

Report by Penny Collinson

The Authentic Movement Institute. Berkeley, CA

Founded in 1993, the Authentic Movement Institute (AMI), in Berkeley California is approaching its 10th anniversary. This year's annual summer course was entitled *Movement as Medicine - Rhythm, Ritual, Renewal* and was led by the institute's founders Neala Haze and Tina Stromsted. In consultation with faculty members Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow, the institute was set up 'on the premise that psyche and soma are inseparable' (Haze, Stromsted, 2002). The Institute's publicity explains that it

'...offers an innovative curriculum, experiential and theoretical, exploring the interweaving of the creative, psychological and sacred through the unique body-based process of Authentic Movement. In this work, one develops kinesiologic awareness, gaining access and giving creative expression to the inner life through an approach in which "movement is the personality made visible". Originally called *Movement-In-Depth* by its founder, Mary Starks Whitehouse, the method grew from her roots in dance, Jungian studies, and pioneering work in dance/movement therapy. Building on Jung's method of active imagination, she saw symbolic meaning in physical action. Today the Authentic Movement Institute continues to develop new training approaches to psychotherapy, artistic endeavour, and the enhancement of daily life.'

Neala Haze is the director of the Institute, she studied Authentic Movement with Mary Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow. She has a history in movement therapy, body-based and expressive arts therapy which spans 3 decades. She works on the faculty of the California Institute of Integral Studies, and has a private practice in Somatic Therapy. Tina Stromsted has a background in dance and theatre, and her extensive clinical experience includes working in mental health, educational, and private practice settings. She is also a faculty member of various institutes and universities in and beyond the California area, including The Jung Institute of San Francisco and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Tina leads workshops internationally, in fact our first meeting had been at her Authentic Movement Workshop in London.

Neala and Tina led this summer course together. An ease, familiarity, and a mutual understanding was evident and endemic from both facilitators. They worked alongside us all in the same manner, establishing a safe, open environment within which to explore.

The course, totalling 33 hours, took place in a beautiful wooden floored dance studio which shares its lease with Ruth Zaporah. It is also a venue for weekly community classes including Tai Chi and Adult Creative Dance. The studio is within a complex of 4 other spaces most of which are leased by companies and institutes working in the arts.

We were a group of 18 participants between the approximate ages of 30 and 70 years old. I was the only English visitor, others were from Korea, and the States. I was perhaps one of 4 professional level dancers, the others were from various occupations including a retired estate agent, an accountant, a few psychotherapists, and a book seller, as well as some mums, one had just done a 10 day intensive of the 5-Rhythms with Gabrielle Roth!

Many spoke during their introductions as being there for a period to take 'time-out' and to focus on their own needs. Others were interested in developing the psycho-physical relationship this work invites, some wanted to dance but 'not learn steps'. Tina spoke about the busy world that we live in, and the busier we get the further from our bodies we go, and yet she said, 'When we go to our inner landscape we realise so much more!'

I was there primarily for academic research into the work of the AMI and to study recent developments of the practice in the US. I was also there knowing that the Workshop would inform my own participatory and leadership skills in the form, and in Tina Stromsted's approach particularly. I had cited her as a key contributor to my Master's research and we had been in contact prior to my visit. We arranged that I attend her private practice at a time after the workshop as well to discuss her Ph.D dissertation and ways forward for my own research.

My interest in Authentic Movement grew from a brief introduction to the form in a 'devising process' 5 years ago. Around that time I had begun to realise that my relationship with dance was changing. For a few years I had been working in dance companies as a performer and workshop leader. This wonderful work had taken me to many countries and to meet a variety of audiences and participants, particularly young people with whom I led creative and choreographic workshops. The intensity of the work (on average 36 weeks a year touring), and personal responsibilities were supported by a long period of psychotherapeutic counselling which introduced me to ways of acknowledging and accessing the 'voice' of my body. This was facilitated through various methods including speaking, sometimes drawing and moving. My concepts of what and how the body expresses itself were being challenged and expanded. Steadily from that time and through somatic body-based practices, release-based dance techniques, meditation, prayer, healing, and Authentic Movement I have become more conscious of mental and physical patterns and habits and felt my dance beginning to change. The search to reunite, to find balance in my self, had been spurred on.

Movement as Medicine - The facilitators outlined their approaches to the course as being: 'Through moving and witnessing we shape the sacred circle as we express and savor gestures that may awaken the healing capacity within us ... we invite you to join us in re-affirming our relationship to our bodies, our community, and our planet!'. The course was facilitated very clearly. Tina, Neala and guest teacher, Linda Aaron-Cort, introduced us to the work explaining the principals of the form, and giving us a framework and structure for the course.

Each day began with a group talk, a time to clock-in with everyone, to present the schedule for the day, and for an opportunity to reflect on the the previous day's experience. It was also time to share anything of the 'absent time' - thoughts and images, and any dreams that had occurred overnight. Neala pointed out that these dreams were not going to be interpreted but that they may be insightful to the individual. We were then guided through a warm-up and introduction into the themes and focus of the day.

It's perhaps useful here to give a brief synopsis of The Authentic Movement dyad form. This involves working in twos, one person is the mover, and the other is the witness. The mover, with eyes closed, decides on a comfortable position to begin their time of moving (i.e. lying, sitting, standing etc). Waiting for an inner impulse to move them, they will move for a period of time, this could be anything from 1-50 minutes as appropriate to the exercise. The witness will observe, see, listen, feel the experience of the mover. They are attentive to the unfolding experience. Once the 'moving' time has finished they join together and the mover speaks first about their experience, followed by the witness speaking back to the mover about their own experience. There is also time for drawing and writing in response to the moving experience to take place.

The speaking, or languaging, is an important part of the process, and the facilitators often reiterated the ritual of it. They said that the formality was important because as witnesses we are asking to make a comment on the mover's unconscious. As we were reminded throughout the course this practice is about developing a relationship with self, and other (between mover and witness). The language then can provide a structure that is useful to both mover and witness in that it can contain honest responses from both (or all) those present to the moving experience. Often the experience can be complex, emotional, and sometimes challenging. Again it is therefore useful to have a language structure that means each person can speak subjectively but without judgement towards their partner's experience. For example, neither needs to say they like or dislike what they see (this ultimately is not very useful anyway), instead they are guided towards a dialogue in which they say what they see, hear, and feel - to recognise their own stories and perceptions within the experience. The facilitators were quick to point out the need to be clear in our languaging, and for us to speak to one another in the present tense. In doing so this enables the experience to remain as present as possible. As the work progressed from dyads to group structures we were guided to use language such as, 'As a mover I imagine...', or 'As a witness I hear....', 'As a witness I see you standing and waving, and my story at that point is...'. The practice of observing and also articulating observations of movement is essential within my choreographic and performance work and as I develop these awareness skills so too am I extending methods of sourcing and constructing, or composing, movement material.

Authentic Movement principals have been applied within the processes of Contemporary Dance practice over recent decades. My Masters research is specifically investigating the implications of the utilization of the 'tools' of Authentic Movement for the work of various dancers and choreographers. I'm also interested to explore how the ideology of Authentic Movement affects the performer. In discussion with Tina after the course she led me to the work of Andrea Olsen who is one of the faculty members at the AMI.

Andrea is a modern and improvisational dancer, she is also a choreographer who teaches and performs internationally. She believes that the relationship between mover and witness parallels that of performer and audience. In her article *Being Seen, Being Moved* Andrea suggests the multiplicity of the human experience lives in each of us, and the stage provides an opportunity to embody our inner selves by moving as performer, or by empathizing or projecting as audience' (Olsen, 1993). Coursework at the AMI, aims to explore one's own artistic imagination through improvisation and choreography which can lead participants into methods of informing and resourcing creative and performance work. In her article Andrea remarks on this as she recalls, 'Simply by letting my body move me instead of trying to control it, fascinating movement and useful insights would emerge. I felt the expansiveness of my own vocabulary as a dancer, rather than wondering if I could come up with one more evocative or unusual movement in the studio.' (Olsen, 1993)

We were mediated through some of the many developments of the form such as regular dyads with different partners, spontaneous writing exercises, the Long Circle, the Breathing Circle and the Gesture Circle. All of these tasks are developments of the original and basic form of mover and witness.

Each day and each movement session produced its own challenges. It was always fascinating to me to see what movement would unfold within the sessions, sometimes they were energized and flowing and progressive, other times they felt blocked and heavy and required extreme effort.

I had spent each day leading up to the course researching and reading. It had been useful to be in the energy and atmosphere of California to do this and I worked in the libraries there.

At the end of my second day on the course, however, I realized that I felt that I was blocked somehow, unable and unwilling to move with ease, I had a feeling in my solar plexus which left me feeling unsatisfied, rather aloof from the movement experience.

The following day in a dyad it was my turn as mover and I recall: I am crawling on all fours around the peripheral of the space. I find a comfortable space and soon I begin isolating different body parts - fingers, fists, toes, ribs. This is very quickly developing into throwing, punching and slashing my arms and feet through the space. It is very rhythmical, fast and dynamic. It continues for a long time... until I am tired and tearful - the battling subsides.'

As I reflected on the moving I felt it hadn't been about fight and defence, instead it had been a breaking through confirming my strength, my place, and clearing away that

which was no longer needed. From that point on in the course I realized I had to 'be there', to be present in the moment of moving. I realized I had I had been struggling to be both in and outside of it, and that I had to be out of my 'researcher head' and into my body to truly receive the wisdom of the work. I trusted that all I needed to know would come to me, and that I would retain and witness enough from inside the work.

This had been a useful discovery, and I was so pleased that it had happened. By its very nature the moving experience had reminded me of one of the fundamental points of the practice: to be in our body.

Courses at the AMI are attended by an eclectic mix of people including body workers, musicians, poets, writers, priests, healers, those workers in political, educational and community environments. We are all there to learn about the inner body experience. As I reflect on the course I am conscious of many connections between the Authentic Movement form, and other somatic and release-based movement practices that I engage in. I am deeply drawn to the freedom it provides as a mover, and as a witness to my mover to ask myself, Who are they in me?

The facilitators reminded us that, as we listen and see the physical manifestation of our movers experience and try it in our own bodies we are witnessing the mover. We ask ourselves how we are responding to it, and it then becomes an association in our own lives. We are then responsible for our own perceptions. I recall one participant on the course feeding back after a form that she had wanted to '...leave the room, get out of the situation. It felt tedious and embarrassing'. During the same form another person recounted that his '...[self] critic gave him D minus'. Both facilitators gently encouraged them to allow the waiting place, asking themselves what movement had just happened, and staying with it until another follows. They invited us all to change our perception of the critic - if it were love in disguise, what might be its gift? Neala reminded us too that often our body has memories which are very close to the surface. In fact we don't even know that they are still there and yet we can access them very easily and quickly. Tina spoke about gradually working through the surface layers and used the analogy of an onion, and peeling back the layers toward the centre.

Since my return to England and to my work, the concepts and experiences passed on from the course continue to filter through and manifest in my own practice.

I realize on reflection that I had gone over there with a question of how to marry more clearly my background of performance and teaching experience with my interest in the inter-relationship between the body, the mind and the spiritual. The course, and my experience within the Bay Area of California have both affirmed for me the accessibility and depth of this work. Geographically it is happening within an area which promotes diversity and alternative philosophy, with a quarter of the population being multi-cultural. It was during the 60's that the conflation of dance and therapeutic, holistic approaches to the 'self' gained prolific recognition, and currently a wide publication and promotion of various esoteric, and psycho-physical, psycho-therapeutic, psycho-somatic and complementary medicine practices have become a significant part of the cultural, educational and artistic systems. This isn't to say that this work is not happening over here, and I'm also very aware that many forms and practices originate from Europe and the East. It was though, thrilling to be surrounded by the energy and atmosphere that this awareness generates and supports

References:

Haze, N. & Stromsted, T. Moving Psyche & Soma. Contact Quarterly. Summer/Fall 2002, pp.55-57.

Olsen, Andrea J. Being, Seen, Being Moved. Contact Quarterly. Winter/Spring 1993, pp.46-53.

Pallero, Patricia (ed) Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow. London/ Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999.

Penny Collinson

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Dear LUTSF Secretary,

Please find enclosed a report of my project this summer to the Authentic Movement Institute, in Berkeley, CA. The return flight from Manchester to San Francisco was dated 5th - 30th August 2002. I am very grateful to John Lesirge for his speedy and helpful organisation of the journey.

My reason for travel was to attend the Authentic Movement Institute's annual summer workshop Movement As Medicine: Rhythm, Ritual, Renewal, which was led by two of the Institute's founders Neala Haze and Tina Stromsted. This course offered its participants (18 men and women from the US, UK and Korea), an opportunity to work with the Authentic Movement form 'as a practice of returning to our bodies as a fundamental source of knowledge and transformation.' Within a structured and creative environment, we explored methods for sourcing personal movement material with which we could then share questions, images, and revelations with a partner and the rest of the group. At the time of booking the flights I had anticipated that I may be able to observe other work taking place at the Institute before the course started, unfortunately this wasn't possible, so instead I researched in the libraries of Berkeley, and I attended professional level class, spoke with dancers, artists and was able to gather very useful and interesting documentation and references. I was also able to have dialogue with Tina Stromsted throughout this time, including a visit to her private practice during which we discussed recent developments of the work in the States, as well as her doctorate thesis.

I have enclosed a copy of the report on disk too. It wasn't appropriate to take photos within the course, however I have some publicity images that might be useful for your publicity which I could e-mail to you. Can you let me have your e-mail address if this is a good idea or I will try to put them on a disk? There were many highlights to my visit. Most significantly it has been the opportunity to be submerged within an area of research which has its roots in regaining our body knowledge, and to be in the Bay Area of San Francisco where there is such a strong public voice on behalf of the integration of mind and body, the sacredness of nature, and the importance of accepting the diversity of religious and political ideologies.

Many thanks to the Fund for making this trip possible. It has inspired and motivated me within my own work so much already.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Collinson