

Denis Kelynack, Past President of the DTAA and member of the Association since its inception (and in fact involved in dmt long before that as you will read in this feature), was interviewed by Jenny Czulak Riley, Grad. Dip. Movement & Dance (University of Melbourne), Grad Cert. Dance Therapy (University of Melbourne) who is also a founder member of the DTAA, and someone who worked hard towards the formation of the Association. She completed her Grad. Dip. in 1979, but was involved in using dance movement a very long time before that. She is the author of Growing Older, Dancing On, and is an experienced dance therapy group leader for older adults. What you read below is a conversation between two revered pioneers of dmt in Australia.

A Conversation with Dennis Kelynack

Jenny Czulak Riley



Jenny Dennis, we all know you as our esteemed ex-President of DTAA Inc and as a practising psychologist and dance therapist. You are also a pianist, singer and composer and possibly one of the first Australians to have been Rolfed! But let's start at the beginning. What prompted your choice of profession in the first place?

Dennis I was always interested in human behaviour.

Jenny You could have taken up acting...?

Dennis As it happened I was very interested in psycho-drama early on, especially

Moreno's psycho-dramatic technique of exploring the function of "roles" and that required me to look at who I was, but I was more interested in my family's behaviour! I think people who take up psychology are often the sort of people who are tantalised by the vagaries of their own families. My father, for instance, was not really present in my adolescence. Even though we became friends in adult life, it still left me with a sense of loss.

Jenny That immediately brings to mind your description of a turning point you reached during the gestation of the book you wrote with Johanna Exiner! But more on that later! In the beginning...?

Dennis In the beginning I enrolled for a B.A.(Hons) at the University of Melbourne.

Jenny And?



Dennis And my studies eventually focused on psychology, in which I did well. As a result I was asked to become a senior tutor in the Department of Professor Alan Jeffery. It was wonderful to be

chosen to work with him. He became my mentor and my inspiration. He helped me to believe in myself and he also urged me to work in counselling.

Jenny He was specific?

Dennis Yes. He felt I had a natural capacity for empathy. So I feel that it was through him that I was immediately asked to become a student counsellor in the same University, and actually I eventually acted as Director of Counselling for a time.

Jenny That must have been vastly challenging! All the raw and youthful undergraduates from every faculty as well as ex-service men and women, mature age students and foreign students ...?

Dennis I somehow found myself getting interested in students I felt were not properly looked after by the University; disabled students for instance, and students from overseas. I felt it was important to do research in their home countries, in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur for instance which I did, finding out their opinions of Australia and so on. And also, even though I was an appointed counsellor, I felt as all counsellors I believe would, that there was room for more information on the techniques of counselling.

So I was lucky to be able to do research in the States. My first training was in family therapy at the Mental Research Institute at Palo Alto in California. It was very innovative. The course was on the whole basis of the therapeutic relationship. And I actually went back there three years later, to teach this time, in the use of video in counselling training, as part of a training course in inter-personal process recall. It was a good course to be involved in.

Jenny Dennis, you and I remember the naissance of group therapy in the sixties. I suppose you saw the beginnings of theories of closeness with others in therapy, and even bodily

contact! An acknowledgment of the repression in western culture of the notion of the body as a medium of expression! Freudian analysis being supplemented by Pessó's psychomotor techniques, transactional analysis, encounter groups, and among others Rolfing?



Dennis It was the heyday of Encounter groups! And yes, I found some of these group programmes were beginning to explore the part played by the body in personal relationships.

Will Schutz* was one of the pioneers in this. He introduced me to Body Reading and helped me to understand the Reichian concept of "body armour".

Jenny Was this at Esalen?

Dennis No. It was here! Actually I had been somewhat disappointed with the bodywork I'd been exploring at Esalen but Body Reading led to the development of Rolfing and that really transformed my appreciation of body mind unity.

Jenny William Schutz came to Australia?

Dennis Yes! A group of us – we were all established counselors – met at the University of Armidale in New South Wales to hear him. One of the first things he said was "Would you like to do some body reading?" and started taking his clothes off straight away! It was extremely confronting. We were

all astonished. But we did it! Then he asked us to each describe something positive about what we saw in the unclothed body. Which we did! It was very moving – and loving! And then we all put our clothes on again.

Jenny Well! So much for “vestis virum facit, that is “Clothes make the man”! Did Schutz also demonstrate the Rolfing technique?

Dennis He did! Eventually, when we happened to run into one another at Esalen, and he said: “What are you doing about Rolfing?” He persuaded me I was ready to deal with deep pain and start work on the muscle tissue to loosen the fascia, and enable normal function. Rolfing goes right in! Even into the muscles of the face and up into the head and you feel the release. You have to start with a deep trust of the Rolfer before you even let them begin. You “allow” the Rolfer to get rid of your formal patterns of fear and anxiety and you love the Rolfer for it! The loving is very important.



Jenny Ah! So we are functioning beyond the quality of empathy? I’ve not known of this before! Only that the theory was developed by a woman?

Dennis Yes, Ida Rolf. She was a contemporary of Feldenkrais. A lot of Feldenkrais’s method encourages people to extend their repertoire of body movement by going back to simple childhood exercises; movement

exploration starting on the floor, encouraging the body to recapture the movements of childhood. But Rolf worked on the fascia – the fibrous envelope supporting each muscle. She maintained that by understanding the way body armour develops in the body, and by extending the movement of the body by deep tissue massage, there will be meaningful outcomes. You can then have lessons in using the “new” body that you’ve got.

Jenny So Rolfing is based on Reichian theories of “body armour”?

Dennis I suppose Wilhelm Reich became known as the “father” of psychosomatic treatment. I took part in Reichian workshops also. Alexander Lowen, of course, took up Reichian theories and became known as “the father of Bio-Energetics”. Then there was Stanley Kellerman. He was also interested in the “energy” in the body: what he called the “streaming”. And Gerda Boyson was the English Lowen, if you like, exploring the yearnings and blocks that a child experiences not long after birth, getting in touch with the “primal scream”; working on recapturing the child’s yearning for the mother... All of these theories were looking for a “whole body” experience. One of the problems though was they were not versed in the psychological spin-off...

But it was the active involvement in Rolfing which was a turning point – a very positive one – for me. It made me aware of my own body. It was an illustration of how our body “speaks its mind” as it were. From then on looking at the body image became integral to my work as a psychologist, or therapist if you like.

Jenny Dennis, was there any aspect of “dance” in these body contact therapies?

Dennis No! They were looking at the body but none of them seemed to understand the part that dance had to play in all of this. Therefore when I had my first experience of a dance therapy group with Tamara Greenburg at the Centre for Energetic Studies in California, I

was astonished at how much dance could achieve beyond Lowen and Feldenkrais and so on. It was so exciting! Here was a DANCE THERAPIST! Through her I found I could dance through psychological blocks! It was a revelation to me! And closer to my later understanding of Hanny Exiner's work.

Jenny I haven't asked you about your work with Anna Halprin? What sort of imprint did she make on your journey?

Dennis Her influence had been germinal in early research and years later when the University gave me 3 months leave to attend her San Francisco workshop I did more work with her, concentrating on particular aspects of "black" dance. Our assignment was we had to go to a club used entirely by the Afro American community and be initiated particularly in pelvic movements.

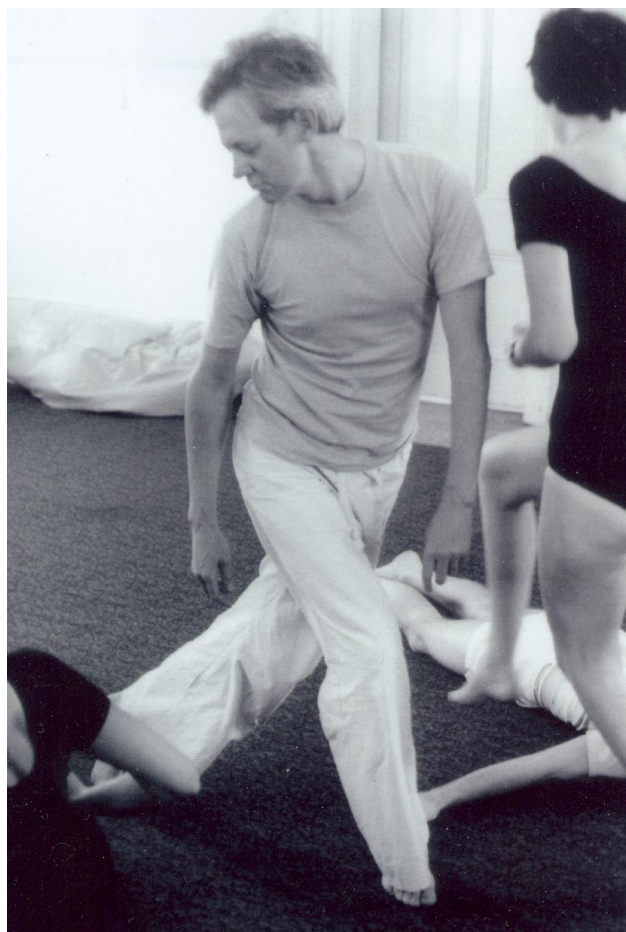
Jenny Dennis, before we come to the culmination, perhaps we could call it, of your research into Dance Therapy, would you like to say something about the efficacy in general of group therapy compared to the one to one convention? Just the other day, randomly opening the pages of a book** that is almost a year older than I am, I found Mr William McDougall advising his readers in 1923 that "...the gregarious instinct does play a part in giving society its great hold upon us...it prompts us to desire to be in emotional harmony with those about us...."

Dennis Oh yes! Group therapy, in my opinion, is the most powerful therapy. When I ran a course on group work at RMIT we achieved some wonderful things. I think in this work I was aware of the power of groups to engender change in individuals.

Jenny So groups are good! And of course we could fill this journal a score of times with words and phrases that acknowledge body-mind synergy. And this is so elegantly demonstrated in the art of dance and yet the profound, wholeing-healing of dance has been comparatively overlooked. So now let's contemplate what was probably

the peak of your investigation into dance therapy, in the book*** you wrote with Hanny (Johanna) Exiner as a result.

Dennis It wasn't really until I started to work with Hanny Exiner that I began to understand for myself the healing power of dance.



Jenny How did your paths meet?

Dennis Hanny Exiner, Professor Warren Lett, and I were all teaching at the Institute of Early Childhood Education in Melbourne. Warren and I were dealing with the practical and theoretical aspects of therapy. And one day Hanny remarked to me that the teaching attitude I was taking "was not in the body". And despite my own research I agreed. The outcome of that was that Hanny and I worked together for three hours a week for three years! Hanny acting as therapist and me acting as client.

Jenny What was the most satisfactory aspect for you?

Dennis Doing work on myself as we went along! I found I had the courage to do that: to face the “disavowed” part of myself.

Jenny And Hanny?

Dennis We were both learning from each other. We were both giving each other professional feedback. As a client I was able to give Hanny feedback on the work she was doing as a therapist.

Jenny How were you able to recognize when your actual therapy was done?

Dennis I had been working on matters as if they were outside myself, dealing with them as experiential influences on me. Hanny gently but firmly insisted I embody them! Instead of being a “warrior” against them! This embodiment was a complete revelation. I had been working a lot on my attitude to my father, but then I became the father, the archetype, the essential father, in dance! That was the culmination for me. Subjectively and objectively I had begun to learn how dance works as a tool for therapy!

Jenny Meanwhile Hanny was learning the techniques of therapeutic intervention?

Dennis She understood the therapeutic elements very well, and while I was understanding how these elements could be induced on me, (the client), because I was also a therapist I was able to comment on technique. So it was a learning experience on both our parts on a number of different levels. It was generative and wonderfully satisfying!

Jenny What aspect were you both most enthusiastic about?

Dennis Oh, the fundamental discovery that it is in the actuality of dancing that healing change occurs! Then we began grappling with how to get the information into some sort of system. We had recorded all our conversations, and videoed a large number of actual sessions. Processing this material now became a major project, and it was Hanny who finally said, “I think we’ve got a book here!”

Jenny And a wonderful book you two made! A breakthrough book, proclaiming dance therapy as a discipline in it’s own right!

Dennis I must say I feel very proud of the fact that as well as the theoretical underpinning, we have been able to give a simple, clear description of the way dance therapy actually works, and how the dance therapist can achieve a unique revelation.....

Jenny From the way it sets out the steps of the therapy.....!

Dennis Yes, the realism of the book is unusual. It is a practical manual. It grounds process.

Jenny And what is also unusual as well as valorous and possibly unique, is the epic you have written about your personal quest. You actually describe what it’s like to be a client. Such a hard thing to do but so valuable!

Dennis (Laughing) I had no difficulty in writing it!

Jenny Dennis Kelynack, What now?

Dennis Now, I am allying myself with a body that has an intense passion for music. I am listening to music in a more perceptive way, I am composing music – expressing myself through my music in ways that I find completely satisfying. And putting it all together I suppose one can say, very simply, my basic philosophy of life is that everything one does should be done with compassion, with altruism and with love.

Notes:
 * *Joy: Expanding Human Awareness*, Schutz, William C., Grove Press N.Y.
 ** *An Outline Of Psychology*, McDougall, William, Methuen & Co., 1923.
 *** Attribution of *Dance Therapy Redefined*

Photos on p’s. 4 and 5, and front cover, 1971, Center for Energetic Studies, California, run by Tamara Greenberg. Photo on p.6, Ca, 1979, workshop run by Denis, with Karen Bond, for Psychologists at IECD, Kew, Melbourne.