

**Embodied experiences:
an investigation into
catharsis and ‘staying-with’**

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Abstract

This is a phenomenological investigation into the nature of emotional catharsis and ‘staying-with’ (a technique similar to an embodied mindfulness), as two ways in which we can process embodied experience in dance movement psychotherapy. It is both a subjective and inter-subjective study into the meaning of these two experiences and of the relationship that exists between them. The researcher was an active participant in the research study, both by contributing her own direct experience of the phenomena under investigation, and by the hermeneutical methodology underpinning the research process. The researcher’s position shifted reflexively during the processes of data gathering, data analysis and through recording her embodied response in a research log, towards an inter-subjective understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

The research discovered that the relationship between staying-with and catharsis was a valuable basis for discussion between participants, being mapped in slightly different ways, but linked by common themes. For catharsis to be an integrated experience, the role of an ‘internal observer’ is significant. There may a staying-with component prior to, during, or following a cathartic experience, which gave an internal witnessing element to the experience and formed the basis for self-reflection.

The researcher reflects on her own journey, its significance for dance movement psychotherapists, and makes suggestions for further research into the therapeutic application of cathartic and staying-with techniques. The findings and theory are set in the wider context of research in dance movement psychotherapy and body psychotherapy.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The beginning

As a dance movement psychotherapist, it has become clear to me that a self-directive, imaginative movement process takes people directly into deep feelings. Looking at my own psychotherapeutic process, I used to be attracted to what I will call ‘emotional catharsis’. It was what my body seemed to need to do for healing to happen. And it probably was - once. Many people would agree that the cathartic process helps to release tension and that it makes them feel better afterwards. But what was I doing with these experiences – how was I relating to them? After several years of working in this way in primal integration therapy, I became aware that I might be habitually ‘going into’ catharsis without asking myself why. Yes, it would temporarily relieve tension, and yes, it gave me a sense of self by identifying with the familiarity of my own process. Of “purging”, Chodorow (1991: 134) asks “Is it possible that we simply get to be good at it”? She describes another way of working therapeutically with our bodies:

For years I fostered cathartic release over suppression as if they were the only choices. But gradually, the image of containment became clear as a third option. To contain the affects is not to suppress or deny it. And it's not to get rid of it through a cathartic purge. To contain is to feel deeply what is in us, bear the terrible discomfort, and find a way to express it symbolically. Symbolic expression holds the tension of the opposites. We maintain the full impact while at the same time maintaining a bit of observing ego. Development occurs when we contain the affect,; the therapeutic relationship is at once container and process.

(Chodorow, 1991: 37)

Chodorow suggests that there are times when feelings of primordial intensity surface which can be processed in a contained way instead of by cathartic release. She describes how, with her “third option”, movement and

sound are minimal although there may be subtle but deeply felt physiological changes such as muscle tension, breath and temperature. However by staying-with¹ the experience, and becoming directly conscious of body sensations, feelings and images, there may at some point be a body shift or an impulse to move which, when followed, may lead to a spontaneous release in the body.

1.2 The background

During my exploration in primal integration therapy, I became aware that cathartic release could have been used as an avoidance to staying aware of my feelings, particularly on an embodied level. I realised that what I was 'letting out' was more of an external expression than an internal feeling. There may have been an apparent full expression of grief or fear but there were times when I wondered whether I was bringing my whole self in to the expression. For instance, was I acting, or giving shape and movement to 'fear' for instance, but not feeling fear in my body? I have no doubt that at that time in my life the process was healing. My body needed to purge itself of emotional material. It brought all sorts of patterns and traits in to conscious awareness that helped to bring about transformation and change in my life. These expressions may have represented difficult or painful experiences from a pre-verbal, pre-symbolic developmental period of my infancy. The primal experience was easy to access from my body-held memory; and hence the body knew what it needed to do. But there was a sense of detaching from the original experience. But I wonder if

¹ I have coined the term staying-with to paraphrase a bodily containment process described by Chodorow.

inadvertently it reinforced these same patterns and traits, by repeating but without reflecting on the process?

Since my primal integration days, I am beginning to find a very different embodied approach of using sensory awareness to bring me into my body in an anchored and centred way. I practise trying to stay present 'here' and 'now' in my body by consciously putting my attention into say, the stiffness at the back of my head, or the knot in my stomach. This led to experimenting with embodying emotional states of being. Can I use sensing my body to get to know my feelings, to feel them fully and directly – perhaps even feeling my resistance to feeling? This completely different way of experiencing myself has begun a journey inwards; of witnessing through my body the inner landscape of my very being. Am I now describing a way of experiencing myself analogous to Chodorow's third option – what I refer to as staying-with?

This discovery led me to turn my attention to how I view the relationship between catharsis and staying-with. At the start of my research I mapped this as a polarity: at that time it felt like they were two completely different and opposite ways of embodying my experience. I perceive a certain synchronicity here between my positioning and how I refer to my early cathartic experiences. Perhaps there was a tendency to see experience in all-or-nothing terms and miss the varied shades in between? Positioning myself in this way with a starting point does not negate what will later become an inter-subjective study of others' experiences. My intention is not to adhere to it – to hold on to it – as to a well worn belief. Rather it highlights how as

a DMP practitioner, I learnt to reflect on a preformed idea by revising and revisiting it again and again over the course of my research. I view this transparency as essential to the nature of the investigation. My approach will become more apparent from the methodology selected and from the findings, discussion and conclusion where I explore how my position shifts throughout the study.

1.3 The aim

I aim to investigate the phenomenological nature of emotional catharsis and staying-with as two ways in which we process our experiences in an embodied way. I will explore others' stories of how they describe and relate to these two experiences, working towards developing an inter-subjective understanding of their nature and of any relationship existing between them.

The starting point of my investigation is my subjective embodied response of the relationship between emotional catharsis and staying-with which I currently map as a polarity. "Research is a process of continually refining knowledge and understanding by seeking information that does and does not confirm the researchers' hypotheses" (Cruz and Berrol 2004: 14). I wonder whether my hypothesis of mapping the relationship between the two experiences as a polarity will shift by dialoguing with others?

The contribution I believe this research will make to DMP is twofold. Firstly, as a DMP practitioner, I believe that we limit our service to our clients if we work only from the knowledge base of our personal experience: a diversity of epistemologies is healthy within any profession. As dance

movement psychotherapist researchers Cruz and Berrol (2004) say, it is important for those engaged in clinical practice to have an understanding of their criteria for what constitutes knowledge and how this understanding develops or changes. Therefore my hope is to define, extend and share my knowledge gained in this research with other dance movement psychotherapists. Secondly, I hope that this research will inform my clinical practice. I anticipate that the process of this investigation will help me to further reflect on whether, when and how to use these two embodied experiences in a group DMP session which will in turn shape my overall practice as a dance movement psychotherapist.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

My research question incorporates both a subjective and inter-subjective² study. As well as critically analysing the literature, I will endeavour to make meaning of my subjective experience. Bringing my subjective reflections in to this section is considered to be an integral part of the study, and further explained in section 1.2. How the literature review relates to my inter-subjective experiences and others' experiences will be addressed in the findings and discussion section.

This literature review will consider the following five themes. Firstly I review literature on the role of the body as a source of human experience, including how I define "embodied experience". The next two sections are devoted to reviewing literature on the conceptual framework of catharsis and staying-with respectively, relating them to the research aim. In both sections, I focus on the history of working psychotherapeutically with trauma. I define trauma as a life threatening experience, or pattern of experiences, with the specific impact on the body-mind system of overwhelming one's coping mechanisms. Trauma work provides a useful framework for relating the two embodied experiences under investigation, both in the literature review and later in the discussion of findings. As a DMP practitioner, I then include a section on the DMP literature relevant to catharsis and staying-with. By using movement as the entry point for a

² Thomas Scheff defines inter-subjectivity as "the sharing of subjective states by two or more individuals."

meeting of self with 'other', DMP is of particular relevance as it can incorporate processes of both catharsis and staying-with within a group session. I conclude with a review of literature on the psychological and spiritual developmental perspective for framing the embodied experiences under investigation.

2.2 Embodied experiences

There is a tendency, particularly in western culture, to treat the body and the mind as separate. This can leave us as individuals, without a sense of ourselves - of being embodied (Hartley 2005). Stern (1985) describes the primary task of the infant as developing a sense of core self. Stern's emphasis on the sense of self focuses on the realm of the body, and out of the realm of mental construct. He describes how the sense of self develops out of somatic experience, bodily sensation, feeling, and expression - which of course involves movement. The infant learns about herself and the world around her through the body, through direct embodied experience. (Hartley 2005). There is a natural sequence of perceptual and movement patterns and repertoires that emerge during our development. When disruptions have occurred in an early stage of infant development, certain movement qualities or mind states may predominate over others leaving the individual with less choice in movement and perceptual awareness. A body oriented therapy, such as DMP, can provide an opportunity for increasing the core sense of self. Embodying and clarifying early movement patterns using movement, sensory awareness and pre-verbal expression strengthens sensorimotor functioning (Hartley 2005).

Merleau-Ponty (1996) provokes a similar divide by proposing that embodiment is an essential element of human existence, which we can only comprehend through an understanding of existential behaviour. He distinguishes between the objective body, which is the body regarded as a physiological entity, and the phenomenal body, which is my body as I experience it, or your body as you experience it. I can examine the physiology of my body; the nervous system, the muscular-skeletal structure, etc, but by doing so, I will have failed to capture my embodied experience, my lived body, and instead captured my body as an assemblage of physical parts - the body as an object. Without my body as the place from which I encounter other objects in the world, I would be unable to perceive or conceptualise them. This means that my body is not an object of perception in the way a physical object is, since it precedes and upholds all my other particular experiences. Our primal engagement with the world must be through our embodied self, that which determines our later relationships with things in the world, with ourselves, and with others.

Following Merleau-Ponty's critique, to define "experience" must mean to define "embodied experience" since how can we perceive our environment before we have become aware of our body – our own physicality? This leads me to define "embodied experience" ontologically as "how we construct through our senses our own perception of reality based on our interaction with the environment". If we take Merleau-Ponty's rationale a step further, it follows that I must have a sense of myself as embodied and in the world before I can comprehend the other. More recently Welsh (2007) follows

Merleau-Ponty's tradition in believing that embodiment and intersubjectivity are two aspects of the same essential being-in-the-world. "Why not just assert an intersubjective embodied self is the primal self?" (Welsh 2007). She poses the question of how much the self is determined by acquired dispositions such as upbringing, class, history and culture and how much of our sense of self comes from an innate embodied condition, essential to our being-in-the-world. This is a 21st century debate between phenomenological approaches which maintain the centrality of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, and those of post-modernism which see the subject as a creation of particular linguistic, philosophical, and cultural traditions. The latter approach is exemplified by dance movement psychotherapist, Allegranti (2009) who offers a post-modernist view of how we embody sexuality and gender in terms of the 'autobiographical', the 'relational' and the 'political' body.

Contemporary empirical research is now of the opinion that a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary to understanding the role that embodiment plays in the structuring of consciousness. Gallagher (2000) believes we need to start with phenomenology and test that out by empirical studies encompassing disciplines of both psychology and neuroscience.

2.3 Catharsis as embodied experience

The roots of catharsis lie in ancient Greek theatre, where *katharsis* represented the "purification or purgation of the emotions of the spectator of tragedy through his experience of pity and terror" (Campbell 1949: 26).

There is a certain amount of confusion and misunderstanding about the definition and interpretation of catharsis. Some researchers equate it with the behaviour of expressing strong emotions, whilst others (eg. Greenberg 2004) emphasise the cognitive aspect and the new awareness that emerges after reliving traumatic events from the past. Modern research on the subject is limited and presents contradicting data about the effectiveness of cathartic techniques in psychotherapy practice. From a humanistic psychology perspective, Rowan (2001) describes it as the vigorous expression of feelings about experiences which have been previously unavailable to consciousness. The goal of primal integration therapy is “to contact and release the real self” (Rowan 2001: 103). Rowan describes how in a primal integration group, there is an emphasis upon early trauma as being the basic cause that interrupts development from childhood, birth or before. Participants are given the opportunity to regress back to the time of the early trauma and to re-live it; often by using catharsis.

From a psycho-analytic perspective Smith (2004) postulates that catharsis is one of two fundamental mechanisms that produce change in psychotherapy. On reviewing the clinical experience of cathartic healing of trauma, he suggests that healing is rapid and largely nonverbal. This leads him to conclude that catharsis is an emotional process, not a cognitive one: emotional whereby painful and frightening experiences are reactivated for healing to take place.

The psychoanalytic theory of catharsis began in 1880 with Breuer's treatment of the hysterical symptoms of Anna O. Freud and Breuer found that a vivid reliving of traumatic events combined with the associated affects led to the resolution of her symptoms. Their technique emphasised bringing the pathogenic symptoms into conscious awareness, verbalising the distressing emotions related to those events and discharging those emotions in a process they termed "catharsis" (Scheff 1979). More recent clinical reports by Symonds (1954) and later by Scheff (1979), and Smith (2004), suggest that catharsis may be the main cause of success in psychotherapy. Scheff devised a formula where he expresses improvement in the state of feeling over a given period of time as proportional to the amount of catharsis and inversely proportional to the level of repressed emotion. In sharp contrast to this quantitative approach to experiencing oneself, Smith (2004) concludes that it is empathic resonance that may be responsible for the success of catharsis in the psychotherapeutic treatment of trauma. What differentiates simple re-experiencing of the trauma to psychotherapy is the empathically attuned presence of the therapist. Human contact draws us out of the state of lost perspective, putting the experience in context within time and space. From a personal and practitioner perspective, I concur with Smith that the presence of the therapist provides a containing environment where one can re-live painful experiences with the support and compassion of another.

Catharsis has not always considered to be the most suitable way of working with trauma. It was Janet (in van der Kolk 1996) who first noted in 1889

that somatosensory elements of a trauma may come back into consciousness when a person is confronted with reminders of that trauma. In a person's psyche, an ordinary event is recalled as a complete whole; the feelings, images, sensations, thoughts and overall meaning of the event being integrated and placed in a historical context. With a traumatic event, these elements often exist as unintegrated and dissociated elements, rather than as a complete memory. More recently, van der Kolk (1996) confirms that many patients regularly enter states in which they partially or completely re-experience the trauma without any resolution whatsoever, and so he promotes controlling dissociation and integrating the traumatic experience. "Effective treatment should minimize the time spent re-living the past and its concomitant emotional devastation" (van der Kolk 2002). Other recent work, including Levine's (1997) important contribution to the healing of trauma, specifically states that some cathartic methods which encourage intense reliving of trauma to be potentially harmful.

2.4. Staying-with as embodied experience

As I have coined the term staying-with, I will initially define it as meaning the development of a sense of self which witnesses one's own embodied process dispassionately, noticing the distance between the experiencer and the experience.

My staying-with approach may have evolved as a natural response to integrating traumatic experiences that may not have become fully integrated in catharsis. From the literature, I perceive a parallel between my staying-

with and modern trauma theory which advocates a gentle and gradual approach to working with trauma that avoids any “retraumatisation” (Totton 2003). Drawing on Janet’s early work, it has been well documented that traumatisation is often accompanied by disturbing body symptoms (Rothschild 2000), so interventions that use the body as a primary entry point have been found to be effective in trauma treatment. Sensory memory is central to understanding how the memory of traumatic events are laid down in the body – how, as van der Kolk (1994) puts it, “The Body Keeps the Score”.

There are several documented body centred approaches for working with trauma that resemble staying-with. One such approach is Sensorimotor Processing, described by Ogden and Minton (2000) which uses a process of consciously tracking sequential physical movements and sensations in the body - such as motor impulses, muscular tension, trembling and changes in posture, breathing and heart rate. The client learns to observe and follow unassimilated sensorimotor reactions that were activated at the time of the trauma. Ogden and Minton believe in integrating sensorimotor processing with cognitive and emotional processing. They summarise that as all three levels of processing interact and depend upon each other, they must be integrated for recovery to occur. Rothschild (2000) has of a similar opinion by re-iterating that bringing meaning into the experience facilitates the process of integration.

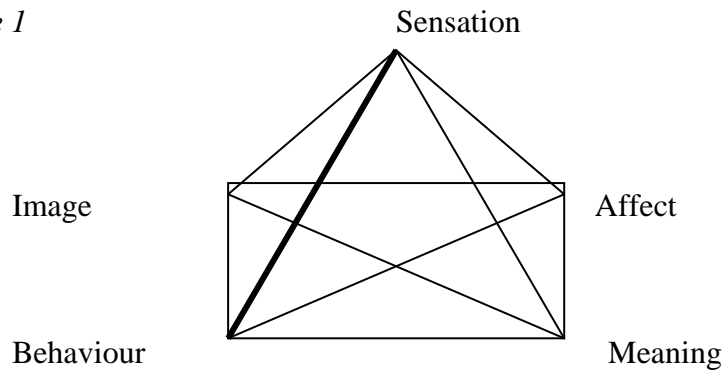
One of the goals of trauma therapy is to help those individuals to understand their bodily sensations. They must first feel and identify them on the body level. Then they must use language to name and describe them, narrating what meaning the sensations have for them

in their current life. At times, though not always, it then becomes possible to clarify the relationship of the sensations to past trauma. (Rothschild, 2000: 44-45).

I can relate to the significance of integrating the cognitive component by reference to my early cathartic work, where emotional processing was asynchronous with embodied expression. By applying Ogden and Minton's model or the above quote by Rothschild, it has become apparent that the cognitive level may also have been partly missing as I was frequently unable to verbalise my experience.

Peter Levine's SIBAM dissociation model (1992) is based on the assumption that any experience is comprised of several elements. Complete memory of an experience involves integrated recall of different elements of the experience. These are identified by Levine as: Sensation, Image, Behaviour, Affect and Meaning (SIBAM being the acronym). He postulates that during some episodes of traumatic stress, elements of the experience become disconnected or dissociated from one another. By applying this model (Figure 1) to my previously disconnected cathartic experiences, it appears that dissociation may have occurred. The dark line indicates the elements I believe to be associated; the lighter lines, elements that may be dissociated. For instance, when re-experiencing a panic attack, I was able to move in a way that gave a sense of release in my body (Behaviour) and I was able to sense physical sensations such as a constriction of the belly (Sensation). I was not however able to put the memory into context (Meaning) or associate the feeling of fear (Affect) to the experience.

Figure 1



As with Ogden and Minton and Rothschild's work, Focussing is a psychotherapeutic technique that integrates physical feelings with emotional and cognitive components, which also resembles my staying-with experience. The technique consists of specific steps for getting a body sense of how one is in a particular life situation. Gendlin came to the conclusion that those who benefited most from psychotherapy had the ability to sense vague, still unformed feelings in their body and connect this sensing with words and images that described it. Gendlin noticed that during the process there would often be an opening or release in the body that he described as a "felt shift".

A Buddhist meditation practice described by Goldstein and Kornfield (1987) illustrates another staying-with experience by encouraging opening to painful sensations that have accumulated in the body and experiencing what is actually present. By paying attention and becoming more inwardly silent, there is a growing awareness of these feelings. The tendency of the mind is to resist, but instead of closing off we can choose to soften, becoming more receptive and allowing. When the mind is open, we are able to go from the level of "my back hurts", for instance which is a concept, to the level of

what is really happening, noticing certain sensations just arising and passing.

Mindfulness meditation has drawn on this traditional practice and is now taught to people suffering from trauma, anxiety and depression in a clinical context. At the University of Massachusetts Medical School the mindfulness programme (Kabat-Zinn 1996) uses techniques such as “body-scanning” to assist pain and stress reduction. As it requires a deliberate, non-judgemental focus on the self as experienced from moment to moment, it helps clients to develop a degree of self-awareness, self-acceptance and a sense of control over their feelings.

Weiss (2009) notes how body psychotherapy and the mindfulness tradition share common goals. I identify one phenomenon, that of the internal observer, as being of particular interest to this literature review. By observing oneself, a distance can be created between the observer and the observed. One becomes more detached from the ego state; that is, anything that seems to be part of the ‘I’, such as emotions, thoughts, memories, sensations etc. This allows oneself to cease being so merged with, for instance, a particular emotional state and instead allowing that emotion just to come and go from a position of compassionate observation. It is of relevance to note here that Scheff (1979), in his research on catharsis alludes to a similar observing presence when he talks about the need for clients to be optimally distanced from their feelings whilst experiencing traumatic events; then they can be both participants in, and observers of their

experience. Interestingly this takes us round in a full circle – back to catharsis!

2.5 DMP on catharsis and staying-with

Dance Movement Psychotherapy is 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 (ADMP 2003). As it is founded on the principle that movement reflects an individual's patterns of thinking and feeling, catharsis is one way of working with expressive movement. Of catharsis Penfield (1992) says:

DMP has a particular contribution to make ... because movement is about the physical self and catharsis is a physical discharge of emotion or energy. Other therapies and methods may stimulate catharsis, but it is something that has been borrowed from movement work. There is a danger that catharsis is seen as the ultimate goal of therapy; that ventilating emotion can expunge it. Ventilation must, I believe, lead to integration, and I treat catharsis as a stepping stone on the path to healthy integration. (Penfield, 1992: 169)

I would imagine that most dance movement psychotherapists would agree with this view: it is after all their task to create a holding environment in which such feelings can be safely expressed. Bernstein (1995) is a dance movement psychotherapist who uses catharsis in dance for trauma resolution of unexpressed feelings and memories. She describes an example of how encouraging a client who had been sexually abused to express herself cathartically through movement, voice and breath, was effective in tracking and retrieving buried memories, thereby releasing the past.

Originated by Mary Starks Whitehouse and further developed by Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow (Pallaro 2006), the practice of Authentic

Movement is a particular approach within DMP which focuses upon the relationship between a mover and a witness where attention is given to the somatic unconscious.

(In) Authentic Movement.....it is the task of the witness to provide a safe space through her mindful presence, a container into which the mover can enter, with eyes closed, to attend to the stirrings of her inner world. An impulse to move may be felt and embodied; or it may be a sensation, an emotional feeling, an image, the mood or memory of a dream which provides the impulse to move. (Hartley, 2005: 9)

The witnessing process allows a client access to her unconscious; the unconscious speaks through movement and she can become conscious of what she is doing, feeling and thinking. Initially the external witness holds consciousness leaving the mover free to open to the unconscious. This allows the mover's internal witness to develop by a gradual internalisation of her external witness (Adler 1991).

The practice for mover and witness is to bring together a tracking or witnessing of their physical, mental and emotional states of being. I see a pattern beginning to emerge: several theories and practices so far reviewed have a commonality of bringing together and working with different elements of experience; all of which must be present for complete contact with the environment. To re-iterate, Authentic Movement assists integration of experience by accessing unconscious material that surfaces through movement, sensations, feelings and images. There may be an opportunity for experiencing oneself through catharsis *and/or* by staying-with, depending upon the impulses which are followed or chosen. To illustrate this, I will refer to Wyman-McGinty (1998) who describes the practice of three different hypothetical movers. The first mover is in a more regressed

state and may at first exhibit movement which appears fragmented and disconnected without an integrated sense of self. The second mover may have a tendency to intellectualise, have difficulty accessing feelings and therefore the movement may initially be without awareness of the underlying affect. The third mover may release intense feelings such as grief or rage in a cathartic way but may not initially be able to contain these affects. In all three cases, over time the movers begin to develop an observing ego which is capable of holding the feelings in their mind and body, whilst movement also appears more connected. Again by referring back to Levine's SIBAM model, elements of experience of Sensation, Image, Behaviour, Affect and Meaning are becoming integrated and are now present in a more active relationship to one other.

Other DMP approaches also appear to make use of a combination of catharsis and staying-with, often as part of a process of conscious energetic charge and discharge. For example Halprin (2003) describes a five-part dance movement process model where I infer that a catharsis phase evolves out of a staying-with phase. She compares the first phase of Identification to Gendlin's Focusing: what I equate to my understanding of staying-with. The next phase, Confrontation, involves active exploration of movement, where expression is on all three levels: physical, emotional and mental. Halprin's Release phase I equate to my understanding of catharsis, which:

...facilitates a release of held impulses ... in the form of tears, anger or any form of letting go...
(Halprin 2003: 125)

Change allows for new movement and Growth involves the application of new learning to everyday life. Like Penfield (1992), Halprin recommends treading carefully when using catharsis:

A cathartic experience or insight may prove difficult to sustain and embody on a daily basis. Growth depends on the ability of the individual to ground such insights and changes in the soil of her ongoing life interaction... (Halprin, 2003: 127)

2.6 A developmental perspective

It has been apparent since Freud that emotion is a form of experience which transgresses the supposed mind body boundary. Our feelings are both mental and somatic (Totton 2003). Goodwin (2007), in her article on Authentic Movement cites Pert's (1987) neuroscience work which privileges this perspective of holistic functioning:

*In the beginning of my work, I matter of factly presumed that emotions were in the head or the brain. Now I would say they are really in the body as well. They are expressed in the body and are part of the body. I can no longer make a strong distinction between the brain and the body.
(Pert, 1987: 16)*

This view resonates with the developmental psychology theory of Zajonc (1980), who argues that affect should not be treated (as it is by many cognitive psychologists), as post cognitive; that is, to occur only after considerable cognitive operations have been accomplished. Zajonc's experimental results on behaviour suggest that affective judgments may be fairly independent of, and precede in time, the associated perceptual and cognitive operations commonly assumed to be the basis of these affective judgments. For instance we can be afraid of something before we are aware of its presence.

This means that emotions are part of the body, but they appear before our mind learns to label and make sense of the information, as in “I am frightened” or “I am angry” etc. This theory provides a new perspective on my speculation about why I could not fully associate affect in my past cathartic experiences. I was reflecting on my experience through the lens of cognition, rather than from an embodied knowing. When we process an inner experience cathartically, the body responds intuitively with movement, gestures and shapes. I like Levine’s (1997) analogy of a bird that mistakenly crashes into a window – as it begins to tremble it will show signs that it is reorienting to its surroundings. If the bird is not injured and is allowed to go through the trembling-reorienting process without interruption, it can move through its immobilization and fly away without being traumatised. However, if the trembling is interrupted, the bird might suffer serious consequences and may not recover. In the same way, my *body* knew intuitively what it needed to do to process the memory, despite my mind not being able to make sense of the experience. It may be that I had regressed to a state where precognitive affect had been accessed. To put it another way, I postulate that I may have been regressing to a pre-verbal developmental phase and that the memory associated with the affect could have been held on a somatic rather than on a cognitive level.

Wilber (1996) provides a useful map which positions this developmental phase in context. He suggests that spiritual and psychological development progresses through an arc, both for us as individuals and in evolutionary terms. During infancy and childhood, development evolves through pre-

personal, preverbal and ego/persona stages, to the mature ego of the adult. The cycle then moves through transverbal and transpersonal stages. Wilber says "...Many structures on the Outward Arc that are "pre" appear on the Inward Arc as "trans". That is ... pre-egoic moves to egoic which moves to trans-egoic" (Wilber 1996: 49). Adler (2002) applies this developmental model to witness consciousness in Authentic Movement, moving from a pre-egoic state, where mover and witness are unconsciously merged; through an egoic phase representing individuation, where mover and witness exist in dialogic relationship; through to a trans-egoic or unitive state, where the witness is completely present with the mover in a state of non-duality. Mary Whitehouse, one of the pioneers of DMP spoke of this unitive state in 1979:

'I move' is a clear knowledge that I, personally, am moving. I chose to move, I exert some demand on my physical organism to produce movement. The opposite of this is the sudden and astonishing moment when 'I am moved'It is a moment when the ego gives up control,of unpremeditated surrender. (Whitehouse, 1979: 82)

Adler (1991) views 'I am moved' as a conscious process where union is created between the moving self and the internal witness. In the quote below, she uses the word 'superconscious' to describe a similar state of consciousness to Wilber's trans-structures:

One no longer sees oneself lifting one's arm, it simply lifts. This can look like a pre-egoic experience, to use Ken Wilber's framework, but, in fact, it is trans-egoic. Experience in the unconscious state can look like experience in the superconscious state. The difference is that in the unconscious state the presence of ego is not yet established, and in the superconscious state, the fully formed ego has been transcended. (Adler, 1991: 178)

The internal witness described by Adler and the internal observer described by Weiss are alike in that they are both observing compassionately and non-

judgementally our internal process from a detached position. In Authentic Movement practice, a note of caution is necessary here. In response to Adler's work in particular, Hartley (2004) emphasises the importance of identifying preverbal and pre-egoic experiences. She maintains there needs to be integration of the mature ego before safe immersion in unboundaried, mystical stages of consciousness can happen.

2.7 Summary of literature review

Post-traumatic symptoms have been described as incomplete physiological responses which will persist until they are discharged and completed (Rothschild 2000). Catharsis may be one such way in which the body can discharge and complete these body-held responses; providing that dissociation doesn't occur. From the literature, it seems that my cathartic experiences in primal integration therapy may have occurred as a result of one or more elements of experience becoming disconnected or dissociated from one another. And my staying-with could have been a technique that I developed in response to this. Furthermore, there seems to be a parallel between my staying-with and contemporary approaches to working with trauma.

Another possible explanation can be understood by assuming that if cognition is not yet fully functional in early developmental phases, then regressing to this phase in therapy will access affect that cannot yet be fully understood. Yalom's rankings of therapeutic factors showed that catharsis "was necessary but in itself not sufficient" (Yalom 2005: 90) supports this

by assuming that a cognitive component is required *simultaneously* to make sense of the experience.

As a dance movement psychotherapist, I am interested in how as a profession we can work in the realm of movement, sensation, feeling and cognition simultaneously with our clients. I am particularly interested in Authentic Movement as it not only allows for expression at both ends of my polarity, but it brings in consciousness. In my research, I am now interested in exploring how others relate to embodied experiences of catharsis and staying-with and how I relate to the others' experiences.

3. Research Methodology

To know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way. The act of researching is to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world. (Van Manen, 1990: 5)

Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that seek to understand and explore the human condition. Qualitative researchers use methodology to build a complex, holistic picture of human phenomena and attempt to make sense of them in terms of the meaning people bring to them. These pictures are based on the research participant's perspectives and the researcher's interpretation. The researcher thus makes the world visible through interpretative material practices that turn the world into a series of representations, including conversations, interviews and photographs (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Postpositivist researchers argue that the act of writing up data necessarily involves the process of interpretation, based on social constructions and the writer's preconceived assumptions (Cruz and Berrol 2004).

The epistemological underpinnings of my work combine existentialism and phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and also a method of inquiry based on the premise that reality consists of only that which is perceived or understood by human consciousness. Existentialism, deriving its insights from phenomenology, is the philosophical attitude that views human life as a subjective experience rather than pretending to understand it from an outside, "objective" point-of-view. By reflecting on age old philosophical questions such as "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", "How do I

live my life?”, we place ourselves in a position to clarify and understand our personal values and beliefs as well as to consider what it is to find ourselves in an embodied existence. Embodied presence (Kepner 1987) supports phenomenological enquiry (Reynolds 2009), which leads to an unfolding of our deepest nature: simply experiencing whatever is emerging ‘here’ and ‘now’. As a DMP practitioner, I work in a phenomenological way, describing and investigating the what-and-how of my clients’ experience. By ‘being with’ my clients I get to know their existential reality; by moving with them I can experience from a second person position³ what it is like to be them. I commit to my epistemology by going about my research work in the same way; attempting to describe rather than explain, acknowledging but putting aside my own beliefs, assumptions and explanations.

Phenomenological research has as its ultimate aim, the fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are. (Van Manen, 1990: 12)

Phenomenology provides the overriding research methodology for this investigation, as it offers a method for accessing ‘subjective’ phenomena of human experience. Its focus is on a rigorous descriptive empirical approach (Giorgi 1985), positing that there is no one truth but that as perceived by the individual. Husserl (1931), deemed the founder of phenomenology, defines phenomenology as a descriptive analysis of the essence of pure consciousness. Husserl focuses on the study of the lifeworld, which is the world as immediately or directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life, as sharply distinguished from the objective world. I specifically draw

³ When referring to person positioning I am using a social constructionist model as applied to DMP practice by Parker and Best (2004).

on Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutical phenomenological methodology. Van Manen has developed the concept of the lifeworld to emphasise basic lived experience; the world as we immediately experience it, rather than as we conceptualise, categorise or reflect upon it. This concept illuminates and excites my research: what matters is my reality or the reality of my co-researchers as experienced: in other words whatever appears in consciousness whether real, imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is attentive to the philosophies underpinning both hermeneutics and phenomenology. My choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology enabled the exploration of co-researchers experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researcher; informed by my own personal knowledge and experience of the subject.

My research also draws on the existential hermeneutic philosophy such as Gadamer (1989). Every individual's world is a "horizon" of meanings which the researcher can go into. But as we are all enmeshed in our own meaning-field, a constant alternation between merging into another's world and linking back into our own reference system is advocated. By means of this movement back and forth, an understanding of the unfamiliar reference system can be achieved which in turn leads to the gradual revising and or enriching of our own; referred to by Gadamer (1989) as a "fusion of horizons". I had a sense of a 'fit' here between my methodology and the

alternation between subjective and inter-subjective ‘horizons’ incorporated into this research study.

This methodology is in contrast to another main theoretical conception of research: positivism, in which the object is uninfluenced by the researcher and the researcher is unaffected by the object. This latter approach is inappropriate to my investigation, as I am not on a quest for a fixed, single or ultimate truth. Phenomenology has brought about a shift away from a subject-object Cartesian duality to a reality of whether the object actually exists or not makes no phenomenological difference at all. When conducting my research I bear in mind that what matters is not whether each experience actually happened in exactly the way described, but that the reality of an object in consciousness exists so long as its experienced (Giorgi 1985).

Meekums and Payne (1993) looked into possible models for approaches to research in DMP. They advocated using an what has been called ‘new paradigm research’ based on deeper understanding of phenomena. This includes aspects of both subjectivity and participatory and holistic knowing (Reason 1988). Regarding the latter, I have endeavoured to make this a collaborative enquiry: one of deep participation (Meekums and Payne 1993), where researcher and co-researcher are interactive in constructing their personal experiences inter-subjectively through narrative, movement and expression. Of the former aspect, Reason (1988) refers to a concept of “critical subjectivity” whereby researchers are encouraged to become aware of and honour their individual experience. I demonstrate this approach by having some knowledge of the phenomena under investigation which allows

me to enter the research from a position of grounding. I also ensure that my personal process and how I am influenced by the research process is documented. It is from my personal lived experience that I not only begin to explore my own sense of meaning from my embodied experiences of catharsis and staying-with, but begin to wonder what it is like for others.

4. Research Methods and Procedures

4.1. Methods approach

Phenomenology not only provides the research methodology framework for this investigation, but it also intersects and interrelates with the subject of investigation. Consequently the methods utilised towards the data production and interpretation are in line with the overall phenomenological perspective of the project.

A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research method based upon Gadamer's philosophy and methods derived from Van Manen (1990) were used. Van Manen does not prescribe a mechanistic set of procedures but proposes a dynamic interplay among six research activities. In my research I have used four of these, described as follows.

First, the researcher explored a phenomenon of serious interest and commitment to her world. This enabled me to acknowledge and utilise my lived embodied experiences of catharsis and staying-with to compare to those of others. This research enabled me to be an active participant in the research project; setting out to make sense of an aspect of human existence within the context of my own personal, social and historical circumstances.

The second research activity investigates experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it. I encouraged my co-researchers to describe their experiences as they lived through them, "from the inside" (Van Manen 1990), avoiding generalisations or abstract interpretations. I encouraged them to describe specific experiences, particularly experiences that stood out

for their vividness. In some instances, a co-researcher was able and willing to re-live an experience in the context of the interview session. As they told their stories, I asked them to pay attention to their body, describe their feelings or other sensory information.

The third research activity reflects on essential themes uncovered in exploring the phenomena under investigation. As I studied lived-experience descriptions, certain experiential themes recurred in the various descriptions gathered.

The last research activity describes the phenomena through the art of writing and rewriting. I used this method to develop a meaningful narrative that could do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld. The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth of questioning between parts and whole: this forms a hermeneutic circle.

4.2. Data Generation

The aim of the phenomenological interview is to gather experiential information for developing an understanding of the phenomena under investigation and the meaning it has for the interviewee. The nature of the questions aimed to explore the 'how' and the 'what' of an experience rather than the 'why'. During the interview, I endeavoured to stay close to my own lived experience of catharsis and staying-with to encourage the interviewees to respond in the same way.

4.2.1. Data Gathering

The interview served to gather lived-experience material using a semi-structured, open and conversational manner with each co-researcher. Prior to the meeting, participants were given an outline of the focus of the investigation in the form of an invitation (Appendix 1). A consent form was signed (Appendix 2) before commencing the interview process. Interviews were conducted one to one and lasted for one hour. They were recorded in audio on a laptop computer, and where consent was given, on video using a camcorder. At the end of the meeting, co-researchers were supplied with a CD audio recording of the interview which they were invited to listen to, reflect on and submit further comments if moved to do so.

The interviewees' lived meanings may be communicated not only by words, but by tone of voice, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of a conversation. As the interviewer, I drew upon my implicit bodily and emotional mode of knowing that allowed a privileged access to the subject's lived world. (Kvale 1996). I practised an embodied listening; listening and waiting and paying attention to non-verbal cues.

4.2.2. Research Participants

The recruitment process involved approaching five potential participants from my social network by sending them an invitation (Appendix 1). As the invitation incorporated the area of experience in which the research was interested, the participants selected themselves to some extent as having something to contribute in terms of their lived experiences of 'catharsis' and

staying-with. Three participants represent a perspective rather than a population. Three are psychotherapists, (of which one is a dance movement psychotherapist and one is a body psychotherapist), one a clinical psychologist and one is a teacher. All co-researchers names used are pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria: firstly, they all participate in their own regular movement practice; secondly, they all work in a psychotherapeutic or teaching profession and thirdly, they all have themselves been clients in psychotherapy. Knox & Cooper (2010) argue that a participants selected on this basis might have the language and ability to give detailed description of their own experiencing. By incorporating Giorgi's (1985) phenomenological method (see Data Analysis paragraph below), I believe that participants therapeutic language might also help with the process of the data analysis, as the original meaning described in the interview is less likely to be distorted by the subsequent data transformations.

Whilst honouring and appreciating differences amongst co-researchers, it is acknowledged that they all have similar professional backgrounds to each other and to the researcher. However, the methodology underpinning this research is not based on background, or any other social or cultural orientation. Rather it is acknowledged that co-researchers are approached from a phenomenological standpoint, allowing their lived accounts to direct the meaning making process in this investigation.

4.2.3. Ethical Considerations

I have sought to maintain an ethical and professional stance towards the co-researchers. All decisions made during this investigation have been in line with the professional and academic codes of practice I adhere to. All co-researchers have given their informed consent (Appendix 2) to participate and for their accounts to be used towards the final report of this investigation. All co-researchers have been informed of issues of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the investigation. I agree to abide by Roehampton University's Ethical Guidelines (July 09) and the Association of Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK's Code of Professional Practice and this was stated on my invitation (Appendix 1).

An important consideration in undertaking any research is protection from any physical or psychological harm. It was thought that selecting co-researchers by the criteria outlined in the paragraph on research participants would help to ensure that they had the necessary movement practice and experience to manage any difficult emotions should they arise as a result of taking part in this study.

4.2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis follows Van Manen's (1990) three-level approach to examining the transcripts: the holistic approach, the selective approach and the detailed approach. Firstly I listened and reflected upon each audio recordings in its entirety to get a general sense of the whole of the subject's experience. This also follows the first step of Giorgi's (1985) data analysis. Secondly I identified those parts of the interview that stood out for me as

being essential to or revelatory of the phenomena under consideration, with the specific aim of discriminating “meaning units” (Giorgi 1985). Thirdly, with each meaning unit established, I went through the transcript line-by-line examining every word for meaning and transforming the interviewee’s everyday expressions into psychological language. These transformations were produced through a process of reflection and imaginative variation (Giorgi 1985).

A few weeks later, having identified possible deeper meanings or themes from their experiences, I went back to dialogue with the co-researchers, thus turning the interview into a collaborative hermeneutic conversation. It also gave me an opportunity to check for consistency: that there was inter-subjective agreement of my meaning transformations. Finally, further development of the themes emerged as I wrote interpretive statements through writing and rewriting from continued reflection.

Utilising Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle, I became an active participant in the research process, working back and forth from self to the transcripts of the interviews for interpretation. A fusion of horizons eventually occurred as I stayed-with the transcripts, and developed a new interpretive understanding through self-reflection and writing.

4.2.5. Capturing my embodied response

According to Betti (cited in Alvesson and Skolberg 2009: 106), interpretation always involves “an irreducible moment of reshaping, of

subjective creativity, with its point of departure in the researcher's already pre-existing frames of reference". My embodied "moment of reshaping" was captured by my writing: recording descriptions of my embodied responses in the form of a research journal. These responses were both a direct response to their descriptions of lived-through experiences and a response to the meaning that the expression of their lived experiences had for them.

4.3. Validation

Postpositivists have a broader concept of validity than positivists, focussing on the method of investigation rather than attempting to determine whether a knowledge statement corresponds to the objective world (Cruz and Berrol 2004). One method of investigation is validation. I have validated my data using various ways in keeping with the phenomenological perspective of this investigation, and include the following:

4.3.1. Person Positioning

I was able to shift between a first, second and third person positioning of reflection, as referred to in a social constructionist model (Parker and Best 2004). A first person voice and body is used to recognise the researcher's presence by bringing a sense of reflection to the process of the writing. A second person position was taken by the researcher establishing a kind of resonance with the object under investigation, in this case the co-researcher, using the existential hermeneutical perspective already discussed. A third

person position was taken by linking lived experience of researcher and co-researcher both to theory and embodied response.

4.3.2. Reflexivity

The inter-subjective nature of the interview meant that both researcher and co-researcher entered the encounter with separate horizons and, during the process, both parties were changed by the encounter whereby an old horizon was replaced by the appearance of a new horizon. As I entered each interview, I had certain preformed ideas of my understanding of catharsis and staying-with and of the relationship between the two. During the interview process, I listened to the interviewee's story and the meaning it had for them but remaining aware of my own pre-understanding and prejudices. Comparing my view to another view led to a new understanding or horizon from where I would began my next encounter. This is a reflexive approach to research, where the researcher and the object of study affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

Phenomenology is both the "description of the lived-through quality of lived experience and the description of meaning of the expressions of lived experience". (Van Manen, 1990: 25)

During the interview I aimed at obtaining un-interpreted descriptions of how the subjects related to the phenomena under investigation through their life worlds. As I write and re-write this section, I 'stay with' my findings as they unfold into essential themes that were uncovered, paying particular attention to experiences that stood out for me as being vivid or evocative – as well as to embodied and movement experiences. During the subsequent process of interpreting the interview texts, and I remained aware of how my own presuppositions influence my writing (Kvale 1996). Along the way, I recorded my embodied responses in a research log. They are reflections of my hermeneutic process; some are of a contemporaneous nature and others unfolded at different stages as I analysed my data. They both reflect my growing capacity to 'stay with' and find meaning for myself from an 'other's' experience.

In keeping with my phenomenological methodology, I am presenting my findings and discussion together in one section. I am aware that the overall style of data presentation in this section does not present a linear narrative; this is inherent in the hermeneutical back-and-forth process of my methodology. Also having a separate section for data collection and data analysis would de-contextualise the data, and be un-reflexive to how contexts generate meanings, rather than treating the interview as a creative

conversation constituting its own meanings (Scheurich 1997). Conversation is a process of coming into an understanding (Gadamer 1994). Interviewer and interviewee are led by the conversation into questioning. To question is to lay open (Gadamer 1994) and it is through this laying open that I understand the other's experience. The first part of this section is dedicated to pure description of the data and to finding common meaning through our conversations and through the literature. In this part I also describe how my body felt and responded to this laying open process. Writing separates us from being so immersed in lived experience (Van Manen 1990) and through this separation I am better able to reflect. A summary of the findings / discussion follows where I draw further on theory, but now more from a third person position. Here there is a stepping back, as I slowly gain a deeper and more discerning sense of meanings.

5.2. What is staying-with?

For Max, staying-with is sensing what is happening in his body 'here' and 'now'. For instance, by staying with a specific body sensation, he described how thoughts, feelings, images, sounds or other sensations may come into awareness for him. What he described as staying-with is choosing, by an act of will, to return his attention to this body sensation and seeing what happens. The mindfulness approach, used to assist with pain and stress reduction, relies on a similar technique involving the conscious act of will for experiencing ourselves moment to moment. Lyn described staying-with as a containing process and agreed with Max that it is an act of conscious will. When she is feeling anxious, she needs a structured and disciplined

movement approach. She gave Authentic Movement as an example that facilitates containing and staying-with her experience:

...And that staying-with is the 'I lifted my arm up and then I kneeled down'. And I guess the next stage is to simultaneously 'stay with' the feeling, the sensation, the images all at the same time.

Halprin (2004) talks of structure and repetition in her five-part process as giving us the ability to tolerate, adapt to and trust in the cyclical nature of things. The ability to 'stay with' movement, feelings sensations and images simultaneously, brings to mind Levine's SIBAM model for working with trauma. Lyn acknowledged how tracking movement (analogous to Behaviour in Levine's model) provides an anchoring effect for experiencing herself through Levine's other elements of sensation, image, and meaning.

For Amy, she described staying-with as experiencing herself moment to moment in a very tangible embodied way. She pays attention to how she is breathing, where she is holding tension and what she is feeling. Most importantly it's about allowing to 'be' whatever is present, acknowledging it and giving it permission. "To have my experience!" It came as a revelation to Amy when she first experienced herself in this way. Up until then she had become an expert at "getting things right" and that had become her "safe ground".

To start to get back in touch with – well, what's me, what's my reality in this moment - in a physical sense - felt very healing actually.

Soon after this revelation happened she recalled:

I remember I drew a picture which I called a cocoon and it felt like I was inside that cocoon with myself. It was the first time I was inside there with me rather than being against me – and it was really tangible. It was really an embodied felt sense of being with myself – which was quite a change.

Amy was able to understand more about her new sense of self from her drawing. Her experience is akin to Gendlin's (2002) Focussing where the body sense is unclear at first but by bringing attention to it, it became "really tangible" as it opened up into a powerful image and there was a felt shift in her body.

5.3 Exploring staying-with

Jim found that exploring early developmental phases in the form of movement sequences such as rolling, crawling and reaching can bring about a "conscious shift" in awareness by staying-with his feelings. This corresponds to Hartley's (2005) view, that as developmental movement patterns are embodied, insights arise into how our early experiences shape our current way of being. Jim demonstrated what he meant by beginning to move in the interview space.

I might curl up like this [curled up on his side in a foetal position] and then sort of feel an urge to reach out a bit [slowly beginning to uncurl and stretch out his limbs and palms of his hands] and see how I feel about what's around me.....its about feeling whether its safe – am I OK here.....

As Jim continued to move I became aware of how time influences our movement patterns. After our interview, I sat on a seafront bench on a still grey winter's afternoon and wrote a response to Jim's exploration (– see Box 1).

As Amy was being interviewed, I suggested we take a few minutes for focussing inward and paying attention to what arises. Afterwards she commented that she got in touch with her self-critic and explained how this was a habitual pattern for her. "Am I getting this right?" "Is this good

enough?” Rather than getting “lost” in this reaction, she caught that part of herself like a “knife-edge” and stayed-with what felt like unfamiliar territory:

It's like a slightly fluttery edge between scary and excited, because again its coming back to myself in a tangible way. It's like an awareness – rather than just thinking - I'm feeling something here (touching her belly). So that's the bit that's scary because it's just my present experience and I don't know if that's right or wrong, or good or bad, or what's required.

As she spoke of her experience, I had a body felt sense of expansion and relaxation as I realised that I, like her, could ‘catch’ a self-destructive pattern before it runs its familiar course of action and reaction. Instead of letting that lead ‘the dance’, I could catch it before it takes over, notice my body’s response and ‘stay with’ whatever arises. How I like to relive my habitual patterns – regardless of whether they serve me!

During the interview, Max also went through a process of staying-with by focussing inward and paying attention to whatever arises. He described the process as a cycle where he waits to see what appears in awareness, then focuses on it and examines it in detail; this process will open up other aspects of awareness. He became aware of a sensation of tension in his chest. As he stayed-with this tension, he got more information about its qualities which led to an awareness of his teeth clenching, a gesture his foot was making and an image of bars. He revealed how he frequently experiences this tension in his life. He described how this state of being makes it difficult for him to think straight or relate to others. Max’s process of returning his attention to this tension led on to his tracking other movements, sensations and images. Max’s process parallels recent body-

centred approaches to working with past unintegrated experiences such as Ogden and Minton's (2000) and Rothschild's (2000). For instance Ogden and Minton describe how the client observes and follows sensorimotor reactions. Rothschild (2000) also uses tracking of sensation and considers that using words to make sense of the meaning an experience, as Max does here, has equal importance to what occurs on the body level.

Ben felt he is getting better at staying-with his feelings and waiting; "it's like sitting on an egg". Ben told a story of how this happened in his life a few years ago after a relationship ended. He would occasionally fall into a state of complete emptiness. He described how there was a sense of falling into something and not being able to come out of it. On an intellectual level, he knew he could get out of it anytime just by getting up from his chair and doing something – like making a cup of tea. But he chose, as an "experiment", to stay-with the experience he was having - sometimes for hours just to see what would happen:

Where would I end up... would I curl up and turn into something dark and ugly, would I eventually come to the end of it and fall asleep – or what?

I was aware at once of a timelessness and a presence that February afternoon as the snow was falling over London. The light from the large bay window slowly retreated as the dimness advanced across the length of the room. As I listened to Ben's story I wondered what would happen if I could just sit with my fear of neighbourhood noise – sometimes I also irrationally wonder whether I will be annihilated unless I *do something*. As I trudged back

through the park to the tube station I wrote an embodied response to Ben's vignette (Box 2).

5.4. What is Catharsis?

Ben described catharsis as having a strong emotional component that "comes through you" rather than "you doing something". It will come naturally when the conditions are right and it might be spontaneous and unexpected:

I could put my mother or father etc onto a cushion and punch the cushion – I don't necessarily see that as catharsis but as a way into catharsis. I may start off punching the cushion and end up crying. Catharsis is what comes through and the initial thing is creating the conditions.

Max described catharsis as follows:

As I start anticipating it I can imagine myself getting a bit charged up by the idea and certainly a kind of emotional charge would build up and a slight wobbliness..... and I can imagine a sense of physical relief – of something having been physically discharged if I went into it.

5.5. Exploring Catharsis

Lyn described how she is always searching for a feeling of lightness and energy in her body. If she's not feeling like that, she is labelling it as "something wrong and needing to change":

If I haven't got that light, easy feeling then I want to get to there and I think the only way is to have a cathartic release.

Lyn revealed how she has a low capacity to 'stay with' any kind of physical discomfort or unpleasant feeling. She referred to how babies experience emotion as something physical and how she identifies with that. For

instance she is able to say ‘my tummy aches’ rather than saying ‘I’m feeling really anxious’:

I want to get rid of that feeling – I need to feel good, I need to feel well. Its almost like a somatic response – that’s how I deal with things, a bit like how a baby does.

Lyn feels it is necessary to release feelings held on to before they can be made sense of in other ways. Like me, she used to have a need to express herself cathartically. She described how she now has a different relationship to her movement practice than she did in the past:

I’ve done a lot of that [catharsis] already so I can now pay attention to what is actually there – than kind of feeling wired and needing to release.

Together we reflected on our past experiences of catharsis, and wondered whether it might play a developmental aspect in learning to manage our feelings. We both felt we needed cathartic experiences during earlier phases of our therapeutic process and wondered whether it had helped us to complete an incomplete response from our past. In other words could catharsis serve to recapitulate aspects of our developmental process?

Max imagined that sensing the tension in his chest could lead to a cathartic reaction. He described how breathing into this tension may first intensify the sensation, allowing the energy to move which ultimately releases the tension. He anticipated the sequence of events, as follows: waiting for an impulse, following it, letting it develop and seeing where it goes. He imagined this sequence, if he let himself go into it now, would lead to a choking or gagging body response that once expressed may relieve the

tension. As we sat together, I had a sense of some holding around his throat and chest.

In the right group setting, Jim is able to express emotions such as anger that he was not properly able to express in childhood. He finds expressing emotions through dance and movement particularly helpful for connecting with emotions through his body. He values a therapeutic group setting which allows him to express states of his being that it may not be acceptable to express elsewhere, where his experiences are “held”. According to Smith (2004), what differentiates therapy from simply re-experiencing a trauma is the empathically attuned presence of the therapist. Perhaps for Jim it is the group that provides the empathic presence where he can be “seen”. Jim explained how it is more satisfying to “express it openly and get it out there rather than hiding it”. By applying Smith’s theory, I hypothesise it is the human contact element that helped Jim move his experiences into context of ‘now’ from ‘then’.

During the interview Amy stayed-with her “fluttering” experience, an embodied response to doubting her performance in the interview. She imagined that if she followed her experience by letting the fluttering develop, her journey could go deeper, possibly into re-experiencing an early phase of childhood development. If this took her into a cathartic experience, she imagined it would be a connected experience which could release something in her belly:

I would be inside my experience and following that and letting that lead me and moving from that.

5.6. Connection and Catharsis

In certain situations, Ben has found it facilitative to have someone guiding him through a cathartic process such as making a movement, taking on a certain shape, using the breath or speaking a phrase. He described how this can allow some genuine emotional energy, such as anger or love, to “come through” for him. However, he has also had experiences where there is a lot of external stimulation or “noise” without anything really shifting internally as a result:

It seems to me that insight gained from a cathartic experience is deeper when accompanied by an awareness of some kind of internal physical shift - then the understanding is ‘mental’, ‘emotional’ and ‘physical’.

This agrees with Ogden and Minton’s (2000) findings for successful resolution of trauma: there must be an interplay of psychotherapeutic techniques between sensorimotor, cognitive and emotional processing.

Max knows it is possible to go through the motions of catharsis by making “empty” movements or gestures that nonetheless may appear very dramatic. His body “remembers” and has developed its own wisdom: it knows what it needs to do to release feelings. So a cathartic experience may give him a sense of release and “Oh that feels good!” But if his psyche has not understood what the experience is about, then it does not lead to an increased sense of self-awareness. This takes me back to my past cathartic experiences referred to in the introduction.

5.7. Reflection and Catharsis

Catharsis is kind of pre-reflective in the sense that you have a sense of it but its not something you make sense of at the time. (Ben)

In other words, during a cathartic experience, Ben may not fully understand the context of the experience. Afterwards it may prompt him to reflect:

I know, this reminds me of something... what is it? Ah! I know what it is!

After a cathartic experience, Amy finds it useful to come back to staying-with; noticing how it feels in her body, what has shifted and whether she now relates to herself differently. It is an opportunity, sometimes with someone else with her, to connect, integrate and make sense of her experience:

I am much more in touch with my feelings than otherwise I might have been, and it feels quite healing and quite satisfying to be able to then stay with that.

Afterward I had a reaction to what Amy said here. On my way home I sat in the service station on the M4 late that Saturday evening and grieved for my past. For the times in my primal integration therapy when I experienced intense emotion but didn't make use of what now feels like lost opportunities for integration. For sharing. Sharing with others; sharing with my therapist; sharing with my partner; sharing with my friends. Repeating experiences over and over but unable to connect. Unable to connect to the formative experience – the experience that preceded all others. Unable or unwilling? Was I protecting myself from the truth? Or had I connected - in an embodied way? Was there an embodied knowing? Yes – my body knew. My body had known and had carried this knowing for a long time.

Jim described how expressing himself and then making sense of it afterwards creates a conscious shift in awareness. Once Jim had a strong negative reaction to someone else's cathartic expression (of kicking) that at the time he wasn't able to do himself:

What's he doing that for, showing off.....I used to really hate the guy!

Since then Jim has realised that kicking is something he needed to do for himself and is now able to in the right setting. But he also sees it as important to reflect on where his impulse to kick is coming from and why he had such a strong previous reaction to someone else's kicking.

Ben acknowledged that catharsis is a useful route when reflection on the experience leads to new self-understanding and self-awareness:

You've heard the saying 'let the body do its thing – release, release, release.' I'm not a big fan of that for its own sake. It's a bit like you're doing something but you're in a coma or a trance. You can carry half an elephant on your chest in hypnosis and not even know you've done it! But you can't necessarily mobilise that strength at the time you need to.

This reminds me of what Max said about “empty” movements in catharsis.

Both Max's and Ben's point of view accord with Greenberg (2002) who emphasises the cognitive aspect of catharsis and the need to understand and make sense of emotions.

5.8. Staying-with Catharsis

Max relates to staying-with as about “being” with whatever comes, and to catharsis as more about “doing” something about it. Whether to follow the catharsis or staying-with path is like getting to a fork in the road. An impulse comes and the witness is aware of that impulse. Then the mind

comes in and makes a choice whether to “go with it” or “stay with it.” There is a choice of whether to ‘stay with’ the “being” approach or take the road that leads to catharsis and “doing”.

Ben described how in the past there used to be an inversely proportional relationship between his ability to retain awareness of the experience and his ability to “be” the experience. He would oscillate between either not allowing himself to enter into the experience, or be so caught up in the experience that he wouldn’t be able to fully contain it. In other words, being aware meant that the depth of his experience was compromised, whereas when there was little or no awareness of the experience, the experience itself became so overwhelming that he could become lost in it. Which way it would go would depend partly on whether the external conditions were right; specifically mentioned here was the setting as container, as well as time and safety factors.

Effectively what Ben was alluding to is how he perceives an inversely proportional relationship between catharsis and staying-with, much as I did at the start of this research. I am particularly interested in his description of his oscillating between these two different experiences. As he was talking I wondered whether there could be more of a moving back and forth between the two *within* an experience. So I was captivated when he went on to say that now, with practice, he finds it possible to be more aware of or ‘stay with’ the experience whilst being fully part of it. He speculated that this is because his ‘self’ as container has got bigger – that he is now better able to self-regulate. This accords with Scheff ‘s (1979) concept of how a client can

be optimally distanced from their feelings: that is, they can both experience traumatic events whilst at the same time observing them. Effectively Ben was saying that to have a complete cathartic experience was to ‘stay with’ it. This came as a revelation to me. I had never conceived of a staying-with *in* catharsis. To ‘stay with’ a cathartic experience!

The process of staying-with in a cathartic experience is to have the capacity to witness the catharsis. (Max)

Interestingly, this became a general theme amongst nearly all co-researchers although there were variations on how they expressed it. Jim’s words were:

Its really connecting totally – staying with the catharsis is staying-with!

Ben put it slightly differently by saying the staying-with comes after the feelings have “come through”. He went on to describe how ideally the staying-with would be a constant staying aware throughout the process although in practice his attention would probably zoom in and out.

Max and Amy both agreed that a cathartic process will bring about more self-understanding and self-awareness if there is a sense of staying-with because the staying-with process actively engages the internal observer. Whereas Max relates to the two experiences as making a conscious choice between one or the other, for Amy a cathartic experience will usually be preceded by and have evolved out of a staying-with experience in more of an organic way. In Halprin’s (2004) five-part process, catharsis also evolves out of staying-with. Between Identification (akin to my staying-with) and Releasing (akin to my catharsis) is Confrontation where, when there is full

expression on all physical, emotional and mental levels, Releasing may happen naturally.

5.9. The Internal Witness

Most co-researchers referred to an “internal witness” as being an important aspect of their process. Max said that the staying-with process put him in touch with the “internal witness”. He perceived a separation in awareness between awareness of the internal witness and awareness of the sensation being focussed on. When Max contacted the tension in his chest, he noticed feelings of weariness and anxiety. By staying-with it, there is a part of him that is distanced and not identified with those feelings:

There is a bit of me that is OK witnessing an aspect of me that is tangled up or knotted up.

Max also described the internal witness in relation to catharsis. There is a difference between maintaining an “active” awareness, and catharsis that is expressed unconsciously, which he referred to as being like an “empty reflex”. For him staying-with a cathartic process, in the presence of an “active witness” which is bringing awareness to what is happening, is more helpful than experiencing an “empty reflex” without any awareness of the process.

Amy referred to a difference between the kind of catharsis where she can become “lost” in the experience, and a cathartic release where she can retain a mindful or witnessing presence. She described a recent cathartic experience where she realised she had moved on. A few weeks before our interview something unexpected and quite shocking happened to her.

Because the circumstances were right, she allowed herself to cathartically process this experience. As she told her story, she realised how she now has enough understanding of herself to be able to ‘stay with’ her emotional response until the process had come to a natural completion in a way that she used not to be able to do. There was a witnessing part of herself present that would be noticing:

Oh that’s interesting! What’s that about? Why am I doing that?

As I interviewed Lyn in her cottage that clear spring morning, all I could see out of the window was the imposing scarp slope of the South Downs – I was struck by their awesome proximity. Lyn found the rhythm and repetition of walking on the Downs contained her anxiety. And as we talked, Lyn likened her up-and-down mood swings to being on a roller-coaster. By paying attention to her “internal witness” she was able to track the “ups” and “downs” from a slightly distanced position where she felt more in control of her process:

Like watching it happen and saying ‘Oh look, there I am! Oh gosh - look its coming down a bit now!’

After the interview, I wrote an embodied response to Lyn’s image of a roller coaster (Box 3).

In this section all co-researchers describe the presence of their internal witness. I take this to be the same concept as the internal observer in mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn 1991, Weiss 2009). The concept is also familiar in the practice of Authentic Movement where a mover strives to see themselves more clearly via their “internal witness” (Adler 1991). The art of

seeing oneself has been referred to widely over time in mystical traditions and by many contemporary spiritual writers such as Tolle (1999) and Osho (2001)

5.10. Consciousness moves

Max described how he can “open up to awareness” passively and see what arises, or actively direct his attention to a specific sensation. For instance he opened up to awareness and noticed the tension in his chest. As he *actively* directed his attention to this, he became aware of a “witnessing function” as he began to track a series of body responses. He had the sense of two aspects of himself – one had a “witnessing function” whilst the other was having the experience:

It would be possible to sort of go through the motions in an unaware kind of way, but I try to stay aware, observing what's happening. Of course I forget and get lost in the experience but then I remember again and come back to what's happening in awareness in that particular moment.

When Ben described earlier how his relationship between catharsis and staying-with has changed for him, he is referring to how he is now able to ‘be’ and ‘have’ an experience at once:

You are your feelings and you are not only your feelings. If you are your feelings you can only perceive and respond from that place. If you are not only your feelings then you can have your feelings, and also respond to your feelings.

Amy also described something similar that she has encountered during ‘chaos’ of her 5 Rhythms practice (Roth 1998) where she could at once “be” the process and be aware of herself in the process:

I am not dancing, I am being danced. I am letting the dance happen and I am just following.

Here Amy recognised she was not the ‘doer’, echoing Whitehouse’s (1979) “I am moved” experience where the ego gives up control and allows the wider aspect of ‘self’ to take over moving the physical body as it will.

Here all three co-researchers spoke of non-duality experiences described by Wilber’s (1996) arc of consciousness. Before the experiencer becomes aware of the experience, awareness of experiencer and experience may be merged, but then a sense of separation develops, rather as a developing sense of self begins to understand the distinction between subject (me) and object (my experience). Ultimately both experience and experiencer are discovered to be appearing in the broader context of awareness itself and the distinction between mover and movement dissolves. (Adler 1991).

5.11. Findings and Discussion Summary

All co-researchers seemed familiar with the concepts of staying-with and catharsis, and had experienced aspects of both in their dance and movement practice. We explored the meaning of the two concepts, how they were experienced, and how they were interrelated. staying-with requires an act of will or conscious decision to focus one’s attention on what is happening ‘here’ and ‘now’, specifically on the body level. Catharsis is less of a choice - more something that “comes through” the mover, and associated with a physical and emotional release of energy. During a cathartic process, staying-with may be more or less present. When it *is* present, the mover is aware of a witnessing presence which observes the process with interest and curiosity. The degree of understanding or awareness of the process may be related to the availability of a mature witnessing ego – both at the time, and

on reflection. A quality of staying-with was identified as being a precursor to (and often as a trigger for) catharsis; as a position of self-consciousness during catharsis; and as self-reflective understanding following catharsis, all which led to greater integration of experience. The value of a therapeutic container in both catharsis and staying-with was mentioned, but this subject was not explored in depth. An appreciation of the witnessing perspective also gave movers insight into the transpersonal realm, where the moving self is seen in a wider context of consciousness.

I now turn to the statement in my introduction where I mapped the relationship between catharsis and staying-with as a polarity. This was my lived experience of how I *then* related to these two phenomena.

Consequently this statement still stands. How my body *now* responds to this impression is to seek something less sharp at the edges – something more encompassing or rounded. As part of the hermeneutic process, I endeavour to put myself into another's individual horizon by using empathy (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). But how can I ever know for sure how it is to be them? It would be audacious to claim that separate horizons have become fused into a new horizon. What I can say is that each interview was influenced by those preceding it. My old reference system was becoming gradually revised and enriched. I don't know precisely how I now view the relationship between catharsis and staying-with. Of more interest to me is that I no longer need to have an answer. As a DMP practitioner, I have become aware that there can never really be an 'answer' as meaning takes form and is re-formed in response to experiences forming and re-forming.

Through my hermeneutical process, I have begun to reshape myself. And the re-shaping is a continuing process as I find myself no longer being attracted to polar opposites. This has been a journey into staying-with or being with what 'is' – in the now, inspired by Chodorow's (1991) quote in the introduction.

I now turn it around, and see what catharsis and staying-with have in common. Both phenomena are related – they must be – because they are both about how we embody experience. Phenomenologically, the context of experience appears at the intersection between person and world, which in Welsh's (2007) terms, manifests as an intersubjective embodied self. So it follows that both phenomena also tell of our intersubjective embodied experiences. Both phenomena are about the lived body expressing itself in a dynamic, open and spontaneous encounter with the now. And they are both about how giving form to our lived experience can create a medium for transformation.

These experiences will not change our life situation – our circumstances - but can change how we experience our sense of self and our being-in-the world. Why would this be? According to Weiss (2009), neuroscientists have shown that some aspects of Freud's concept of the unconscious may have a basis in physiology. The explicit memory system can be distinguished from the implicit, and broadly corresponds to Freud's conscious ego. It has very little power over implicit memory which holds largely unconscious learned and habitual patterns of behaviour that keep repeating themselves whether

they work for us or not. To connect to these patterns, we need to be able to study their emergence in the present moment from a removed position. The internal observer used in mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn 2009) can observe the implicit memory at work as it responds to what's happening for us in the moment, both internally and externally. This is reminiscent of my co-researcher's responses to staying-with where they describe their embodied experiences whilst maintaining awareness of the experience through a witnessing presence. In contrast, traditional psychodynamic therapy mainly relies on our conscious capacities of thinking and reflecting, namely using our explicit memory to make sense of our experiences (Weiss 2009). Weiss maintains that memories we hold in explicit memory are unreliable and may not represent meaningful elements of self-organisation. The overriding implication of his theory for this research is that staying-with as a phenomenon may be an important aspect of psychotherapeutic work.

Neuroscientists have come to the realisation that emotional interactions during infancy play a critical role in the development of neural pathways which later govern our conditioned patterns of behaviour (Totton 2003). Moreover, strong emotional experiences are stored as implicit memory which, once established, we are no longer conscious of these patterns (Rothschild 2000). Of catharsis, both myself and my co-researcher's speak, amongst other things, of discharging often strong emotional material; of something "coming through" that is spontaneous and unexpected. This intense quality of emotion seems to come from the depths of our being.

Linking theory with empirical data, I hypothesise that catharsis can access emotion held by our implicit memory system.

Co-researchers mostly agree that for catharsis to be an integrated experience, there needs to be a staying-with or internal witnessing component to the experience. One co-researcher said that the process of staying-with in catharsis is to have the capacity to witness the experience. Another co-researcher recognised that developing witnessing skills whilst in a cathartic experience is a practice that can be developed. Rothschild (2000) states that the implicit and explicit must be “bridged” for healing to occur in trauma. I hypothesise that through bridging, our internal witness is able to bring the implicit emotional charge of a cathartic reaction into explicit memory. To put it another way, staying-with a cathartic experience allows previously unacknowledged material with an emotional charge to emerge into consciousness and be integrated.

In the above paragraph I hypothesise about the therapeutic effect of staying-with a cathartic experience. There are of course other ways of using the body to bring habitual and conditioned patterns of behaviour back into awareness which are discussed more fully in the literature review - such as DMP and body awareness (Hartley 2004) both of which help to establish new patterns of sensorimotor organisation.

6. Conclusion

This study has two strands woven together by myself and my co-researchers: we have co-created meaning together out of our experiences. One strand represents a study of self-discovery that, through my dialoguing took me to a new understanding of the relationship between the phenomena under investigation towards a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer 1994). The other strand took me into the heart of movement dynamics of how we embody our experience of self. I focussed on two such ways: emotional catharsis and staying-with, beginning with my own deep questioning based on subjective experience. This led to an inter-subjective questioning; exploring others’ stories of how they describe and relate to these two experiences. I believe that effective qualitative research has to be based on using direct experience of the phenomena under investigation. I was only able to achieve a deep understanding of how others relate to these phenomena by an in-depth interviewing which would not have been possible without coming from my own direct experience. The phenomenological approach to my data collection has ensured detailed contextual descriptions which I hope will provide the reader with an in-depth insight into others’ embodied experiences.

From a third person position, it is possible to ‘look in’ on the research and identify common resonances – themes which began as subjective experience have opened up with others reflexively. Together we were able to find common words, expressions, gestures and images to give shared meaning to what are essentially non-verbal and subjectively experienced phenomena.

For me as researcher, the process culminated in a mutual embodied knowing; of diversity, of intimacy; of unity. What started out as two concepts, staying-with and catharsis, proved to have value as the basis for investigating our embodied experiences on the dancefloor of life. At the heart of our experience was an understanding of the importance of self-reflection and the role that consciousness or awareness plays – in being aware of itself. This is where words are not enough. The relationship between staying with and catharsis was mapped in slightly different ways by different participants, but the internal observer seemed to be the link to the two experiences. It is the internal observer that has the key role of bringing implicit memory into explicit expression. And it is finding meaning in that expression where healing happens.

Lifeworld research highlights the complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence of participants' experiences. In my endeavour I have tried to be careful not to make definite what is indefinite. As with all phenomenological–hermeneutical research, a major limitation of the study is that the findings only present one interpretation of the data and are therefore not generalisable. The data gathering can create a potential mismatch through the interview process. What a question or answer means to the interviewer can easily mean something different to the interviewee. A reply in one context has a certain agreed meaning that is lost to another context (Schleierich 1997). Both researcher and participant meet during the interview and then part. Due to the dynamic nature of experience, the interview can only represent a snapshot of experience at that point in time.

Existentialist Rollo May (1958) has stressed that we must study not only an individual's experience but also the individual who is doing the experiencing. We must know him or her in their own reality and be part of it if we are to truly understand that individual. Following May's critique, in analysing data of this nature there will naturally be a tendency to take the experience out of context from the person doing the experiencing. The interview context itself: the time, place, subject matter, and relationship between interviewer and interviewee, will influence the data gathering process which in turn will construct meanings. Although I knew all co-researchers from other contexts, this can itself lead to a co-construction of meanings based on our mutual judgements and presuppositions. The interview process also constructs identities – such as those of 'interviewer' and 'interviewee' - and in so doing, also construct meanings.

Linked to the theme of the internal witness, a concurrent theme of consciousness has emerged. From my own experience, I deduce that cathartic work can access regressed states which correspond to Wilber's pre-egoic or pre-personal structures. Authentic Movement, a movement practice which has a staying-with component, can also present opportunities for regression. Giving form to unconscious contents that relate to pre-verbal experiences can allow sensations and feelings to surface that relate to stages of infant development (Chodorow 1984). It has become apparent in my work as a dance movement psychotherapist that some people do not always have a clear sense of self. Drawing on my personal experiences, those of my clients/patients from clinical practice and from this research study, I

conclude that working with Authentic Movement or catharsis in a DMP setting is generally not recommended with people who live at times with pre-egoic states of consciousness. Authentic Movement is a practice which relies on self reflection, which could be disorientating for clients who are unable to organise inner experience. It has already been noted in the literature review that using catharsis for treating trauma can be disintegrating and may cause retraumatisation (Rothschild 2000). This is emphasised by the title of the first chapter in the *Practice* section of Rothschild's (2000) book, "First, Do No Harm". I agree with Hartley (2004) that there needs to be integration of the mature ego before safe immersion in unboundaried, mystical stages of consciousness can happen. Marian Chace is a pioneer dance movement psychotherapist who found a way of forming non-verbal relationships with clients who live with pre-egoic states of consciousness. Chace kinaesthetically experienced what the client was experiencing through her own body. She would mirror or empathically reflect back her experience of the client, communicating to them that they had been seen and accepted (Chaiklin & Schmais 1986). Using a Chacian approach, the dance movement psychotherapist can use specifically designed structured tasks to build on gaining a more coherent sense of ones body where this may be lacking. As a DMP I may wish to make conscious use of catharsis, but I need an awareness of the possibility of retraumatisation, and an awareness of protocols for dealing with fragmentation and overwhelm (Rothschild 2000).

Better self-regulation was mentioned as contributing to one co-researcher's increased ability to assimilate a cathartic experience, which may have once led to disconnection from the experience. Many dance movement psychotherapists have written about the mother-infant relationship as being relevant to DMP (Meekums 1992, Hartley 2005, Dosamantes-Beaudry 2007). In DMP a meeting occurs between a client and her therapist's movement responses. In that meeting the body speaks not only of the immediacy of the moment, but also of past body-held memories (Chodorow 1984). DMP has the ability to work through these primordial experiences using catharsis. Effective use of catharsis in psychotherapy should not be confused with isolated emotional discharge techniques, such as the venting of anger. Smith (2004) concludes that it is the empathically attuned presence of the therapist that allows for transformation in trauma. I would welcome further research into the effectiveness of cathartic techniques in DMP, specifically looking at the use of catharsis in the therapeutic movement relationship (Chaiklin & Schmais 1986); what I envisage as the counterpart to Smith's empathic presence of the therapist. In summary there is scope for further research in this area but within the broader context of other necessary components of the therapeutic process. Specifically I emphasise the role and significance of a safe and supportive therapeutic relationship as a major component of the process.

As a dance movement psychotherapist, I have used the art form of DMP to embody my research journey through movement, creating a conclusion of

my hermeneutical process by reflexively giving shape to it in a live performance (Appendix 3). It symbolises how the journey was experienced on a myriad of levels: encompassing my academic, professional, emotional and embodied progression from beginning to end.

This phenomenological study is an investigation into two embodied ways of experiencing ourselves. At times I had a felt sense of digging deep, as was necessary by the very nature of investigating the essence of these experiences. However it was also necessary to step back, to look at the whole and how the phenomena under investigation were positioned in their context. It has moved me to seek beyond the surface, whilst it has challenged me to stay grounded within the wider context. My work that has now been accomplished is the outward manifestation of the embodied being of both researcher and experiencer.

To other DMP practitioners, I hope that by investigating my own and others' experiences, this will better inform our reflecting on whether, how and when to use these two embodied experiences in our clinical practice. In the course of my research, I have developed and broadened my own epistemology, and I now offer this to the DMP profession.

Box 1

An impulse comes to move
What comes
Can't be captured
Can't be distilled
A gesture
A shape
A gaze
Comes and then goes
Reflecting a past encounter
Already making meaning
As in a relationship
I am being moved by the witnessing presence of time gone by.

As my writing makes some external sense of my internal world, so too do I show something of myself through my movement.
Allowing me to reclaim what I know
And make it my own.

As that impulse comes to move and I 'stay with' it there is only now. The 'being in' that moment. If there is 'being' there must be 'other'. The external witness on which our very existence depends upon. The internal witness - that still and unchanging part of ourselves. And now I relate to the passage of time also as a witness to my process. Each witness - a 'being' making meaning in its own way. My movement making meaning and my writing making meaning and my witnesses making meaning.

Past meets present as I 'stay with' the movement. Timelessness within time. The movement is gone.

Box 2

A noise
Panic
Too much
Run
Do something
Anything
Must keep moving
Can't stop
Don't just sit there!

What's too much?
Stop the doing
And wait
See what happens
Ah! – my breath
Pulse racing
Body heat
Knot in belly

Making shapes
My outer form responding
In a dance of inner listening.

I wonder what it is about that particular noise that creates this reaction for me? My perception creates a label of 'panic'. I can ask myself how this label has been created in the first place. I can also wonder what do I mean by 'panic'? Surely its just my body's unique response? A mix of different sensations – heart beating, breath shallow, hotness, clenching, buzzing..... I can break my reaction down in this way and 'stay with' the sensations arising, moment to moment. What's happening now.....and now.....and now..... noticing, focussing, breathing. Yes – its all about just experiencing myself in a body – consciousness expressing itself!

Box 3

Up down Up down Up down
Structured movement
Rhythmic movement
Strengthening movement
A strong container

Hold tight!
Ups coming Downs coming
Big!
Oscillating unpredictable

What if this happens
What if that happens
What if
What if
What if
.....the unknown

Keep the movement coming
Ground me in movement
Ground me in repetition
Keep it going
Stay with the movement
Stay with the repetition
Stay with the feelings
The ups and downs
Now steady
Coming back into focus

A dialogue between movement and staying with,
A dialogue between movement and stillness.

I began to reflect on the paradox of staying-with in movement.
What is stillness – what does it mean? What are its qualities?
Stillness is never a static state, in fact that's when I notice what is
moving, and where I am moving from. And so too in movement
there may be a stillness – a stillness of consciousness. Yes – this is a
staying-with.

After catharsis – stillness. In staying-with – movement. A
rhythmic alternation between stillness and movement in the
natural cycle of things.

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Appendix 1



For years I fostered cathartic release over suppression as if they were the only choices. But gradually, the image of containment became clear as a third option. To contain the affects is not to suppress or deny it. And it's not to get rid of it through a cathartic purge. To contain is to feel deeply what is in us, bear the terrible discomfort, and find a way to express it symbolically. Symbolic expression holds the tension of the opposites. We maintain the full impact while at the same time maintaining a bit of observing ego. Development occurs when we contain the affect; the therapeutic relationship is at once container and process.

JOAN CHODORROW (1991 p.37)

Invitation

I am completing an MA in Dance Movement Psychotherapy and am writing a research dissertation titled *Embodied Experiences: Investigating the relationship between catharsis and 'staying with'** (see footnote).

My research subject is inspired both my own experiences of using catharsis and 'staying with' at different times and in different contexts on my therapeutic journey, and also by the above quote from Joan Chodorow who is a Jungian Dance Movement Psychotherapist.

As part of my research, I am looking for a small number of people to explore this theme with. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experiences of one or both of these phenomena and what they mean to you? I have approached you as I would specifically like you to be one of my interview subjects - based on what I know about your background, your experience and my sense of your embodied presence.

Please don't be put off by the word "interview" - I anticipate us working together creatively to describe our experiences and the meanings they have for us. Your experiences may be either from group or individual work in a therapeutic context - or it may just be about experiences you have in your everyday world. The interview may be an opportunity to move together, to draw or paint, or just to sit together and see what unfolds - you don't need to have any pre-formed opinions and there are no expected or 'right' answers - in fact whatever happens will be valid from my research point of view.

• I have coined the term 'staying with' to paraphrase the sense of an embodied containment process of which Chodorow speaks.

** I agree to abide by Roehampton University's Ethical Guidelines (July 09) and the Association of Dance Movement Psychotherapy UK's Code of Professional Practice.

Appendix 2



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School of Arts:

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Ethics Board

Participant Consent Form

Title and brief description of Research Project:

Embodied Experiences: Investigating the relationship between catharsis and 'staying with'

The research is about investigating the phenomenological nature of emotional catharsis and 'staying with' as two ways in which we process our internal experiences in an embodied context. I will explore my own and others' stories of these two experiences to work towards developing an inter-subjective understanding of their nature and of any relationship existing between them.

Data will be gathered through qualitative interviews, as well as from my personal log which will use to record my embodied responses. Findings will be published in an MA dissertation.

Name and status of Researcher:

Clare Osbond / MA Student of Roehampton University, School of Human and Life Sciences

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the researcher and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings. I have read the above title and brief description of Research Project and understand the implications of participating in this research.

More specifically, I agree to (please tick appropriate boxes):

- Being interviewed in person
An audio recording of the interview
A video recording of the interview
The use of quotations in the MA dissertation in the following fashion:
Anonymous / Pseudonym of your choice / *

*Please tick option of your choice

Name:.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the researcher. However if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Course Convenor:

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