

SATIR INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Insights

Movement and Body-focused Learning in the Satir Model

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“If I Could Say It I Would Not Have To Dance It“

Isadora Duncan, *American Dancer 1877-1927*
(Personal communication to a journalist, n.d.)

In this article Jesse Carlock, Ph.D. (JC) interviews Eva Wieprecht on the developments of her work. Eva has integrated her embodied knowledge of many cultures and various lineages, such as: dance, the Satir Model, NLP, generative coaching and the hypnosystemic approach in order to further healing at the body level and teach the original essence of the Satir Model in a next generation approach.

JC: Eva, please tell me a little bit about how you got connected to the Satir Model?

My many connections and influences in the Satir Model training:

My background is in running a family business for decades. Given that, I was always interested in finding practical models that will help describe how systems work, especially when you have to face the double challenge of running a family system successfully as a business and also have family patterns interwoven through that task.

Then I got connected to NLP at the University of Santa Cruz where NLP started. Before it was NLP, it was the study of subjective experiences and Virginia Satir was one of the key models, along with Fritz Perls, and Milton Erikson that NLP was founded on.

My friend, mentor and colleague Judith deLozier actually lived with Virginia as Virginia wrote the book, *Changing Families*, together with John Grinder and Richard Bandler, the founders of NLP.

Another source of study is my teacher, friend and colleague, Dr. Stephen Gilligan, who studied directly with Virginia and then later moved to follow Milton Erickson's path and became one of the most influential and important Next Generation representatives of Ericksonian Hypnotherapy.

Another deep influence came through my studies with my German teacher, Dr. Gunther Schmidt. He is the developer of the hypnosystemic approach and combined the studies of family systems from Virginia Satir and Ericksonian Hypnotherapy. Through these sources I also got connected to the "Satir "family" and studied deeply with Dr. Maria Gomori and Sharon Loeschen. All these sources of people who have studied directly with Virginia Satir gave me a very rich, wide and deep understanding of the Satir Model as well as the methodology of using choreographies/pictures/ sculptures as a pathway for awareness, learning and transformation.

I became Virginia on multiple occasions myself:

I also had a number of very unique direct encounters with Virginia Satir through an Ericksonian technique called deep trance identification.

In this process you identify a person of your interest, in my case Virginia Satir. You invite the person in to embody his/her spirit and through the embodied identification get a deeper "inside out" reference experience about an aspect of your interest. I was very intrigued to find out about Virginia's courage that allowed her to become such a creative pioneer in the field. I was also very interested to find out more about her creative source as well as her unique way of fully making contact with each member of the system. What I found in this process was an intense way of connecting energetically into the system of the client and an endless curiosity about the client's story-line as well as the most delicate details of all layers of the nonverbal communication.

In Gabriola Island as a leader alongside Dr. Maria Gomori and during an interview, Maria encouraged me to found the German Satir Institute and to continue the work in the next generation.

This all created a very deep interest and longing in me to pass on the Satir Model through my own unique voice and understanding.

JC: So multiple sources brought you to the Satir work and then you bring your background in dance. Can you talk a bit more about that?

Dance was my first love and it will be my last:

I am trained as a classical dancer in ballet and modern dance. So my original training used to have the focus on using the body as a tool to get a specific outcome. An unexpected change in my body (I grew very much, very late), physical challenges and later the family pressure and obligation of running our business in the next generation led to a disconnect from my biggest love and resource, dance. I left dance behind between my mid-twenties to my mid-thirties. Through my connection with Judith de Lozier, I reawakened the possibility to make more use of the body in seemingly unrelated contexts, like coaching or teaching. Watching Judy as a model brought the insight to me that I can use the body as a vehicle for understanding and more authentic expression. During that same period, I was also deeply studying yoga as well as open floor movement techniques like 5 Rhythms through Deborah Dilts and Johnathan Horan, explorations in contact dancing, Feldenkreis through Russel Delman as well as many other movement oriented forms.

Dance the Satir Model and much more:

This brought me to the desire to translate all the many core principles and concepts I learned in the Satir Model, Hypnosystemic approach, Generative Coaching (developed by Robert Dilts and Stephen Gilligan) as well as Generative Trance (developed by Stephen Gilligan) as ways to be expressed through the body. This became the Somatic Movement Integration Practice (SMIP). I have introduced SMIP to many groups and many cultures in the world over the past 5 years, like Russia, China, Spain, Uruguay, Brazil, Italy, Germany and the USA. I created **dances** like: The Satir Belief dance, the Stance-Dance, the Change Process dance, the Opposite dance, as well as and universal relationship movement patterns and universal gestures.

JC: How does dance impact the person? What do your students learn from these kinds of experiences?

To put it in words of the famous dancer Isadora Duncan: “If I could say it I would not have to dance it.”

Through my studies with Dr. Stephen Gilligan I learned that research today has shown that two key elements create ongoing, chronic symptoms and suffering:

- 1) The isolation of a symptom from its larger system (trauma is a pretty obvious example for that).
- 2) Lack of musicality and rhythm.

If that is true, my curiosity immediately goes to the idea, how can we create a community space where people can safely reconnect to music and rhythm?

When you start moving your body, you start to heal your mind. When I express myself in movement we can start finding places where the body stops, where I may hit invisible walls, where I connect to my conditioned self, if you wish, and freeze, stop myself from moving further. When you watch little kids moving they do not stop. The stopping of the movement starts to happen much later in life and that is learned through what the existentialist would call “the gazing function” (how the expression of our selves was met by the eyes of other).

We stop moving freely in our bodies when we have learned that some movements are approved and some are not. So when I facilitate different open floor movement activities, it becomes very quickly obvious where movement is restricted, where breathing becomes shallow, where movement stops. Through very gentle, yet straight forward coaching, I will help my clients to make a conscious decision to continue movements, to breathe, to extend and expand known movement territory.

JC: Very interesting. I see you do not need in these processes to have cognition involved, or is it that cognition, the realizations come later?

Absolutely! You know some of our learnings are made so early, so implicit that they may be very deeply rooted in our cells and I may feel them intensely but not be able to put them into words as they have been learned proverbially. So I strongly like to use the body and possibilities of movement as a vehicle for:

- Exploring
- Learning
- Understanding
- Accepting
- Relearning and in that space: moving beyond the usual territory

If I use my body at a very conscious level, in a very careful and loving way of finding the edges of learning, (not pushing through them but being really careful) I find that when I allow that to happen, that my clients, my group will start to have through the body exploration, through the movement exploration, new perceptions, new sensations, new feelings, new meaning makings, etc., basically having a desirable ripple effect on the whole iceberg.

The birth and development of the Stance-Dance:

This was all very much inspired by my dear teacher Dr. Gunther Schmidt who uses a technique, something he calls the Problem-Solution Gymnastic or Problem Solution Thai Chi and Dr. Stephen Gilligan who created a technique called somatic modelling which then becomes a trance dance. Out of that idea I developed the stance-dance. In Coaching, for example, I will identify a body posture that is in relationship to the identification with a desired outcome and then identify what is in the way and have

that represented by another body posture that will best represent that expression. Now we develop a very slow, fluid trance dance that will fluidly connect those formerly separately stored ego states in a fluid dance, so that transformation can take place on a somatic level.

From those models, I then took the Communication Stances developed by Virginia Satir as physical representations of archetypal patterns that get triggered in stress (Blamer, Placater, Computer, Distracter) and developed archetypal Resource Stances that could be voluntarily explored and activated. I created:

- a particular stance and a stance dance of the many ways of being able to express the Peaceful Warrior energy (resource stance of the Blamer stance)
- a particular stance and stance dance of the many ways of being able to express the Lover energy (resource stance of the Placater stance)
- a particular stance and stance dance of the many ways of being able to express the King/Queen/Leader energy (resource stance of the Computer stance)
- a particular stance and stance dance of the many ways of being able to express the Magician energy (resource stance of the Distracter stance)

Then, as a next step, we teeter totter between the stress stance and the resource stance and create a fluid trance dance between them. This all can now become a very powerful source for, deep understanding, transformation and healing. These developments have shaped my Stance-Dances and Stress-Stance-Dance-Intervention.

JC: Again you have to first help people identify with a problem stance (e.g., Blamer) then move it to a resource stance?

Yes, that is one possible way to do it. I would for example ask, “Find an experience when you were blaming and wished you had been able to do something different. Make it even bigger so you have a really clear physical representation of that.” At this point I will invite the client to make that a very fluid dance of exploring the “problem” already in all its dimensions through the body, through the dance.

JC: So that already sets the stage, implies the introduction of movement?

Yes, absolutely, and then there is another piece. When you take the internal process elements that get activated in a specific state/state of mind (like: naming the situation, meaning making, concluding, compare it with similar situations, body stance, body coordination, movement, internal dialogue, internal pictures, sense of age, breathing, sense of self, sense of space around me) you find that breath and any type of body coordination/movement are the two driver elements that get activated involuntarily all the time but that can also be voluntarily/consciously activated and used as well. That gives us a tremendous resource for healing and transformation without the need to understand all details of a maybe very painful story attached to it.

This to me is art in healing! This to me is using esthetic intelligence in the interest of creating peace within.

If I change my body coordination, if I change my patterning of body movement it will also start changing other patterns in my internal process that will eventually create a new brain map. Through the research of neuroplasticity, we know now it is possible that we can create new brain maps. The use of the body is a driver, a key entrance point to make that happen. New body coordination will lead to new thinking patterns, new sense of self, new emotional patterns, basically the whole iceberg will change and I will experience a capacity in me to create a new brain map that leads to a life beyond the family patterning of learning and that will strengthen the capacity of truly living the five freedoms of Virginia Satir! I find that very exciting and creating a lot of hope!

JC: You really bring the picture to life. As we know, the body is a way to access the unconscious.

The body is the creative unconscious:

Yes, and it happens voluntarily and involuntarily. I will give you a personal experience too. I was suffering from a chronic disease called colitis. Supposedly, you do not cure that disease. Over the years I became very curious though about what happens in the body at various stages of colitis and this is what I found out. Acute Colitis hits you right into your center. It creates massive pain in the center and what the body does is the following. You contract in the center and if you would describe what the body looks like, I would say it most looks like being in fetal position. The fetal position sends a signal to the outside world, "I need support, I need care, I need shelter, I am not available right now." My usual self is acting in the world very much the opposite way. I tend to be very available, I tend to extend myself much to the world and others; I tend to care a lot for others. So now when you look at the physical metaphor, the body representation, you could translate the symptom of colitis as an exaggerated form of a physical attempt to create a boundary with the outside world. You could also translate it as an attempt to create self-care. So I already made that link that we can translate body coordination as a physical metaphor of the creative unconscious. Then I studied with Dr. Stephen Gilligan. I did a demonstration with him and in it he used somatic modelling and trance dance as a transformational path working on my subject that was called: "I would like to bring this work piece out but every time I try to make that happen my colitis symptom is stopping me from making that happen." After the exploration, my colitis symptoms dramatically dropped.

Now what happened in the somatic exploration?

We created a body sculpture to picture what I look like when I am in a good internal state. Then we created another sculpture about what happens when I am experiencing the

symptom. Then the crucial third piece is to bridge the two states through the body. The most straight forward way to do it is to continue the movement from one to the other in a centered, sensual, fluid way to basically create new pathways through the body that will link these different ego states with each other. It is in a way a parts party that is accomplished through movement of the body. The outcome of this particular exploration was not about “never experience the symptom again,” but much more about, “Can I establish a sensitivity in me that will allow me to detect earlier when my body system has a need for reconnecting inside, for self-care, for contemplation, for inner work and not wait until the symptom would make that happen in a very forceful, painful, involuntary way.”

JC: Did you find yourself noticing symptoms earlier that were milder so that you could express the need earlier?

Yes, indeed! I found a way to learn to listen to milder signals of the body saying “No,” and learning to translate those messages.

JC: Do you have any difficulties working with people who, for example, have experienced multiple traumatic experiences and who are cut off from the body. Do you find that a challenge? How do you deal with these people?

I think for anyone when cut off from the body, for whatever reason, the body focused approach through movement is an excellent resource for healing and reconnecting. I want to say though that I will take these histories very seriously in consideration and focus on some elements in particular:

- lots of grounding
- slow pace
- small chunks of experiences!

I will focus my attention for a very long time in the beginning on grounding, finding a strong connection to the earth, the floor. I put a big attention on the body being in a specific space in time. One of the mantras I will introduce for example in these movement explorations is: “**Me, here, now.** “

I want to point out about your question, too, that I introduce the resource and vehicle of movement many ways depending on the client’s history with movement, personal story and so forth.

- I have clients moving freely in the space right away.
- I will introduce the idea to move very gently and maybe even almost invisible to the outside world.
- I introduce the possibility to look around and take on movements that others

demonstrate.

- I will introduce the possibility not to move at all and only imagine how the body would potentially move, if I choose to do that.

JC: Is it difficult in the group to track where people are? Especially in larger groups?

Not in particular. I facilitated small groups of 7 in Germany and Italy, middle size groups of 20-50 in Siberia, China, Uruguay, Canada, Italy and very big groups for example of over 100 to almost 200 people in Barcelona, Brazil and Russia. I work with them all the same. I will make sure when the group gets bigger that I will set the frame very clearly at the outset. I will give the group all the many possibilities to explore. I will give the group background information at various points in the process. I want to point out one important aspect though and that is that the therapist use of Self is key here.

I usually work with groups over an extended time. Throughout that time, I will have experienced many participants on the floor. Given that, and taking my observational skills as well as my experience in working with groups for many years, I quickly know where people are, what their learning edges may be and how that shows up in the body as well as in movement. I will track quickly what may be a next step of a learning experience, an expansion piece for each participant. Then I will playfully, skillfully engage at various points with the participants in movement and make contact with them to tease out through the use of myself whatever can lead to a new learning step in movement.

JC: I am glad you are mentioning the Use of the Self here!

Yes, I do use myself as a tool, as a model, quite actively in the process. Interestingly, I just had a conversation with my friend Steve (Dr. Stephen Gilligan) who would tell me that it caught his interest and curiosity that I would do something in movement which he knows for himself he does very consciously in trance work, meaning that he would actively use archetypal energies that are needed to balance the system. For example, I may use some more playfulness if the conversation starts to get too heavy and serious or bring in more seriousness and fierceness when the conversation needs more definition. That is definitely true for me too. When I see in the expression of the movement that some energy ingredients are missing, I will tease them out of the client and basically have a movement dialogue between the two of us to help the client move beyond the edges of the known and cross over to new territory. So I do actually use the Self very intentionally and in every session multiple times. I want to point out that I am working around the edges. I am not pushing people, I rather tease out, invite new possibilities. For that we need to establish first a frame that holds the ingredients of safety, curiosity, protection and positive connection.

We have to carefully take feedback in from the clients. It is a call and return mutual dance that allows us to move beyond the known without pushing the client into a chaos space that feels too overwhelming to be handled in his own sense of self. We have to carefully take in the client's feedback. We need to calibrate the nonverbal. The therapist's Use of Self is a very important tool!

Body approaches were very popular during the human potential era and now I do not hear about them that much anymore. You and other Satir-oriented body therapists are contributing tremendously and I find very refreshing that you bring this all back and that you are bringing it back in connection with the Satir approach in such a creative way. You are contributing so much, I am really impressed and I want to thank you for this.

Conclusion: In this interview, Eva Wieprecht described her innovative use of dance, movement and bodyfocus to promote healing and learning. She described the models she has integrated into her work, the Satir Model, NLP, Generative Coaching and the Hypnosystemic Approach and her process for applying them to body movement therapy as a pathway for competency and resource focused transformation and learning.