

# Dance Movement Therapy in Japan



Tamah L. Nakamura

*Tamah Nakamura, an M.Ed. in second language education and an M.A. in Human Development, is a university teacher in the areas of intercultural communication and comparative gender studies. An American permanent resident of Japan, she has also taught in Korea, Singapore, and the United States. Her workshops in the community include gender issues discussion groups for Japanese and non-Japanese women as well as "Movement for Refreshment of the Heart." She is a doctoral candidate in Human and Organizational Systems at Fielding Graduate Institute with an emphasis on social identity and community creation through somatic movement. Tamah is a member of Butoh Seiryukai dance group in Fukuoka, Japan. In this article she first introduces some dance/movement therapy activities in Japan. This is followed by an autobiographical description of her own interest and activities in movement education. As an American long-term resident of Japan, she includes cross-cultural perspectives.*

The Japan Association of Dance Therapy<sup>1</sup> (JADTA) was established in 1992 (Kaji, Miyagi, Ito, Komori & Matsuo, 2002). In addition to the quarterly newsletter, the JADT holds annual conferences which offer a forum for DMTs (Dance Movement Therapists), therapeutic movement practitioners and educators to present and share their work. The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Dance Therapy Conference will be held in Okayama, Japan, on August 23 and 24, 2003. The theme of the conference is "The Power of Non-verbal Communication". Contact Kayoko Arakawa<sup>2</sup> for more information.

An organized system for educating, training and certifying dance movement therapists is not yet available in Japan although the JADTA newsletter (No. 48, May-June 2001) states that discussion is presently ongoing to

differentiate and determine certification requirements for dance movement therapist, 'dance care leader', and others who use dance therapy-oriented approaches such as dancers, clinical psychologists and teachers.

I am a relatively new member of JADTA and am looking forward to attending my first conference in August. I have also recently begun to attend monthly DMT sessions offered by Kayoko Arakawa, ADTR (Naropa Institute, Colorado). Her six-month basic course introduces the theory and practice of Chace, Schoop and Whitehouse. These theorists are followed by an introduction to Laban's system of movement analysis. Ms. Arakawa also offers an intermediate level course.

## Tamah's Journey

Aesthetic expression through dance movement and performance has always been a highly valued part of my life. As an American who is a thirty-year resident in Asia, twenty of those in Japan, I live in a culture which places high value on constraint of emotional expression in the adult maturation process. I turned to dance and performance as a form to release emotional expression. I have been practising classical ballet for 14 years and Butoh dance for two years. I started practising classical ballet in my late 30's and had not studied dance formally before. Although I started late, my Japanese teacher discovered my ability to "express" and included me in many Russian folk dances and also choreographed special pieces for solo class recitals. It was through these experiences that I discovered the stage provided a safety net and boundary between me and social judgment of my actions. I could express any emotion I wanted and no sanctions were brought against me. Quite the opposite from my experience in my daily life in Japan, my ability to express was praised.

One of my personal ways of knowing is through a kinesthetic, experiential approach to learning. As an educator at the university for many years teaching intercultural communication, gender studies and second language skills, I have always preferred action-oriented, creative techniques (role play, movement conversations, etc.). I have also been facilitating discussion groups on gender and women's issues for Japanese and non-Japanese women in the community for about ten years. Gradually, I noticed that the learning of new patterns first required a shift in old patterns in order for new ways of acting to emerge. I realized that it is important for people to shift their current habits so they can create their own new patterns from information stemming from the consciousness that arises from that movement. There is



nothing I can teach them. I can only facilitate their learning. They have the capability to learn it themselves. I began to sense a need to synthesize my experiences teaching and living in Asia into a theoretical framework toward helping others. In 1999 I entered a doctoral program at Fielding Graduate Institute<sup>3</sup>, Santa Barbara, California as a means of explicating that experience.

Fielding is an interdisciplinary program. It is based on a scholar-practitioner model, set in a transformational learning framework. In addition to the theoretical component for each course, an application to the student's practical/social context is required. At the orientation session, I was torn between a strongly internalized bias that research should be something 'academic', and my interest in aesthetic movement. However, when a faculty asked me, "What is your passion?" I responded from my heart, "I want to be a dancer!" I stayed with my 'passion' of movement as expression exploring it through theory in coursework and applications of expressive movement in experiential settings both individually and collectively in groups. This has brought about a transition in my own life.

Early in my study, a month-long therapy course in London introduced me to DMT (and the DTAA Quarterly) through Penelope Best and Gabrielle Kasper whom I met at the Roehampton campus. In 2001, I explored Authentic Movement in private workshops with Shira Musicant, ADTR and Authentic Movement practitioner in Santa Barbara, CA. That summer I also participated in an archetypal dance workshop at the Omega Institute in New York. In addition to the theoretical underpinnings through my doctoral work, I am currently training as a Registered Movement Educator (RME) and Therapist (RMT) with ISMETA (International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy) faculty, Professor Sondra Fraleigh<sup>4</sup> in intensive 2- to 3-week sessions in the USA. I am also a participant in Kayoko Arakawa's monthly DMT workshops to further my understanding of movement therapy in the Japanese cultural context.

In the Spring of 2001, I joined the Butoh Seiryukai dance group in my city and it has developed into my ethnographical research context within which I am exploring social identity and community creation through somatic movement. Although an article on Butoh<sup>5</sup> dance in the next issue of the Quarterly will explain more fully, it is important to understand that Butoh dance is not based on technique. A highly oversimplified description of Butoh is that it is characterized by the dissolution of the self in the body by moving to internal images, thus changing body form and deconstructing the social body. Butoh has been an avant-garde form of dance-theater performance, but a few recent studies have been exploring Butoh as a method of movement therapy (Kasai & Takeuchi, 2001). In the past two years, experimentation with integrating

my theoretical learning at Fielding and Butoh Seiryukai activities, has helped me to extend my workshops for women in the community beyond verbal discussion groups. I now facilitate somatic movement workshops to offer women a safe space and alternative medium for reflection and expression of personal and social issues such as their gendered roles.

### **"Movement for Refreshment of the Heart" Workshops**

In "Refreshment of the Heart" workshops, my rationale and goals are designed to provide not only a cathartic movement experience but also include activities to foster critical consciousness and social action on an individual and group level (Nakamura, 2002a). "The actual meaning of body language is found through seeing the whole pattern in the context of the individual mover having a combination of personal, cultural and environmental experiences" (Hanna, 1990, p. 117). Pallaro notes that the body has significance as "agent, container, mirror, vehicle of exchange" (1996, p. 114) with the recognition of the experience of the body as the primary sense of core self. When we bring attention to the social structure held in our bodies, we can encourage people to 'listen' and develop awareness by deconstructing or releasing habitual movements to recreate movement in self-directed ways. Movement patterns in different cultures are internalized in the socialization process and are either permitted or denied expression (Dosmantes, 1992). Typical social issues raised by the women are hierarchical gender role expectations and narrow societal perceptions of women as less intelligent and less employable thus limiting their interaction to less than full members of the society. Reflecting on and activating collective social issues through non-verbal improvisation which deconstruct images held in the body is a form of non-dialogic activism toward whole person transformation. The individual is then a social agent with power to shift body self-perception thus promoting self and group transformation.

Workshop process is organized around sequential activities starting from relaxation and ending with expression of a collective social issue. This may be carried out non-verbally through movement from start to finish, or it may include verbal processing depending on the group's awareness level and need to process.

In these workshops, I use a great variety of music from around the world, and limit the reflective activities to non-verbal, movement patterns. As the 3-hour workshops attract many first-time participants, I focus on more intuitive, indirect, inexplicit reflection-generating movement activities and hesitate to force engagement in explicit social issues of discrimination and oppression as women at this early stage of self-discovery. Research



with battered women using activist drama techniques (Fisher, 1994) suggests that without a high degree of developed consciousness, oppression can be reproduced rather than represented. I think this concept can be extended to situations that impose social constraints on participants such as the Japanese Women's Movement workshops. The potential danger of reproduction is in the need to maintain relationship to fulfill expected social interaction dynamics (Nakamura, 2002b), and remain functional in the hierarchical, group-oriented relationship structures in which the individualistic is reflected (Pallaro, 1997). Socially imposed sanctions for non-maintenance may outweigh the benefit of representing oppression.

The purpose of the workshops is for participants to become aware of internalized social structures through guided movement activities and to dialogue to further recreate new patterns of movement toward intervening in their own life drama. As a researcher, I am interested in collecting narrative experiences of the women participants in my ongoing movement workshops in 2003. Answers to questions such as what they have discovered or are doing differently, and how they are taking the learning experience forward into their lives, relationships and community will be valuable to identify knowledge gaps in the social structure, and as a practitioner to extend my movement education to work reflexively in other domains of relational interaction in the society.



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## Websites and email contact information:

- 1 JADTA: <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~aq4j-hsn/jadta/index.html>
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- 3 Fielding Graduate Institute: <http://www.fielding.edu>
- 4 East-West Somatics, Sondra Fraleigh: [www.brockport.edu/~dance/somatics](http://www.brockport.edu/~dance/somatics)
- 5 Butoh Net: Butoh Dancers, Teachers & Performing Groups: [www.butoh.net/performers.html](http://www.butoh.net/performers.html)

**Ed.Note:** We are very much looking forward to Tamah's article on Butoh, which will appear in the May issue of the Quarterly.

