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ABSTRACT

This essay examines how camera-witnessing, a practice derived from the silent witness of Adler's Discipline of Authentic Movement, can inform and enhance the way in which digital media are used for therapy and teaching. The author offers some theoretical considerations to explain why it is important to understand the way digital media work, and what they do and don't achieve. It is argued that the use of digital media in DMP and somatic work, in particular, requires conscious reflection and that a thoughtful, practical application of therapeutic ethics and practices to digital encounters can enhance and aid these.

Preamble

Since the global Coronavirus crisis began in 2019, the topic of being seen digitally has become more pertinent and urgent. The need for social distancing and screen work has become a question of professional survival and not just one of economic and geographical choice. Readers of this article are asked to bear in mind that key ideas were conceived *prior* to the Coronavirus crisis, almost two years ago, for a presentation at the Conference EADMT 2018 and that since the pandemic development in this evolving area of work is considered urgent.

Introduction

Working digitally, online and on-screen, occupies an increasing amount of time in dance movement therapy/and in other arts and psychotherapy practitioners' working lives. Time working in the physical presence with clients and students is constantly decreasing. Prior to the Coronavirus crisis,

only few practitioners thought about the impact that digitally mediated sessions (instead of direct personal contact) might have on their work with clients. Reflection and insight into how digital communications work, their politics and ethics, and their impact on mental health and somatic therapies, teaching and supervision practices is still scarce. My presentation at the EADMT conference proceedings Athens in 2018 and now this essay aim to address this void. Whilst reflecting on the influence of macro drivers this article suggests practical steps to make improvements on the micro level of digitally offered therapies. I suggest that aspects and qualities of witnessing, as introduced by Adler in the Discipline of Authentic Movement (Adler, 1985 &, 2002) and developed into camera-witnessing (Goldhahn, 2007 & E. Goldhahn, 2011), can be adapted to online session work with DMT, DMP and to other somatic and therapeutic practices, such as art therapies and counselling.

Roots of this work

Adler's article Who is the Witness (Adler, 1985) is formative in explaining the relationship between a mover and a witness. Mover and witness are inextricably connected in their influence upon each other's experiences and it is this connectivity that provides the ground for a profound healing presence in being seen and heard. In my practice led PhD research I explored film and other visual arts in relationship to movers and witnesses (Goldhahn, 2007). I was particularly interested in how the Discipline of Authentic Movement's (Adler, 2002) underlying philosophies and workings could provide a transferable methodology. Teaching the Discipline of Authentic Movement in collaboration with Marcia Plevin to a group of practitioners in Finland I explored how I could transfer my witnessing skills directly to my film making. I found that by applying witnessing to my practice of film making, my empathetic and aesthetic experiences became visible to others in the film footage. Further, participants found a coherence between their own experiences of themselves as movers and what they saw in my footage. One woman stated that 'I was surprised that I was neither shocked nor offended by seeing myself moving on film'. And another shared that 'The footage bears witness to your witnessing of us, Eila, albeit silently'. As my work developed over several projects, I came to use the term *camera-witnessing* and this is a practice I now use in therapeutic work as well as in arts projects (Goldhahn, 2007; E. Goldhahn, 2011, 2016).

Camera-witnessing applies the same principles as personal, silent witnessing, namely observing with interest, positive regard and the intention to not judge or categorise the seen. Readers of this article are invited to refer to my previous publication in which I exemplify these findings in the documentation of a so-called Long Circle, one particular format of the Discipline of

Authentic Movement (E. Goldhahn, 2011). Using camera-witnessing I have also made several short educational films about the Discipline of Authentic Movement (Goldhahn in Films Media Group, E. Goldhahn, 2016) as well as fine arts video installations in public venues. Some principles of my camera-witnessing crystallised as being particularly useful when working with others. They form part of an evolving practice that endeavours to take ethical considerations of respect and integrity in working with others very seriously. Like in the Discipline of Authentic Movement it allows movers to be the authority of their own material. At the same time, it allows a witness to be an empathetic part of the movement process and interact with movers as their silent witness.

Camera-witnessing

Preparing a safe space

In addition to confidentiality and privacy, as required in any therapeutic setting, a safe space involves openness about the presence and purpose of the camera. A camera or another recording device, like a laptop, is like another entity that needs to be known in order to be accepted. For example, the camera can be handled by participants themselves. This can help to establish trust between the movers and the camera-witness.

Positioning

As in the Discipline of Authentic Movement, a witness with a camera does not move around the room but stays in the same place. This allows a mover to move into the witness's blind spot if there is a need to not be seen. I use only one fixed, seated position so my perspective remains entirely predictable to the movers whilst they have their eyes shut.

Witnessing with a camera

As a camera-witness, I remain seated and in a quiet position on floor level. I also maintain a mobile upper body able to bend forward, shrink back or to yield. My neck and head are able to turn, fall and rise and to follow. Whenever I can, I look above my camera's view finder to be in a more empathetic, direct contact with my movers. Like this, I am able to use tilts, turns and zooms which are similar to the way I would be following the movers without a camera. The subtle movements of my upper body are reflected in my footage and bring it to life.

Following one's inner witness

A witness's gaze is typically mindful of her own inner witness and rooted in the consciousness of her own body. She is quiet and alert and follows the mover with an open, non-judgemental gaze. As a camera-witness, I attend to my own body and by becoming conscious of my somatic and feeling responses these become apparent in the resulting film footage. As in witnessing I allow my body to be subjectively tuned into the present moment of the movers' somatic presence. For example, my own rhythm of breathing mirrors my emotional responses and this too is visible in the footage.

Vetting the footage

In the Discipline of Authentic Movement, the mover is the explicit expert and author of their own movement material (Goldhahn, 2015). My work with the camera is based on being a silent witness and movers are in charge of my footage of their movement material. This is similar to being a witness who only responds to the mover's explicit ask for witnessing and in response to what the mover has recalled already herself. Some time after the live movement and camera-witnessing session is digested and integrated, movers are invited to see and vet the film footage. If someone wants to not see it or wants to exclude something about themselves, this is done. The mover's authority always takes precedence over my own vision for a film.

As camera-witnessing became my practice for film making it is now also my approach for enhancing digitally conducted online session in DMP and somatics. When thinking about the complexities of online encounters and transferring camera-witnessing to DMP and somatic practices to screen-to-screen relationships, I found myself suddenly in a much larger world of techno politics. Experiencing Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's artwork provided a thought provoking example of this (Figure 1). Realising that the larger context of the often unknown parameters of the digital world has an impact on our work in DMP and somatics I decided to explore not just the microcosm of sessional work but access the macrocosm of digital technology. I sense that with the increased use of digital communication ignorance of its workings can lead to powerful illusions. As therapists, we know that illusions and lack of knowledge can be counterproductive to our work with clients and students. I feel that without knowing this tool it is impossible to demand a critical stance and to examine what can work in our field. One of the most common misconceptions regarding digital communications I found to be the idea of presence.
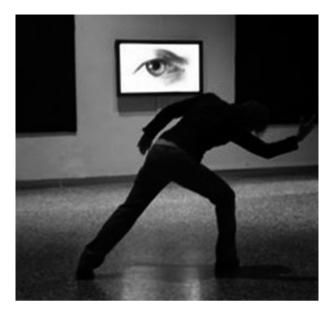
Figure 1. Photo by Stuart Young (2007): Eila Goldhahn responding in movement to Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's installation, Venice Biennale.

The use of digital technology in psychotherapy and somatic practices

The world's economies are based on digital communications applied to all aspects of human life. This applies also to the field of humanities and psychotherapies, namely those areas where in the past actual bodily human presence was considered an essential prerogative, its Conditio sine qua non. This understanding appears to no longer be held. Why is this so?

The digital sharing economy is a platform that now effects the work of most practitioners and looks like it will increasingly do so. Whilst many consider working in this way less than perfect, others embrace this new way of working enthusiastically as demonstrated by panel members at EADMT in Athens in 2018. Others decided it is not for them at all and they simply stay with the physical presence of peoples' bodies together in one space, which, since the Corona pandemic, becomes more difficult. Others, like myself, are raising questions of underlying assumptions and ethics and how we need to assess and where possible transfer our existing beliefs and ethics to the new situation of mediated sessions.

One of my students of The Discipline of Authentic Movement wrote to me: 'The economic convenience for me as a practitioner, to be able to not need to rent space for Skype sessions is an enormous advantage at this stage where, frankly, I need paid session hours over idealised session hours'. It is interesting

that he considers physical bodily presence with his own clients to be an ideal rather than a condition for his work. He is not alone in the field. It is clear that to many practitioners using digital communications for sessional work makes practical and, importantly, much-needed financial sense. Its use is increasing day by day as the new social distancing rules become part of everybody's lives.

To many practitioners, being together in physical space and time has now become a very precious and rare commodity. Embodied presence and encounters between movers and therapists and clients within a studio space have become a luxury. They are reserved to occasional, sometimes annual, retreats and training whilst most of the therapeutic, supervisory, mentoring or training encounters in between take place online. This is by email, online study modules and reading, and by using Skype and other similar applications such as Zoom, etc. The technology has also provided substantial advantages to reach DMT and DMP clients and trainees in countries where these therapeutic practices were formerly unknown. Whilst continuity seems to have been gained, I ask what is lost in these translations? What new understanding do we need to acquire to become mindful and skilful in their use?

The economics of digital communications are based in speed and ubiquitousness, qualities that are considered to be positive. Digital media enable practitioners to reach out to an international community of potential clients, students and supervises around the clock. Speed, and availability to speed, equals money in economic terms and is behind the approaching leaps of technological development. This has driven the imminent shift from 4 G networks to 5 G and will be superseded by holographic mediation in turn. The difference between 4 G and 5 G technology is the speed of transmission of data. 5 G decreases the current latency, the time lag in digital communications, and increases users' perception of real time (and real 'presence') when online. Holography, in turn, is going to create a three-dimensional experience and will be yet a step closer to so-called 'presence' in media technology.

4 G communications are asynchronous with a latency (time lag) of 10 or more milliseconds. This is small yet very perceptible. It is latency that creates a sense of distance and disruption to mediated communications in 4 G. Participants feel as though they have to pause and wait during communications and that they do not really connect and communicate at times because of this lag.

Human senses and social interactions have evolved and adapted to function optimally in the presence of another body equipped with these same senses. The evolutionary function of innate mirror neurons is based in individuals being in each other's presence, of having eye contact, of being in earshot, of being able to join each other's rhythm of breathing, facial expressions and gestures. There is no evolutionary facility to effectively adapt to and deal with a time lag between human communicators (excepting perhaps

smoke signals). Therefore, feelings of understanding and empathising with each other can be said to be lost in the translation of the digital data from one screen to another. Communicators often show signs of tiredness after a shorter period of time in comparison to being in each other's presence when focus and attention can be held for longer periods of time. In part, this is due to the distortions of image and sound and the nervous system having to strain and fill the gaps in poor visual and auditory signals.

5 G will be considered real-time internet and is therefore obviously desirable. It will reduce latency to 1 ms, a time lag so small that it is imperceptible to the human nervous system. 5 G is considered a great improvement in digital communications as it increases the felt sense of individuals' connectivity. 5 G will also improve the resolution of streamed video images making the response to physical expression more possible. It will mediate the experiences of seeing on-line and on-screen with increased visual resolution and depth of field. This means that the digital images that we see of each other are going to appear more real and more like real time, furthering the illusion of providing real contact and presence with another person. This appears to be good news for therapists and psychotherapists working with the body, movement and somatics. 5 G will create a more powerful illusion of real human presence online than 4 G is able to.

Humans living and working within Western-style capitalist systems during the twentieth century have been the drivers for this technological progress to be so widely used now. The spread of Western somatic therapies and DMT into countries such as China and India was enabled by these technologies as well as by travelling pioneers. Perhaps ironically some Western body-mind practices were originally inspired and informed by Eastern practices themselves. These exchanges have been creating new insights and ways of practicing. However, the internet has also enabled the West to spawn its ideas about culture, standards of living and an imagined white racial supremacy. Further, the use of the internet is also closely connected to the worldwide increase in energy consumption. Mega hubs fuel the massive servers necessary to provide us with the computing power to enable the worldwide web to function. Being ubiquitously available around the clock digital technology and economy do not save energy, they also consume energy to work. During the lockdown, the increased use of the internet led to increased energy consumption.

Energy consumption and climate change have to be born in mind when we consider giving up travelling in favour of presence versus not travelling and favouring a new mediated 'presence'. However, I urge to also ponder the societal consequences of people encountering each other less frequently. Randow (2020) proposes that, as our bodies less frequently approach, move towards, gather and move around and away from each other, the opportunity for democratic society diminishes. He refers back to Norbert Elias (1939, as cited in Randow, 2020), the renowned sociologist, who has described

societies as figurations of bodies that move similar to those in a societal dance. Elias argued that democratic society is largely a physical, corporal process that needs practicing just in that way, like a ritual (1939, as cited in Randow, 2020). So, what can happen when we can no longer, literally and metaphorically, dance with each other? What do we need to look out for in this brave new world? What is lost in the translation and the disentanglement of digital data in our offices and studios? How do we as therapists feel after a mediated session or after a session with our client or student present? What happens and is denied us? What happens to our desire and the souciance of bodies and minds seeking to connect with each other in therapy, training and somatic practice? Whilst pertaining to be an economic blessing, there are personal, political and ecological costs to mediated communications. These overlapping complexes are intricately linked and impossible to separate. As the internet of all things connects us all, so does the planet's warming climate. In a politics of the arts, the body and psychotherapy these connections need to be considered. 'We are all connected' is no longer just a metaphor for psychic energy, it is a matter of the ecology of our survival as a species.

Do you see me? Do you hear me?

The title of this section is a phrase from Adler's primer of The Discipline of Authentic Movement (Adler, 2002). It is the essential, urgent and prime question a mover may ask her witness: 'Do you see me?' How much may be at stake in the witness's answer. A lot. 'Yes, I see you', spoken with sincerity can weigh its letters in gold to the mover. When we engage in online therapy or training session this same phrase is often spoken with a different purpose. We actually mean: is the technology between us working ok? Can we see a mediated image of each other on each other's screens?

What was originally meant by Adler and her students to be a deeply affirmative echo of physical presence, retinal and present vision and meaningful understanding within an intimate sharing of private space and time, means something very different in digital communications. The different meaning can evoke a bizarre echo of the former and become, completely unintentionally, confusing. This confusion also provides an opportunity for clarification. Whilst the unintended resonance between these different meanings may seem odd or familiar, I opine that we should be aware of the different meanings imbued. Taking time to clarify what it is we mean, namely two people looking at each other on two screens across a vast distance, we can also practice consciousness even before we begin our actual mindful practice. The absence of presence and the separation of therapists and clients in different spaces altogether pose further alienation requiring deeper questions yet. Further, the immobility of computer and laptop cameras demands

additional strategies of enabling an empathetic camera-witnessing or of being seen digitally.

In digital communications, nobody actually does 'see' or 'hear' each other but the interpersonal contact, whether perceptibly lagging in time or imperceptibly brought near to perfection as in 5 G, is technologically mediated via super-fast digital signals and unscrambled for its recipients. Meanwhile, each participant remains solely in a different time and space. The word 'digital' refers to signals and data that are expressed as series of the digits 0 and 1, so-called binary data. They are typically expressed in values of voltage or magnetic polarisation. Computer technology uses these binary, digital data in order to process and communicate information fast across vast distances. When in digital communications to say 'I see you' it indicates that pixels on a screen have formed into the digital recognisable image of another person or yourself. 'I hear you' in turn means that the participants' voices are transmitted via microphones and digital inscriptions and then unwound by recipients' computer soft- and hardware into audible sound bites. I suggest that the perfect illusion that will be created with 5 G and further down the line with holography requires participants to be even more conscious of the facts than now as there is less to remind us that the other person is not really tangibly in our actual presence. I believe that it is valuable, yes, productive to our work to foster a conscious relationship that continues to distinguish between mediated and unmediated, direct presence and experience.

Whilst time spent in front of two screens sometimes thousands of miles apart in different time zones may indeed be considered *shared time* is does not constitute *shared space*. Shared space enables a direct experience of the other person, the potentiality of haptic contact, touch, the presence of smell, the presence of atmosphere of, shared air and breath, the potential of bacteria and virus being present, the potential of an intermingling and permeation of shared habitats (Goldhahn, 2007). Through the screen, I cannot touch, smell or move with the other. I am not physically present with the other. This raises many profound questions, and amongst them the question of safety in therapeutic practice. What happens when a client disintegrates and within our varied therapeutic practices we might wish to hold, support the client with our body or breath with them?

Gillian Isaac Russell's aptly named book Screen Relations (Isaacs Russell, 2015) offers an in-depth analysis of the Limits of Computer-Mediated Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. Isaac Russell begins from the premise, adopted by many psychoanalysts using the internet for client contact, that psychoanalysis is two minds talking to each other. She critically examines the current practice and offers some improvements. Her main message calls for a conscious handling of the medium. She also sets out how body to body presence is a prerogative to building trust and relationship between analyst and analysand. Her critical arguments echoed what I had been researching.

She urges us 'not to automatically adjust our perceptions to fit the limitations of the tools' (Isaacs Russell, 2015, p. 156) and encourages us to create residual trust by building a face to face relationship that is based in body to body presence prior to engaging in Skyped therapeutic sessions with a client (Rocco, 1998, as cited in Isaacs Russell, 2015). Therapeutic and personal values are reflected within the therapeutic or supervisory space that we offer and I suggest that we extend that responsibility and awareness to the medium we employ in order to see and hear our clients better across cyberspace. What I am proposing is a methodological shift that embraces the medium, making the medium part of the space we create and not bowing or cowering into a window or frame that the medium presupposes and dictates for us.

Suggestions for mediated psychotherapy and somatic work

The culture of the self-styled selfie is often criticised by people seeking authenticity but for the purpose of being seen digitally it might be very helpful for therapists and clients to think as being engaged in imagining and creating moving selfies of themselves. When we position ourselves in front of our computer or laptop cameras, we are in fact engaged in creating an image of ourselves. When we click the camera icon, we begin to film ourselves and permit this film to be transmitted to another in an instant.

By acknowledging and admitting that we are in fact creating moving selfies *for* each other, we might bring greater self-reflection and honesty into our digital encounters. To talk about and acknowledge that we are filming ourselves for another can also affirm a sense of self-agency. This sense of being in control aids the production and projection of a self-image. A consciously creating self-agency helps to bridge the inescapable void in digital encounters and can also be an expressed therapeutic aim. Practitioners may explore in which ways a client's moving selfie is created, neglected or co-created together with the therapist/teacher.

It is clear that the camera does not create a window into the mover's private space through which the witness simply gazes and sees. Instead, the camera captures what is already the mover's own vision of herself: a vision documented via a moving selfie. The implications, especially for practicing the Discipline of Authentic Movement online, are complex and should be considered in more depth as the practice evolves at this time. One might particularly wish to explore the many layers of seeing and being seen, which, as I have tried to explain here, carry those additional layers in digital communications.

The student/mover/client remains on her own in her own space in digitally mediated sessions. It takes leaps of imagination to think and believe of being truly witnessed in this manner. I believe that some clients' sense of alienation cannot be bridged but might deepen into despair by this way of practicing,

which will require very careful handling. The imagination required to fill the gaps lost in digital translation could be seen as a sign of psychological health in the client/student. Being seen digitally requires an increased amount of circumspection, preparation, trust and imagination.

Whilst understanding our mediated encounters in DMP and somatic work more fully is paramount to avoiding illusion, I suggest that, at this time, we also need to be very pragmatic. The ethics of witnessing and camera-witnessing, as shared earlier in this article, can be thoughtfully adapted for creating a safer, therapeutic space for our online encounters in DMP and somatic practice. Further and in addition, the following pragmatic guidance might be helpful to being seen and heard more fully when online:

- Choose or create a space in front of a day-lit window or an artificial light source. This helps your computer camera to film you. Avoid back or ceiling lighting as it will detract from what your client/student will want to focus on, namely your face and eyes.
- Have your camera/laptop very close in front of you on top of a small table, a pile of large books or on a window sill. The camera of your device has to be roughly the height of your head and you can sit quite close in order to give a sense of proximity to the digitally transmitted encounter.
- Avoid tilting the computer screen with its in-built camera back in order to capture you. This leads to your face being shown from below. The recipient will look up at you as if they were in a physical position below you, suggesting a childlike inferiority.
- For somatic movement work in which you plan to move map out a space behind you. Approximately 1 m (roughly 2 arm lengths) away from the camera/laptop mark out a space roughly the size of 2 m (roughly 4 arm lengths) width and then fanning out into the depth of the movement space available up to 5 m. Mark this trapeze-shaped space with rolled-up blankets.
- Sit on the floor or on a floor cushion immediately in front of your camera/laptop. Get ready for your session: have a couple of quiet minutes before dialling in with each other.
- Use only an auditory signal to begin with and check that you can clearly hear each other. Adjust the volume/microphone. Hearing each other is the basis for visual contact as it is easier to accept. Once good auditory contact is established, use this to check in and tune in with each other. (First how are yous?)
- When you can hear each other well and feel that you have made contact with each other, check that you are ready to switch on the visual video signal. Allow a few moments to check in with your own small image, usually visible in the right top corner, depending on the software used. Adjust the angle of the computer camera so that you feel comfortable

with the angle and lighting and the image that is projected of yourself. Authenticity in this context is how you might want to be seen digitally.

- Begin to make visual contact with the other person. Give each other time to describe: Can you see me on your screen? What is the image of myself like? If applicable check that each other's marked movement space works well for the other person and make adjustments as necessary. Does the visual signal mirror the auditory one? Can you give each other permission to express surprises of oddities between your auditory communication and the visual one?

- The small image that you see of yourself can be clearer and sharper than the transmitted image that the other person sees of you on their screen. If this is the case you can decrease the image that you see of the other person on your screen by using the cursor in the right bottom corner of the window and pulling this arrow inwards, making the image smaller and hopefully sharper.

- Acknowledge you are meeting online and not in the presence of each other's bodies and that you might tire of each other's digitally transmitted words and images, not because you are bored of each other, but because being seen and heard digitally is much harder than being together in one space. Allow sessions to be shorter than they would be in each other's presence to take account of this fact.

- Share your practical steps with your student/client/partner. They will find it useful to be on the same page as you.

Most colleagues will not have had an experience of being a film-maker nor reflected on the fact that there is 'an elephant in the room' when being seen and seeing each other digitally. When introducing my simple preparations to a DMP colleague, she stated: 'I was looking for ways to improve my online encounters with clients. Now I feel that I have a practical set of parameters to enable me to do this'. Another Discipline of Authentic Movement peer echoed this, saying that she had felt inhibited taking on students for online sessions. She felt that she needed to practice my suggested ideas and steps for quite a while in order to be able to offer online sessions confidently. She wanted to make these part of her skill-set. Their comments remind me of the work I undertook initially when searching for guiding principles for my camera-witnessing. Having come to grips with using a large camera had, in fact, prepared me for work with the tiny hidden camera within my laptop.

Conclusions

We need to work within the consciousness that when a digital device is used, this becomes an integral part of the therapeutic container, process and the practice itself. The shortcomings of a lack of real-shared bodily

presence are obvious, yet, as we are all driven by necessity, it is very tempting to blend these out. Whilst leaps of imagination are useful in bridging the gaps and shortcomings, the need to be seen and heard in the full presence of another remains. As also in mediated presence the mover/client remains the expert of themselves, a moving selfie may be seen as a true personal expression of just that. The verbal recall and the verbal witnessing of self and other becomes an important verification of what may or may not have been seen in digital translation. There are clear limits to the effectiveness of digital therapies but there are ways in which we can apply our particular humanising skills and ethics to digital encounters. Meanwhile, we do need to remember that we long and hunger to be seen and heard in the physical presence of a witness in the same shared space and time. With offering camera-witnessing, my theoretical reflections and above simple steps, I hope to make a difference to other practitioners' ways of engaging digitally.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Eila Goldhahn trained with Mary O'Donnell Fulkerson at Dartington College of Arts and with Janet Adler in Italy. She is a counsellor and somatic psychotherapist and a teacher of the Discipline of Authentic Movement. Eila offers online sessions in english and german via Skype. She is also a scholar, curator and artist having published and exhibited her work in international peer reviewed journals, books and venues. Her films on Authentic Movement are published with Films Media Group.

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