



## Linda Hartley

*Relational Implicit* March 2011

---

Linda Hartley has worked since 1977 in the fields of dance and somatic movement therapy, bodywork, transpersonal and body psychotherapy. She is a teacher of Body-Mind Centering®, a UKCP registered Psychotherapist, senior Dance Movement Psychotherapist, and ISMETA registered Somatic Movement Therapist. Linda has an MA in Somatic Psychology, is author of *Wisdom of the Body Moving*, *Servants of the Sacred Dream*, and *Somatic Psychology*, and editor of *Contemporary Body Psychotherapy: The Chiron Approach*. As founder of the Institute for Integrative Bodywork & Movement Therapy she has run training programs in England and Germany since 1990, and also works as a therapist in private practice in the UK.

Linda believes that experiences in early life, including pre- and peri-natal life, can profoundly affect us throughout our whole life cycle, and feels passionately about embodied movement practice as a way to address some of the difficulties that may arise.

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

*The following is a transcript of the original audio. Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.*

*Serge Prengel: I'm with Linda Hartley. Hi Linda.*

Linda Hartley: Hi Serge.

*S P: So Linda, you started in life as a dancer, then became a somatic psychotherapist.*

L H: That's right, yes. So how did I get from there to there?

*S P: Yeah.*

L H: Even before I was dancing, I would say that writing was my first interest. I came into dance quite late, and I came into a field of dance called New Dance, which actually led me quite quickly into recognizing the healing and therapeutic of dance and movement, and a way of working that was really about connecting to the inner sense of the body. So I was quite quickly working in the somatic field of dance work, and that took me to studying many different practices, but primarily Body-Mind Centering, and that became the foundation for the Somatic Movement Practice that I am still very much involved with. And it's really artists at work recognizing the depths that the somatic work could take myself and others, students and clients, that led me to train in psychotherapy. So it was out of a need for finding ways to build support and hold and contextualize what was coming up in the somatic work.

*S P: That's a very interesting, different past from say, people who started with psychology/psychotherapy, what you're saying is that an experience in dance, experiencing the healing aspect of it, and the somatic part and psychology was a way of contextualizing what your experience was.*

L H: Absolutely. I feel I learned so much psychology, if you like, through the somatic work, through the somatic practice. But I didn't really have the language or the theory or the therapeutic skills at that point to really work in the depths that I knew that that work could offer. So I think my psychotherapy training was a large part in bringing that somatic work into another level of, a more conscious level, which I also see as reflecting the developmental process from the sensory-emotional processes into more mental-cognitive processes the infant and child are going through. So I kind of went through my own development, in a way, in that way of training. The body is still very much a base and grounds for what I do, the somatic work.

*S P: Yeah, and it's very interesting in a sense of what integrating disciplines is, is that you have one, and you sense through the movement, through the somatic part, about the psychological, so the phenomenon exists in and of itself, but you need to learn another language, another perspective, in order to draw more about that side, and once you have learned both the somatic and the psychology and integrated both in your own life, practice, and experience, something else comes out of it.*

L H: Absolutely, yes, absolutely. The need to address at all levels, for material to be completely and fully integrated, there is something about for me, each of these disciplines really needing the other to fulfill its potential. So the somatic needed the psychological and the language of the experience, and its giving meaning to the experience in that more cognitive way, and I feel that psychology meets the grounds, absolutely, in the body, and the somatic grounding of experience. So I found the cultural aspect, that we've all experienced over centuries of mind, body, it's a little bit reflected in what I'm talking about here, and so the practices are emerging now in our culture very much from both the somatic and psychological, I think about bringing these dimensions of ourselves and our practices together again. So yes, hopefully something understanding will emerge out of that process.

*S P: So you have been practicing as a psychotherapist who integrates a somatic perspective with your psychotherapy. So what is it like in your practice? What do you do that is different say, from colleagues who are doing psychotherapy without the somatic component? Or how is your somatic approach different from other people who have a body-oriented approach?*

L H: Well a lot of what I use is similar to a body psychotherapy approach, I think, but perhaps what I might bring from the somatic work is a very subtle understanding of body processes. For example, we go into the experience of, let me give you an example of the experience which is the foundation of our foundation in a sense, and to me, the cell, with its membranous setting, if you'd like, can reflect the experience of the client, the way the client experiences their psychological setting, or boundary, interface with the world. So that might be a subtle explanation, if we were exploring the issues around boundaries, around interface, there are many other options of practicing, for example, it might be through a meditative purpose, it might be through hands-on body work that brings awareness to this level of what we experience when we go to the body itself, the cell membranes. So that gives information about our sense of psychological boundary, a sense of integrity, if you like.

*S P: So there is a sense, for you, that in a way from the most basic part of us at the cellular level, there is a sense of having a boundary and of using that boundary. And so the therapy is about revisiting this as a very basic issue?*

L H: Yes, absolutely. There is a boundary, which I would prefer to use the word interface, because a lot of people get a bit of a sullen feeling about a boundary, so a boundary is an interface between the inner and outer, the self and other aspects of self.

*S P: And talks about the breathability of that interface.*

L H: Absolutely. So there is movement and communication between the inner and the outer, and I see that most of the problems that people bring into therapy are, in some way or another, have to do with difficulties around that, containment, communication, in relations the inner to the outer. So in some way or another that is going to come up, and by sorting back to our innate cellular beings, we can access information, that, like our early roots, that might have earliest roots in embryology, what can be helpful and useful in exploring how we are as adults in our interface with the world, and in what we might be needing. And a certain amount is what we call movement with passing, a certain amount is possible, is potential at the somatic level.

*S P: So in what way does one get in touch with the experience of the cell?*

L H: Through first, it might be through a psychotherapy session, but in a teaching context we would look at pictures, we would have images, we would talk about the structure and function and so on, and I might contend with a client to do this, but that would depend on the situation. I would be talking then through to imagining the form of a cell that's contained by membrane, the same way the body is contained by skin membrane, so it's a microcosm in a microcosm, and when we access one, we can find an access into the subtler levels. So we might begin with skin, and having some awareness of skin, and imagining the cell beneath the skin with its own membrane. So it starts with a kind of visualizing process, and then the process is embodiment, it's terribly difficult to describe it, it eventually happens, where we can feel as if our awareness becomes centered within the body, within the cell, rather than looking at it and visualizing it, we can feel as if we're seeing it from within it, from within the body. So I think that's the essence of it really, seeing from within the body, we're not looking at it, imagining it, visualizing it, analyzing it, so we come to a sense of feeling from within. And you can even feel it a little bit as we're talking, a sense of that.

*S P: Yeah, so that's a very nice way to put that, instead of, in a way, having a sense of looking at the cell from the outside, have that sense that comes from inside.*

L H: Yes, absolutely, yes. And there's incredible inside information, wisdom, sometimes, comes out of the experience when we are able to center ourselves in the body tissues in that way. So it's quite hard, then, to describe that process, it is what happens when we really are able to, it requires a certain letting go of that cognitive level, a coming down underneath of our rational thinking processes to access something of the innate knowledge of the body, I think, and memory, perhaps we hold there.

*S P: Yeah, yeah. Letting go of that orientation to figure out, or to see as if from the outside, and to kind of sense form inside.*

L H: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah, yeah. So a lot of work in the therapy context might involve inviting the client to keep sensing into their body, and sensing where, to articulate the thinking processes in the body through sensation and then through the sensation what is the feeling from within or behind that alongside the sensation, it's a grounding process, which I think is common in body

psychotherapy. We have another language, perhaps, that addresses a more subtle differentiation, and is it your blood in this moment, or your heart, or your stomach, is it your bones, is it in the bone or muscle, so we might be bringing a subtle differentiation where the tension is centering in the body.

*S P: Yeah, so again talk about sensation, different schools of somatic psychotherapy put the emphasis in different places, some on sensation, some on the muscles. What I'm hearing from you is that include a general self-sense, as well as some specifics about not just say, muscle sensations, but something like the bones, the blood.*

L H: Absolutely and this is the work I learned from Body-Mind Centering practice to explore all of the different body systems. I might be sitting with a client, and I'm feeling a certain energy in myself that I recognize as belonging to the endocrine system, an activation of the endocrine system in that moment, which would feel a little bit different from a client who is in more of an organic process, maybe it's something in their digestive system that's really being activated, so there's a different quality of energy when their experience and their expression is located differently, in different systems. So that's one of the ways we might be differentiating, different kind of energy, different kind of processes coming as they center themselves.

*S P: So this is happening as you were also discussing their issues? Or how does the dance between the psychological issues and the somatic work take place during a session?*

L H: Well I do have some clients where we work in mostly in a verbal, sitting in the chair context. But I have others where we might be doing a lot more active movement work, so it does vary a lot. What I find as I'm listening, I'm offering too what I'm experiencing, and maybe sometimes I notice something comes to my attention that I'm experiencing in my body in a particular way, so it might be different that I note the future, or it might be something to reflect and bring into the dialogue that possibly could take off into exploration, maybe some more internal body sensing exploration, or it might be a movement expression, taking that experience or sensitive expression. It could be information that could lead into hands-on work, or certain body work that something was calling attention, talking through dialoguing, we might explore through that more somatic way. There's not one particular way of using information, but it's often about holding information and building a context, finding where the psychological issues that are being talked about are expressed in the relationship, interfaced with the somatic material and the somatic information that's coming up. And that can often come up in the times movement is occurring, often subtle, unconscious gestures a client might be making can also be indicating something is going on inside of them that we might take into a somatic exploration.

*S P: So as I'm listening to you describing this, I'm realizing I have a visual in my mind, say of a therapist, client, sitting, two chairs, normal office, conversation going, but superimposed to that realistic picture I have a vision of two cells, space between them as a membrane, and that information going back and forth and including retained and processed and some of the processing happening inside and some happening in the exchange.*

L H: Yes, that's one way of putting it, absolutely. A lot of the information exchanged is not going to be conscious, and there will be some processing that goes on without naming it, but if I'm able to become conscious of something that's resonating in me in that moment, that I do believe facilitates the process between us in some way. So it's quite a lot of subliminal work, but the more of that that

can be brought into consciousness, the more the process can be helped along in some way. I'm having an image from one of the aspects of the embryonic process, which maybe I can just describe this: I'm going into the embryonic process about six, seven days, and before the structure which is called a blastocyst, the pre-embryo, embeds, implants into the uterine wall, it does this remarkable thing, hatches, a round sphere of cells, and it's surrounded by a membrane, that's like a suit, I like to think of it as like a tight suit, maybe one of those rubber diving suits, if you could imagine wearing something like that, and it hatches out of this. In that process, the cells on its surface expand, and this is a preparation for meeting, for the first coming into a relationship with the mother, reconnecting with the mother. So this sort of hatching, when I'm sitting there and like the two cells as you described, there's a sense of maybe a tightness, maybe withholding, contained, or there could be a sense of having opened up, and the potential of coming into a relationship. So that may be my little process that I would be reflecting on, how that comes up in a particular way.

*S P: So what you're saying is that from that very early point, say six days on, this is a detailing of the experience as an interrelational process.*

L H: Absolutely, I do. The more I study the embryology, I see that all the pathways for developing attachment and social interactions are being explored and embodied through the processes of the embryo forming, and even the pre-embryo. So it's all there somehow, in the first few weeks, which is an extraordinary process and can be accessed and be brought back in the adult relational context to see what we can learn from that, what might be processed from that.

*S P: So how can we actually bring that into looking at the adult process?*

L H: Well, it's actually once a kind is familiar with this particular way of somatic embodiment, of being able to experience the body from within, being able to feel that they can see form the body and they can center themselves in that way, then it's actually a very simple process. You imagine the movement of the structure, the form, in this instance the form is a small clump of cells surrounded by containing membrane of cells, this under covering, outer coat. And then you just imagine opening, releasing, letting go of that outer coat, and we do that in relationships, so we go through all that in dialogue with partner, and I'm talking about a training situation here, I might be doing this for the client. We can do this with partner, we can have a conversation where we imagine contained in this membrane, and then we imagine sticking out of it, and feeling the difference, and it's a very tangible, noticeable difference in the feeling. So what we're doing now, we're re-embodiment that particular step in development through our sensing, feeling, embodying process, if that makes sense.

*S P: Yes, and what I'm hearing also is that in a way, as we're aware of how this is a process that goes at the tiniest level unit of our cells, and goes back in time, there's a sense of in embodying it, in reliving it, a sense of connecting with also something larger than just the experience of the moment and the self in the moment.*

L H: Absolutely, yes. And the pre-embryo stage has no nervous system, has no concept, so it is existing in the larger sense of the universe, I think, in a way, so definitely I think these early processes really connect us to that sense.

*S P: So it feels like at the same time there is a healing aspect in the biology aspect of it, there is a healing aspect in the spiritual sense, a sense of understanding, a sense of connecting, our place in the universe.*

L H: I think that's absolutely right, that there does seem to find that connection. I'd just like to use the model that comes from called process psychotherapy, and I find it very useful for talking about this kind of work. At this earlier stage, there is no sense of self as we know it, but I think these earlier processes are able to connect us to a sense of being often before the splitting that might come though. There's a potential to connect to something that's very rewarding, a sense of well being that connects us to that being, to that spiritual form, if you'd like. There's a potential there for a reconnection, which can really be a source, or a feeling, or at least at least feelings of trauma, or feelings of destruction later on in the development. And that is often what people seem to experience there, there is something before all of this journey of coming into form, coming into self and all the difficulty and all the pain around that. A sense of healing can be connected through this work.

*S P: Yes, so it's also having the deep experience of well being.*

L H: Absolutely, yes, yes. Backtracking a little bit, I wanted to say what we might do, in the therapy room, with that particular sample I gave you about hatching, and we might be standing and facing each other then, and we really bring it into the adult relational perspective, and we explore that together, with that sense of being closed, and that could be indicating of a whole process of looking at what comes up there, what fears come up or what might have been cause enough to continue to hold onto that early place. I'm calling it withholding because if we stay that way too long, it's like a withholding rather than a containing, protecting memory. If we stay there too long, we can start to explore, feelings might come up around that. So there's an area of exploration around why we might have held onto some stage of the development. So that's taking it forward into the personality-developing aspect.

*S P: Yes, so what I'm hearing is also there is a sense of going in to different levels, crossing different levels, cross experiencing, perhaps early stage of development to the present adult relationship form something that's deeply symbolic to the inner experience of what happens in the moment. There's a lot of that going back and forth, different levels.*

L H: Yeah, yeah, and sometimes we're working exclusively with that, but there may be times where clients are not ready to work at that level. I'm holding that information and processing it in my own understanding of what's happening, but that's the potential to work into those levels, and it can be quite profound, when a client is ready to step into that level of work.

*S P: So Linda, as we're coming to the end of this conversation, is there something that you would want to add or conclude with?*

L H: I would say in sorting back to this embryonic work, what I'm finding is that my two threads of interest, which has always been for me the somatic work and the psychotherapy, really seem to be coming together there which is a really exciting place to be working, to coming together in an experiential way, in that sense you were saying earlier, that opening, that very subtle and internal work, opening into the larger concept, something larger.

*S P: Thanks for sharing that with us.*

L H: Thank you, my pleasure.

 *This conversation was transcribed by Savanna Keator.*

© 2011. All rights reserved. *Relational Implicit* and its web address ([relationalimplicit.com](http://relationalimplicit.com)) should be properly cited when these contents are used in any form.