IN TANGO'S EMBRACE:
A PHENOMENOLOGY AND CEREMONY
CELEBRATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DANCE

by

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Abstract

This research is a soulful quest into learning through the experience of a social dance. It offers some antidote to the problem-solving approaches that typify attempts to improve the world. Within an Indigenist framework which celebrates knowledge as growing out of relationships, this thesis is a ceremony of strengthening connections – within us and among all our relations in the cosmos. Within this epistemology, I chose interpretive phenomenology to study how a person can change from experiences that engage joy and passion in ordinary life.

The research stems from my experience of the social dance of Argentine tango and my engagement of questions that beckoned community involvement. I interviewed three dancers and asked them to describe how their sense of relationship–with themselves, with others, the world, and the Divine–changed through their dance. As I listened and reflected upon our conversations, five themes surfaced within an overall theme of becoming known: breaking patterns, sexuality, vulnerability, desire and wholeness. I explore these themes by highlighting the words of research participants. I then explore the implications of this study for the practice of psychotherapy through metaphor and the meaning of grounding, intention, letting go, presence and attunement, occurring in both verbal and non-verbal conversation. Literature that touches on connectivity and intersubjectivity from the areas of philosophy, psychotherapy and theology joins the conversation. I conclude with consideration of the body as intimately belonging to the process of an inherently shared universe in celebration of the whole. I attempt to engage those places where the invisible touches the visible, inviting a holy awareness of the something more that offers itself into our embrace.

I dedicate this thesis in gratitude to my ancestors for enriching me with a love for music.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express gratitude for the support of my thesis supervisor, Leslie Gardner. Her wisdom, knowledge and confidence allowed the space for my creativity to take form; I learned to trust a deeper process at work within me.

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Chapter One: Creating the Space

Introduction

This is a mixed methods study of the experience of social Argentine tango, my passion. It began with myriad questions. What will we learn through an exploration of lived experience that involves engagement of the body? How does the experience of tango invite dancers to enrich their experience of life? What happens when we talk about the embodied experience of social Argentine tango? The work finishes with questions about whether readers are moved to notice new qualities of experience in their own lives as a result of engaging the text.

This research honours a quest for learning that invites soul. A sign of ensouled work is resonance that occurs in readers. My intention is to create a space for resonance to occur, a space that invites learning to arise from the subtle perceptions of human experience. Research is making explicit that which is less obviously understandable. I wish to be sensitive to those less visible things that become apparent.

Inherent in passionate work is the tender quality of desire. Desires that sometimes appear as new shoots of learning, sometimes as hints of direction, and sometimes as questions, can be protected by compassion. In an interview, O'Donohue describes compassion as "an ability to step outside your own perspective, limitations and ego, and become attentive in a vulnerable, encouraging, critical, and creative way with the hidden world of another" (NurrieStearns, 1999). Drawing on O'Donohue, this project is conducted in such a way that compassion may be recognized as openness to mystery, as openness to the vulnerability of being changed, and openness to a presence behind concepts such that they are not reduced to understandings meant to replace full stories

(NurrieStearns, 1999). My hope is that a compassionate attitude will respect the desires and heart of this project, allowing its own creative process to become known.

Two research methodologies that support this thesis work are interpretive phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1997), and an Indigenist research paradigm as described by Wilson (2008). Interpretive phenomenology includes the concept of the hermeneutic circle wherein each perspective is understood in light of the whole and each perspective influences the whole. Imagine a circle comprising points of differing perspectives, each contributing to the whole through reciprocal relationships of communication and influence.

Central to Wilson's depiction of an Indigenist paradigm for research is the idea of research as ceremony. A ceremony celebrates connections among relations, in encounters of recognition and joy. Bringing this home to the topic of research in social dance, the reader is invited to imagine a creative process in which the dancers step onto a dance floor among other dancers. The dancers are moving to music, united in a flow. To an onlooker, the movement on the dance floor might begin to appear as one organism, breathing in a rhythm such that the music becomes seen with the constantly changing form. Flow changes moment by moment, accommodating new dance pairs in a creative process, unfolding in time and space. Readers are invited to observe the process, to notice the events on the dance floor, so-to-speak, and to also notice what occurs within their own inner space as they observe. Participants are invited to stay with the dance, and to be especially aware of sharing space, of how the space invites through opening and closing, creating, dissolving and changing form. All have a place in the research ceremony, a celebration of who we are becoming in a community of dancers and learners.

Who are the dancers, the players in this research? The pair of dancers entering the circle, the line of dance as it is called in tango, will be represented by research participants as they create meaning through conversation. The larger circle of existing dancers, moving along the line of dance, is represented by the philosophical underpinnings, methodologies, literature reviews, social contexts, as well as the practical support by way of supervisory and academic feedback and practice interviews with friends. All form the various lenses that invite understanding of human experience. The onlooker's engagement is represented by the reader. In fact, the reader represents a level of engagement that invites this entire work into being. Although success of this research primarily rests with personal change within the primary researcher, it is only to the extent that readers notice some movement in themselves that can we claim benefit in the broader community. A brief outline of this proposal will now assist the reader to both relax into and engage an inquiry of how Argentine social tango can become a research ceremony with relevance for counselling and psychotherapy.

Chapter One introduces the primary researcher. I start with the personal and professional context that generated the questions underlying this thesis. Wilson (2008) points out that relationality demands some personal understanding of the writer in order to understand their work. This fits with the phenomenological idea that the researcher is not separate from the research. I allow the introductory context and questions to linger as important ground into which learning occurs. Chapter One also names the area studied. Three research questions appear between statements of a general problem area on the one hand, and my personal interest on the other. In this way, research questions dance in a

space bordered on one side by the wider context of a societal unhealthiness, and on the other by my specific interests.

Chapter Two contains a literature review regarding intersubjectivity in the areas of psychotherapy, philosophy and theology. Intersubjectivity is core to the experience of social dance. The role of the body in connectivity is significant as participants give voice to their experience of dance. Chapter Three covers my choice of methodology, its definition, and methods used. Chapters Four through Six present results in this way: an introduction of participants, presentation of themes, and lessons for psychotherapy. Chapter Seven presents the conclusion and implications.

Wilson points out that, "research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers" (2008, p. 6). Some of these unquestioned answers will be explicitly brought forth in writing, and the reader will notice others. The introductory context reveals something about my perspective. Choice of partners (e.g. literature and methodology) is also revealing. I invite the reader to notice those unquestioned answers, to question them, and to bring their own questions to the reading. All are invited to become part of a process of transformation and change among willing participants.

Background Context

In keeping with the mission of St. Stephen's College and my choice of an Indigenist paradigm, the main goal of this thesis work is my learning and personal transformation. In this section I name what I consider to be significant learnings from my work as an occupational therapist in palliative care, what I want to learn now, and to which sources I turn.

As an occupational therapist in palliative care, I recall two surprises about my learning. The first was to realize what it was like to learn when all aspects of my life were well supported. It was then that I became aware of my erroneous assumption that struggle is necessary for learning and growth. Through experiencing a natural ease with which to meet the daily challenges in palliative care, a new standard for sharing personal reflections and working as a team was set for me. From that experience I bring safety and respect as foundational values, the sine qua non for creating a space in which relationships flourish and new forms of knowledge arise.

The second surprise was when I realized that I had stopped looking to other professionals for a secret source of rehabilitative power that I had assumed others held and I needed. Once confident in my own competency, I realized that every situation carries its own direction regarding what I needed to learn, and that the direction presents itself through my interaction with others, the patients in particular. This marked the beginning of a shift away from relying on gathered information, and relieved me from the fuss about whether I had prepared enough. Another way to view the shift is to recognize that it called me to rely less on the visible sources of knowledge as presented in books, or observable in the work of other professionals, and to rely more on the invisible leads that become manifest in relationships. Indeed, the entire palliative care unit is organized around the invisible reality of pain. Our work was on the threshold of the invisible and visible worlds, easing the comfort of moving between both.

On the threshold of both the visible and invisible, I became attentive to my body as a source of wise guidance for practical purpose. For example, how to know whether to approach a patient surrounded by family? From a distance one might assume that we

should not interrupt, better to postpone the meeting. However, I soon learned that I could carefully approach a family situation and listen to my body's sense of whether my visit would be welcome or out of place. I am confident that many if not all of my palliative care co-workers navigated their tasks while attending to a sense within their body for important guidance and feedback. Gendlin calls this the "felt sense" (2000). He developed his philosophy and psychotherapy around the practice of attending to the felt sense, the practice of which he calls "focusing." My work in palliative care introduced me to the treasure of attending to the felt sense of our experience in any situation, and I continue to learn about the body as a source of wisdom with practical application.

Although I learned much from my own experiences of working in palliative care, it was the patients who taught me important lessons that I still work with to fully apprehend. I saw that the patients carried the most important mysteries. For example, I recall a time when our team delivered the best of assessments, diagnostics, techniques, and interventions, and still the patient did not move–a relational door so-to-speak remained closed. Then, having gone home without receiving our expert advice, the same closed-door patient was later re-admitted, and she showed us quite simply that everything had changed. Despite a worsening of her physical condition and prognosis, a relational door had opened widely, offering us experiential richness in return for the simplest of our acts. In palliative care I witnessed countless examples of palpable change, such that if there is anything in this world I am sure of besides death, it is the boundless potential for creativity and healing expressed in the human person–available at any moment, and more real and meaningful than any notion of rehabilitation power I had previously imagined.

In the palliative environment, I was also impressed by a realized awareness that the spiritual life exists beyond vocabulary. I was reminded that only a few shared my language for the spiritual, but that many others lived and expressed their spirit in concretely felt ways. This was something I witnessed more than discussed. This makes sense, as an active spirituality is something that is lived more than it is talked about (O'Donohue, 2005), and awareness of death effectively engages spiritual resources.

A more difficult learning to express is something I knew, yet it appeared and continues to reappear as fresh new learning each time. It concerns the value of life, each life in particular. Each pair of eyes conveyed a depth of knowing not easily translated into words. Each face reflected a timeless value of the other, a value expressed in concrete action, a concrete being-with now. Hopes for tomorrow and stories of yesterday were important regarding meaning and values, but the present moment was the only real space to express care in whatever language the moment demanded–be it a word, a touch, a breath.

In this introductory context, I name values emphasized for me in palliative care, in my role as an occupational therapist. They are the creative capacity for healing, the immanence of the spiritual life, and the value of life as lived in the here and now. I gained this wisdom from witnessing others in some of their most intense experiences of life. They undergird my vocational journey as psychotherapist. I recall the faces that with or without words asked, "do you see what I see, are you living it?" I want to bring awareness to life earlier in our journey, and not let it be relegated to the final stages of life. This is about making the invisible visible, and speaks of the role of witness. The word witness deserves a pause here.

To witness is to behold, “to know with personal presence and perception” (dictionary.com). Its root, wit, refers to a keen sense of knowledge and expression. Witnessing points to observation with engagement, such that more is apprehended, the very act of which also reveals something more. A witness points to both the implicit and the explicit, and is an action that makes knowing both possible.

Moving outside of palliative care, I ask myself about healing, spirituality and valued living in the absence of terminal illness, in the ordinary rhythm of life. Is my faith in human potential, based upon my experience as witness to others, sufficient for what I bring to psychotherapy? How would my knowing grow if I examined sources closer to my own experience? This represents a shifting of my worldview, of where and how I look for knowledge, something key for this research.

In my work as an occupational therapist, I was accustomed to accommodating healthcare’s paradigm. It operates in an efficient problem-solving model, not unlike the military in its mission, precision, determination and hierarchical execution. Problems are expediently diagnosed and targeted for change. Likely successes take priority. Limited resources are utilized by doing what can be done, rather than in unproven directions. Those in acute care and those troubled by problems associated with chronic conditions appreciate this. However, there are implications with the prevailing scientific paradigm. By way of only one example, although about 50% of those diagnosed with cancer will die of the disease, less than 5% of cancer research is in the area of caring for those who will not be cured. There are many who work hard to bring a human face to healthcare, and the occupational therapy profession is only one of several that works within the scientific paradigm to bring forth voices of those they serve (Lee, 2007).

At this point I want to stretch myself further out of the scientific, problem-oriented views, and research healthy living. I want to research something that has opened my life, touched my core and broadened my views. I am interested to listen for the soul's healing and opening into "the more" in life, and this in the ordinary rhythm of life. To do so, I will take a closer look at passion in ordinary life. I will investigate this with others and present results to the community. My investigation will honour a research paradigm that helped reveal my reliance on a worldview that I eschew, i.e. the scientific paradigm. Although feminist theory has much in common with Indigenous approaches to research, it was Wilson's depiction of gentle, non-impositional reciprocity that provided sufficient contrast for me to recognize that opening to an epistemology of relationship will come with internal change.

The foregoing is a means of introducing myself and the questions that energize and motivate this thesis. It is in keeping with an Indigenist research paradigm, which builds a relationship with the readers (Wilson, 2008). To summarize, my work as an O.T. evoked musings regarding healing, spirituality, and the primacy of now. The worldview operational in healthcare is one that fit my work ethic, and one I easily adopted for the privilege of working in palliative care, an area that consciously seeks to welcome the whole person. Moving out of this worldview, and congruent with a Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality at St. Stephen's College, I choose a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, additionally guided by an Indigenist paradigm as presented by Wilson (2008). This research develops our capacities for listening in psychotherapy and clarifies shifts in worldview, "amenable to feminine forms of knowing" (van Manen, 1997, p. xvii). These forms of knowing involve attending the

process of one's own experience within the context of relationships, akin to the learning and growth possibilities that occur through countless relational movements inherent to social dance.

In order to move from being a seeker of knowledge through uninvolved observation of others, and to move into epistemologies of connection and relationship (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Riley-Taylor, 2002; Wilson, 2008), I explore a phenomenon in which I participate. The phenomenon is the social dance of Argentine tango. I view this as necessary to balance my position as a privileged witness to the healing experiences of others in their final stages of life. I learned much from working with those who were dying. It is time for me to learn more from life in its earlier stages.

Purpose of Research

My professional home was housed within a model that focused on problems, and balance is required to witness the potential for healing and vitality in every part of life. Constant efforts to better understand problems, and to reform and improve systems, all become tiring and need to be tempered with celebration (O'Donohue, 2004, p. 6). Experiences of joy are equally worthy of research. There is a call for research that focuses on harmony; doing so "allows for growth and change to take place" (Wilson, 2008, p. 109). Van Manen calls phenomenology "a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning" (2007, p. 11). Research that is a celebration of what it means to be a social dancer of Argentine tango allows wonder, fascination and the potential to expand meanings.

With scholarly rigor, its purpose is to show healing and spirituality in the lived experience of social dance. I am a participant in a process whereby I touch the ground of

my lived experience and learn through connections with others in my dance community. In this project, I provide a close look at the engagement of an ordinary activity–in the ordinary course of living–that being a social dance, and readers are invited to notice the reverberations of change that take place, both in the dancers and in themselves.

An important purpose is to deepen our capacities to listen, to bring more visibility to our experiences, and to make explicitly known that which enriches and gives meaning to our understanding of being human. Deep listening allows an articulation of soul. This is a part of us that stands as witness, holding a gaze on our movements, our thoughts, and emotions, recognizing that life is more than anything we construct or create, and yet is entrusted to our influence. In the attentive gaze of soul is a healing energy, available in our every day, taken for granted life. In my work toward a Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality, it is of great value to witness this energy in myself, to facilitate the same in others, and to present findings in a language that enriches human experience.

General Statement of the Need for Health

The area I wish to study represents a significant shift from our typical locus of knowledge based upon the scientific method and rationalistic models (Riley-Taylor, 2002). We are living at an interesting turning point in evolutionary history. Although the belief that we are the centre of the universe and the pinnacle of creation is no longer widely claimed as valid (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), the dominant operational paradigm continues to be that humans bring about progress by utilizing our intelligence and the earth's resources (Berry, 1998). Notions about the progressive capacity of science, technology, politics and economics still hold mainstream power despite plentiful evidence contrary to success. Some examples of failure are news of increasing child suicide,

homicide of children by parents, increasing domestic violence, and species extinction. Hanna (2006) lists three pages of sources of stress ranging from natural disasters, violence inflicted by humans, economic and political change, expected life events, and living with pain. Thinkers and scientists warn of worldwide crisis marked by suicide, homicide, biocide, and geocide (Laszlo & Combs, 2011); we ought not omit genocide. The directional trend is not promising. Verduin points to current government spending on incarceration in California that is more than spending for education (Leach, 2014), and the Global Peace Index indicates that violence around the world increased in 2013, internal violence accounting for more than violence between countries (Institute for Economics and Peace).

Despite decades of discussion in sociology, psychology and philosophy to undo Cartesian dualisms, and even long before disasters such as the atomic bomb and Chernobyl, calls were issued for a vision of science to work alongside wider social spheres. Despite all, we have a pairing of science and technology along with the powers of resource allocation that ignores social costs (Tyabji, 1999). Habermas maintains that we have made an ideology of science, and that society is in denial of its need to reflect on the "philosophical and social conditions of knowledge" (as cited in Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 3).

In this unreflected state, our society has barreled along, ravaging the planet with devastating effect to all life systems on earth. Two countries notable for their economic and technological strength have the highest suicide rates. These are Japan, followed by Canada (P. Erb Delfin, personal communication, July 6, 2012). In addition, hunger in Africa is at a level of disaster not seen in nearly 100 years, due largely to the impact of

environmental changes (Delfin, 2012). Swimme maintains that we have evolved from being a relatively insignificant bipedal hominid 65 million years ago, to being the dominant life form such that the viability of every other species depends upon our relationships with the earth (1998). A contributing factor has been the near reification of human abstract mental processes to the exclusion of more subtle forms of perception and less rational forms of thought (Abram, 1996; Ryley, 1998). Consequences include the severe societal malaise cited above, planetary devastation, species extinction, and a host of environmental illnesses (van der Post, Berry & Ryley, 1998).

A second obvious characteristic of this historical time frame is the rate of technological advancement (see Taybji, 1999, for the relationship of technology, science and capital allocation). Never before have people across continents been able to communicate so quickly, a global community in many respects. Can sound bites satisfy our deeper longings for connection and belonging? With an addictive drive for distraction (O'Donohue, 2005), we can sit at our desks, our kitchen tables, in our living rooms, and even lie in our beds listening to media and headlines. Turning off the media, we can become absorbed in a mindless barrage of digital images, on what we call personal devices, or find ourselves with others occupied with text messages. At bay for many is a gnawing sense of helplessness to make a difference in the broad scheme of life that visits us daily, in a future that seems to have skipped the present.

More personally, I take example from attending the difficulties across three generations in my own family, where I query inner impoverishment. Goals and the resources to achieve them appear to lie outside of ourselves, leading to feelings of striving and lack. When pressured activity is over, loneliness and boredom settle in with a new

set of disturbances. As I become more aware of my own sources of knowledge, I catch glimpse of the enormous lack of balance where the norm is to attend outer sources of knowledge at the expense of more subtle inner sources of wisdom and energy. Across the three generations, our efforts are supported by the dominant western, scientific worldview that prefers objective knowledge and explication. One result is that we hold external sources of knowledge as being more valid than internal epistemologies.

Healthy living however, involves connecting on multiple levels, with flexibility for increasing complexity (Mendaglio, 2008; Peet, 2009). Unfortunately, an external life that bombards, demands and distracts, challenges the ability to develop inner connections from grade school to retirement. Little time is left to nurture and attend to the inner resources needed to balance and enrich all of life's experiences. Abram maintains that this emphasis has possibly led to the atrophy in adults of internal connections that endow children with high sensitivity (1996). I suggest that a potential correction lies very close to us: becoming aware of the experience of life through our bodies.

The Abandoned Crucible: Musings on the Body and the Prologue in the Gospel of John by Lawrence (2003) was the first thesis I heard presented at St. Stephen's College. Lawrence points to the Christian mystery of new life that comes through suffering as lived in relationship to her body. Unknown to me, in the ten years since I heard her thesis, a gentle and powerful force has also been inviting a return to my body. In the Christian tradition, both beauty and suffering are included in a circle of wholeness. I wish to explore the mystery of wholeness through the beautiful doorway of joy, through the invitation to dance.

In summary, despite the obvious societal and environmental malaise, I boldly suggest that there exists a creative energy that restores, awakens and invigorates vital connections to deepen and enrich life. I name dance as one avenue to explore this energy and I investigate the concrete, lived experience of dancers in order to appreciate this aspect of healthy living. This is in keeping with the call for serious study of the embodiment of health (Benner, Dunlop, & Plager, in Benner (Ed.), 1994; Hammington, 2004). It fits perfectly with the Indigenist research paradigm that values connection and relationship, the web that holds ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology within the same circle, and demands that I conduct research with others in community (Wilson, 2008).

The Research Questions

The research questions are an opportunity to study healing, spirituality, and the value of life in the here and now, through deep listening in relationship. I invite the illumination of these ideas through conversations with research participants, without trying to separate notions to fit with my definitions. This is in keeping with Tafoya who "postulates that it is not possible to know exactly both the context and definition of an idea at the same time," as one becomes lost when separated from the other (as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 8).

The three questions are:

1. How does the experience of social Argentine tango affect one's sense of relationship with their self, with others, with the world, and with the divine?

2. How does the expression in words, of these essentially nonverbal experiences during the research interviews, affect the participants?

3. What are some implications of this for the work of psychotherapy?

Personal Interest in the Subject

The call to home is a multi-layered journey. I took the long way, literally spending nine months on another continent en route, when moving from my residence overlooking the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton, to the house of our family home in Calgary. Another full six years intervened because of my father's departure from this life. It was never my intention to move to our family home, a house too big for one person, I thought. But following his death, I awoke in that house at the crack of dawn, and watched summer's birdsong slowly and ever so gently fill the air with soft golden light. My heart saw a beauty that beckoned. The place waited another seven years for me. During that time a movement began underfoot to slowly awaken me from inside the darkness of my body, and I am just now beginning to trust that paying attention to the visible call of the invisible dawn may have indeed made good sense.

I describe myself as a seeker, opening to life's revelations on a journey, at home in meetings of cultural diversity. I am not a sight-seer. I like to stay long enough to feel the rhythm of life's ordinary time. I like to make friendships that last over time and distance. Perhaps I particularly enjoy the meeting of another in which cultural difference is so obvious that it is dispensed in order to make space for a more universal language. In keeping with this desire to stay long enough, I now face the mystery of home, of presence and questions about new ways of living here, now. Through this time of transition, something new and unexpected took residence and continues to grow inside me. A new relationship moved in, leading my feet, leading my heart, and tethering my soul while opening me to new experiences before I had time to think. This new relationship came in

the form of dance, specifically Argentine tango. It is an engaging force, provoking questions and awareness. It entered my life in the wake of my father's death, and eight years later, its allurement remains, possibly occupying my life in such a way that I might call it a sacred other. David Abram would use the word 'wild', meaning that it is not under my control (2010). This sacred other not only gives me pause to wonder, it moves me, and I with it.

Is it possible that discovering this dance shortly after my father's death was an invitation into the embodied living of an ancient knowing? When I heard the music, and when I danced, I was in another time, connected to all who had gone before me. There on the dance floor, in my pain, I was touched, held securely and caringly in another realm. I felt embraced in a unity that included all of time and all the people on the floor, in a gentle and powerful embodiment of being here now.

Community is essential to social Argentine tango. After eight years of social dancing, I am noticing that lessons learned in the dance are crossing into both family and environmental relationships. Is it possible that tango is moving me into greater wholeness, bringing previously unnoticed perspectives into significance?

In a review of studies, Sela-Smith (2002) notices psychological resistance to deeper self-learning on the part of research investigators. She also upholds the value of being in touch with both the *I* and the *we* in order to learn. Todres (2007) joins her in pointing out a neglect of reflection on self-experience in psychotherapy research. The point they make is in keeping with an Indigenist paradigm, which would admonish us to not "forget who we are" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 26). A deeper learning of my own experience interests me. I am fully aware that not only can I not do this alone, the endeavor belongs to the wider

community. Only the inclusion of other participants would satisfy my exploration of the topic.

Interest pertaining to phenomenology and psychotherapy. Existential phenomenology (Schneider, 2008; Spinelli, 2005) is a theory I find attractive for psychotherapy. This is something that must be learned by doing (Benner, 1994). Non-hierarchical and non-judgmental attitudes that foster deep listening, being with, and the exploration of meanings with a view to the whole are particularly appealing.

Phenomenology has the capacity to illuminate transformations. It can enrich the breadth of human experience through description that engages reawakened moments of universal experience through attention to the particular. Paradoxically, we connect authentically through the uniqueness of our experience. The deeper I touch my own unique experience of something, the more likely is it that I will touch some authentic and common core of being human that is recognized by another. This is something genuine to share. This can facilitate deeply satisfying connections. The more I connect with my internal experience, the more freely I can connect with others. In much the way that Merleau-Ponty states, "when I speak I discover what it is I wished to say" (as cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 32), the process of undertaking a phenomenological study teaches and connects me with what it is I want to learn at this moment for my practice as a psychotherapist.

When I hear myself and other ordinary dancers wonder at their experience of tango, I hear a question arise out of the close at hand experience of our lives. According to Burkhart, "knowledge is . . . concerned first and foremost with what is in front of us and at our feet" (2004, p. 21). The question opens space for an embodied knowledge to grow

through our experience and relationships. I suspect that for some, the social dance of Argentine tango opens up natural avenues of integration, of being at home in our body. The phenomenological stance of being open to the new assists in reflecting upon what is possibly a natural, creative, and healing tendency in every day life. In such a stance, both the seen and the seeing call each other into existence in an intersubjective space, much like an interpretive dance which mirrors the transition and creation of life: we meet immediate experience in which each moment passes, making room for the next. In such a dance, space is made to welcome and explore questions of meaning, of existence, of who I am and who we are–all within a relationship akin to Martin Buber's *I-Thou* meetings, a concrete invitation into the more of life.

To engage questions about our experience of dance is "also to celebrate . . . the uniqueness and vitality of . . . our immediate encounter with it, both as dancers and as [onlookers/readers]" (Sheets, 1966, p. 3). Sheets notes that the "meaning of any dance comes alive for us only as we ourselves have a lived experience of the dance, and not because we have a prior knowledge or any later reflective efforts" (1966, p. 4). And yet, at the same time, she notes that subsequent reflections have the effect of experiencing something in future dances that would have otherwise been missed, and even to rid us of some pre-conceptions, and bring us more directly into the next encounters. I believe that Sheets is speaking here of the power of lived experience to foreground vital meaning. Equally important to me, personally and professionally, is to query the lived experience of reflecting upon dance and its effect upon one's whole experience of life.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In turning to the literature, my focus has been to follow the lure of the intriguing term *intersubjectivity*. The question of what is going on when two subjectivities meet (subject to themselves, each other, the world) parallels the lived experience of dance. Argentine tango cannot be danced alone. It is a social dance, and neither a private affair nor a performance. Therefore it requires a community of dancers. The world of relationship is not optional. In a sense the dancer, the dance and the community are inseparable. And for all my lamentation about problem-oriented, scientific, reductionist approaches that can fragment a sense of wholeness, rich and abundant bodies of literature focus precisely on relationship, and its creative, healing, and life-sustaining qualities. I highlight some of this work spanning sixty years from the areas of philosophy, psychotherapy, and theology.

Philosophy

What the most learned and ingenious combination of concepts denies, the humble and faithful beholding, grasping, knowing of any situation bestows. The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable: through the embrace of one of its beings.
–Martin Buber

The most important ideas for me concerning who we are in relationship and how we relate, come from Martin Buber. In fact, the more I read, the more I recognize him as my mother container. For a long time, a key question for me had to do with the Other. In any given situation, who is the Other for me, and how do I welcome the Other? I considered the Other as that which presents the key in connection with the commandment to love one's enemies. At this point, I understand the other more broadly to be the one with whom one relates. Of significance is that it is through relating with the other that we

become; our deepest reality lies in the relationships between one being and another (Buber, 1947).

Martin Buber taught us that the area of between is the place of meeting. When two persons come forth to meet each other, they arrive in the space of between, with nothing between them, save their meeting, their becoming. The best way for me to describe this is to say that we evoke something in each other when we meet. The space of between is a conduit of evocation and invitation, facilitating a flow of relational presencing, in give and take exchange of who each is becoming in the act of relating to each other. Carl Rogers speaks of this: "It seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other" (1980, p. 129). At times this between space is an unmistakable, palpably felt presence. At other times, it can be sensed as a void, an absence, and we might even feel diminished in some way. The distinction, while not always so dramatic, might reflect the difference between the nature of *I-Thou* (which Buber defines as relating) and *I-it* (which Buber defines as being experienced, as object rather than as subject). Implications are important also for the *I* in each of these situations. Since it is in the act of relating that we become, the I in a meeting of I-Thou will be different than the I of I-it (Buber, 1958).

For Buber, I-it is the most common form of experiencing the world. Here we move about, organizing and carrying on with many tasks, mostly unaware of meaning, whereas encounters of I-Thou are rare and sacred. Buber writes that the moments when we allow ourselves to be touched in and by subjectivity "are the truly religious moments of our lives" (1967, p. 19). The following moment, when we step back and reflect, we move into an I-it relationship with that upon which we reflect. Reflective living is like another

form of dance, which moves from being in the co-constitutive experience of meeting to a state of conscious awareness, with its ensuing separation and distancing. If fortunate, one moves back again into meaningful experience as a new whole.

In actual dance, each dancer invites the other into being; their meeting creates the dance. Husserl wrote, that "we feel most 'alive' when the 'I' is minimally self-conscious" (as cited in Spinelli, 2005, p. 28). In Buber's view, such moments are co-constitutive of becoming. I would also describe them as healing and creative.

Janet Adler remarks that people are reticent and protective of speaking about tender, precious experiences; however when a receptive listener is found, then speakers feel affirmed and grounded (as cited in Fallis, 2002). I believe that Buber's ideas of real meeting speak to the mutuality to which therapists aspire, in order to engage a deep listening that invites clients' healing capacities. My experiences of real dancing help my understanding of Buber's real meeting.

There are two more important points of Buber's to emphasize. One is the necessity of grappling with the other as "over" and "against," the second is wholeness. Buber emphasizes that his great thoughts come from meetings with otherness (Buber, 1967). This speaks to me of a need or a willingness to engage challenge in order to grow. O'Donohue advises that how we relate to "otherness is one of the most decisive questions" of our lives (2005). Every dancer has experiences with otherness, and embracing the other is fundamental to the social dance of Argentine tango. As a dance, it demands commitment, patience and tenacity (Seyler, 2008). I find it of significant interest that Buber's experience of absence may have brought him into relationship with

presence (Huston, 2007). This research pays particular attention to the various experiences of other as belonging to the whole.

Buber's philosophy is holistic. It is large enough to hold all the paradoxes that make up who we are, from our "two-fold nature" of I-it and I-Thou (Buber, 1958), to thoughts that "move simultaneously inwards, in a deepening self-knowledge, and outwards, in a new and vivid awareness of life in the world with others" (Buber, 1947, p. 11). One is not possible without the other, and no aspect can be understood by itself. Lastly, Buber held that no amount of intra-personal relating could take the place of inter-personal relationship (Cooper, 2003).

Psychotherapy

There is much discussion in the literature about the nature of client-therapist relating. Perhaps the sheer quantity reflects the need to grapple with shifting paradigms.

> Bartoli considers the paradigm shift from a positivist to a postmodern epistemology, as well as feminist and multicultural approaches, as significant in developing a more flexible and inclusive understanding of human experience, and an awareness of diversity of subjective experiences (Cassar & Shinebourne, 2012. p. 133).

Examples of this development span a time frame at least since the 1980s. They include incorporating spirituality and religion into psychotherapy (Cassar & Shinebourne, 2012), and examples of holistic models in the practice of western medicine (Reason, 1988).

Broad connections of relationship. The effect of shifting paradigms is seen in the volume of psychotherapy literature regarding the nature of therapeutic relationship. It may reflect the need to establish the good mother, a place of integration and growth for therapists as well as their clients. "Sometimes in the history of psychotherapy a

phenomenon arises which occurs to several people at once, like ripe fruit which drops into everyone's back garden at the same time" (Rowan, 1998, p. 2). Fifteen years later the fruit is still falling, the time is still ripe for sharing ideas on connectivity in relationship, and his words still relevant. The phenomenon concerns what I would call an exploration of connectivity between client and therapist. Many of Rowan's examples come from the humanist, existentialist, and psychoanalytic traditions. Examples of terms are: resonance, experiential listening, embodied countertransference, being aligned, and relational depth. Like intersubjectivity, they depict qualities of close relationship.

Rowan references the writing of Nathan Field and many others in putting worlds to this natural, sacred and hard to define experience of relating. Coming from the Jungian tradition, Field speaks to "the simultaneous union and separation of self and other. . . . We are not lost in the other, as in fusion, but found" (as cited in Rowan, 1998, p. 6). This speaks powerfully to me of social Argentine tango, wherein the one dance, in a single frame of space and time, each person is found to be both dancer and the dance. "Friedman makes the point that . . . . most people imagine that we are imprisoned within our own individual experience and find it hard to believe that Buber's imagining the real can actually enable us to make our own what the other experiences" (as cited in Rowan, 1998, p. 4).

The shift out of deterministic cause and effect models, to ways of thinking that are more aware of complexity, connectivity and constant change, is evidenced in the work of Shore and Bromberg. These are two researchers who reduce experience into definable categories by viewing both affect and trauma as biological events. However, their examples from the fields of science and psychotherapy show respect for knowledge that

is more inclusive than medical definition alone. In the forward to Bromberg's latest book (2011), Shore writes, "my neuropsychoanalytic perspective views the shift from conscious cognition to unconscious affect, and asserts that the relational mechanism embedded in the therapeutic alliance acts not through the therapist's left brain explicitly delivering *content* interpretations . . , but through right-brain to right-brain affect communication and regulation *processes*" (p. x). Is one reminded here of Heidegger? "What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said" (Heidegger cited in Gergen, 2009, p. 35). In other words, there are two conversations going on. One is represented by what we see and hear. The other is represented by the unseen connection between two people, hearkening to the more than words can say.

It is not surprising that when Bromberg and Shore look at the MRI diagnostic instrument for emotional process between client and therapist, they find it. While they are excited to see scientific evidence on MRI for what is normally not perceived to be seen, I am excited to recognize that under the heavy language of biology, dissociation, and trauma, the call to empathic listening is heard as key to healing. Empathic listening refers to the heartfelt, bodily-perceived connections between two human beings, which allow clients' healing to occur within them. I now turn to the specific intersubjective experience between therapist and client.

Intersubjectivity. The word *intersubjectivity* stems from the work of Stolorow and Atwood in the late 1970s, when they "conceptualized the interplay of transference and countertransference . . . as mutual interaction of the differently organized subjective worlds of patient and analyst" (Stolorow, 2004, p. 547). Stolorow explains that they use the term broadly to say that subjects and experiences co-constitute each other. Significant

to therapeutic practice, is that clinical phenomena cannot be understood apart from their context, to which the analyst is intrinsic (Stolorow, 2004). Additionally, how an analyst is with a client reflects the therapist's theoretical ideas. This is treated in the introductory chapter of Stolorow and Atwood's first book entitled *The Observer is the Observed* (2004, p. 547). Here we see that in a therapeutic relationship, theory and therapist are also in a process of becoming.

Madison treats the relationship between the psychotherapist and a theory openly. In his article, "Focusing, Intersubjectivity, and 'Therapeutic Intersubjectivity'" (2008), it becomes apparent that clients are not alone in their need for validation; therapists and their theories are also in need of the same. Madison speaks about how his relationship with a theory can stand in the way of "being" (or an I-Thou form of relating), and perhaps contribute more to "doing" (as an I-it experience) (2008, p. 58). He asserts that if he can engage a theory to make it his own, it can fall away after revealing something that was hidden. In sacred moments of an I-Thou encounter, wherein self-consciousness collapses, theory is not noticeable. A theory that has been integrated facilitates the encounter; it does not stand between the client and the therapist. In moments of I-it, possibly distracted by the clock, new use of skills, strategy or agenda, there is plenty of room for theory to occupy the space of between, which might result in a relationship that is more about a theory than about human being or becoming.

An existential psychotherapist who believes Buber's ideas have much to contribute to the area is Mick Cooper (2003). He transposes the I-Thou and I-it distinction into the intrapersonal realm, and proposes that what goes on within many people is a cacophony of monologues rather than genuine dialogue between differing views (Cooper, 2003). He

suggests that “a key role of the therapeutic process is to help clients become more able to experience moments of . . . [I-Thou] intrapersonal encounter, and . . . this requires the therapist to confirm the client both as a whole and in terms of each of his or her different voices” (Cooper, 2003, p. 131). Cooper also studied therapists’ experiences of relational depth who described them as not only characterized by “high levels of empathy, acceptance and genuineness toward clients, but also by feelings of aliveness, receptivity, satisfaction and immersion. . . . [similar] to experiences of presence or flow” (2005, p. 94). The first three terms are distinctly psychological; the latter also accurately describe my experiences of memorable tango. In a study of how such moments occur for clients, Knox and Cooper (2011) found that clients reached a point in which they decided to bring more vulnerability to the therapeutic relationship; clients’ awareness of therapists’ acceptance and respect facilitated their readiness to do so.

We will now look at the outward direction, to how clients experience their wider worlds. Spinelli is an existential psychotherapist who appreciates Buber’s ideas for contributing to an embracing of the world dimension and for emphasizing an inter-human meeting in therapy (2002). This perspective asks clients to question how they experience the meaning and effect of their decisions from the viewpoint of those significant to them (and perhaps further still, others who are significant to their significant others). Spinelli regards any therapeutic endeavor that excludes the world as “questionable with regard to . . . ‘well-being’” (2002, p. 118).

Relationship as bridge to wider world. I now open my lens wider than the therapeutic room, and highlight the work of Gergen, who credits Buber as having made the most significant contribution to his text *Relational Being* (2009). Gergen challenges

us to “shift the locus of understanding human action from the individual to the relationship” (2008, p. 335). “Relational Being” is intended for a wide audience, and like Wilson (2008), asserts a relational base to knowledge, in a writing style that includes a wide community. Gergen’s treatise is that our emphasis on nouns, content and individual selves has resulted in a society of bounded selves. His aim is to replace this with an emphasis on the action of relating. Who we are, even in our private, most alone moments, emerges in relationship. Through becoming aware of ways to nurture and to facilitate our connectivity. “Generative processes stimulate the expansion and flow of meaning. Ultimately they may be key to our future well-being” (Gergen, 2009, p. 47). Gergen proposes a view of self as a multi-being–one with enormous possibilities for us–as disparate potentials are celebrated and each meaningful relationship leaves a residue for who we are becoming (2009, p. 137). According to Gergen, we can quit searching inside the cranium for who we are and what we do! The implication is that our relationships reveal who we are.

Much of Gergen’s (2009) work translates well into metaphors of dance. One is the concept of intention. Provocatively, he gives numerous examples about the futility of understanding intention from thought alone. We look to performance to recognize intention (Gergen, 2009, p. 81). This is true enough. Yet it can be fascinating to realize that one can recognize the invisible aspect of intention before it becomes visible action, for example, at a dance lesson. Social Argentine tango does not rely on learned patterns of movement. It is an improvised conversation made up of words no bigger than a single step. The dance relies on effective connection. An able Lead initiates a step with intention, but will not move until the Follow has received the intention, recognized by her

moving, at which point the Lead will move to follow and join the dance. One might not believe this possible, since we quickly attest to the inability to mind-read. However, at the level of bodily perception, we move in response to invisible intentions. We engage this every time we situate ourselves next to another person, in choosing how close or how far to move, whether with friends or among strangers standing in a grocery line. This is captured by Merleau-Ponty who "argued for a consciousness that was deeply inhabited by the other. One's perception of the other, he proposed, contains within it a consciousness of being perceived by the other" (Gergen, 2009, pp. xxi-xxii). In the dance, each person is keenly attuned to each other, in their interaction, to become the dance.

In social tango, intention is paired with axis. Axis involves being centered and grounded so as not to be pushing, pulling, or using the other to assist in balance. Being grounded in one's own axis, while staying with the intention of the other, results in a strong sense of presence. Darwall speaks to this beautifully when he defines *being with* as somehow involving awareness of the other's distinguished personage, with the type of deference afforded a king (2011). This risks the kind of vulnerability that opens us to change within an atmosphere of respect and ceremony. Moving out of the psychotherapy office into the wider world, qualities of connection remain eminent.

Restorative Justice Expert, Dominic Barter names connection as key in his work to establish creative communities and systems (Leach, 2013). He calls listening a profound act, and a needed response to conflict, which he views as feedback expressing a communication failure of existing structures. Awareness of connection facilitates deep listening; it sees beyond existing patterns, structures, and categories. Fundamental to Barter's work is the improvement of connection between persons, and making this central

to social endeavors through efforts that make listening more conscious. In line with feminist thinking that, "safety and psychological growth arise in good connection" (Jordan, 2010, p. 215), Barter works to move people in conflict closer to each other. He notes that when re-engaging communities, the willingness to celebrate together increases trust, and is easy to find. In the social dance of Argentine tango, we can link powerful ideas of human development. These include celebration in community, the natural expression of human spirituality, and movements from externalized sources of knowledge and justice to the discovery of self-power and empowerment.

Although exciting evidence of a high interest in connectivity exists, it seems that mainstream society increasingly does not require the development and maintenance of personal relationships to function. Experiences of separation and alienation create "emotional tumult [that] demands a fundamental contact with the other," . . . who can "connect exactly to bring an authentic sense of coherence" and meaning (Jorna, 2012, p. 32). Buber speaks to this when he writes of "odd moments" of genuine meeting that break forth in surprise, they being relegated to "odd corners" such as the newspaper vendor (1947, p. 37). Cameron notices, "there is an instant [a handshake or 'how are you?'] where the opportunity to truly meet the other exists" (1992, p. 173).

When I started this writing, I could not define what I meant by healing and spirituality, although I recognized their presence and effect in my work. Now it appears simple and clear. Still I am hesitant to separate out the notion of spirituality because I view it as intimately integral to every aspect of our lives (recall also Tafoya quoted earlier by Wilson, 2008). I now define spirituality as connecting, and how we connect as making

all the difference for generating healing and wholeness. Healing action is that which enhances and restores connection within and among the many dimensions of our being.

Listening as key to connecting. Listening is described as stepping into the between space, as midwife to spaces of silence, with the potential to reconnect interior dimensions that have been separated and alienated (Jorna, 2012; Wilberg, 2004). Wilberg flips our common conceptions of communication upside down. He asks counsellors to consider words to be forms of indirect communication, and listening to be a form of direct communication. "Listening *is* relating . . . Authentic listening is an attunement to what Martin Buber called 'the between'" (Wilberg, 2004, p. 88). Verbalizations tend to impose a structure that separates the two, whereas listening with an embodied presence, willing to bear with silences of no words, has the capacity to evoke the other into being in their words. Wilberg has refined a language of listening, and condensed it into key words largely derived from Heidegger and Winnicott. They include hearkening, hosting, hallowing, and withholding. Heidegger tells us, "patience is the truly human way of being" (as cited in Wilberg, 2004, p. 90).

This kind of focused listening has strong parallel in the dance of social Argentine tango. In this dance I wait upon each intention, not imposing my axis (analogous to speech) upon the other, nor moving my axis in a direction that would push or pull. I know that the attentive listening presence that I bring can profoundly move the dance, such that each becomes more present to the other, to the dance, to the music, and to more. The very posture in Argentine tango is a relaxed listing in, to listen, in constant attunement to maintain a sensitive and responsive connection. It is easy for me to

understand the healing potential in this dance and the wordless occasions that break forth into sheer joy.

One person who brings all of these fine attitudes and thoughts together in a practical and accessible way is Eugene Gendlin. He demonstrates that through exquisite listening, the body can enter into genuine dialogue with language such that "words acquire new meaning as we use them" (Gendlin, 2000, p. 3). He teaches ways of listening with focus and connection that evoke the body's implicit wisdom to become explicitly known in each unique situation, in all its complexity. Focus and connection combine to bring powerful healing presence. Cornell (with McGavin 2005) puts forth attitudes that facilitate such presence, attitudes I endeavor to bring to this research. The attitudes are completely consistent with Wilson's depiction of Indigenist research. They might be summarized as creating an invitational space to gently welcome and care for all that ventures forth. This describes a sensitive listening that knows and trusts a healing process that moves naturally into an invitational and welcoming space when provided with the simple and sincere presence of acknowledgement, awareness, and allowing to be (Cornell, 2005, p. 16).

Preston (2009; 2005) explains this process in her work of relational psychotherapy. She views every bit of human experience as relational process. She credits Gendlin when she emphasizes that each experience implicitly carries within it the forward movement that will open into meaning. This meaning is far greater than the categories we might ordinarily ascribe to it (Levin, 1994). When a listening space welcomes "what is known, but what we can't say–the unthought known," then the implicit can become explicitly known as the next step in the process of meaningful becoming (Preston, 2009). Both

persons open the important space for listening (Cooper, 2003; Kögler, 2012). The step that is evoked is unique to each particular person, connecting wholly to all of the person's inner history, their outer lifeworld, their future potential, and to the therapist who also brings a world of complexity to the meeting. Indeed, the step invited by therapeutic connection is one of gentle and radical welcoming, of a kind rarely encountered in daily living (Preston, 2005).

Psychoanalysts and developmentalists emphasize attuned communication that involves the bodily perception of emotions for ongoing adaptive processes. This kind of embodied listening notices the body's registrations, its emotions and felt sense of the whole experience of being with another person. The literature suggests that not only is it helpful to attune and attend the bodily sense of changes in process, such as palpable shifts, but it can also be helpful to reflect on those movements as a way of facilitating and supporting the process (Lamagna, 2011; Tidmarsh, 2010).

Theology

Phenomenology is a work of reflection and "speaks partly through silence" (van Manen, 1997). I-Thou encounters and the creation of meaning require a certain open, invitational space, wherein that which is becoming, is allowed to venture forth without the push and pull of super-imposed structure. In this section I would like to give readers and my words pause to breathe. In so doing, I invite recognition of the spiritual nature of this research and the philosophical underpinnings of existential psychotherapy.

This study is grounded in the work of Martin Buber, a man not easily classified. "He has been called one of the few wise men of our time, and his wisdom may be described as the power to step over artificial boundaries, for the sake of true humanity"

(Smith cited in Buber, 1947, p. 9). To say that his philosophy developed as the spiritual expression of his identity, as a scholar and educator deeply rooted in his own religious tradition of Judaism, though meaningful, seems almost trivial in light of his legacy. One can note, for example, that although I did not use Buber's name as a search term, his name appeared in nearly every article cited in the forgoing literature review. Such is the influence of his spirituality to enliven the attitudes and values of a profession which takes no official position on the matter of spirituality (Elkins, 2015), a profession which typically identifies itself as secular.

It is appealing to me that Buber's work integrates the stuff of life that we grapple with and recognize as real living. "According to the logical conception of truth only one of two contraries can be true, but in the reality of life as one lives it, they are inseparable. . . . The unity of contraries is the mystery at the inner most core of the dialogue" (Buber cited in Friedman, 2002, pp. 3-4). Relevant to phenomenology, Buber exemplifies the paradox of how something uniquely particular addresses the general and the universal (van Manen, 1997); he wrote to the situations of his time from his own concrete experience. Buber emphasized that a genuine dialogue of real meeting is concretely lived: "the more concretizing it is, the more it does justice to the unique, the coming to be, the formed, and is also able to incorporate in it the most spiritual, not metaphorically but in reality, because the spirit seeks the body and lets speech help find it" (Buber, 1967, p. 696). Dance does not stand in for a spiritually lived experience, nor is it a metaphor for conversation. Dance is a real and genuine dialogue, spiritual and concrete.

Borrowing from Lawrence (2003) and O'Donohue (2005), the body is the crucible in which contradiction meets. In the body we encounter the visible ground and the

invisible breath, the intentions and hesitations made visible, the needs for sleeping and for waking. The body borders the inner and outer landscapes of our existence. It is in the body that we find our point in the circle of life, the meeting of all our past ancestral residues of connection of ancient knowing (O'Donohue, 2005), in a present moment invitation to deep engagement, such that we touch the future with real healing (Nouwen, 1975).

In my Roman Catholic tradition, the body is sacred. Not withstanding centuries of taboo, especially surrounding the female body (Kilburn-Smith, 2003; Prokes, 1996), we can find rigorous theology upholding the sanctity of the body and all of creation (Dalton, 1999). The body reveals a trinitarian life of communion, even within the "cell's 'inner dialogue'. The meaning of human embodiment is already physically inscribed in the miniscule beginnings of life, prior to any individual's conscious realization" (Prokes, 1996, p. 70). O'Murchu writes "meaning . . . is imprinted–first and foremost–in the fabric of creation itself and becomes conscious in the dreams and aspirations of the human heart" (1998, p. 57). It is astounding to consider that our miniscule beginnings mirror evolutionary process spanning billions of years and billions of galaxies, and that evolutionary processes also mirror our own development of conscious attention to wonder. This is not about casually passing by a mirror and waving, "hello!" Rather, it warrants pause to consider an intense mystery of intimate and revealing connections.

Vaclav Havel proclaims, "the only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the Earth and, at the same time, the cosmos" (1997, p. 171). Even earlier, and drawing on an experience of WWII battlefield ministry, Teilhard de Chardin regarded human beings as the dimension of evolution capable of

reflecting back on itself, intimately and infinitely connected within the cosmos (Schleinich, 2011). Incarnational spirituality reflects just this, the face to face presence of God in our world. I often hear a question echoing within myself, "if these stones could talk . . . ?" Perhaps they would reveal loving connections so deep and subtle that it takes hundreds of millions of years to be received in a holy moment of reflection. Grace witnesses. It flows into meaning and form, as gift received, embodied, and shared.

A prolific Catholic writer, Nouwen (1992), claims his core truth as recognizing himself as the *Beloved*, at home in the world of existence. He describes the challenge of ministry as firstly to risk entry into our own concrete experience and then to reach out in the offering of a free and friendly space to others, spaces wherein strangers are welcomed and change can take place. He views every human being as called to be a healer through the full and real presence of listening to each other, allowing healing through the transformation of our connections, with each other and with creation (Nouwen, 1975).

Connection and creativity are central to Argentine tango as a social dance; hence I hold the dance to be an avenue of wholeness. What can we learn about conversations of dance? I hope to show evidence of healing and connection in the lives of research participants. In my own life, I have felt the paradox of vulnerable moments that demanded I reach deep within for sustaining connections that opened in surprise to joy. I noticed again, a tangible reaching inward, this time to enable moving with clear intention as I learn to lead the dance in the other side of the embrace. More recently still, I caught a glimpse of *being* the embrace, a thought that almost takes my breath away. I am reminded of Nouwen's story of homecoming. Through his own deep engagement and

study of Rembrandt's painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Nouwen, 1995), he chronicles a journey that called him to embody the compassion of God.

A process that invites an embodied approach to openly reflect upon lived experience invites the spiritual into research and therapy (Hinterkopf 1998; Todres 2007). Clearly this research demands respect for the lived process of participants and for whatever words they use for the spiritual–something I see as integral to every part of life, and needing no magnification to be present.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

To speak of one's experience of dance is to interpret a physical experience. This puts one in a reflective mode, in which one is conscious of meanings that are received and understood through one's experience. Interpretive phenomenology is most suitable for a study that seeks firstly to learn from the experience of dance and secondly to learn from sharing those experiences in words. This chapter will help the reader understand my choice and particular usage of phenomenology, as distinct from descriptive/transcendental phenomenology.

Andrew Cooper maintains that a researcher who engages "passionate research about passions," needs to use methodologies and epistemologies that support such endeavors (2009, p. 432). The closer one comes to the engagement of a single case, the more value will be its uniqueness and particularity, and the greater will be the need for a theoretical container. Preston speaks about how a theory can act as a "*holding environment* (Winnicott's term)" (2005, p. 20), and "as a good mother" (2005, p. 21). Epistemologies of relationship and soul support this work and enable creativity through conversations that enhance awareness of change and growth.

Phenomenology is consistent with the values of an Indigenist research paradigm (Wilson, 2008). Notable methods are the conversational use of storytelling, metaphor, and plain talk to gather data, all with a gentle and non-impositional manner. Researcher and participants are co-learners, and the study benefits the community. This calls for collaborative analysis of data and presentation of results, consistent with St. Stephen's College practices, in a ceremony of connection and relationship. According to this paradigm, the engagement and potential transformation of myself as researcher is one of

the key ways for results to unfold and benefit the wider community. The reader might ask, what is interpretive phenomenology and specifically how is it suited to this study?

Understanding Interpretive Phenomenology

A definition of phenomenology is not easily conceptualized in the literature, and descriptors do not consistently represent the method and approaches used (Conroy, 2003). Phenomenology defies being reduced to a few statements, possibly because it is a richly developed philosophy with a foundation that undoes the Cartesian splits between subject and object, undoing precisely those things that make for neat definitions. In fact, it is a philosophy that seeks to stay close to the experience of phenomenon, close to the perception of things as they appear. It is not associated with theories or methods that stand apart from the experience under study.

Notice the word experience. It is a noun referring to a verb–actions which, like dance, evolve, change and are fluid. Also important to phenomenology is the notion of the whole, with attention to connections making up the whole, and how perspectives on the whole change with changes in our attention. Rather than attempting to define phenomenology, I will bring to the fore some statements by van Manen that in part describe phenomenology. I will follow this with relevant developments by two key founders of phenomenology, and point out how they relate to this thesis work and to my choice of the descriptor, *interpretive*. Lastly, I will name a specific use of the approach, which I expect to be helpful to appreciate the embodied nature of tango. In this way I will identify some main aspects of phenomenology that are important for this study, recognizing that opinions differ among researchers about which concepts are most important.

> Phenomenology is the study of lived experience . . . . Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. This project is both new and old. It is new in the sense that modern thinking and scholarship is so caught up in theoretical and technological thought that [phenomenology] may strike an individual as a breakthrough and a liberation. It is old in the sense that, over the ages, human beings have invented artistic, philosophic, communal, mimetic and poetic languages that have sought to (re) unite them with the ground of their lived experience. . . . Phenomenology is a caring attunement, . . . a mindful wondering about the project of life, ... its ultimate aim: to become more fully who we are. (van Manen, 1997, pp. 9-12)

The philosophy of phenomenology began with Edmond Husserl (1859-1938). He gave us the concept of *intentionality,* possibly the greatest concept for undoing of notions of separation. Unlike the commonly used meaning of intention that settles on a goal or direction, by the word *intention* Husserl emphasized that all consciousness is conscious *of* something. There is an inherent connection between the seeing and the seen. Our attention is drawn to both our environment and our experiences of the environment. Spinelli (2005) refers to this as the natural state of our minds stretching forth. Thomas Berry calls this the universe reflecting back on itself, the earth becoming conscious (1990). It is similar to Gendlin's *Process Model,* which describes how an event is "occurring into implying" (1997, p. 90); it reveals an intimate relationship between what

explicitly occurs and its implicit ground, comprising all connection in its whole situation. Significant is the connection between the seeing and the seen, each influencing and revealing the other.

In dance, and in research, how I engage with intention makes a difference. In a dance, for example, the experience of partnership with someone who is thinking about making me move and translating thoughts to hands, is much different than an experience where two persons maintain a relaxed and engaged connection, giving primary attention to the music. If I am sensitive to the rhythm and flow of conversation, I will be present to the shifts and places in which significant meaning is created (Swinton & Mowat, 2006). That which becomes explicit implies the existence of the other, in a relationship. The concept of intentionality along with the focus on lived experience carries through to all philosophical developments of phenomenology.

A second important term introduced by Husserl is *lifeworld (lebenswelt),* which draws attention to how our experiences are grounded in worlds of meaning, some of which are hidden in natural attitudes. Husserl believed that it is possible to become aware of the natural attitudes one brings to the experience, and to transcend the relationship between our consciousness and what we are conscious of, in order to distill the essence of a phenomenon. This traditional Husserlian approach is sometimes referred to as *descriptive phenomenology or transcendental phenomenology.* Readers may be more familiar with it because it has been used in nursing (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992; Koch, 1996) and in psychology by Amedeo Giorgi (Langdridge, 2007). I now bring in later developments in phenomenology.

A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) believed that we meet the world pre-reflectively, but that we interpret it through the language of our relationships and culture. In his philosophy all language is already an interpretation and it is therefore impossible to transcend background culture. He emphasized an existential nature in the sense that for every person, there is a certain *throwness.* This refers to facts about life that we must accept: limits and circumstances beyond one's making or changing. With Heidegger's philosophy, there is not only an emphasis on the relationship between a person and what a person is conscious of, but also on being in the world with others in a certain time. The world is creatively co-constitutive, beyond prediction. As cited by Leonard, Heidegger tells us "each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of" (1994, p. 49). Heideggarian phenomenology is sometimes called *existential phenomenology.*

An important concept of Heidegger's for this study is the *hermeneutic circle*. It refers not to a method, but to Heidegger's metaphor for moving between the part and the whole in a relationship that gives rise to different understandings (not necessarily better understandings, not necessarily identifying essences). I transposed this metaphor to the dance floor in my introduction to imply how various players, including the readers, influence an unfolding creative process. There are two last points to make before identifying a current approach particularly suited to this thesis. They are statements regarding prejudice and ethics.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), a student of Heidegger, argues for a positive concept of prejudice (Koch, 1996). "Gadamer believes . . . . that all meaningful existence

- is a conversation leading towards mutual understanding," and central to the conversation are the prejudices that form the self-understanding with which we engage (Langdridge, 2007, p. 42). The term prejudice refers to all the background and preconceptions, which continually evolve into knowledge processes necessary for how we access our world. In other words, our prejudices form the biases that open us to the world. I bring value positions to this research. They will both constrain and facilitate conversations with participants. In all cases, what is brought to conversation will reveal meaning.

One of the important benefits of the phenomenological approach is the increase in understanding that comes from uncovering and discovering our bias and assumptions. I do not believe that I can effectively bracket my bias toward tango, nor do I wish to do that, especially when my bias contributes to synergy in discovering new meanings. Instead, I respectfully welcome and acknowledge all that comes, to support our prejudices, and I hope readers will do the same. In this way, prejudices may show up in ways that foster questioning and reinterpretation. By carrying forward meanings, and being open to new understandings, we become more open to transformation. This is consistent with Heidegger's (Conroy, 2003) and Gadamer's (Laverty, 2003) positions regarding phenomenology, as well as a main purpose of research (Wilson, 2008).

When we consider that we are beings-in-the-world-with-others, we see that far from being a private affair, research into unique and particular experience is not a personal endeavour but rather carries ethical responsibility. Who we are and who we are becoming has far reaching implications, especially when we consider human history in evolutionary terms.

> Research is a caring act: we want to know what is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery. (van Manen, 1997, pp. 5-6)

In this research we might touch the liminal space of the dance and catch sight of creative energies intimate to a sacred journey.

Although my aim is to describe the lived experience of a particular dance in a way that enriches or awakens a lived quality of human experience (van Manen, 1997), it is language that interprets and re-interprets the meaning of an essentially non-verbal experience. Sheets-Johnstone would take exception to the statement that it is through language that we first make sense of what we see and then communicate. She makes the case for the primacy of movement (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011). She states that "language is post-kinetic. . . . movement is our mother-tongue, . . . [and] movement develops our sense of awareness" (2010). Recall also Merleau-Ponty who implies the body: "when I speak I discover what it is I wished to say" (as cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 32). Wilberg warns of abstract modes that reduce meaning, "*desensualising* sense perception" itself into recognition of mere signage (2010, p. 16). He points out that "music is a key to *not* sense *as* – but instead finding meaning or sense directly in sensory experiencing itself" (Wilberg, 2010, p. 17).

In thesis work, non-verbal experience is translated into words. Levels of interpretations are necessarily modified by the various senses that we experience at any point in time. While "existential phenomenology . . . recognizes human beings as

embodied creatures beyond language," interpretive phenomenology recognizes the role of language, spoken and written, to convey meaning and understanding (Langdridge, 2007, p. 43). It is an interpretation of experience. Therefore, I specify *interpretive phenomenology* for this study, with strong Heideggarian roots.

At any time, we experience more than we can put to words. This is surely relevant as one can view dance as physical poetry. In this work, I choose words with care that comes from the excess of our experience, in ways that do not reduce that experience, but that bring it to life. Throughout this work I honour the kinesthetic perceptions that underlie the conversations and I attend the natural bodily felt sense for direction, both in conversation and in writing. Use of the felt sense facilitates using all of one's senses, something also encouraged in Indigenist research (Wilson, 2008).

Methods of Engagement

I attempt to engage readers with concrete examples to evoke awareness. In this way, I hope to let the aesthetic experience of social Argentine tango communicate in research, something called for by Todres (2007) and Levine & Levine (1999). Readers might imagine how research conversations mirror the dance. Social tango is essentially a walk, each step a creative improvisation that takes account of the whole moment, using time, space, and focused attention to particular unfolding into new creation. Between each step, from the ground of home, the ground of some understanding, to the landing of the next step in the next words of description, is a transition, a key point to balance. During this transition time, the non-standing free leg ventures forth, exploring both contact and space before coming to land and becoming the next supporting step, as word

expressed in conversational dance. Once landed, the body checks its balance even while venturing forth in a next step.

How do I let participants' words body forth into descriptions on paper? Here I turn to van Manen's interpretive phenomenology, allowing words to pull readers into an experience that attracts, holds, and presences–much like the dance (1997). How are spirituality and healing revealed? With gentle observation of our experience, readers and participants are invited to engage this endeavor, to be with their experience as closely as possible, and to notice the mystery inherent in concretely lived experience. The said points to the unsaid. This fits the gentle, non-impositional nature of Wilson's presentation of Indigenist approaches to research. It also respects the topic, making space for the more subtle, tender experiences of the body to be heard and formed in words of new meaning.

In studying spiritual experiences, Miller notes that the prevalence of reported numinous experience increased significantly when the topic was explored within a trusting relationship rather than through questionnaire polls. She interviewed adults regarding "shy and delicate" experiences (Hardy, cited in Miller, 2009). Although I was interested to hear about tango experiences that are specifically viewed as spiritual or healing, even numinous, the study did not focus on those aspects per se. The dance's spiritual and healing qualities are integrated into the whole of one's life, and they show up indirectly in the way one lives and relates. I respect participants' choice of words to reflect their unique relationships with dance, in keeping with the Indigenist approach of accountability.

How to strive for the silky, satin experience of freshly flowing water rather than the jarring, grinding and forceful methods that remind me more of moving furniture than of dancing? With gentleness, patience, and intimate knowledge of the human condition to haltingly move forward, I sought equal power sharing among participants, letting an Indigenist research paradigm add a fresh layer to this project. Accountability comprised of respect, reciprocity and responsibility to community (Wilson, 2008) is not uniquely Indigenous, but this is the paradigm that sharpens my focus on establishing quality relationships as source of knowledge within research. By conducting the interviews through conversations, my voice is included as a participant. This form of co-learning makes my immersion in the hermeneutic circle explicit (Conroy, 2003).

Breadth of data is not the goal, nor is my aim to capture the essence of tango as a common denominator among various perspectives. Rather, depth of data is pursued by description that is close to experience. Conversations occurred sequentially. Each subsequent conversation followed the transcription, and initial interpretation, of the one preceding. This was a way of attending the hermeneutic circle, allowing each conversation (or pair of dancers) to influence the whole (or shift the line of dance).

I hope that our experience of this process mimics that part of the dance that awakens a greater understanding of what is possible for human experience, in a way that generously enlarges who we are. In the same way that the best dance experiences pass through us–ungraspable, but leaving us with a wide open sense of not wanting to miss precious new experience–I hope that we are left with gratitude trailing in its wake.

Specific Procedures

Inclusion of Participants. I sought and received approval for this study from the St. Stephen's College Research Ethics Committee. I then looked for seasoned dancers who had opportunity to learn through their bodies and to notice the effect of dance in their lives, both on and off the dance floor through all the ups and downs of dance experience. I started within my community. I provided a letter of invitation (Appendix A) to each prospective participant, and discussed potential ethical concerns and informed consent (in Appendix B). Other discussion items prior to the first conversation, such as the purpose and form of the research, appear in Appendix C.

I held two practice conversations. The first was in the early stages, well before my research questions and proposal were formulated; I am grateful to this dancer who helped me develop focus in the study. The second practice conversation occurred after approval for the study and that dancer became a participant in the research. Although she is a ballroom dancer rather than a social tango dancer, it became obvious that this research is not about the dance per se, but about a dancer's experience. The participant's passion and ability to reflect warranted inclusion; to exclude her on the basis of dance style would have been meant a loss of relational accountability and integrity of the study. Therefore I welcomed her contribution and allowed her participation to shift the line of dance to include some ballroom. In reality, this is more accurately reflective of the smaller tango communities in which I dance.

Data Collection. The first two participants were suggested to me by friends; the third was suggested to me by the first participant. The three participants provided sufficient depth and breadth of conversational text such that I approached no others.

Data arose from the conversations with the three sequential participants. A first meeting of about 90 minutes with each participant was recorded and transcribed by me, forming the text from which themes were identified. The letter of invitation suggested questions for reflection, and this assisted the process as each participant had prepared through reflection, facilitating conversational flow.

Additional data subsequent to the first conversation was collected by note taking in four relatively brief follow-up conversations. These were to check validity of transcriptions, receive feedback on my interpretation of the text (introduction of participants and themes), and lastly, to hear participants' final reflections about how the research impacted them. I protected the identity of participants from each other with pseudonyms. Although no participant chose a pseudonym, I maintained the option until this writing.

In aiming for mutuality in conversations, I invited the participants to ask questions of me. Although my voice appears in the data collection, my participation in the research is primarily as initiator and writer. I recognize that I privilege what I hear and how ideas connect. I include examples of my experience in the writing. This helps make my prejudices explicit, and is in keeping with the Indigenist idea that knowledge arises from our relationships.

Data Interpretation. Interpretation involves reflection, a kind of listening backwards to the unspoken questions to which the answers point, and being open for new impressions to open into new questions. "Each re-reading of the text is an attempt to listen for echoes of something that might expand possibilities of understanding" (Moules, 2002, p. 14). This is not the same as listening for repetition of themes, and not the same

as searching for essence distilled from the experience of many (Conroy, 2003; Moules, 2002). Rather, careful attention was given to fluctuations and movements in any one person's view, to gently probe possible meanings further through writing. Meanwhile awareness of the larger circle allowed connection with other perspectives in the research, and maintained openness to shifts in perspective (Conroy, 2003).

I listened to the recorded conversations and read the transcripts in different ways. I kept a dedicated journal in which I conversed with the different meanings that came to the fore. I attempted to bring a fresh way of looking at the data along with a questioning attitude in the search for new or deeper understandings as suggested by Conroy (2003). This involved reading each single conversation as a whole, noting themes, and then re-reading it with greater attention to smaller segments, again noting themes, and then repeating these steps while treating all three conversations as a single whole. Change of time and place also facilitated fresh readings. These are ways I sought to listen freshly, allowing time for meanings and interpretations to arise from my body's sense of the text.

Ultimately, our intellectual plans must bow to what our experience brings. Perhaps this is best portrayed by Caputo:

> ...hermeneutics is a lesson in humility...it has wrestled with the angels of darkness and has not gotten the better of them. It understands the power of the flux to wash away the best-laid schemes of metaphysics. It takes the constructs of metaphysics to be temporary cloud formations which, from a distance, create the appearance of shape and substance but which pass through our fingers upon contact...and no matter how wantonly they are skewed across the skies there are always hermeneuts who claim to detect a shape...a bear here, a man with a long nose

> there. There are always those who claim they can read the clouds and find a pattern and a meaning.
>
> Now, it is not the function of...hermeneutics to put an end to those games, like a cold-blooded, demythologizing scientist who insists that the clouds are but random collections of particles of water...its function is to keep the games in play, to awaken us to the play, to keep us on the alert that we draw forms in the sand, we read clouds in the sky, but we do not capture deep essences...if there is anything that we learn in...hermeneutics it is that we never get the better of the flux. (cited in Moules, 2002, p. 1)

Validation

Axiology concerns the ethics and morals guiding the information judged worthy to be included (Wilson, 2008). In this section I describe how trustworthiness was built into the research. I will name what makes for validity, how that was maintained, and what the participants said in their feedback.

"Research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being," and to know and to care, is to love (van Manen, 1997, p. 5). Tango is an expression of passion, of love and commitment. My ontology is love made visible in creation. A task for me in ensuring validity is to make this visible in the thesis work. Love is made visible in the time and attention given this work and the relationships involved. It appears in the writing, in efforts to bring the material to life. It appears in the sharing of perspectives and process, inviting readers to engage the study.

Indigenist epistemology is relational, and the quality of relationships is fundamental to the quality of data and outcome.

> The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them. Again, an Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves. . . . It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes the entire systems of knowledge and relationships" (Wilson, 2008, p. 74).

These include the concepts and the cosmos, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal, our cultures and histories and much more. This does not mean analysis of every detailed connection; it means an attitude of respectful holding of the whole while honouring the ideas that come to the fore. A relational epistemology seeks the knowledge that arises out the subjective experiencing of relationships. It acknowledges that relating in a more distant, objectifying way is impossible to eradicate, but it enlists a commitment to enter the work with a deepening respect for all.

The first ethical choice was to establish and guard the safety of participants as they shared their experiences of meaning with me, and to take care of how the meanings might be presented to the public. Issues of privacy and anonymity are not taken for granted. In our western culture, privacy typically increases a sense of safety. In research, these notions contradict the Indigenist paradigm, wherein credibility is viewed as lacking when people do not identify themselves as contributors. I too, prefer to be recognized for my ideas and my words when they are published. I understand also, the anxiety and reticence about having one's words in print, where they appear fixed. To honour the Indigenist paradigm, I gave participants choice in this and asked them to indicate their preference on the confidentiality form. Although each chose not to hide their identity, I assigned pseudonyms when sharing text and requesting feedback, so that they could retain choice

in this matter until the final writing. Transcription data is protected according to St. Stephen's College protocol to maintain privacy.

Quality of knowledge depends on the quality of those relationships and experiences. These were nurtured throughout the process, mainly by checking in with participants, seeking their feedback, and letting them know the status of my work. The following lists ways for readers to notice validity in the research process:

- I include my knowledge of the topic; I have a living relationship with the topic.
- I acknowledge the lens of my authorship in this exploration of the relationship between dance and well-being; I preceded the work with theological reflection on my experiences of social Argentine tango (Schleinich, 2011).
- I let readers see how conversations with participants affect me. I show how the research has changed me.
- Letting participants know what I was looking for helped conversations to flow. This allowed a more natural conversational experience, more true to the uniqueness of each participant. Research questions were used indirectly, allowing more freedom for participants to shape the relationship and conversation.
- I emphasized an aesthetic dimension to sense making (see Todres, 2007 and Wilberg, 2010). There is truth-value in being faithful to a bodily felt sense in order to deepen the experience of listening, reading, and writing. I used my attention to the felt sense as a source of authentication.

- Readers can notice how the text reveals my unquestioned answers and what questions they would add. A text that opens more thoughts and questions is in keeping with a phenomenological attitude of ongoing discovery.
- Readers can notice if the writing evokes something in them that contributes to a deeper, richer, perhaps broader understanding of human experience, and if it resonates with something they have already lived.
- I include participants' exact words in the writing.

Perhaps the two most important sources of credibility are that:

- progressive subjectivity was maintained by journaling throughout the study, and
- participant checks were both formally and informally maintained throughout.

Feedback from participants reveals trustworthiness. Feedback was built into the research with the second research question, which asked what the effect of the study was for the participants.

Each participant described the reading of their words as "powerful." One said she had never read about herself before, and that she felt more in tune with her intuition and her ability to surrender and trust. She expressed a wish to post a link on her website to the thesis. Another said that he could feel himself being strongly drawn into the text and that at times he needed to step back. He said he would not change a word written, and expressed a wish to meet with the other participants. A third participant expressed surprise mixed with admiration at her own words. I heard evidence of continuing conversation, for e.g., "boundaries and relational dynamics–still big for me." Two participants asked for changes, which were made. Each of these concerned more accurate representation of personal relationships, revealing an ethic of relational accountability on

the part of participants. Additionally, one expressed relief to see that I included my voice in the theme of vulnerability.

For more information regarding sources of validity in this type of work, I refer readers to Palmer (1993), van Manen (1997), Todres (2007), Kvale (2009), Gergen (2009), and Mertens (2010). Success is a judgment call because interpretations are open to change in a process that is hopefully more generative than reductive. In the final print of this study, understandings remain tentative and changing (Moules, 2002). The work is not searching for a truth to add to the library of tango, but like a beautiful dance, it is lived in one moment that passes into the next. While I believe that dance is food for the soul, it is a relational community that feeds the dance. Following the insight of Sheets (1966), perhaps the greatest source of validity will be when we notice a deeper engagement of our own experience subsequent to engaging reflection of this research.

Chapter Four: Introduction to Participants

It might be helpful to pause and notice how three layers of influence work to draw forth research results. The overarching Ingidenist framework honours the knowledge that arises out of relationships as I highlight connections among ideas. Next, the phenomenological approach guides me to present meanings derived through the participants' experience as related by their conversations. Finally, St. Stephen's College holds me accountable to the broader community as I connect the findings of this work to existing academic literature relevant to the practice of psychotherapy and spirituality. I now introduce my primary relations in this work.

The Tango

An important participant is the dance itself. The tango deserves introduction for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the main inspiration for this work. It led me to the participants and to this page. It is a main player in my own context. I would even call it equal to all my academic preparation in terms of forming a container within which I approach this learning. Secondly, an introduction of this dance will give the readers a broader context for engaging the text. It allows greater imaginative power with which to understand the ideas and experiences of dancers.

For most North Americans and tourists to Buenos Aires, tango is associated with performance depictions that differ fundamentally from the tango as a social dance. Examples are the TV competition, *Dancing with the Stars,* Hollywood films such as *The Scent of a Woman,* and world tours such as *Tango Fire*. In contrast to the tango danced socially, these performances are choreographed and often use postures in which dancers lean away from each other. They are usually set to standardized music for recognition by

the untrained ear and to ease the task of judges. They regularly portray sexualized themes of cat and mouse, sensationalized leg flinging and bordello myth. Although they captivate large audiences and bring newcomers to the dance, they are viewed pejoratively by social dancers. In Buenos Aires such dances are called 'tango of the legs' to distinguish them from the gentle, intimate, and sensitively improvised form of social tango (Dujovne, 2011).

I would like to dispel some of the tango myth and portray the dance as I have come to know it. My source of information is the well-researched book, *In Strangers' Arms* by Beatriz Dujovne (2011). Dujovne used participant observation to present anthropological findings of tango as a cultural and human phenomenon. I provide some of her material that I consider particularly remarkable for my purpose, and refer the interested reader to her whole work.

The popular myth is that this dance developed in circles of prostitution among lonely and nostalgic European immigrants to Argentina. Additional stories of both scandalization and attraction by upper classes in several countries are said to have played roles in both banning and popularizing the dance. Dujovne's archival research disclaims these myths and presents an even more interesting history.

At the turn of the century, the population of Buenos Aires grew nearly eight times. In a matter of 40 years, it grew from 161,000 in 1867 to 1,240,000 in 1909. Although the majority were poor immigrants from rural Italy and Spain, immigrants arrived from areas as diverse as Eastern Europe and the British Isles. Dujovne reports this as being an unprecedented sociodemographic phenomenon at the time, and one that managed to avoid ghettos by favorable integration laws. There is evidence of great diversity in 1914, with

120 different newspapers and photos of storefronts appearing in various languages of origin. The climate was one of huge social upheaval and rapid mixing of immigrants between the local populations of Afro-Argentines and those who held European ties with England and France. Out of this "stew" came tango:

> A mix of the black and the creole; the homegrown and the sophisticated European; nationalities, races, and cultures; pluralistic religious tolerance; various musical traditions; poor and working-class people; secular education; anarchist ideas - all of these were part of the tango's birth context during a process of rapid demographic, economic, social and ideological transformation that began around 1880 and was more or less completed by 1910. . . . This unprecedented, non-segregated mix . . . was the blood that went into the veins of the tango. And it was a nostalgic blood that came from shared losses. . . . we can think of tango as the product of the collective nostalgia of a large majority of voluntarily displaced people. . . .
>
> How to characterize the tango? It is a complete genre: it has its own music, dance, and poetry. Its early music conveys a sense of popular expression with a quality of nice old days, and yet with a complexity that mirrors the ethos in which it was born; it is as earthy as its stomping grounds in the outskirts, and as sophisticated as the European culture of the nearby north. . . . Multi-layered, it fuses melodic romanticism with rhythmic vigor, life energy with tragedy, happiness with despair, roughness with refinement. It connects us with something rich, deep, as real as life is. (Dujovne, 2011, pp. 13-14)

Tango was danced in neighborhood courtyards, in public dance halls, in the most beautiful buildings, such as the opera house, not in bordellos. Statistics on the sale of sheet music and gramophones in the early 1900s is astonishing. An interesting point is that during this time, workers in Buenos Aires were active in organizing for their rights. These people were willing to break status quo and become leaders of empowerment. Outside of Buenos Aires, the dance was banned in Paris and New York for a short time between 1913 and 1916. Nevertheless its popularity grew, reaching its heyday in the 1930s and 1940s–decades that generated a prolific outpouring of music. A turn came in the 1950s: the arrival of rock music, Hollywood film music, and the Peron government which banned milongas (dance events) resulted in a lacuna of tango for 30 years.

Since the 1980s, the tango has returned. Technology plays a role accessing orchestral music from tango's hey day. It also provides easy communication for event organizers. Dancers google tango in any city. They follow their favorite instructors with videos and schedules, and partake in discussion when at a distance. Buenos Aires remains the home of tango, but the dance is a thriving presence around the globe. Dancers who gather for festivals number in the hundreds of thousands. As of May 2013, tango.info lists about 200 festivals annually in 83 countries. The largest yearly festival is in Finland with over 120,000 attendees. In 2007 a special outdoor milonga in Italy attracted 25,000. Local communities support dancers in areas as diverse as Tokyo, Abu Dhabi, New Zealand, and Bozeman Montana. In between festivals, a common dance culture and etiquette supports local tango and welcomes lone travelers who may find themselves walking through dimly lit doorways and stairwells to discover how tango is expressed in a particular locale. What might the reader see at a typical social tango?

At milongas everywhere, one sees a dance floor with chairs around the perimeter, and perhaps a few small tables. If alcohol is served, intake is minimal because it dulls the senses and interferes with walking balance, tango's foundation. One might notice that the music does not obliterate conversation, and in fact, nothing is over-stimulating - neither chatter, nor decor, nor lighting. The soft ambience serves to highlight the music and beauty of the dancers. Depending on taste, one might perceive old, scratchy music, or notice beauty from a by-gone era, in the form of flowing music, poetry made visible on the dance floor. One would notice that the dancers know this music intimately by heart, and one would notice that their dance displays

> neither sexual passion nor violence. Legwork is minimal; feet are kept on the floor; the size of the steps is small. People dance closely embraced to one another, bodies connecting, chests close together, heaving and retreating with every breath, heads resting delicately together, moving as one, immersed in total improvisation that forbids them to hide behind choreographed steps. Beauty radiates from the emotions inside the dancers, not from external displays of skill. (Dujovne, 2011, p. 6)

When social dancers join a dance, they join a context. In broad sweeps, this is the pool of dance, without which there is no social dance to join. This dance is about dancers' inner experience and not about performance. Can we hear the bigness of heart that the dancers join? There are many descriptions available in books and blogs. For a glimpse of tango from the inside, I choose a small sampling from my own writing and from descriptions collected by Dujovne.

Starting with myself, I cannot ignore the energy that is my relationship with this dance. Tango is a living force. The energy can be described as an experience that is both subtle and strongly palpable. Looking back, I can see that I was imprinted at first sight, and I've been engaged in the dance's dynamic ever since. In the early days I wondered at its power to attract me. Others unfamiliar may have questioned it as an addiction or obsession, as did I and likely many other dancers in the privacy of thought. However, contrary to the ill-effects of addiction, I noticed tango's beneficial effects as improvements took place in the way I related to my body, the environment, and to people in my personal life. I also noticed the establishment of a healthier balance between work and celebration. As an example, I learned to care for a foot injury while finding ways and limits within which I could dance. Similarly, I notice a constant learning around social boundaries, from venturing beyond restrictive habits, to tending social ties while being true to one's desire to dance or not. I have now reached the point that I join

> most dancers [who] do not question their healthy addiction to high doses of tango any more than you would question your instincts if you woke up in bed suddenly craving a glass of water. We, social dancers in tango halls across the world, cannot get enough of it. (Dujovne, 2011, p. 15)

When I first saw tango, the image that planted itself like an irretrievable hook in my heart was that of seaweed swaying in the depths of the ocean. I grew up near the sea, and my father would take me snorkeling to where it was very deep. The feeling and imagery of swimming high above seaweed that was taller than my house was unforgettable. At a young age, the sea was both metaphor and reality of God for me. I can still remember my last swim and the feel of water leaving my body when I stepped

out. It's possible that I recognized a dance that could reconnect me with deeper, forgotten pieces of my life.

Another dancer expresses something similar. "When my wife and I took our first tango lesson, I could see right away that tango was deep like the ocean, and I knew I would never know it fully even if I immersed myself in it until the day I died. That's what grabbed me" (Dujovne, 2011, p. 28). This imagery fits well. When I left my first tango festival in Portland, Oregon, I walked from the dance floor with the sensation that I had been swimming in a bath of love for several days. The physical and emotional impressions are tangible, profound, and continuing.

Illuminating impressions of the social dance of tango fill Dujovne's book (2011). It is an understated privilege that we journey into how the experience of dance affects the relationships of three dancers. I make their introduction by summarizing their response to questions about how tango affected their relationships.

Aydan

Aydan has been dancing tango for more than 10 years, in the city in which I met tango. I remember him as being one of the more sensitive and experienced dancers when I started. He recently published a memoir of his journey, entitled *Trauma to Tango*. In our conversation, Aydan describes moving from a desire to fulfill the scripted role of male power to a desire to know more of himself at deeper levels. Attraction to the sexualized male poster image fizzled as personal growth and discovery became compelling. No longer captivated by the depiction of male prowess, what matters to Aydan is knowing himself and being comfortable with emotional intimacy in proximity to both men and women, on and off the dance floor. Although Aydan was initially attracted

by a typical poster depicting a traditionally fully-suited tanguero overpowering a scantily-clad woman in shoes that afford no escape, the lasting legacy of tango for Aydan is an awareness of changes that happen inside himself.

Aydan describes a journey with tango that brings him into greater awareness of his body and how it moves, whether walking in the privacy of his home, or in tango. Tango lessons and dance provide short practicums in relational boundaries and dynamics played out in moving together. He became sensitive to the presence of dissociation and separations in his body. Aydan notices that the placement of responsibilities and intentions is reflected in the comfort and quality of movements. After a number of years, Aydan overcame embarrassment and prejudice and became comfortable with tango's close embrace. He developed a capacity to experience new ways of being with a growing range of emotion and physical expression. He desires to continue this learning, expanding capacity for intimacy. Aydan describes tango as inviting him into a new and healing reality within himself and with others.

Faith

Faith's experience with tango is embedded in ballroom dance. For Faith, tango is one of many dances, and not her favorite! Faith's experience is a healthy antidote to the tendency of social tango dancers to idealize their dance. Faith's passion for dance resonates with mine. It rings through clearly. Her story emphasizes that it is not the dance so much as it is the relationship of dancer in the dance that is profoundly moving.

Faith relates a story of dance filled with anecdotes of surprising discoveries. She experiences herself behaving unselfconsciously with remarkable freedom and joy. Faith comes to dance with more than 20 years of chronic illness, at times severe enough to

require the use of a wheelchair and software assistance for writing. She compensated for her physical incapacities by living "in her head," building a life through words. For years she noted that her words danced on the page. She used dance as a metaphor in much of her writing. Then the metaphor materialized. Faith was surprised by the radical changes in her inhibitions, and by the appearance of new awareness and meaning in regard to her body. For example, instead of taking her body for a run, or pushing it through exercises, she began to pay attention to the experience of herself in her body. She explored the discovery of moving her arms as an expression of her sensuality and playfulness. She also noticed divisions and separations between dance and her pietistic Lutheran background, and discovered moving in and between both worlds with freedom and joy in her body. Significant for Faith were certain retreat experiences that illuminated new meaning and place for dance in her life.

Dance brought Faith an excitement and joy that spilled into other relationships off the dance floor. She noticed experiencing herself first as a dancer and a learner, free from her more familiar identities associated with disability or academia. She surprised herself and others by carrying her new found freedom into traditional grounds with no inhibition. At the time of our conversation, Faith's illness prevents her from pursuing dance. Faith seeks a closer relationship with her body and she continues to explore the literal and metaphorical meanings of dance as incarnation, of dance in its spiritual and physical expressions. She grapples with the meaning of dance and healing in her life.

Gwen

The third participant, Gwen, is well acquainted with dance, having taught, performed and competed in a variety of dances for more than 20 years. She is at ease in

both the ballroom dance world, where she started dance instruction, and the social tango scene in which she continues to develop her teaching. Gwen describes a series of synchronous events that affected a turning point in her life. Significant among them was experiencing the passion of social Argentine tango, rekindling her passion for life and putting her on a journey to discover more about this dance. Like many dancers described by Dujovne, Gwen relates that this passion drives her to travel over continents, and to spend more resources, than she would have imagined. She describes tango as transforming her life from one of mediocrity to passion. She relates changes in her personal relationships off the dance floor, and a deepening involvement and appreciation with Feldenkrais and painting, both remarkable for their embodiment. Gwen also talks of witnessing transformation in her students, and that her own experience of dance changed the way she teaches. She invites tango students to reflect on how issues of intimacy, trust and control on the dance floor mirror their personal lives. In her own life she describes tango as a factor of her growth in integrity, such that her work and personal relationships connect with all aspects of her life, contributing to the strength and vitality of her whole experience.

In this chapter, I introduced the participants. I started by introducing the social dance of tango, an art form that has attracted thousands of dancers. It is both a container and a partner in the relationships of social tango dancers to the dance. It provides some context for the energetic pool that dancers join when they take their first lesson. Next I introduced Aydan, Faith and Gwen. I did this by relating a content summary of their answers to initial research questions about how dance affected their lives in terms of changed relationships. We can appreciate how unique are the stories that each dancer

brings to the dance. These are my partners, within reach from my circle, carefully chosen for their ability to speak and reflect, to speak and to listen to themselves in the give and take of relationship with another. Looking onto a dance floor, I am equally careful when choosing a dance partner. I look for one who might be happy to dance with me, and also for one who will be sensitive to my movements. "When we approach a partner to dance, aren't we just like anxious immigrants arriving in the world of an unknown other? *Immigrant* is the tango's condition" (Dujovne, 2011, p. 32). Let us move deeper into the dance floor, letting voices from the literature join, as we listen carefully to themes that arise from our partners in this research conversation, being open to both the familiar and the unknown.

Chapter Five: Presentation of Themes, Learning from your Learning

My goal is to create a reading experience that carries depictions of the participants' unique experiences. I seek to do this in a way in which readers can insert themselves into a shared experience. Something might touch inner experience in a way that carries further into new experience. Images of dance contain elements that are both visibly tangible and invisibly evocative. As in a dance, I present words sometimes as a Lead, to draw the reader imaginatively into engagement with the text. At other times, I present participants' words to describe and give fuller form to an idea, as a Follow. Both Lead and Follow actively contribute to creating the dance of connection among ideas, into meaning. As in real dance and life in general, intentions that are set forth take on a life of their own. Readers are invited to attend the body feel as they make sense of the text. For example readers might note an uncertain feeling of, where is this going? Readers might notice the relief of, oh yes, we are here. Readers are invited to learn and enjoy both the intention and the letting go, as they actively engage this text. Voices of participants are separated from the text with quotation marks, each in a hanging placement, and depicted in italics to help distinguish them from my words.

Theme: Becoming known

All roads start from the body, and lead back to it. The body is the road. –Edmond Jabes

In general, our culture seems afraid of our bodies. Look at the practice of focusing in which individuals are invited to pause and notice their sense of how a whole situation might feel in their body (Gendlin, 1981). Could there be a more gentle practice of welcoming whatever wants to appear as a felt sense in the body, within a space of hospitality, of non-prodding, non-manipulation, and open acceptance of whatever is and

whatever wishes to come forth (Cornell, 2005)? However, anecdotal evidence tells us that many are afraid of what they might find when listening closely to their body.

Similarly in psychotherapy, many attend counselling in order to feel better but hoping to change others and circumstances more than to change themselves. Then again, when a courageous person resolves to pursue inner change, what they seek can appear as elusive as a dream. Some of the inner change I refer to are capacities such as: sensitivity, complexity, love, growth, identity, meaning, and belonging. Any course that reliably promised such treasure upon completion would be a sell-out. However if it involves venturing into the unknown of who we are, coming as close to ourselves as the feelings held in our bodies, then some doors quietly close.

In general we are more comfortable with clear definitions, and afraid of what lies beyond control. We will see, however, that some dancers venture past these fears, and even tell us they enjoy touching the unknown. What if the unknown includes the wonder of who we are, at a level of body and soul? John O'Donohue asserts that this wonder will not offer itself up to be looked at under light and microscopic analysis.

> The soul is shy. And if the soul sees you coming after it, with direct graspage, it will do a runner and head into a crevice, and then like Sartre said, all you feel is a God-like hole or absence in your heart, but it will be ultimately empty.
>
> (O'Donohue, 2005)

Parker Palmer says something similar when he claims that truth cannot be known directly; better to engage it slant. He quotes Emily Dickinson:

> *Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--*
>
> *Success in Circuit lies*

Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightening to the Children eased

With explanation kind

The Truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind. (Palmer, 2004, p. 91)

Dance is just such a vehicle of truth told slant. And the theme that arises in bold through all participants' conversations is learning about who they are. In the words of Gwen, "we live whatever our truth is." I am reminded of Gergen, "it is nonsense to suppose that we can look inside our mind to locate the intention" (2009, p. 81). He proposes that we can recognize intention by looking at co-created actions. In other words, we can see our truth as it is lived. Through their experience of dance, the participants learned deeper truths about themselves.

I recall a conversation with a companion as we were entering the dance hall. "Nothing is hidden on the dance floor," she said. As I agreed with her, I protected myself in that moment by recalling images of what I have seen in others. I looked out and not in. This kind of self-protection allowed me to remain there, among others, and to engage myself with an indirect view to becoming known, a beautiful slant. This is not to deny that after the dance, safely away from gazes, I reflected, "what was that I felt?" The dazzle is gradual and, I would add, bodily palpable. In a related way, Natalie Goldberg is right on the mark when she writes, "we walk through so many myths of each other and ourselves; we are so thankful when someone sees us for who we are and accepts us" (2005, p. 18).

The thrill of learning appears as a meta theme, specifically what the participants learned about themselves through dance. Let us listen to the dancers gradually become visible in their experience, through their bodies.

Courage for self-revelation. Each participant left aside the social comfort of anonymity in research. When asked, "would you like to use a pseudonym," I heard the reply,

"No, I don't think so."

Each time I heard this openness I felt my breath gasp at the generous and spontaneous disposition toward self-revelation. It fits the courage required to dance, leaving behind the safety of verbal customs.

I see courage in the willingess to discover unknown capacities and limitations within each participant. It is courageous to grapple with boundaries and creative spaces in unfamiliar territory, especially one's own unknown. One risks change that might come with learning about oneself.

There is also risk in becoming intimate with one's own sensory experience. It is one thing to think about joy, but another thing to feel an emotion named joy. It is still another to be aware of sensory perceptions that could be best named as joy. Hayden (2014) notes that we need to work at building a physical tolerance for feeling good. By allowing a whole-bodied experience of something like joy, we lose a certain amount of control as we open to more than we were previously aware. It also allows entry of the uncertainty of where the experience may lead. This could include past experiences that might arise and then be reshaped in and through present experience (Gendlin, 2012b). All of this opens to vulnerability. In light of the courage it takes to enter the experience of

dance, and to reflect on how one changes through it, it is not surprising that the participants were willing to let their names be known along with their stories.

I want to pause here, to call the reader's attention to the introductory space I have just set in this section. It would seem unjust to me, to simply report on what the participants said. I would be casting myself as an expert on some basis, as if I could say better what they themselves have said. Instead, I write from my experience, my dance with them in conversation. In doing so, I hear them speak of body, soul and truth about how dance affected them in their relationships. It is with reverence that I listen to their conversations. Making this pause is also a way to honour that it is I who notices certain themes and sub-themes that stand out among the many; my way of actively dancing with the conversation has affected which themes I notice. The pause helps readers to realize that what we see is a particular snapshot, a view that has already changed as I write, and changes again with your reading. Such change belongs to a social, improvised dance, something like the life we live. I will now return to the learning sub-themes that are highlighted for me.

Breaking patterns.

Breaking the pattern of dance. Gwen relates that when she started tango,

"It was one more dance. And it was good timing for me, and it was just something to do."

When the community asked her to teach, she noticed how different it was from the other dances:

"With all the dances I teach, they are mirror dances. Whatever the man is doing, the woman is doing, and most of them are either stationary dances, or traveling

dances, whereas Argentine tango is a traveling dance, but it has stationary movements–which is very unusual–and the man can start on either the left or the right, so it broke a lot of moulds. Tango broke the mould of reliability in music; tango does not have easily discernible beat; it offers an extreme variety of music even within one piece. I'm used to drums, so this was challenging in many ways."

With other dances Gwen could teach a predictable start on a clear beat, consistently on the right or left foot, and into a known pattern of steps. Breaking moulds was the beginning of Gwen's journey with tango, one which took her to Buenos Aires to learn about its culture and essence, and a journey that introduced teaching workshops entitled Transformation Through Tango. In other dances that Gwen taught, partner connection is found through patterns. In tango, the patterns break down, and movement is determined by the partners' connection and attunement.

Now when Gwen leads in tango, she begins by listening to the music, sensing the flow of other dancers, connecting within to listen for the phrasing and inspiration to start moving, and by gently connecting to her partner's rhythm of breath–a way of nonverbally establishing an intimacy that conveys "we are right here, together, moving to this music. There is no pattern to expect, but I hear and take care of your movements."

Breaking patterns of relationship. I notice a variety of ways that patterns break into something else; it might even be a new pattern itself. Gwen speaks to the power of new dance forms to undo established socialized forms. She has seen transformational change in her students and speaks to this:

"What happens on the dance floor is that it personifies our relationships. What comes up on the dance floor…is that trust, intimacy, and control are the three

major things that come up. And how we deal with them in our lives is how we deal with them on the dance floor. And so, if we are able to change it on the dance floor, and be honest about it on the dance floor, then we're more able to be honest about things in our life."

She noticed that after a recent breakup with her partner, the two of them became closer. Whereas her community expected that a relationship had ended, the surprise is that by each of them taking responsibility for their part, together they are establishing a new and more satisfying relationship. This is akin to focusing on one's own role in the dance and noticing improved quality in the overall dance.

Gwen:

"It's not the normal that says, if you're not living together…then you are not in relationship. And that is so not true. We are in relationship and it's the quality of the relationship that is important, not what it looks like to the outside world. And that's the same on the dance floor, in tango."

This was a noticeable break with social expectations of their community. It is a further developing of Gwen's pattern of pursuing her value of integrity and being true to herself, congruent with other aspects and endeavors in her life, which will be discussed in the theme of wholeness. Notice that it is a change that establishes some new life-giving process in her community. Aydan's and Faith's dance experiences also reveal remarkable breaks with previously held patterns such that new life-giving forms emerge.

Breaking patterns of prejudice and stereotype. Aydan did not dance until the age of 50 because of prejudice and aversion:

"Fags dance, men hunt or do sports or whatever. If you are using your body for

anything other than sex, let's say…sports, your body is all about locking. You lock your hips, your legs, so you get that defensive or aggressive posture–conflict."

He broke through a pattern of stereotyped messages of using the male body.

Breaking into new relationship with one's body. One of Aydan's greatest learnings has been to come into a renewed relationship with his body. He returns attention to his body to learn. In the safety of a three-minute dance, he practices attention to how he experiences himself and his energy. He focuses attention on bringing strength, presence and awareness of his core into the dance, countering what was a deferent posture that hid energy. He processed dance experience afterward, becoming more aware of both comfort and discomfort that he felt in his body.

Breaking pattern of responsibility for others. Aydan talked about unlearning a dance pattern in which he was responsible for moving both the Lead and the Follow through steps. This unlearning eventually yielded more satisfaction:

"When I am strong in myself and leave the woman to make her own appropriate response, that's when the dance works. I have to be sure if I'm communicating my lead, which I can only figure out if she is responding–so there is mutuality but there is separateness. And that's a great model for relationship."

Breaking patterns of reactivity. When sensitivity becomes locked into old patterns, it can be reduced to a limiting form of reactivity. When combined with the intentional work of dance, sensitivity to one's body can play a synergistic role with others that fosters something new. Aydan overcame prejudice, and he increased awareness of his own body.

Aydan also moved through the embarrassment associated with

> *"sexualizing, in part because of male culturalization, and because of trauma imprinting as a child."*

He became able to experience a range of emotions when in close proximity with a woman.

Breaking family and religious traditions. When Faith signed up for her first dance lesson at age 45, she had never danced before. She broke at least three generations of family conformity to pietistic roots. At worst, these religious views cast dance in the category of sin. Faith is clear that precise views of her family on dance are unknown. It's possible they were simply not comfortable with it. She noted that despite playing many musical instruments, she was uncomfortable with moving her body to music, and she remembers hiding her movements under a guise of silliness. Faith relates many delightful anecdotes revealing that dance broke religious norms and overcame body limitations in ways that found her delighting in the contradictions. Even more touching is the change in her image of God as she sought to understand her experience of dance in light of her spirituality, in the person of Jesus Christ.

> *"There was a line between dancing on Saturday night and going to church on Sunday morning."*

Faith tried to reconcile the division:

> *"Do I imagine Jesus present dancing, or don't I? All of a sudden I just heard Jesus say, 'Listen–I am the dance! I am the dance. I'm not in the dance. I'm not Lord of the dance. I am the dance. I am the dance of the cosmos. I am the dance of history. I am the dance of your life. I am every dance that does or doesn't have a name.*

And when you dance, I am, and that is prayer.'"

Even more explicitly:

"Then the most amazing thing happened. . . . it felt like the roof was coming off the building. That's what it felt like. And then I pick up this book. And that chapter . . . was talking about ways of connecting to spirit, and one of the main ones was dance! And then, talking about how we can connect with our bodies and with ourselves, and one of the ways is to dance. . . . The author said he is far too intimidated by his non-dancing background, but I'm suggesting it to you. . . . It was a real breaking open for me . . ."

It is exciting to hear the distinct shift from a kind of dualism (e.g. in the ideas of Jesus as being here or there or possibly not) to Faith's hearing, knowing, feeling inside her body, that that which she sought is God, is the dance. Robert Johnson writes that

> The more wisdom sets in, ... we begin to sense our connection with all people and things, to glimpse the meaning of "I am" as the name of God. . . . it is the dawning of awareness of the unity of seemingly opposed attitudes toward life. . . . This dance is uniquely expressed in you, in me, and every detail of the incarnate world. This is to become sanctified and unified." (Johnson and Ruhl, 2007, p. 214)

"[Saturdays and Sundays] don't have to be separate worlds. Jesus said <u>I am</u> the dance. <u>You are when you dance</u>."

Indeed I hear no separation.

"I am and you are when you dance."

I hear an embodied spirituality.

Unlearning patterns of expectations. I became aware of my patterns of excess:

Example one: Dancer: "Why do you go all over, each time I lead you here?"

My response: "I thought I was supposed to."

Example two: "Look at this little bruise on my hand," said a gracious man last January, showing me the spot where my thumb had been. A little mark imposed, another sign of my misdirected, anxious, trying energy.

As a third example, it was difficult for me to learn how to be grounded, how to stand and dance completely in my own balance. The turning point came when I quit thinking of where to place my next step, when I quit trying to make that one foot look beautiful, and instead focused on staying on the foot that carried my weight. This is also a change in the pattern of over-concern with what another person expects of me, and over-concern with the next, future, step. Staying where I am, grounded in my supporting leg (maintaining my axis in dance language) might preview a being at home in myself. Perhaps I am learning to be more present, precisely from a place of being at home in my body.

Breaking patterns ushers in a freedom that allows new learning from new experience. Readers will notice that the theme of learning carries into all the themes presented. In a sense, all themes are sub-themes of learning. I have chosen to highlight some as themes in themselves because they appear so significant to me. A large area of learning concerns sexuality.

Theme: Sexuality

People are changed more by pleasure than by any other means. –Matthew Fox

In the month of May when all leaves open
I see when I walk how well all things
lean on each other, how the bees work,
the fish make their living the first day.
Monarchs fly high; then I understand
I love you with what in me is unfinished.
. . . .
I love you with what in me is still
changing, what has no head or arms
or legs, what has not found its body . . .
And lovers, tough ones, how many there are
whose holy bodies are not yet born. . . . –Robert Bly

I came away from my first conversation surprised, at my surprise, that there was no way I could deny the power of this dance to inform sexuality. My conversation with Aydan must include the fact that I had previously read his book *Trauma to Tango*. I have, therefore, a heightened appreciation of his gift to us. It is impossible to ignore that his tango experience occurs into his background of childhood sexual abuse. I cannot ignore that I am sickened at the loss of innocence he endured. I feel profound grief to imagine him alone in his pain with repeated experiences of fright and terror. I can sense his desire that no other person experience this, and can imagine him protecting another in every possible way. There is an ache in me for a child robbed of discovery and wonder–a birthright of sensory delight and pleasure and of feeling comfortably at home in one's body. This is what I want for all children: to know sheer pleasure, unencumbered joy, and to have safe places to receive comfort and reassurance when afraid. I shudder to think of a defenseless child being the recipient of abuse. In Aydan I meet a courageous, sensitive and generous adult who has grown all around and through such experience. A man robbed of precious birthright in childhood is giving to us. It is tender and moving.

Intention followed by attention and reflection. Aydan's memoire describes his journey. His conversation shares his process through dance. It is an experiential process of healing from sexual abuse. It involves intentional movement, followed by attention, followed by reflection on body awareness. Aydan's tango began with an initial attraction to a tango poster, depicting the

> *"typical glamour, the exotic, the erotic."*

Underneath the depiction of stereotypical sexualized male prowess, Aydan was attracted to a male exuding strength. It contrasted his internal image of a wounded child, curled in a hiding, protective posture. Aydan visualized the person he wanted to be. Through tango lessons, he took steps to walk into the experience, and he patiently persisted through the range of feelings with the help of reflecting afterwards. Tango gave him

> *"three minute practicums"*

in which to pay attention to how he felt in his body. Reflection assisted a process of growing in awareness and discovering meanings outside of stereotyped notions:

> *"And then I have to get away from the dance floor and do all the other . . . processing work about being uncomfortable and comfortable in my body, about becoming self-aware, healing, and all that sort of thing."*

Aydan relates that this involved working through

> *"attraction, repulsion, fear, anxiety, and that whole . . . touch thing, proximity thing, body getting close. Right now we take close embrace for granted, but it took me probably three to five years to get comfortable with it. It probably took me two years to even try it, and . . . what does it mean to get comfortable?"*

Learning in layers, expanding limits. Aydan used the image of peeling to describe successively reaching deeper levels of learning.

> *"There are so many layers that in the process, you begin to peel off. You peel off the performance representations–dancing with . . . women in slit skirts . . . and that gets peeled off, and then of . . . learning of being in your body–my awkwardness . . . my stumbling, dancing with somebody who's . . . odd-shaped, and what does that feel like, and then you peel that off, and then you have the experience of just being alone in your own body–the balance, the presence, the energy and so forth, and that takes you to another level, and then you peel that off, and you find a level of resistances where the trauma resides, ... and then my bottom level of the trauma would have been to have the dissociation, so to have really not been present in my body anyway. . . . unless you're in a flight or fight response. You don't want to go there because you're going to feel, experience separation or violation."*

We can appreciate the depth of change and patient commitment to a decade long process through which Aydan gained an expanded range of emotional availability in close proximity to others. One can sense the vulnerability present at each successive level and the importance of safety in the process of reaching each level of new awareness. He is now keen to learn tango's role of Follow as a way to engage similar learnings, this time with men.

> *"I'm pushing edges all the time. I want to learn."*

The lasting legacy for Aydan is that he remains keenly interested in his inner experience and self-discovery.

> *"I am still learning things about my body."*

Quality of connection. Aydan identifies the real gem as a shift away from relating in external, objectified ways, to relating at the level of subject to subject. This involves being in touch with self, embodying feelings, distinct from maintaining dissociation. No longer captivated by sexualized images of tango, nor distracted by odd shapes, nor caught in attempts to move another human being through a pattern of steps, Aydan states that this is

> *"about bringing myself to the dance floor, in my own centre, being clear with where I want to go. Of course you want to do that in synergy with another person, but you can't do that . . . until you've figured it out with yourself. "*

Aydan is now a tanguero for whom

> *"the connection is everything."*
>
> A fully lived tango is all about the exaltation of a human connection at the primitive level of our senses, movements, and reflexes. It sublimates our basest instincts, which actually interfere with dancing, and draws out our memories, histories, sentiments. (Dujovne, 2011, p. 86)

In other words, the tango invites us to connect with all of who we are, where we have come from, our different agendas for the future, and above all, to make this one dance a timeless creation of beauty, born of the best connection possible in an unrepeatable moment. It is sensitive to qualities of connection and being present to newly created experience.

Meaning of sexuality. Sensuality, sexuality–is this not fundamental to our identity? I pause here to reflect on what this means to me before turning to how Faith and Gwen add to our conversation.

If I lean into the word sexuality, I know it means more than gender identity and more than a procreative act. It has something to do with a life energy running through me, not only the event which germinated my first cells, but the particular way that they hold life attractive and find expression in me. This is a powerful energy, begetting life. Brian Swimme coined the term "cosmic allurement," to represent this "energy of attraction" that is found throughout the universe, infinite in variety, from quarks, to gravity, to love (as cited in Ferder and Heagle, 1992, p. 16). Its implications are an evolutionary expanse with unimagined limit.

The concept of sexuality is related to the energy I see coming forth each spring. Ancient peoples insightfully portrayed a woman who was continuous with the earth from the waist down. Clay artifacts point to deep reflective processes of humanity in ancient times. Respecting this wider view, Berry establishes a direction of scientific inquiry that is "profoundly related to the religious-spiritual experience of the earlier shamanic period in human history" (2009, p. 115). It is a link of our human story, intimately related to the Earth as living.

> The deepest mystery of all this is surely the manner in which these forms of life, from the plankton in the sea and the bacteria in the soil to the giant sequoia or to the most massive mammals, are ultimately related to one another in the comprehensive bonding of all the life systems. Genetically speaking, every living being is coded not only in regard to its own interior processes but in relation to the entire complex of earthly being. This is to be alive and to be the fertile source of life. (Berry, 2009, pp. 111-112)

Sexuality is to be aware of the power of life–the power of attraction, bonding,

belonging, creating, moving, groaning and bodying forth life in its very next expression. Human growth in sexuality involves becoming aware of this power and its effect–even its far-reaching effect in so-called private interactions. We make a big deal over weddings because unions and pairings affect whole communities. Nothing survives in isolation. Swimme (1998) broadens our sense of community by challenging us to recognize that the quality of all of human relationships impact every species on the planet. "Our sexual energy is an 'embodiment' of the relational power that permeates the universe" (Ferder and Heagle, 1992, p. 16). It is Eros, a body wisdom present in every cell of our bodies.

Sensuality is more specific. It gives sexuality a real body-feel for being in the world in a context of earthly delights (McMahon, 1993). McMahon teaches that awareness of our sexuality and our sensual delight in beauty inspirits, invigorates and integrates our living, as we are invited to be congruent in our relationships. "We are born again and again as our presence to our own sexuality reveals more and more of who we are and are becoming" (1993, p. 186). We heard this expressed beautifully through Aydan. It involves becoming vulnerable to change, moving from familiar ways of knowing into new expressions and feelings of being. In this way of knowing, power is within each body, through the ways we connect and relate. Unfortunately, our culture has sadly devalued our bodies, and in many ways, we need to reconnect with the source of our primary experience.

Attention to bodily-informed knowledge runs counter to all of the institutional power brokers in our society, from the religious to the educational and political. In the dominant culture, we are socialized to ignore our feelings, physical and emotional, and to trust dualistic notions of reality rather than the murky unknown. We are taught countless

ways of denying the lived reality of our bodies, and many of us live in varying degrees of dissociation as we mentally adhere to one-sided camps, rejecting signals from our bodies that indicate a more complicated reality with more diverse needs and wants. McMahon asserts that this violation of body gives rise to denial and addictive behaviours as means of coping. It is exciting, however, that the antidote to this pervasive disempowerment lies as close at hand as attending to the immediate real experience in our own bodies.

There are no rewards for who has been most masterful at promulgating the denigration of our body wisdom–neither Descartes, St. Augustine, the institutions that reward left brain work, nor science, media nor advertising industry. All have variously feared, debased and used the body, especially its sexual and sensual attributes. Rather, if awards are to be bestowed, they go to beauty which "dwells at the heart of life," inviting us into "a subtle embrace of belonging" (O'Donohue, 2004, pp. 50-51). Beauty's presence and attraction has endured every circumstance. It reaches out with soft light, with soft touch, with beautiful sound, whether imperceptibly gentle or breathtakingly spectacular. Its power is to stop us out of automatic function and invite us into the more of life. Sexuality is to be prized for granting us all we need for engaging beauty. At the core of sexuality is our empowerment, empowering us to be real and intimately involved in the creation of life, moment by moment. Sexuality empowers us to be aware, in touch, and moving–in a stream of life that continues to surge forth into new forms of beauty.

Fox (2000) writes that in the pleasure of natural ecstasies, we learn to trust our experience. These have the power to expand the sense of ourselves and to awaken our connections with others. Natural consequences are growth in care and compassion, celebration and community (Fox, 2000). Practically speaking, sexuality opens me to be

aware of energy in my body, and to be aware of my power to affect others and the space between. There is relief in the body-feel of belonging to a world of subjective relationships. It is distinct from the feeling of burden that comes when one relates to others as objects in the name of problems to be fixed, situations to be solved, or goals to be achieved. When we are aware of being intimately connected to a life-giving expanse of energy, we touch present reality with the hope of possibility.

Overcoming dualism. Having opened our appreciation to the wider meanings of sexuality, I'm ready to notice and celebrate how Faith and Gwen convey their growth in sexuality through dance. I hear Faith grapple with conventional dualistic thinking of subject and object. Whereas for Aydan, objectified thinking was more in relation to the other person, Faith's reflections are more toward herself:

> *"Do I take my body dancing, or do I dance in my body?"*

Faith remembers being embarrassed and unable to move on a dance floor at a wedding. I hear her trying to understand her relationship with her body:

> *"Being ill has furthered a sense of alienation from my body and distrust of it. Dance invites something else."*

She goes on to say that the invitation is

> *"to celebrate embodiment, even in illness, where I have felt betrayed by my body, or resenting my body. I think the invitation is to find a way of being in harmony with the embodiment, in spite of and in the limitations, and in the hope which expands those limitations."*

I notice a shift away from body as object of betrayal to body as being with the invitation. Hear Faith's reflections on the transformation of her relationship with her body:

"I think what I realized at some point, if I had fun, at all in the first 19 - 20 years of my illness, it was not fun in my body. It was fun in spite of my body. And suddenly I was having fun in my body, involving my whole body . . . and people who know me have watched this transformation, and I'd just get so animated when talking about it, and the people who knew me best would say, 'what an amazing thing, a remarkable thing that's happened to you.'"

Growing awareness of body. In concrete terms, Faith relates becoming aware first of her feet, then her hips, then her arms. Within the playfulness of a safe dance relationship in classes, she became more aware of her body, acknowledging not just a functionality of parts, but their contribution toward feeling sensual and the pleasure of the whole experience.

Faith relates times of feeling of emotional discomfort with her body. She remembers feeling uncomfortable after having learned and attempted a sensuous role of her arms. In caring detail, Faith relates conversations with herself, including permission to quit, and discomfort with the sensual aspects of the dance that were foreign to her whole sense of self. She recalls exploring her movements at home, then noticing a greater ease and discovery when initiating a playful sensual gesture with a dance partner. He became mirror and teacher as she stretched beyond familiar ways.

Like Aydan, Faith's reflections after her dance experience contained important growth work. She realized that she was not only exploring her arms, but also her relationship with a dance partner and herself. She was aware that never having been in an intimate relationship, she was waking up to legs moving between legs, the sensuality of arms, facial expressions, and the powerful effect of hands touching. Faith wonders if we

appreciate the power of the human need for touch.

"Perhaps none of us can survive without touch, and dance is a socially acceptable way to touch."

Faith realized also that the energy of connection,

"that male-female energy of connection, is life-giving."

Faith was not sure that others would accept her experience of feeling sensual, and initially, was not sure that she would accept it either. In dance we enter into the dynamics of risk and trust. It puts us in touch with vulnerability and the fears of not being accepted at the fundamental level of sensory experience. Safety becomes important for enabling and allowing experience that deepens trust, and more will be said on this.

Gwen comes to the conversation with a familiarity and comfort with dance since her teen years. In addition to no obvious cultural or religious proscriptions, she has the advantage of over 20 years of instructing dance and familiarity with bodywork. We might not expect then, to hear a story in which novel dance experience opens her to expanded body awareness and experience of herself.

Allowing transformation. I experience Gwen as being open and comfortable with her sexuality. I hear her freedom to be and fully express herself in the quiet intimate spaces on a social dance floor, at times aware of opening and being touched in ways that are transforming, and at other times, aware of feeling fully sexual with the ability to create the safety necessary for unencumbered experience. She often uses the word, "allowing." I hear her experiences of trust and mutuality in dance. Both allow dance its creation. Gwen speaks of the sexuality in dance that allows a surrender to energies that surface and move in a creative synergy, taking new and passing form from one moment to

the next. Gwen relates:

> *"While attending a milonga with a visiting instructor from Buenos Aires, we were requested to do a demo. And we had this dance. And I just surrendered to it. I surrendered to him and to the music, and we had the dance. The music ended, and you know how you hold for that moment–I realized for that moment when we just held each other there–no one in the room was breathing. It was dead silence. The music was over. We stood. We parted. The room erupted into applause. It was the performance of a lifetime, in this small, you know…it was, what, as a performer–it's the dream. It's the dream. And he thanked me for dancing with him, for really dancing with him. It was sensational. It was so quiet. It's not big."*

Gwen describes a dance in which she felt such a powerful, deep, and exquisite connection that she felt changed. She names this a transformation. It gave rise to creative energies that change the way she teaches dance. Gwen is describing an experience that was deeply uniting of her whole enjoyment of herself in her body, in the dance, and among strangers. Gwen's sexuality appears so integrated in her identity and her experience of herself, that one can hear her powerful presence in this dance, so different from silence and denial.

From denial to experience. Conversations with Aydan, Faith and Gwen have forced me out from under my comfortable blanket of public denial of tango's sexuality. It prompts more reflection on my experience of sexuality in this dance. For me at this time in my life, I pay particular attention to my encounters with women who carry their womanhood in ways that appear full, present, comfortable, vital and enjoyable. Their beauty radiates from depth, and easily welcomes others into a warm and delicious

presence. These women show how I can stay in this dance regardless of my age. The tango embrace is all-important to the dance. Something in it is a life-giving connection with who we most fundamentally are.

Sexuality has to do with the fundamentals of identity and acceptance of our bodies, in relationship to ourselves and to the world. I hope to never again deny the presence and importance of sexuality in this dance. What is this denial about and why does it matter? The answers might lie as deep as the connections in our body to the whole universe. Perhaps we are afraid to see ourselves in all our smallness and largeness. Certainly, we can appreciate each person's sensitivity when we become gentle enough to notice our moving points of growth during the rich encounters of dance experience, on and off the dance floor.

Theme: Vulnerability Together With Safety

There is no real courage where vulnerability and fear are denied. –Judith Jordan

Vulnerability is a prize–beautiful, exciting, luring and tasteful. It deserves to be sought after with more abandon and zeal, more eagerness and full-heartedness than a boxer seeks a prize fight or an executive seeks to be number one. –Matthew Fox

You should behold your vulnerability as one of the most important gates of blessings into your inner world, not something to avoid or hide. Look at the moments of real healing in the bible - all are moments of great vulnerability or exposure. – John O'Donohue

Personal reflection. When I walked to the library, I had lots of time to reflect on the baby hare that defenselessly sought cover in our yards. My neighbour had heard it squeaking just in time to scare a crow into dropping it out of its beak, and it took refuge under an evergreen while an adult hare sat still nearby–poor defense against a swift crow I thought. Most of us hurt to see the bigger and stronger attack the weak and vulnerable. We want to protect the small shy animal, allowing it to grow in safety. The baby hare is

an image of that tenderness we instinctively know inside. Parker Palmer, John O'Donohue and Eugene Gendlin all talk about a shyness of soul that needs caring, quiet and attentive space, such that our inner experience will venture forth in a way that is connected to who we deeply are. My thoughts turned to musings on my last tango festivals. There I became aware of the ways that tango etiquette fosters safety and how this opens my dance, allowing me to experience my self differently. I noticed more freedom for the soft, shy expressions of my being that palpably ventured forth. Far from imposing circumstances that bring us to vulnerable experience, this section is about the courage to create the safe space for vulnerability to surface and to transform our capacity to be fully human.

Reframing vulnerability. Jordan describes our dominant cultural discourse as one that views vulnerability to mean being "open to attack," as per the Webster dictionary definition (2010, p. 206). She suggests "we reframe vulnerability as an experience in which we are open to the influence of others at the same time that we are open to our need for others" (Jordan, 2010, p. 206). To me this speaks of mutual responsiveness and respect, something that enhances both the dance between partners and the dance community as a whole. I enjoin the readers to marvel at the extent to which the participants risked moving into their vulnerability, allowing themselves to let go into new experience.

Gwen is comfortable with dance and bodywork and did not use the word vulnerability. I notice engagement of Jordan's meaning of vulnerability, however, in her willingness to be open to the influence of others, which allowed her to engage key points of change in her journey. I first notice this in her strong response to a person whose

guidance she sought. The person gave her an image of complacency:

> *"It was very disturbing to me, 'cause he said to me, 'you're in a boat, and you have everything you need, and you are going no where.' I was furious, furious! For about two weeks I was absolutely livid. Because he spoke a truth, and I didn't want to hear it."*

These words prefaced the changes that ensued for Gwen–changes in work, in relationship, and an encounter with the passion of tango in a visiting dancer. Although lauded as an instructor from Argentina,

> *"he was a beginner tango dancer. However, what I got that evening, with him, was a passion I had never experienced... and it's because I got to know him, I've actually been to Argentina five times . . . and he had a fire that I'm going, 'I need to know this! This I want to know!' . . . Dancing with him, and feeling that inspired passion, changed my life. Within nine months I was in Argentina because I had to know more. It wasn't an 'if' or 'what a nice idea'–I had to."*

Gwen also talks about the tango itself, as a living relationship to which she opened, and which resulted in changes in her life.

> *"In Argentina they say, 'the tango, she waits. She waits for you. She knows.' She knows that if she waits, you will come to her. And I really feel that it was a long road. For me, it could have been missed in so many ways. It was a destiny. And it brought me out of a nice life, just moseying along, to being impassioned. Without tango, I don't think I would have found Feldenkrais, which I love."*

Unlike Gwen's experience, Aydan and Faith did not start dance on a bedrock of bodily comfort. In fact, each had a long history of pain.

Vulnerability in embarrassment. To appreciate the significance of vulnerability, it is helpful to imagine embarrassment. It is not easy. Embarrassment consists of feelings that can be tied to other feelings of not belonging, along with this becoming visible in some way. In dance we risk more visibility than we are accustomed to. In movement, our bodies speak and our minds cannot construct words and stories to hide ourselves. Aydan and Faith speak of initial feelings of embarrassment:

Faith:

> *"I knew it looked foolish, so I made it look even more foolish, so that if they are going to laugh at me, at least I was looking for someone to laugh at me!"*
>
> *"I felt so inhibited. I just wanted to escape. I couldn't move to the music!"*
>
> *"[It] was partly freeing to know I wasn't being observed by people who did not know me as a dancer."*

Aydan:

> *"I couldn't get it at all. The other people I was with were great, but I was embarrassing myself."*
>
> *"At this point I can dance and not offend someone. Initially I was horrible, because I had no way of communicating with my body. When someone showed me something, I'd hear it, I'd see it, but it would not translate into my body."*

Vulnerability in disconnection. Aydan:

> *"It was a total disconnect, as if the sensory transmission was cut off at my waist. So obviously my body awareness was deficient, was wounded. "*

Faith:

> *"In some ways I'm quite disconnected from my body. . . . I'm trying to understand that myself. . . . She (instructor) would say, 'I know you're thinking it. Now just stop thinking and let your body do it.' And I'd think, I'm a thinker. I've got four degrees. I got my way through life by thinking."*

Vulnerability leaps out through the conversations in many ways. For example, Aydan and Faith both spoke of becoming aware of feeling disconnected from their bodies. This implies becoming aware of not being able to fully access the feelings, movements, nor wisdom that is available through the senses. It also implies becoming aware of not being fully aware of what one non-verbally communicates. It could further imply a certain amount of grief regarding the non-acknowledgement of whatever is left unaware, something like unborn potential. In other words, the dancers were open to becoming aware of both the grief and joy that awareness itself can bring, even if awareness includes insight into the existence of unawareness. To this, I hear O'Donohue speak of the hope and power of such awareness when he states, "if you can identify the shape of your inner prison, then you are already moving out of it" (2005).

Vulnerability in sexuality. Sexuality is a sensitive area. The participants opened themselves to becoming aware of their sexuality in a public space, and then again when they opened themselves in private self-reflection that risked becoming further aware of deeper feelings.

Aydan:

> *"My block, in part because of male culturalization, and also because of trauma imprinting as a child, equated intimacy with sex, or sexualized intimacy always. . . .*

Part of my learning was, when I'm feeling things, my reflex is that this must be sexual energy, and I'm going to embarrass myself."

Faith:

"There is a part of me that is sensuous or sensual and is opening to that expression through dance but I didn't know she existed before, and she's still part of a bud that certainly hasn't fully opened into a vibrant flower. . . . She is part of my shadow self who wants to emerge but is fearful too, because my world of people doesn't even know her, and I'm not sure I do either!"

Vulnerability of limitations. We hear openness to the pain of bumping into limitations.

Faith:

"So it's a bit like a flower opening up. There's this plant that is growing up, and it gets this bud, and then suddenly it starts to open. And I didn't finish blooming! And suddenly smash, it all came to an end again this year."

Aydan:

"...and then you find a level of resistances where the trauma resides, in my case anyhow, and my bottom level would [be] the dissociation . . . . You don't want to go there because you're going to feel, experience separation or violation."

Vulnerability in the unknown. Participants open themselves to the unknown, both in their inner and outer worlds. They are not just open to thinking about new concepts, but bodily moving through new experiences with others. The newness includes touching strangers, and moving to music with the intimate awareness of responding bodies. It includes new sensory feelings, new emotions, and new ways not sanctioned by familiar

social spheres. The willingness to become vulnerable through engaging foreign territory, along with the reward, is expressed by Faith:

> *"That whole sense of vulnerability is so real on the dance floor. . . You come into another person's arms, and you might not even know the person. . . You would not do that in any other context. It's unthinkable. But on a dance floor, that's totally what is expected. And so there is a physical intimacy that takes place within the parameters of social acceptability, and you are vulnerable to how that person is going to treat you, whether it's gently, professionally, or some other way. You are vulnerable to that when you are moving from partner to partner. And you are so close to each other. For someone who lives alone, suddenly there is a whole lot of touch. And I don't know whether I even processed that at one level. I just experienced it at a different level altogether, but it is another element of dance that was opening me to a new part of myself that I hadn't experienced before, and realizing that I was not uncomfortable with it."*

Risk of rejection. Lastly, Aydan reflects to me my own vulnerability, which I had not appreciated fully. He said,

> *"When I'm the odd man out, I find that really humiliating. . . . I would experience that as just continual rejection."*

I had just related to him my first tango festival, to which I had gone a distance of 3,500 kms and sat with the feeling of fruit on a tree ready to drop, with no one to receive it. I considered the situation as my first real struggle that surely belonged to tango: in the very same way that I did not want to dance with beginner dancers with whom I had injured a joint, the more experienced dancers did not want to dance with me. I could not enjoy my

best dance with beginner dancers, and the more experienced dancers could not enjoy their best dance with me. There was no cover for this. I had gone considerable distance in terms of time, money, and now vulnerability, to discover that I had a long way to go on an unknown path before I would be joining the beautiful dance, which seemed to nail my heart's desire. I protected myself by acknowledging the imagery of these feelings: fruit that wants to taste beauty before turning into compost. Thinking about my situation gave me distance from the painful feelings I was experiencing. I accepted the struggle as circumstantially necessary at some point–my first experience of surely a common experience. When Aydan spoke I began to reconsider the deeper pain of this experience. Humiliated. What does that mean?

To be humiliated is to be exposed as inferior (Leary, 2001). At a festival, every set of four tango pieces (called a *tanda*) is separated by a musical signal (called a *cortina*) to clear the floor and change partners. I sat with a group of women at the best place for receiving invitations but in four days, the men did not even look at women they did not know. We were therefore, "ignored, excluded, and rejected" (Williams & Zadro, 2001, p. 21) by those with whom we wanted to dance. This taps into the pain of isolation which Jordan names as "the primary source of suffering" in clients who seek psychotherapy (2010, p. 211).

To be a social dancer is to risk this kind of exposure. Could it be that the dance, in general, supports dancers to not only risk their vulnerability, but to grow imperceptibly in their experience of trust and safety, such that they are able to become more vulnerable and aware? There are many factors that enable dancers to stay with their vulnerable experiences. I first give example of those I hear in the participants' conversations, and

later speak more generally about the provision of tango etiquette to act as a safe container for delicate inner experience.

Safety through self-care. Some of the most important factors to establish safety are self-reflection and caring attitude by the participants toward themselves. Aydan and Faith gave themselves permission to feel their discomfort. They were patient with themselves, ultimately believing in their potential for new experience and allowing radical change to occur within.

Aydan:

> *"I had patience with myself. . . I didn't say, O.K. I'm a forever clutz. No, I said, I'm going to stay with the process and learn."*

Faith:

> *"When I signed up, I said to myself, if you don't like it, you don't have to stay . . . it's not like a class you have to finish off. I gave myself all this permission."*

Safety through community support. Gwen:

> *"I had no idea how I was going to get the money. But literally, the community . . . sent me to Argentina . . . My friends threw me a party and we had an Abundance Bank, and people stuffed money in it. . . . Everything in my life supported me to go to Argentina, that very first time. It was very touching, in a very remarkable way."*

As a dance instructor on one of Canada's islands, Gwen was already part of a dance community. Her need for support to pursue the passion of tango was a venture into the unknown and travel to Argentina was costly. The community heard her desire and supported it.

Aydan and Faith spoke of talking with others who helped them process and find

meaning for their experience with dance. All spoke of learning; for Faith and Aydan, the learning itself appears to provide motivation and staying power. Notice that the text of their conversation implies that the dance was internally challenging, opening them to various degrees of feeling vulnerable, and the need for safety.

Aydan:

> *"I wouldn't have stayed with tango unless there was some deep inner learning for me because it wasn't pleasant for the first longest while. For the first six months it was really unpleasant, and we started at least to get a little bit of comfort, but it was probably three years before it felt like a dance."*

Faith speaks of retreat experiences in which reflection with others helped bridge the contradictions she felt between church on Sunday and dancing on Saturday. At the urging of a spiritual director, she quietly slipped out to a dance while on her silent retreat,

> *"and had a blast! What a rich part of my silent retreat!"*

More safety with joy.

> *"I thought, I'm not quitting! I'm having too much fun!"*

These words of Faith's, bring us to the joyful energy implied by fun. Fun is a word we often associate with children's play: enrapt attention in a physical activity that is open to creativity, surprise and joy. It has the capacity to keep us engaged in new experience. Fun is a word that arises over and over in the conversations.

Aydan:

> *"I often ask myself about the comparison of yoga or tai chi with tango. . . . There is learning and feeling inside the patterns. But it doesn't feel like dance because there is no creativity, no breaking out, no fluidness or freedom in it. . . . I don't come*

away saying, "Yes!" I come away thinking, I'm probably a better person because I've just spent the past hour putting myself in uncomfortable positions. Anyhow, dance is different that way. I come away thinking, not only was it good for me, but I really feel charged, energized by the process."

The body attracts learning. Paying attention to their body was an interesting and attractive source of learning for the participants, and this itself acted as a safe container for new experience in the dance. The participants opened to the possibility of their bodies as a place of learning. Each in turn addresses the fundamentals of touching, walking, trusting. Faith openly addresses this as challenge:

"There is a great challenge and invitation to learn how to be more in my body and dance has been an opening in that. . . . Being ill has furthered a sense of alienation from my body and distrust of it. Dance invites something else. . . . Being single and so much alone, I can go a long time without touch. Babies can't thrive without touch and perhaps none of us can. Dance is a very socially acceptable way to touch. And I realize that the energy of that–the male-female energy of that connection is somehow life-giving. It is also an experience of vulnerability; we trust each other to move together."

Aydan:

"The biggest learning for me through the whole process, as I said, it started off with the whole male-female dynamic which was kind of like really new - oh this is spicy or scary or whatever - and then the teaching always brought me back to where I was in my body. . . . So I often kind of dance through a day. . . I like to have that feel in my body, . . . that is huge for me. That is something new."

Gwen, referring to her significant mentor and friend, a world-renown teacher in Argentina:

> *"The first time I was down there with students, I couldn't figure out why is he doing this. It took me four and a half weeks to go, oh my God, he danced with me, and he knows who I am, and he treated me with so much respect. . . . He had a trust in me that was beyond his knowledge of me, and what an honour it was, that he knew who I was. When he would introduce me, it was totally as an equal. . . . And he brought me to life."*

Gwen speaks of the dance relationship itself as revitalizing, using the words, "trust," "respect," and "knowing beyond language.'' I hear her trying to understand what is going on, and trying for a month to figure it out. Then I hear her drop into her body and trust the knowledge that arises out of dance. There she is moved by the depth of respect she felt. She describes this dance experience as transforming. Out of her experience Gwen gifts her students:

> *"You embody who you are in the dance. Be your dance and then bring that into all your potential relationships."*

In the whole experience of dance itself, participants felt their initial vulnerability become tolerable. In Aydan's words, they found satisfaction in "huge learning;" in Faith's words, they experienced a new sense of "freedom, fun, pleasure and joy;" and in Gwen's words, "transformation." The community of dance supported their experience. This included the structure of lessons, belief and encouragement of other dancers, a relaxed atmosphere for learning, compliments, and non-verbal social acceptance beyond words. Aydan refers specifically to tango etiquette that builds safety:

"That's why dance is so great. Because you have this three-minute practicum."

Safety in dance culture. In social Argentine tango, universal conventions and etiquette strongly contribute to safety. One example is the structure of the dance's availability through lessons, practicas and dance events. When I was at a festival and couldn't dance, the days were full of lessons. These not only gave me opportunity to dance, but fostered an important sense of belonging that supported me during the times when I sat with other women hoping to dance. Practicas are sessions that typically provide an instructor to help, where it is allowable for dancers to give and receive feedback and to specifically work on technique. Next are milongas. These are dance events with stricter codes of conduct to protect dance experience. At milongas, dancers bring their best behaviour; here feedback and instruction are strongly frowned upon.

The presentation of music is also protective. Easier music is played at lessons and practicas. Music is presented in sets that are predictably grouped so that dancers know what to expect and how long they will be with a partner. The words "thank you" serve as the signal to part, but also as simple and important acknowledgement for an experience just shared. Thank you is unconditional; it has nothing to do with the perceived quality of the dance.

Likewise, etiquette around invitations to dance is protective. Invitations are solicited and accepted primarily through a non-verbal *cabaceo.* Translated literally as *head-nod*, it is primarily a communication through eye contact that prevents being audibly or visibly declined a dance. In other words, invitations are extended, received, and either declined or accepted via non-verbal communication.

A gentle taboo on apologies is a convention that instills an attitude of nothing being

a mistake. All is shared creation. Lastly, every partner becomes the other's most important being for each three-minute dance. Since exclusive partnerships are not the norm, the stage is set for unconditional acceptance and regard, lasting the length of the dance. A personal example of the effect of tango etiquette might help convey the implications.

At the end of dance with someone I knew, I apologized and explained something. "Shhhsssshhhh," was the gentle and polite response carried with command. After another dance with the same person, I uttered some non-specific accolade, to which he gently, clearly and definitely, replied "don't say anything." This time I received the message, and I was stopped. I was left in the space of the dance: a powerful present stillness, an uncluttered space in which the body can receive, convey and contain the energy exchanged. I became aware there, that despite my intent to convey joy and longing, my words had worked to reduce what we could only hold and attend in a bodily way if we were to fully respect the gift of the moment. For the rest of the festival I stopped speaking at the end of tandas. I became aware of the profound freedom in the words, "thank you," a complete letting go into the safety of a pool rich enough to carry me to the next tanda or to the shoreline. Those two words signaled acknowledgement of the wonder just experienced and a letting go into the next moment with complete trust.

In addition to the foregoing, it cannot be missed that the music itself acts as a powerful container of emotional experience. At the same time that tango music is playful, it is also deep and consoling. Its sheer pleasure gives comfort to the body, balm to heart and soul. Tango music gets under the skin. Every cell of the body seems to know the notes of thousands of pieces of music composed early in the last century, and

dancers share its passionate flow. When I sit at the edge of a dance floor, the music and arresting beauty of the dance have the power to fully engage me. This is also something to silently share, fostering a wide sense of belonging, supportive of vulnerable moments.

Not least important, the equalizing culture of social Argentine tango promotes an authenticity that includes one's vulnerability. Size, shape, age, gender, nationality and social status do not matter on the dance floor. Shoes and contacts might procure a first dance, but the only thing that counts toward further dancing is the quality of felt experience in the dance, something that dancers can see and feel even from their seats. Rewards go to those who invest themselves–in the lessons, practica, milongas, and ultimately in the moment of dance on the floor. Like life, it is a gift that comes with a cost. The cost is the genuine openness to actively receive the gift, something that risks change, otherwise known as being vulnerable. The reward of dance itself provides a staying power through vulnerable experience. The rewards include joy, learning, self-awareness, freedom, new experience, an expanded sense of self, and a life with passion and intimacy.

I hope the readers will appreciate that each person has their unique place of vulnerability. The dance invites each to step into their experience and move a little further into the unknown. The dance community offers support in myriad ways–through lessons, practicas, milongas, and social etiquette. The invitation to create something beautiful in an intimate embrace with stranger, friend or foe, while being in connection with the whole on the dance floor, is an exceptional experience of unity in one unrepeatable moment. The distinctly non-possessive, non-attached nature of social Argentine tango has given me an experience of letting go into an unconditional loving

freedom that I've rarely experienced. It builds trust, facilitating the opening into the more of one's whole experience. Perhaps the most important factor that keeps dancers moving through vulnerability is the power of desire, of connecting inside to what might be most primal. Let us now listen to the theme of desire in the participants' conversations.

Theme: Desire

Meaning of desire. Desire is a deeply present longing, something not easily satiated, if at all. It exists in its own right, is not a determinate, not part of a rational, cause-effect system that finishes with attainment. Desire wants more and is not satisfied by consumption. Something is deeply satisfying about both quenching a desire's thirst and remaining desirous. At once, the filled and unfulfilled keep one open to repeated invitations of pursuing and experiencing pleasure. By touching a quality of the infinite, desire brings a meeting of what is real and what is liminal. Unlike addiction which traps, desire does not destroy. Instead, it expands us into more living. Sheldrake writes that "desire can be interpreted as a permanent openness to what is other than ourselves and to what is beyond our boundaries" (2001, p. 125). Spiritual teachers describe desire as a metaphor for the process of searching, for movement to depth, truth and vitality, and for transformation (Sheldrake, 2001). Key is to engage the desire, despite the inherent risk of vulnerability.

Unlike ideals, aspirations or plans, desires are sensuous, embodied, and grounded in reality. O'Donohue states that all desire is holy (2005). I'm tempted to call desire a holy seat of personal wisdom, perceivable by attending our bodies as we engage the various forms those desires take–grappling with them through reflection, discernment and action, and ultimately leading us to growth through integrity. By listening to and honouring our

desires, we learn that we can trust our own inclinations to be who we most naturally are. Therein lies a source of authentic power.

None of the participants ran from or numbed their desires. They responded to their dance experience initially with spontaneity. They persevered through discomforts. Once they engaged their deeper passions, the reward of increased self-awareness kept them engaged. Each participant responded to some attraction and cultivated a space that opened to greater passion. Through their openness, they came to know and experience themselves more deeply. Each came to dance in the context of deeper desires present and at work within. The dance beckoned Aydan, Faith and Gwen to move beyond their known worlds. It is as if dance spoke to a desire within them that they didn't fully know existed.

Engaging desire, from surface to deep. Notice that within each context, invitations appeared at a surface level, and engagement drew the participants into deeper awareness. Gwen wanted to move out of mediocrity and live with more integrity. In this context she accepted a chance dinner invitation to meet a visitor. Something within her was ready to recognize the passion she encountered in the one brief meeting. Within months she followed this passion to Buenos Aires, not because she thought it was a good idea, but because her whole being felt compelled to go. Relating her first tango, Gwen said:

> *"What I got that evening with him was a passion I had never experienced. . . . Within nine months of meeting . . . , I was in Argentina because I had to know more. It wasn't an <u>if</u>, or <u>what a nice idea</u>–I <u>had</u> to."*

Faith's context was that she was physically moving better after 20 years of chronic

illness. She wanted to experience life differently and feel it in her body. She relates,

"I thought swing sounded fun even though I didn't know what it was."

The body senses desire. Although Faith's language reveals that she thought about what she didn't know, the sensory appeal is decisive:

"It sounded fun."

The words reveal a sensuous quality of desires. This wasn't a health project. It issued from her heart. The idea rang. It connected to her body with lively energy. In time it revealed deeper desire. When illness necessitated sitting out from dance, she again reflected in words telling of desire's embodiment:

"I was just so hungry for dance."

Aydan describes a process of encountering increasingly genuine desires, each taking him to deeper levels of embodied awareness:

"We were in our romantic, adventurous mood, and we said, that looks like fun! So we signed up . . . The typical glamour, the exotic, the erotic ... got our attention. . . . It's the initial glitch, I mean glitz, . . . that's the initial thing that catches you, but you lose it ... because that's not where my deep learning is... I always have a learning about <u>me</u>, ... different levels of self-awareness."

Again we can hear the embodied quality of desire, as well as his commitment to engagement. Aydan's choice of words appeal more to the body than to the mind.

"I had patience. . . bit by bit I'm going to put myself in it. . . . But this was the calling. It was the vision. It called me forth."

One can hear Aydan's desire to learn through each layer that appeared in his journey with tango, and the radical honesty with which he engaged each encounter. With

all the work of attending his experience in tango, he followed his desire and literally walked into his image of a fully healed, vitally alive self. Fox writes that "honesty . . . is the avenue to becoming aware. To be radical psychologically is to be honest all the way so that layer upon layer of masking, that is, dishonesties, must be stripped off" (1972, p. 82).

Honesty is the way of learning, through intimacy and courage, coming to know who we are and how we relate. No wonder Sheldrake writes that desires "are best understood as our most honest experiences of ourselves, in all our complexity and depth, as we relate to people and things around us" (2001, p. 18). And in the words of a dancer, "nothing is hidden on the dance floor." In a truth told slant, dance engages our desires, bringing us to greater awareness and deeper experiences of ourselves with others.

In a way, being in conversation with the participants is about listening to their desires and the truths they learned about themselves. Aydan ended with statements that reveal his value for what is real, valuing honest, here and now engagement:

> *"I don't want a made up, painted, pretense of some image somewhere that someone picked up, of some photo. I want a real person. If a person comes in their body, and they know who they are and are comfortable with who they are, we can make it work, we can make it a wonderful experience. . . . Let's make this feel like a dance, feel comfortable, feel pleasant as who we people are. Not pretense."*

Similarly, Faith expressed growing desire for what is real:

> *"The true form of the dance is only true and real when the body is dancing it, otherwise it's just a shadow of the form. It's not the real thing unless it's embodied."*

Faith expressed a desire to experience her faith as a whole relationship with God in Jesus, to experience the incarnation of her faith in dance. She relates that the concepts are different in language, but that at the level of lived experience, they are the same, bringing the mystical into ordinary experience. This might be a movement to greater experience of herself, from awareness of concepts to internal experience as lived reality.

It is fantastic to hear Faith differentiate between trying and passionate desire. Faith is

> *"trying to be content with the fact that dance is on hold . . . . trying to fall in love with my body, which is an enormous challenge for me."*

Faith's language changes when she recalls a retreat experience,

> *"No. I think it's more like . . . what resonates for me is this idea of leaping into the dance and becoming one with it, and being it, and it being me, and it not being an it but being the soul centre of myself where my relationship with God is."*

She is not satisfied to think of achieving some end. No, she wants to leap into an experience and feel it with a whole sense of herself, and be right in it. This is about moving from the circle around our life where we judge and evaluate, strategize and plan, and about getting right in the centre, living it with full engagement of body and soul.

Gwen also speaks clearly to the role of trying to make something happen, in contrast to allowing and being in touch with one's reality in the moment. It came in response to my question about maintaining presence in an impromptu tango performance. She described it as the

> *"performance of a lifetime. . . . You cannot think of the audience or the performance. Whatever held their breath, it wouldn't have happened if I had tried*

to perform."

Trying has its time and place. It underpins the discipline required for learning. Anyone who has learned a highly physical skill has practiced drills in a focused manner, and noticed that the skills become integrated into the next level of learning required, which frees attention for the next challenge. However, if we are not in touch with our desires, we deprive ourselves of energy and direction. Moreover, if I try too hard, I can become stuck and disconnected from the broader power base to which I belong. I offer my own example from the dance to illustrate the difference in experience between trying and desire. Trying belongs, but in connection with desire. Notice the difference in body feel with the following examples.

Examples of trying and not trying. I want to lead a forward diagonal step. I think about it, then I set up my feet, and then I push my arm and torso forward, in a twisting direction to steer my partner where I want her to go. I am thinking through the steps I learned and trying hard! I hold my Follow tightly so that she knows clearly where to go and goes there. If I am the Follow in this situation, the Lead is clear. Depending on the physical strength applied, and my own comfort level with the dance, I might feel relief in knowing what to do. Or, I could feel pushed, ordered, controlled and even mistrusted to dance without strong direction. I don't take it personally, as it reflects only the application of cognitive effort, and is all part of the learning path. I know that my effort can be unintentionally expressed by my hand. The bruise left by my thumb print impressed me too.

I feel a change coming in the music that invites expression. Almost immediately, I move into this by changing which foot I'm on, in a quiet way, undetected by my partner.

Just before the anticipated musical phrase issues, I take a deep breath, and when the new phrase begins, I rotate my torso just as far as my out-breath and obliques allow. Simultaneously, I put strength into my weight-bearing leg and push into the ground with this out-breath. If my partner is well connected to me, she has changed directions without even knowing it. She feels the change in music and receives it with her free leg. If I am the Follow with this Lead, I might feel that something subtle has happened, and we may have even moved considerable distance despite the effortless feel, but mostly what I am aware of is the music. If I am a beginner dancer, I feel secure in not being asked to do something that I can't do, and if I am an advanced dancer, I might be fully enjoying of the circularity of musical interpretation between me and my partner.

It's easy from this description to see a difference between efforts that stem mainly from a cognitive level, and efforts that stem from an intention that has an ease of connection with body and environment. I associate trying hard with efforts that can lead to excess anxiety. When I work for something I desire, love becomes more present. The presence of love can allow me to let go excess trying, and at other times, can foster the courage needed to face the unknown. I feel the word desire deeper in my body than the word trying.

John O'Donohue writes that "love is our deepest nature, and consciously or unconsciously, each of us searches for love," (1997, p. 10). He goes on to say that "we do not need to go out to find love; rather, we need to be still and let love discover us" (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 11). Perhaps we need to come home to our desires, and there find our unique expressions of pleasure, satisfaction and thirst within us, in touch with the rhythms of breath and heartbeat, and echoed in the eternal rhythms of nature. In the case

of this study, the participants moved out of their usual patterns. The safe, predictable patterns had become confining and even lifeless as described by Gwen. Desire invites expansion of experience. Paradoxically, attention to desire spurred a journey that moves both outward and inward, integrating growth in both directions through engagement of desire, action, awareness and reflection. Gwen explicitly relates that her desire for integrity opened her to be ready for meeting the passion of tango, which led to transformations of her teaching and to discover other occupations.

Faith describes a poignant aspect of desire, a longing for that which was lost. She awakened to something precious that she didn't know was there. She felt something long desired, and then bore its disappearance with no knowledge of its return. She experienced herself as a bud wanting to experience the full bloom. Having tasted the real thing, substitutes of metaphor won't do. What happens when one opens oneself to fully embrace one's desires, and–smash, they are not met? Faith's experience of needing to stop dancing because of illness is taken up in the theme of wholeness.

Desire for wholeness. The work of integration overcomes separations. Integrating the spiritual and the physical is a melding of deep desires that orient our direction and energies characteristic of carpe diem, into an action that culminates in a response issued from a deep sense of "yes!" It is as if the whole comes together in one moment, in one word, as yes. All participants related their experience of a resounding, yes! We hear in Aydan, a description of yes as a central, core experience:

"Yes! . . . . I really feel charged, energized,"

It puts a smile on his face. Aydan's experience of tango differs from an orientation that sits in the distance offering critique that says,

"I may be a better person because I spent the past hour putting myself through uncomfortable positions."

Faith describes falling in love with the dance. It was a new kind of physical expression that she had never before experienced, a joy that overflowed into her speech and animation, even when talking about it, that was different from all her previous physical experience including running and singing. I asked what were people seeing.

"They were seeing joy, . . . life, ... excitement, ... something almost illuminating me. And they weren't seeing me dance, they were just seeing me talk about it!"

Gwen also describes her yes in an experience like my own, wherein the only outward expression is shared giggles and laughter. Unlike nervous giggles, laughter in response to a full yes is a deeply felt joy, an audible expression of every cell's joyful vibration rising up into sound.

Desire not meant for ourselves alone. O'Donohue says that we could not live if we fully knew ourselves (2005). His wise words imply great kindness for that much berated, though widely practiced thing we call denial–that which saves us from being fully conscious and maintains our presence in mystery. O'Donohue's words also imply that the knowing and seeing of ourselves through others is not a gift meant to be mirrored back in its entirety. Traces remain here and there, the soft sticking of belonging to all. It implies that we truly do give ourselves away, and a certain amount of trust is necessary–trust that unseen gifts are valued and received. It speaks of our inherent connectedness, traces more felt than seen.

This reminds me of a new experience for me as a Lead in the dance. In close embrace, I practiced a lead from my centre, one that invited the Follow to trace a circle or

other embellishment on the floor with her free leg. All went well, and I maintained awareness and orientation to her standing leg, but I could not sense whether she had felt and received my lead for the embellishment. The instructor and the Follow told me that I had succeeded, but I could not sense this. Suddenly I gained respect for the amount of trust that a Lead must have in the Follow, the trust that is demanded of a sensitive Lead. I understood why so many might be tempted to lead with a heavy hand: they want solid evidence and affirmation for their effort. The sensitive Lead does not enjoy all the fruit of his or her efforts, whereas the Follow and those who catch glimpse of this might enjoy more delight in the Lead's musicality. Some desired musical expression is simply given away, not to be seen or felt, by the Lead.

More than I realize, we do not fully belong to ourselves alone. Some of the mystery of who I am remains with others and I must simply trust its effect, hopefully to be one of blessing. That of myself who I see through others is a gift, and literally a mixed one, created by our interaction. The real blessing is when I can recognize this as a co-creation between us, and realize that we are part of the flow of creation. Tango teaches me to let go of my gift, and quickly welcome the other again, into the creative mix.

Theme: Wholeness

There is in all things . . . a hidden wholeness. –Thomas Merton

He who truly experiences a thing so that it springs up to meet him and embraces him of itself has in that thing known the world. –Martin Buber

Words about wholeness. Listen to an exchange, after a first dance on the opening festival night: "Doesn't this just tell you that there is something more?" . . . . "Yes!"

Tango is a concrete, sensory experience that touches mystery, the something more in life. In it I am drawn into an expanding sense of wholeness. What do I mean by

wholeness? In search of definition, I recall musing after attending a Marion Woodman body workshop. Hours later in the quiet, I searched for a word to describe the beautiful feeling in my body. The word "whole" came to me, and I recognized a new experience of that word for me. It was in my body and distinct from typically mathematical concepts that formed my previous concepts of whole. Wholeness may have something to do with being in touch with all of one's experience, even expanding our awareness of what experience includes.

Parker Palmer gives the word wholeness particular attention in *A Hidden Wholeness, The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (2004). He links it to the word integrity, defined by the 1913 Webster's dictionary, as the "'state or quality of being entire, complete, unbroken,' . . . 'unimpaired, . . . genuine state, corresponding to original condition'" (Palmer, 2004, p. 8). My 1984 Webster edition lists "honesty" as synonym for integrity. Palmer draws attention to the quality of space between us, a co-created reality, which is influenced by our living with integrity and wholeness and our constant engagement in a "seamless exchange between whatever is 'out there' and whatever is 'in here'" (2004, p. 47). We do this "for better or worse" with "no place to hide" and in the process, we discover both body and soul (Palmer, 2004, p. 47). Wholeness is found in and through relationships. In conversation with research participants, I hear movement toward wholeness in and through their relationship with dance. Before turning to their conversation, there is one more word I want to introduce here, "reality."

Reality is defined by dictionary.com as "real things, . . . or events taken as a whole" (2013). It is my belief that what is real undeniably reveals God, something I cannot make up nor argue out of existence. Like the ocean, or a sudden summer storm, or even my

relationship with gravity, some realities appear as ontological givens revealing life beyond my understanding and imagination. My witness to these realities brings me into a relationship with something bigger than myself. In these realities we find deeper connections with each other and all of life. I hear O'Donohue lament those marooned in superficialities, when only a few inches below, there is great wonder to share. Similarly, Palmer draws inspiration from Thomas Merton who "claimed that there is in all things . . . a hidden wholeness" (in Palmer, 2004, p. 4). Perhaps wholeness has to do with the presence of an evolutionary bedrock of reality.

Participants reveal wholeness. Aydan speaks to this, when he relates that some have done

> *"tons more therapy than I have. How am I wounded, or how I am I not wounded? Well, let's add another focus on that. What does the fully healed, vibrant, free self look like? Because you have to know where you want to move to."*

Is it possible that our bodies hold such a wisdom, and could be working toward it, despite all our logic, analysis and explanations? I cannot help but reverence the journeys I hear in each participant and suggest that their dance not only invited them to something more, but that something more responded to an invitation equally present in them. Perhaps each side of the invitation found resonance in the other and in the dance, touching a present wholeness.

Aydan refers to

> *"the initial glitch, I mean glitz, . . that catches you," [as the tango poster of] "the classic male thing . . . the male trying to seduce the woman."*

The poster led him to lessons where he aspired to the power and presence exuded by the

instructor–a dance performer who could fill the space in his stance alone. Aydan was ready. Cloaked in the intimacy, safety and adventure of his recent engagement, a powerful male image beckoned him to move beyond his images of wounded childhood. While a superficial image caught his initial attention, something else was at work beckoning him to own his power in his body. In time he recognized that

> *"I had to learn to be just me, a man in strength, and not in a dominating way. At the end of the day, it has very little to do with my partner. It's about bringing myself to the dance floor, in my own centre, being clear with where I want to go. Of course you want to do that in synergy with another person, but you can't until you've figured it out with yourself."*

I suggest that Aydan's longing to realize this image invited deep engagement in a healing process through social tango. I believe that Aydan's healing through tango is a realization of a healing reality, already present within. In the words of Merton, it revealed a hidden wholeness already there.

Faith was also ready. With over 20 years of illness behind her, and in an uncertain and unfamiliar remission, she was ready for fun and a completely different way of engaging her body. She signed up for lessons because they sounded like fun and didn't need a partner, and she quelled her doubts with ample permission to quit. By the third lesson, joy amplified her new experience.

"And by the tenth class, I was just dancing."

Faith grew in trust of her learning and awareness of new feelings and functions of joints and limbs, moving alone, and in play, and in unison. Her image of God voiced new presence, read to her of dance's power to connect with the body, and lifted the roof off

with the assertion:

"I am the dance, and when you dance, I am, and you are, and that is prayer."

A spirit of sensuousness is one that is bodily in harmony with the rest of creation. However, "a flight from our sensuality is built into an educational, cultural, or religious view of the world that rewards only the left side of the brain" (Fox, 1981, p. 7). The dance's sensuality is present to all participants. Fox points to "healing . . . preceded by turning or being converted; . . . from asensuality to sensuality" (1981, p. 23). Faith's conversation might be one example of the work of integrating the separation to which Fox refers, one which values the sensual art of dance. New freedom, new trust, new questions regarding a harmony that can include illness, all appear in a trajectory that includes illness and healing, in full swing before Faith's first dance lesson. Interestingly, the first lesson was swing dance! This is a solidly grounded dance that playfully improvises its way between two poles. Perhaps it can work as a symbol of not being stuck, playing with opposites and gliding through the gap. Palmer uses the idea of "standing in the gap" to convey the discomfort, even the pain of disconnection, when living an outer expectation that is incongruent with deeper identity and desires. We might question how to grapple with gaps, perhaps between the real and the ideal, between experience as subject and object, between the literal and the metaphor, realizing that we engage life at either end and all along the way. However it is that we make sense of reality, an underlying hidden wholeness could be inviting us into the more of life with greater inclusion for the unknown.

Gwen speaks powerfully of the role of integrity in her life, a living from the inside out in ways that strengthen the whole, being sensitive to areas that are incongruent. At

the end of our conversation, I asked about her spirituality. She recalled a significant moment as a teen in which she came to the decision about who she wanted to be. The strength of her intention played out at key moments, and also when she met tango. Just prior to meeting tango, she was told:

> *"'You're in a boat and going no where.' I was furious, furious. For about two weeks I was absolutely livid. Because he spoke a truth and I didn't want to hear it."*

It's possible that dissonance with a deep-seated intention fueled her anger, and like Aydan and Faith, she met tango with a heart issuing forth its own invitation for the more of life. Gwen describes tango as

> *"Learning to live more alive, learning to want more."*

Perhaps this learning was a realization of Gwen's own healing presence, voiced at the age of sixteen.

Synchronicity, sign of a hidden wholeness. All three participants spoke of synchronous events as being significant for introducing them to the dance. Hollis describes synchronicity as when the inner and outer lives align (2005). Unlike cause-effect relationships, synchronicity implies deeper and wider connections. Whether synchronicity be ordered chance or chanced order, it is as though some wholeness hidden below breaks through, giving us an intriguing glimpse. Gwen relates:

> *"By remarkable coincidence . . . I ran into . . . at the ferry . . . on this small, tiny Gulf island. . . . You must come, . . . this guy's a teacher from Argentina. . . and only for the evening. . . . Well, it turned out, he was not a teacher; he was a beginner tango dancer. However, what I got that evening, . . . was a passion I had never*

experienced, . . . and he had a fire that I'm going, I need to know this! <u>This</u> I need to know!! ... Dancing with him... changed my life. . . . The synchronicity of tango coming into my life, and I wouldn't say it was a low part of my life, but there was no life left in my life. No drive, no passion."

This was the beginning of Gwen's story of tango to me. At the end of our conversation, Gwen relates:

"Everything is more alive. The weave has become tighter, and ... has more integrity, more vitality to it. I love my body more than ever. I love my life more than ever. I value my friends more than ever. I live it, all of it. You can't pull it apart. It's a tapestry, you know, when woven together with love and integrity, and humility as well."

Aydan's introduction to tango was also marked by synchronicity. He and his betrothed chose a romantic weekend at the city's only tango salon. They were greeted in the morning by a typical tango poster. Of deeper significance than the poster, was the attraction by Aydan to a man's presence and style of moving that could not be more opposite to his. The superficiality of the poster and a performance style that turns art into entertainment belied the deeper recognition of Aydan's body for the needed energy of standing in one's own power, fully responsible for oneself, clear and centered in its intention. Aydan relates:

"You see dancers, and they're like bulldozers, right? They have all the steps and they just plough across the floor–I've seen . . . dance like that lots of times. He's shaking his partner like a rag doll. Show some sensitivity, right!? So I was big on sensitivity but weak on the strength, so I had to learn the strength. . . . So when I

am strong in myself and leave the woman to make her own appropriate response, that's when the dance works. If I'm not clear because I'm trying to do this mutuality thing, the dance goes nowhere. If I'm too responsible for the woman ... then ... I can't lead."

Synchronicity resounds for Faith as well. As she relates her dance experience, she notices the importance of certain retreat experiences:

"I just couldn't believe the synchronicity of these things happening."

Significant was that her whole experience with dance was preceded in months by a retreat in which she was called to recognize three disparate aspects of herself,

"and that I was called to love them, love the all of me as Jesus did. And I noted in our conversation that two months later, I started dancing, though I had not before made the close connection between the two. In a sense, the dancing began a healing process that Jesus was already inviting me to in that retreat."

Once again, I hear an invitation to the more of life taking form, a hidden wholeness peeking through.

In the same way that synchronicity catches our attention, the role of metaphor also shows up. Palmer explains metaphor as something that helps keep our attention on something that might otherwise be too strong, too powerful for us to receive–a way of telling the truth slant (2004). Van Manen describes metaphor as "making it possible for the poet to transcend" the limit of words, returning them to the silence of the experience from which they issued (1997, p. 49). Metaphor can play a powerful role in touching a greater whole. Aydan tells us:

"So, learning how to be strong. It's so much fun. Tango is so much fun because

those are dynamics we carry in our life, relational dynamics get played out–it becomes a kind of a mirror, or a metaphor. . . I've talked about my own posture, my presence that I carry with me. But as a metaphor, uh, learning how to be... know my own path, know my own steps I want to take, not be responsible for the other person."

Faith speaks of metaphor:

"For many years I've been dancing on the page. I've been very creative and playful in dance-like ways, and I've been using dance as a metaphor in my poetry, since the 90s sometime, so, then all of a sudden, that word became flesh. See, it moved from metaphor into a literal. And somehow that made it more alive, even though recently, and I don't remember where, and I was talking about my love for dance, that the person said, 'well dance is a great metaphor,' and I said, it is a great metaphor, but far more exciting when the metaphor becomes the concrete, the real, the literal, becomes embodied, because that's the real thing."

It's exciting to hear recognition of synchronicity and metaphor. Each participant's journey also includes struggle in a very real way. I sense it most clearly in Faith as she grapples with a huge setback in her health and the meaning of her words,

"There is no dance unless it's being danced, ... unless the body is dancing."

A hole in the wholeness? What does it mean for a dancer when there is no dance? When the body, flesh incarnate, cannot move onto the dance floor?

I ask myself, does this mean that Faith is experiencing herself in illness as *not*? Is *not* then also a form of God, of the great I am who does not dance? Images come to mind of cosmic voids, dark empty spaces, which attract light such that life explodes into being.

Furthermore, this gives me new view of the dancer who is sitting, painfully aware of not being invited to dance. I know this feeling: a situation of mounting desire and increasing tension in two directions, one looking out into the field of desire, and the other holding within, to bear the stillness with all of one's strength. It is a strength that must match the force of increasing desire, in order to simply remain still and open and waiting, ready. On the outside, a person sitting at a dance can appear to be doing nothing. However, it might be that nothing is further from the truth. The position could in fact, be difficult to hold, more like a rock climber calling upon all strength to hold a single position, to carefully search for the next small move, a step hidden under a cloak of either possibility, or not. Will my experience open me to move with great relief and greater trust, or will it keep me here, in touch with an unwelcome presence of fear? Perhaps these instances are the natural pauses within a whole movement, equal in their creative power to the power of visible movements. Could these be pauses wherein energies gather and build, before entering into visible form? In respecting the limits of illness, injury, time-bound constraints and the seasonality of life, we can be reminded of the legitimacy of readying, of gestation, of invisible life preparing to receive new form. I hear echo of Gwen's words, "tango, she waits."

"Tango, she waits," implies a readying, a patience, and a recognition that the dance happens when the requirements comes together. It implies a respect for these factors. Some factors I can attend, but over most I have no control. Being at ease with an ebb and flow, that is larger than me and my life, is part of the dance.

I know the futility of trying to change reality. I also know the feeling of finding myself unsure of reality's rhythm. It's taken years for me to become more comfortable in

the seat on the perimeter, to connect with the energy of the circle from there, and to be more at ease with waiting. Faith desires the real thing. She isn't yet sure of what it means,

> *"to be fully present in my body, and to be fully accepting of my body, ... and there is something about that which is a challenge to a greater sense of wholeness and healing and integration."*

Faith is trying to be content with the fact that dance is on hold. She is sitting on a couch talking to me about dance, and talking to me of Plato's example of men mesmerized by shadows moving on a wall, not realizing that the real thing was the light behind them, and that those shadows were their own movements. Could we belong and be inherent to all of it - including the dance, the stillness, the waiting? Could wholeness include the light, the dark, attention to shadow and the fuzzy realization that we somehow embody all of it, close enough to touch, to embrace?

Aydan helpfully points out that learning through dance is a journey of deepening layers, with a gentle admonition to return to one's body and learn from there.

> *"The teaching always brought me back to where was I in my body."*

With each learning comes an ease of forgetting of the by-gone layers peeled back, as deeper levels appear for engagement. "Anyone who works at a high level of physical skill . . . must trust his or her body implicitly, which is tantamount to 'forgetting'" (Palmer, 2004, p. 106).

I resonate with Aydan's work to remain 100% in his axis. In dance this is about relying on one's self completely for maintaining physical balance. It might also be a metaphor of being in touch with the whole through one's own here and now concrete

experience. I recognize my challenge to engage every relationship from my own porthole, rather than be distracted by advising others based on humanly arrogant assumptions about having a special point of view, and rather than leaving my porthole completely, in the assumption that I have mastered a better vantage point! In the struggle to remain with one's own limited body and space, comes the paradox of opening to embrace the whole. I suggest that it sneaks up, that in all the work, in the forgetting and in the reminding to return, there comes a time when all comes together in what Csikszentmihalyi calls flow (1990). He characterizes the state of flow as being 100% involved, intense; as having adequate skill, inner clarity, a sense of timelessness; and feeling a part of something larger. On the dance floor, I recognize it as an experience of yes! It is a powerful moment of connection, distilled into one word. It is touching the eternal more of life through one unrepeatable moment. It is precious fodder for reflection that can hold us through 1,000s of moments of wondering if we should quit.

Chapter Six: Implications for the Practice of Psychotherapy

Two Main Ideas: Healing and the Role of the Body

The third research question asks: What are the implications of this study for psychotherapy and spirituality? This chapter connects ideas from the experience of dance, in particular from social tango and the research participants, with ideas in the literature and the practice of psychotherapy.

A significant finding of the research is affirmation of the idea that healing potential is innate to ordinary life. The idea fits my occupational therapist perspective to value ordinary activities as meaningful, even as therapeutic. Perhaps this is no surprise to readers who recall my initial intent was to look for healing, spirituality and valued living, less in the presence of illness and more in the presence of healthy living and experiences of joy. In one sense I knew this idea to be true. In another sense I needed to gain confidence in the obvious by honouring the presence of doubt, allowing questions and desires to arise in the company of other dancers willing to describe their experience.

My assertion that there is innate potential for healing and creativity available at any time can therefore be viewed as a questioned answer. It is an answer that has grown in strength through the real experience of three research participants. The work yields a depth of recognition and knowing that comes through the lived experience of the dancers and our deeper listening to the implied meanings of their words in conversation.

Psychotherapists are wise not to underestimate the role of healing that occurs outside of therapy. This is supported by research that found extra-therapeutic factors to have the most significant role in change among clients (Assay and Lambert, 1999). It is not difficult to imagine that an effective client-therapist relationship works synergistically

with those other relationships outside of therapeutic encounters that are also significant for well-being. Such ideas are shared with therapists who expect transformation in their clients to occur outside of therapy hours (Bowen, 2010). They are consistent with views that clients hold an expertise in their lives that cannot be relinquished. The work and the rub in therapy consists of sharing expertise in a relationship, in which therapists ultimately work toward improving the overall satisfaction and effectiveness of their clients' lives (Robinson, 2009).

A second important finding is the idea that the body is significant for growth and healing. The changes for each research participant came about through increased awareness of what they experienced in their bodies during dance (e.g. discomfort, sensuality, recognition). Again, readers can return to my original suggestion that a potential correction to societal malaise lies as close as becoming aware of the experience of life through our bodies. Similarly, McMahon asserts that

> before the emerging corruption in our culture further erodes our collective spirit we must, without delay, discover that we are the bridge that unites and brings harmony into human life, *not from outside* but from *within* our humanity itself. I believe the answer lies at our own backdoor in the human body we all share. (McMahon, 1993, p. vii)

For this reason I turn to literature that looks to the body as source of healing. Two areas are body-oriented trauma therapies and focusing oriented experiential psychotherapy. I also draw from philosophical and feminist approaches because they reach beyond the traditional disciplines that prefer objective material and disqualify subjective knowing. Since I believe that the power for healing in a therapeutic setting lies

mainly within the client, I believe that all types of therapy have value. Well-delivered therapy facilitates what is innate to clients, and every encounter can be enhanced by adding a listening type of attention to the body.

Cultivating Healing Space

What can we learn from this study about how healing happens through the body that is meaningful for the practice of psychotherapy? One way to look at this is to consider the idea of a healing space between two people. Here we enter the realm of intersubjectivity, explored earlier in Chapter Two. I propose to look at this space through the use of metaphor.

In approaching the idea of space, let's start by considering what clients and therapists bring. Levine states that the "drive to complete and heal trauma is as powerful and tenacious as the symptoms it creates" (1997, p. 173). His statement is made all the more believable in light of the healing I have witnessed in a whole range of circumstances, from the willing pursuit of passionate endeavors to the forced circumstances of end-of-life pain. It suggests that powerful forces are at work in psychotherapy clients, whether or not they feel particularly hopeful.

Clients typically arrive with difficulties in living, feeling out of sorts if not in outright pain and distress. Jordan and collaborators in Relational Cultural Therapy (RCT) "suggest that isolation is a primary source of suffering, and that people come into therapy with both a yearning for connection and often a terror of the vulnerability that is necessary to move into growth-fostering connection" (2010, pp. 211-212). We might view the typical client as feeling unhoused, in exile from an expected manner of connecting to ordinary life. It's possible that clients fundamentally seek a space in which

their circumstances and unvoiced hopes will first of all be seen and believed. The quality of space found by clients has the potential to profoundly affect their movement from a sense of exile to a sense of connection, acceptance, and belonging.

The core assertions of RCT "are that . . . all people grow through and toward connection" (Jordan, 2010, p. 2). The journeys of research participants exemplified this as they grew in connection in: i) a community of dancers, ii) their private reflection time with others, and most significantly, iii) their relationships to themselves as they gained awareness of their experiences. Some of the factors that cultivated space for their growing in connection were: safety, sensory pleasure, listening to desires, patience, trust, joy, and witnessing the truth told slant. Their experience invites questions for cultivating a healing space in psychotherapy, questions that best linger and remain open rather than close into certain answers.

Examples of useful questions follow. Readers are invited to add their own questions and hold them open for the remaining discussion. How do we create and maintain safe space? How can we welcome sensory pleasure in a meeting of two people, and what stands in the way of this in therapy? How do we invite and treasure the appearance of longings and desires? How do we discern when slow is the new fast? Are there ways we protect and de-limit the growth of trust and joy? How is a therapeutic encounter an occasion of the truth told slant? All such questions can help cultivate therapeutic space with a questing type of attention.

Metaphors connect language to experience and to the silence out of which both language and experience spring, thereby keeping us in touch with the visible concrete reality and the invisible more (van Manen, 1997). Three uses of metaphor will inform us

about the inter-subjective space in an encounter between client and psychotherapist. First we hear participants' use of metaphor that directly refers to what they learned of relational space through dance. Next I describe a single dance step to highlight factors that impact qualities of movement and connection, factors that also potentiate the meeting space of psychotherapy. The third metaphor involves the meaning of the body, drawing on the work of Gendlin for the process of counselling, and drawing on some who share my faith tradition for spiritual meaning. Let us first privilege the metaphors put forth by Faith, Aydan and Gwen regarding how dance informs the quality of space for connection.

Metaphor raised by participants. Faith:

"It reminds me too, of my spiritual direction ministry, and realizing at some point, taking my experience of dance as I was learning it, into the room with my directing, and thinking to myself, don't lead. Follow. But stay close enough to the conversation that when you follow you are not lagging behind, which can happen on the dance floor. And again, not over-thinking it, you're just being fully present. And it means you are 100% engaged, and not taking that person where he or she is not prepared to go, but following in a way that puts you side by side, so that again, the conversation becomes the one that is the connection of the two partners that are in it."

We will take a closer look at what is happening in a conversational, side by side walk, in being with another by looking at a single dance step. We listen now to Aydan who learned how strength of presence and clarity of intention impact relationship:

"So when I am strong in myself and leave the woman to make her own appropriate response, that's when the dance works. If I'm not clear because I'm trying to do

> *this mutuality thing, the dance goes nowhere. If I'm too responsible for the woman, . . . then that screws up my step and I can't lead. So I have to learn to take my steps, and I have to be aware if the woman is following. I have to be sure if I'm communicating my lead well, which I only figure out if she is responding–so there is mutuality but there is separateness, and that's a great model for relationship."*

This speaks to the need for a therapist to grow and develop in self-awareness and attention to the creative action that arises between them and their clients, as feedback for how intention is conveyed and received.

Gwen addresses the relationship between life on the dance floor and life lived off the dance floor:

> *"What happens on the dance floor is that it personifies our relationships. What comes up on the dance floor, and I've seen this over 20 years, is that trust, intimacy and control are the three major things that come up. And those things are part of the fabric of our lives, and how we deal with them in our lives is how we deal with them on the dance floor. And so, if we are able to change it on the dance floor, and be honest about it on the dance floor, then we're more able to be honest about things in our life."*

We recognize here the fundamental work of therapy to build a trusting relationship. The experience of increased intimacy between client and therapist builds this capacity in the rest of life.

Metaphor of a dance step. The social Argentine tango is essentially a walk between two individuals connected as one. The couple embraces and walks as one moving being, connecting body, soul and rhythm to music. Arms add presence and

touch, but it is the space between the couple that is the main connection. It is a space full of energy, regardless of the size of space, regardless of whether bodies actually touch or appear to be apart. In an individual, this space houses heart and breath, and awareness of this can be as important as any step in the dance. The beat in tango is generally slow and heavy, like a strong methodical heartbeat, yielding a dance in synchrony with heart rhythm.

We can well imagine that the vibrational energy of heart and diaphragm continue out from the body into space. In Eastern terms, the space represents the fourth or heart chakra. Fox describes it in Christian terms, as the fire of the Holy Spirit, and in Eastern terms, a life energy that intersects with other energies. It is interesting that "the fourth fire names *compassion*, the culmination of all our passions in the fire of love" (Fox, 1999, p. 96). We can appreciate the presence of energy and mystery, a power available to dancers and therapists as they give subtle and regular attention to the felt energy of this body area.

In social Argentine tango, the dancers constantly monitor and take care of their felt connection. They orient themselves to this space, and do so regularly whether consciously or unconsciously, much the same way that a hand on a steering wheel constantly monitors and adjusts its connection to the road. Dancers also become aware of consciously using their inner core strength to assist with balance, and they give conscious attention to how their feet meet the ground. These dancers grow in bringing a whole-bodied orientation and presence to the dance. The dance grows out of the way they occupy and unfold the sense of space between them, joining the other dancers on the floor and the tango orchestra.

In order for dancers to offer their upper body to their dance partner and remain in their own balance, dancers must connect well to the ground. Indeed, a dancer's primary connection is to the ground, to the earth. Social Argentine dancers do not skirt and skate, moving superficially across the ground. Rather, they move into it, and the deeper the step, the more solid their grounding and the more available they are to their partners. Without holding ground, a dancer may fall or lean, turning dance into a recovery of balance. In my experience, it can take a long time to learn one's balance, and it can be sobering to realize that without balance, the dance has yet to begin.

Movement begins when the Lead takes a breath and puts energy into the ground while directing intention. Next, and possibly most challenging, is for the Lead to remain in relaxed and fluid connection with the Follow while letting go. Letting go allows the Follow to receive the energy and carry it into a step. Once the Follow has fully arrived at the new place, a reset of balance and connection occurs, and the Lead is ready to issue a next step with new breath and energy. Throughout this, the Follow claims space, holding the place in which she stands upon her supporting leg. With a strongly grounded energy, the Follow seems to say, "this is nice, let's stay here." The desire to stay is matched by equal commitment to remain in connection and to surrender to the movement. The desire might say, "I want to be with you, and it's O.K. to go." The result of this dual commitment, to stay here and to be with, is a strong sense of presence, at times palpable right along with the rhythms of heart and breath. Some Follows treat every step led as an invitation to be accepted, lingered with, or musically embellished with more or less movement. The active creation in a two-way improvisation heightens the listening engagement of the pair. One can imagine the synergy that develops and the need for

strong grounding to support the energetic flow. A point invisible to others, is that in order for the Follow's free leg to be available to receive the energy of the Lead, the Follow connects inside herself. The more connected is the Follow inside, the more directly does the energy flow between the pair, and the more indivisible does it appear and feel. One can see that there is a lot of work going on inside the dancers as they attend and move through a single step.

This way of breaking down one step of the dance serves to appreciate the role of the body and experience when taken as metaphor for attending to process as interaction created between client and counsellor in psychotherapy. Attention to body adds an understanding of essential attitudes that cultivate the quality of connection in the space between therapist and client. Descriptive ideas from the dance step that can inform the practice of psychotherapy are: grounding, intention, letting go, presence, and attunement, all of which facilitate quality of connection. None of these ideas apply to therapy as stand-alone concepts in stand-alone bodies. In fact, they are so much related that the reader might wonder if each speaks about the same thing.

In a way each idea–grounding, intention, letting go, presence, attunement–does refer back to the one idea of connection. If we think and feel into each strand, however, we allow a slightly different aspect or quality to come into the foreground. This will hopefully increase our appreciation for the possible depth and differentiated texture of a wholeness that waits to appear through interaction. In a concrete way, I might also describe wholeness as the body's sense of *yes*– yes, this feels just right for me now. The wonder of these concepts consists in being enacted in the interactional space between two people.

Grounding. In any twosome, if one person is ungrounded, the other is affected. Does this matter for two people, usually seated, in a psychotherapy session? Indeed, Bowen points out that "all living is moving" (van der Kolk, 2008). We can be imaginatively aware of this if we recall the body feel of being with a person who is anxiously breathless, and how different this is from the body feel of being with a person who speaks slowly, softly, with a breathing rate nearing sleep.

Gendlin reminds us that therapists are never just working with a person over there. He calls such an attitude a "perceptual split," the idea that one body here perceives another separate body there (Gendlin, 2012a, p. 3). According to the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, a primary way that we are in the world is through a perception that is closer in meaning to experiencing and connection (Madison, 2008). The point is not to forget about differentiated individuals, each unique in their whole set of circumstances, but rather to appreciate our influence and connection in our experience of each other. We are moving in a dance of connected relating, and the body senses this tangibly, including a sense of grounding.

Cornell presents an example from psychologist, Carol Ivan, to describe how something Cornell names "Self-in-Presence," affects the way she is with clients. I call it an example of grounding:

> Being open to all of my own internal reactions, being with them in a more neutral compassionate curious way, making room for all of them, not having to push any of them away . . . that allows me to be with my clients just the way they are, and not have to need for them to be different from how they are, either. (Ivan cited in Cornell, 2013, p. 88)

Aydan gave us an example of this when he emphasized that he needed to be strong in himself, responsible first for his own movement, by being centered and balanced, for the dance to work. Wilberg quotes Heidegger, "we hear not the ear," to emphasize how the process of grounding, of being present as a real person as opposed to a role, facilitates listening in both speaker and listener (2013, p. 7). We hear - not the ear, not the mind, not you, not me, but we.

Grounding through use of felt sense. Grounding influences therapeutic process. Madison (2008), Levine (1997) and Cornell (2013) describe grounding through attention to the felt sense as a way to assist awareness of themselves, awareness of each client they are with in light of their awareness, and awareness of the process developing between them. The felt sense was coined by Gendlin in the 1950s, and a body of research now substantiates its contribution to many types of therapy (Hendricks, 2002). The felt sense was identified in collaboration with Carl Rogers, as Gendlin set out to research what differentiated successful clients in therapy. He found that successful clients could be identified in the very first session by their reference to a body-feel of their situation, and by their attention and effort to articulate this body feel of something which was at first vague and not accompanied by ready-made words. Successful clients were describing the body-feel of their situation as they were experiencing it.

In order to teach this process to everyone, Gendlin did further work to learn how clients touched into their felt sense and how they experienced change in their bodies during therapy sessions. His work developed into a practice called focusing (Gendlin, 1981), something which Cornell points out is less a method or technique, than it is a natural human capacity for noticing change, and certainly useful both inside and outside

of therapy (2013). Focusing assists people to be in touch with the felt sense, something precise and fresh in the way it reflects the intricate complexities inherent in a whole situation in any one moment. Since it is fresh and new at any given time, it reflects the living tendency toward change, and does not fit well with words tending toward reduction and categorization (read judgment, interpretation, answers). With careful attention to describing one's felt sense, change can become explicitly known in just the right words. In a safe and caring space, it can become known and felt to change from one moment to the next, seemingly in tune with some larger, life-giving direction while grounded in the present moment. I liken it to improvisational dance, when just the right connection and precision creates visible poetry, each unknown future step unfolding gracefully out of a grounded present.

The process of attending a felt sense matches the reflective process of the research participants, as they searched for words and meanings of what they experienced in a natural way. The process prompted their attention to felt body experience. First attention was given to an interactive experience from the point of view of how something felt inside their bodies, and then to finding meanings that fit. This opened into new awareness over time.

We all have a natural capacity to sense ongoing interaction and change, and to become aware of this in the here and now. We also know the feeling of stuck. Therapists who are grounded in body awareness, are more likely to recognize the edges of stuck, the places needing more attention in order to break out of old patterns and open to change. Grounded therapists establish a quality of presence while interacting with clients. Doing so creates an invitational space for clients to experience and witness themselves,

something essential for change in psychotherapy clients (Cornell, 2013; Gendlin 1973; Levine, 1997).

Recalling the work of Martin Buber, we can view grounding as one way to move from the more distant I-it experience of oneself, in which we think about something in relation to ourselves (often evaluating, problem solving, comparing, etc.), to an I-Thou experience of sensing and being in direct relationship, in touch with the ground of our own experience, witnessing the moment. Practices such as body and felt sense awareness deserve recognition and reverence for effectively bringing a person in direct contact with present moment experiencing.

The work of Gendlin and Rogers came to view a "process of change in psychotherapy that is dependent on two key interdependent factors: how the therapist is with the client, and how the client is with her own 'experiencing'" (Cornell, 2013, p. xvi). Grounding is one important aspect of how the therapist is with a client and how therapists influence clients' awareness. The use of intention by the therapist influences these two factors.

Intention. Our bodies feel and respond to a listener's attention and intent. Readers are invited to check for themselves the effect of intention by imagining a time they felt tongue-tied in the face of an authoritative and judgmental questioner, and contrast this with a time they felt surprised at the ease with which they related a difficult experience to a friend. A listener's intention profoundly affects the way we listen and speak. Therapists attend a therapeutic space with a number of intentions to invite clients to engage in a relational process. In general these include establishing and maintaining safety, orientating to some form of assessment and evaluation, and facilitating a

collaborative process that focuses on client goals and desires.

Recall that phenomenology began with Husserl's conception of intentionality as significant for the experienced connection between the seeing and the seen. In this section I emphasize that a therapist's intentions are a powerful influence in therapy. Intention directs attention, and attention heals, and quality of attention makes a difference.

> We do not understand the process [the how and why of change]. It is much too big and deep and arises of its own accord; we cannot encapsulate it in our concepts or even in our intuition. It belongs to itself. It is a healing that comes from underneath. With this kind of relational and inward attention the whole intricate mesh reorganizes itself. All we understand is that this happens if we enter in a certain way, if we let a felt sense form, if we "make a space for it," if we "stay with it" with our attention, and if we honor the little steps that take place. (Gendlin, 1996, p. 149)

Bowen points out that the awareness of a therapist acts as an influence upon the awareness of clients (van der Kolk, 2008). If awareness remains at the level of externalities, little space is made for internal resources and they remain untapped. However, when a therapist turns awareness to his or her felt sense, i.e. pays attention to an inner body feel of the interaction taking place, then this level of awareness becomes more available to grow in the client. The dance analogy here is the difference felt by a Follow between a Lead who thinks about where to move the feet, and a Lead who communicates clear intention while keeping balance and centered connection. The first feels tentative, maybe confusing, and certainly empty of support, while the latter feels full

of a natural ease. It takes commitment and practice to turn from a thinking style into a whole-bodied movement.

Wilberg describes the intention of listening as having innate therapeutic power when the listener becomes present as midwife.

> [This] is a specific mode of not only being but *being with* others in the pregnancy of silence. Only such a therapeutic bearing can help another to not only 'endure' their own suffering but bear and body it - allowing it to give birth to a new *inner bearing* towards the world and other beings. (Wilberg, 2004, p. 2)

Wilberg laments therapists who fail to appreciate the essence of every dialogue and relationship, who seek to separate feelings and meanings as belonging to two separate people, mine and yours, and thereby "treating experience as private property" (2004, p. 2). Relationship is no more private than is dance, as every conversation reveals a third voice, the *between* or *we*, not belonging to one person alone. "If the therapist's listening is a response to the between, it will itself call forth a co-response from the client" (Wilberg, 2004, p. 2). Therapists are of course also affected by the intentions of clients, for example, the pressure to provide an answer. Being grounded in presence is helpful in cultivating the space for acknowledging and responding to a client's needs.

I do not mean to suggest that therapists are to be continuously and consciously aware of all levels of connection to be effective. I do mean that by checking inside our bodies, what we say and think can become a more accurate expression of how we are living and which direction opens to more. Tidmarsh refers to "the '*touch and go*' principle" in his work with addictions to emphasize that therapy is not about "logic but briefly allowing a different feel to touch us" (2010, p. 9).

How does a therapist reach across the feeling of separation inside a client who may feel stuck in an exile of sorts? With the intention of great care to attention, and with the sensitive awareness that how we see also touches. Cornell points out that when we are inviting someone to a quality of attention, to witness themselves with caring attention, "the first requirement is that we ourselves have that quality of attention" (2013, p. 203). It starts with the therapist. Responsibility for creating the space, for inviting the client's interaction requires ongoing work by therapists to develop these same abilities inside themselves. In the same way that Aydan looks to his partner's response to determine the clarity of his intention,

> counsellors and therapists need to constantly remind themselves that what a client reveals to them in the counselling or therapy session along with the manner in which they reveal it, is already and in itself *a response* to the inner bearing of the counsellor or therapist *as listener.* (Wilberg, 2004, p. 3)

The conscious use of intention is an important way that therapists create and maintain a safe space for a relational process to develop. Inviting and holding connection needs to be balanced with a caring, non-attached, letting go, in order for clients to be successful in tapping into the process that led them into therapy and for allowing the surprise of something new to arise in them.

Letting Go. Gwen spoke of tango as calling her to

> *"surrender to the music, to that other soul, . . . allowing yourself to be present. . . .*
>
> *That's surrender–allowing yourself totally to have an experience."*

Gwen's use of the words, "music, soul and surrender and totally experience," hint at something more. She was with an other, she was invited and not directed by an other.

With trust, she allowed herself to sink into the something more. Allowing herself a total movement, both interior and exterior, can be viewed as an act of empowerment to experience becoming more, in that moment.

> There is an awareness within our bodies that leads beyond ourselves. . . . It does not confine us to what we can figure out and control with our minds, but it turns, instead, toward *an openness* within bodily knowing. (Campbell & MacMahon, 1997, p. xxv)

It matures not by thinking, nor by doing, "but by virtue of a wholeness we *allow* to break through inside ourselves. . . . It is not so much thinking as *resonance"* (Campbell & McMahon, 1997, p. xxv).

Aydan showed us the connection of body awareness and the breakthrough of greater wholeness. At a time when the word "uncomfortable" fit for Aydan, it silently pointed to a wider, deeper meaning in his body than his intellect could know or foresee. In an experiential process, recognized over time by attention to his body and reflection to meanings, it unfolded to reveal not only deeper levels of self-awareness, of inner experience, but also a greater knowing of his own path in life outside of dance. Aydan gives beautiful example to Campbell and McMahon's notion that bodily felt meanings always give more than what is experienced in the moment, as they lead one forward along a path of further unfolding (1997).

A therapist's attitude of allowing whatever comes forth from the client into the interaction is hugely helpful. What is essential is to allow a client's healing process to reveal itself. Helpful is the letting go of agendas and theories in order to allow a client's process in any given moment to either unfold or not unfold, in tune with the client's

timing and need. Letting go includes restraint from imposing method and unwelcome interpretation. A therapist who gives caring, open, and interested attention to the interaction, allows these same qualities grow in the client, allowing the client to attend and care for a process that is revealed through their experience (Cornell, 2013).

> It is not the wisdom of the therapist's advice or interpretations which will aid the client. Rather it is the therapist's ability and willingness to risk more open living with each other. . . . The therapeutic value lies not in what the client thinks what happened, but in the happening itself. (Gendlin, 1973, pp. 338-339)

By allowing and attending those aspects of ourselves that we typically avoid, shun or deny, we allow them to change. "Every bad feeling is potential energy for a more right way of being, if you give it space to move toward its rightness," into its life-giving direction (Gendlin, 1981, p. 76). Slowly, as clients experience and feel the small steps of change in a direction that fits and feels right, they grow in trust and in the ability to let go further into their experience. This enables "people to let go into the truth of themselves, especially their brokenness, in order that they may bodily experience *grace* within the process of their growth into wholeness" (McMahon, 1993, p. 248).

Trust in embodied-knowing grows with experiences of pleasure (Fox, 2000). When people feel positive change to be real in their body, they grow in trust of their experiences. No matter what framework or therapeutic approach is used, therapists who are able to bring body awareness into therapy empower clients to grow through attention to their naturally occurring ability to perceive change in life giving directions. Possibly the best therapy is recognized when clients come into a relationship with themselves, in a way that deepens their honesty and acceptance of their unique and particular life and its

unfolding nature. This fosters trust regarding their fundamental existence, worthiness and belonging, a discovery of truth grounded in relational experience with themselves with others.

Presence. Without presence, an experience of letting go might feel like goodbye. With presence, letting go becomes an empowering experience of being with, especially with just the right amount of closeness and distance for growth. In such a case, letting go might feel more like the words, "I believe in you. I believe in what is happening here with you."

Presence is a whole-bodied, full attention way of being with another. I once heard my tango instructor exude a favourite tango experience. "For three minutes you are the most important person in the world! You are not a wife, not a mother, not a teacher. And for that feeling of being the most important person for a full three minutes–that is why we will go so far to have a dance." In her words, I heard a universal desire to feel unconditionally valued, for who we are apart from expectation and role.

Presence facilitates the move from the type of speech that abides role or expectation, and arrives into authentic speech (Wilberg, 2004). The purpose of presence, however, is not to grasp accurate content. Rather, its significance is for facilitating a real meeting between human beings, and for cultivating a space that allows creativity, the possibility of something new to come and keep coming. Presence is a way of turning toward while letting go control. It models a way of listening to clients such that they grow in listening more openly and deeply to themselves. The previous example of grounding by Carol Ivan is one example of presence. Two other beautiful examples open articles by Gendlin (1990) and Madison (2008). They appear in Appendix D for

interested readers, due to their length. They demonstrate the use of presence as a way to be real with clients during psychotherapy sessions, to be firstly one human being with another.

Gendlin (1990) and Jordan (2010) point out that being with clients in this manner requires that therapists be at least as courageous as their clients. Beyond a continuation of professional learning, it requires therapists to fully engage their own personal learning, to touch their own places of disconnection and to enter their own healing in an on-going way. This requires that therapists be willing to experience vulnerability and change. Similar to the experience of research participants, this requires safety, something that the experience of presence itself facilitates. While it takes courage not to hide, and to be comfortable with oneself with others, it might help to remember that this is our natural state.

Some of the qualities of presence are described by Cornell; she claims that "presence is the natural state of the self: calm, curious, interested, and able to act in mature and balanced ways" (Cornell, 2013, p. 85). This claim to a natural state can be seen as finding support from biology researchers who found that peaceful behaviour, more indicative of social attitude than of skill, was maintained for two decades among a troop of 62 baboons following an outbreak of TB that removed the aggressive males (Angier, 2004). The researchers wondered how long it would last as they considered the troop of baboons to be more vulnerable than their counterparts. Despite the increased vulnerability, they found that the baboons were living with far fewer stress hormones, and that learning was passed on to newcomers. Readers might notice that I like to broaden our notion of kin while appreciating our community of learners, but what does this have

to do with presence? I want to emphasize the notion of natural learning, something different than excess trying.

Cornell's view is that presence is a natural state which comes through natural learning. By using language that facilitates an attitude of listening to oneself with just the right amount of distance (i.e. not too aloof, not too anxious), Cornell predicts that "compassion and kindness" arise "naturally" with the practice of presence (2013, p.106). These attitudes create spaces of safety and healing, inviting places of disconnect to emerge and to experience connection. Faith described this as

> *"following in a way that does not lead ahead nor lag behind, but is fully engaged in the one conversation that becomes the connection between the two."*

This is a felt body experience. Faith describes it as "side by side." The difference in body feel when a companion walks ahead, or behind, or right beside is something we naturally learn and know by feeling. In a culture of separation and isolation, a sense of presence is easily diminished or lost. Re-establishing presence has an important role in a healing process that restores a sense of wholeness.

Attunement. I once watched two couples from a distance as we waited for a store to open in an otherwise empty mall. Not wanting to disturb the sight, I kept myself at a distance well over 100 feet away. From there, I enjoyed the pleasant banter, the mood and the regard that the couples communicated. I especially enjoyed the father and son pair, presumably because their exchange was more physical than verbal, and therefore more visible. Cspregi (2006) describes the body as interactive intelligence, with many natural attributes such as spontaneity, rhythm, sensibilities, memory and imagination. Among them is a mimetic capacity at work throughout our lifespan. It imbues us "with a

sense of involvement and participation" in our environment, gifting us with "the bodily potential . . . to act in unison with the world and to perceive it with sympathy and care" (Cspregi, 2006, p. 90). These are qualities that make dance especially delightful as each partner listens to the other listen to the music, to their dance, to their human glitches, and to occasions of transcendence. Attunement can be thought of as all the ways our body intelligence interacts to establish and maintain connection with others. These same qualities are also at work from the first moment of contact between a therapist and a client.

Attunement might be viewed as an invisible web, supporting interaction. It refers to listening to another while engaging an inner listening that responds to the sense and tone of music played in the interaction. It becomes visible in the way a first "hello" is issued, and in the care and willingness of therapists to adjust to their clients, to fine tune a sense of being with. It is recognized when therapists select a therapeutic approach and adapt their methods to the particular needs and style of each client. Explicit attention to detail is a way to invite clients' attention and collaboration in the process of attunement. This happens in the initial discussions of what makes for safe therapeutic space and of the general expectations and responsibilities in counselling. To further refine attunement, therapists might invite clients to witness themselves through their therapy and to check inside for times that therapist correction is needed – those times when something does not fit or feel right according to that inside check. In a natural way, attunement and attention to attunement invites awareness to deeper listening. As in dance, something that facilitates this work is just the right amount of tension (as in attention) and relaxation. Too much trying and self-consciousness works right along with rote responses to

undermine the body's natural abilities and sense of knowing how to connect.

Two powerful ways to deepen attunement are pausing and waiting. In social tango, this is called collecting. It refers to collecting one's feet under oneself, a time for balance, breath, and attention to the connection inside oneself and to one's partner. It can be a time to savour the sensing, readying, and waiting for the right time and the next step. Although collecting happens in a split second or over a whole phrase of music, there is a sense that, like meditation according to Lawrence Freeman, it grants time (Hines, 2012). Cornell emphasizes the power of the pause to get in touch with the felt sense and its potential to transform is such that "slow is the new fast" (2013, p. 53). Pausing gets us out of repetitive patterns of the same old stories and explanations that keep us stuck spinning in superficiality, disconnected from sources of authentic power to move. During the pause we wait. Waiting with presence enables clients "to dwell deeper in their own inner silence and become aware of the silent communication going on in 'the between'" (Wilberg, 2004, p. 99). This level of attunement helps clients "to feel their own questions, formulate them for themselves and find their own answers within themselves" (Wilberg, 2004, p. 99). Silence can be viewed as an attentive gestation process for something new. As in the creation of art, engagement with whole-bodied listening and responsive sensitivity makes for effective participation in a life free to move into creative expression.

Effective attunement moves attention in listening from *I* to *we.* We see its gentle appearance in the statements, "let's make a pause here; let's stay here a while longer and keep this company." By growing in awareness of experience, an experience which is essentially an interaction of relational intimacy and connection, psychotherapy clients

slowly come in from out of exile, into a grounded experience of being at home, and having witnessed themselves to be an experience of home. Philosophical counselling (such as existential phenomenology) informs us that in listening to their questions in the experience of *we*, clients might realize that their questions belong to a universal nature of being, and that they are not alone (Wilberg, 2013). Over the course of therapy, attunement gently helps clients on a journey from separation to acceptance and belonging.

At this point, perhaps the reader's view has distilled to occasionally resonate with some of the fine strands that intone and cultivate connection. With a big breath we might feel ourselves come to the surface and reconnect to here and now ground, opening to a wider whole of all present. It might be helpful to pause and collect our attention to the sharing of ideas, connecting psychotherapy and spirituality with learnings implied by the research, in conversation with the whole dance floor. I recall the words of van Manen and O'Donohue, to remind me that right here we come face to face with mystery, the threshold where the invisible takes visible form, something more felt than seen. In terms of a course of psychotherapy sessions, the invisible strands of grounding, intention, letting go, presence and attunement can work to empower a client to more tangibly hear and feel their own leadership, in tune with the music that finds expression in their particular circumstance. In the beauty of relationships that centre around deeply hearing the other, in relationships that work to be understood using just the right words to find the meaning of experience whether stuck or in flow, we might feel the tug of "this is beautiful, I want to stay," and "yes, I am willing to move as I grow in awareness of more and more subtle connections." With attention to these connections, we might occasionally recognize transfigured moments intimate with the journey of ordinary life.

Such connections have the potential to touch into ever greater universes of experience in our one short lifetime. I now turn to consideration of body as tangible presence of mystery.

Metaphor or the real thing: body as shared universe of process. The word body is commonly understood to mean the physical substance of a single human being or other living creature. Taking another look at the word, we might connect *bod* to *abode,* and poetically view the body as where we live. Meanings of abode include habitation, dwelling, and as verb - to remain, to wait, in relation to motion. We might carry on and consider *dwell*, meaning to linger, ponder, and *well,* as a reservoir (*look at the resourceful reserve!)* of human feelings, emotion and energy. As a structure, a well serves to direct water, air or light, and its etymological root is connected to the German word *wohl*, a word meaning good, well and at home when connected to self. All these ideas might open a space for seeing past our habitual meanings. Gendlin is careful to warn that "the space of locations is a spectator's space," and with it is a tendency to view the locations as real and the space between as empty, thus dropping awareness of the processes that fill the gap between (2013b, p. 1). Indeed, the beauty and poignancy of our body as home is the sharing and exchange of life processes that occur into the spaces and so-called gaps.

There are a number of thinkers, philosophers, theologians and scientists who bring a larger view to typical notions of the body. The philosopher and psychotherapist, Eugene Gendlin, put forth *The Process Model* (1997), which conceptualizes the intricate and precise relating of what we normally think of as separate entities and actions, namely body, environment and interaction. He describes body as process, not separate from the environment, nor from ideas of time. "We *are* the process of event*ing* the environment.

We are not caught in one mere 'is'" (Gendlin, 2013a, p. 229). *The Process Model* explains that everything is implicitly connected, not as separate things, but as verb, as process in living action. When something occurs, it becomes explicit, and it changes the implicit field out of which it came and into which it occurs. This model helps me conceive of much finer and more delicate relationships between what I might view as parts and whole, not as separate things but as living process and influence. This living process is more complex and precise than we can imagine. "The implicit intricacy is never arbitrary, never just invented" (Gendlin, 2013a, p. 230). Gendlin tells us, "your physically felt body is . . . part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people–in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is [your] body felt from the inside" (1981, p. 77).

The mathematician and cosmologist, Brian Swimme, conveys the sensitivity of all relationships in the universe (which he says is really a multi-verse). He tells us that all life energy on earth is related to the energy of 14 billion years and a trillion galaxies, and that "it took all trillion to bring forth a single kitten . . . . If the expansion was altered by one tenth to the power of 60 in either direction – [there would be] no universe" (Swimme, 2012; see also Dalton, 1999). In other words, there is an inherent elegance that permits the universe to unfold. These ideas bring us into an ethic of care and compassion that belong in a counselling practice of psychotherapy and spirituality. Swimme exhorts us to recognize the power of our awareness and imagination. By imagining a future recognized by compassion for all life forms, we bring compassion into the present. He names *feeling* as key to entering into this. In fact, the title of Swimme's talk that I attended was "the earth's imagination," but he said he wished he would have called it "the earth's feeling,"

because it is by feeling that it unfolds (2012).

In practical terms for psychotherapy, learning about how to engage the body as process is highly relevant. I have already named Gendlin as one who shows how to get closer to experience by freshly directing our attention and by tapping into a way of touching the whole of something–a fresh feel for our experiencing a whole situation–whereby we can notice that even one small change can bring a physical relief that shifts the whole into its next step of something new. Another teacher is Arnold Mindell, a Jungian analyst who developed what is called process oriented psychology. A simplified description of process work in therapy might be to become aware and to amplify the process of change occurring in clients. Mindell names a number of process "channels" through which process occurs, including dreams, relationships, bodily perceptions, and world situations (1989). The premise is that each client arrives already in process, frequently with a solution imbedded in their problem (Mindell, 2009). Help is found by amplifying this. Enlisting a channel not normally used by a client can bring a sense of newness arising from the fresh view and sense of new experience.

Mindell turns to Larry Dossey (religious scientist and medical doctor) and David Bohm (physicist) to inform his concept of body. "Dossey's concept of the body reflects the theory in physics that an 'implicate order' exists which manifests itself in 'explicate phenomena' by 'enfolding' itself through the work of some perceiver" (1989, p.38).

> According to Dossey, the 'body behaves more as a pattern and process than as an isolated and non interacting object. It cannot be localized in space and its boundary is essentially illusory. And later, 'Connected as we are to all other bodies, comprised as we are of an unending flux of events themselves occurring in

> spacetime, we regard ourselves not as bodies fixed in time at particular points, but as eternally changing patterns for which precise descriptive terms seem utterly inappropriate.' (Mindell, 1989, p. 38)

I hear practically minded readers ask, what about boundaries? Intuitively we know boundaries to be real, and at the same time not easily definable. Bowen warns that "boundary violations can occur when we lose touch with our body," when we ignore the sense that "that is not right for me" (van der Kolk, 2008).

Bill Bowen, founder of Psycho-Physical Therapy, is one of several in the field of somatic psychotherapy who bring explicit attention to the body in their practice of psychotherapy. He describes "somatic resourcing [as] the creation, introduction and integration of new physical possibilities" (2009, p. 5). We all come with varied strengths in terms of how we become aware of living process. Somatic psychotherapy expands awareness by gently attending body structure in process.

Our bodies are essentially our only means of experiencing the world. There is plenty of agreement that the mind and body mutually influence and form through interaction (Bowen, 2009; Siegel, 2012). "Somatic awareness and interaction is essentially direct experience and . . . this direct experience has profound influence on psychologically based beliefs, meanings, feelings, interpretations and perceptions" (Bowen, 2009, p. 5).

Social and personal histories show an unfortunate tendency to stay with the same out-lived patterns of thinking and behaving, especially in regard to conflict. Some out-lived patterns are described by Gendlin as "dead-ends" (1996, p. 7). One example is talk about the same things, even variations on a theme, but essentially talk that is without

experience-near process. We tend to limit our understandings to what is comfortable and habitual, in the I-it mode of relating, whereas the body continually invites greater possibilities of I-Thou. Therapy that invites awareness through the body, gently and concretely tapping its resources, has power to reveal, access, process and transform experience (Bowen, 2009).

> We keep coming back to the body because it is what brings us most effectively into the transformative moment. We believe that it is important to ground the therapeutic work in the client's daily life. That daily life occurs in the body. (Bowen, 2009, p. 9)

Readers might recognize an unquestioned answer. O'Donohue (2005) quotes Edmond Jabes to affirm, "all roads start from the body and lead back to it. The body is the road." Readers may also pause to consider how the research participants reflected the body as shared process.

Shared lives celebrate and change the whole. Anyone who has shared a small office with a deeply unhappy person knows that our lives are shared. Wilberg (2013) points out that the more we attempt to separate our experience from others, the more insecure we become; there is no such thing as privatized experience. A contribution of philosophical counselling is the recognition that who we are is tied to deep questions held in common. We touch the universe by touching into our own experience. In this section I give a sampling of how the research participants both experienced change and touched a greater whole through their courage to enter into and engage an enlivening process. I start with myself.

This example hearkens back to the words after a dance, “doesn’t this just tell you that there is something more?” Yes! For me, tango is a highly sensory experience that does just that. It tells me concretely that there is more to life than we can see, than we can feel. It opens my senses, inviting me to touch the edge of a vast universe of invisible life. For me, it is what the Irish call a “thin place,” a space right between two worlds, a space wherein I know I belong to both.

I recollect the participants who journeyed through uncomfortable dance moves, recognizing a change in their awareness of how they perceived their bodies in relation to themselves and to others. They responsibly created the safety they needed for persisting in this, and they noticed change to the point of feeling an emphatic, yes! Out of Faith’s quest for integrating dance with spirituality issued a poem of immanence touching transcendence. I hear a language reflecting desire to feel herself in her body. Here is one expression of surprise at the change:

“I’d be out there, by myself, dancing around the room! I didn’t care if people were watching me! It didn’t matter at all! I don’t know how that so radically changed.”

Faith remarked that dance invites her into a new relationship with her body. Earlier this month she was invited to give a guest sermon. She chose the topic, inviting reflection on our relationship to our bodies. Her sermon entitled, “The Word Became Flesh” evoked thoughts on the incarnation, on divine love being uncomfortable and comfortable, and maybe even taking pleasure in our own skin, in bodies that know hunger, vulnerability and the need for touch. Meanwhile, Aydan’s *Trauma to Tango* (2013) is in its second printing, and Gwen leads workshops entitled, Transformation through Tango and practices Feldenkrais.

Each participant shares from authentic listening, from a ground of growing self-awareness. In this study, they were present to their senses and reflections. They noticed the changes they sensed, found words to describe their experience, and they now share in ways that fits with their communities. We might consider that their lives are an ongoing reflection of the music and harmonies present in the universe, in real touch with a larger whole. In the words of Swimme,

> the whole [universe] story is present in us, and our lives are a celebration of that, and should include an awareness of the whole, an awareness of the vastness of a small act–a big shift out of control, into participation. (2012)

In this research project, I asked each participant to reflect on how their dance affected their relationships on a number of levels. Their overwhelming response was that dance had changed them. They listened to their desires, and opened to experiences of pleasure that took them beyond their usual range of comfort. Be the change you want to see. Do we walk in the company of Ghandi's words, and not take full notice?

Aydan, Faith and Gwen all became the change that their hearts desired. Is this not the most powerful form of change? When a client in psychotherapy changes, does not their whole world change as well? Is this not the fundamental endeavour of psychotherapeutic effort? Unlike directly attempting to become more conscious, something that is sure to evade our grasp, and unlike efforts to be different which are inevitably unsuccessful, dance led each participant into a deeper and larger truth, an expanding experience of themselves and their world. In a beautiful truth told slant, the practice of psychotherapy and spirituality in counselling is much like dance when it creates a space for wholeness and creative expression experienced in the here and now.

Each dance is a celebration of the universe, unfolding according to an inner elegance that we are now and then privileged to recognize and to witness.

Chapter Seven: A Ceremony In the Space Between Here and There

Summary of Journey and Structure

"The truth's superb surprise …" –Emily Dickinson

As I started this research, I kept company with a memory in which I am standing at a window, captivated by the soft infilling of light and birdsong in the very early hours of a summer morning, the first morning after my father died. It held me in speechless wonder for three hours and drew me in a way beyond description. Tango soon entered my life and became a partner in further wondering, in my curiosity about the changes I was living. I could not have chosen a better thesis topic, as it too, became a captivating partnership for learning in a community of growing relations.

Aydan, Faith and Gwen became my dance partners, participants in this research. Together in conversation, we explored meaning in our lives as we related the changes we experienced through dance. We encountered the capacity to listen under the dance. We heard passion in every day life, and reflected its quickening effect upon soul, intoning life-giving, life-expanding connections in our experiences. We felt the gaze of our own inner compassion that made space for the awareness of vulnerability to surface into conversations with each other. I hope that each of us touched a bit more of ourselves by reflecting on our experiences, and I hope that each touched the power of seeing their personal story as belonging to a larger whole, continuing to unfold. If I can be bold, all seemed to touch into healing and creative experience in which the *I* is minimally self-conscious and the *we* comes together in a *yes.* We witnessed healing and spirituality in ourselves whenever we noticed a coming together of what was previously disconnected– whether this was the arrival of a new idea or a stronger sense of fitting well. I heard a

healing journey into the unknown, a journey with the unknown other of what would be discovered in particular dance experiences. I heard how the participants learned to be with themselves differently, in a way that allowed their relationships to be transformed such that they too continue to transform.

The structure of this study was through interpretive phenomenology within an Indigenist framework, both of which allowed participants to shape the research by their conversation. The conversations took place, and were transcribed into text, one at a time. Each text was listened to separately and then as a whole, and then with contributions from the literature. Although I aimed to establish as much mutuality with participants as possible, it was I who transcribed the conversations into text, I who listened in different ways to the conversational texts, and I who identified the themes–therefore I hold responsibility for the content presented. However, the participants were never far away. Their presence, feedback and their very identity in connection with their small local dance communities, contribute important validity. Since data was collected in a conversational style, and feedback was sought upon the interpretation of themes, the knowledge grew out of our relationships together. Data collection and interpretation influenced each other, as they both appeared in conversations that happened more than the two formal times I initially proposed. I wish I had tape-recorded every conversation subsequent to the first, but that would have intruded an informal conversation with unnecessary formality. I wish I had taken better notes following these informal conversations and kept them all in one booklet. Most important is that we listened and learned together, influencing each other and the process.

I let myself be seen in the writing, particularly in the choice of themes and subthemes. Wilson (2008) points out that part of relational accountability is being true to oneself, as primary researcher, and putting one's own voice in the research. I hope that the participants see how their stories affected me in the themes I presented. These themes–breaking out of patterns, sexuality, vulnerability and safety, desire and wholeness–found particular resonance in me, especially within an overall theme of becoming known. I hope that the participants noticed some of the specific ways that their stories changed me as I was prompted to reflect more on my own journey with dance. Some of the things I wrote about were: i) my habit of trying too hard, ii) overlooking the power and role of sexuality to enliven and attract, heal and beget life-giving connections, and iii) feeling more deeply into the experience of rejection and vulnerability in the dance. I attempted to evoke reflective involvement of the readers by use of examples and images in which one can imaginatively participate with the senses.

" . . . Success in Circuit lies . . ." Emily Dickinson

As we leave the dance floor of the circle of research, it is time to reflect inwardly on what we notice and how we may have changed. I will introduce the Indigenist ethic of presenting conclusions before stating some of my learnings and possible wider implications of this work.

Letting Indigenist Values Inform Conclusions

I cannot overstate the helpfulness of Wilson's conversational style to present an Indigenist research paradigm (2008). The effect was to make a friendly space for me to write. This suits the idea of intentionality in a phenomenological approach perfectly. When I think of others for whom I write, my work becomes a space in which to express

care in sharing a passionate work among loving relationships. It also becomes a space in which I can introduce many related ideas and voices in the literature, something I naturally love to do and a main goal of the Indigenist paradigm as presented by Wilson (2008). Wilson makes many important points about presenting conclusions. Although I have already boldly summarized my work and presented interpretations, albeit with feedback from the participants, the ethics around conclusions are more important than any statement I can make regarding the content of this research project. The points are important for holding the space open for readers to take responsibility and draw their own conclusions, according to what fits in terms of the relationships within their own context. This is consistent with a phenomenological approach that prefers to open to more questions than to provide a single answer.

This is a suitable place for pausing briefly to appreciate key questions raised in the research by participants. I hope the readers will add their own questions to the list:

- (Aydan) What does it mean to be comfortable, and to explore healing?
- (Faith) How to be in harmony, and what is healing?
- (Gwen) How to live truth?
- (Me) What am I learning, and how to feel into my life, via my body?

The non-impositional nature of Indigenist research is a value I aspire to live. The truths touched in this work stand on the relational ground out of which they came. The context that holds the relationships is changing as I write–as with everything else, it belongs to a grand ecology of many relations in connected living systems. I have been true to the findings as they arose and trust their presentation as such. Each reader is

responsible for seeing the ideas of value that can be internalized and tried out so that potential learning does not remain sitting on a shelf, separated from relational life.

> It is required of you that you allow this to happen and not view ideas presented as static in time or place. You must develop your own context.
>
> You must therefore form your own conclusions. Only you can know how the information that is shared will fit into your context. You must also have faith that all is meant to be as it is meant to be. It is your job to listen, to internalize and to be aware. The conclusions that are right for you will come to you when they are ready. It would not be polite to force them into coming too soon or to hang around after they are ready to move on. Be patient and wait until you have all the information you are ready to accept before making conclusions. And be willing to change those conclusions as new relationships develop that allow you a different point of view. The main point of Indigenous discourse is to provide a foundation or platform from which to grow . . . It is your responsibility as a listener to learn and to grow, as you too are accountable to all our relations. (Wilson, 2008, pp. 134-135)

How I Have Changed

If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right.

–Indigenist Researcher

Humility is an important attribute of the Indigenist scholar (Wilson, 2008, p. 134). I am no more knowledgeable or important than anyone else. I am sharing my work, which is important to me to do. Perhaps the most revealing outcome is how important doing this research was to me, especially to notice my growth in accessing internal sources of knowledge, including experiences of joy. Readers may recall an earlier quote by

Goldberg, “we walk through so many myths of each other and ourselves; we are so thankful when someone sees us for who we are and accepts us” (2005, p. 18). I am deeply grateful for recognizing myself as witness in my process, from the outside in and the inside out.

Readers might also recall that I introduced myself with musings about a multi-layered call to come home. I presented an image that led me to purchase the home in which I now live. I have variously wondered if looking out at the rising dawn symbolized an integration of my father’s life into my own, or the call to inhabit my body, or a call to see my mother as my other self. It could mean all of those in a call to come out of exiles, and into a new sense of wholeness on a path led by opening to more knowing senses. I will reintroduce a second image at this point.

I did not recognize the import of this next image’s symbolism until, when searching every paper for notes on informal participant conversations, I turned to my personal journal. There I was astonished at the directness of my words in experience-near descriptions, a style of relating that surely grew with this research. There I caught sight of something I had not caught before: twice I wrote about my situations as feeling I was swimming in superficiality when I longed to touch something deeper. It reminded me of what I saw when I first saw tango: the image of seaweed taller than my house, with the memory feel of what the sea meant for me. I will let this imagery sit as I list some of the learnings I internalized with this research and then return to it.

Awareness. This past year has been a confluence of learning for me. It has brought me to a deeper feel of myself from the inside, aware of precious vantage to witness my process of change and learning. Important learning environments formed a

context of relations that supported me in this. One of which is Al-Anon, a self-help group I joined a year ago. Much to my family's surprise, alcoholism impacted my mother in her later years; it dropped like a puzzle piece, helping me to understand the confusing presence of absence in my immediate family and my struggle to relate with denial. I want to touch the real thing; I want to touch deep life in deep waters; I am not satisfied skirting the surface.

Perhaps the first internalized learning for me from the research conversations occurred through accountability to myself and to my research relationships. How could I value the synchronicity of which the participants spoke while ignoring the possibility of the same for me and remain accountable? When one of the research participants unknowingly said something highly relevant to me, I decided to honour it by attending Al-Anon 13 months ago. I now know the power of such a group. It fits closely with what Wilberg prescribes for training counsellors in therapeutic listening:

> The Listening Circle . . . can achieve . . . closer unity between what is being discussed (the 'It') . . . and what is said by one person to another *through* these words . . . The 'We-It' relation becomes a living medium for the 'I-Thou.'" (Wilberg, 2013, p. 151)

In other words, the Listening Circle achieves a unity, (analogous to unified moments of dance), between what is being said/seen and the relationships through which the said/seen becomes heard/visible. This is an intimacy that enables us to touch more deeply into our lives, and to grow from there. The rules of such circles involve not questioning others directly and pausing to first listen inwardly before speaking. I see myself in the others in no way that I can pinpoint, but in a sure truth told slant. In the group I speak as honestly

as I can perceive my immediate experience to be. Through the space of We, I have become more aware of my experience and from a deeper view of myself. There I witness the difficult subject (of painful experience) become a Thou, teaching me in the between space of us all.

A second strongly influential learning space has been the practice of focusing. Again, my learning here has not been so much about focusing, but rather its power as a space of personal growth. Within the sacred space of a focusing partnership, in which a listener supports the focuser's inward listening resonance to their felt sense, I grew in the ability to stay with difficult and challenging feelings that arose in relation to the greater awareness of problems associated with addiction in my family.

The third space of growing awareness was the space of the dance. Twice I rewarded my writing efforts by journeys to my favourite tango city. Twice I returned with greater realization of how joy and celebration can act as container for grief and an opening to greater compassion. My experiences in both the practice of focusing and in the tango have taught me the power of learning through honouring desire and by attention to body–both are means of deepening honest relationship and acceptance. I attempted to bring this kind of attention into the way I listened to the text and in my choice of words when writing. There is also no question that this thesis work was also an important form of attending to myself, in community, through a truth told slant. A list of other internalized learning follows.

Phenomenology. I understand better the power of phenomenology to support and inform a counselling practice. There is power in experience-near description for increasing awareness. Before I started this study, I had thoughts like, how will I get them

to do this? I now feel that I can invite the creation of a space for description and attention to here and now experience, facilitating I-Thou relationship.

I can go a little deeper too, to recognize that when we describe what we mean, we are describing ourselves. In describing tango, and in how I interpret the experience of the research participants, I am describing dimensions of myself that arise in a community of dancers. To the extent that the themes find real fit for the participants, I am also describing dimensions of their being created in relationships. The deeper we listen for and describe our unique experience, the greater is the chance that we touch common ground and recognize more of who we are, and how we are living and growing as human beings. Phenomenological counselling is a type of listening that is experienced. I witnessed the power of this, in the participants and in myself.

A you-turn. I know well the feel and interference of trying too hard. When I recognize it, I now prescribe for myself what I call a "you-turn." Instead of continuing to narrow my efforts onto a singular goal, I turn my attention inside and imagine turning around to touch into the whole implicit field of where I am, which includes a whole amazing set of ancestry and current relations. I let my imaginary feet sink into that field to sense the real presence of wisdom and support, and from there I feel into the rightness of the next step, much like an improvisational dance. Once I feel the support of this field, I can relax and sense with a much more open attitude. Simply by making a you-turn, I shift out of control, and into participation–into a space that welcomes new dance. This actually fits well with one of my current points of learning in the dance, which is to let my whole foot, from heel to toe, sink into the ground, taking enough time for the feel,

strength and energy of that before moving. I notice that this calls me to more depth in the way I relate at the interface of body with ground.

This idea of you-turn reverses the flight from internal to external epistemologies that I named as prevalent. It calls to mind Gendlin's idea of "process-skipping" and Campbell's idea of psychological addiction, wherein anything (even prayer and volunteer work) that substitutes "for a congruent owning of what is real inside me contains the negative potential for contributing to a process-skipping pattern of addiction" (Campbell and McMahon, 1997, p. 181). When I notice my avoidance of attending inner process by use of some effective distraction, and when I turn attention to my body to experience the sense of my felt reality, I open to growth and reduce the need for whatever I habitually use to avoid living truthfully. For me, working harder is no answer to avoiding family pain. I learned that pausing in my work to attend the whole of my situation produces not only better work, but it might also help everything else move along in more life-giving directions.

Separation doesn't work, distinctly. "If we can attend directly to something we have implicitly, we can be in a place that is grounded in our much wider actual body-environment interaction, and we can think from there" (Gendlin, 2013b, p. 9). When I tried to separate myself out of my context in order to do finish writing, my thinking didn't go well. I recall Tafoya's words that it is not possible to separate an idea out of its context without losing meaning (Wilson, 2008). And also Wilberg: "the more we seek to separate our own experience from that of others the more insecure our boundaries become" (2010, p. 24). I notice what happens when I internalize this wisdom. When my mother was moving out of her home, I tried to set a boundary so that I could focus on my

work because I could not write and pay attention to her situation at the same time. I made no progress within that boundary. After I made a you-turn and gave full attention to what might help all of us, my work became unstopped. In a similar way, every time I stopped writing to attend the physical presence of emotional pain, my work proceeded to flow. Miller suggests we find a different word for boundary, perhaps agreement; her point is that a boundary speaks about how we connect (2010). Wilberg calls this the "contact of being. . . Where human beings are in authentic contact with one another, the boundary that distinguishes them is the very boundary that unites them" (2013, p. 102). When I paid more attention to how I was connecting with everyone in my whole situation, taking time for authentic connection, I found a more workable way.

These you-turns required trust because they appeared unproductive at the time (I had to stop working to give them full attention). I learned that my inner process requires time, and I could not separate out and enforce another notion of time (as in a deadline). My process did not spell itself out in black and white words, but was nevertheless a work of distinction. I learned that in the midst of mutually listening and caring relations, my inner process of grief could become known, an important step on the way to transforming into acceptance. This idea of you-turn captures one example of how paying more attention to my felt body experience changed me, an outcome of internalizing the findings of this research project.

Joy and intention are worthy partners. When I wrote about how it is courageous to feel a whole-bodied sense of joy, I had a friend in mind. Through her, I saw a tendency to limit experiences that feel good. I did not see the same tendency in me, but this writing asked me to look for that possibility. With attention to my body feel

of situations, it is easy to detect when unfavourable news shifts, and removes, a good feeling toward something to which I had been looking forward. This is nothing new, and I usually call it realism (a category which can serve to limit new movement and even lead to cynicism). I learned that indeed I do limit subtle and meaningful experiences of joy. With a more intentional way of listening to such moments, I also learned that I can maintain openness to two personally opposite possibilities, without one diminishing the other.

Holding an open mind to different viewpoints or outcomes is certainly not new. Each of us likely has a range of ability in regard to this, varying with circumstance. For example, the imminent death of a loved one often brings out intense differences and varied ideas of care. I value attitudes that respect and support diversity. They welcome all of our humanity and made working in palliative care a real privilege. However, being open to the many and varied feelings evoked by addiction in one's family is unquestionably very difficult. When living with addiction, it can be difficult to hold a space of unpredictability, and easier to trust in the arrival of pain and confusion than to open and trust the benefits of joy. Yet it is utterly unnecessary to let joy be nudged out, and I learned that the intention of maintaining openness to its possibility significantly re-textures the background feel of daily living. Its intention allows a shift to occur, cultivating a space for greater connection and healing. Soft joy allows entry of more compassion to quietly seep and ease the opening of knotted connections.

In a related way, I have come to respect the power of intention to work more widely in my life. Its power might be recognized when something moves, but its power happens *before* the movement. This is obvious to a sensitive Follow in the social dance

of tango. Similarly, intentions executed with hesitation are plainly evident. When introducing myself in this work, I described myself as a searcher. I look, and see, and discover, and out of that action combined with the deeper desires I trust, something congeals into a goal that I work toward. I considered myself to be listening to the whole. I am envious of people with more clarity in their direction.

Over the course of this research, I became more active in setting and listening to direction. I will never forget the tango instructor who told me that Follows who follow perfectly are a bit boring, and most Leads like an active Follow. He gave me permission to let my musical interpretation flow and to more fully create the dance. I incorporated this immediately and never turned back. Moving off the dance floor, in the same way that I described how a listener's intention profoundly influences the way we speak, I have begun to realize that the way I listen to a whole situation concerning myself influences the situation in some way. While this may appear obvious to the reader, it is important to appreciate that this is entirely different from using denial or positive thinking to help paint or manipulate desired outcomes. It is also entirely different from ideas about there being a Secret way, in which by thinking about what we want, the universe conspires to deliver it to us. Rather, listening with intention as I mean it here, is about knowing my ground, being accountable to all my relations, and belonging to all that lives and moves within me to find its concrete expression. It involves the intention of listening and the intention of actively engaging decisions that arise in relation to all of that–putting them out there in the dance. This way of listening influences the many subtle connections that exist in the implicit context into which something might occur. This involves taking intentional responsibility to create a space for this kind of awareness as well as taking action to

further attune to a living process. It leads to the kind of honesty and relational accountability that touches the ground of authentic power. I am growing in the internalization of this learning by trying it on in different situations. So far, my living environment feels more harmonious! I'm reminded of Swimme, who asserts that the universe evolves not by control, but by feel and by Eros, an energy of attraction and participation.

The power of an intention lies in its clarity and connection to both ground and direction. It is one aspect of visible movement. By paying attention to my intentions, and by taking responsibility for them, I influence the quality of interactions. Specific attention to the power of intention is something I learned with this research. I am more confident when I bring thoughtful, caring intention to my relationships.

Intimacy and belonging. I cannot end this without extolling the dance for the space it offers to experience intimacy. To listen to another in a way that deepens listening, is a form of intimacy; to speak of what we hear and find in those places is another form of intimacy. In a way, this research has been a sacred and intimate journey as the participants shared what their deepening listening revealed to them. On the dance floor, we hear the way someone hears us. We communicate a silent knowing of each other and respond to this through music. There have been a few times that I have shared an astonishing experience on the dance floor with the partner present. The sharing was a way to bring forth, to make more real, something that touches into liminal space. I learned that Gwen's words are true for me too. If I can be honest on the dance floor, then I am more able to be honest about things in my life. I have grown in the ability to confide myself, as in the writing of this thesis. It is about having faith in the value of my

experience and its belonging. It speaks to one of the reasons I undertook this research, to grow in confidence in human capacities outside the intensity of end-of-life situations with which I was familiar. This is a way that my listening changed me.

Images call to wholeness.

It is within the communion of the whole
that the full meaning of the part is achieved. – Anne Marie Dalton

I now return to two personally potent images that connect me in this work. In one I am standing, mesmerized in wonder at the sound and sight of a new dawn filling the surrounding trees with a beauty I had never seen before. In the other, I am swimming in deep waters, impressed and moved by the sway of tall seaweed far below. In both I feel my whole being reaching out in wonder from where I am, tangibly in touch with gravity and a geographic pull–in touch with where I am and what I am looking at, and in touch with all the feelings that fill the space between. I am in touch with something I cannot touch. In such moments I know I am seeing, yet have the feel of also being seen. I feel myself apart, yet connected to what beckons. I see the Other, and I am called into something new, though I know not what. From the perspective of this writing, I recognize the yearning for more of some mysterious unknown, and it seems unreachable. Yet as O'Donohue points out, once we perceive a barrier, we have already moved beyond it.

I become aware of the boundary of my life, and already I am living beyond it. I walk onto the dance floor, aware of my bodily self. I become the dance, in communion with the whole of it, and through this I become more aware of myself, a miniscule life called to celebrate from one porthole of given experience. In the words of Faith, I am the dance. In the words of Buber, "Man does not meet, he is the meeting" (Buber, 1967, p.

140). In the words of Gendlin, the perceptual split dissolves into regard of process. I call it a powerful awareness of presence, pregnant and potent, a sacred space of being and being with.

Seen with these images, the tango might well be a space in which I enter the yearning of something fresh and primal–a union with the cosmos, a ceremony in touch with all my relations, a spirit of connection made real. Wilson writes, "the purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us" (2008, p. 137). For me, this research has been a celebration of those relationships. I hope that I have added to the awareness of our connections in our journeys to greater wholeness.

When O'Donohue (2005) tells us that we can discover, and experience inside our bodies, the landscapes visible to us in nature, his words resonate in me as completely true and believable. They become a beautiful invitation to awareness through the wondrous gift of our bodies. Before specifically relating how this research can contribute to other work, I close this section on what I have learned with words of Thomas Berry:

> The outer world and the inner world are reciprocal in their functioning and in their destiny. All is in all. As above so below. As within so without. Microcosmos and macrocosmos correspond. All things move in sympathetic relations to each other ... Especially the human, in its deepest reality, is consubstantial with the entire range of the universe. The sequence of experiences leading to fulfilment of the human is shared by all the universe. Indeed this fulfilment is attained in a comprehensive communion experience of the cosmic, the divine, and the human. (as cited in Dalton, 1999, p. 47)

Wider Implications

The body is an awareness. –Carlos Castaneda

… I love you with what in me is unfinished ... –Robert Bly

This thesis presents an exploration of growth and healing depicted through the tangible and metaphoric possibilities available in social dance. The relationship of a dancer to a dance is as unique as any relationship in its particularity. Especially in regard to passionate endeavors, the unique constellation of what attracts is something more to be discovered than to be predicted. Tango is not a therapy to be applied with universal effect. In fact, some take a look at the dance and know it is not for them to try.

Social Argentine tango is a beautiful, complex and challenging experience that can offer powerful access to deeply held emotional and psychological patterns. These patterns don't necessarily shift just because one dances tango. Furthermore, it is possible for negative dance experience to open and wound in ways that require support. Both positive and negative dance experience can become avenues for healing through psychotherapy. An interesting area of research would be to explore the pairing of psychotherapy with the experience of dancing tango.

The findings of this research support other work in three main areas: the role of the body in awareness, role of awareness in relationship and belonging, and the role of the arts in healing through community and ecological harmony. When taking seriously the words of Berry, the role of the body as avenue for harmonious relationships is obvious. While few of us have access to shamans who attune themselves to the environment for the benefit of all, all of us have a body through which we can more precisely listen to the

particular circumstances of our lives. In Chapter Six, I addressed the implications of this for improving all types of psychotherapy and counselling.

This research supports other disciplines, such as dance, movement and music in healing and therapy, wherein body engagement is paramount. The default to thinking with concepts separated from bodily context and engagement has limited results. This is why it is nearly impossible to teach dance musicality by teaching elements of music theory. It is no more possible to listen to music through concepts, than it is to dance by looking at one's feet. It is the body that hears and listens, resonates and moves. The body takes a longer time to process and learn than does the formation of abstract concepts by thinking alone. We have a cultural challenge to integrate both conceptual and bodily sensed information. This research supports all other research efforts that bridge sensing and languaging into understanding.

"Self-awareness, available at best in fleeting moments, is the rarest power in Nature, tapping the very source-ground of the creative principle" (Dover, 1987, p. 28). Growth in self-awareness belongs to the development of every psychotherapist (Dover, 1987; Wilberg, 2013), not to be confused with ideas of a self, or I, as separated from our relations of I-it or I-Thou. This study supports other work that shows how self-awareness enables active participation in relationships. An example of inspiring work in this area is by Jacques Verduin, founding director of Insight Prison Project at San Quentin, who works to create a learning community through relational accountability on both sides of prison walls. He was inspired by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* to ask, "are we living in a way that is worthy of our suffering?" (Leach, 2014). He builds awareness of suffering received and given, and challenges men to generate dignity in the quality of

their relationships. He works to harness the power of fleeting moments, to never let a moment be hijacked into a lifetime of regret. Two powerful tools of awareness that he uses are "learning to witness, [which is] the mother of all interventions . . . . and guiding people to body awareness because there's a level of truth in the body that is hard to get around" (Leach, 2014). He goes onto describe "your body [as] your own bio-system waiting to connect. The quality of that connection is the closest thing to what we call *love*. . . . On the ground of body, we have everything in common" (Leach, 2014). Love is a physically felt gift; we can grow in its awareness.

Art has the power to connect bodily engagement with thought. The early history of occupational therapy involved creativity in the rehabilitation of war veterans and artistic endeavor that connected those with mental illness to the cultural values of their heritage. The tendency toward evidence-based practice in a scientific paradigm has reduced inclusion of the arts in rehabilitation, however disciplines active in peace building and reconciliation make active use of artistic modalities to engage individuals, to reduce isolation, and to build communities with the capacity to hold difference. An example is given by Ross (2011) who recalls that in the presence of violence, namely sleeping on a mattress of rifles and the secret IRA meetings in her home, it was music that allowed borders to be crossed and music that brought warring cultural traditions together in the teaching of a flute band. Theater and performance art provide examples of its intentional use to bring voice to oppressed people (Balfour, 2013; Cohen, Varea, & Walker, 2011). Art offers a vehicle of the truth told slant. Skill and sensitivity with regard to timing and preparation to build safety are critical for the kind of participation that reduces isolation in communities marked by violence (Borisenko, 2013).

In another example, Schinina outlines a project using creative arts among groups of refugees and double refugees in Serbia two months after the war, in 1999. It is an effort that has been renewed yearly for more than a decade. Although the initiative was intended for refugees and double-refugees, the worst squalor encountered was among the Roma (displaced gypsies, in permanent exile). The Roma responded and participated in the challenge to find voice, leadership and participation (Balfour, 2013). In my experience of comparative privilege, I have seen the ability of tango to cross cultural difference. I recollect Dujovne's (2011) research that hints at the dance's influence to empower immigrants and to equalize. I am excited to hear that she has been invited to join cultural and musical anthropologists at a university in Indiana to present an intensive learning experience through tango, on the topic of welcoming difference into local society.

How many of us long to come in from innumerable exiles? May we come to know ourselves as belonging to artful embrace, one that opens to a depth of wonder that is reaching out to us with an equal longing of desire. Maybe we become the embrace. May we hear and touch the music under our skin; may we know that we are all in this together, called to actively dance in celebration of the cosmos.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participants

In working towards the completion of a Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality from St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta, I am writing a thesis about the experience of tango under the supervision of L. Gardner, PhD. In my view, the social dance of Argentine tango can be naturally therapeutic for many dancers. I have noticed changes in myself since I started dancing, and I am interested to hear from other dancers who have also noticed the dance's effect in their lives. I plan to hold conversations with a small number of dancers who have more than three years experience of social Argentine tango. The conversations will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes, which will be presented in the thesis. The purpose is not to explain or prove something about the dance, but rather to add to the broad understanding of human experience through an in-depth study of the phenomenon of Argentine tango as a social dance. The time commitment of participants will involve an initial discussion of confidentiality and procedures, then a first conversation (of 1 to 2 hours), and later a second conversation (likely shorter, to review reflections). The conversations will take place in a quiet, comfortable spot, to be mutually agreed upon.

In order to help decide whether you want to participate, I have posed a few questions below to give you an idea of what the conversations might cover. I am looking for participants who want to share their experience and reflections. In my experience, this dance can have a long period of initial enchantment, and I want to

capture the experience of dancers who have been through both ups and downs. Please be sure that I will treat all of your responses with the greatest respect and confidence.

These are some questions:

What were some of your initial impressions of this dance that captivated your interest?

Has this dance increased awareness of your own body? Is there a time that stands out for you? What do you suppose might be some effects of that for you?

Do you recall some times of significant experience that you might descibe - whether memorable peak experience, or particularly difficult - or both?

Are there some ways that tango has changed you or your view of the world (or your view of yourself and/or others)?

If you were to pick a metaphor for your experience of tango, what would it be?

Thank you very much for your consideration.

For those interested, the study will contribute to the body of qualitative research. I will use a phenomenological design and be guided by an Indigenist approach to research that welcomes the study of those aspects of life that contribute to growth and harmony.

Mary Anne Schleinich
St. Stephen's College
8810 - 112 St.
Edmonton, Ab T6G 2J6

Appendix B

Informed Consent

I have agreed to participate in a research study, which is a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of being a dancer of social Argentine tango. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of Argentine tango through in-depth conversations with a small number of dancers.

This work will be published as a thesis, and will be credit toward a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality from St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Ab, Canada. The study will be in accordance with the respectful values of Indigenist research, as a study of well-being and a celebration of what it means to be a social dancer of Argentine tango.

I understand that my involvement will mainly consist of two conversations: one of two hours, and a follow-up conversation of about one hour, both of which will be recorded and transcribed. The first conversation will be about my experience of Argentine tango, and how I have noticed its effect upon any of my relationships - with myself, with others, with the world, and with the divine/with the earth. I will receive a copy of the transcription of this conversation and be able to add, change, or delete material.

In a second conversation, I will have opportunity for further reflection or clarification, and to consider what it was like to speak about my experiences of tango in this research. The conversations will take place at a place jointly decided by and Mary Anne Schleinich and me, in a place where we feel comfortable.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may discontinue participation at any time or decline to address any part of the study. Should I opt out of the study, my transcription will be returned to me, and recorded data will be destroyed. Since the study concerns an area of interest to me, it is not anticipated that the conversations will touch upon particularly disturbing memories. However, if emotionally sensitive material does surface, I have personal support to which I can turn. Should I need additional emotional support, I understand that the researcher, Mary Anne Schleinich, will be available before, during and after, the conversations to talk about any concerns that arise, and will also provide some options for seeking professional support.

I understand that I have a choice regarding the use of a pseudonym, and I have discussed the implications of this decision with the researcher. Of primary concern is my comfort in sharing personal information, which will in part be published, and the protection of my relationships. I understand that the material from our conversations will be shared with the thesis supervisor, and that a summary of themes arising from the conversations will be published along with examples from the words of participants. Additionally, a synopsis of my data may be published in an appendix to the thesis. I will have the opportunity to review this synopsis for accuracy, and to make changes I believe are necessary to reflect my data.

I grant permission to use the data for the thesis work, for its publication, and in any future publications about this research. I understand that the ethical treatment of my data in this thesis will carry over to other presentations of data.

I understand that there will be no compensation for my participation. A possible benefit may be that I feel more connected to my experience and empowered in my identity and relationships.

I understand that theses of graduates of St. Stephen's College are presented publicly, usually in the fall of the graduating year. If I wish, I can receive an invitation to this event. Additionally, the theses are typically available for reading through many university libraries in North America, and a copy will be stored in the National Library of Canada.

If I have any concerns regarding this study, I may address them to the thesis supervisor, or the Program Chair at St. Stephen's College.

Please circle the desired yes or no statements:

1. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, that I can refuse to answer any question at any time, and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation and without risk of consequences to myself. Yes No

2. I agree to participate in this study knowing that, as research, it is an exploration and may or may not yield benefit to others or myself.

Yes No

3. I understand that I will not be compensated in any way for participating.

Yes No

4. I will use a pseudonym, to keep my participation confidential. Yes No

5. I would like any use of my words published in this thesis credited to my name.

Yes No

6. Information about this research has been discussed with me by the Researcher,

Mary Anne Schleinich. I have read and understood this information. Yes No

I have reviewed this consent form and I grant permission for my information to be used as described in the above research process, for use towards a thesis in the completion of a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality from St. Stephen's College, and for any other related future publications.

_____ _____

Research Participant, Date Researcher, Date

Appendix C

Checklist Before Signing Consent

Indicate if the following have been discussed with each participant before signing of consent:

- Purpose of the study (in-depth study of tango experience, unique to participants)
- Design of the study (phenomenology with participation consisting of recollection, reflection, and description)
- Expectations and time commitments (with invitation to stay in contact for feedback regarding themes)
- Recording and transcriptions (confidentiality, maintenance and destruction of data)
- Voluntary nature of participation and freedom to decline in whole or in part
- Ethics of privacy (standard research practice, protection of identities, consideration of impact upon relationships, ways to achieve this)
- Ethics of revealing identities if desired by participant (discussion of reasons, ways to protect identity of other persons referred to in data)
- Unlike typical ideas of research, this study carries no formal hypothesis, and does not need to prove certain ideas. I hope that the resulting themes will resonate as plausible experience. I hope that it will enrich our ideas about human experience. I believe there are many ways that tango

changes us, and contributes to our lives, and that the deeper we touch our own unique experience, the more likely we are to touch something that belongs to all human experience.

- We might learn something about our biases and assumptions, particularly mine, as I interpret the data. I hope that my bias towards tango experience will facilitate our conversation through understanding, but I also hope to not let my assumptions preclude participants' descriptions. Therefore, I may ask for more description rather than rely on presumed understandings.
- My attitude will be one that welcomes what arises in the participant. Given that this dance puts us in touch with our bodies, I may ask about the body's reactions during the conversations, even in relation to our choice of words, e.g., "does that feel like the right word?"
- Sometimes a welcoming attitude brings forward what we perceive as something negative, and I would want to make a place for that, believing that we can learn from that.
- In the end, we might notice that some things about us have changed as a result of new understandings of our experiences. According to Indigenist research, this is the most important outcome of research.
- A second important outcome is the benefit for community. St. Stephen's College's practice of public presentation of theses is therefore in keeping with this goal. There could be other presentations to community as a result of the research.

Appendix D

Examples of Presence by Greg Madison and Eugene Gendlin

"As I sit across from a client, my intention is to be with them as they explore their life experience. To do this, I let my attention fall down into my body. There I can hover with a physically felt sense that includes a present feeling of the other person, how we are together, my present mood, what I understand about therapy … in fact, many aspects of the situation all at once without grasping onto anything in particular. In this non-attached state, I can be with another person without trying to figure them out or fix them. It is 'being' rather than 'doing' and is what I recognize as an essential aspect of existential-phenomenological therapy" (Madison, 2008, p. 58).

"I want to start with the most important thing I have to say: The essence of working with another person is to be present as a living being. And that is lucky, because if we had to be smart, or good, or mature, or wise, then we would probably be in trouble. But, what matters is not that. What matters is to be a human being with another human being, to recognize the other person as another being in there. Even if it is a cat or a bird, if you are trying to help a wounded bird, the first thing you have to know is that there is somebody in there, and that you have to wait for that 'person,' that being in there, to be in contact with you. That seems to me to be the most important thing.

So, when I sit down with someone, I take my troubles and feelings and I put them over here, on one side, close, because I might need them. I might want to go in there and see something. And I take all the things that I have learnt—client-centered therapy, reflection, focusing, Gestalt, psychoanalytic concepts and everything else (I wish I had even more)—and I put them over here, on my other side, close. Then I am just here, with my eyes, and there is this other being. If they happen to look into my eyes, they will see that I am just a shaky being. I have to tolerate that. They may not look. But if they do, they will see that. They will see the slightly withdrawing, insecure existence that I am, I have learnt that that is O.K. I do not need to be emotionally secure and firmly present. I just need to be present. There are no qualifications for the kind of person I must be. What is wanted for the big therapy process, the big development process is a person who will be present. And so I have gradually become convinced that even I can be that. Even

though I have my doubts when I am by myself, in some objective sense I know I am a person" (Gendlin, 1990, p. 205).