkins and Dr Hunt. Both of them believed in the creativity of the human being and the human's full potential to

be, whether emotional, mental, spiritual, creative. However each of them were very different and certainly unique in their own individuality. They came from very different backgrounds and perspectives. Dr Hawkins was a dance educator pioneer. Dr Hunt came out of physiology, anatomy, kinesiology, and was also very drawn to the arts, very artistic herself, and ended up teaching dancers kinesiology (and in so doing, probably changing everyone's life). But the thing that the two of them had in common is they totally believed that each of us (their students) had our own uniqueness and that was what they tried to inspire in us.

When you were working with Valerie Hunt – she believed in promoting and expecting excellence in each of her students and she supported the expectation that each of her students would go beyond the mastering of mere facts or theory and create and explore and develop ideas further. She expected, and therefore she got, key performances from all of us. That was probably my first understanding of that self fulfilling prophecy that someone really mirrors for you what they want to come out of you (and that's exactly what you give them, whether its bad or good), and with both these women it was something beautiful. But she was firm – she was brilliant she was supportive she was ready to play and she was there to guide us beyond what we believed was possible. At that time in her life she was starting to explore energy fields and looking at "strange" phenomena that scientists usually didn't look at. So she was very creative and very supportive to all of us and there was no such thing as failure with her. Because when you were being mentored by her you would just see things as challenges or hurdles, problem solving. She supported us and would always encourage us to find some sort of answer. It didn't have to be her answer; I think that was the main thing. But she expected no more from any of us than she expected from herself. And from her I learnt about analyzing personality, client movement expression, and about the importance of the beauty of research, about honoring every individuals 'uniqueness'; without the need to label or classify; and to challenge myself to go beyond and to have the courage to walk the tightrope of the vast unknown without the safety net of the expert's opinion or theory ...that was my discovery. Having her in my life at such an early age has affected my teaching life & facilitating life immensely.

Now Dr Hawkins, who was a dance educator, always believed that dance had the answer to helping people evolve and she always believed that everybody had a creative potential and all you had to do was find the way into it. And I saw it, I saw what she did with people, people you wouldn't think could walk, let alone dance and she created dancers out of them

because of this belief and the way she worked that belief into a method.

So in that respect both of these women were very, very important mentors for me ...and from Alma Hawkins, she really believed that you needed to prepare yourself; you needed to honor what went before, so that you would have a solid foundation for the new and innovative. She was a true visionary, she read broadly, integrating theories from art and science, and she also felt it was important to define your models. So I think it is interesting that you talk about that because certainly I presented my model, or models as they evolved, and I tried to encourage you all to find your models. A working model is important because it gives you a road map, which is needed as a kind of "holding" for yourself as you are evolving.



**Dr Hawkins and Dr Hunt with Dr Leventhal at Alma Hawkins 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebration**

Essentially, both women were pioneers. Alma was an amazing talent scout because she would find the most up to the moment discoveries in psychology and learning, physiology and dance and art and then she would entice the creators of these ideas to meet with her students at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles). We were so fortunate to be exposed to these brilliant innovators from the "get go" and we certainly learned, in retrospect, to appreciate the impact that the exposure to these creative, bright people had upon our development as performers, teachers, therapists, professors, choreographers; (people such as Edmond Jacobson, Eugene Gendlin, John Martin, Merce Cunningham, Mary Whitehouse - to name but a few) all inspired. There was a group of us at UCLA at the same time all doing our Masters in dance and when we meet we now call it the

"golden age of UCLA," because everyone from that time went on to do something significant. And that doesn't mean just that period of time, but throughout the time of Dr Hawkin's tenure at UCLA, when she created and chaired the dance department. People went on to become dance educators and dance in international dance companies; they became artists, dance therapists. I wrote the first Masters thesis in DMT that we know of anywhere in the world based on what was happening there at the time. But a lot of my friends at the time, who weren't doing DMT were all doing performing and choreography degrees - that I was doing too, but I became the first non-choreographic degree that they ever gave in dance - the women and men went on to do major things: one of them developed a renowned body therapy, another one became the lighting designer and helped actually establish 'Pilobolus', the dance company, and

someone else went on to dance with Merce Cunningham, and someone else created a dance company that worked worldwide. There was a lot of that going on - a lot of creativity and excellence. That's what was so amazing - people did what they did with excellence. It reminds me of that picture of the seagulls flying, with the inscription, "they can because they think they can". Well we did because we were told we could. That's what I have tried to inspire in all my students. I was thinking that for all of us growing up say in

the last 20, 30 or 40 years - it would have been different for Alma who lived to 93, she would have been close to a 100 years old by now. It was a different time, but Alma was a single woman, a single woman getting an education and going from her little town from the middle of America to New York, studying with some of the most innovative and influential thinkers of the time; and that's what inspired her - Eric Ericson, Harold Rugg, and many other people of that ilk with whom she studied.

**Jane:** *So when you go into a working space: the dance studio, the area that's prescribed to work with a certain population - when you go in - what is it that you are thinking? How are you connecting "how am I going to work with this group of people today?" with that influence from Alma Hawkins of understanding everyone has the potential to be connected to dance?*

**Marcia:** I've been on my own for thirty years or more – once I became a professor at NYU (New York University), I had to develop theoretical and conceptual areas in order to evolve a viable clinical program. I had to evolve, I had to develop what I knew and it's only in retrospect that I am able to. I look back and reflect on how much I was inspired and influenced by my teachers and mentors. My leading style is probably directly influenced by Mary Whitehouse who really was the first to talk about the human potential as developed and/or expressed through a dance movement event. (And she was "discovered" initially by Alma Hawkins). She came and taught Alma's students at UCLA, and that's where I first met Mary. Another inspiring influence was Blanche Evan who could improvise about anything. I did a lot of work with Blanche Evan and I learnt that you could pick up this glass of water and you could create a dance about it, because it would relate in some way to you personally. But it was then in finding the symbol and finding the expressive gesture and then organizing your thoughts afterwards that it brought meaning to it.

So there's all those influences. I don't copy any particular one. Yet one day I found an old tape that I'd made of Mary Whitehouse, and when I listened to it, I thought that sounded like me on the tape. I thought that was interesting, you don't know always how you have been influenced by a mentor. I didn't deliberately copy her. I had to create my own models. I had to create my own way of working. In the early days I called my work the "Integrative Treatment Model"<sup>TM</sup>, then that evolved into the "Conscious Healing Dance"<sup>TM</sup> and now it has evolved to "The Quantum Healing Dance"<sup>TM</sup>. Eventually throughout the model's evolution, from both clinical application and teaching imperatives, and behavior observed worldwide the model came to include the understanding and incorporation of elements from the so-called "Quantum" world and the so-called "Newtonian" world. These are seemingly different paradigms, which I studied to find a relationship or interaction between, because I needed to have a language to describe the phenomenon I was seeing working worldwide with people when they went on a deep dance movement journey. So when you ask, how do I use a model of one of my teachers or mentor, I don't believe that I use their model per se; rather the idea that a model is crucial to bringing form and order from chaotic or competing theory and methodology. There are a lot of things that one or two of my mentors did that I wouldn't do. For instance, I believed early in my career that wearing a "uniform", i.e. dance workout clothes could be too distancing and off putting to clients. I believed that the therapist and client should dress the same and meet on a common ground. And within a year or two after my not being able to say

that to one of my mentors who used to dress in leotards and dance skirts when working, she discovered the same thing and stopped with the dance "uniform".

The way I use or do not include music necessarily in my sessions; I am sensitive to not using music, because music can absolutely ruin an internal, unique dance movement 'journey' for a client; meaning stop it, change it, block it, if the music is not just "right". When I was involved in my research for my Master's project, I had a wonderfully talented, sensitive accompanist. This individual went on to compose a Broadway show and to head an Art Center in Los Angeles. He was the dance accompanist at UCLA and he was very sensitive to emotion and nuance. Yet, one day when I was working with one of the schizophrenic children involved in this Masters project at the Neuro-Psychiatric Institute at UCLA, as the child and I were building a dance from weeks of carefully coming together and relating non-verbally through the dance improvisation, it seemed that we had finally built a trust and a rapport, we had just started to create some major, seemingly breakthrough theme together, and the accompanist, (I think he assumed that we were going in a certain way and we went in a different way) changed the musical theme, which interrupted this carefully crafted flow/rapport between the child and myself. It shocked us both. The child 'flipped out'; she ran out of the session, back into the hospital. I had to chase her all over the institute. It took a long time to both comfort and stabilize her and set back our budding therapeutic bond by weeks. I realised later what had happened. The accompanist had so profoundly affected our work that when he changed the flow of the music, because the music had previously seemed unobtrusive and seamlessly integrated into the dance movement, when he lost the dance's thread/theme, it literally broke the connection with this girl that had been building carefully over weeks and weeks and weeks. So that was a lesson for me that it doesn't matter whose accompanying. You can't have accompaniment, you find out that it doesn't matter if the music is background or it is created for your group or session, or you use the music to get the clients to a place that might be better therapeutically to be initiated by the dance movement within the context of the therapeutic relationship. Music is a third member of the therapeutic team and it is not as controllable or flexible as the dance that evolves between a therapist and a client, or a therapist and a group. Many dance therapists will only just turn on music and let the music lead the session, because that's what they were taught to do. I feel you've got to be as informed about music as you are about dance to begin to use the music effectively integrated with the dance.

**Jane:** *So with the theory of yours that I've read – the Five Part Session™, the Unfolding model, understanding the quantum healing that occurs in the dance movement event - is that your theoretical model?*

**Marcia:** Those are parts of the model, individual elements, which help to hold or to facilitate or to clarify movement expression, but they are not the entire model by any means. My theoretical model changes. It took me a long time to evolve and realize that there was more than just the integrated treatment model. I was already looking at education, creative process and therapy. How did they become integrated? I looked at that for a long time and I would facilitate clients and teach students within that framework. You could be doing something educational, like helping a person use the function of their body correctly and you could still be doing dance therapy. People would get confused about doing body therapy and not dance therapy. It is dance therapy if you have a greater picture in mind. That's when I began to understand that there was something called a "field". That's when I began to read David Bohm who talks about 'unfolding'. I began to look at unfolding as a process energetically. At the same time I was also influenced by Allegra Fuller Snyder. Allegra had written an important article about rhythm and I talked to her a lot about aspects of the article which seemed to impact upon a healing dance event. Many of us at that time were beginning to explore the influence or impact that "rhythm" had upon healing; thinking that perhaps the healing was to be found somewhere in the element of rhythm. I explored that for a couple of years. I explored every piece of my model with clients and with my students for two, three, four years before I could say that this was my model and this is how I work. And each aspect of the model needed to offer an insight to behavior, to theoretical foundation, to a hypothesis of working; it had to become integrated. Many people and theories and experiences influence the evolution of one's "Model".

**Jane:** *Can you put in words what that is?*

**Marcia** That every human being has much potential. That with Valerie there was no such thing as failure, there were challenges and she expected greatness from her students, and she thus got "greatness" or excellence. That idea of expectation eventually translated into my work and model of the understanding of the energy field, and its relation to holding, containing, unfolding. I did a PhD in clinical psychology and I studied object relations and all the psychodynamic work and I was constantly trying to integrate that. Along with my work with Kestenberg, and with my work with Bartenieff and Laban Movement Analysis - I was one of the people that

she worked with in New York early during the development of the dance therapy profession and various theoretical elements. (I eventually did my CMA). But my first exposure to Laban's concepts was via early research I did with Valerie Hunt who had gone to England on one of her sabbaticals and worked with Marion North years before I studied with Irmgard. So I personally did Effort/Shape with Valerie Hunt before I ever met Irmgard Bartenieff. Valerie was really a pioneer in that respect as well. Things that I incorporated, where I teach people to witness and hold and understand what a field is, that has been informed by my object relations work, my understanding about Winnicott's holding environment, by always looking energetically.



**Dr Leventhal with Dr Valerie Hunt at Valerie's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration**

Way back in the beginning understanding something about rhythm and that rhythm translates into energy. What is it? How does it manifest and maybe effect personality expression/integration? I explored rhythm for about three years. Looking at and exploring the concept of "time" cross culturally, looking at rhythm as a form, etc. My energy work came from the profound research work that Valerie Hunt did after she left UCLA. She started at UCLA observing individuals who had been Rolfed (Ida Rolf). Valerie developed instruments for recording how their fields changed after being Rolfed. (That and more of her seminal research has been well documented in the literature). And then we did research together, she, I and four or five other people, for about two or three years. I would fly into California from New York and we would go away to a retreat near Ojai, or stay in Malibu for long, intensive weekends, and explore energy and energy fields and how it is translated into

people's actions, performance, expression, personal development, healing, etc.

So I was influenced by that, but I am constantly realizing that I have to work with people right here - in the here and now - and continually must reflect upon how some theory or method or application translates into the immediacy of clinical practice, etc. Eventually the "Integrative Treatment Model" morphed into the Newtonian/Quantum model. Here the model is foundation to considering how, in the so-called "Newtonian" world view, there is a "bottom line": the bottom line is, there is a bottom line! In the Quantum world view there is no bottom line. There are connections and interconnections and it is **non linear**. So how those considerations and subsequent theoretical elements connected to each of those disparate paradigms became the next piece or evolution of my model. It has, of course, taken years of study, of clinical practice of **personal** development for the unfolding and development to occur.

So, coming back to your query, when I walk into a room and start to work, it's the years of experience of working with people and the different theoretical frameworks that have informed me and helped my particular work/practice to evolve. My style of working was probably informed by my four major mentors, which were Valerie, Alma, Mary and Blanche: the way they worked with people and what they expected of people. But not to be minimized or forgotten are psychodynamic and object relations, considerations; understanding energetically what they are. Understanding that much of what happens to and in the space between individuals when a wound of the psyche, or an insult to our growth becomes part of the interaction, part of the interpersonal relating, part of our own individual unfolding. Reflecting upon how it may become a neurosis or maybe even a psychosis. But however and whenever these rifts in our development occur, more often than not, they usually affect the individual at a pre-verbal level - something happened to our developing sense of self, personality, ego pre-verbally. When we begin to move people into a more integrated, wholistic sense of self, what gets expressed and worked through, ultimately, seems to begin at a pre-verbal stage - before concepts and words were formed. Clinically, clients and students alike were reporting to me what they were experiencing, often in frustration, because they could not find an adequate word descriptor for their experience. Over time we learned to use other art modalities to try and capture the affect or the meaning of these "felt", possibly pre-form, experiences (so difficult to articulate). Something happened or happens to us early in life, it is felt, sensed, experienced, but how do we find meaning for

such events. Or learn to interpret our personal symbology? At some point it seemed crucial and maybe even logical to begin to explore energy as a system.

And then I spent a couple of years when I used to go back to California and have conversations with Alma who was a great friend. We would talk about anything and everything, about all kinds of ideas, but always came back to dance as a healing art. Alma believed that forming was an important concept to consider regarding the healing/wholing process. So then I started to look at what was healing and what was forming and going back to my old dance roots - because I was a dancer, I was a choreographer and I was an actor. I've always been involved in the performing arts since I was four years old - so that was just there in my background. I've always believed in dance. One day, when I was having a hard day during the research at NPI (i.e. creating a dance therapy model/ project/thesis out of little more than blind faith in dance, though I was being mentored by fabulous people, there was no model or precedent for what I was doing at NPI), anyway, on this particularly difficult day, I asked Alma, "Have you ever doubted dance?" And she said, "Never - not for a minute - dance is where it's at." Then I said, "OK" and that freed me to continue and to stay focused upon my belief/faith in the power of the dance event, which I always had; but to hear such faith coming from someone I respected so deeply, reinforced my faith. It has always been important in my life to dance. It went from movement to dance. I was a mover-explorer as a little kid and my first memories of myself are running up and down hills and rolling and being fearless with my body. My mother gave me my first dance class when I was about three or four and I remember when they put me in a harness to teach me how to do flips. My mother held one end and the teacher held the other end and I started to do flips that way, and that was the beginning of my flipping and cart-wheeling and experimenting with all kinds of exotic (i.e. to a four year old) movement. Then I danced in my first recital. I was like a baby ballerina in a tutu.

When I began to study dance seriously, my main influence when I was growing up was a teacher who came from the Ballet Russe. She was a real hard task master and I would show up, four, five times a week, having to catch all kinds of buses and streetcars to get to my dance class. I was only about eight or nine years old and I think that is where I first learned internally what discipline and commitment meant. I believe that the discipline that a dancer learns is paramount to understanding that - we have to have the discipline in order to have the freedom.

**Jane:** *How important do you think it is to have that early dance experience to become a dance movement therapist?*

**Marcia:** I think that perhaps a person has loved dance all their life but they have not had the opportunity to dance or to study any sort of dance. I think they have to dance somewhere and they have to move - I call it dance movement now, rather than just "dance" or just "movement". It is more than just moving for exercise or for pure function, and it is not just a dance form. A lot of people have had myriad experiences with a variety of body therapies, whether yoga, Alexander, Rolfing, etc. They come from the body therapies but they haven't danced or done any expressive improvised movement - yet they intuitively feel the healing power in or from the moving body. That seems to be the important, key here - **expressive dance movement**. My early experiences were just being like a wild child with moving and I would climb and balance and invent things to do with my body. Then I had ballet, which channeled my energy into a clear form, and then I discovered jazz and Modern and even tap dancing. I was fortunate to have studied with some great dancers and choreographers (Eugene Loring, Gene Nelson, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Matt Mattox, Gus Solomons Jr.). For me there was something natural to discover dance out of pure moving; there seemed to be an affinity in my soul so to speak. I knew that ballet was important but it wasn't where I wanted to put my creative energy; but there was something important in the way this dancer from the Ballet Russe inspired us despite her strict disciplinarian ways. We were expected to be in class no matter what, no excuses - the philosophy being that "the show must go on" - commitment, hard work, discipline - which for me became important life's lessons for character development. And of course the ballet offered a structure and a routine seemingly giving order to a turbulent childhood and adolescence. I learnt a lot from that. Ballet gave me a way to structure, to organize and to discover my body boundaries, but it didn't fill my creative soul. Jazz did that for me.

Before I went to UCLA I studied with Merce Cunningham, which was a great transition from the structure of ballet, since his style was ballet like, but definitely extended the boundaries of the form and brought another sensibility to moving expressively within a structure or form. At UCLA I was exposed to many techniques and methods as I was able to explore many modern forms and styles as well as improvisation and choreography. In New York I worked in an improv company directed by Margie Beales. That was very exciting. It was all ages and sizes and shapes - it was like Circus Oz in a way and people would just love it. We would only do one

performance a year and we were just there for our own workout. It was so wonderful to see real people dancing. What they didn't know was that there were a couple of Paul Taylor dancers there, Martha Graham's rehearsal pianist was in our company, two of my colleagues were there. We were real people - we looked like real people

**Jane:** *There was a depth of experience. I have a sense of you talking about Valerie Hunt and Alma Hawkins, but can you tell us a little bit about Mary Whitehouse and Blanche Evan?*

**Marcia:** Well, Mary Whitehouse offered me my first experience in finding what I am calling now my soul's movement expression. But at the time I don't think any of us realized that that was what was occurring. We didn't come together with Mary to make dances or to sharpen up our dance technique, but just to move and share what our dance experiences were bringing up; that was unique. We take it for granted now, but in those days it was uncharted territory---our "soul's" expression/journey. Sadly, in the midst of these raw and exciting even terrifying challenges Mary fell ill, and it was her students, myself included, that began to try and codify and develop her initial thoughts, techniques and imperatives. What is interesting is that such a mystique developed around Mary because she was very grounded and very connected. She herself often said the only reason she began to teach was so she could support her two children because she was divorced and she was a single mum. She was modest, with no thought or realization that she was contributing to the human potential field that had flourished in California in the 60's. Even more interesting is that Alma recognized the unique vision of Mary and brought her in to UCLA to work with dance majors. Finding authentic expression was important to Mary, but it was a means towards insight. Her work did not stop at "authentic movement" per se. It was about working through patterns and shifting perception but it was not in itself a technique or a method, but just a conceptual idea. Years later, when I was doing peer supervision, first with one of Blanche's people and then with a dmt (dance movement therapist) who had worked with Marion Chase, we worked on exploring so-called "authentic movement". That was when I began to develop my "**unfolding model**". I began to realize that the authentic place is where you start from but then you have to unfold or evolve to something else, eventually discovering in closure that a new authentic place has been uncovered; which then becomes the springboard again for the next event. Having read David Bohm by that point; where he discussed the "implicate" and "explicate" order and how one can only unfold to greater knowing, which then brought up the question of how do you let go of

old patterns in order to get to a more expanded or enlightened awareness?

So anyway, my first experience with Mary was when she came to UCLA to work with 6 of us dance majors. She said, "I want you to lie down on the floor and not move until you feel the urge to move". None of us knew what she was talking about. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of my friends/dancers get up and start to do like a pantomime thing and somebody else starts to roll and I'm lying there thinking, "What in the heck am I doing here? What does she mean 'the urge to move'?" I mean I could do a split, I could do a cartwheel. "What does she mean 'the urge'?" And I was getting so uncomfortable. "I'm going to flunk and this woman is going to tell Alma Hawkins that I am a flunker. She doesn't know what she is doing." I just lay there and lay there and lay there – finally something just started to shift in my torso, it was probably my discomfort, and that just started to lead me into a small bit of movement. Then just a little bit more and a little bit more. Then I started to get involved in this and then I thought, "This is strange - what is going on here?" And then I moved a little bit and then she brought the experience to a closure. Then the first thing she said is, "There was only one person following my direction and that is Marcia." I'm looking like, "What is she talking about? I didn't follow her directions. I didn't know what I was doing. I was in a state of high anxiety the entire time." But she was trying to get to a point - none of us knew what the point was. There was no such thing as "come from a deep place and move". What does that mean? We take it for granted now. So that was interesting. And, seemingly, the beginning of a "magic" way to explore the psyche through dance movement.

*Jane: When you say, "It's as if Authentic Movement doesn't unfold", what is it you see when someone just stays at the authentic level but doesn't unfold and develop it?*

**Marcia:** Well first of all when we work at the authentic level, we have to talk about what that is. Just because someone goes to "a deep place" it may be to a fixed pattern that they do the entire time. I learnt that in my private work. Someone came to me for dance therapy and I was developing a private practice in New York and being trained at a psychoanalytic clinic at the same time and this woman came in and her movement expression was quite spontaneous and fluid. It took me a month or more to realize that that was her defense, because I was initially dazzled by her willingness to move rather than talk. But it seemed that she was moving so that she wouldn't have to talk or conceptualize or confront any of the pain in her life. She seemed to

move to block out rather than work through and/or confront issues. Never having to articulate her fear, how she was messing up and not being able to move through her life in any way with grace. That just seemed to be too hard for her to put into words, because then it became too real. I remember thinking that, "OK you can move, but just because you are moving doesn't mean you are going to be healthy." It's an integration; a careful balancing of all modalities of perception and avenues of expression.

And that's when I started to think about balancing all the various constructs and exploring the process of integration; what is integration? and what is insight?, and working through? etc. It seemed to be about the interaction and relationship between the body, the mind and the spiritual, and understanding how each of those aspects of our total being contribute to our health and functioning. Currently, for me, it is a four dimensional experience which also must consider the soul. I believe that the soul is different from the "spirit". So authentic for authentic sake is only a starting off place. Because what a person is confronted with is their own patterns and you can't perceive anything but what you have experienced, and you can only experience what you perceive. So the challenge is in shifting this held perspective. In other words, if this is the way you move this is the way you are going to continue to move, because there is no way you are going to break that pattern (unless you are being witnessed or held in a way that helps the person move into the next developmental level or stage). Sometimes you do have to intervene. I learned that when I was doing dance therapy with emotionally disturbed and learning disabled children. I could not let them just improvise with their own dance because they would stay exactly stuck as they were. So suddenly you have to confront all your own issues around being an authoritarian figure; but it's being "authoritarian" from a caring, loving place where you're going to attempt to guide or facilitate the person to the next developmental level. Then you have to learn what is the next level – emotionally, cognitively, socially, perceptual or sensory motorically? We learn that it means having to go beyond and beneath the elements which contribute to learning skills and modalities and find what developmentally has to happen. And understanding just how profoundly movement can and does affect basic development and pre-learning skills.

So in terms of authentic movement, it's the same thing. First of all what is authentic movement? And I don't think anybody can define it and I think it's pretentious to say we can...but let's say that it is movement that is devoid of form (a stylized form) but the minute you move you have form. Then can you, as a facilitator, help evolve that to take the person outside their pattern...and then as a therapist



you have to understand you may be holding for the client a lot of anxiety, fear, indecision, ambivalence as one form-pattern is loosened and an individual discovers or evolves or unfolds their stuck place/pattern to a more functional, even if less familiar form. You, as the therapist/facilitator, may often be in that place, which a DMT friend of mine called, of 'enlightened discomfort' (i.e. holding for the client until such time as they have internalized the new form-pattern - holding their fear and anxiety). Essentially, we are always held or contained within some sort of form or pattern, even in seemingly chaotic or unfamiliar experiences --- fractals have taught us that **there is exquisite form even in chaos**. That gives us the courage to emerge and let go of old patterns learned early in life for survival but which we have probably outgrown; to trust that as we have the courage to "unfold" a new pattern or foundation will "**hold**" us as we continue our journey towards health and hopefully enlightenment.

Blanche was a tiny woman with an enormous field; what we call charismatic. She was a strong woman who didn't suffer fools lightly. She believed in getting down to the business of being in charge of yourself. There was no rationalizing one's behavior. There were no excuses. She wanted you to become conscious and clear, to develop and evolve and to trust dance and the insight of what was brought towards consciousness on the way. Both Blanche and Mary brought their own personal understanding of psychodynamic development as they had experienced it. With Blanche it was Adlerian training and with Mary it was Jung. Whereas Mary attempted to translate some of Jung's concepts directly to dance, Blanche developed her own way of working and then she used Adlerian concepts as cornerstones to make interpretations. So what happened, my experience of Blanche allowed me to realize that anything could be a stimuli for entering the unconscious and expressing what was being jarred via the dance movement. So, in her so-called "training groups" of which I was a member for several years, here or there she might use a word, a picture, a concept or an object to catalyze a personal dance. And she had a very personal vocabulary for movement, and for training the body, but you improvised to bring forth your unique expression and then it would be interpreted and analyzed by her or you together over time. That was her style and a part of her method in her training groups.

Mary used concepts as stimuli as well but her work was aborted early because of her illness. It is a testament to Mary's vision, her genius, that so much survived because she spoke to our "soul essence", I believe. Just coming back to Mary for a second, after she was in a remission (she had multiple sclerosis)

some of her old students had lunch with her. By that time I had been working in Europe and had been working in New York and we had this lunch. Mary hadn't seen us in a long time. We had grown up since she had known us as very young women at the start of our various careers. I was directing the Dance Movement program at NYU (New York University) and another was teaching at UCLA, and we'd had to evolve theory and method and we'd just had to do it on our own. We'd had a lot of experience in the world at that point and we were talking to Mary about things we knew and wanting to know, and you know we wanted Mary to love us like we were her children, and Mary stopped in the middle of this lunch and this sharing where we were at and she said, "You girls have gone so much further than I ever could have gone." And it just stunned us because here we were thinking we're not quite to where Mary was. And I also learned from Mary's illness how important it was to deal with transference and counter-transference issues. Mary said that we must stay aware of boundaries between ourselves and our clients; be careful not to mix-up roles as therapist, vs. friend, vs. teacher. Mary had some inkling that there might be a relationship to boundaries and illnesses. This was a sensibility I brought with me when working with terminally ill cancer patients.

***Jane:** So in a way by not having strong boundaries there can be a permeation into oneself. That's another area to consider in terms of theoretical models: this the notion of protection.*

**Marcia:** Yeah... I learned about protection from many other modalities and trainings, I studied shamanic traditions worldwide for more than fifteen years, and did Yoga and T'ai Chi and meditation, all for years. And bits and pieces from these ancient traditions have also informed my own development as a person, as a therapist, as a teacher. As has Assiogoli's Psychosynthesis and Perl's Gestalt --- both theories and techniques helped me form theoretical and methodological positions very early in my career in New York. Here is how I discovered the healing power of a yoga tradition - I was a professional actor. I had just come from Europe. I'd made twelve or fifteen films I was becoming a "movie star" and being auditioned for Broadway shows and I'm two days in New York and I'd auditioned for a show to replace the lead, that was going to open a week later and was receiving huge publicity. I got the part and I had an anxiety attack like I'd never known could exist. And I'd just stumbled across yoga. And I went to my yoga class. And it absolutely helped me with my anxiety and then I started to learn about visualization and I studied with some of the gurus of the time, Swami Sachidanada and with Swami Rama. He was the swami upon whom the Menninger Clinic based much

of their bio-feedback theoretical development. And he was the man who taught us that you could be dreaming, awake and asleep all at the same time. In learning such “strange” and new (for me) concepts, these Swamis expanded for me the idea that this reality is not the only reality. So that all opened up to me at that time. At the same time I was training in Psychosynthesis and was quite influenced by the concept of “self”.

*Jane: I was asking about protection. But you were also talking about it's the body/mind/spirit/soul theoretical model. And I guess we are getting to the spiritual aspect and the soul aspect of your model. And once you're working at that level it's even harder, or it seems to me it's even harder, to create boundaries. How does one develop boundaries that protect both yourself and the clients?*

**Marcia:** Well we don't know. People say, after seeing patients, “Go wash your hands in cold water”, or “Sprinkle your field” so to speak - “just protect yourself”. So it's just knowing that you need to protect yourself. Knowing that you learn from experience. That's what I did. I would work with my clients and then at the end of the day I still had that client inside me and I'd say to myself, “This just can't be. What am I doing?” Had I been thinking about it too much? But no, it was more than that. We are working energetically. We are working with movement and therefore our fields are merging. That's when I started to develop my understanding about attunement: how you can enter a field and then leave it. You know how I work with the “**dynasphere**” (a term coined by Dr. Leventhal meaning the “dynamic kinesphere” and explored in the training groups J.): “Know your own dynasphere, know where your back is, know where you are here, now. What's your lowest place? What's your top or highest place? Where are you in terms of personal and environmental space?” etc., etc. And then when I was working with cancer patients we developed a way of them developing a “shield”(energetically, metaphorically). And they tell me it really helped them - the concept of a shield in front of them so that everybody didn't keep entering their space... with good intentions or bad intentions. They put a shield, meaning something like plexiglass, in their mind, so that nobody could get through their field but they could see what was going on so they felt protected.

*Jane: So really at a deep spiritual level or at a level of the unconscious you can allow yourself to be so porous that someone else's energy can penetrate inside you and then you need to clear that out. In my experience of working with clients this is sometimes actually a part of their unwellness. So that there is an energy that can pass from one person to another that*

*can actually be in one but not necessarily be of one's essence. That part of the dance movement therapy work is to sift and to clear out, to differentiate, and create stronger boundaries for the client.*

**Marcia:** Definitely, which brings us to the theoretical concept of the Body Image, which has influenced the development of my model and my initial research (at the Neuro-psychiatric Institute at UCLA). The theses hypothesized that a change in body image would result in a change of self concept, ability to learn, ability to socialize which are needed skills for life. I spent years really looking at body image and researching body image and I still use it.

*Jane: Do you want to say anymore about Blanche Evan - Or Mary Whitehouse?*

**Marcia:** For me, I just feel personally that there is a way of leading and a way of understanding dance and knowing that you can improvise and get to deeper parts of the unconscious; so you have to wait, to hold, and interpret afterwards. You can't just lead the person, but must gently guide them as new parameters and insights unfold. I think I got that from Mary and Blanche and then it went on with my studies certainly after that. But that's essentially as much as I can say about Blanche at this point in terms of the influence. But all the women were mavericks. They were pioneers. They were courageous. They were daring to go where very few women dared in their era. So maybe that's inspired me. Oh I know the other thing that inspired me is that there is no age. You know Alma died at 94 and she published her new book at 88: *Moving from within: a new method for dance making*. What Alma did at the end of her life, she turned back to her dance roots and came back to teaching dance from a dance therapy perspective - to take the average person on this deeper journey. It was a very effective class; and that book came out of that work. And Valerie who is still a friend and I speak to her all the time and see her from time to time is now 88 years old and still very vital. So it's wonderful. Those have been wonderful models. Blanche died too young and so did Mary.

*Jane: Two other areas to discuss: I'm getting this sense that a theoretical model actually evolves as one evolves. So it changes and develops. So how has your model changed since you last really wrote about it? And, perhaps, really in response to the work that you are doing now with the children in protection?*

**Marcia:** Well the children in protection, I can't really say yet, because I think it takes time. And I look at things and I think about them. But I am considering how these childrens' ‘as if’ persona affect their stability, day to day functioning, amount of anti-social acts, recidivism etc. In other words,

how much of who and/or what they present to the world is a survival defense, or an integral part of their complex psychological makeup, or a superficial “shield”, and can aspects of their “soul-self” still be discerned, regardless.

But there is one aspect to the model I hope to explore currently with the Certificate Graduates and Diploma Students here in Australia. It took me a long time to evolve the Newtonian and Quantum model and the various elements connected to the model; what it looks like and what it feels like and how you activate it, and what you do with it in dance therapy and how you hold for it and why. Realizing there is a third dimension and I don't know what to call it yet, but a working name/title maybe is “the structure of the psychological blueprint.”

I believe that as humans we struggle with the psychology of our being, whether connected more to a Newtonian sensibility or to a Quantum sensibility. The so-called struggle, for lack of a better description at this point, relates to the main or pervasive insult to our core, our intact psyche: the place that's been injured, the place that needs to be healed, or the places. That in the Newtonian world that becomes identified as the blocks, the stoppage, the neurotic pain.... *possibly* - but I think that's something I'm going to start to look at now. So that's going to be like a third piece. I've always said that there are three sides to every coin. There are the two sides with the Newtonian and Quantum. I don't think its either/or. I think we could be shifting from the psychology of our being, which could be way out there in the Quantum world because we've left every thing behind, we have literally 'split', but we need to come back into the Newtonian world (possibly what occurs in some psychosis). But do you bring it (the personal insult psychology) with you or do you leave it out there? Or, if you are in the Newtonian world, you're so rigid and you're so held to the day-to-day and 'this is the way it is and there's nothing else', that you can't even conceive of helping yourself, of individuating or of actualizing. Can you even move yourself out of that piece of psychology into the Quantum world so that you can take a breath? So there's something there in that third piece, but I don't know what to call it right now. But it relates to the ease of flow between the two worlds, what comes with us, what we leave behind, what we essentially work through or with, and how---whether from the body, the mind the spirit or the soul. So it is multi layered and complex, but accessible through the dance movement event. Perhaps it informs our personal style, movement, conceptual expression or as an aspect of our core essence.

*Jane: It's in the body for me, very Newtonian they are very much the structure and yet we've got fluids*

*in the body that move in a fractal or Quantum way. So within the body there is that interface.*

**Marcia:** Yes. All the neuro-physiological material that has come out of the research of people like Candace Pert: what they're looking at with neurotransmitters and the possible re-programming of the brain's chemistry; transmitters that can be re-formed and make new formations --- all of that current research I believe will impact upon our DMT models --- and in a good way. But even this cutting edge, innovative, shifting paradigm research seems to have roots or seeds in the early explorations of the brain's function and re-programming as put forward by people like Kephart and Delgado. I was very influenced by these theorists when I was dealing with children with sensory-motor disorder and perceptual-motor disorders, learning that it is possible to re-pattern certain parts of the brain. So everything has a link, everything has a seed, just like in tension and relaxation and energy flow elements. The seed comes from Laban which came from Delsarte, and before that, who knows what influenced him? And so goes it right through history right to Martha Graham who did “contraction and release” and then developed in a different modality by persons into, for example, the biological sciences - a researcher like Edmond Jacobson who explored relaxation and did tension-relaxation models. I mean there are seeds that get planted and then roots take form in a myriad of fields and disciplines which shape the knowledge in a new way and application.

How we evolve, nourish and develop each of those seeds, those influences is what excites me. I guess it's really what moves us and for me I guess just going back to the beginning. I just always discovered my work in my body and I felt empowered in using my body. There was nothing my body couldn't do, and that affected a basic relationship with my developing self-concept; and then the dance of course became the creative part and that's probably the soul's expression in a way. But as important is the concept of conceiving, and imagining and finding one's belief in self from a strong faith/belief. So even if in the Newtonian world, the physicality of the self is limited, there are ways to still stimulate an imaginative, creative soul-self expression. So, for me, when I am working as a therapist, I pretty much try to “see” beyond a so-called “limitation” and imagine the anecdote for the individual and hold that thought-image in the field as a way of modeling an unfolding for the individual. But, coming back to dance as the soul's expressive outlet, unfortunately in our society it can also become just the Newtonian expressive piece: you know: here's the form, you learn someone else's choreography, and it has to be done in a particular way...

**Jane:** *Myself, having had an extensive dance background and also studied quite traditional psycho-analytic theory what impresses me with the dance movement therapy training I've done with yourself is this understanding of the energy and that spiritual side and how that's not included necessarily in either of the other two disciplines, although it is present, but with your work it somehow becomes a medium through which the change occurs. I was wondering if you could talk about this. Because in my experience, and I haven't had an extensive experience, although I have worked around the world, your work embodies this more than anybody else's that I've encountered. And I find your model incredibly spiritual, generous and transformative.*

**Marcia:** Well, the only thing I can say is that it just felt like something that had to be there. For better or for worse. Something to explore something, that I would try to facilitate. I know that I was very drawn to the shamanic work and I spent years studying it both with shamans in their natural habitat as well as with Michael Harner, who evolved a way of bringing shamanistic tradition to the Western world. I don't know if that's the answer for me but it is knowing that there is something else there. We can't necessarily see... we might feel it, we don't hear it necessarily. Our ordinary senses don't capture it, but somewhere sensorially we capture it. And to keep myself open; to say it's that and for the lack of anything else I would say is the spiritual. People always ask, "What's the difference between the spirit and the soul?" I'm not sure but I think there is a difference. And I think the soul can even be a

Newtonian soul. There's something about the soul, maybe it embodies all that we want it to embody, maybe it doesn't, maybe it has our potential. The spiritual maybe is the flow of the energy that moves whatever it is that somehow has to connect with something more universal.

**Jane:** *So there's some comfort with the unknown. There is something about this work that is unknowable. It's hard to put in words. And as you said earlier perhaps from a pre-verbal time and there's an energy to it. But it seems to me that there is a necessity to be comfortable with the unknown and to somehow work with it.*

**Marcia:** I think so... to leave yourself open. Ever since I've been teaching I've said today's theory is tomorrow's myth. Tomorrow's myth is carved in stone and then the stone breaks up and it's sand again. And like, don't take anything too seriously. The paradox is you want to learn it all and you want to be able to throw it away too. And you want to see what genuinely fits and what doesn't fit. Don't fit the human being to the theory but the theory to the human being. That's what I've been doing all these years. I've been observing what I've seen in all these years. It's been a great privilege to have been able to work with people worldwide and trying to find a theory that would maybe explain and then when that doesn't work anymore I throw it out and start looking for something new.

**Jane:** *Thank you Dr Leventhal.*



**Pictured: Dr Leventhal with the first training group in Melbourne - 1990.**

**Top row: left to right:**  
Iris Solomon with Suzanne  
Andrew Morrish  
Anne Thomson

**Then:**  
Bella Grossberg  
Beatrice Lucas  
Jane Guthrie

**Crouched:**  
Janice Trenair  
Noela Zenner  
Tony Norquay

**Squeezed or seated:**  
Virginia Woods  
Elizabeth Loughlin  
Elaine Thompson  
Jennifer Helmich

# Suggested Readings

The following list was provided by Dr Leventhal:

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