

Dramatherapy, Tai Chi & Embodiment

戲劇治療，太極與具身化

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Abstract

This paper will consider potential theoretical, philosophical and pragmatic connections between Dramatherapy (Jones, 1996) and Tai Chi (Zheng, Lo & Inn, 1985); I will specifically consider these connections from the Western perspective of embodiment (Shaw, 2003, Jones, 1996). Dramatherapy is a creative drama based psychological therapy. Tai Chi is an ancient form of martial art. Both approaches use movement and from a Western perspective that ‘embodiment’ could be central to both disciplines. I am interested in how embodiment through movement is a potential connection between these two seemingly very different disciplines, and how these may offer shared knowledge.

I will acknowledge that the two disciplines come from very different backgrounds and philosophies and recognise that it is impossible not to generalise in a short article such as this. The aim is to compare and contrast these two disciplines based on my empirical experience of them. As a European trained Dramatherapist I approach this paper from a Western perspective, acknowledging the differing opinions and viewpoints between Eastern and Western philosophies and practice. The aim is to begin to consider some synthesis between a Western creative based therapy and an Eastern form of martial art; acknowledging that both use movement at their core.

Key words: Dramatherapy, Drama Therapy, Tai Chi, Embodiment, Chinese Philosophy, Comparison, Eastern, Western, Perspective. Martial Art, Yin, Yang

摘要

本文就戲劇治療和太極之間潛在的理論性，哲學性和實踐性的關係進行了討論。我會專門從西方具身化的視角來考慮這些連接。戲劇治療是一種基於創造性戲劇的心理治療，而太極拳是一種古老的武術。這兩種方法都使用動作，從西方的角度來看，“具身化”可以作為兩個學科的核心。我感興趣的是具身化如何通過身體動作成為了這兩個看似完全不同學科之間的潛在聯繫，以及它們怎樣提供共用的知識。

這兩個學科都有著非常不同的背景和哲學，但也我認識到，在這個簡短的文章中進行概括並不是不可能的。我的目的是通過我的實際經驗來比較這兩個學科。作為一個歐洲受訓的戲劇治療師，我從西方的角度來寫這篇文章，並承認東方和西方哲學與實踐不同的意見和觀點。這樣做的目的是要開始考慮西方基於創意的心理治療和東方武術形式之間的一些合成，並意識到兩者都在其核心應用動作。

关键词: 戏剧治疗, 太极, 具身化, 中国哲学, 东西方视角, 武术, 阴阳

1. Introduction

Flying across the room was an unusual and surreal experience; neither I nor my shocked and concerned collaborator expected it.

To place this into context I was taking part in a Tai Chi class in the UK. I had always been intrigued by the movements often seen on TV of elderly, sprightly men and women moving in unison. Their slow, moving, graceful arm and leg movements intrigued me to such an extent that I decided to try this for myself. I begin this article with my own experience of Tai Chi to demonstrate the power of movement and as a way of beginning to explore connections between two philosophies and two sets of theoretical ideas.

I readily acknowledge that Dramatherapy and Tai Chi do not come from the same traditions, nor am I suggesting they are the same thing. However they both use movement at their centre, and are practices in which I have personal experience. I wonder whether each can shed light on the other's process and am curious about the latent power both disciplines appear to hold within their practice. Both disciplines strongly fit the philosophies of the CAET journal which aims to compare and contrast Eastern and Western philosophies from the arts, arts therapies and educational perspectives.

Although qualified as a Dramatherapist for quite some years I had only just begun to learn and practice the basic form of Tai Chi (Zheng, Lo & Inn, 1985) at the time. Specifically the Tai Chi Cheng Man Ch'ing style is a series of 37 movements which are carried out slowly and repeatedly, in order, time after time. Each movement relates to a particular defensive posture, many of which are based on movements taken from animals and birds in nature.

For the second half of the session our Tai Chi tutor would normally split us into small groups to try out a range of additional exercises. My partner for the day, a much older man, was more experienced than I. In hindsight, I now believe he had grasped and harnessed the inner energy 'chi' learned from our tutor. What happened next surprised us both. We were involved in an activity in which our arms were entwining with each other in a gentle rhythmical rebuffing activity – 'push hands' (Zheng, Lo & Inn, 1985). To both our surprise I found myself being flung across the room quite forcefully. As if in a car crash, everything went into slow motion as I flew across the room. After composing myself and getting up off the floor my partner dashed over to me with great concern and confusion. We both stood and looked at each other and scratched our heads – neither of us knew what had just happened.

Neither of us had felt we had pushed or been pushed by each other and my colleague confirmed that he had not pushed me. Our physical contact had been very minimal, nothing more than the merest brushing of arm against arm, certainly no strained push or shove. Yet I had flown across the room with some force. Once I had assured my partner I was physically fine we had a conversation with our tutor about what had just happened. Our experienced English Tai Chi tutor had learnt his craft over many years from a great teacher. He was a practical person who rarely discussed the esoteric ideas of power, energy or chi. However we began to have a brief conversation about what just happened. Where did this energy come from that threw me across the room?

This incident in my experience of Tai Chi brought me to explore further its connections with Dramatherapy. I began to ponder about embodied physical connection and how the latent powers of each discipline appears to support healing in Dramatherapy and a sense of being grounded in Tai Chi. I am not necessarily trying to make sense of what happened on that day or the mechanics of how it happened, but I am interested in the power that appears to exist in each discipline. I am also interested in Dramatherapy's power and its connection with Tai Chi's inherent powers that appeared to throw someone across a room without any party understanding how. Maybe this ambiguity about how things happen in both disciplines is also what connects them.

2. Philosophical Dichotomies between East & West

There is usually an inherent (academic) tension when making connections between two ideas which on the surface have few similarities and very different routes and philosophies. I have already said elsewhere that we need to be cautious about our over reliance on theories that seek to 'make direct connections between two (approaches) where they may not always exist or where the comparison may not be helpful' (Holmwood, 2014, p. 17). However I have also stated that 'it is necessary to acknowledge where another inter-related discipline can be helpful and what light it can shed' (ibid). Although the aims, philosophies and routes are very different, they have similarities in that they both use physical movement and appear to have a latent energy within. I readily acknowledge it is difficult to avoid generalisations in a short article such as this, but wish to begin a debate that others may wish to continue.

I have also hypothesised that the need to separate things out into an 'either/ or' category may be more of a Western construct (Holmwood, 2014) which seems to go against Taoist philosophy which suggests that everything is one with and in nature. Benjamin Hoff in 'The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet' (Hoff, 2002) brilliantly attempts to explain Eastern philosophy, by using the most quintessential character in English literature, Winne-the-Pooh. Beginning with the story of the three men dipping their fingers into a vat of vinegar he attempts to explain the three main Chinese philosophies in one analogous story. To Confucius, life tasted sour, to Buddha life tasted bitter and to Lao-Tse, Taoism tasted sweet (Hoff, 2002, pp. 15-16). Whilst many scholars might scorn the simplicity and over generalisation of the story as being reductive of Chinese philosophy, Hoff relates Pooh to Taoism in noting that 'things in their original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is changed' (2002, 22).

It could be argued that Western philosophy is less interested in reducing things to one simple construct. In health for example, the Western medical model is based on categorising health conditions in a way that often separates out physical and mental illness. The same could be said for separating the arts from the sciences. As Shaw points out, all the founders of psychotherapy were firstly medical doctors. He states 'the problem of mind-body dualism is not only located within psychotherapeutic culture, but appears to be endemic within Western culture' (1993, 11).

Thiessen agrees by stating:

Historically, interdisciplinary exchanges between the sciences and the arts, between science and religion have been valued from a Humean perspective. However, these exchanges have also been challenged by Cartesian philosophy and by the political and economic forces of a materialistic society that discourages the sharing of information among disciplines.

(Thiessen, 1998, p. 52)

Within Western cultures I have observed the perceived need for disconnection between the arts, arts therapies and arts education in society (Holmwood, 2014). Each profession appears to carve out its own space or place that is separate from the other philosophical approaches, despite there being many connections and overlap. Even though the art form is central it is almost missed in the jockeying for positions on the pluralistic hierarchies, especially and sadly within academic communities.

Even before we begin to consider Dramatherapy and Tai Chi it is necessary to acknowledge that each comes from not only different sides of the same hemisphere, each also comes with very differing philosophical considerations and practices. One is a modern Western form of creative therapy, the other an ancient martial art. The idea here is not to negate the one from the other but in the true Taoist philosophical approach – bring them into one and share their simplicity, whilst acknowledging that some may struggle with this attempt.

3. Dramatherapy

The British Association of Dramatherapy describes Dramatherapy as having its focus in:

The intentional use of healing aspects of drama and theatre as the therapeutic process. It is a method of working and playing that uses action methods to facilitate creativity, imagination, learning, insight and growth. (Badth.org.uk, retrieved 2016, July 7th)

There are now many approaches and philosophical differences being developed across the profession, but all Dramatherapy in some way uses drama and therefore movement at its centre. More specifically Dramatherapy is used as a form of therapy, intentionally, as an aid to psychological and emotional healing. The use of movement and action methods set Dramatherapy apart from talking therapies where physical engagement is not usually used. It shares the idea of movement and physical activity with that of Tai Chi.

As a Western construct, Dramatherapy has been discussed since the beginning of the 20th century. The first known use was written with two words ‘Drama-Therapy’, with a hyphen, and was coined by Stephen F. Austin (1917). However his work remained largely untouched and disconnected from the mainstream of Dramatherapy for almost a century. In the United States it is continued to be written as two words. In the UK its first

use as one word ‘Dramatherapy’ is attributed to Peter Slade (1954), a drama teacher and Dramatherapy pioneer in his lecture to the Guild of Pastoral Psychology in which he discussed his experiences of working with hard to reach children using drama. Slade interestingly had a particular interest in movement which I shall return to later.

Dramatherapy has developed since the 1960’s in both the early work of Sue Jennings (1978) and Marian Lindkvist (1998) in the UK, and Robert Landy (1993) in the United States. Dramatherapy is now becoming more established as a profession across the world with training courses in the US, Europe, the Middle East - in Israel (Lahad, in Jennings, 2002) and Far East in such places as Taiwan (Landy, 1997). Landy in his first venture to Taiwan interestingly stated at the time:

There was a small part of me that felt prepared. As a student of *tai chi* on and off for the past 20 years, I was at the time of my journey fully into the practice, having discovered a generous teacher in my town. As a scholar, I filled myself up with classical Chinese literature, history and current Chinese cinema. But the larger part of me, although curious, felt ignorant. Chinese culture seemed as vast and unfamiliar as its enormous land mass.

(Landy, 1997, pg. 159)

I share that experience with Landy of Chinese culture being both ‘vast’ and ‘unfamiliar’. Interestingly the international development of Dramatherapy appears to have travelled West to East, with qualifying courses such as those in Taiwan relying on their educators having been taught in the West originally.

There is almost no mention of Tai Chi in UK Dramatherapy literature other than Linda Chase Lee who writing in the *Dramatherapy Journal* (1989) saw the importance of the use of it within psychiatric hospitals where she worked; suggesting few others to date have attempted to write about the connections between the two disciplines. I will also return to her work later.

3.1. Tai Chi

Tai Chi is an ancient form of martial art which is beneficial to health. The Cheng Man Ch’ing T’ai Chi Ch’uan movement begins with a neutral standing posture and then continues through 37 slow and graceful movements (Zheng, Lo & Inn, 1985). Each movement has a specific description, often inspired by nature with names such as ‘White Crane Spreads Wings’ and ‘Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain’. They add that ‘it would be ridiculous to discuss Tai Chi without discussing yin and yang’ (1985, pg. 24). Suggesting this would be ‘like getting rid of arithmetic and algebra and then trying to discuss mathematics’ (1985, pg. 24).

Yin and Yang are both opposite and complementary; the two are not only aligned but combined. In Western philosophy we might discuss the light and the dark (or the shadow as Jung would famously describe as our unconscious). The famous symbol depicts a little dot of light in the dark and a dot of dark in the light. Yin and Yang seek balance and harmony which is at its core. From a Western perspective we might consider balance to be physical and mental health in harmony. Yin and Yang may also symbolise

control between inner and outer self, or body and mind from an Eastern philosophical perspective. When Yin and Yang separate we lose harmony and balance and there is dissolution/death or transformation.



FIGURE 1 | Yin & Yang

Pang Jeng & Inn go further discussing that the focus of:

Tai Chi Ch'uan is its ability to sink the ch'i to the tan t'ien. This is the first degree of what Lao-Tzu referred to as 'developing the chi to reach suppleness'. Lao-Tzu said 'those who are pliable and weak are alive and those who are hard and strong are dead.' From this we can see the way to cultivate life is to be supple. If you desire to be supple you must first develop the ch'i.

(1985, pg. 30)

The very lines of the Yin & Yang image are therefore transformed into being not hard or soft lines but represent more of a sophisticated amalgam of two into one, a subtle suppleness, a true Taoist perspective. From a Western perspective, our ability to manage mental and physical health in balance could also be considered relevant here. Historically in the West mental and physical health services have been greatly separated out, suggesting an imbalance in the very health care system that is there to support patients. Maybe Dramatherapy attempts to provide some balance, in that it treats the whole person and not just one aspect of the individual.

Modern China has certainly embraced Tai Chi with numerous articles around the health benefits of the martial art form. Zhang et al (2013) have monitored the effects of patients with high blood pressure (hypertension) and suggest traditional Chinese movements are of benefit to female patients they statistically analysed over a 24 week trial. A World Health Organisation report states that a randomised control trial using Tai Chi with elderly women 'demonstrate(s) perceived health status benefits most notably in ambulation, after taking part in intensive tai chi exercises' (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). It would appear that there is substance in the physical health benefits of Tai Chi within specific groups of people.

4. Embodiment

From a psychotherapy perspective Robert Shaw believes:

That our bodies as therapists are a means of acknowledging our part in the therapeutic conversations and the amazing variety of responses that we experience somatically are a way of engaging in a co-constructed therapeutic dialogue.

(1993, pg. 55)

From a slightly differing, though similar, perspective Schneider discusses that:

As an element of the individual's perception, body image develops out of the interaction with the environment, incorporates the values of others, strives for consistency, rejects inconsistent experience and change as a result of maturation and learning.

(1981, pg. 7)

He continues that there is a connection between the body and its environment 'the individual knows his body, the signs and signals he receives from it, and using this knowledge he can be taught expression through movement' (1981, pg. 10). His discussion is from the specific perspective of a movement tutor working with individuals with severe physical disabilities. He suggests that regardless of an individual's level of ability they have an ability to foster and nurture an experience and connection with the world around them. Therefore we can see from these two differing perspectives that the body operates as an emotional antenna which intuitively reflects back to the individual a sense of who they are in the environment they exist in. And in a professional context, the body assists the therapist in 'co-constructing therapeutic dialogues'. The body as resonator may echo elements of Tai Chi, of having softness and being supple to survive. One could conclude that Dramatherapy in a similar way to Tai Chi allows the inner world of the body to connect to the external world around it. Just as Tai Chi is about physically grounding the body, Dramatherapy is about allowing the physical and mental health of the individual to connect with the world both in and out of the therapy session. Both disciplines, I would argue, are seeking balance and wellness in the lives of the individual.

Phil Jones originally discussed the idea of embodiment in Dramatherapy in his 1996 seminal work. He states 'embodiment in dramatherapy is the client's physical encountering of material through enactment and combines the knowledge gained through sensory and emotional feeling with the knowledge to be taken from abstract reflection' (1996, pg. 114). He also felt it allowed the client to make a 'deepened encountering of the material' (1996, pg. 114). Masson (2015) brings together two counter arguments around embodiment; Mahan's view is 'that symbolic thought is the foundation for cognition' (2015, pg. 159), versus Glenberg who believes in an 'embodied view of cognition (that) conceptual knowledge and thought are necessarily grounded in sensorimotor representations' (2015, pg. 159). This pushes our thinking further as to how embodied feelings are understood; are they seen or felt, cognitively and critically assessed, or abstractly understood through the nuances of our physicality. Dokter (2016 in press) also shares a similar concern acknowledging that she has 'looked at the issue

of symbolism and interpretation and how for some clients embodiment may take a more direct expressive functional, rather than a symbolic form' (in press 2016).

This brief summary suggests that we cannot clearly explain how individuals embody their experiences and that different individuals will have differing ways of understanding it dependent upon their context, be they therapist, tutor or client. From a Chinese philosophical perspective it is argued that Tai Chi is principally a martial art form; however it might be described as an 'embodied action' from a Western psychological perspective. What we can say with some certainty is that the two approaches share the idea of health and balance in their practices.

4.1. Movement and Embodiment in the Arts, Tai Chi, Dramatherapy & Theatre

From an aesthetic perspective Crowther argues that 'the dominant twentieth-century conception of aesthetic experience is, broadly speaking, a formalist one' (2006, pg. 31). He argues aesthetically that art is often seen from a practical perspective 'in relation to its qualities of line and colour' (2006, pg. 31). He also contends that there is an alternative to this formalist approach, the idea of 'aesthetic vision' and 'concept less 'pure' perception' (206:33). This could be considered akin to the concept of 'mindfulness' a slowing down of the everyday, 'bringing awareness to the present moment with an attitude of acceptance and non-judgement' Rappaport & Kalmanowitz, 2014. Mindfulness might invite us to stare at an image, and to be with it in whichever way it leads us, without streamlining our experience or judging it, for example according to commonly accepted criteria. We might embody or absorb the image¹. A more formalist theory would be that we have an emotional reaction to the image – but then we fail to fully articulate *how* we respond emotionally to an image. I would argue the same could be said of our response to a poem, a film, a play or an individual movement we see in others or make ourselves.

As I have begun to consider, the experience of movement is central to both Dramatherapy and Tai Chi, though an Eastern perspective might not consider this to be an embodied action in the same way it might be in Western based Creative Arts Therapies. Movement is also central to play and theatre. Peter Slade in his early work with children noticed the recurrent patterns of 'circles, diagonals, crosses and zig zags in their play' (1995:8). These shapes also appeared in their image making in art. He felt the different physical shapes represented particular moods. The zig zag often represented by boys during 'violent dance' (1995, pg. 8). Linda Chase Broda described how many of her clients using Tai Chi in a mental health setting struggled with the idea of relaxation (not moving); but relished the idea of movement – she states:

In the learning process, each of the moves of the sequence is learned by doing it again and again. Once the student drops the notion of 'getting it' and realises there is no end goal, only a continuous on-going one, the repetition becomes relaxed and for its own sake. (1989, pg. 32)

¹ Mindfulness would be an excellent area to explore here further, especially acknowledging its currency and popularity. Sadly the size of this paper does not allow more than a brief mention.

One idea both authors suggest is the need for movement and the need for the body to engage with this through embodied action. This is central to my argument; that movement is about absorbing and reflecting in and on emotion whilst in the process of motion – hence embodied action. As I have already discussed, it is through our body we sense what is going on both inside and around us. What might create some useful discourse between Tai Chi and Dramatherapy is the notion of the coming together of the outer and inner self – a becoming one – where inner and outer self-merge so that we can have a greater sense of self in the moment of the movement. This could imply that we are somehow separate in the first place and need to come together, which is perhaps more of a Western construct, rather than an Eastern philosophy. Many modern commentators such as Oliver Sacks (1970) have argued that one of the scourges of the modern age ‘mental illness’ does just that, disconnects us from ourselves.

From a theatrical perspective Stanislavski, the Russian theatre director and trainer suggested the processes of theatre are akin to the natural processes of life. His work was at a time when Freud and the unconscious were relatively fresh and innovative ideas. Stanislavski suggested ‘in order to express (as an actor) a most delicate and largely subconscious life it is necessary to have control of an unusually responsive, excellently prepared vocal and physical apparatus’ (1980, pg. 16). He believed in the constant and regular training of the actor’s body and mind so that every performance was both fresh and new each time the actor performed. This could also be said of Tai Chi, every time the form is done we are mindfully reinforcing the link between the body and the external world.

Jones discusses how clients within Dramatherapy use dramatic frameworks through which they can both explore and express themselves with role being central to this. He suggests that:

Role taking and personification can enable the client to experience what it is like to be someone else, or to play themselves within a dramatic representation of an aspect of their own lives. This connects to the process of creating empathy and can help in developing the ways in which a client relates to others. (2007, pg. 94)

The client therefore uses their own body as an antenna to explore both self and others, the body being a connection between the two. This allows us to embody and attune to both our own experience and that of others thus allowing ourselves to be both ‘self’ and ‘other’ simultaneously. Robert Landy echoes this idea in his role method of Dramatherapy in which he states:

The healing potential of role is to be found as it positions the role taker or role player within the dramatic paradox of “me” and “not me.” The therapeutic actor, like the theatrical actor, is given permission to move in and out of two contiguous realities.... (1993, pg. 46)

This might be where there is a divergence in both the philosophy and approach between Dramatherapy and Tai Chi. Jones and Landy both seem to suggest that

'role' functions as both 'me' and 'not me,' they acknowledge a duality that exists between playing self and others. As discussed earlier this is more of a Western construct, the need to divide, segregate or departmentalise. Dramatherapists would also argue that boundaries between self and other are an important and essential part of keeping individuals psychologically safe within the therapy space. I don't necessarily disagree with this notion. Tai Chi however does not necessarily fit comfortably within this Westernised perspective; needless to say it is also not classed as therapy. One could argue that Tai Chi is about becoming one and letting go of duality. I discussed earlier Pooh in relation to Taoism suggesting that 'things in their original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is changed' (2002, pg. 22). One might wonder about making artificial connections between an art form which is intended as a therapy and a martial art which is not. Or is that the very point, that they are neither one thing nor another, just one.

Certainly the Western need for duality and opposition (and therefore safety and status quo) seems to lure the Dramatherapist into defining rationalising camps of being in role or not being in role, being me or being another. This is important for creating dramatic distance and therefore safety for clients. From a Tai Chi perspective, there seems to be a lesser need for a specific series of techniques and approaches that would categorise self from other. As Chase Broda stated earlier 'once the student drops the notion of 'getting it' and realises there is no end goal, only a continuous on-going one, the repetition becomes relaxed and for its own sake' (1989, pg. 32) I remember from my own experience of Tai Chi classes that the large external movements can be reduced until they are completely internalised within the body. This is to such an extent that there eventually needs to be no physical movement at all as the movements have been completely internalised within the individual.

One could argue that this is similar to the Western idea of 'individuation', the Jungian idea of the self, divided at birth, and the struggle to be made whole (Jung, 1939) Rosen & Crouse discuss the Taoist philosophy and the connection to Western psychology by stating:

The metamorphosis of one's false (non-genuine) self into one's true (genuine) self is a central aspect of Taoism and the psychologies of Jung, Erikson and Maslow. Through the transformation of the inauthentic into the authentic self, one attains integrity (wholeness) and wisdom (spiritual knowledge). (Rosen & Crouse, 2002, pg. 120)

They go on to conclude that:

The Tao has been described as the Way, Supreme Being, Primary Essence, Eternity, Wholeness, Mystery, Meaning, and Ultimate Being and Non Being ... One is born out of the Tao, experiences ego in t'ai chi (duality of yin and yang) but proceeds towards wholeness (wu chi) to return to a child-like state, re-joining the Tao in death. (Rosen & Crouse, 2002, pg. 128)

If we can put aside the binaries that attempt to separate both Western and Eastern philosophies, and whether we call it Dramatherapy (with its intentional use for therapy using drama); or Tai Chi as a martial art; it might be the actions, the movements that allow us to find either a Western inspired ‘individuation’ or an Eastern inspired ‘wu chi’ (wholeness or one-ness). Are we in essence talking about the same thing, from different cultural and philosophical perspectives, wrapped up within the physical experience of movement? This holds centrally the ‘me’ and ‘not me’ in *one* place at the same time within our movement.

5. Conclusion

I said at the beginning of this paper that I was not trying to find a way of explaining my initial experience or why I suddenly found myself flying across a room in a Tai Chi class. It was used as a way of beginning to contextualise my initial ideas, and it is my intention to try to stick to this premise. However I am reminded of the idea of ‘suppleness’ and softness of touch to ‘live’, in parallel to the idea of ‘hardness,’ leading to death, suggesting that the softer we tread on the planet the greater the effect we have. This is counter intuitive to the notion that the greater the force, the greater the effect. I wonder whether it was this lightness of touch that created the greater energy in my Tai Chi class, hopefully the Tai Chi teacher and his master might agree. I also wonder whether the essence of Dramatherapy is to seek ‘metaphorically’ for that lightness of touch through drama and action that allows us to balance our physical and mental health and its relationship to the world around us both within and outside of the therapy space.

What can we conclude about Dramatherapy and Tai Chi, are there any embodied connections we can be sure of? According to Pang Jeng & Inn ‘T’ai Chi is the mother of yin and yang’ (1985, pg. 21). They suggest extreme Yin produces Yang and vice versa. ‘In the alternation of hard and soft, and movement and stillness, each is applied to its limit’ (1985, pg. 21). Maybe embodying the idea of moving and not moving at the same time is central to this. As I have mentioned, the Taoist philosophy suggests a way of going lightly on the earth; the greater the softness of touch, the greater the energy, the less we struggle with rigidity, thus leading us to find our own true path.

In Western cultures Dramatherapists often work with clients who suffer from distress or anxiety about aspects of their lives, perhaps they too have not yet found how to tread lightly on the earth. Eastern & Western vocabularies, points of reference and philosophies may differ. However Dramatherapy also utilises the idea of the moving body through space², and embodying that experience as a resonator of the ‘me’ and ‘not me,’ or ‘wu chi’ be it sometimes through the smallest of movements. We may have very different frames of reference, but I wonder whether the central focus of how the body connects to itself (internally) and how it connects with the environment and others in the world around (externally) is central to both disciplines even though they come from differing theoretical and cultural backgrounds. Whilst embodiment might be a contested phrase

² As does Dance Movement Therapy – however I have purposefully not discussed this here not because it isn’t relevant but due to lack of space and lack of personal empirical experience of Dance Movement Therapy.

from an Eastern perspective of Tai Chi, the experience of two into one, which I suggest as possibly-integral to both disciplines, is the central mechanism that allows us to make those inner and outer connections, with the potential to see or feel them as one experience.

People will often come to Dramatherapy when all else fails. Dramatherapists often work with the most complex, difficult and challenging clients, due to disability or other complexity. This is often when other more traditional talking based therapies have limited or no effect, or cannot reach the individual. Dramatherapy may not be about using any spoken language at all but is based on action and movement. Through the embodying of feelings, thoughts, characters, stories and actions we as individuals may be able to connect in hither to unfamiliar ways. This is a way which releases a new kind of energy – never before found or seen in traditional psychotherapy. I would argue that this could be similar to Tai Chi and it's 'wu chi.' Controversially I would also like to suggest that whether we call the specific movement Dramatherapy or Tai Chi this almost feels like a superficial divide. Whichever discipline we use, as long as it assists us to find our own unique way to tread softly through the earth, then that will hopefully allow each of us to find the balance or Yin & Yang we strive for in our lives.

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