Tina Stromsted

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Tina Stromsted, Ph.D., MFT, BC-DMT is a Jungian analyst, Somatic psychotherapist, and Board Certified Dance therapist. Past co-founder and faculty of the Authentic Movement Institute in Berkeley and a founding member of the Women's Spirituality program at the California Institute of Integral Studies, she currently teaches at the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, the Depth Psychology/ Somatics Doctoral program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, in Marion Woodman's BodySoul Rhythms® Leadership Trainings, ZIST, and numerous universities and healing centers internationally. Founding director of the AuthenticMovement-BodySoul Center, her Soul's Body™ approach integrates Jungian Depth Work, Somatics & Expressive Arts. Ongoing Dreamdancing® groups engage the healing power of working with dreams in the body. With roots in theater and dance and over 35 years of clinical experience, her publications explore the integration of body, brain, psyche, soul and nature in healing and transformation. Her private analytic/somatic practice and consultation are in San Francisco.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (http://relationalimplicit.com).

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge Prengel: This is a conversation with Tina Stromsted. Hi Tina.

Tina Stromsted: Hi, Serge.

S P: So you're a Jungian analyst and somebody who's passionate about Authentic Movement?

T S: Yes. I practice in a way that integrates many forms, as I know is true for you and for many of our colleagues. I have a private practice here in San Francisco where I work with individuals and groups. But because I was a Dance therapist and a Somatics psychotherapist decades before I became a Jungian analyst, my analytic work is deeply informed by bodily experience; they enrich each other, in working with the body, psyche, spirit connection.

More specifically, Authentic Movement has been a very meaningful practice for me personally for the last thirty years, and I began integrating it into my therapeutic work and my teaching at John F. Kennedy University in the 1980s. I also used aspects of moving and witnessing practice in my clinical work in hospitals and in community mental health. To give you a bit more background about how things developed, in 1989 I became a core faculty member in the Somatic Psychology program at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and introduced moving and witnessing practice as a way to teach students about embodiment skills, including the somatic foundation of the transference/countertransference relationship, integrated with Family Systems theory.

Then in 1992 my colleague, Neala Haze, and I co-founded the Authentic Movement Institute here in Berkeley where we offered in-depth training. Some years before I had also begun studying with Marion Woodman, a Canadian Jungian analyst, in her BodySoul Rhythms® approach. Marion later invited me to join her and her team in offering Leadership trainings in that work, which integrates dreamwork, myth, and fairytales, with body awareness, movement, voice, art, maskwork, ritual and

other creative elements in assisting women in deepening their embodied individuation journey. My teaching and therapeutic work has always included the way that the body is trying to contribute to the conversation – how the unconscious, the implicit dimension, gradually becomes more explicit. So the somatic and the depth analytic work are very much in a dance with each other.

S P: Yeah. So there's an integration of Jungian analysis and movement/dance; and you said that the movement helps makes the implicit explicit. So do you want to talk a little about that? Give an example? Talk about something of how that happens?

T S: Yes, well, as you can imagine, many people come for analysis and some very much want to work with their dreams and aspects of their emotional or soul life that they may not have paid very much attention to, in a lifestyle that's been primarily focused on building their career, raising a family and so forth. However, there comes a time when their inner life begins to press on them, whether it's through somatic symptoms, difficult relationship patterns, synchronicities or other life events that finally grab their attention. Something deeper from their inner life comes to find them. Joseph Campbell, another teacher I studied with for many years while working with Stanley Keleman in the late 70s and 1980s (in their co-facilitation of their Embodied Hero's Journey seminars) once expressed it like this: " We might "spend our lives climbing the ladder of success only to find out when we get to the top that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall." (laughs).

S P: (Laughs.)

T S: I love that. So people who come to work with me may have already done quite a bit of verbal psychotherapy, and can express themselves quite articulately. Or perhaps they have less language for what they are experiencing. In either case, there are often feelings and material that the body has been holding until the psyche is strong enough to begin to become more conscious of it and allow it expression. This is where, for example, Wilhelm Reich's work came in with his concept of how 'body armoring' held unconscious impulses and conflicts in the musculature until there was a safe enough relationship or "temenos" (sacred container), as the Jungians would say, for the person to begin to thaw or soften the constrictions enough to begin to allow those impulses, feelings, conflicts, traumas or memories of various kinds to begin to unfold in the room. The person needs to feel warmed enough to soften the defenses they've needed for survival, and safe enough to share. Then there are other clients who come specifically to do movement and embodied work. For those who come expecting to talk a lot I acknowledge the importance of that, while letting them know that I'm also a Somatics practitioner and dance therapist so that our work together can also draw from the body's experience and wisdom. At that point I watch for their response and if they look a little frightened, or perhaps more interested, then I say something like, "These choices are up to you, and if we work somatically we'll go at your own pace and I'll always share with you some impressions I have about ways we might begin to invite the body to enter into our exchange and then you can see how that feels to you, and if that's something you'd like to explore." So that's often how it starts.
That's a bit of a framework. You asked for an example…. And at the moment I'm thinking of a man I worked with many years ago. I'll call him 'Daniel.' He was a lawyer and appeared in a business suit, immaculate, very put together, very depressed. Daniel worked in a law firm where his father worked; his grandfather had been a lawyer as well. So there was a family lineage there and Daniel felt very trapped in it. But when I asked him how he liked his job he said, "It's really not my nature."

S P: Yeah.

T S: So I asked him how he got involved in it and whether his trapped feelings had to do with not wanting to disappoint his father and his grandfather, at which point he hung his head and looked down, nodding. He then told me that he was also married and had three children whom he felt responsible for. At one point I asked, "Well, what would it be like finding another way of working that would be closer to your soul, to your own nature?" He paled and protested, "I can't. I can't let my family down, my father down. And I can't give up the kind of cash flow I get. How am I going to support my family and eventually get the kids through college and that kind of thing?" This was his dilemma, which we explored for some time, until at one point I noticed that he was saying, "Well, on the one hand…. I need to stay there, it's important that I keep this profession'…. And as his voice petered out. On the other hand, I feel trapped, I'm depressed. I'm starting to drink. I don't know how to get out of there." When he said, "On the one hand I have to stay," I noticed that his face paled and there was a very quieting impact on his body and I stopped breathing. There was a deadness in the room. But when he said, "And on the other hand" the energy in the room began to shift so on the strength of that I asked him what gave him pleasure? And he said, "Well… sculpting, working with wood and stone, building things." At that point he started to smile and the color began to come back into his face, and I started to breath again.

S P: Right, so I want to just slow down a bit…

T S: Yep!

S P: So what you're describing is something where you're picking up two sides; you're noticing what happens to him, you're also experiencing it yourself so …

T S: Exactly.

S P: You know that the whole body experience is very much in the room and you're resonating with it.

T S: Absolutely. Though he wasn't really aware of what his body was doing at that point. So here we have this exquisite thing that happens all the time, that we sometimes don't notice: body metaphors.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: How metaphors in our language often spring from body wisdom, as the body shapes language and produces images to faithfully express its situation. For example, a common expression like "on the one hand and on the other hand…" often carries the conflict. You know? Or I" feel torn in two directions."

S P: Mmhm.

T S: Or "I feel saddled with this"… "it's a burden I bare' or 'it's a pain in the neck'… You know …. any of those kinds of things.

S P: As you're talking about it, I see that I have in my mind a picture of the god Janis with the two faces…

T S: Oh yes! Quite an image of struggling to come to terms with the opposites in ourselves…

S P: So as you do "on the one hand, on the other hand," I have this vision of the whole body being oriented in one direction and then the other whole direction, and the two parts that don't talk to each other…"

T S: Well said! Yes, I think the work is so often about helping parts of the self get introduced to each other, getting to know each other better. Somatically this involves helping people begin to feel the reality of one shape, as Stanley Keleman might say, the "shape of that experience" and how "the body speaks its mind" in a natural way that then gives rise to specific ideas and feelings, belief systems and other ways of identifying oneself that are contained in that embodied stance, that way of 'organizing oneself'. So if there's a way to become more conscious of that, to amplify it a bit so you can make the shape a bit more consciously, and then let it begin to soften a bit more, and then wait, breath and notice what you feel in the transition you can get a lot of information about what this bodily configuration holds. Then if you wish, you can encourage the person to gradually transition into taking on the shape of the 'other' aspect, the part of the self that's on the 'other hand'. And gradually find a movement pathway that links the two shapes, because the body/ psyche/soul, let's say, knows them both but these parts don't necessarily know how to make natural contact. Instead, these parts of the self -- with their bodily configurations, moods, belief systems and so forth – often pop out unexpectedly in different environments or in different relationship situations and so forth.

So here's the client, in this case Daniel, a lawyer who has now put himself in a safe space where he can begin to discover each of those two bodies, these two states of being. Jung would say that individuation, or the process of becoming more whole, more fully oneself and living one's true path is about the process of being able to 'hold the tension between the opposites.' This means being able to experience each of them without splitting off, and when we're able to do that, holding both in awareness, one often finds a third way that is beyond what only the two parts contained; something new, a new life disposition. Jung called this process and the third that gets created the 'transcendent function'.

In this case, when I asked Daniel if he might consider doing what gave him pleasure, he completely brightened when he talked about working with his hands, and working creatively. But then the inner conflict came up and his face dropped again as he said, "But I can't make money doing that, I can't support my family," and so on. So I said, "Well, before we get into the practicalities, let's just see if you could live that part a bit more."

S P: Mmhm.

T S: At first he remained in his chair because for him to get up and move about would make him feel quite self-conscious and awkward. Though I'm a dance/movement therapist I never press people to move, but rather start with where they are comfortable so they feel safe enough to allow something to unfold more naturally. Most people are accustomed to talking in chairs, you know; they tend to gravitate to the familiar, particularly when they are talking about challenging things. So in this case with Daniel, there was a moment of brightness, of vitality, a fuller breath. And I, too, felt more vital in my chair; my somatic countertransference was about liveliness, and interest and curiosity when Daniel spoke about what gave him pleasure. I also felt the deadening when he expressed feeling stuck "on the other hand." So then I invited him to become more conscious of what he felt as he expressed all the reasons why he couldn't live a more creative life. As he did so, I noticed that he

crossed his legs and that his left foot was flipping up and down; you know how we sometimes do that?

S P: Yeah.

T S: … His foot was joggling…at the end of the leg, and he wasn't aware of it. So I said, "As I mentioned to you Daniel, the body is often trying to express things that we don't know yet. What might it be like if we included what your body may have to contribute to this conversation, would that be okay with you?" And so I get permission to get closer to the unconscious through the body signal….

S P: So without, without specifically alerting him to the foot movement at the time, it's more of a general permission to include the body?

T S: Exactly. This feels respectful…. To include the consent of his ego (waking awareness) as we get closer to his unconscious through his bodily expression; it's a bit like making a contract. Because if I just point out the movement in the foot, as I did a few times when I was a younger person (laughs) and got curious about body phenomena and pointed it out, people would freeze or stop, giving me the message: "Oh I'm doing something down there that I'm not aware of?" They didn't like that their body was expressing something they weren't aware of. The fact that I was noticing something that was out of their own awareness made them feel self-conscious or out of control. Their unconscious was peeking out….

S P: Mmhm.

T S: It's kind of a natural, shy thing. It can also feel intrusive, particularly with someone who's very new to working in an embodied way. In these cases I tend to gradually bring in a bit of somatic education, and then I get permission to include observations of bodily expression when they arise in the session. In Daniel's case, he looked a little shy but then nodded and smiled and said "Oh, well okay, sure." So I said "Well, I'm noticing that your foot is joggling a bit, it's wiggling; I wonder if you aware of that?" And he looked down and he said, "Well, no, not exactly." And then first he stopped it, and then he started it up again and kept it going a little bit. And I said, "Well, I wonder if it would be okay if I do that with you?" And again he looked a little shy and smiled and said, "Okay." So then I made the joggling movement, mirroring his expression so he could see his movement witnessed, and reflected on the outside. This increased his awareness of what he was doing and allowed some of the feelings that were being expressed in the joggling of his foot to come up. So after making the movement together for some moments I said, " I wonder if we could experiment with what your foot might be trying to say? How about if we make the movement a little bit smaller?" So we made it a little smaller. Then I suggested, "What might it be like if we make it a little bit bigger?" And I'm all the while using my voice, too, somewhat softly and playfully, with an attitude of curiosity and support.

S P: Yeah, and bringing in the relationship element at that moment…

T S: Yes

S P: It's one of being very much with him, and both of you are in an experimental mode. So it's the exact opposite of say the critical observer witnessing or intruding on the unconscious, but rather a kind of a gentle inquiry and playfulness for both of you.

T S: Yes, thank you. That kind of atmosphere is so essential in the work. And as you say, I'm very relational. Also very process-oriented, because one never knows how things may evolve, how the spirit is going to find expression through the body, through the musicality of speech, body metaphors, transference dynamics, or through dream images or memories that bubble up, as you know.
So, in the situation with Daniel we begin to make the movement a little bit bigger. And then I say, "Wow, great!; how about if we add the breath", because supporting the movement with breath allows the affect to come in. Because, as you know, if you're holding your breath, you're holding in your feelings and then you just have motor movement, without the affect.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: With the additional support of the breath, Daniel's foot movement really started to pick up ~ like whoosh! His leg really started to go, and so did mine…. It had a bouncy quality to it, almost like the way a father would bounce a child on his knee, you know?

S P: Mmhm.

T S: Whoop! Like that. And then I said, "Let's make it a little softer"…. , and then "let's make it a little stronger." In doing this, I'm recruiting all of the elements of dance.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: Tempo. Weight. Direction. Strength. The amount of energy that goes into it. So, Whoosh! Now he's making the movement bigger and I say, "Maybe there's a sound; what might that be like….?"

S P: Mmhm.

T S: "Oh!", he says. At first it's a little quiet and then "Ohhhh!" it gets stronger. I then begin making the sound with him, mirroring his speech as well as his movement. So now he's accessing another part of himself, not the reasonable, explicit, rational, lawyer's vernacular. Now we're exploring a kind of speech that's more embodied, that's more like sound, and closer to feeling, emotion. That's more playful, and unformed, so it goes beneath the cognitive radar of the brain, if you will.

S P: Yeah.

T S: And as you point out, it's that left brain where the critic tends to live, with its access to the spoken word. Yet language is also important for integration so at a certain point as we were making the sound on the breath with the movement I began to sense that we might be able to begin adding words. I also knew that he might need to back off of the words though if the process began to move too quickly, as it could risk him going back into his head, back to his thoughts about all of this. Fortunately, however, Daniel was able to say, "Stop! Get out of here!" as he kicked his leg and put his arms up, "Uhh!" Like this. And so his aggression, upset feelings and growing sense of being able to assert himself gradually began to emerge from underneath the weight of the depression.

S P: So when he's saying the "Stop, get out of here!" Is it in response to something specific or is it just in the sense of following the arc of the movement itself…?"

T S: Yes, good question. At first it was following the arc of the movement; he didn't know what he was responding to, he was just connecting to the stream of emotion that was pregnant in the movement. And then the meaning came as he continued to do the movement and said those words; he got in touch with feelings about his boss, and beyond that, his father, and his grandfather… important male authority figures. All of this material began to come up; the things that had been forbidden to say or even to feel.

S P: Right. So, so all of this is happening as you are exploring the movement and the sound, as opposed to materializing or talking about the boss and the environment itself. These are his long held reactions…that…

T S: Exactly.

S P: That find in that situation encouragement for coming out.

T S: Exactly. And he discovered that some of his feelings were much more powerful than he had realized; that's what the depression had been about. The depressed energy had been sitting on his deeper feelings, forbidding them, because it created too much conflict for him to carry them consciously. Also, his identity had been "the good son", you know? But the deeper, authentic feelings that arose spontaneously in his movement allowed him to bring in more of his 'shadow side.' These were the repressed, forbidden elements that had been pushed into the darker recesses of the body in its habitual 'holding patterns' – the aggression and assertion that could allow for more of his own voice; the part of him that could object, push back and have his own standpoint, his own voice, his own perspective. Those qualities had not been as encouraged or developed. So there was a whole reservoir of unexpressed feelings, repressed memories; the shadow if you will. Parts of himself that were undeveloped, and that his highly developed rational ego was much less aware of.

S P: Yeah, yeah.

T S: Previously, when his feelings would start to come up, he would push them down and get depressed or start to drink, or get into a conflict with his wife, or hamper his children when they were playing, telling them to 'be quiet' when they were having fun, instilling the deadening in the atmosphere that he had experienced, and was now, unconsciously, experiencing in himself. So his whole family was a bit unhappy, as you can imagine.

S P: Yes…. When you talk about the shadow, there's something very beautiful in the way that you're describing the session. That actually, it was not just theoretical permission for the shadow to come up. But as you are mirroring him and to some extent, preceding him, there is a very real, visual, emotional encouragement; permission to be in it.

T S: Yes… that's true; thank you. I think if we as therapists are willing to go to these expressive emotional places, it can provide a kind of modeling rather than a 'taking it over.' It's not about pushing people, but rather picking up on what's already present in the room and underscoring it in some way through the mirroring and witnessing, which helps bring it more forward in

consciousness, both for the person, and in the relationship between us. Then we see what direction the gesture or feeling might want to go in, and with what amplitude; how much energy is just the right amount at that time. In the old days at Esalen (laughs) -- you know I taught there a lot in the 90s and into the 2000s-- I remember there was a time when there was a lot of emphasis on punching pillows, you know?

S P: Mmhm.

T S: And I think we all got really good at it..

S P: (Laughs)

T S: Being angry. And when Primal Scream therapy came around we became expert screamers! But I think that we now know in the field of Somatics and body oriented work that these powerful feelings need to be titrated in a way that allows them to be digested and gradually integrated into the larger personality.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: So that you don't just get to be really good at expressing: "GrrrrRah!!"

S P: Right.

T S: Shadow affects that you then put in your pocket, because you don't know what to do with them.

S P: Mmhm. You know, I want to come back to what you were saying a few moments before that when you were describing the session… I was struck by how your vocabulary had very much the sense of observing movement. You're talking about observing direction, amplitude and so it struck me that in a way, what you were describing is an integration of the authentic movement… you know, being a witness…

T S: Mmhm.

S P: …and bringing that into the context of the Jungian therapy.

T S: Yes.

S P: There is a part that is about being attuned to that implicit movement…

T S: Yes.

S P:… of being able to pick up a little bit and amplify it so that the client could then have permission to go there. I had almost a visual sense of you witnessing and amplifying the movement as you were talking about that session.

T S: Yes, those are very important elements, and as you're saying, developing an 'inner witness' -- an increasingly conscious awareness of your bodily experience -- is very much aligned with what you do

in Focusing work. Both practices teach us to continue to refine our own sense of our embodied sensations. So in the process of working with someone and resonating with their bodily expression, tone of voice, etc. I'm being guided by what's happening with my own breathing – the tightening, opening or tingling, etc. that goes on in various parts of my body. Perhaps there are areas that get a little more deadened, and areas that begin to feel a kind of vitality, itchy things that start to happen. My heart begins to melt. Different images may arise. Perhaps my languaging begins to get impacted by the sensations that I'm feeling in my body. There's a kind of poetic speech that we begin to use as Somatic psychotherapists that includes the body; it's not just abstract, rational language; it speaks directly to the body, you know?

S P: Yeah.

T S: The language of sensation, imagery, and metaphor…. So to come full circle with Daniel, and to what the work lead to over time…. (Aside) he's so present for me now as we talk about this…

S P: (Laughs).

T S: I was so touched by his work and we worked steadily and gradually because I didn't want to rush him -- as it never works, and doesn't feel good for either person -- so what unfolded over time was that as the foot movement gradually kept growing there wasn't enough room to stay in the chair and so at a certain moment I said, "How…would you like to get up so you have a little more space? What if we stand together?" And over a few sessions, he ended up standing and I worked with him around grounding his feet more firmly on the earth, finding his own standpoint, feeling his weight first in one leg and moving through his center into the other leg. Breathing. Jiggling into his heels… all the kinds of things we know how to do in the embodied work. In this way he began to feel more connected to himself, and more deeply supported by the earth rather than the culturally prescribed image of what "a man" is supposed to be or what "a lawyer" is supposed to be. Rather, he was experiencing something much deeper, an energy that came from an authentic source within him that gave him a more rooted sense of support. Jung would call that a more archetypal ground.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: Drawing from a timeless, more universal source that is deeper than simply one's own personal history, nor limited to the physical tensions in the moment. Rather, it's a resource that comes from a more robust place in the self that can allow for more of you to be present, more space for your authenticity than the old constrictions from one's family of origin or culture can allow for.
So there he was; standing up, and planted! So I said, "Well, I wonder if we could try that swinging movement that your leg knows how to do while we're here standing?" So, to make a long story short he swung first one leg and then the other. And at a certain point because he had danced with his wife at an earlier time in their relationship, so dancing was sort of okay (and is now on mainstream TV!) I said, "Well, would you like a little music?" And asked him what kind. I have lots of music in my analytic office so I put on some African music that had a good solid beat. And he (beat beat beat beat) ended up bringing his heels into the floor and found a natural rhythm that brought a lot more of the "blood rhythms", the heart rhythms, the breath rhythms in. And I mirrored the rhythms with him, with him taking the lead. At one point he started to smile widely and I had the feeling that this was a different person in front of me!

S P: Mmhm.

T S: Who was of course, Daniel! And then he laughed. And then he looked a little shy, and then he looked very happy, and then he looked very strong, and then he looked more sensual and he looked more full of joy. You know? So, over time, he began to feel more of himself, more whole… And his wife said, "Well, what's happening to you? You're starting to change. And what's going on in there?" (laughs). And he said, "Well, we're starting to do movement stuff with some music…. And gradually, in dialogue with his wife, he shifted his career. He began to study architecture and worked on buildings, doing sculpture on the weekends, a change that made him very happy. At first he was very worried about the finances and about being able to support his wife and his children. But, he was also much happier around them so his kids started to play with him. And his wife said, "This is the man that I married."

S P: Mmm.

T S: "I thought that I'd lost you," she said…. So it was very moving. And seeing him come to life and inhabit more of his authentic nature and capacity was very moving for me, as well.

S P: Yeah, yeah.

T S: So there's an example.

S P: Yeah, it is very moving. It is very moving.

T S: He found his right path, I think.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: His vocation, a way of living in the world -- his work, his family life, and in a growing sense of comfort and authority within himself. He also connected with his creativity, which was a potent, expressive part of his true nature, his own soul.

S P: Yeah... So there's a part of me that …. wants to find more words to qualify what is moving but I'm actually resisting it, and maybe just to express that there was something very moving about that. And to leave it at that.

T S: Mmhm. Yes. What comes to mind is a marvelous quote by Mary Starks Whitehouse, the pioneering 'grandmother' of Authentic Movement.

S P: Mmhm.

T S: She says, "Movement, to be experienced, has to be found in the body. Not put on like a dress or a coat. There is that in us that has moved from the very beginning. It is that which can liberate us."

S P: Mmm, (laughs) That feels like a beautiful place to end this conversation.

T S: Yes. Thank you very much, Serge.

S P: Thanks, Tina.

T S: It's been a real pleasure.

🕮 *This conversation was transcribed by Megan E. Solberg.*

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