

Healing Soul's Body: An Introduction to Authentic Movement

Pre-Congress Day: Moving Journeys-Embodied Encounters: The Living Body in Analysis

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“Blossoming Spirit” by Mara Friedman (2001)

Abstract

How does psyche manifest in the body? The discoveries of contemporary neuroscience document the important role of non-verbal cues, rhythmic resonance, and affective attunement for healthy attachment and development (Schoore 2003; Siegel 1999). This paper examines how we can bring a more embodied awareness and dimension to our analytic work, redeeming the body's connection with the inner world and attending to the nuances in the intersubjective dance within the therapeutic relationship. Drawing on the perspective of a Jungian form of dance/movement therapy called Authentic Movement, it explores how we may augment our work with the ‘talking cure’ through the experiences of the living body.

Authentic Movement, also known as ‘Active Imagination in Movement’ or ‘Movement in Depth’, is an inner-directed movement practice that can help us to utilize non-verbal forms of awareness in individual psychotherapy, non-analytic group work, and in daily life, across cultures. The author demonstrates how elements of this form of therapy work in practice in describing the experiential session she led as part of the integrative Pre-Congress day, co-facilitated by IAAP colleagues who are among those working to develop dance/movement as a form of active imagination (Chodorow et al 2007).

Authentic Movement

If we can reconcile ourselves to the mysterious truth that the spirit is the life of the body seen from within, and the body the outward manifestation of the life of the spirit—the two being really one—then we can understand why the striving to transcend the present level of consciousness through acceptance of the unconscious must give the body its due.

(Jung 1928, para. 195)

Authentic Movement is a form of dance/movement therapy that can facilitate healing and transformation of the body, psyche, and spirit through inner-directed movement.

Active imagination, a self-guided method for contacting the unconscious developed by C. G. Jung, is the psychological underpinning of this approach. Authentic Movement was originated by Mary Starks Whitehouse when she integrated her studies at the Zurich Jung Institute with her dance experience and training with German modern dancer Mary Wigman and myth-inspired dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. A modern dancer and pioneer in the field of dance/movement therapy, Whitehouse returned to California to explore a particular form of active imagination through movement, working with dancers and people interested in personal growth from the 1950's until her death in 1979. ‘Movement in Depth’ or ‘Active Imagination in Movement’ were other names she gave to this practice, as it allowed the individual to contact and respond to the flow of unconscious material as it found expression through the body (Whitehouse in Pallaro 1999).

The work has two main phases: letting the unconscious come up, and coming to terms with it. Marie Louise von Franz described five subdivisions of Jung’s two phases. Inspired and informed by von Franz—as well as her own perspective—Janet Dallett (quoted in Chodorow 1997, p. 11) proposed four:

- 1) opening to the unconscious,
- 2) giving it form,

3) reaction by the ego, and

4) living it.

Jung himself emphasized that it was not enough to gain some understanding of the images that arose during the process, but that once these insights had arisen into consciousness, one had an ‘ethical obligation’ to live them (Jung 1961, pp. 192-3).

Authentic Movement has many applications and is practised as psychotherapy, meditation, sacred dance, and/or as a source for creative work. It can also be used to amplify dreams, bringing further clarity, depth, and meaning to them as formative images become consciously embodied (Stromsted 1984, 1998, 2004). Through its incorporation of expressive movement and other creative media, Authentic Movement evokes and facilitates the integration of unconscious material as it arises in the body. Other elements may include drawing, painting, sculpture, free-writing, clay, sandplay, improvisational music and theatre (Chodorow 1997, p. 7).

Moving and Witnessing

Authentic Movement involves a mover/client (or group of movers) and a witness/therapist. The mover moves with eyes closed in order to attend to and bring a clearer focus to the inner experience (only opening the eyes slightly if needed for safety). This inner attending/listening, or ‘interoception’ as it is now called in the field of neuroscience (Schoore 2001), is done in the presence of a witness.

The mover's task is to engage in his or her own experience—an inner impulse—attending to it with curiosity and respect and following where it may lead. Each mover is given ample permission to move in any way the body calls, allowing exploration of the inner world in whatever way and in whatever depth is right at that time. This also contributes to the sense of safety necessary for embodied descent. The witness, on the other hand, has the dual responsibility of observing the mover's experience, as well as tracking his or her own bodily and imaginative processes—the ‘somatic countertransference’ responses that are evoked in the presence of the mover's experience.

Following the movement, the mover describes the experience, and may ask for feedback from the witness. The witness's task is to reflect on what has been observed and also experienced by him- or herself, ideally without judgement or interpretation, owning whatever projections may have been stirred. Through this process, the mover is able to re-contact deeper inner layers of experience, and bring

consciousness to them. Previously repressed ‘shadow’ elements or underdeveloped aspects—often introjected voices about whatever was discouraged within the family of origin, other important figures, or cultural or religious influences—have the opportunity to emerge, be acknowledged, and transformed as the mover begins to experience a sense of wholeness on physical, psychological, and spiritual levels. Thus the form offers a practice for developing the ability to be present, both in oneself and with another, in a more vital, embodied, increasingly conscious relationship. Though simple in its basic format, the work provides a framework for complexity, richness, and depth.

The mover’s openness to exploring and integrating this material in order to bring it to consciousness is a critical component in the transformative process. Attending to kinesthetic imagery (images that arise during movement [Dosamantes-Alperson 1987]) and dreams as well as body symptoms, relationship patterns that emerge within the mover-witness relationship, and synchronicities is also instrumental.

Witnessing Language

Witnessing feedback is non-judgemental, non-interpretive, and free from aesthetic evaluations such as ‘it was beautiful, awkward, etc’, reducing whatever tendency the mover may have to control the experience or to perform. Instead, what is reflected back is how the movement affected the witness, in terms of body sensations, emotions, images, memories and stories which the witness ‘owns’. This frees the mover, and helps him or her to recall experienced but perhaps forgotten movements. The practice also builds embodied consciousness and affirms the healing power of relationship, both for the mover, and in what the mover's experience may awaken in the witness (Stromsted & Haze 2007).

Creating a Safe Container

Creating a safe, trustworthy, and non-intrusive container—a temenos—is one of the most essential elements in this practice. This means having a ‘good enough’ witness/mother-figure/analyst (Winnicott 1971, p. 110) to contain the mover's experience so that a transformative process may occur. This is true both in individual work, and in group work. Without a sense of being safely ‘held’ by a witness who sits with his or her eyes open, holds ego consciousness, and watches the mover without judgement or intrusion, the mover cannot relax his or her vigilance (the ‘inner self-care system’ comprised of early negative object relations and self representations [Kalsched 1996, p. 4]) enough to open to his or her unconscious material. Creating a safe container allows for the ‘free and sheltered space’ described by

Dora Kalff (1980), innovator of sandplay therapy, also described as the ‘transitional space’ by Winnicott (1971).

Shadow Work: Reclaiming the ‘Inner Other’

‘It is often extremely difficult to recognize in ourselves the tendency to project unwanted emotions on to others...’ (Chodorow 1991, p. 55). Feelings of guilt and anxiety often accompany contact with this split-off, rejected part of the self, though many of these aspects, unwanted in childhood (such as aggression and sexuality), are often necessary for healthy adult functioning when the person is better equipped to handle them. Family transferences naturally arise, in individual and group work, and Authentic Movement practice allows for this to be explored at the body level where they often otherwise hold the person captive in chronic patterns of muscular armouring and relating (Stromsted 1994/5, p. 20). If these qualities can be brought to consciousness and re-integrated rather than simply being ‘acted-out’, the person’s sense of self and sphere of activity is increased and he or she is able to make better choices in life. When this happens—through exploring previously forbidden movement behaviours, experiencing the feelings associated with them, and verbally owning the experience—there is a release of energy that was previously needed to maintain the dissociation and repression of these rejected qualities, allowing him or her to experience a new lease on life. Contacting shadow aspects through revisiting painful experiences through movement, in the psyche’s natural timing within a safe *temenos*, allows parts of the self unconsciously held in the tissue to become freed up—energies essential for development and wholeness.

Embracing Sacred Energy

As we grow, depending on our access to ‘good enough’ witnessing, our ‘inner witness’ evolves to one who is more compassionate, who is able to tolerate, accept, and live the wide range of feeling states that our humanity encompasses. Authentic Movement offers a container in which this evolution can take place. The development of the inner witness also provides a pathway to reclaiming the God/dess nature within us, the Sophia nature that is contained in matter. The Shekinah—God’s feminine aspect who at some point descended into the Abyss—is often awakened in women and men who take the risk to engage in this work. Moving from this inner source, women and men can come to a deeper sense of knowing that is rooted in the depths of their bodies, and in the feelings and dreams that they discover there. A conscious feminine principle evolves, that is, living life in a way that is rooted in feeling-values. Here, ‘feminine’ is not associated with gender, but rather with the feminine energy in men and women. Words like process, presence, being here now, paradox, resonating, receiving, surrendering, and listening are at

the heart of this feminine aspect of being (Woodman 1993). Authentic Movement offers an invitation for women and men to awaken their embodied ‘resonators’, the foundation for experiencing and knowing their truth. Sensual perception, intuition, feelings, non-verbal ways of knowing, and a deep valuing of relationship are among the qualities that develop further through this practice.

Community, Culture and the Collective Body

Analytic work, for the most part, emphasizes the journey of the individual, attending to their path of individuation. However, none of us exists outside of a family network, a kinship group, a community, a village, a nation, one world. Experiencing a sense of belonging and of one's purpose in the larger community or ‘collective body’ (Adler 1999) often emerges as a powerful theme when practising Authentic Movement in a group setting. Here, the emphasis is on witnessing the group's story or myth, which is informed by each individual moving with authenticity from a deeper source. It is not uncommon, for example, for one person to be crying while another is laughing; for one to experience him or herself as if he or she was dying, while another has a sense of giving birth. Projections naturally occur and are named and further explored through movement. Opportunities to hear multiple perspectives and to engage in relationship, while remaining true to oneself, are vital elements of the practice, and of true individuation.

As analysts, we have much to learn from earlier Shamanic traditions in which the larger group or tribe participated in an individual's rite of passage, thereby involving transformation of the whole. These ceremonies were also informed by myths—stories that reminded people about the nature of all their relations—to themselves, to each other, to the natural world, and to the gods. Jung emphasized how the symbolic imagery in myths also conveyed knowledge about stages of life, about obstacles along the way (the complexes or ‘storms’; places where the energy got stuck), and the necessary steps to allow a more conscious development. Elements of Shamanic traditions often arise spontaneously in Authentic Movement, where we have the opportunity to learn about the embodied energies—the figures, animals, and elements in nature—that the individual/protagonist needs to help him or her get through the forest, over the mountain, or across the sea on their life path.

Somatics pioneer, Stanley Keleman, pointed out how ‘myths today are no longer grounded in bodily experience. We prize the body's images and symbols, its cerebral functions. This has led us to a modern Wasteland. We have forsaken the body as a source of knowledge’ (1999, p. xiv). Authentic Movement helps us reconnect to these deeper myths and to give shape to those aspects that have most meaning and value for us today. Holding a larger mythic and community awareness is another important

aspect of the transformative process: one moves beyond an individual understanding of an event or change, developing the ability to see it within a broader context. This points toward the evolution of consciousness: an awareness of one's contribution to the group or community, to the evolution of the species and to life on the planet within a magnificent cosmos.

Eros, too, plays an important role as the healing process has much to do with love. Not the child's self-referencing love, a focus on 'me' and all the things necessary for his or her survival, but a love that allows a person to experience his or her connection and relationship to all living beings; a mature love that is at once personal and transpersonal. This represents a paradigm shift in thinking, and a development on all levels: physiological, cognitive, emotional, psychological, social, aesthetic, ecological, and spiritual. Relationship is an essential component in the transformative process. Alienation and isolation are the shadow side of relationship, and speak to our modern affliction with technology, that paradoxically brings us closer through the internet while at the same time enabling us to remain sensually distant from one another. Relationship brings in feeling. Participants have often remarked to me that Authentic Movement helps them practise intimacy. Authentic Movement, practised in analysis and in groups, can facilitate deep, world-changing work, providing analysts with a more embodied understanding of how to better negotiate and facilitate transitions between the unconscious and consciousness, individual and community.

In the scale of human history, it is only recently that the body has disappeared from many therapeutic practices. Shamans danced to access trance states that they believed allowed them to communicate with the dream/spirit world. Contemporary South African Sangomas (Xhosa, Zulu and others) continue to dance for the health of the patient: physical, psychological, familial, and spiritual.

Embodied, depth-oriented approaches such as Authentic Movement can further these inroads, integrating body, psyche and spirit, individual and community, in a deeply integrative process of transformative work. Contemporary neuroscience also supports the predominance of right brain function in early life, when facial expression, non-verbal communication, proximity and voice tone comprise much of the infant's world before the development of language. In analysis, the body is continually 'speaking its mind', expressing the inner worlds of patient and analyst alike. These tiny, intimate dances are the stuff of human relating, and are the somatic underpinnings of the transference and countertransference relationship. As we have seen, in this practice the body is understood as a sensitive pathway to the soul, a vehicle for expressing the mysteries of the unconscious. It is time that we 'gave the body its due'.

Experiential Session

At the Pre-Congress experiential session led by the author, participants were invited to sit in a large circle, learn the elements of the moving and witnessing practice, and engage in an inner-sourced movement exploration, followed by speaking and moving with a partner. After a short ‘warm-up’, in which participants were led through a series of movements to heighten awareness of their bodies and breath, they experimented with pressing against the floor and the walls. This amplified elements described in Jackie Gerson’s talk earlier that morning and brought more consciousness to the kind of unconscious ‘walls’ that we often create through the stiffening of the musculature and the sensing membranes in relationship to self and others, which is an expression of the lack of hearing and receptivity that patient and analyst can often experience within the dyadic work (Gerson 2007). Jackie Gerson’s presentation was followed by Antonella Adorisio, who provided a video with images and experiences of the union of nature and spirit (Adorisio 2007).

Both of the earlier presentations led in a natural way into the experiential session, as the group explored ‘grounding’ the body, while opening to imagery from nature through embodying a tree whose roots moved deep into the earth, and then its opposite: exploring the sensations of a bird who pressed off of the earth in order to soar. In this way we explored the continuum between earth and sky, matter and spirit. Participants then continued to move to music that combined African drumming with Australian didgeridoo in a kind of ‘walk about’ that deepened their explorations of the territory, inner and outer. Each discovered the specific nature of his/her unique tree and bird, before releasing these images to open to his/her own, inner-directed active imagination process.

The group continued to move, with eyes closed, for twenty minutes, witnessed by the five movement co-facilitators who sat quietly in the corners of the room. Following the movement, participants were then invited to remain in the space with eyes closed, taking time to reflect back on their movement experience, ‘like recalling a dream’. They were next invited to return to a shape or gesture that had been particularly meaningful, repeating it a few times for greater clarity, before bringing their movement to a close.

Giving shape and form to the energy by working with colours on paper, participants then shared their experience with a partner, beginning with the movement that had stood out to them, and the feeling that emerged. Their gesture was then mirrored back by their partner/witness, together with a word or phrase about how it had felt in the witness’s body. Then the mover spoke about other aspects of their movement journey that felt ready to be shared. The witness held a receptive presence and later reflected

back words that had carried a particular resonance for him/her. Once they had switched roles and repeated the process, participants again joined the larger group to share their drawings, discoveries, and insights.

Following the afternoon programme that combined film, lecture, video, movement experience and discussion, a panel at the end of the day provided an opportunity for participants to reflect further on their experiences, to ask questions, and to dialogue with the presenters and with each other. Responses reflected how integrative the work had been, as many expressed feeling a sense of wholeness. Still others spoke about how natural it felt, how universal and cross-cultural the approach is, and how essential non-verbal work could be in working with populations such as children, teenagers, and adults who did not respond well to traditional, verbal analysis. ‘How can we continue to bring the body into the work of analysis, and into our training programmes?’ was asked repeatedly, emphasizing the efficacy of bringing elements of approaches such as Authentic Movement into analytical practice. Perhaps Jung anticipated these developments when he said (1930-34, p. 473):

When the great swing has taken the individual into the world of symbolic mysteries, nothing comes of it, nothing can come of it, unless it has been associated with the earth, unless it has happened when that individual was in the body... And so individuation can only take place if you first return to the body, to your earth, only then does it become true.

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Suggested Citation:

Stromsted, T. (2009) 'Healing Soul's Body: An Introduction to Authentic Movement.' In P. Bennett (Ed.), *Journeys & Encounters: Clinical, Communal, Cultural, Proceedings of the 17th International IAAP Congress for Analytical Psychology*. Capetown, South Africa. Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag.

Acknowledgements

My deep appreciation goes to Dr. Joan Chodorow, for her invaluable contributions to our field and for her mentorship, which has had a profound impact on the development of my work and life as well as those of countless other colleagues around the world. Her vision, commitment, generous inclusivity, and hard work made this pre-congress day possible.

Indexing

Body, Active Imagination, Authentic Movement, somatic transference, somatic countertransference, witnessing, sacred, community.