

Reflections on The Body as Storyteller – led by Sara Boas

When you listen to your body, what does it say? When you witness the movement of your therapy clients, coaches, or fellow artists, what stories do they seem to tell?



These questions were the basis of this two-day workshop, led by Sara (www.boastl.com), an international presenter who seeks to embody and integrate her calling as a dancer, healer, researcher, and leadership coach. She is, as well, a registered dance movement psychotherapist and practising artist, who has performed in venues across Europe and in the United States. Held in Sydney on February 10 -11, 2018 at the Drill Hall in Rushcutters Bay, Sara (also known as Zora), provided a deep experiential dive into one's own body of experience, as was promised, through an intensive engagement that integrated therapeutic, coaching and artistic practice. It successfully invited trust in new ways of working through combining sensing, moving, writing, witnessing and voicing, to reach the depths of personal life

experiences and history. We were led to explore our own body stories with the support of a witness, using humour, words and voicing. Sara highlighted the importance of play and poetry in the storytelling process and together, we took the step towards storytelling as an art form.

From Robyn Price

"Supported by a sound bath, moving in relationship with one, with all. I have choices. Considering what is offered; see, respond, relate in a way that is true to me. I don't feel any pressure to do anything other than be myself. I feel able to be seen in my ordinariness. Losing the story, the idea of me."



Robyn Price with Françoise Bale

There is so much I have drawn from this workshop that is embodied and evident in my evolving therapy practice. With extraordinary skill and presence, Sara stepped us through many experiences, demonstrating how to create safety and build gradually into greater complexity.

Day one was dedicated to

generating material for our artwork, the performance piece we shared at the end of the day. Beginning with a simple story, we developed movement, coached a partner, and as we prepared to perform, invited our voices. Sara's presentation of her own story and illustration of the art-making process, for interested family and friends, capped off day one and gave us a chance to witness the therapeutic processes we had

moved through. A choice to have us work with one partner throughout the weekend allowed me to stay present with the themes, images, movements and thoughts that emerged. By the end, with the support of the deepening relationship, I had clarity on a core issue and the potential for resolution. This



workshop wasn't a series of exercises. It was an opportunity to experience the art of 1:1 DMT in action, the craft of group facilitation and appreciate the relevance of performance in our work. Reading back over my musings, I am amazed that this group of brave, dancing humans gathered for just two days, so much did we move through.

From Theresa Jackson

I think it was towards the end of the two days and it was just about sharing and pushing and pulling the boundaries of contact. I remember we started out a fair distant apart but by the end of the improvisation we were physically touching and enjoying human contact. We moved towards and away from each other, went high and low, side to side, turning and whirling as we both explored the spaces between us. It's amazing how non-verbal movement and actions can dispel the

unknown both for the audience and the performers. Improvisation is something which is secretly ever present in people's lives today.... that accidental meeting, that miscalculated move, the sharing of a movement to push a street crossing button all to confirm our humanity. The choice to go left instead of right, to wait instead of move, to smile instead of frown.



Theresa Jackson with Sara

I am in the beginning of reading an article in *Research in Dance Education* (2017) written by Katia Savrami titled 'A Duet between Science



and Art: Neural Correlates of Dance Improvisation'. My overall impression is this is interesting, because for the last 30 plus years there has been a plethora of writings about dance and movement, it has been prodded to the point of exhaustion. But what still remains is the wonderment of this elusive thing that everyone does. It is needed for survival,

fight, flight, freeze. It is needed for communications, it can move us to tears or laughter, and it can unite us in political, cultural and social ways which can so often go unnoticed or do not give it its proper due.

For me improvisation is fascinating, coming from old school it was spontaneous, real, intense, satisfying and very creative. You had to think on your feet, hands, back, stomach. You had to be aware of the space in the back, in front, on the sides. The bumps, twists, thrown, picked up, balanced, stumbles - you didn't worry too much about being polite, or getting hurt - it was to be expected, it was part of the exploration. Then at

the end of it all you smiled, sat down and said that was great.

Aram Khalkhali

This workshop was an exploration for me, through which I encountered different dimensions of myself that I had not known existed.



Aram Khalkhali - right

As I am both a dancer and an actress I thought it would be easy to be part of a storytelling workshop, because I believed it would be

similar to my known background, to what I am used to doing. But when I began to be fully engaged in the flow of the improvised movement experience, I began to understand the difference between being on the stage and acting, and instead being spontaneous and involved in this real life situation of honestly being my authentic self. I was responding as me with my thoughts and feelings, rather than as I was used to being on a stage and acting a part. This was a real-life situation, where I could be honest with myself and try not to act or show off. I found that I could let my body respond to the cues from my partner and my mind and feeling states among new people who I could trust. This was in the first workshop day with Zora's extraordinary coaching.

On the second day I found myself relaxed amongst the circle of participants and was interacting and responding to my partner spontaneously. We communicated through our eyes and movements and feelings in the safe



atmosphere which surrounded me. This helped me to sink into and live my real story easily. To sum up, the whole experience was very liberating and a great release.

Juliette Kirkwood

For me, the process was very powerful, starting something that has only just now come to completion with a rebirthing of my marriage. It demonstrated to me the importance of embodying a story and how as we work with that story, the movements eventually percolate down to our life story. As we continued to work throughout the



Juliette Kirkwood - left

weekend I witnessed in myself and many others how the initial story became irrelevant and a much bigger all-encompassing story evolved which encapsulated the whole life. In my case this was not just my story but it was the story of my mother and my grandmother. It never ceases to amaze me how the body can link us with ancestral wounding that would not otherwise have been identified.

In addition to witnessing the evolution of the process and its power to bring into our consciousness the overriding story of our life, there was another undercurrent of learning that was and still is ongoing for me. From the very beginning of my Dance Movement Therapy career I have struggled with a dichotomy. On one hand I have encouraged my clients to listen to their bodies and trust the undeniable truth that comes from the body as it is rooted in the here and now, grounded in perceptions of reality that cannot be denied. The area where I become unstuck however, and which was highlighted to me during the Sara Boas weekend, is that the voice of trauma is also housed within the body. As we go on in our day to day life it is not easy to differentiate between the voice of trauma or the voice of truth as they both stem from the body. Trauma is in our nervous system and sometimes causes us to respond in ways that are not in our best interests. One of my biggest struggles has been to differentiate between the voice of truth/intuition and the voice of trauma. They can feel the same. It is only through post event reflection that it becomes clear and then it can be too late. I am assuming that I am not alone in this. If I as a therapist am having trouble differentiating the messages that I am getting from my body, how can I help my clients to do the same? I am still learning.

My 'story' is very deeply rooted in my subconscious and hence in my body. I want to help my clients find a better way to navigate their life. A common theme that I see in my clients is this sense of not knowing what to do. Travelling blind and experiencing a real 'hit and miss' process to navigating themselves through life, experiencing a great deal of frustration in not having a reliable compass.

The Sara Boas weekend clarified a huge amount for me as a person and as a therapist and also raised some fundamental questions. Sara is a great teacher. I loved her ability to create safety. This is so fundamentally important as it allows people to feel safe enough to go deep. I have been to so many workshops/events where the facilitator was not able to create safety and this left me feeling frustrated. There are many people out there doing work that involves the body, and the lack of training in this area is quite evident and highly concerning.

Sharon Todd-Miller

Having experienced Zora's (Sara) 2017, Sydney workshop, which so positively transformed my relationship to performance, I was eager to dive into this two-day workshop. Acknowledging attendees' diversity of experience and background in DMT and the potential for any story to trigger emotional overwhelm, Zora built and offered safety in a variety of ways. This included exploring a 'power move or gesture' – using body, voice, a verbal phrase, experimenting with toning - in order to provide a safe space for



Sharon Todd-Miller

the body to return to and re-centre.

For the story-telling process we worked in pairs, each in turn being story teller and witness. In working with one witness/partner over the two days, a shared

connection, trust, curiosity, co-creativity, engagement and a profound sense of being seen and heard allowed a deeper and more universal story to unfold. Ultimately, this allowed me to experiment with an expanded story and

new way of being. The witness - holding the space, attending, attuning, listening and responding through the body- was instrumental in the unfolding process. Our partner was also invited to take on a different role as coach, which further guided me to explore my story in a new way. Coaching was done with the permission of the other person. This interactive coaching included the metaphorical and corporeal - inviting me to give a movement more weight (I struggled with this and felt taken aback by it) and to explore reaching higher and expanding a movement. Being a witness, I can still recall a somatic response in my body - a 'body to body' moment and remember the healing impact and sense of self-discovery in sensing a revelation in another's story.

A sample of the many rich themes explored and questions raised in dancing our stories and supporting the stories of others through voice, included: letting go of the story and letting the movement have its own voice; exploring "the



movement behind the story" through performance; being able to maintain contact with self, with others inside the circle and with the surrounding group simultaneously; while performing in pairs within the circle, how can we work with the tension between co-creating an improvised performance and individuation? Zora as facilitator used her therapeutic, coaching and artistic skills to help us work with our individual stories and questions, in

developing and processing our material in pairs and with the group as a whole. The weekend was such a precious gift, giving me the opportunity to share, expand and perform my story with others. Zora continues to inspire me to develop the use of voice as a resource for movement and to find ways to bring the power and revelation of story-telling using the body and movement into my group work. I am looking forward to her next workshop!

Mary-Claude Vietet

Since being in Australia, Mary-Claude has mostly been known as Mary. From early 2018, It felt key to reconnect and embrace my full first name Mary-Claude.

At first when Sara Boas asked us to say our name and work in pairs to voice it and move it, it felt fun, playful, however not integrated. Later a shift occurred and from just saying my name and moving it, I was truly appropriating it. It allowed me to explore the feminine and masculine aspects of both names. Mary-Claude became the warrior, soft and strong at the same time, embodied, present and embracing my full name, embracing



Mary-Claude

who I am. Mary-Claude voicing and expressing her full first name, embracing it

Strong and feminine, moving from femininity to masculinity

And from Rosemarie Smith as witness

The work of the therapist/witness is to create and hold a safe space to allow the client to explore. With Sara facilitating and developing the experiential with Mary-Claude, then through me as the therapist/witness, Mary-Claude was able to embark on her journey of exploration. As Dr Graham Barker has said on many occasions "the relationship is the therapy".



Rosemarie Smith as the therapist/witness.

Thank you to Sara and to all the participants for such dedication on what was a truly hot Sydney weekend.