BODY-MIND INTEGRATION:
RECLAIMING THE FORGOTTEN TREASURE

by

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
PSYCHOLOGY

MERIDIAN UNIVERSITY
2010
Dedicated to my teachers, without whom I would not be
Why has the self created the body? I don't know why we are not wind; we might be forms made of air and beyond sex or appetites or digestion and such nuisances, but it is a fact that we have bodies which have been created by the self, so we must assume that the self really means us to live in the body, to live that experiment, to live our lives.

— Carl Gustav Jung
*Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*
ABSTRACT

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This study explores body-mind integration by examining the Research Problem: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The hypothesis stated: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allow for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

The Literature Review presents sources addressing the mind-body relationship, trauma and dissociation, affect theories, integrated approaches to psychology and psychotherapy, dance and movement as healing modalities and imaginal perspectives. Most sources reveal a lack of appreciation for the somatic aspects of human existence.

The four-phase research methodology of Imaginal Inquiry was utilized, consisting of Evoking Experience, Expressing Experience, Interpreting Experience, and Integrating Experience. Nine participants and two co-researchers met twice in a group.

Five learnings emerged from this study. First, exploring somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person can transcend one’s personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Second, in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of experience. Third, exploration of
affect through movement, by facilitating suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience. Fourth, the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment. And fifth, consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; an invitation to do so is met with resistance, yet engaging fear creatively may lead to empowerment. The cumulative learning is that a group exploration of somatic process through movement and art is a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal experience becomes part of a ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear.

This study shows how working with body and feeling can assist personal and cultural integration, as seen through the mythical lens of Inanna’s descent to the underworld.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. v

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ................................................. x

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

   Research Topic
   Relationship to the Topic
   Theory-in-Practice
   Research Problem and Hypothesis
   Methodology and Research Design
   Learnings
   Significance and Implications of the Study

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................. 22

   Introduction and Overview
   The Mind-Body Relationship
   Trauma and Dissociation
   Affect Theories
   Integrated Approaches to Psychology and Psychotherapy
   Dance and Movement as Healing Modalities
   Imaginal Approaches
   Conclusion
Chapter

3. METHODOLOGY .............................................. 107
   Introduction and Overview
   Participants
   Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

4. LEARNINGS ................................................. 127
   Introduction and Overview
   Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside
   Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld
   Learning Three: The Body Is a Doorway to Mystery
   Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting
   Learning Five: One Thing We Fear Is Fear Itself

5. REFLECTIONS ............................................ 204
   Significance of Learnings
   Implications of the Study
   Mythic and Archetypal Reflections
   Conclusion: A Vision for the Future

Appendix

1. ETHICS REVIEW ........................................... 222
2. CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE ............................... 232
3. CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE ....................... 235
4. INFORMED CONSENT FORM ....................... 238
5. FLYER ......................................................... 241
6. VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE STUDY ........ 242
7. SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE ............................ 244
8. REJECTION AND ACCEPTANCE LETTERS .......... 248
9. OPENING MEETING SCRIPTS ............................... 250
10. LOSS QUESTIONNAIRE ................................. 253
11. POEM BY DAVID WHYTE, “NEWS OF DEATH” .... 254
12. MOVEMENT AND ART EXPLORATION SCRIPTS .... 255
13. MEETING ONE JOURNAL QUESTIONS ................. 262
14. POEM BY DAVID WHYTE, “THE WELL OF GRIEF” 263
15. MEETING ONE CLOSING CIRCLE SCRIPT ............. 264
16. MEETING TWO JOURNAL QUESTIONS ................. 266
17. SUMMARY OF DATA ........................................ 267
18. PARTICIPANTS’ ARTWORK .............................. 288
19. SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS ............................... 291
NOTES ............................................................ 294
REFERENCES ..................................................... 318
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

Illustration 1. Margaret: Grief ............................... 155
Illustration 2. Margaret: Fear ................................ 155
Illustration 3. Kerri: Grief ...................................... 158
Illustration 4. Kerri: Fear ....................................... 158
Illustration 5. Diana: Grief .................................... 159
Illustration 6. Judy: Grief and Fear ......................... 160
Illustration 7. Grief Detail ..................................... 183
Illustration 8. Fear Detail ..................................... 185
Illustration 9. Judy: Grief ...................................... 288
Illustration 10. Judy: Fear ..................................... 288
Illustration 11. Diana: Grief ................................... 288
Illustration 12. Diana: Fear .................................... 288
Illustration 13. Greg: Grief .................................... 288
Illustration 14. Greg: Fear ..................................... 288
Illustration 15. Amy: Grief .................................... 289
Illustration 16. Amy: Fear ..................................... 289
Illustration 17. Margaret: Grief .............................. 289
Illustration 18. Margaret: Fear .............................. 289
Illustration 19. Trish: Grief .................................... 289
Illustration 20. Trish: Fear ..................................... 289
Figure

Illustration 21. Elena: Grief ........................................ 290
Illustration 22. Elena: Fear .......................................... 290
Illustration 23. Kerri: Grief ......................................... 290
Illustration 24. Kerri: Fear .......................................... 290
Illustration 25. Rachel: Grief ....................................... 290
Illustration 26. Rachel: Fear ....................................... 290
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

The topic of this study is *body-mind integration*. In a Gestalt theory formulation proposed by James Kepner, the concept refers to a person’s present sense of the unity of one’s being, the felt continuity between one’s bodily, emotional, and mental processes.\(^1\) Sometimes this unity has been awkwardly termed *bodymind*, to indicate and emphasize the integrity of a human being that encompasses all the dimensions of human experience.\(^2\) Though it may seem that hyphenating the word re-introduces the split the term is designed to bridge, I have chosen to use the more familiar hyphenated spelling while maintaining the unitary intent of the word.

Body-mind integration is a relatively new topic in psychology even though it was first discussed in the writings of Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries. At the dawn of the discipline of psychology, the notion of the unity of body and mind was—in contrast to the mainstream scientific paradigm accepted in Europe at that time—an implicit assumption in Freud’s declaration that somatic symptoms of *hysteria* are manifestations of delayed aftereffects of traumatic events (i.e., a psychological problem and its bodily manifestation are expressions of the same phenomenon).\(^3\)

This notion was, however, apparently too radical for Freud’s times because it did not lead to a formulation of a holistic view of a human being. Instead, the attention focused on *personality* as consisting of *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, where the body is
mentioned only indirectly, as the vessel containing the id’s base *instincts* that must be resisted and controlled by the ego.\(^4\) And although initially Freud claimed that the ego is “first and foremost a body-ego,” the emphasis soon shifted to ego as a *mental representation* of the body.\(^5\) To Freud, “The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions.”\(^6\) This view conformed better to the mainstream paradigm of modern Western science and the culture of Freud’s time, which had, ever since René Descartes’ assertion *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), accepted the notion of a split between body and mind, and the superiority of the mind.\(^7\)

After Freud, the discussion progressed from the controversial writings of Wilhelm Reich to the experimental movements of the 1960s, and finally to the cutting edge *neuroscience* which continues to produce empirical evidence for the interconnectedness of body and mind. Of the latter, the work of Allan Schore and Antonio Damasio are but two examples. Their research concerning the *right brain* in particular—the brain hemisphere responsible for receiving and processing information from the body—shows how sensation and feeling shape cognition, making it difficult to delineate meaningful boundaries between its mental, physical, and emotional components.\(^8\)

While those and other voices in psychology have explicitly recognized the need to heal the *Cartesian affliction*—the split between body and mind—Kepner reminds us that those voices still seem to constitute a marginalized minority both in the history of the discipline and to a large degree also in what is accepted as mainstream canon in Western psychology today.\(^9\)
As Kepner points out, in Western psychology, I refers primarily or exclusively to the mental functions of the self, rarely including the affect layer, and even less frequently the physical human body.\textsuperscript{10} The scientifically and culturally supported ontology of body and mind existing as two parallel realities manifests in individual experience as an inner split between \textit{subject} and \textit{object}. The mental I is the subject, and the body is projected as an object (“not me”) and disowned. In this way a large portion of human experience is excluded from awareness, often leading to a sense of alienation, depression, anxiety, and loss of meaning. An integration of body and self seems necessary to bridge the gap between this modern dis-ease and the lost sense of wholeness and psychological well-being.

Kepner goes on to say that integration can be understood as a developmental process leading back from a fragmented sense of self—where the identified self is mostly rational and verbal and where much of one’s physical and emotional experience is excluded from awareness—to an integrated experience of self as including the physical, kinesthetic, feeling dimensions along with the thinking mind.\textsuperscript{11} True to its Gestalt roots, this definition proposes that integration is a process of growth rather than a state one can achieve, and that an \textit{integrated self} is an experience felt in present time, rather than a fixed object of consciousness. This definition stands in contrast to those framed only in psychological terms, such as Freud’s concept of personality as consisting of id, ego, and superego, or other definitions of self found in self-psychology or object-relations psychology.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Somatic awareness} is essential for body-mind integration. The term \textit{somatic} is rooted in the Greek \textit{soma} (the living body), which in the words of Thomas Hanna, the
originator of this use of the term, is the “living, self-sensing, internalized perception of oneself.” Hanna’s *somatic viewpoint* proposes that everything we experience in our lives is a bodily experience. Similarly, Richard Strozzi-Heckler views the soma as a “unified expression of all that we think, feel, perceive, and express.”

Donald Bakal writes that somatic awareness involves attending to sensory information and requires the ability to perceive, interpret, and act on the basis of internal bodily sensations. In large part, this happens through attuning to one’s *proprioceptive* sense, concerning the location and movement of one’s body in space. Bakal says:

Sensations arising from the body are characteristically vague, hard to localize, and even harder to quantify. Internally, somatic sensations have their origins primarily in proprioceptive information coming from the muscles, tendons, and joints… making somatic awareness to a large extent a muscle sense.

Somatic awareness, Bakal claims, is an active process that begins with a willingness to pay attention to the information coming from the body and, with practice, results in the full integration of sensory information into one’s total experience of oneself, a state of *somatic presence*. Somatic presence is a state in which one has conscious access to one’s awareness of bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts, resulting in a sense of full-bodied presence in the now.

Somatic presence is essential to psychological well-being. In the words of Alexander Lowen:

*The life of an individual is the life of his body.* Since the living body includes the mind, the spirit, and the soul, to live the life of the body fully is to be mindful, spiritual, and soulful. If we are deficient in these aspects of our being, it is because we are not fully in or with our bodies.

Unfortunately, for many of those who have grown up in white Western cultures the experience of somatic presence is more of an exception than the norm. What seems to
be the norm instead, is a pervasive experience of alienation from one’s body, sensations, and feelings.

According to Bessel van der Kolk and numerous other theorists, this alienation may be due to unintegrated residue of past trauma—a painful experience or series of experiences that were too overwhelming to be processed and integrated at the time they occurred.¹⁸ Claiming that memories of trauma can live in the body unavailable for conscious recall long after the original event, trauma theorists reference Pierre Janet’s concept of dissociation—an exclusion of trauma-related contents from one’s consciousness.¹⁹

The old experience, van der Kolk writes, is inscribed in one’s nervous system as an implicit memory.²⁰ Implicit memory is also called somatic, non-cognitive memory; it is often fragmented, non-verbal, and lacks the logic and coherence of explicit memories; when activated, it gives one a sense of reliving a past event as if it were happening in the present moment, known as a flashback.²¹ In such instances, flight/fight/freeze impulses (nervous system alarm responses to life threatening circumstances) will occur in situations which trigger the implicit memory of the original event, even though the threat is not present in real time.²²

The effects of trauma are most damaging when severe trauma occurs early in life or repeatedly over a period of time, especially in the absence of support or holding.²³ However, Schore, among others, claims that damage can happen not only in extremely severe situations but also in common instances of early relational trauma, such as those characterized by maternal neglect “with little reparative effort.”²⁴ This is helpful in understanding how early experiences contribute to the mind-body split.
Most current attachment research in neuroscience, in large part spearheaded by Schore’s work, indicates that the brain develops in relationship, specifically in the earliest dyadic relationship between the infant and the primary caregiver, optimally the mother. Attachment is the experience of an infant forming an emotional bond with the mother. Schore claims that attachment trauma related to an abusive or “merely” neglectful relationship with the primary caregiver may severely interfere with right brain development; the ability to process somatic information remains underdeveloped, which affects directly the capacity for emotional awareness and self-regulation, as well as empathy and emotional communication. He adds that “the right hemisphere is critically involved in the maintenance of a coherent, continuous, and unified sense of self.” With attachment trauma, dissociation from bodily reality will manifest as a sense of inner fragmentation and an absence of a “corporeal and emotional” sense of self. It will also likely lead to the formation of compensation patterns such as left brain dominance with its preference for logic, verbal processing, and linear thought.

In the presence of unresolved trauma, the individual attempts to avoid feeling the sensations and emotions associated with the painful material, and by extension, becomes insensitive to other sensations or feelings. The effort involved in keeping sensations, feelings, and memories out of awareness results in an overall sensory and emotional numbness.

The flavor of a full-blown expression of this experience is best captured in descriptions of derealization and depersonalization reported by people diagnosed with dissociation of a severe degree of pathology. They talk about living with the sense of dream-like unreality, as if looking through a veil, lost in the sensory fog; feeling flat and
withdrawn; experiencing oneself as disembodied, two-dimensional, an unattached cardboard figure.\textsuperscript{29} This description may seem dramatic, yet many clinicians encounter some version of this in their practice every day. As Rollo May writes:

The “typical” kind of psychic problem in our day is not hysteria as it was in Freud's time, but the schizoid type—that is to say, the problem of persons who are detached, unrelated, lacking in affect, tending towards depersonalization, and covering up their problems by means of intellectualizations and technical formulations. . . .

There is also plenty of evidence that the sense of isolation, alienation of one’s self from the world is suffered not only by people in pathological conditions, but by countless “normal” persons as well in our day.\textsuperscript{30}

Nearly 50 years later, Schore echoes, “It should be pointed out that dissociation may be a more common phenomenon of everyday pathology than previously thought.” \textsuperscript{31}

Colin Ross describes how dissociation is culturally supported by the West’s unquestioned devotion to rationality and the dominance of the \textit{dissociated executive self} (\textit{dissociated ego, dissociated self}).\textsuperscript{32} Ross states that the dissociated self excludes the body as subject of consciousness and perceives the physical body as its property, as “real estate which it owns.”\textsuperscript{33} The dissociated ego’s tendency is to define its rigid and linear modes of logic as the only consciousness. This is a psychological manifestation of what Schore would call left brain dominance.

Morris Berman refers to the disconnection from the body as “the basic fault” of Western civilization, manifesting as the denial, domination, and exploitation of nature and the feminine, both associated with the material, earth-bound, physical dimensions of reality.\textsuperscript{34} Berman proposes the return to direct engagement with somatic presence not so much in order to bridge the gap between body and mind but rather to expose that gap as an illusion: for “our secret history was always a \textit{somatic} one, ‘the secret life of belly and bone.’” \textsuperscript{35}
Theodore Roszak and other writers in *ecopsychology, deep ecology, and ecofeminism* describe their remedies for a culture ailing from the illusion of duality. Seen from their perspective, the healing of the mind-body split is a matter of emergency in a world apparently heading for an ultimate disaster.\(^{36}\) In ecopsychology, the healing of the earth is seen as a necessary condition for the healing of the human psyche, which is, as Roszak states, “densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable, mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos.”\(^ {37}\) Similarly, deep ecology advocates for expanding the concept of self to account for the fact that humans are, in Arne Naess’s words, “in, of and for Nature.”\(^ {38}\) His term *ecological self* describes a person as belonging to a natural environment much broader than the human community; even more importantly, Naess proposes a shift of emphasis away from viewing the self as part of the environment and toward the view of the environment (including humans) as one interconnected, relational field.\(^ {39}\)

Ecofeminism brings together ecopsychology and feminist thought. Susan Griffin is one of the female voices for “those of us whose language is not heard, whose words have been stolen or erased, those robbed of language, who are called voiceless or mute”: women, animals, the earth, the body.\(^ {40}\) With others in the field, she sees the current environmental disaster as directly related to how the mind-body split shapes humanity’s perception of ourselves as separate from the earth.

In the face of environmental damage wrought by that perception, authors like Ralph Metzner and Chellis Glendinning call for a shift from the mechanistic view to *organismic* (holistic) models in approaching issues of ecology.\(^ {41}\) Metzner’s *emerging ecological worldview* is one where earth, previously seen as inert matter subject to
domination and exploitation by “man,” is now regarded as a living organism, a delicately balanced system in which humans are called to foster ecological stewardship and recognize the intrinsic value of nature.

For Glendinning, the “screaming link between pervasive personal dysfunction and the ecological crisis” makes clear that psychological healing must include recovery from “linear thinking, the mind/body split . . . and the mechanistic view,” in short, a “recovery from Western civilization.” 42 Inspired by her work with indigenous peoples, Glendinning talks about healing as a return to the primal matrix: “the state of a healthy, wholly functioning psyche in full-bodied participation with a healthy, wholly functioning Earth.” 43 She advocates for regarding the unified primal matrix as the original blueprint, and trauma as a secondary phenomenon, which shifts the usual emphasis of Western clinical discourse from disease to the health inherent in the integration pattern in the human psyche–its intrinsic movement toward wholeness. 44

The holistic perspective and focus on health, rather than pathology, is shared by writers in Imaginal Psychology, such as James Hillman, Thomas Moore, and Aftab Omer. Omer describes Imaginal Psychology as concerned with restoring the depth and wholeness of human experience in all its spiritual, somatic, emotional, social, and ecological dimensions. 45 Moore speaks of psychotherapy as “care of the soul” which is “not solving the puzzle of life; quite the opposite, it is an appreciation of life’s paradoxical mysteries that blend light and darkness into what a human life and culture can be.” 46

Hillman points to soul loss as a mark of our age and speaks of “returning the soul to the world” as one of the tasks of psychology; using the Latin term anima mundi (soul
of the world), Hillman evokes the depth, mystery, and implicit reality that shines forth from the world— and from each human being—when illuminated by the soul. From the perspective of Imaginal Psychology, body-mind integration in its broadest sense would be a restoration of the intimacy between self and cosmos. In his theory of Imaginal Transformation Praxis Omer proposes that psychology, to be truly healing, must aim at the transformation of individual and cultural consciousness, experience, identity, and action. For this to occur, psychology must be rooted in ritual, transformative arts, and spiritual practices.

Interestingly, this holistic notion of healing was one of the original tenets of what later became known as Dance/Movement Therapy. According to Trudi Schoop, dance/movement therapists have assumed the unity of body and mind from the beginning. Schoop describes her and her colleagues’ shift from the understanding that mind and body are in reciprocal interaction— in which “whatever the inner self experiences comes to full realization in the body, and whatever the body experiences influences the inner self”—to an integrated view of a human being as indivisible unity.

Another pioneer of Dance/Movement Therapy, Norma Canner, says, “We have not only separated ourselves from the earth and one another, we have separated ourselves from ourselves”; pointing to the roots of ecological crisis in the mind-body split she calls on dance therapists to be healers of both, to help humans move from isolation into connection with all living things and “create a world that moves toward inclusivity and oneness.”

In the context of this study, expressive movement and other somatic practices play a central role in the exploration of the potential shift from the mind-body split to what is
experienced as somatic presence. These are body awareness and/or movement practices in which one’s sensory experience is the focus of attention. This is where the topic is of most personal interest for me.

**Relationship to the Topic**

In the summer of 1995, I was participating in a long-term movement program called “Waves and Whispers” based on 5Rhythms, Continuum, and Authentic Movement. During a partner exercise I had an experience similar to what a Zen student might call satori, a moment of insight that occurs unexpectedly, a sudden awakening, also described in Gestalt as an *aha experience*.

The instruction was for one person to move, and the other to witness. The mover was invited to explore movement and breath patterns related to fear, that is to embody our experience of fear, but rather than freezing with it (which is often the response to this emotion), to move with it, or be moved by the fear. The role of the witness was to simply be present for the experience in an open, receptive, non-judgmental way.

When it was my turn to move, I started slowly, with fast shallow breath and small, darting movements close to the ground. Initially this expression was a purely physical exploration with no emotional or cognitive content. But suddenly I felt as if some greater process had taken over and now I was moved by the fear, the same fear I had experienced as a young child facing yet another eye surgery in a strange and terrifying hospital.

The movement helped me access, for the first time ever, a full blown memory of that terror complete with a clammy cold sweat, a nauseating taste in my mouth, and the sense of panic a trapped animal may feel. My body remembered the movements I must
have attempted to make when I was lying there alone, strapped to a gurney, unable to evade the inevitable ether mask that would descend like death on my face and plunge me into an abyss of dreamless darkness from which I was never certain to return.

As the memory unfolded, I gasped, shook, and cried. I kicked with my legs and imagined using my arms to break the restraint straps and push away the ether mask. An energy release followed and I came back to the present feeling as if a miracle had just happened to me. I felt fully present, whole, and vibrantly, almost unbearably, alive.

In that exercise, I relived memories of events long buried in oblivion. At age two, I had been diagnosed with an eye dysfunction that resulted in several eye surgeries between the ages of three and 10. I was repeatedly brought to hospitals and left there, betrayed and at the mercy, as far as I was concerned, of uncaring strangers and their terrifying medical procedures. My suffering was compounded by the feeling of the most terrible aloneness.

I spent the next 20-some years of my life in a strange, detached state of being that felt like playing a part in someone else’s movie. Life had an unreal, dream-like quality, as if I were living behind a wall of thick clear glass where I could see things and people around me but could not really touch them. I did not feel empty inside, I simply did not feel. Like James Joyce’s often quoted Mr. Duffy, I too lived a short distance from my body.53

I believe the subtle sense of unreality and disconnection that pervaded my early life was a result of living with aftereffects of those repeated hospital experiences. Well into my late 20s, I had no language for what I was experiencing, only a vague longing for that magical day when I would be able to somehow break through the glass barrier and
enter into the living center of my existence. Since that time I have met many others who
describe their lives in a similar way even when they do not recall a history of early
trauma.

I was born and raised in the Polish Western Territories, a frontier land for
displaced persons, to parents traumatized by their families’ and the nation’s tragedy and
devastation of World War II. They had neither the skills nor the support to process their
experience, and we certainly never talked about it. Nearly everyone in my family (and in
the country) used nicotine and alcohol to help manage their lives; this too helped shape a
culture of numbness and dissociation. I have a sense that exposure to alcohol and nicotine
smoke in the womb may have contributed to my inability as a child to feel secure in my
body and at home on this earth. In addition, Poland was a predominantly Catholic
country, and the thousand years of Christian legacy of secrecy, shame, and denial of the
flesh and the feminine only reinforced my own alienation from my body and my
femininity.

All this, complicated further by the terrifying surgeries, conspired to create a life
that was one long out-of-body experience. I was a smart child and relied on my intellect
to get me through the nightmare of my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. I
was rewarded for being able to use my mind in ways that pleased my parents and
teachers, but I was not really there. I was going through the motions of what looked like a
life.

Yet I was not completely dead. For some mysterious reason, perhaps divine grace,
I sensed there was more to this existence than what I was able to access. I wanted that. I
came to America, looking for it, not knowing what it was. I found it in the most
unexpected place. During a performance of a stunning all-Mozart program by the Mark Morris Dance Group, I suddenly understood something about being embodied that forever changed me. My shortcut for the experience is to say that I saw and recognized God (Life) as energy movement in space. I was moved so deeply by what I was watching onstage that I cried through the whole performance not knowing why, as if my soul was finally waking up from a long black sleep. I woke up with a longing for more aliveness, connection, and feeling so intense that it could no longer be denied.

This longing led me into deep inner explorations with teachers of transformative work. My somatic adventures included two summers of body awareness work at the alternative Women’s School in Visby, Denmark; my participation in Bioenergetics and Gestalt workshops led by Laboratorium Psychoedukacji, a group of holistically oriented Polish psychotherapists; and two years of intensive residential practice at a Tibetan Buddhist center which included a daily dose of awareness-based movement explorations.

Among my teachers were Robert Hall and Richard Strozzi-Heckler who pioneered somatic psychology in the 1970s with Lomi Somatics, a blend of Western body-based approaches with Eastern meditative and martial traditions; Christine Stewart Price, master teacher of Gestalt Awareness Practice, who with her husband Richard Price developed a body, breath, and movement-based version of Gestalt Therapy, lacking its original confrontational edge and enhanced by the addition of Buddhist theory and practice; Anna Halprin, one of the creators of the Halprin Life/Art Process, a form of movement and art based therapy; John and Jennifer Welwood, teachers of psychospiritual inner work, combining techniques from East and West; Ray Castellino, originator of Pre- and Perinatal Therapy, an approach to healing traumatic imprints from conception
and early life; and Vinn Marti, the designer and master teacher of *Soul Motion*, a modality using conscious movement as a vehicle of somatic and spiritual inquiry. The practices I learned from these teachers opened up for me access to levels of experience previously unavailable to my consciousness, resulting in a series of somatic awakenings over the last 25 years that have radically changed the way I experience my body, self, other people, the world, and God. The transformation I have experienced has been so profound that I have made a career out of sharing body-based practices with others.

I have chosen the topic of body-mind integration to explore how this integrative process can be facilitated in the context of awareness-based movement work. My experience of gradual healing has made me curious about what exactly made it possible for me to wake up out of the dissociated trance I lived in for so long, and how this can be translated into working with others. I am especially curious how movement can be helpful in accessing lost fragments of experience the way it was for me in the exercise previously described. In broader terms, this study is an attempt to understand how to facilitate a shift from everyday dissociation from the body to somatic presence.

**Theory-in-Practice**

To help frame the study, Kepner’s contemporary articulation of Gestalt Therapy is used here as a theory-in-practice, referring back when possible to the original concepts of the creators of Gestalt Therapy, Frederick Perls and his collaborators.

In *Body Process*, Kepner articulates the essential somatic aspects of Gestalt Therapy. He points out that in Perls’s Gestalt since its inception, the self is seen as an *organism* whose integrity includes the physical, emotional, and mental dimensions of
human experience. The separation of body from self is seen as resulting from an adaptation to distressing life events that are experienced physically but disowned as if happening “outside” oneself and then split off from consciousness by means of dissociation, or repression.

Kepner defines repression as a defense mechanism that aids in maintaining the mind-body split. An example of repression is retroflection, the process in which a movement response to a distressing situation is distorted or inhibited, resulting in disowned movement. In contrast to earlier conceptualizations, by Freud and others, repression of painful or distressing sensations and feelings is not a purely mental process: it involves breath constriction, muscular tensing to numb and deaden bodily sensations, or as in retroflection, tensing against movement impulses such as sobbing, reaching out, striking, or kicking.

Those repressed feelings and movement impulses are held in the body as unconscious breath constriction, postural patterns, numbness, pain, or muscular tension long after the distressing event occurred. Healing requires a re-integration of a person into a whole by the recovery and re-ownership of the disowned aspects of the self, particularly the bodily aspects of the self, including the recovery of disowned movement.

Verbal psychotherapeutic interventions rarely address this layer of experience. Gestalt therapists use expressive techniques to work with re-ownership of expression; as described by Claudio Naranjo, expressive techniques involve, for example, initiation and completion of actions (including movements) blocked or interrupted in the past, as well as exaggeration of any expression not only in words, but also through breath, movement,
and sound. Working with retroflection in this way can bring up feelings of anxiety, shame, or guilt, and mental constructs that can block re-associating the disowned experience.

**Research Problem and Hypothesis**

The Research Problem poses the question, When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The hypothesis was, When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allow for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

**Methodology and Research Design**

The design for this research study was based on the methodology of Imaginal Inquiry. This approach, developed by Omer, is situated within the participatory research paradigm and consists of four phases: Evoking Experience, Expressing Experience, Interpreting Experience, and Integrating Experience.

The main part of data collection was a daylong group meeting seven hours in duration. The second meeting, a two hour evening session two weeks later, served the purpose of presenting the preliminary learnings and was part of the integration phase. Two co-researchers collaborated with me.

For Evoking Experience, participants were asked to complete a “Loss Questionnaire” and guided in a movement exploration focused on relaxing and opening
stretches as well as self massage. Two emotionally evocative recordings of poetry and a movie clip were included and followed by self-directed explorations of “the dance of grief” and “the dance of fear,” accompanied by evocative recorded music.

In the Expressing Experience phase, participants were asked to draw oil pastel images in response to what they experienced in their movement explorations and answer in writing journal questions related to their movement and art exploration. Another expressive movement segment, this one witnessed in a dyad, was based on dialoging with one’s artwork as well as moving in response to having witnessed one’s partner’s dance. An additional opportunity for expression was the writing of a poem at the end.

A combination of approaches was used in Interpreting Experience. They included identifying key moments and eliciting meanings from both the co-researchers and the participants and exploring the findings by looking through the lens of the Sumerian myth of Queen Inanna’s descent to the underworld.

For Integrating Experience, attention to transitions was included at various points in the process; frequent pauses were incorporated in the design; and all breaks were silent to aid the digestion and integration of the experience. Verbal sharing and the reading of the poems at the closing circle of the daylong session, as well as the discussion and sharing at the second group meeting, also served an integrative purpose. In addition, a written Summary of Learnings will be sent to all participants after the approval of the dissertation.
Learnings

The cumulative learning of the study, Surrender of the Known Opens a Door to Hidden Treasure, is that a group exploration of somatic process through expressive movement and art can be experienced as a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal expression becomes part of a collective ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration that can occur in the process depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear.

The main claim of Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside, is that the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld, declares that in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. Learning Three: The Body Is a Doorway to Mystery, states that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience.

The main claim of Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting, is that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment. Learning Five: One Thing
We Fear Is Fear Itself, shows that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment.

**Significance and Implications of the Study**

The results of this study are relevant for anybody interested in being fully alive, but especially to those whose work is devoted to addressing human suffering. Dissociation from the body is a prevalent feature of modern Western life and much of the emotional dis-ease plaguing contemporary children and adults is related to this culture’s “betrayal of the body.” This study is helpful in understanding how working with the body through expressive movement and art can begin to bridge the gap.

This study’s learnings indicate a great hunger in the soul for context in which feelings, and especially culturally taboo feelings, can be explored, embodied, and expressed. Doing so in a group setting can intensify and deepen individual experience in significant ways. In addition, in a group context, an individual’s story can be experienced as one expression of the great human drama which may give one a felt sense of authentic participation and belonging.

The study was designed to test the limits of an egoic identity exclusively invested in left brain modes of relating to life. Participants’ accounts point to places of difficulty and struggle where the temporary sacrifice of the rational mind was a condition for deeper engagement with experience. Those unable to tolerate the discomfort of suspending familiar reference points had limited access to their inner reality. Those who
were willing or able to surrender to Mystery experienced transformative shifts accompanied by feelings of greater self-acceptance, exhilaration, and empowerment, all indicative of a movement toward integration and well-being.

Exploring the approach presented here may be useful to individuals in their personal growth, as well as professionals in many fields. In particular, psychotherapists, hospice workers, and movement teachers could have a greater impact in their work with groups by exploring body and feeling as this study did. Facilitating more events of this sort could help shift the collective belief that feeling is weak and shameful and should be done in private.

If this study were to inspire other researchers to continue exploring the territory of embodied affect, theories conceptualizing psychological health as a question of integration and wholeness would gather increasing support and recognition. This could assist the culture at large in its shift toward more of a holistic paradigm of healing, and make a contribution toward the reclamation of the values historically seen and devalued as feminine: body, feeling, and the human need for belonging and staying connected to community, both social and ecological.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Overview

Writings related to the topic of body-mind integration emerged in the literature as far back as the 1860s in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, their student Freud and later his students and followers. Yet it seems that the thread was dropped for several decades, with one notable exception being Reichian and Neo-Reichian theory, and resurfaced again only in the 1960s, 100 years after modernity’s first discoveries of the connection between the physical and emotional aspects of human experience. This chapter presents the most important voices in the discussion that led from Freud’s writings on hysteria to modern formulations of trauma theory and contemporary somatic psychology.

The first cluster, entitled The Mind-Body Relationship, deals with literature concerning the mind-body problem—the perennial question of whether and how body and mind are connected and how they interact. The most significant perspectives ranging from philosophy and phenomenology to modern neuroscience and developmental psychology are presented there.

At the dawn of modernity, Descartes’ distinction between res cogita (mind) and res extensa (body) posed generations of thinkers with the perplexing question of how the two may relate.¹ In Descartes’ view, and the mechanistic discourse he initiated and powerfully influenced, the body is seen as machine, unconscious and independent of the
mind, functioning in parallel reality. This thought has been the foundation for the dualistic worldview of modernity.

In response to Descartes’ dualistic philosophy, two schools of thought developed, representing the materialistic and the idealistic worldviews. Each was an attempt at determining which phenomenon, body (matter) or mind (consciousness) could account for an integrated understanding of the whole of reality. Only a few theorists attempted to approach the mind-body problem from a perspective of psychosomatic unity. Notably, one of them was Freud. Others discussed in this section include Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology school he inspired, as well as contemporary neuroscientists and attachment theorists such as Damasio and Schore. In psychology, the pioneers of the integrated view include Wilhelm Reich and Carl Jung whose views will be discussed later.

The interest of this study in exploring the role body-mind integration plays in reclaiming lost fragments of self requires a discussion of how one can “lose” fragments of one’s experience. The assumption here is that they are not lost, but rather temporarily excluded from conscious recall through dissociation. As mentioned earlier, in the broadest sense, dissociation is a phenomenon of excluding some contents of experience (memories, feelings, thoughts) from consciousness. This is the topic of the second cluster, entitled Trauma and Dissociation.

The cluster entitled Affect Theories reviews literature concerning the origin and nature of emotions, from views expressed by James, Freud, and Silvain Tomkins to writers representing modern neuroscience. A discussion of the nature of fear, as well as
the role of grieving in healing and psychological integration, from psychoanalytic approaches to the more recent literature on grief, is also included here.

The fourth cluster, Integrated Approaches to Psychology and Psychotherapy, presents an overview of theories which reclaim the body as an essential aspect of the human person and advocate the inclusion of somatic work as a necessary ingredient of healing. This includes literature that has gathered under the umbrella of what is now referred to as Somatic Psychology, as well as theories of Pre- and Perinatal Therapy and Sensorimotor Trauma Resolution approaches.

The literature in the fifth cluster concerns Dance and Movement as Healing Modalities. Dance is one of the oldest rituals of humanity, and as ritual it was used for the healing of the individual and the community since ancient times. This section briefly discusses the history of dance and recent developments in dance/movement therapy.

Finally, the cluster Imaginal Approaches presents literature on the relationship between body and mind, dissociation, trauma resolution, and body-mind integration from the field of Imaginal Psychology. This cluster also addresses the healing potential of therapeutic approaches in which emotions are contacted through movement and imagination, and expressed through the body.

The Mind-Body Relationship

The mind-body problem has been widely discussed in scientific literature for centuries. Writings on this topic come from a broad array of interdisciplinary studies, spanning such diverse fields as philosophy, phenomenology, biology, neurology, and developmental neuroscience. Paradoxically, until recently, the body was left out of
psychological considerations. Descartes’ statement *Cogito ergo sum* suggested that a human being as the subject of cognition is a psyche, a mind, and that psychological factors are enough to account for human experience. Only recently, brain studies have offered evidence for the interconnectedness between body and psyche by showing how the development of the right hemisphere with its connection to the body is crucial for somatic awareness and emotional health.

**From Descartes to Freud**

Descartes’ dualistic view of body and mind functioning as parallel realities presented a paradox which many thinkers attempted to resolve by choosing a *monistic view*, indicating either the body (brain) or the mind as primary reality—thus espousing either a materialistic or idealistic view, respectively.

The extreme of the materialistic view is represented by the school of philosophy and psychology which claims that there is no such “thing” as mind, that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the brain and can be reduced to and explained in terms of brain physiology.\(^2\) Thinkers asserting this view include such influential authors as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Karl Marx. Materialistic thinking dominates modern American analytic philosophy represented, among many others, by writings of Daniel Dennett or John Searle.

At the other extreme, the less popular idealistic view holds that there is no such thing as a thing—the world is merely a projection of consciousness and there is no way of proving its objective existence.\(^3\) The most prominent proponent of this school was
George Berkeley, though its history went back to Plato and continued in modernity with Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Arthur Schopenhauer.

With the breathtaking advances of the industrial revolution, the mechanistic view of the body won predominance in Western thought and was unquestionably upheld in its various editions until Freud’s discovery of the interconnection of psychic and bodily phenomena. In his discussion of hysteria, Freud demonstrated how emotional issues are somaticized (i.e., appear as bodily symptoms with no identifiable physical origin), and conversely, how working with physical symptoms brings up unconscious psychic material.

Freud’s discovery was apparently too incompatible with the dominant world view for it was lost for several decades. Despite his recognition of the significance of the body, Freud’s psychotherapeutic approach remained a “talking cure.” He believed that bringing forgotten events into the realm of consciousness by means of speech was enough, as “language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be 'abreacted' almost as effectively.” His approach left out the dimension of working with the body as a way of accessing and healing old trauma.

**Phenomenology**

Yet the puzzle of the mysterious relationship between body and mind persisted. In philosophy, the interest in the issue of consciousness experiencing the material world was reignited by the new phenomenological approach. Phenomenology asks questions of particular interest to this study, such as questions about the nature of experiencing, the phenomenon of body awareness—the way the body appears in consciousness.
Rather than trying to solve the mind-body problem, phenomenological writers describe experience as an intricate interweaving of the world and our perception of the world. Maurice Merleau-Pointy has attempted to articulate the experience of being alive in a human body, interacting with a complex, mysterious world of sensory information coming both from one’s interior as well as the reality “out there.”

For Merleau-Ponty, perception, or cognition, is impossible without a body. He says, “The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body.” One can only experience things other than as a bodily being engaged, or “entangled” in the world. He introduces the concept of the lived body. In the experience of a lived body, the subject’s own embodied reality is given to her as I-body, distinguished from her objective body that others can perceive.

In his critique of the positivist conception of an objective world posited before a subject, MerleauPonty proposes that the (embodied) subject is inseparable from the world one perceives; as a being which is “from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them,” the body is both object and subject, and neither of the two.

In another phenomenological account, supported by a wealth of interdisciplinary research, Daniel Stern attempts to explore the experience of the present moment which in his working definition is “a subjective, psychological process unit of which one is aware.” The present moment (or moment of presence) is a holistic happening received via the felt experience in the moment, during the moment being lived; it is not a mental or
verbal account of that happening. Awareness is prerequisite for an experience to qualify as a moment of presence. Stern also emphasizes that the experience must be subjectively relevant, so that the mind will intentionally “reach” or “stretch” toward its content—an image, a sensation, a memory—and through this “intentional-feeling-flow” become aware of an unfolding non-verbal narrative, a *lived story*. Feelings are an essential characteristic of a lived story. In Stern’s definition, feelings include sentiments, sensory and motor sensations, along with classical Darwinian affects.10

Stern repeatedly warns against assuming an “overly determining role for verbal/narrative reconstruction after the fact” which often destroys both the moment and the lived meaning of it that cannot and should not be verbalized.11 Stern’s is a good working account of what happens moment by moment in a movement exploration. His discoveries are significant for an understanding of expressive movement as a lived story that may elude conceptualization, yet may be an effective means of both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication.

Stern is one of the numerous writers who, in an attempt to bridge the mind-body gap, cite modern neuroscience research which has produced increasingly convincing evidence that the body and emotions play a significant role in determining cognition and shaping the sense of self. Damasio is another contemporary author whose interest lies primarily in brain and consciousness studies. He has written extensively and expressively on the role of body and emotions in the “making of consciousness,” thus making a powerful argument for the unity of body, emotion, and cognition.12

Damasio argues that consciousness begins as a feeling—a special kind of feeling, a *dispositional representation* which seems to be more related to *image* than verbal
thought. His definition of image includes all sensory and somatic components of one’s interaction with the internal and external environment. These representations (images), formed in the hypothalamus, brain stem, and limbic system, and felt in the body, make possible the passionate depth of a truly human existence. “Were it not for the possibility of sensing body states … there would be no suffering or bliss, no longing or mercy, no tragedy or glory in the human condition.”

Damasio takes this even further, claiming that those images (i.e., feelings) formed in response to what is happening in the moment, even when they are not consciously acknowledged, play a significant role in shaping cognition and influencing decisions and behaviors at all levels of human functioning.

Extending his notion of how simple, nonconscious processes affect the higher functions of the brain, Damasio introduces the concept of *somatic markers*, body states that include both visceral and nonvisceral sensation and that “mark” an image of an event as a memory which will later provide a shortcut to evaluation, decision-making, and behavior in the present. These concepts present a framework for understanding how a somatic approach can help access “forgotten” experiences from the past.

In a similar vein, Daniel Siegel defines *mind* as an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information, including sensory and proprioceptive input. Evidence for how body and mind develop in intricate interdependence comes from the field of pre- and perinatal studies, attachment research, and *developmental affective neuroscience*, the study of how brain development and affective development are related.
Developmental Theories and Neuroscience

Schore argues that the early social environment, mediated by the primary caregiver, influences the evolution of structures in the infant’s brain, specifically the emotion generating limbic system and the right hemisphere of the brain.\textsuperscript{17} The right brain, Schore writes, is dominant for the processing of social, emotional, and sensory information through integration and analysis of input received from the body; it is what controls the reception, expression, and communication of emotion.\textsuperscript{18} The left brain, in contrast, is dominant in analytical and logical thinking and verbally mediated mind states.\textsuperscript{19}

All theorists in the field of affective neuroscience emphasize the two-way interaction between emotional environment and brain development: secure attachment promotes optimal brain development, and a well developed brain enhances ability to be in relationship, emotionally available to self and other. The right brain with its somatic connection plays a crucial role here. It matures early and is dominant in the first three years of life. Its modes of functioning, writes Diane Fosha, are affective, sensorimotor, somatic; emotional experience is encoded in non-linear, non-verbal, body-focused language.\textsuperscript{20} According to Siegel, the right brain is holistic and responsible for an integrated map of the whole body, emphatic non-verbal response, and “raw and spontaneous emotion,” while the left brain is “logical, linguistic, literal and linear.”\textsuperscript{21}

When the left brain is dominant, experience is shaped and “enslaved” by thoughts, judgments, and beliefs based on past learning; Siegel calls this \textit{top-down processing}.\textsuperscript{22} Typical to this mode are \textit{cohesive narratives} of one’s experience which lack the dimension of sensation and affect; an example would be someone who can recount their
trauma history without much feeling, but is unable to process and integrate the traumatic memory, instead coping via fixed, restrictive behavior patterns. In contrast, bottom-up processing relies on contact with sensory and affective experience as it is occurring in the body in present time, for which right brain capacities are essential. It is what makes it possible to develop a coherent narrative of one’s experience, in which all aspects of one’s history are included and integrated; this integration is dependent on the inclusion and processing of sensory and affective data. While a cohesive narrative makes sense on the surface level but keeps one stuck in one’s patterns, a narrative that is cohesive and coherent provides deep personal meaning and a possibility of transformation.

Psychological health is thus utterly dependent on a brain whose both modes operate in harmony; however, as will be discussed later, traumatic births, problematic attachment, inadequate parenting, or other trauma often result in right brain dysregulation and left brain dominance. The good news is that due to neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to change—integration of left and right hemispheres can happen at any point in life. Recent studies reveal that increasing brain-body connection could affect brain structures in adulthood, especially those responsible for the reception and communication of feelings.

As one way of bridging the right/left brain split, Siegel proposes the ancient practice of mindfulness, or mindful awareness: paying attention to the present moment and attending to the richness of the here-and-now experience. This requires a functional shift away from exclusively left brain (conceptual) thinking toward inclusion of non-verbal imagery and somatic sensations (of the right brain), as well as relational
input from the environment. Being mindful, Siegel says, creates scientifically recognized enhancements in our physiology, including changes in brain structure.\textsuperscript{30} Mindfulness makes possible \textit{bilateral consciousness}, an integrated way of knowing in which both brain modes are included without favoring either, and which Siegel claims corresponds with the emergence of psychological well-being.\textsuperscript{31} Mindfulness further leads to what Siegel calls \textit{mindsight}, the capacity to bring into the focus of attention “thoughts, feelings, intentions, attitudes, concepts, images, beliefs, hopes, and dreams” of oneself or others, which “enables one to gain deep insight and empathy.”\textsuperscript{32} Siegel’s findings are as old as ancient Buddhist teachings, but Western scientific studies can now confirm them with verifiable data.

In the literature reviewed above, the question of the relationship between mind and body was considered from perspectives ranging from philosophy to phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and neuroscience. The notable absence of writers representing classical psychology in the discussion of this issue points to the fact that after Freud, the psyche has been regarded as a primarily mental phenomenon. Isolated attempts at bringing the body back into the discourse, such as Reich’s and Jung’s, were the exception until late into the 20th century when somatic psychology came into existence; these will be addressed later, in clusters considering integrated and imaginal approaches to healing.

While discussing the issue central to this study–how working through the body may help heal dissociation–writers representing developmental affective neuroscience who do affirm psychosomatic unity focus on neural integration and psychological well-being; only rarely do they explicitly mention somatic presence.\textsuperscript{33} Those who do, like
Siegel, have researched mindfulness-based practices but have not yet considered movement work or any expressive arts explorations in this context.

**Trauma and Dissociation**

This section presents the literature on dissociation and theories exploring the relationship between trauma and dissociation. The term dissociation has been notoriously difficult to define, and a brief history of its definition is presented below. Further discussion of the literature on trauma highlights theories concerning how dissociation happens and its possible relationship to overwhelming traumatic experiences.

**Dissociation**

The concept of dissociation goes back to the writings of Pierre Janet from the late 1800s and early 1900s. In his work with psychiatric patients Janet found evidence that the conscious mind could be disconnected from parts of itself in a way different from simple forgetting.\(^3\)\(^4\) In his view, a part of the mind separates in the presence or aftermath of a painful experience and carries the memory of the event with it. Janet saw dissociation (*désagrégation*) as a passive defense of individuals with a deficiency in their personality structure that prevented them from integrating the traumatic experience, instead requiring a split in consciousness.

Janet's clinical research provided the first convincing evidence that some individuals exposed to trauma developed two or more separate, dissociated streams of consciousness, each with a spectrum of mental contents such as memories, sensations,
volitions and affects. This was contrary to the notion that human consciousness is always a single, unbroken, and unitary entity.

The same discovery was made by Breuer and Freud. In the introductory chapter of their “Studies on Hysteria,” they noted that “The splitting of consciousness which is so present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria...is the basic phenomenon of this neurosis.” Whereas Janet saw dissociation as a passive defense, Breuer and Freud saw it as an active (albeit unconscious) attempt at removing conflict or pain from consciousness and they labeled this defense repression and the resulting condition hysteria.

The concept of dissociation resurfaced in contemporary psychology accompanied by much debate as to the nature of this phenomenon and its relation to such concepts as regression, denial, emotional detachment, flattened affect, even suggestibility. Steven Lynn and Judith Rhue have found that there is little or no agreement among contemporary theorists on how dissociation operates as a defense or whether it can be clearly distinguished from other defenses. Some authors see dissociation as a descriptive rather than an explanatory concept, admitting that no one seems to have a convincing theory about what it really is. The importance of historical, interpersonal, psychosocial, or cultural influences in causing dissociation is not clear either.

Etzel Cardeña in a lucid discussion of the term proposes, given the notorious difficulty in the literature, to describe the domain of dissociation rather than trying to arrive at a singular definition. In the broadest sense, he suggests, dissociation points to “two or more mental processes or contents that are not associated or integrated.”
Disturbances of memory are often reported in relation to dissociation. Jane Tillman, Michael Nash, and Paul Lerner suggest that what is involved is not a loss of memory but a distortion in the *mode of experiencing* in which perception of “realness” of an event is affected so that a memory of an actual event may be perceived as imagined (and vice versa).\(^{42}\) Moving further along the continuum of *dissociative phenomena*, one finds *depersonalization* and *derealization*, extreme states on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES).\(^{43}\) The depersonalized individual may feel that she is physically numb, that bodily sensations happen at a distance from the self, or that the self actually resides outside the physical body. In instances of derealization, the individual may not doubt reality of the self but the world around may seem devoid of substance and is experienced as unreal and dreamlike.

Ernest Hilgard is the proponent of *neodissociation theory*. In the first line of his book on the subject he states: “The unity of consciousness is illusory. Man does more than one thing at a time—all the time—and the conscious representation of these actions is never complete.”\(^ {44}\) Hilgard introduces the concept of the *executive ego*, the central control structure in the mind. The function of executive ego is to decide what gets to be attended to in awareness. This function is extrapolated from the discovery of the phenomenon of the *hidden observer* in hypnosis. Here the ego appears as editor or censor of what contents of consciousness are appropriate for an individual to be in touch with at any given time.

This could be a valuable concept for the discussion of presence because it points to the phenomenon of choice in favor or against certain contents of consciousness. The hidden observer phenomenon points to the fact that more information is being registered,
processed, and remembered that one can be consciously aware of, and encourages the intuition that this information may be accessed by a shift in attention.

Many of the above theorists seem to focus on the realm of memory and mental processing as the main regions of functioning affected by dissociation, often leaving out the affective and somatic factors. However, the BASK model of dissociation, proposed by Bennet Braun, identifies four aspects of dissociative experience—Behavior, Affect, Sensation, and Knowledge—and claims that dissociation can occur on any one or all of these levels. For successful recovery of dissociated content all the four aspects must be attended to and integrated into the flow of consciousness.

The discussion of dissociation would not be complete without addressing the parallel concept of multiplicity, recognized by some theorists as a normal phenomenon of human psyche. One of the earliest proponents of this view in the 1880s and 1890s was Frederic Myers who wrote that normal consciousness is only a small, and not even very privileged, part of the whole human psyche. This was a view supported also by William James. However, due to the influence of Charcot, Janet, and Freud the view that dissociation is pathological gained and maintained preeminence in psychology.

An interesting perspective on normal versus pathological multiplicity comes from Ross. He believes that multiplicity is a crucial organizational principle of the normal human psyche, and shows how in modern Western culture normal multiplicity is suppressed by the dissociated executive self (dissociated ego, dissociated self). A cultural dissociation barrier, a system of beliefs and culturally supported behaviors, keeps other part selves suppressed; those part selves—subjective experiences of self different from the dissociated ego’s—are kept out of contact and communication with the
executive self, and relegated to second class status in the mind. Ross names three categories of suppressed experience: *paranormal experiences* (experiences that appear to defy the laws of physical or causal relationships, such as telepathy), *intuitive consciousness* (immediate, direct knowing not obtained from reasoning or sensory information), and the experience of the body.

Ross states that the dissociated self perceives the physical body as its property, as “real estate which it owns” and it dismisses the complex and profound intelligence that is required for the body’s performance of everyday tasks of living. The dissociated ego excludes the body as subject of consciousness. Its tendency is to define its rigid and linear modes of logic as the only consciousness. Other modes of knowing are devalued as “irrational, primitive, female, childish, or psychotic.” Worse yet, the dissociated self sees the deeper intuitive and physical modes of perception and cognition as unpredictable, irrational, and untrustworthy, therefore demonic and dangerous.

Ross, as a researcher of multiple personality phenomena, points out that “the problem is not the multiplicity, it is the degree of pathological dissociation.” When multiplicity is suppressed, it is more likely to become distorted and manifest in pathological ways. He suggests that pathological multiplicity is more frequent in cultures hostile to multiplicity, like the dominant culture of the West.

Another perspective on how multiplicity is suppressed in the Western world comes from Charles Tart, the researcher of altered states of consciousness. Tart, alluding to George I. Gurdjieff’s notion that most people are “automatons controlled by mechanical habits of thought, perception and behavior,” claims that human beings are in a perpetual state of trance induced by the society in which they live; Tart calls this state
the consensus trance. In this deep trance state mistakenly called “normal consciousness,” people accept as real the feelings, images, and impressions their culture has agreed to call real, and deny the reality of what the culture ignores, severely limiting the range of what a person can experience. Tart’s interest is primarily in expanded states of consciousness and paranormal phenomena, but to extrapolate his notion, the normal everyday dissociation from the body so common in Western culture can also be seen as a limiting trance state.

**The Role of Trauma in Dissociation**

The following discussion addresses some views on the origins of dissociation. The understanding of the role of traumatic experience in causing dissociation goes back to the 1880s. Early in his work, Freud firmly adhered to the notion that traumatic experiences, especially when they occurred early in life, were at the origin of psychological conflict and symptom-formation.

Due to severe criticism Freud later abandoned this point of view in regard to childhood sexual abuse, and only after a lengthy hiatus has there been a resurgence of the understanding that the experience of prolonged and/or severe trauma, particularly trauma that occurs early in the life cycle, can lead to complex psychological problems that include dissociation, disturbances of affect regulation, and impairment in the capacity to appropriately interpret somatic information.

The view that dissociation is caused by trauma has been adapted by most clinicians and has been both ardently defended and ardently criticized. Frankel addresses the danger of oversimplifying the clinical picture by assuming a “linear” connection to
trauma and the impoverishment of theory that results from the use of dissociation to explain everything.\textsuperscript{55}

Tillman, Nash, and Lerner also reject the view that trauma is the cause for dissociation.\textsuperscript{56} They claim that the relationship between trauma and dissociation does not appear to be linear, that is, trauma does not always result in dissociation and, on the other hand, dissociation can be caused by other environmental pathogenic factors, especially the “contextual features of the victim’s family and social environment that may also cause impairment.”\textsuperscript{57} This is an interesting perspective when one considers the impact of attachment trauma occurring within contemporary white Western culture which promotes self-regulation in isolation and emphasizes rationalization and efficiency in processing experience.\textsuperscript{58} Very rarely are children supported in processing difficult experiences in a way that would promote healing and integration. In cases of parental abuse the main caregivers are also the perpetrators; the child is frightfully alone with the impact of overwhelming stress which has to be excluded from awareness to protect the nervous system from utter collapse.\textsuperscript{59} In that context it is hard to imagine trauma not leading to a split in consciousness. It must be stressed that the claim that trauma leads to dissociation is based on cases of unresolved trauma.\textsuperscript{60}

Janet’s discovery regarding the direct link between unprocessed trauma and dissociation has been revisited in recent decades with the advent of new trauma research presented by van der Kolk and a host of other psychiatrists and physicians who have attempted to paint a fuller clinical picture of trauma, especially regarding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).\textsuperscript{61}
Judith Herman, one of van der Kolk’s collaborators, makes a forceful argument supporting the connection between childhood trauma and dissociation. She challenges such (mis)diagnoses as *borderline personality disorder*, *somatization disorder*, or *multiple personality disorder* (now known as *dissociative identity disorder*) and proposes to include them all in the category of *complex post-traumatic stress disorder*. This new diagnosis would acknowledge the association between any of the three disorders mentioned above and the person’s history of trauma; among the symptoms these three disorders have in common Herman names affect dysregulation and dissociation, pointing to their origin in past traumatic experience.

Neurobiology research shows the link between trauma and dissociation and confirms that trauma induced dissociation is a body-mind phenomenon: at the neurobiological level, it is mediated by excessive release of stress hormones and by stress-related alterations in brain regions that serve integrative functions. Bruce Perry et al. argue that repeated activation of specific trauma-related responses in childhood can shape the brain in ways that promote functioning dependent on dissociative patterns later in life. Ellert Nijenhuis suggests that it is dissociation with its avoidance of the traumatic memories, detachment, numbing, and partial or complete amnesia that allows a person’s *apparently normal* self to continue with the daily tasks of living while their traumatized *emotional* self “recurrently suffers vivid sensorimotor experiences charged with painful affects.”

Finally, there is increasing evidence that dissociation may result in large part not only from problematic attachment patterns but also from disturbances in prenatal development and birth. Already Freud was “inclined to regard anxiety states as a
reproduction of the trauma of birth,” an experience that “involves just such a concatenation of painful feelings, of discharges of excitation, and of bodily sensations, as to have become a prototype for all occasions on which life is endangered, ever after to be reproduced again in us as the dread or ‘anxiety’ condition.” 66 One of Freud’s students, Otto Rank, developed this idea further, regarding the trauma of birth as the *primal trauma*, and the repression of birth trauma as “the Archimedean point from which the whole process of repression starts.” 67 Rank goes on to say: “One can only advance the proposition that the primal repression of the birth trauma may be considered as the cause of . . . the partial capacity for remembering,” thus naming birth trauma as the origin of dissociation. 68

Inspired by Rank’s insights, others writers like Francis Mott and Frank Lake went further back, exploring the influence of not only birth but also the prenatal period, including conception, implantation and gestation, on a person’s emotional development later in life. 69 More recently, Stanislav Grof has written of the role of *prenatal dynamics* in the etiology of many emotional disorders, from depression and sexual dysfunction to psychosis and sadistic aggression. 70

These views are not new, but they are now being supported by science. A growing body of interdisciplinary research that integrates findings from neuroscience, cellular biology, and developmental psychology indicates that pre- and perinatal trauma imprints play a crucial role in shaping a person’s sense of self, other, and the world. In their creative syntheses of pre-and perinatal psychology and their own research, William Emerson and Raymond Castellino write about how the earliest imprints shape a person’s ability to live an emotionally and relationally healthy life. 71 Attachment disturbance,
especially its most pronounced expression, *disorganized attachment*, is pointed to in most research in this field as the condition both originating from early trauma and responsible for coping difficulties later in life, often characterized by reliance on dissociative patterns.\(^7^2\) According to Fosha, disorganized attachment has confusion and paralysis as its two experiential hallmarks, and dissociation as a dominant defense mechanism.\(^7^3\)

The phenomenon of paralysis, or the *freeze (immobility) response*, in Robert Scaer’s words, the “least understood or appreciated” of the flight/fight/freeze sequence, deserves special attention in the context of this study.\(^7^4\) The freeze response in animals mimics death in order to avoid a predator attack; among its characteristics are slow heartbeat, low blood pressure, slack muscles, immobility, and numbness.

The freeze response, Scaer states, is analogous to dissociation in humans. When it remains unresolved, it will result in repeated dissociation in instances of stress which trigger the implicit memory of the original event. Scaer asserts that sensorimotor release is necessary to resolve the freeze response; this release often has the semblance of the defensive or protective movement that was interrupted in trauma.\(^7^5\) When a sensory impulse does not have a motor resolution, an energetic charge is held in the nervous system—according to some researchers also in the fluid and endocrine systems—resulting in muscular tension, breath constriction, and feelings of depression, withdrawal, or anxiety.\(^7^6\)

Research in neurobiology has confirmed the link between trauma, dissociation and immobility, showing the similarity between the physiology of dissociative experience and that of the freeze response in traumatized individuals.\(^7^7\) Some theorists consider any enduring difficulty with past trauma an effect of unresolved freeze response.\(^7^8\) Emerson
uses the concept of shock, or shock memory, to refer to unresolved freeze response, sometimes also including in this arrested fight/flight impulses from the original traumatic events. 79 When chronically unresolved, the implicit memory of shock interrupts one’s ability to stay present, relational, and oriented in present time.

This is true, as discussed earlier, not only in instances of shock trauma (overwhelming life/death situations) but also those of attachment trauma, such as, for example, maternal neglect with little reparative effort. Schore notes that “the freeze response is known in infants as young as one to two months of age . . . who lie motionless staring into space with a glazed look, indicative of dissociation as an attempt to direct attention away from internal emotional states in order to self-modulate painful affect.” 80

The capacity to regulate one’s affective state is essential to one’s psychological well-being. The loss of this ability is seen by Schore, van der Kolk, and other authors as the most far reaching effect of trauma, with the right brain centrally involved not only in regulating bodily and affective states but also in the control of vital functions supporting survival and enabling the organism to cope actively and passively with stress. 81 These findings have far reaching implications for the field of body-mind integration. Clinical relevance of the studies of the right hemisphere lies in the connection between disturbances in right brain development and the etiology of severe self pathologies, in other words, the impact of early trauma on right brain coping functions and the origin of pathological dissociation. 82

When affect regulation is severely disturbed, dissociation is the next best action an organism can take to cope with emotionally overwhelming situations; this manifests in
large part as dissociation from the body. Given the right brain’s role in the forming of
dissociative defenses against overwhelming affect on the one hand and its central
function in the processing of information from the body (including affect) on the other,
researchers in this field, most notably Schore, Siegel, and Fosha, focus on affect
regulation within a therapeutic relationship as crucial to healing trauma.⁸³

Even though all trauma research includes the recognition of the biological,
physiological elements of trauma phenomena, until recently almost none of the literature
on the subject has focused on methods of treatment that involve working directly with the
body. Research in affective neuroscience constitutes one of the exceptions. That
discussion, however, centers around addressing specific issues in the context of a dyadic,
psychodynamically-based therapeutic relationship. Very little is written from the
perspective of working with the everyday dissociation from the body, or about applying
expressive arts or movement interventions in the process.

Emotionally centered therapy will be discussed at more length in the section
devoted to integrated approaches to psychotherapy. What follows first is a review of
some theories concerning emotion.

**Affect Theories**

The significance of *emotion* in the human psyche has been recognized since
ancient times, but for many centuries, *cognition* (thinking) and emotion (feeling) have
been regarded as separate areas in philosophy—and later in psychology—and the studies of
cognition have received significantly more attention and focus. Especially after
Descartes, emotions were often discussed in the context of being an impediment to
cognition. This changed toward the end of the 20th century with the advent of neuroscience and the discovery of the role emotions play in shaping cognition, but the issue remains subject to new research and interpretation. The literature in this cluster presents various views concerning this topic, from those expressed by James, Freud, and Tomkins to writers representing modern neuroscience. Attention is also given to some theories specifically concerning fear and grief as these affects are central to the design of this study.

It must be noted that no authoritative definition of the word affect is available, and it is often used interchangeably with the terms feeling and emotion. The words affect and emotion replaced the term passion used in early French and English; similarly to the Latin affectus, passion denoted a mental event by which a person is passively affected or overcome (as opposed to actions which were seen as flowing from one’s own initiative).

Descartes understood passions as being generated in the body: as movements of organs and senses that are perceived by the mind. He was the first to call them emotions (the French l’emotion meant at that time social unrest or uproar) to indicate their unruly, vehement, restless nature which causes them to disturb the soul. The Cartesian view persists until today in that emotions are still often defined as something that “intrudes” upon the ongoing flow of thoughts and behavior or “impedes” decision making.

Donald Nathanson offers some useful working distinctions. He equates affect with biology and physiological responses such as changes in circulation, temperature, and facial expression. He relates feeling to psychology, pointing out that feeling includes
awareness (subjective experience) of affect; and links emotion to biography—as emotion also incorporates memory and story (meaning). The James-Lange theory of emotion was one of the early modern attempts to explain the origin and nature of emotions, developed independently by James and Carl Lange. The theory states that in the face of external experiences, the human nervous system responds with physiological events such as muscular tension, a rise in heart rate, perspiration, and dryness of the mouth. Emotions come about as a result of these physiological changes, rather than being their cause. James elucidates his concept in the following way:

My theory ... is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion. . . . The hypothesis here to be defended says that . . . we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble... Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colorless, destitute of emotional warmth.

While James included the influence of all bodily changes on the creation of an emotion, including among them changes in organs, muscles, and skin, modern research mainly focuses on the effects of facial muscular activity. One of the first to do so, Tomkins—whose theory is based on Charles Darwin’s observations of the commonality of facial expressions of affect in humans as well as some animals—wrote: “The face expresses affect, both to others and the self, via feedback, which is more rapid and more complex than any stimulation of which the slower moving visceral organs are capable.”

Tomkins defines affects as biologically based responses triggered by particular types of internal or external stimuli. He names the following types of affect: interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear, anger, shame, contempt, and disgust. Some of these affects are
on a continuum of increasing degree of intensity; for example fear can escalate to terror, anger to rage, enjoyment to ecstasy.

Tomkins differentiates between innate affect, backed-up affect, and authentic, full throated affect, claiming that expression of innate (biologically and psychologically authentic) affect is uncommon in many cultures. He says: “Because the free expression of innate affect is extremely contagious, all societies exercise substantial control over the free expression of affect, particularly of the sound of the cry of the affect.” 93 Thus one rarely witnesses others expressing affect in its pure innate form; instead, backed-up (controlled, unexpressed) affect is much more commonly present.

Tomkins’s views on fear are especially interesting for this study. He claims that the cost of fear is so great that the body was not designed for a chronic activation of this affect. 94 He equates fear/terror with anxiety and phobia as expressions of the same affect, though they may be felt differently and elicit different responses. Fear is more intense and more sharply rising in intensity. 95 It is expressed by eyes frozen open; pale, cold, sweaty skin; facial trembling; and erect hair. Tomkins regards fear as one of the “negative” emotions; he claims that fear is hard to recognize and often fails to be correctly identified by the person experiencing it.

Fear and Affective Development

Trauma research on the one hand, and attachment research on the other, point to fear as the central emotion in the etiology of both trauma and insecure or disorganized attachment. Fosha calls fear (along with shame) a pathogenic affect when it stems from unresolved attachment trauma. 96 If unprocessed, pathogenic affects result in defenses
against feeling (denying, avoiding, numbing, or disavowing affectively laden experiences) and against relatedness and intimacy. In contrast, core affective experiences, or core affects are means of authentic emotional expression. As one of the core affects, when triggered by a real threat, fear can provide important information about the dangerous aspects of a situation.

In addition to fear and other distinct categorical emotions such as grief, anger, and joy, core affective phenomena include felt sense body states, relational states of affective resonance (feeling “in sync,” known, attuned to), and healing affects such as love, gratitude, and tenderness.

The full, visceral experience of fear, Fosha claims, even when it manifests in its pathogenic function, is necessary for healing; it “unlocks the door to the past: encapsulated in it is a history of trauma, i.e., abuse, helplessness, and terror.” As will be discussed later, experience and transformation of affect plays a crucial role in Fosha’s approach to treatment.

In relation to individuals’ ability to recognize and properly identify their emotions, Daniel Brown proposes a developmental approach to affect theory. He points out the often neglected fact that affect, like any other human faculty, matures over time in the lifespan of an individual. Brown identifies several tasks of affective development, required in corresponding developmental stages of a human life: affect expression and experience in infancy; affect tolerance, verbalization, and defense in childhood; affect orientation in latency; transformation of affect in adolescence; and consciousness of affect processes in adulthood.
Brown understands the psychopathology of everyday life, which “passes for relative health,” as resulting from the failure to master any of the developmental tasks of affective development. He points to emotional reactivity, egocentricity, and tendency to confuse affect and action (when emotions are experienced less as internal states and more as impulsive behaviors) as symptoms of incomplete affective development. Other symptoms include the lack of awareness of feelings one is actually experiencing, recognition of certain emotions and not others, or the inability to hold multiple feelings in one situation.

The latter aspect of emotional deficiency is addressed in studies of alexithymia (from Greek, without words for emotions), defined by Peter Sifneos as difficulty identifying feelings and distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensations of emotional arousal; difficulty describing feelings to other people; constricted imaginal processes, as evidenced by a paucity of fantasies; and a stimulus-bound, externally oriented cognitive style.

Joyce McDougal calls alexithymia an “uncommonly effective defense against inner vitality” and regards the affective split in which the connection between psychic and affective components is severed as a “triumph of the mind over the instinctual and affective body.” Manifestations of the split are strongly somaticized (bodily felt) affect on the one hand, and emotional ideas devoid of felt experience on the other. A person misses the felt sense, or the meaning (content) of the affect; what is left is feeling without words or words without feeling. Henry Krystal talks about affective regression when feelings are only felt as extreme bodily discomfort with no words; this is experienced by some people as a feeling of “possession,” as if the affect was an alien
who takes over. After Sifneos, McDougall claims that to lose touch with feelings is dehumanizing, as feelings are the most human feature of psychic life.

Brown, who argues that many adults’ affective development is incomplete, offers another interesting recommendation. In addition to psychotherapy as one method of supporting affective maturity, Brown proposes another: meditation. He defines meditation as a “type of attentional and awareness skill training and a systematic application of focused attention to, sustained concentration on, or moment-by-moment awareness of certain events in the stream of consciousness.” Such attentional skill development results, according to Brown, in significant alterations in cognition and perception.

Psychotherapy, he states, can help with accurate recognition of affective experiences, a sense of conscious and unconscious motivation, and distinguishing between emotional state, its meaning, and the response that arises from it. Meditation adds the observation of the behind-the-scenes workings of the human mind, and thus can offer the possibility of “relatively enduring psychological well-being for the remainder of the life span.” This is similar to Siegel’s claims about mindful awareness as a path to emotional healing.

Krystal points out a fact Brown fails to mention: that affects develop in relationship, especially the capacity to recognize and verbalize affect as feeling, not just as a body phenomenon. The extent to which a person comes to experience affects as mind (i.e., as feelings) rather than solely as body depends on attuned responsiveness from early caregivers. This has been consistently confirmed by all subsequent research, including a landmark study by Béatrice Beebe and Frank M. Lachmann showing how
affect regulation occurs in relationship between mother and infant. In this context, Stern proposes the concept of *interaffectivity*, the mutual regulation of affective experience that occurs in early infancy. He claims that if particular affects cannot be integrated because of lack of attunement and support from the environment, they then become repressed (dissociated). In the same vein, when moment to moment attunement is present, it allows for states of affective resonance; Fosha, quoting attachment research, argues that repeated experiences of affective resonance are crucial to optimal development and contribute to *affective competence*: the ability to experience, regulate, and process affect.

As discussed earlier, current interdisciplinary research in developmental psychology, cognitive science, and especially developmental affective neuroscience shows that affect, behavior and cognition are inextricably linked. Evidence presented by Schore, Damasio, and Candice Pert illustrates how old approaches separating affect from cognition no longer make sense. In Nathanson’s words, it is now recognized that affect “causes behavior all over the body”; and that feeling not only influences thinking, but is a “form of thinking.”

Another long neglected aspect of affect finally receiving consideration in literature is the issue of gender differences regarding the experience and expression of emotions, or rather the cultural stereotypes associated with gender in this context. Siegel offers with caution a brain research based “gross generalization” that female brain development may involve more integration of the hemispheres than does the male brain, which would put women more easily in touch with body and affect than men.
Leslie Brody and Judith Hall note that the stereotype that women are more emotional than men is pervasive; women are also seen as having more intense emotions and being better at reading interpersonal clues regarding feelings. In white Western cultures, happiness, sadness, fear, shame, guilt are believed to occur more in women, and anger, contempt and pride more in men. These stereotypes, while to some degree accurate (congruent with many individuals’ experience) are at the same time “imprecise, overly general, and they ignore the cultural and situational contexts.”

Studies reviewed by Brody and Hall indicate that there is a significant difference between what emotions individuals might feel, and what they are culturally free to express; in other words, while many men may feel intense sorrow, and women intense anger, the expression of these feelings is modified or suppressed due to respective cultural expectations and possible social consequences. Women communicate about emotions verbally more than men, and they are also more accurate and more congruent in their facial expression of emotions. Women are also shown to be more “emotionally competent”: they perceive emotions more accurately and have greater skills in managing emotions. However, studies among African American men indicate gender differences of much smaller magnitude; for example, white men are much more likely to minimize the intensity and the expression of their emotions than black men; the studies explain that as a result of white men’s greater need to maintain their individual social position.

In terms of differing motives, women seem to use emotional warmth and feelings such as fear and shame in service of “affiliation and intimacy” while male pride, aloofness, and contempt serve the masculine goals of independence, competition, and status. Studies concerning the physiology of emotions have been inconclusive as to the
differences between genders. Brody and Hall conclude that developmentally, the “socialization of emotion” seems to be the most important determining factor in producing gender differences in this area, as these differences are “adaptive for the successful fulfillment of gender roles.” \(^{123}\) Brody shows that from infancy on, parents “socialize their daughters and sons differently, and . . . in accordance with the prevailing norms of the culture” in an attempt to “create children who will be appreciated by the wider culture and be accepted by it.” \(^{124}\)

One of the emotions more easily observed in women than men is grief. Again, it must be repeated that often the collective stereotypes regarding the expression of emotion may not match actual individual experience, that is, men may not express grief where it is culturally seen as a feminine emotion while they still experience it.

**Grief and Mourning**

The recognition that the experience of grief and the process of mourning are necessary ingredients of healing dates back to early psychoanalytical theory. Freud wrote about the “normal affect of mourning” which is a natural and necessary response to loss. \(^{125}\) The ability to mourn is an expression of the capacity to tolerate and process the pain of loss and grief; the lack of mourning leads to the pathological state of *melancholia* where rather than feeling the pain, one turns against oneself with self-hatred.

It is important to note here that the experience of grief can include many feelings in addition to sorrow: anger, guilt, confusion, shame, even relief and elation. Alice Miller reminds us that the “true opposite of depression is not gaiety or absence of pain, but vitality: the freedom to experience spontaneous feelings,” suggesting that doing grief
work will perhaps never eliminate the pain of loss, but it will open up more possibilities for a fuller, fuller-hearted participation in life.\textsuperscript{126}

In Melanie Klein’s articulation of object relations theory, grief comes up at the developmental transition from the \textit{paranoid-schizoid position} to the \textit{depressive position}. The paranoid-schizoid position is an early stage of ego development where the psyche is unable to tolerate the anxiety involved in holding an object as a whole that is comprised of both good and bad qualities, and resorts to \textit{splitting} (seeing the important person at any given time as either all good or all bad). One could paraphrase Klein to say that when only one aspect of the object is held in consciousness, the other is temporarily “dissociated.” The attempts by the ego to incorporate whole objects are accompanied by anxiety as this shift also means a loss of the ideal, all-good object (the all loving mother, or the “good breast”). This anxiety “brings about the sorrow, feelings of guilt and the despair which underlie grief.”\textsuperscript{127} The negotiation of these feelings is essential to “overcoming” the paranoid-schizoid position and greater maturity:

\begin{quote}
The very experience of depressive feelings has the effect of further integrating the ego, because it makes for an increased understanding of psychic reality and better perception of the external world, as well as better synthesis between inner and external situations.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

Despite the necessity of feeling grief, Klein points out ways in which the ego will defend against it, such as the initial manic defenses including denial and triumph, only gradually followed by a movement into sorrow and reconnection with the world.\textsuperscript{129}

John Bowlby, who wrote about grief from the perspective of attachment theory (mostly in the context of a loss of a loved person), also notes the complex and sometimes mysterious nature of this emotion.\textsuperscript{130} He shows unusual appreciation for the depth and intensity of the pain involved. Bowlby does not regard anger or denial as defenses against
grief, but as aspects of the multifaceted experience of grief itself. Incidentally, similar recognition is present in recent literature on death and dying. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has proposed the now widely accepted model for understanding the stages of grief as a progression from denial, through anger, bargaining, depression, and finally (perhaps) to acceptance.¹³¹

The necessity of feeling grief is not widely supported in mainstream Western culture. Grief is often seen as a shameful, private emotion exposing human vulnerability and weakness. In contrast, in indigenous cultures grief is a village affair, accepted as a natural and necessary part of life.¹³² Martín Prechtel describes grieving rituals in a Mayan community in which everyone takes part, and “everyone weeps . . . even the sky weeps, all the people weep, the dog has to weep, the house has to weep, the stone has to weep, the rainbow has to weep . . . our ancestors have to weep.”¹³³ He says it takes a village to grieve one person; one cannot and should not do it alone; after all, “the whole idea of grief is to make people care for each other.”¹³⁴

Increasingly, Western writers on grief critique the psychological approaches to grieving that focus on the individual and advocate for including its social and political dimensions as well as ways grieving can be held in communities.¹³⁵

It may be useful in this context to recall Ross’s concept of cultural dissociation. While Ross does not discuss specifically the effects the cultural dissociation barrier has on the experience of grief, in the light of his discussion of the dissociated ego it seems logical to extrapolate his theory to an assumption that grief and mourning, like all feelings, would also be seen as dangerous and kept suppressed.¹³⁶ This seems true for the whole territory of death, dying, and grieving in modern Western culture. Tart’s concept
of consensus trance also has a possible application here. It seems that the Western psyche would rather hypnotize itself into believing that loss and death are unreal than face the pain of grieving. This indicates that strong attempts at denial and defense should be expected in a study where contact with grief is explored.

The struggle human beings seem to experience around grief, and feeling in general, is often discussed in the context of pathology. There are significantly fewer authors who address affective difficulty as a manifestation of the “normal everyday dissociation” this study is concerned with. Gender studies, for example, do not seem to consider the fact that many women, who are culturally expected to feel more and express their feelings more freely, report feeling disconnected from their affective experience and either numb their emotions by work, sex, or addiction, or else express them in distorted, caricatured, or somaticized ways. There is also relatively little literature exploring how to facilitate access to feeling for anyone who is not “emotionally competent” and what role somatic interventions might play in that process.

Even though the role of the body in emotional experience has been discussed in Western psychology since at least Descartes, affects are often still discussed as psychic, rather than somatic phenomena. Only relatively recently, new approaches have been developed that offer a more integrated perspective. Those will be discussed in the next section.

**Integrated Approaches to Psychology and Psychotherapy**

This cluster deals with the body of literature concerning Somatics, a relatively new field in psychology, based on the recognition of the essential role the body plays in processing emotional distress and facilitating emotional healing. Somatic refers to an
integrated view that includes the body as an essential aspect of human experience. The body of relevant literature includes works by Reich and Neo-Reichian authors, Gestalt Theory, and other modern approaches to working with the body in psychotherapy. Finally, it extends to trauma theories that recognize the need for somatic trauma resolution, including Pre- and Perinatal Trauma Therapy.

It must be noted that along with new theoretical perspectives, or sometimes ahead of them, recent decades have witnessed rich clinical developments in the emerging fields of somatic psychotherapy and other integrated approaches. Somatic psychology is of necessity less abstract and more experiential and experimental (in the more casual, and less rigorously scientific meaning of this term) than the traditional, established models. This results sometimes in theoretical weakness or confusion in this relatively young field of exploration.

The notion of an “integrated” self in psychology arose parallel with the advent of systems theories and the paradigm shift in science. This was a shift toward a view of reality as a holistic, interdependent process, or organism, where the whole is seen as more than the sum of its parts, organized at levels of increasing complexity irreducible to its elements; change at any level affects the whole system; and second order change transforms the system to an altogether different state. Without the new world view which gradually unfolded from the advances in quantum physics and systems theories, the integrated view of the human person might have been unthinkable.

Inspired by Kepner’s distinction, I chose the term ‘integrated’ rather than ‘somatic’ approaches to limit the discussion to those theories and practices that have developed from a holistic point of view of a human person as a complex, integrated
whole manifesting and functioning simultaneously in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms. In these approaches, psychology (theory) and psychotherapy (practice) are seen as needing to address all those levels at once in order to facilitate the process of body-mind integration.\textsuperscript{139}

\textbf{Reich and Neo-Reichian Approaches}

The question of the unity of body and mind was first explicitly–and emphatically–addressed by Wilhelm Reich, one of Freud’s students and the first proponent of an integrated view of a person. Reich has been considered the grandfather of body oriented psychotherapy. His concept of \textit{character armoring} as observable muscular tension has become a basis for many contemporary methods of somatic work.\textsuperscript{140} His approach addresses the essential unity of the physical and psychological manifestations of neuroses. In \textit{Character Analysis}, he equates bodily tension and psychological conflict as aspects of the same issue.

Reich was interested in energy flow in the body and discovered how \textit{energy blocks} in various segments of the body (maintained by chronic muscular tension) relate to a person’s emotional blocks and other psychological issues. He believed that chronic repression of energy flow leads to neurosis or even psychosis. Reich developed a method of working with the breath to free the energy flow and unblock a person’s expression through movement and sound.

Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos continued along similar lines of inquiry and developed their approach, called \textit{Bioenergetics}, in which attention is focused on how the body “holds” emotional issues in posture and movement patterns.\textsuperscript{141} Lowen describes
how emotions affect a person’s body, and how physical tension keeps one locked in the
same self-defeating emotional responses to situations in one’s life. The assumption is that
once rigidity is released from the mind and body, the individual is free to respond
spontaneously and appropriately to challenges of everyday life.

Another representative of the Neo-Reichian tradition is Stanley Keleman, whose
writings are of particular relevance to this topic. He has attempted to articulate “how
movement creates the body and the body creates movement.” 142 In his search for an
accurate account of human experiencing Keleman suggests the concept of somatic living
for the reality of living life as (rather than in) a body. One can then experience thinking,
feeling, gesture, satisfaction, sexuality, dependency, individuality, community, love, and
other events as aspects of a living process that is who we humans are.

“Anatomy is destiny,” Keleman writes, echoing Freud. 143 But at the same time,
he points out that the body is more plastic, mobile, and re-organizable than is commonly
assumed. Keleman underscores the fact that a person can participate in the changes in the
shape and motility of the body by consciously experiencing their somatic process, that is
by experiencing thoughts, feelings, and actions as events that are muscular, visceral, and
kinesthetic.

One of Keleman’s core concepts is excitement: the basic pulse of life manifesting
as a stream of images, sensations, thoughts, desires, and feeling responses, the current of
“tissue metabolism which constantly shapes and reshapes itself as our body.” 144

Excitement when contained can be held and experienced in the body as high energetic
charge (this could manifest as deep sadness, rage, pleasure, or any other intense feeling or
sensation) without the need to suppress it or act it out. Containment means that
excitement can be allowed to build up until the organism is ready for action. The inability to tolerate excitement results in either impulsive acting out to get rid of the discomfort or suppression: freezing excitement by applying muscular or breath contraction to keep it “under control.” Awareness of the somatic manifestation of emotional and behavioral patterns in shaping excitement is the first step toward changing those patterns.

Keleman introduces a useful framework for tracking transitions in this process of change. He describes three phases: the end of embeddedness in a particular way of doing things; then a period of being unformed and in flux; and finally, a period of trying out a new behavior. The second phase, which Keleman calls the middle ground, is where old reference points cease to be useful, and a new way of being has not yet emerged. A flood of chaotic sensations, unformed images, and mixed emotions often accompanies this phase. This description is relevant to exploring a shift toward somatic awareness through movement because in movement explorations, the middle ground appears frequently as a place of disorientation.

Perls’s Gestalt Therapy was another holistic approach inspired both by Reich and by the research discoveries in Gestalt Psychology concerning human perception, especially the insight that what is perceived is always a gestalt (a whole) whose meaning and impact is greater than the sum of its parts; what one chooses to focus on comes out of an interplay of figure and ground: certain perceptions are more compelling and they become figure against the background of other sensory input. As an extension of those discoveries, Perls proposed the understanding that any human experience is a complex, integrated phenomenon that includes physical, emotional, and mental factors. Perls replaced the concept of self with the term organism to indicate the integral sum of “body,
soul, and mind” that can best be understood, rather than as an entity, as a process of self-regulation in a movement toward balance in its constant interaction with the environment.  

The environment, also termed the field, gives context to each experience; it is the ground against which the experience (and also a self) becomes a figure. In its negotiation with the environment, the organism modifies its actions according to what is supported and rewarded; in this process, some of the impulses that originate as natural responses to internal or external events are interrupted or distorted. Perls incorporates Reich’s body/energy orientation and his notions of muscular armor and character structure. A child repeatedly told that boys don’t cry will tighten his jaw and eyes to restrict his expression of sadness. A girl punished for aggression will tense her muscles to keep her arms from punching and her legs from kicking. Chronic tension develops when those situations repeat. This tension is a symptom of unfinished business.

Unfinished business is the place where a person is at an impasse and where a willingness to feel pain is essential to moving forward. The impasse presents a choice point where one can move toward either integration (the fertile void of possibility) or more dissociation (the sterile void where no movement can happen). Avoidance of pain compounds the difficulty and intensifies anxiety. Perls says, “Because of the phobic attitude, the avoidance of awareness, much material that is our own, that is part of ourselves, has been dissociated, alienated, disowned, thrown out.” One of the stated goals of Gestalt Therapy is to help the person re-own those disowned parts of her personality. Perls’s discussion of avoidance is helpful in understanding the challenges
experienced by this study’s participants in the process of turning toward dissociated or
disowned feelings.

In Perls’s theory, still implicitly rooted in psychoanalytic thinking, the body holds
memories of unfinished business from the past. But in his approach to therapy, Perls
got beyond the talking cure and placed great importance on completing the interrupted
impulse and expressing the unexpressed in the present. Awareness of the body is seen as
crucial to healing. Thus some of the work takes the form of expression (sometimes
purposely exaggerated) through movement, sound, and breath.

Other proponents of the neo-Reichian tradition include, among many others,
Richard Strozzi-Heckler and Robert Hall, founders of the Lomi School of Somatic
Education. They write from an integrative viewpoint of Lomi Somatics which is a
synthesis of neo-Reichian thought, Gestalt, principles of Aikido (a Japanese martial art),
and Eastern meditative traditions.

Another eclectic approach, Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP) is the work of
Jack Rosenberg and his collaborators; IBP integrates Reichian breathwork with British
object relations theory, systems theory, and Eastern approaches to healing such as tantra
and acupressure. IBP has found its most powerful applications in couples’ work,
resolving of boundary issues, and sexual counseling.

David Boadella developed Biosynthesis, based on Reichian and bioenergetic
principles with an added foundation of embryology and prenatal psychology. Boadella
proposes a model of dynamic morphology of the human body that describes the
relationship between the three embryological layers: ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm,
and the development of the main regions of the body: head, heart, and hara (belly).
“Excessive stress,” he states, “whether before, during or after birth, breaks up the cooperation and integration between the realms of these three cell layers. Therapy can be defined as a way of seeking to restore that integration.”

Boadella relates the sensory organs, the brain, and the skin, developed out of the ectoderm, to the function he calls facing and the region of the head. Bones and muscles develop from the mesoderm, and are related to the function of grounding: taking a stand and moving into action, which is centered in the hara. Internal organs of the trunk, lungs, and the abdominal region relate to the flow of breath and feeling; the function of centring [sic] is to connect to the rhythms of breath and sensations of feeling.

If any of the three regions is over-active or under-active, Boadella claims, then breathing and feeling, thinking and action can become disconnected from one another. With over-active ectoderm (corresponding to language and sensory perception), access to feeling inside is blocked by sensory vigilance of the environment and mental activity (judging, evaluating). Over-active mesoderm (related to bones and muscular action) can create constriction of breath and muscles that block contact with feeling. Over-active endoderm (corresponding to the soft internal organs and the function of feeling) can lead to uncontained expression (acting out) with little awareness.

When no energy blocks are present, breathing, movement, feeling, and thinking are experienced as one integrated expression. When the balance is disrupted, patterns of dysfunction develop. A person can experience a change in breathing without muscular release (an experience of anxiety is one example) or mechanical movement with no change in breathing or affect. This understanding underscores the point that for a person’s expression to be integrated, movement, especially expressive movement, would have to
be accompanied by a change in breathing and feeling. For the purpose of this study, this
distinction may help identify the difference between moving as in going through the
motions and conscious movement that opens up access to affect and memory.

**Sensory Awareness**

Many integrated approaches were developed following the theoretical frameworks
described above; while different in their particular forms, they have certain characteristics
in common. Those include the use of breath, movement, touch, and sometimes
imagery. In that they all work with awareness, these methods rely on a person’s ability
to track breath and physical sensations; often helping someone develop or deepen this
skill is the first task of the facilitator. In this context it is important to mention the early
originator of what later became known as sensory awareness work, Elsa Gindler. Gindler
explored the impact of paying attention to simple everyday acts such as breathing,
standing, eating, or moving, and discovered the importance of simple noticing in
transforming one’s habitual restrictive physical patterns. Gindler saw human
awareness as a physiological, rather than a mental, psychological, or spiritual faculty; she
described how when attention is directed to any place in the body, the body adjusts
immediately toward more efficient and more effortless functioning.

Gindler lived in Germany between the two world wars; all her writings but one
were destroyed by the Nazis. Charlotte Selver, one of Gindler’s students, brought the
approach to the United States and called it *Sensory Awareness*: “a very sensitive inquiry
. . . into this sensing, this possibility of becoming more alerted in our senses, and using
them more fully, and more altogether.” Selver’s method, or rather attitude, as she
preferred to call it, was based on making direct contact with breath and physical
sensations where the content of a particular experience was less important than the open,
“pure-hearted,” non-judgmental quality of attention brought to it. She said:

There is a certain relationship which we have to have with our inner functioning. That of respect and that of wonder. When we are quiet enough and positive enough that we can follow those fine indications inside which lead us to more functioning, we will find out what precious abilities we have which we usually don’t use. . . . You have to come into a state of curiosity and deep interest for that which gradually may emerge out of the sum of many conditionings. It needs no criticism. It needs willingness to allow changes.162

For Selver, the work of paying attention to the sensory experience was far more than physical; rather, it was done in service of waking up to a different experience of oneself and of the world. When followed as a practice, it would lead, she claimed, to an identity shift from one restricted by conditioning and past trauma to an expansive, holistic sense of oneself as an intelligent universe. Selver writes: “Each of your cells could be participating in what you happen to do . . . if you really understand the organism as a living entity that is you. . . . Every cell is sensitive. You could say you are all mind.”163

This way of working with experience influenced many of the pioneers of somatic psychotherapy, including Reich, Perls, Keleman, and others, in many cases becoming the foundation for their work. Some of them are discussed below.

Following principles discovered during her work with Gindler, Marion Rosen developed the Rosen Method, “a way to access feelings and experiences through the body” by using touch or movement.164 The intention of a Rosen Method session is to use touch not only to alleviate physical tension but also to allow feelings and insights to surface in the process.165 As the client talks about her experiences and concerns, rather than offering interpretation or advice, the practitioner calls her attention to breath
restriction and release, muscular tension and softening, etc., knowing that “the body cannot lie. . . . It speaks the emotional truth.” The practitioner’s role is also to educate the client about the interdependence between psychic pain and physical pain, the relationship between bodily tension and emotional challenges the client is experiencing in everyday life, and the value of awareness and expression of feelings.

The above is true also in the work of Stewart Price. Her approach, Gestalt Awareness Practice, is based on Gestalt Therapy and Buddhist thought, with emphasis on body process, and a strong assertion that this way of attending to a human soul is a practice of presence rather than therapy. She regards breath and sensations as primary expressions of the organism and awareness of those as fundamental in any exploration of embodied experience.

Similar to sensory awareness work, Eugene T. Gendlin’s Focusing Method is a process of making contact with “a special kind of internal bodily awareness” which Gendlin calls the felt sense. Felt sense is the “wholistic [sic], implicit bodily sense of a complex situation,” in which the body communicates one’s response to a situation, person, problem, or event through one’s bodily felt experience. When the felt sense, at first usually vague and unclear, is allowed to form and come into focus, it has the quality of the right fit and can be a source of insight and (if it pertains to a problem) make possible the shift necessary for change.

Hakomi Body Psychotherapy is a body-based method that blends Western psychotherapy with the Taoist and Buddhist principles of mindfulness and nonviolence. Ron Kurtz defines mindfulness as a state of consciousness, a “preference for noticing how one is being touched and moved” and “how one organizes one’s experience”; this is
similar to sensory awareness, but here, it is put specifically in service of becoming aware of repressed feelings and deeply held limiting beliefs—as bodily felt events—so that they can be allowed, known, and released. Nonviolence is expressed in acceptance of the client’s whole self by following her process without interfering or agenda and in an emphasis on experience rather than advice or interpretation. Originally developed by Kurtz, Hakomi Body Psychotherapy later became the foundation for Pat Ogden’s *Hakomi Integrated Somatics*, one of the first somatic approaches to trauma resolution.

**The Body and Affect in the Treatment of Trauma**

Despite the implicit recognition of the role of physiology in trauma, in most of the extensive literature regarding the treatment of trauma the body is disappointingly absent. Apart from pharmacotherapy with antianxiety drugs and antidepressants, the most common approaches recommended in the literature about trauma work have been based on techniques employed in cognitive-behavioral therapy such as exposure therapy and desensitization training. Other cognitive-behavioral techniques include learning coping skills, relapse prevention, and social skills training or marital therapy, as well as educating individuals and their support system of the expected effects of traumatic stress.

Group therapy and psychodynamic therapy are also recommended. More recently, *EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)* has gained some recognition as a useful approach which, acknowledging the importance of the body in treating trauma, facilitates the accessing and processing of traumatic material by the use of techniques (eye movements, hand taps, sounds) that create an alternation of attention back and forth across the person's midline.
Van der Kolk has been one of the most vocal proponents of including affect dysregulation and somatization into the clinical picture of post-traumatic stress disorder and of extending treatment for this disorder beyond mere cognitive-behavioral techniques, which, while effective for intrusive memory symptoms, do not address any of the other problems related to PTSD such as affect dysregulation, dissociative problems, somatization and difficulties with trust and intimacy. Van der Kolk proposes that these issues may be best addressed by psychodynamic therapy as part of a “a strategically staged, multi-modal treatment approach, as first described by Janet, and subsequently rediscovered by contemporary clinicians.” 179 Yet even he does not directly suggest applying recently developed integrated body-based approaches of trauma resolution. Similarly, Herman omits any discussion of somatic interventions in her work with trauma survivors. In fact, the only comments about working somatically are her (legitimate) warnings against cathartic release.180

Again, exceptions are offered by approaches based on affective neuroscience, like Fosha’s who–citing several research studies–asserts that therapeutic interventions that are effective in functionally reversing the effects of trauma must involve “emotion, the body, somatosensory activation and bilateral information-processing.” 181 In her Accelerated Experiential-Dynamic Psychotherapy Fosha works with Focusing and Hakomi methods, but her main emphasis is on regulation of affect in an attachment based therapeutic relationship. She says:

Empathy, attunement, and the establishment of security and safety are essential, but not sufficient. The bond that gets created as a result of dyadic processes, the adult therapeutic equivalent of secure attachment, serves as a matrix, a holding environment in which deep emotional processes, the kind mediated by limbic system and right brain, can be experientially accessed, processed and worked
through, so that they can eventually be integrated within the individual's autobiographical narrative.\textsuperscript{182}

Siegel points to the integrative function of emotion, claiming that an emotional experience shifts one’s state of integration; emotional development promotes integration; emotional well-being reveals an integrated individual; and that integration through emotional processing of experience is the heart of health.\textsuperscript{183} Fosha echoes his conviction, stating that “positive affects, positive interactions, and the process of healing transformation are organically intertwined.”\textsuperscript{184} Her research indicates that emotional healing is accompanied in the nervous system by new somatic markers, which she calls \textit{positive affective markers}, to replace traumatic memories and form a new basis for one’s choices in life.\textsuperscript{185}

Along the same lines, affirming the centrality of emotion in the therapeutic process, Schore proposes to redefine psychotherapy as the “affect communicating cure” rather than merely a “talking cure.”\textsuperscript{186} Siegel writes that emotionally therapeutic relationships are at their core integrative as they “produce conditions to promote the growth of integrative fibers in the nervous system.”\textsuperscript{187} But, as Ogden cautions, in some instances focus on emotion through simple body awareness may reinforce problematic emotional patterns; affect regulation, she says, is most effective if bottom-up sensorimotor processing interventions form the foundation of therapy.\textsuperscript{188} Ogden seems to be a lonely voice in the choir of the recent advocates of emotional therapy, some of whom hail mindfulness as the new cure for what ails the soul, once again leaving the body behind, if not in theory then possibly in the therapeutic practice.\textsuperscript{189}

Strictly somatic approaches to trauma work are represented by only a few authors. In addition to Ogden, they include Babette Rothschild, Peter Levine, and Marianna
Eckberg. P. Levine’s *Somatic Experiencing* and the *Sensorimotor Processing* approach developed by Ogden and her associates are among the most notable models.

P. Levine presents a body-based approach to trauma resolution emphasizing *titrated sensorimotor discharge*, a method for working with sensory awareness and following the client’s nervous system processes as expressed in muscle tension, micromovements, barely visible fight/flight impulses—the whole array of cues that signal the body’s response to a traumatic memory—in order to access its potential for completing the interrupted movement and resolving the trauma. Eckberg describes the application of the Somatic Experiencing approach and passionately advocates for the use of somatic interventions in working with trauma, including the trauma of torture and ritual abuse. Similarly, Ogden and Kekuni Minton apply recent findings in neurology and brain studies as a foundation for their approach. Like P. Levine, they and their collaborators stress the importance of sensorimotor release in treating trauma.

There are somatic approaches working specifically with the earliest trauma imprints such as the work of Emerson and Castellino. The somatic emphasis reflects the assumption that dissociation from the body is simultaneously one of the sources and symptoms of psychopathology. In their work with both adults and children, Emerson and Castellino stress the importance of body-based interventions such as touch, pressure (“creative opposition”) or encouraging the client to find the movement sequence that supports the re-patterning of the traumatic imprints.

Literature reviewed in this cluster presents an impressive array of body-based approaches to healing. These approaches however do not, for the most part, work with expressive movement. Examples of those that do include movement as an important
vehicle for somatic intervention are Sensory Awareness, chiefly concerned with the sensory experience of ordinary everyday movements; Hanna Somatics whose stated goal is to improve functioning; trauma resolution approaches, aiming at symptom relief; and expressive techniques in Gestalt, designed to complete unfinished actions. None of these approaches utilize free-form expressive movement employed in the design of this study. Keleman’s discussion of the lived experience of movement comes closest to the interest of this study, but his discussion does not address the question of how the shift from dissociation to experiencing one’s somatic reality can best be facilitated and what are the necessary steps that allow the accessing and reclaiming of dissociated experience.

**Dance and Movement as Healing Modalities**

This section directly relates to this study’s interest in researching expressive movement and its possible application in the healing of dissociation. Literature exploring dance as ritual recognizes that dance is one of the oldest rituals of humanity whose lineage reaches back to prehistoric times. Sources included here present some of the ways dance has been used throughout history as a vehicle of healing in community and a form of worship: these sources describe the tradition of dance as an embodied phenomenon of a personal or communal life rather than as “noble art.” They address primarily the healing and ecstatic potential of dance and its role in reclaiming the experience of the spiritual.

Among literature about Dance/Movement Therapy, both the traditional analytically based approach to dance therapy as well as its critique are reviewed. The discussion also addresses other approaches using expressive movement as a therapeutic modality, such as the Halprin Life/Art Process and multimodal *Expressive Arts Therapy*
(in which art, voice, poetry, and other means of artistic expression are used in addition to movement), which are of particular interest to this study.  

**Dance as a Ritual of Healing**

Dance is one of the oldest rituals of humanity. Ellen Dissanayake and Catherine Bell describe some of the ways dance has been used throughout history as a vehicle of healing in community.  

Howard Gardner, listing some of the possible purposes of dance, describes it as a vehicle of secular or religious expression, a psychological outlet or means of release, a statement of aesthetic value or aesthetic value in itself, an instrument for sexual selection, or a ritual enacted to placate the elements, invoke supernatural powers, or celebrate community events; adding that dancing can serve several of these functions at once.  

Walter Otto presents a fascinating interpretation of ecstatic dance as the first form of worship, a first and most immediate art form, a natural, immediate (non-mediated) expression of the awe a human being feels in response to the glory of divine presence.  

Today, this attitude survives in the ecstatic dance of the Kalahari Bushmen described by Bradford Keeney. Kalahari shamans are dancers; in their tradition, dance and vibratory touch are what heals. All Bushmen healers dance without effort, writes Keeney; during the dance, shaking and vibrating takes place effortlessly; the experience of luminosity and visions is common. Other researchers of the Kalahari mention the sounds the dancing shamans make, which are not really songs, but something more akin to sound poetry: “the most significant fact about the dance songs is that no words are used.”
The most powerful experience shared by all Bushman healers, Keeney claims, is the recognition of the deep bond and love among all people. Through dancing together, the men and women of the Kalahari “know each other’s hearts.” An ecstatic bliss arises in the process, which opens the dancers’ hearts to the whole of life. Their work is not just about healing individuals, but healing the community. They are very conscious about the impact their healing work has on the whole village, or as some of them say, even the whole world. Conversely, they acknowledge how important the health of the community is to the health of individuals.

The worshipful approach to dance, still alive in some parts of the world, did not survive the advent of Western civilization in Europe and went largely underground for over two millennia. Roderyk Lange presents a historical sketch of the role of dance in Western culture which since the earliest times seemed to develop on parallel tracks: one officially sanctioned by high culture, and the other practiced in the everyday life of ordinary people. Remarking on his encounters with “the facts of dance” during his research expeditions in remote regions of Eastern Europe in the 1920s, Lange says: “One has had to bow to the human dignity still preserved in the old patterns of life, where Dance has always played a vital role in organizing the whole of life.”

Yet as early as during Plato’s times only the “noble kind of dancing” was approved by the culture’s pundits. According to Plato, any kind of dance connected with rites of expiation and initiation (showing traces of a Dionysian nature) or of lascivious character would be unfit for the citizens and should be disposed of and dismissed; Plato had no place for “ugly bodies or ugly ideas.” Only the solemn movement of beautiful bodies was of interest to him.
Lange deplores the fact that already at the very beginnings of European civilization, rather than being cultivated as an expression of prayer or means of community making, dance was codified as an imitative art, to be watched rather than engaged in. The respect for dance waned with the decline of Greek civilization, and even more in ancient Rome where Cicero wrote, “Nobody dances, unless he is drunk, or unbalanced mentally.”

In medieval ages and on, dance survived mostly as a highly stylized art form among the educated class. “Heathen dance” was condemned by the Church while the notion of sacred dance was promoted but only as part of the liturgy employed toward the adoration of divinity. During the Renaissance, “noble dance” was brought back to royal courts as a stylized, highly formal art, concerned with agreeable motion, measure, grace, and form. Anthropological accounts of “exotic,” “wild” and “indecent” dances of other cultures which began to appear in mid-1800s were regarded as merely further proof of those cultures’ uncivilized nature.

Yet pagan dance culture continued underground even in “civilized” Europe where dance has always played a major role in magic rites and community customs. Lange’s presentation of the two streams of dance history is relevant to this discussion in that he makes the essential distinction between dance as noble art and dance as an embodied phenomenon of a personal or communal life. When dance is defined as an imitative art form, it does not require emotional or spiritual investment on the part of the spectator or even the performer. Not so in the case of the “savage dance,” on the other hand, which has never lost its connection or relevance to the immediacy of lived experience. It is the latter way of viewing and participating in dance that is of most interest in this study.
The revival of interest in dance as an ecstatic, erotic, emotional, spiritual, and intensely personal experience dates back to the 1920s. Lange quotes several books written at that time in Germany as well as the works of Havelock Ellis, who for the first time in modernity named religious and erotic aspects of dance in one sentence, thus vindicating what has been discarded since Plato in the name of “noble dancing.”

Ellis said: “Dancing is not only intimately associated with religion; it has an equally intimate association with love”; and “If we are indifferent to the art of dancing we have failed to understand, not merely the supreme manifestation of physical life, but also the supreme symbol of spiritual life.”

The return to dance as a way to reclaim the ecstatic potential of the soul was embraced by the counterculture movement of the 1960s and continues today with an explosion of ecstatic movement communities worldwide. Gabrielle Roth is one notable voice writing and teaching with passion from this perspective.

**Dance/Movement Therapy**

*Dance therapy* is a field that emerged in the 1940s among modern dancers who observed the power of movement to access psychological material, among them Schoop, Marion Chace, and Mary Starks Whitehouse. These dancers were not psychologically trained but they were interested in clinical applications of movement in working with hospital patients. Many of them spent time working on psychiatric wards making contact through movement with patients whom no one else could reach. Since then, various approaches have developed within what is now known in the United States as Dance/Movement Therapy.
Schoop names two tasks of Dance Therapy: “First, the bringing into awareness of any inhibiting or denied feeling. Second, the full expression of this feeling. . . . By expressing them in movement, the person can become them and accept them as part of the self.” 214 As a therapist, she declares: “I don’t want to tranquilize: I want to incite—so that we both become totally involved–intensely preoccupied with living.” 215

Blanche Evan emphasized both movement rehabilitation to restore function as well as dance education to restore a person’s potential for expressive movement. 216 Evan developed a method for an in-depth exploration of feelings through insight-oriented improvisation seen as a “direct route to the unconscious,” capable of giving physical form to psychological experiences. 217 Evan worked from the assumption of unity of body and soul and claimed that “to experience psycho-physical unity is a basic need.” 218

The principles and methods of Dance Therapy later helped lay the foundations for Expressive Arts Therapy where the full range of creative arts is employed: movement, drama, voice, painting, poetry, ritual, and performance. 219 Spiritual connection to nature became another strong influence. Canner’s work, for example, was shaped from the beginning by her interest in ritual and in “the ways of older peoples who lived in harmony with their environments, and whose lives and art expressed their oneness with nature.” 220 Boundaries between expressive arts, ritual, myth, exploration of natural environments, performance, and healing blur in A. Halprin’s many decades of Transformational Dance, an approach in which explorations in “compassion, health, love, catharsis, life, death,” as well as the earth, human community, and spiritual identity are all contained within ever evolving forms. 221
Louise Steinman proposes that creative performance and healing have in common the same process of “‘making whole’ . . . bringing together bone, bringing together the disparate experiences and sensations of one’s life.”\(^{222}\) They are both rooted in the knowledge that “our physical, mental, spiritual realities are intertwined, inseparable.”\(^{223}\) The performance work Steinman describes includes movement, words, imagery, dreams, shamanic ritual and archetypal material, all in service of healing, understood here as integration of “both sides of the body, both sides of the brain” so the person as a whole can meaningfully engage with the world.\(^{224}\) She points out that this kind of therapy was practiced in antiquity at Epidaurus—the ancient sanctuary of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing—where music, dance, poetry, and dream were among the modalities employed in restoring health to body and soul.\(^{225}\)

Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry shows how the recent re-emergence of therapies using expressive media such as movement and art was made possible by a change from the medical model—an approach to therapy as the cure for symptoms done by experts—to a collaboration intended to explore and maintain health, defined as emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being.\(^{226}\) She traces the shift from the medical model, until recently predominant in Western medicine and psychotherapy, to a “contemporary, interdisciplinary, developmental-relational, arts-based model of healing.”\(^{227}\)

Dosamantes-Beaudry introduces the concept of regression-reintegration, defining regression as the ability to return to “earlier modes of perceiving, thinking and relating” through pretend play, in other words through exploring the in-between space (Winnicott’s transitional space) of creative art making.\(^{228}\) Her discussion is directly relevant to what
can potentially happen in an awareness based movement session: a return to a preverbal space of play and as a result, an integration of new ways of experiencing.

Johanna Exiner, in discussing the difference between dance versus mere motion, proposes transformation of consciousness from ordinary to heightened sensitivity as an essential element of dance. Quoting Louis Murray, Rudolf Laban, and other theorists of modern dance, Exiner defines the essence of dancing as sensing the nature of movement through *kinesthetic identification* (by which the mover identifies with the movement). Dance is action that arises from within and follows an impulse coming from the center. To know movement one must attend to sensations. This inner awareness (of sensations), Exiner proposes after Marian Chace, is an indispensable facet of therapeutic dance. The biological root for the kinesthetic-sensuous experience in dance is the kinesthetic sense, and the capacity to perceive in this way is called *proprioception*. Exiner defines the intention of dance therapy as putting the mind in the body in order to *own* the issue physically so it can be experienced as shape and motion.

"Experiencing emotions in the flesh” means that anger, grief and other emotions can be felt “in muscle, bone, and skin.” This in turn allows feelings and sensations to be successfully integrated, and to enhance rather than cripple one’s life.

“Dance Therapy’s job is not so much to get people moving as to help people move more consciously,” writes Christine Caldwell, “and then to stop moving and listen to the song of the cellular self as well.” She makes the distinction between volitional movement and what she calls the *autonomic movement*–the subtle movement generated by the heart, lungs, intestines and fluids below conscious awareness that “dances out our life force.” Caldwell stresses the vital importance of taking ownership of the
autonomic movement, which may be “the equivalent of our sense of self”; both unique to each person and, paradoxically, universal, because shared with all living beings.\textsuperscript{235} This requires sensing, listening, and lingering in relative (outer) stillness, which can be difficult given our culture’s fear of death and the resulting obsession with “staying in motion no matter what.”\textsuperscript{236} Caldwell makes distinctions between genuine pausing in \textit{conscious stillness} and \textit{collapsing} (drifting into distraction) on the one extreme and \textit{holding} (tensing in an attempt at creating false stillness) on the other. She sees the aim of Dance/Movement Therapy as accessing the expressive potential of both biological (autonomic) and psychological (emotion based) movement.

Similarly, Daria Halprin proposes that expressive movement as therapeutic approach is the dialogue between the inner world of sensation, perception, and feeling, and outer expression in the world.\textsuperscript{237} Expressive movement work engages three \textit{levels of awareness and response}: physical (sensation, breath, posture), emotional (affects such as anxiety, joy, anger, sorrow), and mental (visual images, memories, associations, meanings, narratives). D. Halprin points out that these levels cannot really be separated, as they are all intimately interconnected. Movement both engenders and expresses feeling; feelings have both sensory and mental aspects.\textsuperscript{238}

This unity of experience in expressive movement parallels Winnicott’s concept of \textit{play} as the “creative use of the whole personality.”\textsuperscript{239} As with play, staying open with not knowing, not analyzing, judging, or editing is essential here. D. Halprin suggests that a movement exploration happens in what Donald Winnicott identified as transitional space where by being creative, a person can discover the self.\textsuperscript{240}
Among approaches that do not utilize expressive movement as a medium or make artistic creativity their primary focus are Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s *Body-Mind Centering* and *Rosen Movement*. *Body-Mind Centering* focuses on awareness and integration between touch, movement, breathing, voice, and thought. *Rosen Movement* sessions are designed to develop neuromuscular awareness, which leads to “reshaping” not only of the body, but of one’s emotional reality as well.

Authentic Movement, when used in a therapeutic context, is unique in its approach; whereas most dance and movement therapies are therapist-directed and highly structured, Authentic Movement is unstructured and highly self-directed. The most common practice in this practice, as described by Janet Adler, is a dyad in which one person moves in the presence of another. The mover, who is “the expert on his own experience,” listens inwardly with eyes closed for movement impulses and in the process of following them into expression “his body becomes a vessel through which unconscious material awakens into consciousness.” While “moving and being moved at the same time,” the mover gradually begins to “lose the illusion that one is anything other than one’s body.”

The other is the witness who brings a specific quality of attention and presence to the experience; practicing the art of seeing clearly, as witness one observes both the partner’s movement and one’s own reactions, judgments, and interpretations that come up in response. Afterwards, mover and witness speak about their experiences with each other, and then they switch roles.

Authentic Movement has progressed over time from an inquiry into embodied personal unconscious to the phenomenon of embodying the collective unconscious. Adler
asks, “Can we become opened toward consciousness of the collective body? Can we create a sacred, conscious circle that evolves organically from the knowing body of each member?” She responds that not only is this possible, but it is necessary. She claims that the importance of finding a way from the “privilege of individuation,” developed consciousness of the self, into “membership of the collective” lies in the power of experiencing interconnectedness and then using that direct experience in service of healing not just the human community, but what Adler calls the earth-body, the entire eco-system.

“We forget that the human psyche cannot endure without belonging,” Adler states. She points to the experience of Authentic Movement as one of belonging to the whole of life, where “new energy repeatedly, cyclically accrues, . . . is gathered, contained, dispersed back into the collective through one body, then another, then another.” She refers to this phenomenon as the collective body. A parallel concept used in psychoanalysis is that of intersubjectivity. According to Robert Stolorow, an intersubjective field is as system of reciprocal mutual influence, formed by the reciprocal interplay between two (or more) subjective worlds; in this conceptualization, intersubjective refers to any psychological field formed by interacting worlds of experience.

Some practitioners use Authentic Movement as a form of somatic psychotherapy. In that context, the therapist acts as a witness and the process of sharing after a movement sequence helps process and integrate the material brought to light in the mover’s (client’s) experience. In her early work with autism, Adler saw that this approach made it possible for an autistic child to develop inner witness—an awareness
of the child’s own experience—and from there, a sense of herself in relationship with an other. She saw her work as giving the children “the gift of themselves.”

Dance/Movement Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy have been shown to be useful with a broad spectrum of clinical issues, such as addiction, anxiety, or medical illness, and with a variety of populations, from children and adolescents to the dying. Neuroscience offers supportive evidence for Dance/Movement Therapy’s role in helping with attachment issues through empathic attunement, and its positive effect on immunity and mood.

A. Halprin has applied her Transformational Dance not only in service of diagnosing and working with her own illness (cancer), but also in healing other individuals with cancer and AIDS, families, and communities, including the global community. Her Planetary Dance is a communal ritual devoted to prayers for the earth and for peace, performed simultaneously around the world on Spring Equinox. One study shows how the Halprin Life/Art Process may aid in preventing and healing illness.

Evan’s theory and method has been used, among others, by Bonnie Bernstein in her work with adult women survivors of sexual abuse and Anne Krantz in the treatment of women with eating disorders, who found it helpful in restoring their ability to experience affect and to “develop healthy psychophysical unity.” Case studies cite research confirming the need for non-verbal therapies in cases of complex PTSD and show that Dance/Movement Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapies have been helpful in cases of extreme dissociation related to the trauma of violence, war, torture, and exile.
Dance/Movement Therapy has rarely been studied directly for its effect on affect. One small sample, short-term study found that the Dance/Movement Therapy group reported “greater feelings of confidence and affection, along with lesser feelings of inhibition and anxiety” than either the control group or the group offered verbal therapy. Subsequent research suggests that this influence on affect is observable both in normal populations (to which the former study was limited) as well as in hospitalized patients. Specifically, anxiety and depression lessened for both groups, though to varying degrees. Similar decrease in anxiety was reported in another study, where the target group followed a class in modern dance. Compared to three control groups, the dance group showed significantly reduced anxiety measures.

Expressive Arts Therapy has been recommended for treating alexithymia and some authors claim that it seems to be a promising form of treatment for traumatized people suffering from it, even in cases of severe pathology. Attempts have also been made to use expressive arts in medical settings. One example is the Arts in Medicine program at Shands Hospital in Florida portrayed in a PBS documentary in which a dance therapist and a poet working together with a patient long immobilized by her illness encourage her expression through poetry and movement; this brings her not only relief from pain, but a “transcendent experience” even while she remains confined to her bed.

The literature reviewed in this cluster provides material useful in framing the exploration of embodied presence through movement. However, what is missing in these writings is a description of what exactly is required for this process to take place. Many accounts are written from the viewpoint of kinesthetic competency, skipping over the
issue of how kinesthetic reality can be accessed in the first place for individuals who are
dissociated from their body.

Furthermore, research in this area that concerns populations with physical or
psychological issues, sometimes of significant degrees of pathology or dysfunction, does
not directly address the question of healing the everyday dissociation from the body
experienced in non-clinical contexts. No studies on affect have been found that would
focus on the potential of Dance/Movement Therapy to evoke feelings such as grief or fear
in service of integrating body and mind. The question remains as to what ingredients are
necessary for the exploration of somatic process to aid that integration.

In some approaches to Dance/Movement Therapy, significant emphasis is put on
the client-therapist relationship in one on one situations, and a non-therapy oriented
group experience such as designed in this study is less often considered. Some dance
therapists still revert to narrative interpretation methods of talk therapy or attempt to find
symbolic meaning and new metaphors for clients experiences. These approaches do
not explicitly entertain the possibility that integration can happen in the process of play,
art making, and movement without the mediation of conceptual meaning. Also, in the
literature reviewed above, the body is accessed in order to bring up feeling; this study
reverses the sequence, in that feelings are evoked in order to access and integrate the
awareness of the body. It is rare to find accounts that explore expressive exploration of
affect as the starting point of a process of bridging the mind-body split.
Imaginal Approaches

The emerging field of Imaginal Psychology is a study of psychological phenomena through imagination as the central organizing and integrative principle of all experience; in it, imagination is recognized as, in Moore’s words, the “instrument of the soul,” and image as an elemental structure of experience: a structure that has somatic, emotional, and cognitive content. This cluster presents an overview of basic concepts of this field, as well as literature investigating the mind-body relationship, trauma and dissociation, affect theory, and therapeutic practice from the viewpoint of imaginal studies.

Imaginal Psychology presents a world view in which the soul is placed at the core of psychology’s concern. Soul is conceptualized similarly to some theorists’ integrated understanding of soma as the comprehensive experience of human existence including its physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Multiplicity, expressed in the coexistence of several subjectivities (psychic voices) in the experience of an individual, is an essential characteristic of the soul, problematic only when the subjectivities are encapsulated, out of contact or conversation with each other.

In Omer’s words, the nature of soul is passionate and participatory. He names “loving prior to knowing” as the essence of the participatory paradigm: to know means first to participate, and to participate is to “surrender through creative action to the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment.” Omer evokes Dionysus as the embodiment of animated, intimate participation.

Participation is resisted when the animated intimacy of Being–Jung’s anima mundi—gets disrupted in trauma. Omer describes trauma as a place where one has
chronically retreated from participation with life. In those instances, reactive enactment—acting out in habitual, unconscious, ineffective ways—replaces creative action in both individual and collective lives; limiting imaginal structures narrow the range of experience; and an adaptive identity takes the place of a full expression of an individual soul.

Imaginal structures are defined by Omer as “assemblies of sensory, affective, and cognitive aspects of experience constellation into images; the specifics of an imaginal structure are determined by an integration of personal, cultural, and archetypal influences.” The concept of imaginal structures parallels those of scripts or core beliefs in cognitive behavioral therapy, filters in Gestalt, or self/object representations in object relations therapy—concepts denoting psychic structures conditioned by early experience which narrow the range of possible responses in present time.

Adaptive identity (the false self, or persona) is the identity assumed in the face of life’s unavoidable trauma and of the restrictions imposed by the personal and cultural gatekeepers, internal voices that limit what is possible for a person to experience, leaving one with a set of predictable responses to life. Superego, the inner critic, Gestalt’s underdog are concepts parallel to gatekeepers; Ross’s dissociated self and the cultural dissociation barrier are examples of individual and collective gatekeeping.

Affects are the biological bases of a passionate participation in life, says Omer. With habitual responses, the same habitual affects are experienced. If a person is to respond to life creatively, old affective responses must be transformed into fresh expression rooted in reflexive awareness. Reflexive awareness is the capacity to engage
those instances of reactivity that shape our experience: frozen responses to painful events from the past manifesting as repetition of ineffective actions in the present.

Reflexive awareness makes possible what Omer calls creative suffering (Jung’s conscious suffering). Creative suffering entails opening to affects with awareness so they can be transformed; this means bringing caring attentiveness to experiences of reactive enactment so creative expression can begin to replace them.\(^{277}\)

Omer makes the distinction between core wounding and core trauma.\(^{278}\) Core wounding is a result of the missing support, inaccurate reflection, or unmet emotional needs early on in a person’s development; it allows for later, corrective experience to be healing and the process of emotional development to proceed. Core trauma is of such depth that it will not readily heal and often the person is not equipped to seek experiences that are healing. In core trauma, a person may be caught in a cycle of re-wounding. Working with core trauma is more difficult and delicate.

Omer notes that the movement from enactment to expression is most difficult in situations where language is not there (as in preverbal memory) and where trauma is severe.\(^{279}\) Contacting affect is very difficult here and often interrupted by shame. Shame can manifest as seeking privacy instead of expression. Omer makes a distinction between situations where privacy is needed for the care of the soul versus where privacy is the isolation of shame.\(^{280}\)

Fear is another phenomenon experienced in the process of creative suffering. Anthony Stevens discusses the Jungian understanding of fear as a defense in the individuation process.\(^{281}\) He maintains, with Jung, that development can be arrested and distorted not only by events in the history of an individual, but also by one’s fear of
taking the next step along the path to emotional maturity. In some cases this fear leads to a recoil to an earlier stage of development at which the person may remain fixated.

Imaginal theorists such as Hillman, Moore, Stevens, and Omer, are deeply influenced by Jungian thought. In Jung’s view, the ontological questions concerning the existence or even the ultimate nature of matter and psyche are essentially unanswerable. In his view, the way the mind is connected with the body is “for obvious reasons unintelligible.” In spite of that, Jung repeatedly asserted the unity of body and psyche, stating that: “The difference we make between the psyche and the body is artificial. It is done for the sake of a better understanding. In reality, there is nothing but a living body. That is the fact; and psyche is as much a living body as body is living psyche: it is just the same.”

In another place, Jung wrote: “Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing.” Jung worked from the assumption (without necessarily asserting it as truth) about there existing a transcendental unitary reality between matter and psyche that eludes our conscious grasp which he called the unus mundus.

Several Jungian therapists have now incorporated direct work with the body into their clinical practice. Invoking the concept of unus mundus, Deldon Anne McNeely writes about utilizing somatic interventions within her practice of Jungian analysis, combining body work (direct touch) and movement with Jungian dreamwork. Similarly, Marion Woodman writes about her understanding and treatment of issues
related to femininity and eating disorders from the Jungian viewpoint of the unity of body and psyche.\textsuperscript{287}

Jung wrote about the body being experienced as \textit{shadow} which in his view may account for its absence from conscious consideration. The term shadow refers to contents of experience and knowledge that are excluded or, one might venture to say, dissociated from consciousness as they do not conform to one’s preferred image of oneself.

We do not like to look at the shadow-side of ourselves; [t]he body is a most doubtful friend because it produces things we do not like: there are too many things abut the personification of this shadow of the ego. Sometimes it forms a skeleton in the closet and everybody naturally wants to get rid of such a thing.\textsuperscript{288}

John Conger has attempted a synthesis of the Jungian and Reichian perspectives on the body, comparing Jung’s concept of shadow with Reich’s discovery of character armor. Looking at the concept of shadow from a somatic vantage point, Conger suggests how the body as shadow expresses those aspects of a person’s experience that one most wants to hide. The muscular tensions, posture, breath constrictions conceal and at the same time reveal one’s unexpressed anger, anxiety, fear and need. Conger adds,

Indeed the body \textit{is} the shadow insofar as it contains the tragic history of how the spontaneous surging of life energy is murdered and rejected in a hundred ways until the body becomes a deadened object. The victory of an overrationalized life is promoted at the expense of the more primitive and natural vitality. The body as shadow is predominantly the body as “character,” the body as bound energy that is unrecognized and untapped, unacknowledged and unavailable.\textsuperscript{289}

Conger points out that as an object, the body can be a “cultural construct, a manifestation of family, of imposed ideals, of blocked and charged responses, of collective implications, of genetic peculiarities, or biological functions.”\textsuperscript{290} In contrast, the \textit{embodied self} is an experience of being “at home” in one’s body, with the ability to be grounded in inner and outer reality, to experience one’s wholeness as clear energetic
flow, to be emotionally aware, to have access to an unrestricted flow of breath, to make genuine contact with others and set appropriate boundaries when needed. “Embodiment represents our capacity to bring diverse internal and external elements into an organization called the self.” Conger suggests after Winnicott that early experiences of adequate physical holding are necessary for an infant’s “psyche-soma hookup”; that to integrate body and person, a baby must be held as a unit by the mother. If the mother is unable to perceive the unity, the child’s self will be “unable to gather itself.” The body then remains depersonalized, the psyche ungrounded, and the self fragmented, undeveloped, split. Winnicott says: “The baby is … all these parts … gathered together by the mother who is holding the child and in her hands they add up to one.”

Donald Kalsched, a modern Jungian theorist, links trauma theory with contemporary object relations theory and describes how the archetypal self-care system in the psyche, a structure designed to protect the self from further injury, can instead perpetuate the repetition of trauma. The self-care system employs the mechanisms of splitting and dissociation that result in the inability to symbolize affective experience—mechanisms which may be adaptive at first but become problematic later on. In Kalsched’s view, it is the failure to process information on a symbolic level which is at the very core of the difficulties that result from trauma.

**Body and Movement in Imaginal Approaches**

Jung and Jungian theorists are very clear about the need to relate to, work with, and integrate the shadow but there is little discussion of how to do it through working
with the body. In this respect Conger’s attempt at synthesizing Jungian theory with somatic practice presents one exception.

In addition to practices from the Reichian and Bioenergetics tradition, Conger suggests explorations of unstructured, spontaneous, inwardly initiated core movement which, as it follows its own “inevitable, integral sequence” can “uncannily lead back to unresolved childhood actions, enacting a forgotten drama.” Core movement has some parallels to the practice of Authentic Movement which is another way Jungian thought has found its somatic application. Joan Chodorow describes how Jung’s method of working with the unconscious (dream images and figures, dream-like states of consciousness) which he called active imagination became a foundation for the development of the discipline of Authentic Movement. She points out that bodily sensations were always the starting point of the practice of active imagination as Jung intended it, and mentions Jung’s conviction from as early as 1916 that “symbolic expression through the body is more effective than ordinary active imagination.” A few of the early analysts used movement in their work with their patients, but it was not until 1960 that Mary Whitehouse brought together a thorough understanding of dance with principles of depth psychology.

Chodorow has written and lectured extensively on the imaginative potential of emotions and proposed that dance therapy is a “comprehensive method of psychotherapy that draws in a natural way from all forms of imagination.” Inspired by the affect studies of Tomkins, who considers the affects to be primary motivators in human beings, Chodorow suggests that the healing potential of dance therapy lies in its ability to access
archetypal material by working with the body where unconscious primal emotions can be contacted through movement and imagination and expressed through the body.

Adler presents the reader with an interesting reframing of the issue. Rather than seeing the body as unconscious, Adler assumes that the body has its own way of knowing, a way of receiving and processing information and memory—of being “conscious”—different than the mind, and that through the medium of movement it is possible to access that knowing.300

Most movement approaches described above—Dance/Movement Therapy, Conger’s organic movement, even Authentic Movement—have a distinct therapeutic slant. They make it possible to access and integrate unconscious material, including memories of childhood trauma. In contrast, in multimodal Expressive Arts Therapy, the creative process is respected on its own terms, without an explicit therapeutic agenda, and the autonomy of the image is protected.301 The image is regarded as a gift presented to both the artist and the viewer and it is followed not in order to “enact childhood dramas” but rather in service of shaping new possibilities.302

Multimodal expressive arts theorists, such as Paolo Knill, Stephen Levine, Ellen Levine, and Shaun McNiff, propose an integrated approach to Expressive Arts Therapy based on the recognition that imagination is intermodal—manifesting in visual images, movement, sounds, rhythm, action, and poetic words—and that all the art disciplines engage all the sensory and communicative modalities.303 Consequently, an image is not just visual, but includes all the other sensory aspects: kinesthetic, auditory, “even tastes and tactile sensations.” 304 The task of an expressive arts therapist is to follow the image in its process of clarification and crystallization, rather than engage in interpretation.305
These authors remind us that the senses are the vehicles through which our histories are recorded and they see creativity as what “enables us to receive deep psychic material, struggle with and transform it.” They outline the phases of an art therapy process as well as concepts and techniques that are useful in framing the process of this study and making meaning of the data. Two of the techniques they describe are *intermodal transfer*, switching between art modalities and *intermodal superimposition*, a layering of modalities within one act, which serve to deepen or extend expression.

McNiff is one of the most ardent proponents of using multiple modalities in Expressive Arts Therapy. In this way, the process can broaden and deepen: “Like the shamanic ‘shapeshifter,’ who passes between the different worlds of spirit to restore the lost soul to a person or community . . . movement between expressive faculties animates the person or the environment.” He also advocates for engaging in *imaginal dialogue*: talking with, rather than about a work of art, and not just in words but by using sound, movement, poetry, and ritual in a creative exploration of a painting or a sculpture.

McNiff is one of the few expressive arts therapists to write in any depth about the use of voice, which while it “allows for a very primal and direct expression of emotion,” may also be overwhelming and thus possibly harmful to the client. Discussing this view, Paul Newham points out that voice is the least developed medium in Expressive Arts Therapy in need of better methodology for “containing, directing, and intervening during a client’s vocal expression.” Newham’s own interest centers around the use of voice in therapy; his approach, *Therapeutic Voicework*, is grounded in body, breath, movement, and imagination. Departing from the “cathartic view of therapeutic
procedure,” Newham has developed a model that uses artistic techniques to contain and deepen vocal expression in service of therapeutic goals.314

In his approach to art-based research, McNiff suggests applying multimodal techniques and respecting the non-linear nature of creative process and expression not only in therapeutic practice but also in presenting the research. He proposes a model of practitioner-research where the researcher would “talk, write, dance, draw, and sing” their understanding of the world in a language of research that abandons the distanced, authoritative, generalizing tone of the academy and instead embraces the voice of uncertainty, and the changeable, instinctive, intuitive language of artistic expression.315

The Halprin Life/Art Process seems to be a blend of both perspectives. D. Halprin points out that a body-based expressive movement exploration is at its core an aesthetic experience as it is based on sensory perception and an understanding of the body as a sensing, feeling, imagining whole. In aesthetic experience, substance (inner life phenomena) and form (movement expression) meet in such a way that the soul is touched.316 At the same time, part of the stated intention of her work is the inquiry into how the body carries one’s life story and an exploration of memories and life situations in order to heal.

D. Halprin’s is essentially an imaginal approach. She says that movement is an expression of our biology, personality, and soul; and that the expressive interplay between body, feeling, and imagination is necessary for true embodied experience. After Chodorow, she states that improvisational movement is where a “mutual education of the conscious and unconscious” takes place.317
Addressing the question of what might be the bridge between the two, she proposes that it is *imagination*, quoting John Dewey, who described imagination as the faculty that has the power to unite diverse feelings, images, and sensations.\(^{318}\) Her Life/Art approach is based on the *psychokinetic imagery process* originated in the late 1960s by her mother, teacher, and colleague A. Halprin, and later adapted and made central by most Expressive Arts Therapy approaches, among them those discussed above.\(^{319}\) A. Halprin’s process involved moving, then drawing, then dancing the images, then moving back and forth between drawing and dancing. D. Halprin’s model in addition to movement and art also includes dialogue and poetry, to “recreate and strengthen the interplay between body, emotion, and imagination.”\(^{320}\) Spoken and written dialogues in which images and movements are given voice provide a non-analytical way to discover deeper meanings.\(^{321}\)

Writers incorporating indigenous healing traditions and rituals in their discussion of trauma and dissociation present another useful perspective. Sandra Ingerman describes an approach adapted from traditional practices of Native American *shamans* (healers) used by her to address dissociation. She interprets dissociation as *soul loss*, and points to a variety of traumatic incidents—such as incest, abuse, loss of a loved one, surgery, accidents, illness, extreme stress or addiction—that can bring it about.\(^{322}\) Similarly to explanations of dissociation in trauma theory, Ingerman sees loss of soul as a powerful survival mechanism employed to avoid the impact of the pain or humiliation caused by a traumatic experience.\(^{323}\)

Ingerman suggests that *soul retrieval* may be necessary in cases where other therapies fail. Soul retrieval is a process in which a shaman enters into an altered state of
consciousness, often with the aid of a drum, and travels on a *shamanic journey* outside of space and time into non-ordinary reality to gather the lost soul pieces. She or he then returns them to the person in ordinary reality. This process is recommended as an addition, rather than a substitute to psychotherapy.

A manifestation of soul loss described in Jewish mysticism and folklore since the 1600s is the phenomenon of a *dybbuk*. A dybbuk is an external agent, a restless soul of a dead person that enters a living human being to replace her soul and continue under the new identity. A possession by the dybbuk implies amnesia, with the possessing agent unable to remember its previous identity and the host personality equally oblivious that she is living someone else’s life; “the personality and the will of the victim are extinguished” and the dybbuk can be expelled only by the most powerful exorcisms.

Today, some authors conceptualize what was considered dybbuk possession in the past as one of *dissociative trance disorders*, pointing to the many symptoms those phenomena have in common; among them are subjective loss of control, impairment in social functioning, marked distress, narrowing of attention, and *analgesia* (numbness) or general unawareness. Interestingly, Ross, a researcher of dissociative phenomena and advocate for recognizing healthy multiplicity as a fact of psychological reality rather than an inexorably pathological phenomenon, is also among the clinicians who adapted techniques of shamanic journey and soul retrieval in their work with dissociation, and in particular with multiple personality disorder (currently known as dissociative identity disorder).

Some authors have attempted to describe shamanic experience in terms of the current neuroscientific paradigm. Ede Frecska and Luis Eduardo Luna propose that when
information reaches a certain complexity, its processing occurs following the laws of quantum physics. The authors argue that some unconscious/conscious shifts have quantum origin “with significant psychosomatic implications.” What happens in those instances escapes what they call perceptual-cognitive-symbolic explanations (characteristic of ordinary states of consciousness); another channel of information processing, direct-intuitive-nonlocal (common in non-ordinary states of consciousness) is required for their interpretation. They describe the difference between these “channels” as follows: “The first one is capable of modeling via symbolism and is more culturally bound due to its psycholinguistic features. The second channel lacks the symbolic mediation, therefore it . . . is practically ineffable for the first one.” They show how different traditional healing rituals (the use of hallucinogens, chanting, fasting, dancing, etc.) pursue the same end: to destroy “profane” sensibility; yet clearly, the breakdown of ordinary sensibility/cognition is not the ultimate goal, but rather “the way to accomplish healing, that is psychointegration in the widest sense.” This can occur when the coping capability of the perceptual-cognitive-symbolic processing is exhausted and an interconnected universe is experienced via the direct-intuitive-nonlocal channel.

A Mythological Lens: Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld

An exploration of the creative and therapeutic process through expressive arts can be likened to a shamanic journey—or a descent into the unconscious. The mythological lens useful in framing this study is the myth of Inanna’s descent to the underworld.

Regarded as the most prominent and powerful female deity of ancient Sumer, Inanna was worshipped as the goddess of fertility, love, and war. She was queen of
the upper world, both heaven and earth. A story told of her journey to the underworld was written down on clay tablets in the third millennium B.C.E., but is thought to date from a much earlier time.

In the text, Inanna's stated reason for visiting the underworld is to attend her brothers-in-law’s funeral rites. However, Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld and Inanna’s sister, is suspicious of her motives, afraid for her dominion, and furious. She tells Inanna through her chief gatekeeper that if she wants to come, she must come “bowed low” and naked.

As Inanna passes through each of the seven gates to the Underworld, she is required, in spite of her protest, to remove another piece of clothing or jewelry—the elaborate regalia she had been wearing at the start of her journey—thus being stripped of all outer signs of her power. When she arrives in front of her sister she is naked and on her knees. Ereshkigal, along with the dreaded seven judges of the underworld, render their decision against her. She is given the “look of death,” turned into a corpse and hung on a meat hook.

After three days and three nights have passed, Inanna’s assistant pleads with the sky gods for help. Enki, the god of fresh waters and wisdom, agrees to intervene. He creates two androgynous figures and sends them to appease Ereshkigal. When they come before her, she is moaning in agony and they attend to her with great empathy. In gratitude, she offers them whatever they want, and they ask for Inanna's corpse. Following Enki’s instructions, they sprinkle the corpse sixty times with the food and water of life and Inanna revives. She then returns from the underworld.
Sylvia Brinton Perera interprets this myth as an attempt at reclaiming the wholeness pattern of a “healthy soul.” Originally, she claims, Inanna and Ereshkigal were aspects of one deity or even different manifestations of the same primal energy, the Great Round encompassing both death and life, darkness and light, matter and spirit. With the shift toward the dominance of patriarchy, the *chthonic* (of the earth, instinctive, dark) aspects of the Goddess were gradually split off and relegated to the Netherworld, the dreaded realm of isolation, inertia, unconsciousness, and death.

Already as the queen of the upper world, Inanna unifies many aspects and qualities. Johanna Stuckey writes of her as a goddess of “Infinite Variety,” almost as if she were many goddesses in one, “central and unified and at the same time . . . infinitely variable.” Stuckey goes on to say that Inanna stood for potentiality and transformation, the essence of the continually changing cycles of nature.

The Sumerian sign for Inanna—a pair of specially shaped standards, usually interpreted as gateposts—is a clue that the Sumerians viewed her essence as transformation. . . . All of Inanna's powers, attributes, and aspects involve transformation and stretching or crossing of boundaries and limits. . . . Thresholds and doors lead from one place to another, from one reality to another. Changeable Inanna was, then, goddess of the doorway and, thus, of the eternal threshold . . . not being but becoming . . . poised at the threshold of change. Essentially she was life—the great, continually changing cycle of being and becoming.

As the goddess of love and sexuality, as well as aggression and war, Inanna unites in her essence the feminine and the masculine. She is also capable of a wide range of feelings, portrayed variously as loving, grieving, joyful, passionate, generous, ambitious, cruel, or humble. In an old prayer, this is how she is addressed:

To pester, insult, deride, desecrate—and to venerate—is your domain, Inanna.
Downheartedness, calamity, heartache—and joy and good cheer—is your domain, Inanna.
Trembling, affright, terror—dazzling and glory—is your domain, Inanna.\textsuperscript{337}

This wholeness pattern represented by Inanna, claims Brinton Perera, was lost in the Western civilization with the transition to patriarchy.\textsuperscript{338} In another, later poem, Inanna is heard lamenting her homelessness. She has been dispossessed and banished from her land and sent into exile by a male deity, the sky god Enlil, symbolizing the ascendance of male values and the exile of the feminine.

According to Brinton Perera, having grown up in a patriarchal culture both men and women of our times are faced with the devastating effects of this exile. They are bound to develop an \textit{animus ego}, an ego that is oriented toward masculine values, wounded and cut off from its roots by the devaluation of matter (body) and the feminine. This animus-ego tends to be rational, linear, rule-bound, goal-oriented, devoted to upholding “the virtues and aesthetic ideals” of the patriarchal culture.\textsuperscript{339}

The myth of Inanna’s descent is then seen as the blueprint for a journey necessary to reclaim the disowned aspects of the original wholeness. In order to make the descent, one is required to suspend the “cerebral-intellectual-Apollonian . . . consciousness” and surrender “its ethical and conceptual discriminations” at the gates to the realm of matriarchal consciousness.\textsuperscript{340} As it always involves a sacrifice, such a journey is an \textit{initiation}, an ordeal.

Mircea Eliade defines initiation as a “body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated.”\textsuperscript{341} The central moment of every initiation is represented by the ceremony symbolizing the death and rebirth of the initiate who emerges from such an ordeal, Eliade says, endowed with a totally different being.\textsuperscript{342}
Initiation rites are often experienced as happening in *Dreamtime*, the timeless space of the eternal Now. Similar to the myths of descent, in the scenario of many initiatory rites death corresponds a symbolic retrogression to the womb. Eliade’s concept of initiation can be a lens through which to look at any explorations of descending to one’s own depths, and the resulting birth of a new mode of being. Brinton Perera writes:

The process of initiation in the esoteric and mystical traditions in the West involves . . . rediscovering the experience of unity with nature and the cosmos that is inevitably lost through goal-oriented development. This necessity— for those destined to it . . . forces us to the affect-laden magical dimension and archaic depths that are embodied, ecstatic, and transformative; these depths are pre-verbal, often pre-image, capable of taking us over and shaking us to the core.

In the course of the descent, Brinton Perera suggests, the dominant mental consciousness must be sacrificed for the purpose of retrieving values and qualities long repressed by the culture. Inanna must be humiliated (*humus* is a Latin word for earth) and return to her naked body-self. In the process, she becomes a fully embodied person and when she is brought back to life, she is intimately familiar with both the light and the dark aspects of reality.

Anthony Stevens points out that the symbolism of descent and ascent, of “going down into the maternal underworld and up into the paternal heavens” recurs in the seven steps of the alchemical process, “leading up to the water bath in which the King and the Queen perform their *coniunctio*—the creative union of the masculine and the feminine archetypal principles.” The integration of body and mind thus requires (for both men and women) an inner marriage of the masculine and the feminine.

The ordeal in the netherworld is full of primal affect: terror, defensiveness, aggression, rage, anguish, and grief. Those can be seen as the reactions of the split off
aspects of the self to any attempts at bringing them to light. In response, the initiate often backs off. It takes patience and reverence to stay with the inquiry in the face of those forces. Brinton Perera writes:

> When the conscious personality is asked to confront such affects, it blocks, feels embarrassed, fears being shattered by superior strength, often retreats into anxiety or detachment, suspended out of life. It is at such moments that the energies need to be reverenced, seen as aspects of the goddess which can be served and allowed consciously to enter life.\(^{347}\)

What is eventually gained through this sort of initiation, Brinton Perera says, is balance, wholeness, authenticity, and a new aliveness. When Inanna returns, the earth which lay barren during her absence also comes back to life. The person re-ascending from the underworld is forever transformed by having experienced the primal, chaotic feminine energies and integrated them with the masculine spirit who so adores order and light. She is a fully embodied human being.

It may be noted here that the ancient myth of descent stands in sharp contrast to the myth of ascent, identified by Berman as the central metaphor of Western religion, as expressed in its longing to transcend mundane (bodily, sexual, earthly) reality in reaching upward, toward the light of spirit.\(^{348}\) All myths of ascent, Berman claims, are “a form of male heroics.”\(^{349}\)

Jean Gebser saw human consciousness as an unfolding through five historical stages that he termed the archaic, magical, mythical, mental-rational, and (now emerging) integral structures of consciousness.\(^{350}\) Integral consciousness allows the free expression of all of the other structures without being captured by any of them.\(^{351}\)

In this context, it is helpful to consider the work of Victor Turner, another researcher of indigenous ritual. Having studied rites of passage, which begin with the
subject’s being separated from ordinary social relationships and end with a symbolic reincorporation into society, Turner proposes the concept of *liminality* for the intervening phase in the ritual, in which one is “betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life.”

Liminality—from *limen* (threshold or margin in Latin)—is characterized by ambiguity and “frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and moon.” In its lack of the usual reference points, liminal space resembles Keleman’s middle ground and Brinton Perera’s underworld.

Turner extends the concept of liminality to refer to any condition outside, or on the peripheries of, everyday life, and suggests that liminal space is where *communitas* can occur. Communitas is a modality of social interrelatedness different from what is experienced during participation in the usual structures of society; it is a “spontaneously generated relationship between . . . individuated human beings.” The bonds of communitas, Turner proposes, are “undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, nonrational (though they are not irrational), I-Thou relationships.”

Edith Turner claims that communitas naturally occurs in the context of a shamanic experience:

Shamanic experience can act as actual connectivity, as an extension between people, which we feel as a second way of being social, like Victor Turner’s communitas. We are collectively conscious of it in a dim way. It is the collective psyche, which appears to be operating at every turn, just as both sides of our brain operate at every turn. It seems to be an endowment with which we were born.

“We are collectively conscious . . . in a dim way” about the possibility of this “other way of being social,” but it seems that many people are also conscious of the absence of such connectedness in their lives. In this context, one might want to consider
the use of the term *re-membering* as it refers to one of the therapeutic practices of Narrative Therapy for restoring one’s associations with communities that contribute to one’s desired identity.\footnote{357} The re-membering practices follow the view that identity is founded on “association of life” rather than on a notion of self, meaning that identity is shaped by membership in relationships with significant persons and communities in either affirming or life-denying ways, and that one can choose to associate more with those where one feels nurtured and held.\footnote{358}

As can be seen above, theorists representing Imaginal Psychology write from a variety of perspectives inspired by knowledge domains often ignored by mainstream psychology, such as anthropology, mythology, spiritual wisdom, and deep ecology. They approach the human person in ways that attempt to account for the full complexity of human experience, and encompass all of its somatic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. The somatic aspect is, sadly, the least developed in these considerations. While asserting the need for integrating the body in the discourse and the practice of psychology, many of these perspectives fail to provide well developed articulations of praxis. Dissociation from the body is not often addressed directly, nor are ways of facilitating integration.

**Conclusion**

This survey of the literature addressing body-mind integration shows an increasing interest in approaching this topic despite Western culture’s dissociation from the body and its predilection for left brain forms of expression and living. At the same time, the prevailing world view seems mostly unaffected even by the paradigm shift in modern (or rather, post-modern) science which at its best has moved away from the
mechanistic understanding of Cartesian epistemology and Newtonian physics and toward an appreciation of holistic approaches such as systems theory and quantum reality.

The relationship between body and mind is still often addressed as the mind-body ‘problem’. Somehow the most basic fact of human existence remains a problem for the mainstream psychologist. In 1961, seemingly exasperated at the positivist insistence on a disembodied knowing, Merleau-Ponty asked: “Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?” Since then, many of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological intuitions have been grounded in neuroscience research. Yet even today, many still argue that it is Damasio’s error to criticize Descartes for his misguided theory of cognition and for the confusion he initiated.

Many writers on dissociation and trauma ignore the significance of a somatic viewpoint in their theories. Dissociation is still often regarded purely as a phenomenon of memory, concerned with cognitive content. Even though all trauma research includes the recognition of the biological, physiological aspects of trauma phenomenon, until recently almost none of the literature on the subject has focused on methods of treatment that involve working directly with the body (or even less, with expressive movement).

The astonishing absence of the body in the vast majority of psychological literature and clinical practice in the long period since Freud’s classic descriptions of hysteria is just now being addressed by the relatively recent wave of interest in somatics. At times these recent articulations lack the elegance of intellectual systems that conveniently leave the body out of the equation. Part of the difficulty seems to be the need for approaching the issue in a whole new language, more expressive of attempts at
integration than recreating the body-mind split. This new language often sounds more soulful and poetic but also more awkward, messy, and vague than what has been accepted in the mainstream canon to date.

Writers representing imaginal approaches often employ such poetic language, and they seem to be closest to capturing the full extent of human experience, especially when the somatic dimension is in the forefront of the discussion. The discipline that seems to have been most successful in shifting away from a mechanistic medical model of both framing and treating dissociation toward shaping a theory and practice of creative collaboration in well-being is the broad domain of Expressive Arts Therapy, including movement and dance therapy. Especially with movement, the body is impossible to ignore. Yet at this point, the question of how to address dissociation from body and feeling remains at the growing edge of research and therapy. Many theories attempting to articulate the importance of body-based approaches to the healing of the psyche do not consider movement as one of the most immediate tools for accessing the material held in the body, or describe how expressing affect through movement could help bridge the mind-body split. Even dance therapy often seems like an excuse for analysis and interpretation rather than an experiment in embodied living.

The Research Problem poses the question, When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? My hypothesis was that when embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allow for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

Research Problem, Hypothesis, Design

This study was devoted to the exploration of the Research Problem: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The hypothesis stated that when embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allow for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

The design for this research study was based on the methodology of Imaginal Inquiry, a qualitative approach developed by Omer and situated within the participatory research paradigm, which draws on experiential, phenomenological, and art-based research methods. Imaginal Inquiry is a four phase process that progresses from evoking experience, to expressing, interpreting and integrating experience.

Participants met as a group twice. The main part of the data collection was a daylong meeting seven hours in duration. The second session, two hours long, served the purpose of presenting the preliminary learnings and eliciting feedback and reflection from participants. Two co-researchers were invited to collaborate with me.
For Evoking Experience, participants were asked to complete a “Loss Questionnaire” and guided in a movement exploration whose purpose was to access the areas of tension in the body often associated with held grief: face, jaw, and chest.

This warm-up was followed by a self-directed exploration of the breath, sounds, and shapes of grief, accompanied by evocative recorded music. Two evocative recordings of poetry about loss and grief were also included. Another movement segment was devoted to the exploration of the breath, sounds, and shapes of fear, which was preceded by a video clip showing a terrifying scene from a movie.

In the Expressing Experience phase, participants were asked to draw in response to what they experienced in their movement explorations and answer in writing journal questions related to their movement and art exploration. Another movement sequence in response to the images, witnessed by a partner, and the partner’s aesthetic response, provided additional opportunities for expression. So did the writing of a poem at the end.

A combination of approaches was used in Interpreting Experience, including identifying key moments and eliciting meanings from both the co-researchers and the participants, and exploring the findings by looking through the lens of the myth of the descent of Inanna.

For Integrating Experience, attention to transitions and frequent pauses was included at various points in the process. The reading of the poem at the closing/sharing circle at the end of the group session as well as the second group meeting also served an integrative purpose.

A written Summary of Learnings will be sent to all participants after the approval of the dissertation. This will be the conclusion of the integration phase.
The use of guided and expressive movement activities in this study is based on reversing the assumption that movement practices rooted in somatic awareness can be effective in getting in touch with feelings. In this design, affect was the starting point, a vehicle to move toward somatic presence. This approach was inspired by the movement practice offered as part of the “Waves and Whispers” program described earlier in the Introduction chapter. It bears some resemblance to Schoop’s exploration of affects discussed by Chodorow with the distinction that Schoop’s emphasis was on the aesthetic rather than somatic dimension of movement.

Both individual as well as witnessed movement explorations were included in the design. Working with affect in a group setting confronts the cultural agreement that one’s feelings are to be dealt with privately or in a therapist’s office, that they are shameful or a sign of weakness. In the case of grief, the absence of communal rituals of mourning helps create an illusion that individual grief is special and unique, and that it requires distance from others. Witnessing others in grief can be a powerful means of accessing one’s own and facilitates the recognition that grief is a universal, inescapable part of life, which normalizes one’s experience and mitigates possible effects of shame.

Art making and movement activities were used for expressing experience as they provide the most immediate media for communicating to oneself and others how one is affected. The approach to art making proposed to participants is one suggested by Knill of low skill–high sensitivity, in which what matters is not so much technical ability as expressive competency, a willingness to be honest with one’s process and sensitive to any expression that arises spontaneously, without concern for technical perfection. Several modalities were used in this study: movement, drawing, movement in response to visual
images, and writing; the study utilizes techniques of *intermodal transfer* (switching between art modalities) and *intermodal superimposition* (layering of modalities within one act) which serve to deepen or extend expression.\(^5\)

As Ellen Levine reminds us, the discipline and practice of art can provide a container for narratives emerging from working in the realm of imagination and creativity.\(^6\) Images are seen, heard, or touched simultaneously by both “artist” and “witness.” Within this framework, the embodied image becomes a transformational force.

Following Knill et al., responses to the images (both movement and art images) were kept aesthetic and metaphoric, rather than explanatory and reductive.\(^7\) In their definition, *aesthetic response* is rooted in what Gendlin has described as felt sense, and expresses how a piece of art affects us in “ways that touch the soul, evoke imagination, engage emotion and thought.”\(^8\) When writing is used in the study, efforts are made to formulate questions in ways that encourage bypassing one’s normative identity and invite other subjectivities to come forward. Poetry is one such way for the soul to communicate without the censorship of the rational mind.

**Co-researchers**

Two co-researchers were invited to participate, both of them women who have worked with me over several years. I chose them because both have done a considerable amount of movement practice and have been engaged in their own growth work long enough and deeply enough to understand what it takes to access and allow the expression of feelings. We have collaborated on other projects and have known each other long enough for me to know that they are capable, reliable, reasonably acquainted with their
own psychology, and a delight to be around. They are willing to confront me on my blind spots and ground their own perception in situations in which we disagree.

The first, Alexis Miller, is a graduate of the dance therapy program at Naropa Institute, a consummate mover with acute kinesthetic sensibility. She has worked with me assisting in groups that I have taught, ranging from weekend and week-long residential intensives to month-long programs. She is sensitive to what happens in the group field, perceptive of things that escape me, and has an impressive ability to articulate her perceptions while being aware of her own states of activation, and imaginal structures.

The second, Emily Anderson, works with me regularly, taking and assisting classes and workshops. She is an artist with great aesthetic sensibility, passionate about movement, healing, and dreamwork. She is self-reflexive and interested in assisting others in their growth. She has a strong connection to dreamtime imagination, myth, and the natural world which are all dimensions that helped deepen the research exploration. These qualities made her a great asset for this collaboration.

Both co-researchers were entirely enthusiastic about this project, convinced of the importance of this work, and thrilled to see more application of movement work in psychological inquiry. One of them participated in the pilot study and was very helpful with numerous suggestions for fine-tuning this research design. Their help was invaluable in conducting and making meaning of this study.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The brief length of this study was a significant limitation. Emotional growth is slow and takes long years of determination and patience. Grieving even one significant
loss can be the work of a lifetime. It is not clear how much can be demonstrated in the course of one daylong meeting. Yet even an experience this short can have a transformative effect. But how this experience affects the somatic life of a person afterwards or increases their level of body-mind integration would not be very easy to determine.

The difficulty in eliminating confounding variables is another limitation. It may not be clear what the deciding factor is in a study where individuals willing to explore their inner world receive space, time, and permission to do so, along with compassionate presence, facilitation, movement practices, art materials, provocative questions, support, and a sense of belonging and connectedness with others doing the same work. Participants’ ability to access, express, and integrate feelings in the course of the study may be supported by the somatic approach, or by that combined with all the other elements involved.

A delimitation of the study is the population: individuals who are already comfortable with their bodies enough to do movement work. Participants were recruited from the dance community and chosen if they had some previous experience with movement work. Those accepted for participation in this study had already discovered for themselves that the body is their doorway to the inner world of feelings. They may have chosen a movement practice for that very reason. They fulfill criteria for being kinesthetically aware/oriented.

It is likely that people who are already kinesthetically oriented may get significant results from using conscious movement as a way of accessing, exploring, and expressing their feelings. The same may not be true for someone for whom other modes of
perception are primary. It may be possible to research movement and other somatic approaches in a way that would account for differences among people (and most likely differences in results) due to their perceptive modes. Conversely, it may follow that the results of this study may necessarily be transferable only to similar populations, and its implications limited for the general public.

At the same time, another possibility (supported by trauma research, especially in the arena of pre- and perinatal trauma) is that for many of us the kinesthetic disconnection is at least in part due to trauma induced right-left brain split and familial and cultural conditioning. If that is true, somatic practices such as movement could affect in significant, positive ways a person’s ability to orient kinesthetically. To explore that, however, would require a longitudinal study far beyond the scope of this project.

Another delimitation involves the focus on grief and fear. By choosing to frame the research around these two feelings, the study acquired a certain slant that may have limited the range of emotion participants felt invited to explore. This is not a hard fact, though, given that “grief” has many affective aspects, and that accessing grief may bring up shame, anger, or feelings of helplessness, and expressing grief may lead to feelings of joy, surprise, relief, or delight.

The fact that participants may have known each other before in the context of movement work could have twofold effect. On the one hand, people’s familiarity with each other could create a situation where some trust is present from the beginning, which would likely deepen the experience for participants. On the other hand, that may have introduced another confounding variable into the design, where it is not clear what did
the work: the activities performed or the support and holding provided by relationships between participants.

Of course, the converse could also be true. The fact of being known outside of the context of the study could have affected adversely the participants’ willingness to expose themselves, and inhibited their expression; the same adverse effect, however, could have resulted from participants meeting for the first time in the context of the study and the lack of emotional safety that could engender.

Another delimitation involves the choice not to use touch. Originally, a partner practice of giving and receiving touch was included in the design because touch can ground a person’s experience of embodied self by bringing attention to immediate sensation and what is felt in the body at the moment. It tends to draw attention away from thinking and toward physical sensations of pressure, warmth, tingling, and energy movement, possibly accompanied by pleasure and relaxation. If people are open to giving and receiving touch, it can increase trust and safety between them. Touch is a part of many integrated approaches to healing and a powerful means of support.

Touch can, however, be problematic for people with abuse history and other trauma imprints. For some people touch, and sensation in general, may have become an enemy because of what it was associated with in the past. In those instances, touch may have the opposite effect of the one described above. It can lead to shutdown and dissociation, rather than to increasing body awareness and deepening contact with self. The use of touch would have also introduced another confounding variable into an already complex situation. For the above reasons, the touch exchange was omitted in the
final design and only self-applied pressure point massage was suggested to participants in the guided warm-up.

The delimitation around excluding those experiencing recent loss is due to the fact that acute grief manifests differently than the kind of unacknowledged, unprocessed grief that the study is designed to explore. Grief literature and common sense dictate that people in early stages of grieving may need much more support and holding than a research study would allow them.

Participants

Participant Pool

I am involved with quite a sizeable community of dancers (a thousand or more people), some of whom have taken my programs over the last dozen years. Participants for this study were chosen from among this community, a few of them somewhat familiar with me or with each other in the larger context of movement work. Twelve qualified applicants were selected to participate out of the 16 who applied. Nine actually participated in the study.

Participants’ level of intimacy with each other did not in most cases exceed or even approach that of a casual acquaintance. Those selected did not know each other in professional or intimate contexts. I excluded those applicants with whom I have worked closely in groups or workshops I have led in the past to avoid introducing the complexity of dual relationships.
Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants, I put out a flyer announcing the study in the community and made verbal announcements at the events I attended (Appendices 5 and 6). The announcements spoke about a study that investigates body-mind integration and the relationship between motion and e-motion. Those encouraged to participate were people with some prior experience with expressive movement and curious and willing to explore movement as a way of getting in touch with feelings.

Describing the Study

The study was presented as useful to people looking for new ways of getting in touch with their bodies and feelings, and contributing to the understanding of the relationship between motion and e-motion. No mention was made of specifically what feelings the study was designed to explore. The flyer stated that participation would include activities such as guided and self-directed movement, journaling, and simple art making and sharing, and that participants’ identities would be protected in any sharing or discussion of the results.

Screening

Potential participants were asked to contact me by phone or email to obtain a screening questionnaire by mail or email (Appendix 7). All interested applicants returned the screening questionnaire by email. There was a deadline set for that, as well as the final selection date, by which applicants were informed by email whether they had been
accepted or rejected (Appendix 8). All accepted applicants also received a more detailed letter in the mail, along with a copy of the Informed Consent form (Appendix 4).

Demographic Data

A group of 12 participants was chosen to allow for last minute attrition, and nine actually participated in the study. They were diverse in terms of age (38–61 years old) but not in gender–eight of them were women, only one a man. Regrettably, two other men who had been accepted withdrew for various reasons the week before the study. Despite the hope for the greatest possible diversity, all participants were white and similar in their socio-economic background (middle class).

Participant Characteristics

Some prior experience with awareness based movement was required of all of the participants. Their degree of prior experience was diverse; there also were some significant differences in their levels of psychological awareness which served to yield richer data.

Some self-awareness and some familiarity with psychological work was an important inclusion criterion, as participants must be able, or at least willing, to engage in explorations involving movement, art, and writing.

Information about participants’ level of psychological and somatic awareness and their experience with somatic work was requested in the screening questionnaire. Based on self-assessment, this information was likely only partially accurate, but it did give
enough of an impression about the person’s degree of somatic and psychological awareness.

Participants were recruited from a large community where many people have danced with each other over the years. Some degree of acquaintance between group members was unavoidable. However, participants who were known to have prior history of close personal or professional involvement with each other were excluded from participation. Students who only have taken an occasional drop-in class with me were considered on a case by case basis. The number of participants who knew me from prior engagement of any kind was kept to a minimum.

The study was not open to people unable to tolerate any emotional distress without therapeutic support, unavailable in this context. The screening process was an attempt at making sure individuals with severe or recent trauma history would not be invited to participate. The same applied to those who have recently experienced a significant loss.

**Ensuring Participants’ Confidentiality**

In the initial description of the study participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential. When accepted for participation, they were asked to agree to respect other participants’ confidentiality. They were informed that the identity or confidentiality of the researchers and co-researchers did not need be maintained, and that they had permission to discuss what the three of us said or did during the study. They were also assured that access to all research materials would be restricted to anyone but the researchers and that the results of the study would always be presented in ways that
ensured participants’ anonymity. These agreements were explicitly spelled out in the Informed Consent that participants were asked to sign, and repeated at the beginning of the first meeting (Appendix 9).

Setting

Both study meetings were conducted at a movement studio in a private home near Sonoma, California. It is a space with minimal outside noise and maximum privacy, which created a sense of quiet seclusion with no interruption.

Informed Consent

Accepted participants were mailed a copy of the Informed Consent letter and asked to read it in advance. Another copy of the letter was distributed and signed by each participant at the beginning of the first meeting. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions or discuss any concerns they had either beforehand, by phone or email, or in person at the beginning of the meeting before giving their consent to participate.

Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

Evoking Experience

For evoking experience, participants were asked to fill out the Loss Questionnaire designed to evoke experiences directly related to loss and grief (Appendix 10). Before they began, they were played a recording of David Whyte reciting his poem, “News of Death” (Appendix 11). The content of the poem points to an experience of loss. The way Whyte reads it is evocative in itself.
Participants were then invited into a guided movement warm-up focused around the area of face and jaw, upper chest, arms, hands, and upper back (Appendix 12). They were encouraged to breathe and move in ways that open and stretch the chest, to make faces and stretch and massage their faces to relax the face and jaw, and work with pressure spots in their intercostal muscles to release tension around the chest. At this point movements like reaching, arching, bending, and opening were suggested to further help in opening the energy flow in the chest.

These activities were designed following the recognition by Reich and neo-Reichian theorists that muscular tension in the chest and upper back often relates to repressed feelings of longing, sadness, or despair, and interrupted impulses to sob and reach out. Similarly, tension around the jaw and eyes can be a sign of held back tears and sobbing.\(^9\)

The intention behind this part of the design was to shift away from thinking into feeling and sensing, by guiding participants’ attention toward sensations, especially in the area of their heart. Attention, breath and touch brought to the body also helped participants arrive and relax.

In order to further evoke the experience of grief, participants were invited to enter a twenty minute solo movement exploration of the breath, sounds, shapes, and gestures of grief to a set of evocative music pieces (Appendix 12). This was preceded by listening to another recorded poem, Whyte’s reciting his “Well of Grief” (Appendix 14).

A similar sequence was repeated with focus on fear. Participants were shown the opening scene from the movie *Cliffhanger*, after which they were encouraged to explore
the breath, sounds, shapes, and gestures of fear, accompanied by another set of evocative instrumental music cuts.

Expressing Experience

Movement was the primary expressive modality in this study. In addition, art making, writing, and verbal sharing were also used as ways of expressing experience.

Participants were asked to draw in response to what they discovered and experienced in each of the two movement explorations. While originally only one period of drawing was planned, to be offered after the completion of both movement segments, it became obvious in the process that a shift from the grief dance immediately into the exploration of fear would have been jarring. Participants seemed to need more time to work with the experience of grief, so they were invited to express how they were affected by drawing; the same opportunity was offered after the fear segment.

Oil pastels were provided and enough drawing paper for participants to make multiple images. The art pieces were to express some of what was experienced in the solo movement explorations by bringing it into visual form. Participants were encouraged to make one or more images that expressed the flavor, intensity, mood, or content of what they had discovered (Appendix 12). This method is inspired by the kinesthetic imagery process described by D. Halprin and the intermodal approach of Expressive Arts Therapy as articulated by McNiff as well as Knill, Barba, and Fuchs.¹⁰

This portion of the process was introduced by reminding participants that art making could be a process similar to a movement exploration, where the body is trusted to come up with its own expression that need not represent anything or be available for
anyone’s interpretation. To encourage those who do not see themselves as “artists” participants were asked to let the image unfold on paper as a dance would, without having to know in advance what it would look like and without concern for its beauty. They were encouraged to begin drawing with eyes closed, relying first on kinesthetic, rather than visual feedback.

In another expressive segment, participants entered into a movement dialogue with their images, either moving in response to an image that drew their attention or by taking on an image and moving as that, while witnessed by a partner. This section was based on McNiff’s method of imaginal dialogue and D. Halprin’s psychokinetic imagery process.11

In turn, their partners responded with shapes and gestures expressing how they were affected. This was an expression of their aesthetic response, which according to Knill and his collaborators, is “a distinct response, with a bodily origin, to an occurrence in imagination, to an artistic act, or to the perception of an art work” which “occurs within persons who engage in the artistic/creative process as artists or performers and as witnesses.”12 Aesthetic response is different from analysis, interpretation, evaluation, or even reflection. Rather, it is a soulful communication in a shared space of exploration.

Another invitation for participants to express their experience were four journal questions they were asked to consider and respond to in writing (Appendix 13). The questions were framed in a way that invited participants to speak from outside their normative identity. For example, they were asked to write in the voice of an image they drew, or write as grief or fear. This way of expressing experience was designed to access
information that would not come across from the more rational, conscious way of writing in response to questions about “me” and “my experience.”

Writing a poem was another way for participants to capture their experience. Expressed in a poetic language, experience can deepen and reveal subtler nuances. Writing a poem can touch and express a layer of the soul inaccessible to everyday language. In the words of Knill and his colleagues, “Poetry has the capacity to elaborate and explain in an imaginative way characterized by precision and particularity. … It is a tool for re-discovery and being taken by surprise.”

One other expressive sequence, in which the group was to be split in two and take turns presenting to the other half of the group moving, communal enactments of grief, was dropped from the design to avoid emotional overload during the daylong session and instead to allow space for digestion and integration of what already seemed like a rich and potent event.

Participants did have another opportunity to express their experience at the follow-up Meeting Two weeks later. They were asked to consider journal questions concerning their reflections of how they had been affected in the intervening period as well as their responses to preliminary learnings presented by the researchers at that meeting (Appendix 16).

The data consists of written responses and poems, photographs of the art pieces, videotaped movement explorations, audio-recordings of all verbal sharing in the group, and the key discussions between co-researchers as well as co-researchers’ journal writings.
Interpreting Experience

The closing circle of Meeting One began by participants’ identifying the key moments of the day and describing how they were affected by them (Appendix 15). Some meaning making emerged directly out of that. More meaning was gleaned from participants’ written responses to the journal questions, their art pieces, and from observing them in their movement explorations as well as in the process of drawing.

In the co-researchers’ meeting immediately after the main data collection session, key moments were identified and shared as well as comments about how we were affected by what had happened. This was initiated by a period of journaling. A preliminary discussion of parallels and differences between our responses and perceptions and of the learnings that emerged at that point was included. Themes and patterns noticed that day in participants’ movement were discussed and noted. This conversation was audiorecorded.

In the data analysis process a combination of intuitive and condensation approaches was applied by looking for themes, landscapes, and stories that emerge from participants’ writings, art, and videotaped movement sequences. As Knill, Barba, and Fuchs remind us, “Interpretation need not be a process of translating images, sounds, rhythms, acts, movements and words into a theoretical framework that lies outside the context” but rather, it can be expressed in poetic language, “imaginative, particular, and precise.”

The myth that emerged to hold this inquiry was that of the descent of Inanna, a story about the utmost necessity of descending into the underworld in search of a dimension of experience that was once acknowledged as an essential part of the unbroken
wheel of life and was then split off and lost; descending to bring the lost piece back so it
can be re-integrated in the recognition of health understood as wholeness.

**Integrating Experience**

Ways of integrating experience were built into the study’s design, where during
each transition participants were given a chance to have a moment of quiet, to make eye
contact with another person, or to sit still and connect with their breath before moving on
to the next thing. To allow maximum integration as the process unfolded, the pacing of
the meeting was kept such that nothing felt rushed or speedy. The material evoked in
these processes was sensitive and needed time to be digested. As mentioned above, one
activity was dropped from the design for that reason; another was added to help create
more psychic space. In addition, participants were asked to have a silent lunch and to use
the extra break time to journal about their experiences rather than talking to each other.

Safety in the room can be crucial to what can happen during the process,
especially if the group is formed by people who have not met before, or not in the context
of personally sensitive exploration. Safety is also important for integrating the
experience. To support the building of safety and trust in the group, in the opening circle
participants were invited to say their name, one thing that brought them to this study, and
something about their relationship to their feelings. Throughout the course of the study,
the permission to go into the processes only as far as each participant was willing to go
was repeatedly emphasized. Participants were given options of modifying or sitting out
an activity if it did not feel right for them.
The closing circle sharing and reading of the poems, as well as sharing of touch at the end (holding hands in the circle, good-bye hugs) was also meant to aid in integrating the experience of the day.

The follow-up Meeting Two weeks after the main session was offered to help integrate this experience further. Its purpose was to present preliminary learnings, to receive participants’ responses, and to inquire about what might have shifted for them in the intervening period. Upon approval of the dissertation, participants will be emailed a summary of the learnings gained from this study (Appendix 19).

The findings of this study can become a basis for several articles. One article could be written for professionals working in the field of somatic therapy. Another could be addressed to the growing community interested in meditation; this article would promote the possibility of using conscious movement as an awareness practice and a method of discovery of the immediate experience underneath the thinking mind, especially useful for people for whom sitting still and attempting to meditate initially leads to more dissociation rather than more presence. A presentation, written or oral, for the population at large would focus on the benefits of body-mind integration for stress reduction and physical and psychological wellbeing. Hospice workers could benefit from the inspiration to approach grief and bereavement work with their clients through somatic practices. The results of the study can also be incorporated in the design of new workshops or class series offered to the general public interested in exploring the somatic basis of experience.
CHAPTER 4

LEARNINGS

Introduction and Overview

This study was devoted to exploring the Research Problem: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The research hypothesis was: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

Cumulative Learning: Surrender of the Known Opens the Door to Hidden Treasure

The cumulative learning was, A group exploration of somatic process through expressive movement and art can be experienced as a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal expression becomes part of a collective ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration that can occur in the process depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear. This learning validates the research hypothesis.
Overview of the Learnings

The main claim of Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside, is that the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect.

Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld, declares that in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience.

Learning Three: The Body Is a Doorway to Mystery, states that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience.

The main claim of Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting, is that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment.

Learning Five: One Thing We Fear Is Fear Itself, shows that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment.

The detailed discussion of these learnings will be the topic of the next five sections. Following the principles of Imaginal Inquiry, the validity of the learnings is addressed by examining the different aspects of the inter-subjective field. This includes
considering the feedback of both the co-researchers and the participants, especially when it offers counter-evidence or competing perspectives; attending to shadow or taboo aspects of the research; and self-reflexive examination of imaginal structures and researcher bias. Additionally, authenticity is discussed as a measure of validity in the participatory paradigm.²

In the account that follows, Meeting One is also referred to as the main session, and Meeting Two as the follow-up session. All participants are referred to using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

**Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside**

The primary claim of this learning is that the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Regardless of whether one has a positive or negative response to the group, being with others in a space of shared intention transforms an individual’s experience into an expression of the collective feeling matrix.

**What Happened**

The two main segments in the Evoking-Expressing Sequences in Meeting One were the movement explorations around grief and fear, accompanied by evocative music. Participants were invited to move with the breath, shapes and sounds of these emotions, if possible accessing rather than attempting to playact the feeling. Each section was followed by art making.
In the grief section, participants began moving as soon as the music started, and then continued to expand their expression with larger movements and sound. There was a lot of movement in the upper body, extension of the arms, chests opening, necks stretching. Many participants spent some periods of time shaking. Some people were on the floor, curling and uncurling. Soon, several were crying, sobbing, or wailing. Almost everyone was turned away from the camera most of the time.

At some point early on, “Trish” (pseudonym), who moved around the room quite a bit, uttered a loud piercing scream. Some people covered their ears and moved away. Others began to make loud sounds also. Everyone cried at some point. Midway through it, “Kerri” (pseudonym) crouched on the floor rocking back and forth, with tears welling up in her eyes. Her face opened, softened, and she began to cry, then sob, and continued to rock. At several points “Margaret” (pseudonym) was walking around the room speaking in a haunting, deep voice in an unrecognizable language.

The next movement exploration was a dance of fear. Here, participants were scattered around the room. Some moved through various shapes and postures of hiding, turning away, and curling up. Once again, Margaret vocalized her experience in that same chilling, otherworldly way.

In their journal responses and verbal sharing, all participants but one addressed in some way the influence of the group on their experience. They were surprised by “[t]he ease of accessing grief which was from others in the room (I had no personal example which fueled me)” and grateful for “the connectedness that is here because of taking the risk to dive in to the unknown with each other.” One said that “it helped to have space
held, but without a strong focus or eye just on me–it gave me more freedom to be whatever I was, without questioning it.”

“Greg” (pseudonym) spoke at closing circle with tears in his eyes about the support he felt in the room: “To be able to be in an experience like this and be able to be not just okay but encouraged, encouraged with elegance about how to go through it there and to have the support of the room like that... this has been fun, thank you.”

In the journal from Meeting Two, “Diana” (pseudonym) spoke about tapping into a space of “tribal grief,” and the experience of “grieving together” in community. It felt to her like a “cellular, genetic coding reclaiming”–not so much a personal one. During the closing discussion she spoke about this “tribal reclamation” as connecting to “something way back that has no psychological framework but was . . . really deep . . . this tribal ‘we are in it together’ that was deeply nourishing and very surprising.”

In contrast, “Amy” (pseudonym) wrote and later spoke in the closing circle about her discomfort with both feeling and expressing her feelings in a group. She was mostly still in both movement sections. She was on the periphery of the room, turned away from others, covering her ears when there was loud sound. She hardly moved at all. She wrote: “I don’t like grief or fear. I had trouble accessing those 2 feelings. And when I did, I wanted to experience them in privacy. I wanted to be alone + quiet + still. It was hard for me to be expressive or to keep moving . . . I really just wanted to be still + quiet.” Yet at Meeting Two, she wrote that during the group experience she had been “remembering those very real and intense feelings . . . that I really wanted to forget (i.e., my reaction to fear and that I was a very fearful, scared child).”
Amy acknowledged that the group experience gave her “a littler more clarity” regarding the judgments she held about feeling and expressing intense emotions and her ways of coping with overwhelming experience. Others, too, expressed their ambivalence about the influence of the group. Diana said in the closing circle: “I am very challenged when big processes are happening in the same room. It’s hard for me to stay connected to myself, and it’s just an inquiry I have about how... about the line between staying connected to myself and also letting myself be impacted and how it takes me away or [becomes] untrue... or is that more true? It gets a little confusing there for me.”

Kerri echoed Diana’s comments, “[o]nly that I saw that in the same way, [the group] served me at some point, really served me. But I think [next time] I would bring earplugs... so that I could at least stay with my own experience. Have it [the group], sense that it’s there, . . . but I could control, particularly the sound... because that’s a little too much and pulls me.” She spoke with visible agitation, or irritation, and was less circumspect in her journal response, where she wrote: “I wanted to kill the screaming lady.” She added though, “but she was also the one who led me into the grotto [of my grief]–so, I guess she’s 1 for 1 in my book. Realizing that her ‘fear’ was totally invasive for me. I hated it–yet, it’s also one of the tougher emotions for me to access [on my own].”

How I Was Affected

Early on, during the first movement exploration, my response was a sense of relaxation and softening. I was just arriving in the room and in my body after the initial experience of anxiety and tension. I felt present, I could sense my feet on the floor, my
back, and my breath. I felt happy to see so many of the participants so enthusiastically diving into their process with relatively little encouragement. I felt relieved and satisfied, but a little removed from what was happening.

When I saw Kerri cry in the grief sequence I began to feel a constriction in my throat, a warmth spreading in my chest, and tears coming up. I felt oddly comforted by being in the space. An ache appeared in the area of my heart and my throat opened. I felt like I needed to take in more air. I felt full of intense emotion, moved to tears and almost ready to scream. I did make some movement and sound just to allow the emotion to flow more freely. I felt filled to capacity, closely connected to the room, and deeply affected by participants’ expression.

The same sequence repeated itself during the fear segment. From initially feeling detached, or isolated, I experienced another deepening in my state of presence and connectedness to the room. The shift at that time occurred for me in response to Margaret’s incantation which sent a shiver down my spine. At that point I felt a familiar sense of being blasted open, as if overcome by too much feeling, or a feeling bigger than I could contain. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, I felt elated and astonished, or awed.

As mentioned earlier, in my initial internal check-in during the movement explorations in the morning, I noticed that I felt present and “in touch” with myself. However, the remarkable shift I experienced a while later made me realize that I had been keeping a certain distance from what was happening around me and only when I opened to the feeling of the room did I really get “in touch.” The experience of that shift made me realize that I have a certain way of being dissociated that feels like “presence” and maybe to some degree it is; but after I shifted, I experienced the initial state as a subtle
compensation, or coping skill I have developed to create for myself the impression of presence while actually protecting myself from being affected by what is happening around me.

When I became present in that deeper way, I noticed a fullness in my body where there was empty feeling space before; openness now felt like a feelingful flow rather than an absence. I am describing this in detail because I think many people, even those regarding themselves as somatically aware, live in that space of semi-dissociation mistaking it for normal presence. I credit the power of the field that day for my being able to experience the shift into full embodied awareness.

My co-researchers reported similar responses of being deeply affected by the room and getting in touch with their own feelings by witnessing the participants. Emily wrote while witnessing the movement segment:

I feel the awareness, the “awakeness” of the extreme polar opposites of moving, being—I can feel the desire, the pull towards the deepest blackness of sleep, . . . and I can feel the pull of the explosion, of dancing so hard that my body shatters and becomes the universe, sparkling and AWAKE in every particle. Feel the real need to balance out all these words with movements, loud, fast, large…wanting to push against something, feel resistance back against me—push hands, press against back, pressure on my body would be good. I want to shake or be shaken. A good roar would cure the dull ache of the head.

Alexis said in the closing circle: “[A]s I was witnessing grief, I felt my whole body respond to everyone in the room... It was like a tango, my body was leaping out of my heart.” She wrote in her journal: “As an assistant, I thought I would not be impacted as I was. I was deeply moved by the room, by the participants, and by the collective energy. When I witnessed Kerri, my heart felt like layers were shucked off...”

All three of us noted a vicarious impact what was happening in the room had on us, and the difficulty of just witnessing, without the ability to join in by moving or
sounding. I felt myself shake with the impact during most of Meeting One. Only the next morning, after I danced for an hour and had a chance to let the energy move did I feel more complete with the experience.

**Imaginal Structures in Use**

Witnessing the feeling explorations in the room brought up for me the imaginal structure related to the prohibition of feeling that I experienced as a child. I was born with a lot of affect into an environment where emotions were not only not encouraged but either ignored or actively denied, negated, and ridiculed. I felt a profound sense of validation, I could say vindication, in a room full of people who were allowing themselves to both experience and express their feelings. I wanted to cry for all those years when my feelings were hidden or denied and at the same time, out of intense joy at having found an environment where the old prohibition did not hold. I felt strongly that being with others in this experience had a lot to do with my deep sense of relief: not just was it okay for me to feel but I was in a group of people who were also willing to descend into this realm of human experience. I cried afterwards remembering the profound loneliness I felt as a child in so many situations fraught with terror and heartbreak.

Both of my co-researchers had similar observations about themselves. What we all had in common was the paradoxical presence of imaginal structures related both to the prohibition of feeling and to the longing for permission and company in feeling. Emily wrote in her journal about this paradox of trying to keep it together, like a “manicured garden,” and the longing for expression:

I want to be out there on the floor, I want to unleash the volcano that lies idle, quiet…hair in place, face expression calm, yet such a force is screaming from
behind these seemingly sacred and quiet gardens—manicured gardens, watered and tended—remembering the full fury of nature. . . I suppose it is aliveness that I feel; yet I am keeping it at bay.

Theoretical Concepts Assisting in Interpretation

In her work with groups practicing Authentic Movement, Adler observed that when each person in a group is engaged in exploring her own bodily reality, a shift appears to occur where each individual expression seems to become a manifestation of just one aspect of the whole of life, less personal to the particular individual and more an expression of the collective unconscious. Adler has termed this phenomenon the collective body.3

Omer’s concept of transformative learning community is also helpful here. As Omer declares, “The role of peers in initiatory contexts is to create a community of practice.”4 In such a community, difference and ambivalence can be engaged with creatively and reflexively, challenged, and struggled with in the process of developing new ways of being with experience and engaging in creative action. Though Omer speaks about learning communities involved in long term educational endeavors, a similar phenomenon seems to occur even in a short event such as this study.

That a group of strangers can become a community of practice for the duration of the one day they spend together points to what V. Turner defined as communitas and his concept of liminal space: a meeting outside of the usual societal forms, where a spontaneous intimacy occurs between people. In liminal phenomena, V. Turner says, we are “presented with a ‘moment in and out of time.’”5 His description of communitas as “the direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities which tends to make
those experiencing it think of mankind [sic] as a homogenous . . . community” resonates with what participants reported experiencing in the study.  

A parallel concept used in psychoanalysis is that of intersubjectivity, expanded here beyond the one on one context to recognize that one’s affective experience within a group is influenced by the mutual interplay of the subjective experiences of all present.  

Similarly, the understanding of affective resonance, usually described in attachment theory within the context of a dyadic relationship, is also expanded here to describe a group phenomenon where affective attunement can lead, in the words of Beebe and Lachmann, to “peak experiences of resonance, exhilaration, awe, and being on the same wavelength.”  

The primary mythological lens guiding this interpretation is the myth of Inanna’s descent into the underworld. As proposed by Brinton Perera, the goddess’s dangerous journey in order to retrieve wholeness requires the surrender of individuality to the primal matrix of undifferentiated being.

My Interpretations of What Happened

The act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. At several points during movement explorations described above, there was a palpable sense in the room that a process was unfolding that was larger than the sum of what was happening for the individual participants at any given moment. An intersubjective field was constellating where participants were affected by what was happening around them.
The group field supported and strengthened the invitation to feel. In many cases, participants unable to access their own feelings at the moment sensed what was present in the field and then were able to contact their own emotions. With Margaret’s incantations something more powerful was constellated in the room than even a common emotional field. The space took on a timeless, liminal quality. The progressions seemed illogical, the jumps qualitative in nature. While not looking at each other, participants moved in synchrony according to some invisible design. Waves of kinesthetic and affective resonance seemed to pass through the room, creating a sense that participants were enacting a choreography beyond their individual expression.

Participants took turns expressing aspects of the collective body. Those who a minute ago were sobbing were now laughing. Distinctions between whose grief? whose fear? who is feeling this? seemed to blur. A spontaneous ritual was unfolding in the room, resembling Prechtel’s portrayals of Mayan village rituals, the healing dances of the Kalahari bushmen with their wordless songs, or V. Turner’s descriptions of communitas.

Communitas dissolves the norms of institutionalized relationships and is “accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.” V. Turner points out that although the communitas spirit “presses always to universality and ever greater unity,” it is not antithetical or hostile to individuality; indeed, in its absence, individuals become alienated and are prone to suffer from despair in ways that diminish the authentic nature of a person. In this study, individual expression was transformed into a communal enactment and in turn, the experience of the communal field catalyzed the most discovery in participants’ individual journeys.
The concept of undifferentiated being can be applied in this interpretation on a couple of levels. First, the body in Jungian thought is seen as identical with the unconscious. An expressive movement and art exploration of embodied feeling is designed to make it possible to descend into one’s underworld, offering access to the chaos of sensations, images, and feelings, one’s inner world of undifferentiated being.

At the same time, the collective field constellated in the room also had those characteristics of the primal matrix, with its lack of apparent logic, qualitative leaps, and undifferentiated field of feeling. It is as though the room became a visible external manifestation of the internal process; the pull to abandon the familiar sense of individuality was felt both on the inside and the outside; the subjective I was taken over both inside and out: taken someplace unfamiliar by one’s somatic process, but also taken over by what was happening for others in the room. Alexis points out the positive aspect of this: the surrender to the matrix also means giving up the (painful) idea, or for many us, a memory, of being alone in the place of despair or terror; what is found in the space of undifferentiated being is not just a terrifying dissolution of individual identity into the energy field, but also a sense of finding a holding environment, of being received by an archetypal mother, in Alexis’s words, “feeling seen and held in the deepest way.”

Trish poetically captured the feeling of the primal matrix, writing (as grief):

I am a container through which things must flow. I change shape and flow in waves and when you are in me, I can lead the way to oneness. It is through me that all humans are connected. This is where loneliness, loss, despair intersect and are soothed. At the core/base of me is calm, knowing and emptiness. I am a blanket to cover with, or a wave to ride out to sea.

“Judy” (pseudonym) was the only participant who never said anything about being affected by the group. She seemed to be oblivious to any influence the field might
have had on her, though paradoxically, she seemed acutely aware of the environment and her attention seemed more focused outside of herself than inside.

Amy had a negative experience of others’ presence and expression in the movement sequences. For her, at least initially, the group was a distraction, an assault on her senses and a violation of her right to privacy. Later she acknowledged that most of her reaction had to do with her resistance to the internal, more than the external, space of undifferentiated being: her not wanting to surrender to the intensity of the fear with which she had gotten in touch during the group experience.

Validity Considerations

The validity of this learning is supported by accounting for the experience of all participants, most of whom, even when ambivalent, had something to say about the experience of being together in this exploration. They spoke of the power of being seen and inspired, the sense of being supported and sustained, held by the field, and changed by the impact, in some cases in lasting ways. Even in the case of a negative reaction (Amy’s), it was the community’s impact that brought out in strong relief her own ambivalence in embodying her process, and later allowed for a shift in how she approached her inner experience.

The researcher bias was examined by addressing the imaginal structures of the three co-researchers related to our assumption that feeling is good, valuable, and indispensable, and our appreciation for communal contexts for feeling.
Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld

The primary claim of this learning is that in a group exploration of affect, repeated sacrifice of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. Because the invitation into feeling, movement, and art making is an invitation into the unconscious, it can be seen as a descent into the underworld. In the words of the myth of Inanna, the upper-world consciousness must be sacrificed (temporarily suspended) for the purpose of retrieving and integrating other modes of knowing. This sacrifice is required repeatedly, the way Inanna was asked to relinquish something at each of the seven gates to the underworld.

What Happened

During the entire study, everyone chose to follow all the instructions and participate in all the activities. At several points, participants were encouraged to continue only if it felt right to them, yet everyone stayed with the process throughout Meeting One. Everyone also attended Meeting Two.

Diana, “Elena” (pseudonym), Kerri, Margaret, and Trish seemed to have most ease in entering into and staying with their process. They moved and made sounds, their movements were expressive and varied in pace, force, and volume, and their faces alive with emotion: tears, laughter, anger, fear, and disgust. In contrast to others, they rarely looked up or around the room. Rather, they seemed internally focused and fully engaged with whatever they were following at the moment. Diana wrote in her journal responses:

Today has been an interesting journey in the unexpected, the mystery, the unknown—and I LOVE that! I love the surprise of body process oriented work . . . it shows me most clearly that something is here beyond myself; beyond me
“doing”—something is doing me and that brings with it a kind of freedom and letting go that is a rich dynamic teacher for me.

Yet all of them reported noticing points of choice, where they made conscious decisions to surrender into the process rather than following their thoughts or reactions and so leaving their experience. About one of her key moments, Trish said:

The moment I heard we were going to do a grief thing I thought oh man, I’m outta here (laughs) . . . I look at it and I think ah, crap... what kind of a day are we in for? but then ... the next piece for me has to be about making a conscious choice, okay do I stay or do I go? Okay, I’ll stay and there is a qualifier: and if I get too uncomfortable I am going . . . I will not just do it because I promised or because, whatever, all that stuff . . . it feels really good to have been able to do that and not be caught up in the fear, break down, or run out of the room, or any of the million things that could have happened way back when.

In contrast, Greg, Judy, and to some degree “Rachel” (pseudonym) were moving little and scanning the room often, sometimes with a vacant look in their eyes. Judy had brought her small dog with her to the main session and kept checking in on her pet who was left on the patio outside the sliding door of the studio. This required her to leave whatever we were doing at several points in the session when the dog whimpered or wandered away. Judy moved relatively little and spent long periods of time laying on her back with eyes open, sometimes moving her arms just a little.

Judy wrote about fear: “Fear is mostly concerned w/protecting you–getting you out of danger, or inspiring you w/energy to act to avoid danger. The energy, though, can just spiral out to hysteria, which can defeat the purpose of fear.” And about grief: “[G]rief is often a result of disappointed expectations–loss of something we expected to have longer, or separation from something we want. Part of that is anger–anger that life is unfolding or people are acting, in a way we don’t like or want.”
In the grief exploration, Greg looked lost. He stopped often to look around and spent some time just standing there, with that repeated gesture of wringing his hands that we have come to associate with him. In the fear section he was more expressive, though his movement had some quality of playacting. He said in the closing circle of Meeting One that he realized “what an incongruent being I am... how many contradictions live inside me... and how much control that I actually have over these emotions... that it’s my choice...” Asked to clarify, he said, “I have the control to bring back the grief. I have the control to bring back the fear. So if I can make those happen, if I have that control, do I have the control to transform those? Yes.” In his poem, he says,

Choose an emotion
act it out.
Act it way out
of your body.

Amy hardly moved at all during the grief and fear segments. Her emotional expression was limited to some tears she shed early on. Then she stayed motionless for long stretches of time. She later reported being aware of “judgment–of myself and others” and “varying degrees of denial.” In her written and verbal responses, she repeatedly mentioned her aversion to experiencing strong feelings for fear of being out of control. She wrote: “I don’t like grief or fear. I had trouble accessing those 2 feelings. . . . Guess I feel my grief + fear are not really legit. I also don’t want to dwell on either or feel either.” In her poem, she said:

What is legitimate grief? Real fear?
Big. Dark. Enveloping. Endless.
I want to be alone. Quiet. Still.
Loud. Uncontrollable. Looming.
I want to feel in private.
Tenderness. Intimacy. Peace.
Stay connected.
How I Was Affected

I was positively impressed by most participants’ willingness to enter and follow their process. I felt happy and deeply moved seeing them dive into their experience with apparent readiness and courage. I had a different feeling in relation to those who did not seem to surrender to the process as easily. In those cases, my responses ranged from disappointment, to slight aversion (most often manifesting as a judgment about what I perceived as their limitation), to rage.

I experienced flashes of rage in response to what I saw as some participants’ refusal to surrender, especially Amy’s. In a journal entry, I said: “I am angry as I write this, and I was angry transcribing her responses. My reaction startled me. The feeling had the flavor of rage really, about the ignorance and arrogance of the point of view that inquires into the ‘legitimacy’ or ‘reality’ of feelings.” I also felt reactive in the room when I saw immobility and restrained emotional expression.

In contrast, Alexis stated that Amy’s report in the closing circle about the difficulty she had experienced accessing and expressing her feelings was a key moment for her, full of poignancy, honesty, and vulnerability.

Imaginal Structures in Use

When reflecting on the question posed to participants in Meeting Two regarding what they felt they had been asked to surrender, I realized that one of the ideas I refused to give up was the expectation that a successful process is intense, expressive, and now. Because of my own preference for intensity, and the lack of permission and support for it in the past, I carry an expectation that a good process must have a certain look or feel to
it, similar to how I look or feel when I enter my own process. I forget that a larger intelligence is in charge here and that my reactions only point to my own limited view and my lack of trust in a person’s timing and capacity for self-regulation.

Another related imaginal structure has to do with my lack of tolerance for what I see as refusal to feel. Both my parents had their own ways of avoiding feeling, and growing up I was faced with what seemed like a wall of denial and unconsciousness. When in the presence of someone who in my perception walls off her emotional reality, this imaginal structure is activated and results in my feeling impatience, agitation and often anger.

The rage I felt in response to Amy questioning the legitimacy of her fear and grief took me into an identification with those feelings she doubted, as if my legitimacy was being questioned. I was what was considered an illegitimate child and growing up I felt as if I was asked to justify, explain, or prove the legitimacy of my existence. In its cultural dimension, this imaginal structure of being an illegitimate child seems to play into my outrage at the culturally low status accorded the emotional and somatic aspects of being human (often associated with the feminine), as if they were but mistakes, bastard children of the enlightened mind.

My anger at how matter, woman, feeling are subjugated in the Western mainstream is relatively recent. I too was once a dutiful daughter of patriarchy, in service of the dominance of the upper-worldly values and attitudes. When I see in someone else a reflection of who I used to be, committed to upholding the ideals of the distorted masculine, I react with aversion and rage.
Theoretical Concepts Assisting in Interpretation

The main theoretical lens used in this interpretation is the distinction between left brain and right brain processing, often employed by Schore, Siegel, Fosha, and many others. Related to that are concepts of top-down and bottom-up processing: the former based in linear, rational reasoning and reliant on belief and established patterns of perception; the latter inclusive of sensory and affective input. Siegel’s notion of mindfulness is also used as a model for bilateral processing.

When left brain processing is exclusive or dominant, it can be framed in psychological terms by Ross’s concept of the dissociated ego. The dissociated ego protects its identity through exclusive acceptance of linear logic and rational thinking; it is unable to sacrifice this form of consciousness or surrender to unpredictable experiences which may prove dangerous to its existence.

Other theoretical concepts helpful to apply here include Keleman’s discussion of excitement and especially the distinctions between containment and suppression. To summarize, having good containment means that the high energetic charge of deep sadness, rage, fear, pleasure, or any other intense feeling or sensation can be experienced in the body without the need to suppress it. Containment is the place of homeostasis on the continuum of how an organism manages excitement that has suppression (overcontainment) at one end and acting out (undercontainment) at the other; it allows appropriate expression—a healthy discharge of energy, different from acting out.

Boadella’s concept of dynamic morphology of the human body is useful in illuminating the differences in how people access and express their inner experience, especially differences resulting from the dysfunction or disconnection between the
ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm that manifest as imbalances between the three modes of functioning: perception, action, and feeling.  

Seen through the lens of the myth of Inanna, the distinction between left brain and right brain is one between ways of knowing and being that are sanctioned by the upper world (left brain consciousness and values) and those needed to enter the underworld (right brain consciousness and values). From the myth of descent also comes the metaphor of surrender at the gates. As Inanna passes through each of the seven gates to the underworld, she is stripped of all outer signs of her upper-worldly power. Similarly, participants were repeatedly asked to surrender some of the power of their executive ego at the gates to their inner world.

**My Interpretations of What Happened**

In a group exploration of affect through movement and art, repeated sacrifice of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. This sacrifice requires tolerating the suspension of the familiar top-down processing mode of the left brain, and surrender to the right brain mode of bottom-up processing. The right brain, deeply connected into the body, is in Schore’s model “the biological substrate of the human unconscious mind.”

Participants who continually allowed the process to take them past the restraints of the dissociated ego experienced transformative shifts. Those unable to tolerate the discomfort of suspending familiar reference points had a more limited access to their inner reality. All participants with no exception reported some level of challenge around their need to know—what is happening, what will happen, what the outcome will be, what
this all means, and who is in charge inside. Some stated that this issue had to be
negotiated over and over again; as if they had to pass through the same gate repeatedly at
different stages of the process. Participants’ need to know manifested in several different
ways. Each time this need became evident it turned into a gate where a sacrifice was
required to proceed further.

The gate most obvious to everyone was the reality of this being a group study.
The presence of others in the room, and the collective field that was constellated through
common intention became the dominant experience for all participants but one. This also
meant that as a consequence, participants felt that they needed to surrender the
separateness of their individual experience in the process. As described in the previous
section, most participants did allow the undifferentiated being to take over at least to
some degree, or at some points during the session. Even those who explicitly expressed
their ambivalence in the closing discussion, also reported instances of giving up the
resistance to the field.

Another gate required surrender of preference for limited, or controlled intensity,
and for certain feelings over others. The psychic underworld seems to be the realm of
primal rage, terror, anguish, and grief, and one does not always get to feel some of these
flavors to the exclusion of others, or moderate their potency. Many participants reported
being surprised by the intensity of their feelings, and also of others’ feelings. Surprise
turned into overwhelm and shutdown for Amy, Rachel, Judy, and Greg. Judy and Greg in
particular both seemed to use evaluative thinking and the idea of control as unconscious
defense against feeling, while stating that they were feeling a lot. Their self-assessment
seemed incongruent with their expression.
Defending against the pull and intensity of collective feeling made the descent harder. Reactions to loud expressions of fear or grief leading to judgments about oneself or others, one’s habitual patterns of avoidance of feeling, or opinions about what experiences one is allowed or safe to have—each an example of how top-down processes restrict contact with present experience—all seemed to divert attention from the feeling itself, or made going deeper into it more difficult; and each presented participants with a gate that would only open through a surrender of that particular stance.

Several participants chose not to go past some of those gates. This appeared especially evident in the case of Amy, Rachel, and Judy, who repeatedly chose to restrict both the experience and the expression of their emotions, seemed conscious of their choices, and did not report regretting them later. In consequence, the depth of their descent may have been limited.

To extrapolate Keleman’s model, suppression could be seen as a refusal or inability to surrender to an intense feeling or sensation; and that dissociation is an extreme way of suppressing excitement (i.e., losing touch with feelings) through physical contraction or mental management of emotions, or both. Judy, Greg, and Amy seemed overcontained and dissociated from their bodies to a significant degree. Paradoxically, Judy worked hard on suppressing feeling because she was afraid of “feeling too much, being run by feelings,” meaning not being able to contain the charge. She seemed to remain in her egoic identity a lot of the time. In some of her journal responses, she wrote in a detached, lecturing voice, unable to shift out of the dissociated self’s point of view.

Another gate required the surrender of control over the outcome. Those who were unable to consciously give up the illusion of being in charge had difficulty accessing their
depths. Greg is an example of someone who talks about “consciously transforming” emotions and who actually gets in his own way of experiencing them. His way of accessing his feelings “in order to transform them” seems an expression of a desire to control.

Greg is a public speaker, concerned about image and performance. In his movement, he seemed to be working from the outside in and not often connecting to an authentic layer of feeling. In his writing and speaking, he repeatedly used the words “perform,” “performance,” and “script.” While apparently dissociated in the grief exploration, he was visibly angry later, speaking more than once of the losses he had experienced. This seems to indicate that his grief can only manifest as anger. Giving in to the softer aspects of grief would have required more surrender than he was willing to offer, and a vulnerability that anger can mask. A gender related attitude may be at work here which is outside the scope of the present discussion.

In a discussion at the follow-up session concerning the necessity for a temporary sacrifice of the left brain mode and shift into right brain, Kerri proposed an alternative view pointing out that the act of choice has a masculine/left brain quality and that the journey might need to already require some integration of the right and left brain. Thus it may be inaccurate to say that all upper-worldly attitudes need to be suspended for the process to be successful. The capacity to make a choice, however, must not extend into attempts to manage or control experience; the choice that makes it possible for the process to deepen must paradoxically be a choice to surrender.

Some of the differences between participants’ ability to surrender may have resulted from differences in their body structures–following Boadella’s typology. This
approach of expressive descent may work best for participants with a well-developed endoderm layer who have an ease getting in touch with their inner reality, and may be hardest for those with an overactive ectoderm, whose attention is focused strongly on their perception of the environment.\textsuperscript{21}

Trish and Diana, two clear examples of the endoderm type, have done a lot of work with themselves and seem no strangers to deep inner explorations. For them, the left brain seems present but not dominating. They can make choices from a witness’s point of view and know the difference between feeling and getting lost in feeling. In contrast, Rachel and Judy, examples of an overactive ectoderm, are both easily overwhelmed, seem to dissociate often in the process, and apparently need more titration and caution. Both seem hypervigilant in their orientation to the environment, both with nervous systems easily prone to startle and freeze reflexes. Greg and (perhaps) Amy are examples of an overdeveloped mesoderm for whom muscular contraction and restriction in breathing block access to feeling and expression.

A question around this learning concerns the issue of values. For us co-researchers, aliveness and expression are what we cherish. In Emily’s words, a “surrender of a sanitized version of ‘sanity’ for health (wholeness) and ‘safety’ for aliveness” seems like a reasonable sacrifice: “what I hold on to as safe, secure, and certain has to be put aside for the process to unfold.” But what about those who do not share this value, or do not have enough inner support for the adventure?

Inanna made the choice to visit the underworld despite the suspected dangers and the real sacrifices required at the seven gates. She never turned back. What about the need some of us have not to descend too deeply? As one patient put it in a heated
argument with his therapist in the television series *In Treatment*, what if some things are forgotten for a good reason, what if they are not meant to be faced?\textsuperscript{22}

The answer may depend in part on the individual’s capacity for holding energetic charge. Perhaps some gates are best kept locked for those of us for whom the safety constraints of the upper world are what allows for functional sanity. It appears that for people with history of trauma combined with limited ego strength it would be unwise to attempt a descent. Several participants of this study seem to know that about themselves, know which gates not to knock on. Rather than a failure to surrender, this can be seen as a life affirming choice, an expression of organismic self-regulation. In part for this reason, Alexis wondered if the word descent was too specific and may have excluded some participants’ experiences.

**Validity Considerations**

This interpretation is supported by taking into account the multiplicity of experiences among participants. Parallels and differences—gleaned from observing their movement and referencing the screening questionnaires, journal responses, and verbal transcripts—were considered. Both my co-researchers and I had our own gates to cross in order to surrender to the process, and our experiences are also part of our conclusions. In addition, some competing interpretations were addressed above and researcher bias expressed in our preference for descent was explored.

This learning was presented in its preliminary form at Meeting Two and participants were asked to comment on its accuracy; their feedback was incorporated in making meaning of the data. This included written and verbal responses to questions
explicitly addressing the concept of descent and surrender which corroborate the authenticity of participants’ experiences.

**Learning Three: The Body is a Doorway to Mystery**

The primary claim of this learning is that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience. Participants reported accessing feelings, images, and insights that were not directly related to the topic of our exploration; and they experienced transformative shifts that seemed alchemical in nature. Their unexpected discoveries point to surprise as one of the primary catalysts of transformation discovered in this study.

**What Happened**

Reflecting on their experience during Meeting One, both writing in response to the journal questions and speaking in the closing circle, participants described the experiences and discoveries they made during their journey.

Kerri discovered joy and power in the midst of grief and fear:

In exploring grief . . . [t]here was a feeling of being consumed by the sorrow; then with an in-breath there began a release of the tension and an experience of lightness/flow/or joy. . . . I felt the “fear” pull me closer to the ground–hands and knees like a creature and a growl/vomit sound came. Very satisfying deep bellow of angst/anger/power. Even though it was harder for me to access–when I stayed with some basic somatic qualities I felt the shoulder tightness, short breath and pulsing heart move into a raw power. It was an energy of . . . fearlessness.

Trish, expressive with her movement, breath, and voice, was one of the most engaged participants. She made large movements with her arms, stomped her feet,
growled, screamed, and sobbed. At one point she was lying on the floor, kicking the air as if fighting off an invisible attacker. Afterwards she wrote she felt that she reclaimed her “personal power. Like some sort of validation that I'm really OK...I am more normal than I think...And that I have what I need to take care of myself. [I reclaimed a] stronger sense of my ability to make choices over fear.” She also wrote, “Perhaps after today I am a little more comfortable with grief–my own. I found it easy to go with it here, and that was probably a good thing.”

Illustration 1 – Margaret: Grief

Margaret found in her encounter with grief an untapped depth of compassion, for herself and “for all beings.” In the closing circle she spoke of her grief as present “all over the place in all areas of my life... it colors my life, my grief,” and referred to the habitual way grief takes her down the spiral of inertia. In the movement dialogue with her art piece, she realized that inside this grief spiral lives an untouched potential for compassion:

[I]t seems to be universal that . . . what goes up must come down and vice versa, so there is the potential of spiraling out of that. And in the drawing, my spiraling down, [inside] the circle that’s contained in every bit and dip of the going down is
some potential that’s not able to express... So what I got was the hit that I can move back up and that potential that’s not being expressed can manifest as compassion... for myself and for what I see in the world, you know...

For Margaret, the process also brought a deeper recognition of her own wholeness. Speaking as the image she drew, she wrote: “The thread that runs through the mala [beads strung together worn as a necklace, or a bracelet] of your life is vibrant and will still hold you together in wholeness. It is holy. Even as fears manifest, threaten, harm, your physical body, this golden thread remains connecting all the parts of you, they are with you and cannot be taken away.”

Illustration 2 – Margaret: Fear

Elena’s shift in her relationship with her feelings brought a newfound appreciation for them.

I didn’t know that today I was going to receive so much space, time, and permission to deepen my relationship with my feelings. I had a very good time with my grief and think that we actually turned out to be good friends now. My fear showed up. Arrogant as she is, I was able to look at her with different lenses. I was able to feel in my body my fear’s pain. I think I developed (or started to) some compassion towards my fear.

Alexis spoke in the closing circle about the way her short movement exploration of grief, when she had to stand in as a partner in a dyad, transformed her perception of herself and the room. Her experience speaks to the psychic equation that just as unfelt grief blocks love, when grief is allowed love is also allowed to flow.23
Alexis said:

I was just so grateful that... I got to move, with [a witness], and in that ten minutes... it just felt like pure, liquid release . . . I could feel my relationship to the room, to everybody in the room, everything softened, it was like a different lens that happened in my body . . . and then to witness from that place after moving, my ability to love, my ability to see, my ability to hold was just so fluid and pliable . . . I felt so gifted to have . . . the whole experience, and also just that ten minutes of moving deepened my witness capabilities, it was so startling.

An interesting pattern emerged from the segment of the expressing sequence after lunch when participants returned to their art pieces and were asked to dialogue with the images in movement while being witnessed by another. This segment was not accompanied by music and participants were encouraged to move and sound as the images they drew, or in response to them, or alternating between the two perspectives. They took turns in dyads and were witnessed by their partner.

Several participants reported that segment as one of their key moments, mentioning the element of surprise and delight at discovering an unforeseen depth and richness in their images, and their own ability to express that in their movement. Some of them said later that initially the instructions had not made much sense to them, yet almost all spoke of how their exploration of their images in movement deepened or changed their experience of the whole process that day.

During their moving turn, most people stayed in one spot in the room, close to their images and their partners, except Judy who claimed more space in this section than she had during the whole preceding time, with large movements and travel around the room. The group of movers who took their turns first was a little more active, with waves of movement that seemed to ripple across the room when someone would make a loud sound. The second group was very quiet, almost introspective, and on the whole,
observed from outside, this section had the quality of being more integrative than
expressive for most.

From what participants said afterwards, this observation does not seem
completely accurate. While many reported a deepening, integrative function of returning
to the images they drew, there was more that happened. New discoveries were made, and
unexpected insights occurred seemingly out of nowhere.

Kerri had stayed with her drawings through both breaks that followed the art
making segments. She continued to work on them with intent focus and obvious delight.
In the journal responses she wrote about reclaiming the memory of drawing as a way of
expressing her feelings when she was a child, the way she “could best communicate what
was happening” in a “language of symbol or shape or color–so much more effective than
script.”

Illustration 3 – Kerri: Grief

Kerri spoke about the drawing segments as her key moments:

[C]oming out of the intensity of the emotion from the movement, and then being
able to just express on paper . . . reminded me of ... as a child, that’s what I would
do. I didn’t have a way of communicating my emotions necessarily or . . . skills at
that, so I would draw. I would just stay home sick for the day and I would color and draw. So kind of going back to this fundamental, rudimentary aspect of how I could communicate what was going on inside outside of myself, and then learn from it, learn as it would inform me.

In the journal responses, she wrote: “I learned and re-connected to the long-lost love of drawing when strong emotions come up. Such a gift to allow my intuitive-artistic side to reign during the brain overload/shut down. Just trusting this larger intelligence to reveal the truth/beauty of what is. The beauty of what is–whatever it is.” In the circle, she referred to expressive art as “another way of communicating to myself“ and asked to clarify, added, “to myself, yes, absolutely... it only makes sense to me.”

![Illustration 4 – Kerri: Fear](image)

Diana’s experience with the art represents the surprise, and the delight, both on the level of process and content. She said in the closing circle:

My biggest surprise was actually from the drawing. . . . [T]he surprise was how it came about, the process of it, the actual drawing of it... and that I ended up sweeping it and doing something that completely changed it. . . . Then the moving with the drawing after... was a very dynamic experience. . . . I thought it would be similar to what came out of me [in the movement] . . . yet the teaching was very different and the experience was very different, that was another peak moment. . . . I really still don’t know all of what it is ... and that’s unusual so I like that. . . . It was really fun to be surprised in this way.
In her poem, Diana wrote:

I love the surprise! Where did you come from? I am a “tear-drop-dradle [sic]” spun of blood, sweat, and tears, this is my beauty. I am the masterpiece that arises into form when you trust and flow with the intelligence that is greater than you alone. This is where I come from.

Judy, who was moving more in this segment than during the whole rest of the day, said she had been skeptical about this section when she first heard the instructions. She did not allow her skepticism to stop her; instead, she chose to enter with an open mind. Rather than trying to remember what happened in the explorations that brought about the visual expression, she decided to look at her pictures as if she saw them for the first time. This freshness of perception, and her willingness to stay with the unknown, brought about a discovery of what she termed her witch-like power. She talked about this in the closing circle.

One of the key moments I had was when we were dancing the picture which I have to say, when you first described it I thought uh oh, not sure I'm going to get into this one... but actually... [there] was more material there than I thought. I tried to look at the picture and not remember my experience, but just look at it like I’d never seen it before and... I had this image as I was dancing of Baba Yaga, who is... well you know who Baba Yaga is... she kicks ass... she's got a lot of people afraid of her and that was really interesting because it is not what... it wasn’t in the grief, it wasn’t in the fear... it is just this sort of witch-like thing that came up.
She mentioned in her journal responses that this Baba Yaga image seemed directly connected to the work she is doing with her life coach, revolving around the question, What would it be like to feel more powerful in my being? She added, “This all makes me wonder if there is a great deal of personal power in me that is waiting to come out and be expressed, meanwhile I am focused on power from outside myself.”

Illustration 6 – Judy: Grief and Fear

This insight is followed by the mention of another discovery: “For me, I feel that wanting is my main issue—images of times in my childhood when I wanted something but it was blocked from me came up. I was reminded of how much information can come from just moving. I am left w/the thought/image of sorcery.”

**How I Was Affected**

The dominant feelings I have noticed in response to the key moments that resulted in this learning were surprise and delight. The feeling of surprise reflected the unsuspected breadth and depth of the experience of the main session, and the enthusiastic engagement participants brought to the follow-up meeting. I was also humbled once again when listening to participants describe their experiences of the art making process, and deeply stirred both aesthetically and emotionally by being in the presence of their art.
Witnessing participants emerge from their process, many of them astonished by what they found, was as source of joy and awe for me and my co-researchers alike. Emily reported in her notes feeling increased energy, life force, softness and flow in her body. She got in touch with her caring, compassion, and trust in the human being’s ability to heal. Alexis mentioned feeling moved, softer, and more in touch with her heart.

**Imaginal Structures in Use**

Witnessing the discoveries participants made during their descent brought up for me two imaginal structures that seem in contradiction to each other: the one who is an enthusiastic explorer of body and soul, and the other who does not have a lot of hope for the process and lives in secret resignation.

The imaginal structure I am usually more conscious of is the enthusiastic explorer. She loves going to the bottom of things and thinks everyone can and should do this in order to find their wholeness. The resignation seems to be a young place in my psyche where I am discouraged and perhaps jaded. This relates to memories of how dissociated I was for the first 25 years of my life, beginning in my early childhood, and how long it took me to develop a capacity for presence. From that place, I had little hope for the process to be of much impact for participants, especially given how short the main session was and how tightly scripted. The resignation says this work takes forever and is a matter of inexplicable grace; one cannot make anything of import happen just because one schedules a research study. As a group leader I also have the conviction that scripting a process pretty much destroys it. All these ideas were debunked in the study.
I did not trust that the art making would be of much use, either. I have an image of myself as being kinesthetically oriented, and see art as a nuisance necessary to complete the multimodal picture. I underestimate the power of visual art to convey or reinforce messages not fully grasped through expressive movement itself. I tend to repeatedly forget that every time I engage in expressive art, I have the experience of deepening and new discovery.

At the same time, I felt in awe in response to the depth and dimensions of this process, which feels much bigger than me, the researcher, designer, facilitator; much bigger even than the group. A larger intelligence seemed at work here, a Mystery that took over when the collective field was constellated, which had its own logic and timing as to what would happen and how, or what the outcomes would be. This brought to light again the mistaken identification of me as a doer, the one who thinks that she is in charge of events or knows where the process should go.

**Theoretical Concepts Assisting in Interpretation**

This interpretation is supported by the theoretical framework of expressive interventions in Gestalt as ways to reclaim disowned experience. Gestalt theorists understand dissociation from feeling as a process of interrupting a movement impulse (such as reaching out, sobbing, or kicking) by way of muscular or breath constriction; Perls emphasized the importance of “completing the interrupted impulse” and expressing the unexpressed in the present, sometimes in purposely exaggerated ways, through movement, sound, and breath. Often, what is expressed is a surprise to the individual; for example, an innocuous rocking movement, when exaggerated, can develop into a full
throated sob, and reveal previously unacknowledged sadness or despair.\textsuperscript{25} Such a shift is an embodied ‘aha’ moment: a moment of realization that is “neither purely rational nor purely intuitive, but it is an integration of both with experience.”\textsuperscript{26}

Because of the element of surprise and unexpected discovery, Ingerman’s concepts of initiation and shamanic soul retrieval also seem applicable in this context in which the “rules of the outer world are suspended.”\textsuperscript{27} Eliade’s definition of initiation has as its essential element the “transformation of being” that a person undergoes in the process.\textsuperscript{28} The central theme of every initiation is symbolic death and rebirth, thus the person who emerges from the ordeal is different from the one who went in; though in what ways different cannot be foreseen.\textsuperscript{29} Omer conceptualizes initiatory process in a similar way.

Frecska’s and Luna’s explanation of how quantum leaps may occur within an initiatory context accounts for the seemingly illogical progressions in participants’ experiences.\textsuperscript{30} The authors show how habitual sensibility gives way in these circumstances to direct-intuitive-nonlocal ways of receiving and processing information, and how difficult it is to talk about such a process by applying cognitive explanations used to account for ordinary states of consciousness.

The concept of shamanic soul retrieval suggests that extraordinary events will take place when a journey is undertaken in search of lost pieces of one’s soul. The transformation that occurs in the process has alchemical characteristics. The alchemical concept of coniunctio, which expresses the creative union of the masculine and feminine principles, requires that the union bring about a new element, or attribute, that is qualitatively different than its ingredients.\textsuperscript{31} Applied to this interpretation, the concept of
alchemical transformation speaks to the quality of the fierce feminine experienced by several participants.

The myth of Baba Yaga offers a useful concept of dark feminine power. Some interpretations mentioned by Perera see the tale of Baba Yaga as a myth of descent and point to the culturally forbidden aspects of power, denied to women by the patriarchal culture that wants the feminine to be pretty, nice, and harmless. Baba Yaga, in contrast, is powerful, tough and mean; she is also ugly. In some myths she represents the bringer of both life and death. Peace and power, expansion and grounding are all recognized as attributes of Ereshkigal; Baba Yaga can be seen as another manifestation of this dark feminine.

My Interpretations of What Happened

The primary claim of this learning is that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience. The repeated discovery in the study was that while all participants reported having accessed aspects of experience that were not in their awareness before, many of those reclaimed feelings and images were not directly related to the topic of our exploration. The process did not follow in most cases predictable or previously known formulae. Rather, it had a flavor of alchemical transformation, not unlike sorcery or shamanic work.

In all the accounts, written and spoken, of the discoveries at Meeting One, the common theme was surprise—the kind of surprise that brings delight and wonder. All participants reported that what was found during their descent was unscripted,
unanticipated, alchemical. Their experiences resembled accounts of a shamanic journey of soul retrieval, as if they had traveled into another dimension of reality and brought back pieces of themselves they did not know were missing. The image of sorcery, mentioned by Judy, points to the dimension of Mystery that allowed a magical process to occur inside each of them. Some of the patterns that emerged will be discussed next.

For some participants, what was found were new, unexpected qualities or dimensions of themselves: power, unsuspected range of motion and emotion, humility, compassion. For others, the treasure lay in a new relationship to their feelings: becoming friends with grief, acknowledging anticipatory grief, considering that fear may be not only okay to feel, but may even be seen as a valuable ally. A few experienced what they named as a transformation of feelings. Fear turned into power, or fearlessness, grief became joy or compassion, or opened up into love. For most participants, the common theme was the value of getting closer to whatever they felt. These were ‘aha’ experiences felt in the body, rather than merely moments of understanding via mental insight.

The experience of power seemed to be one of the main themes in participants’ discoveries. Six of the eight women wrote or spoke of “sense of power,” “personal power,” “what felt like fearlessness,” “witch-like power,” freeing the “wildness caged within,” “unexplored power,” “fierce, ferocious power.”

Judy, who said she “felt a surge of witch-like power come out of the exploration” wrote about her image: “the one piece that was left unexplored was a black border which felt like peace and power, expansion and grounding.” As the image, she wrote: “Contained in this fury and agitation is something that I really, really want, like a cool
pool or a very restful state.” It is interesting how “fury” and “restful state” are used in one sentence in this account. Both are characteristics of the underworld.

Another recurring thread had to do with participants’ entering into a new relationship with their feelings. Many realized, again to their surprise, that they have the ability to allow their feelings without the need to defend against them, and that it can be not only bearable, but even valuable to do so. They referred to a “trust in my process, sense of wonder, capacity for joy,” “a larger connection or sense of a ‘whole.’”

Interesting shifts occurred specifically in relation to fear, which brought about another learning. This will be discussed in a separate section.

Finally, another surprising theme was the shift participants reported in their relationship to themselves. They spoke of “validation that I’m really okay,” a “sense that I am okay as long as I am whole with myself,” “self-love,” “connection to myself,” “remembering that nothing deep inside of me is broken or wounded,” “calm assurance in me.” Emily expressed this feeling, common to most participants’ accounts at closing of Meeting One and repeated in the discussion and journals from Meeting Two, in these words: “All is well. I am here. I am whole. I am well. I am.” This was a surprise that ran counter to the expectation that evoking intense feelings may bring up resistance, shame, or anger. These negative responses did come up at some points for a couple of participants, but in the end, it was for everyone a process that seemed to bring about a feeling of wholeness, and with it, a greater degree of self-love and self-acceptance.

Inanna goes down to the underworld not in order to stay there, but to reclaim those denied, ignored, banished aspects of the psyche so they can be integrated into the life in the upper world. Participants’ engaging in the process of re-owning, giving a
place to those exiled aspects of themselves that lived as unattended grief or disowned fear opened the door to other aspects relegated underground as well, such as a sense of power, joy, and wonder.

**Validity Considerations**

The fact that so many participants experienced their discoveries as surprising may point to the authenticity of the process, supporting the validity of the learning. Some of the discoveries described above may seem predictable, such as experiencing compassion when allowing grief, or fearlessness when fear is accessed and felt as somatic process. This does not seem to negate the genuine surprise encountered by participants in the living experience of the moment when the discovery was made. The sense of surprise was shared among the research team as well.

**Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting**

The primary claim of this learning is that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment. When discerning awareness is paired with surrender, inertia can become a place of rest and creative gestation. When resisted, inertia can lead to dissociation; however, the same can happen when inertia is identified with. Considerable presence and awareness skills are needed to distinguish between these experiences and choose an appropriate response.
What Happened

At various points during the movement explorations in Meeting One, participants spent periods of time motionless. It was true for everyone, though in varying degrees. There were participants like Amy, Judy, Rachel, and Greg who stayed still for relatively long stretches of time. In contrast, Elena, Diana, or Trish were moving most of the time. Yet everyone at some point could be seen not moving, sometimes barely breathing. There was a different quality to those who seemed to be present with themselves even in those moments when they were still; they seemed oriented inwards, focused, and attentive to something inside them. Others, when motionless, were looking around the room in a distracted, absent-minded way, yawning.

Margaret was most articulate about her experience of the paradox of inertia. Her report here is compiled from both her journal responses and comments she made in the circles at both meetings. She talks about how in the process of accessing grief, resting in stillness was necessary for her to find her movement again.

I found that to access grief . . . I spiral down into the place of inertia where my potential is numb and I’m protecting myself. So it all came out very literal in the drawing but then when I looked at the drawing it revealed that if I, after I have some rest there, and this is something I am hearing others . . . speak of, the same thing . . . it seems to be universal that after you have some rest there, you know, what goes up must come down and vice versa, so there is the potential of spiraling out of that.

When asked what she felt she was asked to “surrender at the gates, ” she wrote she was asked to surrender her initial inertia.

I was feeling I would rather just sit there frozen but instead I went out and moved and it turned into something else... I don’t know if it would have if I had remained frozen in inertia. . . . When I moved from “frozen” to actively feeling and remembering I went down, down, until I hit the bottom of my grief & I just wanted to roll up in a little ball & hold myself, which I did. When I allowed
myself that rest, I reclaimed the potential to transform the debilitating aspect of my grief into acceptance.

Elena also talked about stillness as an opportunity to take a pause in order to listen more deeply, to re-assess, to make a fresh choice: “You stay there for a moment, and then begin again.” Kerri spoke of “the difference between trusting the stillness versus resisting the stillness. . . . When I surrendered to trusting it, it had more potential for whatever would come next.”

In closing circle at Meeting One Amy talked–reluctantly, with hesitation–about her challenge in the movement segments. She was articulating her frustration in a room where everyone was talking in positive terms about what they had gained from the experience. She was giving voice to a shadow aspect of the inquiry into both movement and feeling, saying “it was hard,” I didn’t like it,” “I didn’t want to do grief,” “I didn’t want to do fear.” At the same time, she wrote in her journal responses of the power of choosing not to move, but rather to respect her need to stay still: “I felt my strength amidst the craziness, the chaos. I felt the tiredness/exhaustion that my body expressed. I felt the power and tenderness of that awareness. I felt free.” And as mentioned before, underneath her reactions, she was aware of “those real and intense feelings” that she “really wanted to forget.”

Parallel to inertia as a shadow aspect of a movement inquiry is the sensation of numbness in an exploration of feeling. Trish expressed this when she wrote, “I was surprised that I still have a lot of numbness? emptiness? around the post-traumatic time–I was surprised I did not have anger or sadness–just emptiness. My surprise is that I think I should have some feelings [emphasis hers] still about it... curious. Maybe it is that I do not have much expectation/hope.”
How I Was Affected

Witnessing participants’ process, I felt spells of anxiety in response to the inertia I perceived in the room. At those times, I would shuttle between feeling upset about nothing happening, and trusting the process, reminding myself that I do not really know what anybody is experiencing just by observing them from the outside. My anxiety was strongest during the fear exploration. I could feel the impulse to do something, to change what was happening, to encourage participants to be more active, to say “c’mon, move, move, don’t just sit there!” I could feel my fear of the place of forced immobility.

I felt reactive and aversive to those participants who in my assessment spent too long not moving. A feeling of rage flashed through me in response to seeing one person completely motionless, in silence, her body turned away from the room, as if trying to hide in the corner. Then reading journal responses that in my perception seemed to affirm the choice to stay frozen and avoid feeling, I again felt the aversion and rage.

A parallel experience for me was facing the inertia in the writing of this paper. Here too, I had very little patience for the places of stuckness. I felt awful when I could not see (or cause) much movement in the process, as if I was rotting on the meat hook. I felt beholden to the project when I would write and also when I did not write. It seemed to have a grip on me that I wanted to slip away from, a certain pull, like gravity, a certain sense of dead weight.

I slept a lot during that time, and dreamt about being denied passage, asked to wait at the border, missing flights and getting trapped on interminable train journeys. Wrestling with the material and the resistance of the material, and my own resistance to
entering into it, contributed to a sense of overwhelm with the whole interminable project, and the desire to just give up, the way one gives up struggling when caught in freezing weather without shelter and slides into the merciful embrace of sleep that brings death.

I also felt that at this time in my life I was in the process of my own descent and reclamation of the powers of the darker nature, sometimes feeling like a prisoner of the zombie world. My consciousness felt thick, with the density of inert matter, and seemed to demand a sustained effort in order to continue the journey of descent and discovery. But that process and the whole rest of my life also felt on hold, hanging on the hook, as I felt taken hostage by the dissertation process and immobilized, unable to endeavor anything of consequence either in my personal life or my work and teaching. Thus anything I was involved in at the time required a daily discipline of repeatedly making the conscious choice to re-engage with the focused, attentive, and delicate work against the pull of inertia.

**Imaginal Structures in Use**

The mere sense or smell of inertia brings up for me memories of being strapped to the gurney, frozen in fear, stuck in the immobility and then oblivion of ether. Inertia is thus, for me, coupled with the memory of terror. The recollection of being repeatedly put under general anesthesia brings back feelings of the unbearable powerlessness and helplessness I felt in that situation, of my fear of losing grip, of my life, sanity, agency slipping away.

The imaginal structure of the one who moves (also the one who is on the move, like a moving target) is a response to that fear. Even though by now, I have repeatedly
experienced and appreciated the gift of spending time with myself in the place of inertia with presence, compassion, and patience, my initial response to the state of it in myself and others is often a reactive aversion.

I “don’t like” inertia very much, the way Amy “doesn’t like” fear. I was traumatized in my early life by repeated experiences of being dragged to the underworld by a foul smelling anesthetic; and before that, by being exposed to nicotine smoke in the womb, every day of my nine month stay there.

My aversion to being in the field of inertia is especially amplified with the added flavor of denial or unconsciousness, especially when defended. It took conscious effort for me not to read some participants’ comments as expressions of prideful affirmations of their right not to feel. I sense that kind of defensiveness in my mother, who has always been committed to denial and largely unconscious of and uninterested in her inner life. Early on, this lack of presence felt life-threatening to me, especially given my abundant emotional aliveness as a child and a high need for presence, contact, and emotional resonance.

**Theoretical Concepts Assisting in Interpretation**

Caldwell has defined Dance/Movement Therapy as an exploration of conscious movement and conscious stillness. Her distinctions between stillness and collapse and between holding and pausing, as well as her discussion of relative stillness as necessary for sensing autonomic movement are useful in making this interpretation.\(^\text{34}\) Caldwell suggests that an essential skill in movement therapy is to discriminate between movements that “distract and sedate” and creative movements that are expressive of the
life force as it speaks from the individual and collective soul. This points to the need to distinguish between inertia and genuine (conscious) stillness.

Perls’ discussion of the impasse and the implosive layer are helpful in understanding the phenomenon of inertia. In the impasse a significant amount of the energy is turned inward and invested in holding (physical tension) and avoidance (psychic tension) against the energetic charge of an unwanted or feared impulse, emotion, or other form of self-expression. This is a place where opposing forces are at a standstill resulting in a state of implosion: psychic and physical immobility. In the implosive layer the individual has no energy available for the outward impulse which could loosen the impasse and lead to movement into authenticity. The impasse presents a choice point where one can move either toward integration or more dissociation. Because of the painful feelings of stuckness and confusion, the impasse can be a place of existential despair.

Trauma theory concepts of autonomic nervous system cycling, shock trauma, shock memory, and the freeze response are useful in making the distinctions between shock or freeze and resting in stillness. While each autonomic nervous system cycle passes through a stillpoint, this is different from the freeze when the cycle cannot complete and come to resolution, instead getting stuck in a state of arrested sensorimotor impulse.

Keleman’s concept of the middle ground is also helpful here. The middle ground refers to the phase of transformation where old reference points cease to be useful and a new way of being has not yet emerged. It is an in-between space where one may feel anxious, lost, overwhelmed, or scared. The positive experience of middle ground is that
of inner silence, mystery, a boundless space where “we know the sweet taste of all that feels eternal … and are touched by something sacred.”\(^{41}\) Both flavors of the middle ground can be experienced when the familiar, habitual mode of approaching experience through thinking is abandoned and the sensing, feeling mode is not yet trusted.

Keleman’s description resembles Brinton Perera’s portrayal of the underworld with its lack of familiar reference points which often requires a suspension of movement or effort, as if waiting, “hanging on a hook”: following Ereshkigal’s verdict, Inanna’s body is hung on a meat hook and is rotting there, unmoving. Brinton Perera names inertia as the essence of the underworld; the motionlessness of the dead means powerlessness also.\(^{42}\) One cannot will anything to happen there, one must wait patiently. Anyone who undertakes the descent must go to the place of no life, in Whyte’s words, “turning downward through its black water to the place we cannot breathe.”\(^ {43}\)

Some of this interpretation is guided by my own discoveries from years of exploring expressive movement with myself and when leading groups, and enhanced by my co-researchers’ observations. We have found several options available in the place of inertia. One is to resist it, another to surrender. The risk of fighting inertia is that the next movement has the potential of being inauthentic, fabricated. When surrendered to, inertia can be a place of rest and creative gestation; it can also be a place of dissociation and sleep. This is where sensitive discernment is necessary for choosing the appropriate response, and compassion for the challenge the situation presents.

The choice to linger with presence amidst inertia calls for a surrender of will, of willful attempts to make something happen. In this context, one must surrender to the timing of the process, allowing things to take their course while continuing to bring
awareness to the experience of inertia and compassion to oneself. Then making the choice to move, or better yet, allowing movement to occur, has more chances of being an authentic expression and has more transformative potential. Awareness is the defining factor that makes the difference here. The figure may be the energetic state of inertia but awareness is not necessarily inert here. However, when one’s ability to hold a figure with little or no charge is underdeveloped, staying present with inertia can be all the more challenging.\textsuperscript{44}

Sometimes surrender is anything but a place of passive waiting. If a strong habit of repression is being challenged by a high energetic charge of authentic affect pushing toward expression, there can be considerable dynamic movement in what from the outside looks like absence of motion.\textsuperscript{45} With presence and awareness, an impasse that initially may feel like Perls’s sterile void where nothing is happening can be transformed into a fertile void of possibility.\textsuperscript{46}

In contrast to waiting in presence for the shift to occur (if it is meant to occur), one can become identified with inertia and get stuck in immobility. Identification with inertia is different from patience or presence with it; it is more likely a form of resisting inertia. Brinton Perera talks about women who in their refusal to descend into their inner underworld because of the fear of inertia become paradoxically identified with the “timeless stasis” and “unable to budge.”\textsuperscript{47}

Often, inertia leads to dissociation, possibly due to its resemblance to the immobility of death. It is where it is easy to slip into the habitual thinking mode, just to avoid the dread of nonexistence. Paradoxically, inertia can also be an act of avoiding existence; a refusal to engage; a hiding place. One freezes in immobility, holding one’s
breath, because movement, even the movement of breath, may bring up feeling. In those instances, physical movement can be helpful when it can provide a bridge out of dissociation and into awareness of the somatic process. Even introducing the movement of breath will make a difference here.⁴⁸ Again, compassionate discernment is required to know when such movement is called for.

**My Interpretations of What Happened**

This learning states that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of a dynamic struggle between expression and suppression, or of the inertia of dissociated affect best met by returning to movement; negotiating this paradoxical territory requires sensitive and compassionate discernment.

Inertia is an essential part of the inner journey; the obvious challenge it presents to a movement inquiry is the lack of motion. Yet the deeper challenge is the ability to stay present in the face of inertia and make a skillful choice as to how to proceed. Participants were able to negotiate this territory with various results.

Those who were able to bring presence to inertia found in it the creative rest needed for deepening their exploration. Margaret, Kerri, and Elena seem to have experienced that at various points during their process. For them, it was possible to remain present to their somatic process even while they were, like Inanna, “hung on the hook,” suspended in stillness. Most likely, some of the time what they experienced as inertia was the rest phase of the autonomous nervous system cycle, in which the parasympathetic response brings relaxation and a decrease in nervous system arousal.
Allowing that phase to complete without trying to push through made space for a new increase of arousal and a renewed capacity for exploring further.

The distinctions they were able to make between the inertia of stuckness and the inertia of what Caldwell calls conscious stillness and pause helped them navigate the challenge without getting trapped in the former. Margaret, for instance, recognized that while stillness was a necessary resting place in the process, the experience of frozen affect was not a place to surrender to if she wanted to access her feelings. She was able to discern the need to move when tempted to freeze; and conversely, to use the creative still point as a spot to rest, integrate, and then move into the next phase of her exploration.

For others, inertia seemed to be a sign of implosion. Amy’s experience seems to be an example of that. Like one of Brinton Perera’s women, terrified of the descent, Amy appeared to be identified with inertia and “unable to budge.” Her physical and psychic movement seemed arrested at the implosive layer as described by Perls: her energy turned inward and remained in the impasse for most of Meeting One, hardly ever reaching far beyond the implosive standstill to a place of outer expression. Yet it later became clear that her experience was anything but static; rather it was one of dynamic struggle between forbidden, unexpressed, and highly charged emotions and a lifelong habit of repression and denial.

Similarly, Greg’s immobility, muscular and breath constriction, apparent disconnection from feeling, and anger in the way he described his process suggest an implosion, though accompanied by much less awareness than Amy was able to bring to her experience. In contrast, for Judy and Rachel inertia seemed to lead to dissociation;
when motionless, they would leave their somatic process and revert to thinking, judging, or detached mental wandering.

Evoking fear can bring up the memory of shock which is a common reaction to traumatic events that engender fear. We wondered if some of the inertia we experienced and perceived in the room, especially in cases where it led to dissociation, was related to memories of shock. In some cases, inertia is a result of remembering an event from the past when one was under anesthesia. Such memories might have been triggered in the fear exploration.

At some point in that segment, Alexis smelled what she identified as the odor of anesthesia which kept growing stronger; I could not smell it, but I know Alexis is keenly sensitive to nuances of this sort. It is not uncommon when working with memories of trauma involving anesthetics that the smell is released as the trauma is being integrated; we wondered if the smell Alexis commented on might have had something to do with that. Regretfully, I failed to asked participants at Meeting Two how many had a history of general anesthesia, whether at birth or during surgery. An alternative, more prosaic explanation could have been that what she smelled was the air-conditioning running at that time.

Another prosaic yet sad comment is that the unresolved shock many of us carry stems from the culturally supported, insidious, and pervasive disturbances in early attachment patterns which teach children to self-regulate in isolation if they cannot give up feeling completely. Many researchers join Schore in pointing out that the shock residue from relational trauma with the accompanying dissociation may be “a more common phenomenon of everyday pathology” than previously assumed. 50
Early relational trauma affects people’s capacity to be in touch with their own emotional reality or to have empathy for others. Judy’s inability to connect to the room, Rachel’s fear of feeling, Amy’s wondering about the “legitimacy” of her experience and her strong preference for being alone with her emotions may be some indications of such trauma. I believe some of the sense of shock present in the room was an expression of that layer of psychosomatic reality, which manifests physically as the freeze response and psychically as dissociation.

It should be noted here again that in the place of inertia, a movement of attention is movement. When one is (unconsciously) identified with inertia, attention is also stuck; the possibilities for a shift decrease. Yet if one can bring conscious attention to the place of inertia, the awareness of it, including the sensing of numbness, emptiness, stillness, feeling the textures and sensations of those states is feeling something, different than saying “I don’t feel anything here.” Paradoxically then, that shift in perception becomes a movement out of inertia.

For example, in Trish’s description of the place of numbness, emptiness, her attention is directed toward the absence of certain feelings, but the feeling of emptiness, numbness is present, and that can become the focus of awareness; opening to the sensations of numbness without judgment or expectation is a movement in the service of wholeness, so that nothing has to be excluded from awareness or banished to the underworld.

The bias present in my interpretation seems to suggest that any movement may be better than no movement, or at least that certain ways of being with inertia are better than others. It is true that for those who desire a fully alive relationship with experience, a
conscious encounter with inertia seems to be a required part of the journey. Through such encounters, past trauma is gradually resolved, shock residue clears from the system, the freeze response becomes less frequent, and the degree of dissociation needed to cope also decreases.

At the same time, inertia can remain a place of safety, and dissociation, paradoxically, can be a conscious choice. Diana wrote to that, speaking as fear: “I know how to mobilize a physical body to release me, but never too soon. I hold on tight until the time is right, and if I need to ‘go away’ before that time comes then that's what I do.” Diana articulates here the process of conscious discernment which allows periods of inertia and dissociation to be part of a life lived with awareness and presence; for her, appropriate response is a question of not only surrender, but right timing.

In this context, Alexis suggests to emphasize the intelligence of constriction and dissociation. As mentioned earlier in discussing Gestalt theory, every defense is seen as an ability, an initially creative adaptation to challenging situations. If ideas about what change looks like are surrendered, they can be replaced with compassion and acceptance for the timing of any shift that is not a matter of will but rather of patience with not knowing. Even the preference for presence with rather than identification with inertia may have no place here. When remembering how many years I remained in the fog of shock and the cloud of anesthesia and freeze before I was ready to face the terror hidden inside, I am glad to renounce any expectation that anyone else should choose to face theirs.

Again, just bringing awareness to the constriction can be an act of transformation. Amy’s testimony of her challenge and her preference for not moving, not feeling, not
expressing, not sounding highlighted the fact that the work of somatic inquiry is not always about having epiphanies and coming away with a peak experience, but more about the ability to track sensation and to connect with the place where one finds oneself at the moment, and sometimes that is a place of disconnection, resistance, or inertia. Sometimes movement is not going to happen no matter how long one “hangs on a hook”; but the ability to sensitively discern the nature of one’s experience of inertia and be aware that one can consciously and compassionately choose to surrender to its needs in that moment can be empowering and transformative.

Validity Considerations

The validity of this learning is supported by the fact that it expresses an inquiry into a shadow phenomenon. Both participants and co-researchers encountered the power of inertia at various points during the data collection process which points to the authenticity of the experience explored here. Attention has been given to several different perspectives on this issue and researcher bias has been addressed in the interpretation.

Learning Five: One Thing We Fear Is Fear Itself

The primary claim of this learning is that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety, hence an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment. Due to its association with survival, evoking fear is likely to provoke dissociation as a way to redirect attention away from this affect; even in the apparent absence of survival threat, fear can serve a defensive function in the face of
any potentially overwhelming experience. Though many participants of this study expressed ambivalence in response to the invitation into the territory of fear; several gained new insights and access to new experience of themselves in the course of working with this affect.

What Happened

Following a short silent break after the grief art section during Meeting One, participants were shown a movie clip, the opening sequence from *Cliffhanger*, in which a woman climber falls into a 4000 foot abyss during a failed rescue operation. The scene is witnessed in helpless desperation by her boyfriend and the rescue team. It is evocative not only of fear of heights and fear of death, but also the fear of losing a loved one.

We watched the clip in a side room, gathered sitting and standing around a television set, without making eye contact except for moments when the suspense thickened and we would look at each other and gasp; some were chuckling nervously and shifting on their feet. Following this, participants were invited to move, breathe, and sound as fear.

There was a significant difference in participants’ movement between the grief and fear explorations. In contrast to the grief section, where participants were moving in flowing, circular, and spiral patterns and open shapes, with their limbs extending and hearts and faces lifting, in the fear section their movements were often darting, frequently interrupted, sharp, jerky. Participants would look up and look around more often as if to orient or re-orient, as if they were moving in and out of contact with themselves.
The difference between the drawings made in each round was also striking. While most of the grief art has flowing, connected images (Illustration 7 – Grief Detail), many of the fear images look disjointed and lack coherence. Fear pictures show straight lines, small, quickly jotted, sometimes repeated marks that are not connected to each other or do not seem to be part of any larger whole. Lines are often interrupted, jagged, sharp,
pointing in all directions in the way explosions are depicted in comic books (Illustration 8 – Fear Detail).

Many participants’ reports about their experience of fear in the session were extremely ambivalent. Many reported resistance or an inability to relate to fear or stated that fear was hard for them to access. Even those who in the end gained new insight or experienced a transformative shift spoke of fear very differently than they had about grief. While grief was easier to access and seemed to hold a promise of healing, fear seemed more ominous, almost dangerous. In the follow up session, two of the participants questioned the usefulness of intentionally evoking fear.

A narrative of grief in its own voice, compiled from seven participants’ responses when speaking as grief, could run as follows:

I have positive intent. Whatever I am I need to be seen, felt, heard, expressed. Express me and I will enliven you. When I am in your company, you find a way back home to yourself. I am so connected to the joy of living. I open up into the sweetest spots ever where golden rays of universal energy come streaming in. When you are in me, I can lead the way to oneness. I can become compassion which can shoot out in all directions for the benefit of all beings.

In contrast, here is the collective fear narrative, compiled from eight accounts:

I manifest, threaten, harm your physical body. I isolate you against the world. I know how to hide. I make you feel helpless and powerless. Slow fear has a smell, you will smell me coming. Boo! You’re it! I don’t know how to speak with a soft voice. I scream inside your limbic system, your muscles, the corners of your bones!!! Shortness of breath, the constricting of muscle, the panic of freezing... rapid pulse... adrenaline making muscles twitchy. My energy can just spiral out to hysteria. I am like a little Tasmanian devil locked in a box–banging around to get out. I want to take as many people down with me as I can. I am hard to beat.

Judy described the difference between fear and grief in these words: “The physical sensations were greater with the fear, but it was much more simplistic than grief.
The emotional content of grief tended to eclipse my awareness of my body, whereas the fear was much more body centered and less emotion based.”

Illustration 8 – Fear Detail

Speaking as fear, Rachel wrote: “You have learned so many ways to mask me. You have felt me so much but have mastered the way to block me out, avoid me, numb
me out, cover me up, over, blanket yourself away from me, blind yourself to not see me, become mute & not to speak of me. I will overtake you if you let me.” Her fear says: “You give me way too much power over you. Just like the sadness, maybe if you dove into me more, I wouldn’t be so strong. I gain all this power from your avoidance of me.”

Elena, who ended up experiencing a shift in her relationship with fear, initially reported:

In the movement exploration, I discovered that my body works very hard to fight fear. I felt a lot of pain afterwards, in my back, legs, shoulders... I felt pain in my muscles so hard I fought fear. . . . I feel fear yet respond with anger and confrontation. Literally painful.

Trish spoke of her new insight about fear:

[T]here is this great thing about fear, it can be really fun! it can, like, bring interest to life, too, and maybe that’s the whole piece, like when it shows up, stop freezing and doing all that other stuff... and just like, YEAH! . . . okay . . . there’s that bit of me that dreams about that and I don’t actually live it out, so I thought that’s just a sort of an interesting layer about fear and how you can use it in a different way and make a different choice about it.

Speaking as fear, she says: “But remember, you cannot stay here–with me–I will overload you and blur the lines till you are crazed.”

Greg expressed a similar insight when, writing as fear, he said: “Hear me, I am part of each person, as we breathe we all experience fear, breathe thru me, appreciate the primal nature of shortness of breaths, the constricting of muscle, the panic of freezing. I am not your most dreaded emotion, label me not! Know me, appreciate me as physicality and do not hold me and use me as an excuse.”

Kerri, for whom fear was a doorway into fearlessness and power, wrote as fear:

Silly fool! I’m preparing you for your launch. . . . What better way than to flood your system with the juice of adrenaline. Really, I’m a latent power in fear clothing, but you insist on using me like some cheap whore. C’mon, stop wasting our time–it’s so short you know–and really feel what I’m all about. I liberate you.
Diana described how she was initially convinced that she is not a “fearful person,” but in the movement exploration, “doing it, when I kind of pulled on the group . . . I discovered how I do do fear. I do identify with it more . . . than I realized.” She saw how she avoids her fear, “daydreaming away from it,” saying to herself, “oh I’ll just go somewhere else for a while” and then she “got in touch with all that was stirring underneath; even though I would look calm on the exterior, underneath I had a lot of agitation.” Later in the circle she added that in the movement piece she was confused as to the line between really accessing her fear and playacting it. During the discussion at Meeting Two, she said fear was more present for her in the intervening time, and she was more able to recognize and experience it without having to dissociate from it: “I feel I have been more aware of how I am when fear arises in me and with less judgment about how I respond.”

Judy said she could not relate to fear during our main session, yet for the first time fear came up directly in her therapy the week after, and then the following week, as well. Similarly, Amy related a life situation that occurred between our meetings (her husband’s surgery), saying:

I just experienced fear this week . . . and I really felt that fear. . . . Letting myself feel how afraid I was felt ugly to me, or I didn’t want to get into that because I don’t want to feel it I guess. Fully, I mean. . . . but then I did let myself feel it, I did let myself just acknowledge to myself that I was really afraid. . . . My husband went into surgery and I was so afraid and so out of control of what was going to happen to him, and so I was helpless, and I was a wreck.

The opposite was true for Rachel, who reported that she had not actually let herself go into fear, yet left Meeting One with curiosity about it, “something brewing in me about actually letting myself go into the fear as I let myself go into sadness and other
emotions and then . . . what I imagine is that somehow it will transform... that’s my hope.” However, at the follow-up meeting, this curiosity had turned back into doubt. “Why should one feel fear?” she asked during the closing discussion. “I don’t want to go purposely into my fear, or evoke fear, because I don’t feel it’s good for my body, or my soul.”

During the Expressing Sequence after lunch, participants were asked to pair up and take turns with one of the partners moving while the other witnessed, and then the witness moving in response. They had about 15 minutes each for their turn, and just under two minutes to see their partner’s response. In this sequence, Amy, Greg, and Judy were moving a lot, compared to the rest of the room, and compared to the preceding explorations where each of them spent considerable periods of time in stillness. Greg continued to find new movement and he made sounds in this section for the first time.

Several participants commented on the power of being witnessed. Amy wrote: “[I was surprised by] how special the witness’[s] interpretation was–how intimate + present + observant + supportive.” Greg echoed this in his journal response: “That was amazing. The picture as a script–from inside out to outside in to perform and then the witness performed her version of my performance. Powerful!” Elena: “The most beautiful surprise, however, was the feeling of being seen and felt by a stranger who witnessed my dance. Am I that clear? Am I that obvious? How come I can't see myself sometimes?”

**How I Was Affected**

During the fear segment, I felt in myself some of the responses reported by the participants. In contrast to the grief section, I found it harder to connect to the feeling in
the room. I was more aware of my defenses against fear than fear itself: a subtle way of distancing myself from the experience, back to that initial place of “presence” which I now recognize as veiled dissociation. Both co-researchers reported similar responses.

Emily reported that during the fear exploration, she felt foggy, slightly irritable, slightly dull—not as open as before, less connected to the group. She was startled by Trish’s screams. In her notes, she wrote: “Trish screams! It freaks me out… Sounds are really scary, they make the fear so real—we never, I never hear the sound of fear, it is usually silent, hidden, masked—not so available.” She was also shaken by Margaret’s sounds, which felt scary and compelling to her, “as if I have kept myself so safe that I have missed part of life.”

Alexis wrote down her response while witnessing the fear exploration, noting the difficulty of connecting to herself and others.

The shock place is very difficult to access—aloneness and isolation are amplified as an observer. I cannot feel the room or my own fear as easily. Seeking touch, connection, safety. My tolerance for this segment wavers. Very little relief. Fatigue. Need food. Resource. At the end of drawing, when pictures are completed, my nervous system has softened and my eyes have relaxed. Breath comes more easily. The silence no longer has the trauma living in it.

While watching the movie, each of the researchers noticed wanting to make contact to touch someone, or to dissipate the tension by joking or laughing. Emily watched herself try to reject the movie, call it stupid, check out. “Knowing fear was coming, I found humor. Sylvester Stallone… I’m feeling sarcasm and less connected to the movers, like they are performing. I’m not letting my feelings in—lower back stiff, shoulders sore, stomach tight…”
Another shared way we were affected was a sense of puzzlement and mystery around fear and the expression of fear, not being able to grasp or conceptualize what exactly was going on inside or out.

**Imaginal Structures in Use**

My own ambivalent relationship with terror played a significant role in how I saw what was happening in the room. On the one hand, repeated encounters with my own memory of terror have made possible deep and lasting healing in my psyche. In this imaginal structure lives the desire to open the door for others. On the other hand, I too am afraid of fear and despite my best intentions when fear is present for me or for others my first unconscious reaction is to recoil from it. This imaginal structure lives in a memory of loneliness and overwhelm in the place of terror, where it really was not safe to allow myself to feel it if I was to survive the trauma that evoked it.

Emily, noting her avoidance, or resistance to letting herself open to the fear others were working with, wrote: “There is an energy in fear . . . I feel as if it was hard to go there with everyone as if–if I did it would have happened to me. I was imagining Trish being raped and am most afraid of that–her scream ripped through me, scattering all my cells that were in order–fear shatters order.” This points to an imaginal structure that is an expression of magical thinking–if I let myself feel fear, then the thing I'm afraid of will happen. Emily also noticed defaulting to her imaginal structure of being an artist, for whom it is “easy to hide behind the camera and separate myself from what’s happening, make it beautiful, make it art.”
Theoretical Concepts Assisting in Interpretation

This interpretation is supported by Tomkins’s assertion that the cost of fear is so great that the body was not designed for a chronic activation of this affect. Tomkins regards fear as one of the taboo emotions; it is one of the “negative” emotions that are often hard to recognize; it often fails to be correctly identified by the person experiencing it; he suggests the operation of a probable denial mechanism in the perception of fear and points out that “whenever a taboo is placed on an affect, it generates a retreat to a safer interpretation.”

Tomkins’s concept of backed up affect and the societal prohibition of expressing affect, especially through sound, is also helpful. Because, as he points out, the free expression of innate affect is extremely contagious, it is perhaps understandable that fear, due to its emotional intensity, physiological cost, and destabilizing quality would be one of the more discouraged expressions.

Similar to the discussion in the previous section concerning inertia, this interpretation is aided by the concepts of shock trauma, freeze response and dissociation. There seems to exist a paradoxical relationship between these phenomena; fear can cause the freeze response and dissociation, yet at the same time, immobility and dissociation can also manifest as defenses when attempts are made to access fear.

Perls’ discussion of the impasse and the implosive layer is also helpful here. While in the implosive layer, the individual is paralyzed by the fear of the unknown. Authentic affect lives underneath in the explosive layer and cannot be accessed until there is enough resource and energy available for its expression. Perls does not list fear
among the affects of the explosive layer, which are grief, anger, joy, and orgasm. He focuses on fear’s defensive function in resisting authentic expression.

When suppression of authenticity—once a matter of survival by means of gaining environmental support—is challenged, potential loss of outer support brings up unbearable existential anxiety generated by having to enter the unknown which appears as a void. If inner support is not well enough developed to face this anxiety, an individual will resort to the habit of avoidance. According to Perls, most of us avoid experiencing this layer because allowing the explosion of authentic feelings equals death to the defended egoic identity rooted in the restrictions of past conditioning. Since avoidance is so strong here, it intensifies both the fear and the likelihood of dissociation.

Fosha’s distinction between fear as defense and fear as core affect parallels Perls’s discussion of the difference between avoidance in the impasse versus the authentic affect underneath. Fosha’s concept of fear as a pathogenic emotion serving as a defense against all intense feelings helps interpret some participants’ experiences as instances of the fear of fear rather than feeling authentic fear.

From imaginal psychology comes Omer’s distinction between core wounding and core trauma and the reminder that in cases of core trauma individuals may not have enough resource to face their terror. Jung’s understanding of fear as a defense in the individuation process shows how in some cases this fear may lead to a recoil to an earlier stage of development at which the person may remain stuck. In his discussion of how intense fear of individuation can cause paralysis in the psyche and arrest growth, Stevens holds this psychic inertia responsible for the amount of vital psychic energies remaining unconscious, and gives the ferocious feminine as one example of such energies.
Interestingly, the very term ‘ferocious feminine’ was used in one of the participants’ reports.

**My Interpretations of What Happened**

This learning suggests that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment. Being the natural response to threat, especially survival threat, fear has an intimate connection to the recognition of our mortality and the fragility of human life. Due to its association with trauma, inviting fear may likely trigger memories of past trauma when survival was threatened or perceived to be threatened. Evoked in the context of this study, where it was not a spontaneous response to perceived danger, fear seemed unusually difficult to access, embody, and express. Allowing fear did not seem to carry the same promise of resolution that opening to grief did. Many participants expressed ambivalence about engaging with this affect.

As discussed earlier, dissociation is commonly applied in traumatic circumstances as a way of avoiding overwhelming fear. For those participants for whom fear triggers the shock response it is understandable that they would avoid re-entering the territory, especially in the context of a group study with the lack of therapeutic supports it engenders.

However, it appears that a more compelling interpretation arises from the understanding that fear can be used as a defense against any potentially overwhelming affect, as proposed by Perls and Fosha. In this way, fear is an essential building block of
one’s egoic identity and approaching its territory seems to signify death to the I.

Challenging fear would be like disregarding the inscription *hic sunt dracones* (beyond here there be dragons) on blank regions of medieval maps, which was meant to warn explorers that they have reached the far edge of the known world. Some participants seemed to stop there, reluctant to enter what was uncharted, fearing the unknown and possibly dangerous void.

As mentioned above, during the fear exploration, the space had a palpable feeling of shock, characterized by a certain inertia and disconnection, the sense of loneliness, isolation, being overwhelmed by stimuli, Whyte’s “place we cannot breathe.”63 This atmosphere pointed to a certain level of fear; yet it appeared that for some participants what was felt was the reaction to fear rather than fear itself. It became clear that working with this affect presented all participants with the greatest challenge by bringing up previously unacknowledged levels of anxiety and resistance.

Those who thought they had some relationship with their fear were surprised at how difficult it was to access, or how hard they fought against it. Those who explicitly chose not to engage with fear, like Amy, Rachel, and to some degree Judy, defended against the experience by muscular contraction and/or mental dissociation (rationalizing, evaluative thinking, hypervigilance regarding the environment). Their fear dance had the feel of impasse and implosion, with its lack of movement, muscle tension, and either apparent or reported discomfort with their inner experience or disconnection from it. This was also true in a slightly different way for Greg, whose fear enactment was more lively and expressive than his grief dance, yet still bore the muscular stiffness and dissociative feel of avoidance. Rachel’s was the most articulate description of habitual avoidance of
fear. She experienced her fear as a threatening presence, and, despite recognizing that it may be possible to surrender to fear the way she can surrender to grief, she remained faithful to her choice not to engage it. The amount of anxiety the invitation caused her was greater than she was prepared to face.

Curiously, even despite initial reluctance to enter the territory, several participants realized and acknowledged that they live with more fear than they had allowed themselves to know. In response to her husband’s surgery, which occurred between our meetings, Amy let herself consciously experience her fear for the first time in her adult life. Noticing how much subterranean anxiety she lives with daily, Diana shifted from the identity of “I am not a fearful person” to a sense of creative disorientation. Fear, absent from consciousness before, showed up for Judy as an issue in each of her therapy sessions between our meetings. It seems that the invitation into fear, however resisted in the course of the data collection, helped each of them change their relationship to this affect in ways that allowed for transformative shifts outside of the study room, but only by acknowledging the anxiety under the surface.

Those participants who—despite the commonly expressed ambivalence—were willing or able to enter and successfully negotiate the territory of fear gained increased awareness and even acceptance of their fear. This was true for Margaret, Elena, Kerri, and Trish. Trish discovered the possibility of a different relationship with fear, regarding it now as an ally rather than as a reason to stop herself from making certain choices in her life. Others too were startled by how exciting fear can feel, or how much less scary than the idea of it. One especially interesting discovery worth mentioning here involved the relationship between fear and power. Kerri, Judy, Elena, Diana, and Trish experienced in
various ways and to varying degrees a transformation of a felt sense of fear to a sense of power and named that as one gain from entering into this dreaded realm. Specifically, Diana mentioned in the follow-up meeting her own discovery of the quality of the ferocious feminine, in herself and related it directly to her exploration of fear in Meeting One. She used those words (ferocious feminine) to describe her new experience of herself in relationship to her husband, and reported that their marriage seemed to deepen and expand through that.

It is likely that the key to these participants’ ability to stay engaged with fear was the fact that they all shared similar backgrounds with either relatively little history of core trauma, or significant experience and history in working with their past that allowed them to develop more tolerance for and fluidity with processing intense affect. In their cases, evoking fear did not lead to triggering a shock response and thus presented little danger of retraumatization but rather made possible greater aliveness and self-knowledge.

Also because of the somatic, visceral quality of fear referred to by several participants, fear may be easier to access for those with greater ability to stay with the somatic thread of sensation and feeling without getting lost in a story. However, this did not seem to be true in the case of Diana. Despite a lot of experience in working with her process, both in movement and in somatic therapy, she still seemed to oscillate between engagement and detachment, so her example does not follow the pattern described above.

Remembering Fosha’s claims that pathogenic fear can best be addressed within the therapeutic attachment relationship, and that often the most painful element of early trauma is the child’s unwanted aloneness in the face of unbearable feelings, a question arises about the context of this exploration. The data around the witness exchange may
give some indication that a more personal engagement may be helpful in working with fear: those participants who had most difficulty accessing fear on their own showed a markedly greater mobility and intensity of experience when accompanied by a witness. It was clear that the presence of the other made possible a deeper level of contact with oneself. It seemed that just the fact of being witnessed was more important than anything else, even the content of what was witnessed.

The rest of the study was set up to allow everyone’s individual experience to occur and be processed without direct interaction with anyone else. The commonality of experience offered a holding field and a permission was issued to everyone in the room, but no one in particular, to drop into their somatic experience. The researchers adhered strictly to the roles of compassionate yet uninvolved witnesses.

It appears that for some participants the context might not have felt safe enough to enter further into their fear. We wonder what would have happened with more support, such as can be given during a workshop, or therapy group, where the co-leaders or assistants can at least offer their touch and reassurance, a felt sense of not being alone in this. Would it have made accessing fear easier? It is not clear to what degree the lack of direct person-to-person connection during the fear segment contributed to some participants’ unwillingness to enter the territory. Also, for those who carry core trauma it may have been wise to avoid addressing that layer in a situation where no individual support or sufficient length of time was available for slow, titrated resolution work.

This interpretation feels tentative and open to revision, perhaps by designing a different study. Both the participants as well as the co-researchers seemed puzzled and confused in the fear segment. Paradoxically, even though it is ubiquitous and universal,
fear was perceived by most participants as an unfamiliar emotion that seems to elude both intuitive grasp and conceptualization. Some participants raised the question of the usefulness of making fear one of the topics in the study, given what a delicate and complex territory it evokes.

Once again the bias that all feelings are good to feel must be addressed here. The usefulness of evoking fear remains problematic for some theorists and practitioners who claim that invoking fear on purpose, especially without a strong therapeutic container and titration skills always carries a risk of retraumatization.64 Other therapists, in particular those representing Gestalt-based and existential approaches, point to the necessity of accepting fear as a key fact of human existence and finding ways to acknowledge it as part of one’s experience.65 This approach seems to work only if fear can be actually felt without freezing into shock and when the process of organismic self-regulation can be trusted to take care of the timing and intensity of any encounter with fear. In those instances, increased energy and creative discovery can be expected as potential rewards for working through the impasse to the authentic expressive aliveness and power that lie underneath.

Validity Considerations

One consideration for any interpretation on this subject is that there seem too many factors affecting the possible outcomes. Working with fear may require a more complex study design that includes a more extensive consideration of such confounding influences as a person’s trauma history, experience with therapeutic work, level of
self-awareness, ability to disidentify from an emotion, or even body type (according to Boadella’s classification).

Another question concerns the trustworthiness of the method used for evoking the experience of fear. Showing participants a scene from a movie portraying an extreme situation few would be likely to experience in their own lives may have been part of the reason why some of them felt unable to access the experience that was meant to be evoked. On the other hand, the movie clip was effective for those participants who were able to connect to their somatic response and enter the exploration from there. For those who instead focused on the details of the movie’s unlikely plot, that choice may have served the purpose of distancing from the feeling. Since avoidance seems to be part of the pattern of encountering fear, both situations offered interesting data.

**Conclusion**

To restate again, the Research Problem of this study asked the question: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The cumulative learning shows that a group exploration of somatic process through expressive movement and art can be experienced as a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal expression becomes part of a collective ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration that can occur in the process depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear.
Implicit in the Research Problem was a question of reclaiming recollections of forgotten events, following my own experience of movement opening doors to the re-associating of repressed memories. No participant reported a discovery of that sort. The explicit formulation of the Research Problem, however, referred to “reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience” and this happened for all participants without exception, though in vastly different ways.

If we define remembering as a process of re-membering, putting the fragmented pieces of oneself back together, each participant re-membered and reclaimed a dissociated (forgotten) fragment of their experience by becoming aware of it in the process. Another use of the term re-membering refers to one of the therapeutic practices of Narrative Therapy for restoring one’s associations with those communities in which one feels held in nurturing, life-affirming ways, and which in consequence expand one’s options for the future. In this context, re-membering oneself as part of a community whose purpose was an exploration of feeling and body proved nourishing to the soul and offered participants possibilities for personal transformation.

As stated in Learning One, the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Both Emily and Alexis point out that just the fact of allowing space, permission, and support to explore feelings in a group of people seemed to effect a shift in the collective imaginal structure which prohibits not only feeling but especially feeling in public, being seen in one’s emotions. To be reminded not just in words but through an experience of the value of getting in touch with one’s somatic process opens up a possibility for a new way of
relating to oneself from now on. The collective reclamation of a culturally dissociated and banished dimension of experience may translate into a message received on the cellular level by each participant: it is okay to feel and show my feelings, we are in this together, I am not insane for feeling. These feelings are universal, and hence not shameful, or bad.

On the cultural and mythical level, the study’s exploration resulted in a retrieval of those aspects of the psyche that are relegated to the shadows of the underworld: the culturally shunned feelings, fear and grief, the act of feeling in community, or the value of feeling at all. The various facets of discoveries we made could be summed up as a reclamation of the feminine, including the power of the ferocious feminine.

This also refers to reclaiming right brain ways of relating to experience often referred to as feminine; indeed, those participants who were most able to suspend their usual ways of knowing experienced most transformative outcomes. Learning Two states that in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. The scope of body-mind integration that is possible in the process appears to correspond with the degree of surrender of top-down processing and willingness to accept what Mystery has in store.

It may be noted here that the experience of the collective descent seemed to have had an effect even for those who during the exploration seemed unable or unwilling to descend. From participants’ accounts on Meeting Two it appears that for many, an initiation had taken place in ways other than linear cause and effect progressions. Participants who had reported not being able to relate to some aspects of the inquiry
during the main session were affected in ways that became more obvious days or weeks afterwards and led to new ways of being embodied in their lives. This points back to the transformative power of the communal matrix.

Learning Three shows that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience. Participants’ discoveries of aspects of experience that had not been in their awareness before were in most cases different than we, or they, expected. The alchemical quality of the process contributed to the awe most of us felt in response to the surprising turns of experience participants reported.

Some of the unexpected discoveries concern participants’ experiences of not moving and the degree of awareness and presence required to distinguish its various manifestations. Learning Four states that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment.

In an expressive movement exploration, inertia is an essential yet potentially challenging part of the inner journey. This quality has associations with the feminine immobility of the underworld, which is the opposite of the masculine injunction to stay in motion: active, dynamic, productive in the upper-world. Often what looks like inertia is a very potent, dynamic struggle. Participants discovered that sometimes compassionate surrender to non-doing is necessary. At other times, discernment calls for a return to movement. Facing the fear of inertia is also a part of the process.
The inquiry into fear brought about Learning Five: consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment. Because of fear’s relationship with trauma and survival issues, this affect is difficult to work with in situations of limited therapeutic support or titration skills. Yet it seems that fear was another theme weaving implicitly or explicitly across all the previous learnings: the fear of feeling, fear of dissolving into the undifferentiated field, fear of isolation, fear of not knowing, fear of inertia, fear of death. Being a commonly dissociated affect, fear may be the one place where facing the reality of its presence in the psyche can be considered a prerequisite for reclaiming any other dissociated fragment of one’s experience. For this reason fear may deserve a deeper inquiry in future studies on body-mind integration.
CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

Significance of Learnings

The cumulative learning of the study, Surrender of the Known Opens a Door to Hidden Treasure, is that a group exploration of somatic process through expressive movement and art can be experienced as a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal expression becomes part of a collective ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration that can occur in the process depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear.

The main claim of Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside, is that the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld, declares that in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. Learning Three: The Body Is a Doorway to Mystery, states that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience.
The main claim of Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting, is that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment. Learning Five: One Thing We Fear Is Fear Itself, shows that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment.

The hypothesis suggested that when embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allow for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

The learnings support this hypothesis to a significant degree. The ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown, as evidenced by the varying degrees of surrender at the gates to the psychic underworld during the art/movement experience, was the deciding factor in participants’ ability to gain access to and reclaim dissociated aspects of their experience; those who resisted relinquishing control over outcome and intensity had a more limited access to their inner reality. In addition, participants who were able to follow the somatic image without the need for story or meaning seemed to gain the most from the exploration.

What was actually reclaimed in the process was the source of many surprises. In this study’s Research Problem: When embodying and expressing feeling through
movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? the phrase “dissociated fragments of experience” was originally meant to refer to memories of forgotten events from the past. Because of my own story, I had some expectations of movement being a way for participants to reclaim such memories in the process of data collection. The surprising learning was that none of the participants actually had the experience of reclaiming a forgotten memory. However, all of them without exception seemed to have an experience of discovering or reclaiming something about themselves that was forgotten or previously unknown.

There are several other ways in which the learnings gleaned from this study shed new light on the Research Problem. Even though the study was from the outset designed to take place in a group setting, no attention had been given to the potential influence the group field would have on what learnings may emerge. As it happened, the communitas experience was one of the most significant factors in shaping and supporting most participants’ process. The Research Problem in its current formulation does not account for that factor.

Meanwhile, as the learnings indicate, one piece of dissociated experience recovered by many of the participants was the forgotten felt sense of support many received from relaxing into the group field. The embodied experience of being together with intense feelings re-introduced into the individual and collective consciousness the possibility of drawing support from a community in one’s quest for more contact with oneself. Beyond even the recognition that “I am not in this alone,” this felt sense of being nourished by the communal feeling field may have allowed for a repatterning of that old myth that says having feelings means being weak or deficient; the experience had its own
undeniable strength and it also led several participants to a new and compelling experience of personal power.

Another learning that throws new light on the Research Problem was the one concerning inertia. Since inertia is a necessary phase if a movement exploration is to reach any depth, the skill required in negotiating its territory must be accounted for as one of the ingredients required for allowing the accessing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience. This was not considered in the initial formulation of the hypothesis.

Due to a close relationship between inertia and dissociation, this area seems fertile ground for further research concerning both expressive movement and working with dissociation. Studies could be designed to explore the various manifestations of inertia and ways to negotiate them within a facilitated movement inquiry.

While reclaiming memories may be one desired outcome of movement and expressive arts explorations, the learnings suggest that at another level, the reclamtion concerns something less obvious, yet more pervasive: getting in touch with the aspects of oneself often taken for granted yet hardly ever experienced, such as breath, sensation, and feeling.

As many researches admit, dissociation is not a clearly observable or well understood symptom.¹ To go back to Cardeña’s discussion, he warns the reader that “to assume that any type of disconnection between the experiencing self and various perceptions, emotions, and thoughts is ‘dissociative’ makes the term so overarching that it loses descriptive value.” ² Cardeña does not find it useful to apply the concept of dissociation to ordinary instances of less-than-full engagement with one’s experience.
“Rather,” he proposes, “it should pertain to qualitative departures from one’s ordinary modes of experiencing, wherein an unusual disconnection or disengagement from the self and/or the surroundings occurs as a central aspect of the experience.” In contrast to that, it is my observation that disconnection from the self is for many people not an unusual but an ordinary mode of experiencing.

As an example of dissociative phenomenon Cardeña quotes an “out-of-body experience” of a rape victim who “may disengage from the ongoing event by seemingly having no sensory experiences or emotions during [the event], by ‘observing it’ from a perspective at a distance from the physical body . . . or becoming fully immersed in an imaginal event.” While this example is quite dramatic, the difference between the experience Cardeña describes and the normal mode of living common in our culture seems merely quantitative in nature. Many people go about their everyday lives at quite a distance from their bodies, unaware of the sensations and emotions inside. It became clear during the process of conducting this study that a distinction is necessary between the clinical use of the word dissociation, mainly concerned with forgotten memories, and the everyday dis-embodiment that in Western cultures is often implicitly regarded as the norm while its consequences affect individuals, communities, and the ecology of the planet in profoundly negative ways.

Loss of contact with the body can be seen as one of the main manifestations of soul loss. Ingerman argues that soul loss is widespread in the Western culture, manifesting in the prevalence of addictions, abusive relationships, depression, workaholism, and chronic illness. She claims people living with a general feeling of not
being whole or being present in their bodies and observing life from a distance rather than engaging or experiencing it fully in the moment likely suffer from soul loss.\textsuperscript{5}

If one considers a mild expression of the symptoms of what is regarded as dissociative trance in psychopathology, especially the numbness, lack of awareness, narrowing of attention, and a sense of having no control over the distress one feels, these symptoms seem to describe many people’s experience of themselves when in a state of soul loss. Regarded in this manner, it appears that pathological dissociative trance and common, everyday soul loss are two expressions of the continuum of dissociation, and not as far removed from each other as may be commonly believed.

Western treatment approaches often fail in cases of soul loss, Ingerman claims, because they are not dealing with the whole person. She proposes the shamanic experience of soul retrieval as another avenue. This requires that a trained medicine person undertake the journey on behalf of the afflicted person. This study may provide an alternative approach where individuals themselves travel to the psychic underworld in order to retrieve a missing piece of their soul. Such a journey has many characteristics of shamanic experience. In its focus on wholeness as a prerequisite for health, it offers an integrative perspective that addresses an issue that has no name in diagnostic manuals of mainstream psychology but is one of the leading and pervasive causes of psychological distress for many people.

This nameless problem of dis-embodiment is often seen as a form of depression and treated with medications. The alchemical process described here is simple and does not require special skills or equipment; yet the results, as shown on a small scale in this study, can be astonishing.
Implications of the Study

Both I and my co-researchers were inspired and elated by what we have learned in the course of this study. The experience of being part of this group was itself affirming for the longing each of us has felt in our own lives for contexts in which we could exist inside the full range of our experience.

A community in which embodied expression of feeling is invited and encouraged is for the three of us a prayer answered. It satisfies our craving for permission, presence, space held, company, validation; for me personally, it offers a cure for the unbearable loneliness of those endless childhood days when I was starving for real contact both with myself and another. Emily wrote during Meeting One:

I do know that we could all use more time and space to feel our feelings—feel our whole selves together where there is no shame—crying at home alone is one thing but there is always some part of me that cries harder because I feel alone and the image of anyone crying alone is so painful. Show me what you have inside of you, tell me I’m not insane and that it is safe to feel.

When accessing feelings is considered, my imaginal structure of the one who pulls herself by her bootstraps may have contributed to overlooking the possibility of the support offered by the presence of others in an individual’s endeavor of reclaiming dissociated experience. Growing up in my family and my culture, I have learned that the environment only conspires to support the silent pact of denial and dissociation and that if I desire something different, I am left to my own strength, like a salmon swimming upstream. In broader terms, this blind spot may point to the ethos of individualism and the lone hero prevalent in the collective consciousness of mainstream America where it is believed that everyone should take care of themselves without expecting or asking for
help from anyone else. In this ethos, feelings are often seen as a sign of weakness, and a private matter to be dealt with discreetly and without involving anyone else. Even the psychotherapy model supports this atmosphere of privacy and secrecy, as if feelings were something shameful that can only be disclosed and discussed behind closed doors in the presence of one other person who is bound by the strictest agreements of confidentiality.

I have learned a lot about my own need for permission and support in this area. After the fact, I have realized that I designed an experiment in aliveness of the sort that I craved most of my early life; looking back at the study experience, it occurs to me that the stage was set in this particular way in order to satisfy the place of hunger inside me. At the same time, I have seen this hunger in others—a hunger for a context and support for feeling and becoming whole again—and have been engaged in an inquiry into means by which it can be met.

For over two decades now, I have been looking for ways to facilitate group explorations at the interface of movement, somatics, emotional process, and spirituality. The study has validated the direction for the path of my professional future. I now know that this type of group experience is not only possible, but desired. I am inspired to continue developing and refining structures that will support participants in descending to their own depths within the container of a moving community.

I know there are many people in the dance community who have experienced openings of the sort described here. Often, these experiences occur without context or holding, “on the occasion” of participating in a movement class; the practice is often held as an artistic, rather than therapeutic endeavor. The learnings of this study can encourage a broadening of the perspective that would present movement-based practices as a vehicle
of body-mind integration with the potential to access and reclaim sensations, feelings, new levels of self-affirmation, and eventually an experience of an integrated self.

For people not already involved in expressive movement practices, at least some elements of this study can be useful. I imagine hospice workers would benefit from using the inspiration of this experiment in their work with bereavement and grief. Of the two emotions explicitly explored in this study, grief seemed the more accessible and less resisted. It appears that when approached through the medium of movement, grief can be experienced, expressed, and integrated in ways that cannot be accomplished by merely talking about it. “The art form of movement may speak a language that communicates feelings from the inner recesses of one’s being,” writes Delores Gulledge from her experience with her own grief; “grief in motion may speak the hurt and pain when the vocal chords are silent. The emerging and releasing emotions of grief in movement is freeing.”

It has been recognized within the hospice community for a while now that support groups are more helpful in addressing grief and bereavement than individual grief work. The use of movement within that model may make another qualitative difference. Even just an invitation to listen to evocative music and allow feelings to arise might open up new channels of expression in groups where movement is a new and intimidating modality. It is worth remembering in this context that in Knill et al.’s approach to expressive art therapies “low skill high sensitivity” is a prerequisite for success; in other words, it is not required for the person to have technical proficiency in the art modalities, only a willingness to surrender to the process.
Somatic psychotherapists could use models based on this study or similar designs to invite their clients into group explorations as an adjunct to their individual therapies. Group therapists could benefit from using movement and expressive arts as alternative avenues of emotional inquiry and expression that would likely enhance and expand their usual processes. Most of all, therapists themselves could greatly benefit from this way of working with their own experience and repeatedly descending into their own depths in service of deepening their work with others.

More generally speaking, the profession of psychotherapy, especially those clinicians who have yet to respond affirmatively to Merleau-Ponty’s question: “Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?” could learn from this study of embodied presence that the body is a doorway to the experience of wholeness that they may be looking for in vain in their exclusive reliance on verbal interventions.10

This study offers a modest contribution to the academic discipline of Psychology in its slow and halting process of shifting away from its exclusive allegiance to a rational, disembodied, Cartesian model of thought to a more inclusive, fleshy, and alive discourse of what it is to be a human being. In addition, as a contribution that places embodied soul at the center of its inquiry, this study brings another somatic perspective to Imaginal Psychology which in its breadth and depth of interest sometimes skips over the immediate reality of the somatic dimension of human experience. In the broadest context, these learnings offer another piece of support for the transformation of culture toward one of inclusion, integration, and wholeness.
Mythic and Archetypal Reflections

Inanna abandons the light of heaven and earth—the upper world—in order to enter the darkness of her sister’s chthonic realm. She arrives at the gates ambitious, belligerent, and proud. Soon, she is humbled, stripped naked, brought to her knees. She must surrender all the insignia of her upper-worldly power. She suffers and then dies. Symbolically what dies in the process is the unquestioned superiority of the intellect, the culturally narrow version of reality, the left brain dominance and disconnect.

The myth holds the many stages of the journey taken by this study’s participants: the choice to descend (willingness to stay and participate fully even after it became clear what the study involved); the humbling and surrender at the gates to the underworld (repeated need to sacrifice or suspend the thinking. evaluating, controlling mind); confronting the attachment to one’s egoic identity (refusal and resistance); the experience of facing Ereshkigal and what she represents (grief, fear, rage, the split-off darker aspects of our experience); the anguish of hanging on the hook (inertia, dissociation, the stillness of waiting); and the exhilaration of return (with an increased sense of self-acceptance, power, and wholeness).

Each, like Inanna, arrived at our meeting place from the brightly lit upper world of their ordered, rational, everyday existence, not knowing clearly what lay in store for them. I imagine they each came in response to some longing within them, or at least a curiosity to explore, as the flyer announcing the study stated, the bridge between motion and emotion. Some saw themselves as experienced, intrepid somatic explorers, and were faced with challenges they had not met in their explorations before.
Each person was met at the gates to his or her underworld by a question, Will you surrender? All participants reported having to answer the question more than once. Like Inanna stepping through the seven gates, they described how after each sacrifice another juncture point would appear. They were asked to suspend the attachment to their egoic identity, their need to know, the habit of control and attempts at figuring things out or thinking their way through experience; their ideas of proper timing, their fear of emotional intensity, or any expectations of outcome.

Some participants, at least some of the time, were unable or unwilling to confront the strength of their restrictive patterns and remained faithful to the animus-ego’s linear, rational devotion to upholding the virtues and ideals of the upper world. Their refusal to surrender closed some gates before them. Others who continued to say yes were invited to their depths and allowed, or perhaps forced, to face the Ereshkigal aspect of themselves. They were shaken by the depth of grief, rage, dread, and helplessness they experienced inside and sensed in others in the process. For some, this confrontation changed the image they held of themselves as fearless or easily able to engage their inner depths. The experience of meeting those feelings inside themselves and within the group was humbling, and at the same time expanded their notions of wholeness and presence.

All of the participants, at various point in their journeys, had Inanna’s experience of being hung on a hook as they yielded to the paralysis of inertia. Some had the ability to surrender to it with presence and compassion and found in stillness a deeply restful state; others got lost in the fog of confusion or succumbed to the pull of dissociation and unconsciousness.
In the myth, Ereshkigal falls ill during her sister’s visit. What is the nature of her suffering is not clear. Perhaps with Inanna rotting on the meat hook the world is in such imbalance that even the queen of darkness cannot stand the pain. The two unassuming androgynous (neither male nor female) creatures sent by the god Enki to save Inanna accomplish their mission by patiently, with great empathy, bearing witness to Ereshkigal’s anguish. They cannot do much to relieve Ereshkigal’s pain, other than being with her in it, and that was exactly what helps her. Their patience while waiting, not pushing for resolution, doing nothing but being there, resembles the experience of staying present with inertia some participants described as part of their process.

Enki’s liminal creatures are not heroic in the way of mythical male heroes, nor ambitious, but selfless and willing to face the horrors of the netherworld with compassion as their only weapon. Based on this, Brinton Perera names the god Enki the patron of therapists. Within one’s psyche, Enki’s messengers may symbolize the capacities of patience, presence, and wisdom, perhaps the most essential qualities required on the inner journey. They also happen to be what is most effective when accompanying or witnessing someone on a descent.

For those individuals who were temporarily lost in the immobility of dissociation, being witnessed by another seemed to provide a way back to presence. Like the creatures who revived Inanna by sprinkling her with the waters of life, the partners in the witnessing exchange provided the empathy and loving presence that made it possible for participants to make sense of and integrate their underworld experience. Bringing oneself back into a relational context after an experience of descent is the final phase of the journey, and in the witness exchange many individuals felt received, seen, and held.
Participants, like Inanna, returned from the descent changed. The surprising turns of experience that took them into encounters with Mystery felt to many like the fresh waters of new possibility; in touch with their own aliveness, no matter what flavor, whether grief or exhilaration or the power to say no, they could sense the promise of a transformation in the ways they relate to their experience and act in their everyday lives.

Priorities and relationships may change after a descent. It is poignant to note, Brinton Perera points out, that Dumuzi, Inanna’s male consort, untouched by loss or grief, is sacrificed upon her return. One who has experienced wholeness can no longer abide the narrow, exclusive perspective of the masculine consciousness; in the psyche, the dissociation from feeling and depth is renounced in favor of a more inclusive view. Participants who were able to make that sacrifice during the study spoke of empowering and exhilarating shifts in the ways they held their experience that continued past the time we spent together.

The ancient poem ends with Dumuzi and his sister each spending half of the year in the underworld, each in equal measure paying homage to the dark as well as light, upper as well as lower aspects of reality. Similarly, some participants reported increased openness to experiencing the darker aspects of their feelings in the future, seemingly less afraid and more willing to make time and space for encounters with their inner depths, and recognizing the promise of integration engendered in this choice. The myth’s ending speaks to a transformation of consciousness toward a configuration that incorporates the perspective of the underworld experience and so makes possible engaging with the upper world as an integrated self.
It is again important to remember that the aim of Inanna’s descent is not to replace the masculine upper world’s ideals with the values of the underworld, but rather to unite both; in Brinton Perera’s words, to allow the dark, repressed aspects of self to “enter conscious life—through emotional upheaval and grief—[in order to] radically change conscious energy patterns.”

While Brinton Perera focuses on women’s experience, she suggests that the process is the same, and equally necessary, for men if they desire psychological healing. Many people, both men and women, in our culture seem in need of reclaiming the feminine dimension of our experience; indeed the entire Western civilization suffers from an overdeveloped masculine muscle to highly detrimental results for the whole planet. To quote Brinton Perera again:

Connecting to those levels of consciousness involves a sacrifice of the upper-world aspects of the Self to and for the sake of the dark, different, or altered-state aspects. It means sacrifice to and for the repressed, undifferentiated ground of being with the hope of gaining rebirth with a deeper, resonant awareness. . . . And it means returning with these resonances, adding them to the mental-cerebral, ordinary Western consciousness, in order to forge what Jean Gebser calls integral consciousness.

As discussed earlier, the need for restoring feminine values reaches far beyond the intrapsychic domain. A world such as ours, where femininity is devalued and banished into exile, also suffers from alienation from the body, the earth, and the sense of belonging to a larger ecological and spiritual web of connectedness and wholeness. The reclamation of the feminine seems a matter of emergency in a culture hopelessly lost in its devotion to such a severely narrowed version of reality.

This aspect of the study, highlighting the need of restoring wholeness not just in individuals but in the larger world we share, became very clear to me, my co-researchers,
and the participants in the course of our collaborative inquiry. It is perhaps telling that I, for many years of my life a spokesperson for the animus ego, was not so keenly aware of this particular dimension in advance, though it may have been obvious from the beginning. I was given Brinton Perera’s book by a friend who for some reason decided to make this gift without any knowledge of what I was writing about or that I was just entering the process of making meaning of the data: a seeming coincidence which I accepted as another manifestation of collective field interaction, and to which I gladly surrendered, for it became clear that the myth of Inanna which I had not considered before was precisely what I needed to frame the learnings that have emerged out of the research.

**Conclusion: A Vision for the Future**

As shown above, an expressive movement practice, especially done in a group setting, can lead to a shift from the dissociated I (the thinking self) as the exclusive subject of consciousness to a more inclusive feeling-sensing perception of the integrated self. It also seems evident that embodied presence is not only a prerequisite for the transformation of the individual but the society and culture as a whole. Advocating for embodiment, Berman argues that empathy is impossible without somatic presence; conversely, our becoming fully embodied may spell the end to the need for ideology, war, and the exploitation of nature. Berman calls for a “conviction that the flesh of my body is also the flesh of this earth, the flesh of experience.”¹⁴ He writes:

To know your own flesh, to know both the pain and joy it contains, is to come to know something much larger than this. . . . Something obvious keeps eluding our civilization, something that involves a reciprocal relationship between nature and psyche, and that we are going to have to grasp if we are to survive as a species.¹⁵
This is a perspective often forgotten in mainstream psychology. The need for integrative approaches devoted to embodied exploration of culturally taboo topics rarely engaged in the dominant paradigm, such as the body, feeling, and the feminine (including its earth-based, dark, and ferocious aspects), seems greater now than ever and is perhaps, as Berman suggests, indeed a question of humanity’s survival. Somatic psychotherapy using expressive/ecstatic movement could be used as a form of remembrance, a way to heal this particular kind of dissociation: the postmodern alienation from the physical, emotional, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of the soul.

A broader application of somatically based practices of descent could potentially contribute to what systems theorists call a second order change in the culture at large: one whose occurrence changes the system itself to an altogether different state. A transformation of this sort would be an expression of a shift from rational to integral consciousness. In Gebser’s words, integral consciousness allows the free expression of all of the other structures without being captured by any of them. Rather than allowing only one (rational) structure to be valid, in integral consciousness all structures are recognized and accepted. A transformed culture of integral consciousness would shift away from the medical model of healing—performed by experts armed with rational science—toward a collaborative, multiperspectival exploration of health defined as emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being. New practices of healing, rather than help with adaptation to the reigning social norm, would introduce possibilities of inclusion and acceptance of many perspectives on wholeness. Somatically based practices like those explored in this study can be a significant component of this personal, social, and planetary movement toward transformation and integration.
APPENDIX 1

ETHICS REVIEW

Population

Participants in this study will be selected from those with prior experience with conscious movement, a degree of self-awareness and familiarity with psychological work, and some openness to exchanging safe touch. Caution will be taken to screen out those participants who cannot tolerate any emotional distress without therapeutic support, especially individuals with severe or recent trauma history.

An unwillingness or inability to experiment with (safe, non-sexual, clothes-on) touch would be an exclusion criterion in the study. Another exclusion criterion will apply to those who have recently experienced a significant loss.

Ideally, 10 to 14 participants will be selected from interested and qualified applicants.

To recruit participants for this study, I will address the Bay Area ecstatic dance community. I will email the flyer to my contact list and ask for it to be put out at various dance venues in the area. I will make verbal announcements at the events I teach and attend. The announcements will talk about a study that investigates the relationship between motion and e-motion. Those encouraged to apply would be people with some prior experience with expressive movement and curious and willing to explore the connection between body and mind.
Procedures Involving Research Participants

Screening

Potential participants will be asked to contact me in person, by phone, or email, to obtain a screening questionnaire by mail or email. Interested applicants will then return the screening questionnaire by mail or email. There will be a deadline set for that, and a date by which applicants will be informed by email whether they have been accepted or rejected (“final selection date”).

Care will be taken to select participants who do not know each other well in professional or intimate contexts and to avoid introducing the complexity of dual relationships. The list of selected participants will be announced to all chosen with the option that they can withdraw if anyone else’s participation would make them uncomfortable.

I will also exclude those applicants with whom I have worked closely in groups or workshops I have led in the past. Those who only have taken drop-in classes with me will be considered on a case by case basis. Ideally, the number of participants who know me from prior engagement of any kind will be kept to a minimum. I will use my best judgment to avoid any unnecessary complexity of relationships between me and the participants.
First Meeting

I will greet each participant as they arrive, introduce myself to those I do not know, and ask them to take a seat on one of the cushions arranged in a circle on the floor. Each will be handed two copies of the Informed Consent letter, one to keep, and one to sign and return to me before we begin.

Once everyone is there, I will welcome them again and introduce my co-researchers. They will collect the signed Informed Consent forms.

I will then orient participants to the space, point out the bathrooms and the tea and fruit table and present an overview of the day’s schedule, mentioning the time of the lunch break and approximate times for snack breaks. I will ask participants to be “crisp” about being back on time and tell them that we will ring the bell a few minutes before each break is over to help them track the time. The bell will also be used for marking the beginning and end of other activities. I will remind everyone that the meeting will be videotaped and audiorecorded, and that any of the three of us may be taking notes at any point during the meetings.

In my opening statement, I will briefly describe the study, setting the tone for the depth of engagement and focus I hope for, ask participants to keep crosstalk to an absolute minimum, and remind them about the confidentiality agreement. I will name the activities we will engage in: movement, touch exchange, art making, and writing, and remind participants that their participation at all times is voluntary, and that they can adapt or opt out of any activity that does not feel right to them. I will add that emotional discomfort may be unavoidable in this process but that no particular outcome is expected, that is whatever they experience can contribute useful data in this study.
Then I will ask participants to introduce themselves to the group. They will be asked to share their names, say what brought them to the study, and name one thing about their relationship to their feelings. I will ask for succinct answers to these questions.

**Data Collection Procedures**

This study utilizes art-based research methods. Modalities used will include movement, art making, writing, touch, and verbal sharing.

Activities involving movement will begin with a warm-up. This will be a guided movement and touch sequence focused on relaxing stretches, softening and releasing tension in the face and chest, expanding and stretching the area of the chest, including bending back, arching, and reaching up and out with the arms, as well as a short guided self-massage.

“The dance of grief” will be a self-directed movement exploration with evocative music. Participants will be invited to move with the breath, shapes, and sounds of grief. Two witnessed movement activities will involve half of the group’s moving with the images one drew, with their partners witnessing in a circle; and each half of the group witnessing the other half in moving from one shape into the next as one large body. Partners’ aesthetic response to what they witnessed by taking a shape expressing how they were affected will also be included in the witnessing sequence.

Part of the evocative sequence will be listening to a recording of David Whyte reciting his poem, “The Well of Grief.” Art making will consist of drawing what was discovered in the grief dance. Oil pastels and paper will be provided, with a brief verbal introduction to this “low skill, high sensitivity” approach to artistic expression.
Several activities will involve writing. These include filling out the Loss Questionnaire, responding to journal questions, and the writing of a poem. In a closing circle, participants will be invited to share their experience and read their poems if they so choose. The reading out loud of their poems is meant to serve to integrate the experience of the group session.

In the second meeting, two more journal questions will be asked pertaining to participants’ observations about themselves and responses to preliminary interpretations.

Guided touch exchange with a partner will be included as part of the warm-up. This will consist of receiving a partner’s touch at pressure points in the upper back, with the aim to help open the upper back and the front of the chest. This sequence will be presented as optional and will take ten minutes per person. Participants who are willing will also be encouraged to hold hands at the end of the closing circle and share hugs as they leave the room after the session is complete.

The sharing of touch is included in the design as it can facilitate access to one’s physical sensations and feelings, preparing the person for the movement/feeling exploration that comes later. At the end of the session touch can play an integrative role.

The effectiveness of touch increases if trust is already present between people. If I draw from the dance community, I am likely to find a group of people who have moved with each other before, engaged, or witnessed others engaging in similar explorations. Touch may have been a way of relating they have used with other dancers before and the use of touch in the study may not be an issue.

It could be different for the participants who are strangers to each other, though not necessarily. The guided, safe, non-intrusive sharing of touch where feedback is
elicited at any step can be helpful as part of rapport building and increasing trust between participants.

A mention of touch being an element in the study is included in the flyer and the consent form, and participants will be screened along this factor, with only those who agree to experiment with (safe, non-sexual, clothes-on) touch being selected to participate.

In any case, it will be necessary to offer participants the option to adapt the instructions so no partner touch is required. In the initial warm-up, for example, those participants who are not comfortable with sharing touch will be invited to work with the wall or the floor instead, and use their own touch in order to find ways of addressing the same areas of upper back, arms, and chest to release tension and bring more attention to that region of the body.

Verbal sharing with the whole group in Meeting One will be limited to the opening circle introductions and the participants’ sharing of their reflections at the very end. The closing circle will be devoted to hearing about participants’ key moments and how they were affected, and to them reading their poems if they wish.

In the follow-up session, writing and verbal sharing will take the form of written feedback from participants in response to researcher’s initial learnings and their reflections about any effects the study had in their lives, as well as a discussion along these lines.
Consent Process

Accepted participants will be mailed or emailed a copy of the Informed Consent Form and asked to read it in advance. Another double copy of the same form will be distributed at the beginning of the first meeting: one to be signed and handed in, the other for them to keep. Participants will be encouraged to ask any questions or discuss any concerns they might have, preferably beforehand, by phone or email, or in person at the beginning of the meeting before giving their consent to participate.

Risks

Potential risks in this study, especially during the main session of data collection, include participants’ becoming aware of unintegrated psychic material that may result in a regression in the psyche and lead to an emotional emergency beyond the scope of what the study design can support. Another similar though less dramatic possibility is that some participants may become overwhelmed by the unanticipated intensity of their own or others’ experience beyond their coping skills and be unable to continue with the process or integrate what happened.

Another unlikely risk is that participants may sustain a physical strain or injury during one of the movement explorations.

The conversational silence requested from the participants for the duration of the daylong meeting may bring up memories of being silenced, or a sense of having to keep family secrets, and cause participants undue distress, not intended by the study’s design.
Safeguards

To minimize the potential risks related to this study’s emotional impact, I will endeavor to be very clear in how I present this study in the recruitment and selection process. The possibility of emotional distress will be repeatedly mentioned at all stages in that process. I will make every effort to be especially sensitive to cues and hunches in my initial contact with applicants and their responses to the screening questionnaire. If I sense emotional fragility, or a need for more support and holding than the study can provide, I will apply the general rule “When in doubt, screen them out.”

During the study, participants will repeatedly be reminded to adapt or discontinue an activity if it does not feel right to them. I will never attempt to talk anyone into doing something if they decline.

To minimize risk of physical injury by anyone going past their limitations, or by others’ lack of spatial awareness, the researchers will be watching closely the movement explorations and address any potentially risky forms of motor expression before they become an issue. We may ask someone to slow down, open their eyes or move to a safer area of the room to give them more space for their expression without the risk of unintentionally hurting someone else.

I will make sure participants know that I am open to being asked for clarification or explanation at any point. I will also offer psychotherapy referrals for those who feel that they need more support outside the study in order to process and integrate what came up for them in the course of our meetings.
Benefits

This study can be of benefit to participants by introducing them to the possibilities and potentials of expressive arts in integrating body and mind. It can deepen their experience of themselves, open up areas of emotional work they were not aware of, and point in the direction of an integrated, passionate, wholehearted living that includes more and more of their previously disowned experience, including their somatic reality. It could be an experience that normalizes grief, a feeling generally abhorred and pathologized in this culture, and give participants a taste of what a community can do together to hold a space for mourning as a ritual of transformation. Participants can be affirmed in the embodied recognition that grief is essential in reclaiming more of one’s self.

Benefits for the professional community can include presenting ideas for new somatic explorations and movement-based mindfulness approaches: using conscious movement as a method of discovery of the immediate experience beyond the thinking mind, especially useful for people for whom sitting still and attempting to meditate initially leads to more dissociation rather than more presence. Hospice workers could benefit from the inspiration to approach grief and bereavement work with their clients through somatic and art-based practices. The results of the study can also be incorporated in the design of new workshops or class series offered to the general public interested in exploring somatic reality.
After the Study

Participants will receive a thank you card after the follow-up meeting and later, upon approval of the dissertation, a written *Summary of Learnings*. The Summary will briefly discuss the meaning making methods of Imaginal Inquiry, especially the approaches used in identifying key moments, or key narrative passages in the data; the use of a mythological lens; and the requirement of self-reflexive participation by the researcher and co-researchers, all of which constitute a research paradigm unfamiliar to most people and worthy of introducing into the mainstream discourse at every opportunity.

The Summary will list the learnings gained from the study, significantly condensed from the final version of the dissertation and translated where necessary into more accessible language, a paragraph or two for each, preceded by a section naming the initial research questions, the Research Problem, and the hypothesis. The Cumulative Learning will be presented first.

Some reflections from the dissertation Reflections Chapter will also be included, as appropriate. These will include any reflections on whether and how the study’s results were found to support the initial hypothesis. The Summary will be two pages in length. I will make the full text of the dissertation available online to those who might possibly be interested in reading more about the study.
APPENDIX 2

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

Evoking Experience

Meeting One

• Recorded poem by David Whyte, “News of Death.”

• Loss questionnaire.

  1. What were some of the losses you experienced in your life? List briefly.
  2. Describe a time when you felt a loss. What happened?
  3. What did you feel in your body?
  4. What feelings were you aware of?

• Movement exploration focused on relaxing stretches, softening and releasing tension in the face and chest, expanding and stretching the area of the chest, including bending back, arching, and reaching up and out with the arms, as well as guided self massage.

• Recorded poem: David Whyte, “The Well of Grief.”

• “The dance of grief”: A self-directed movement exploration with evocative music. Moving with the breath, shapes, and sounds of grief.

• Play a clip from the movie “Cliffhanger.”

• “The dance of fear”: A self-directed movement exploration with evocative music. Moving with the breath, shapes, and sounds of fear.

Expressing Experience

Meeting One

• Art making: drawing what was discovered in the dances of grief and fear.

• Taking turns moving as the images of grief with the partners witnessing in a circle.

• Partner’s aesthetic response to what was witnessed.
• Journal writing in response to questions:

  1. What did you discover in the movement exploration? Please include description of physical sensations if you can.
  2. What surprised you?
  3. Write as one of the images/the image you drew. What do you want the author of the drawing to know?
  4. If grief had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as grief.
  5. If fear had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as fear.

• Writing a poem about what happened.

Meeting Two

• Participants share their responses to researcher’s initial learnings through journaling and discussion. Journal questions:

  1. What do you feel you “reclaimed” in the process the day we met? What did you find coming out on the other side, after your “descent”?
  2. Have you noticed any effects of our last meeting in your life since? Please describe.
  3. What surprised you about the preliminary learnings of our study? Include any other responses you have to what you heard this evening.

  **Interpreting Experience**

Meeting One

• Participants identify the key moments of the day and describe how they were affected by them.

After Meeting One

• Researchers name key moments and identify parallels and differences.

• Data analysis: Finding metaphors and recurring themes in participants’ experience; looking for surprises and the unexpected; self-reflexive exploration: inquiry into bias, shadow, researchers’ imaginal structures.

• Making meaning of the discoveries through a mythological lens.

Meeting Two

• Elicit feedback from participants in response to researcher’s initial learnings and their reflections about any effects the study had in their lives.
Integrating Experience

Meeting One

• Paying attention to and taking time with transitions.

• Silent breaks.

• Verbal sharing in a closing circle and the reading of participants’ poems.

• Sharing of touch at the end of the session.

Meeting Two and After

• Sharing the preliminary and later the final learnings with the participants.
APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

Meeting One (10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.)

I. Informed Consent and Orientation (10:00–10:20 a.m.)
   A. Greeting and seating of participants by researchers.
   B. Obtain each participant’s Informed Consent form.
   C. Researcher’s greeting and logistical information
      1. Introducing the co-researchers.
      2. Orienting to the space (bathrooms, tea, snacks).
      3. Schedule (breaks, request to be crisp about beginnings and endings, bell indicates end of break, etc.).
      4. General overview of the flow of the meeting.

II. Opening Circle (10:20–10:55 a.m.)
   A. Participants share their names, what brought them to the study, and one thing about their relationship to their feelings.

III. Evoking-Expressing Sequence One (11:00–11:25 a.m.)
   A. Recorded poem by David Whyte, “News of Death.” (5 minutes)
   B. Participants fill out loss questionnaire. (20 minutes)

IV. Short silent break/transition (11:25–11:35 a.m.)

V. Evoking-Expressing Sequence Two (11:35 a.m.–12:20 p.m.)
   A. Warm-up (20 minutes)
      1. Movement exploration focused on relaxing stretches, softening and releasing tension in the face and chest, expanding and stretching the area of the chest,
including bending back, arching, and reaching up and out with the arms, as well as guided self massage.

B. Introduction to moving with feeling. (5 minutes)

C. Recorded poem: David Whyte, “The Well of Grief.” (5 minutes)

D. “The dance of grief”: A self-directed movement exploration with evocative music. Moving with the breath, shapes, and sounds of grief. (15 minutes)

VI. Silent snack break (12:30–12:40 p.m.)

VII. Evoking-Expressing Sequence Three (12:40–1:45 p.m.)

A. Watching a movie clip, the opening sequence from “Cliffhanger.” (10 minutes)

B. “The dance of fear”: A self-directed movement exploration with evocative music. Moving with the breath, shapes, and sounds of fear. (15 minutes)

C. Art making.

1. Researcher introduces art making. (5 minutes)

2. Participants draw what they discovered in their dances. (30 minutes)

VIII. Silent Lunch Break (1:50–2:30 p.m.)

IX. Expressing Experience, Continued (2:30–4:00 p.m.)

A. Introduction to moving in response to image and to witnessing. (5 minutes)

B. Witnessing practice, half the group taking turns moving in response to their “images of feeling” with their partners witnessing. (10 minutes for each turn). Witnessing partner gives an aesthetic response at the end of first partner’s turn. (2 minutes each)

C. Journal writing: participants reflect on the movement discoveries and write from images they drew. (20 minutes)

D. Participants write poems about what they experienced. (15 minutes)

X. Silent Break (10 minutes)

XI. Closing and Integration (4:00–5:00 p.m.)

A. Verbal sharing in a closing circle (participants sharing their key moments) and the reading of poems.
B. Sharing of touch: a circle holding hands, good-bye hug.

After Meeting One

I. Researchers journal about their experiences, identify key moments and how they were affected during the process.

II. Researchers share their observations and discuss parallels and differences.

III. Main researcher transcribes recordings and performs narrative analysis with the input from the co-researchers.

Two Weeks Later: Meeting Two (7:00–9:00 p.m.)

I. Interpretation and Integration

A. Participants journal about their experience of themselves in the time between meetings in relation to how they were affected.

B. Researchers share their preliminary learnings and elicit feedback about them.

C. Participants write about their responses to the learnings.

D. Verbal discussion.

II. Acknowledgements and closing.
APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To the Participant in this Research:

You are invited to participate in a study on body-mind integration and the relationship between motion and e-motion. The study’s purpose is to better understand how body and mind are connected and what is the bridge between motion and emotion.

Participation will involve guided and self-directed movement explorations, journaling, simple art making and sharing. The study will consist of two meetings: one daylong meeting of seven hours, and a follow-up two hour evening meeting two weeks later. These will take place on May 16, 2009 and June 3, 2009 at a private movement studio near Sonoma. My two co-researchers will be present at and involved in both data collection and analysis.

The meetings will be videotaped. Additionally, sections of them will also be audiorecorded. Written notes may be taken by me and my co-researchers at any point during the meetings.

For the protection of your privacy, all research materials will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected. All written materials, audio and video recordings, and photographs of art work will be kept in a locked file to which only the researchers will have access. In reporting of information to anybody, or in any publication or public presentation, any information that might identify you will be altered to ensure your anonymity.
You, for your part, will be asked to keep the identity and privacy of other participants confidential. The confidentiality of the researchers, on the other hand, need not be maintained. You will have permission to reveal their identity and discuss anything you heard or observed them say or do during the study.

This study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to you. It may be useful, however, to people looking for access to their bodily reality and may benefit the understanding of how movement may be helpful in that.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. However, some of the activities such as movement or art explorations, or some journal questions may touch sensitive areas for some people. This could cause emotional discomfort for you. If at any time you develop any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss these with you.

I, the researcher, cannot provide psychotherapy, but at your request or using my personal judgment, will facilitate referrals to an appropriate mental health professional, if such a need should arise.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. Please note as well that I, the researcher, may need to terminate your participation in the study at any point and for any reason.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me any time at phone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx or you may contact the Dissertation Director at Meridian University,
47 Sixth Street, Petaluma, CA 94952, telephone (707) 765-1836, during normal business hours. Meridian University assumes no responsibility for any psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

I, __________________________ consent to participate in the study on body-mind integration and the relationship between motion and emotion. I have had this study explained to me by Zuza Engler. Any questions of mine about this research have been answered, and I have received a copy of this consent form. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I will keep the identity of other participants’ confidential and refrain from discussing their experience in any context that would identify them to others.

_________________________  __________________________
Participant’s Signature     Date
APPENDIX 5

FLYER ANNOUNCING THE STUDY

This is a call for participants in

a study on bodymind integration

You are invited to apply for participation in a doctoral study on bodymind integration. The study’s purpose is to better understand how body and mind are connected and what is the bridge between motion and emotion. We will explore these questions through experiential, art-based methods: guided and self-directed movement, art making, and writing. Some experience in expressive movement is required. It would also be helpful if you have had an experience of opening into feeling through movement.

Participants will be screened and selected by responding to a questionnaire, and will meet in a group twice: in a daylong session on a Saturday, and a follow up evening session two weeks later.

what: Participation will involve movement, writing, simple art making and sharing.

when: Saturday, May 16, 2009, 10 AM–5 PM
    and Wednesday, June 3, 2009 7-9 PM

where: a movement studio near Sonoma

who: those interested in exploring ways of integrating body and mind
    ~some prior movement experience is required~

contact: To obtain the screening questionnaire, please call or email
    Zuza Engler at 707.789.0809 or zuza@transformativedance.com

THE SMALL PRINT:
This study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to its participants. Its results may be useful, however, to people looking for new ways of getting in touch with their bodies and aid the understanding of what is helpful in that.

Your privacy will be protected. All research materials and results will be kept confidential and anonymous. If you have any questions or concerns, please email or call Zuza on any time (see contact info above).
APPENDIX 6

VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE STUDY

General Announcement

I am looking for participants in a study I will be conducting this winter on bodymind integration. I want to explore the connection between body and mind and the bridge between motion and emotion. I would like to work with people who have some prior movement experience. If you would like to participate, let me know and I will tell you more about the dates and details.

To Potentially Interested People

Here is the flyer with the dates and more information. I am looking for people with some movement experience and interest in exploring the connection between body and mind. The activities during the study will include movement, writing, art making, and sharing.

I will have two colleagues working with me. Your privacy will be protected at all stages. All research materials and results will be kept confidential and anonymous. I cannot promise any benefits to you from participating in this project, as this is purely a research study. Application requires a screening questionnaire and if you fill the criteria and are selected, two meetings total. We will meet on a Saturday and two weeks later on a Wednesday night at a private movement studio near Sonoma. I can give you the screening questionnaire that you can return to me by mail or I will email it to you and you
can fill it out on your computer. If you have any questions or concerns, please email or call me any time. Here is my card.
APPENDIX 7

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Cover Email

Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you so much for your interest in taking part in my study on bodymind integration. I appreciate your enthusiasm for this project. Attached is the questionnaire for you to fill out, either by typing into the document, or by printing it and filling it out by hand. Feel free to use additional space/paper if needed.

Please return this questionnaire to me by May 8, 2009.

Mail to: Zuza Engler, 883 Chardonnay Circle, Petaluma CA 94954, or email to zuza@transformativedance.com.

Final selection will be completed by May 11, 2008. I will email you on that date to let you know whether or not you have been elected to participate.

I look forward to reading your responses.

With gratitude,

Zuza

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Bodymind Integration: Research Study Questionnaire

To the applicant: *There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. If you have doubts about them, answer the best you can at the moment. No particular answer will*
necessarily qualify or disqualify you for this study. All your information will be kept confidential and anonymous.

1. Have you had any experience with awareness based movement work? If so, please list (what kind/s, how long, in what role/s or context/s).

2. Have you had any experience in somatic (body-oriented) work of any kind? Please list (modalities, how long).

3. If you answered Yes to either of the above questions, please describe briefly your experience with those body-based approaches.

4. What (if any) regular movement practices do you have, e.g. yoga, sports, dance?

5. How would you assess your level of being “in your body” in an average day? Please check one.
   - [ ] all the time
   - [ ] most of the time
   - [ ] some of the time
6. What does it mean to be “in the body” to you?

7. Are you (your best judgment on a scale of 5 to 0):

    Comfortable with unstructured movement? 5 4 3 2 1 0
    Able to track sensations? 5 4 3 2 1 0
    In touch with your feelings? 5 4 3 2 1 0

(5) very much    (4) mostly    (3) somewhat    (2) a little    (1) not really    (0) no

Additional comments regarding this question?

8. What feelings are you most uncomfortable with?

9. What feelings are hardest for you to access?

10. This study may bring up emotional discomfort or memories of difficult events from your past. How able do you feel to handle those in a situation that is not therapy-oriented and not geared toward individual support?
11. Have you experienced significant loss recently? Please describe.

12. Do you have a history of trauma (medical, accident, physical or sexual abuse, etc.)? What, how long ago, have you worked with it in any way?

13. Do you have any history of psychiatric treatment, including medication or hospitalizations? Are you currently on any medications?

14. Do you have any health conditions that could affect your participation?

15. If you are accepted to participate, will you be able to attend both study meetings in their entirety?

(Please note that if accepted, and if you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. This question is just to assure that should you want to participate, you will be able to attend both meetings.)

NAME:
AGE:
GENDER:
CURRENT OCCUPATION:
ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER:
BEST TIMES TO REACH YOU:
EMAIL ADDRESS:
EMERGENCY CONTACT:
APPENDIX 8

REJECTION AND ACCEPTANCE LETTERS

Rejection E-mail

Dear ________,

Thank you so much for your application to participate in the study on bodymind integration. I regret to inform you that I have chosen not to invite you to be part of this group. Paradoxically, the amount of emotional work you have done places you in the “above average category” and I am looking for participants who can represent more of a mainstream population so the study’s result can be relevant to a wider audience.

I appreciate your effort in filling out the questionnaire and wish you the best as you continue on the dancing path,

Zuza Engler

Acceptance E-mail

Dear ________,

Thank you so much for your application to participate in the study on bodymind integration. I am delighted to inform you that you are invited to be part of this group and I look forward to our collaboration on this project. In a couple of days, you will receive a letter in the mail with more details about the study.

With gratitude,

Zuza Engler
Acceptance Letter

Petaluma, May 11, 2009

Dear ________,

Thank you again for your application to participate in the study on bodymind integration. I am excited to have you be part of this project. I appreciate the time you took to fill out the screening questionnaire and the honesty and vulnerability expressed in your responses.

If you decide to participate, enclosed please find a copy of the Informed Consent letter. This one is for you to keep. Please read it and contact me with any questions or concerns you may have. I will have copies for everyone to sign at the beginning of our first session.

The dates of our meetings are Saturday May 16, 2009 and Wednesday night June 3, 2009. It is very important for all participants to be present for both meetings. Please do let me know if you have any scheduling conflict, or if for any reason you decide not to participate after all.

Attached are directions to the studio. This Saturday’s meeting will begin at 10 a.m. and end at or about 5 p.m. I ask that you arrive by 9:45 a.m. to have time to settle in. Please make an effort to attend to any outstanding business beforehand so you can be fully present for the duration.

Bring a bag lunch. We will have snack breaks and take a short lunch break on the premises. Tea, water, nuts and fruit will be provided.

Thank you again. I very much look forward to our collaboration on this project.

With delight and anticipation,  Zuza Engler
Before we begin today, let me introduce to you my two magnificent collaborators, Alexis and Emily. Alexis Miller graduated from Naropa with a master’s in dance therapy several years ago and is now working with troubled teenagers and families in the Bay Area. We have known and danced with each other since 1995. And this is Emily Anderson, a graduate from the Transformative Arts program at JFK, a passionate dancer, artist, and dreamwork facilitator. Both Alexis and Emily have taken and assisted classes and workshops with me in the past, and I am really happy to have them here with me today as collaborators on this project.

Opening Statement and Introducing the Study

Thank you again for your presence here as we begin this study in bodymind integration and the relationship between motion and emotion. This is an area that needs more research, and one I have a particular interest and passion for. We know very little about the connection between body and mind and we are about to find out more. I am delighted that you have chosen to join me in this endeavor.

Our exploration can touch areas that may feel sensitive and emotionally charged. That is why I am asking you to stay as present with yourself in the course of the whole
day as you can and especially, to keep any talk to an absolute minimum. If you need anything, please talk to one of us and try not to engage others in conversations.

Please remember that what happens here stays here; you have agreed to keep both the identity and the experience of other participants confidential. If you like, you can talk outside of this room about your own experience or about anything I, Emily, or Alexis said or did today. Please make eye contact with someone here and nod if you intend to keep this agreement. … Thank you.

We will do several sequences of movement, art making and writing today. I want to remind you that your participation at all times is voluntary. If anything does not feel right to you, please consider adapting the activity to make it work for you, or sitting out. There may be times you will feel emotional today (or that is the hope!) but please know that we are not looking for a particular outcome, or a certain kind of feeling. In other words, whatever you experience can contribute useful data in this study. I will remind you about this throughout the day.

Speaking of emotional discomfort, another reminder. This is a research study, and that is different from, for instance, a therapy group. We are working with a certain design and aiming at data collection, not so much at emotional support. As you have read in the letter I sent you, we cannot provide counseling in this process, only referrals in case you need them for the time after we part.

Any questions? If not, we can begin by opening the floor for you to introduce yourselves to the group. Please state your name, one thing that brought you to the study, and tell us one thing about your relationship to your feelings. So, three things: your name,
what brought you to the study, your relationship to your feelings. I will begin and we will go around the circle to the left.
APPENDIX 10

LOSS QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUR NAME: ______________________

PLEASE USE ADDITIONAL SPACE IF NEEDED

1. What were some of the losses you experienced in your life? List briefly.

2. Describe a time when you felt a loss. What happened?

3. What did you feel in your body?

4. What feelings were you aware of?
APPENDIX 11

POEM BY DAVID WHYTE

NEWS OF DEATH

For Tom Charlotte

Last night they came with news of death
not knowing what I would say.

I wanted to say,
"The green wind is running through the fields
making the grass lie flat."

I wanted to say,
"The apple blossom flakes like ash
covering the orchard wall."

I wanted to say,
"The fish float belly up in the slow stream,
stepping stones to the dead."

They asked if I would sleep that night,
I said I did not know.

For this loss I could not speak,
the tongue lay idle in a great darkness,
the heart was strangely open,
the moon had gone,
and it was then
when I said, "He is no longer here,"
that the night put its arms around me
and all the white stars turned bitter with grief.

Reprinted with permission from David Whyte, Where Many Rivers Meet.
Guided Movement Exploration: The Warm-Up

Find a comfortable place in the room and lie down on your back, with your eyes open or closed.

Bring your attention to your breath without trying to change it. Notice your inhalation, the pause at the top, your exhalation, and the slight pause at the bottom of the exhale. Allow your breath to be just as it is and allow your attention to rest in the breath.

Rub the palms of your hands together and cover your eyes. Feel the warmth of your hands enter your eyes. Open your eyes, let them relax and look into the darkness. Then drag your hands down your face, neck, chest, belly, down your legs as far as you can reach and feel these areas relax and soften. Repeat two more times. Imagine as you take your hands down your face that you can take off the mask you may have been carrying, the mask of tension or fatigue.

Bring your fingertips to your face and massage it gently. Follow what feels good. Now make some faces. Scrunch up your face, then relax. Open your mouth as wide as you can, close, open again. Allow your breath to be audible. Aaah… A few more sighs like that.

Now notice the area of your chest and upper back. Feel the contact of your body with the ground, and let your weight drop even more. You can also use the wall to lean
into. Feel as much of your upper back in contact with the floor or wall as possible.

Massage your back against the floor or the wall, finding places that like the pressure.

Send your breath there.

Bring your fingertips to your sternum, the breast bone, where your ribs meet.

Press into the tender points along that bone. Then find your clavicle, that is your collarbone, and with your thumbs or fingertips press into the points alongside it, away from center. Then find your top rib and the second rib, and massage the muscle in between, pressing gently into the tender spots you find there, moving away from center. Repeat the same for the muscles between your second and third rib, and then again between the third and fourth, all the way down your ribcage. Continue to breathe. Do not press too hard. Soften and open to the touch of your fingers. Breathe. Breathe. Aaah…

Now find movements in your arms and back that open your chest and upper back: raise and drop your arms, open and close them, arch your back, find any stretches that feel good and that feel opening, expanding in your upper body. That’s right. Continue for another while. Reaching up, stretching back, finding undulating movements in your spine, especially upper spine. Creating more space inside your chest. Breathe. Breathe and continue to relax. When you are done, rest for a moment and feel the effects of what just happened. What are you noticing? What are you sensing? Feeling? What else are you aware of?

**Introduction to Moving with Grief**

In this exploration, I will ask you to enter for a period of 20 minutes into the shapes, movements, and sounds of grief. Allow your imagination to guide you. Allow
your body to move as if you were moved by grief. Breathe the way grief breathes, move with the shapes grief takes, make the sounds grief makes. It is always okay to pause to listen more deeply for what expression wants to emerge. Listen to your sensations and feelings. But then if you can, please continue moving.

Notice what images, feelings, or thoughts emerge. You may feel affected by the loss exploration we just did, and start from there, by just allowing your body to move with the memories, sensations, or feelings. Sometimes movement will bring up more feeling, or memories, so continue to listen. If all you feel is resistance, or anger, or confusion, see if you can start by moving with that, not waiting for any particular feeling. Just have the intention of dancing your grief and let the movement unfold from there.

Please remember that there is no right way of doing this, nor any right outcome. Whatever your experience happens to be will be good research data, even if what you access is not grief at all but something entirely different.

I will not be talking during this time, except to remind you to breathe and to encourage you to stay in motion. Allow yourself to be guided by what your body knows about the experience and expression of grief. Do not worry about disturbing the others with your sound. Your expression can help someone else go deeper. If everyone makes sound, the room will absorb it and no one will not have to feel like you stand out. Any questions? Let us begin. I will ring the bell when it is time to end.

**Art Making Introduction**

Next we would like to invite you to make some drawings of what you have just experienced in your movement explorations. Here we have some art supplies for you.
Pick up some oil pastels, a cardboard pad, and one or more sheets of paper to begin with. Find a comfortable place in the room and sit for a moment with your eyes closed. Go inside. Breathe some deep breaths.

Now allow the images to come to you. This is just like a dance. You do not need to know what will happen, what shapes or colors will appear on this paper. Let some images come to you that express what you discovered, felt, saw, or experienced in your movement. Let the images surprise you. If you don’t think of yourself as an artist, that’s okay. Your picture, or pictures, do not have to represent anything that anyone would need to recognize or interpret. You are the only one to whom your drawing, or drawings, need to make sense. That is okay.

See if you can trust yourself to come up with your own expression that need not “represent” anything or be available for anyone’s interpretation.

If it works for you, start drawing with your eyes closed. Let your hand and the crayon guide you. Trust the feedback of your body, and your hand, rather than your eyes. When you're ready to look, notice what has emerged before you continue with eyes open.

Draw one picture, or more, as you are inspired. We will take 30 minutes for this. I will let you know when there are ten, and then five minutes left so we can all end together. The bell will ring when the time is up.

(At the end of the second drawing period:) We will break for a silent lunch in a minute or so. Before you go, put your pictures in a place where they will be safe. Make eye contact with a couple of people. Please stay around here for this break and take this time to nourish yourself and rest. We will ring a bell about seven minutes before we are to gather again. If you need anything, talk to one of us. Otherwise just use this time to be
quiet. You may write or reflect on your experience if you like. Please do not initiate conversations with other participants.

**Instruction for Moving in Response to Image**

Turn to a person near you to be your partner for this part. I will ask one of you to enter into a movement dialogue with your drawing, and the other to witness. We have arranged the seats in a big circle. Bring your art to your seat. Witnesses, you will stay in the circle. Movers, when you are ready, you will come out to take the space in the center, all at the same time.

Movers, first look at your picture, or pictures, and notice what you see. Notice the shapes, colors, and moods in what you drew. What do you sense in your body as you look? What do you feel? What attracts you, what repels you?

Choose one image that draws your attention. What do you sense in your body as you look at it? Does your breath change? What do you feel? How would you want to move in response to that image?

You can also move as that image. What would it be like to enter the image and give it breath, motion, sound?

You can also switch between both these ways, moving as the image, then moving in response. Again, see if you can trust your body to know where to go with this. If you feel done with one image and another draws your attention, allow your body in motion to dialogue with the next image in the same ways. We will take 10 minutes each for this.

Witnessing partners, there is nothing to do but be here. At the end of your partner’s turn, you will be asked to move and express how you were affected by what you
witnessed. For now, see if you can relax, lean into your own back, and not so much “watch” as “receive” your partner’s movement, just as you would a work of art. Let your attention be open and spacious.

Both partners, stay present with your breath. In either role, if judgments come, just come back to breath and begin again. First partner, please begin now. The bell will ring when your time is up.

**Instruction for Aesthetic Response**

Witnesses, notice how you are affected by what you saw. What do you sense in your body? What do you feel? How would you express in movement, shape, gesture, or sound your response to your partner’s dance? We will take just two minutes for this. Please begin. (Bell rings.)

**Shortened Instruction for Moving in Response to Image**

Now we will switch roles so the witness becomes the mover. Take a look at your picture, or pictures, and notice what you see. Notice the shapes, colors, and moods in what you drew. What do you sense in your body as you look? What do you feel? What attracts you, what repels you? Choose one image that draws your attention. Remember you can move in response to that image, or as that image, and switch back and forth.

What do you sense in your body as you look? What do you feel? How would you want to move? What would it be like to enter the image and give it breath, motion, sound? Trust your body to know where to go with this.
Witnessing partners, there is nothing to do but be here. See if you can relax, lean into your own back, and not so much watch as receive your partner’s movement, just as you would a work of art. Let your attention be open and spacious.

**Instructions for Poem Writing**

We would like you to do some more writing now. (Distribute paper and pens.) Put your name at the top of your sheet of paper. Close your eyes for a moment and allow the day to come back to you. Let your awareness open to remembering what happened here for you today so far, from the beginning when we introduced ourselves to the group, the initial movement warm-up, the poems we listened to, your exploration of the grief dance … the fear dance … the drawing process … moving with your images … witnessing and being witnessed… writing your responses to all those questions. The feelings, images, memories, discoveries that you made. Look at your drawing, too, and let it inspire you. Take five minutes to just write down without interruption whatever comes to you, anything about your experience today that was significant for you.

Now read what you wrote and circle words or phrases that strike you as particularly potent.

Write a poem about your experience today. You can use those words and phrases you circled, or make a new poem. Write it on a separate page and put your name on it. We will take ten more minutes for this.
APPENDIX 13

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

YOUR NAME: ___________________

PLEASE USE ADDITIONAL SPACE IF NEEDED

1. What did you discover in the movement explorations? Please include description of physical sensations if you can.

2. What surprised you?

3. Write as one of the images/the image you drew. What do you want the author of the drawing to know?

4. If grief had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as grief.

5. If fear had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as fear.
APPENDIX 14

POEM BY DAVID WHYTE

THE WELL OF GRIEF

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief

turning downward through its black water
to the place we cannot breathe

will never know the source from which we drink,
the secret water, cold and clear,

nor find in the darkness glimmering
the small round coins
thrown by those who wished for something else.

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APPENDIX 15

MEETING ONE CLOSING CIRCLE SCRIPT

Invitation to Share Key Moments

This is our closing circle for Meeting One. I would like to hear from you what were the highlights of what you have experienced today. We call them the “key moments.” It could be one, or two, or three, and maybe you have had many. If you could tell us about one or two or three such moments you had today when something shifted for you, or something new came up, or you were taken someplace you did not sign up to go, any experience like that. One person will speak at a time, without crosstalk. I would love it if everyone said something because you have been silent all day and I would love to hear your voice again.

When you feel moved, tell us something about your key moments. When you are done, we will take a breath together, and then the next person will speak. You can speak later again. So tell us the most interesting, powerful, surprising, or difficult experience today, anything that stands out for you. And tell us how you were affected by it.

Invitation to Read Poems

Now those who would like to read your poems, please do. See if you can read loudly, slowly, and breathe. I may ask you to read your poem twice. We will not comment or applaud. The bell will ring for the next poem.
Closing

Let us stand in a circle and take each other’s hands. Take a look around. Notice your breath. Notice what you are aware of. Make eye contact with a couple of people.

Allow that you may be feeling more vulnerable than you realize, or that others may feel that way. When we break the circle, please take care in how you talk to each other. If you can, take a walk before you get in your car, and feel your legs and the ground under your feet. When you get home, I recommend that you do something to take care of yourself. Take a bath, cuddle up with a friend or a book or a cup of tea. Maybe you’ll want to journal for a while, or meditate. Put off those emails and phone calls till tomorrow. Get some good rest. You may have touched some tender spots in yourself that may need some extra kindness in the next few days.

As we end for today, give a hug to a few people before you leave. I will see you all again in a couple of weeks. I will send you an email to remind you about the date and time of our next meeting.

Thank you again for your presence and focus today. I really appreciate your willingness to be part of this study.
APPENDIX 16

MEETING TWO JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you feel you “reclaimed” in the process the day we met? What did you find coming out on the other side, after your “descent”?

2. Have you noticed any effects of our last meeting in your life since? Please describe.

3. What surprised you about the preliminary learnings of our study? Include any other responses you have to what you heard this evening.
APPENDIX 17

SUMMARY OF DATA

Journal Responses Meeting One

What did you discover in the movement explorations? Please include description of physical sensations if you can.

AMY: I felt a cleansing—a release of the weight, the heaviness. I felt my strength amidst the craziness, the chaos. I felt the tiredness/exhaustion that my body expressed. I felt the power + tenderness of that awareness. I felt free.

DIANA: Grief movement: I learned how much (more than I touch usually) grief I have about my dad, his condition, how much I love him and how painful it is to watch him suffer so. I re-learned the bittersweet aspect of grief; the “sweet spot” that so quickly can turn to the bittersweet, very painful place. I learned that I let go and let flow much more easily than I have in the past.

ELENA: In the movement exploration, I discovered that my body works very hard to fight fear. I felt a lot of pain afterwards. [i]n my back, legs, shoulders... I felt pain in my muscles so hard I fought fear. It is almost a reaction formation. I feel fear yet respond with anger + confrontation. Literally painful.

I also noticed how I can easily fall into the default of supporting/helping others in pain around me also in pain [sic]. I quickly found a source of spiritual connection in the room (e.g. a candle) and focus my pain; my experience of pain using the candle to ground me and tolerate others’ expressions of pain.

GREG: The bodies [sic] recall and resembles [resemblance?] to the feelings when grief and fear were experienced. There was an ebb and flow of feelings—a physical contraction (solar plex) then an exaggerated expansion. The body held [?] emotion and the body let go of the pain and receive [sic] release and joy in the chest.

JUDY: That I felt a lot of disappointment in the grief—more disappointment than loss. The fear felt more like anxiety and agitation—a feeling that all my energy was in my chest, not my belly, so that I felt really ungrounded.

KERRI: In exploring grief—the tightness of the throat and the rocking motion led into a full blown cry and full body shaking sobs which led into laughter. There was a feeling of being consumed by the sorrow then with an in-breath there began a release of the tension and an experience of lightness/flow/or joy. Fear was initially hard to access. I stayed with the bodily sensation of rapid pulse—adrenaline making my breath short, my muscles twitchy and felt the “fear” pull me closer to the ground—hands and knees like a creature and a growl/vomit sound came. Very satisfying deep bellow of angst/anger/power. Even though it was harder for me to access—when I stayed with some basic somatic qualities I felt the shoulder tightness, short breath and pulsing heart move into a raw power. It was an energy of (what I associate with) fearlessness.
MARGARET: My grief shoots out of my beingness in many aspects of my life. It is so busy shooting out that potential spirals down, down, potential is hidden inside the downward spiral. The downward spiral is fatiguing and my spark of life experiences inertia as I lay motionless at the bottom of grief.

RACHEL: I discovered pain, physically, but at the same time, some freedom I haven't felt in a long time. Learning to find freedom in the midst of my limitations. Lots of sadness about this lost freedom. Longing to swing my arms WIDE & around & all the ways I took these free arms for granted. Longing to dance the wildness caged in these joints.

TRISH: Permission to be in the feelings to a fuller extent than w/out movement. A freedom from mind. During a few moments of intense fear, I experienced a trembling that was new to me, as the body had really taken over to a true expression/release, without my emotions causing or seeking to cause the movement. I experienced an integration of emotions + body without much mind, except as a quiet observer. From the last exercise of moving as the witness in response, I'm still feeling a mild shaking around my heart.

What surprised you?

AMY: The power of the emotions that lie beneath. The ability of the movement to touch the truth. How special the witness’ interpretation was—how intimate + present + observant + supportive.

DIANA: One of the images in my grief art—I was surprised and awed by what came and more importantly (the art) where does it come from? I still don’t know “what” it is but I am surprised at its beauty!

ELENA: I have not participated to works [sic] like this before. I have a tendency to judge, analyze, and today I was surprised by the way I allow[ed] myself to go deeply into the exercises proposed.

GREG: The intensity and fluidity of movement and the story the movement told. The beauty of the witnesses.

JUDY: Most surprising is that in the movement based on pictures, I felt a surge of witch-like power come out of the exploration. I had an image of Baba Yaga; Then at the end—the one piece that was left unexplored was a black border which felt like peace and power, expansion and grounding.

The physical sensations were greater w/the fear, but it was much more simplistic than grief. The emotional content of grief tended to eclipse my awareness of my body, whereas the fear was much more body centered and less emotion based.

KERRI: Feeling fear turn to power. The ease of accessing grief which was from others in the room (I had no personal example which fueled me.) The satisfaction of drawing after the movement—I was reminded of my youth—drawing being perhaps the only way I could communicate the depth or intensity of my experience. I actually didn’t want to stop on the exercise. I was enjoying myself so much!

MARGARET: My fears come at me from all directions they are known and unknown. I run away and they follow. They are all about physical harm.

RACHEL: More range of motion & emotion than I thought I had. A real ease with grief, the slow trickle of tears feeling like a balm, or a blanket. Surprise to still feel the pain so
many years after the loss although the sadness felt more in relation to the physical losses I am experiencing in my body.

TRISH: A few old memories that no longer have a hold on me. Some came and went. I think too that I was surprised once that I still have a lot of numbness emptiness around the post-traumatic time—I was surprised I did not have anger or sadness—just emptiness. My surprise is that I think I SHOULD HAVE SOME FEELINGS —— [?] about it... curious. Maybe it is that I do not have much expectation/hope. One other thing: How easily bored I can become! And yet, I know how to keep re-engaging myself to keep looking, LEARN more.

Write as one of the images/the image you drew. What do you want the author of the drawing to know?

AMY: (to the audience:) You can't touch me. I can get really small. I can protect myself. (to the author:) You can find peace + strength through connection. Stay connected. Keep wanting the connection with yourself.

DIANA: The image that surprised me... I am a “tear-droodle” spun of blood, sweat and tears; that is my beauty. I am the unknown masterpiece that forms and comes to be when you trust and flow w/the intelligence of your blood, sweat and tears; the pain you feel and allow it to be.

ELENA: I am the deep blue. The deep blue that once you met. You felt scared to explore me, remember? Someone held your hands at times. Another waited at shore. With all that loving support, you still felt fear to swim in my deep blue water... Now, I live inside you. You carry my beauty within you, my mistery [sic] and all the possibilities I once was for you. You also carry the fear of all that I am to you.

GREG: Dear Artistic Drawer,

Know that it is you that create me, both fear and grief. As you so admirably expressed the circles, the infinity signs, the vibration dashes are permeable and impermeable. You so well expressed the transformation. The change that took/takes place. You expressed us well. Namaste, Grief & Fear

JUDY: That contained in this fury and agitation is something that I really, really want, like a cool pool or a very restful state.

KERRI: There is such beauty in the dark—such comfort and rich, rich soil to grow from. I am a constant companion to joy and can only deepen the connection and privilege of being born in form. Thank you for welcoming me with such appreciation and devotion.

MARGARET: What goes up must come down

What you run away from will find you
One thing turns into the other
Stay curious
What is down will germinate and rise again
Be ready
Be brave

RACHEL: I want you to risk a little more freedom. Don’t be so afraid of it. Let me flow some more. Always protecting me. I will freeze up if you don’t move me more. Please move me more. I hope that I will heal and we will fly again.

TRISH: That all these images are intensively connected—not separate as they appear on the page. And, the bottom is not really the bottom. It’s just where it seems to be for now.
The trembling
The dark abyss
The swirl of despair
Suddenness
Exploding daggers
And the healing sky is there always

If grief had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as grief.

AMY: I am big + dark + enveloping + endless. I have no limit. I have no boundaries. I am deep sadness. Sadness that hurts to the core. You don’t want a part of me. I may take over you.

DIANA: I feel so deeply that I bring people to their knees and I cut their hearts open leaving them to bleed. But when they are willing to allow the blood to run w/o trying to stop me or change me I open up into the sweetest spots ever where golden rays of universal energy come streaming in, warming and healing their body, minds, and souls.

ELENA: I know.

I make you cry.

In my company you feel sad and all that deep blue starts pouring out of your deep brown eyes. Please notice that when I am in your company, however, you find a way back home to yourself. Let me be with you and hold you in my arms during this process of now. I won't stay too long. I always leave. I always return. Just like the waves breaking ashore.

GREG: Recognize my importance and as importantly my impermanence. Express and appreciate me and I will enliven you. I am one of your beings way of placing value on life [sic]. Do not hide me or hide you from me. As Grief, I have positive intent as does all life.

JUDY: That grief is often a result of disappointed expectations–loss of something we expected to have longer, or separation from something we want. Part of that is anger–anger that life is unfolding or people are acting, in a way we don’t like or want.

KERRI: I am so connected to the joy of living that you might mistake me for my twin. Allow yourself to be ravished by the sorrow of loss–there is more room in you than all the universes known and unknown.

MARGARET: After you have spiraled down into inertia, numbness, self preservation; after you have rested there you can reverse the spiral and travel up out of depression, your grief can become compassion which can shoot out in all direction for the benefit of all beings.

RACHEL: I need you to feel me, move me, share me with others. Let me out. I don’t have to look a particular way. I can be quiet or loud, angry or sad, simple or complex, old or new. Whatever I am I need to be seen, felt, heard, expressed.

TRISH: I am a container through which things must flow. I change shape and flow in waves and when you are in me, I can lead the way to oneness. It is through me that all humans are connected. This is where loneliness, loss, despair intersect and are soothed. At the core/base of me is calm, knowing and emptiness. I am a blanket to cover with, or a wave to ride out to sea.
**If fear had a voice, what would it say about itself? Write as fear.**

**AMY:** I am loud + uncontrollable + powerful. I want to take as many people down with me as I can. I am unpredictable. I am looming. I am hard to beat. I make you feel helpless + powerless. I won't go away.

**DIANA:** I protect! I know how to hide to help a soul feel safe. I know how to mobilize a physical body to release me, but never too soon. I hold on tight until the time is right, and if I need to “go away” before that time comes then that’s what I do. I am very dynamic, clever, and strong. I am a shape shifter that can survive ANY terrain!

**ELENA:** YES!!!

I don’t know how to speak with a soft voice.

I scream inside your limbic system, your muscles, the corners of your bones!!!

I am here to provoke a reaction on you. [sic]

Go ahead!

Jump! Run! Scream!

React! React! React!!

No. I will not let you respond.

I want you to react.

React! React! React.

I am like the wind that you don’t like.

**GREG:** Boo! Your [sic] it! Boy can I control, but I want to protect you. Hear me, I am part of each person, as we breathe we all experience fear, breathe thru me, appreciate the primal nature of shortness of breaths, the constricting of muscle, the panic of freezing. I am not your most dreaded emotion, label me not! Know me, appreciate me and as physicality and do not hold me and use me as an excuse.

**JUDY:** Fear is mostly concerned w/protecting you–getting you out of danger, or inspiring you w/energy to act to avoid danger. The energy, though, can just spiral out to hysteria, which can defeat the purpose of fear.

My feeling of fear was very much like a little Tasmanian devil locked in a box–banging around to get out.

**KERRI:** Silly fool! I’m preparing you for your launch. You need me to find those channels–those nadis–where the prana flows. What better way than to flood your system with the juice of adrenaline. Really, I’m a latent power in fear clothing, but you insist on using me like some cheap whore. C’mon, stop wasting our time–it’s so short you know–and really feel what I’m all about. I liberate you.

**MARGARET:** The thread that runs through the mala of your life is vibrant and will still hold you together in wholeness. It is holy. Even as fears manifest, threaten, harm, your physical body, this golden thread remains connecting all the parts of you, they are with you and cannot be taken away on all levels on some levels but not all.

**RACHEL:** You have learned so many way to mask me. You have felt me so much but have mastered the way to block me out, avoid me, numb me out, cover me up, over, blanket yourself away from me, blind yourself to not see me, become mute & not to speak of me. I will overtake you if you let me. You give me way too much power over you. Just like the sadness, maybe if you dove into me more, I wouldn’t be so strong. I gain all this power from your avoidance of me.

**TRISH:** I will protect you! My walls are high and hard. Sometimes I am loud in your head, sometimes your stomach–take heed of me! Pay attention and save yourself. Move,
run, hide, GO. By my nature I will isolate you against the world, the threat. If you recognize me when I come, this is good—but you do not need to. I will give you the edge you need to save yourself. But remember, you cannot stay here—with me—I will overload you and blur the lines till you are crazed. Slow fear has a smell, you will feel me and smell me coming. Quick fear is high alarm—Wake up and RUN. Run hard. Fight. Don’t think—Run.

Poems

AMY:
What is legitimate grief?
Real fear?
Big. Dark. Enveloping. Endless.
I want to be alone. Quiet. Still.
Loud. Uncontrollable. Looming.
I want to feel in private.
Tenderness. Intimacy. Peace.
Stay connected.

DIANA:
I love the surprise! Where did you come from? I am a “tear-drop-dradle” spun of blood, sweat, and tears, this is my beauty. I am the masterpiece that arises into form when you trust and flow with the intelligence that is greater than you alone. this is where I come from.

ELENA:
Koda
(My Koda)
is leaving me for death.
The one who once waited for me
(patiently)
at shore
as I explored the deep blue
of my own fears
The one who received me with
joy
upon my returns from endless fights against
my own fears.
Grief says she will support me now
and promises
to leave me too.
And I shall find
Koda’s spirit
In the eyes of strangers who can
see me. Strangers who will
know me through my dance.
GREG:
Take them from anywhere
    your head
    your heart
    your feet
    any part
Choose an emotion
    act it out.
Act it way out
    of your body.
Express your heart
Express your mind
It’s all inside
taken from everywhere
it[‘s] there anyway.

JUDY:
I really, really want
to use my witch-like power
to conjure up whatever I like

KERRI:
Trust this larger intelligence to reveal the truth.

Allow yourself to be ravished by
    sorrow–there is more room in you
    than all the universes known and unknown.

Really, I’m latent power dressed
    in clothing you call ‘fear’.
And you insist on using me like some
    cheap whore.

C’mon, stop wasting our time–it’s so short
    you know–and really feel what I’m all about.

I liberate you.

MARGARET:
I am learning the truth
of things as they really are
I am learning to see things
as they really are
not as I want to see them
not as I want to feel them
but as they really are
May my eyes become transparent
May my soul glow
This gift of life is most precious
This moment is all there is.

RACHEL:
Come back to the dance open
No longer hungry for contact, stimulation, attention.
Freeing the wildness, caged
Dive in & take back your power.

TRISH:
There is sadness,
trembling.
Shaking itself into
a quiet freedom
where the healing sky
covers,
then reveals
the dark abyss.

Closing Circle at Meeting One (Partial Transcript)

DIANA: ... My biggest surprise was actually from the drawing. There’s just something about the artworks that surprised me in a different way because I don’t do art as much as I do movement or emotional work. It was really fun to be surprised in this way... yeah... so that’s the highlight that’s really standing out to me right now.

KERRI: . . . Another key moment was that because fear is a difficult emotion for me to access necessarily, the fact that it was irritating and annoying ... but which was great because it was you know getting me up to ... I couldn’t get to it myself so the sounds outside, in the space, with everyone else’s participation, actually helped me to get to just some basic somatic feeling, you know the heart racing, the tension in my shoulder, kind of the... I could get to the somatic level and then found the shift from a feeling of fear, almost in this animal state, to an actual quality of power, like fear moving into power ... but again it came as a result of the help from the group. And then my final third point was that that happened with grief, as well. I didn’t... I couldn’t access a personal element of grief of my own but I could feel in the group the ... and sense and feel and hear the sorrow... the element of just... and just let myself totally, completely dive into sorrow, you know, as far down as I could go ... as far down as I would ... and I could feel I even wanted to go even further ... but as far as I wanted to go into sorrow ... and almost like springboarding off the bottom into this place after just like racking sobs in my body into laughter. All of a sudden there was laughter coming ... from feeling the depths of sorrow to bouncing off into this other place of lightness. ... So these were my key moments:
sorrow into joy ... fear into power ... and then recognizing through expressive art another
way of communicating to myself ... *(to yourself?)* to myself, yes, absolutely... it only
makes sense to me. (laughs)

GREG: I don’t know why it surprised me but ... being the only man here could be a
surprise . . . and the access to the emotions is something that ... when I started out I said I
loved it and there’s a big difference between loving and accepting something and I think I
would have to change it... I didn’t really *love* my grief ... I *accepted* my grief. And I
accepted my fear. ... And the biggest surprise for me was to be able to act out those
pictures for what seemed like an eternity... and to find that there was a well, there was a
well, there was more that kept coming, there was different ways of looking at it and the
more ... I’ve had the experience of emotions that Kerri talked about with that sliding:
you're in fear and it just slides ... you’re totally lost and depressed and you're down as
you can be ... and in the very next instance they just slide right back to the other side and
you realize, what an incongruent being I am... how many contradictions live inside me...

RACHEL: I’m not feeling very verbal which is unusual for me, so I’m not sure if I will
be able to articulate the surprise... but something around my fear... I basically see myself
as a fear based person... like, I experience it a lot in my day to day life. But... it’s
something like... it comes but I don’t allow myself to feel it so it’s kind of I have this idea
for example that sadness... I know this from *deep* experiences like, I feel it, and it goes
through me, and something is transformed. With fear, it’s like, it just starts to peek in and
I go, bam! and, so there is some like... something brewing in me about actually letting
myself go into the fear as I let myself go into sadness and other emotions and then the
hypothesis or whatever what I imagine is that somehow it will transform... that’s my
hope. On the floor here I basically let myself do what I usually *do with* fear so I didn’t let
myself feel it so much... so I didn’t get to try my experiment yet but I’m kind of exited,
it’s kind of interesting or intriguing or something...

TRISH: I had seen the movie when it originally came out, and I was mortified. ... And I
... I mean, I’m very susceptible to believing and being in that real fear. And so to watch it
as I watched it today, it was almost amusing, you know, I had a lot of distance from it,
but also where that happiness kind of took me ... but beyond that, all these other things
came in like, oh yeah yeah, there is this great thing about fear, it can be really fun!
...I had another... I think another key moment that I didn’t quite grasp intellectually till
later, but... just I mean... the moment I heard we were going to do a grief thing I thought
oh man, I’m probably outta here, I’ll give it a minute and see what happens... *(laughs)*
so the moment was when I realized that I was in it and I was okay with it and I didn’t
have to think about it at all. It was just happening. So... that was a really good experience
for me. I look at it and I think ah, crap... what kind of a day are we in for? but then I ...
the next piece for me has to be about making a conscious choice, okay do I stay or do I
go? Okay, I’ll *stay* and there is a qualifier: *and* if it gets, you know, if I get too
uncomfortable I am going, and I will take care of myself and I will do that. So I have to
let myself know that it’s... that I will look after myself and not just do it because I
promised it or because, whatever, all that stuff . . . it feels really good to have been able to
do that and not be caught up in the fear, break down, or run out of the room, or any of the
million things that could have happened way back when.

DIANA: I have a few things that I wanted to add. I’ve done a lot of grief work
throughout my life, and I realized that the thing that was really different about my grief
work today was . . . today was active process of deeply grieving my father who is still here with us . . . I don’t know if that’s being clear but it’s like, my dad is still alive and yet I’m grieving his life and what is happening to him right now so it’s an active... it’s not a past... like doing grief work... so that’s new and different. I recognize too, fear is a hard one for me to access, or, like I don’t identify as a scared person, but doing it, when I kind of pulled on the group, I learned ... I can identify with grief but, thinking like, oh that’s prevalent in my life, but not fear, and then after doing the stuff I thought, woah, because I do more of, like, mmhmm, daydreaming away from it, oh I’ll just go somewhere else for a while so I just think you know, I’m not really a fearful person and then I got in touch with all that was stirring underneath; even though I would look calm on the exterior, underneath I had a lot of agitation.

AMY: Yeah. I guess a couple observations for me, or challenges for me, is that I don’t feel comfortable with grief or fear, ... uhm... and the challenge to continue to move and how I just did not want to move, I just wanted to be still and quiet and alone and private and small... and so just to... that was a real challenge for me to continue to try to move ... uhm... and I did feel the same with fear as having a hard time accessing it and I was kind of playing with that why ‘cause I wanna everything to be okay ... and I just but reacting to the room how I reacted to that (laughs) and just let myself feel that. And I guess another key for me was... I’m not an artist ... or I don’t allow myself to be trying to stay true to the task of, you know... I used my left hand instead of my right hand, trying to stay true from the movement we had had, which... didn’t feel like me (laughs)... uhm... and so... to stay true... so, my art I felt like, that’s boring, that’s simple, that doesn’t say anything and resisted the temptation to make it pretty and make it have a purpose and add into it... uhm... but then, I really felt the release and everything come together through the movement, and that’s where it really... I felt the release and so much made sense and... yeah, it all came full circle. (Can you say one thing that made sense?) I could move it out more than being grief or being fear but I could respond to it ... and so I think in the witness portion I was really connecting with myself and with what was going on and what I had felt.

RACHEL: The challenge for me was . . . when you said, now this time we are going to access our fear, I was like, Are you kidding me? Like, Why would I do that? (everyone laughs) Why, why, what? And how would I do that? You know like there’s a big scary monster actually attacking me right now, you know... I mean I had those kinds of like, yeah, right. And I think even... not to judge the movement piece... it’s gonna sound judgmental but... even the way I did the movement piece in a sense feels a little bit like a copout because I didn’t access really my fear, I just went into my own world instead of accessing it, so it’s kind of like I didn’t really do what you told me to do... like I did it wrong...

GREG: One of the challenges... one of my losses is hearing. I don’t hear very well. (said loud) And when you shushush talking like that (very low voice), I’m lost, I don’t hear it... and I could really go into a lot of stuff about that. But that’s just one of my challenges. It’s like, what else is going on that I can pay attention to so that I can still play the game. Because, I’m a little older than most people here. And, I’m on the down slope and I know that it’s on the down slope. And when you talk fear, you’re talking death, you know. And I’ve had people pull guns on me and I’ve been in those places... those things... are easy. Fear? Yes. Grief? yes. I’ve experienced those things, and I wanna experience them again
because I don’t wanna miss anything, you know... I don’t have another 60 years left, you know. If I do, it’s not going to be the same as this last 60 years because I’m losing this (points to ear), and I don’t see as well as I used to. And when I look in the mirror, I’m not that handsome guy that used to drive all the girls crazy years ago... so things about my image have changed. . . I've moved, and my friends have died, you know, and I live 600 miles from where my son lives, and he is my best friend. . . . One of the things that I've learned is if you want to be alive, you have to remember: this is a round trip ticket. This is a round trip ticket. And I'm a public speaker. I get the opportunity every week to deal with fear! And we set it up for ourselves this is a round trip ticket. If you're not very good, and you don’t need to be, very well but when you are good and you don’t have a good presentation, you're not at standard... You’ve gotta meet the standard, I can't just be sloppy again, I can't leave words out, I can er and uh and ahem... can't do what our president has learned to do since he’s been elected, now he can say uh, all the time, what the hell happened there, I don know... but to be able to find yourself in this position, where you're able to have the support of a group that’s saying let’s find out what’s really going on in that connection, I thank you for that. I really do.

EMILY: With grief, I instantly felt connected with everyone, I could just feel my body like my blood was... I was warm, and my hands were just pulsing and I felt so open. . . . And then, when we moved to fear I found quickly the shadow pieces... that I just wanted to turn to humor, make fun of Sylvester Stallone, and I could tell, oh phew, this is a movie, it’s not real . . . But as soon as the sound came, it shattered all of my protective mechanisms in my body, it just like, made my cells spin. And I woke up, and I got really curious and compelled by that, because I realized I don’t actually ever hear fear... I've actually never heard my own fear, so that’s a huge gift and such a... like it was compelling, there was so a lot of energy there and I thought, wow, and a lot to explore, but I don’t know how to explore fear ‘cause I don’t really want to explore the real one ‘cause it’s too scary, so...uh.. but there's a lot of energy and ferociousness and the sound was what woke up my body from its stiff, kind of controlled pattern of how to deal.

TESSA: I had a... My boring moment was when you asked us to dance the art work and I ... It took me a while to just get my head around that, what is she really asking us to do here, and didn’t I just do it already, it’s all here on paper. I found it challenging to... I mean I appreciated the exercise and I think overall that I was able to explore some more nuance in what was there... uh... but it felt a little self-conscious to me, and I got a little bored, and I had to keep going back to it ‘cause it didn’t flow for me... and that part of it is what I drew is disjointed and that’s what came out. So I had to keep looking at it, okay so what’s that what’s that mean, so okay, dance that... keep reengaging from a place of curiosity so I wouldn’t just stop... so that was my shadow side.

Journal Responses Meeting Two

What were you asked to “surrender at the gate” in the process of “descent” the day we met, and did you say Yes or No?

AMY: Judgment–mostly of myself, but also of others and the process. I kept saying ‘yes’ in varying degrees. A little at a time. Gradually ‘giving in’ so to speak.
ELENA: I said “yes.” I surrendered my way of attending to others, pay attention to them, caring for them and loosing myself. I, however, did not surrender that at the gate. I had to go through several gates and hand in that slowly so I could be with myself, find myself.
GREG: Rational knowing–what will happen? Surrender knowing what will.
JUDY: The other thing that occurs to me is “expectations.” In my more “rational” life, I always have expectations (if I go to work, I’ll get paid, etc.). In my personal exploration (which is more feminine) I don’t have concrete expectations. In volunteering for this study, I didn’t know what to expect and wasn’t particularly concerned about what to expect.
KERRI: Comfort and composure–I said “yes.” Then control–I said “no.” And slowly acquiesced. Also my separation–I was “forced” to feel “the group” or “others” through the sounds/screams.
MARGARET: Grief–my inertia, I said yes.
Fear–my judgment that I am too fearful. I didn't actually say yes or no, I dove into it and discovered that the core of my being remains even with my fears consuming me. I don't feel I re-claimed anything from the exercise. I let myself feel the fears but not completely.
RACHEL: I was asked to surrender my pre-conceived notions about my body, my process, my emotions. I happily said Yes. I felt intrigued & interested & willing to be surprised.
TRISH: Fear of falling into a bottomless pit. Yes. And of course, it was fine.
Fear of discovering something awful about myself–said yes; and a fear of feeling shame–said yes.
ALEXIS: 1st surrender: my first wall of defense is usually a thought about not wanting to do what I committed myself to do. It's a “no.” Then, as soon as I begin to move, the “no” melts and I breathe and I pass through the gate to myself. 2nd surrender: inertia–my mind wanders, I feel agitated and tired. I'm not sure how much time I spent here, but breath helps my mind to settle and movement helps my body to find an impulse. I said yes to that gate and entered.
EMILY: Expectations/control–yes!
My desire to follow the rules–well….
Tightness/stiffness in my body/ resistance–yes
Awareness of self, identity, individual personality–yes
My “story” that these were negative feelings–carrying the stories of fear and grief as one-dimensional objects, not letting them change or be revealed for/as anything more. I surrendered the energy–the life force and mental focus–it takes to keep them under control and in check.
ZUZA:
My idea of what people would experience.
My separateness shifted from observer to participant.
My idea of what constitutes a “successful” process (= expressive, intense, NOW).
I don't trust the timing.
What do you feel you “reclaimed”? What did you find coming out on the other side, after your “descent”?

AMY: Truth. A little more clarity as to who I am. Memories that I really wanted to forget (i.e., my reaction to fear and that I was a very fearful, scared child–remembering those very real and intense feelings but also thinking they weren’t legitimate–judgment quickly entered in).

Somewhat of a connection to myself–comfort in the familiarity of myself–that I was not alone but in it with myself, does that make sense?

DIANA: Specifically in the grief, the reclaiming of “grieving together” in community. It felt like a “cellular, genetic coding reclaiming”—not so much a “personal” one. Some tribal reclamation. In general, reclaiming the “one that knows” (beyond the cognitive knowing) and deepening into the truth of that.

ELENA: I reclaimed self love and a sense that I am ok as long as I am whole with myself.

GREG: Body confidence–reclaimed.
Calm assurance in me–after descent.

JUDY: Again, the only thing that came to me was the image of Baba Yaga—which is another symbol of the dark, powerful feminine. I’m not really sure what it means but my guess is that there is some Baba Yaga-type of energy in me that wants to manifest.

KERRI: Capacity for joy. Power and what felt like fearlessness. A larger connection or sense of a “whole” (are tragedies really tragic or is my perspective too small to see?) (Is that cry sorrow or relief?)

MARGARET: Concerning grief: when I moved from “frozen” to actively feeling and remembering I went down, down, until I hit the bottom of my grief & I just wanted to roll up in a little ball & hold myself, which I did. When I allowed myself that rest, I reclaimed the potential to transform the debilitating (sic) aspect of my grief into acceptance.

RACHEL: I reclaimed trust in my process; I reclaimed my sense of wonder; I reclaimed some of my dancing, free-moving self but not as much as I want to. I still feel stuck in my limitations & have a lot of sadness about that.

TRISH: Personal power. Like some sort of validation that I’m really OK…I am more normal than I think…And that I have what I need to take care of myself.
A stronger sense of my ability to make choices over fear.

EMILY: Following from the last question–I reclaimed tremendous amounts of energy, life force, softness and flow in my body; awareness of all things; clear seeing of others; love; closeness; caring; compassion; a feeling of trust. All is well, I am here. I am whole. I am well. I am.

ALEXIS: A remembering of what I love and how I love–I remember that nothing deep inside of me is broken or wounded. I remember I am part of a community, I know how to do this thing called life, and there is ease and relief. I was also able to see grief in the form of a memory (a present living memory) of an umbilical cord connecting me to my sister and feeling the life of that cord. The image helped me create a cohesive story and I felt relief.

ZUZA: Validation–deep contact with the place of longing (for company, intensity)—satisfaction. How to reverse this–need for others to go there with me—to my own connection with my depth. Reclaimed my own longing for my depth.
Have you noticed any effects of our last meeting in your life since? Please describe.

AMY: Yes, I’ve been thinking a lot about grief and loss and wondering if I really experienced both. Thinking that my experiences of grief/loss or exposure has been minimal. And wondering if my grief/loss is legit. I also realized how much I do not like fear.

DIANA: More peace and ease with my dad’s suffering (I was grieving his situation during the grief exploration. I feel it has to do with the container and being with others with the pain that I feel alone in. Also, I feel I have been more aware of how I am when fear arises in me and with less judgment about how I respond.

ELENA: Yes. I spent the first week processing that meeting through dreams that I remembered. I also found myself being calm about not compromising myself. Instead of running away and letting others rule, I simply showed up wholly a few times and felt very impressed/surprised by the positive results.

GREG: More confidence and risk taking in Nia. I spent two hours one day in a pool doing Nia without an instructor remembering and refining movements. Greater presence on stage during a Laban evaluation.

JUDY: Honestly, no. Or, I don’t know—maybe? The daylong was intense and I remember feeling the next day that I just wanted to be out in the sun, enjoying life. During the section on fear, I had a harder time connecting to that than grief, but in my Inquiry work in the last 2 weeks, fear has been more prevalent. Finally, I have been feeling more dissatisfied in my life these last few days and I think it is related to me wanting to exercise more power in my life. I want to create something tangible (a marriage and a family) and I want more power in my work/profession (I’ve been very aware of negative uses of power in my work lately.) Whether this is all related to the daylong is hard to say—probably somewhat but I’m doing a lot of other exploration right now, so who knows? My reflections on power have made me think about my Diamond logos work on the Black essential state more than this experience.

KERRI: I’m generally finding simple pleasures—a walk, a meal, a smiling person, my partner's touch—more pleasurable. I have a little greater awareness about the emotions (anger, sadness, fear) when they surface. I feel them, but don't necessarily act on them.

MARGARET: Yes, I have been more able to face current grief and let myself feel it then & there. I have been able to speak about grief without judging myself that I should “get on with it.” I’ve discovered that speaking about it, feeling it fully, helps me really move on, not just bury the feelings.

RACHEL: Not at this point. I am pretty immersed in my physical stuff. My body feels like a cage...

TRISH: More calm. While my sense of loneliness & the tangible factors of my life have not changed significantly, I seem to have a slightly different relationship to myself, and a greater acceptance of where I am “at.” I have had ideas resonate with me differently than before—like “who I will be” or what I'll do next. I don't feel as stressed, or that I have to push so hard. I also took a little break from work & took a mini-vacation. It was a very different experience for me. Normally, I would be very high about the break, and then have a tough time in re-entry. This time, I did not. Everything was more even-keeled. Like somehow my life view is satisfying. (I do not think this is a coincidence!)
I have also noticed a shift in my perspective at work/job. I am more accepting of what is—my role/purpose there, and I am not as energetically caught around my job. Yay.

All the above is very different for me.

ALEXIS: Relief, more joy, less rage, more intimacy. I felt less protective and defensive and I noticed myself sharing more of myself when I would meet friends for dinner. I felt softer and more in touch with my heart.

EMILY: Firstly, an ever deepening respect and awe for this work/practice. Joy that this work is a part of my life and gives so much to others. Great AWE and HOPE in the human being’s experience to KNOW and HEAL. These feelings create deep spaces of joy, wonder and faith within me and allow me further access to even greater depths of feelings along the entire range [of feelings.]

ZUZA: I’ve felt a lot of grief lately. My grief seems more accessible, easily triggered. & I feel empowered to move my work in the direction of what happened here—from “dance” to shamanic soul retrieval. Also deeply affected by reading the Inanna book. Longing for my own depth—not just for facilitating others.

What surprised you about the preliminary learnings of our study? Include any other responses you have to what you have heard this evening.

AMY: What surprised me is that I had a really hard time relating or accessing fear and grief in the first session. I definitely felt inertia and wanted to stay in the inertia. So I felt that I couldn’t relate or fully participate. The surprise is how much I can relate to the learnings of the study—need for integration between masculine and feminine, the difference between thinking and knowing and feeling. I could also really relate to others responses yet at the first session I really felt that I couldn’t—that my experiences were so different (and this was all of course without verbal communication).

DIANA: That “surprise” was the common thread pulled from the material.

ELENA: Well, the past few weeks have been of big losses to me. I bid farewell to my dog and a group of children I was working with. It surprised me how well I have been experiencing and in touch with my feelings of sadness. It seems that moving through grief prepared me to shift my relationship with it…not sure.

I also want to share that I was very much in touch with my impulse of caring for others in the room in the first session by diminishing my expression, my own feelings (have done is for my family my whole life). Nevertheless, I surrendered. I chose to. I went to the underground and back with myself whole and permission to feel and show how I feel. Feeling ok with feelings. Creating a relationship with my feelings that gives them a voice to express themselves and just be.

GREG: The clarity of the metaphor from the Vedas. The group’s grasp of the descent, the perils and choices. Both were pleasant excitement over being involved in this work.

JUDY: I’m curious as to what Zuza expected to occur (that didn’t). I don’t feel like I’ve heard enough yet of the findings to really answer this question (or I don’t understand). I am surprised that we are talking about Inanna and in my experience, another old myth re: feminine power came up.

KERRI: How much resistance I have to addressing fear. That what I think “I know” about myself is ridiculously limiting and just the surface of the vast terrain. My particular expression of existence can offer.
I'm curious about choice. I would “label” it a masculine quality of direction and manifest action. As I surrendered at each gate I would call on the nobler qualities of my masculine side to trust the process and occupy the mind or divert it so I could truly “fall” into the experience. My brain/control side consistently seeks & keep me “up right” not succumbing [sic] to being turned “upside down” by emotion—or thrown into a current that is unruly and unpredictable. Emotions are scary because I'm not sure what they'll do, or bring up, or how they'll incapacitate me or another, or when they will calm down., blah, blah, blah! And they are the doorway to aliveness! So, how about that middle path, eh? Or am I destined to be bhakti devotee my whole life?

She, Also—myth of Persephone and myth of Inanna, by Robert Johnson (I think).

I want to talk to you more about this because I believe the next evolution is back to the integration. It's why the helpers hung out with Ereshkigal—she is/was Inanna, too. Same thing. Help one= help the other.

MARGARET: I was surprised that each time the opportunity to do this work comes my way. I travel deeper into my unconscious. Even if I deal with the same issues I can face them from a deeper place each time.

RACHEL: I feel surprised that I was able to access as much emotion as I felt. I was worried I would be numb or shut down. I was also surprised that I had as much physical range which I thought was completely lost.

TRISH: Not surprised. Glad that you are able to see the patterns/trends/energies and that they all make sense. I love that you noticed the themes of surrender & choice.

ALEXIS: As an assistant, I thought I would not be impacted as I was. I was deeply moved by the room, by the participants, and by the collective energy. When I witnessed Kerri, my heart felt like layers were shucked off and when I moved, I felt like I was home.

EMILY: That a myth from thousands of years ago is relevant today. I carry this idea that humans are just messed up “right now” and we’ll get back to this place of perfect balance, but really this “place” [of perfect balance] looks a lot different than I thought or have been aiming for. Balance looks and feels a lot different than I thought—I only attach “good” feelings with it [balance] and have detached the ‘bad’ as something to endure along the way [rather than accept as a healthy part of being balanced and whole.]

ZUZA: The place of inertia is a curious paradox.

Discussion Circle at Meeting Two (Partial Transcript)

MARGARET: The first thing I was asked to surrender was my inertia... it showed through in the art ‘cause I surrendered my inertia brought it through and kept moving and then it turned into its opposite... the feeling that I was feeling I would rather just sit there frozen but instead I went out and moved and it turned into something else... I don’t know if it would have if I had remained frozen in inertia.

KERRI: Just a thought I had about the inertia ... was the difference between being still and trusting the stillness or in resisting the stillness, that’s the difference I found. When I surrendered to trusting it, it had more potential for whatever would come, that’s all.
GREG: I had a lot of trust in the process itself. My surprises were about how much strength I had with the process. I had no beliefs that I could dance with this group for twenty minutes about experiences... and I believe I descended as deep as I could descend, as I wanted to descend. There was no withhold. It was a safe environment, for one thing. I have been here before. I wasn’t hanging off some line, like in the movie, this was me. This was my descent into me and I've always come back from that descent... I’d gone [to] . . . such incredible places in recent times, and part of that was this process... of just being in the group and realizing this work that you're all doing to descend, to bring your emotions back to the surface is the work to bring the power back to the feminine, that's what it is. . . . I [didn’t] even know what we are going to do, but if we're going to do mind and body, and if we’re going to do some emotions, I’m there. This is life, this is the real part of life; this is my only time when I can bring those emotions out. I come from an emotional father who never communicated with me, and I can get so emotional about absolutely anything. And this feels soo good to be able to feel that. I've been cheating myself. I didn’t feel the grief when it happened. I didn’t feel the fear when it happened. I'm not even able to feel that joy that happens all the time. . . . [T]his is what I want to do, this is such an important work.

KERRI: I appreciate that Inanna also chose, she made the choice. So we all made the choice to come here not knowing, we made the choice to participate... we didn’t have to participate... we could have said forget it Zuza, I'm not going to do this stupid thing... but we didn’t, we showed up and we were asked to engage in particularly icky aspects of our living... which we knew they were somewhere... well I didn’t know that but I went and found out. But there is a juxtaposition between Inanna and Persephone... where Persephone was dragged down, not by her choice, and Inanna chose...

JUDY: Baba Yaga is another myth of the feminine, so it’s weird you were talking about Inanna and Ereshkigal... Ereshkigal is kind of like Baba Yaga...

ZUZA: This whole power thing, reclaiming the power of the feminine, that aspect of ferocious animal, witch-like power, she is not gentle or nice.

JUDY: Baba Yaga is ugly too, that’s another thing about the myth. She's got that chin that comes up and the nose that comes down and they almost touch... She's supposed to be hideous... so there's something about that, about being willing to be hideous, you know... and mean, and scare people... that’s not really what the “feminine” of late has been, be nice, be pretty... be powerless...

DIANA: This fierce feminine power just came through in my relationship with my husband... this power came through where I went raaah! [growls loudly]... I got big and ugly and fierce, but not just for the sake of getting big and ugly and fierce and overpowering him, at all... it’s a really ferocious commitment to staying with the truth and not backing down in that way that’s really fierce, and it opened him up into this really feminine place of speaking about feelings, like it just cracked through. So I'm now more than ever getting the strong, fierce feminine without losing the heart and the... it’s not either pretty or ugly, it has to be ugly when it needs to be ugly, and really soft and fluid still. It was a powerful experience. And to see him to come through to a beautiful feminine place without losing his ground, it strengthened his masculine. It feels good and I support you all in doing it.

ELENA: When I hear you speak about Baba Yaga... I am very much that... the stereotypical feminine that’s the part I don’t know in myself. You know I'm from the
Amazon... so I'm like, rah! it comes out so I have to apologize sometimes, I didn’t mean to be that strong... and I don’t feel like I have any problems to express that, or then express some joy... but I get very much misread in this culture, by which I mean California. I’m “very direct,” that’s what I get here. But I’m experiencing this shift as if the two were finally meeting, as if I met both of them, it’s a place where I don’t feel I have to go either way, I can just say no this won't work for me, sorry... in the last session that’s what I noticed... and also another thing: moving through the feeling kind of prepared me for the next time I’ll feel the feeling, my relationship with feeling is different. I can say, oh yeah, I know you, c’mon, sit here with me a little while. ... you're not going to eat me...

KERRI: For me the “you're not going to eat me” feels like the initial thing, and that was more with grief, and now... I don’t know. [chuckles] I feel like... I don’t know, maybe you will me, but that’s all right! Now there is even that next place where all the things I thought I knew about meeting the emotion and what would come next... I don’t... which is why the fear was such a challenge for me to deal with, because of the knowing... knowing what’s going on, the knowing and the comfort and the control of knowing what’s going to happen next... I don’t know... and maybe that’s okay...

ZUZA: ... and I'm willing...

KERRI: yes, I'm willing, and I’ll see... And in fact the part of the struggle and the pain was the trying to know what would happen, that got to be more painful than actually just, alright, I don’t know... and then seeing where I’ll go... or where I would be taken... because part of the frustration was, it wasn’t mine, it wasn’t my experience, it was the field, it was the group, so then that feeling of goddammit, I don’t wanna... and then being sucked into this thing that’s larger than anything that my little small controlled happy content little temenos... knows or wants, which is too small, too, ultimately. So that surrender to the larger... but kicking and screaming all the way you know... it was like being dragged kicking and screaming into this... until I decided to stop kicking and screaming, and then I was on it, I was on the ride with it, but there's that choice point, there's the choice again.

The little humans made from the dirt under the fingernail, they are made to serve. So of course when they arrive where there is a calling they are going to serve the calling even if it doesn’t look like what they expected to find. So though it doesn’t look like they are going to serve Inanna, they do because they are the same, Inanna and Ereshkigal are the same, they are going to serve where the need is. So they too are open to what’s not yet imagined, what doesn’t necessarily follow the plot line... so again, trusting that empathy and the compassion... Trust that empathy, trust the ability to tune into the field, or the group, even if my small ego is kicking and screaming, saying, where the hell are you going, why are you going where they're yelling, don’t go there... but you go.

EMILY: Those creatures from under the fingernail... the only reason they came is because Inanna had an assistant. I was thinking of the fact that we did it together. I can go further if I know that I have some way of coming back, that someone is there, somebody knows I went, or I left some crumbs to find my way... or, if we’re all here together then I have a little bit more courage to push a little bit further through, because when I'm on my own I may get completely swallowed up. She was the queen of heaven and earth and she still had someone “in case I need help, I'm going to give you a call.” This says to me,
okay, I'm going to ask for help too. Otherwise I have to do it all by myself, with all of my jewels and armor, do it all by myself.

JUDY: This is dismantling, this is like an ego dismantling. In work where you do ego dismantling, you want to have support. It’s good to do this kind of work but not if you don’t have a structure in place. Like you were talking about “feeling is good.” I wouldn’t necessarily go into every environment... I don’t think it’s good necessarily... I think it’s wise to know, is this a proper environment? Do I have the support? There's some wisdom that's guiding this descent... and it’s the wisdom of knowing I've got support, I've got the backup.

ZUZA: You are talking about the wisdom of not going there. Diana, you wrote something about that: sometimes I do not want to go. Because it is not appropriate, the timing is not right, or I don’t want to, or I don't feel strong, don't have the structure or support in place, so I'm just not going to go, I’ll just check out for now.

ELENA: Kerri was talking about the pause in the movement, where you don’t just go, you stay there for a moment, and then begin again...

DIANA: The way I hear us talking is about the right support and the right context. I had this experience in the grief section, of reclaiming the, I want to say, cellular, genetic, tribal ... something way back that has no psychological framework but was like really deep . . . tribal, “we are in it together” that was really deeply nourishing and very surprising, and specifically around grieving my father, and now being around him, it’s changed. There's still grief, but it’s really different because I know I am being held in that. I have a question about accessing fear. Because since then I had experiences where I was actually in real time fear, and ... you had asked us to not just role play but actually be in an emotion ... so now after experiencing fear, I don’t think I really went beyond role-playing it in our day. So I have a question about that level of primal emotion... how do I access fear in the real way that I know how to access other feelings. So there's a lack of safety around accessing fear...

I just know that the grief I felt here was congruent with the grief I feel out there; but the fear I was attempting to tap into here didn’t feel congruent with how it comes up in real time. So whatever that is, I don’t know. But the reason I'm saying it is that it lends less safety for me to go in and experience it when there is that incongruence in my experience of invoking it. . . . But actually in real time, I was more present with it, so it translated... but just accessing it, if I can't get to what’s authentic

RACHEL: Yeah, I really question it as a choice of being one of the ones we explored. It’s rich but there's something like, with sadness, I know I’ll go in there and I’m going to be healed by that, but I don’t want to go purposely into my fear, or evoke fear, because I don’t feel it’s good for my body, or my soul. . . . [Y]eah it’s rich but I don’t want to go there purposely.

ELENA: I want to say that I did have a good experience doing it. Not that I would want to do it again but I was shaking, I remember shaking, couldn’t hold the crayon. I had a really good insight, because I do feel . . . I got really good insights into it, by moving... it was not comfortable, but I did get the insights, and I feel it helped me. Though next time, I'm not going to go hello, lets get into fear again, it’s not like that...

TRISH: . . . One of the things I used the exercise for was kind of like a re-programming, rewriting of what had happen. Basically, I was waiting for memories to come up . . . and if that was something in my childhood, then I would have just frozen and stood still. Or
hidden. And there was no point to just do that so I made different choices, okay so what’s a different choice, how do I fight it, what do I say, what do I do, what could I do now, and I approached it that way and I found it to be very empowering. And I rode it... It’s not like I just became a different person and I’m saying oh, no fear now, like I’m in total control, but as the memory was activated, I was just kind of riding with it, and making different choices with it.

DIANA: I wonder if I got my message across . . . It’s not so much in real time but I wonder if I can really access my response to fear by evoking it . . .my distaste in going back and evoking fear is that if I can’t access it in a way that feels embodied, not just playacted, though I question the value...though . . . I actually found myself in fear [in real time recently] and I felt that I was actually more present there with it...

JUDY: I think I experienced something similar, it was difficult for me to access fear but then I had an individual inquiry session and it was all about fear! and the level I got to it in the inquiry session was not what I would normally get to ... because fear, like you said, is usually something we try to avoid and I think that even if I didn’t “get it” on the daylong, it’s like you're touching the edges of it and then it kind of you know... percolates in there for a few days, it’s there and then it comes up later.

EMILY: I appreciate that, even the way we respond in not going there, you know... ‘cause I noticed that I tried to make the movie funny... I have a million systems in place to guard against it, but I experience it every day, even in driving, that rush of adrenaline and it feels like carbonation, after the moment of fear ... I just don’t have lot of... I don’t link my thoughts to what my body is doing ‘cause I just shut all the systems down and they do not communicate. So that’s a small example, that fear when you almost get hit, but that’s what happens with big fears also... I feel like I'm just beginning to scratch the surface of understanding what this is about, to feel fear...

ZUZA: Maybe not understanding but having a relationship with it... there's this thing in SE about animals, they just shake it off. We block it, and lock it, and we never shake it off... and so we become more and more tense. So if I know I am afraid and I can allow myself to feel it then I can maybe let it move through me and it does not stick for forty years.

DIANA: I'm also thinking, I've been taking these risks lately... When you have a more developed relationship with fear I think how that can support you in taking those risks that bring up that feeling ... (Zuza: because you can tolerate it...) so it’s not just shaking it off after, but actually entering in. Because life is risk, if we’re really alive.

TRISH: We’re not just tolerating it...

ZUZA: I meant the ability to tolerate the charge, so the fuses don’t get blown so easily, so I can let myself shake more with it, and not wig out of consciousness.

DIANA: Creating a bandwidth, we’re creating a bandwidth.

AMY: I hope I can make sense here because I am not clear here myself. But... Fear ... that’s so large that you’d think of the person who’s about to fall to her death, or you're on the ledge and you're looking down, or that adrenaline rush in the car... That’s harder to access, or replicate when it’s not happening to you... but the fear that I can relate to . . . I was a fearful child, very fearful... and I just experienced fear this week but it wasn’t any of the body sensations ... but fear that I was going to lose, just fear that... and I really felt that fear, and my response was... I was afraid of my reaction to it, which was more ugly... ‘cause I was afraid of feeling out of control ‘cause I was out of control... could not
control the outcome. So the letting myself feel how afraid I was felt ugly to me, or I didn’t want to get into that because I don’t want to feel it I guess. Fully, I mean. I was feeling it, but not more... but then I did let myself feel it, I did let myself just acknowledge to myself that I was really afraid and got a kind of a positive out of the fear... that I actually had so much love... my husband went into surgery and I was so afraid and so out of control of what was going to happen to him, and so I was helpless, and I was a wreck. What helped me let myself go into that fear was to feel that love, so I thought wow I'm so lucky that I am afraid, to have something to be afraid of losing so much. So I think being fearful as a child was being afraid of what you couldn’t control. Like, everything... Being afraid of death, being so afraid. So in my mind there are two kinds of fear, one that I can definitely access and relate to, and then the fear when a bear is coming at you and you're going into fight or flight.

AMY: As I was kissing my husband goodbye, as he was being rolled off, with all that confusion not knowing what’s supposed to happen next . . . I barely held it together and I was trying to be so strong for him... anyway afterwards he said I started crying when you did, and I said, you saw that?! I turned to the elevator so fast... but it was that crying together, you know... it felt good to be together in this.

GREG: . . . One of the things that excited me about coming to this group was . . . [we] were going to move... doing... whatever the hell you had in mind for us to do... so that was going to move, the fear was going to move, it was not going to be locked. And it will be another opportunity to practice that skill, practice that skill of accessing your emotions. . . . Emotions, we can learn more about them.

MARGARET: I had this word come in: “unclaimed,” about fear, my fear is unclaimed.
APPENDIX 18

PARTICIPANTS’ ARTWORK

Illustration 9 – Judy: Grief

Illustration 10 – Judy: Fear

Illustration 11 – Diana: Grief

Illustration 12 – Diana: Fear

Illustration 13 – Greg: Grief

Illustration 14 – Greg: Fear
This study was devoted to exploring the Research Problem: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, what allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience? The research hypothesis was: When embodying and expressing feeling through movement, sustained somatic attention in following an image and the ability to tolerate somatic and cognitive discomfort of the unknown allows for releasing and reclaiming dissociated fragments of experience.

The meanings were derived utilizing the methods of Imaginal Inquiry, specifically by identifying key moments or key narrative passages in the data (sourced from both participants and co-researchers); the use of the myth of Inanna as an interpretive lens; and the examining of researcher bias, all of which constitute the participatory research paradigm.

The cumulative learning of the study is that a group exploration of somatic process through expressive movement and art can be regarded as a descent into the underworld in which one’s personal experience becomes part of a collective ritual enactment of feeling. The degree of body-mind integration that can occur in the process depends on individuals’ willingness to repeatedly sacrifice their egoic identity, surrender to Mystery, and sensitively engage the territory of inertia and fear. This learning validates the research hypothesis.
The main claim of Learning One: The Communal Feeling Matrix Feeds the Starved Soul Inside, is that the act of exploring one’s somatic process within a group constellates a transformative field in which a person is able to transcend one’s own personal story and spontaneously engage in a communal, ritual enactment of affect. Learning Two: Surrender at the Gates to the Underworld, declares that in a group exploration of affect, repeated surrender of the egoic identity facilitates deepening engagement with previously unexplored aspects of one’s experience. Learning Three: The Body Is a Doorway to Mystery, states that an exploration of affect through movement and art, by facilitating the suspension of familiar modes of knowing, allows for contact with Mystery via surprising turns of experience.

The main claim of Learning Four: What to Do or Not to Do When Hanging on the Hook, Waiting, is that the experience of not moving during movement explorations can allow for resting in rich and fertile stillness; it can also be an expression of the struggle between expression and suppression, best met by returning to movement; negotiating this struggle requires sensitive and compassionate discernment. Learning Five: One Thing We Fear Is Fear Itself, shows that consciously embodying and expressing fear requires a willingness to face existential anxiety; consequently, an invitation to do so is met with resistance and constriction; yet engaging fear creatively may lead to an experience of exhilaration and/or empowerment.

The results of this study are relevant for anybody interested in being fully alive, but especially to those working with human suffering. Dissociation from the body is a prevalent feature of modern Western life and a source of suffering for many people; much of the emotional dis-ease plaguing contemporary children and adults has its cause
in the dominant culture’s “betrayal of the body.” This study’s addressing of these issues is helpful in understanding how to include the body in the equation and who may most benefit from a somatic approach in therapy.

In particular, somatic therapists, hospice workers, and movement teachers could have a greater impact in their work with groups by applying the approach explored here. Facilitating more events of this sort could help shift the collective belief that feeling is weak and shameful and should be done in private. This, in turn, could affect the culture at large in its shift toward a more holistic paradigm of healing, and make a contribution toward the reclamation of values historically seen (and devalued) as feminine: body, feeling, and the human need for belonging and staying connected to community, both social and ecological.
NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Kepner does not actually use the term “body-mind” when discussing integration. Instead, he talks about unity of somatic and emotional expression, continuity between physical and mental processes, mutual identity of physical and psychological phenomena, integration of body and self, the present sense of unity of one’s being. James Kepner, Body Process: Working with the Body in Psychotherapy (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 28, 36-42.


5. “The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides . . . representing the superficies of the mental apparatus.” Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” 26.

6. Ibid., 28.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 29, 36-41.

12. See for example Ernest S. Wolf, Treating the Self: Elements of Clinical Self Psychology (New York: Guilford Press, 2002), 23. Here, the self is referred to as a “presumed psychological structure.” Furthermore, “The self-psychological theory has not directly attempted to examine or explain the biological substrate that would have to be present for the observed psychological phenomena to occur.” Ibid., 33. In object relations theory, the self is understood as a mental representation, an internal image. Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 10-11.


15. Donald A. Bakal, Minding the Body: Clinical Uses of Somatic Awareness (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 4-6.
16. Ibid., 15.


21. Bessel A. van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score,” in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, 221. The term *flashback* refers to an experience giving one a sense of reliving an event, especially a traumatic, unintegrated event from the past.


27. Ibid., 44. Schore repeats this in several passages in his other books, citing Orrin Devinsky, “Right Cerebral Hemisphere Dominance for a Sense of Corporeal and Emotional Self,” *Epilepsy and Behavior* 1 (2000): 60-73.

28. Schore offers a physiological explanation, claiming that dissociation stimulates endogenous (internally produced) opioids and numbness ensues as a result of those. Schore, *Affect Dysregulation*, 219.


33. Ibid., 57.


42. Chellis Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), ix.

43. Ibid., 5.

44. Ibid., 175.


55. Kepner, *Body Process*, 29. The Literature Review contains a more detailed discussion of the terms dissociation and repression and some comments about how they may differ from each other, though it seems that no one has a definitive answer to this question and they are often used interchangeably. In body based approaches like Kepner’s Body Process, the activity of repressing (through muscular tension and breath restriction) is seen as resulting in the phenomenon of dissociation (exclusion from awareness).


59. Ibid. This is one of the basic tenets of Gestalt Therapy, but was first proposed by Reich in his discussion of muscular armor–the sum total of the muscular attitudes (chronic muscular spasms) which an

60. Frederick S. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 64; and Kepner, Body Process, 41. Also see Frederick S. Perls, Ralph Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (New York: Dell Publishing 1951), 83. The authors write, “Our attempt . . . is to recover all experiences concomitantly—whether they be physical or mental, sensory, emotional, or verbal—for it is in the unitary functioning of ‘body,’ ‘mind,’ and ‘environment’ (these are all abstractions) that a lively figure/ground emerges.”


62. Ibid., 105. See also Perls’s discussion of the implosive layer. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, 56-57.


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**Chapter 2**


3. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer writes: “There can never be an existence that is objective absolutely and in itself; such an existence, indeed, is positively inconceivable. For the objective, as such, always and essentially has its existence in the consciousness of a subject; it is therefore the subject's representation, and consequently is conditioned by the subject, and moreover by the subject's forms of representation, which belong to the subject and not to the object.” Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 2:50. Also see G.W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. James Black Baillie, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1931); and *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller and John Niemeyer Findlay (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).


5. Ibid., 17.


10. Ibid., 79. A more detailed discussion of affect is included in a separate cluster.

11. Ibid., 28.


15. Ibid., 173.


18. “Because the early developing right hemisphere is, more so than the later maturing left, deeply interconnected into the autonomic, limbic, and arousal systems, it is dominant for the processing of social emotional and bodily information. A large number of studies now indicate that this hemisphere is dominant not only for the reception, expression, and communication of emotion, but also for the control of spontaneously evoked emotional reactions, the modulation of ‘primary emotions’, and the adaptive capacity for the regulation of affect.” Allan N. Schore, “Dysregulation of the Right Brain: A Fundamental Mechanism of Traumatic Attachment and the Psychopathogenesis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 36 (2002): 9.


22. Ibid., 134-137.


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 303.


33. In *The Mindful Brain*, for example, Siegel devotes only a few paragraphs to his discussion of body awareness. Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, 48, 122, 297-298.


36. Ibid., 23.
38. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue, *Introduction to Dissociation*, xii.
41. Ibid., 15.
48. William James, “Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 17 (1901): 17, 13-23. Quoted in Crabtree, “Explanations of Dissociation,” 101. James was also aware of an intimate relation between traumatic events and a symptom constellation of dissociation, somatization and affect dysregulation: "In the wonderful explorations by Binet, Janet, Breuer, Freud, Mason, Prince and others of the subliminal consciousness of patients with hysteria, we have revealed to us whole systems of underground life, in the shape of memories of a painful sort which lead a parasitic existence, buried outside the primary fields of consciousness, and making irruptions thereunto with hallucinations, pains, convulsions, paralyses of feeling and of motion, and the whole procession of symptoms of hysterical disease of body and of mind." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902), 230.
50. Ibid., 57. Ross adds, “The physical body, seen through the cultural dissociation barrier, is to be used for a variety of purposes, including stimulation of the dissociated ego through sex, drugs, and alcohol in a manner which is toxic to the body and to the other part selves.”
51. Ibid., 60. Ross’s article is a powerful presentation showing how the phenomenon of cultural dissociation leads to justifications of monotheism and religious fundamentalism, white supremacy, domination of nature, Newtonian, mechanistic, and reductionist ideologies, among other pathologies and limitations of the Western worldview.
52. Ibid.


57. Ibid., 409.


59. See for example discussion of “the fright without solution” in Erik Hesse and Mary Main, “Disorganized Infant, Child, and Adult Attachment: Collapse in Behavioral and Attentional Strategies,” Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 48, no. 4 (2000): 1097-1127. The authors research the consequences and clinical implications of situations where frightening parental behavior confronts the child with the dilemma of needing to simultaneously run toward and flee from the parent who is the primary caregiver and the source of danger at the same time. Hesse and Main point out that the resulting psychopathology, with dissociation as one of its main features, may at times represent a second-generation effect of the parent's own continuing unresolved responses to trauma, thus extending the time horizon for the link between trauma and dissociation to past generations.

60. This is true for people with history of unresolved trauma, and may also be true, as is mentioned in the note above, for children whose parents have unresolved trauma from their own past. See Erik Hesse et al., “Unresolved States Regarding Loss or Abuse Can Have ‘Second Generation’ Effects: Disorganization, Role Reversion, and Frightening Ideation in the Offspring of Traumatized, Non-Maltreating Parents,” in Solomon and Siegel, 90-92.


62. Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 125.


67. Otto Rank, The Trauma of Birth (Toronto: Dover Publications, 1993), 8. For Rank, the essence of birth trauma lies in the fact of separation from the mother. In contrast, Freud spoke of the traumatic physiology of birth. Current pre- and perinatal approaches integrate both dimensions of the birth experience. Many authors, like Grof and Emerson, also consider the spiritual challenge of being born into human form. See discussion that follows in text.

68. Ibid.


75. Scaer, *The Body Bears the Burden*, 21. Sensorimotor release resembles the way animals shake and tremble after a traumatic event in order to discharge stored autonomic energy.


77. Perry et al., “Childhood Trauma,” 275.


88. Ibid.


92. Ibid., 218.

93. Ibid., 57.

94. Ibid., 73.

95. Ibid., 398.


97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.


100. Ibid., 252.


102. Ibid., 51-52.


105. Ibid., 153-154.


108. Daniel Brown, “Path of Meditation,” in Ablon et al., 373.

109. Ibid., 377.

110. Ibid., 375.


120. Ibid., 396.

121. Ibid., 399.

122. Ibid., 403.

123. Ibid., 405.


125. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in Strachey, 14: 243-258. Freud’s definition of mourning includes, along with the reaction to the loss of a loved one, reactions to any substituted abstraction (father-land, freedom, ideal).


128. Ibid., 127.


130. John Bowlby, *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, vol. 3 of *Attachment and Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 31. Bowlby says, “What is impressive about mourning is not only the number and variety of response systems that are engaged but the way in which they tend to conflict with one another. Loss of a loved person gives rise not only to an intense desire for reunion but to anger at his departure and, later, usually to some degree of detachment; it gives rise not only to a cry for help, but sometimes also to a rejection of those who respond. No wonder it is painful to experience and difficult to understand.”

131. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 50-147. This is a somewhat simplistic representation of Kübler-Ross’s model, not taking into account that the process of grieving is rarely a linear progression from one stage to the next. Rather, it is often a meandering, circular journey in which the different stages are revisited, not always in any predictable sequence.


133. Ibid. See also, Martin Prechtel, *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar: Memoirs from the Living Heart of a Mayan Village* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 272, 283.

134. Prechtel, *Grief and Praise*.


139. Kepner, Body Process, 39. As Kepner points out, there are many “somatic,” or body-oriented models that do not necessarily aim at or lead to body-mind integration, because while focusing on sensory experience and the physicality of the person, they do not address emotional issues. Examples of those are Rolfing, Feldenkrais, and Alexander Methods. Approaches such as those are omitted from consideration here.

140. Reich, Character Analysis, 263, 364.

141. Alexander Lowen, Bioenergetics, 55. Also see John Pierrakos, Core Energetics (Mendocino, CA: LifeRhythm, 1987).


143. Ibid., 15.

144. Ibid., 29.

145. Ibid., 63.

146. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 26.

147. Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression, 33-34. Systems thinking of Gestalt Psychology was at the roots of this and many other principles of Gestalt Therapy. See for example Kurt Goldstein, The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man (New York: American Book Company, 1939).

148. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, 57.

149. Ibid., 67.

150. Ibid., 38-54, 56-66. Also see, Frederick Perls, Gestalt Approach and Eyewitness to Therapy (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books,1973), 31-32; and Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 276.

151. Perls. Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, 64. A detailed discussion of some expressive techniques used in Gestalt Therapy toward this end can be found in Naranjo, Gestalt Therapy, 77-106.


153. Jack Rosenberg, Marjorie Rand, and Diana Assay, Body, Self, and Soul: Sustaining Integration (Atlanta: Humanics, 1985). This presentation of Integrative Body Therapy has become one of the classics in the field of somatics.

155. Ibid., 13.
156. Ibid., 14-16.
157. Ibid., 67.
162. Ibid., 25-6.
163. Ibid., 26.
165. Ibid., 22-24.
166. Ibid., 24, 27.
172. Ibid., 27-28.
173. Ibid., 29.
175. See, for example, John P. Wilson, Matthew J. Friedman, and Jacob D. Lindy, “A Holistic, Organismic Approach to Healing Trauma and PTSD,” in *Treating Psychological Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. John P. Wilson, Matthew J. Friedman, and Jacob D. Lindy (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 28-58. Even while declaring a departure from traditional formulations and describing a holistic model of trauma, in addressing treatment these theorists revert to discussing ego states, ego defenses, etc.
176. Exposure therapy and desensitization training use repeated imagining of the trauma (exposure) in a safe, controlled context to help the survivor face and gain control of the fear and distress that was overwhelming during the trauma.

179. van der Kolk et al., “Dissociation, Affect Dysregulation and Somatization,” 89.

180. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. 172. Herman’s is, however, a perspective that is integrative in other ways, conceptualizing trauma in a broad social and cultural context, looking at domestic abuse from the feminist viewpoint that the personal is political (and vice versa), and repeatedly emphasizing social and cultural factors that affect trauma on all levels: its perpetuation, perception (diagnosis), treatment, and integration.


182. Ibid., 231-232.


188. Pat Ogden, “Emotion, Mindfulness, and Movement: Expanding the Regulatory Boundaries of the Window of Affect Tolerance.” In Fosha, Siegel, and Solomon, 204-205.

189. Ibid., 205.


196. Ray Castellino, “Being with Newborns: An Introduction to Somatotropic Therapy” (course handout, 10th Foundation Training in Castellino Birth Trauma Therapy, Santa Barbara, CA, 1995).

197. Although extensive literature exists also in the realm of movement approaches such as the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Method, Continuum Movement, and others, these approaches are omitted from consideration as psychological healing is not their declared intent (though it certainly can be often observed as their side effect).


203. Ibid., 223.


212. Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*; Roth and Loudon, *Maps to Ecstasy*.

213. The field is referred to as Dance/Movement Therapy in the U.S.; Dance Movement Therapy in the U.K.; and sometimes also as Dance and Movement Therapy or, in earlier writings, as Dance Therapy. *Dance Movement Therapy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Helen Payne (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.


215. Ibid., 100.


218. Quoted in Bernstein, “Dancing beyond Trauma,” 42.


223. Ibid., 3.
224. Ibid., 41-44, 87.
225. Ibid., 2.
227. Ibid., 4.
230. Ibid., 14.
231. Ibid., 16. Other terms, such as *body awareness*, *sense of motion*, *energy awareness*, *the sixth sense* are used synonymously by the author without discrimination which confounds the issue to some degree.
232. Ibid., 26.
234. Ibid.
235. Ibid., 11.
236. Ibid., 10.
238. Ibid., 104.
240. Ibid., 73.
241. Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1989), xxxii, 94. Bainbridge Cohen’s theory is grounded in an in-depth study of the developmental movement sequences (age and stage-specific movement patterns such as crawling, reaching, pushing, etc.) as well as all of the body’s anatomical systems; the practice, rooted in cellular sensing (deep perception of inner physical reality) and therapeutic relationship often involving touch, aims at *movement repatterning*—undoing not only limiting movement habits, but through that, old ways of being in the world—in service of becoming a “fully functioning person in relation to community and environment.” Bainbridge Cohen’s Developmental Movement Therapy has been used successfully in her work with trauma. See also, Bainbridge Cohen. *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*.
242. Marion Rosen and Susan Brenner, *The Rosen Method of Movement* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1991), 14. In the process of a carefully designed routine of stretches and range of motion exercises, *holding patterns* (muscular tensions and breath constrictions, especially around the diaphragm) are released, often bringing up repressed feelings; joint motility increases, freeing the body for more spontaneous, effortless movement. Focus on breath, attention, and relaxation in the session translates into an attitude of openness and flexibility in facing the challenges of one’s life.
245. Ibid., 143.
247. Ibid., 193.
248. Ibid.
249. Ibid., 190.
250. Ibid., 202.
251. Stolorow and Atwood, Contexts of Being, 3.
256. Bavilof, Moving Toward Life, 185.
257. Ibid., 186.
259. Bernstein, “Dancing beyond Trauma,” 41-58; the quote comes from Anne Krantz, “Growing into Her Body: Dance/Movement Therapy for Women with Eating Disorders,” American Journal of Dance Therapy 21, no. 2 (1999): 81. Another study of women who had been sexually abused as children reports that dance therapy made it possible for these women to make sense of their struggle, reclaim more spontaneity in movement and emotional expression, as well as feel permission to play and experience pleasure. The sense of reconnection to the body was a common theme among the participants. Letty J. Mills and Judith C. Daniluk, “Her Body Speaks: The Experience of Dance Therapy for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse,” Journal of Counseling and Development 80, no. 1 (2002) 77-85.


268. Moore, *Care of the Soul*, xiii; and Aftab Omer, *Integrative Seminar* course at Meridian University, author’s notes, May 2005.


270. For example, Strozzi-Heckler writes, “Somatics does not see a split between the mind and body but views the soma as a unified expression of all that we think, feel, perceive, and express.” Strozzi-Heckler, *Anatomy of Change*, 9.


275. Ibid.


278. Ibid.

279. Ibid.

280. Ibid. Omer adds that sometimes just speaking about shame to others will allow crossing the threshold of expression; but if there is no movement, privacy may be the isolation of shame, and it may then be toxic, detrimental to growth. This is often true when there is a lot of trauma and not enough resource to face it. Omer quotes the Psalms: “Where I thought to look it was too painful for me.”

281. Anthony Stevens, *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self* (London: Routledge, 1992), 148. The same is true for the superego repressing any aspects of the self for fear that they may be unacceptable to others.


290. Ibid.


293. Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 12, 16.


304. Ibid., 25.


306. Ibid., 45.

307. Ibid., 47-55.

308. Ibid., 39.


313. Ibid., 441-446, 513-517.
314. Ibid., 425.
317. Ibid., 119.
321. Ibid., 132-133.
323. Ibid., 20-21. The shamanic perspective adds the understanding that in the act of self-protection from overwhelming pain, parts of a person’s soul wander off into other realms (often spirit realms, or the land of the dead), which causes a diminishment of vital and spiritual energy and prevents one from living a fully engaged, satisfying life.
324. Ibid., 27.
327. Somer, “Trance Possession,” 132. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines dissociative trance disorders as “single or episodic disturbances in the state of consciousness, identity, or memory that are indigenous to particular locations and cultures. Dissociative trance involves narrowing of awareness of immediate surroundings or stereotyped behaviors or movements that are experienced as being beyond one’s control. Possession trance involves replacement of the customary sense of personal identity by a new identity, attributed to the influence of a spirit, power, deity, or other person, and associated with stereotyped ‘involuntary’ movements or amnesia.’’ American Psychiatric Association, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM IV-TR*, 4th ed., Text Revision (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 532-533; emphasis added.
330. Ibid.
331. Ibid.
332. Ibid.

336. Ibid., 94.


338. Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess, 11.

339. Ibid., 11, 56.

340. Ibid., 12.


342. Ibid., xii.

343. Ibid., xii, 81.

344. The difference between Eliade’s theory and Brinton Perera’s interpretation of the myth of Inanna lies in the fact that for Eliade, initiation is always an introduction to the mystical, spiritual dimension of reality, while Inanna’s descent reclaims the totality of Life in all its profane (material) and sacred (spiritual) aspects.


346. Stevens, Archetype, 162.


348. Berman, Coming to Our Senses, 310.

349. Ibid., 311.

350. Jean Gebser, “Foundations of the Aperspective World,” Main Currents of Modern Thought 29, no. 2 (1972), 80-90. Magical consciousness perceived events as the operation of occult or uncanny forces; mythical consciousness sought meaning through grand images and stories of the gods; mental consciousness, our present structure, searches for rational understanding. Rather than calling the shift an expansion, Gebser proposes to call it an intensification of consciousness: not a linear but a quantum process, one that involves qualitative leaps.


353. Ibid.

354. V. Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors, 169. This definition concerns only existential or spontaneous communitas; Turner makes the distinction between that and two other types of communitas, the normative and ideological communitas. These distinctions are not relevant to the present discussion.

355. Ibid., 53.


357. Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 137.

358. See for example, Michael White, Maps of Narrative Practice (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 129.
Ibid. While Narrative Therapy is not per se an imaginal approach, it is certainly different from traditional therapies in its inclusion of cultural, societal, and political contexts of human life, the use of ritual and community oriented action, as well as in its insistent emphasis on heath rather than pathology. Interestingly, narrative therapists have used V. Turner’s concepts of ritual process, rite of passage, and liminal space to reframe clinical problems and their treatment. Michael White and David Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 8-9.

360. See for example, Jay Schulkin, Bodily Sensibility: Intelligent Action (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5. Schulkin objects to the trend toward “reification of feeling” which he observes in Damasio’s theory; while Schulkin acknowledges the intelligence of the body, his concept of consciousness still seems limited to intellect/thought.

Chapter 3

1. In Reichian and neo-Reichian theory, the areas of the chest, heart, jaw and eyes are where grief is “stored” by means of muscular tension and constriction that was originally meant to prevent feeling sadness, crying, or wailing. Reich, Character Analysis, 372, 376-77.

2. The notion that expressive movement brings up feelings is widely discussed in the literature. It is central in Dance/Movement Therapy and Authentic Movement and was the basis for developing the Art/Life Process, to name a few examples. See Introduction to Dance and Other Expressive Arts Therapies, ed. Levy, Pines-Fried, and Leventhal, 1; Chodorow, Dance Therapy and Depth Psychology; D. Halprin, Expressive Body, 104; A. Halprin, Moving toward Life, 195.

3. Chodorow, Dance Therapy and Depth Psychology, 22.


5. For more on these techniques, see Knill, Barba, and Fuchs, Minstrels of Soul, 147-153.


10. D. Halprin, Expressive Body, 130-133; McNiff, Art-Based Research, 71; and Knill, Barba, and Fuchs, Minstrels of Soul, 35.


12. Knill, Barba, and Fuchs, Minstrels of Soul, 71.

13. Ibid., 51.

Chapter 4

2. Ibid.
7. Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, 3.
12. Brinton Perera uses the term daughter of patriarchy interchangeably with daughter of the father, or daughter of the collective for women who have developed an animus ego, an ego that is oriented toward masculine values, wounded and cut off from its roots by the devaluation of matter [body] and the feminine. This animus-ego tends to be rational, linear, rule-bound, goal-oriented, devoted to upholding “the virtues and aesthetic ideals” of the patriarchal culture. See Brinton Perera, *Descent to the Goddess*, 11, 56.
15. Ibid., 303.
25. A detailed discussion of some expressive techniques used in Gestalt Therapy toward this end can be found in Naranjo, *Gestalt Therapy*, 77-106.
27. Ingerman, *Soul Retrieval*, 33.
29. Ibid., x.
30. Freckska and Luna, “The Shamanic Healer.”
31. Stevens, Archetype, 162.
32. Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess, 40.
33. Ibid., 15.
35. Ibid., 12.
41. Keleman, Somatic Reality, 79.
42. Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess, 25, 40.
45. Ibid.
46. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, 67.
47. Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess, 27.
48. This understanding is common to Gestalt Awareness Practice and the Roth 5Rhythms teachings, as clarified for the author in a conversation with Kathy Altman, 22 April 2010. Altman is a senior teacher in the 5Rhythms school.
49. Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess, 27.
50. Schore, Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self, 220.
52. Exploring Affect, 73.
53. Ibid., 249-251.
54. Ibid., 57.
55. These concepts are discussed in the Literature Review, quoting, among others, P. Levine, Waking the Tiger; Eckberg, Victims of Cruelty; and Scaer, The Body Bears the Burden.
56. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, 57.
57. Clarkson and Mackewn, Fritz Perls, 118.
58. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, 28-29.
60. Aftab Omer, Integrative Seminar course notes, January 21, 2006.
61. Stevens, Archetype, 148.
62. Ibid.


65. See for example, Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, 57; and Fosha, “Dyadic Regulation,” 249-250.


67. White, *Maps of Narrative Practice*, 129. The re-membering practices follow the notion that identity is founded on “association of life” rather than core self, meaning that identity is shaped by “membership” in relationships with significant persons and communities in either nurturing or life-denying ways, and that one can choose to associate more with those that contribute to one’s desired identity and less with those that do not.

**Chapter 5**


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


8. Some attempts are made to include movement when addressing grief through expressive (visual) arts, but this often takes the form of structured warm-up exercises rather than what would facilitate a free expression of grief in motion. See Barbara Thompson, “The Expressive Arts and the Experience of Loss,” *The Forum of the Association for Death Education and Counseling* 29, no. 2 (April/May/June 2003): 1-3.


12. Ibid., 15.

13. Ibid., 14.

14. Berman, 343-44.

15. Ibid., 344.


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_____. “What is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9, no. 34 (1884): 188-205.


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