

News from Aotearoa

Jennifer De Leon

Late last year the DTAA received exciting news from Jennifer De Leon, a New Zealand based Dance Therapist. Jenny was the first dancer to gain full registration to the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists (NZAP)!!

Her fiery dissertation won the hearts of the psychotherapy board, when it spoke of dance in psychotherapy and it's role as a powerful tool for 'healing the soul'.

We would like to congratulate Jenny on her achievement, which is outstanding in a country where there is no specific dance therapy training. As Jenny informed us there is a Masters program running at Whitecliff College, in Arts Therapy, and several degrees at other Institutions running in Dance and Arts Management, yet nothing in Dance Therapy.

Jenny is leading the way in New Zealand with innovative dance psychotherapy and performance work. She is the Director of Poyema Dance Company, which performed *RISING* for the Auckland Dance Festival last year. It generated media interest including an interview with channel 3's 'Nightline!' Well done Jennifer!

The following are two contributions from Jenny. The first is Jenny's response to the events of September 11 and her reflections on the meaning of dance at times of such tragedy. The second piece contains excerpts from Jenny's dissertation, presented to the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists.

Dance that Flows on From Tragedy

Jennifer De Leon

2001 was a powerful year. The September 11th bombing affected and affects the world. It seems far away, here in beautiful NZ. What will be the dance that flows on from such a tragedy and in such a world, where, for some people, making such a statement is their only voice?

On the Sunday following September 11, I danced the *TE DEUM* at a big church in Auckland. This dance is a Shout!

to the belief the Christian church holds that there is a God, and that this God is universal and omnipotent. How, though, could I dare to perform such a dance after Tuesday the 11th?

Indeed how can life go on? But life does. A letter from the dance community in New York expressed the same sentiments I dance in the *Te Deum*: this is our Statement of Life, and pain, and strength, and grace, and ugliness, and despair, and forgiveness, and hope, join in the dance we offer.

In April my dance company *POYEMA* (Greek word meaning 'the handiwork of God') presented *RISING* for the Auckland Dance Festival, performed over 3 nights at another big Auckland Church. (Was *Rising*, in some way, prophetic)?

It is about death and resurrection; burial - re-emergence. (Is this not a story we all know and work with in our therapy sessions)? In June my dance partner and I began performing *SOUL*, a dance about relationship. When Television 3's 'Nightline' interviewed us they asked us about performing in churches - and the answer is this: Dancing for worship is a peculiar challenge and gift. The audience is one not typically warmed-up to dance - yet, across congregations, the feedback has been consistently that, in the dance, the people see new insights, new ways of understanding their own Statement of Life.

In a different methodology of insight and new perspectives, this year was the first year ever that the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists accepted among its ranks - a dancer! In early March, I gained full registration to NZAP. My dissertation was entitled 'A Fierce Dance' and described how I use dance in psychotherapy and why I believe it is a powerful tool for 'healing of the soul'.

Whether we physically dance or not, I believe there are others of us who will acknowledge with me the fierceness of the dance! I have seen another parallel so clearly this year as well - that my psychotherapy work is the same as my dance work: enabling my clients to find new insights and understanding of their own Statement of Life.

I would like to salute! the work of Dance Therapists. We dance, pray, challenge the 'heldnesses' of our cli-

ents and ourselves... because (paraphrasing mine) - 'in the midst of all aridity and disenchantment, dance is as perennial as the grass. In the noisy confusion of life, dance brings peace to our soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Practice hard. Keep dancing'.

The Healing Dance

Movement and Dance Psychotherapy

Jennifer De Leon

Abstract:

Movement is a fundamental, organic and intrinsic aspect of our lives. In this paper I discuss a psychotherapy of movement: in which the fundamental movement of our existence is included as a fundamental part of the therapy, and where that movement is taken a step further into the realm of dance.

I offer to you: The Healing Dance. (r)

Movement and Dance Psychotherapy

When we are born, one of the first things we do - provided we live - is breathe. Breathing is thus our first dance, and continues as the fundamental kinetic impulse for the rest of our lives. What the breath sustains, is our bodies. Breath + body = movement.

There are no clients who come to therapy independently of breath or body or movement. Preceding and containing whatever issue the client has come to therapy for, are breath, body and movement. Further, every client presents with distinct characteristics of breathing, body and movement.

Dance Psychotherapy

Like every good therapy, Dance Psychotherapy is the relationship. Uniquely to Dance Psychotherapy the language of relating is the fluid inter-weaving of the unconscious, the conscious, cognition and movement.

"Dance therapy is the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional and physical integration of the individual" (American Dance Therapy Association)

Jung said:

"To my mind, in dealing with individuals only individual understanding will do. We need a different language for each client... to apply a whole spectrum of therapies as the client moves through the spectrum of consciousness". (1965,p.131)

As a confluence of mind and body; thought and movement, Dance Psychotherapy may be perceived as encompassing a whole spectrum of therapies... uniting:

the primacy of the body

the immediacy of movement

the intellectual, cognitive faculties

and recognising that emotional, spiritual, dream and transpersonal material are embedded within these.

Dance Psychotherapy is a new therapeutic model. Traditional fundamental therapeutic tenets as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice, and methodologies as attending, listening, matching, pacing, reflecting, are fully present.

Movement and the body are part of the organic; the 'Creation' side of life, thus, in this writer's experience, Dance Psychotherapy attracts clients asking existential questions, exploring *why* (they are here).

Most of my clients seek out The Healing Dance because they perceive it as a language of imagination, for meaning making.

Hillman (1983,p.12) said

"The aim of therapy is the development of a sense of soul, the middle ground of psychic realities, and the method of therapy is the cultivation of imagination".

The Healing Dance - including the mechanics of it - is a language of metaphor and imagination.

As such, it lends itself to phrases like *the Great Dance; the Dance of Life* - Symbolically inherent in these words is, for me, the essence, the heart of the work: Spirituality. Love. Joy.

Spirituality is a word pregnant with definitions and interpretations as diverse as humanity. We each have a spirituality unique to ourselves; a unique relationship with the God of our understanding, a unique *raison d'être* for life. This we hold in the intimacy of our own souls. In The Healing Dance, the mind, body and their dance are vehicles of the soul's expression.

The symbolic imagery that arises in movement is the soul's expression. It is a language beyond words, expressing that for which we have no words, or for that which, being expressed in this other 'language,' renders it somehow more poignant, more meaningful, perhaps even deeper and more satisfying. Sooner or later expressing 'God' becomes part of the journey I and my clients do (dance) together.

(Perhaps this is ALL that we do; perhaps that is all of what we all do - this is a question of philosophy, which fits into another paper)!

Methodology

1. Assessment and Diagnosis

In my work *The Healing Dance*, for the terms 'assessment' and 'diagnosis' I prefer the words *Compassionate Co-ordination* or *Looking with Love*. In the paradigm of the Great Dance, the 'self' is not reified as a discrete entity; there is, therefore, no thing available for encapsulation by assessment or diagnosis. The goal is to recognise self as part of The Dance - to perceive 'self' as also movement - changing, shifting, transiting, flexible, and, in truth, existing only in this moment of it's passing. The Healing Dance concept of self is that it exists as motion; and that 'I' is no thing. (Epstein 1996 & Broom 1996).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual contains invaluable information and guidelines however. Integration of DSM information about state and condition with the movement-transition-flexibility tenets of Dance Psychotherapy offer a model in which clinical accuracy and imagination exist side-by-side. Making a medical diagnosis based on conduct, utterances, feelings I or my client can never fully understand and then *expressing this in dance* is one way of understanding the condition better, and transforming it to metaphor. As metaphor, we allow for mystery and creative magic (Coates, Forum 3/97/p.84 and *The Course*, 1997-'98-'99).

"The more we let (it)creativity flourish, the greater is our satisfaction with life, the better our mental health. Our creativity can let us come to terms with our conflict. It can be a crucible for dissent". (Crawford;June'97)

By *dancing (embodying)* the diagnosis the client is empowered with the sense that now s/he has ownership over this condition - and the dance-of-healing is, from now on, in both our hands (bodies and feet)! Testing, evaluation and analysis of this information is described in terms of the Effort-Shape Movement Fundamentals Analysis system originated by the Hungarian scientist Rudolf Laban (1879 - 1958) which is now the modern-day dance therapist's generic medium for testing and evaluating normal and clinical populations. (Bartenieff 1981)

Effort-Shape Movement Fundamentals Analysis investi-

gates the elements of effort, shape, space, time and emotion as they combine in the person's physiology and kinesis, and are expressed in the body's conscious and unconscious movements, thus producing the global dynamic affect.

The Movement Fundamentals Analysis is:

a) Quantitative, For example: I look at the angle of a person's neck to their shoulders; the amount of tension held in the thighs; the ability to open the arms or hands past the necessary degree of functionality. Opening, closing, widening movements indicate the baby's experience of sucking; Directional movements indicate the ability to move from self to other (object); Posture components indicate adaptation to earliest mirroring and affirming, or lack of. If the baby for example has received a mixed message, such as the free-flow of milk accompanied by a tense, rigidly-holding embrace, then her belief in adequate provision will be coloured by what it costs. The associated movement adaptation is most likely to be tension-flow rhythms and constricted spatial occupancy.

b) Qualitative; discernment and description is made in such terms as bound, free, percussive, lyrical, static, flowing, centred, peripheral, (and more). These qualities describe emotional states; for example: percussive, static movements indicate the presence of fear which could derive from inhibition of early drive discharge; as in a message in infancy that crying or feeding was *not* alright.

Matching, pacing, reflecting, empathizing, questioning, provoking, flow on from the initial observation.

2. Mindfulness

The observing, listening, matching, pacing, reflecting, modelling, empathizing, questioning, teaching, provoking, attending of Psychotherapy - occur in an attitude of Mindfulness.

Mindfulness (bare attention) is the technique central to *The Healing Dance Psychotherapy*. Mindfulness (Krishnamurti (in Epstein,1996,pp.147,166) calls it "Choiceless Awareness") is a cognitive activity: of continual aligning of awareness to the here-and-now experience.

Mindfulness incorporates the physical: encouraging awareness (and even some theoretical knowledge), of breathing, alignment and posture, even to anatomical, muscular and cellular connections. The seeing and feeling

and moving is organismic, physiological, locomotive, corporeal; it is a kind of depth encountering, leading on to the awareness that stimulates the processes of reflection and change.

"The healing is in the looking" (Milner/Sweet, NZAC Newsletter Dec.1998, p.39).

The healing is in the dancing.

In the psychoanalytic 'mirror' model, the analyst's stillness allows the client to hear and reflect upon what s/he has said. In The Healing Dance this same inner stillness draws forth the client's self-reflective movement. Hearing, seeing, moving; self-reflecting; enables the client to encounter his longings, conflicts, confusions - and himself.

Mindful hearing, seeing, feeling and moving makes it possible for in-habitation, or embodiment, (to give form, body; to express tangibly, so that mind and body become intimate reflections of each other).

3. Embodiment

Embodiment - to give flesh, to give form - to our longings, conflicts and confusions; hopes, joys and visions; literally, to take *in corpus*, is to reject the dispersal that comes from unconscious repression or dissociated splitting. We are able to engage more fully with who we are. Analysis and interpretation of embodied movement is part of the work of dance Psychotherapy. It is analogous to Winnicott's (1976) "*in-dwelling*" -

"achieving a close, easy relationship between psyche, body and body functioning." (p.68)

To facilitate the embodying process...

Client and therapist create dance sequences; then practice and process these verbally and in movement. (Comparable to Freud's "Remembering, repeating and working through" 1964, p.147)

Dance sequences of increasing complexity and accuracy are practised, so *the embodiment gets more mindful, the mindfulness more embodied*. This facilitates our interpretation of somatic signals.

We create, practice and process dance sequences containing motifs of paradox (perceived conflict). *Dancing paradox* gives entry to the transpersonal. Examples are movement polarities of motion/stillness, chaos/order, balance/out-of-balance.

Epstein(1996,p.94) describes 'dancing the paradox':
"...the fluid ability to integrate potentially destabilizing experiences of insubstantiality and

impermanence"

Embodying paradox acknowledges, values, aids interpretation and contains it. (Epstein,1996,p.212)

4. Mirroring

Empathic movement reflecting, or, attunement through mirroring - setting up the mirror transference, provides the environment for the therapist to enter the undifferentiated world of the narcissistically wounded adult. In empathically adapting her movement to that of the client, and breathing together, the therapist creates a relationship with even the most isolated. (Siegel 1978). This environment allows for the emergence of unconscious, authentic, 'play' movements; movement dramatizations and metaphors, of the pre-verbal and unverbilisable. As these are remembered, re-experienced and brought into the transitional therapeutic space, the therapist interprets and reflects back, using symbols and mythologems created by the client.

This empathic, attuned movement mirroring, sensitive to the client's developmental effort and shape flow (equivalent to 'holding' and 'handling'), facilitate the evolvment of meaningful memories. These in turn are the 'stage' for the development of transferential object relations (perception of the extension of self which is 'other' then self) and eventual object constancy and differentiation to occur.

After a suicide attempt Paula regressed and retreated; she lay on my studio floor curled into the foetal position; barely moving and rarely speaking. Paula and I worked together for one year and most of our work during that time consisted of empathic, attuned movement: lying on the floor - dancing the foetal position - emerging from the foetal position - choreographing a dance symbolizing the security and haven that Paula perceived the foetal state to be - quitting the foetal state - giving herself permission to open her arms and lift up her head - acknowledging and dancing a Paula that could exist with beauty and authority - eventually making a dance expressing "I have a right to be here".

5. Transference and counter-transference

Transference and counter-transference are psychotherapeutic terms used to describe the mental process of buried or unconscious memories of earlier relationship experiences coming to life and directed towards the therapist, and the therapist unconsciously responding. Using transference skilfully is an important element in Dance Psychotherapy.

And the reality is that I do not listen, look and sense alone. While my goal is bare attention, choiceless awareness, the reality is I am not a mirror empty, but another human being with beliefs, ideas, preconceptions, personal idiosyncrasies. In other words, transference and counter-transference are a given. My clients come because in my course of listening, looking and sensing I am making a choreography out of all that they bring to me. Every movement of the dance I dance with my client is a choreography inflected with my own subjectivity. I am aware of this, and conscious of the persuasive potential of my movement, I use silence, stillness and space.

With space beneath our arms and the slight zephyr of wind in our faces as we move, the transference and counter-transference dynamics that I and my client take on and visit upon each other to become more visible, more out in the open, and less toxic.

End Statement

Clients for The Healing Dance psychotherapy do not need to be 20, slim, fit and have beautiful legs. The Dancer Within lives in all of us, waiting for us to call him or her onto the stage that is our lives. The stuff of psychotherapy - talking, grieving, celebrating, complaining, hoping, praying, happens in words both spoken and unspoken. Often it is in the unspoken language of our souls that moments of rarest insight and breakthrough occur. The invitation of our miraculous, moving bodies and ever-sparking imagination is to make this a day in which, at least once, we dance.

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