

Impressions: The 45th ADTA Conference in Brooklyn, New York City

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My journey to the 45th ADTA conference, *Creating the Mind-Body Mosaic: Theory, Research, and Practice in Dance/Movement Therapy*, September 23 – 26, 2010 in Brooklyn, New York City, was an interesting prelude to my first ever attendance at this annual event.



New York skyline from the Brooklyn Bridge

Starting from the south west of the United States I made my way overland to New York in its north-east, travelling from Los Angeles across that vast and varied country. Setting out from one of the US's great Union Stations, on the 'Southwest Chief' (replacement of the old Santa Fe Railway), then breaking the journey at Williams Junction (at 4am!) to spend several days at the Grand Canyon – a breathtakingly beautiful place – before travelling on through the vast plains of Arizona, settlements of New Mexico, places like Dodge City, and vast expanse of the great Mississippi River, to alight in Chicago. Here spending several more days to soak up the wonderful architecture, fascinating history, and excitement of finding such places as 'State Street' where they "Do things they don't do on Broadway"! I eventually arrived in New York City, at Pennsylvania Station (literally around a quarter to four! (pm this time), which lived up to its reputation of being one of the busiest stations in the world. After battling to find my way to the subway I arrived at my destination, The Marriot Hotel, in Brooklyn, hot and tired and relieved to enter the coolness and orderliness inside. And there, at the top of the escalator into the lobby – I was greeted by the smiling face of Sue Mullane (from Melbourne)! As there were only four Australians registered for this conference out of over five hundred attendees (and Sue wasn't

even staying at the hotel), it was quite a coincidence and a very special moment!

Conference highlights and special events

There were many other special moments, with the networking aspect of the occasion very high on the list for me, together with the opportunity to be immersed in DMT theory and practice in a multitude of ways across the four day event. Not to mention, of course, the ambience of staying at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, and being able to walk across it on some really beautiful velvety nights with the Manhattan skyline so close it seemed as if it could almost be touched, and Statue of Liberty standing proudly what seemed just a stone's throw away.

It was lovely to reconnect with Joan Chodorow, and Sharon and Harris Chaiklin. Joan was keynote speaker at the DTAA conference in Melbourne in 2000, and Sharon in 2007. It was also lovely for me to connect face to face with many others for the first time, having carried out extensive correspondence with them over the years and very special to be made to feel so welcome by all. These people included Robyn Cruz, now immediate past president of the ADTA, Sherry Goodill, the incoming president, the gracious, now past public relations officer, Christina Devereaux, Mimi Berger, who has reached out to us on many occasions in her role relating to the International Conference Panel, the warm and lovely Patrizia Pallaro, now one of the ADTAJ's editors and Beate Becker her co-editor. Others I was delighted to meet, after getting to know them through their writing contributions to the DTAA's journal, *Moving On*, included Susan Kleinman, so willing to share her wonderful work with people with eating disorders, Donna Newman-Bluestein with her expertise in working with people with Dementia and her development of the Octaband (such a useful prop to have in a group situation), Jody Wager, a recent contributor with *Dance Obama* and David Alan Harris with his incredibly moving work with Child Soldiers (See *Moving On*, Vol. 8 No's 3 and 4, 26-30 and 47-48). As well I briefly met Ilene Serlin, also a significant contributor to the last issue of *Moving On*, under *A Rationale for the Arts* (pp. 68-69). Ilene created an Arts therapy track within the humanistic psychology division of the APA and with the Mission Statement she developed for this she

created material of great potential value in marketing and promoting DMT.

The foyer with the exhibition and trade display provided a great place for networking and it had to be passed through to get to any of the sessions. It was bright, colourful and inviting with an array of props and other interesting things. I found it difficult to go past the extensive collection of books about dance movement and creative arts therapies without browsing through a different one every time and usually purchasing it! It was gratifying to see the feast of literature included our own, newly published, *Dance Movement Therapy Collections 3*. It was here, in this hive of mingling people, that the majority of new connections, or renewal of old, were made. Not that there was much time for mingling as the program was so jam-packed throughout, that coffee breaks were almost non-events.



Outside the Brooklyn Town Hall

Opening Ceremony, Flash Mob Dance, Banquet Dinner and Closing Movement Choir

All these exciting and special events engendered a great sense of togetherness and sharing. The ADTA's first Flash Mob Dance was practiced by attendees having early access to a Utube film and/or early (7am) rehearsal times at the conference. At the given time hundreds of attendees enthusiastically streamed from the hotel to the forecourt of the Brooklyn Borough Hall to take part in the event. It was a lot of fun for those of us involved, with attendees from all around the world, and also for bystanders who got caught up in the enthusiasm. The event, choreographed by Dawn Morningstar, left us all with a sense of being a part of a whole: a sense of togetherness and strength.

The Banquet dinner was also full of energy and a real gala occasion with a great band – “Soul be in

it”. Certainly well named for the occasion as the dinner guests literally threw themselves into the dancing – hearts as well as souls - as one might expect – and danced the night away! This was on and off the dance floor which was really too small to hold the entire moving mass (Photograph p. 57). For some reason the closing Movement Choir was held in a long and narrow room, so it was a bit more difficult to get that sense of togetherness in such a large group, but then when it came to the part of honouring various people or groups for their presence or achievements, the arrangement proved to be ideal. It allowed those being honoured to dance up and down between the long rows of people who held the space on either side of the room (Photograph p.58).

Keynote address and International Panel

The Marion Chase Foundation Lecture by Suzi Tortora was excellent – *The need to be seen – From Winnicott to the Mirror Neurone System*

DMT Comes of Age – and is to be published in a forthcoming ADTA journal for the benefit of all. The 16th International Panel, *Men in Dance Therapy*, was brilliant. In the first place it was so good to see a group of male DMTs because it is something that we are not accustomed to in Australia. And then it was so moving to hear them speak about their work with such

sensitivity and passion, and with such a wide range of diverse applications. They came from all corners of the globe, including Argentina, USA, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Russia and the Ukraine. The panel finished with the group performing a short dance together, much to the delight of the audience.

Program Highlights

On some occasions there were difficult decisions to be made about choosing which sessions to attend. For example: in one time-slot I found it particularly difficult to choose between listening to a panel of pioneers including Sharon Chaiklin, Miriam Roskin Burger, Claire Schmais and Iris Riskin-Gainer, all of whom have made significant contributions to the body of knowledge of DMT, and another interactive panel that explored Labananalysis and DMT – with panel members including Carol-Lynne Moore and Suzi Tortora. And in the same time slot yet another choice

between listening to Beth Kalish, another pioneer of DMT, with her presentation focusing on Laban's concepts of 'Movement Thinking'. In fact, in this same session, there were eight choices, all from presenters that I would like to have heard speak. Not to mention the fact that the presentation from Kim Dunphy and Sue Mullane was one of the eight choices!

It was also difficult to make a decision in the Pre-Conference Workshops as, again, there were many interesting choices - in fact nine offered. I felt really drawn to *Becoming an Embodied Therapist: Accessing the Language of the Body in Treatment* from Susan Kleinman, and *Fostering Global Well Being: Easing Recovery from War and Organized Violence through Dance/Movement Therapy* from David Alan Harris, as well as some of the others, but I finally opted for *Embodied Neurobiology* with Kalila B. Homann. A short report of this whole-day workshop precedes a short report of two others attended.

Embodied Neurobiology with Kalila B. Homann

I would like to do this whole day again! There was so much to think about in the structure and function of the brain as presented in relation to DMT, and the mind's integral relationship with the body. The workshop explored the role of the brain stem in "arousal and rest, the role the limbic system takes in organising memory and emotion and sensory processing, and the Association Cortex in our perception of experience" (workshop description). Brain lateralisation and Mirror Neurones were also drawn into the content of the day and highlights for me were the way that I was able to embody much of the content. And surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, it is the parts of the day that were embodied that I still remember!

For example, we were provided with some lovely images of neurones with their dendrites, axon and axon branches leading from the nerve cell bodies. For the first time my attention was drawn to the shapes and potential of this for movement and I loved experiencing the many possibilities of extensions, reaching and beautiful Shaping. I also enjoyed experiencing the idea of the dialogue between chemical and electrical stimuli within our own bodies, and in communication with others, as in the process of neuro-transmission via synapses with messages leaping across junctions. Sometimes zapping when very active, or sometimes soothing and calming down. We were made aware of the influence of our emotions on

our connections via the Amygdala and Hippocampus – all making for a beautiful dance – something I had not thought of doing prior to being led through this experience.

Another special memory of this session is the brain movement experiential, where we divided ourselves into left and right brains, with the Corpus Collosum drawing the two together, and fore, mid, and hind brains, with the Cerebellum, responsible for steadying movement, and the sensory cortex for our understanding of what is happening in the moment. From here without moving beyond our kinaespheres, but sharing them with many others, we moved as a mass, connecting, communicating, pulsing, influencing movement and interacting - each playing our various roles.



Banquet Dinner

Memorable Sessions from other days

Dance/Movement/Word Therapy: Dance Activism for Human Rights and Social Change - Bonnie Bernstein

I chose this workshop (also selected from nine on offer at the same time) because it was run by Bonnie Bernstein. (A name very familiar to me, and someone who was mentored by pioneer dance therapist, Blanche Evan, from 1970-82, and also because she is someone who has since developed her own dance therapy methods in in-depth, insight oriented DMT, and has conducted lifelong research into the therapeutic use of dance in indigenous world cultures.) The workshop was about how Bonnie uses the Blanche Evan method of DMT in her work and how it can shift clients towards meaningful life changes. Through the methods she uses she encourages personal empowerment and dignity and aims to build inner strengths. We were involved experientially in the

way she works with her clients in Kolkata, India, who are survivors of sex trafficking, trauma and abuse.

Bonnie talked of the importance of restoring the survivors' connection with their body and to achieve this she emphasised three aspects of Blanche Evan's work.

1. Mobilisation with the emphasis on dance education.
2. Creative dance, with the use of abstract imagery to free up the body to lead to the experiencing of different emotional states and to move the imagery to allow its physicality to come forth.
3. Working with aspects of theme improvisation to find power in the self and control to bring out the person within.

Bonnie stressed the importance of using what she refers to as pedestrian movements initially: to involve people and have them feel comfortable. She then develops these into empowering movements, such as in claiming space, or in a push, throw, punch and/or grab. She advocates universal movements from nature as being the best pathway to take to progress the movements outlined, such as 'gusting like the wind' – guiding participants into 'my' dances, as in developing 'my' type of wind, to lead on toward becoming one's own person.

We worked in small groups with some themes from nature such as thunder and lightening. Bonnie stressed the importance of getting sounding to occur: for the purpose of being able to find a voice, to be able to speak up for yourself. We also worked in pairs with simple 'Yes/No' themes, and just 'gibberish', and interchanges with movement with and without voice. All had the purpose of moving the client towards becoming better at saying what they needed to say, and saying what they felt.

Her work involves employing dance – but not only dance – and transforming the dancing into something meaningful - to make it appropriate as a dance therapy application for the people she works with. Bonnie's methods make use of practical teaching methods like 'stops and starts' as control strategies. The work is also about finding the words from the dance that are needed to assist the individual's growth and, importantly, to do this within a supportive group situation. In the workshop the need to learn to push obstacles away was also emphasised, and to be able to take risks and break out into things that are new.

Bonnie encourages the use of multi-model expression using art, voice, words and poems. She also believes that homework is essential and that clients need to be taking something home with them for use in their living situations.



Closing Ceremony

Gene Expression and Neuroplasticity: Implications for Dance/Movement Therapy and Alzheimer's Disease – Lora Wilson Mau

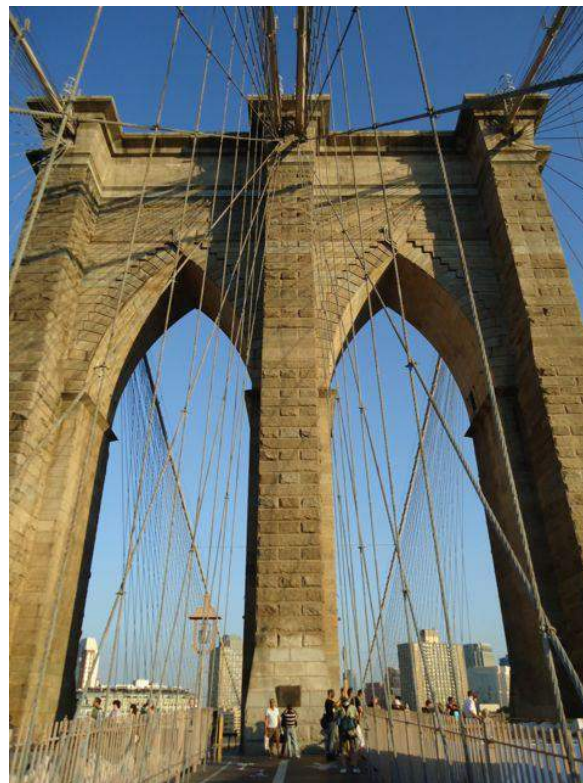
This workshop drew on the theories of Ernest Rossi, his concept of "psychosocial genomics", and work aimed at keeping the brain healthy and delaying the onset of Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Lora talked of neuroplasticity being the natural ability of the brain to repair and grow in response to new experiences in life. She cited research that shows the decline of plasticity as we age, but also research that supports the theory that certain types of activity increase neurogenesis or brain plasticity, particularly those that are novel, and salient sensori-motor experiences. These are activities that are able to modulate; that provide environmental enrichment that are physical, sensory and social experiences – and ones that can be exciting. Such activities are able to stimulate protein production, which can stimulate stem cells. Our subjective states of mind, behaviour and feelings can also modulate gene expression. She made the point that genes can also be turned off by stressors, such as trauma, and expanded on the complex dance that genes make with hormones.

Laura made an excellent case to support the use of dance movement therapy as an ideal approach to provide the suggested enriched environment for the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's disease and highlighted the fact that there is much research already that points to the power of dance and dance/movement therapy.

The experiential side of this workshop incorporated an incredibly rich range of stimulating objects – props – for investigation by the group providing many choices of colour, sound and textures. The overall message was to encourage ways of increasing brain plasticity at the first signs of this becoming necessary. Suggested reading from Laura: 'The brain that changes itself' by Dr Norman Doidge (2009).

Other Thoughts

Overall, the conference was a memorable experience so well worth the effort and expense. I felt much the richer for it and wondered why I had not previously made the effort to get there. There are many more aspects of the conference I could have mentioned, but I have written about those that made the greatest impression on me. Some of the presentations, such as the films for *Thought and Action*, which had excellent feedback, are totally missing. For some reason I didn't take notes and my only explanation is that I must have been so super-saturated with mind/body – particularly neuro-anatomy – that my own mind/body tripped out. I can't remember which one, if any, I saw! And suspect I may have slipped out for a well-deserved break and cup of coffee, or may even have gone for a stimulating walk across that wonderful Brooklyn Bridge! Definitely time for me to start the process of 'environmental enrichment' – or, I wonder - can you overdose on it?



The Brooklyn Bridge

Bio: Jane is a DMT, Physiotherapist, CMA and Professional member of the DTAA.

Note: The Official ADTA Flash Mob Video from the 45th Annual Conference is now available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v49gNbmb-wM>