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Where one cannot speak, there, one can dance

Abstract:

The text aims to outline the basic comparison of the theoretical roots, concepts and frameworks, principles, attitudes, typical interventions, phases of development and scope of practical use of dance movement therapy and process-oriented psychology (Processwork). The author proposes that mutual benefits and opportunities are at disposal for practitioners from both schools, including the primary and secondary process and “edge work” in Processwork, as well as movement observing techniques, movement profile mapping and the “dance-not- done” approach in dance movement therapy. The theme of communication channels and the theme of “essence level” or spiritual experience as approached in both practices is discussed as well. A chapter describing personal experience of a dance movement therapist becoming a process worker is included.

Key words:

dance movement therapy, processwork, movement channel, dance, body, dreambody, intersubjectivity, embodiment, awareness, edge

Introduction

I am a dance movement therapist. When starting my second training in process oriented psychology, also known as Processwork (PW) in 2012, I experienced confusion, asking myself and my mentors: How it is possible that so many approaches and interventions I know from dance movement therapy (DMT) I am learning now as PW material? Is it just the synchronicity of the psychotherapy world? Or is there a mysterious relationship between the two schools that I am not getting? Is there a historical connection that I do not know about?

I soon realized how privileged I am in my PW being befriended with my body, my movement and dance - a gift brought to me by DMT and before, through the opportunity of being a dancer. On the other hand, I felt relieved and thankful when some key processes and principles that I knew from DMT practice and through my body experiences, in the course of my PW training received names and verbal specifications. Within my personal development, the PW 'multichannel' concept and the concept of 'the edge' showed me how I tend (by "being at home" in movement) to escape from 'edgy' feelings; I "move it" and "dance it away". In the DMT world, I was processing the very situation through exploration of the repeated movement pattern of "escaping" where the theme of body-sensing versus movement-expressing arose. I began to anticipate that there would be more on the horizon.

Defining the terms

PW is defined as a psychotherapeutic paradigm and practical methodology for uncovering deeper meaning in a broad range of human experience by following experiences in the moment through tracking signals, synchronicities, and somatic experience; it acknowledges its roots as in Jungian psychology, shamanism, Taoism, sociology, and physics (Mindell, Amy, n. d). The ultimate goal of PW is to bring awareness to a process, and thus allow the process of the individual or of a group to unfold.

Developed by Arnold Mindell, a Jungian analyst with a background in physics, it has its origin in the founder's observation that night-time dreams both mirrored and were mirrored in his

clients' somatic experiences, particularly physical symptoms. He generalized the term "dreaming" to include any aspect of experience that, while possibly differing from consensus views of reality, was coherent with a person's dreams, fantasies, and somatic experience, as well as the unintentional but meaningful signals.

Mindell's training in physics encouraged him to view the unconscious mind phenomenologically as well as symbolically, leading him to apply information theory to PW. The concept of the 'unconscious' was expanded to include a whole range of unintentional verbal and non-verbal signals, on the one hand, and of perceptions, beliefs and ideas with which the individual does not identify, on the other. In other words, the "unconscious" here is being expanded to anything that a person does not identify with, rather than unconscious of.

PW uses awareness to track real and imaginary psychological and physical processes that illuminate and possibly resolve inner, relationship, team, and world issues. There are three levels of experiencing reality: consensual, dreamland and essence level. It works with awareness of primary and secondary processes, with work around edges, channels awareness and the concept of the 'dreambody'. Movement is one of the channels in which we may discover the dreaming messages; others are visual, auditory, proprioceptive, relationship and world channel. Mindell's (Mindell, 2008) term of dreambody is defined as the interconnected nature of body and dream experiences. The unconscious manifests not only in dreams but also from moment to moment in our body experiences. In a sense, "illness asks for integration ... it requires consciousness by creating pain" (Mindell, 1989). PW then proposes to live the energy of the symptom through various channels, including the movement channel and dance. Arnold Mindell's wife and partner, Amy Mindell, who holds a BA in dance, contributed to the PW conceptual framework in the areas of metaskills, coma, creativity and dance (Mindell, Amy, n.d). The formation of PW is dated to the year 1976 and early 1980s. (IAPOP, 2010)

Dance movement therapy (DMT) is defined by the American Dance Therapy Association as the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional and physical integration of the individual (ADTA, 2016). Similarly, according to the Association for Dance Movement Therapy UK (ADMP, 2016), it is defined as:

‘The psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance through which a person can engage creatively in a process to further their emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration. DMT is founded on the principle that movement reflects an individual's patterns of thinking and feeling. Through acknowledging and supporting clients' movements, the therapist encourages development and integration of new adaptive movement patterns together with the emotional experiences that accompany such changes. It is a relational process in which client/s and therapist engage creatively using body movement and dance to assist integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, social and spiritual aspects of self.’

The philosophical orientation is based on the belief in the inter-relationship between psyche, soma and spirit as evidenced in the potential held in creative processes. The theoretical background of a dance movement therapist consists of knowledge of developmental movement patterns, movement analysis, and process dynamics. Lately, the concepts of intersubjectivity, embodiment and enaction enriched the theoretical framework of DMT (Zedkova, 2012). One of the key instruments used by many dance movement therapists to observe, describe and analyze individual movement styles is Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), which is a complex system that allows a therapist to observe and understand movement based on objective concepts (Zedkova, 2012). The system of clear categories for each of the movement qualities and characteristics of individual movements allows the therapist to develop a tailored approach and application in therapeutic individual and group work. It supports the therapist to see the movement as such and to avoid interpretations.

LMA is a complex non-hierarchical view on human movement widely used as a core method in DMT. Unlike some other schools of nonverbal behavior, it does not look for meaning, or the symbol of the movement, but looks at the movement itself (La Barre, 2004, p. 174), observing in great detail individual adaptations of movement styles to the internal psychological life of an individual and to the surroundings and vice versa. It is based on the idea that there is mutual influencing between body and mind. In DMT, besides movement as the communication channel, there is dance as a form of art, a space for symbols, creation and metaphors. This can bring the unknown from the depth of the unconsciousness into light without the need to verbalize immediately or whatsoever. The formation of DMT is dated from the 1950s, while the American Dance Therapy Association was founded in 1966 as an organization to support the then emerging new profession.

Similar and different

Even at a glance, it is clear that both schools stand on the bases of the concept of the interrelationship between body and mind and both strongly accentuate the body as a source and movement as a communication channel.

Concepts such as “movement is a universal form of communication” or “the body and mind are interconnected” are stated as specific core principles both in DMT and PW. A nonjudgmental and non-interpretive approach is crucial in both, and in DMT it is supported by movement observation system such as LMA. Both PW and DMT share the celebration of experiences beyond personal will and control, while both schools see movement as a bridge of these experiences into awareness.

PW was originally founded by a single author, Arnold Mindell. DMT does not have this singularity at the time of its birth. The literature refers to women in different parts of the world: Marian Chace, Franciska Boas, Mary Whitehouse, Troodi Shoop, Audrey Wethered, Chloe Gardiner followed by the league of 1st generation DMT therapists in the early years of the

second half of the 20th century. While the PW theoretical frame and paradigm is clearly elaborated and unified, the DMT theoretical framework is nowadays in the phase of completing its formulation. DMT is just in a phase of gaining collective consensus and complexion of its theoretical paradigm system. DMT practice is rather varied and often bound to the second training of the therapist, whether it be Psychodynamic, Jungian, Gestalt, Rogerian or other. From my personal observations, dance movement therapists share with dancers a certain reluctance to naming and verbalizing of what is happening in their work, while cultivating the moved, non-spoken intelligence of the body. The PW philosophical framework strongly adheres to the concept of 'finality' (a future - oriented principle where the processes have tendency to strive toward a goal or a point in the future) as opposed to 'causality' (a principle where any appearance has a cause in its past, responsible for the effect). DMT as a typical expressive psychotherapy, is mainly orientated to present and future change rather than to tracking the past for the reasons of present status quo. However, there are dance movement therapists who work within psychodynamic and developmental paradigms and work with movement re-patterning from early developmental stages. For instance, the Kestenberg Movement Profile (Zedkova, 2012) works with individual developmental movement patterns connected to specific rhythms of the flow of tensions in certain time periods of early life. Work with kinesthetic memory is a key part of the individual styles of many DMT therapists.

Led by the natural principles of improvised movement and dance, DMT considers movement as source of information and dance as a self-healing symbolic process. Whatever arises is celebrated and valued i.e. there is not a right or wrong dance. Some of the pioneers of DMT in the USA were dancers working in the psychiatric hospitals in 1950s and 1960s, dancing and moving with patients. In order to be able to do this work, they had to be orientated on health and present, rather than diagnoses and past.

According to the dance movement therapist Elisa White (White, 2009), people do not change when we change their movement patterns, but when they are prepared for it and when the dance

movement therapist sees and encounters the change in the client's movement, these are subtle indicators of the change coming.

DMT, similarly to PW, is mainly uninterested in correcting the movement and body of the client from "wrong" to "right". However, it is important to say, that the DMT paradigm does not have in its definitions the non-causal approach in explicit formulation.

Both PW and DMT have a common lower rank experience of being young schools of thought, not yet fully accepted and sometimes marginalized by mainstream psychology and older psychotherapies. For example, practitioners from the more established schools may view DMT as 'strange dancing around' and PW as having 'esoteric terminology' and a 'new age' flavor.

The bridging phenomena

At the same time, one can sense the possibility and ambition that both DMT and PW could and would like to be a universal bridge for different psychotherapeutic schools. In DMT through the presence of movement in all human interaction and the importance it gives to movement and non-verbal phenomena; and in PW, through the comprehensiveness of its theoretical framework.

Amy Mindell (1989) writes:

What Process work seems to offer that has been missing until this point in the field of psychotherapy is a unified theory in which any of the above methods and techniques can develop by following the spontaneous flow of signals and processes. As the field of psychotherapy stands now, each area contains some process experiences without a comprehensive theory which integrates or generates other approaches. (p.5)

Gallagher and Payne (2015) write:

Embodied intersubjective interaction on the movement level that should seem obvious for those involved in various body-based psychotherapies is also the case even in those encounters where less hands-on processes or motor affordances are involved such as verbal psychotherapy and counselling approaches. Embodied processes are involved in any context in which there are two people communicating, even if they are not touching. (p.73)

Moreover, Amy Mindell in 1989 suggested that PW has the potential of a specific bridging effect specifically between DMT and mainstream psychotherapies: 'In Process work, in this unified body of theory and practice, movement is viewed as an integral aspect of all human processes, thereby creating one possible bridge between dance therapy and other forms of psychotherapy (...) (Mindell, 1989, p.1)

These ideas facilitate the integration of dance therapy with the mainstream of psychotherapy, demonstrating to the therapists of other schools that movement is one of the main information vessels through which unconscious material manifests itself. Movement is no longer a 'specialized' approach to the individual but an integrated aspect of a larger field of human processes, (Mindell, 1989, p.29).

Jung, PW and DMT

PW and many dance movement therapists are inspired by the work of Carl Jung. In the 1950's, a dance movement therapist Mary Whitehouse undertook her studies in Jungian psychology and subsequently developed Authentic Movement, a technique in which one allows the unconscious to well up inside the body and express itself authentically in movement, while the therapist serves in the role of a witness. Mary Whitehouse also developed work around active imagination in movement and dance, where the raw material of dreams is being further "cooked" through embodiment in dance. Arnold Mindell was originally a Jungian therapist, finishing his Jungian studies in 1970. In 1976, PW principles were formulated with Jung's work being one of the major pillars of it, and the concept of the dream body arose.

Jungian amplification intervention has found its honored place both in PW and DMT. The technique of "forbidding" (creating an obstacle in order to help the client to activate) used as a means of amplification is well known by both schools too. Movement mirroring (Bräuninger, 2014, p. 446), a key DMT approach to promote 'kinesthetic empathy' appears in PW practice too. The PW technique of "shapeshifting" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 53), resembles the dance movement therapist's ability to "dress into" the movement of the client, i.e. to understand the client through moving in his or her momentary movement profile. 'Naming' what is happening in terms of body parts, movements, posture, is a reflecting technique used in both PW (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 43) and DMT as empathic reflection (Bräuninger, 2014, p. 446).

Both DMT and PW know and honor the practice of following a spontaneous movement process. While a dance movement therapist would support the client to improvise and let the body lead the movement, the process worker would name the very same attitude as discovering the dreaming messages in the movement channel (Amy Mindell, 1989).

PW looks at what movements have not yet been fully expressed and supports them to be completed. Similarly, DMT works with allowing movement to happen, challenging the client to move further after the movement seemingly ceases. Providing the space for slight movement tendencies to further develop is something that DMT and PW therapists both do.

Using PW's concept of channels, one can say that DMT is favoring the movement and proprioceptive channel, while auditory and visual channels are there in DMT to support and ground in consciousness whatever arises. Indeed, while DMT radically favors body and movement (maybe balancing the historical approach of favoring a head-body hierarchical order, marginalizing the body and supporting hegemony of mind), PW brought a more clear and comprehensive concept to the verbal mainstream world. PW honours the sensing and moving of the body, but it includes the movement channel among others such as the auditory, visual and proprioceptive channels which are seen as all equally important. In PW, any channel

can act as a neutral or uncensored pathway. PW states, that the psyche has a mysterious way of changing channels (Mindell, 1985, p. 37) and these changes are worth noticing and following.

In LMA, the term of the body also looks at sensing and proprioception i.e. the breath and subtle weight shifts. In PW terminology, this would be happening mainly within the proprioceptive channel where the process worker refers to felt body sensations, such as temperature, weight, and pressure. The category of effort in LMA orientates more to the expressive element of the movement. In DMT, movement is seen as a communication channel less subject to conscious censorship. Body, movement and improvised dance are understood to be an expression of those parts of us that are in great part beyond conscious control similar to dreams or intuitive drawing. Movement itself becomes a metaphor for the expression of our being (Halprin, 2003).

However, some key dance movement therapists suggest connections between various channel experiences (Amy Mindell, 1989), while staying with movement and dance as the central medium.

The use of expression, metaphors and synchrony are essential techniques that are inseparable from DMT. Metaphors may be experienced visually, kinesthetically, acoustically or in a tactile manner (Bräuninger, 2014).

Moreover, verbalization (as such included in the auditory channel in PW) during or after the movement experience is often used as a valued step in the DMT process (Stark, 1989). It is a stimulus for a movement action, further discovery and naming of the events and emotions that arise; and after the dance or movement experience, as a way to clarify and provide insight into the personal contents of the material that appeared. Mutual transformation between words and movements occurs even though it is not possible to reflect in words everything from the movement experience. If the experience is not possible to express in words, the therapist has tools to stay with the client in the transformation and adaptation in movement.

Implications for practice

Let us try to shift the above outlined thoughts on similarities and differences of PW and DMT into practice: What about a client for whom movement and body is unknown, i.e. a completely unoccupied (consciously or unconsciously unused) area? At first glance, for this type of client, DMT might not be considered a suitable choice, while PW with its multichannel way of working can be more useful.

In DMT practice, however, people who have an unoccupied (consciously or unconsciously unused) movement and body channel sometimes do show an interest in DMT. According to my experience as a DMT practitioner, they report that they feel attracted to exploring the body and ‘unusual’ movement in a safe environment. Often it takes quite some time in verbal dialogue and working with visual imaginary before the client decides to begin the exploration of body and movement and the full-fledged DMT can come in. Even in verbal interaction, the dance movement therapist intensively maps the non-verbal communication and body dance that is present in any personal communication. For some clients, the dance styles with given, fixed structure are the best and safest entry point to movement in DMT. And some people indeed will never engage in a type of therapy which has dance or movement in its title. From this perspective, the PW therapist seems to have a more neutral starting point and wider scope of potential clientele.

To sum up, with a great deal of simplification, I will dare to say, that what is ‘process’ in PW, stands for ‘movement’ in DMT.

Gifts from both sides

Referring to Amy Mindell and my own knowledge and practice, as a DMT therapist and PW student, I support the idea that PW (Amy Mindell, 1989, p. 29) can help DMT in the form of the differentiation of the kinesthetic channel into primary and secondary movements and the concept of the edge.

Reciprocally, I want to strongly support process workers to look at the opportunities waiting there in the DMT world: the ability of subtle movement orientation in sub-channels (various aspects of expression in the movement channel) through LMA; concentration on the movement profile and something that I, as a DMT practitioner and a PW student, started to call a 'multi-secondary movement material' lying in the movement shadows of our 'dances-not-done' (see below).

It is possible that DMT and PW practitioners can learn from each other, receiving 'gifts' for their own practice. For example, observing movement of the client, the process worker attends to whether the given movement is either 'primary' or close to awareness and close to the personal identity and self-image, or 'secondary' (farther from our primary identity). Secondary motions are incongruent with the primary process and intention, they repeat over and over again because there is an edge to this particular kind of movement, repetitive, incomplete, 'it happens to us'. The PW typical primary/secondary differentiation of the observed movement allows the dance therapist to identify, which movements are closer to identity and which are further away. The concept of the edge and its identification helps to hold on to the most energetic growing points. According to Mindell, the edge is most often skipped over. Particularly in movement work when not picked up, the point of growth is often lost (Amy Mindell, 1989, p.27-28). Amplifying (Mindell, 1989, p. 21) a secondary movement in PW inevitably leads to a movement edge, an experience in movement where one feels that it is not possible to process farther. Edges in movement often appear as sudden stops in motion, a decrease in energy and a resumption of movements typical of the primary process. Edges (in movement) can be spotted visually or can be felt as some dynamic drop of energy. Picking up movement edges is one of the central aspects of process-oriented movement work which could act as a source of inspiration for DMT.

In DMT, supported by LMA, the therapist sees and maps the actual typical and unique movement profile of the client following his or her movement choices - a dynamic image of our preferences and tendencies towards certain movement qualities. Some aspects of the

movement profile of the individual are closer to and some more distant from the client's awareness and ownership, speaking in PW terms. The movement profile of the DMT client always have some primary and some secondary aspects. In DMT integrating even one's actual movement profile with its unknown fields of 'secondary' movement choices, is often an adventurous, harsh and fascinating tour.

In addition to this, as a DMT practitioner, I assess the movements the client is not doing i.e. mapping his or her 'movement shadow' - something like "the dance not done" or, in my understanding supported by PW concepts, 'multi-secondary movement material'.

One of the core principles in the PW approach is work on or with the edge. The edge is a borderline between our primary identity and secondary material, guarded by terrifying 'edge figures' and a firm belief system. DMT, especially if practiced in the Euro-Atlantic world, with its body and movement marginalization, very often works on the edge simply for the reason that it works with a moving body. PW here can offer DMT tools for more precise and aware work with the edge.

Dance movement therapists using LMA can decide about amplification suggestions in subtle subcategories of movement observation supported by the LMA system of body, effort, space and shape categories and further subcategories and movement scales called sub-channels of the movement channel in PW. LMA is a potential tool for PW to see the movement signals and to address their amplification more precisely. In group DMT, much of the therapy process is happening with no words - in movement only. Movement then functions as a catalyst or amplifier of the emerging field in the group. Not using verbalizing in group work and allowing the field to evolve beyond words might be an interesting idea for PW too.

The technique of role playing, very central for PW, is not typical for DMT in the direct sense, even though some DMT therapists might use it. Role-playing (Diamond & Jones, 2014) in PW

often involves shapeshifting, or entering into the multi-channeled experience of a role or a dream-figure (a fluid personification of dreaming tendencies) and taking on its worldview.

DMT with its battery of instruments on how to be conscious and aware of our bodies and our momentary or repeated movement choices, could serve in the PW role-playing technique as a source of knowledge on how to shapeshift into the given role or the figure authentically. Rather than beginning with thoughts and images, it might be worth trying to begin consciously through bodily and kinesthetic presence first, letting the words to come a bit later. PW of course uses movement in role playing i.e. shifting into the role or into a dream figure requires moving or being moved to a specific place in space, sinking into body sensations and following unintentional movement hints. DMT has ways how to go through these shifts with full physical, sensory and kinesthetic awareness and knows how to let the movement character of the role evolve.

DMT and PW are respectful of touch and hands-on techniques, determined by the clear permission of the client. Unlike visual perception, tactile experience is something we can choose to have or not to have. DMT and LMA movement observation skills can be valid here to support sensitivity towards perceiving nonverbal responses when the therapist asks for permission to touch while the verbal “yes” can be accompanied by a nonverbal “no” or vice versa, sending a double signal. PW highly values perception of and work with “double signals”.

PW therapists sometimes use ‘resistance work’ (Diamond & Jones, 2014, p.79) using movement. For example, pushing against something that represents the critic that can help people feel their power and negotiate difficult edges. DMT, historically connected with contemporary dance techniques and contact improvisation, might use touch within the concept of active support (mutual active weight shifts and releasing the weight as the way of letting the movement happen) or for the purpose of grounding. In this connection, PW work with the concept of the ‘movement ghost’ (Diamond & Jones, 2014, p. 33) might be interesting to discuss. Considering movement ghosts in PW (see below), the therapist presumes that

movements are almost always made in relation to a movement ghost. Speaking about the relationship level in movement, the LMA concept of shape can be interesting to compare with the PW movement ghost concept.

The category of shape in LMA explores the way a moving body changes its shape specifically according to how it relates to the surroundings, objects and other people. It is an integrating category binding the other movement qualities (body, effort, space) into meaningful movement. It is observable in subcategories of “shape flow” representing how the body relates to itself, “directional shape” (how the movement is directed to the other person or object) and “shaping” (the type of three-dimensional relating in movement) (Hackney, 1998, p.221-223). While observing two people moving within the shape category, we can look at the degree of synchronicity in shape flow or the way and degree of how the body is adapting to another body in movement. Looking at the shape category, dance movement therapists might ask themselves questions like: Is the change of shape of movement initiated from the internal or external environment? How does the shape of the movement change? What is the main factor influencing the change?

In synchronicity with the PW practitioner’s decision to go either with the role or to take on the movement ghost side, the dance movement therapist decides either to mirror or to respond to the client’s movement. According to Gallagher and Payne (2015), “the therapist either uses reflecting techniques to adapt to or to clarify the client’s movement (mirroring, amplifying, contrasting or echoing), or the therapist may use her body-felt sense to respond to the patient’s emotional/feeling content as manifested in their movement, subsequently creating a non-verbal conversation together, a form of kinesthetic inter-subjectivity” (Gallagher and Payne, 2015, p.72).

Summarizing, as a DMT therapist and PW student, I support the idea that PW (Amy Mindell, 1989, p. 29) can help DMT in the form of the differentiation of the kinesthetic channel into primary and secondary movements and the concept of the edge. Reciprocally, I want to strongly

support process workers to look at the opportunities waiting there in the DMT world: the ability of subtle movement orientation in sub-channels (various aspects of expression in the movement channel) through LMA; concentration on the movement profile and something that I, as a DMT practitioner and a PW student, started to call a 'multi-secondary movement material' lying in the movement shadows of our 'dances-not-done' (see below).

Catch the spirit!

As the triangle is the most stable geometric form in our world, we can see the stability - mobility system of our moving bodies functions in triangles too. Once moving, physically we need three bodily points to support us. The triangle symbol is mirrored in different aspects of our lives: from physical principles, to, if you wish, the holy trinity.

PW is based on a paradigm of three levels of experience: consensual (the commonly perceived reality that we share and agree on), dreamland (where our conflicts, symbols, polarities, creation appear) and essence reality (where all polarities disappear). At first glance, it looks like DMT remains dual: there is the body-mind concept, there are dual movement quality scales in LMA, and there is the duality of the danced metaphor arising from the unconsciousness and its conscious meaning.

Speaking from my personal understanding of my practice of DMT and with a great deal of personal metaphor - essence, or spirit has been tacitly and somewhat illicitly present in DMT. Only recently, this theme has been explored in the DMT discourse and literature. Hayes (2013) adds to the concept of bodymind a new term: 'bodysoul' (p. 23). Using a post - Jungian perspective on imagination, Hayes (2013) considers this connection between body and soul or spirit as an essential and powerful resource in mental health. According to Payne (2006), there is an exciting development happening in DMT which builds on all that has gone before. It appears to be concerned with the body becoming the soul incarnate, through the soul in action - a transpersonal dance.

As a dance movement therapist and PW student speaking about spiritual or essence level reality of a moving human being, I face the following questions:

Why is the spirit - or essence level in DMT not often named and discussed, whilst in PW it appears more explicit?

In general, spiritual experience is mostly described as something intangible and body-free. Does it mean that a fully-fledged bodily movement is only a possible bridge towards the immaterial spiritual experience - 'just' a medium, a way to the transpersonal, aiming to let the body "out of the way"? If the Tao cannot be spoken, can it be danced?

The personal story of a dance movement therapist becoming a process worker

Why did I enter a long five-years training in process work after having my dance movement therapy training done? I would like to name three consensus reality reasons before I dive into wild waters of the dreamland.

The first reason was around being acknowledged by psychotherapeutic community: DMT training I went through in Prague, guaranteed by American DMT Association, while this psychotherapy, unlike process work, isn't officially represented and accredited in Slovakia. The second reason was that I felt I need more training-based supervision and individual work for my further practice and I was looking for a frame that would hold me in it. The third reason was that, besides I understood and felt bridging importance of DMT through the fact that movement is in all human interaction, I also felt that some of my movement experiences don't have names and that I need to understand more deeply what is happening in intrapersonal and interpersonal situations. I was longing for a theoretical framework through which I can look at psychotherapy (DMT's theoretical paradigm has been still in the phase of formulation). I have chosen process work with its friendliness to body, movement and dance.

Remembering dreamland of those days, I recall a lot of mobility, longing for stability – finding gradually and surprisingly stability in mobility and trust instead of firmness to rely on. I recall an image I drew and moved for my admission for the process work training. It was a big elephant standing on the edge of a gap, wanting to cross it, and having just a narrow string leading to the other way. The dance of the elephant, if I call for help LMA terminology, was about lightness and playfulness in upper body, head and even ears, direct and bound movement in lower body and breathing giving rhythm to the whole and cooperating with the string. And I recall the feeling of the physical principles of this world being irrelevant, sense of contradiction between the heavy body of the elephant and the playful steps on a tiny string and call for courage mixed with fear and excitement with the void opening beneath my elephant's feet.

And then the actual process work training started, with its modules, duties, dances, images, sounds and insights, and I discovered my rare privileges connected with my movement skills and the fact I was present in my movement channel. But also, there was confusion connected to the fact that many approaches and interventions I knew from DMT I was learning now as PW material. However, once I dived deeper into my own process, being held in the process work concept, the awareness of my movement privilege vanished and changed into work on my life-myth edge.

Early on in my dance career I noticed the ability of dancers to escape from 'edgy' feelings; "move it" and "dance it away". For myself, this ability to "dance it out and away" has been a great and helpful life-saving mechanism for years when some feelings were unbearable and there wasn't safe space to integrate them. I believe this is why many people dance – we can show the feelings without integrating them, or there is only a tiny bit of bodily integration that happens during the few seconds of movement expression, get relief and go on. I believe that as there are "wounded therapists", there are also "wounded dancers", and I have been one of them. The same as in therapy, also in dance, the wound can be a stopper, or a power source, and depends whether it is integrated or not. Dance itself can do profound and many times life- saving crisis intervention, but one may need therapy for the healing. And just

because I was “at home” in movement, I was able through my DMT training to unfold some of my edges, but also to sneak around others. Approximately in the middle of my process work training, I became fully aware of this old good “dance – escaping from feelings” pattern of mine, and started to work on the feeling side. One of the “side effects” of this process was that I stopped moving and using my movement wisdom within my work and life. As if not-moving and not-dancing became the condition of feeling. The dancer in me got sad and frustrated and things started to move.

While working on my edge towards feelings, I started to receive signals from my colleagues, supervisors and friends that triggered irritation: “Why don’t you dance?”, “You are a mover, use more movement in your work”. Each time I had strong reaction. When unfolding it in inner work, I saw myself being dreamed up by the training group as “the mover” and when I shifted from this role, the system got irritated. This led me to the quality of freedom to be but also not be and deeper to the edge towards power and competences and to liberating discovery that power doesn’t mean service – it can serve the group, but also me, and, I can enjoy it and be useful by enjoying my power and competences in movement and dance.

I am discovering a new way how to use movement and dance, even if this new pattern is coming and escaping – while I can have my “dancing out and away from the feeling” ability on stock, I am very interested in dancing THE feeling. I am experimenting with and stopping my movement in the moment I am stopping to feel. To dance THE feeling requires my huge respect towards the possible difference of inner perceiving of the movement and outer appearance of the movement.

What is still a question for me is how to invite and bring into cooperation the inner experience with dance and its quality seen from the outer position. I would like to start experimenting with my knowledge of LMA qualities as blind access interventions. I believe, somewhere there the frustrating polarity of the question “Am I dance movement therapist or a process worker?” vanishes and my own therapeutic style arises.

Another way to dance THE feeling instead of dancing it away is to ask: who am I right now – recognizing not a figure but rather a quality. One of the metaskills I am inviting to my work and life is the second attention, diffuse focus in moving with the client.

What is still in plans is finalizing my PhD work exploring whether and how the movement shadow or “dance-not-done” of the individual within his or her longer- term movement profile describable through LMA corresponds with his or her growing edge and life myth. And for the future, I am still very curious how is the essence level experienced through movement channel. By now, I just have a question, but even the question feels great to me: How it is when we dance Tao?

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