

Dance of Awareness in Theory and Practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dance of Awareness (DoA) is a new approach to working with movement, dance and awareness, developed by Tim Brown, a body psychotherapist and Clare Osbond, a dance movement therapist.

It has five main streams of influence:

Neo-Reichian body-centred psychotherapy;
Five Rhythms dance;
Authentic Movement;
Dance Movement Psychotherapy;
The experiential exploration of awareness itself.

It is a group movement practice that aims to increase self-awareness and self acceptance. Practiced regularly it can be a resource for continuing wellbeing on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. DoA has been growing since 2003, and is based on experience gained through over 1200 hours of DoA classes, groups and workshops.

The DoA cycle – **sensing, grounding, expressing, releasing, connecting and completing** – follows an energetic wave, charging and discharging over the course of a session. The DoA is similar in structure to the Five Rhythms wave developed by Roth (1999), but has been adapted to take account of psychodynamic theory and developmental psychology. The phases of the cycle follow themes of human development from pre-birth through to around five years. This is the time period associated with the growing sense of self which becomes embodied through early experience, and which sets the patterns for adulthood. This gives the mover the opportunity to re-experience the formative years of early development, explore old imprints, and discover new patterns of moving and relating.

Such patterns are mapped in psychoanalytic thinking through concepts of character structure, concepts which grew out of Freud's original psychosexual developmental framework. Most relevantly, the body-based understanding of the development of self used in Neo-Reichian psychotherapy gives a valuable model of the stages of development, and the likely issues and themes which arise. We add to this an understanding of the evolving sense of self, drawn from other psychoanalytic work, object relations and developmental psychology.

The DoA process is underpinned by an emphasis on awareness as the ground to our experience. A focus on awareness at any point in the cycle provides the here-and-now impulse for new movement and growth. Our potential, our possibility or our vision can become realised by responding to whatever exists in awareness. As an impulse comes, we can learn ways of responding creatively as opposed to in an automatic or habitual way. What exists in awareness is our source of creativity. When we respond to a thought, feeling, sensation or image we are responding creatively with our unique self-expression. By so doing, we are giving shape to our becoming; to our

actualisation. The Gestalt cycle of experience provides a useful awareness-driven model here.

Music is an important element of the process, helping to evoke our embodied responses. The music guides the group through six sequential phases which together form a continuous wave of energy. The phases are described in more detail in the Practice section below, but are briefly:

- **Sensing** the body directly – bringing attention to the physical sensations of flesh, muscle and bone;
- **Grounding** our bodies in connection to the earth, receiving support;
- **Expressing** the shapes, patterns and movements that are ready to take form;
- **Releasing** the energy that is ready to move in the body;
- **Connecting** deeper into ourselves – and outwards with others and the world;
- **Completing** the journey and returning to our true nature.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our methodology is phenomenological and influenced by Gestalt and non-dual concepts of awareness. By ‘non-dual’ we mean an appreciation of awareness as the unchanging ground of experience (eg Wilber 2001, Gill 2004) – whatever emerges into awareness may be given shape, take form, and find expression in movement.

We encourage participants to respond spontaneously by following their internal impulses and trying out new ways of moving and interacting. This calls for a courage and a willingness to be self-directed and take responsibility for their own process. As we move through the cycle, we invite participants at intervals to ‘come back to awareness’. For us, this means experiencing whatever is emerging here and now, and putting to one side our beliefs, assumptions and explanations, in the interests of giving ourselves permission to allow whatever is ready to come into awareness. What presents itself may be a breath pattern, an image, an emotion, or a bodily sensation. The aim is simply to be present with whatever is happening, and to fully experience it by directly experiencing it in the body.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Over time, countless approaches have evolved for working with the body-mind. Some work principally with the body, others seek to increase awareness of the embodied self, whilst more therapeutic approaches also support psychological and spiritual development. Many of these approaches and schools of psychology have developed quite independently, and consequently address human experience and behaviour from different perspectives and with different frameworks. The theoretical framework of DoA draws on psychoanalytic theory, objects relations and developmental psychology, set in a context of experiential movement exploration.

Infants go through their own unique process of learning how to interact with others, exploring space and relating to gravity (Frank 2001). Their development is mainly directed towards accomplishing tasks in relation to their mother or primary caregiver. The emerging gestures, postures and breathing patterns adopted reflect and express that relationship. Consequently the developing experience of self is being shaped by the infant’s interaction with his environment. Although new behaviours and capacities emerge - and with them movement patterns - these overlay previous subjective

experiences of self, rather than replacing them (Stern 1985). So we not only continue to shape and be shaped by our contact with the environment, but past interacts iteratively with present as the self continues to develop in overlapping waves. Both processes are addressed in the DoA cycle; the former by using our bodies to respond to the music and to interact with others. The latter, through creating the conditions conducive for exploring, expressing, and potentially completing old patterns and ways of being that may no longer serve us, whilst providing the freedom and permission for new movement patterns to evolve.

3.1 Theoretical Principles

3.1.1 Some concepts from dance movement psychotherapy (DMP)

The American dancer, Marian Chace, was one of the main pioneers of DMP (Chaiklin and Schmais 1986). Chace worked in a psychiatric hospital in the 1940s where her approach centred on her core belief that dance is communication, and that feelings and thoughts are expressed through facial expressions and postures in the body. Chace kinaesthetically experienced what the client was experiencing through her own body. Chace's methodology focussed on therapeutic interventions that elicit movement expression, one of which was the use of mirroring. By mirroring, the dance movement therapist takes on movement or movement qualities that the client is expressing. By taking on the client's body expressions, we are empathically reflecting back our experience of the client. This communicates to them that they have been seen and accepted and also creates a relational exchange between client and therapist. DoA uses this intervention; by empathically reflecting each other, one participant can resonate with the emotional experience associated with another's movement. As in DMP, we may choose to further explore a participant's expression; for instance by clarifying, expanding or accentuating their movement.

Recent research into mirror neurons confirms the importance of mirroring. Neuroscientists have found that an individual who is simply witnessing another person performing a movement or expressing an emotion, will have the same sets of neurons activated as the person they are witnessing. In other words, the activation of mirror neurons is dependent upon the empathic identification with another, validating Chace's original use of empathic reflection as a therapeutic tool.

Empathic reflection shares some similarities with Stern's description of the phenomenon of affect attunement. Infants' actions are responded to by their mother with a response that conveys a similar feeling state, rhythm and temporal pattern but is performed through a different modality. Applying an example of this phenomenon to a DoA group, a vocal sound by the participant may be responded to with clapping or a shape/gesture that is designed to echo their feeling state. Attunement behaviours allow for the sharing of internal states; it is the quality of feeling that is being shared with another. This is the basis for the development of inter-subjectivity, where the transfer of meaning is communicated to another non-verbally, through gesture, posture or facial expression.

As practitioners, we shift our perceptual position to generate different viewpoints of the group, so shaping our lived experience. Changing positions gives us an appreciation of the other's point of view, facilitating the self-reflexive position documented in the Social Constructionist literature and first introduced to dance movement therapy by Parker and Best (2004). We can look out of our own eyes from

first position, move in the others' shoes from second position, look back at second and first positions at a distance from third position, and take a 'helicopter' view of all positions from fourth position. Finally, we return to first position with all the experiential information gathered by moving between positions. Gadamer (1989), a hermeneutic philosopher, describes how we are all generally enmeshed in our own meaning-field created by our beliefs, assumptions and prejudices over time. By constantly alternating between merging into another's world and linking back into our own reference system, an understanding of the unfamiliar reference system can be achieved, which in turn leads to the gradual revising or enriching of our own. As group leaders, we have adopted this conscious shift of positions to afford simultaneous awareness of the group as a whole whilst being able to honour individual difference. In any DoA group, we are constantly moving in and out of the first person position as we reflect on our own process. In co-led groups, one co-leader may adopt predominantly a second person position, for instance empathically reflecting back to group members. The other co-leader may adopt predominantly a third or fourth person position, for instance witnessing the group as a whole, and at times responding by empathically reflecting the group as a whole.

A major theme in DMP is the container; its nature, purpose and role. This addresses the demands of working with spontaneous process where there are often issues of safety, risk and control. DoA places importance on providing structure; we create spaces in which process happens and boundaries that provide containment. As in DMP, containment in DoA has a number of facets. The group leader's presence may be viewed as container, using their leadership skills to create a holding environment. The group leader's body can also be seen as container; in second person when working with participants' movement and exploration, and in third person when holding the group process as a whole, as in the opening and closing circle. The group itself can be viewed as container; like an organism it self-regulates and holds process. Space is also part of the containment matrix. DoA pays attention to creating and safeguarding the therapeutic space which creates safety for experimenting and free expression. The beginning and ending circle both act as containers. As in DMP, DoA uses a circle as a way of establishing safety and trust in a group and is used to begin and end sessions. On a personal level, movement as process provides the container. And on a transpersonal level, awareness can 'hold' one's experience in place of the therapist's 'holding'.

How does DoA interface with dance movement psychotherapy? Both are dance and movement groups, but is DoA, like DMP, a form of psychotherapy? The therapeutic relationship is integral to any form of psychotherapy. It is hard to define exactly what is meant by a client-therapist relationship, partly because of the multitude of techniques and approaches that exist. Despite this elusiveness, most psychotherapists would agree that the relationship is a vital part of the psychotherapy experience. They would probably also agree with Geslo and Carter's (1985) definition that the relationship is the feelings and attitudes that therapist and client have toward one another, and the manner in which these are expressed. From a group perspective, one of the therapeutic factors defined by Yalom as necessary for therapeutic change to occur is 'cohesiveness'; the group therapy equivalent to the 'relationship.' Yalom argues that in order to look at the benefits of a good relationship within group therapy, the different levels of relationship need to be considered; between client and therapist, between the group members and between the individual and the group as a whole. Note that Yalom is referring to verbal group therapy; cohesiveness can also be achieved on a non-verbal level. In DMP, the therapist uses movement and dance as

the primary tools for communication, and it is through this medium that the therapeutic relationship develops. As with a DMP group, DoA places a significant emphasis on the relationship, as suggested by Yalom. Exactly where DoA positions itself on a spectrum of therapeutic dance at one end, and psychotherapy at the other end is complex, not least because of this rather unique client-therapist relationship that exists in DMP. And the point on this spectrum will vary depending on length of the group, form of group and its therapeutic aims.

3.1.2 The Wave

The wave-like or cyclical nature of development is a unifying theme in DoA. It is seen in the charge and discharge of energy over a DoA session, in the ebb and flow of breath and awareness, in the Gestalt 'cycle of experience'. Originally, DoA grew out of an impulse to match Neo-Reichian character structures in their developmental sequence to the elements of Gabrielle Roth's Five Rhythms dance practice. The correlation of her wave rhythms (Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical and Stillness) with character structure is the subject of a more detailed paper (Brown 2009). Table 1 is an updated summary of the possible links here.

The Gestalt cycle of experience in body process is depicted by Kepner (1987) as a wave of phases; *sensation, figure formation, mobilization, action, contact, withdrawal*. This cycle describes any sequence of behaviour and experience of any organism which is geared towards the completion of an interaction that promotes self-regulation.

The cycle begins with *sensing*, as does the DoA cycle. In the cycle of experience this is the raw data of experience from which we begin to organise our functioning.

Figure formation equates to *grounding* where the sensation presenting itself is given meaning in terms of need and its relationship to the environment. Kepner states that a capacity for experiencing bodily sensation is essential for our sense of reality and for grounding us in our physical contact with the environment; in other words for enabling figure formation to follow from sensation.

This is reflected in the DoA cycle where the cycle begins by sensing our internal sense of self (relating to our feelings, wants and needs), shifting focus to an external sensing (vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) as we begin to relate to our environment in *grounding*.

Mobilization is the charge or surge of energy that impels the figure into action and equates to the DoA phase of *expressing*.

Action is the behaviour or movement that brings one into contact; in DoA this is *releasing* where there is a discharge of energy.

Contact is the meeting of one's bodily needs (in DoA this is *connecting*), and with it completion of the figure so that *withdrawal*, which equates with the DoA phase of *completing* can occur.

Completing to a point of stillness and return

3.1.3 Neo-Reichian body psychotherapy and character structure

As noted above, DoA initially arose from an intuitive link between Five Rhythms and Neo-Reichian character structure. Reich's understanding of the significance of body holding patterns and their roots in childhood development, has been elaborated by a range of therapists, writers and teachers. Over recent years there has been increasing convergence in establishing the links between childhood development (eg Stern *op. cit.*), neuropsychology (eg Schore 1994), psychoanalytic character styles (eg Johnson 1994), and the body-centred wisdom of the Neo-Reichians (eg Lowen 1975, Totton and Edmonson 2009, Ziehl 2003, 2007-8) and somatic psychologists (eg Hartley 2004).

Table 1 outlines some current character models and their links to the DoA cycle. In DoA we pay attention to patterns of physical holding associated with particular character positions; to the developmental themes (and potential arrests) which arise as we grow; and to the movements which may characterise (or have been inhibited in) the sequential stages of development. We also use the Bioenergetic breath wave (Painter 1984) which matches particular breathing styles to character structure.

Writing on body psychotherapy, Totton (2003) suggests three approaches to working therapeutically with the body: the adjustment model, the trauma/discharge model, and the process model. Adjustment deals directly, physically, with the body. It can include hands-on work to release what is often described as 'stuck energy', and re-education of movement patterns. The trauma/discharge model assumes that the body holds echoes of early shocks or developmental arrests, and that these can be released by paying attention to unexpressed reflexes and allowing the completion of held-back impulses. The process model trusts the body's innate self-healing capacity, assuming that spontaneous growth will occur in a place of safety and support. It takes an interest in what the body and its symptoms represent as story or metaphor, and explores the ideas, gestures, images and movements which arise in the course of process work. DoA uses elements of all three models – for instance by offering structures which encourage new embodied experience (adjustment); by paying attention to sensation, and allowing for spontaneous movement and release (trauma/discharge); and by witnessing, supporting and reflecting on our own and others' movements (process).

3.1.4 Witnessing

DoA draws on the discipline of Authentic Movement (Adler 2002, Pallaro 1999) in working with witnessing other movers, either in dyads or as a group process. The act of compassionate witnessing can be significant both for movers and witnesses. Movers experience having their movements supported, reflected and validated. Witnesses help to hold and contain the mover's process, and will have their own reactions – mental, emotional and somatic responses – to the material they witness. By paying attention to the sensations, feelings, memories and images which emerge whilst observing their mover, the witness comes to notice their own projections and interpretations. As we learn to witness, we open up to experiencing with all our senses, and give space to another to express him or herself, as we enter their world with sensitivity.

Authentic Movement illuminates the paradox of embodied awareness; we need both spontaneity (being 'in' the experience) and discipline (tracking) to develop it. Our degree of self-awareness is not constant; there are times when I may observe my

movements with curiosity and fascination. Witnessing can often assist here in the development of awareness by cultivating a sense of *internal* witnessing of one's own process. At other times, I may become so engrossed in my experience that the boundary between me and my movement is temporarily dissolved. The ability to shift attention between being 'in' a process and having a detached curiosity about what is happening is sometimes described as a distinction between the 'experiencing self' and the 'observing self'.

4. THEORETICAL APPLICATION

Just as movement patterns form in overlapping sequences throughout development, so too does the DoA cycle build on itself. For instance, as *sensing* comes into being, it forms the basis for the remaining part of the cycle. Subsequent phases add to the complexity of experience, and the earlier phases remain as a foundation for later development. As I *sense* my body, I am able to *ground* myself, allow my body to *express* itself, to *release* what I may be holding, to *connect* to others and more deeply into myself, and to *complete* the energetic cycle of charge and discharge in a satisfying way.

4.1 Sensing

Sensing evokes the earliest phases of development, pre-natal, around birth, and very early attachment. There may be a sense of the body being experienced at an undifferentiated, cellular level. The invitation is to initially experience this non-differentiated state, as a prelude to coming physically into the body as we sense kinaesthetically the bones, muscles and soft tissues and allow body impulses to be recognised.

It is through touch and movement that we learn and form ourselves, beginning in utero and continuing throughout life (Cohen 1993, Juhan 1987). As we develop by embodying specific sensory-motor patterns, an organising experience of self gradually comes into being. We begin to both receive information through sensory input and respond to it through movement, so developing a relationship to the physical world around us.

According to the object relations theorist Winnicott, provided there is a sufficiently empathic holding environment in early life, the infant can rest in a state of simply 'being' (Gomez 1997). This allows for the development of a cohesive sense of self. The DoA group begins with providing the optimum conditions - safety, warmth and a nurturing space - which support the process of surrendering to a 'being' over a 'doing' state.

Researchers and clinicians have differing opinions about the age that the infant experiences himself as a unique individual, which consequently has a bearing on the infant's inter-subjective world and his developing relationships. All agree that the self develops into a coherent, physical entity with a unique affective life and history that belong to it. Winnicott believes that the infant begins life in an undifferentiated state merged with mother and only later shifts to a state of individuation where a cohesive self-system is experienced. Mahler (1989), a psychoanalyst who based her work on infant observations holds a similar view and identified an early symbiotic phase where mother and baby are merged in a dual unity by a common boundary.

Mahler identifies a later separation-individuation phase which she refers to as a second birth experience ('hatching'). Prior to hatching, the infant's inner sensations form the 'core' of the self around which a sense of identity will later become established. The infant's attention later shifts from being predominantly inwardly directed to being more outwardly directed as perceptual activity comes into being. DoA marks this beginning of self-other differentiation in the *sensing* phase of the cycle. The group is led through a body awareness process focussing initially on interoception, perceiving feelings within our bodies. The focus shifts to becoming more externally aware, particularly of the sensory-perceptive organs – tactile, auditory and near-visual.

From the perspective of character, *sensing* explores the schizoid or fragmented structure – entry into the world and first awakening of selfhood. Existential concerns, an inner focus, and head-centred retreat from contact may be evoked.

4.2 Grounding

Grounding addresses the beginnings of attachment and bonding, relating physically to others, and to the environment. It tends to move from horizontal grounding (lying, crawling, rolling), towards vertical grounding – standing, bringing attention to feet, legs, and pelvis.

This is the stage when the infant begins to experience himself and his mother as physically quite separate. In Mahler's terms, individuation is the development of the ego – autonomy, perception, memory, cognition. Alongside this process runs differentiation - distancing, boundary formation and disengagement from mother. The infant is able to physically move away from mother by crawling and righting himself. Then the greatest step in human individuation is taken – the infant walks freely with upright posture. In DoA, this is where we begin to explore our relationship to gravity, both from a horizontal and a vertical perspective.

By contrast to Mahler and Winnicott, the self psychologist Kohut (1971) believes that the infant is not born into a non-differentiated or merged state, but is already a unique individual from the start who is seeking and taking part in relational experience. Similarly the developmental psychologist Stern suggests that the development of a sense of core self is the infant's first developmental task, and that this process begins soon after birth. Stern's focus is very much with the infant's subjective experience and DoA likewise emphasises direct and felt experience. The *grounding* phase of DoA cycle represents Stern's sense of a core self where the self is now a single, coherent, physical entity. During *grounding*, participants explore through proprioception their relationship to self, including the differentiation of me and not me – I am this but not that. Their physical contact with the ground serves to establish the demarcation of 'self' from 'other'. It is also the phase where infant and mother begin to enter into the intersubjective interplay of mirroring or the type of behaviour described by Stern as affect attunement. The DoA cycle marks this development through pair work exercises where we mutually influence each other by reflecting back each other's feeling state; there is a 'dance between'.

Grounding opens up the oral character - relationship with the other, exploring the contact and support received from caregivers and the environment. Bioenergetics (Lowen *op cit*, Boadella 1987) emphasises the importance of physically grounding our bodies and feeling rooted and centred as the basis for a strong sense of self.

4.3 Expressing

This developmental stage is associated with the toddler adventuring out, with the assurance of return to support and safety, and a developing sense of self. It includes the desire to be recognised and validated. Having established support and taken in what is needed, energy shifts into expressing - making shapes, significant movements, embodying 'how I am right now'.

Mahler describes upright locomotion as being accompanied by rapidly growing autonomous capacities, for instance exploring the expanding environment and with it the push & pull away from mother. The child's attention is in practicing and mastering his own skills and s/he wants to be seen. The *expressing* phase of the DoA cycle is associated with an upsurge of energy and exhilaration as the child gains mastery over the body and its functions.

Expressing engages with the narcissistic, or inflated, character structure. This involves moving from a symbiotic relationship where identity is found in others, to a more bounded sense of self. The emerging personality is embodied through shape and movement, and is reinforced by reflection and validation. Exploration of proximity, exaggeration, repetition and mirroring can be helpful here.

4.4 Releasing

As the child develops pleasurable autonomy and self-expression, s/he begins to encounter boundaries, constraints and parental authority. The demands of others represent an unwelcome cramping of a newly-discovered agency and freedom.

During Mahler's rapprochement phase, the child now begins to experience the obstacles that may threaten his newly experienced omnipotent self. Autonomy has been defended up until now by the "no" and also by a 'warding off' pattern and increased aggression. The child must give up delusions of his own grandeur, which leads to a sense of helplessness, often demonstrated by temper tantrums or impotent rage. An ambivalence develops around wanting on the one hand to push mother away, and on the other hand to cling to her. Fear of losing the love of the object – mother, comes alongside the realisation of greater physical separateness. At the same time internalisation of parental demands means that the child becomes very sensitive to reactions of parental approval or disapproval.

We are in the *releasing* phase of the DoA cycle. On the character axis we are working with the holding (historically known as masochistic) structure. Just as the child develops an exciting sense of agency and self-expression, he begins to encounter limits and challenges to his grandiosity by a stronger authority. Natural exuberance may be squashed, bodily expressions stifled or shamed. A natural reaction is to learn to hold in and control impulses. Such holding becomes embodied, and the *releasing* phase allows participants to release old holding patterns.

4.5 Connecting

This phase addresses early sexual awareness, opening the heart and connecting to the pelvis. The sense of self is no longer grounded in the infant-carer dyad, but moves to the parental triad and wider society.

According to Stern, inter-subjective relatedness can only develop out of a foundation of core-relatedness. A sense of core relatedness between self and other develops during the period of development of the core self. Patterns of relating are thus profoundly influenced by developments during this time. We can begin to communicate with the other as by now there is some shared framework of meaning. Intersubjective relatedness and core relatedness coexist and affect the individual's experience of self and other throughout life. The DoA cycle enters *connecting*, exploring our connection inwardly to our sense of self and outwardly to others, but in line with Stern, only to the extent of staying true to ourselves and continuing to connect through our core self.

The character basis is the Oedipal or Rigid period, with its growing awareness of sexuality and love. On a body basis this may be represented as a split between heart and pelvis, and *connecting* aims to (re-)connect the two. Psychoanalytic sub-structures are based on a boy or girl identifying most closely with mother or father, or with 'thrusting' and 'crisis' positions. The common theme is to be 'accepted for who I am' in my totality. The child begins to see her/his position in the family triad and wider society, and *connecting* supports a natural impulse to move in and out of connection with others and with group structures.

4.6 Completing

Having evoked and explored the developmental structures in sequence, we allow a completion of the cycle, coming to a final resting place which feels appropriate; for now. It is an opportunity to return to the basis of awareness and allow integration of the overlapping phases. The completion of one cycle also holds the seeds of the next. Key themes and patterns in life often seem to be revisited in a cyclical rather than linear way, cropping up at each turn of the spiral of development.

5. THERAPEUTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Body-centred approaches are increasingly favoured for the exploration of early trauma, attachment difficulty and developmental arrest, where other psychotherapeutic interventions may not address pre-verbal experience. Through the practice of DoA, we can re-embodiment our formative years and investigate early imprints. Integration takes place within the body, through working with the body, and in relation to interaction with other bodies and the group as a whole.

By being predominantly client-directed, DoA creates opportunities for individuals to discover early primitive reflexes and developmental movement patterns. As structure is kept to a minimum, the process can be principally guided by the participant's inner experience and innate body wisdom. This allows for the possibility of completion of arrested movement patterns or phases of development that for a variety of reasons may not have been fully embodied at the time.

The cycle reflects the progress of the development of the sense of self in several ways. Firstly, the experience of movement and sensation supports a growing integration of our emotional states with our physical being. Secondly, the work encourages self-regulation in relation to others and the environment – for instance by exploring our impulse to connect or withdraw. Thirdly, the cycle reflects our emerging relationship with boundaries – from an initial position of merging, or lack of boundaries, to the

development of clear, self-defined boundaries, through to an appreciation and honouring of others' boundaries.

Of the hundreds of hours spent in DoA group sessions, by far the majority has involved regular classes, closed groups and workshops attended voluntarily by people who enjoy this type of work (for clinical applications, see below). Typically participants are using dance as part of their personal development repertoire – furthering a mix of social, physical, psychological and spiritual aims. DoA groups are characterised by a very wide range of ages and physical abilities. The work is considered suitable for participants who are able to maintain, or quickly return to, adult states without dissociating or losing self-agency. The design of the cycle encourages this, with early emphasis on sensing and grounding, prior to expressive and potentially cathartic phases. The work is not recommended for individuals who are not able to maintain a sufficiently available adult state.

Rothschild (2000) states that some cathartic methods which encourage intense reliving of trauma can potentially trigger hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal. Certainly any self-directed movement process can take people directly into deep feelings. How we directly experience catharsis in the body and its role in the context of the therapeutic setting has been researched by one of the authors (Osbond 2010). She acknowledges that therapeutic technique, (in DoA this is the movement experience as we embody each phase of the cycle), is just one component of the therapeutic process. As already discussed, in psychotherapy a major component is the therapeutic relationship.

In a DMP context Osbond has adapted the DoA cycle accordingly for working in clinical settings - as follows. *Sensing* is designed to teach a felt sense of the body as a safe container and resource. This is valuable skill for some client groups, for whom the body may not previously have been experienced in this way. Thus sensing is generally limited to body awareness exercises that orient participants in the here and now. In *Grounding*, participants increase their ability to identify and manage feelings arising in the body. They generally report feeling more present and connected to themselves at this stage in the cycle. *Expressing* is confined to simple rhythmic movements (and sometimes sounds) that further connect participants with their bodies and assist in their expression of feelings. Clients find this phase helpful in relieving tension and anxiety. In the interests of maintaining personal safety, *Releasing* is either omitted or can take the form of a creative improvisation using movement metaphor. *Connecting* focuses on creating interaction between group members, and participants often experience profound connection through non-verbal compassionate communication.

Table 1: Comparing Dance of Awareness phases, character structure, Gestalt cycle of experience and 5 Rhythms.

Dance of Awareness (Brown & Osbond)	Reichian character structure** (eg Lowen, Ziehl)	Psychoanalytic character style (eg Johnson)	ERT character position (Totton & Edmonson)	Gestalt cycle (eg Kepner)	Five Rhythms (Roth)
Sensing	Schizoid (Fragmented)	Schizoid	Boundary	Sensation	Body parts warmup
Grounding	Oral	Oral Symbiotic	Oral	Figure	Flowing
Expressing	Psychopath (Inflated)	Narcissistic	Control	Mobilisation	Staccato
Releasing	Masochist (Holding)	Masochist	Holding	Action	Chaos
Connecting	Rigid	Oedipal	Thrusting Crisis	Contact	Lyrical
Completing	Surrendering* Integration*		Open*	Withdrawal	Stillness

* not strictly a character structure or position

** Original Reichian terms such as schizoid, psychopath, masochist are generally considered negative and pathologising – alternatives are given in brackets.

6. THE DOA PHASES IN PRACTICE

The DoA cycle may be experienced in a single dance-movement event – typically as a two hours wave - or explored in more depth in a workshop setting. Such group process requires the creation of a space which is permissive enough to allow free expression and safe interaction. In our weekly DoA classes this is achieved through a standard format which provides a predictable container for the work. Regular movers come to recognise the safety provided by this structure.

Session structure

On arrival at a session, movers join an initial warm-up. Group members are invited to arrive in the space and to be sensed directly. From a gentle introduction, the music becomes more energetic as movers are encouraged to become aware of their breath, their body, the space, and others in the space. There may be an invitation to acknowledge other movers, to loosen, explore, move, shake.

At the peak of the introductory energising phase, movers are asked to stop, turn their attention inwards and note what is present in awareness for them. This is an invitation to come to a stillpoint of awareness – being aware of awareness itself - and see what is present, here and now.

DoA marks the beginning and end of the group process with a circle, to denote the entry into and exit from ritual space. This is important in marking the boundaries of a container that allows for the exploration of non-ordinary states in a spirit of mutual support and co-operation.

The aim of the beginning circle is to help participants arrive more fully, to welcome them, and to brief them on the structure of the session. Introductory comments will include reminders about any group protocols and ground rules. Depending on the nature of the event there may be opportunity for participants to introduce themselves, and share with the group.

Following the opening circle there may be a guided body-centred meditation, before entering the DoA cycle itself. Once into the cycle, music follows the DoA phases. Simply playing the music may be enough to allow the development of the cycle, or we may encourage particular structures or exercises during the cycle.

In the closing circle, there is again the opportunity for participants to share their experience before formally closing the session. Sharing creates a period of transition from non-verbal to verbal, from an instinctive to a cerebral mode of being, and for integration to take place. As co-leaders, we do not usually get involved in discussions; it is simply a reflective space for clients to contemplate their movements and emotions, to clarify their experiences, and to deepen their understanding.

The Phases

What follows is a summary of the DoA **phases**, the **themes** important for each phase; the active **process** we encourage; the key **body** areas which are engaged; the type of **music** used to evoke the process; the **witnessing** style or intention which might support movers in each phase; the relevant **character** style / structure / position (according to, respectively, psychoanalytic / neo-Reichian / Embodied Relational terms) which are addressed; and the associated **movement** processes which emerge.

Sensing.

Themes:

I exist, safety, holding myself together,

Process:

Arriving safely, coming into a body. 'Outer container' safety (ground rules, orientation, timescale). Becoming present to my 'inner container'.

Body:

Inner, core sensation. Eyes & ears, secure breathing.

Music:

Silence, or quiet, meditative, introspective.

Witnessing:

Holding, containing.

Character:

Schizoid / Fragmented / Boundary

Movement:

Impulses in response to inner focus, enteroceptive sensing. Working from core to extremities.

Experiencing a state of simply 'being'. Paying attention to inner sensation and the external senses, the body is experienced directly and allowed to move on impulse. Movers may be standing, sitting or lying down. Sensing may take the form of a guided meditation where we arrive in the body and notice how it appears in awareness. Movements, breaths, gestures, sounds, are simply arising without agency or agenda.

Grounding.

Themes:

I need, holding on, giving & receiving support.

Process:

Attaching (being supported, giving weight) and Hatching (beginning separation & individuation).

Body:

Mouth, throat, holding arms, nurturing inbreath.

Music:

Seamless, fluid, solid, encouraging connection with the ground.

Witnessing:

Supporting, affirming

Character:

Oral - Symbiotic / Oral / Oral.

Movement:

Yielding, pushing, reaching, grasping, pulling. Use of hips, legs and feet, taking steps. Working with gravity & physicality, contact & support, reaching out, exploring our kinesphere.

We give weight and receive support through connection with the ground, and in relation to other movers. Support may be provided by partners, for instance in pair work where one partner witnesses the other moving possibly with eyes closed to encourage inner attention. Or the partner may provide physical support, perhaps by making contact with the mover's body and following it, helping them to move more easily or fully. As the lower body becomes securely established, the upper body is encouraged to take on the movement, including the structures associated with oral holding (arms, jaw).

Emphasis is given to the inbreath, charging, taking in what is needed - although orality may initially be evoked by encouraging a sighing outbreath. Awareness moves between inner and outer focus, and movers may be encouraged consciously to move attention between inner and outer realms.

Expressing.

Themes:

I want, validation, being seen, holding myself up.

Process:

Self-agency, autonomy, continuing separation & individuation. Being witnessed and encouraged.

Body:

Chest and expressive upper body, exploring outbreath.

Music:

Assertive, expressive, defined beat. Rock, hip-hop.

Witnessing:

Enthusiastic validation, delight.

Character:

Symbiotic - Narcissistic / Inflated / Control.

Movement:

Exploring space, rapprochement, 'this is me'. Working with body image, self-esteem, witnessing, proximity & boundaries, leading & following, rhythm and repetition.

Movers adopt an outward focus, exploring the physical space, taking steps, showing themselves. Movers are encouraged to explore self-expression whilst receiving support – physically or through supportive witnessing. They are encouraged to notice habitual patterns – including beliefs and feelings that may be expressed physically - and to experiment with new shapes or movements, and to have these mirrored and reflected by other movers. Gestures, shapes and patterns are explored that feel satisfying; rhythm and repetition feature to further accentuate a sense of 'this is me!'

A conscious use of space, and interaction with other movers, encourages clarity around boundaries. Expressing is achieved through discharging - assertive use of arms, elbows, shoulder girdle, and encouraging the outbreath, including the expressive use of sound.

As movers become clearer and more confident in their expression, issues of will and authority emerge and movers often exhibit inflated 'squaring up' behaviour, particularly in pair work. This increases the group energetic charge and leads into the release phase.

Releasing.

Themes:

Freedom and control, holding myself in, letting go.

Process:

Letting go, relaxing control, liberating new energy, being free in myself, moving to my own rhythm.

Body:

Head, shoulders, spine & pelvis, open mouth, free breath.

Music:

Repetitive beats, trance, drumming.

Witnessing:

Permissive, encourage the let-go.

Character:

Holding / Masochist / Holding.

Movement:

Loosening, softening, shaking, effortless movement. Staying grounded, yet flying, as the body lets go of whatever energy may be ready to move. Working with freedom & choice, shame, control.

As expression becomes fully developed, movers are invited to tune in and notice parts of the body 'ready to move'. Energising music is used to encourage the softening and loosening of any holding or tension, using movement and sound. Movers may release on their own, with partners, in small groups (taking it in turns to be the focus), or in a larger held circle where one or more may enter and enjoy the energetic permission to release. We may also work with physical loosening, partners contacting particular parts of the body where holding may be noticed. We may offer the opportunity to enjoy a stylised tantrum or work with saying "No!". The key issue is freedom – to be myself, to move as I want to.

Release works through the discharge of stuck or compressed energy, transforming into easy movement, and free breath. This phase can be dramatic, noisy and cathartic, although the body may also release in gentle, easy action. The mover may enter a transcendent state where the body loosens, shakes and releases without conscious effort.

Connecting.

Themes:

Invitation, desire, excitement, sexuality, holding others, my place in the group.

Process:

Open to connecting love & sexuality – connecting to others, and staying connected to my core.

Body:

Pelvis-heart connection, fingertips, eye contact, excited breath.

Music:

Celebratory, emotional, interactive. Disco, latin, traditional dance music, heartfelt songs.

Witnessing:

Interactive, relational.

Character:

Oedipal / Rigid / Thrusting – Crisis

Movement:

In dyads, triads, whole body, whole group. Touch, contact, display. Working with play, sexuality, performance, celebration, my place in the group/tribe/family.

Typically, the freedom associated with release creates a sense of openness and space for connection. Initially the phase may continue the trance-like transcendent quality of releasing, and may continue on an effortless plateau for some time, but gradually the invitation is to return to embodiment and open to easy connection with self and others. Simple forms of contact (eyes, fingertips) may deepen into an exploration of touch and physical connection.

With the theme of connection comes a general ease of moving with others in a celebratory or exploratory way. Often little structure is necessary, other than the permission to make contact and move in ways that feel right, following impulses. As the phase deepens, however, awareness around the issue of connection may include questions of what kind of connection I want, or do not want. Connections to inner worlds, new resources, other places and people may arise. Physical contact may become gentler, slower, mesmeric. Movers seem able to support each other, or to move in ways that support themselves. The cycle is moving towards completion.

Completing.

As the cycle completes, the mover experiences a sense of individuation into their own dance. There may be a body-held sense of something which remains unresolved, and there is an invitation to allow any movements, gestures, shapes or sounds which may be needed to give a sense of completion.

Movers may be in contact, or by themselves. They are returning to awareness of breath, body and awareness itself.

Process: Surrendering, unifying, realising the Self

Movement: Integrating, working with stillness, awareness.

Music: Contemplative.

Witnessing: internal witnessing, hold in awareness.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper describes a movement practice that has, in the experience of the authors, proved to be transformational - on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. The body of work has been co-created by the authors in dynamic relationship with our co-movers, to whom we express deep gratitude. Without them, and without our direct experience of embodied awareness, Dance of Awareness would not exist.

As a movement practice, Dance of Awareness takes the form of a wave. Like a wave it continually recreates itself from the underlying ocean – in this case an ocean inhabited by maps and models of bodymind theory and therapeutic practice, all contained by (or appearing in) the ground of awareness itself.

Chodorow (1984) describes the therapeutic value of a meeting between client and therapist's movement responses. In that meeting the body speaks not only of the

immediacy of the moment, but also of past body-held memories. As a regular practice, Dance of Awareness gives the body the space to tell its story, and to have this story witnessed and validated by others. This can move participants beyond expression and connection, to profound authenticity on personal, interpersonal and transpersonal levels.

We hope that this paper may provide a useful framework for those who wish to explore the therapeutic benefits of working with dance, and who share our curiosity about the mysteries of our embodied awareness, and how they are revealed through movement.

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