
The metaphoric title of this book is simple, straightforward, and poetically appealing—one to which we dance/movement therapists can immediately relate, The Dancing Self. However, the subtitle had me worried. Research professors’ voices from graduate school days rang in my ears, “Too many variables!” So, I approached Carol Press’ wonderful book with some skepticism. Though it is indeed true that she has a lot going on, it is a very worthwhile read for dance/movement therapists, dancers, scholars and others interested in the powerful connections between creativity, modern dance, self-psychology and education.

I appreciated the sweeping overviews of information, including the entire history of modern dance, the basic principles of self-psychology, the relationship of these two fields of study to creativity, a case study (none other than Paul Taylor!) and dance education. The author states that her book is “. . . an interdisciplinary investigation of the fortification that creativity brings to a meaningful sense of self, to sustaining relations with others, to a vigorous society and culture, and to the empowering role that education can serve towards these endeavors.” (p. 3) She further states that, “Creativity involves exploration and self-assertion, through a multileveled subjective relationship that serves significant selfobject functions through the construction of an ideal form that embodies and expands self-delineation, self-cohesion, and self-development, and that is ultimately self-transformative.” (p. 4) These claims are accomplished in six chapters: “Introduction,” “Modern Dance, Sense of Self, and One’s Surrounding World,” “Self Psychology,” “Creativity, Self Psychology, and the Modern Dance Choreographer,” “Paul Taylor: A Case Study,” and “Creativity and Transformation: The Heart of Education.”
The best thing about the book for dance/movement therapists is that the focus is on dance, dancers, and choreographers as unfolding selves. The direct connection of the art form to psychology is beautifully accomplished. The book is predominantly about the creative process as a psychological imperative to the development of a cohesive sense of self, both subjectively and in relation to the world. Although it may be true that this particular theoretical framework, or the emphasis on dance as art, is not readily applicable to all of the arenas and ways in which dance/movement therapy is practiced, it does provide a valuable basis for the creation of the dances themselves, including dances created in dance/movement therapy sessions as selfobjects for both the choreographer/therapist and for the dancers/patients. Dance/movement therapists already know that the dances are important in and of themselves, and through an understanding of self psychology, Carol Press clarifies and supports why this is so. She quotes anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake:

> Our world and our selves have fragmented to a degree unimaginable in earlier human history, and if there is to be any coherence at all in our lives, it is up to us to put it there. To this extent, we are all called upon to be artists—to shape, find significant aspects of, impose meaning upon, discern, or state what is special about our experience. Response to the mystery of life becomes a personal aesthetic gesture. (1988, p. 190)

This book is a reminder for us to stay close to the art, and to our subjective experience as artists, as therapists, and as people. Mircea Eliade called this “founding the world.” Carol Press has written a book that supports such creative practice, as well as the potential for a deepened experience of self in every dance we do.

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**References**
