

The History & Guiding Philosophy of the Moving Cycle

By Christine Caldwell

a. Historical Context:

The Moving Cycle's genetic ancestry came from the Los Angeles area, where from 1970 to 1976 I took my BA in Anthropology and my MA in Dance Therapy at UCLA, while also training in the LA Gestalt Institute, and beginning to train in a movement education and bodywork form called Aston-Patterning. This cauldron of teachings, along with the zeitgeist of LA in the early 70's, formed many of my basic values and therapeutic principles, from a deep appreciation of culture and ethnicity, to the healing power of the creative movement process, to the psychological effects of bodywork. In my dance therapy program, under Alma Hawkins, I was steeped in the work of Gendlin (Focusing) and Jacobson (Progressive Relaxation). At the same time, my main trainer at the LA Gestalt Institute, Allen Darbonne, was also a Rolfer, so from the age of 20 I received and learned physical and psychological therapy techniques that I knew were bound up in culture, and also inextricably linked. I learned to observe bodies and movement in my bodywork training rather than my DT training (the UCLA DT program only taught Laban notation), which helped me to think in terms of time, space, and effort in relationship to the use of touch and the effects on movement rather than the body's relationship to psychological diagnosis. I never experienced any training that wasn't simultaneously addressing both the biology and the psychology of the person.

In the late 1970's, however, after two years as a dance therapist in the back wards of a state mental hospital in rural Maryland, I had begun to question my orientation as a clinician. I had assumed that my unease was just a product of inexperience, but as I gained skills this upset got worse. When I began contemplating this feeling, I determined that as a dance therapist I had to look at the process of physical healing as it occurs naturally in the body, without any external help. Resiliency research tells us that overall, many illnesses, both physical and mental, tend to resolve whether we 'therapize' them or not (Yalom, 1975). It struck me that the healing process may be akin to watching a cut on

my finger heal. I'm not consciously directing this healing, yet an ordered process occurs, time and again, without my attending to it. If we can study and articulate this elegant natural process, could we as body psychotherapists get in alignment with it and model our therapy after it, especially in more complex and severe situations in which self-regulation proves inadequate? Why not model therapy on the ways that the body automatically heals itself?

Then began a four-year observation project that accelerated tremendously when I moved to Boulder, Colorado (1980) and began teaching at Naropa University, a Buddhist-inspired college that invited me to begin a Dance/Movement Therapy Department for them.¹ By serendipitously landing at an institution that valued and taught meditative and contemplative practices, I began to develop cognitive and affective witnessing skills that tapped into wisdom traditions thousands of years old and were akin to my bodywork-oriented observation skills. I began to meditate, and study with a Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, who is renown for his work for social justice. It was in this womb that the Moving Cycle gestated.

As I observed my students and clients, I came to see that the natural processes I was witnessing were not confined to healing, but were also the same sequences that generated growth, creativity, evolution, and transformation. Nature does not seem to separate healing from growth and creativity, but puts them on an oscillating continuum. I developed the Moving Cycle work as a way to describe and then teach what I was learning from watching natural healing and organic movement in the individual. My students and clients helped me to refine it, and continue to do so to this day. The Moving Cycle remains one of the central teaching paradigms of the Somatic Counseling Program at Naropa University.

I began to examine successful therapy sessions with both high and low functioning individuals to see if I could discern any kind of pattern or sequence of events in them. Healing, growth, and transformation seem to occur in four phases. Each phase must be successfully resolved in order for the next one to occur. We can see these phases

¹ I founded the BA program in Dance/Movement Therapy at Naropa in 1982, and the MA program in 1984. In 1990 we split the department into two majors, body psychology and dance/movement therapy.

in physical healing, emotional healing, cognitive healing, and transpersonal/spiritual healing. The phases are the same in each.

b. Moving Cycle Description –

Based in both contemplative and humanistic traditions, the Moving Cycle is premised on the observation that adaptive motion promotes healing, from a cellular to organismic level. These motions take place in four stages, which build on each other to identify, repair, and integrate direct movement experiences. The first stage is Awareness, where symptoms work to get our attention. Learning to pay high quality attention to one's body, similar in some ways to Focusing, forms the first phase. Second is Owning, where we commit to sensory tracking and developing movement impulses, as a holding environment for the processing of emerging associations (such as images, sounds, words, feelings, memories, etc.). Taking ownership of ones present moment, embodied experience builds a framework of descent into the stored resources within us, and re-establishes a more internal locus of control. Accomplishing this heralds the third stage, Appreciation. When we access inner resources and move with them we feel more whole, and come towards a state of completion and satisfaction. Satisfaction can threaten our internalized beliefs and physiological habits, and special attention to the conscious movement sequencing of self-appreciation must be addressed. The fourth phase is Action. No true healing is accomplished until it is applied to daily living. This phase helps us to negotiate our movement processes as they occur in daily acts and relationships.

Awareness, as was noted above, is the first phase in the Moving Cycle. It commences as therapy begins, and it begins each session. It involves focusing our attention on sensations, feelings and thoughts in an impartial and nonjudgmental way. First and foremost, health seems to be a phenomenon of accessing and mobilizing high quality attention (Speeth, 1982). If we have been trained to stop attending to the raw data of our direct experience then we are unable to participate fully in self-regulation. If we begin our work with the practice of paying attention to our physical bodies, we create a rich experience of non-judgmental consciousness, the first source of fuel we need for the healing journey. Conscious attention to direct experience is also required for healing

because it stimulates movement impulses that are less socially mediated; these movement impulses are the resources for the next steps in healing. Suffering results from my holding views, emotions, or positions that interfere with my ability to directly and accurately experience myself, and to move adaptively with that experience.

Einstein once opined that what we decide to look at determines what we see. He also noted that we cannot solve a problem in the same state of consciousness that the problem arose in. The Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh once said that all views are wrong views, but since it is in our nature to have views, we might as well relax and get them as accurate as possible. The Awareness Phase is about just such a relaxing, a surrender to whatever arises in the attentional field of our body, coupled with a willingness to change our vantage point so that our view is both altered and open, and an understanding that any view is not ultimate truth, but a transient and creative facet of it.

Charles Darwin (1998), when he wrote about emotions, stated that attention or conscious concentration on almost any part of the body produces some direct physical effect on it.² One of the effects is that associations arise and enrich our awareness. These spontaneous up-wellings from the unconscious can take the shape of images, sounds, words, other body sensations, memories, or emotional responses. When we attend carefully to the body, it begins to speak to us from a deeper source. A felt shift (Gendlin, 1996) occurs as a result of the Awareness phase, when we let our attention focus on the less arguable, more concrete qualities of movement impulse made visible by sensation, and then acknowledge and include the associations that arise. What we attend to is our movement. Sensation is merely information that informs us we are moving, and how we are moving. And this attention and its concomitant shift in the body supports us in the second phase of the Moving Cycle.

Owning and engaging with what arises comes next. On a physical body level, we deepen our focus on sensation and movement for their own sake. We commit to an emerging movement sequence, to seeing it through to the end, even if it gets rough, even if it rattles our defenses or our ego. The Owning Phase follows Einstein's idea that we must change our consciousness in order to solve problems. Numerous therapists, most

² One of my favorite quotes from Darwin: "I have no great quickness of apprehension or wit...my power to follow a long and purely abstract train of thought is very limited...(but) I am superior to the common run of men in noticing things which easily escape attention, and in observing them carefully."

notably Stan Grof (1985) believe, as many indigenous cultures do, that all healing takes place in an altered state of consciousness. In the **Owning Phase** we descend or ascend out of the pattern of movement and consciousness we are used to, and this alters our state so that new, somatically-based solutions begin to emerge.

In the act of Owning we take deep personal responsibility for ourselves and our movement. For it is within this ability to respond that the shift from our deep experiences being un-owned and unrecognized to being empowered is made. Anne Morrow Lindberg once said that the most exhausting thing in life is being insincere. Owning gives us the energy, the next source of fuel, to move sincerely. It generates self-efficacy, and what is called a more internal locus of control. In this realm we tell and move the deepest truths we can about our experience.

We typically resist Owning through classical means such as projection, denial, dissociation, depression, and distraction. The Owning Phase calls up introjected critical voices that will urge us to go back, or to shut the door. The task of this phase is to make the movement sequence more important than any of these voices or urges. The Awareness phase is about a change of attention. The Owning Phase is about a shift in intention. We make a commitment to the emergent expressive movement, and make it more important than the old pattern. What gets stimulated in the moment of intention is our fear of death. We typically identify with our patterns, and we rightly fear their death as our death. In a sense, a good Owning Phase will kill you. It will dissolve the pattern I call me in some way, and in its place put new movement that may feel more true, but may also feel more tender, vulnerable, and unfamiliar.

When a movement sequence completes, the body relaxes, and satisfaction, if not pleasure, occurs. We have returned to a state of increased wholeness. The third phase begins as we learn to tolerate and move with this satisfaction. Marianne Williamson would call it a return to love (1992). I call it the **Appreciation Phase**, for this moment requires that we appreciate, welcome, hold, and caress our new-found movement as if it were our own child we had just birthed, one we had known before only as someone buried deep within us and growing. After the labors of Owning, we bond with ourselves; we spend time holding and loving ourselves.

Many modern therapies ignore this crucial phase, not realizing that most of us need help tolerating and basking in feelings of satisfaction and love. Most of us have been acculturated by family, society, or religion to limit our positive feelings (Hendricks: 1990). Even when the Owning Phase has uncovered feelings of rage or grief, our moving with those feelings and directly engaging with them gestures new movement that feels whole, true, and relieving. Appreciation involves spending some time with this movement, and bonding to it. The Appreciation Phase brings us back to a shift of attention. Thich Nhat Hanh has written that attention is like sunlight and water for a plant. What we pay attention to will grow. If we want to grow a more whole, satisfied self, we take this time to allow the movement that supports that self to have its way with us.

The fourth stage is Action, and it aligns us with the very real truth that we have to leave the therapy room now and go back out into our daily lives. When the Appreciation stage is completed, we feel inner healing. In order for this healing to be sustainable it must find a place in our outside environment. This means literally using our thoughts, feelings, and our body differently, and applying this difference to our everyday movement. Only then can we truly change, and contribute this change to the benefit of the external environment. Contributing to the world may be one of our prime directives, and the Action Phase honors this directive. Personal healing has no reference point, no point at all, if it does not extend into the community. It is from personal healing that planetary healing becomes possible.

The **Action phase** is about transitioning into the outer world, and an intention to manifest ourselves differently within it. Perhaps we will walk in a more relaxed manner. Perhaps a reluctance to reveal ourselves has melted a bit. We need to practice this change and commit it to our patterned movement repertoire, or else it will dissolve, as all dreams and impulses do.

The Moving Cycle, though an ordered sequence, is individual to each person in each situation. We are all on many Moving Cycles in our lifetime, some which take moments to complete and others, which will take our entire life. We have tendencies or patterns of obstructing our Moving Cycles at characteristic places, tending, for example, to have difficulty with the Appreciation phase no matter what the content of the specific situation is. But this ability to focus on the process of wounding and healing, rather than

getting bogged down and led astray by the content of the wound or the characteristics of it, allows us to heal more efficiently and completely. We are accessing our core nature more than the history of our experiences. We are addressing our habitual withdrawals from experience, which starve our core being, more than chasing down the specifics of each withdrawal.

The Moving Cycle uses several techniques to "fuel" each of the four phases. The first is breath. Balancing ones breathing literally gives the body enough energy to tolerate and enjoy our feelings and actions. Without this deep oxygenation of our tissues, we cannot sustain full aliveness. In sessions we will ask clients to breathe more fully into what they are saying, doing, or thinking. This usually exposes the unfinished issues so they can be worked on.

The next form of fuel is movement itself. Movement can be said to be the "definition" of life. Whether it is the movement of breathing, heartbeat, or brain waves, movement literally is what separates that which is alive from that which is not alive. In a Moving Cycle session, finding the organic impulses of the body to move is the heart of healing and transformation. Removing inhibition from movement, with safety and integrity, is like coming home, home to ourselves. We will frequently ask a client to give what they are saying a movement, or to track a sensation in their body and see how the body may be wanting to move with that sensation.

Another accelerating form of fuel is telling the deepest truth about what is happening right now. In a session, our ability to accurately describe the detail of our experience cuts through any "scripts" we have learned, and directly nourishes us. Often it takes some time to even recognize our truths, and the Moving Cycle uses the body and its' direct sensory messages to access our ability to discriminate between truth and storyline. Instead of focusing on past events or having elaborate discussions about something that happened this week, we focus on giving a voice to the underlying statements that our actions reveal. Staying with your body experience while you uncover these statements allows you to finish the old wound that bred them.

The Moving Cycle "goes for it". It can directly and quickly access our core

issues, and exposes us to the path of healing and growing. You do not have to be in a certain physical shape to do it, nor do you need to be a dancer or athlete. What makes this work appropriate for you is your commitment to learning to love yourself and inhabiting your entire being. Your body will do the rest. It knows how!

c. The Future of the Moving Cycle

The Moving Cycle continues to reveal itself and shape itself. To hold it too dear and see it as an unchanging and revealed truth would negate its power and our creativity. I hope and trust that my students will continue to shape it according to their own Moving Cycle experiences. In some respects, I will feel satisfied if this Cycle feels simple and obvious to the reader, taken for granted like the healing of a cut on ones finger. It should describe processes that are visible and familiar to us all. It is then that we can know that even though all views are wrong, we might have relaxed enough to get this one as accurate as possible.

Moving Cycle work and traditional psychotherapy have many areas of complementarity, and can benefit greatly from exchange. By organizing our theory, diagnosis and treatment around the principle of movement and systemic interdependence we can bridge these two modalities and enrich them both. This process can be like a birth of a new therapy. As we consciously and lovingly participate in this labor and delivery we can welcome into the world a new and more relevant being, one that can contribute to not only personal growth, but also the evolution of society.

d. The Moving Cycle Institute

To promote the understanding of movement as it relates to our health, well being, and conscious evolution, and to promote movement practices that bring these into being.

To serve this purpose, the Moving Cycle Institute (MCI) offers individual and group counseling, classes, workshops, and a teacher training program, all designed to develop the therapeutic and evolutionary possibilities of conscious movement, called the Moving Cycle.

The Institute teaches and promotes movement on the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual levels, and so serves people who would like to develop in any of

these areas. People who tend to find this work the most useful are therapists, counselors, educators, bodyworkers, artists, and scientists.

The Institute specializes in three areas. First, we offer individual, couples, and group counseling. These sessions work therapeutically and creatively to recover flexibility and choice in ones physical structure, emotional life, thinking, and connection with all life. Second, the Institute presents workshops and classes in various areas of interest, such as addictions recovery, play and pleasure, and birth and death issues. Finally, the MCI trains people through its Apprenticeship Program, emphasizing the theory and skills of movement as they apply to ones chosen field.

References

Darwin, Charles, (1998). *The expression of emotion in man and animals*. New York, NY:

Oxford University Press.

Gendlin, E. (1996). *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy: A manual of the experiential method*. New York: Guilford Press.

Grof, S. (1985). *Beyond the brain: Birth, death and transcendence in psychotherapy*.

Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Hendricks, G. and Hendricks, K. (1990). *Conscious loving*. New York: Bantam.

Speeth, K. (1982). On psychotherapeutic attention. Stanford, CA: *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, vol 14, no 2.

Williamson, M. 1992. *A Return to love: Reflections on the principles of a course in miracles*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Yalom, I. (1975). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.