

The Tango of Therapy: A Dancing Group

Laurie Hawkes

Abstract

This article describes a form of group bodywork using a couple dance (the Argentine tango), which serves as a “container” for the experience and feelings of participants. The frame offered by the group and the dance facilitates awareness of and experimenting with posture, how participants move and sense their bodies, and how they relate to others through their bodies. The aim of the group is to access nonverbal levels of functioning using a vehicle that is more conducive to progressive rather than to regressive work. Dancing with a partner particularly opens up issues concerning the other, including meeting/leaving, guiding/following, deciding/trusting, and so on. The title of this article also refers to the cocreative aspect of psychotherapy, an interactive process based on mutual listening and responding that is, in many ways, similar to a dance.

Toward the end of her life, after she had left Russia, it has been said that Emma Goldman remarked that she just could not believe in any revolution that didn't have dancing! (Allen & Allen, 2000, p. 191)

The Body in Transactional Analysis

For over 20 years, transactional analytic authors such as Erskine (1980) have underscored the importance of including the body in psychotherapeutic work. Such a focus fit with the redecision school of transactional analysis, which was based on the Gouldings integration

The author wishes to thank Miguel Gabis, tango professor extraordinaire: His sensitivity to people's developmental needs, discretely obvious in his individual comments, confirmed my ideas about the feasibility of this work, which was partly developed together. Also, for the writing of this article, the author is indebted to many friends for their valuable feedback and suggestions, among them William Cornell, Michael Houseman, Lise Small, and France Brécard, and to Robin Fryer for her wonderful editing.

of gestalt with transactional analysis. Gestalt has always focused a good deal on body manifestations, the expression of emotion, and the physical representation of inner conflicts (e.g., two-chair dialogues, the empty chair technique, etc.). Erskine and Zalcman (1979) added to that visible physical dimension the reported inner experience (physiological).

In transactional analysis, our theory and ways of working have always adapted well to incorporating material and techniques from other schools of psychotherapy, which may well be one of our major strengths. Thus, in the area of body therapy, we have had, for instance, practitioners and theoreticians who combined bioenergetics and transactional analysis (Cassius, 1977; Lenhardt, 1980, 1984) and others who integrated neo-Reichian work and transactional analysis (Cornell, 1992, 1999; Kohlrieser, 1980; Ligabue, 1991), to mention only a few.

Although Berne (1961, 1972) himself often emphasized the importance of the body's nonverbal manifestations—in particular, as they often contradicted conscious verbal communication—a specific focus on these expressions came more from others. In particular, the gestaltists often directly shifted attention to small unconscious movements and/or encouraged amplification of or experimentation with various movements. This often took place within therapy marathons in which emotional expression accompanied by more or less strong movement (e.g., pushing, pulling, hitting, etc.) enabled people to liberate themselves through catharsis, experimentation, and discovery. This would then be followed up in ongoing therapy and assimilated in such a way as to modify daily experience and change or open up the person's life script. In my view, this enactment of the body is essentially a means (not an end in itself) to reach a more important goal: changing script beliefs or usual emotional manifestations.

In the last 8 years or so, my training and personal inclination have been leading me to give

the body a more central role in therapy rather than to view it as a useful adjunct. In other words, bodywork is no longer a means toward other changes but an essential aspect of the therapy, a component in its own right. The self—that entity that is at every instant being constructed and changed—is so largely made up of our corporeal experience! It thus seems fitting in undertaking therapy—which we enter to better know and own ourselves—to explore not only the workings of our psyche but also our physical actions, reactions, and inhibitions, to free ourselves at that level in order to open up our possibilities for living.

Waldekranz-Piselli (1999) described these more subtle aspects of bodywork in depth in a wonderful article. As therapists, we are working with the body already with such simple things as inviting clients to lie down—not in classical analytic fashion, but with the clearly stated aim of feeling their physical state more and with the therapist near enough to touch if need be and also in view. Or if they need to stand, walk, hold a hand, breathe more or less fully, or emit a sound (not necessarily a scream or shout), inviting them to do so is also working with the body. However, even such seemingly simple actions or expressions can be too much for some people and would require that they force themselves beyond their “affective edge” (Cornell & Olio, 1992). The only way they can respond at that point is simply to comply from a dissociated position. In such cases, a better alternative would be for them to *imagine* a movement or sound, choosing whether or not to share with the therapist what they imagined. Later, perhaps, they can make these movements or sounds visible or audible to the outside. Another process might be to have clients become aware of their posture or a muscle contraction, see if they have any associated representations or emotional tone, and perhaps experiment with changing it. This may mean the therapist becomes involved through touching clients or being touched by them, allowing clients to lean on him or her, or simply using his or her physical presence to witness clients’ experience.

The nonverbal dimension (not necessarily preverbal, but rather “subsymbolic” as described by Cornell [2003] or as “implicit” by

Allen [2000]) of existence must be accounted for, known, and unblocked through work that is not necessarily regressive in nature nor even necessarily emotional. For example, for many years I tended to confuse “bodywork” and “emotional work (often regressive) accompanied by movement.” From this perspective, the body’s involvement is tied to emotional intensity. It is often a *means of amplifying emotion* (e.g., *bataca* work, with the strong hitting opening up powerful anger, itself often a doorway to other underlying feelings), a visible manifestation of emotion, or almost a way of *measuring the degree of emotion*. In redecision or other deep changes in belief systems, emotion is necessary for encoding the new neural pathways (Ginger, 1995; Ligabue, 1991), and movement may be necessary, or at least useful, in helping the person to feel the emotion strongly. In other words, we must associate the limbic emotional brain to cognitions, and “it is difficult to imagine emotions in the absence of their bodily expressions” (LeDoux, 1996, p. 40).

One important aspect of what may have been blocked in our early relationship to the world (and to mother in particular) is the gesture. We become subjects in the world through our movements, subjects through agency, subjects through our power to affect our environment and to make an impact—on things, on others—so as to create a change in how the environment is affecting us. This can be related to Winnicott’s description of the real self, which at the beginning of life is not much more than the sum of the sensorimotor life manifested through spontaneous gesture or personal idea (Arcangioli, 1994, p. 274): “The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 148). The response of the environment allows us to a greater or lesser degree to have our natural gestures with which to explore the world, to obtain something from it, to taste it, to act upon it. Downing (1995) refers to these chunks of movement—pregnant with meaning and feelings—and the responses to them as “affectmotor schemas.”

Waldekranz-Piselli (1999) offers this definition: “An affectmotor schema is the organization of an experience, its affects (vital affects and emotions), physical reactions, and responses.

Affectmotor schemas work as the building blocks of the child's experience of who he or she is and will be used to structure his or her experiences in the future" (p. 38). She relates them to Stern's (1985) RIGs (Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized): "In affectmotor schemas we find both the affective and physical reaction to, as well as the affective and physical creation of, the mother-child interplay" (Waldekranz-Piselli, 1999, p. 38).

I believe working with the body might mean simply becoming more and more finely attuned to parts of the body and what is going on in various areas/parts of the body, such as contracting, closing, and freezing, or, on the other hand, relaxing, opening up, becoming warm, trembling, and vibrating in relation to some feeling and/or representation. When no feeling or representation is tied to the sensation—as in many massive anxiety states, for instance—the goal is largely to establish that link. This is part of what Steiner (with Perry, 1997) calls "emotional literacy" and what McDougall (1989, 1995) has described so beautifully with the mother giving meaning and representation to the child's bodily states. To Aron (1998), the goal is to achieve "self-awareness of one's affects as signals to oneself" when affects can be experienced "as mental and not only bodily phenomena" (p. 12). The crucial element is to tie body and mind together.

That is why one essential aspect of psychotherapy is, to my mind, the easing of constrictions by reopening the door to spontaneous movements as well as to movements of the heart and body in relationship. The question is, how can this be facilitated? As therapists we all know more or less how to help our clients unblock some of these schemas, particularly in the areas of closeness or setting personal limits. For example, we invite them to push or hit cushions if they had to repress their anger, or we may offer them physical support or even hold them if they have lacked nurturing contact. We are often creative in inventing techniques and experiments through which people can symbolically experience what they missed so that they may integrate this schema and later live it out in their lives.

Based on Panskepp's (2001) view of four lasting primary emotional systems in the infant

(seeking, play, lust, care), Cornell (2003) considers that most psychotherapy models excel at mastering the care component. But, he adds, is it not time to add the dimensions pertaining to "seeking, play, and lust" (p. 50), thus bringing to the psychotherapy of adults an enlivened, rough, and tumble relatedness.

In the end, two types of problems in therapy led me to seek modalities other than the ones I had been using. First, I wanted to access affectmotor schemas other than the category of, say, "need-pain-comfort." As essential as that one may be, I wanted to explore other domains of human experience ("seeking, play, lust," one might say). Second, in some cases the benevolent environment offered by individual sessions, groups, or marathons would indeed unblock one side of an affectmotor schema (e.g., a belief such as "people are mean" or "no one could love me" would begin to change). However, *the person's* side of the schema, his or her "gesture" or personal action, would remain frozen. Experiences in group or in individual sessions with me remained in a world apart, a sort of regressive paradise impossible to recreate outside. Hence, it was important to offer nonregressive work in which the "physical and affective creation" of the experience clearly occurred together.

The Dancing Couple

I began to consider a different context for dyadic experimenting between adults: dancing. In her book entitled, *When Dancing Heals*, Schott-Billmann (1994) eloquently explains the major benefits of dance therapy, which allows for deep work, although often in an atmosphere of joy rather than pain. Dancing can be a concrete, playful, often joyful means of noticing problems and gaining access through the body to other levels of consciousness. On the one hand, the music and dance carry in and of themselves many jubilant aspects. As Sibony (1995) states, "Dancing is the event of the body unfolding" (p. 63) and "dancing remains a laugh of the body" (p. 52).

Furthermore, dancing implies moving, and moving seems essential for freeing the gesture and broadening the identity. The fluidity of the living self is facilitated by the fluidity of the mobile body. Schilder (1950), a pioneer in the

body image concept, expressed it this way (my translation from the French): “Human beings are in a sense awkward and squeezed tight in their body image. . . . [They] would like to mellow its rigidity” (pp. 222-223). One way of “dissolving and softening the rigidity of the body’s postural model, is dancing” (p. 223). Any movement, Schilder said, “is sufficient to modify the body’s postural model” (p. 223). But those movements from dance, especially, “often use postural reflexes which are not fully conscious” (p. 223). This brings us back to the aforementioned subsymbolic level. The quick or slow and sometimes rotating movements of dance play on the sense of lightness or weight of the body. “The tension and relaxing of the muscles, the displacement of the body in the direction of gravity or to the opposite . . . may have a considerable influence on the body image” (p. 224). Schilder concluded, “Phenomenologically, dancing is thus a change and a relaxing of the body image” (p. 224).

Group Workshops Using Dance

About two years ago, I developed a model for a series of weekend workshops based on dance. Co-led by a psychotherapist (me) and a dance teacher, these workshops take place at a local dance studio for 12 hours over 2 days. Participants include both individual clients and couples who are in therapy with me or with colleagues. Each workshop alternates times for dancing (alone or in dyads) with times for group exchange about what participants experience or discover—sharing, comparing, debating, disagreeing, finding similarities and differences, and generally deepening the experience. Participants may choose to do just one workshop or several; thus the individuals in a group vary with every workshop. Usually the group is fairly heterogeneous with regard to socioeconomic and professional status, and the ages of participants range from about 20 to 65, though there is no age limit. Although we are not rigid about accepting an even number of men and women, we like to have as much of a balance as possible.

The Argentine Tango

The choice of the Argentine tango as the dance used in these group workshops was not

random. First, because it is slow, the dancers have time to become aware of what they are doing. Second, the way the partners relate to each other is emphasized by many instructors, which means that this way of dancing the tango is not so much about learning steps or masterfully repeating learned choreography as it is about the relationship. The person who guides must convey his or her intention to the person being guided while remaining attentive to the latter in such a way as to respect the other’s rhythm. When this mutual harmony succeeds, the couple produces a sort of “oneness of two” that is almost magical to watch. These moments of fusion are quite joyful to experience in and of themselves, and they also raise a number of therapeutic issues (e.g., fear of merging, fear of the ensuing separation, various resistances, etc.). What better metaphor for the ability to be close yet separate than a dance in which the two dancers are connected but different, each with his or her own role? Finally, the tango carries a major sensual dimension. Especially for people who have more or less lost touch with their natural animal grace, this sensorimotor level can offer an great wealth of insights and gentle experimentation. Even at the basic level of dancing that we use in these group workshops, it is possible to connect with that sensuality through walking, listening to the music, and having contact with a partner.

Couple Dancing

Working/dancing with another person sheds light on several dynamic polarities in the ways people relate to one another. As we dance with another, we are at once *two* persons and *one* dyad, with two contrasted aspects working together to form a whole yet remaining different so we do not merge into an undifferentiated mass.

1. *The Polarity of Active/Passive.* Dancing in pairs means that one person is leading and one is following. This opens up the possibility of experiencing both roles: passive and active, listening and guiding or deciding. When one person is prone either to too much carrying or too much being carried, exploring the complementary role is interesting and important. It is also valuable to have a clear, well-defined experience of one’s “usual” role, that is, for example,

to lead without being in charge of everything or to follow without becoming passive. This can be especially crucial with regard to gender issues and the permission to be oneself (man or woman) with the balance of active *and* passive, decisive *and* receptive aspects that befit each individual.

According to Martinet (1991), working in pairs “facilitates relaxation, trust, balance, and awareness” (p. 274). Being in a dyad, albeit short lived, means it is no longer necessary to carry everything alone. According to Sibony (1995), this often provides a sense of lightness, in which “the body does not so much forget the weight of things—that would be impossible. But it ceases to carry those things which are irrelevant to it, which would bind its call to being. At least, it learns this art of lightening” (p. 66).

In the context of the dance group workshop, this was a major experience for Anne, a small woman with a strong personality. Her father, “a big baby who never really left his mother,” had deserted the family early on. Her mother had covered most basic needs without, however, being protective or tender much less able to make up for the void father had never filled. So Anne had learned from an early age to carry many things by herself. It was no wonder she had had her children with a man who was also quite immature and had left the parental responsibilities to her since their separation (and even before that). Anne’s thin body was tough, always tense and on the ready. So it was amazing for her to discover this “lightening” in dancing with a partner. If she had merely gone to a dance class, she probably would have become what we call a controlling dancer; in the workshop, however, she was able to experience a deep change. Not only could she not be responsible for the other, she could actually let the other bear a part of the responsibility *for her!*

2. *The Polarity of Regressive/Progressive.* As mentioned earlier, one goal of a dance group workshop is to contact deep body states without having to enter a regressive way of relating. I do not wish to eliminate regression, which can be useful and has, indeed, been conceptualized in transactional analysis as one step of the redecision process (Goulding & Goulding,

1979) and of “disconnecting rubberbands” (Erskine, 1974). However, other ways of working can be effective at a deep, nonverbal level without some of the drawbacks of regression (e.g., the “parenting” quagmire with the risk of getting stuck there or the reluctance of many people to lose their adult identity).

When dancing with a partner, the archaic aspect could be accentuated by physical contact with the other and by being momentarily in his or her arms. However, in most cases the progressive aspect is actually emphasized through the technical aspects of learning as well as through the social situation of dancing. This makes it possible to experience and take in different ways of relating that are not of the comforting or mother-child type.

3. *The Polarity of Meeting/Leaving.* In her work with body expression, Martinet (1991) noticed that frequently people experienced the problem of “leaving the other or being left by them. Because one can experience the separation positively only if one can live solitude well” (p. 274). This aspect of bonding and then separating is readily accessible via couple dancing. For example, Victoria tearfully expressed that she felt unbearable pain at leaving and being left by one partner after another. She asked to remain a longer time with the same person so that she could get used to their contact. This opened up an area we had not yet explored regarding her sense of having been neglected by her mother. Since her mother had not actually abandoned her, this area had not emerged in her work with me in our regular, predictable individual sessions. It was only working at this nonverbal level, without the usual rationalizations, that the distress fell upon her and enabled Victoria to understand part of her early unmet needs.

These various dimensions—feeling one’s body dancing or moving, experiencing moments of relationship and separation, being active or passive—can contain important aspects of the therapeutic relationship as well as of other important relationships. In the therapy dyad, we (client as well as therapist) need both to remain aware of our own feelings (bodily or other) and to be able to sense the other’s emotional or physical state and messages. Many clients (and many of us) have overdeveloped

their sensitivity to the other and lost touch with their own state or can only feel themselves if they block out the other. In the dance group workshops, they can openly practice awareness of self (their muscle tone, posture, balance, axis, resistance, etc.) and awareness of the other (how he or she is guiding or responding to being guided) simultaneously or in rapid succession. Hopefully, this occurs to a point where the relationship itself, or rather the *relating*, can become foreground. This can allow for internalizing this way of relating (i.e., filling more than one particular role). Doing so in the here-and-now adult fashion of the dance group workshop is largely what makes this a progressive rather than a regressive vehicle for therapy.

Dancing and music lend themselves particularly well to the inside/outside shuttling that enables us to feel or build our boundaries. Schott-Billmann (2001) calls this opening up to otherness (“*altérité*”) in play, during which, on the one hand, we imitate the other (we are “*like* them”) and on the other, our imitation is never perfect and we assert our own style (we “*are* not them”) (p. 24). According to Schott-Billmann, the “other” is everywhere in dancing: in the music, which tends to make the body move and to carry us away into the movement; in the rule or the frame of the dance; in the group around us doing more or less the same thing; in the partner when we dance in dyads; in the dance teacher and the more familiar figure of the therapist; and in the ground, which carries us and which we touch or strike with our feet more or less consciously.

Kepner (1987) added to this contact with another the importance of movement in the constitution of the self:

It is through action that we move what is inside of us—our energy, liveliness, vitality, needs, feelings—across the organism/environment boundary. It is our capacity to act fully and meaningfully in the world through which we create ourselves as powerful, able to cope, expressive of our true nature and the integrity of our boundaries. We express our commitment and courage to be fully in the world when we carry our feelings and needs into the environment: when we express our caring

or sadness, protect our integrity, move with grace and exuberance, voice what is unsaid, reach out for comfort or contact. (p. 142)

Boundaries

Yontef (2001), in his remarkable article on the schizoid process, emphasizes the importance of the contact boundary. The constant coming and going between the polarities of connecting and separating is what enables us moment after moment to constitute our self, that ever-evolving phenomenon.

The connecting process involves a closing of the distance between people, a receptiveness or openness to the outside—and especially to other people—with the boundary becoming porous so that one takes in from and puts out to others. The separating process involves increasing distance, closing off the boundary, being alone and not taking in, with the boundary becoming less porous and closed to exchange. . . . People need both connecting and separating. (p. 8)

After describing both extremes, Yontef concludes that it is “this flexible movement between close connection and separation [that] preserves the sense of being humanly connected. It is unhealthy when this flexibility is lost and either separation or connection becomes static” (pp. 8-9). This is an aspect offered by the experience of dancing with someone: In a way that is repeated, foreseeable, and reassuring, we have the possibility of becoming close (more or less close, according to our choice) and the certainty of separating thereafter as well as the possibility of connecting again.

When dancing with another, the arm is a crucial boundary point. Although there are other points of contact, the semiextended arm is where the relationship is most clearly represented. For persons who are guiding, their left arm may be too strong and overpowering or too stiff (usually out of awareness, in anxious concentration on the task versus contact with the partner); on the other hand, it may be too soft, not daring to assert a decision openly. In fact, those who are being guided need that left arm to remain alive and present (1) in order to

follow and to feel the direction proposed and (2) very importantly, to preserve one's personal space. (In tango there is a significant emphasis on each person's space: respecting the other's space yet coming into it at times, resisting, keeping one's space—enough, not too much.) In dance this is referred to as “the frame” or “keeping your shape/form” by not allowing the leader to “deform” you.

One participant, Jeanne, whose entire torso was contracted on the first day of the workshop, became aware during group discussions of the possibility of using her right arm deliberately to modulate the distance between herself and the other person. On the second day, despite some muscle pains remaining from the day before, she found her whole body could relax thanks to the conscious choice of how much resistance she put into her arm. This metaphor led to a chain of repercussions during individual therapy sessions in the ensuing weeks as many life situations appeared to her in the same way: heavy with unconscious resistance, then lightened by the deliberate and accepted decision to set limits. Her tendency to accept other people's requests, although already explored a good deal in therapy, still had such deep unconscious roots that in spite of several changes in her life, Jeanne remained at the mercy of her fear of displeasing if she defended her territory. So defending it through her body, calmly and without having to become aggressive, afforded her an extra degree of freedom. (Later, as her many dreams of shouting and fighting revealed, she also needed to be loud and powerful about her “no's,” which was perhaps facilitated by this quieter first step.)

A Dancing Group

To complete the “Other” described by Schott-Billmann (2001, pp. 15-24), we must introduce the group, for the dyad partner, the ground, and the music provide only part of the containing function. The presence of the group around the pair offers further rules and protection within which there is more freedom to experiment.

As compared to a therapy marathon, a dance group workshop is different in several significant ways:

- Since the whole group is busy dancing, individually or in pairs, one person is not

“working” under the gaze of the others. Thus people can experiment without the pressure of being observed. In my experience, having a whole group watching you, willing you, perhaps encouraging you out loud—to hit a mattress, for instance, or to reach out to someone—can lend great force and make the gesture possible. However, some people may be adapting, even to the point of dissociation, when they seem thus liberated. At worst, they may suffer a backlash later, or simply forget, or the affectmotor schema is not really acquired, just play acted.

- In dyad experiments such as dancing the tango, the person is usually exploring with someone other than the therapist. In such circumstances, people may dare to try out something they would not even think of trying with the therapist (e.g., how often do you get to ask a therapist, “May I try leading you?” or “Is my leading clear?” or “Am I reading you right?”). Others are able to experiment with a lesser degree of security, much like going off to school after the first phase of life in the protection of the home.
- In the dance group workshop, physical contact between group members is more “ordinary” and therefore easier to carry into the real world than are the “cuddly” or nurturing forms of contact sometimes practiced in therapy groups (especially in the 1970s and 1980s).
- People generally get to try out both roles (guiding and being guided) and to interact with both genders through exercises between men and men and between women and women as well as between men and women.
- The model offered by the dance teacher often enables people to explore issues “on the sly,” so to speak (i.e., unbeknownst to the Parent ego state). When a gesture—with all the intentionality of the affectmotor schema—might otherwise meet with heavy resistance, it can happen more easily and naturally in this framework. This may then lead to new awareness and even budding changes, affective

and cognitive, that are opened up by the freed movement.

- There can be a problem, however, with monitoring the affective edge within the dyads since the contact is not with the therapist directly. However, it seems that the threshold of tolerable contact rises in this context, perhaps because it seems more normal and ordinary. People explore and experiment more without dissociating and later report on their experience and continue integrating it in the group discussions.

For instance, after several years of individual and group therapy as well as annual marathons, Diana wanted to use the dance group workshop as an opportunity to explore a more feminine role vis-à-vis men. This area was not easy for her to access, despite all the work she had already done. At the time, Diana had stopped seeing me and was continuing her therapy with a male therapist who used a Reichian approach. In the first dance therapy workshop, she mostly gained acute awareness of the difficulties that persisted for her in this area. Several times she needed to “rest” (i.e., stop an exercise and observe from the sidelines) so as to avoid going beyond her tolerance level and dissociating. In the interval between the first and second workshops, she started experimenting more, especially with her therapist, and she noticed she felt more trust in men. In the second dance group workshop she was able to begin applying her own permissions, often joyfully: looking men in the eye as they danced together, feeling she could modulate the space between them and even get fairly close, and letting men take the lead without so much monitoring of what they were doing.

All of these advantages do not, however, preclude the value of more conventional body-emotional work in some situations. We may even set aside the dancing for a while and focus on a therapy issue via more traditional bodywork. For example, with a partner or the therapist or the dance teacher, a participant might push mightily to test his or her strength or capacity to resist, perhaps with more or less sound. If that is too much (i.e., beyond the person’s affective edge), we might invite the participant to use his or her eyes to convey a

desire for more closeness or to try just holding the partner (or the therapist) at a more comfortable distance, playing with the connection and space to feel the differences produced inside. In some cases we prefer internal techniques aimed more at awareness of inner states than at outward experimenting (see Waldekranz-Piselli, 1999, p. 46) and invite the person to notice the lifelessness (hypotonic) or stiffness (hypertonic) of his or her arm or how he or she pulls away from a partner with his or her back, even though his or her front seems to be “there.” We may also focus on how a couple gets so close, almost merging, that each person seems to lose his or her individuality and then ask what each feels when he or she becomes aware of this process.

How the Workshops Differ from a Dance Class

It might be argued that many of the factors just mentioned as therapeutic can be accessed in a dance class, which is, to a certain extent, true. Certainly I have seen people change on the dance floor. Many women explore more feminine sides of themselves, especially women who in their everyday lives are powerful professionals; they often love the “abandon” they experience in dancing the tango. Other women enjoy accessing more masculine sides when they learn to lead. Likewise, some men become more assertive while others learn to be more aware of the other rather than blindly dragging a partner on. However, in a simple dance class, at some point the evolution of the process stops when it snags on a personal issue and/or people cannot do or feel something (e.g., cannot offer enough resistance, cannot relax his or her arm, do not dare to trust or to be decisive). They may then remain blocked and even discontinue dancing unless they are in therapy and can explore the block there and then return to their dancing with new possibilities. In such cases it is often useful to take part in the talking, sharing, unveiling, and open experimenting that we offer in the dance group workshop. In addition, some people are not interested in learning how to dance and yet can benefit from this work, which only uses a bit of dancing as a vehicle for personal growth rather than aiming to produce skilled dancers.

Importance of a Group

With regard to the dance workshops, the group is important in several ways. First, it keeps the social aspect of dancing present: the activity occurs with other people, in their presence, and is encouraged and “held” by them. Second, there is the therapy group aspect with times for interchange. While the dyad work allows participants to experiment with one other, the group offers an opportunity to be oneself among others, with various ways of relating. Aron (1998) calls this “reflexive self-awareness,” a “body-in-relationship self” (p. 20) that we recognize as “an object in the world, an object among other objects . . . [yet] not at all like other objects in the world” (p. 22).

The Dancing Group. The “group other” is all around during the workshops described here, although direct interaction is with one person at a time, with occasional interventions of the dance teacher or therapist or communication with another “couple.” In each workshop, part of the time is spent with dance exercises. These begin with the individual experimenting with his or her own body, feelings, and blockages. Then participants work in pairs, still holding on to their individual experience while remembering to continue exploring what they feel in their own bodies while simultaneously relating to the other person. There are a number of questions that arise in this process: How much do people remain aware of themselves while in contact with the other? How much do they manage to “listen” to the other while in contact with the self? And when other factors are added—the music, the dance steps, the rest of the group, trying not to be bumped or to bump into someone else—then what happens to their awareness? What receives attention and what is neglected? Also, since the process usually involves changing partners at times, participants can observe what is different with each new person, what is easier, and what is harder. Often noticing these differences can provide participants with ideas about other relationships outside the dance group workshop.

The Process Group. This kind of group time often involves a difficult type of work because it is focused on current experience in the group instead of talking *about* other people, times,

and/or places. The process is facilitated, however, by having a certain content that becomes a kind of container—a role that is played well by the dance. However, the dynamics remain similar to any kind of process group: describing one’s experience, hearing other people’s thoughts and feelings, finding that one’s experience is like another person’s and different from yet another’s. Participants might, for instance, discover that they tend to be drawn to people who react like them and to be afraid or critical of those who do not. Or, conversely, they may be critical of traits that they are not conscious of possessing and that they project onto others. This interchange is a crucial part of the workshop, a time when the body experiments can come to make sense, to be encoded emotionally and cognitively, and to be reinforced by others as people hear and respond to each other, perhaps sharing similar reactions or differing ones.

Cocreation: An Aspect of Transference/Countertransference

Dancing in general and tango in particular is a deeply shared experience, that is, the business of both people! In my view, a “good” tango involves shared responsibility, with both individuals playing their parts and contributing the necessary energy. The same is true in psychotherapy. Although some clients come expecting to be changed by us and our magic, it is really together that we create a relationship and a new story. The dance group workshop clearly demonstrates this, particularly because of its progressive nature. The situation allows participants to experiment in the present and to try out things that differ from what their old models prescribed (Summers & Tudor, 2000).

For instance, since the first dance workshop, Karin has become much better at saying what is not right for her in our relationship and/or in my way of being with her. This became obvious when I led her through a bit of dancing, a discrete kind of invasion that she had not been aware of in our office interactions. To her, inviting her to try the steps with me was an invasion because she did not allow herself the possibility of saying “No” as she would have with other participants. As a result, the whole subject of invasion opened up, and she was

then able to notice such moments more easily and in increasingly subtle forms. We thus had a living example of the new experience as described by Summers and Tudor (2000) as well as a shared responsibility: My part was to recognize my invasiveness and to change it; her part was to see how she had tolerated it, to find new ways of noticing it, and to convey her refusal to me (often using dance metaphors from the workshop). For both of us the task was to attend to the relationship, with me inquiring when some sign appeared in her, and with her stopping me when I did not observe it in time, or enough, or accurately.

This experience with Karin raised an important issue for me about the tango workshops: Should I or should I not dance with the participants? At this point I decide on a case by case basis. With people who are not my clients, I do not think it is a problem. It can be interesting for them to have a different sensation by leading me or being led by me. With my own clients, it depends on where they are in their therapy. For example, we could say with Karin it was a mistake to have that form of physical contact. But as described so frequently in our field, it was a fruitful mistake that opened up new areas for discussion and work. Interestingly, Karin did have physical contact with me prior to the tango workshops, in both group and marathons. However, there was something different about the dancing contact that awakened her awareness of feeling invaded.

Thus, dancing (i.e., moving, with more or less assurance, amplitude, grace, power, and force), especially in a dyad so that participants experience the contact boundary with another (as well as the contact boundaries with the "other others"), seems to offer real potential for personal discoveries and experiences. This is particularly true for our construction of relating with the Other. Many of us still have at least some traces of a narcissistic phase in which we hoped to manage on our own, to not need another, or at least to control the other (Green, 1983). With couple dancing there is a gentle nudging to acknowledge that the other is necessary and that he or she is separate. In the words of Moisseff (in press), a couples therapist, by facing the otherness, we learn "more about ourselves than about others: our ways of reacting,

our abilities to bounce back, our weak spots and how to make do with them, all things we cannot learn on our own" (p. 4).

Aliveness: Fluidity and Eroticism

This is another area in which a group with dancing can be effective: It helps to promote aliveness, as in bringing parts of our bodies and selves to life and unblocking blocked emotions or words or gestures.

Fluidity. In his article on script cure, Erskine (1980) wrote of recovering "spontaneity and flexibility in problem solving and relating to people" (p. 106). To me, one word that describes cure or wellness is "fluidity": between ego states, as posited by Berne (1961) when "free cathexis can pass with relative ease from one ego state to another" (p. 23); between affective states (in contrast to the sterile repetition of the same racket feeling and the avoidance of forbidden affects); and between self and other, "between contact and withdrawal" (Yontef, 2001, p. 8). The movement of dance both symbolizes and allows such unblocking and thus increases fluidity.

For example, Philip, who had not been making much progress in individual sessions despite my offers of various verbal and nonverbal experiences, came to the dance group workshop in a very anxious state. He was not frozen, as he often was, because he actually remembered a dream (rare for him, "once every ten years," as he put it). With words and feelings more fluid than I had ever witnessed in him, he told the dream and one he had the following night, dreams filled with movement (he was driving a car in the mountains in the first and a train in the second). Furthermore, he received more strokes in two days than he had gathered in several years in group therapy, in particular for his quality of contact and presence as a man. Apparently, this work with movement "unstuck" him from his immobility and his frozen, disincarnated identity—or started to, since after three such workshops, he still has many areas that need opening up and consolidation.

Introducing a new modality—especially one that involves movement—thus seems to be an interesting means of enabling script changes, particularly in relation to Waldekrantz-Piselli's

(1999) view of affectmotor schemas as “primitive script convictions (or beliefs)” (p. 38). Fluidity can increase in a body’s movements and experience, leading to greater freedom and flexibility in self-perception, feelings, and action.

Excitement and Erotic Experiences. Although I do not find that sexual material is particularly taboo in transactional analysis, the erotic realm is all too often overshadowed by the concretely sexual or the genital, as Bonnet (2001) distinguishes it. So many clients (and others) seem caught in a sort of politically correct view (“psychologically correct,” to quote Gastine [personal communication, 4 November 1998]) that they “should” be having sex—great sex, and frequently, and without misgivings. So we end up with only two realms: the sexual and the nonsexual. In this scenario, the “sexual” can even become a kind of defense against the erotic: As long as a person is having regular sex, preferably with orgasms, everything is presumed fine. However, the erotic is more subtle, rich, and vast than that. It also involves that which is not necessarily sexual yet not simply nonsexual but somewhere in between and connected to both. This is the aliveness and excitement brought on by stimulating contact with otherness (another person, the other sex, another’s thoughts, feelings, reactions, and so on).

Being in therapy—with the opening up of life prospects and envisioning that one does not have to go on living in the same limited, dead-end way—can feel exhilarating, intoxicating, and even erotic. Finding that the therapist—who week after week remains welcoming, alive, and interested—also wants the client to be alive and interested in life can generate powerful feelings in the client toward the therapist. Sometimes these can feel like love, and sometimes they can get in the way. These can include the “puppy love” that leads clients to want to be adorable to the therapist and to fantasize about being “adopted” (as a friend, child, favorite client, etc.) or to the romantic or sexualized “love” that distracts clients from the real business at hand and may cause obsessive, pre-occupying fantasies about the therapist. Hargaden (2001) gives a powerful account of how complicated it can be to welcome all of this

into the therapy and to help clients make use of it in a way that sooner or later enhances their lives.

We as therapists need to keep our minds (and senses) open to erotic experiences and expressions other than sexual ones: excitement, awakened senses, the elation of newfound closeness, and so on. In dancing there can be a whole range of erotic feelings and experiences. Many women describe a euphoric feeling, “like being in love,” after a few good dances during which both partners are well attuned to each other. Fewer men have shared this sense with me, although they too seem to experience a kind of magic when dancing with an attuned partner. However, this contact is seldom actually sexual. Even on regular dance floors (in contrast to the dance group workshops), most dancers are more concerned with leading/following well, performing their steps accurately, and the joy of managing well and really flowing together than with seducing people. In the workshop, of course, it is even clearer because of the therapy setting and format. People know they are not there to find a partner for their life or their bed, but to experience—and do they! For most people this seems to happen after a while, perhaps during the second workshop, because early on they are often too busy with self-discovery and the multiple tasks related to learning the dance. As they become more confident, they discover the excitement of working/dancing/moving with another, of reaching a deeper level of understanding the other at a subsymbolic level. This excitement can then revitalize other aspects of their lives.

For Sandra, the dance group workshop opened up several erotic areas of her experience that had been dormant for years. In the days following the workshop, it became increasingly obvious to her that she treated her body like some kind of automobile, a mechanical thing that was supposed to function in order to get her around. This image, which kept occurring to her, gradually became unacceptable, especially after a weekend spent focusing on her feeling, dancing body. During one sleepless night filled with emotions and images, she rebelled against her old way of treating herself (a result of her family’s contempt for bodies in general and her own strong hatred for her body

in particular). Although she still did not consider herself attractive, she reached morning with a clear redecision: to appreciate and enjoy her physical being and to respect that dimension of herself as well as her much-valued intelligence. This change triggered an intense creative movement in her. She began going out more as well as writing songs that combined music and poetic words that depicted and alleviated various life experiences. Three months later, she was still writing, although a bit less intensively. Her vitality had clearly increased as well as her joy in life and her capacity for pleasure. Clearly, the hopeless and loveless aspects of her script were starting to change. At long last, Sandra conceived that perhaps her body *was* good enough to live in and to live *with* rather than against. Such physical grounding had apparently been lacking, which had restricted the full expression of her intelligence and creativity.

Using couple dancing as a vehicle for psychotherapy opens up erotic realms probably more explicitly than do most other means. The eroticism of one's own body—its aliveness, sensing, moving, experiencing the pleasure of movement, feeling competent and attuned with a partner, exchanging energy, feeling a partner's energy responding to one's own—all this can awaken sexual feelings, although that does not necessarily occur.

Staying Alive: The Follow Up. Of course, these dance group workshops are just moments in the course of therapy. Ongoing therapy is necessary to prepare participants for the workshops as well as to help them assimilate whatever happens there lest these moments remain merely that: isolated instances of a different experience but not made "mine" by each participant. The workshops are, therefore, useful to the degree that issues that arise during them are picked up afterward, especially those with a focus on relationship.

For example, after a second workshop, Karin went to a much deeper level of contact regarding early physical abuse. She did not want to attend further dance group workshops for many months as we labored through a phase during which she needed to isolate a great deal from others and could not tolerate much contact, especially physical contact. In her negative

transference, a mistrust vis-à-vis me emerged; often she would arrive saying, "I didn't want to come, today," and she needed me to sit several feet away while she often hid her body under a blanket or was unable to stand my gaze. Things are progressing slowly, and at the time of this writing, Karin is again readying for a tango workshop. She has also started going out dancing on her own again after stopping years ago because she could not stand the contact with men.

For Jacques, coming to two dance workshops finally budged a blocked negative transference. Two years before, Jacques had attended a marathon in which he had experienced great "merger bliss." However, losing that extreme closeness after the weekend, with no contact from other participants, was traumatic for him. Regardless of what I or the members of his ongoing group did afterward, he would come in and sulk, proving in every way he could think of that this therapy was going nowhere. Yet he was determined to continue coming week after week until one of us died. Jacques quit the group after one year of this and remained both fearful and fascinated by groups, claiming he *had* to attend another weekend group to see whether he could survive it better.

The tango format seemed right for him, although the dancing aspect definitely was not appealing to him. Indeed, not regressing while in group changed things for Jacques, although only gradually. A few months after the second workshop, he began saying he no longer felt the need to see me every week. He still withholds most positive things from me, but after a while he grudgingly lets me know he is actually quite satisfied with some aspects of his life. And he is no longer waiting for me to die! Bonnet (1999) claimed that "the therapist should always consider him/herself as in reprieve, and allow for the idea that the end of treatment could be equivalent to an accomplished putting to death" (p. 68). Perhaps Jacques, who had not managed to find nourishment in symbolic closeness and reparation but had clung to the wish for real merger, is finally content with "killing" me only symbolically.

In my limited experience with this work so far, it has clearly functioned as a trigger, a more or less disturbing experience that finds its

real value in the ongoing work the client does afterward.

Conclusion

In psychotherapy we need to find a balance between comforting and “disturbing”—some might say “confronting”—lest things settle into not much more than pleasant conversation. The dance group workshops described in this article appeal to me as a therapist because I love the tango and perhaps because I can “disturb” better with a dance than otherwise. The important point I want to convey is the value in psychotherapy of using an activity that involves the body, preferably an activity that can be done in pairs and that is likely to open up affectmotor schemas and to free interrupted gestures. The choice of activity will depend on what a given therapist loves. After all, through such a choice we also communicate some of our passion, which is a part of the erotic, alive therapy relationship. The activity could be aikido or taekwon-do, something with the self, a partner, or in a group. As pointed out by Houseman (personal communication, 15 March, 2003), “Another type of progressive rather than regressive interaction that shares much of the mirror-but-not-a-mirror type of interaction that take place during couple dancing is conventional fighting (boxing or wrestling for example).” As an anthropologist, Houseman underscores “the close association of dancing and fighting as the hallmark of many shamanistic rituals in which people are said to ‘play’ both with spirits and with each other for the spirits’ enjoyment.” In fact, few of the people attending the dance group workshops described in this article have wanted to learn the tango afterward, which reflects the fact that the dance is only a vehicle. Perhaps wrestling would be even better?

Waldekranz-Piselli (1999) summed up the drawbacks of purely mental or purely physical therapy and concludes that they need to be combined for effective treatment to occur. I would add that it seems necessary to tie together mental representations, emotions, physical sensations, and possibilities for movement. Hence, it is important to seek new modalities that will facilitate the unblocking of affectmotor schemas that are sometimes not accessed in the usual interchanges of psychotherapy.

The dance group workshop described here is one such modality. As I use it, the workshop is not a separate method of psychotherapy, but rather an occasional adjunct to standard individual and group transactional analysis therapy. It does, however, permeate the rest of my work, even in individual sessions. I often have in mind affectmotor schemas, interrupted gestures that need completing, and tango images (leaning too much/not enough, being decisive or not, losing the self when the other directs, losing the other when directing and deciding, etc.).

Beyond fluidity, we can say that vitality is an important goal of therapy (Cornell, in press)—to be as alive as possible, with all that we are and can be. And what has more vitality than dancing? In a joyful “revolution” (Allen & Allen, 2000), let us all dance!

Laurie Hawkes, DESS in clinical psychology, is a Certified Transactional Analyst in private practice in Paris, France. She can be reached at 191 rue d'Alèsia, 75014 Paris, France, or by email at laurie.hawkes@laposte.net .

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. R. (2000). Biology and transactional analysis II: A status report on neurodevelopment. *Transactional Analysis Journal, 30*, 260-269.
- Allen, J. R., & Allen, B. A. (2000). Every revolution should have dancing: Biology, community organization, constructionism, and joy. *Transactional Analysis Journal, 30*, 188-191.
- Arcangioli, A.-M. (1994). Introduction à l'œuvre de Winnicott. In J.-D. Nasio (Ed.), *Introduction aux œuvres de Freud, Ferenczi, Groddeck, Klein, Winnicott, Dolton, Lacan* [Introduction to the works of Freud, Ferenczi, Groddeck, Klein, Winnicott, Dolton, Lacan] (pp. 265-290). Paris: Payot & Rivages.
- Aron, L. (1998). The clinical body and the reflexive mind. In L. Aron & F. S. Anderson (Eds.), *Relational perspectives on the body* (pp. 3-37). Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Berne, E. (1961). *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: A systematic individual and social psychiatry*. New York: Grove Press.
- Berne, E. (1972). *What do you say after you say hello?: The psychology of human destiny*. New York: Grove Press.
- Bonnet, G. (1999). *Les mots pour guérir* [The words for healing]. Paris: Payot.
- Bonnet, G. (2001). *L'irrésistible pouvoir du sexe* [The irresistible power of sex]. Paris: Payot.
- Cassius, J. (1977). Bioenergetics and transactional analysis. In M. James (Ed.) and Contributors, *Techniques in transactional analysis for psychotherapists and*

- counselors (pp. 272-282). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cornell, W. F. (1992). [Review of the book *Confessions of a psychotherapist: Is physical touch therapeutic?*] *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 22, 189-191.
- Cornell, W. F. (1999). Si Reich avait connu Winnicott [If Reich had met Winnicott]. *Actualités en Analyse Transactionnelle*, 23(90), 44-52.
- Cornell, W. F. (2003). Babies, brains and bodies: Somatic foundation of the child. In C. Sills & H. Hargaden (Eds.), *Ego states (Vol. 1 of Key concepts in transactional analysis—Contemporary views)* (pp. 28-54). London: Worth Publishing.
- Cornell, W. F. (in press). The impassioned body: Erotic vitality and disturbance. *British Gestalt Journal*.
- Cornell, W. F., & Olio, K. A. (1992). Consequences of childhood bodily abuse: A clinical model for affective interventions. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 22, 131-143.
- Downing, G. (1995). *Il corpo e la parola* [The body and the word]. Rome: Astolabio.
- Erskine, R. G. (1974). Therapeutic intervention: Disconnecting rubberbands. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 4(1), 7-8.
- Erskine, R. G. (1980). Script cure: Behavioral, intrapsychic and physiological. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 10, 102-106.
- Erskine, R. G., & Trautmann, R. L. (1996). Methods of an integrative psychotherapy. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 26, 316-328.
- Erskine, R. G., & Zalcman, M. J. (1979). The racket system: A model for racket analysis. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 9, 51-59.
- Ginger, S. (1995). *La gestalt, l'art du contact* [Gestalt, the art of contact]. Allier, Belgium: Marabout.
- Goulding, M. M., & Goulding, R. L. (1979). *Changing lives through redecision therapy*. New York: Grove Press.
- Green, A. (1983). *Narcissisme de vie, narcissisme de mort* [Life narcissism, death narcissism]. Paris: Editions de Minuit.
- Hargaden, H. (2001). There ain't no cure for love: The psychotherapy of an erotic transference. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 31, 213-219.
- Kepner, J. I. (1987). *Body process: A gestalt approach to working with the body in psychotherapy*. New York: Gardner Press.
- Kohlrieser, G. (1980, 8-9 November). *Transactional analysis and neo-Reichian work*. Workshop in Saint-Cloud, France.
- LeDoux, J. (1996). *The emotional brain*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Lenhardt, V. (1980). *L'analyse transactionnelle: Concepts et procédures, bioscénarios, perspectives spirituelles* [Transactional analysis: Concepts and procedures, bioscripts, spiritual perspectives]. Paris: Retz.
- Lenhardt, V. (1984). Bioscripts. In E. Stern (Ed.), *TA: The state of the art: A European contribution* (pp. 89-107). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Foris Publications.
- Ligabue, S. (1991). The somatic component of the script in early development. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 21, 21-29.
- Martinet, S. (1991). *La musique du corps: Expression par le mouvement* [The music of the body: Expression by movement]. Paris: Chiron.
- McDougall, J. (1989). *Theaters of the body*. New York: Norton.
- McDougall, J. (1995). *The many faces of eros*. New York: Norton.
- Moisseeff, M. (in press). *Le couple comme espace initiatique* [The couple as an initiation space]. *Thérapie Familiale*.
- Panskepp, J. (2001). The long-term psychobiological consequences of infant emotions: Prescriptions for the twenty-first century. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 22, 132-173.
- Schilder, P. (1950). *The image and appearance of the human body*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Schott-Billmann, F. (1994). *Quand la danse guérit* [When dancing heals]. Paris: Chiron.
- Schott-Billmann, F. (2001). *Le besoin de danser* [The need to dance]. Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Sibony, D. (1995). *Le corps et sa danse* [The body and its dance]. Paris: Seuil.
- Steiner, C., with Perry, P. (1997). *Achieving emotional literacy: A personal program to increase your emotional intelligence*. New York: Avon Books.
- Stern, D. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Summers, G., & Tudor, K. (2000). Cocreative transactional analysis. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 30, 23-40.
- Waldekranz-Piselli, K. C. (1999). What do we say before we say hello? The body as the stage setting for the script. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 29, 31-48.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment: Studies in the theory of emotional development*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Yontef, G. (2001). Psychotherapy of schizoid process. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 31, 7-23.