

## **An Understanding of Dance Therapy and Authentic Movement**

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*"The symbols of the self arise in the depths of the body." --C. G. Jung*

*"Our moving bodies have stories to tell." --Suzi Tortora, Ed.D., DTR*

**Expressive Movement Processing (EMP):** Developed by Anandha Ray, EMP utilizes processes from improvisation, dance therapy, authentic movement, improvisation and acting to

- (1) uncover and release blocks to creativity in performance,
- (2) formulate choreographic vocabulary,
- (3) understand and embody character development.

EMP is a journey into the subconscious world in which creativity bridges the void between self and other. Through this process one surrenders control and follows pathways that allow the subconscious to reveal itself through artistic expression in movement. The process is both a deep exploration of self and personal motivations, and a practical education in the universal hieratic and culturally specific language of movement.

Through EMP one can expect to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which movement communicates, and to further develop mastery of movement as a means of communication.

In order to understand EMP, it is helpful to understand the processes that have influenced it, specifically Dance Therapy and Authentic Movement, both of which are closely related to the art of dance. All of these forms are "first and foremost embodied forms. The mover-witness dyad is mirrored by the performer-audience relationship. The process of creating dance is a process of sourcing the body for what it has to express in ways that words can never replicate. Authentic Movement does this and also provides a structure to translate the embodied experience into the dimension of words so that what is moved-danced can reach additional levels of shared experience." (Tannis Hugill MA, RCC, RDT, ADTR)

The three forms are also superficially related to improvisation at its best "because it allows the mover to follow deep organic impulses. But there is no goal or end product, no performance to create or shape in the forming that occurs in the art making process." (Tannis Hugill MA, RCC, RDT, ADTR)

We know that people have danced to heal themselves and to connect with the sacred since earliest human history. When given safety and permission, the body moves in natural rhythms and unwinds in patterns of wholeness. This is our birthright as humans, yet we have forgotten that dance and movement are one of the most powerful healing forces available to us. This doesn't necessarily mean

dance or movement as performance, but rather dance and movement as self expression for what is living in us now—whether known or unknown. Jung records that some of his patients used dance to embody their dreams and to engage in active imagination.

### **DANCE THERAPY(Dance Movement Therapy, DMT):**

*Freeing the inner workings of the psyche.*

The American Dance Therapy Association defines dance-movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral and physical conditions<sup>1</sup>. DMT strengthens the body/mind connection through body movements to improve both the mental and physical well-being of individuals<sup>2</sup>. As a form of expressive therapy, DMT is founded on the basis that movement and emotion are directly related<sup>3</sup>. The ultimate purpose of DMT is to find a healthy balance between mind and body, and a sense of wholeness<sup>4</sup>.

Since its birth in the 1940s, DMT has gained much popularity and has been taken to more serious and beneficial levels. Over the years, the practices of DMT have progressed, however, the main principles that founded this form of therapy have remained the same. Influenced by the “main principles” of this therapy, most DMT sessions are configured around four main stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and evaluation<sup>5</sup>. Organizations such as the American Dance Therapy Association and the Association for Dance Movement Therapy, United Kingdom maintain the high standards of profession and education throughout the field. DMT is practiced in places such as mental health rehabilitation centers, medical and educational settings, nursing homes, day care facilities, and other health promotion programs<sup>6</sup>. This form of therapy which is taught in a wide array of locations goes farther than just centering the body and psyche. Specialized treatments of DMT can help cure and aid many types of diseases and disabilities. Other common names for DMT include: movement psychotherapy and dance therapy<sup>7</sup>.

**Preparation:** Preparation of a safe space without obstacles and distractions. Creation of a supportive relationship with a

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<sup>1</sup> “Who We Are,” American Dance Therapy Association, <<http://www.adta.org/about/who.cfm>>.

<sup>2</sup> “Who We Are,” American Dance Therapy Association, <<http://www.adta.org/about/who.cfm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Payne, Helen, *Dance Movement Therapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Levy, Fran J., *Dance Movement Therapy: A Healing Art*, (Reston, VA: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Meekums, Bonnie, *Dance Movement Therapy*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.).

<sup>6</sup> “Who was Marian Chace?,” American Dance Therapy Association, <[http://www.adta.org/resources/chace\\_bio.cfm](http://www.adta.org/resources/chace_bio.cfm)>.

<sup>7</sup> “Who We Are,” American Dance Therapy Association, <<http://www.adta.org/about/who.cfm>>.

witness. Providing a level of comfort for movers to be familiar with eyes-closed movement.

**Incubation:** The leader provides verbal prompts for the mover to dive into the subconscious. Open-ended imagery is used to create the internal environment that is specific to each individual mover. Open-ended imagery provides the opportunity to create specific yet private images. For example: As movers walk with eyes closed the leader may say "Imagine the surface below your feet. What texture is it? What color? What temperature?" allowing the mover to create their own, personal experience. At the end of a set period of time the leader ends the session with verbal feedback or by ringing a bell.

**Illumination:** This process is integrated into conscious awareness through dialogue with the witness, the one who is observing while the mover moves. Through reflection, discussion and/or journaling the mover dives into the images and experience to uncover and resolve subconscious motivations. Witnesses provide verbal feedback and interpretations for the mover to hear in relationship to their movement experience. Our sense of self grows in a complex evolution of increased awareness by sensing our bodies and through the mirroring feedback. The mover can choose to share aspect of their movement experience as desired.

**Evaluation:** Through therapeutic discussion and journal writing, insights are discovered and its relevance is explored.

### **Principles:**

The theory of DMT is based upon the idea that the body and mind are inseparable:

- Body and mind interact, so that a change in movement will affect total functioning,
- Movement reflects personality,
- The therapeutic relationship is mediated at least to some extent non-verbally, for example through the therapist mirroring the client's movement
- Movement contains a symbolic function and as such can be evidence of unconscious process,
- Movement improvisation allows the client to experiment with new ways of being,
- DMT allows for the recapitulation of early object relationships by virtue of the largely non-verbal mediation of the latter.
- Through the unity of the body, mind, and spirit, DMT provides a sense of wholeness to all individuals

Carl Jung says of the psyche-body connection:

*The distinction between mind and body is an artificial one... In fact, so intimate is the intermingling of bodily and psychic traits that not only can we draw far-reaching inferences as to the constitution of the psyche from the constitution of the body, but we can also infer from psychic peculiarities the corresponding bodily characteristics.*

*The body means as little to us without the psyche as the [psyche] without the body.*

*[The] whole psychic organism corresponds exactly to the body, which, though individually varied, is in all essential features the specifically human body which all [people] have.*

*Since the psyche and the body are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter [body] are two different aspects of one and the same thing.*

Jung encouraged those he worked with to access and interact actively with the contents of their bodies and fantasy life through art, dance, and other modalities as a way to make the contents of the unconscious conscious - and therefore useful and relevant to one's transformation. Referring to this process, he said:

*I was able to recognize that in this method I was witnessing the spontaneous manifestation of an unconscious process...to which I later gave the name "individuation process"...In many cases, this brought a large measure of therapeutic success, which encouraged both myself and the patient.*

### **AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT**

Part of the first generation of modern dancers, Mary Whitehouse studied with Mary Wigman in Germany and with Martha Graham. On resuming teaching in Los Angeles, she became disaffected by the kind of dance taught and performed and became more interested in the symbolic, communicative, expressive functions of movement. Authentic Movement is an embodied awareness practice developed in the mid-twentieth century by Mary Starks Whitehouse, a dancer and avid student and teacher of Jungian psychology. Mary focused on using dance and body movement as the medium of the active imagination process referred to by Jung, above. She

initially called her work the tao of the body (Whitehouse, 1958) and movement in depth (Whitehouse, 1972).

The ground form of Authentic Movement takes place between and within two people, who are identified as the mover and the witness.

**Safe Environment:** Authentic Movement takes place in a free and protected space which is cleared of all obstacles.

**Active Listening:** Here, in this safe movement space, the mover closes her eyes and focuses inwardly, holding what Jung described as “the good attitude” toward her body and psyche. Listening, opening as fully as possible to the present experience, the mover senses all sensations, thoughts, images, emotions, dreams, energies, and symptoms, with interest and friendliness.

**Active Imagination:** ...the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of physical actions is active imagination in movement, just as following the visual image is active imagination in fantasy. It is here that the most dramatic psycho-physical connections are made available to consciousness.

When an inner impulse or interest arises, one begins to move (posture and gesture). This may lead into any degree, combination of, or cycling through of movement, stillness, sound, or silence. The mover is free to choose what arises - perhaps following it, perhaps engaging with it in active imagination, or perhaps surrendering to it. During the movement, it is the mover’s intention to practice conscious awareness while simultaneously opening to, choosing, and surrendering to what happens in and through her body; she is both “moving and being moved” (Whitehouse, 1958), exploring the exquisite balance between will and surrender in direct relationship with her body and psyche.

**Witnessing:** During this movement process, the witness sits to the side of the safe space with her eyes open and tracks what she can see and know of the mover, as well as her own internal experience; she is witnessing the mover as well as herself. Like the mover, the witness practices conscious awareness of her own experience, including thoughts, images, feelings, sensations, and anything else that may arise in the course of witnessing the mover. Like the mover, the witness practices holding the “good attitude” toward all that arises in the shared field. It may be apparent that, in many ways, the mover and the witness are participating in the same practice, except that the mover actively engages the experience through movement and expression, while the witness actively engages the experience within the framework of stillness and containment.

**Processing:** At the end of a mutually agreed-upon time, which has been arranged together before the movement starts, the witness signals to the mover (by speaking or by sounding a bell) that it is time to bring the movement experience to a close. The mover gradually does so, making eye contact with and joining the witness. At

this point in the practice, the mover and witness may speak together about their experience, art materials may be used to express or record some aspect of the experience, journal writing may be engaged in, or some combination of the above may occur. The intention here is to capture what has been gleaned from the unconscious (personal or transpersonal) and to ground it in memory and daily life. There are variations on this ground form, which, for example, would be somewhat different if the mover/witness dyad is engaged in a psychotherapeutic relationship, creative relationship, or if Authentic Movement is being done as a group practice.

Important to remember, is that the movement happening in the body is not "put on like a coat or a hat" (Whitehouse), nor is it meant to be a performance. It is a simple opening to what is, and then following what is living in the body at the present moment into movement.

**Practicing Non-Judgement:** In the tradition of compassionate communication Authentic Movement offers a respectful and non-blaming template for speaking from embodied experience. Because Authentic Movement takes place in a context of relationship - between a mover and a witness - it offers the opportunity both to be and to see one's self more clearly.

Authentic Movement offers the possibility of an awake experiencing of one's self in one's body and the holding of one's self in this experience without judgment. As a human it is difficult to see anything in the world without judgement. It is a habit that we constantly judge, whether in a positive or negative manner. There are methods one can employ to actively avoid judgement. For example: as one witnesses the mover, envision that the mover is ones-self experiencing the movement. When thoughts arise, let them roll by as if on a ticker-tape at the bottom of a TV screen. Rather than engage in the thoughts and continue the thought process, simply see the thought and let it go as you re-focus on the mover.

**Objectives:** Authentic Movement provides a direct link to the unconscious - including the archetypes, dreams, and personal history stored in the body - giving form to that which words can't access, but which must be known. Through the practice of Authentic Movement, dreams can be processed, body symptoms can be listened to and danced, transpersonal healing energy may be received, personal history stored in the body can be witnessed and lovingly held, and the sacred may be embodied through direct experience. The practice of Authentic Movement also fosters a respectful listening to the many voices of one's self and others through the cultivation of witness presence in the body - strengthening and deepening one's capacity to hold and transform all experiences of Life with compassion and mindfulness.

Ultimately, the practice of Authentic Movement is about creating, strengthening, and enlarging one's capacity, impeccability and compassion - with self, toward others, and within the larger community - as we aspire toward the wholeness of embodied presence.