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## Transpersonal Movement Therapy

*Kathlyn T. Hendricks*

Life is movement, from the motion of the tides to the life cycle of the human being. The way we move broadcasts our relationship to life. It is the bridge between what goes on inside and what we show the world. The way people move together reveals more about their relationships than anything they could possibly say in words.

Dance and movement rituals have formed the core of community life for thousands of years. Dance has demarcated the major life cycle experiences, the rites of passage, and acts of war. Healers were movers until the age of the mind-body dichotomy and ancient communities recognized and honored the healing power of movement.

In the twentieth century, movement therapy has developed as a specialty in the field of psychology. Since its reemergence with the work of Marian Chace at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, DC, in 1942, dance/movement therapists have acknowledged the intrinsic life force in all people, the healing power of shared rhythms and expressed feelings. Dance/movement therapists work with all ages and populations—in psychiatric hospitals, prisons, geriatric residence programs, adolescent halfway house settings, special education programs, and private practice.

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*Movement is a universal language, and dance/movement therapists are trained to use that language to heal and enhance the quality of life.*

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### THE LIFE OF THE BODY

When a person moves, his or her total psychological process emerges. A trained therapist can see the life script, style of encountering the world, major problem areas, all in the way these phenomena are lived out in movement. Movement conveys truth. Because the body essentially fleshes out one's concepts and attitudes and has no mechanisms for lying, it reveals directly

one's Willingness to see and be the truth of moment-to-moment experience. Movement is the direct printout from the unconscious. When we move, we recreate the self. Movement is therefore the image of our continuity. What we tell ourselves about ourselves becomes embodied. One client, for example, was always told she had "mousy brown" hair. Eventually she came to see her hair that color instead of the blond it actually is, and to become her image of a mousy brown-haired woman.

When people move, their investment in life becomes visible, as does their relative degree of aliveness. The basic rhythm of life is expansion and contraction; all movement is rhythmic, its cadence arising out of the omnipresent pulsation of life energy. Transpersonal movement therapy allows the movement experience to represent the individual's personality and also to move through and beyond the individual's shell of defenses to a deep connectedness with the complete cycles of existence.

The process of the mover (*how* the mover moves) is the focus of movement therapy. The transformation point is upon encountering the unknown, the void before one risks the unexperienced, that juncture between the familiar pattern and the unimaginable. One client wrote a short poem about his experience of that edge:

### *To Move Without a Reason*

*Action that does no violence to the actor.  
"Just move without any particular reason."  
She said.  
"Okay," he said with the confidence  
of one who found it easy to  
follow directions.  
... without a reason?  
Frozen on hands and knees  
Struck by a ray of paradox  
in a place no thought can change.  
Waiting.  
The bubble of expectation pierced.  
Waiting.*

In movement, the therapist sees the client's Willingness to choose to change. As we grow up, most of us grow in. We limit ourselves what works, what is functional, what takes less time. We gradually ourselves into shells where the inner life becomes dissociated from expression, conflicts with expression, or is denied entirely. For example, client, while lying on the floor in an early therapy session, was responding to the suggestion to stretch and release. She raised her straight s above her head slightly, then craned them back to her side, extended her arms directly sideward like one of those wooden Christmas dolls on string, stretched her toes down momentarily, and stopped. That was the extent of her inner sense of "stretching and releasing—no three-dimensional movement, no whole-body stretch, no real surrender into contact with the floor.

The body is not just a vehicle to carry the head around. The collective twentieth-century human body contains large areas that are internally invisible, not felt, sensed, or imagined. This body literally feels less, acts less with the environment, takes up as little space as possible, moves only when the task at hand requires it. Expression and creativity have become obsolete or imbued with vaguely sinister overtones. Bertherat, a physical therapist and author, has outlined the problem clearly:

At a very early age we acquire a minimal repertory of movement that we never think about any more. All our lives we repeat these few movements without questioning them, and without understanding that they represent only a very small sampling of our possibilities. The majority of us make use of a few variations of only about a hundred of the more than two thousand movements that the human being is capable of. But we'd never take seriously someone who suggested that we're physically deficient.<sup>1</sup>

A young, very troubled woman discovered while lying down that she could suspend her leg in the air for nearly twenty minutes (try it!) before she could sense where her thigh was, what muscles were holding her leg in the air, and what could release that holding.

The reasons for this movement atrophy are manifold but are generated primarily in the conflicts created by trying to become what we are told we are as children: "You'd be so pretty if you'd ... "; "You're not really hurt"; "Don't be too smart" (...pretty, successful); "Be still; don't be so loud"; and so on. The major signal that internalized conflicts are present is the word "tension."

Tension is the expression of separation from life, from the ground of being. Tension is the label for the process of rigidifying, withdrawing, withholding from life. Our bodies reflect that illusion of separateness: the stiff necks and knotted shoulders, immobile diaphragms and shallow breathing, the face-front march through life with no knowledge of the back, the shadow.

One can manipulate and squeeze and exercise the tension away, but whatever supports tension will recreate it until its deeper meaning is felt, understood, and expressed. Tension, resistance, and stuckness are the same, all signals of the need to experience more deeply.

Tension in all its manifestations emerges throughout the therapy process, and in fact may be the significant presenting problem. The client's assumptions about tension should be addressed before inner sensing can even be approached. I frequently hear people say, "Oh, that's just a tense place," "I'm just tense today," or, most often, "I'd sure like to get rid of this tension," as if tension were an "it," outside experiential, body awareness, somehow correctable by the remedies we use for other disorders (e.g., take a pill for a headache). As one man, totally dominated by keeping an eye on things and keeping up with things, and with frequent headaches, said to me, "If I calmed down, I'd be boring."

People live their tensions and become their conflicts. Polarization, the pervasive either-or, supports much of the unhappiness and life-emptiness that I see in clients. The dichotomies of win-lose, love-hate, up-down, controlling-collapsing, and so forth fight for dominance within the person, eventually immobilizing not only the structure but the life force as well.

## **PURPOSES OF TRANSPERSONAL MOVEMENT THERAPY**

The major purposes of transpersonal movement therapy, as briefly discussed next, are to expand beyond conditioning, recover the self, create authentic movement, and achieve transcendence through movement.

### **Expanding Beyond Conditioning**

Why focus on movement as a process in therapy? Does it have some intrinsic validity, or is it a therapeutic luxury? Many movement experiences have taught me crucial lessons about my own life process and have served my evolution as a therapist. Perhaps my deepest ongoing exploration has been to complete my relationship to fear, especially the fear of expressing myself. A recent movement experience illustrates this cycle of encountering tension, allowing sensation, acknowledging feelings, and moving through to a new experience of self.

At a free-form dance with African drummers one evening, I allowed myself to go into free fall, to really explore that sensation in movement. Letting go into gravity was the culmination of my experiences in relation to fear. An equivalent to my sensations that evening would be skydiving. I discovered that when I became totally soft against gravity instead of *holding* myself to keep from failing, holding myself in any particular attitude about the way I should be, or in any kind of a position, no matter how pretty or daring, I became a kind of movement gyroscope. For about three hours I moved continually, over and over letting go of the position in space or **the** pattern of moving. As a result, I felt balanced in any position I tried. I didn't fall no matter what I did or how much I turned and leaped. I didn't find any limits in my ability to be grounded and to be simultaneously in motion. It felt as if I had expanded my awareness out into my fingertips (in fact, I had small hematomas on my fingers the next

morning). I had totally expanded to my experience of fear so nothing was left in my body to be solid and dense, nothing left to contract. It was all free fall.

## Recovering the Self

Movement therapy is essentially a recognition process, a knowing again or remembering who we are. One of its major purposes is to affirm the experience of being fully alive. The transpersonal approach assumes that one is in the continual act of becoming. As we become aware of how we actually move and relearn that we have arms and toes and genitals, we begin to remember the freedom we originally had to keep discovering ourselves in the world. We remember old feelings and sensations, some pleasant, some most unpleasant, each gradually acknowledged and integrated. Each knowing enriches the mover and the mover's kinetic sense.

The major key to open this process seems to be the recognition of inner signals, the streamings, pressures, tinglings, surges that lie below the surface tension. Most of us avoid that recognition and the confrontation with self that follows, not only by tensing ourselves but also by talking to ourselves continually so that nothing else can be attended to. Maslow called the inner signals "the impulse voices" and observed that in most neuroses the inner signals are weak or have disappeared (to be replaced by the internal dialogue, or with psychotics, whole worlds of voices). "Recovering the self *must*, as a *sine qua non*, include recovery of the ability to have and to cognize these signals, to know what and whom one likes and dislikes, what is enjoyable and what is not."<sup>2</sup>

Tense people are often experientially empty people, for whom others' opinions, a list or schedule, internalized Mom and Dad, make their choices for them. Recognizing the inner impulses, however, can seem dangerous and frightening after long repression. For example, what might one want to do with one's hands if one weren't sitting on them or holding them stiffly at one's sides? And besides, moving around like that is silly, isn't it?

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***Transpersonal movement therapy challenges the system that maturity is exclusively a process of taking on the appropriate role and doing it well. That sense of maturity looks like rigidification.***

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Transpersonal movement therapy supports the pulsation of energy within the human form and assists in the risk of becoming *more*. Recognition, and allowing inner impulse, is the fundamental vocabulary of life with which a person forms his or her relationship to self and to the world.

## Authentic Movement

The bridge between inner impulse and form is a way of moving that we can call authentic movement. Authentic movement is more than involvement and spontaneity. It also involves a shift in the use of attention, and that ability to shift and focus free attention gives movement consciousness. The combination of attending while moving carries it beyond habitual repetition and distinguishes it from our functional movement. The quality of attention is based on a special kind of awareness.

This *awareness* of life working within us is something fundamentally different from observing, fixing and comprehending from the outside. In such observing and comprehending he who comprehends stands apart from the comprehended and observed. But in becoming aware, the experience remains one with the experiencer and transforms him by taking hold of him. Whenever an experience changes a person, it happens unnoticed in the greater awareness of what has been experienced. To become aware means to regain the oneness with the

Allowing, an integral aspect of attention, has two dimensions: giving permission to oneself (even if it's silly or scary or confusing) and allowing whatever emerges to be visible. From a point of relaxed, active waiting, we can "mobilize our attention so that the energy can express itself. This attitude would be the *act of attention*; we follow what happens, concentrating on it. The movement leads and the mover follows."<sup>4</sup>

Attentive movement can open the channel for inner experience to find form in space and time. Such movement is always surprising, especially to the mover, who has brought up the unknown from within.

My experience of people who participate in a profound movement therapy process is that they go through repeated, identifiable cycles with many instances of discrete awareness, "little learnings." Individuals learn, for example, that they have been holding their whole body in a burdened way. Then they begin to understand that the burden has something to do with their relationship to gravity and needing to "keep on top of it." They begin to explore their fear of falling and its source. Those little learnings seem to be cumulative, so that at a certain point the movement process itself takes over, if you allow it, with its own quite visible, magnetic laws. If someone in the room engages in authentic movement, it will draw the attention of everyone in the room. It is unmistakable, like an explosion. All those little experiences of awareness come together in a new form.

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One client had been involved with little learnings for several sessions at the time of this particular breakthrough. While moving within the structure of following a sensation in his stomach, he found himself catapulted directly into the reexperience of his five-year-old feelings of pain and abandonment about a serious, crippling illness. His cognitive mind had already adjusted quite well to his limitations, his atrophied leg, not being able to run, and so on. His unconscious mind, however, had given previous signals in dreams, moods, recurring daily patterns, that some material was unfinished. In this movement process he let go into the full intensity of the fear, pain, and helplessness that his five-year-old body had been unable to complete. This experience effortlessly generated several others (some on his own) over the next few weeks, in which he acknowledged, felt, and expressed, in both movement and drawing, his deep feelings from that time. Tremendous energy was released in this process, which he used to move out of a longstanding impasse both personally and professionally.

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In the movement process, resistance/stuckness is material to be sensed and moved. I often have people "become" their stuckness to taste its particular quality for them at that time. Any movement in which the mover is awake can transcend "going through the motions." It can enrich even the trained dancer's "response-ability," because it has the capacity for renewal and freshness that come from one's inexhaustible inner life.

Dichotomies and polarities are the stuck places that most often arise from clients in the conflicts they experience in their life situations. Some people are stuck in one polarity (retreating, for example) and have no experience of initiating or wanting. Others swing from one extreme to the other (e.g., good girl, bad girl) with no sense of the middle ground. When one follows the movement instead of controlling it, contrasts tend to synthesize, to become something else, a new possibility, new movement, new life choices.

## **Transcendence Through Movement**

Letting go into the process of authentic movement often leads through personality issues to experiences of transcendence, connection to the self. This transcendence is visible as being

moved, effortfully directing the body's action. Authentic movement means fully trusting one's body, allowing fusion between one's brain and one's body cells. The fusion creates movement that is totally involved, unpredictable, elegantly economical.

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A professional man who had been working in movement therapy for a few months clearly had access to his authentic responses and had begun to work on the essential issues of his life. He kept returning to themes related to having to do something, to "get my act together," on the one hand, and a tremendous inner drive toward freedom, on the other hand, which he experienced as "tearing him up inside." He brought material in to sessions, needed little prompting, and usually began moving immediately.

In one session he began by circling "it" (whatever was pushing or pulling at him, represented by a pillow in the middle of the room). Quickly I could see the almost-visible cord that held him as his movement took on the involved, whole-body focus of authenticity. He was clearly stalking, encountering an aspect of himself with full attention that had a timeless quality to it. I have learned not to interrupt this process, for clients are often so involved that the room disappears for that encounter. Any comment or interpretation that I might see a need to make is irrelevant. At that point, then, my presence was important as the anchor, witness, and permission-giver.

As the man moved in response to his ambivalence and finally became "it," his movement changed, taking on a diffuse, halting, hesitant quality. He later described "it" as vague and foggy; he couldn't see clearly through it. He spent the rest of the session exploring "its" demands and his responses, sometimes moving, sometimes talking to "it." I understand this current phase as a ripening for that client. Each time he moves consciously, he remembers more childhood experience, the image from a recent dream, the connection of his bodily sensations, and he learns to become more of who he is.

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## **WINDOW ON A SESSION**

### **Introduction: Seeing**

Because movement is a universal language, anything that occurs from the time the client walks in is potential material. Most of my work is with individuals, and I generally do not move with them. Sessions usually begin with expanding the emergent movement material. I recognize this potential movement in several ways: I look for areas where the client's body is more dense, areas that are unmoving. Any repeated mannerism, such as hand fidgeting or facial tics, can signal a condensed movement metaphor. Areas of the body that work against each other draw my attention, such as the pelvic area moving forward while the chest and shoulders are retreating. I notice whether impulses to move are recognized and course sequentially through the body to expression or whether the person stops this process, as with a yawn that forms a stretch or is held behind tight jaws and shallow breathing.

My attention is focused on the edge of the movement that is about to happen. In the therapy process the client is encouraged to literally be *more*, to take the hesitancy in his or her hands, allowing the whole body to be hesitant, to breathe around the area that feels painful or numb or hard, and to allow that body sensation space to become a form, an expression. When clients allow the potential movement to arise, they experience directly the flow of energy and aliveness. They reclaim the truth of their actual experience and recreate feedback loops that get Covered and distorted when somebody else is given authority to govern their internal experience.

## **Importance of the Therapist's Attitudes**

My attitudes and processing of my experience seem to be critical to the flow of the session. One difference between transpersonal movement therapy and dance therapy, which evolved from the medical model, is my assumption that each client already contains everything necessary for his or her perfect evolution. I acknowledge that the door to this cognition involves a lot of work with personality, as personality constructs stand between the client and his or her connection with the life source. My attitude toward the emergence of personality is to understand that it is held in a bigger container, space. Content-free space is where I rest my body and my attention.

I agree with Durckheim that "one must understand from the core of one's being that all forms are brought forth in stillness and When they are fulfilled, taken back again."<sup>5</sup> My degree of willingness to be present, to go beyond boundaries and roles to touch the actual current of life in clients, to go on their journey with them, modulates the flow of the session and its relative degree of furthering the client's awareness and choice. I support the client's acknowledgment that his or her body is both whole and holy.

If I'm working from a transpersonal perspective, I don't take the personality very seriously. I look for the movement that expresses essence, supporting and reflecting it with my own body attitude and with every level of my experience. I continue to reflect essence no matter what kind of role, drama with spouse, or other element emerges. I still honor that, but I don't take it seriously. I don't act as if that is the only alternative. From more than a decade of work with people, I know that supporting the emergence of essence supports the perfect next step in the client's process.

## **Essence and Personality**

Essence is what one sees out of the corner of the eye, the underlying rhythm and context of the actual visible movement. If one were humming along to that person's movement, it would be the melody of the tune. It can't be pushed; it can't be structured; it can't be called up on demand.

Personality looks contracted. When "seeing" a person's body, most personality is quite visible. The contraction is large. The whole body is bent by it. But the contraction also can be subtle, just the slightest withdrawal from the moment.

In most individuals, movement is circulating personality all the time, with only rare moments of essence breaking through. When essence emerges, the movement has that sense of inevitability and enormous vitality. This is a transformative experience, and the transformation can be created in movement, that space where something else takes over.

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One movement experience with a twenty-six-year-old married woman provides an electrifying example of essence emerging. This overweight, unhappy woman felt profoundly stuck in her body, her marriage, her life. In this session we were actively exploring feeling "stuck." She used the floor as if it were glue and stuck parts of herself to the floor alternately while continuing to move, illustrating her life stance as if nothing were amiss. She eventually shifted to her shoulders and recognized that burdened part as the nexus of her stuck feeling. She chose to allow the inner voice in her shoulders to emerge in sound and movement, with the phrases "I'll show you, I'll sacrifice, I'll give up, I love to suffer" welling up and out, much to her surprise. Suddenly she began cackling and crouching, darting about the studio like a demon. The hair on my arms stood up as I felt the presence of almost pure hatred. After a few

minutes of this frenzied, inferno movement, she seemed to wake up, looked at me, and said, "I always thought I was the 'bad seed.'"

Her early life experiences had been so ugly (incest; alcoholic parents) that she decided a long time ago that she must be evil to cause such misery. As this realization swept over her in the present, she felt the need to open the windows, to put on beautiful music, and to exorcise the palpable presence in the room. This session was the turning point in her learning to love herself.

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## Through the Window

The actual movement continua and experiences I draw from have simplified over the years. Most important, it seems, is to know how clients experience the ongoing pull of gravity, how much space they occupy both internally and in interactions, their relationship to the fundamental axes of possibility: rising, sinking, expanding, contracting, and so forth. The structure I generally provide in sessions is to define wide boundaries around the potential material (e.g., an unpleasant stomach sensation) and to encourage clients to begin expanding out into it in their own way.

Clients spend as much time not moving as moving, and they may be lying down, sitting, standing, or using all the available space to move through. Sessions rarely look the same, because each client's process is unique. I intend to honor that inner knowing and internal direction by being as transparent as possible myself and by repeatedly returning my attention to the edge of the becoming movement in the client.

An example of expanding a habitual movement might illustrate the interrelationship between my process and that of the client. Suppose the person were fidgeting with the hands, a common pattern. Working with this from a trans personal approach, I would first feel that process in myself, as the initial level of intervention. My fundamental process would be to alternately observe and internally attend, seeing the movement and feeling my responses, watching the quality and allowing it to move me. I would hear the quality of the sounds, as if the movement were a symphony in my head. I would take in information as openly as possible, without labeling it in myself

At the same time, I would allow another part of myself to be open to any images that might occur to me. Most often I share these images with clients as part of the process we are engaging in together. Frequently it fits some aspect of their experience that I could not have logically predicted. The image-making capacity depends on allowing whatever is coming up to do so. If clients can learn just that, it gives them enormous freedom from the pattern of clinging desperately to their current position until they are wrenched loose and grab for the next available position.

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*Our bodies are a visual representation of a life stance.*

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I also perceive the quality of the compromise, the conflict. I'm thinking of one woman I saw, and I sensed the desperation in her from her hand movement. As it emerged, I allowed that feeling to move its way through me without my impeding its progress. If as sometimes happens, it reaches a stuck place of mine, I attend to that. This is a process of really participating in the client's process. The willingness of both parties creates the crucible where change happens.

In that session, the woman's composite realization was a surprising sense of how angry she felt and how scared she was to express that feeling directly. **It** literally leaked out through her fingertips.



## Embodying the Concepts

In this culture, unlike others across the world and throughout time, we are not well-acquainted with the healing nature of movement itself. We need to know what it is good for, the end product. How can movement, being nonverbal, carry over into verbal communication? How can something you learn about the way you stand change the way you communicate with your spouse?

We must remember that the way one stands is not the issue, but, rather, that the quality of moving when standing in that particular way, *experiencing* oneself in the moment, is what enables fuller communication to take place. Verbal communication is the end product of the person's willingness to express.

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One woman discovered that she had been habitually standing on her toes for years, but she really hadn't *experienced* standing on her toes. When she actually began standing on her whole foot, both feet, and explored her expression from that root, she realized during the next week a parallel in her relationship with her husband. Before, she had always been anticipating him, his wants, his feelings. She had kept on her toes in relation to him. When she stood solidly on her own feet, it totally changed her communication style with him.

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Transformation occurs at a deep level in this style of movement therapy, and it is allowed to reverberate through the whole system. The therapy is based on the assumption that any contracted area (a hyperextended knee, for example) has life stored inside the defense system. Because the knee usually has no sensation, awareness is lacking. The knee is a part of the person that has become mechanical. But if that suspension begins to come alive again, the life that was stored starts flowing again, bringing with it any leftover, unfinished, old movement experiences, contractions that haven't expanded. All of the life of the cell that had been suspended while the knee contracted is going to start flowing through the system again. The end product of that flow may be what in our society is the basic form of communication, speech.

## Core Concepts

The embodiment of three core concepts from transpersonal psychology—willingness, space, and unity—can be well-illustrated in movement process.

### *Willingness*

Because willingness truly seems to be the key, trying to recognize and describe what a willing attitude would look like has been an intriguing study for me. If the client is willing, anything is possible, so it seems valuable to be able to uncover and encourage that attitude in the concrete arena for learning to love yourself-movement therapy. Willing clients have some commonalities. Their bodies are more toned; their skin lies smoothly connected to their muscles. Their natural movement preferences more closely match their internal experiences, seem truer. That congruence doesn't mean their internal life is necessarily in harmony or satisfying, however. In one case the client's internal life was psychotic. Her face grimaced, her body twisted, but she knew it. The germ of consistency was already present.

The movement of willing clients is generally more fluid, though rarely throughout their bodies, which contain the usual hunches, burdens, and numb areas. The quality of the movement itself deals better with transitions than more resistant clients. Unwillingness tends to look more static in time and space, as if the person were rooted to the spot. The fluidity of

the more willing mover isn't chaotic or without purpose, though. It rather seems to follow an inner thread. The form of the movement looks more reedlike than steely. Possibly, part of willingness is the repeated choice to let go, even of the comfortable places. With these clients, the suspicion that no one else is going to rescue them seems to allow the risk of letting go of life stances and movement styles that no longer fit their sense of responsibility for who they are. Willingness seems to short-circuit the need to understand, the need to figure it out before they can risk change.

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The man's body looked as if he had a surgical-strength rubber band attached to his chin and his genitals, so whenever he stood to his full height, he vaguely experienced a sexual threat and excitation.

This forty-year-old man's back was a reservoir of old burdens and resentments, and his shoulders were especially hunched and thick, painful. All this conflict was upheld quite tentatively on tense thighs, locked knees, and curled-under toes, making walking itself fatiguing.

Most of the movement Work with this client began by acknowledging the most prominent body sensation, which he then amplified, exploring throughout his body (chasing it around), breathing around, and following. He used movement as a form of meditation; when the analyst part of his mind became active, he gently turned his attention back to the actual sensations, especially the vague, fleeting ones. The words that were apt to emerge some time in the sequence were, "I don't know," followed by a larger exhalation of relief and the formation of a definite movement expression of that vague body sensation. For example, one energetic, flinging-off movement came out of his stomach uneasiness.

His willingness seemed contingent on his acknowledging that his body is a whole system with its own intrinsic relationships and laws, not necessarily dominated by his cognitive brain. Each experiencing and expressing cycle enlarged his aliveness, his choices in his everyday life, his capacity for renewal. He began to stride more easily, throw off the burdens, and see more clearly into himself and others.

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## *Space*

Individuals' relationship to space is critical to their sense of belonging in the world and represents their method of grounding or security. How much space people use in their movement and how much internal space they are aware of parallels their cycle of expansion and contraction. I often have clients move in that particular structure in the first sessions, expanding until they feel as far out as they wish to go, then contracting as far in as feels right, and again expanding. Most people use little of their potential space, and their feelings about security, protection, and guardedness emerge with this focus of exploration. Birth issues especially are triggered by the experience of expanding right to the edge of possibility, into asymmetry and fears of falling.

Use of space also indicates degree of self-esteem. One older woman who had ovarian cancer moved through space as if she were constantly testing the water. It emerged that at home in her small kitchen with her husband, who was a huge block, a retired military man, she repeatedly made herself smaller whenever they had to cross paths. Her inner experience of herself was a mix of unfinished little-girl needs to skip and frolic and turn and the acculturated constrictions her body had accumulated from years of having her desires blocked while her responsibilities to others were accented. The choice to make oneself smaller is a giving up that breeds resentment, confusion, and eventually hopelessness.

*Internal space*, the sense of being at home in one's body, is a primary goal of movement therapy. A woman with many self-image issues was working with falling into

pillows and noticing the stiff, deadwood feelings in her arms, whereupon she remembered a childhood incident of falling off a swing set. She had expected her arms to break her fall and remembered the fear paralysis they locked into, as well as her decision to disown them for being so stupid as to allow her to badly hurt herself. From that point, she apparently had contracted severely at her shoulder joints, so her arms hung loosely and fairly ineffectively at her sides. The process of owning her arms again involved a long movement dialogue between her arms and the rest of her, reclaiming reaching, throwing, pushing, and swinging—all the movements that arms do.

Use of space in interrelationships is largely learned, as are role behaviors. A young man was exploring "sideways" movement one afternoon when he began to feel prickly along his back and seemed to need to crouch and guard himself. He looked as if he were being held, so I asked him to imagine a tether attached to him and someone or something at the other end. The someone became his father, who stood behind him and prevented him from moving forward. The young man then recalled a complex series of memories of all the ways he had felt tethered in his lack of free time—his father's constant demands in the family store, refusal to acknowledge the son's desires, and so on. From that point, the client could begin to reclaim that widening space, and his body (especially the chest) began to fill out as he presented himself in the world as more capable and free.

### *Unity*

The illusion of separation is most visible in the body fragmentation and movement dissonance of conflict. As long as one holds someone else responsible or to blame, experiences of unity are rare. Fears of being consumed and annihilated, dissolving—all those birth-related issues - block the free flow of awareness out into space and unity. My attitude in work is that we are exploring the obstacles between the client's present life and his or her full potential. An obstacle is like a logjam in the flow, and actively loving the obstacle frees the jam. I feel the obstacle in myself and love it, move with it. I see the obstacle in the client and love it, move with it.

Most often in sessions the experience of unity is the end result of letting go of a particular pattern of moving through the world. The exhilarating freedom of dropping an old resentment lodged between the shoulder blades, or straddling more of the ground when walking, or standing and facing a fearful situation that formerly induced averted eyes and clenched stomach are the moments of free attention, the moments of full breath and oneness with life.

The experience of unity seems to always be available behind the veil of projection. In a women's movement therapy group we spent one session exploring literally moving behind veils, as is commonplace in much of the Moslem world. The women used large pieces of cloth to drape themselves and began exploring space and the rhythms of covering and uncovering. They worked a long time individually, then in pairs, and finally in a spontaneous swaying circle dance under a parachute. The video I made of the group clearly reflected the phases of taking on roles—the harem girl, the nun, the aloof matron, the invisible slave—and the tentative and then more abandoned release of those roles. The momentum of covering and uncovering built as group members began using their cloths in elaborate coverings and uncoverings of each other, learning to include one another in that universal rhythm. At an inspired moment I put "Scheherazade" on the record player, and the movement became even more circular and inclusive. As the covered form of the women swayed quietly, the presence of unity was radiantly evident.

## **MOVEMENT EXPERIMENTS**

Each of the following activities is designed to illustrate a particular facet of transpersonal approaches in therapy. These are based on the experience that is possible when one lets go of content and focuses on process.

## Experiment 1

This experiment is to be done with a partner. Ideally, choose a time when you've put aside schedules and demands; use an open space where you feel comfortable; and have nonrhythmic music in the background (Brian Eno's "Ambient" series is especially good for this purpose).

1. Have the partners (you could be one) stand facing each other, each person with one foot about a half-stride behind the front leg. They are to experiment with rocking their weight from front to back and make any adjustments that allow them to feel more fluid, as if the hip, knee, and ankle joints were on rollers.
2. Have partner A offer his or her forearm to partner B, allowing every other body part to relax. Partner B is to place his or her fingertips on partner A's forearm, with pressure somewhere between feather-light (withheld) and anchor-heavy (giving up responsibility).
3. Ask partner B to close his or her eyes, while partner A begins to move his or her arm smoothly, slowly, and in random patterns in space. The objective for partner B is to maintain the same extent of finger contact throughout, and for partner A to consciously make his or her movement wavelike. They will notice how much information is transmitted through the fingertips. Each time partner B anticipates or tenses, partner A will feel it. Exhaling completely assists in releasing tension, for both partners.
4. After several minutes, have the two switch roles, then take time to share their actual experience.

This experiment ages well. With practice, participants report experiences of unity, not only with their partner but with life energy as well. Images of rivers, floating feelings, enlivening of unnoticed body parts, and the positive experience of giving over control to another person have also transpired for participants.

## Experiment 2

This experiment can be done individually or in partnership. To simplify the activity at the beginning, use a partner as observer until the observer in oneself is developed. This structure can be a tool for discovering automatic responses and enlivening them.

1. The initial framework for this experience is relatively unstructured. Simply have the mover allow and follow movement impulses as they emerge in his or her body. This movement can be done lying down, sitting, or standing, and may involve large movement or small gestures of hands and feet. Movements cannot be *right* or *wrong*, just that which wants to be moved.
2. Let this random moving continue for some time, even if the person runs out of things to do and starts repeating previous movements. Meanwhile, the observer (either the partner or your mind's eye) is to notice the movement to which the mover keeps returning. This may be a discrete gesture that is repeated; a way of moving from place to place, such as in short, quick bursts; or a quality or style, such as circular arm movements or a tunnel-like focus of the torso. The important aspect to notice is the repetition.
3. Let the attention focus on this identified movement now, by having the person repeat it, taking some time with each of the following variations:
  - a. Make the movement larger in the sense of *more* of whatever it is. Exaggerate it beyond "everyday" dimensions and really bring it into relief. Let the whole body become that quality. Initially this may feel ridiculous or silly; allow that feeling and whatever other responses arise to be part of the experience.
  - b. Take the kernel of the movement, the quality, and do its opposite. For example, if the movement involves arm circles, have the arms make only angular,

- straight lines in space. Notice the body's response to trying this opposite.
- c. Take the movement and let another part of your body move it. For example, do the arm circles and let the hips move in the same way.
  - d. Let the movement alternate between exaggerating the identified pattern, moving its opposite, exaggerating, opposing, many times. Notice the tendency of qualities to blend, to find a new kind of movement somewhere between the two.
4. Allow a few moments of reflection time for the participant to ask:
    - a. How am I creating this pattern in my daily life?
    - b. Is this movement familiar, like any other experience I've had?
    - c. What have I discovered about the way I think I should move and be in the world, and how do I feel when I change that habitual response?

### Experiment 3

Remember the little wooden, multijointed animals or dolls, about three or four inches high, on a round stand with a button on the bottom? Push the button, and the doll collapses; let go and it springs back up. This experiment is based on that principle and is an active way to learn the art of "going with" while remaining grounded. It is fun to do in a group with partners, to experience the differences in everyone's style of resistance and flow.

1. For contrast, have partner A take a position (both feet on the floor) where the person feels he or she can't be moved. Have partner B circle partner A's body until partner B can see the "loophole," the flat place, the area which, if nudged just slightly, causes a loss of balance.
 

Switch roles, perhaps a few times with various positions, to have the participants really experience the body sense of "taking a position" and to experience its relative security.
2. Have partner A take a fairly wide stance, knees slightly bent, eyes closed, exhaling each breath fully. Have partner B use his or her hand to push various parts of the partner's body lightly: shoulders, head, hip, stomach, thigh, and so on. Ask partner A to imagine his or her body as a spiraling form, allowing each push to move through the body, going with it along the spiral until the energy of the push dissolves, then returning to the central position. This is to be repeated with the next push, and so on. After about five minutes, the partners' roles should be reversed.
3. Everyone seems to have a central tension reservoir, the place that responds reflexively to a push by becoming rigid. It could be one's lower back, chest, back of the neck. Have partner A nudge partner B at these various body places. Partner B will have the experience of rigidifying, losing balance, rigidifying, losing balance, perhaps many times before deciding to let go of the automatic response and explore the sensation of "going with." Reverse roles, and be sure to take time to share discoveries with the partner and the group.

### NOTES

1. T. Bertherat and C. Bernstein, *The Body Has Its Reasons* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 38.
2. Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Viking Press, 1971) p. 33.
3. Karlfried Durckheim, *Hara: The Vital Centre of Man* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975), p. 159.
4. Mary Whitehouse, "C. G. Jung and Dance Therapy: Two Major Principles," in *Eight Theoretical Approaches in Dance-Movement Therapy*, edited by Penny Lewis Bernstein (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1979), p. 62.
5. Durckheim, *Hara*, p. 161.