

**Reclaiming Wholeness
After Intergenerational Family and Domestic Violence**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #15101.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Marshall', written in a cursive style.

Date: 7/6/2024

Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the traditional lands and custodial groups in Australia. I wish to pay my deepest respects to First Nations ancestors and members of their communities, past, present, and to their emerging leaders.

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Abstract

Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) is a major health, welfare and social issue that can have lifelong impacts on families now and for generations to come. Women who have experienced FDV are soldiers. They are veterans of a war. The battlefield is their home. Most often the battle started before they were born; it was their mother's battle and her mother's before that. Their wounds are not glorified, often not spoken about. Afterwards they carry the trauma like any other soldier, but their trauma is unseen and unsung. This exegesis, performance and original choreographic process seeks to address the disconnection and fracture from self, love and wholeness that FDV creates and the challenge of repairing this disconnection to reclaim wholeness.

This practice-led research autoethnographic enquiry is comprised of two parts: a performance titled *Performing Wholeness* and an exegesis titled "Reclaiming Wholeness After Intergenerational Family and Domestic Violence". The key question driving both the performance and the exegesis asks: How can Somatic Practice (SP) and Systems Theory (ST) transform the oppression that comes from the lived experience of Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) into wholeness?

To create the performance, I designed and facilitated creative workshops with women who have lived experience of FDV and who have moved out of it by three to five years. These workshops were devised with SP and ST components as a collaborative, embodied, safe journey in which participants' FDV experience was sculpted into shapes. The workshop participants measured and reflected upon feelings of wholeness both during and after the workshop. The workshops culminated in a performance that conveyed our shared experience of wholeness reclaimed. In addition to choreographing this performance I also performed in it. The filmed artefact is linked to my exegesis.

The theoretical framework outlined in the exegesis includes performance/autoethnographical research that I use to underpin my creative practice. This enquiry also involves my experiences through social justice theatre and choreographic trainings that I undertook, as well as SP reflections, including Improvised Practice and the Feldenkrais Method (FM). I use body knowledge gained from FM personal sessions to inform my choreography practice and as a reflective means to question my past embodied FDV habitual behaviour and interaction with the world. I have also researched statistics, theories, service responses and

intergenerational aspects of FDV in Australia. Each chapter of the exegesis also includes an added autoethnographic component of a creative written piece about my experience with FDV.

I have used my experience as a mother, grandmother, natural therapist of over 35 years, and veteran of FDV to add to the body of knowledge about FDV, to honour women, and to create performance with and for them. This field is unmapped, making the research distinctive in its contribution to women who have experienced FDV trauma and to the field of FDV services.

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Abbreviated Terms

ATM: Awareness Through Movement

AT: Applied Theatre

CI: Contact Improvisation

DV: Domestic Violence

FDV: Family and Domestic Violence

FC: Family Constellations

FI: Functional Integration

FM: Feldenkrais Method

PIP: Perth Improvised Practice

SPT: Social Presencing Theatre

ST: Systems Theory

TFL: Theatre for Living

TO: Theatre of the Oppressed

SP: Somatic Practice

Chapter 1: Introduction

Our object is to discover what it is you really want. It is not an easy task.

(Feldenkrais, 1985, p.215)

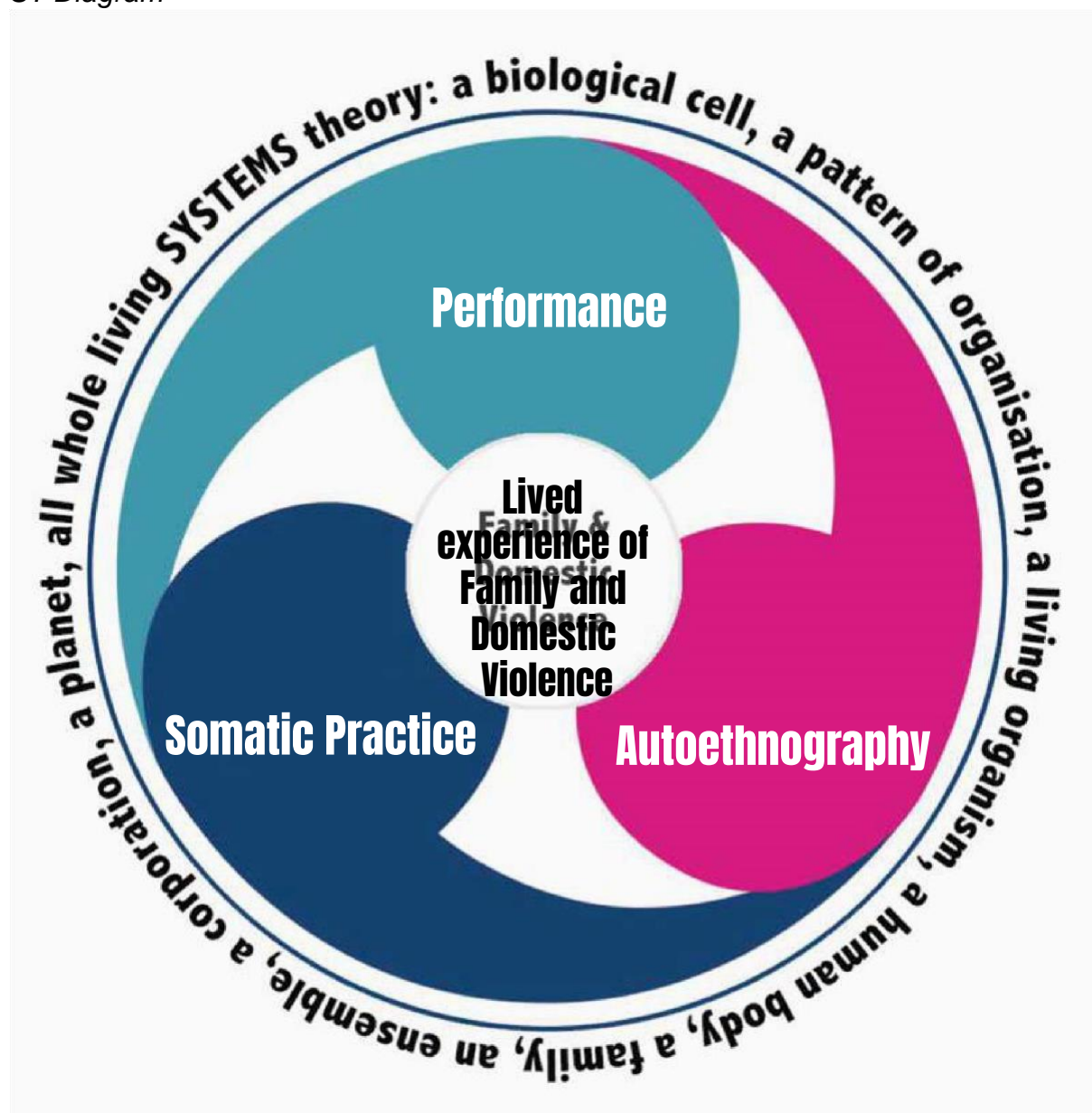
This autoethnographic project emerges from my lived experience with Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) and my exploration to release trauma post FDV. In personal Feldenkrais's Functional Integration (FI) sessions I found that my body had stored FDV experiences from my childhood, my adult experience in domestic violence (DV) relationships, and from previous generations. In my experience, my body remembered those traumatic experiences by encoding the trauma in a contraction (which for me was a frozen stuck state, a concept that I will unpack later in the exegesis), and subsequent Functional Integration (FI) sessions enabled expansive healing by releasing movements that transformed my contracted body into soft relaxation, trauma and repeat cycle (also, a concept that I unpack later in the exegesis) release. I embed this lived experience in this exegesis in two ways. Firstly, by using writing: creative nonfiction and journaling. Secondly, by using the Feldenkrais Method (FM) as a choreographic device, as well as my creative embellishment of FM and Theatre for Living (TFL), to create my own original combination and choreographic process for the creation of Performing Wholeness. This is a 20-minute performance, choreographed with workshop participants who have moved past FDV physically, emotionally, and financially by three to five years. The theoretical perspective I use to assist this research comes from Systems

Theory (ST). Figure 1 below illustrates the ways in which my lived experience of FDV, my research and my creative work interacted throughout this research. The whole large circle represents an entire ST view of my research into Family and Domestic Violence (FDV). The white circle in the centre represents my lived experience with FDV at the centre of this system. The three colourful swirls coming out from the centre circle are the methodologies/processes that I used to try and make sense of/process that experience with the hope of achieving wholeness. The teal blue section at the top of the circle represents the choreography journey that created the performance. The pink swirl on the right side of the circle represents the autoethnographic research (qualitative, arts based and practice-led) that I undertook.

It includes my theatre facilitator trainings, creative writing, reflections of lived experience and qualitative research into FDV. Finally, the dark blue swirl on the left represents the Somatic Practice (SP) components and explorations of the research including Feldenkrais Method (FM), Functional Integration (FI), (a component of the Feldenkrais Method), movement, dance and reflections about my somatic experience.

Figure 1

ST Diagram



Jennipher McDonald 2024

Positionality and Lived Experience

My lived experience with institutional¹ and family abuse as a child, and later in two domestically violent relationships over 20 years, has given me insight into the causes of FDV for me, and a passion for making a difference for women and families who are currently affected by FDV. Notwithstanding my childhood experience, when violence showed up in my first relationship it shocked me. This violence was not from a random attacker in the street; it happened to me in my home from someone who said he loved me. After a long-drawn-out separation over three years that included my ex-partner stalking me and repeated applications for restraining orders-that were never enforced, as a single parent I settled in a new town where I knew no one and eventually started a second relationship. In love, very happy about my relationship and moving forward, I married. The relationship was wonderful and the honeymoon period lasted 18 months – then violence showed up again. The violence continued throughout our time together and severely escalated over time. In the 13th year of our marriage my husband tried to kill me and our three children with his fists and then his rifle. We fled and stayed for a short time in a Kalgoorlie refuge. My 14-year-old son was not allowed to seek safety at the refuge with myself and his two sisters because he was a male. As a family, this separation and the necessity of finding another safe place for him was an added distress. Even though the police refused to lay assault charges against my husband, I managed to free myself and my children from that abusive marriage. Six months later, after a sunny day at the beach, I asked my 15-year-old son to clean up his room; in response, he raised his hand to hit me.

Even though I believe that both of my ex-partners committed multiple crimes of assault against myself and my children that they were never charged for, it was hard to ignore that the common denominator in these relationships was me. I realised that somehow, I was connected to the violence. I began to wonder how this repetition was occurring to me.

¹ Scarba House Orphanage for children, Bondi, NSW

Physicist, martial artist, and founder of the Feldenkrais Method (FM), Moshe Feldenkrais says:

The “how” is the hallmark of our individuality: it is an inquiry into the process of acting. If we look at how we do things, we might find an alternative way of doing them, i.e., have some free choice. For if we have no alternative, we have no choice at all. (Feldenkrais, 1981, p. xii)

This repeating pattern was trying to kill me. Physicist Fritjof Capra states: “At all levels of life, beginning with the simplest cell, mind and matter, process and structure are inseparably connected” (Capra, 2002, p.38). This research is an exploration into how that connection to violence occurs for me and possibly for others who have lived experience of FDV.

Over many years, through attending and studying many therapies where I discussed my problems, my focus was always on trying to move away from what I did not want in my life. I have since discovered through my Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) trainings that a major premise of a happy life is to focus on what I want. This perspective led to my interest in personal transformation work. I am a dancer: I have practiced Five Rhythms, Soul Motion, and Ecstatic dance for the past 20 years, along with other forms of dance such as Contact Improvisation, and improvised dance. I am trained in breath work, and I have explored Family Constellations, a Systems Based Family therapy for over three years in the late 1990s. I am the author of the book *Reclaiming Trust*, an ethnographic and therapeutic storytelling that contains key questions designed to lead the reader to find renewed trust after experiencing FDV. My work as a Clinical Hypnotherapist and NLP trainer has shown me the power of language and linguistic processes to unlock judgements about past events.

I have a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Theatre and have undertaken previous research and training in Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Theatre for Living (TFL) with TFL founder, David Diamond at the Centre for Dialogue and Change in Bangalore, India. I have an ongoing collaboration with Israeli TO facilitator Amit Ron (who I met in India) and sponsored to come to Perth in 2018 and 2019 to run three TFL workshops. This research has been a balance of working in the field of theatre and SP by facilitating workshops and creating choreography. As well, I was working with myself, my body, and inner reflections through the FM and autoethnographic writing.

Included in each chapter in this exegesis is a creative nonfiction story (written in italics) that comes from my lived FDV experience. I chose to include these autoethnographic stories because they are the best way to show the personal, embodied, and political intricacies of FDV, while also allowing their creative expression to act as a healing salve. Following this first historical personal story, *Beer and Bourbon*, are a few paragraphs about autoethnography, what it is, and why I chose to use it for this research.

Beer and Bourbon

Family and Domestic Violence is a beer and bourbon smoky hangover. Clenched fistful angry holes punctuated in bedroom walls; cold gun-metal chills to the bone; dirty lying bastards; a deeply wounded deficit where dreams used to be; getting trapped in court tug-of-warring over kids for years; broken promises, broken family, broken trust, broken heart, broken pride, skint broke.

Circa 1990

He'd been gone for hours. It was dark. I'd had dinner with Josh, my six-year-old son. We were in the living room when we heard a car arrive outside.

"He's back mum," Josh squealed, happily racing to greet his stepdad.

"Get to bed!" Shane snapped as he came through the door.

"Why? It's not my bedtime yet."

"Because I said so," he thundered, smashing his fist on the table.

His eyes were bloodshot, his breath alcoholic.

Rushing for the bedroom, I tried to shut the door. He smashed it open. I fell backwards. His angry twisted face contorted, and the veins in his neck protruded, pulsing.

"You tall, stropky bitch. Who do you think you are?" he roared.

I was committed to making a happy home. Sunshine shining in on the kitchen table: stories at bedtime. Brilliant colours, homemade curtains, and pillows to brighten things up. I thought if I could mend something it would last longer. I'd learnt that from my mother.

He put his fist through the bedroom window. Splintered glass shattered everywhere. He filled the doorway, boxing me in. I thought I was hallucinating.

I backed up against the wall as he pushed his face into mine.

Fleetingly, I thought I saw my father's face, and then in the shadows, I thought it was my previous partner, Joe's face. Shane looked at his bleeding hand.

"Now, look what you've done!" he breathed through clenched teeth.

"What happened to – 'I'll never hurt you'?"

"I haven't hurt you – YET. I'm so angry, I could kill you," he threatened. For a fleeting second, I saw my father's angry face again. I shook my head to focus.

In that moment, I knew, somehow, I'd made this happen.

I moved to check if Josh was okay, but Shane pushed me into the kitchen bench. He put one hand around my throat, picked a knife from the knife block on the kitchen bench and shoved it to my face.

"It's okay Josh," I shakily called. "Mummy's coming." I clawed at his hand, trying to release his grip. When I'd won that set of knives in the local pub raffle, they'd given a demonstration on how sharp they were. It was the first time I'd ever won anything. He hit me. He'd never actually hit me before. Shane was telling me, now, how he was going to get his gun.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others, and treats research as a political, socially just, and socially conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, think of the researcher as part of the data, as flesh and blood and feeling (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p.57).

Autoethnography is more than performance. It is transgressive. It is resistance. It is dialogical. It is ethical. It is political, personal, embodied, collaborative, imaginative, artistic, creative, a form of intervention, a plea for social justice. (Denzin, 2018, p. viii)

The multi-faceted nature of autoethnography fits my purpose for a performative/embodied/community/social justice/wholeness model of research (Spry, 2001, p.709). Autoethnography also aligns with my pursuit of joy, fulfilment and meaning making about my FDV experience. The term “ethnography” means “portrait of people” and “autoethnography” involves “self” (auto) and “writing” (graphy) (Poulos, 2021, p. 4). This research focuses on the author and other women (who I will refer to as “the participants”) who have lived experience of FDV. Ethnography speaks also to the moral tone, character, and quality of life of those being studied. In this research it will also include our world view and how we make meaning in our lives after FDV.

The [auto]ethnographer is a co-performer in a social drama, a participant in rhetorically framed cultural performances, enacting rituals, writing fieldnotes, recording interviews, videotaping, observing, talking, doing the things ethnographers do. (Conquergood, 2006, p.360)

When we study and write from the perspective of self, as facilitator, as critic, we do autoethnography (Ellis, 2015, p.6; Denzin, 2018, p.108). Carolyn Ellis, author of *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* says a “calling” is the cornerstone of autoethnographic work. I have a heartfelt calling to give my lived experience meaning and to make a difference to women who are still stuck with trauma post FDV by showing how ST, SP and performance have positively affected my life and increased my movement towards wholeness. I have designed a performance for, and with, these participants because autoethnographic performance makes us conscious of how we “I-witness” our own reality constructions, interpreting culture through the self-reflections and cultural refractions of identity (Spry, 2001, p.706). Autoethnography is a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and other in a social context (Spry, 2001, p.710). This self-narrative that Spry refers to underpins my work in the context of FDV. “In crafting the story of one’s practice, one also crafts oneself into existence as an artist researcher” (Murphy, 2012, p.22). *Reclaiming Wholeness*, both the exegesis and the performance, aims to give heartfelt expression to my experiences.

According to Bessel van der Kolk who is a psychiatrist, leading researcher, and educator in post-traumatic stress and author of *The New York Times* best seller, *The Body Keeps the Score*, “theatre gives trauma survivors a chance to connect with

one another by deeply experiencing their common humanity” (van der Kolk, 2014, p.335). In my choreography workshops I use theatre games and physical shape-making to allow the participants to tell their stories with their bodies instead of words. In doing so, their performance is very powerful. In my choreography, I ask the body to do the talking, the participants to use their bodies and share their stories with others and this is helpful in alleviating trauma.

In addition to the choreographed performance, my creative nonfiction writing transforms the vulnerability of my lived experience into a personal offering to the collective, that is, something to be shared with and witnessed by others. In the same way, the participants are offering their lived experience, using their bodies to transform their inner contraction and muscle memory of FDV into art to be shared, witnessed, and transformed from the personal to the collective.

During the research, I have continued to discover feelings of worthlessness. Whenever they arise from my body, I am surprised. These feelings manifest as questions such as: Who am I to be writing this work? Who am I to talk about these things? Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, says we bring our oppressions with us as we move forward in our lives: “We carry with us the many fabrics of self – soaked in our history, our culture, a memory sometimes scattered sometimes sharp and clear of the streets of our childhood, of our adolescence” (Freire, 1992, p.47).

In this work I am reclaiming what I am, and what I want, and letting go of what I am not and what I don’t want. Letting go of worthlessness, letting go of any place where I have carried the oppressed experience within me. In the following section, Victims and Survivors, I am specific about the power of the words we use to label our experiences, and the importance of having clarity about what I am doing, and what I am not doing. In this way autoethnographic research allows me to search within, to discern what is empowering to me and what is not. In doing so I am deconstructing myself, discarding what no longer serves me, choosing what I want and creating a pathway towards reclaiming wholeness for myself and others.

Victims and Survivors

Language can be used to expose violence, clarify offenders’ responsibility, honour victims’ resistance, and contest the blaming of victim/survivors or alternatively,

language can conceal violence, obscure offenders' responsibility, conceal victims'/survivors' resistance and blame them. Perpetrators use language strategically in combination with physical- or authority-based power to manipulate public appearances, promote their accounts in public broad space, entrap victims, conceal violence, and avoid responsibility (Coates & Wade, 2007, p.513).

This project in no way blames victims of domestic violence for the violence they experience. I am not responsible for any oppressor's actions towards me in my childhood or past relationships. As a child I was not responsible for any trauma that happened to me. In no way am I condoning, excusing, or minimising any violent, oppressive, or criminal behaviour. This project is from a post-FDV perspective, a place of peaceful reflection, with the intention of capturing wisdom from the FDV lived experience. I find it weakens me to label myself a victim. The word "victim" is a nominalisation; it's a fixed, belittling word used by members of law enforcement and within the context of courtroom proceedings. For many of our organisations, "survivor" speaks to the sense of empowerment our coordinated response aims to encourage in people. I and any veterans of FDV from an ST view are living beings in a living process with our highest hopes being our embodiment and our fullest expression of love. I am a verb; I am a dancer in my system of infinite beingness.

The words that I use about and for myself powerfully affect my body/mind system. I once heard a story about a man who uses a wheelchair. When asked if it was difficult being confined, he responded, "I'm not confined to my wheelchair – I am liberated by it. If it wasn't for my wheelchair, I would be bed-bound and never able to leave my house" (Clear, 2018, p.131). This shift in perspective completely transforms how he lives each day. Similarly, if I align with the word "victim", I feel that I would be giving my power away. The words "survivor" or "veteran" recognise that I am strong, that I have come through situations, and I can now reconnect to my wholeness again. Freire, one of the most important and radical educational thinkers of his time, comments on his concerns for education and social justice: Let me put it this way, you never get *there* by starting from *there*, you get *there* by starting from some *here*, this means ultimately that the educator, must not be ignorant of, underestimate, or reject any of "the knowledge of living experience" with which educands come to school. (Freire, 1992, p.49) *Here* is the present moment. Previously, my *here* moments were contaminated with my earlier *here* moments. I have lived my life learning and discovering that my FDV past kept on recreating itself in my present.

When I was younger, I judged traumatic experiences and I hated the world. I hated the people that hurt me. As an adult, I noticed my judgements, those old childhood *here* moments, were from my past. I wondered if I could change; I wondered if I could let go of judgement, if I could stop the trauma from reoccurring. I felt better; I felt like it was working. When I move my body in SP and let go of those old judgements as I notice them, as they come up, I begin again from this *here* moment. This project is me taking radical responsibility for myself in my now, in each new *here* moment. Taking radical responsibility in this *here* moment enables me to free myself, to become the choreographer of my life. The present is the time in which we live, and what we do with our present selves is the most important factor for tomorrow. If we do nothing to change our emotional patterns of behaviour, tomorrow will resemble yesterday in most details except the date. Maturity itself is a process, and not a final state; it is the process whereby past personal experience is broken up into its constituent parts and new patterns are formed out of them to fit the present circumstances of the environment and the present state of the body (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.xxxv).

In a Feldenkrais session when my body responds with terror in a *here* moment, I understand that that is not my body's response to any *now* moment. Rather it is my body letting go of a response to "back then" in my childhood. The more I can physically let go of those old judgements that arise in somatic sessions, the more I become aware of my wholeness and my ability to choreograph my present and my future. I can create new patterns and the past is gone. Here in this present moment in my new environment, I reflect on the power of language that I use for myself, and I have to say that I prefer "veteran" to either "victim" or "survivor". The word "veteran" better acknowledges my lived experience, aligns my spine, and toughens my resolve. I am in the present; I am the dancer and the choreographer of my life. I am whole.

Wholeness

This exegesis is about reclaiming wholeness, which presupposes that "wholeness" of the self is *a priori* condition. It could seem that reality is fragmented: fragmentation of self, relationships, race, culture, religions, poverty, our political systems. It could seem that our reality is conflict in the form of wars, terrorism and violence and that

wholeness is only an ideal towards which we might strive but what is being said here is that reality is wholeness.

Wholeness is what is real, and ... fragmentation is the response of this whole to man's [*sic*] action, guided by illusory perception, which is shaped by fragmentary thought. In other words, it is just because reality is whole that man [*sic*], with his fragmentary approach, will inevitably be answered with a correspondingly fragmentary response. What is needed is for man to give attention to his habit of fragmentary thought, to be aware of it, and thus bring it to an end. Man's approach to reality may then be whole, and so the response will be whole. (Bohm, 1980, p.9)

Our understanding of life is fragmented, and wholeness difficult to see. I will first discuss the term wholeness and follow that with a discussion of ST and how wholeness is connected to ST in Chapter 3. Wholeness and ST lean into each other. Bruce H. Lipton, PhD. Biologist and international bestselling author of *Biology of Belief*, says, "I learned from cells that we are part of a whole and that we forget that at our peril" (Lipton, 2008, p, 159) and "the cell engages in behaviour when its brain, the *membrane*, [*italics are mine*] responds to environmental signals. In fact, every functional protein in our body is made as a complementary "image" of an environmental signal" (Lipton, 2008, p.158). Lipton's theories tie with Feldenkrais's observations that the environment and our bodies are both part of the whole whether we are aware of it consciously or not.

"DNA does not control our biology, and the nucleus itself is not the brain of the cell. Just like you and me, cells are shaped by where they live. In other words, it's the environment, stupid" (Lipton, 2008, p.43). This is important because I learned my behaviour by growing up in FDV. We either have fragmentation, where many people live, or wholeness. I have discussed wholeness throughout this exegesis: I have measured my own levels of wholeness from my inner experience as I experienced the work. I have measured the participants by their definitions of wholeness in questionnaires before, during and after the workshops and the performance.

Wholeness, for me, means possibilities. It means having full access to my function and creativity, doing what I love, and loving what I do, loving myself and being in reciprocal loving relationships – healing the divide between self and *Self* (the highest version of self). That is, who I am today and who I may become, my

highest future possibility (Scharma, 2018, p.28). In my choreography workshops I asked participants to imagine what a life well lived and completed looks and feels like, when wholeness is achieved. I asked them if there was a shape that would best represent it, a feeling, smell, taste, sound and knowing, what would that shape be? I called this Shape Eight in our performance (see below on page 27-28, Appendix C: Participants' Reflections and in Chapter 6). It represents wholeness in their body for them (as if they were in a place where their true heart's desires had already been met). I asked them to embody that shape at the beginning of every workshop.

As a facilitator, I spent time directing participants to witness Shape Eight (wholeness) in themselves and in each other. I reinforced this wholeness shape for a few different reasons: firstly, because it shows how helpful it is to know and focus on what you want, which comes from NLP. Secondly, in line with American social psychologist Amy Cuddy's research on holding power shapes (Cuddy, TED, 2012), when we hold our body in a shape that represents success, such as an athlete winning the race with her arms raised in triumph above her head, or a prize boxer winning the fight, it tricks our body into matching our emotions and feeling good internally. According to Cuddy, it only takes two minutes, and our physiology changes our psychology. Together, as a group, we held our wholeness shape and focus, felt wholeness in our bodies, intended for it to happen for ourselves, for the other, for the group and in our performance at the end of the workshop. Wholeness is a major focus of this research. It is woven throughout the entire choreographic workshop because wholeness is where I choose to go and it's where my workshops intend to lead the participants.

Mainstream understandings of human development and the treatment of trauma tend to focus on what is wrong and to talk about the problem. Kendra Cherry, psychosocial rehabilitation specialist, psychology educator and author of *The Everything Psychology Book* says that the major goals of psychology, in everything from treating mental illness to enhancing human wellbeing, is to describe, explain, predict, and change human behaviour (Cherry, 2022). In contrast to Cherry, Diana Fosha, psychologist, psychotherapist, and author of *The Transforming Power of Affect*, writes: "the length of psychoanalytic treatment and the relative selective inattention to issues of effectiveness and evidence make me uncomfortable" (Fosha, 2017, p.12). In my experience, both personally and as a therapist talking about what is wrong, talking about the problem keeps the problem more present in the mind and

more present in the lived experience. In my view, resilience is found in a sense of being seen, understood and existing in the heart of a loving and self-assured other (van der Kolk, 2014, p.107).

In my workshops, with the knowledge that there is no benefit from re-experiencing the past and that people don't see the world with just their eyes but with their entire life (Brooks, 2023, p.64), I asked the participants to not talk about the problem, not to use words, but instead, to put their story and feelings into an embodied shape. People can be braver with a shape; they can allow themselves privacy and at the same time express their vulnerability to each other. They can be witnessed and get the comfort that being seen offers. I always have the wholeness shape both as our focus and available to support participants.

Musician, composer, filmmaker, and author of *The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life*, Robert Fritz proposes that when we respond to life's situations from wholeness – where our true heart's desires have been met – we are operating from the orientation of creation and from the orientation of an artist, and so we can create for the joy of creating. Fritz's approach to human development where the creative process has a structure (like a wholeness shape) differs from that of reacting or responding to circumstances. It is one that resolves rather than oscillates (Fritz, 1984, p.56). In making the wholeness shape, the participant is making a conscious choice to give their body direction and be the predominant creative force in their own life. In mastering the creative process, imagining our true desires being met, and making a fundamental orientation shift to a complete separate life stance to the orientation of the creative (Fritz, 1984, p.xxvi), life is changed forever: your vision for life becomes effortless (Fritz, 1984, p.17).

When I make a wholeness shape, when I act from a place of wholeness, it feels natural. The word "health" in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word "hale" meaning "whole"; that is, to be healthy is to be whole (Bohm, 1980, p.3). "Relativity and quantum theory imply undivided wholeness, in which analysis into distinct and well-defined parts are no longer relevant" (Bohm, 1980, p.183).

Wholeness is the opposite of what I felt for all those years when I was living in FDV: I felt terrified, stuck, numb, and controlled. My creative and performative journey to wholeness has transformed my wounding. This transformation is made better when I can use my life experience and choose how that occurs (for me through movement and performance) to assist others. My wounding has been

replaced by my power. David Brooks, author of *How to Know a Person – The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen*, says that people who practise effective empathy have suffered in ways that give them understanding and credibility. Thornton Wilder, American playwright, novelist and winner of three Pulitzer Prizes, once wrote on the pain, suffering and empathy that one gains from lived experience:

It is your very remorse that makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men [*sic*]. The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children on earth as can one human being broken on the wheel of living. In love's service only the wounded soldiers can serve. (Wilder, 1928, p.56)

In their responses to my questionnaires regarding their definitions and experience of reclaiming wholeness, the workshop participants also contributed to my understanding of the term. Participant T said,

That wholeness shape became active and a guiding light to what was to come – and moving towards that light. It felt fantastic to do this shape and gesture. Fantastic in a spiritual goose bumpy sort of way. Making a shape that represented this felt like a “full acknowledgement”, and in that moment of making the shape, I could feel why and how – and that somehow led to some kind of liberation. (Appendix C, 2022, p.178)

Participant V said,

I love the freedom and simplicity of this wholeness process. Afterwards I feel more embodied, slower, and softer. Any unresolved challenge or real problem that was affecting my nervous system could fall into a more nourishing shape in my body which gave the sense that it was possible to overcome this hurdle with support and connection. Tough to put it into words! I was so embodied and present with my internal process that there was no self-consciousness about being in a performance. (Appendix C, 2022, p.178)

Participant L said,

Creating from wholeness is exciting, revelatory, possible. I felt I was part of a valuable self-exploratory process and that I had something to say, in my body, beyond words and I became witness to a deeper knowing. I am an

artist. Witnessing others in their process is enriching and deepens our own exploration. I felt like I was a paintbrush with my body and being, writing a story with my movements, supported by the group, the music, the facilitation, the inner muse. (Appendix C, 2022, p.179)

The participants' comments about their reclaiming wholeness experiences resonated with my own. It felt good to acknowledge my inner self and lived experience from an embodied wholeness shape. It felt empowering to have choice and control in having the shape, and embodiment and being witness to others' enhanced creativity in performance.

Leading trauma specialist and renowned doctor Gabor Maté argues that wholeness means first healing the past (2022, p.361): "When I speak of healing, I am referring to nothing more or less than a natural movement toward wholeness" and focusing on our wholeness as *a priori* is powerful. Wholeness is the capacity to freely take responsibility for my existence by exercising "response ability" (Maté, 2022, p.377) in all essential decisions that affect my life, to every extent possible. Wholeness means acknowledging the past and letting it go. In this sense, I agree with van der Kolk's (2014, p.95) and Maté's understanding of wholeness, which is knowing that we have a say in what happens to us, knowing that we have some ability to shape our circumstances now. Also, the neural circuitry of wholeness, social engagement and love is intricately connected to the heart and its functions (Maté, 2022, p.366). Wholeness is also connected, for me, to my empowerment as an artist, choreographer, writer, dancer, mother, and grandmother, and in performance. After listening to participants' experiences of the reclaiming wholeness workshops and combining our wholeness definitions, I think that wholeness is a reconnection into the infinite possibilities of self, acknowledging our knowing on the inside, taking power and responsibility in our collective connection to matriarchal knowing and our sense of creatively expressing what we want.

The following section explains why my writing is feminist in intention but not by academic focus. The reason for this is while feminism is defined as "a set of ideologies and theories aimed at realising equal social, political, and economic rights for women", and essentially promotes gender equality (Li, 2023, p.180), it does not consider the whole picture as ST does. Although feminism is a deep, wide global movement that has many forms and has made great strides in improving life for

women over the past decades, for me, feminism was just a theory. It was an external notion that had not touched my life. ST on the other hand is an internal connection, an internal enquiry, that is not determined by external references but by looking within. David Diamond explains this:

If we embrace the systems view, it becomes impossible to consider that a family, or a community, an organisation or a nation can benefit from being worked on from the outside. Living things change and grow in a healthy way, not because they are made to by outside forces but because they want to ... actual behavioural change comes from within. (Diamond, 2007, p.50)

Because my journey out of FDV towards wholeness is an internal enquiry, I feel enabled and empowered by it, as I will explain in the following paragraphs.

Not Feminist Theory

Violence against women and FDV has been a pervasive, long-standing problem that has been challenged by a broad range of specialists: social work administrators, service providers, psychologists, community leaders, legislators, and the emergence of the women's movement over the past quarter-century (Abbott, 1996, p.235). Acknowledgement of the abuse of women has been heightened by the fact that more police officers have been killed intervening in FDV situations than in the entire war on drugs (Abbott, 1996, p.236). In the past twenty-five years not much has changed. Research shows police risk assessment tools currently in use need to be revised as high-risk assessment factors are absent (Richardson & Norris, 2020).

“Best practice” responses to domestic and family violence are widely contested and therefore highly political. Within neoliberal contexts, conservative governments have sought to de-gender and de-politicise domestic and family violence by attacking and de-funding feminist services and reducing domestic and family violence to a relationship problem, rather than acknowledging it as a gendered human rights issue. (Morley & Dunstan, 2016, p.43)

Feminist research is diverse in its understanding of FDV, for example, postcolonial feminism has a different view on the aetiology of violence (Spencer-Wood, 2016, p.480), than mainstream, dominant feminism that is grounded in the principle that intimate partner violence is the result of male oppression of women within a

patriarchal system in which men are the primary perpetrators of violence and women the primary victims (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). Much research has been done to show the causes of FDV, from attachment theory to severe psychological deficit theories that state such factors as a victim's masochism, low self-esteem, poor impulse control or learned helplessness play a role in abuse (Chornesky, 2000, p.283).

Other research refers to efforts to address FDV through the passage and enforcement of criminal and civil laws (Danis, 2003, p.237), that, 20 years later, have not fully arrived. A recent example of this was the killing of Hannah Clarke and her three children by her former partner Rowan Baxter, who jumped in the car, splashed petrol, and set them on fire in 2020. An inquest into her death in 2022 uncovered that FDV was more than 40 to 60% of the Australian police workload and exposed a system not built to effectively deal with men's violence against women. The coroner made recommendations for the need for whole-system reform, as well as to improve policing, child safety, and service system responses (Ketchel, 2022). The fundamental problem with the police response to domestic abuse is that the culture is incompatible with the crime (Hill, 2020, p.42) Feminist theorists have also examined

the complex roles of states, non-state actors from dominant classes and communities, and individual perpetrators in the enactment of violence with impunity and they have traced intricately modes of resistance in response to violence. (Lokaneeta, 2015, p.1010)

While I believe in and advocate for equal rights for all women, and I acknowledge that the feminist research on the problem of FDV to date is significant, when I review the issue of FDV, it seems impervious to this research and funding, over all this time and all best intentions. In my personal exploration to find relief from my FDV experiences I have also looked at what constitutes a healthy relationship. For more than 30 years John Gottman, author of many books including *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, has researched the key elements of healthy relationships and how to transform troubled relationships into positive ones. I feel that more research of this nature plus new and different explorations around what we are not seeing is required as FDV is still a national crisis in Australia (Ketchell, 2022).

Thus, while this research project is feminist in its intention it will not incorporate Feminist Theory. Instead, it will focus on reclaiming wholeness as a novel addition to the literature within an ST model that acknowledges the human female body, the connection of the oppressed to the oppressor and our connection to the whole. It will bring together a cross-section of theorists and practitioners from a diverse range of fields, with a common Systems approach: Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Gregory Bateson, Fritjof Capra, David Bohm, Karen Barad, Ugo Mattai, Peter Senge, Joanna Macy, Gabor Maté, Bessel van der Kolk, Moshe Feldenkrais, Tami Spry, Carolyn Ellis, Stephen Gilligan, Robert Dilts, William Whitecloud, Robert Fritz, Paulo Freire, Richard Bandler, John Grinder, Otto Scharmer, Augusto Boal, David Diamond, Bert Hellinger, and Arawana Hayashi.

Conclusion

I have discussed my positionality and lived experience. I have shared my first historical–personal story and outlined autoethnography as my form of research product and process and my take on victims/survivors. I have outlined wholeness and explained why I am not using Feminist Theory but ST instead. In Chapter 2 I will review different aspects of FDV in Australia; these include statistics, theories, service responses, new laws for FDV, a discussion of intergenerational FDV, and an articulation of the relationship between my research project and FDV.

Chapter 2: Family and Domestic Violence

FDV cuts a cavernous wound into our society. Lifetime prevalence data indicates that 51% of women in their twenties have experienced sexual violence, and it accounts for nearly 60% of the women hospitalised for assault (Hill, 2019, p.11; COA, 2022, p.22). FDV is big business for Australian police consuming 40 to 60% of frontline police time (Hill, 2020, p.42). In Victoria alone, police responded to a record 88,214 FDV incidents in January to June 2020. This is disturbing when we now know that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery and incest was essentially the same as seen in survivors of war (Herman, 1992, p.32). In addition, after they have fled the violent relationship, newly single mothers subsist with their children on below poverty-level income (Summers, 2022, p.99).

This chapter is important to my overall research because even though I had been out of FDV experiences for over 20 years, and I thought I was free of it, I found that I was not. When I first became a grandmother I noticed new layers resurface. I found myself hurting, disrespected, and estranged from my son and my grandchild. At the same time, I was in a unique position to explore FDV and was determined to research other experiences, and discover the gaps of knowledge and the root causes of this devastating social problem. I know women who in the last two years have experienced FDV and a system that fails them. I know friends who, like me, have moved out of FDV but are not thriving as they could. I know grandparents who do not get to have a loving relationship with their grandchildren.

Statistics for FDV

FDV is a difficult and long-standing social issue (ABS, 2019). FDV, as defined by the Australian Government *MyGov* website, is

any behaviour that is violent, threatening, or controlling intended to make you or your family feel scared, harassed, intimidated or unsafe. It includes deliberate or unintentional harmful behaviour, and it could be emotional, psychological, financial, physical, social, or sexual. (2020)

I would add coercive control to augment this definition.

Coercive control is a strategic pattern of behaviour designed to exploit, control, create dependency, and dominate. The victim's every day

existence is micromanaged and her space for action as well as potential as a human being is limited and controlled by the abuser. (Gearing, 2021, p.17)

I think that coercive control and intergenerational aspects of FDV are hidden characteristics of FDV that allow it to occur.

The effects of FDV within the family are ongoing and disruptive to wholehearted living. Family violence cost the Australian economy \$15.6 billion in 2021 to 2022 (DCP, 2014, p.9). In addition to the \$1.7 billion investment in October 2022, which broadly committed to work related to violence against women, the 2023 budget measures included \$589.3 million funding to support women's safety (Monash, 2023). In 2016, the Victorian government of Australia held a Royal Commission into FDV and handed down 227 recommendations, concluding that the human cost is unacceptable.

FDV, while predominantly men abusing women (95%), can also be women abusing men, or LGBTQIA+ relationships and any family participants behaving abusively towards another including either parent abusing children or elder abuse (DCP, 2014, p.8). I see elder abuse as a continuation of FDV and the Royal

Commission into Aged Care report tabled on 1 March 2021 described the findings as "a damning indictment of Australia, a system plagued with abuse and neglect" (COA, 2018, p.8). It seems that the intergenerational aspects of FDV can span a lifetime from birth through to death. There are no boundaries to victims of FDV; it affects all religious and cultural backgrounds, with or without disabilities, all socioeconomic groups, all ages, and education level. Of all the women who experienced violence, 34% said that their children witnessed the abuse. In South Australia, one in four children are reported to child protection by the time they are 10 (Hill, 2019, p.166). "Deep-rooted and systemic", domestic violence is to Australia what gun violence is to the US (King, 2021).

Three years on from the Royal Commission in Victoria, across Australia it is estimated that FDV increased by 20 to 30% during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Rose, 2020). Having no refuges available for women experiencing FDV to have alternative housing further exacerbated the problem. Federally, the Morrison government pledged an extra \$328 million to combat domestic violence with the average daily police FDV matters across Australia being 650 in 2020 (ABC, 2020). So far, in May 2024, there have been 66 murders and hundreds of acts of violence perpetrated on

women by their ex-partners. Apart from the suffering of victims, there is also a minimum of 241,865 police hours. The actual number is much higher when more than one police unit is required and the processing exceeds the four-hour minimum (Community Advocacy Alliance, 2023). On Wednesday 1 May 2024, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared FDV a national crisis with 28 women killed by their current or former partner and members of their family in the first four months of 2024.

FDV is the leading cause of death for women aged between 15 and 40 globally (AIHW, 2018) and 80% of incarcerated women have experienced FDV (COA, 2022, p.77). Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan called violence against women and girls the “most shameful human rights violation” and the World Health Organisation called it a “global health problem of epidemic proportions” (Snyder, 2019, p.6). The ABS 2016 Personal Safety Survey found that less than one in five women (18%) who had experienced violence at the hands of their current partner had ever contacted police. FDV is also, according to the Western Australian Department of Communities (2019), the main reason women seek help from the homelessness services (Snyder, 2020, p.7). Personally, FDV cost me physically, emotionally, and especially financially because we lost our beloved home on the NSW central coast that we had been paying off for over seven years and I became a single parent of three children.

COVID-19

During the COVID-19 restrictions there were dramatic increases in the reporting of FDV globally. A qualitative and quantitative survey of 166 practitioners from Victoria, Australia, reported that the pandemic led to an increase in the frequency and severity of domestic violence (Pfitzner et al., 2020). As a result of the pandemic-related lockdowns the federal government reported a 75% increase in Google searches for domestic violence support. Nearly 60% of family violence practitioners in Victoria reported an increase in the frequency of violence and a 50% increase in the severity (Leonard et al., 2020).

Theories of FDV

Traditional theoretical explanations of the persistence of abusive relationships and violence fall into four broad categories: psychological, sociological, feminist, and neurobiological (Chornesky, 2000). Some neurobiological researchers have linked violence to the biology of abusive men who have shown evidence of previous head trauma (Rosenbaum et al., 1994) and women who stay in violent relationship have been subjected to intense prolonged violence that may develop into PTSD (Walker, 1993, p.63; Bowlby, 1988). Men who are abusers have shown psychological problems such as lack of impulse control and low self-esteem (Hamberger & Hastings, 1988) and women who stay in abusive relationships have been labelled severely psychologically deficient and suffering masochism (Ferraro & Johnson, 1993). Some sociological markers of men who are physically abusive are alcohol and substance abuse (Kantor & Straus, 1987). The predominant Feminist Theory views range between defining FDV as a sociological structural problem based on traditional gender-role expectations and the imbalance of power between men and women, to the domination and control of women based on biological differences in a patriarchal society (Busch, Chornesky, 2000; Kulkarni et al., 2007; Saulnier, 1996).

Attachment theorists rationalise that FDV comes from children whose basic needs were not met. That is, children whose caregivers endangered, abandoned, or rejected them so that they, as adults, are prone to become anxiously attached and that this attachment can continue throughout life and disturb their relationships (Bowlby, 1988; De Lozier, 1982). While we have many theories about the whys of FDV, it is also interesting to note that throughout human history FDV has not always been considered a crime; many religions traditionally believed it was within a husband's right to discipline his wife as he would any of his other properties, such as servants or animals (Snyder, 2019, p.11).

An ST view of FDV that considers the inner sources of FDV victims/survivors could lead them out of the FDV loop by using Theory U processes (discussed in Chapter 3) to co-shape the present by downloading past patterns, seeing with fresh eyes, sensing the field, being present, performing from the whole, prototyping and crystallising a new vision (Scharmer, 2018, p.43) towards reclaiming wholeness.

Service Responses to FDV

In Australia, families experiencing FDV and other potential child maltreatment issues are also likely to experience a constellation of other problems such as social isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, alcohol, suicide, and other drug problems (AIFS, 2015; Gruenert et al., 2015, p.24). Even though violence between intimate partners and the maltreatment of children have been evident in families, and services have known of this violence connection for decades, practice and research in dealing with FDV have been separated from other contributing factors and other services (Jeffries, 2021).

Different types of violence are most often managed in isolation from each other. Much of the research about FDV and the interests of lobbying for change involve separate areas and agencies. Most research looks at FDV violence separately rather than as a whole continuum of connected relationship processes that form a systemic whole. Looking at mental health, alcohol, and other drugs separately (Nicolas et al., 2015, p.10) to FDV is not helpful when FDV most often involves alcohol and other drugs: “In Australia, integration of systems within the states and territories cannot adequately address the maze through which victims of domestic violence must negotiate to develop avenues of safety and recovery” (Jeffries, 2021). There is a need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the causes of FDV and its prevention and treatment. A Systems approach that also considers the interrelationships between sectors such as alcohol, other drugs, child and family welfare would be helpful.

When I was living in FDV in 1996, I found it confusing that the alcohol-infused violence I experienced from my husband was not considered a crime; my relationship was viewed by family and others as turbulent, where we had communication issues. This was finally clarified at the 2021 Family Law Conference as a common assumption in society, “once violence is present the issue is control, coercion and criminal” (Jeffries, 2021).

Besides this disconnect between FDV, mental health and addiction service providers, there has been awareness about the way the FDV services use language to describe perceived events that further victimises the victim (Coates & Wade, 2007, p.512). Our language reflects our beliefs and thoughts and perpetuates empowerment or disempowerment (Wade, 1997, p.137). While I will not include my

NLP language findings in my exegesis, I have added two paragraphs as examples of the way that language can be used constructively or destructively by FDV service providers.

The first example shows the usual current destructive documentation (provided by Kate Jeffries at the 2021 Family Law Conference) that mostly focuses on the victim/survivor experiencing a crime as if it is not a crime. The service provider used language strategically in combination with physical- or authority-based power to manipulate the appearance and support the perpetrator by diminishing and concealing violence of the perpetrator and avoid Mr Harris's (Ms Jones partner) responsibility for his actions. Below is an example of FDV Destructive Documentation:

Ms Jones has history of family and domestic violence relationships including her current relationship with the father of her youngest children. She has traumatic childhood experiences and relapses from substance abuse. The most recent referral was because her current boyfriend (father of the youngest child) assaulted her in front of the children, giving her a black eye. After he was arrested, she went to the police, denied the violence, and tried to bail him out. Ms Jones insists she wants to maintain the relationship even though interviews with the older children indicate they are scared of him, and the younger was in danger of being physically harmed during the last incident. The paternal grandparents have requested a family court proceeding for full care of the youngest child, allowing supervised visits between the mother and child. (Jeffries, 2021, adapted from Safe and Together Institute, 2019)

The second example shows how a new awareness of language used by family services moves away from blaming a victim/survivor who has experienced FDV by naming the perpetrator's violent actions and responses. This is FDV Informed Documentation:

Mr Harris has a pattern of negatively impacting family functioning through physical violence directed against Ms Jones in the presence of the children. This physical violence (including the most recent arrest when he punched her in the face two times, giving her blurred vision and headaches for two days and a black eye, threw her down on the ground and kicked her in the stomach and groin) has led to multiple moves of the children, disrupting

their school attendance (oldest child has missed 22 days of Year 10 school this year because of family disruptions related to the stepfather's violence). Mr Harris is regularly abusive to the mother and the older two children. The oldest child steps in to defend his mother verbally and once physically. The older two children express that they are afraid that Mr Harris will hurt their mother when he gets angry. They indicated he has never physically hurt or disciplined them. The family is less financially stable than one year ago because both parents have lost their jobs because of Mr Harris' violence and arrests. Ms Jones was kicked out of her AOD treatment program three months ago when

Mr Harris threatened another client (male) in the parking lot. Since then, Ms Jones has relapsed. Now she is three weeks sober. In the past Mr Harris has taken the youngest child to his parent's house and not returned for weeks at a time, saying "he's never going to let her see her son ever again". His parents, when interviewed, expressed no concerns about his violence but only concerns about her substance abuse. (Family Law Pathways Network Conference, 2021, Jeffries, 2021, adapted from Safe and Together Institute 2019)

Language is so embedded in our day-to-day experience that it mostly goes unnoticed and has added to victim-blaming. It is important to show examples of these gaps in the provided FDV services because I hope to show with my research that new approaches might assist in filling the spaces that these gaps present.

Language is not the only issue in service responses to FDV. After the murder of Hannah Clarke and her three children in Queensland in 2020, a Women's Safety and Justice taskforce established by the Queensland State Government found a systemic failure of current legislation, policing, civil law and criminal law to protect women and children (and some men) from being trapped in toxic relationships that too often lead to deadly outcomes if and when the victims (and their children) attempt to escape to safety (Gearing, 2021, p.12). Also, current service workers in the field can be unaware of feminist histories of activism and continue to regard domestic violence as a problem for the individual (Chung, 2018, p.167). After researching FDV for six years for her bestselling book *See What You Made Me Do* and her essay "Thin Blue Line", award-winning Australian investigative journalist

Jess Hill writes that “family violence is ... a love or hate thing ... police officers are either fine to do it or they hate it” (Hill, 2020, p.36). Hill asks, “Is it even possible to have a truly reformed policing culture – from which misogyny and victim-blaming attitudes are banished?” (Hill, 2020, p.45).

The latest federal government National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 –2032: Ending gender-based violence in one generation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022), calls for a plan to work on priorities. Out of the 17 suggestions to improve responses to FDV, holding perpetrators accountable for violence against women is 13th on the list. In my opinion, it needs to be number one. I consider that equality is best demonstrated by charging perpetrators with assault; whether it happens in the street or in the home, assault is assault. Also in the

National Plan, in the “What we know about violence against women” section, no mention is made about intergenerational FDV, with the major focus being placed on gender inequality (COA, 2022, p.34). Intergenerational FDV is hardly acknowledged, and I would go so far as to call it a root cause. I will discuss the intergenerational aspects of FDV in the following paragraphs.

Intergenerational FDV

A further complication of FDV and its treatment or recovery is its intergenerational component. Intergenerational FDV is the repeating of family trauma patterns of either child maltreatment or FDV or both. Domestic violence and abuse in Australia are overwhelming our child protection system. Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) causes trauma. Trauma is a wound that happens inside a child because of what happened to them. This scarring is painful as it makes the person feel alienation: disconnected from self, disconnected from work, disconnected from other people and nature (Maté, 2019). Maté says, “Trauma is not what happens to us but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness” (2010, p.xii). An empathetic witness is often and, over generations, long been absent for victims of FDV. The absence of an empathetic witness in the family, in the community and most importantly in the eyes of the legal system, creates the loop of trauma and repeat victimisation.

Violence can repeat when children grow up in an environment where FDV occurs as a model of behaviour that is repeated in their own adult relationships (Hill,

2019, p.180). Childhood trauma affects how we connect to others. Children who experience trauma are forced to make adaptations to survive stress. The same adaptations the child makes to survive stress in their childhood stop healthy relationships later in their lives: the body keeps the score (van der Kolk, 2014, p.349). Also, the risk of disease increases – for example, children whose parents experience FDV are four times more likely to suffer from heart attack, diabetes, and cancer.

The common source of all human illness is a disturbance in people's attachment relationships. Attachment is a drive for a person to be close to another person. The seeking of closeness for the person to be taken care of or for the purpose of taking care of someone else. (Maté, 2019)

Families who experience intergenerational FDV have problems connecting in relationships and maintaining ongoing relationships. Recent research from Swinburne University found that people who experienced abuse and trauma as children are five times more likely than the general population to be assaulted again as an adult (Tapscott, 2020). Also, women who have reported physical or sexual assault are five times more likely to experience a new assault (Kilpatrick, et al, 1998). The cyclical nature of intergenerational FDV and gender violence is indicated in the above research. Trauma does not only affect the individual, but it also affects the family and the community.

FDV can occur in different ways between different family members. An underreported, repeated, and intergenerational variation is child-to-parent abuse that is virtually unmentionable. The most common pattern is a boy abusing a sole mother post-domestic violence. A child who has grown up seeing his or her mum constantly belittled and abused can have a derogatory view of her (Hill, 2019, p.181). The phenomenon of repeat victimisation or multiple criminal victimisations experienced by one person has been documented across crime types (Finkelhor et al., 2007; Farrell & Pease, 2001).

There have been recent law reforms of increased sentencing for non-fatal strangulation as well as prison terms for breaking restraining orders and persistent family violence (Government of Western Australia, 2019). There is also a push to make new laws against controlling or coercive behaviour. Both the laws and the services of FDV work on the structure of FDV from outside of the problem and not the behaviours that come from the inner source structure of FDV. Current service

interventions emphasise providing medical and psychological support for the current incident and do not consider the risk of future victimisations or the role of cumulative trauma and its recovery (Tomsich, 2013, p.2).

Conclusion

I have described the devastating harm caused by FDV to women, children, and men in our community. This harm currently permeates families and communities with significant economic and other costs to our broader society. I have discussed the statistics and theories for FDV. I have also looked at service responses. I have reviewed the different ways that services are noticing their use of language in their documentation that can sometimes be destructive. I have also written about the ways that FDV can be carried across generations. A ST view would look at the whole: the whole family, the whole problem and all the associated issues within the family of which violence is only one part.

The second historical–personal story concludes this chapter.

Pattern Repeat

Circa 1996

When Josh turned 15 years old, I suggested that he go for his bronze surf lifesaving medallion at Bondi beach. Then he dared me to do it with him. I've always loved moving: action tricks my jangled nerves, never a day went by that

I didn't walk with Josh, or swim and play at the beach. The beach is my beautiful sanctuary, and, in the end, we both became certified Bronze Medallion lifesavers.

"Would you clean up your room please?" I asked Josh.

"Stop nagging me. I'm listening to my music."

"If you cleaned room, I wouldn't nag."

"I need money to buy new board shorts for next week's swimming carnival."

"Clean up your room, Josh, and we'll see," I pleaded. Seeing the flash of anger in his eyes shocked me. If looks could kill. I turned to leave the room. I felt a swift

movement behind my back. When I turned around to face Josh, he'd raised his fist above my head as if he wanted to hit me.

Circa 2013

She lay naked in the hospital's intensive care cot except for her nappy. Long tubes entangled my granddaughter's tiny body with a myriad of monitoring beeping machines. Masking tape plastered across her face fastened the tube down her throat. An arm splint secured the needle piercing her tiny hand. I spoke softly beneath the beeping sounds, "This is a tough day little girl." Merrin, the baby's mother, stood opposite me.

I barely knew her. Josh's relationship with her was as long as her pregnancy. I noticed Josh's anger leading up to the birth; at first it was road rage whenever we shared a car, then he would suddenly snap in temper or speak to me with contempt.

"Your next birthdays will be better, it's going to get better," I cooed to her as I stroked her tiny bare back with my fingers. She lifted her head and looked straight at me.

"Wow, she's listening to you!" Merrin exclaimed from the other side of the cot.

"When she comes home from a day with you her eyes sparkle like she's had the time of her life," Josh said when Ava was 12 months old.

"I'm her grandmother, I love playing with her on our day together. And I love giving her back".

"We're putting her in day care full time."

"Why?"

"She doesn't smile like that with us."

This story highlights the anger and confusion a child can have towards his mother when he has witnessed her abuse in his childhood and the disconnection that this can cause to next generations.

The following chapter discusses ST as central to my project and to the overall research because ST offers myself and others a new way of self-organisation: new forms of behaviour that are generated from within (Capra, 1997, p.85). Also, I review

examples of ST in the contexts that I have found useful and how ST can bring greater clarity and understanding to how wholeness can come about. These contexts include: The Work that Reconnects, Somatic Practice (SP), NLP, the Unconscious Mind, the Blind Spot, Family Constellations (FC), Theory U, and Creativity.

Chapter 3: Systems Theory

ST shows us that living systems are cognitive systems and living is a process of cognitions. This statement is valid for all organisms with and without a nervous system (Capra, 1997, p.97). In this research I am using ST to position FDV in relation to a living system such as a human being, a relationship or a community. All living systems have something in common – they have a pattern of organisation that produces its own organisation and maintains and constitutes itself in space (Diamond, 2007, p.45). The key conditions of ST were articulated in the 1930s by ecologists, gestalt psychologists, and biologists. The exploration of living system organisms led scientists to a new way of thinking about connectedness, relationships, and communities of organisms (Capra, 1995, p.95). The systemic properties of living systems are destroyed when a system is dissected into isolated parts (Capra, 1996, p.36). ST rejects the artificial mechanistic idea that the world is a machine that can be controlled and extracted from. This mechanistic view also regards the body as a machine and the mind as separate.

In science, the mechanistic paradigm that began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries includes an emphasis on quantification, introduced by Galileo Galilei, and on the human domination of nature, championed by Francis Bacon: the view of the material world as a machine, separate from the mind, advanced by French philosopher René Descartes; Newton's concept of objective, unchangeable "laws of nature"; and a rationalist, atomistic view of society promoted by John Locke. (Capra & Mattei, 2015, p.18)

In the mechanistic view of the universe, the structure is the material embodiment of a pattern. In ST view, *behaviours* create the structure, a pattern of behaviour is a concrete reality (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.33). Bruce H. Lipton PhD and medical biologist says,

The fundamental behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes we observe in our parents become "hard wired" as synaptic pathways in our subconscious minds. Once programmed into the subconscious mind, they control our biology for the rest of our live, unless we can figure out a way to reprogram them. (Lipton, 2008, p.154)

This is good news because we can change behaviours. Physicist Dr Fritjof Capra says the cornerstone of ST is patterns of interdependency. We enact, in the living networks of our human society, networks of communications involving language, culture, and community experience (Capra, 2007, p.15). The key criteria of a living system are:

1. Pattern of organisation: the configuration of relationships that determines the system's essential characteristics.
2. The structure: the physical embodiment of the system's pattern of organisation.
3. The life process: the activity involved in the continual embodiment of the system's pattern of organisation. (Capra, 1996, p.161)

In his book *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*, Capra describes systems (for example, the body or a relationship) as “the material embodiment of its patterns of organisation” and describes life process as “the continual process of this embodiment” (Capra, 2002, p.70, p.71). In this view, the patterns of behaviour in relationships create the structure and not the reverse, as “every living thing (single cell, vegetable, human, organisation, community, and every nation) is in a complex network of overlapping feedback loops or dialogues with the world” (Diamond, 2007, p.62). The structure is the material embodiment of the pattern (Capra, 2003, p.82). We can understand this best by looking at how it applies to a single cell in the process of autopoiesis.

Autopoiesis defines the chemistry of self-maintaining living cells. Auto means “self” and poiesis means “making”. It literally means self-making, and from the circular closure of the nervous system it is also self-referring so that perception cannot be viewed as a representation of the external reality but must be understood as the continual creation of new relationships within the neural network (Capra, 1996, p.96). A further elaboration by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, which has become known as “The Santiago Theory of Cognition”, argues that living systems are cognitive systems and living as a process is one of cognition. Beginning with a single cell, this scientific theory unifies mind, matter, and life, and mind and matter as process and structure, connected and inseparable (Capra, 1996, p.35). This view is also supported by foremost scientific thinker, philosopher and physicist David Bohm, who says that, “Both relativity and quantum theory agree, in that, they both imply the need to look on the world as an undivided whole, in which all parts of

the universe, including the observer and his instruments, merge and unite in one totality” (Bohm, 1980, p.13).

ST focuses on whole living systems, the parts, and the interdependence of the parts within the whole: our natural environment, the human body, family systems and relationships, organisations, or community groups can be seen to have a natural function towards their highest outcome (Capra, 1996, p.17; Senge, 1990, p.344).

When we embrace the metaphor of a “system” we shift from seeing ourselves as separate, to seeing patterns of interrelationships – ourselves connected to the world, and a holistic and ecological vision of life that sees the material world as a network of connected patterns of relationships (Capra, 2009, p.14).

Systems are difficult to see. All of us are in and surrounded by systems, so it is helpful to be aware of them. Above I have discussed ST in the field of science. In the following pages I briefly deliberate about other examples of ST in different contexts to further show how ST influences my work and is fundamental to reclaiming wholeness. These following examples of ST are included to highlight how systems can be made visible. Not seeing systems kept me trapped in FDV. Seeing ST allowed me to free myself from FDV and I share these examples with the hope that they may free others. I will first discuss *The Work that Reconnects*, a ST set of group processes to assist us to reconnect deeply with the natural world.

The Work That Reconnects

The Work That Reconnects is based on a sense of relationship with all of life. This way of thinking and perceiving can be called “Gaian consciousness” and is a gateway to liberation from the limited view of the small self (Macy, 2020, p.1). The founder of *The Work That Reconnects* – scholar, activist, and author of *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* – Joanna Macy, summarises the theories of

Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Ervin Laszo, Gregory Bateson, the cybernetician Norbert Weiner, the political scientist Karl Deutsch and others in response to the impending collapse of planetary systems at all levels. Macy writes that modern science’s discovery of this relatedness of all life phenomena (2020, p.170), where biologists began to look at wholes instead of parts and at processes instead of dissecting nature, found:

That wholes – be they cells, bodies, ecosystems and even the planet itself – are not just a heap of disjunct parts, but dynamic, intricately organised, and balanced systems, interrelated and interdependent in every movement, every function, every exchange of energy. They saw that each element was part of a vaster pattern, a pattern that connects and evolves by discernible principles.

The discernment of these principles is what is known as general systems theory. (Macy, 2020, p.171)

Although ST is science, I wasn't taught it at school. However, it has created brilliant breakthroughs in areas such as the environment, business, self-help, education, and the arts. For example, Macy merged ST with Buddhist teachings, creating insight into the truth of *pratityasamutpada* (interbeing), a term that Macy represents as “mutual causality” in her doctoral dissertation on dharma of natural systems (Abram, 2020, p.xii). Mutual causality is the notion that each autonomous thing leans upon everything else. Macy has created *The Work That Reconnects* to explore the deep ecology consciousness and process that reconnects humans with the environment. Francisco Varela, Chilean biologist, mathematician, philosopher, and co-creator of the concept of autopoiesis, says, “Until people can start to see their habitual ways of interpreting a situation, they can't really step into a new awareness” (as cited in Senge et al., 2004, p.45).

Currently human beings are consciously, and even more unconsciously (Macy, 2020, p.175), causing harm to the environment because we have separated ourselves from nature.

No one wants to produce the systemic outcomes that we consistently produce with layers and layers of systems on top of systems and yet that is almost the kind of archetypical definition of system intelligence – that is really systems ignorance. (Alto University, 2014)

One process from *The Work that Reconnects* that highlights our disconnection from nature and systems ignorance is called the truth mandala. In this process we make a circle, we make it sacred by telling our truth, we only speak if we wish to, and we keep it brief. The four quadrants of the circle are named for our feelings: fear, grief, anger, and hope (Macy, 2020, p.77). Objects are placed in these quadrants formed by two intersecting invisible lines – for example, a stone for fear, a pile of dead

leaves for grief, a stick for anger and the grass for hope. The premise is that once these feelings have been expressed, we have less reason to hang on to them.

I attended a *Work that Reconnects* workshop, exploring all things systems, in Margaret River, Western Australia in 2020. Without knowing what would happen in this process, I chose the stick; what came to mind immediately was memories of my mother beating me when I was a child. I realised in the process that those beatings made me leave my body. Separating from my body disconnected me also from nature. I had never previously made this connection. This simple process reached deep into my soul and in the safety of the sacred circle I wept for the loss. From an ST view, any movement toward wholeness begins with acknowledging our own suffering (Macy, 2020, p.78) and performing an honest audit on the impacts of those injuries as they have affected our lives and the lives of those around us (Senge, 1990, p.249). Until we do this we are disconnected from our present and disconnected from our environment (Maté, 2022, p.363). In a ST view of the *Work that Reconnects*, the truth mandala creates a structure to represent the whole and in doing so allows the disconnect from nature to be seen and felt, and connection to be regained.

In his keynote speech “Systems Thinking for a Better World” at the Aalto Systems Forum in 2014 Senge asks how do we fall in love again with the natural world? He says we need to expand our compassion, expand our empathy, and build a relationship based on mutual care (Alto University, 2014). This can be done because we are biologically predisposed to love (Maturana, 2008, p.325) and since we only mourn what we love, our sorrow is in equal measure to our love (Macy, 2020, p.78). Both Macy and Senge have processes where people who are interested in having Systems awareness come together to allow the structures of ST to work in their lives; “while trauma occurs in separation, healing happens in relation, where the inner dynamics of voice and expression play an important role in narrating a traumatic experience” (Hübl & Shridhare, 2022, p.9).

The archetypal system for human beings is the family. If we ponder for a moment the suffering that we may have witnessed firsthand in families – and that suffering could range from miscommunications, hurt feelings, bullying and many forms of abuse – I ask, is it anybody’s intention to hurt feelings or inflict abuse? And yet we consistently produce those outcomes. When we work with ST intelligence, we have awareness and respect for all parts, produce greater outcomes, allow growth,

regeneration and cause less harm. *The Work that Reconnects* allowed me to reconnect to life, and in doing so to also reconnect with and have more compassion for myself.

The following section introduces SP, NLP and the Feldenkrais Method (FM) as a vital part of this exegesis because they connect body–mind awareness to help survey the internal self and to listen to where the body is experiencing wholeness. This inquiry of exploring internal experiences has been used in my choreography processes with the focus of letting go of the oppression and trauma of lived FDV experience and a renewed focus on connecting with wholeness.

Somatic Practice

SP has become a buzzword in the health and wellness arena. The term *somatic* means “of or relating to the living body” (van der kolk, 2014, p.101), for example, somatic nervous system or somatic disorder. The word *soma* means “the body as perceived from within and the results of self-learning as somatic” (Hanna, 1990, p.1). The SP in this exegesis is FM, the choreography trainings I attended, and the workshops I created that are embodied processes that support wholeness. My SP also extends into the methodology section because Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), Theatre for Living (TFL) and Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) are all somatic.

FM is an ST view of physical movement. Moshe Feldenkrais – visionary, scientist and author of many books including *The Potent Self – A Study of Spontaneity and Compulsion* – states his fundamental theory that thought, emotion, sensation, environment, psyche, and soma must be addressed at the same time (Feldenkrais, 1949, p.xviii). Feldenkrais created a whole system to improve somatic movement and healing called Awareness Through Movement (ATM). This method is widely applied in medical, athletic, pedagogic, and artistic fields and is concerned with zooming in and out between detailed embodied inquiries and connecting to a broader contextualisation of an awareness of the “whole self” in relation to its social environment (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.149).

In the following paragraphs I introduce Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), a study of how language can be used to create success in life and learning, and a collection of processes designed to improve our communication with our body–mind system and others. While I only discuss NLP in this ST section and not in other parts

of the exegesis, NLP processes have been a major influence in my life and underlie and influence my thinking in the creation of my work.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming

Founded by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, NLP is the study of success and how we use language to influence our body–mind system. In his book *Sleight of Mouth – The Magic of Conversational Belief Change*, NLP trainer Robert Dilts extended their work by pointing out that the difference between people who respond effectively to life and the environment, as opposed to those who respond poorly in the world around them, is largely a function of their internal model of the world (Dilts, 1999, p.12). NLP acknowledges words are the surface structures that attempt to represent or express deeper structures in the internal world of an individual (Dilts, 1999, p.xi).

Through my ongoing NLP studies over the past 25 years, I have made many positive changes in my life. The biggest change happened at an accelerated change NLP workshop in Perth, Western Australian in 1999. I exchanged an NLP learning process with a piano teacher. The following weekend I attended a training with her and within a month I was accredited as a piano teacher. I taught piano to over 20 students a week for the next 13 years. NLP processes allowed me to begin to let go of past limiting decisions that were still influencing my present moments. NLP processes allow changes in the system, often replacing dis-ease, with ease: “A true Systems philosophy closes the feedback loop between the human being, their experience of reality, and their sense of participation in that whole cycle of awareness and enactment” (Senge, 1990, as cited in Scharma, 2018, p.90).

NLP is a mind- and internal-focused process. This research blends Feldenkrais and Somatic practice with my NLP training, thus accessing the deeper knowing of the body to create wholeness. I wanted healthy relationships, instead I only attracted nasty bastards. Once, in 1999, I attended NLP training and the trainer called me up on stage. He asked me what I wanted. “I want change,” I said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out some coins. He proceeded to tell me a story of a woman he knew who had this amazing talent. Whenever she met a group of 100 good men and in amongst them one bastard, she could find the bastard!

In ST view, *behaviours* create the structure (Varela et al., 2016, p.3; Diamond, 2007, p.46; Diamond, 2007, p.64; Feldenkrais, 1985, p.33). There is also a pattern of organisation and interdependency – the configuration of relationships that determines the system’s essential characteristics. This is tricky to understand – how does this interdependency occur? This has taken me a lifetime to understand, and I am struggling now to tease it apart as I write about this pattern of organisation that feels like an ethereal “field” interacting, together with an inner blind spot, the inner place (in my case “worthiness”) from my past. I became aware of it in a moment referred to in my first story *Beer and Bourbon* when my second husband was attacking me: “Fleetingly, I thought I saw my father’s face, and then in the shadows, I thought it was my previous partner, Joe’s face.”

In ST, in my understanding, the “field” and the blind spot interact in the *here* moment to recreate the patterned loop which is the continual embodiment of the system’s pattern of organisation. Somehow, I had behaved to create this I-find-a-bastard structure. I am sorry if this sounds crude, but this was my life. In this instance my inner patterned loop had recreated an unwanted repeated pattern.

As an NLP coach and trainer I can do the reverse of the unwanted pattern loop above. I can assist people to locate an unwanted pattern and create a new pattern instead so that they create positive experiences that they do want. By purposely mirroring a client’s movements and gestures, I can influence them with integrity to change their behaviours. For this commitment, I can reflect their embodiment, their posture, the tone, and timbre of their voice. I can copy their breathing and subtly mimic their hand gestures, and in this way gain rapport to assist and influence them to align their wants with their behaviours to achieve their outcomes.

The body is run by unconscious processes and controls the staple affairs of the human body. It controls our breathing, heartbeat, digestion, hormone levels, heals our skin when we cut ourselves, grows us from babyhood to adulthood and contains every thought emotion and belief we have ever had. These processes are important but hidden from our consciousness. I am not my thoughts. I have found it helpful to notice what thoughts arise, and when and where they come from. I became conscious that the sum of my thoughts was producing results in my life, results that I did not like. For this reason, I am including the unconscious mind in this ST section.

The Unconscious Mind

The unconscious mind controls all reflexive functions without the need to think about it (Freud, 1923, p.13). The unconscious mind perceives the world. We reflect on the world that is not made, but found, and yet it is also our structure that enables us to reflect upon this world. Thus, in reflection we find ourselves in a circle: we are in a world that seems to be there before reflection begins, but that world is not separate from us. (Capra, 2014, p.4) The human body–mind–spirit can be divided into three sects of consciousness: self-consciousness (our waking day-to-day reality), our unconscious or subconscious mind, and our superconscious or higher self.

The first level of the human mind is the analytical state of the mind, or conscious mind, that analyses then finally integrates the unconscious mind to interpret the meaning of reality; we can see what we do (results) and how we do it (process). We are usually not aware of the who: the inner place or source from which we operate (Sharma, 2022, p.24). Each part works together to help us comprehend and then reconstruct reality (Whitecloud, 2019, p.26). Mainstream consciousness seems to singularly notice Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) theory of personality (McCloud, 2013), which uses an iceberg to represent the three levels of mind. These levels interact to contribute to the human experience.

The conscious mind is represented best by the iceberg metaphor as the tip of the iceberg above the water. The unconscious mind and superconscious mind are below the water line, out of awareness. The unconscious or primitive mind is designed to keep you alive (Duncan, 2021, p.141). I came to know my own unconscious mind in a similar way to how Varela describes it: "We did not design our world. We simply found ourselves with it, we awoke both to ourselves and to the world we inhabit. We come to reflect in that world as we grow and live" (Varela et.al, 2016, p.3).

Our unconscious mind and body hold all our experiences, including our fears and limiting beliefs that we have accumulated throughout our lives, before and during our birth. Before our minds create the world, the world creates our minds. We then generate our world from the mind the world installed in us before we had any choice in the matter (Maté, 2022, p.366); then through the experience we resist fear instead of creating wholeness. Primitive consciousness recreates endless versions of itself,

only growing slowly beyond itself (Gilligan, 2012, p.49). According to Maté, a person who has experienced trauma will unconsciously recreate aspects of that trauma.

C.G. Jung was referring to this trauma-repeating phenomenon when he said, “What we resist, persists” in “The Psychology of the Transference”, a lecture he delivered in London in September 1936. Freud investigated the unconscious mind and saw repressed anger, sexuality, and repeating patterns:

For it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a “compulsion to repeat” proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts – a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients. All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner “compulsion to repeat” is perceived as uncanny. (Freud, 1919, p.237)

In contrast to Freud, American psychiatrist and psychologist Milton Erickson spoke of the unconscious containing an immense storehouse of life experience, habits, beliefs, and attitudes. I think that the human being in wholeness is not one static thing but a moving evolving process. Each person has their own unique version of an unconscious mind that represents their unique genius self together with their wounding and lived experience and their ever-living spirit. Stephen Gilligan Ph.D., NLP trainer, coach and generative change specialist sees the unconscious as a set of potentials. It is a set of possibilities and depending on how you connect with it, that creates it in a certain way. In his book *Generative Trance: The Experience of Creative Flow*, he says, “In strongly emphasising both the conscious and the creative unconscious minds, generative trance work is a bridge between the two worlds of infinite possibility and specific reality. Transformation is born on this bridge” (Gilligan, 2012, p.19).

In the processes of creating *Reclaiming Wholeness* workshops, I have intended to support participants access their unconscious fears (what I have labelled hurdle shapes that will be described in more detail in Chapter 5) and explore embodied wholeness. I have created my choreography processes by combining my experience as an NLP trainer, my experience as a dancer, my lived experience of

FDV, somatic practices, and my new awareness of my unconscious blind spots. This lived experience also helps participants to feel safe to explore their unconscious minds through the body and to know their blind spot (also known as resistance). In the following paragraphs I discuss the blind spot and how we can see it.

The Blind Spot

The current system that responds to FDV produces results that nobody wants. Below the surface of what we call the landscape of social pathology lies a structure that supports the existing structure – that structure is the blind spot (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p.44). If the essence of wholeness is connection to a deeper source of knowing, flow and creativity, then being in alignment to wholeness would feel connection to those things.

The blind spot is what is in the way of wholeness, the thing that is stopping you from having what you want. The blind spot is our old ego in the current self and anything in our inner self that blocks or resists knowing, flow and creativity. There is a blind spot. As mentioned in the previous section [The Unconscious Mind] for me, the blind spot was not seeing my worthiness. Freire also refers to this blind spot, saying that educators have often contributed to the fragmentation of knowledge with a reductionist view of “the act of knowing” (Freire, 2001, p.125).

Freire identifies educators who claim objectivity is an ideological fact, and in their blind spot deny the role of ideology in their work by “hiding” in what they regard as neutrality. In doing so they cannot evolve without self-knowing, self-criticism, scepticism, or contestation to find a more authentic and inclusive reading of the world. Even though we cannot see them, such assumptions still have a powerful influence on our experiences by keeping us stuck in reaction instead of responding in innovative ways. Edgar Schein, author of *Organisational Culture and Leadership*, defines culture as the assumptions we cannot see: “Culture is all around us but within us as well” (Schein, 2010, p.9). One of the greatest barriers to changing our behaviours, according to Maté, is seeing the blind spot.

If the heart is our best compass on the healing path, the mind – conscious and unconscious – is the territory to be navigated. Healing brings the two into alignment and cooperation, often after a lifetime of one hiding behind or being disregarded by the other. (Maté, 2022, p.365)

Not recognising our habitual ways of interpreting the outer systems that we live in is further complicated by not recognising the inner workings of our body–mind system and how those inner workings are interacting with the lived experience in the world. We experience the world as a social field; the quality of relationships in this field give rise to patterns of thinking, conversing, and organising which is a mix of our perceived subjective and perceived objective realities. This experience is not just cognitive; it is also a shared knowing between the viewer and the viewed (Hayashi, 2021, p.191). This place of perception between the inner and the outer world, between the subjective and objective, this subtle shift in how we see, sense, and relate to each other, to the system, and ourselves is the field – the place where a system can sense and see itself is the field (Hayashi, 2021, p.197).

The Field

The field is referred to throughout this exegesis as it is present in ST and wholeness. It's difficult to describe because it is invisible, it is experiential, it is connected to each of us, and we are a part of it. It is the space around us, and orientation in space is an essential function for any living organism (Feldenkrais, 2005, p.108). The field is not cognitive alone, it is a felt knowing, a resonance that oscillates between the subjective and the objective that is shared between the viewer and the viewed (Hayashi, 2021, p.190). Also in the field are the blocks to our experience of wholeness. Mark Wolynn, bestselling author of *It Didn't Start with You – How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle*, says that inherited traumas show up in our behaviours and in our relationships; and they also appear in our words (Wolynn, 2022, p.63). When we have an intention to notice the field, we can notice what is present, and this awareness enables the social system to feel its humanity and its own longing for health and wellbeing – for example, the *Work that Reconnects*, NLP sessions, FC, FM, Social Presencing Theatre, and Theatre for Living. Theory U describes the warming up process to get to the felt knowing in the field in ST, while FC and the *Work that Reconnects* use the device of setting the sacred circle. I think that the field is the space between behaviour and environment as articulated by Feldenkrais:

Behaviour and environment are a whole that cannot be subdivided and acted upon separately. The indefiniteness is inherent in the intricate

correlation of (1) the individual and (2) the medium of his existence, and only in words can we act on one first and on the other next. (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.36)

And I think the field is more. The awareness required to notice the field is different to everyday consciousness; it refers to a consciousness with kinaesthetic knowledge, a listening to oneself while acting, a way of feeling back to oneself the state of one's system in functioning (Feldenkrais, 2005, p.xv). I think the field is magic. It contains knowledge, lies, truths, ancestry lines and entanglements. I have experienced the reflection of my worthlessness painfully by friends and lovers. "And what am I in the end such that I can catch sight of myself outside of every particular act? I am a field; I am an experience" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p.42). Varela states, "Thus, in reflection we find ourselves in a circle: we are in a world that seems to be there before reflection begins, but that world is not separate from us" (Varela et al., 2016, p.3). The field interacts with the blind spot and the lived experience in the *here* moment to recreate the patterned loop that is the continual embodiment of the system's pattern of organisation. All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner "compulsion to repeat" is perceived as uncanny (Freud, 1919, p.237).

In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss Systemic Family Constellations (FC), a therapeutic process which draws on elements of family systems therapy, existential phenomenology and Zulu beliefs and attitudes to family. This section follows on and validates the experience of the field in the previous section. Information is sensed and felt in the field and transformed by being acknowledged. FC is important to my research question because it shines a light on the systems in families. Consistently, FC reveals how family members carry burdens from their ancestors over generations and this work confirms some of the ways that the trauma of FDV can flow through to present generations.

Family Constellations

Systemic Family Constellations (FC) is an embodied ST image-producing process in which people are placed in the space representing members of a family to read a dynamic from these related persons and release family trauma. FC is a specific way in which family trauma such as intergenerational FDV can be resolved. FC was

developed by German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger in the mid-1990s. FC therapy evolved out of his work as a family therapist and his belief in the energy (both positive and negative) found in familial bonds suggested individuals might unconsciously "adopt" these concerns as a way of helping other members to cope. Hellinger referred to the relation between present and past problems that are not caused by direct personal experience as systemic entanglements (Preiss, 2015, p.193). These are said to occur when unresolved trauma has afflicted a family through an event such as murder, suicide, death of a mother in childbirth, early death of a parent or sibling, war, natural disaster, emigration, or abuse. When entangled, you unconsciously carry the feelings, symptoms, behaviours, or hardships of an earlier member of your family system as if these were your own (Wolynn, 2022, p.46).

The premise of FC is that if a family member was left out, then in future generations the energy of the whole family will be disrupted. FC uses the body, the field, and awareness to notice the disruption, honour it through acknowledgement, witnessing and a conversation, thereby dissolving the disruption.

I was a representative in Bert Hellinger® FC work for three years in the late 1990s. The constellation serves the person to uncover the background of failure, illness, disorientation, addictions, aggression, longing for death and more. FC releases the old entanglements through embodiment, witnessing, and acknowledging conversation, so that our focus is redirected towards true love, and respect. The third historical personal story follows.

Mother's Constellation

My mother, Thea, chose FC for anxiety she'd suffered most of her life. Fifty years of Valium, time in mental hospitals where they gave her shock treatments, and now in her 70s, angst-ridden. Phillip, the facilitator, held space in the circle. He asked Thea to choose a person to represent her; she chose me.

Sensing the circle my gaze found the floor.

"Choose someone for mother, Tess, and father, Cedrick," Phillip said. Three family members' gazes found the floor.

“When representatives look to the floor, it means someone’s passed,” Phillip stated calmly to Thea sitting next to him. “As you look at them, can you think of anyone?”

“I was four years old, when my grandfather Angus died of influenza.”

“Okay, choose another representative for Angus.”

Thea chose an older man opposite her, and he lay on the floor. I started to feel incredibly sad; tears filled my eyes. Tess started to sob.

“There are more dead,” Cedrick said, clutching his heart.

I sat on the floor, looking near Angus. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s all your fault, Thea,” said Tess.

Phillip put his hand on Thea’s shoulder, offering support. “What’s happening here?” he asked.

“Influenza went through our town when I was four. My mother was sick in hospital, my father had to work. Angus was minding us, but he got sick too. It had been raining and I was playing with my two-year-old sister Mercia. She plunked down into a puddle, and we laughed. Later that week Angus and Mercia died. When my mother came home from hospital, she said ...”

“What did she say?” Phillip insisted.

“Get out of my sight; Mercia’s dead and it’s your fault.”

“Okay, thank you. Watch this.”

Phillip walked over to me sitting on the floor.

“Thea, look at Tess and say to her, ‘I’m sorry that Mercia died. I lost my little sister; it was not my fault. I give you back your blame and I walk free.’” I looked into Tess’s eyes and repeated the words. I felt the relief immediately. “I’m sorry too,” Tess said, tears streaming down her face. She came closer, taking my hands in hers. “It wasn’t your fault; I am sorry that I blamed you!”

“We see you and we acknowledge you,” Phillip said to the family.

“In witnessing the lost hopes and dreams caused by their passing we ask that your family finds peace,” continued Phillip.

FC acknowledges family trauma and disconnection to loving relationships. It allows for all parts of the family to be acknowledged and heard; in fact, FC insists on all parts of the whole family being acknowledged and its premise is that when any part of the family is left out the whole system is disrupted. The FC session with my

mother brought peace and my mother shared with us how much she loved that my sister and I gave her time for her experience to be heard. My mother felt relief as if she had laid down a great burden.

In the next section, I introduce Theory U, a process that delivers awareness of the field, a creative orientation and moves awareness towards wholeness when applied in stuck situations. I am using Theory U as a tool in my research because it was a process designed for the purpose of sensing the field in each problem situation, unearthing the blind spot, and drawing on the future possibilities from wholeness. The Theory U process allows a mapping of our deeper territory and shows what is happening in the underlying system.

Theory U

Theory U is a process that allows people to deal with their blind spot and shift their attention to the inner place from which they operate (Scharmer, 2018, p.42). Theory U allows for two principal insights: first a distinction between normal mental frames versus a deeper level of knowing and second an activation of the deeper level of knowing. Traditional organisation learning methods operate by reflecting on experience, where often experience was not helpful. When we stop and sense the emerging future, we have access to new possibilities. Theory U is a specific process that allows new possibilities, blending ST and innovation from the viewpoint of an evolving human consciousness (Scharmer, 2018, p.106). Are we reacting and responding out of fear? Or are we choosing an outcome we love, connected with self and nature, self and other, self, and spiritual for the highest future possibility? (Scharmer, 2018, p.25). To see the whole more easily, Scharmer developed Theory U by interviewing over 150 successful innovators around the world. Theory U comprises three main elements. Firstly, as a framework for seeing the blind spot of Systems change in leadership. Secondly, as a method of implementing awareness-based change through process, principles and practices. Thirdly, as a new narrative for evolutionary societal change, updating our mental and institutional operating systems in all of society's sectors (Scharmer, 2018, p.10).

According to Scharmer (2018) there is a blind spot in leadership and social change that concerns the inner place from which leaders operate. He asks, where do our actions come from? This blind spot is their "interior condition". The quality of

“how” we pay attention is a largely hidden dimension of our everyday social experience. This involves a shift of thinking from seeing problems outside of ourselves to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience. This is difficult to comprehend because the system seems to be “out there” and is difficult to see. Difficult but not impossible; when we make the system see itself we call it “dialogue”. For Scharmer, “dialogue” is not people talking to each other, “dialogue” is the capacity of a system to see itself and its own assumptions and patterns (Scharmer, 2018, p.37). Theory U require us to slow down, stop, sense the bigger driving forces of change, let go of the past, and allow the future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2018, p.26). The diagram below depicts Scharmer’s “Theory U: the Seven Ways of Attending and Co-shaping Core Principles and Applications” (Scharmer, 2018, p.5).

Figure 2

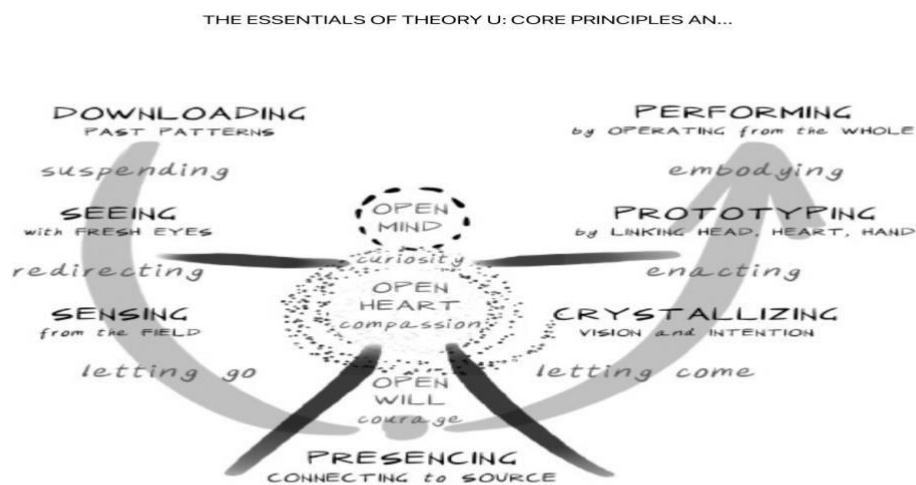


FIGURE 5: Theory U: Seven Ways of Attending and Co-shaping

The Essentials of Theory U

When we move down the left side of the U – suspending past patterns, seeing with fresh eyes, and sensing from the field – we allow ourselves to connect to the world outside of our personal bubble.

At the bottom of the U lies an inner gate that requires us to drop everything that isn’t essential. This process of letting go (of our old ego and current

Self) and letting come (our highest future possibility, our best future Self) establishes a subtle connection to a deeper source of knowing. The essence of presencing is that these two selves – our current Self and our best future Self – meet at the bottom of the U and begin to listen and resonate with each other. (Hayashi, 2023)

Then we move up the other side of the U to bring forth the new into the world – crystallising vision and intention, linking head, heart, hand, and operating from the whole.

The principles of Theory U are suggested to help political leaders, civil servants, and managers break through past unproductive patterns of behaviour that prevent them from empathising with the perspectives of others and often lock them into ineffective patterns of decision making. Theory U allows a creative process that moves to the edges of the system, connects to the deepest sources of knowing, and prompts us to explore the future by doing. This act of creation bypasses the need to fix the past or to fix the problem at all and brings instead conceptions from the future that we want. The now is the future when it comes from the inner source of our emotions, our identity and how we behave. When there is no difference between our identity in the current reality and our desired reality, there is no resistance (Duncan, 2021, p.121).

I use Theory U processes to support my creative methods for my workshops because it gives a working structure to strengthen my practice. In my research, I chose Theory U as a process to help me lead participants to develop their ability to become aware of themselves, their bodies, and the room.

Part of wholeness and reclaiming wholeness is creativity. This research project has been a delightful exploration into my own creativity and this vital component of my work is – as discussed in the following section – a vibrant part of wholeness. Creativity takes many forms in this research: writing, improvising (especially in Perth Improvised Practice or PIP), and designing original choreographic processes. I will use the examples of two bestselling writers to show how creativity – together with the intention to focus on what you want and the awareness of the blind spot/resistance pattern – can create what you want instead of being stuck in a state of FDV oppression.

Creativity

Two writers, Steven Pressfield (author of multiple bestsellers including the non-fiction works *The War of Art – Break Through the Blocks* and *Win the Inner Creative Battle*) and William Whitecloud (the bestselling author of *The Magician’s Way* and *Secrets of Natural Success: Five Secrets to Unlocking your Genius*) have insights into bridging this gap between resistance and wholeness. There are varying forms of resistance including, but not limited to, resistance to completing things, being successful, being present, showing up, and being all our wonderful selves. Pressfield labels the enemy of creativity “resistance”, his all-encompassing term for what Freud called “the death instinct” (Storr, 2001, p.66). This refers to that destructive force inside human nature that rises whenever we consider a tough, long-term course of action that might do something good for us or others (Pressfield, 2002, p.31). As adults, this “resistance” causes us to suffer creative blocks, depression, anxiety, addiction, or in FDV survivors “stuckness”, but it can be bypassed and wholeness can be found.

Resistance wants us to cede sovereignty to others. It wants us to stake our self-worth, our identity, our reason for being, on the response of others to our work. Resistance knows we can’t take this, because no one can. (Pressfield, 2002, p.92)

Like Pressfield, the main premise in the work of Whitecloud is that we live in a benign universe that naturally supports us in creating our best life possible and the highest version of ourselves, what Whitecloud calls us “pure creative spirit” (Whitecloud, 2019, p.32). Very similar to Pressfield’s “resistance”, Whitecloud calls whatever ways we sabotage ourselves, our dysfunctional orientation – our survival or egoic self made up of beliefs about the past and assumptions about the world. Instead of being in any given present moment, our dysfunctional orientation projects what we already believe about the world onto the present. This dysfunctional orientation self is a structure – it has integrity and nothing will be created by this consciousness other than a confirmation of these old beliefs (Whitecloud, 2021, p.9). Neuroscientists have found that the same part of the brain that becomes active when our physical survival is threatened also becomes active when our beliefs are challenged (Whitecloud, 2019, p.32).

For Whitecloud, focusing on what we want to create in the world is the way to connect to ST and to achieve our highest potential; our super conscious/higher self

is our pure creative spirit, the part of us connected to everything that extends beyond what we know through all time and space (Whitecloud, 2019, p.27). The concept of superconscious has been around since the early 20th century. William Walker Atkinson in his 1909 book *The Subconscious and Superconscious Planes of Mind* said,

There is always this impression or sense of the thought coming from *above*, although we may differ materially in our theories of ideas of what this “above” may be. From this above comes the inspiration of the artist, writer, poet, or sculptor – the inventor has testified that some of his ideas have come to him like flashes from the blue (Atkinson, 1909, p.97).

We can focus on being in or healing our dysfunctional egoic self (our individuation and separation from our super conscious/higher self/wholeness) or we can choose to focus on what we want to create and use our creativity to bring wholeness.

Conclusion

I have discussed ST in different contexts to outline how my use of ST in this research can transform the lived experience of FDV. I have explained how *The Work that Reconnects* systems view relinks us to the relatedness of all life phenomena. I have included SP and the FM as a specific way that I have explored the inner place of my body. I have discussed ST of the mind with NLP, the unconscious mind, and how the field exists in our experience as well as the ST specifics of Theory U and creativity. I have included personal stories about my FC experience and my connection to aspects of intergenerational FDV. These examples of ST applications show my novel use of ST along with SP to transform the lived experience of FDV and reclaim wholeness.

The following chapter, Methodology, focuses on practice-led research methodology that is primarily based in social justice theatre, namely Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). This is a foundation of Theatre for Living (TFL), an ST based theatre and Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) that is also an ST performance-based theatre practice.

Along with these practices I will also discuss the Enquiry cycle from Action Research, the use of shapes and gestures within my Action Research and the importance of reflective practice with these methodologies.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology I used to critically evaluate my research question needed to be steeped in ST and SP to explore the relationship between the lived experience, the body and the environment. To that end I have trained in multiple methods: TFL with creator David Diamond in Bangalore, India at the Centre for Dialogue and Change (2018); TO with Rob Pensalfini, founder and director of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble in Brisbane, Australia (2019); and SPT with Arawana Hayashi at the Presencing Institute in New York (2023).

Theatre has been shown to be effective in the treatment of trauma (van der Kolk, 2014, p.235) because it is embodied, imaginative, playful, collaborative and community building. For this reason, I focused on TFL and SPT as the best fit for my methodology and they are described more fully in this chapter. Since facilitation of any kind was initially a terrifying concept for me, I knew I needed to overcome this fear to feel whole. To that end TO trainings provided self-development as a Joker/facilitator, which is part of the creative practice component of this exegesis. I also discuss TO in this research because it is one of the foundations of TFL. I used TO in its original form and in terms of its somatic and aesthetic benefits. The focus of this exegesis and its methodologies are ST, SP and autoethnography. While TO has subsequently been appropriated within the field of Applied Theatre (AT) AT is not the focus of my work.

Augusto Boal's TO is based on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's work focuses on lived experience and reciprocal learning, it is based on the principle that you cannot have power, such as corporal punishment, over a student and expect the student to learn (Freire, 1992, p.13). For Freire the student is not an empty vessel that you can fill up with knowledge, so true learning occurs when the lived experience of the student is used, appreciated, and respected in a reciprocal relationship with the teacher. TO extends that same respected and reciprocal relationship with participants.

The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action! (Boal, 1995, p.155).

My focus is on noticing and honouring the knowledge of the lived experience the women in my groups bring to my workshops and performance (Freire, 1994, p.49), but unlike TO my work also includes the views of the oppressor.

In the following section I describe each theatre mode in more detail starting with TO, followed by TFL and then finally SPT. This progression of these social justice theatres is important because it shows more fully how the ST in TFL and SPT contribute to my use of ST. Since TFL uses TO's games and exercises as its base, to fully show the benefits of TFL, I must first discuss TO.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Legendary Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal developed Theatre of the Oppressed – a series of imaginative theatre exercises promoting awareness of one's social situation and its limitations, and our individual attitudes. Boal was inspired by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1992, p.49; Diamond, 2007, p.15).

One of Freire's most procreative ideas was that education is always a political act functioning either as a "practice of liberations" or a "practice of domination". In the case of "domination" that propagates exclusion and injustice, there is a hierarchical relationship where the teacher is the authority who deposits knowledge into the student as in a "banking system". According to Freire, the banking concept implies an assumption of a dichotomy between the world and the human being – a person is in the world, not with others or with the world. He says that "in this view, the person is not a conscious being (*conscientisation*); s/he is the possessor of a consciousness: an empty mind passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside" (Freire, 1992, p.56).

In opposition to the education model of his time, Freire proposed that education needs to be a "practice of freedom" (1970, p.53). In this way, students are present in the learning experience, engaged and connected to the process of building on what they know and, at the same time, co-creating and constructing conditions for social transformation and open dialogue.

Boal created TO by applying Freire's concepts of "liberation" for education to theatre. In doing so, he created a tool to open dialogue in areas of conflict resolution, social change and political activism, and to tackle oppression. Also, a major tenet of

Boal's TO is committed to ideological analysis where the body is inscribed by oppression from "social distortions" imposed on it by oppressors' ideological discourses (Boal, 1985, p.126). Because the mechanisms of oppressions shape the body, it is through the body and its habits that those mechanisms can be exposed and must be overcome before the body can become expressive in performance (Boal, 1985, p.127).

Forum Theatre is a component of TO that transforms spectators into "spect-actors" (Boal, 1979, p.150). The spectators in the audience are free to come onto the stage and take part in the action. In Forum Theatre the spectator frees herself, thinking and acting for herself by becoming the "spect-actor" (Boal, 1979, p.155). Boal considered TO as a theatre of struggle: "A theatre OF the oppressed, FOR the oppressed, ABOUT the oppressed and BY the oppressed" (Boal, 2006, p.106).

TO has been used as an apparatus for change in social and political conflict resolution and, over time, Forum Theatre has been used in Applied Theatre (AT) contexts and in educational institutions. It has gained recognition because of its aims of challenging behaviour, personal and social development (Hughes, 2004, p.57), working with trauma (Bundy, 2006, p.7), and in prisons (Pensalfini, et al., 2019).

Boal was passionate about his work and he continued working until the day he died (2 May 2009) at 78 years old. He knew oppression; he was imprisoned, tortured, and exiled from his country, and yet he believed in wholeness and drawing possibilities from our future. In an interview with Democracy Now in 2005 he said,

If we believe that's the way it is, like fatalistically, then nothing is going to happen. I believe that with TO, in the present, we have internalised the past. The past is not to analyse or contemplate, but we need to think about the future. If we have in our mind that everything can be transformed – then another world is possible – everything is possible. (Boal, 2005)

The next section discusses TFL and how its creator David Diamond – a Canadian actor and theatre practitioner who worked with Boal for over 20 years – applied ST to TO to create TFL.

Theatre for Living

Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to give a voice to the oppressed. Theatre for Living transforms TO by adding the voice of the oppressor to the dialogue, and in doing so

addresses the whole social issue of the oppressed, the oppressor and the environment (Diamond, 2007). TFL is a social justice community-based theatre technique that opens dialogue and combines TO's symbolic language of theatre and the science of ST. Using the TO games, which are experiential and symbolic (Diamond, 2007, p.177), TFL seeks to create community-based dialogue in oppressive situations to air different points of views and generate compassion. Generating compassion opens further possibilities, allowing creativity to help us face difficult social issues in the communities in which they occur.

After attending Diamond's TFL facilitator training in Bangalore, India in January 2018, I also attended his climate change workshop "Two Degrees of Fear and Desire" along with 60 other participants. The workshop began with games, then people told stories about climate change and about the things they wanted to change. Three stories were selected and from those stories the group chose one. A young student teacher had attempted to get her principal to help her integrate a change where instead of using hundreds of paper cups each day, students, staff, and teachers all bought their own cups and reused them any time they had a drink. David asked the young teacher to set up a tableau (an image using participants) that represented the scene with the principal and a student. He asked the teacher to represent her fears and desires using participants that she chose from the audience. After she had shaped the participants into images on stage, Diamond asked, "Is there any other image or shape that is not being represented here and needs to be here?" Another young woman came forward and laid at the feet of the image. She put her hands over her eyes and said, "It's too fucking hard. I don't want to look!"

Diamond then suggested that if we as "spect-actors" felt that we resonated strongly with any of the shapes on the stage we should come and join them. I resonated strongly with the woman on the floor, so I got up and laid on the floor next to her. So did 46 others in the audience. It was a powerful moment, but also a funny one, about a serious topic. We all laughed. Lying on the floor covering my face saying "it's too hard. I don't want to look" seemed funny at the time but it was a relief to express that. After the exercise, we reflected on the difficulties, but no real "solutions" were found.

As I sit here typing I realise that in the five years since my time in Bangalore, I have rarely, if ever, bought a takeaway coffee in a paper cup with a plastic lid. I did not do this through trying not to do it – my behaviour changed as a result of that

tableau exercise. I also realise with amazement that I was socially activated by that TFL training with Diamond. In January 2018 I registered my business, Theatre Games Australia, and have been running my own TFL courses as a “Joker” ever since. A Joker in TO and TFL is not a facilitator, but a “difficultator”, who creates a safe space for participants to enter disequilibrium (Diamond, 2007, p.172). This disequilibrium, where people find themselves taking risks and are a little off balance or disturbed, is where creativity exists in the collective system (Capra, 2003, p.112). I have also connected to TO and TFL Jokers globally and feel that I am an empowered agent for change for myself and my community.

Bessel van der Kolk, Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and President of the Trauma Research Foundation in Brookline, Massachusetts (2018) says a big problem with victims of trauma is that they identify the trauma as who they are and that after trauma the world is experienced with a different nervous system (van der Kolk, 2014, p.53). His work focuses on how theatre can be used to help people step out of the victim role and into a new identity. In his 2018 plenary at the third International Childhood Trauma Conference in Melbourne, he told a story of a workshop rehearsal he attended at a Shakespearean theatre program for trauma in his hometown in Massachusetts. The play was *Hamlet* and a young trauma victim was playing Ophelia.

Director (*to young girl*): I want you to go into the pool, drown yourself and then Hamlet will come to you, pick you up and carry you out.

Girl: Oh no! He can't, I am an incest victim and I can't have any man touch me.

Director: Actually, you are Ophelia, and you are dead.

Girl: Oh, in that case, he can pick me up and carry me out.

(van der Kolk, 2018)

According to van der Kolk, the focus of therapy and psychotherapy has always been to tell your story and mediate how you feel about the story. He finds that theatre brings about more therapeutic effects and restoration through playful interaction and connection with others:

We don't exist by ourselves; we are human primates and interactive creatures. We have brains to interact with each other. All mental disturbances are expressed in a failure of synchrony between organisms

and so the restoration of health is the restoration of synchrony of human beings. (van der Kolk, 2018)

TFL allows communities to explore social issues where they are positioned as the experts in the field the people with the lived experience of the issue. While TFL has many applications, in this research I am focusing solely on FDV.

Traumatized people are afraid of conflict. They fear losing control and ending up on the losing side once again. Conflict is central to theatre – inner conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, family conflicts, social conflicts, and their consequences. Trauma is about trying to forget, hiding how scared, enraged, or helpless you are. Theatre is about finding ways of telling the truth and conveying deep truths to your audience. This requires pushing through blockages to discover your own truth, exploring, and examining your own internal experience so that it can emerge in your voice and body on stage. (van der Kolk, 2014, p.335)

Discovering your own truth and finding your voice and body is an important part of reclaiming wholeness after trauma. Trauma devastates the social engagement system and interferes with cooperation, nurturing, and the ability to function as a productive member of a clan (van der Kolk, 2014, p.349). Functioning as a productive member of a clan involves embracing the idea of here and now and being present in the present. When a TFL participant creates their story of oppression in a workshop in the form of a theatre play, they are bringing their “there” (a past traumatic event to “here” to be witnessed and to practice taking a different, more empowering action. In this way they get where they want by starting from here.

TFL recognises that the oppressor is an authentic part of the system and is part of the living community; it reveals the patterns of behaviour within the system between the oppressed and the *represented* oppressor. TFL does not condone the actions of oppression, but acknowledges that the oppressed and the oppressor are connected as legitimate members of a living organism thereby allowing dialogue to take place between them. TFL and TO both use Forum Theatre (an interactive theatre where spectators become actors) and Rainbow of Desire (a process that creates characters out of participants’ fears and desires) as the main vocabulary for psycho-therapeutic investigation. Rainbow of Desire is a therapeutic tool and theatre game that activates layers of subtext of communication by creating images of the protagonist’s (i.e., the oppressed) inner demons and desires. It is a technique

designed to create a deeper understanding of what drives the behaviours of the oppressed. TO only focuses on the oppressed in the Rainbow of Desires exercise, while TFL also creates the oppressor's Rainbow (Diamond, 2007, p.189).

Extending the Rainbow of Desire to both the protagonist (oppressed) and the antagonist (oppressor), Diamond's TFL created the possibility of a deeper dialogue between the two sides within the FDV issue for the audience. By recognising the oppressor in this way, we can find deeper understanding of the causes of FDV and new knowledge that may transform the way we communicate within relationships. This inclusion of the other view. (the oppressor) moves away from "us and them" thinking to consider the whole system – the interconnections between us and them – and the complexity of life (Diamond, 2007, p.40). This action brings deeper compassion and understanding, as "if we embrace the ideas inherent in ST, it becomes apparent that the oppressor and the oppressed are not only linked, but they are an inseparable part of the same network and sometimes the same organism" (Diamond, 2007, p.63).

When Boal started his TO work, the oppressor was the fascist state power in his home country of Brazil. Over his career he explored the oppressor in our own limiting and inherited, internalised beliefs which he called "cops in the head" (Boal, 1995, p.137). Diamond has extended the exploration to oppressed/oppressor in TFL with an ST premise that recognises the interconnection and synchrony between people and their environment. TFL is a way for collective social action, artmaking, storytelling, opening dialogue, and of people feeling and being in sync with each other – all of which form a critical part of healing from trauma and a critical part of life. I experienced this collective social action in person when I met David Diamond at the Centre for Dialogue and Change in Bangalore. The Centre had been engaged with their community creating TO for the past 10 years and were interested in TFL and opening further dialogue around FDV. Whenever Diamond responded to the language used by members of the TFL ensemble in India, he consistently reframed the participants' language towards what they wanted. During this training Diamond told me that after working with TO that focused on the oppressed moving away from what they didn't want, he felt they just ended up getting even more of what they didn't want. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire also identifies how the oppressed, in wanting to move away from being oppressed, become what they don't want – the oppressor, saying, "But almost always, during the initial stage of the

struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” (Freire, 1992, p.22).

The most important dialogue is dialogue amongst the oppressed and with those in alliance with the oppressed. This is the dialogue I encourage in my TFL workshops with women who have successfully extricated themselves from FDV by three to five years and who have applied the knowledge of that successful exercise to their lives. According to Boal, “It’s not about convincing the oppressor to behave better but creating power to have a counter power” (Boal, 2020).

In his book, *Theatre for Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*, Diamond weaves Systems science into theatre, together with new understandings that life and living networks are self-generating (Diamond, 2007, p.16). TFL views the world through an ST lens and recognises that the binary of the oppressed and oppressor are part of the same organism living in some kind of dysfunction (Diamond, 2007, p.38). To investigate the root cause of the oppressed, TFL also makes space to investigate the motivations, fears, and desires of the oppressor. The challenge of TFL is to move beyond the individual and work with the living community. When we trust the knowledge in the room (a microcosmic representation of the whole), we trust that it is connected to the knowledge of the larger community. Or as Diamond puts it, “The room has the answers. Always” (2007, p.181).

To increase the ST awareness in my TFL practice, I will evolve the positive focus on what we want. A person brings their history with them, sometimes unconsciously. Awareness of language is one important tool for the creation of positive focus. For example, in a TFL workshop that I co-facilitated I witnessed a participant who sculpted an image using the bodies of the other actors to represent herself and her husband in an FDV situation.

Facilitator: (*touching the woman on the head*) What do you want?

Woman: I want him to stop yelling at me.

Facilitator: That’s what you want him to do. What do you want?

Woman: I want to speak my mind (Ron & McDonald, 2018).

In the above example, the facilitator directs the woman’s language using a TFL process designed to keep the intention focused on what she wants. Another example

is in the TO Pushing Exercise in which Boal instructs participants to “push – using all of your strength and still not winning” (Boal, 1992, p.65). In the TFL version of this exercise, Diamond also instructs participants but the difference in his language is informative: “Push, one of you is going to be stronger – that’s life, find the balance of strength between you” (Diamond, 2007, p.88). In my practice, I instruct participants with “push, find your point of power”, thereby presupposing that they will find a place of strength within themselves or “lean in and find support”. This distinction demonstrates how I intend to combine my lived experience with my TFL practice to reframe language and hold a positive language space within the workshops I facilitate. My research with women who have experienced FDV goes back to the roots of Freire treating these woman/TFL participants as co-creators of knowledge. Together we co-create movement, theatre games, and art. This sets TFL apart from TO and makes the work therapeutically safer and empowering.

Theatre in the time of COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023) put my theatre practice on hold. The lockdowns interrupted my studies, and my professional workshops at Uniting WA in Fremantle, Western Australia with First Nations women who had experienced FDV. While I hoped for a future where we could resume this important, embodied practice and I could have the opportunity to learn from my TO and TFL colleagues in person, during that time I continued to listen and learn from leaders in the field via Adrian Jackson’s podcasts *Cardboard Citizens* in which he interviewed Jokers like Julian Boal (Paris), Barbara Santos (Germany), David Diamond (Canada), Sanjoy Ganguly (India), Katy Rubin (UK) and Kok Heng Leun and Koh Hui Ling (Singapore) in an online format.

Given that both TFL and TO use a Joker as kind of facilitator, I will explore the concept of this role in the following section.

The Joker

The Joker in both TO and TFL is a facilitator who moves in between the theatre action and the audience (spect-actors). They assist the action so that the spect-actors – who are both members of the audience as well as actors – may choose to

come up and replace an actor in a play. At this point the Joker role transforms from a workshop facilitator into provocateur and theatre director (Diamond, 2007, p.82).

Forum Theatre – a TO technique that is also used in TFL – does not have a written script, and thus never a predetermined outcome because the audience interacts in the event. It begins with the enactment of an anti-model (a situation that ends with a crisis) in which the protagonist tries, unsuccessfully, to overcome an oppression that is relevant to the audience. The Joker's first role is "protagonic" – that is, they are like a character who interacts between the action and the audience where "on stage s/he makes all the explanations, verified in the structure of the performance" (Boal, 1985, p.182).

After the depiction of the crisis, the Joker invites the spect-actors to come on stage and take the place of the protagonist at any point in the scene where they can imagine an alternative action that may create a solution. The scene can be replayed any number of times with different spect-actors intervening, which results in a dialogue or a witnessing of the oppression, and a rehearsal of solutions for real-life situations.

The role of the Joker is complex and can be influenced and influencing in different ways. In TO interventions, the Joker tends to move away from what they didn't want. In contrast, TFL understands that living systems change and grow not because they are made to by outside forces but because they choose to. The TO Joker takes the side of the oppressed; Boal stipulated that the Joker, "after having chosen the oppressed side" (2006, p.104), gets them to move away from what they don't want. The empowerment of the oppressed cannot be an end unto itself; by listening to both sides of the dialogue and the Joker being unbiased, I think we have a better chance of understanding the whole issue and changing the patterns of behaviour that create the structure (Diamond, 2007, p.64). The TFL Joker looks at the whole picture and asks both the oppressed and the oppressor, what do you want? The Joker also influences the work in the way they hold the space for participants. Each Joker brings with them their own lived experience. In my role of Joker, I bring my lived experience of FDV to my workshops and I feel that gives me shared knowledge with my workshop participants.

Becoming a Joker in TO and TFL has been an exhilarating journey of intention and awareness. These social justice theatres that enable people to bring their own stories to life have given me insight into human relationships. At the same

time, I have been immersing myself into the embodied place of the FM and choreography workshops. After I completed my workshops and performances, I was pleased to discover SPT as an embodiment practice that deepens reflection and supports awareness-based individual and social ST transformation. In the following section I discuss Social Presencing Theatre and how this embodiment practice supports social ST transformation.

Social Presencing Theatre

Social Presencing Theatre is an embodied, social, arts-based change methodology developed under the leadership of Arawana Hayashi for making current reality visible and exploring emerging future possibilities. Hayashi (innovator, performer, creator of SPT and author of *Social Presencing Theater – The Art of Making a True Move*) has uncovered a link between embodiment, awareness, and social systems. SPT is a process in which people learn to use their bodies to explore, individually and collectively, what the mind can never fully grasp – the intricate social structures we humans create and become stuck in.

A premise of SPT is that basic goodness is the fundamental nature of ourselves, others, and society itself. Goodness in the sense of wholeness and healthiness, the unconditional wholesomeness that lives in us all (Hayashi, 2021, p.10). NLP has a similar premise: people are doing the best that they can. SPT invites us to tap into our natural creativity and ability to fully embody the “performance” of being human. It is a set of embodiment activities and reflections that support personal transformation, social creativity and systems change (Hayashi, 2021, p.xx). SPT got its name from Scharmer, and the words describe what it is. Social refers to both the social body (the physical arrangement of a group of people in a space) and the social field (the quality of the relationships between the people). Presencing relates to awareness and a larger sense of the environment. This practice is social because it is engaged in by groups and teams (Scharmer, 2021, p.5).

While TO and TFL are theatre without scripts, the stories come from participants; SPT is all about the body in movement, without words. It is also about the social space in between and around the bodies. I find this important because for me FDV happens not just in the communication, not just in the words that couples

say to each other, there is something else going on in the space around the bodies. SPT is not theatre in the conventional sense, it uses simple body postures, movements, and spatial design to dissolve limiting concepts and communicate directly to access intuition. It also makes visible both current realities, and the deeper, often invisible, leverage points for creating profound change. SPT can reveal insights for individuals, team, organisations, and larger social systems. It is one of the most important and effective methods developed by the Presencing Institute. The practices have been used for over 15 years in business, government, and civil society settings in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the United States.

I signed up for online training with Hayashi for three days in January 2023. The event explored recognising our own healthiness, heartfulness, and connection to possibilities. Key themes were: grounding; having an open mind, open heart and open will to suspend beliefs; considering all sides of the issue being explored; letting go of old thoughts; and letting new possibilities come.

On the first day we did a 20-minute dance that started with us lying on the floor in a still shape and asking the body what movement the body would like to make, while allowing the mind to be in the background. Resting the body in stillness, feeling the quality of the shape, what would this shape want to do? What is the feeling quality of the shape? My body wanted to rock backwards and forwards in a soothing motion. After this process I experienced a deep sense of feeling grounded. Below my toes, the soles of my feet, my back body, and the back of my calves and thighs were tingling – this was a new awareness for me. During the training we explored other processes including the Village, the Duet, *Ma* exercise and the Stuck. The Village practice is one that explored the social field. In SPT a social field describes a social system that we collectively enact, for example, a family, a team, an organisation. This process explores and illuminates the interiority of the system (the first person) and the exterior (the third-person view). The Duet is a powerful process of listening to the body, noticing the body of another, and opening an embodied dialogue in the shared space. *Ma* is a Japanese term that means the gap, the space in between things. In a *Ma* moment we spent five minutes observing self, noticing what was taking place and finding a quiet mind (Hayashi, 2021, p.111). The Stuck exercise is a process of making a shape to represent “stuck”, and then allowing the body to find healthfulness by creating a new shape to change the Stuck experience, getting new insights in the process. Other processes included in the SPT

training were: The Seed Dance, Field of the Future, A Journaling Practice, and 4-D Mapping.

I particularly loved the Stuck process, perhaps because it is not a problem/solution method. It is about how we attend to this shape with clarity/heart/sense – the shape has something to say. Think of a “Stuck” in your life and make a shape that represents that Stuck. The qualities of the Stuck is that the Stuck is not a problem but is part of creativity. A Stuck is not you; it is discovering patterns. We are all full of wisdom. No one is stuck by themselves. A Stuck is an invitation to listen and learn. A Stuck is not sustainable and a Stuck knows what it wants – the body will move towards potential (Hayashi, 2023).

The next historical personal story in this creative writing series is about one of my experiences of a Stuck.

Circa 1962

“You’re such a stupid little girl,” the fireman said.

I’m four years old visiting my grandmother. My uncle lives here. I’ve pushed my head hard in between the wrought iron, spearheaded bars that make up the front fence of her house in Bondi Junction, Sydney. My head is stuck.

Her name was Myra Murphy but I called her Granny. Her puffy red face glowed and she grimly looked down on me over her glasses. Her wide backside fit snugly into the recliner that she spent much of her day seated and knitting in. She rested her knitting needles on her large chest. Knit, purl, knit, purl, the loops beat across the knitting needle faster than the tick tock ticking of the tall wooden grandfather clock that towered behind her. She had long grey hair that fell all down her back when she brushed it at night. Daily she rolled long plaits in tight scrolls at the back of her head. I moved in behind her elbows, I learnt not to get in front of her.

“He hurts me in the night-time.”

She just kept knitting, for a moment we both watched the wool slip over her fingers. I wanted her to look at me, but she didn’t. A little while later she was at the stove boiling some water for her tea. She called me over to her.

“Yes Gran.”

“Come up here,” she said, pulling a kitchen chair near the stove. I climbed up onto the chair next to her curiously, wondering what I would see.

She snatched my hand and pulled it into the gas flame for a second burning my fingers.

“You better learn to shut your mouth, stupid girl.”

The first time the fireman came to help free me, he was kind, the second time he didn't say much at all, it was this time when he arrived and he saw that I had done it again, he shook his head and he said, “You're such a stupid little girl.”

Looking back, I know I was trying to get help. I couldn't find the words, so I used my body. When help didn't help, I decided that people could be cruel, and I decided “life's hopeless. I give up. I want to die”. My childhood experiences led to me wanting to let go of that awkward stuck feeling and have what I'd lost – wholeness.

This story shows my four-year-old body was not just stuck, it was seeking help because I didn't have the words. My body had intelligence. It also shows decisions about life in childhood are powerful. In my opinion, those decisions contributed to my FDV experiences and my blind spot later in life. In the following section I discuss practice-led research, the model of the autoethnographic research that I chose to work with and my reasons for doing so.

Practice-led Research

Practice-led research affirms dance performance as a research outcome (Haseman, 2007, p.222). Practice-led research is

initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners. (Gray, 1996, p.3)

As a Joker, I will be writing a critical, philosophical commentary on the development of my Joker practice. This, in tandem with the development of my choreography and performance skills and the journey toward my choreographer self, is a unique and important part of my personal and artistic development.

This project will follow the research question model by investigating a single question in two languages (Barrett & Bolt, 2010, p.8) – creative practice and an

exegesis. Using methods predominantly and specifically familiar to TFL and SP (Gray, 1996, p.3) I will track the work using these three tools: action research; shapes and gestures; and reflective practice.

Action Research

Action research has been involved in multiple layers of this project. Action research moves qualitative research beyond the representational towards the presentational (Denzin, 2003, p.xi), enabling theatre, performance, dance, and creative writing to represent claims to knowledge (Norris, 1997, pp. 87–115). Action research is considered “messy” and has reshaped debates about scientific discourse and the meaning of research itself (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p.7).

As an artistic researcher, it is through my practice that I can make tangible the theoretical by making the connection between the actual and the virtual, the objective and the subjective, the technical and the creative, the body and the mind. (Reid, 2007, p.77)

Action research is performative research. The action research process inaugurates movement and transformation. It is performative (Haseman, 2007, p.218); it not only expresses the research but, in that expression, becomes the research itself. When research findings are presented as such performances, they too perform an action and are appropriately named “performative research” led by practice (Haseman, 2007, p.222). Performance-led research allows for multi-modal ways of thinking, doing, questioning, and recognising subjective, artistic processes and collaborative modalities that challenge the idea of the solitary researcher (Barrett & Bolt, 2007, p.217).

Action research is apparent in my facilitation of monthly TFL workshops and the choreography workshops I conducted towards the creation of my performance. In my TFL workshops I devised and revised my work in an enquiry cycle of self-reflection and group reflection. This cycle of action – acting, observing, and reflecting – is fundamental to action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003, p.381). Each workshop provided opportunities for me to gather shapes and gestures, photos, videos, and community collaboration as I held space and witnessed others. Each workshop allowed me to collect shapes and gestures that came from the participants in the movement inquiry to be used later to choreograph the performance.

Shapes and Gestures

In all my theatre trainings (TO, TFL and SPT) the body is vital. In warm-ups, theatre games, and theatre action the shapes and gestures our bodies make hold much of the emotional language of the work. Without speaking, the participants make a shape using as much of their body as possible; this shape is a fragment of the performance (Diamond, 2007, p.186). The shape becomes a character that is not the protagonist per se, but a fragment of the protagonist's whole. It becomes a focused character that wants a specific thing that is embodied by the shape.

Often a shape will also have a gesture. Diamond says, "I always do a lot of gesture work in every workshop" (Diamond, 2007, p.107). In Bangalore, India (2018) at the TFL training with Diamond, I was called to play an oppressive uncle (the antagonist) of a young woman (the protagonist). As the actor in that moment, I made a shape for that character. The shape I made gave me access to the character. Once I embodied the character, my body allowed for a minute gesture to be revealed, a slight movement of the chin. I remember David pouncing on the gesture. "What was that?" he asked quickly. I responded, "I don't know." At first, I didn't think my character knew what the gesture meant, but on reflection, my character noticed that with the chin movement, he also looked up and thought, *I own her!* My character looked at his niece who was wanting an apology for his past behaviour and said, "No, I do not apologise for anything, I own you". This important fragment came out of my character's shape for the participants and audience to see. The audience let out a gasp. This information was a hidden piece of the family structure that was never spoken about.

We find shapes and gestures in every culture, including yogic and religious cultures. The simple gesture of placing the hands together in a prayer position is a universal signal. Body shapes – movements made with hands, head, or face to show a particular meaning, feeling or intention and slightly anticipate speech – reveal utterance in their primitive form (McGilchrist, 2009, p.189). When a person taps their temple with their forefinger it could mean different things – "intelligent" or "crazy". Both opposing meanings could be conveyed in the same motion, for "psychological gesture aims to influence, stir, mould and attune your whole inner life to its artistic aims and purposes" (Chekhov, 1991, p.66). These movements do not merely reflect

thought but help constitute thought. According to McGilchrist, without the thought the gesture would be altered or incomplete (2009, p.190).

In my choreography workshops I am using the body to make shapes in the context of lived experience of FDV. Gestures are an essential extension to the shapes and add intricate important pieces of information when they arise. The gesture is primal (Diamond, 2009, p.105) and all the reasons outlined above make shapes and gesture important to my project: “We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might almost say in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by no one, and understood by all” (McGilchrist, 2009, p.189).

In our embodied shapes and gestures process we can learn new things, share our ideas, and create artful community. Some take the linking of gesture even further. George Lakoff, author of *Philosophy of the Flesh*, tells us “[w]e cannot think just anything – only what our embodied brains permit” (1999, p.79). Our embodied brains, through gesture, can experience and learn liberation from FDV. I am interested in the language of the body in FDV experience, spoken by participants who have experienced and moved out of FDV.

In another example of the importance of embodied shapes, Feldenkrais found a relationship between faulty posture and underlying emotional states that led to dependent and compulsive behaviour (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.109). When faced with neurological limitation in the body of a client, Feldenkrais used the idea of reversibility of action of the movement or gesture of the limbs to attain liberation from inhibited movement. This allowed the body to develop the full potential of movement and consequently develop wellness and wholeness. In a similar way I am using the wholeness shape (Shape Eight) of full potential of movement and lived experience to have participants take themselves to wholeness.

I used the shapes and gestures that arose in my workshops to choreograph a gestural performance that tells a story of the pathway out of FDV violence. In the following paragraphs I will discuss how reflecting on the action in the workshops is required to deepen the learning.

Reflective Practice

Reflecting in action means noticing what comes to the surface in somatic experience in my choreography workshops. I used improvisation, spontaneous journaling, and digital photo feedback as methods of capturing reflection-in-action while it is happening in and after the workshops. In conversations, participants reflect on each game, on how they sense themselves in the games and on group work (Haseman, 2007, p.226). I have taken photos of the shapes and gestural images in the playing of the games and exercises, and I am taking notes on the development of my Joker practice. I am collecting questionnaire responses from participants about the nature of reclaiming wholeness from workshop participants. I am reflecting on my practice and ongoing learning within the TFL workshops.

In line with SP, I have explored my own body through Functional Integration (FI) sessions with a Feldenkrais practitioner, as well as noticing the gestures that come to my body during the sessions and bringing that awareness to my choreography of the performance. This is called action-tracking. Fixing is a method of data gathering specific to the needs of performative research (Haseman, 2007, p.223). Action-tracking and fixing supports reflective practice to track and record dramatic action as it occurs in rehearsal. This tracking will take the form of photos and video of the movements, shapes, and gestures created in the workshops. In this way, I am using FM as both a therapeutic and choreographic tool. My choreographic practice and choices come from a combination of my own body knowledge that arises in FI sessions, the learnings from attending choreographic workshops as a student, and the engineering of gestures that I gathered from participants of my TFL workshops. I will show how this is done in the action-tracking and fixing section below.

Conclusion

I have reviewed my methods, which are primarily social-justice theatre TO, TFL and SPT. I have used TFL and SPT specifically because of the ST view that they bring to my research on ST and FDV. At the end of the SPT section I have added my fourth historical personal story to further demonstrate a Stuck. I have included a discussion of the Joker, a novel form of facilitation that comes with social justice theatre, and a

discussion of practice-led research including why allowing my practice to lead my research is important. I have also reflected on aspects of that research, including the enquiry cycle of action research, my focus of shapes, gestures, and reflective process and how they contribute to my methodology.

The next chapter, Somatic Practice, is a continuation of my methodology, as the learnings from my FM sessions and the choreography trainings have become key choreographic devices in my performance. My discussion of FM is supported by longer descriptions of my FM sessions in Appendix E. I have woven theatre, performance, SP, and choreography together to allow each to form part of the structure of my practice and my research. I also discuss the SP insights I gained from three choreography trainings I attended as part of this research and my ongoing monthly Perth Improvised Practice (PIP).

Chapter 5: Somatic Practice

Somatic Practice (SP) is vital to knowledge as it allows space in an FM session to listen to the body for what is there. Listening to what arises from the body in a session is all that is required to release stored energy so that new possibilities and choices are available. Take for instance left or right – there is no left or right that can be perceived without a body (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.127). By transforming my own oppression, I am finding ways to assist others. SP links with my previous chapter, Methodology, as TO, TFL and SPT are somatic in that they are drawing on the body for information and expression.

In the following pages I discuss the FM and two components of my SP experience. Firstly, the learnings I have discovered during private FI sessions and movement (see Appendix E) and, secondly, in the Choreography section below, which describes the three choreographic trainings I attended and my ongoing Perth Improvised Performance training that has influenced my choreographic choices.

Feldenkrais said, “Life and movement are practically the same thing” (2010, p.71). The choices made by each person depends on the health of her nervous system and its support, as well as on the environment. The environment may reinforce her nervous system in growing and renewing itself or force it to adopt crippling tendencies and ways of functioning, gradually narrowing and limiting activity to mechanical routine (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.xliii).

The Feldenkrais Method

FM is a type of exercise therapy devised by Israeli physicist and engineer Judoka Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–1984). FM offers emancipatory, embodied self-care, empathy-forming and agency-constituting processes that can support an open-ended and rigorous approach to performer training (Kampe, 2015, p.201). At the heart of FM is any human condition, reconditioning, and relearning of movement for the nervous system providing choices rather than fixed patterns of responding (2005, p.196).

FM is based on principles of physics, biomechanics, and an empirical understanding of learning and human development. Feldenkrais said, “We act in accordance with our self-image” (1977, p.3). By expanding our perception and

increasing awareness, we become more aware of our habits and tensions and develop new ways of moving. By increasing sensitivity, the FM assists you to live your life more fully, efficiently, and comfortably. FM is a system of human development that captures physical movement, thought, sensation, emotion, and environment. Furthermore, FM movement leads to “maturity”, which for Feldenkrais is the capacity of the individual to break up the total situation of previous experience into parts and to reform them into a pattern most suitable to the present circumstances. FM offers the embodied spontaneous self: The properly adjusted system is capable of completely lifting the inhibition as well as completely damping out the excitation for each function in any plane of activity and enacting only what is considered fitting at that moment. Only when in possession of that full range of functioning at each level or plane of action can we eliminate compulsion to the degree that our action becomes the expression of our spontaneous selves. (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.199).

Within the FM, two options are available. In the first, Feldenkrais pioneered the field of body–mind education and therapy aimed to provide learners with “conditions where they can learn to think”. This is a mode of moving while at the same time self-observing that he named Awareness Through Movement (ATM) because it is awareness and “understanding while moving” (Feldenkrais, 1972, p.ix). The second option is Functional Integration (FI). This treatment is carried out through directed movements by a practitioner with hands on the patient’s body. The patient just lets the movement happen passively and observes the effect. The movements can be small or sometimes large and playful (Feldenkrais, 2013, p.109).

The emphasis in the FM is on improving one’s whole action, rather than just alterations to separate aspects of one’s thinking, emotional, or physical state (Brand, 2001; Shafarman, 1997). The FM is a psychosocial practice for improved mobility that promotes a deconditioning, the liberation, in which we develop a self-active part that liberates the individual from their subjective enslavement through reflective embodied movement (Katzir, 2010, p.173). This view directly opposes the Western medical view of the human body that separates the inseparable – mind and body/ body and mind – from the environment.

Feldenkrais’s ground-breaking book *Body and Mature Behaviour: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation & Learning* (1949), is a Systems view of physical movement, sensation, emotion, thought and environment that documents the first

steps of his method for developing a movement-based approach that calls on the individual's self-regulation powers. In this research, Feldenkrais' ST view matches well with TFL systems. In Feldenkrais' view, one's nervous system was wired into responses that were habitual, and a process of movement could create new desired responses by deconditioning (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.134).

When we, despite our best efforts, fail to achieve our dreams we miss out on personal fulfilment. We do not look at life through our eyes, we look at life through our whole life, our whole lived experience through the body, our conflicts are embedded in our bodies (Feldenkrais, 1985, p.xiii).

When we have dreams that, when realised, can be a source of a deeply satisfying life then we have unlocked our full potential. Feldenkrais found that the potent state was that of Judo masters who could tire out a dozen men half their age without any strain (1985, p.199). He named this state "Reversibility", a kind of supreme poise where we can start, stop, or change the direction of what we are doing at any moment; "At every instant or stage of a correct act, it can be stopped, withheld from continuing, or reversed without any preliminary change of attitude and without effort" (1985, p.113).

Movement is the most important key to unlock new thinking and new potential. When the learner thinks without words – and instead thinks with images, patterns, movement, and connections – that sort of thinking always leads to a new way of action and in essence is learning how to learn (Feldenkrais, 2010, p.88). The fusion of FI into this research allows me to think without words and instead think with patterns, movement, and connections and to bring that new embodied learning to my emerging TFL practice.

Feldenkrais's methods are suited to working with the intergenerational effects of FDV because of his focus on "the whole". For Feldenkrais, the connection between body, mind, and environment is an indivisible one (1985, p.149). The problem of violence is in the body, mind and environment and the solution to violence is in the body, mind, and environment. Any psychological or physical treatment that tries to resolve the problem by focusing on any of these single components is bound to fail.

TFL and SP looks at the issue in its wholeness. FM brings, through movement, a vocabulary for showing what is in the way of personal development that eliminates "compulsive" behaviour and achieves "spontaneity". Spontaneous

movement comes from “making available the full range of functioning in all planes, and the ‘compulsive’ state has a relationship with faulty posture, pain, and the emotions that cause poor habit formations” (Feldenkrais, 2005, p.153).

In all the FI sessions (See Appendix E), my greatest learning is that my body holds knowledge about my lived experience that is available to me when I take the time to listen and feel it. This knowledge is in the form of movements, shapes, gestures, memories, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. I will take these learnings from my FI sessions and use them as choreographic tools and movements to create my performance piece.

The next historical personal story, *She’s Weak and Stupid*, is included below to show that my mother was abused by my father, she was violent towards me and my body was assaulted well before I experienced FDV as an adult.

She’s Weak and Stupid

It was so hot. It had been for days; so hot, that the night before, I’d slept on the bare floorboards instead of in my bed.

I was in my swimmers, barefoot in the backyard. As soon as I turned the tap on, I knew I was in for it. The garden hose slipped out of my tiny hand and came alive writhing. Swirling circles in the air like a big snake spurting venom onto the crisp white bed sheets that hung like large white flags on the clothesline. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the feather duster in my mother’s hand.

“You little mongrel,” she screeched.

She raced to turn the tap off and grabbed me with wet hands. I did the first thing that came to mind, I bolted. I took off as fast as my little legs would take me. I could hear her breathing hot on my heels, as she chased after me.

Our house was a 1950s Housing Commission, two-bedroom fibro dwelling like all the other houses in our street. No side fences and no grass, it made for a great racetrack. On the third lap, with my mother still close behind me, clenching that feather duster, there was little likelihood of me stopping anytime soon – and then I heard her laugh. It was funny; I remember thinking, her chasing me around the house and not catching me. I smiled too and slowed down thinking she wasn’t angry anymore. I thought we would be okay.

My parents came together and moved my sister and I from Bondi to Blacktown when I was four. I found out later that Blacktown, 34 kilometres west of Sydney, earned its name when the Native Institution for Aboriginal children connected to the Stolen Generation opened there in 1823. Hence, “The Blacks Town” that later, in 1862, became Blacktown. I remember feeling the extreme weather: in winter, the water could freeze in the taps and in summer the searing heat was often only broken by magnificent lightning and thunderstorms.

But no, she grabbed me and viciously whipped the plastic handle of the feather duster against my skin leaving crisscrossed welts, like the lattice fence that held up the passionfruit vine in our vegetable garden. My mother was batshit crazy – her laugh wasn’t connected to her heart and even though I knew my father hit her, I judged her as weak and stupid.

This story, together with my historical personal story in Chapter 2, shows intergenerational FDV in action. In the same way my son judged me and was angry at me for being the victim–survivor of his father’s violence, I, even as a four-year-old, judged my mother and was angry at her for being the victim–survivor of my father’s violence towards her and for being violent to me. Similarly, my historical personal story in Chapter 3 shows my mother’s childhood experience when she disconnected from her mother.

The following sections discuss choreography: what it is and how it is important to this research. I also write about the four choreography trainings that I attended as part of this research to become the choreographer of my performance and the facilitator of trainings to help women who have lived experience of FDV as a somatic journey for me in the process of becoming whole and becoming both a performer and choreographer.

Choreography

Choreography is an act of creation. It can be used to create something fearful and ugly or something loving and beautiful. It could be the art of design itself. A choreographer is one who designs choreographies. I chose choreography as part of this research because I think we are all creating our lives, our own choreography, whether we realise it or not.

Choreography is the art of creating dance performance by organising different moves, by grouping together sequences and patterns of movement that can be performed to a specific melody. Discourse on contemporary choreography frames the choreographer's knowledge as "not just somatic, but mental and emotional as well, encompassing cultural history, beliefs, values, and feelings" (Sklar, 1991, p.6). The metaphor of the choreographer is perfect to emphasise the designing qualities that workshop participants can apply to their lives to reclaim wholeness, and the idea that life can be choreographed, just like a dance.

Choreography allows the subjective voice of the researcher and the embodied experience of the personal to be expressed in performance (Bromberg, 2000, p.27). If you think of choreography as an expanded practice that engages with strategies and modes of doing from various fields, it becomes possible to shift away from more traditional notions of choreography as merely dance composition. In so doing it is possible to understand choreographic practice as a complex embodied means through which one can "philosophise" and engage in critical reflection, concepts, and theoretical ideas like the way that we do with writing (Ehrenberg, 2019, p.98). Jones says, "I feel that we're constantly trying to convince the world that there's beauty in movement. That space is an eloquent medium. That text is not always necessary" (Jones, 2020. p.8).

Choreography also allows for a reframing of dance as a critical practice, deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge sourced from my bodily awareness as a dancer and from other people's bodies in my workshops to be placed in a form that I choose for the purpose of creating self-agency and wholeness for myself and participants. I am the choreographer of my life. I have come to believe that I have always been choreographing my life (not consciously, of course, when I was younger). Now that I am conscious of that, being the choreographer of my life gives me feelings of wholeness.

Leading anatomist-embryologist Jaap van der Wal says that we are all choreographers. From our very beginning as an embryo in the womb we are cocreating with our environment; "the 'embryo' apparently is not a past phase in human lifespan but still exists in our so-called adult organisms as the primary way of being a body with a mind" (van der Wal, 2013, p.151). Applying this choreography concept to my life further empowers me when I use the embodied knowledge I have found when I dance, interact with, and assist others.

Towards my goal of becoming a choreographer, I attended four choreography trainings. Alice Cummins, Michael Molin-Skelton, Annette Carmichael and, for the past five years, monthly Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) improvised choreographic classes run by Jacqui Otago. I will describe these four workshop experiences below and the learnings I carried over to my choreographic practice to create my performance. This choreographic training enabled me to collect shapes from my workshop participants (other FDV victim–survivors) that were the basis of the choreography for the performance. The workshops helped me to gather knowledge from others (Barrett & Bolt, 2010, p.5) and therefore, both the choreography and the SP acquired knowledge through doing to produce new understanding in action (Barrett & Bolt, 2010, p.1). My choreographic practice and choices come from a combination of my own body-knowledge that arises in choreography, Somatic Practice sessions, and the learnings that I gather from my workshop participants. As Cohen said, “The mind is like the wind and the body like the sand: if you want to see how the wind is blowing, you can look at the sand” (Cohen, 2008, p.11).

First Workshop

Embryological Origins with Alice Cummins² at The Chapel, North Perth, 2–4 June 2018

In my first training with Alice Cummins on *The Embryonic Self*, I learnt that in the third week of pregnancy the embryo splits in half – one half becomes the body and the other half becomes the placenta. The zygote is already whole. Instead of joining part-to-part in an additive manner, it develops and differentiates from within. It divides, reorganises, and transforms itself (Talbot, 2013, p.173; van der Bie, 2001, p.53). Scientists have tested both sections of the embryonic fluid only to find that the fluid is identical. The only explanation is that the fluid knows which part it plays in the symphony of life, as if the embryonic fluid is the choreographer. It is from this moment in time, the third week of the embryo’s life, that a scientist can take the cells

² Cummins is a dance artist and somatic movement educator. Cummins’s work is influenced by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s Body-Mind Centering®, feminist philosophy and new dance practices. Bainbridge Cohen is a movement artist, researcher, educator and therapist and the developer of the Body-Mind Centering® approach to movement and consciousness. An innovator and leader, her work has influenced the fields of bodywork, movement, dance, yoga, body psychotherapy, childhood education and many other body-mind disciplines. In 1973 she founded [The School for Body-Mind Centering®](#).

of the embryo and clone an entirely separate body (Talbot, 2013, p.174). Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela described the human organic interaction with the environment as “a structural dance in the choreography of coexistence” (1992, p.248). Van der Wal goes further to say that “our body is behaviour, human behaviour, to be explicit. The body is not a thing, an anatomical substrate: it is a performance, a function, a behaviour. Soul does not have a body, it is body; body does not have a soul, it is soul” (2013, p.157). The unity of life is not the cell or the particle – it is the organism, the whole. The embryo organises itself in cells and via that in organs and tissues, not the other way around (van der Wal, 2013, p.158). As anatomist Johannes Rohen (2007) puts it, “All the life processes are still one great, almost incomprehensible unity” (pp. 57–58).

This somatic experience workshop focused on the lived experience of each person in the workshop and what their body remembered in movement from their third week of embryonic development when they implanted in the uterus wall. It was supported by beautiful embryo development video footage by Jaap van der Wall, whose work shows an intelligence deep within us that is guiding us – an interface between the scientific and the mystical world.

I had a profound, nourishing and healing experience in this work. Cummins’s somatic exercises were the bulk of the training, especially the first two days. Each morning we began with a warm-up that followed a series of relaxation processes that ran something like this: lie on a blanket on the floor, breathe into hands and feet, breathe into the belly, practice embryonic breathing (that is, breathing slowly and deeply with intention and awareness into the organs). Allow time to connect to the layers of the body.

Zygote Exercise

First, we chose a partner. The zygote is the fertilised egg. We imagined being our zygote self. The first part was holding our hands out, holding space for the other. Then holding the other as if holding them in the wall of the uterus, just holding them to allow time and space for awareness and insights and potential change. One person represented the uterus wall and the other person was their embryo self. The uterus person holds the embryo self. Then there was time for reflection before we changed places and repeated the exercise. Thoughts filtered through my mind during each of the exercises (see italics below).

Cummins also made time after each exercise for the group to reflect about their somatic experiences to a partner and at the end of each day she allowed more time for sharing and reflections to the whole group. In between each exercise we watched beautiful videos on YouTube of the embryological structure and process during the third week of pregnancy and listened to van der Wal talk about the embryological choreographer.

Endoderm Partner Exercise

Rub your feet and warm them up, warm up with the hands, now move the middle body (endoderm). Dance the middle body in pairs, then dance the heart, the first organ is the heart. One dances and the other witnesses. Dance the back body (ectoderm). Bring your amnionic sack with you. Cummins asked the group, each in their pairs, to dance their embedding in the uterus wall. One of the pair was the uterus wall and the other the egg.

Jacqui was my partner; she played the part of my uterus wall. She invited me, the embryo, to be held and implanted. I felt welcome, and that was a new experience for me. I felt happy to be embedded in the represented uterus wall. It was a big relief to have lost so much self-doubt. It was with a renewed sense of self that I could hold the uterus space for my partner.

Choreographic Learning

Cummins's instructions flowed gently and effortlessly, so that each process felt safe and the participants felt supported. There was a clarity about the process of being in your body in the moment that was nourishing and totally engrossing. It is important to take time to explore what is there. Taking time to notice what is present in the body is a beautiful choreographic learning. Respect, appreciation, and love for the body is a choreographic choice. Witnessing and holding space for the other is a powerful participant experience. I will find ways to incorporate this into my choreographic choices.

Second Workshop

Soul Motion with Michael Molin-Skelton³ in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 15–23 May 2019

In this workshop, Molin-Skelton invited participants to “pause”, take a moment to relax and listen for further instructions from the body. To take time out or time in. He believes that your body is a source of inspiration. Soul Motion invites participants to be in orbit, to have 360-degree awareness of the world and their place in it so that they have more opportunities to make choices. Soul Motion asks participants to be an inspiration to those around them and to give that inspiration back to others while always enjoying being a soul in motion.

Molin-Skelton introduced the choreographic device of the words *Sikhona* and *Sawubona*. In South Africa these are the Zulu words for “hello” when meeting and greeting one another. There's a beautiful and powerful intention behind the words because *Sikhona*, literally translated, means “I am here to be seen” and *Sawubona* means “I see you and by seeing you bring you into existence”.

The Zulu people believe that when a person says *Sikhona*, “I am here to be seen”, it invokes the person’s spirit to be present. Saying “I am here” is a declaration of intent to fully inhabit this moment. It signals a willingness to engage with integrity.

Saying “to be seen” emphasises “no masks”, “no editing”, and “no defences”. It means, “This is the real me” and “I will speak my truth”. It means, “I will be honest with you” and there will be no deception. *Sawubona*, is a powerful experience both for the person who says it and for the person who hears it. According to the Zulu tradition, to say *Sawubona*, offers an intention to release any preconceptions and judgements so that “I can see you as God created you”. To hear *Sawubona*, “I see you” is an affirmation that you exist, that you are both equal, and that you have a person’s respect. This may be the most moving part of the greeting. It strengthens the resolve to be more authentic and visible in our lives.

Each new day of the workshop, connecting with the red-earth dancefloor was a delight for my body. Forty-seven bodies connected in dance filled my heart with

³ Molin-Skelton is the embodied leader of Soul Motion®, a choreographer, dance artist and international dance teacher from the United States. Soul Motion® is a conscious dance practice designed by Artistic Director Vincent Martínez-Grieco, founded over 20 years ago.

belonging. Thirty-degree heat fired up my form as white sun umbrellas on the edges of the dance floor created shade.

Exercise One Sequence

In groups of three. Person One is the dancer – they show Person Two places on their body they wish to be held/touched for support. Whenever the dancer pauses, Person Two comes to the dancer and touches their body in support. Person Three witnesses. Take turns to change places. Reflections: How was this dance experience for you? How did it feel to be supported and seen?

Exercise Two Sequence

In groups of four. One witness, two support dancers say *Sawubona*, one dancer says *Sikhona*. Each dancer takes turns to change places. As a group we reflect on how this dance experience was for each other.

Exercise Three Sequence

In groups of five. Two witnesses, two support dancers, one dancer. We each take turns changing places. We each take turns reflecting on how this exercise was for us.

Figure 3

Soul Motion Workshop, Alice Springs, NT, 2019. (Photo: Jennipher McDonald)

Figure 4

Yeperenye Ranges Campfire, 2019. (Photo: Jennipher McDonald)

Figure 5



Yeperenye Ranges dancefloor, 2019. (Photo Jennipher McDonald)

Choreographic Learning

Place is a powerful choreographic tool. It's important to hold space and support the group. The instruction to pause is a powerful choreographic tool. Taking moments to relax and listen for instruction from the body is a powerful choreographic tool. The witnessing aspects of *Sikona/Sawubona* were profound for me to experience. A choreographic device could be the power of these two words or any words of meaning for the group. Molin-Skelton used the choreographic tool of groups of threes to see, touch, support and move together. He created choreographed dance that felt good within the groups of dancers moving that could also be felt in the audience. I will take these concepts into my own practice as a choreographer: the power of witnessing the other in dance and the use of pause or rest.

Third Workshop

Chorus Gestural Opera with Annette Carmichael⁴ In Perth and Denmark, WA, August 2019–February 2020). Rehearsal and two performances in Denmark, WA, 1–3 March 2020.

⁴ Carmichael is a community artist, choreographer and dance artist who creates large-scale dance performances in communities across Australia, specialising in regional cultural development and community engagement. Carmichael collaborates with communities to create performances that have contemporary dance at their core but also include theatre, writing, music, textiles, and installation.

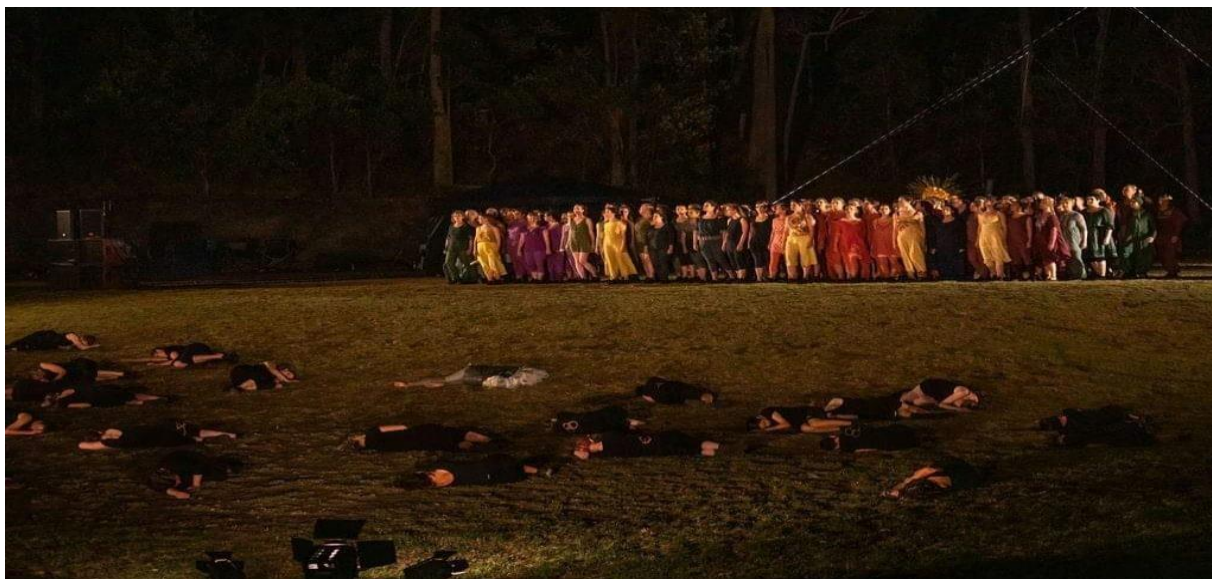
Figure 6



Rehearsal warm-up, Denmark, WA. Photo Jennipher McDonald)

Chorus Gestural Opera was a community dance project designed to bring awareness to FDV led by dance artist and choreographer Annette Carmichael with a team of artists working across dance, sound, and design. The project culminated in the creation of a dance performance by 160 women from the communities of Denmark, Bunbury, Mandurah, Ravensthorpe, Perth, and Albany in Western Australia. The project started in August 2019 with participants attending workshops in their hometown and culminated in the performances in Denmark over a long weekend in March 2020. Chorus Gestural Opera is a dance performance that holds hope and optimism for women who have experienced FDV at its core. It is inspired by the peace marches and group actions of women across the world calling for equality and demanding safety. It is an exploration of power, its loss and ultimate recovery. I was a dancer as part of this Chorus, one of thirteen women from the Perth contingent of the whole community dance project and I attended my first rehearsal on Saturday 16 August 2019.

Figure 7



Chorus Gestural Opera: Fallen women represent FDV deaths, 2020. (Photo: Nic Duncan)

Figure 8



Chorus Gestural Opera, Denmark, WA, March 2020. (Photo: Nic Duncan)

The Perth contingent had six separate dances and all participants were given the choice to include themselves or not. All participants included themselves into every dance. I found great difficulty in following movement instructions and set

moves, not because I didn't want to but because it was a totally new experience for me. Each sequence was filmed and recorded and placed in a Facebook group for the dancers so that we had a support tool at home for dance practice. Each location had their own sequences (e.g., Perth, Mandurah). Carmichael, as choreographer, then threaded together all the different sequences to create the whole performance.

Choreographic Learning

My longstanding interest in using shapes and gesture as a choreographic device in this research emerged from my repeated experience of FDV with two different husbands. I was interested in how I communicated to them that I could be oppressed in the relationship. Since I did not give verbal consent, I deduced that there had to be some other communication underneath my communication.

When Annette Carmichael's Chorus Gestural Opera came up, it was exciting to have found someone else who was working with gestures. Carmichael's use of gesture, coming from women's storytelling, was a powerful tool. I noticed that although the intention behind her Chorus Gestural Opera was to bring awareness to FDV, Carmichael asked the group for their happy childhood memories. All the gestures used in Chorus were gestures of happiness. In fact, besides the introduction and the call out, at no time in the workshops was FDV even mentioned. Only at the final performances in Denmark – where the group dressed in black and lay on the ground to represent women in our community who had fallen from FDV – was the issue obvious

Fourth Workshop

Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) Choreography with Jacqui Otago⁵ and Phillippa Clarke⁶ In Morley, Western Australia, 2018–2023.

⁵ Otago is a dance artist, performer, and Somatic Movement Educator who facilitates Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) and Perth Contact Improvisation and has trained for over 10 years with Alice Cummins. Otago runs weekly Contact Improvisation classes and monthly PIP classes for dance artists.

⁶ Clarke has a master's degree in dance. She is an independent arts practitioner, registered teacher, choreographer, and Feldenkrais practitioner. Clarke has worked as a dance artist for over three decades. She was recently awarded the Outstanding Achievement in Teaching Award by Ausdance WA. She teaches dance weekly at the Chapel in North Perth and choreographs with PIP.

PIP is an ongoing improvised and choreographic workshop where Otago and Clarke set improvised dance tasks for the whole group. I found the first few months challenging, I was immediately aware of an inner frozen place in my body, a terror to be me, a fear to move and be seen. In time I learnt to love these monthly movement sessions. I loved the people, they spoke a new language about gravity, the floor and being grounded that I had never heard before. At PIP workshops I experienced safety in being myself, in my present playful body and improvising with others

I attended PIP workshops once a month for five years. Each session builds on the previous sessions and the cohesion in the group builds each time we dance together. Often, after a warm-up, which includes some aspect of the body, Otago continues with the theme started in that warm-up. For example, if the theme is “fluid” we focus on the fluids in the body during the warm-up and awareness on the fluidity of the body in the session (see more PIP Choreography details in Appendix F).

Figure 9



PIP rehearsal workshop, June 2021. (Photo: PIP GoPro)

In the photo above, Otago added a large piece of fabric that represented fascia and we included it in the improvised practice that followed. Otago also included creative choreographic responses to the words below that are open to interpretations (Otago, 2021). She used these words with the dancers to create shared meaning:

- **Pause** could mean stop or tune into what is present in the body or both.
- **Reverse** could mean move backwards or reverse the movement that you have moved in.
- **Respond** could mean respond to another dancer, respond to the space, respond to a movement or feeling.
- **Shift** could mean shift your eye focus, your height up or down, your direction back or forth or sideways.

Choreographic Learning

The last session focused on fascia, a system of connective tissue that encases our body parts and binds them together. Fascia, made primarily of collagen, can be thought of as a sausage casing for your body's tissues. It surrounds muscles, nerves, tendons, and ligaments and gives them shape. Fascia also connects your skin to the tissue that is directly beneath it. Using specific focus on body parts in this way makes for creative choreographic inspiration that comes from the body.

First Performance

On Friday 11 December 2020, I performed with eight other dancers at the Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) end-of-year performance in front of an audience. In an improvised practice, questions, problems, and challenges are identified through collaboration as the dancers create strategies towards the performance. In this way, the creative practice is leading the research, the dancer is a co-creator with the other dancers. The movement is multilayered because it is through the movement, reflection of the movement, witnessing the movement of others and connecting with them, that the performance is generated.

Performance Choreography Notes

(11 December 2020)

Otago's choreography structure for the performance was broken down into five scores (see below). Each score allowed for improvising and interpretation. The

dancers know to interpret these instructions for themselves, and this adds to the choreography by allow freedom within the structure. They are:

- **Score 1:** walking, sitting, standing, stillness
- **Score 2:** mirroring duets
- **Score 3:** complimentary mirroring duets
- **Score 4:** connected trios
- **Score 5:** rush and gush (changing trios - stillness, move fast together, stillness, exit).

Figure 10



PIP Rehearsal, Morley, 2020. From left Rowan Worth, Brenda Downing, Tej Bhagti, Jacqui Otago, Jump Lemur and Jennipher McDonald. (Photo: GoPro PIP camera)

All the above choreographic workshops continue to inspire me in my own ideas about the performances that I will create. I especially found these choreographic devices simple yet effective for me as a dancer responding to other dancers: pause, reverse, respond and shift. This is because they allow some structure but remain open to interpretation, and they enhanced fluidity of movement, ease, and connection in the group.

Conclusion

I have discussed the FM as the ST form of SP that I am using in this research. I have included another personal history story *She's Weak and Stupid* to highlight how the effects of intergenerational FDV occurred in my life, and I have described choreography as a concept. My idea that we are all constantly choreographing our lives, with wonderful or ugly outcomes sits inside ST – of course, I cannot speak for other people and this research focuses on my experience where I am taking radical responsibility for my own FDV lived experience as a novel approach for the purpose of regaining wholeness. I have also given my reasons for including choreography as a part of this research, and I have discussed the four choreography trainings that I immersed myself in as a researcher to become the choreographer of my performance. In the following chapter I will discuss performance as a concept, how it relates to choreography and *Performing Wholeness* that forms the creative component of this thesis.

Chapter 6: Performance

The performance, *Performing Wholeness*, was created from my workshops. It was a showing of my choreography work that designed ways to transform lived FDV experience into worthiness and wholeness. Personally, the performance was a way to overcome my fear of being seen, a way of showing the body – both mine and the participants’ – and making the shared embodied FDV experience and the transformation to wholeness visible. This performance was a way of creatively exposing what FDV looks like without words, bringing it out from behind closed doors, and was at the same time a way of celebrating our worthiness, our art, and our wholeness.

Performance is many things at the same time. It is a contested term. It is a verb, a noun, a form of being, an action, a form of doing, a form of mimicry, of minstrelsy, showing, a way of knowing, a way of making the world visible, an incitement to action, an entanglement, simultaneously a space of intense personal and cultural risk. (Spry, 2011, p.47)

In this research, I question how SP and ST transform the oppression that comes from the lived experience of FDV into wholeness. The mother story and all the other stories above are remembered in my body – these past experiences remain alive in my present in a repeating loop. By using performance, I am using that loop of somatic knowledge in a creative way. It is my intention to use the body as a site of inquiry by meeting the mind at the source of oppression.

Put your body into it. I mean right in it. Right on it. Climb in. Lie on the canvas. Feel the scrape of the dried oils, the scuff of the acrylics. Feel the body that pushed the paint. Feel the body that made it. Feel the body made on it. Now speak from this body diffracted through wood and paper and oil and pigment and skin and blood and water. Feel what happens when these things are theorized as much “force as entity, as much as energy as matter” when you lay your body down in art. (Spry, 2019, p.48)

I have attended to my body to explore and bring my embodied self with lived understanding of FDV to seek a new awareness of myself and my world. In this way, in accordance with Conquergood’s definition of performance requiring a special doubling of consciousness, an ironic awareness, I have treated myself in this research as both subject and object simultaneously (Conquergood, 2013, p.21).

Performance becomes the method of change – the site of praxis. The performative, based on ethnography, is always pedagogical and always already political, always already an intervention in search of a politics of hope. We seek a way of connecting, outwardly and inwardly to the worlds we inhabit as a way of exerting influence in a bewildering complex realm that often seems to be entirely out of our control. Under such circumstances, performance is the only salvation. (Denzin, 2013, p.344)

Performance is something that terrified me. At the same time, I knew that growth happens outside of my comfort zone as post-traumatic growth. Choreography and performance have given me a way of connecting my inner/outer FDV experience and a way to exert influence over the world that previously seemed entirely out of my control. Getting out of my comfort zone has involved different aspects of SP and facilitation. My response to performance has been so multi-layered – it's given me ways of connecting with comfort in my body, with others, ways of contributing and having influence over the complex world of the growing FDV problem.

Performance and the performative are influential academic principles (Nelson, 2013, p.4). Performance autoethnography is less established in educational research (Denzin, 2018, p.viii; Sughrua, 2016; Gannon, 2017), but it challenges conventional ethnographers who prefer traditional, post-positivist values of hard evidence, truth, and objectivity and find little value in performance and autoethnography approaches. In her article "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", feminist philosopher Karen Barad questions how language came "to be more trustworthy than matter" and why language and culture grant their own agency "while matter is figured as passive and immutable" (2003, p.801).

Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn – it seems that at every turn lately everything (even materiality) is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. The ubiquitous puns on "matter" do not, alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them. Rather, they seem to be symptomatic of the extent to which matters of "fact", so to speak, have been replaced with matters of signification (no scare quotes here). Language matters, discourse matters, and culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thinking that doesn't seem to matter anymore is matter. (Barad, 2003, p.801) Matter is the body and it is my body, no longer passive or immutable. In my FDV experience, I learnt patterns of behaviour in relationships in

my family as a child that created my structure of organisation around future relationships. Similarly, as Conquergood reminds us, for performing researchers a performance paradigm prevents the reification of culture into variable to be isolated, measured and manipulated (Conquergood, 2013, p.17). As a performing researcher my aim is to analyse how the body's connection with FDV can be transformed to embrace wholeness.

Barad connects ST to the notion of performativity – a materialist, naturalist and post-humanist elaboration that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming. In the action of transforming FDV oppression into wholeness I am an action participant in my own becoming. Barad's theories reject the dichotomies between male and female, culture and nature, and words and things. In Barad's theory of intra-activity (2007, p.114) the key point is "quantum wholeness" between the "object" and the "agencies of observation" (2007, p.136) that is akin to Diamond's awareness of the connection between the oppressor and the oppressed (Diamond, 2007, p.63).

When I am an active participant in transforming oppression into wholeness, I am also embracing my life as a performance. I have realised that it is all performance. This way of viewing performance in life from a sociological perspective is valid. Erving Goffman (1922–1982), American sociologist, social psychologist, and writer compares how actors in plays present impressions of the characters they play to ordinary individuals presenting themselves in their lives. According to Goffman, ordinary individuals are similarly make-believe and rehearsed. The difference is that on the stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players, while the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction.

Goffman's ideas about the presentation of self in everyday life and the part one individual play is tailored to the parts played by others present who constitute the audience (Goffman, 1959, p.61). He also emphasised the corporal nature of performance fieldwork:

It's one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, ...so that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them (Goffman 1989, p.125).

FDV had affected me and the performance of my everyday life. I may have given the impression of coping with life, but I was acting. One of the drivers for me in this research was that I did not think that I “performed” as I would like in the world by earning money, getting work, and making a living, making a life. Similarly, the women who come to my workshops have struggled to “perform” in the workforce, in the arena of being creative, or of socially living up to their highest potential as a human being (some are homeless). Using Goffman’s ideas, when participants make shapes for wholeness and use their bodies to perform their story as a “performance” they get to experience themselves in a different way.

The individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others (Goffman, 1959, p.63). The participants of my workshops are choosing to redefine their situation in the presence of others. What was hidden in the body reveals itself in performance, and in this way together we show and share knowledge. For me, performance involves being seen, being acknowledged, being present, feeling worthy and whole. To create my performance, I have explored my body artfully in four choreography trainings (see Chapter 5), attended theatre trainings in India and Queensland, facilitated monthly theatre workshops over the past five years, and facilitated the eight-week Reclaiming Wholeness workshop.

The following section shows the eight-week Reclaiming Wholeness Choreography Workshop that led to the performance *Reclaiming Wholeness*. The outline of the workshop is followed by a weekly breakdown of how the performance design, created by finding individual embodied shapes with participants, led to the final performance.

Reclaiming Wholeness: Eight-Week Workshop

Week One (26 July 2022)

Figure 11

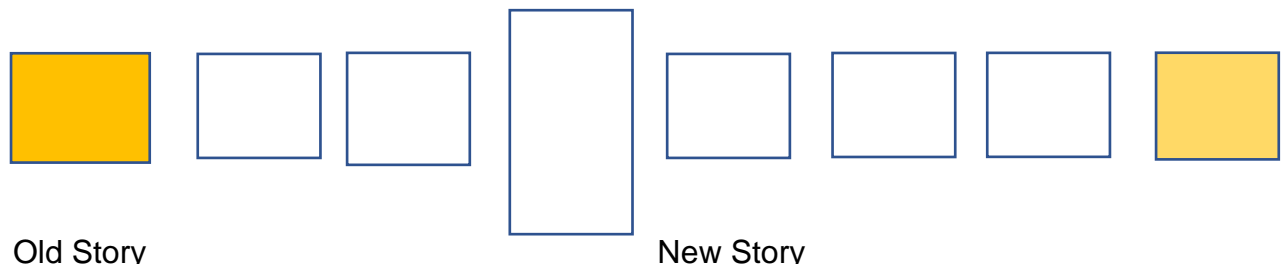


Diagram of Week One workshop: Shapes One and Eight

Over the course of these workshops, five participants made eight shapes (some with accompanying gestures) that represented their past lived experience of FDV, as well as shapes and gestures that represented what they want in their future. We used these eight shapes to create an embodied performance together. I asked the participants to think of their lived experience and consider three hurdles that they have had to deal with in FDV, and I informed them that we would create three shapes to represent these hurdles. These shapes may or may not include a connected gesture.

Participants made Shape One from their past FDV experience and Shape Eight to represent what they considered wholeness. I instructed participants to consider their current reality when making shapes with their body and to ask themselves: What can I learn from my body? What can I learn from that hurdle shape? What can I learn from this wholeness shape? What might wholeness be like for you?

They reported to me that they could not consider wholeness from their experience because they all said that they had not experienced it. I asked them to consider what wholeness might be like, imagine, explore what it would feel like if they had it already. I offered that they might write a list of what they would love to include in this wholeness imagination, and maybe these additions would make a different shape. Every participant also made their shape for wholeness in the first week. I have included their different definitions of wholeness below and more fully in Appendix C. All participants discussed the effects of imagining the wholeness they achieved for themselves in the workshop processes. At the end of the first workshop, I asked the participants if they would be part of my performance at the Hayman Theatre and they all declined emphatically. If none of them changed their minds, this meant I'd not be able to complete the *Reclaiming Wholeness* performance outcome.

I took photos to capture each participant's Shape One (see Figure 12 below) and their Shape Eight/wholeness (see Figure 13).

Figure 12



Shape One (first hurdle shape)

Figure 13



Photos of Shape Eight (wholeness)

Week two (2 August 2022)

Figure 14

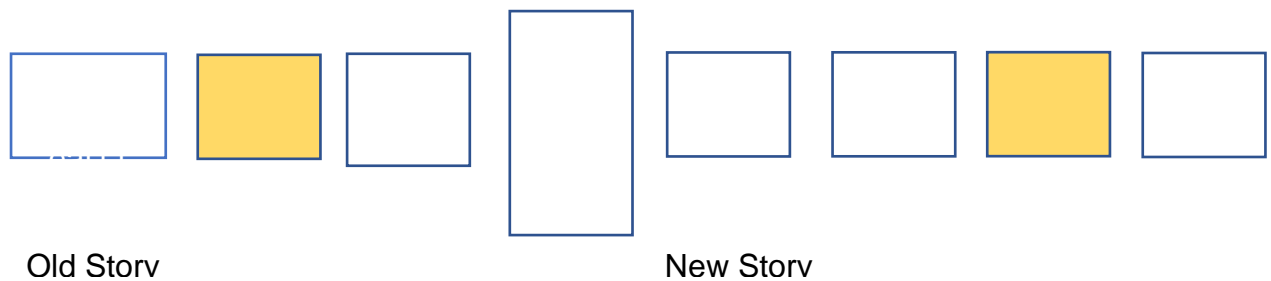


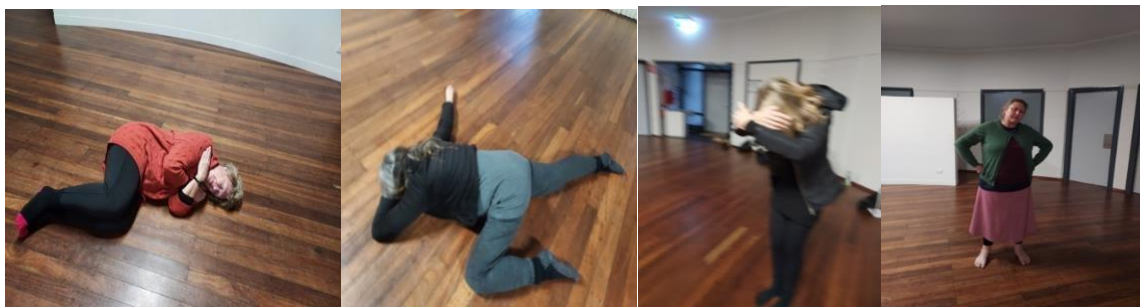
Diagram of Week Two workshop: Shapes Two and Seven

In Week Two, the participants had more comfort in their bodies with what was being asked of them. I asked the group to create the second hurdle shape (Shape Two). I

asked them to find a way to remember the shape, feeling, sound – was there a taste? a memory? – and to somehow capture and write that information down.

“Write down what comes to mind, write down something to remember the shape and the thoughts, beliefs or assumptions that come for that shape and notice was there a gesture that also came along to represents the behaviour you took up because of that hurdle? Now you have two hurdle shapes (one and two) and two wholeness and agency shapes (seven and eight) with gestures.”

Figure 15



Photos of Shape Two (second hurdle shape)

Figure 16



Photos of Shape Seven (second wholeness shape)

Week Three (9 August 2022)

Figure 17

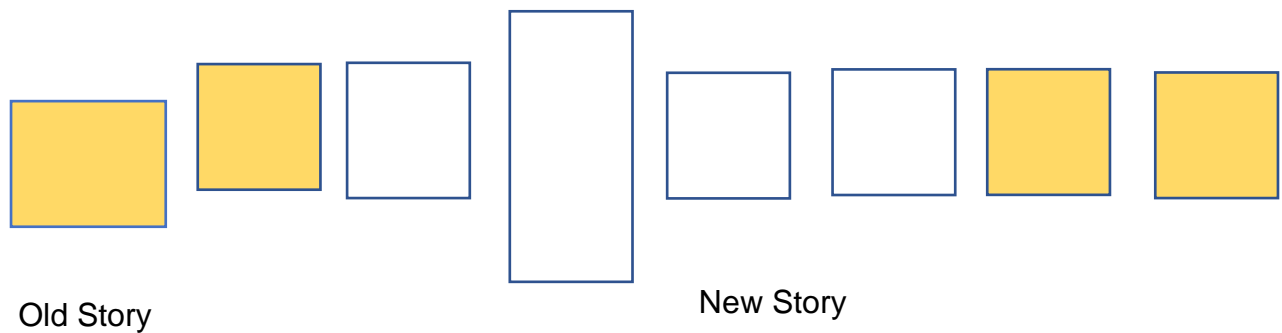


Diagram of Week Three workshop: working with the first four shapes

Rather than adding new shapes or gestures, this week we witnessed our first four shapes using the Zulu greeting words (*Sikhona* and *Sawubona*) that I was introduced to as choreographic tools by Michael Molin-Skelton. In line with Theory U, we created a space of deep listening. In this listening space we are making a container to hold a space for wholeness after FDV.

I instructed the participants, “In pairs, do the *Sikhona* exercise on the eighth shape of wholeness. Witness your partner and change over. Then do the *Sikhona* exercise on the first hurdle. Witness your partner and change over.”

An interesting thing happened this week as we made our shapes to represent aspects of the lived experience of FDV and wholeness. Wholeness felt wonderful, while aspects of FDV felt horrible. It was physically difficult to hold these shapes, and it was interesting to note how the past in a shape was painful to the whole physical being, not just a thought. We all had to shake it off after each shape. Becoming aware of how horrible the shape was to hold made it easy to let go of it.

I asked the participants a question, “What can you learn from today’s shape?” This became a choreographic learning by asking a question to direct curiosity about the inner experience. In this way, we were avoiding being stuck or triggered by the hurdle shape. Also, in seeing the other, I asked if supportive touch to each other was helpful? Sometimes it was, sometimes it was not.

Figure 18



Photos of Shape One and Two and being witnessed

Figure 19



Photos of Shapes One to Four, and being witnessed

Week Four (16 August 2022)

Figure 20

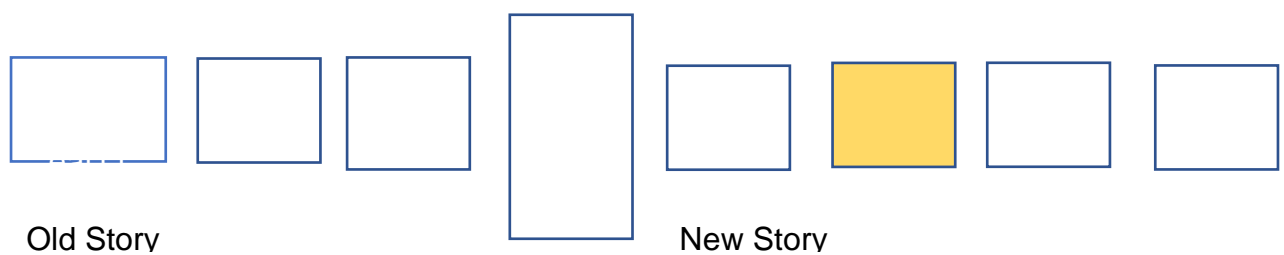


Diagram of Week Four workshop: finding Shape Six

In this week's class I introduced the concept of *Ma*. *Ma* is a Japanese aesthetic principle that translates as a gap, an interval, or the space-time between things. It pervades the traditional Japanese arts, such as Noh theatre, traditional music, calligraphy, film, architecture, and SPT. *Ma* helps SPT participants to connect with

their feeling-knowing human qualities (Hayashi, 2021, p.111). I extended *Ma* with the following instructions, “Go to the window and sit for five minutes and look out. Don’t do anything. Just sit there and look out. Thoughts will come and go. Let them. Don’t try to relax. Just sit there without any special effort, awareness is there. Awareness tells us what we see and how we feel. Awareness is always present. Now write a phrase or sentence describing what you saw or heard or felt. Finally, write a phrase or sentence that links your perceptions and your feelings.”

This week we also developed the sixth shape leading up to wholeness working backwards from Shape Eight to Shape Seven with the following instructions, “Take a step back in time to the shape that represents what was happening just before you achieved the end outcome (Shape Eight). What was there just before you achieved wholeness and agency? Make a shape and gesture for that. What is a thought, belief, or assumption in this shape? Share this shape with the other participants. Move around and witness each participant’s Shapes Six, Seven and Eight.”

It was at the end of the fourth week that I became worried that none of the women were intending on doing the performance with me at the end of the workshop. I had booked the Hayman Theatre for 6 December 2022 and I had no backup plan. I had an idea that something would work but at this stage I began to think that I had been mistaken. The women loved the work, enjoyed the play, the movement and the witnessing of each other’s shapes, but had not agreed to be witnessed in a final performance.

Week Five (23 August 2022)

Figure 21

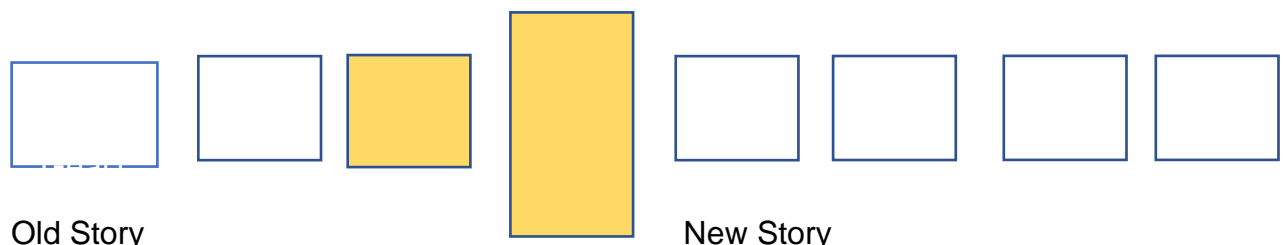


Diagram of Week Five workshop: finding Shapes Three and Four

To create Shape Three, the transition shape, I began by asking the first person to show their Stuck shape (the third hurdle shape from the old story of FDV). My instruction was as follows: “Feel your embodied shape and remain there until the body begins to move. Move from Shape Three to Shape Four. Move without thinking or planning. When the movement stops, say one word or phrase that arises from the sculpture, as if the sculpture itself had a voice. What would it say?”

Figure 22



Photos of Shapes Three and Four for five participants

Continuing to work with the first person, I said, “Build a group sculpture around your personal Stuck shape. Ask others to embody forces that are restricting movement. Invite and direct others verbally (do not place them) one by one to a position and shape that intensifies the feeling of the forces in play. Do not tell others what movements to make or how to make them, or how they should feel.”

Figure 23



Photos of Shape Three and four with group



Photos of Shape Three and four with group continued



Photos of Shapes Three and Four in group continued

My biggest happiness is that this week I again asked the participants if they would be part of my performance at Curtin University and I received an overwhelming yes from all five participants. This was a big shift in the group. I don't know what in the workshop caused the change. It could have been the shift out of the third shape to the transition shape. That was powerful. When we added the group to each shape, I

asked the protagonist of the shape to invite the group into their shape. They felt the shift in their own group shape, and they felt the shift in each other's. The rehearsal of the group performance was filmed and I played it back to the participants. After watching the recording of their movement, they all loved the film. Watching the playback of their work had become an enjoyable part of the reflective process. The participants commented that they began to look at themselves as dancers in a performance, as artists, and that the performance was bigger than them. It was us! One participant said, "I was so in the performance of my shapes that I had no care what others thought about me" (Appendix C: Participants' Reflections).

Week Six (30 August 2022)

Figure 24



Diagram of Week Six workshop: finding Shape Five

I wanted to explore the interconnectivity of ST. The processes I used came from Hellinger's Family Constellations (FC). In his book *Love's Hidden Symmetry*, Hellinger calls the interconnectivity moment "humility" (like *Ma* of SPT, and presencing of Theory U), a non-judgement moment that opens perceptions. Tranquillity and clarity of perception are made possible by consenting to the world as it is without any intention to change it. That's fundamentally a religious attitude, because it aligns me with a greater whole without separating me from it. I don't pretend to know better or hope to achieve something better than what the inner forces already at work in the system would do by themselves. When I see something terrible, that, too, is an aspect of the world and I consent to it. When I see something beautiful, I consent to that also. I call this attitude "humility" – consenting to the world as it is. Only this consent makes perception possible. Without it, wishes, fears, judgements – my constructs – interfere with my perception. (Hellinger, 1998, p.91)

Today's instructions to the participants were as follows: "After establishing some mindfulness of the body, let your awareness expand to experience the social body, the field. Attend to the shifting arrangements of people who constitute the social body. Notice proximity (close and far), level (higher than and lower than) and directions (facing toward, away, in, out). When thoughts appear, let them go. Without thinking or planning, let the sense of the social body guide you. Move or pause, sense what is emerging. There is no goal or anything to accomplish. Practice this for five minutes."

Constellation Dance

Adapting Hellinger's FC work, I replaced family elements with aspects of FDV such as men, women, society, money, and relationship. I asked the participants to "gather in a group of five" – what I called "a social body". The instructions for this exercise were as follows: "Pay attention to the whole social body as you engage in five ordinary everyday actions of standing, sitting, lying down, walking forward, and turning from facing one direction to another. Limit your movements to only these five ordinary actions and apply mindfulness of body in performing them. You can do them in any order, at any time, at any speed. Do not add arms or any stylized gestures. Simplicity support awareness."

I asked them to repeat this group movement only this time to "keep the five movements and add the components of FDV playing the following roles":

- Women – Participant L
- Men – Participant T
- Child – Participant V
- Society – Participant A
- Money – Participant G

Each week we practiced a different version of what I labelled the Constellation Dance.

Figure 27



Participants moving through their shapes (Photo: Lyn Robinson)

Figure 28



Participants moving through their shapes (Photo: GoPro)

Week Eight (13 September 2022)

Figure 29

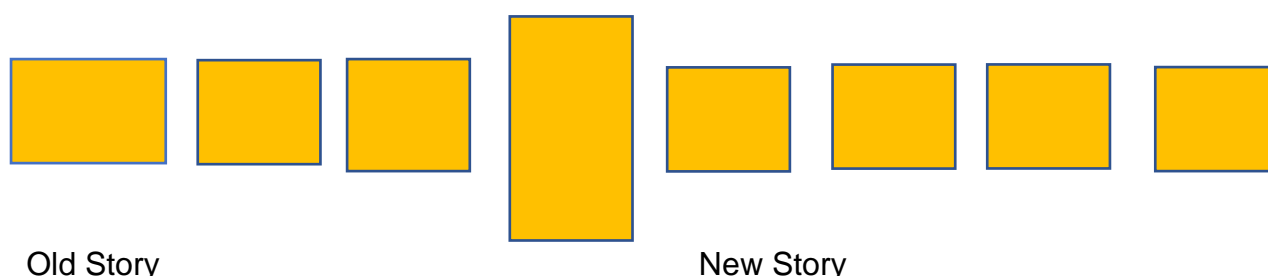


Diagram of Week Eight workshop: putting all the shapes together as a whole performance

In Week Eight we did the theatre games warm-up as usual and then we had a few rehearsals with the constellation, the shapes and the performance. We finished off with reflections. The process of turning my old story into my new story has taken me my whole life up until now. This process can be experienced in eight weeks. The participants loved using their own shapes and working together in the constellations and mini performances in the final weeks of the workshop.

There was a seven-week gap between the end of the workshop and the rehearsal at Hayman Theatre at Curtin University on Monday 5 December 2022 and the performance on Tuesday 6 December 2022, between 4 and 6 pm.

During the workshops the Constellation exercise involved only the participants, and I was surprised and very happy with the result each time. In the performance at Hayman Theatre, I placed myself in the Constellation exercise for the first time. This was not a good idea; it was difficult for me to concentrate on my part in the field. I look forward to improving my performance in the future. In our only rehearsal on 5 December, one of the women was nervous that she would forget one of her shapes, so she came up with an idea of drawing them on her arm like tattoos. She forgot one shape in the performance. Later she commented to me that in the moment on stage, instead of worrying, she improvised and made another shape instead and felt happy about that. Her comments made me smile because I know that creative people improvise.

On reflection, I am pleased with the performance. I love the grey, white, and black tones, and colours in the filmed artefact. The music selection of cello and classical music made my heart open each week. I timed the music to the different sections of the performance. The video begins with my introduction of the performance. I chose eight minutes of music to support each participant holding their

eight shapes; the first five minutes shows our first five shapes and the next three minutes shows shapes five to eight. Following on is the Constellation section, a three-minute piece where each participant chooses a part of the constellation – women, men, relationship, society or money. *Performing Wholeness* begins at the 14-minute mark of the video. The total music playlist was 22 minutes. Video of *Performing Wholeness*, the performance component of my this thesis (see Appendix A) can be accessed [here](#).

Figure 30



Reclaiming Wholeness performance and photo at Hayman Theatre, Curtin University

Figure 31



Reclaiming Wholeness performance and photo at Hayman Theatre, Curtin University

Figure 32



Reclaiming Wholeness performance and photo at Hayman Theatre, Curtin University

Figure 33



Reclaiming Wholeness performance and photo at Hayman Theatre, Curtin University

Workshop reflections below: I have captured some of the participants' responses (see also Appendix C: Participants' Reflections) and their definitions of wholeness from the workshop and the performance.

Participant V: I love the freedom and simplicity of this wholeness process. Afterwards I feel more embodied, slower, and softer. An unresolved challenge or real problem that was affecting my nervous system could fall into a more nourishing shape in my body which gave the sense that it was possible to overcome this hurdle with support and connection.

Participant G: My hurdles, abandonment, and shame have been catalysts in my life for coming home to myself in a heart-centred way, with a growing sense of freedom through acceptance. The message comes ... I have done the very best I could, and it all makes sense now; moving in and out of these shapes and gestures offers a visceral sense of homecoming and wholeness.

Participant L: Being part of something that feels alive, transformative, purposeful, and exciting. The potential to expand and it felt like the beginning of something. Starting the workshop by creating a body posture depicting satisfaction with having

accomplished everything in life – the peace it birthed in me, it surprised me just how present that feeling was in me and therefore possible to acquire. It was revelatory for me ... helped me believe it was possible to reach. It created a trajectory into the future like a beacon of light. Validating and normalising traumatic memories and witnessing others in theirs, creates community and connectedness. It's okay to be honest. We are the instrument of power, creativity, and beauty and together we can expand that reality, become that reality. It is an expansion of our sacredness through the art-making process because it was designed to liberate us by our intent and focus, by trusting innate wisdom. We are more powerful than we realise.

Participant A: Loved this experience – felt very free and unencumbered and was cathartic in expressing different aspects of FDV e.g., society, male, female, money etc and working with the other women. Was interesting that “getting out of the way of the analytical mind” showed that I had the ability to trust myself and my body and its intuitive knowledge of how to get into an immediate shape to show the form and wholeness. Lots of fun.

Once participants became aware of wholeness as a shape and feeling, and how it shows up for them in their body, making a powerful physical statement that changes their psychology (Cuddy, 2012), they have choice about what they focus on, and they can make that shape again and again in their everyday life.

Post-performance Reflection

Participant T: I thought starting with the end shape of wholeness was clever. That shape became active and a guiding light to what was to come – and moving towards that light. It felt fantastic to do this shape. Fantastic in a spiritual goose bumpy sort of way. There was benefit beyond words in embodying a shape that represented the end of our lives and symbolic of a life well lived. My shape was reaching my arms to the heavens, looking up to the sky, saying internally YES. It felt like a celebration of a spiritual life. My gesture was my arms flying in a flowing up and down sort of way reaching up.

In the first hurdle, my body found its way to hanging downward from the waist. My arms were hanging down, my head was hanging down and I didn't want to be seen.

I have spent so much of my life wanting to be seen, yet not wanting to be seen. It felt liberating to acknowledge this was a hurdle from very early on in my life and has been a shadow to so much internal struggle in my life. Making a shape that represented this felt like a "full acknowledgement", and in that moment of making the shape, I could feel why and how – and that somehow led to some kind of liberation. We were asked what comes before not wanting to be seen, and I realised it was confusion. I felt compassion for myself and that little girl who felt so often confused. My shape or gesture that represented this was looking down over one of my shoulders skewing my posture and robbing myself of my postural and emotional alignment.

Participant L: Creating from self is exciting, revelatory, possible. I felt I was part of a valuable self-explorative process and that I had something to say, in my body, beyond words and I became witness to a deeper knowing. I am an artist. Witnessing others in their process is enriching and deepens our own exploration. I felt like I was a paintbrush with my body and being, writing a story with my movements, supported by the group, the music, the facilitation, the inner muse. I am the voice of many. Art making is liberating. Art making is an antidote to loneliness, disempowerment, meaninglessness. Collaborative group process creates a collective myth.

The following final story in the creative writing series is a recent historical personal story noticing reclaimed wholeness in the body.

Performing Wholeness

I stood frozen! On stage in the Hayman Theatre with four dancers who were participants in my Performing Wholeness workshop. I looked at them carefully, they didn't seem to notice. We had already performed the first section, a demonstration of our eight shapes. We were about to start the second section, a constellation piece where I'd placed the names of the FDV characters into a hat (women, men, child, money and relationship) and each of us had chosen a character. As I turned to start

the music, one of the dancers said, "I'd rather do 'men' today, who wants 'child'?", swapping their parts.

I felt my mind jar. We were being filmed! My heart jumped a beat. I was the facilitator, the PhD student, and I had inserted myself in the show, a performer. Awkward, it was obviously too much. I stopped breathing and my heart was pounding! I observed my hands, okay, no shaking. But I knew I wasn't in my body. The old terror and complete freezing up about being seen had not fully showed up, but it was close. Previously, if I ever was required to perform, I'd get dizzy, breathless, my heart would pound, then palpitate, powerful tingling and sweaty hands. I felt like I was going to pass out. Then I would start to cry and even more embarrassingly I couldn't stop crying! Without warning the internal dialogue would rage, why is this happening? What's wrong with me?

Now, instead, in this performance my mind cleared.

I wasn't fully there but I was okay. The music soothed me, and the women performed their part of the constellation, dancing and interacting wonderfully. I felt relief to hear the sounds for the final section. I took a step and embodied worthlessness, my first hurdle shape. The inner experience of worthlessness thawed inside as I reached up pulling my body into my expanded shape of wholeness. I paused. I dipped again into the worthlessness shape and noticed how exhausting it felt. Covering my face with my left hand and squatting down into my rejection shape, I took a full breath. Bending forward holding my head I became my hurt shape. I was in my body, in performance and I felt myself come home. Altogether present, I danced. I witnessed other dancers, they witnessed me. We moved through our wholeness stories.

A calmness washed over me. I felt whole new choices available to me and I claimed them.

Conclusion

I have discussed the concept of performance and why I chose the performance process to strengthen my own and the participants' experience of wholeness. I have included the final historical personal story in the series. I have used performance as an action, a way of knowing, a way of making the world visible, an incitement to different actions, as a way of seeing FDV entanglement, and simultaneously a space

of intense personal, cultural risk and post-traumatic growth (see Participants' Reflections in Appendix C). I have included the eight-week workshop structure and tools within each week, such as Theory U and *Ma*, that helped me to build ST processes into the workshops. Also included are photos and videos from the workshops, photos, and video of the final performance at Curtin University. I have shown how performance can be a powerful and novel way of seeing and experiencing the effects of FDV (see appendix C) and how performance can simultaneously bring empowerment, insights and creatively merge the inner wisdom of lived experience with the present creative artist growing in self-worth and wholeness. In the following conclusion, I give an overall summary of this research and how ST and SP can transform the oppression that comes from lived experience of FDV into wholeness.

Conclusion

In this research I have identified FDV as an ongoing, painful, costly disease in our society. This exegesis is focused on creating ways for women who have experienced FDV to move away from the disconnection and fracture from self and love that it creates to reclaim wholeness. I have deconstructed my own lived experience as a model of FDV. I have discovered gaps and blind spots in the way that we (and particularly those in the field of FDV services) see, hear, feel and understand FDV as a problem, and designed choreographic processes and performance to reclaim wholeness.

The theoretical framework of performance/autoethnography includes Systems Theory (ST), Somatic Practice (SP), specifically, the Feldenkrais Method (FM), Choreography, Theatre for Living (TFL), Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), and my original processes and adaptations of these practices. I have given examples of ST and asserted the premise that when systems can be seen, they can be changed. By seeing and acknowledging what is there, we can then make choices to act towards what we want.

This framework, along with participation in and documentation of four choreography trainings and three theatre facilitation trainings, have culminated in this exegesis, the accompanying performance *Performing Wholeness*, my training to become a Joker/Facilitator and the development of my original creative choreographic processes. I have created these processes that support transformative, embodied awareness and change by making visible and bringing awareness to the less tangible patterns and dynamics of social systems. In this way, I have assisted the transformation of FDV lived experience into wholeness.

In Chapter 1: Introduction, my lived experience of FDV sits at the centre of this research. As I set out to explore how FDV occurred for me, performance, autoethnography and SP emerged as equal theories to explore my lived experience. All three theories sit within ST context, (see Figure 1, p.15) as identified in the text on the outside of the diagram circle. The autoethnographical components also include interwoven layers of creativity – six personal stories placed strategically throughout the chapters, the original workshop/choreography process and the performance. I defined wholeness for myself as having full access to function, self-love and creativity – healing the divide between self and Self (the highest version of self), that

is who I am today and who I may choose to become. The workshop participants defined wholeness for themselves (see Appendix C: Participants' Reflections, p.183).

In Chapter 2: Family and Domestic Violence, I discussed FDV theories, statistics, service responses, the language used by these services, and intergenerational aspects of FDV. I began by showing that in 2024 FDV remains a growing, costly, dangerous, and deadly cultural problem in Australia, with little exploration into innovation of new services. This research likens the violence and trauma of FDV to a war. I consider women who have experienced FDV as veterans of war. Through my personal story in this chapter, I have shown that the battleground is the home with long term wounds hidden in the body. My work chooses ST, SP and wholeness over feminism as a theoretical framework because of its wholeness *a priori*. Although feminist research is diverse in its understanding of FDV, mainstream dominant feminism is grounded in the principal that FDV is a result of male oppression within a patriarchal system in which men are the primary perpetrators and women are the primary victims. My research goes beyond this "us" and "them" attitude. My research shows that my environment shaped me, I learned worthlessness from my mother, and she learned it from her mother. My research also demonstrates that learned behaviour can be changed, thereby offering new concepts when offering services to assist FDV survivors.

In Chapter 3: Systems Theory, I examined ST as a science and in different contexts to show how to see systems more clearly (via The Work that Reconnects, SP, NLP, the Blind Spot, the Field, the power of creativity, TFL, SPT and FC) so we can begin to see possibilities, feel empowered and make changes. In the autoethnographic story *Mother's Constellation*, I showed that within the layers of systems that we live, there are blind spots to our understanding that result in missed opportunities to let go of oppression caused by FDV. I also discussed how often the current system produces results that nobody wants. In showing how ST can be seen I have shown how my research can be added as an adjunct to the current services as valuable in empowering women and bringing new intelligence to a tangled issue. Once we see blind spots in the context of FDV we can make changes. And I have shown in this research that change is possible through the choreographic and performance processes (see Appendix C: Participants' Reflections, p.183).

In Chapter 4: Methodology, I clarify that this thesis does not use Applied Theatre (AT) and specify that I only used TO in its original form as a form of Joker/facilitator training and the originator of theatre games that underpin TFL. This research work uses ST-based TFL and SPT that allows for a whole view of the issue of FDV including the oppressed, the oppressor and the environment where they occur. These theatre processes have provided fertile ground for embodying the journey from fragmentation to wholeness. In this chapter I also examined the cycles of action research, reflective practice, embodied exploration and documented my role of becoming a Joker/facilitator. In completing these trainings and becoming a Joker, I have navigated the complexities of FDV trauma to achieve authorship over my old FDV narrative.

In Chapter 5: Somatic Practice, I assessed FM as a self-care and ST process that recognises that the choices made by each person depends on the health of her nervous system, its support, as well as on the environment. The environment may accentuate her nervous system in growing and renewing itself or force it to adopt debilitating tendencies and ways of functioning. FM has a ST view of the body and lived experience and FM self-care sessions show what is present in the nervous system and in the body. I traced the development of shapes and gestures from my FM work and workshops and used what came up from the body as a resource, as part of the process of creating the performance (see Appendix D: Choreographer Reflections About Workshops). I included choreography as SP and discussed four workshops that I attended as part of my choreographic training. I found that SP is a vital component to understanding the lived experience of FDV and that the key to resolving past trauma can be found in the experience itself.

In Chapter 6: Performance, I examined the field of performance and discussed why I chose performance/autoethnography as my method of change, even though performance/autoethnography is less established and challenges conventional ethnography. Since my terror of performance was a symptom of my fragmentation, I knew I needed to use performance as part of my solution. I also knew I needed to use performance without words because FDV is lost in a sea of words that do nothing to reduce, educate or remedy. As a performing researcher I chose to put myself, my body on the line to query my embodied FDV habitual behaviour and how it has impacted my interaction with the world.

By deconstructing my trauma and exploring wholeness from within the body, I have unearthed layers of resilience and creativity. I created the original Reclaiming Wholeness Choreography Workshop, (see Appendix B) and performance, *Performing Wholeness* for others with a group of fellow veterans. Together we showed a collective story using shapes without words and improvised our creative journeys from FDV fractured to wholeness.

By focusing on women who have moved out of the initial trauma phase of FDV, this research recognises that women carry those FDV traumas in their bodies long after FDV events. Drawing on women's bodies of knowledge, my participants and I learnt to bypass the trauma of fragmentary thought, bypass being stuck in historical experience, and embrace the creation of our embodied wholeness. Inviting others to bring their insights of embodied FDV habitual behaviour and interaction with the world broadens the scope of the research. Our experience was shared. My life experience was like that of Participant T who said, "I have spent so much of my life wanting to be seen, yet not wanting to be seen. It felt liberating to acknowledge this was a hurdle from very early on in my life and has been a shadow to so much internal struggle in my life".

I found that this creative work brought me self-love and artistic expression like Participant L who felt "included, valued, authentic and seen". She said, "I felt like I was a paintbrush with my body and being, writing a story with my movements, supported by the group, the music, the facilitation, the inner muse." I also resonated with Participant G who shared how "moving in and out of these shapes and gestures offers a visceral sense of homecoming". I especially resonated with Participant A who said, "The learning of a 'different language' of expression was hugely appealing and powerful. The expression of shapes one to three reflecting our barriers, then transition and then the learnings and the positive nature of shapes five to eight – wholeness – was very inspiring." In the process of this research, I, like Participant V, let go of a deep sense of self-consciousness and worthlessness that has impeded my success throughout my whole life. Participant V shared, "I was so embodied and present with my internal process that there was no self-consciousness about being in a performance." Bringing light and making visible the less tangible patterns and dynamics of social FDV systems.

Through this research I have studied and become a choreographer, TFL Joker, performer, creative writer, and FDV trauma specialist. I have dived deep into

my body, acquired knowledge, and used that knowing to create my own practice. I have extended and adapted other specialist knowledge about trauma and the beneficial uses of theatre, taking these practices to whole new levels by creating witnessing in social justice theatre and performance, witnessing in workshops, as well as witnessing in the actual performance.

On a personal level, finding my wholeness has revealed to me connection, present and future purposefulness, and joy. In the process of deconstructing the past, I have come to understand that FDV experience has also underwritten goodness in my life. My wholeness contains my trauma transformed. I feel a deep sense of fulfilment to have assisted others through the workshops and performance to transform their FDV experience into creativity and wholeness.

My lived experience across 65 years is unique. From my childhood, growing up in a family FDV, my adult relationships over 20 years, and as a grandmother disconnected from some grandchildren, I have witnessed the layers of FDV in my life. I have used my experience as a mother, grandmother, natural therapist of over 30 years, and veteran of FDV to add to the body of FDV knowledge, to honour women and offer new insights. This lived experience enquiry offers new learning in dealing with FDV.

My survey of current FDV services in Australia shows that the theoretical framework I have used to view FDV, namely ST, SP, choreography, and performance, is unique. My research demonstrates that such an approach can create positive outcomes, fill the gaps in FDV services, and successfully act as an adjunct to those services. This research shows that the services in place to address FDV do not consider this component of the FDV problem. I intend to continue to apply and develop my approach to assist outcomes in FDV trauma.

Looking ahead, I am inspired to continue this work beyond this research project. I am excited to discover where this work will lead me: bridging the gap between lived experience and academic inquiry, between trauma and creativity, between fragmentation and wholeness. My journey has been one of personal and collective empowerment, of reclaiming wholeness, and of honouring the resilience and creativity inherent within each of us.

As we navigate the uncharted territories of FDV trauma and recovery, let us continue to harness the transformative potential of Somatic Practices and Systems thinking, and focus on what we want and our own wholeness. This field is

unmapped, making the research distinctive in its contribution to women who have experienced FDV and trauma, and to the field of FDV services.

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Appendix A: Performing Wholeness Introduction

Reclaiming Wholeness, the performance part of my PhD, explores reclaiming wholeness through SP after Intergenerational Family and Domestic Violence (FDV). In it I ask how can SP and ST transform the oppression that comes from the lived experience of FDV into wholeness?

Ultimately, as human beings, we are all being informed by two different aspects of consciousness: firstly, our unconscious, and the biggest part of our unconscious mind is our body. Our bodies record everything we experience, which includes negative bodily experiences like FDV, limiting thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the world (our unconscious draws on the past, not our present moment and not our future possibilities). And secondly, we can be informed by our wholeness which is connected to all that is, through all time and space. Our wholeness includes our potential, and it takes perception from beyond what our five senses experience tells us. Our wholeness offers brilliant perceptions from our future, which is unknown and full of possibilities. Our wholeness includes knowledge from our internal self, our physical body, and our highest self, and enables us with better choices; having awareness of our unconscious body and our future possibilities and choices is the foundation of creating what we want.

Premise: Our focus creates our reality – what we each focus on and where we focus from. For example, a person with a violent past might focus on avoiding conflict and by focusing from that place, by resisting conflict, they somehow seem to attract that. In my workshops I have merged Theatre Games with choreography and movement processes, and I've been working with women who have lived experience of FDV and who have moved out of those experiences physically, emotionally, and financially by at least three to five years. I have asked these participants/dancers to create embodied shapes that represent their personal journey from FDV to wholeness. This performance journey is personal on one level, but also community building and liberating because we have shared this experience in the workshops and now in performance.

As a prologue, we perform our eight individual shapes, which include three hurdle shapes that we experience because of FDV, a transition shape, and four shapes towards wholeness so that the audience sees the bones of the choreography.

Then the performance, *Reclaiming Wholeness*, begins with a constellation, where each dancer represents an aspect of FDV: women, men, relationship, money, society, children; and they perform that interaction between these aspects. Finally, the dancers have the choice to move through their shapes from one to eight as we perform our collective embodied performance reclaiming wholeness after intergenerational FDV.

Performance

Tuesday 6 December 2022, 4–6 pm Warm-up – no music Voice introduction – Jenn’s recorded voice over.

Choreography Playlist: Eight Shapes

1. Max Richter – *Found* (2:25)
2. Steven Sharp Nelson – *The Traveller* (1:40)
3. Cello Piano – *Granite* (1:24)
4. Cello Piano – *In Troubled Times* (1:44)
5. Richter – *Thermodynamics* (0:45)

(Total: 7 minutes)

Constellation

6. Max Cooper, Tom Hodge – *Symmetry* (3:45)

(Total: 3:45 minutes)

Eight Shapes

7. Slow Meadow – *Adorned with ribbons* (5:27)
8. Paul Smith – *Chant* (3:50)

(Total: 8.77 minutes)

Reclaiming Wholeness: Eight-week Wholeness Choreography Workshop Theme:
Body awareness of wholeness

Choreographic tools: I applied the following tools from each of the choreographic trainings that I have attended:

- Alice Cummins: Our embryonic self, the original choreographer and listening to the body.

- Michael Moulin-Skelton: *Sikhona* literally translated means "I am here to be seen" and *Sawubona* means "I see you and by seeing you bring you into existence."
- Annette Carmichael: Using the lived experience of the dancer and inviting gestures from the dancer's body.
- Jacqui Otago and Phillipa Clarke (PIP): Respond to the other dancers.
- TFL, SPT and Theory U as system movement warm-up.
- The concept of *ma* in exploring the social field. *Ma* is a feeling-knowing experience; it symbolically marks the transition between the mundane and the sacred. The Japanese character for *ma* is a torii found in the entrance of Shinto shrines – the open structure allows the light, the experience of a gap, to let the light, brilliance, and clarity to shine through interrupting the crowdedness of our doing and striving (Hayashi, 2021, p.112).

The creative process will also include using Theory U as a way of activating Systems Theory, noticing the structure of the current reality on the left side by suspending past patterns, being willing to see with fresh eyes, sensing from the field with the body in the present moment and letting go. This will allow a presencing in the present moment. When we are in the present moment, with an open mind, open heart and open will, we can have compassion and courage for ourselves and others. We can make a shape with our bodies, what we choose, what we want for the future using the right side of the Theory U – operating from the whole and embodying what that feels like. Linking our heart, head, and mind, and having the intention to hold that vision in our body as our new result of wholeness. In this way the performance starts to transform FDV past lived experience into wholeness.

Appendix B: Eight-week Choreography Workshop

The following outlines the lesson plan I designed for the workshop that I facilitated. I have included my spoken instructions, a description of the warm-ups and exercises that I ran and some reflections.

Each participant creates eight shapes over the eight-week (two-hour) workshops:

- Week one: Shape One and Shape Eight
- Week two: Shape Two and Shape Seven
- Week three: *Sikona* & *Sawubona* with first four shapes
- Week four: *Ma* exercise and find Shape Six, movement with six, seven and eight.
- Week five: Shape Three and Transition Gesture
- Week six: Presence exercise and the Constellation? FDV dance
- Week seven: Shape Five, six and Constellation? FDV dance
- Week 8: rehearsal and performance

Week One

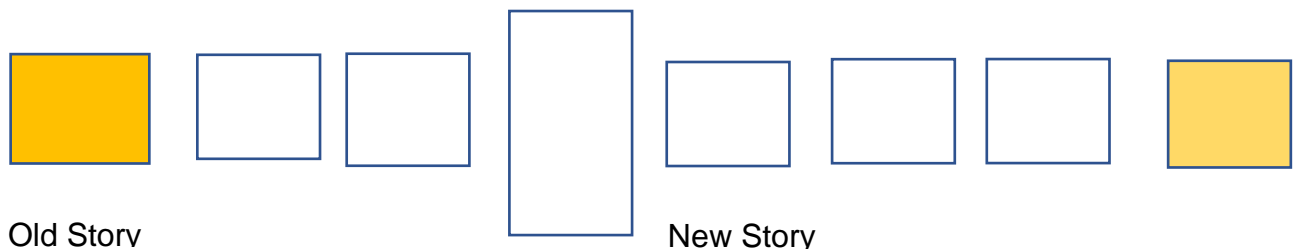


Diagram of week one workshop: shapes one and eight

Welcome: I want to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Nyungar nation. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. Over the course of these workshops, you will each make eight shapes and gestures that represent your past lived experience of FDV. A hurdle shape (there are three in the performance), represents three challenges that the lived experience of FDV created for you. As well, we will be creating shapes and gestures that represent what you want in your future. We will use these eight shapes to create an embodied performance together. In the current

reality, when making shapes with your body, the questions to ask yourself are: what can I learn from my body, what can I learn from that hurdle shape?

Participants were asked to think of their lived experience and consider three hurdles that they have had to deal with in FDV and I informed them that we will create three shapes to represent each of these hurdles. These shapes may or may not include a connected gesture. We made one of the hurdle shapes and one shape to represent the future and the state of wholeness and agency (shapes one and eight respectively).

Today we will also get to know the first four components of Theory U (see diagram below). We will start with presencing. Presencing calls for us to begin with an open mind, open heart, open will, to notice past patterns, see with fresh eyes and sense from peripheral vision. In today's class we will create Shape Eight to represent the future by using our imagination and Shape One, a shape that represents a past life hurdle.

Rules:

- Have fun, be kind and gentle to yourself, and to others.
- Take responsibility for your body, only you can look after yourself.
- We are all different, we celebrate our differences, it's okay to disagree.
- We keep confidentiality and agree to not share private details.

The rules are shared at the beginning the workshop because it helps to create the importance of having this as a safe space; it helps participants to bridge into the process from the outside world and informs the parameters of the processes. My project is titled *Reclaiming Wholeness: After Intergenerational Family and*

Domestic Violence. It is driven by the question: How can Somatic Practice and Systems Theory transform the oppression that comes from lived experience of FDV into wholeness?

Warm-up

1. **Blind Cars:** Person A is the car with eyes closed. Person B leads the car around the space keeping the car safe. (Short reflection after each game). (*The blind car exercise is a wonderful game because it*

allows participants to connect into their other senses, connecting into the body. This game encourages leadership, trust, support, trust, sense of fun and playfulness, breaking down barriers, communication with bodies rather than words).

- 2. Gibberish:** Move around the space blowing raspberries with your lips, loosening up your lips and face and when your face is ridiculously loosened start talking gibberish. To speak fluent gibberish, you need to call up your four-year-old self. When you are feeling free, go to someone and introduce yourself.
- 3. Fill the space:** Breathe into your body and become a particle, a molecule connected to the energy in the room. See how connected to the group you can be while you are equally spaced out in the room. Feel into the feeling of connection to earth; feel into your connection to a loved one; allow your body to create a shape and gesture that represents connection for you.
- 4. Movement of the day:** Person A is a mover – you are going to think about your day. Choose 3 or 4 movements (actions that you did today) and make them into a sequence that tells the story of your morning. Repeat these movements, in order, in a different order, just keep moving telling the story of your morning. Person B is the witness. Change over. Now Person A makes the movements again, this time only moving your face. Change over.
- 5. Lead the blind:** Take a partner, you are both going to do both parts, but do not switch until I ask you to. One of you is going to be the leader (eyes open) one of you is going to have eyes closed. Decide on a sound together. No words, not language. Also, not a mechanical sound, not clapping or stamping feet, but something you can make with your breath. The leader makes the sound, and the partner following the leader has two signals. Sound and no sound. No sound means stop. Everyone is going to be doing this at the same time, so you really must listen. Take your blind partner around the room without collisions. *(Similarly, both lead the blind, and blind cars build trust, support, a sense of fun and playfulness and getting more into the body).*

- 6. 1, 2, 3 game:** Person A says “1”, Person B says “2”, Person A says “3”.

Replace “1” with a movement and “2” with sound and “3” with another movement and sound.

Reflection

Participants shared that the games are sometimes challenging, that they didn’t trust their partner when they had to have their eyes closed and they felt nervous, or they felt silly doing the “gibberish” and “movement of the day” expand exercise. “I felt like a silly kid, I loved making a connection shape with my body, this simple action filled me with connection something that I have been craving.”

- 7. Build an object:** Stand in a circle please. Without speaking and as fast as possible use your bodies to build a doorway and a door; a bunch of balloons on a string; a saxophone and a melody; a bunch of flowers and a card. *(Build an object, requires collaboration as a group, a sense of fun, as well as, making it up and improvising on the spot which I feel is vital to performance. I always make a point to encourage the playfulness of bringing the child self in these games).*
- 8. Create a positive anchor shape:** Building on Amy Cuddy’s 2020 TED Talk about how positive postures can anchor positive feelings I created the following exercise.

Hold a victory shape for two minutes. Squeeze your dominant thumb and store those good feelings. According to Cuddy’s research, you can choose your state of mind. Now return to presencing: open mind, open heart, open will and connecting into the source. Find a place that represents wholeness and agency for you and go there. If there was a shape that represented wholeness and agency for you after FDV what would that shape, be? Make that shape.

Come into a circle, make enough room to swing arms around. Think of a time when you planned an outcome, you set your intention to do something, you acted, and you made it happen. Feel the feelings in your body. Notice the first thing that comes to mind when I ask you to point to your body where you feel those wonderful, empowered feelings. Good. Again, the first thing that comes to mind when you feel

those feelings point and reach out to the imaginary picture that represents those feelings, reach out with both hands, and get the size of the picture. Now expand that picture out as big as a drive-in movie theatre screen and notice how good that feels, now hold it above your head. Now imagine that you can turn it into a warm woolly blanket and wrap it around your shoulders and really snuggle into those good feelings. Anchor these good feelings into the thumb on your dominant hand; squeeze that thumb and anchor those feelings there.

Today we will make one of the hurdle shapes and one shape to represent the future and the state of wholeness.

Shape One

Excellent. Now, thinking of the three hurdle shapes in your movement piece, choose one. Go to a different place in the room and think of that hurdle. If there were a shape that could represent that for you, what shape would that be? Make that shape and share it with your partner. I do this exercise in pairs so that it feels safer for the participants to share. Once they start working on the shapes, it's important to me that I thank them each for sharing their offerings and give them permission to respond to/reflect on others' shapes. The framework for this, that creates safety, is always prefacing reflections with how much I appreciate their brave exploration and courage to play. A Social Presencing Theatre technique to help reflection and sharing without interpreting other shapes is to always preface our sharing with "I saw" and "I felt" (Hayashi, 2023).

Shape Eight

To create the Shape Eight, I asked the participants to imagine they could go to the end of life, perhaps even move past this lifetime, and imagine that they could look back at a life well lived. What would you see, hear, feel to let you know that you had achieved that? And if there was a shape that represented wholeness of a life well lived regardless of experience for you, what shape would that be and make that shape. This will become Shape Eight: wholeness.

Reflection

The interesting thing about the hurdle shapes is that I did not ask for any words or story to accompany the shapes. The participants all said that the Shape One was difficult to stay in and once in the shape, memories and thoughts came to mind that were not positive. I reiterated that there is no positive outcome from reliving old negative experiences. Get the Shape One and instead of reliving aspects of that old experience, ask yourself what can I learn from this shape? Participants responded that this question was helpful, and they received answers: I'm strong, it's not now, I have courage.

Week Two

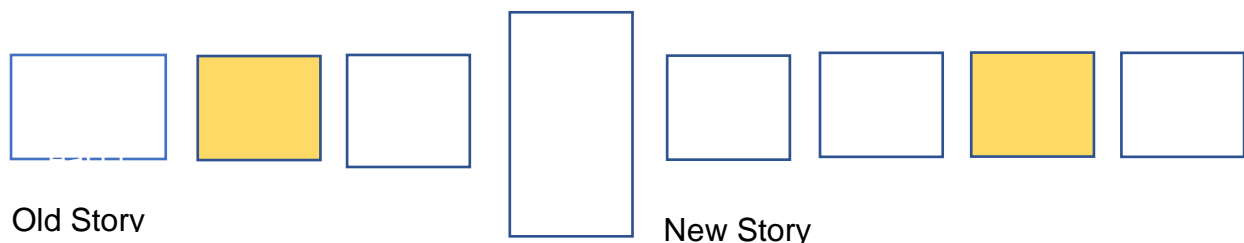


Diagram of week two workshop: shapes two and seven

Welcome: I begin each workshop with an Acknowledgement of Country and a re-stating of the rules of play.

Go around the circle, say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving.

Warm-Up

- 1. Heart Meridian:** Find a partner and run their heart meridian, over shoulders, down the outside of the arm and out the little finger, bladder meridian on the outside of hips down the outside of the legs and out the little toe. (*The body has energy lines that are called meridians, each energy line is connected to an organ in the bod. Chinese medicine and Qi Gong practices refer to these; running these energy lines with our hands creates energy and wellness*). Change over.
- 2. Black and white:** As your walk the space, I say, "jump" – you rub your belly. I say, "rub belly" and you jump. I say, "walk" and you clap your

hands. I say, “clap your hands” and you walk. I say, “pause” and you wiggle your body. I say, “wiggle” and you pause. (*Black and White is a game to stimulate the brain, creating opposites for the body to think about and respond to quickly. It enables participants to use their body and mind in different, playful ways. I always encourage participants to laugh at mistakes. There are no mistakes only new creative expression; this creates safety in the workshops*). Walk the space slowly; using your peripheral vision notice the other members of your ensemble. Space yourself evenly over the floor. Walk in a circle to your left; change direction.

Breathe into your feet; notice your feet connecting the floor. Pause. Notice what it’s like for you to pause and remember pause is like a neutral relaxed state. Listen to the souls of your feet. Stand on the balls of your feet, on the outside edges of your feet, dig you heels in and notice your heels. Stand on your toes; wake up your feet and ground yourself; think of a gesture. Make that shape. Does the shape have a corresponding gesture? Now remember your result, that really good shape and possible gesture that you created for yourself last week, that represented things like celebration, wellbeing, stillness, peace and complete. Notice your shape and gesture again.

3. **Fill the space:** Breathe into your body and become a particle connected to the energy in the room. See how connected to the group you can be equally spaced out in the room. Feel into the feeling of connection to earth; feel into the feeling of connection to a loved one; think of a gesture. Make that shape and gesture.
4. **Shapes of the day:** (*see previous week, this is also a memory and rehearsal technique embedded in the workshop space*).
5. **Give a sound:** Take a partner, you are both going to do both parts, but do not switch until I ask you to. One of you is going to be the leader (eyes open), one of you is going to have eyes closed. Decide on a sound together. No words not language. Also, not a mechanical sound, not clapping or stamping feet, but something you can make with your breath: The leader makes the sound, and the following partner follows the leader has two signals. Sound and no sound. No sound means stop. Everyone is

going to be doing this at the same time, so you really must listen. Take you blind partner around the room and don't have any collisions. After a few minutes. Freeze. Take four or five steps away from each other. This is the closest you can get to each other. Continue. After a few minutes. Freeze. Leaders, be as far away from your partners as you can and still be in the room. Leaders stay where you are now, and start making your sounds, bring your partner "home" to you. Partners once you reach home, please just wait silently until everyone is home.

6. **West Side Story:** One leader: followers follow the leaders doing dance movements. Change leaders.
7. **Make a shape with your hands:** Person A makes the shape. Person B has their eyes closed walks towards the person with their hands out; you can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of the person A. Once you have the shape in your mind return to the beginning place and make the shape (*"Making a shape with your hands" is a version of "Making a shape with your body" which is safer for participants in the beginning workshop. "Making a shape with bodies" will be used in the later workshops*).
8. **Fidel's Followers:** One person in the middle, all the others around them, follow their actions completely; change over.

Reflection

The participants loved Fidel's Followers; most of them know it from theatre games. I put music on here as the exercise can be a movement warm-up, warming up the whole body, a creative exercise, playful and fun in the group, building ensemble. The participants have shared in the beginning circle what came up for them during the week. Some expressed feeling raw from making their first hurdle shape and wonderfully empowered from designing their wholeness shape.

This week go to the end outcome that you created last week, and notice the first thing that comes to mind, a few thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions in that shape. Excellent, now take a step back in time to the shape and gesture that represents what was happening just before you got the end outcome achievement.

Just before you achieved wholeness, what was there for you? Make a shape and gesture for that. What is a thought belief and assumption in this shape?

Go to the first hurdle shape that you made last week. Instead of revisiting any pain, ask: What can I learn from this shape? What is a shape and gesture that represents how I behave because of this hurdle experience?

If you know, jot down a thought, belief, or assumption from that shape. Remember, you have control of your state, and you can take the anchor state whenever you need to! Closing Circle.

Week Three

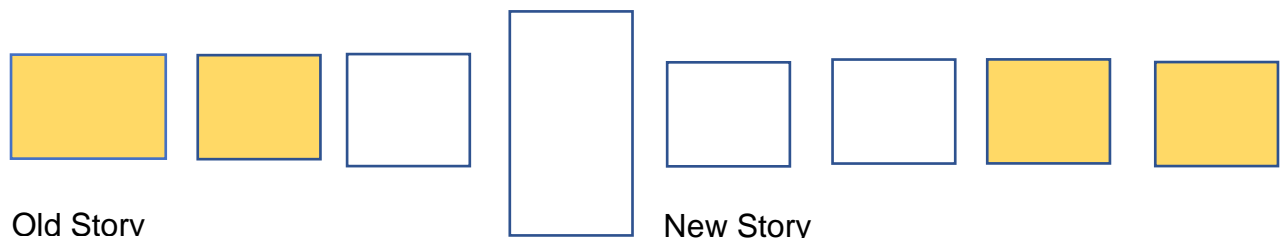


Diagram of week three: shapes one, two, seven and eight

Introduction: This week we are not going to add any new shapes or gestures, instead we are going to witness our first four shapes using Zulu greeting words. I was introduced to these greetings (*Sikhona* and *Sawubona*) as choreographic tools by Michael Molin-Skelton. In South Africa these are the Zulu words for hello when meeting and greeting one another. The intention behind the word *Sikhona* means “I am here to be seen”, and *Sawubona* means “I see you and by seeing you bring you into existence.” The Zulu people believe that when a person says *Sikhona*, “I am here to be seen”, it invokes the person’s spirit to be present. Saying “I am here” is a declaration of intent to fully inhabit this moment. It signals a willingness to engage with integrity. Saying “to be seen” emphasises “not masks”, “not editing” and “no defences”. It means: “This is the real me” and “I will speak my truth”. It means: “I will be honest with you”, and there will be no deception. *Sawubona*, is a powerful experience both for the person who says it and for the person who hears it. According to the Zulu tradition, to say *Sawubona*, offers an intention to release any preconceptions and judgements so that “I can see you as God created you”. To hear *Sawubona*, is an affirmation that you exist, that you are both equal, and that you

have a person's respect. This may be the most moving part of the greeting. It strengthens the resolve to be more authentic and visible in our lives (Molin-Skelton, 2019, Alice Springs Open Floor training). Also, in line with Theory U, we create a space of deep listening. Listening. In this space we are making a container to hold a space for wholeness and agency after FDV.

Warm-up

1. **Push:** Find a partner and push with your hands on each other's shoulders to find your balance, your point of power. Change to different body part. (*The pushing exercise is a good warm up game, it is an opportunity to find strength, balance, connection with the other.*)
2. **Glass bottle:** One person stands in the centre and trusts that the others will keep them standing as they fall forward and back. (*Glass bottle is a trust exercise; in fact, there were two women in the group who opted out of this exercise this week because they were not feeling ready to participate yet.*)
3. **Build an object:** Stand in a circle please. Without speaking and as fast as possible use your bodies to build a doorway and a door, a bunch of balloons on a string, a saxophone and a melody, a bunch of flowers and a card. (*Sometimes when an exercise is enjoyable it is good to repeat it just for fun.*)
4. **Make a shape with your body:** Person A makes the shape; Person B has their eyes closed and walks towards the person with their hands out. You can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of person A. Once you have the shape in your mind, return to the beginning place and make the shape. (*The participants know each other, and their comfort can be extended with the added difficulty of the whole-body exercise.*)
5. **Fidel's followers:** One person in the middle, all the others around them, follow their actions completely. Change over.
6. **Black and white:** As you walk the space I say jump: you wiggle your body. When I say wiggle your body, you jump. I say hug yourself and you clap your hands. I say clap your hands and you hug yourself. When I say pause, you walk. I say walk, you pause. Walk the space

slowly; using your peripheral vision notice the other members of your ensemble and space yourself evenly over the floor. Walk in a circle to your left; change direction. Breathing into your feet, notice your feet connecting the floor. Pause (notice what it's like for you to pause and remember pause). Pause is like a neutral, relaxed state. Listen to the soles of your feet. Stand on the balls of your feet, on the outside edges of your feet, dig your heels in and notice your heels. Stand on your toes, wake up your feet and ground yourself. Draw that energy up through the soles of your feet; notice your connection to the floor; notice your connection to the earth beneath you. (*Grounding is an important part of Social Presencing Theatre. Walking the space brings participants out of their previous day's activities and into the room together as an ensemble.*)

7. **Complete the image:** Person A comes in and makes an image; Person B comes in and completes the image. Person A bows out and Person C comes in to complete Person B's image.
8. **Break:** Water and five-minute rest.

Jidda Krishnamurti – Listening Exercise

I read out this writing from Jidda Krishnamurti on listening before the *Sikhona* exercise to emphasise a renewed version of listening to ourselves, our bodies, and each other. "I hope that you will listen, but not with the memory of what you already know; and this is very difficult to do. You listen to something, and your mind immediately reacts with its knowledge, its conclusions, its opinions, its memories. It listens, inquiring for a future understanding."

Just observe yourself, how you are listening, and you will see that this is what is taking place. Either you are listening with a conclusion, with knowledge, with certain memories, experiences, or you want an answer and you are impatient. You want to know what it is all about, what life is all about, the extraordinary complexity of life.

You are not actually listening at all.

You can only listen when the mind is quiet, when the mind doesn't react immediately, when there is an interval between your reaction and what is being said.

Then, in that interval there is a quietness, there is a silence in which alone there is a comprehension which is not intellectual understanding.

If there is a gap between what is said and your own reaction to what is said, in that interval, whether you prolong it indefinitely, for a long period or for a few seconds – in that interval, if you observe, there comes clarity. It is the interval that is the new brain. The immediate reaction is the old brain, and the old brain functions in its own traditional, accepted, reactionary, animalistic sense (Hayashi, 2021, p.119).

Exercise: In pairs do *Sikhona* exercise on Shape Eight of wholeness. Witness your partner and change over. Then do *Sikhona* exercise on first hurdle. Witness your partner and change over.

Week Four

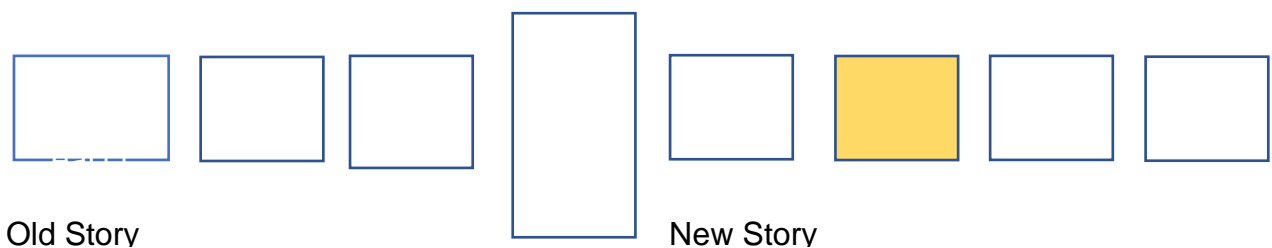


Diagram of week four workshop Shape Six

Welcome: I begin each workshop with an Acknowledgement of Country and a re-stating of the rules of play.

Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving.

Warm-up

- 1. Push:** Find a partner, place your hands on their shoulders push and find your point of balance, find your point of strength. Now push your partner across the room, notice your front body. Now pull your partner across the room, notice your back body. Change over. Now pretend to push your partner across the room with body memory of previous exercise, now pretend, act to pull your partner across the room, change over. (*Repetition*)

of an exercise, bring safety and familiarity into the exercises and allows for leaning in further, finding different layers and strengths in the exercise.)

- 2. Fill the space:** Breathe into your body and become a particle connected to the energy in the room. See how connected to the group you can be, equally spaced out in the room. Feel into the feeling of connection to earth; feel into the feeling of connection to a loved one, think of a gesture. Make that gesture.
- 3. Movements of your day:** Person A is a mover. You are going to think about your day, choose three or four movements (actions that you did today) and make them into a sequence to move the story of your morning. Repeat, in order, in a different order, just keep moving telling the story of your morning while Person B witnesses. Change over. Now person A makes the movements again only this time make the movements only with your face. Change over. Now person A conducts Person B to either expand or contract those same movements. Change over.
- 4. Lead the blind:** Take a partner, you are each going to do both parts, but do not switch until I ask you to. One of you is going to be the leader (eyes open), one of you is going to be the follower (eyes closed). Decide on a sound together. No words not language. Also, not a mechanical sound, not clapping or stamping feet, but something you can make with your breath. The leader makes the sound, and the following partner who follows the leader has two signals. Sound and no sound. No sound means stop. Everyone is going to be doing this at the same time, so you really must listen. Take your blind partner around the room and don't have any collisions. After a few minutes, freeze. Take four or five steps away from each other. This is the closest you can get to each other. Continue. After a few minutes, freeze. Leaders, be as far away from your partners as you can while still in the room. Leaders stay where you are now and start making you sounds; bring your partner "home" to you. Partners, once you reach home, please just wait silently until everyone is home.
- 5. Getting up off the ground:** Find the easiest way to get up off the ground, sit cross legged on the floor, notice one-way corkscrews up, easily.
- 6. Build an object:** Stand in a circle please. Without speaking and as fast as possible, use your bodies to build a doorway and a door, a bunch of

balloons on a string, a saxophone and a melody, a bunch of flowers and a card.

- 7. Make a shape with your bodies:** Person A makes the shape. Person B, with your eyes closed walk towards person A with your hands out. You can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of person A. Once you have the shape in your mind return to the beginning place and make the shape.

Exercise: A simple everyday life practice: This is an extension of the concept of *ma*: Go to the window and sit for five minutes and look out. Don't do anything. Just sit there and look out. Thoughts will come and go. Let them. Don't try to relax. Just sit there without any special effort; awareness is there. Awareness tells us what we see and how we feel. Awareness is always present. Now write a phrase or sentence describing what you saw or heard or felt. Finally, write a phrase or sentence that links your perceptions and your feelings.

Break: Water and five-minute rest.

Exercise: This week go to the sixth wholeness and agency shape. The way to get there is to go from Shape Eight to Shape Seven. Excellent, now take a step back in time to the gesture that represents what was happening just before you got the end outcome achievement. What was there for just before you achieved wholeness and agency? Make a shape and gesture for that. What is a thought, belief, or assumption in this shape? Share and move and witness six, seven and eight.

If you know, jot down a thought, belief, or assumption in that shape.

Remember you have control of your state, and you can take the wholeness and agency state if you need to!

Go to the second hurdle shape. Write it down and the gesture that represents the behaviour you took up because of that hurdle. Now you have two outcome shapes and gestures and two hurdle shapes and gestures.

If you know, jot down a thought, belief, or assumption in that shape.

Remember you have control of your state, and you can take the wholeness and agency state if you need to!

Excellent, be in Shape Seven. Does this shape have a gesture? Now take a step back in time to the shape that represents what was happening just before you got the end outcome achievement. What was there for you just before you achieved wholeness and agency? Make a shape for that. What is a thought, belief, or assumption in this shape?

Go to the first hurdle shape that you made last week. Instead of revisiting any pain, ask: what can I learn from this shape? Ask: what is a gesture that represents how I behave because of this hurdle experience?

In pairs, share your shape and gesture (the gesture represents how that shape changed/informed your behaviour).

Extending the choreographic device of a pause – *ma* – a usefully useless thing (See description on p.97). The *kanji* (Japanese character for *ma* is a *tori* gate with the sun shining through). Traditionally a *tori* is found at the entrance of a *Shinto* shrine and symbolically marks the transition between the mundane and the sacred (Hayashi, 2021, p.112).

In everyday experience, the experience of a gap invites the ever-present qualities of the sun – brilliance, warmth, and clarity – to shine forth and interrupt the speedy crowdedness of our doing and striving. *Ma* concept is based on Buddhist meditative tradition (Hayashi, 2021, p.118). *Ma* is the unconcerned moment of movement from one step to the next.

Non manipulative, without striving – a true move from nothingness. A direct and immediate experience of the movement in which time and space are not separate. *Ma* empties both the objective and the subjective worlds. *Ma* celebrates the sacredness in ordinariness (Hayashi, 2021, 113).

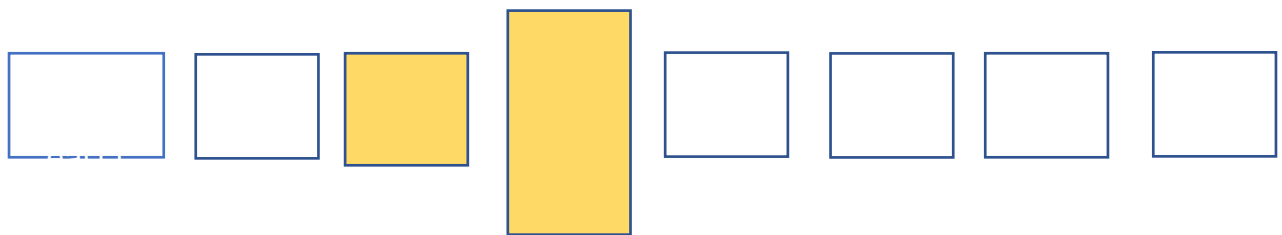
Practice Ma

Stand together with a partner, attending to what is about to happen – to what has not happened yet. First person begins from a still, standing shape. Without thinking about what to do, without planning, offer a “movement phrase” or gesture. At the end of the movement, pause in a still shape. Hold or rest in this body posture (5 to 10 seconds). The partner receives the movement phrase or gesture without immediately responding in movement. Both then rest in the stillness, the gap, the *ma*.

After resting in the space for a few moments, the second person lets a movement arise. The gesture is not a reaction to what was offered by the first person but arises freshly from the shared moment of spacious stillness. Let movement simply arise naturally without contrivance from the shared open space of *ma*. At the completion of the gesture, the second person holds the ending shape. Remain still. Then the first person allows a movement phrase (gesture) to arise. At the completion of the movement, pause. *Ma*. Then the second person moves. Continue like this. After a time, when the sense of space is prominent in awareness you can begin to move together, not forgetting that your gestures arise from the open space of *ma*. Remember you have control of your state, and you can take the victory state if you need to!

Dance to shake it all out.

Week Five



Old Story

New Story

Diagram of week five workshop: shapes three and four

Welcome: I begin each workshop with an Acknowledgement of Country and a re-stating of the rules of play.

Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving.

Warm-up

1. **Push:** Find a partner and push to find your balance; find your point of power. Change to different body part.
2. **Glass bottle:** One person stands in the centre and trusts that the others will keep them standing as they fall forward and back.

3. **Build an object:** Stand in a circle please. Without speaking and as fast as possible use your bodies to build a doorway and a door, a bunch of balloons on a string, a saxophone and a melody, a bunch of flowers and a card.
4. **Make a shape with your body:** Person A makes the shape, Person B with their eyes closed walks towards the person with their hands out, you can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of the person A. Once you have the shape in your mind return to the beginning place and make the shape.
5. **Fidel's followers:** One person in the middle, all the others around them, follow their actions completely. Change over.
6. **And then ...:** Person A starts telling a true or imagined story using their whole body. When they have enough, they pass the story on to Person B by saying: "And then ..." (*This game connects the participants into the playful creating storytelling selves, I invite them to use their whole bodies in the storytelling game, it also invites creativity, playfulness, and safety.*)
7. **Come into a circle; complete the image:** Person A comes in and makes an image, Person B comes in and completes the image, Person A bows out and Person C comes into complete Person B's image.

Exercise?

- **Step 1:** Sit in a small group. One by one, show your three embodied shapes to the others. After everyone has demonstrated their shape, reflect briefly, sharing what you saw or felt as you witnessed each person, without any judgement or interpretation of the gesture. Always speak from "I" voice about your own experience: never project what you think the stuck person is experiencing.
 - **Step 2:** Beginning with the first person: again, show your stuck shape. Feel your embodied shape and remain there until the body begins to move. Move from Shape Three to Shape Four. Move without thinking or planning. When the movement stops say one word or phrase that arises from the sculpture as if the sculpture itself had a voice. What

would it say? The others in the group briefly share their experience as witnesses starting only with “I saw” or “I felt”. Next, the second person goes through the same process. Continue until everyone has completed this part of the practice. Take care to keep reflections brief and related directly to the experience. Speak only about your own experience.

- **Step 3:** First person, build a group sculpture around your personal stuck shape. Ask others to embody forces that are restricting movement. Invite and direct others verbally (do not place them) one by one to a position and shape that intensifies the feeling of the forces in play. Do not tell others what movements to make or how to make them, or how they should feel.
- **Step 4:** After remaining for a minute in the stuck social body, which is what we sense and feel, specifically the physical sensation of the shapes and relational space in between the sculpture and fully experiencing it (Hayashi, 2021, p.141), move as a group from sculpture three to sculpture four. Move with an awareness of yourselves as a social body. Give up any ideas about helping or fixing and allow the social body and the space to guide the shift to sculpture four.
- **Step 5:** Without thinking or planning, each person speaks a sentence from the shape and place in the social sculpture. The person bringing the stuck is the last person to speak. Then all the group members share details about their experience using “I saw” or “I felt” (the “I” voice) and engaging in an open conversation about the shared experience.

Week Six

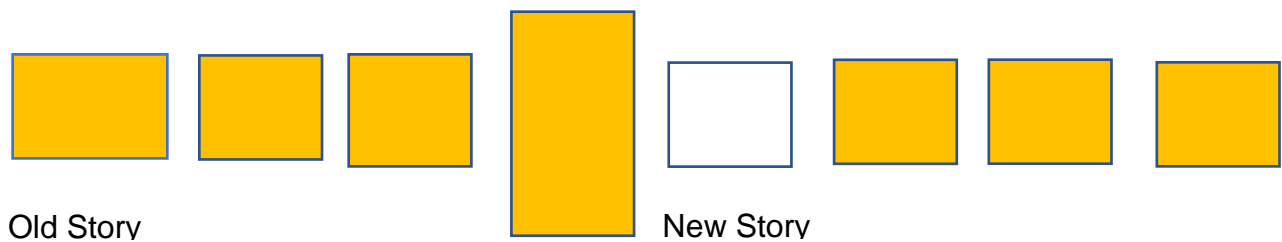


Diagram of week six workshop: Shape Five

Welcome: I begin each workshop with an Acknowledgement of Country and a re-stating of the rules of play. No new shapes this week.

Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving.

Warm-up

- 1. Push:** Find a partner and push to find your balance, find your point of power. Change to different body part. Push waking up your front body, then waking up your back body. Pull, waking up you front and back body, now act as if you are pushing/pulling someone and get the same physical feelings.
- 2. And then ...:** One person begins, in an animated way, using their whole body to tell a true or fictional story. Once you have completed your story or are too tired to continue, pass the story to person B by saying "And then ..."
- 3. Build an object:** Stand in a circle. Without speaking and as fast as possible use your bodies to build a doorway and a door, a bunch of balloons on a string, a saxophone and a melody, a bunch of flowers and a card.
- 4. Make a shape with your body:** Person A makes the shape. Person B, with their eyes closed, walks towards person A with their hands out. Person B, you can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of person A. Once you have the shape in your mind, return to the beginning place and make the shape.

5. **Physical choir:** One person is lead conductor; all the others are around them. With a sound and movement enacted when the conductor points to them, repeat whenever instructed by the conductor. Change to a new conductor. Change again. (*Theatre games can warm up the whole body and the voice is a vital component of the body.*)
6. **Walk the space:** Be like a magnet, pulled to others, repelled from others, walk fast, walk slow, move backwards. Feel into the feeling of connection to earth, feel into the feeling of connection and really being grounded to Mother Earth. Think of a gesture. Make that gesture. Now remember your end result, that really good shape and gesture that you created for yourself last week that represented for you things like celebration, wellbeing, still, peace and complete (notice your shape and gesture again).
7. **Complete the image:** Person A comes in and makes an image. Person B comes in and completes the image. Person A bows out and person C comes in to complete person B's image.

Welcome: Each week begins with theatre games warm-up

Presence exercise: The group sits in a semi-circle. One at a time participants come to centre stage, feeling feet grounded, front body, back body, soft eyes, peripheral vision, breathing presence, open mind, open heart, open will (Scharmer, 2018, p.5).

Constellation dance: Gather in a group of four – a social body. Pay attention to the whole social body as you engage in five ordinary everyday actions: standing, sitting, lying down. Walking forward turn from facing one direction to another. Limit your movements to only these five ordinary actions, apply mindfulness of body in performing them. You can do them in any order, at any time. At any speed. Do not add arms or any stylized gestures. Simplicity supports awareness.

Week Seven

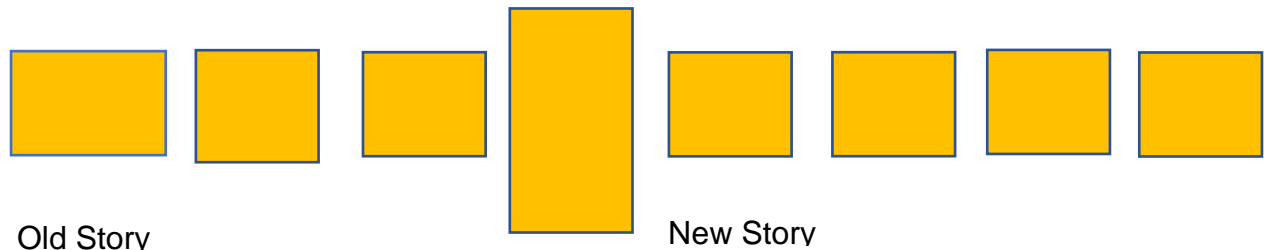


Diagram of week seven workshop

Welcome: Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving. No new shapes this week:

Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving. No new shapes this week: Warm-up

- 1, 2, 3 game:** Go around with numbers and then replace numbers with a sound and a movement in stages.
- Contract/Reverse/Expand:** Person A is the conductor, telling Person B to contract their body, reverse their movement or expand their movement.
Person B follows the conductor's instruction: Contract their body, reverse the movement, or expand the movement. (*This game gives them the tools for the movement piece later, helps them make bigger and braver physical choices in their movement, adds playfulness.*)
- Mould the clay:** Person A is the clay. Person B, choose five separate moves and makes them one at a time clearly and slowly taking the body parts of person A and showing the movement. The game is to remember the order and the five moves in the right order. Change over. (*This game helps with memory, which is useful for later choreography; enables participants to embody physical shapes that are outside their usual repertoire of moves; allows witnesses to practice reinterpretation.*)
- Make a Shape with your Bodies:** Group A makes the shape. Group B, with their eyes closed, walks towards the person with their hands out. You can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the

shape of Group A. Once you have the shape in your mind return to the beginning place and make the shape. Change over.

5. **Fidel's followers:** One person in the middle, all the others around them; follow their actions completely. Change over.
6. **Walk the space:** Be like a magnet, pulled to others, repelled from others, walk fast, walk slow, move backwards. Feel into the feeling of connection to earth, feel into the feeling of connection and really being grounded to Mother Earth. Think of a gesture. Make that gesture. Now remember your end result, that really good shape and gesture that you created for yourself last week that represented for you things like celebration, wellbeing, still, peace and complete (notice your shape and gesture again).
7. **Complete the image:** Person A comes in and makes an image, Person B comes in and completes the image, person A bows out and person C comes in to complete Person B's image. Person C stays, Person D comes to complete the image, Person E completes the image.
8. **Pull and Push:** Get into pairs, hold hands, lower to the floor and up again, turning on back body, Pull turning on front body. Move across the room acting as if you are pulling someone across the room. Move across the room acting as if you are pulling a person across the room.

Exercise: This week review all shapes. Get into pairs or a trio to witness each other's shapes.

New constellation with five dancers in the field: In character as money, relationship, society, men, women and intending that FDV is the field. This idea comes from Bert Hellinger Family Constellations and resonates with SPT and the social field (that we can pick up on energies). Also, in TO and TFL when an actor is asked to be the shape of a fear or a desire, they call on their body knowing. In this exercise I am asking participants to imagine that the field they are in is the social field of FDV and the parts that they are representing in that social field are

separately: relationship, society, men, and women. Each participant will take on one of these characters. Do movement with all shapes in play.

Week Eight

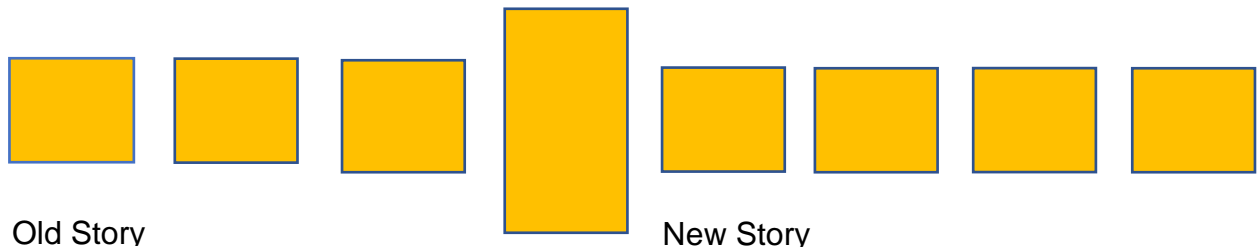


Diagram of week eight workshop: all shapes

Welcome: Go around the circle say your name and something that you noticed about last week's moving. No new shapes this week. Warm-up

- 1. Heart and bladder meridian massage:** Find a partner. Person A stands relaxed; Person B moves their hands over Person A's shoulders and down the outside of their arms down to their little finger. Then in between their shoulder blades down to their waist, then out to the sides of their body and down the outside of their legs to their little toe, breathing out fear, breathing in loving thoughts.
- 2. Glass bottle:** One person stands in the centre and trusts that the others will keep them standing as they fall forward and back.
- 3. Movement circle:** Stand in a circle please. Person A makes a shape and sound. We go around the circle and copy that sound. Repeat until everyone has had a turn and we've gone all the way around the circle.
- 4. Make a shape with your bodies:** Group A makes the shape; Group B has their eyes closed, walks towards the person with their hands out. You can use your hands or the back of your hands to get the shape of Group A. Once you have the shape in your mind return to the beginning place and make the shape. Change over.
- 5. Contract/Reverse/Expand:** Person A is the conductor, telling Person B to contract their body, reverse their movement or expand their movement.

Person B follows the conductor's instruction: contract their body, reverse the movement, or expand the movement. (*This game gives them the tools for the movement piece later, helps them make bigger and braver physical choices in their movement, adds playfulness.*)

- 6. Mould the clay:** Person A is the clay. Person B choose 5 separate moves and makes them one at a time, clearly and slowly taking the body parts of person A and showing the movement. The game is to remember the order and the 5 moves in the right order. Change over. (*This game helps with memory, which is useful for later choreography, enables participants to embody physical shapes that are outside their usual repertoire of moves; allows witnesses to practice reinterpretation.*)
- 7. Complete the image:** Person A comes in and makes an image. Person B comes in and completes the image. Person A bows out and Person C comes in to complete Person B's image. Person C stays, Person D comes to complete the image. Person E comes to complete the image.
- 8. Pull and push:** Get into pairs and hold hands as you lower to the floor and up again, turning on back body. Pull turning on front body. Move across the room acting as if pulling someone across the room.

Appendix C: Participants' Reflections

The workshop participants were encouraged to give their feedback, in the sharing circles at the beginning and the end of each workshop, after each exercise, and in their journals to record what they wanted to contribute throughout the eight weeks. They had the option to keep some of their journals private. In week six I sent out a questionnaire with questions to be returned to me at the end of the workshop. I transcribed the feedback at the beginning and the end of workshops based on what the participants shared in the circle, wrote in their journals, and emailed me from their journals. Feedback below is from the eight-week workshop and performance. I am keeping the participants anonymous by not using their names.

Week One

Participant V: I love the freedom and simplicity of this wholeness process.

Afterwards I feel more embodied, slower, and softer. An unresolved challenge or real problem that was affecting my nervous system could fall into a more nourishing shape in my body which gave the sense that it was possible to overcome this hurdle with support and connection. Tough to put it into words!

Participant G: Thank you for another wonderful session on Tuesday! My hurdles, abandonment, and shame have been catalysts in my life for coming home to myself in a heart-centred way, with a growing sense of freedom through acceptance. The message comes ... I have done the very best I could, and it all makes sense now; moving in and out of these shapes and gestures offers a visceral sense of homecoming.

Participant T: I love the metaphor of life being a "journey" towards wholeness and the way we created an embodied story from our hurdles and to our celebrations in life. I love the way the body "knows" and leads the way in this journey.

I thought starting with the end wholeness shape was clever. That wholeness shape became active and a guiding light to what was to come – and moving towards that light. It felt fantastic to do this shape and gesture. Fantastic in a spiritual goose bumpy sort of way. There was benefit beyond words in embodying a wholeness

shape that represented the end of our lives and symbolic of a life well lived. My shape was reaching my arms to the heavens, looking up to the sky, saying internally YES. It felt like a celebration of a spiritual life. My gesture was my arms flying in a flowing up and down sort of way reaching up.

In the first hurdle, my body found its way to hanging downward from the waist. My arms were hanging down, my head was hanging down and I didn't want to be seen.

I have spent so much of my life wanting to be seen, yet not wanting to be seen. It felt liberating to acknowledge this was a hurdle from very early on in my life and has been a shadow to so much internal struggle in my life. Making a shape that represented this wholeness felt like a "full acknowledgement", and in that moment of making the shape, I could feel why and how – and that somehow led to some kind of liberation. We were asked what comes before not wanting to be seen, and I realised it was confusion. I felt compassion for myself and that little girl who felt so often confused. My shape or gesture that represented this was looking down over one of my shoulders skewing my posture and robbing myself of my postural and emotional alignment.

Week Two

Participant T: In week two we were asked what shape came before number eight. I immediately drew upon a shape I had learnt during a prior dance class – that of a Spanish dancer with one hand up above my head and the other hand following with a dance of its own. Oh, the power of a shape, and how much I loved that dance. The shape connected me to my feminine – not something I've given a lot of permission to. The shape felt feminine *and* strong, celebratory, and full-on pleasure – which I love. The gesture from the shape became the hand still in the raised position but the hands became like an offering with the palms raised to the heavens – again, in wonder of the spiritual nature of life and being in this shape I felt immense gratitude for my incredible life, well lived!

Participant L: Aggravation came up for me this week during the *ma* exercise; I am stressed about work, and a family issue and it was difficult for me to be present in this quiet moment for the full time. My mind kept wondering.

Participant V: I couldn't focus: the sound of the traffic, noises coming from the garden outside, my own expectation to do the exercise right.

Week Three

Participant G: I am here to be seen. I see you. I see you and by seeing you, I bring you into existence". To be witnessed and accompanied by another during these transitions, a sense of wholeness is integrated. To be this for the other is love.

Week Four

Participant G: Generative listening and opening to possibilities infinite and deeply nourishing; we listen with our bodies, we listen to each other when we take sacred pause, slow down to respond rather than react, intersperse movement with stillness.

Week Five

Participant G: The Shape Three and transitional four shape; the midpoint, the choice point, the wholeness, and agency to direct the other participants in my internal system for empowerment, for the health of the whole. I was once a victim, trapped and contracted, and I can, with support, surrender into expansion.

Week Six

Participant T: The exercises we did in week six felt great as it enticed attention to parts of our bodies otherwise not noticed. The movements felt sacred. Our awareness was brought to the front and back of our bodies as we moved. We did the exercise's five moves. I found my mind open; my heart was open. I was safe in not knowing.

We did a dance together where each of us represented some aspect of DV – masculine, feminine, money, society, and relationship. I represented masculine. It took me by surprise how marginalised and confused masculine was. Wow, what an eye opener in empathy! I felt trapped in my body, wanting to be outside my body, overwhelmed, looking out of myself. Freedom felt nowhere to be seen. I felt an epiphany in that the masculine experience outcome felt very similar to the feminine experience of marginalisation, aloneness, and disempowerment.

Week Seven

Participant T: This week we repeated the exercise using the five positions. This time I was society. I felt conformist and judgemental. Not particularly compassionate and remote.

Week Eight

Participant T: It's been a real privilege to partake in the group. I love the creativity and how you can transform in ways that can't necessarily be intellectualised or understood in a linear way. It's been bonding to partake in an intimate group such as ours and to stand alongside the other women in a unity of strength and wholeness. This felt like a political action as we stood together in health and wellness. We've had fun, we've laughed a lot, we've been silly, we've been reverent, we've been courageous.

The sessions I've enjoyed felt safe in the most, is when we've briefly checked in with each other, thus paying attention to process. I've identified "process" as an important way of feeling safe, and sharing, albeit briefly what's come up – hence the power of unity and witness.

I've made discoveries about positions I have adopted unconsciously and brought other aspects of my life more fully into acknowledgement. In this I have realised certain patterns I share with my daughter, which took me by surprise as the invisible becomes visible.

For me, the "*ma* moment" was a way of bringing in mindfulness – when the mind enters the body – a coming home to the self. It was an intention of being, with no thought. An attention on the present moment. The moment became a connector and a conductor throughout the dance.

During the exercise of *ma*, I sat watching the branches of a tree move in the wind. I wrote I see the flexibility of the branches moving in the wind. On locating a feeling in this moment, agitation came up. In joining them both together, I wrote: Appreciating the tree branches swaying in the wind and not breaking.

Shape Two hurdle: I had quite a realisation in this shape. I placed my hands on my hips, not looking happy. A voice came up and said, "Not fair." Well, this voice certainly had significance. It was the first two words my daughter strung together and has said a lot ever since! To discover that I too had firmly claimed this shape in my

formative years was interesting. Looking back, I remember now, that jealousy had been a feature in my life that caused me suffering. I dealt with it many years ago now. It was something I had forgotten about but somehow remembering, opens more space to be compassionate and understanding of my dear daughter's experience of fairness. I can see and feel how this shape keeps you isolated and keeps others at bay. *Sikona*: I am here to be seen. *Sawubona*: I see you and by seeing you I bring you into existence. [During this exercise] we placed our hands on the back, then the hands on the side of the shoulders of another. This was a highly charged, energetic experience and difficult to put words to. It was moving, it was the experience of being seen and supported! It was nurturing, to be seen and supported as a sovereign human being. It was a healing experience. Shapes three and four: the shape has a way of righting itself ... I felt that Shape Three had brought me to the edge – a compounded feeling of everything that had gone before. My hands were on my head representing the cacophony in my head and despair. The shape that emerged as a bridge was a motion of giant steps as in moving across the bridge.

This group gathering didn't go so well for me. I was triggered unexpectedly. We didn't pay as much attention to process, and I felt floundering and lost. I didn't hear the instructions and I moved between Shape Three and four instead of through the whole dance. I need shape number eight to hold me and the celebration of number seven.

The following comments are responses to my questionnaire. I have included my questions and a cross-section of responses.

Participant L

Q: What were your key take aways from these eight wholeness workshops?

A: Safety to explore whatever came up which is paramount when using personal story. Well held – trust was high on the agenda and necessary to enable freedom of expression. Permission to be ourselves in a nonjudgmental space. Creating physical postures especially positive ones – accessing qualities within, previously not explored, brought them into conscious reality which strengthened their existence and made them achievable, with a felt sense of their presence.

Group connectedness.

Body soul mind and spirit integration.

Nature inclusion and an increased sense of connectedness plus a resource from natural world when looking out the window at trees.

Gentle process of integration and sharing inner world with other participants.

Connecting with inner locus of control “body as language with movement and intent.” I developed a capacity to use body posture to reframe negative holding, gain a deeper understanding of the somatic language and self-awareness. Also, a sensitivity towards others' process and respecting innate wisdom and including it in workshops as a resource. Trusting body flow as a way of self-creation, dreaming, and being dreamt with conscious intent, self-empowerment.

Q: What did you learn from the wholeness choreography workshop experience?

A: That somatic experience through movement and creating body postures with intent, gives direct and valuable information from the unconscious, into conscious awareness which is the beginning of the possibility to make changes in a creative way. That intent with movement and key body postures gives space for story to be told and transmuted. The body doesn't lie. The power of being witnessed and seen in creative process, without judgement. Attention to both positive and negative parts of self is necessary and gives a completeness to the creative process. The power of laughter in the face of revealing hidden fears. How rich we are inside. Being guided in a specific way with intent increases the power and value of the creative process. Validating and normalizing traumatic memories and witnessing others in theirs, creates community and connectedness. Its ok to be honest. We are the instrument of power, creativity, and beauty and together we can expand that reality, become that reality. It is an expansion of our sacredness through the art making process because it was designed to liberate us by our intent and focus, by trusting innate wisdom. We are more powerful than we realise. The facilitation was immensely helpful - the openness, curiosity and general easy going pace with maturity enabled a lot of exploration, respect for the creative process and an emergence of rich inner expression this was no puppy love thing - it was well organized, researched and presented.

Q: How does your contribution and collaboration to the Art making performance process make you feel?

A: Included, valued, authentic and seen. It gives meaning, a desire to be alive – creating from self is exciting, revelatory, possible. I felt I was part of a valuable self-exploratory process and that I had something to say, in my body, beyond words and I became witness to a deeper knowing. I am an artist. Witnessing others in their process is enriching and deepens our own exploration. I felt like I was a paintbrush with my body and being, writing a story with my movements, supported by the group, the music, the facilitation, the inner muse. I am the voice of many. Art making is liberating. Art making is an antidote to loneliness, disempowerment, meaninglessness. Collaborative group process creates a collective myth.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the wholeness choreography workshops?

A: Being part of something that feels alive, transformative, purposeful, and exciting. The potential to expand and it felt like the beginning of something. Starting the workshop by creating a body posture depicting satisfaction with having accomplished everything in life - the peace it birthed in me, it surprised me just how present that feeling was in me and therefore possible to acquire - it was revelatory for me - helped me believe it was possible to reach - it created a trajectory into the future like a beacon of light. I liked the variation of creativity - music, journaling, movement, games, voice in more ways than one, body sculpting small group was beneficial, the potential for growth communication and a language for the soul to be expressive.

Q: What did you find valuable about the experience? Artistic or social?

A: Socially very rewarding. I was witnessing others beyond the mask into the transpersonal. It invoked authenticity, truth, presence, and connection, even love – just how rich we are in our nakedness and when we open to play and creativity the power of self-empowerment socially and artistically, in the space group work much more satisfying – like the plant kingdom, biodiversity creates health wealth, community finding the authentic voice from within, together. How much we affect one another and need validation and kindness and how far that can help us transform or overcome obstacles and stuckness during the art making itself.

Q: What changes would improve the workshops?

A: More time for each body posture - a whole workshop each. Expanding more on the posture moving into the gesture and the power of word - possibly creating a group posture for each of the eight aspects it helps to already know the participants.

Q: Any overall feedback for the wholeness performance event?

A: Excellent, riveting, life transforming, dynamic and well-choreographed with a deep compassion at its roots.

Participant G

Q: What were your key take aways from these eight wholeness workshops?

A: My body holds memories and information that I can access to create change; even a traumatic experience that happened years ago can be accessed safely in a circle of trust with positive intention and transformed using the shapes and gestures that live organically in my body; that these memories are often awaiting expression which can be achieved by creating shapes, moving from painful hurdles to liberation and wholeness.

Q: What did you learn from the wholeness choreography workshop experience?

A: The power of a group working toward a common purpose, i.e., the wholeness/empowerment of each other through movement (expressing difficulty to freedom) is paramount to the healing process. The synergistic field created by all participants intensified my sense of safety, confidence, and trust. We created something truly beautiful together which was felt viscerally.

Q: How does your contribution and collaboration to the Art making performance process make you feel?

A: It made me feel empowered; part of something greater than myself, part of a like-minded community working toward the wholeness and agency of the whole.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the wholeness choreography workshops?

A: Feeling the organic movement from contraction to expansion in my body. Tight, tense shapes and gestures made me feel small, disconnected from my life force and others, whereas the expanded shapes and gestures gave me a sense of ease, liberation, connection, and presence with heart.

Q: What did you find valuable about the experience? Artistic or social?

A: Yes, both artistically and socially fulfilling. I could have kept working with the group after the eight weeks as I feel the possibilities are endless in discovering the immersive movements living within the body, and to share that collaboratively with others is both nourishing and enriching. I loved the pauses of presence in between movements also and moving within the structure offered provided a safe container in which to explore.

Q: What changes would improve the workshops?

A: I can't think of anything I would change. It was deeply satisfying for me.

Q: Any overall feedback for the wholeness event?

A: More please! :-)

Participant A

Q: What were your key take aways from these eight wholeness workshops?

A: Loved the “flow” from one week to the next – each week was a creative expression of the one shape, and it was only at the end of the eight weeks, and we flowed from shapes one to eight that I could see my own trajectory in expressing my own experience of FDV.

The support from Jenn and the other women in the group was very powerful, and it was very inspiring to see us all re-enacting our shapes together as theatre that I could see the trauma and the beauty of all of our experiences together.

The learning of a “different language” of expression was hugely appealing and powerful. The expression of shapes one to three reflecting our barriers, then transition and then the learnings and the positive nature of shapes five to eight – wholeness, was very inspiring.

Q: What did you learn from the wholeness choreography workshop experience?

A: Loved this experience – felt very free and unencumbered and was cathartic in expressing different aspects of FDV e.g., society, male, female, money etc and working with the other women. Was interesting that “getting out of the way of the analytical mind” showed that I had the ability to trust myself and my body and its

intuitive knowledge of how to get into an immediate shape to show the form and wholeness. Lots of fun.

Q: How does your contribution and collaboration to the Art making process make you feel?

A: I felt that I learnt a lot about my own ability to be spontaneous and that I could trust my own feelings within my physical and spiritual body in an authentic way.

Felt very tuned in with the other women in the group and we had learnt to trust each other. Sitting with emotion and upset on occasion with the women was a bit confronting and had to firmly not judge these reactions.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the wholeness choreography workshops?

A: The ability to be myself and trust my own intuition and body to respond to the requests of me as an “actor”.

No right or wrong and the reassuring support from Jenn that it was OK to be “weird!”

Q: What did you find valuable about the experience? Artistic or social?

A: Both artistic and social – the shapes and the theatre warm-ups were important to tap into our personal creative processes and give us/me the confidence to work with a different “creative language” – it was valuable and challenging to express myself differently but felt that it did open different ways of communicating for me.

Once the women got to know each other, there was a lot of social interaction both before and after the workshops and created a common ground to communicate such personal and intimate feelings in this space.

Q: What changes would improve the workshops?

A: Acknowledgement to country at the beginning of each workshop would be good.

Perhaps we could have taken turns to bring a small plate of food, as food is very much a women’s community spirit.

Recognise the pronouns (he/she/they) and that not everyone is “male or female” and acknowledge this so that participants can feel free to express this in the group.

Q: Any overall feedback for the event?

A: Great experience; could be a platform for extended performance and shapes.

Those who felt tired in the beginning were not tired at the end!

Acknowledgement to Jenn, who always showed her love and support in the process.

Participant V

Q: What were your key take aways from these eight wholeness workshops?

A: I was so embodied and present with my internal process that there was no self-consciousness about being in a performance.

I was tired this week and a bit distracted. Representing men in performance was so challenging. I started out trying to find the sense of strength even dominance but found myself feeling immense pressure and getting dissociated. It was intense. Too much pressure from outside to even begin to feel it all and so somehow collapsing into any escape. Sucked sadness towards the feminine ... not being able to really reach her. I struggled to remember all the shapes ... still a bit mixed up.

Rehearsal

Monday 5 December 2022. Hayman Theatre, Curtin University.

Today we had a run through of the order of performance. I recorded the voice over. I had no time to rehearse this, and it would have been good to do some in hindsight. The warm-up was a little awkward as we only had two people and we were in a different space. The eight shapes went well and were each held for 50 seconds. To time this, I had recorded a chime each 50 seconds so that I would know when to change over. After the eight shapes, we had a small rest where we drew different aspects of FDV out of a hat (men, women, society, child, money); this gave us each a different performative trait to bring to the performance. I needed to take more time to absorb what the other dancers' traits were, in the rehearsal. I completely forgot what they were, so I was restricted to play my own part, and this was disconnecting from the whole. In another time, I know that my inner critic would have had a field day and would have carried on long after the performance. I feel the changes internally: more safety, more inner kindness, a softer, safer more carefree internal me. The

performance of the constellation of the different aspects of FDV was followed with the performance of the eight shapes with the first song Slow Meadow's *Adorned in Ribbons* and *Chant* for shapes six, seven and eight. After the rehearsal we decided that the first song *Adorned in Ribbons* would be best for shapes one to five and *Chant* as the end song only for shapes six, seven and eight that represent wholeness and agency.

Appendix D: Choreographer Reflections

The following reflections come from this final eight-week workshop. I facilitated another two workshops, one with Uniting WA with First Nations women and another group that also had five participants. The first two workshop participants dropped in and out of attendance and there was a lockdown due to COVID-19 so that following the flow of the work was interrupted and very difficult. I had success in completing the final workshop and completing the work through to rehearsal and performance and the following reflections are how I worked through each week.

Week One

Today we made the positive anchor state eight which is the wholeness shape, and I included an NLP process which is thinking of wonderful life experiences and stacking them in a thumb, so that you can feel good in the future whenever you squeeze that thumb. Then we made the wholeness shape, Shape Eight. Each participant had a word that went with each shape: L = Peace/Complete; V = No more pressure – still; T = celebration; G = wellbeing. I was happy with the creation of the eighth shape and the victory shape as an anchor in this first workshop. Participants shared that they were surprised that the imagination, embodied anchor exercise was so simple and so effective. All participants felt their mood altered to an improved place. The participants made the shapes (see exegesis p.94); they reflected that Shape Eight felt wonderful. They used their words, “peace”, “grace”, “calm” with the wholeness and agency shape. One participant said the shape felt good to be in, another said it felt like a relief to be in Shape Eight after being in Shape One.

I provided some music and asked the group to move from their Shape One and then into their Shape Eight and continue to move from Shape One to Shape Eight. In this way the group made a performance piece out of the space between their wholeness Shape Eight and Shape One, their first hurdle shape.

At the end I sat together in a circle with the participants. They used words like “constriction”, “pain”, “heavy” and “sorrow” to describe shape/hurdle one, and “grace”, “freedom”, “peace” and “liberation” to go with Shape Eight, wholeness. The interesting thing about the hurdle shapes is that I did not ask for any words or story to accompany the shapes. The participants all said that Shape One was difficult to stay in and that once in the shape, memories and thoughts came to mind that were not

positive. I reiterated that there is no positive outcome from reliving old negative experiences, instead of reliving aspects of that old experience in Shape One, ask yourself what can I learn from this shape? Participants responded that this question was helpful, and they answered: "I'm strong." "It's not now." "I have courage."

At the end of week one, I asked all five participants if they would assist me by performing in my performance at Curtin University – all respectively declined.

Week Two

This was a potent week for me. Participant A had missed week one. I realised it is never a good idea to let someone come in on the second week. It was only that this participant was sick the first week, she has years of experience in FDV services, and I wanted to take advantage of that. I would not do it again as it is disruptive to the group. I caught participant A up at my home during the week, and in the next week. It was a relief for the others to have this week to revise their shapes. The *Sikona* and *Sawubona* greetings were nourishing and received well by the group. My biggest challenge is technical: operating the GoPro for filming, taking photos, and playing music. My Samsung phone will not take photos and play music at the same time. Again, this week I failed to get the movement section filmed on GoPro even though I had spent a few hours trying to load the photos and relearn the operation of my GoPro camera.

The workshop was really nourishing for me to run, and I can see that the shapes make interesting, intense art in the movement section at the end of the workshop. I have been making my own shapes at home and have not yet added my shapes into the workshop space.

In the first circle, all the participants said that they were nervous to do the workshop. None of them considered themselves dancers or movers. They talked about having butterflies in their bellies and said that they could never see themselves as participants in my movement performance. Participant V said it was the first time she had said out loud that FDV was her experience. The first hurdle shapes represent three main hurdles that we have had to face in our lives. When participants were making each shape I said this to them: Ask yourself, what can I learn from this shape and how did the experience of holding that shape change my behaviour? My three hurdles were worthlessness, rejection and hurt. When I made the shape of worthlessness the first thing that came to mind was how much hard work it was to

hold that shape. This was a refreshing insight and helpful in being aware I can let it go. “Facilitating transformational change by changing our inner place that we operate from” (Scharmer, 2021, p.xii).

I asked the participants to protect themselves from triggering past experience, and to choose to control their present state by making the positive anchor shape with their body whenever they needed to and to ask themselves the question whenever they went into a hurdle shape.

As a group we noted that upward and expansive gestures, shapes and hand shapes represented celebration and positive states while downward and contracting shapes represented more negative states and feelings.

At the end of this first workshop, I chose some instrumental cello music (I added the music following my intuition at first, then the women responded saying that they loved this genre of music and felt that it resonated beautifully with them while they were in their shapes – this prompted me to search for beautiful classical music in my own time and find and choose my favourites). I asked participants to move with their two shapes, incorporating movement from Shape One and Shape Eight; it was a powerful moment to watch, and I was deeply touched by the participants’ movements.

In our work, aesthetic sensitivity reveals the beauty in each moment. The Greek root of the word aesthetic means “relating to perception by the senses”. If we look at the word anaesthetic, which means “without feeling or perception” we realise that with perception comes a feeling sense. (Hayashi, 2021, p.114)

I regret not capturing this special first movement process of this second workshop. Facilitating, taking photos, video, and notes was a lot to be aware of in the first workshop. The music was from my phone, so it did not then allow me to take video and the GoPro was not working. I took photos and while they were okay, I would have loved to have captured this first movement piece. I did the work to learn the GoPro, but still did not have success with it. I have had learning to do on the technical side of things which is frustrating as it does not come easily to me. It was stunning to witness the dialogue between the women as they shared their shapes and gestures, not the story behind the shapes and gestures. Somehow it seemed more intimate than using the words. You could feel the care in the room for each other. I was humbled by the attention that the women gave to their own shapes and to witnessing the others’ shapes.

Week Three

Today I was in awe of these women's beautiful shapes. The exercise of *Sikona* and *Sawubono* felt deeply raw, deeply healing. It was such a simple act, a bodily act without words, because these past experiences that we have all experienced are difficult to put into words, and words do not capture the depth of emotional experience in them anyway. There was a reverence in the room between the participants that was a very important experience for me to have. I am very grateful to be doing this work.

I instructed the participants to go to the first hurdle shape, then to write the gesture down. I said that it represents the behaviour you took up because of that hurdle. Being seen in the hurdle shapes was raw and sensitive, the women were speaking up: "No, that does not feel good to touch me there", openly stating their feelings, thinking carefully, checking in with their body again and again before inviting their partner to touch them.

The *ma* exercise requires participants to sit still for five minutes and look out the window. There is nothing to do here, nothing to be. I can rest and slow down and immerse in the green. Still and at ease, I am grounded in quiet movement. Notice your thoughts and feelings, a phrase or sentence whatever you saw or heard, a phrase or sentence that describes your feeling. Finally, write down a phrase or sentence that links your perception and feeling.

I love the *ma* exercise. I put on a little music and asked participants to move in performance of their shapes from shapes one and two with *ma*. I explained that the *kanji* (Japanese character) for *ma* is a tori gate, with the sun shining through the entrance of Shinto shrines, and symbolically marks the transition between the mundane and the sacred (Hayashi, 2021, p.112). In everyday life, the experience of a gap invites the ever-present qualities of the sun – brilliance, warmth, and clarity to shine through. Now apply *ma* to shapes seven and eight. The movement was loaded and powerful. This was the very first glimpse of what the performance might look like, and I loved watching it.

Week Four

Having two shapes that represent hurdles was noticeably heavy and I took the time to reiterate the question: What do I need to learn when I make this shape? This week

the group was powerful with the *ma* moment; it extends the pause and is powerful in that it connects more fully into nothingness and the authentic movement coming from the body. The movement piece with shapes six, seven and eight was commanding and the music I selected was *Alone in Kyoto, Instrumental Chill, Polaris and Ghost Pong*. These pieces resonated profoundly with the images that the women created in performance. The movement looked exhilarating, engaged, and deep. Participant V said she was so present during the performance that she didn't care what others thought: "You turned self-consciousness inside out". I loved her movement and her comments. I love this work. Both participant L and participant T loved Shape Eight and said that it had helped them over the last few weeks as it came to mind during their daily actions.

Week Five

This was the most powerful workshop so far, for me. I could see the group shapes had so much interior power that could be further explored. The intuition of the group was supportive, and the images were heavy, difficult, and then free and uplifting. This week was exciting. I love this work; the group is very happy to be here and loving the work as well. This week the solo and group stuck shapes were very powerful, organic, and rich. The energy in the group was engaged and present. The women were wonderful to work with. At the end I instructed the group to move from the number three hurdle to the transition shape and mix it with any variation of Shape Six, Seven, or Eight. Participant T did not hear me mention Six, Seven or Eight and for the movement piece she moved with only number three hurdle and transition. She noticed it was difficult and felt nauseous. To remedy the situation, we as a group moved in her Shapes Six, Seven and Eight for a few moments and she felt better. The GoPro worked and I filmed the movement piece at the end and downloaded it onto my Vimeo account. It feels so good to have mastered the technology. It was a breakthrough capturing the movement piece; it was just a few moments but it was something. I also worked out Google photos and how to place these photos in a word document.

Week Six

I asked the participants to repeat the Presence exercise (Presencing is different from the *ma* exercise, each participant comes to centre stage and shows their whole self-present in front of the audience) only this time each participant makes a movement and then leaves the stage. I asked them to reflect together on what they noticed:

“One by one, share something you noticed and then move into open conversation. Begin by simply recollecting and describing. What patterns emerged? What was the feeling tone?”

Later I asked them to repeat this group movement, keeping the five movements and adding the components of FDV with each participant playing the following roles:

- Women – participant L
- Men – participant T
- Relationship – participant V
- Society – participant A
- Money – participant G

I had the idea to use the field of FDV by setting the intention with the above five components using Family Psychotherapist Bert Hellinger’s Family Constellations (FC). Each participant took on the character of women, men, relationship, or society and moved in the five movements. This was an interesting exercise, and I am drawn to use this as the opening of my performance as it had such thought-provoking authentic qualities. Each participant perceives the characters by bringing their lived experience to the movement and authentic expression.

I had the idea to use the FDV component of the above movement piece as the introduction of my performance. The movement with relationship, society, men, and women was striking to me. The movers can embody a concept and the body knows how to express.

This week when we danced our stories, I noticed I held myself with much greater compassion.

Week Seven

Today's final movement piece was excellent. The movement is alive and authentic. I used the warm-up to bring in presence, front body alive, back body alive, soft eyes and owning the space with peripheral vision. It was amazing! I got to film the movement from shapes four to five to six to seven and eight. The last shapes were very powerful. Besides an accidental collision between participants G and L there was no connection between the dancers. This made me realise that if the dancers can somehow add in the "I see you" exercise to touch another dancer I will be able to add in connection. It was obvious in the eight shapes that there is no connection and with FDV experiences women do not have connection. I spoke about the possibility of adding connection with the last shapes or the hurdle shapes.

Week Eight

The workshops enable the participants to notice their own and their group's individual journeys. This is connecting for the participants; I loved that words are not the sharing but shapes and gestures. The participants shared that they felt that they bonded deeply in this group very quickly. The impetus to change the shapes in the performance mainly came from the dancers, I used exercises like the *ma* exercise to heighten peripheral vision and the Presence exercise to heighten self-awareness in this workshop. The shapes were an individual journey and what came up for me as a choreographer was how to add authentic connection in between the dancers. We addressed this a little in conversations, but I feel that I need to look at this more in my research. My biggest happiness is that this week I asked all participants if they would be part of my performance at Curtin University and I received an overwhelming **yes** from all five participants. It seems like the process that has taken me a lifetime they have created in eight weeks. They loved being part of the movement pieces, using both their own shapes and gestures and the constellations.

Reflections About the Performance

This performance is a little rushed and came about because after running my first eight-week choreography workshop I worried that if I did not capture something of the workshops it would be lost as participants went about their lives, especially in the COVID-19 environment where we do not know what the future brings.

Five of the women were available for the performance, others were travelling, on holidays, moving house and had other priorities. On the day of the performance, in the performance space, it is my job to look after the dancers' needs. Participant V was afraid of the ball game and the noise made her have anxiety so I arranged for her to stand outside the theatre, and I had a friend tell her once the ball game was completed so that she could come back in and be in the rest of the warm-up. Also, some of the dancers in the workshops initiated touch with each other in the performance section. This is important because although we experienced FDV separately in our lives. Some touch was not helpful because the participants have all experienced trauma in their lives. As the facilitator I needed to be mindful of looking after each dancer. We had discussions in the car on the way there and I was surprised to hear that two of my participants have difficulty driving because of anxiety and one did not want to initiate touch in the performance. I will explore this aspect of choreography further in future workshops.

Appendix E: Feldenkrais Sessions

The following accounts are of FM somatic healing sessions that I attended to improve movement and body function, to connect, to remove blocks that were in the way of my performance in life and the undertaking of this project. The sessions were helpful in different ways. Firstly, they were relaxing. They helped to improve my movement and manage the stress I felt about writing my exegesis. Secondly, I discovered that as the FI practitioner moved me, my body created contracted shapes. Along with these contractions came the limiting beliefs and decisions about my past life experience. So, as these limiting beliefs came to mind the FI practitioner would move my body in expanding movements to counteract the contractions. I found the physical relief and mental opening to new possibilities inspiring. I subsequently used the contraction and expanding movements that came from my body and mind in FM sessions as inspiration for my choreography and the performance of wholeness in this project. I have selected a series of Functional Integration (FI) sessions to represent this aspect of my somatic practice. FI sessions are hands on interventions with a Feldenkrais practitioner. Reflections are represented in italics below.

In an FI session my body showed me decisions I made about my experience. Memories arise, thoughts arise, I want to die, I want to kill, I am worthless. These are a result of past trauma, a fear of being seen, public speaking, and a fear of being successful in general. Resema Menakem, best-selling author of *My Grandmother's Hands*, writes from the perspective of trauma and body-centred psychology: "Our very bodies house the unhealed dissonance of trauma from our ancestors" (Menakem, 2017, p.11). Over the past five years, I have balanced SP by adding a more physical weekly dance practice including Contact Improvisation (CI), Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) and FI.

The following paragraphs describe some of the shapes, gestures, and experiences of my personal Functional Integrations (FI) sessions which are part of the Feldenkrais Method (FM) which are important to discuss because I was inspired by these shapes for choreography and performance.

Over the past five years I have had sessions with Feldenkrais practitioners Molly

Tipping⁷, Bugs Boyd⁸ and Phillippa Clarke⁹ and participated in their dance practice (Clarke at PIP and Boyd's Contact Improvisation) and Tipping's online Feldenkrais group classes. See Appendix E where I have documented a selection of FI sessions to best represent my somatic practice experiences. The FI sessions have been invaluable in increasing my feelings of wholeness. Increasing my feelings of wholeness is directly transforming oppression held in my body from lived experience of FDV.

FI with Bugs Boyd (Monday 11 February 2019)

"What is the goal for the session?" Bugs asked.

"I want to feel grounded and to be able to speak confidently at my daughter's wedding in two weeks, in front of a big audience," I said.

"Walk around the table," he says. "First forward and then backwards." In Contact Improvisation class the week before I could complete a backwards roll but rolling forward in a forward roll was not possible for me.

"Notice ease in your body moving backward – now walk forward." Bugs asked. "Walking forward is more difficult," I noticed with amusement although it really wasn't funny.

The Feldenkrais session began. I lay comfortably, fully clothed on the low table; Boyd moved my feet this way and that way placing different pressure on the soles of my feet. My feet don't hold the ground, I thought. At some point I got a hollow horrible feeling in my stomach, it intensified, and I felt dizzy, my head swirling in energy and yet I was laying down. How could I feel dizzy laying down? I called stop! I sat up. I sat back on my feet and then rolled off the low table forward onto my hands and knees onto the floor. Feeling sick in my stomach. Worried I was going to be physically sick. Then I rolled into a foetal ball shape. I was terrified. I had no words. I did not know what I was terrified of. No words could express what I was feeling which

⁷ Molly Tipping, Adjunct Lecturer at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), teaches Performance Anxiety and Somatic Optimisation. She is a Feldenkrais and Pilates practitioner, dancer and choreographer and the owner/director of The Feldenkrais Method Studio in North Perth.

⁸ Adrian Bugs Boyd is a Feldenkrais practitioner, Structural Integration Practitioner, Personal Trainer, and Co-Facilitator of Contact Improvisation classes at the King Street Arts Centre, Perth.

⁹ Phillippa Clarke is a Feldenkrais and Movement Educator, Dip. Teach, Dip. Performing Arts, Master of Fine Arts, C.F.P Performer, choreographer and lecturer, facilitator, and choreographer PIP classes in Morley.

intensified the fear and sent me spiralling into terror no, no, no, no, no! I needed to rock, and my fingers were constricted stiff and spastic. I started to cry. Boyd sat next to me on the floor. It felt like I had opened a Pandora's box of feelings that I could not control. It felt like an endless loop of hopelessness. And then as quickly as they came, the feelings faded. Boyd sat by my side curious, and when the energy subsided, I walked around the bodywork table again and he instructed me to notice the difference in my body movement now compared to before the session. I felt freer, walking forward felt easier. I was given rolling exercises as homework for the week and the following Wednesday night at Contact Improvisation I did a forward roll.

Feldenkrais talks about "reversibility". It is perhaps worth mentioning that a movement that satisfies these conditions also fulfils the principle of reversibility. That means that along the trajectory, the centre of gravity of the entire body, and each individual bone, the conditions of potential movement are fulfilled (as understood in theoretical mechanics). Since the work done in a potential movement is equivalent to zero at each point and at each moment in time along the movement trajectory it is possible to continue the movement, reverse its direction or initiate a new action, without using energy to begin (Feldenkrais, 1959, p.27).

Working with the Feldenkrais process revealed several sessions where my body wanted to withdraw inwards, and the Feldenkrais movement was the opposite (or the reverse movement); the movement was the reversing of what was present in my body. The reverse movement applied by the Feldenkrais practitioner felt so soothing to my body and mind. I have experienced many meditations and hypnotherapy relaxation states in my life, and I give this relaxed state the highest rating.

Choreographic Learning one

Reversibility is a choreographic learning. I am inspired by the notion of the reversed movement and will use this in my choreographing of the dance response. In many of my Functional Integration sessions, my body responded to the practitioner's movement of my body in a contracted movement, and then the FI practitioner applied the reverse of that movement and this movement felt soothing to my body. As a choreographic tool, representing contracted movement and the reverse of the

contraction would feel good and represent what happens in the body of a person who has lived experience of FDV.

My arms and hands contracted when he rocked my legs. My hands clenched tight responding to the gentle pressure of a board to the soles of my feet, the movements he assisted my body to make e.g., broad sweeping movements with my arms thus reversing the contractions. The reversibility movement was also highlighted in walking backwards and forwards and the forward roll, backward roll.

FI session with Bugs Boyd (Tuesday 19 February 2019)

I started the Feldenkrais session laying on the table on my back. Boyd pressed a small wooden board onto the soles of my feet. It felt pleasant enough and I relaxed. Within twenty minutes the hollow feeling came to my stomach, thoughts floated across my mind.

“I want to die”, “I wish I were dead”, and the feeling in my stomach was like I was starving hungry but at the same time my stomach felt delicate and sensitive. Sensations and thoughts subsided as quickly as they arose and were replaced with a deep sense of calm and peacefulness.

Choreographic Learning two

My body knows everything about my past, my body has a lot of knowledge. I can trust the knowledge in my body.

FI session with Bugs Boyd (Tuesday 14 May 2019)

The Feldenkrais movement was moving my hips up and down. My right foot twitched and tapped of its own accord. Furious feelings along with the thoughts, “I want to die”. I stopped breathing, or more precisely I thought I could hold my breath forever; there was a stubborn holding on – tears, feeling pure fury. My hands and arms tensed. Boyd tried to bend my elbow and move my hand towards my mouth – a soothing motion to suck or eat nourishment.

My body refused to make the gesture. Heels need to stick more to the ground – Boyd helped my body to complete the gesture.

Choreographic Learning three

Hand and arm gestures and then the reverse: full-arm curving movements. My body is emotional and is holding emotions from the past; my body wants to share this information with me, and the information is shared when I move my body in specific ways, shaking, tensing, specific gestures represent nourishment. Breathing is vital! I have used my breath to give up and feel hopeless in the past and bringing that awareness to my present awareness is empowering.

FI session with Phillippa Clarke (Monday 10 June 2019)

“Welcome, what do you want to gain from the session?” Phillippa asked. “I want to be able to hold, receive support, I feel like success is always out there somewhere in the future that never arrives.”

Phillippa held my hands and I stood; she released my hands and I stood. She asked me to notice my feet. My right foot felt support only slightly on the pad of my foot behind my toes. My arch felt tight. My left foot felt more supported across the sole of my foot at the front, less tension in the arch and more floor connection in my left heel. My right shoulder falling forward was tensed and higher than my left shoulder.

Laying on my back on the low table, Phillippa begins by rolling my knees and therefore, hips from side to side. My chest is not connected. “Breathe in as you roll back slowly. Roll to the right and bend right knee and right elbow and bring inwards. Rolling slowly feel the connection from feet to head different rolling.” Phillippa instructs me to trust the support and allow my leg to fall into support. She moves my head slowly supported and asks me to imagine rolling my body from side to side in supported way. I could feel little tensions, little catches and I was able to relax them so that my head was moving, and my neck was very relaxed.

At the end of the session standing, I could feel my feet flattened over the floor surface, more suction, or seemingly more hold on the floor.

FI session with Phillippa Clarke (Monday 8 July 2019)

“What do you want to work on today?” Phillippa asked.

“I want to hold onto things, have success in my life, and I feel it is out of reach.” I lay on my side. She moved my arms pulling the scapula over the ribs, large round movements – mine was moving as one prior to moving my legs and knees bent

from side to side reaching up with alternate arms. Sick feeling comes in my stomach. My right shoulder started to tremor from the inside. Philippa asked me to relax into the tremor and told me that was my nervous system righting itself that it was like an animal that had been faced with trauma, releasing shock. My right foot was also twitching and shaking.

FI session with Phillipa Clarke (Monday 15 July 2019)

I lay on my side. The Feldenkrais session was focused on my hands: softening my heart and my hands. She massaged my right hand and moved my shoulder; she noticed my arm pulling inwards towards my chest. Her movements were outwards, a full arc circle movement. Eventually my right foot twitched. She massaged and moved my right foot. My hands moved into clenched fists “spastic” came to mind. She uncurled my clenched fingers and moved my arm in a wide circular movement turn onto right side movement came from my hips felt a tremor coming in my arms and shoulders releasing/opening/softening heart and hands and the space between my shoulder blades at the back of my heart. Pulling both arms as my hips rolled from side to side. I felt myself drift in the deepest place of safety, *a calm and comfort that was new to the inside of me.*

FI session with Phillipa Clarke (Saturday 6 of March 2021)

Stand with shoulders and arms relaxed, feet shoulder-width apart, notice the gravity as it holds you to the floor and how the weight of your body is distributed over the feet. My right foot takes most of my body weight and my left foot does not contact the floor in my left toes at all and the left big toe only slightly. I am surprised by the limited contact of the left foot in the middle of the heel and in the middle of the front foot. This lesson focuses on the hip joints and the pelvis. The pelvis holds the power of the universe. Authentic Movement hips, I found the easiest movement on the outside of my foot, the little toe side gliding my foot up to the bent knee position and back down, first the right side and then the left side.

Choreographic Learning four

As I had experienced previously, my hand and arm gestures in response to the FI pulled inwards and tightened and then the FI practitioner helped my hands and arms

make the movements in reverse: full-arm curving movements. Again, connecting into my body and how it holds emotions from the past, how my body wants to share this information with me, and the information is shared through releasing tremors and softening. Tremoring and shaking could also be a choreographic device.

FI session with Molly Tipping (Thursday 17 December 2020)

“What do you want to work with?” Molly asked.

“I want to feel connection.”

“Now for many of us we talk about our experiences in feelings and that’s normal human speak. But from a Feldenkrais practitioner perspective we want to link feelings with sensations. Jenn, what does connection feel like in your body?” Molly asked.

“It feels open, forward and playful.”

“When you think about rejection you look down to the left and pull back,” Molly said.

“Jenn, you are not counterbalancing your weight as you look left. Whereas you did spontaneously counterbalance when you looked right. You are unknowingly making yourself unstable and in a small act of having to stop yourself from falling. You must tense up and hold your breath when you look to the left – where you look when you feel rejected. Let’s explore this in sitting,” Molly continued.

“Look down to the left and notice where you shift your weight on your bottom.” Left of right side of your bottom? It’s the same in standing.

If you look to your left to counterbalance your weight, you’ll shift your weight to your right leg. Now try standing on your left leg as you look to the left and down. You will feel like you’re at risk of falling, it will be unstable, that instability will make you feel cautious or anxious. To counterbalance we shift weight to the opposite leg and side of the pelvis.

Rejection is a vital emotion to allow. If I want to speak honestly about my ideas, or I want to write a book, or ask someone out on a date, I need to be comfortable with rejection. Rejection has to be a safe emotion, or I will never write a book or ask someone out and as I say this you can start to see the potentially long-term consequences of trauma. That when the insecurity of rejection is linked with a postural pattern that is unstable, we get confirmation that rejection is a risky emotion.

And as we need to feel safe and secure, we narrow our choices. Thus, trauma leads our lives to shrink.

What we are looking for here is something we call reversibility. We can have physical reversibility and if we come back to our chairs, we can explore this simply forward and back ...

But we need emotional reversibility. And this is simply a matter of bringing attention to these experiences. Jenn, ask yourself these questions and feel your body's response," Molly said.

"Can you move forward into playfulness, connection, and openness? "And then back into yourself?

"Can you go into rejection and come out?

"Can you open yourself to connection and then change your mind, or get rejected and come back for more?"

Choreographic Learning five

The next day I had my book launch at Curtin University. It was the very first time in my life that I had given a presentation in front of a group of people, and I felt present and comfortable in my body.

Contact Improvisation class with Bugs Boyd and Jacqui Otago (Wednesday 7 August 2019)

I started dancing with Jacqui, we made contact standing, after a few lifts, I danced with Philippa for the first time, then Bella made contact back-to-back she lifted me off the floor so that I was flying. Back-to-back, she lifted my body so that I was facing and looking at the ceiling, my spine connected to her spine she lowered, and it felt like a smooth as silk glide to the floor. I rolled over her body to the right then she adjusted and rolled under me. She asked me to relax my left leg. I was resting, still facing the roof on top of her body, supported in a back bend over her body. She asked me to relax my left leg (my mind could hear her instruction and yet I could not connect my mind to move my leg – like the thought was not connected to my body) She nudges my leg, loosen, and let go. I laugh because I notice in Contact Improvisation that my body feels awkward, disjointed by the contact. If I could melt, it's not a rational thinking conscious thing, it's a feeling thing.

Later as I was talking to Phillipa about her dancing with Rowan she commented:

“Rowan is new to CI like you – he has difficulty holding the ground”.

Choreographic Learning Six

Trust is a learnt body feeling that is occurring for me more and more in the somatic movement process. I am feeling my bodily sensations, dancing with other dancers, and learning to trust my response to their somatic movement. I am confused about

Philippa’s ideas of gravity and holding the ground. I can see their fluid moves on the dancefloor; I can see how easily they can fall to the ground without hurting themselves, but it does not translate into my body yet.

In all the FI sessions so far, my greatest learning is that my body holds knowledge about my lived experience that is available to me when I take the time to listen and feel it. The knowledge is in the form of movements, gestures, memories, and emotions. I will take these learnings from my FI sessions and use them as choreographic tools and movements to create my performance piece. The nature of how important gestures are in our experience deserves a deeper exploration and I will follow this somatic enquiry.

Appendix F: Choreography Training Reflections

First workshop: Embryological Origins with Alice Cummins.¹⁰ (The Chapel, North Perth. Friday 2 June – Monday 4 June 2018)

In the first choreography workshop with Alice Cummins (see Chapter 5) we explored our embryological origins: I experienced my zygote embryonic self, the ST view was my mother's womb, the field was my soul's spiritual connection to all that is, and my inner blind spot was my wholeness and the knowing that I am the creator of my life. The Reclaiming Wholeness workshops were my collection of all these learnings and lived experience and by playing with them I created processes designed to help others.

This somatic experience workshop focused on the lived experience of what their body re-membered in movement from their third week of embryonic development when they (as the embryo) implanted in the uterus wall. This workshop brought to my body-memory the death of my brother who died the year before I was born. The following historical personal writing is about what came up in this workshop for me, and what happened to him. Following this, I continue writing about the workshop.

Circa 1957

Thea was pale and drawn and heavily pregnant. It wasn't long to go now – only a few weeks. She tried to focus on making the dinner – peeling potatoes while seated. Soon she could go up to bed and rest. They were living with her mother-in-law, Myra. Thea's husband Ron drank too much, and they'd discovered Ken, Ron's younger brother, had stolen money from them to gamble.

Ken stood in the dark, leaning over the dresser; he was looking intently when Ron entered the room.

¹⁰ Alice Cummins is a dance artist and somatic movement educator. Cummins' work is influenced by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's Body-Mind Centering®, feminist philosophy and new dance practices. Bainbridge Cohen is a movement artist, researcher, educator and therapist and the developer of the Body-Mind Centering® approach to movement and consciousness. An innovator and leader, her work has influenced the fields of bodywork, movement, dance, yoga, body psychotherapy, childhood education and many other body-mind disciplines. In 1973 she founded [The School for Body-Mind Centering®](#)

“What are you doing?” Ron’s body was tight, both fists were clenched and without thinking he raised his fist and struck Ken in the side of his face. Ron wasn’t expecting Ken to fight back and that caused him to take a punch in the eye in retaliation. Hurting, he got Ken in a headlock and pulled him out of his

bedroom towards the stairs. The force of both bodies lunging forward together sent them toppling down the steep steps. Thea had heard the noise and was on her way up the stairway. The brawling men hit Thea heavily, knocking her pregnant body over and squashing her beneath them as they rolled over her.

“Stop it, Stop! Look what you’ve done Ron! You’ve hurt your girl, and the baby” Myra yelled!

They didn’t stop fighting. They punched and kicked each other over and over again. No matter how loud Myra shouted they kept up with their vicious brawl, rolling on into the living room, smashing glasses and plates off the table, knocking over the crystal cabinet and they stormed along the hallway into the lounge room.

Myra raced to the telephone and called an ambulance.

Thea was lying in a crumpled heap at the foot of the stairs. She wasn’t making a sound.

The hospital room was dimly lit. Thea lay in bed feeling wrecked. She couldn’t stop crying. In her arms lay her little son. He was so tiny, so perfect and so blue. She called him Kenneth. Thea stroked his face; she couldn’t comprehend that he was dead. She touched his tiny fingers as he lay there lifeless in her arms and then the nurse came and bundled his little body away from her. The doctors said he died of toxic blood.

“You must get some rest now,” the nurse said. “Let’s move you onto the verandah so that you don’t upset the other mothers.”

Circa 1958

Even before birth, in the womb, she was broken and so was I.

She was filled with heartache; she’d carried a beautiful blue baby boy full term. He died on his third day. I was conceived two months later embedding in a wall of grief, embedding in a wall of pain. Rejection. Swimming in embryonic fluid, fermented with sorrow – I hated being in my mother’s belly. I didn’t want to be there. So sad, she

was so sad, I wasn't the one. She wanted the other one she wanted the boy. Because she didn't want me, I didn't want her.

"I don't want to be here", "I want to die", "I can't do it", kept coming to my mind as if the thoughts were mine, but not. This was confusing until I sensed it was my brother in the womb before me. My brother, born in September 1957, the year before me, died at three days old, after a full-term pregnancy. It felt like either I was him, or I was carrying his thoughts and his fears in the womb. Even though I never met him, he was my big brother. His name was Kenneth Wayne McDonald, I hold his doubts and fears and failure. I cannot separate, I am him. My first attempts have in the past, always failed.

This three-day workshop was deep and spacious; the work with Alice allowed deep exploration of my embodied self in the womb. The memories that surfaced were surprising and brought me peace and connection to a bigger inner sense of calm.

Second Workshop: "Soul Motion" with **Michael Molin-Skelton**.¹¹ (Alice Springs, Northern Territory. 15–23 May 2019)

I landed in Alice Springs at 3:30 pm. I caught the airport bus to the township and headed to the local shops. I quickly bought provisions for the night and following morning. I caught a taxi to meet Mary, my local host, the town Chinese Medicine therapist, and acupuncturist and stowed my bag there. I met up with others and we drove out along the McDonald (Yeperenye – caterpillar dreaming) ranges to the dance floor at the foot of Mount Sonta (a woman's place), 70 kilometres from the edge of town where the Simpson Desert commences. It was a one-hour drive to

Ellery Creek and a one and-a-half hour's drive to Glen Helen River – the oldest river system in the world.

Michael, our facilitator was set up with his DJ station, huge speakers and a backdrop of the Yeperenye Ranges, and the music began. The dance floor was red earth. The moon and sun both visible in the twilight sky at 5:30 pm. Fires burned on

¹¹ Michael Molin-Skelton is the embodied leader of Soul Motion®, a choreographer, dance artist and international dance teacher from the United States. Soul Motion® is a conscious dance practice designed by Artistic Director Vincent Martínez-Grieco, founded over 20 years ago.

the edges of the dance floor. Smoke from burning peppermint leaves smudged our bodies, fire embers swirling, twisting swirls of smoke raising above us to the sky.

We each chose a boab seed to represent our intentions for the five-day event and new beginnings on our dancing journey and placed it in a circle at the north end of the dance floor. The night sky was overwhelming. A million stars and the full moon shone brightly in the black sky above us. The rhythm, the beat and 47 bodies dancing under the black star-studded blanket until 9 pm.

Exercise Three sequence, in groups of five: Two witnesses, two support dancers, one dancer. We each take turns changing places. Reflect.

I moved my body on the red earth in the hot sun for five days. “Pause”, listen to your body. Open your peripheral vision, a “360 Orbit” and be aware of all around you. Sweat rolled down my arms and chest. I lay flat on my belly smudged red on my forearms and hands and let the soft sand fall through my fingers. Hats and fly nets. Lemon cordial. Ice and smoke. Smudged bodies with red earth. Sweat and bodies in communion. I danced my body for five days at the edge of the desert. My body is strong and vital.

Choreography exercises were being witnessed. Dancers witnessing others dance, noticing gesture, noticing energy, dancing in a whole group, dancing in pairs. Dancing in groups of threes, fours, and fives. Dancing through exhaustion, dancing emotions, pausing, and listening to the body, dancing joy, and opening 360° awareness. Starting the performance before you stepped onto the dance floor. Tuning into the choreographer on the inside, filling the space on the outside with intention.

Five days of dancing nourished me down to my bones. The environment, the people, the moon, the stars and especially the sun showed me the power of the environment for performance. The food was spectacular: all local Alice produce and our host Mary, chauffeured us to and from the venue, offered us her home to rest in, good company and conversation and the whole experience was a delight! For the next week I joined a road trip to Uluru and Kata Tjuta also known as the Olgas, about 360 km southwest of Alice Springs with 12 of the dancers, including Michael MolinSkelton.

On the last night in Uluru, walking amongst the “Field of Lights” (installed by Internationally acclaimed artist Bruce Munro in a remote desert area within sight of

the majestic Uluru) I found myself walking in the lights with Michael. I acknowledged his teaching. In the workshop, several times I noticed him make positive comments to the group, several times when I was in action on the floor. I felt acknowledged without being put on the spot. I noticed when he positively acknowledged others in action. I found this a powerful choreographic tool in promoting dancer confidence and group cohesion.

On the plane home to Perth from Uluru, we flew via Sydney, flying high over my original hometown I thought, I am a travelling independent dancer. I am a choreographer, I am home: content in my body.

Third Workshop: Chorus Gestural Opera with Annette Carmichael. (Perth and Denmark, WA. August 2019 – February 2020) Rehearsal and two performances (Denmark, WA. 1–3 March 2020)

The first rehearsal was a three-hour workshop with 35 women at the Mandurah Performance Centre. I arrived with my friend Trish and joined the other women. We did a 45-minute warm-up. Annette asked the group for happy childhood memories and chose three women to tell their stories. In the story telling the women used natural movements of their hands (gestures) to tell their stories. We watched the storytellers and when the story was finished Annette asked the group to remember the gestures that each storyteller used while telling their story and we chose three gestures to represent that story. Each person, three gestures: nine gestures in total. As a whole group we repeated the gestures and learnt them. The group was then split up into three groups. A group of 15 women that moved around the stage, a group of 10 that were in a diagonal line across the stage and a group of 10 that clustered around the older women who made the gestures while sitting. When the music began, we performed the nine gestures together in our groups. Once we had run through one gesture round, we began the gestures from the beginning again. We went through the set of nine gestures three times and then stopped. The nine gestures and timing of repeating the gestures was difficult but Annette said that it was not necessary to be perfect, the difference in timing made for good artistic beauty.

I was in a lot of pain; I struggled to move freely in this three-hour workshop. I later found out that I had a bulging disc in my lower back and felt a renewed task of the importance of listening to my body. I enjoyed the dance workshop, even though I was in pain. I was happy to have a gap in rehearsals to give my body time to heal.

There were rehearsals in November, December and in February leading up to the final week and then performances on 29 February and 1 March 2020.

Rehearsals for Chorus Gestural Opera continued in Perth in September then, after a break, resumed in November 2019, leading up to summer. The weather was extremely hot making rehearsal seem much longer than the two-hour duration.

Having experienced no previous choreographed dance training, I found rehearsals to be physically difficult and mentally exhausting. I think, “I am stupid”. No, that is not a helpful thought. “I will never get all of this.” That is not helpful either! “Oh, you forgot it again, why can’t I remember that simple sequence?” It’s not that simple! Be kind, you are just beginning to learn and its okay not to know yet. Back and forth, doubt and being gentle with myself were a big part of these first few weeks of rehearsal. Fortunately, I have a sense of humour. As a dancer I was responsible for my body. As the choreographer, Carmichael used the gestures from the first Mandurah workshop to create a dance sequence for the whole group. I found this sequence the easiest to learn.

I remember clearly that it was in my sixth, two-hour rehearsal when my movements, my position in the group and my place at the end of the sequence was correct – I was in the right shape at the right time! All my movements and all the ensemble of dancer’s movement matched and all came together correctly for the first time. Wow! I felt like I had accomplished something quite grand.

Fourth Workshop: Perth Improvised Practice (PIP) with Jacqui Otago and Phillipa Clarke (Morley, Western Australia. 2018–2023)

I started attending PIP workshops in 2018 after meeting Otago at a Contact Improvisation class. Initially I could not think of anything more terrifying than to improvise dance with others. I have only added a snippet of this experience. Improvisation with the whole body is the ultimate creative act! It is an act of freedom and an act of wholeness.



PIP rehearsal workshop (May 2021) Photo PIP GoPro



Showing: Julimar, 11/12/2020 Photo PIP GoPro